



Tamil women collecting tea leaves in Southern India, Kerala

Spice, Trade and Botanicals Histories along the Malabar Coast 23 January – 7 February 2026

Post Tour Extension to Kumarakom 7 –10 February 2026



Level 3
MODERATE





Meenakshi Temple in Madurai

The captivating Malabar Coast has been a meeting place of cultures throughout history. Its lush landscapes were fragrant with the precious spices that brought traders from far and wide, making this coastline rich in both wealth and culture. This tour takes you through the most evocative parts of Malabar, taking inspiration from Hortus Malabaricus (meaning “Garden of Malabar”).

Hortus Malabaricus, with its beautiful illustrations, captured the flora of the Western Ghats. It brought Malabar’s indigenous plant knowledge to the attention of the world. Nearly thirty years in the making, it was published in Amsterdam from 1678 to 1693. K. S. Manilal, the respected Cochin botanist, translated the Latin Hortus into English and Malayalam. Each day on the tour has a botanical theme, which will be discussed briefly, that day.

Start your tour in Bangalore, traditionally known as the Garden City, and learn about plants that heal and restore balance in an Ayurvedic garden. Continue to sumptuous Mysore, famed for its palaces and its silk, sandalwood and spices, where you will visit a palace, a sandalwood factory, take high tea in a heritage building and watch traditional hand rolling techniques in a family run Ayurvedic plant.

Enjoy a spectacular journey into the Blue Mountains up to the hill station of Ooty to visit a tea plantation, an old cinchona factory and its famed botanical gardens. Head over the Cardamom Hills to Madurai, with its magnificent temple, and discover the precious indigenous plants of the highlands. Continue to the highlands of Periyar on a spectacular drive past vivid green tea, coffee, rubber, pineapple and spice plantations, to visit the spice smallholding of Mr and Mrs Abraham and immerse yourself in the life of local spice producers. Head back down to the coast and board a converted rice barge to cruise along the tranquil Keralan backwaters. Finish your tour in historic, languid Cochin – the birthplace of the Hortus Malabaricus. After the tour, there is the option to extend your trip for three nights in Kumarakom.

THIS TOUR IS CLASSED AS:

Level 3 | Moderate



Regular walking at destinations, extended standing and /or increased travel distances. Good fitness is required.

Tour Leader

Gina Fullerlove is an honorary research associate at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and a fellow of the Linnean Society.

Having graduated in zoology and botany from the University of London, Gina undertook postgraduate studies in biological anthropology at Durham University before becoming a scientific publisher for Academic Press,



Macmillan and Nature. This was followed by a nineteen-year stint as head of publishing at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, commissioning and producing award-winning books for all ages, on plant science and natural history, botanical art and environmental history. Since retirement she has worked as an honorary research associate in Kew's Library & Archives, helping to uncover its unrivalled historic South Asian botanical art collections dating from East India Company times, drawn by Indian artists.

Gina is passionate about retelling Indian botanical history and is helping to organize an exhibition at Kew, opening in October 2025, called Flora Indica, showing East India Company commissioned illustrations, drawn by Indian botanical artists, dating from 1790 to 1850.

Gina is also a musician and many years ago played the horn for the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Lalitha Mahal Palace in Mysore



Itinerary 23 January – 7 February 2026

B = Breakfast **L** = Lunch **D** = Dinner

2 nights Bangalore - 3 nights Mysore – 2 nights Ooty
– 2 nights Madurai – 3 nights Periyar - 3 nights Cochin



Day 1: Bangalore (Fri, 23 Jan) **D**

Botanical Discovery in the Land of the Hortus Malabaricus

Am: Arrive in Bangalore and transfer to the hotel.

Day 2: Bangalore (Sat, 24 Jan) **B D**

Botanical Art of the "Company School"

Am: Visit the Lal Bagh Botanical Gardens, as well as the library with its excellent collection of botanical art.

Pm: Drive to the outskirts of Bangalore to visit Amrutha Vana Ethnomedicinal Garden, which cultivates a vast and beautiful range of plants valued for their medicinal properties according to Ayurvedic principles. Tour the lush gardens and immaculately catalogued plant library.

Day 3: Bangalore / Mysore **B D**

(Sun, 25 Jan)

Silk: Made with Mulberries

Am: Drive to Mysore, stopping en route to visit the elegant summer palace of Sultan Tipu, set in lovely riverside gardens and notable for its teak pillars and ornamental frescoes depicting the Sultan's struggle against the British.

Pm: Arrive in Mysore and check in to your hotel, before wandering through the colourful throngs of Devaraj Market.

Day 4: Mysore (Mon, 26 Jan) **B AT**

Sandalwood: The Scent of Mysore

Am: Visit one of the most astonishingly ornate palaces in India, Mysore Palace.

Pm: Retire for sunset afternoon tea (AT) with a local flavour, at the heritage bungalows.

Day 5: Mysore (Tues, 27 Jan) **B D**

Ayurveda and its Botanicals

Am: Visit a traditional Ayurvedic production centre, BV Pundit's of Mysore. This third-generation, family run factory follows strict Ayurvedic principles and uses authentic methods of distilling and cooking the herbs, hand rolling the tablets and packaging.

Pm At leisure.

Day 6: Mysore / Ooty (Wed, 28 Jan) **B D**

Gin and Tonic, Cinchona Bitters

Am: Drive into the Blue Mountains up to the hill station of Ooty. Known as the Queen of the Hill Stations, 'Snooty Ooty' is a cool, tranquil town surrounded by hills and tea slopes.

Pm: Stop to see the Naduvattam old cinchona factory before checking in to the hotel.

Eve: Gin and tonic at the hotel.

Day 7: Ooty / Coonoor / Ooty (Thurs, 29 Jan) **B L**

Tea: Two Leaves and a Bud in the South

Am: Take the toy train to Coonoor on an exhilarating switchback ride through the Blue Mountains. Visit a tea plantation and factory to learn about the production of this most essential of leaves.

Pm: Lunch at the residence of William Graham McIlvor, the founder of the Ooty Botanical Gardens. Return to Ooty and visit its famous botanical gardens, which were originally laid out by gardeners from Kew.

Day 8: Ooty / Madurai (Fri, 30 Jan) B D

Planting Gardens

Am: Meet with Mr Bosco, an ecologist at the indigenous plant nursery at Ooty, before departing via the lush Cardamom Hills.

Pm: Arrive and check in to the hotel.

Day 9: Madurai (Sat, 31 Jan) B D

Hill Stations: Healing Nature

Am: Visit the soaring, brightly coloured Meenakshi Temple – one of the oldest and most significant Hindu temples in India.

Pm: Take a rickshaw ride, followed by a mouthwatering street food trail.

Day 10: Madurai / Periyar (Sun, 1 Feb) B D

Curry: Making the Dish

Am: Set out for the highlands of Periyar on a spectacular drive past vivid green plantations of tea, coffee, rubber, and spice.

Eve: Arrive and transfer to your hotel. Watch a performance of the high energy, traditional martial art of Kalaripayattu.

Day 11: Periyar (Mon, 2 Feb) B L

Pepper: Kerala's Gift

Am: Join Mr and Mrs Abraham on a tour of their local spice plantation which featured in Monty Don's Around the World in 80 Gardens.

Pm: Watch Mrs Abraham proudly preparing a meal using their own spices, which you will then enjoy for lunch.

Day 12: Periyar (Tues, 3 Feb) B D

Spice Plantations: Export Riches

Am: Take a guided nature walk of Periyar National Park with a local naturalist. Explore this vast and pristine reserve, renowned for its wildlife which includes elephants and leopards.

Pm: Afternoon at leisure.

Day 13: Periyar / Cochin (Wed, 4 Feb) B D

Trade: Why the World Came to Cochin

Am: Depart the cooler highlands and drive through the Western Ghats to the coast.

Pm: Arrive at the port of Cochin.

Day 14: Cochin (Thurs, 5 Feb) B D

Fort Kochi: Historical Village

Am: Take a walking tour of Fort Cochin and visit the oldest church in India, 500-year-old Portuguese houses and the spice houses.

Pm: Watch a Kathakali dance show.

Day 15: Cochin (Fri, 6 Feb) B L D

Trip to Alleppey: Land of Backwaters

Am/Pm: Drive to Alleppey, board a converted rice barge for a private cruise along the tranquil Keralan backwaters. Watch local life unfold as you drift past families swimming, fishing and washing in the canals, past vegetable-laden canoes, vivid green rice paddies and coconut farms. Enjoy a delicious Keralan lunch on board before returning to Cochin.

Eve: Enjoy a farewell dinner with the group.

Day 16: Cochin (Sat, 7 Feb) B

Am: Depart OR take extension.

Extension to Kumarakom

7–10 February 2026

On 7 February, transfer from Cochin to Kumarakom, a village surrounded by thick mangrove forest on Vembanad Lake in the tranquil, canal-laced backwaters of Kerala. It is also a birdwatcher's paradise, with Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary being home to many species, including cuckoos and Siberian storks.

Arrive at the luxury Kumarakom Lake Resort to relax at your leisure for three nights. On the 10 February, depart Kumarakom and transfer to Cochin Airport for your return flight.

All itineraries are subject to change according to local conditions.



Fragrant Nature Hotel

Hotels

Lemon Tree Ulsoor Hotel (Bangalore)

Sleek and contemporary, this comfortable and friendly hotel is situated in the heart of Bangalore.

Southern Star (Mysore)

Centrally located and built within 4 acres of beautifully landscaped gardens with a pool, this hotel provides comfortable and spacious rooms, contemporary style and excellent customer service.

Accord Highland (Ooty)

Overlooking the misty green hills, this hotel blends contemporary design with a homely, traditional touch. The rooms are spacious, comfortable and well-appointed. On the grounds, there is a tea kadai where you can enjoy a cup of chai and a butter biscuit in the peaceful surroundings.

Heritage Madurai (Madurai)

A luxury hotel with understated elegance. The spacious rooms are full of natural light, with some designed by the renowned Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa (contact us to reserve). There is an Olympic-sized temple tank pool, wellness centre and excellent restaurant.

Elephant Court (Periyar)

A welcoming hotel rambling across spacious grounds, Elephant Court provides spacious and elegant rooms, a lovely pool and an excellent restaurant.

Fragrant Nature (Cochin)

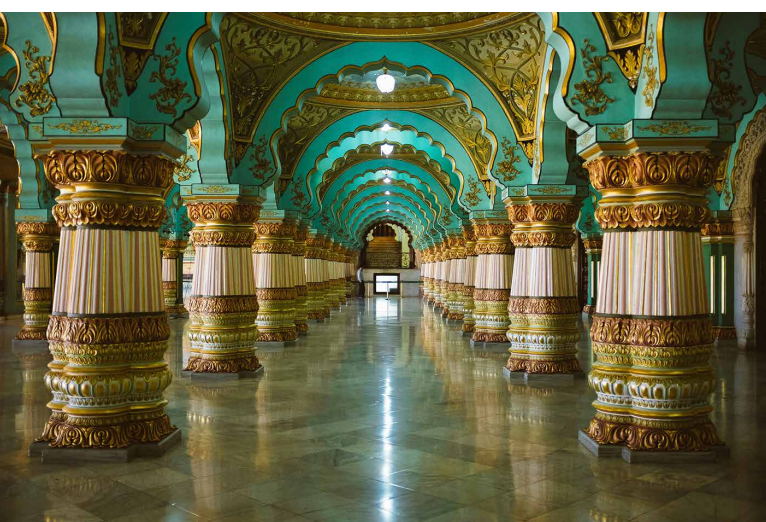
A boutique hotel in Fort Cochin located in a restored East India Company office. All rooms are tastefully designed with modern comforts and the suites also have a private balcony overlooking the harbour (contact us to upgrade). The hotel facilities include a gym, spa and rooftop pool, two restaurants, a pool bar and cafe and bar.

Extension - Kumarakom Lake Resort

Set along the serene banks of Vembanad Lake, the resort spans 25 acres of luxury villas, gardens, and a large swimming pool. The complex has two excellent restaurants, one serving Keralan delicacies and a specialty seafood bar with sunset views. Indulge in Ayurvedic treatments at the wellness centre and unwind in a luxury pavilion room.

“Without doubt a thoroughly enjoyable, inspirational and informative experience.”

Sonia Benster, Histories along the Malabar Coast, Jan 2020



Relax in the Keralan backwaters on an extension (top);
The Chinese fishing nets in Cochin; Mr Abraham in his spice
plantation; Inside Mysore Palace (above)

The cost of the tour per person sharing is US \$4,732

The cost of the tour with a room to yourself is US \$5,594

The cost includes:

- 15 nights' accommodation in twin-bedded rooms within medium grade, heritage and boutique hotels
- The services of a tour leader, (Gina Fullerlove)
- The services of an English-speaking national guide, ('Prince' Charles)
- A full programme of cultural visits
- Comprehensive briefing notes
- All admission fees
- Breakfast and lunch or dinner daily (as per itinerary)
- All internal transport, tips and taxes

The cost excludes:

- International flights and airport transfers
- Meals not mentioned
- Drinks with meals
- All optional excursions, tours and visits; all personal extras such as portage, laundry and inoculation fees; travel insurance

The cost of the extension per person sharing is US \$690

The cost of the extension with a room to yourself is US \$1,222

The cost includes:

- 3 nights' accommodation with private facilities in a luxury pavilion room at the Kumarakom Lake Resort
- Breakfast daily
- Daily activities at the resort
- Transfers to the resort and from the resort to Cochin airport

"Thank you for the India trip. Gary and I had a tremendous time and were really impressed by Charles! We can't recommend the trip highly enough."

Amanda Bamford, participant Spices, Trade and Botanicals Malabar Coast, January 2024.

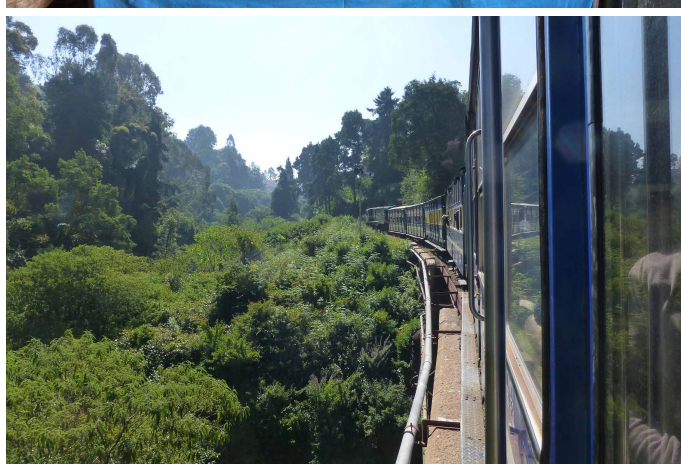
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Mysore Palace (top); On the road in Periyar;
Spice seller in Mysore; Take the train to Ooty (above)



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