



Journey through the Cardamom Hills, Western Ghats, Kerala

A Cambridge Alumni Private Tour: Spice, Trade and Botanicals Histories along the Malabar Coast

4 – 19 February 2027

Post Tour Extension to the Keralan Backwaters

19 – 22 February 2027



Level 3
MODERATE





Mysore Palace

The lush Malabar Coast is fragrant with the precious spices that have brought traders from far and wide throughout history, making this coastline rich in both wealth and culture. Travel through the most evocative parts of Malabar, taking inspiration from *Hortus Malabaricus* (meaning “Garden of Malabar.”) Each day features a botanical theme.

Hortus Malabaricus, with its beautiful illustrations, captured the flora of the Western Ghats, bringing Malabar’s indigenous plant knowledge to the attention of the world from 1678 to 1693. The respected Kochi botanist, K. S. Manilal, translated it from Latin into English and Malayalam.

Start in Bangalore, the Garden City of India, and visit the historic Lalbagh Botanical Gardens. Continue to sumptuous Mysore, famed for its silk, sandalwood and spices, to enjoy high tea in a palace and watch traditional hand-rolling techniques in a family-run Ayurvedic workshop.

Drive into the Blue Mountains to the cool tranquility of ‘Snooty Ooty’, known as the

Queen of the Hill Stations. Take the toy train through the mountains to Coonoor and continue through the Cardamom Hills to Madurai, home to magnificent Meenakshi Temple. Onto the lush spice holdings of Periyar and spectacular Periyar National Park.

Cruise the Keralan backwaters on a converted rice barge to finish in historic, languid Kochi – the birthplace of the *Hortus Malabaricus* – or extend your trip in the lush Keralan backwaters.

This journey has been organised for the University of Cambridge alumni and their friends and family. This tour is also open to alumni of Oxford University and their friends and family.

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. In 2025, she helped with the curation of the exhibition *Flora Indica* at Kew, which showed East India Company commissioned illustrations, drawn by Indian botanical artists, dating from 1790 to 1850.

She will be accompanied by Charlie, a popular national guide, who travelled with her on this tour in 2026.

**'Gina and Charlie worked very well together and made an excellent team.
You could not have created a better leadership pairing!'**

Liz, Histories along the Malabar Coast, Jan 2026



Lalbagh Botanical Gardens, Bangalore

Itinerary 4 – 19 February 2027

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

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



Day 1: Bangalore (Thur, 4 Feb) **D**

Botanical Discovery in the Land of the Hortus Malabaricus

Am: Arrive in Bangalore. Transfer to the hotel.

Pm: Welcome dinner.

Day 2: Bangalore (Fri, 5 Feb) **B D**

Lalbagh and the Making of the Garden City

Am: Tour of Lalbagh Botanical Gardens, laid out in 1760 by famous ruler Hyder Ali.

Pm: Drive to the city's outskirts to visit the superb Amrutha Vana Ethnomedicinal Garden, which cultivates a vast and beautiful range of plants valued for their medicinal properties according to Ayurvedic principles.

Day 3: Bangalore / Mysore (Sat, 6 Feb) **B D**

Silk: Made with Mulberries

Am: Drive to Mysore, stopping 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 the hotel.

Day 4: Mysore (Sun, 7 Feb) **B AT**

Sandalwood: The Scent of Mysore

Am: Wander the colourful throngs of Devaraj Market and visit the astonishingly ornate Mysore Palace.

Pm: Retire for sunset afternoon tea in the princely grandeur of Lalith Mahal Palace.

Eve: Enjoy the Mysore Palace illuminations.

Day 5: Mysore (Mon, 8 Feb) **B D**

Ayurveda and its Botanicals

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

Pm: At leisure.

Day 6: Mysore / Ooty (Tues, 9 Feb) **B D**

Gin and Tonic, Cinchona Bitters

Am: Drive up to the lush hill station of Ooty.

Pm: See the old cinchona factory in Naduvattam before checking in to the hotel. Relax with a gin and tonic.

Day 7: Ooty / Coonoor / Ooty (Wed, 10 Feb) **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 production of this most essential of leaves.

Pm: Lunch at the residence of William Graham McIlvor, the founder of 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 (Thur, 11 Feb) B D

Planting Gardens and Colonial Sins

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 (Fri, 12 Feb) B D

Healing Nature and Herbals

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

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

Day 10: Madurai / Periyar (Sat, 13 Feb) B D

Botanical Collectors in the Ghats

Am: Drive to Periyar in the Western Ghats.

Pm: Transfer to the hotel to relax at leisure.

Day 11: Periyar (Sun, 14 Feb) B L

Cardamom and Pepper: Kerala's Gift

Am: Join Mr and Mrs Abraham on a tour of the spice smallholding they have nurtured for many years, which featured in Monty Don's *Around the World in 80 Gardens*.

Pm: Watch a local family prepare a meal with their own spices and share this with them. Watch explosively balletic Kalaripayattu, a Keralan martial art.

Day 12: Periyar (Mon, 15 Feb) B D

Exploring Nature and Spice Trade Riches

Am: Take a guided walk of vast Periyar National Park with a naturalist. This pristine reserve is renowned for wildlife, such as elephants and leopards.

Pm: Afternoon at leisure.

Day 13: Periyar / Kochi B L D

(Tues, 16 Feb)

Trade: Why the World Came to Kochi

Am: Depart the cooler highlands on a spectacular descent through the Western Ghats, past tea, coffee, rubber, pineapple and spice plantations. Continue to coastal Alleppey with its serene backwaters and lush landscapes.

Pm: Board a private converted rice barge and see Keralan life unfold as you drift through the canals, past vivid green rice paddies and coconut farms. Enjoy a delicious Keralan lunch on board before driving to Kochi.

Day 14: Kochi (Wed, 17 Feb) B L

Fort Kochi, Historical Village

Am: Take a walking tour of Fort Kochi and witness the wonderful blend of influences. Visit the oldest church in India, 500-year-old Portuguese houses, and scenes that could be lifted from an English country village.

Pm: Watch a performance of Kathakali, a classical Keralan dance. At leisure to explore the many wonderful restaurants of Kochi.

Day 15: Kochi (Thurs, 18 Feb) B D

Spice Trades and the Great Hortus Malabaricus

Am/Pm Tour the old spice houses of Kochi and trace Kochi's spice trade back to ancient Greece.

Eve: Enjoy a farewell dinner.

Day 16: Kochi (Fri, 19 Feb) B

Am: Depart OR take extension to Kumarakom.

All itineraries are subject to change according to local conditions.

'There was a wonderful variety of visits, both botanical and cultural, greatly enhanced by the knowledge and expertise of the tour guides and national guides.'

Victoria Bull, Spice, Trade and Botanicals - Histories along the Malabar Coast, Jan 2026



Fragrant Nature Hotel

Hotels

The Royal Orchid, Bangalore

A charming, ivy coated red-brick building with well-appointed rooms, scenic views and a rooftop temperature-controlled pool.

Southern Star, Mysore

This centrally located hotel provides spacious and contemporary rooms, excellent customer service and a lovely outdoor pool area.

Sterling Ooty - Fern Hill, Ooty

This resort hotel sprawls across 8 acres of Ooty's leafy hilltop slopes with bright and spacious rooms. The site's organic vegetable garden supplies the restaurant.

Heritage Madurai, Madurai

A heritage building originally designed by Geoffrey Bawa, restored in his signature style of tropical modernism. This luxury, eco-friendly hotel has elegant rooms, a pool, a spa, and an excellent restaurant.

Elephant Court, Periyar

This lovely resort combines a sustainable ethos with rambling grounds, spacious rooms and a wonderful pool and restaurant.

Fragrant Nature, Kochi

Once an East India Company office, this boutique hotel provides tastefully designed rooms, a wellness centre, rooftop pool with a bar, and two restaurants. **Contact us to upgrade to a suite with a harbour view and private balcony.**

Extension to Kumarakom

19 – 22 February 2027

Transfer from Kochi to Kumarakom, a village in the canal-laced backwaters of Kerala. Check in to Kumarakom Lake Resort and spend three nights at leisure. At the end of your stay, we will arrange your transfer to Kochi Airport for your return flight.

Kumarakom Lake Resort

Set along the serene banks of Vembanad Lake, the 25-acre site contains luxury villas and suites, several swimming pools, an Ayurvedic spa, health club and multi-cuisine and specialty restaurants serving up Kerala delicacies. It is a birdwatcher's paradise, located close to the Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary, where many species nest, including cuckoos and Siberian storks.



Tamil women collecting tea leaves, Kerala (top); A dahlia at Ooty botanical gardens; Meenakshi Temple Madurai (above)

The cost of the tour per person sharing is €4,304

The cost of the tour with a room to yourself is €5,120

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, Charlie
- A full programme of specially arranged cultural visits as detailed in the itinerary
- 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 €714

The cost of the extension with a room to yourself is €1296

The extension cost includes:

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

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About Us

To travel with us is to dig below the surface, revealing the deeper destination. Of course, you will visit the great historical sites; marvel at the wonders of architecture and engineering; be moved by the riches of culture and art; and experience the most spectacular landscapes in the world. We also ensure that you see the country as it is today, giving you privileged access that independent travel and other tour companies rarely get close to.

From the sublime to the humble, we provide a variety of experiences in the company of intelligent, curious, like-minded people. And while we can be worthy, we also make sure that you have a lot of fun!

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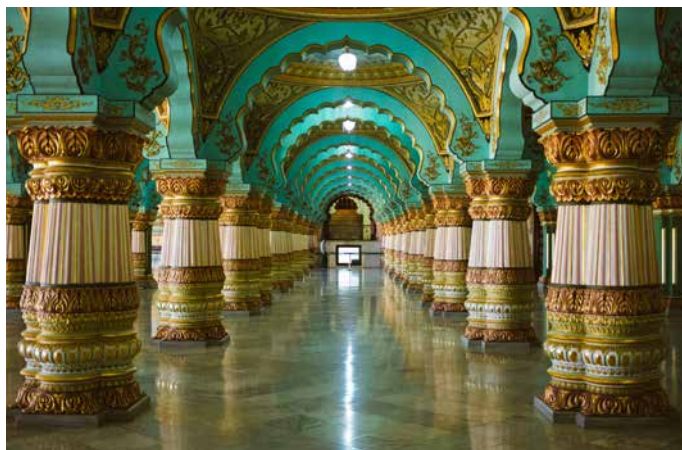
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Take tea at the Lalitha Mahal Palace (top); Relax in the Keralan backwaters on a converted rice barge; Inside Mysore Palace; The Chinese fishing nets in Kochi (above)



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