

A Unique Journey in Kerala 2018-19

The Journey:

The trail starts in the historical Muziris and famed Pokkali farms, slowly moving to the rainforest regions of Chalakudy river, and traverse through lands covering Palakkad, Thrissur and Malappuram districts where Nila is more a culture than a river. The trail concludes in Ponnani where the river joins Arabian Sea. Next phase of the journey starts from Kozhikode to Kannur exploration the cultural immersion of the region ranging from Thirayattam to Theyyam.

Meet people whose livelihood are connected to Nila. Experience the culture and lifestyle the river has nurtured. Encounter rare art forms and craftsmanship. Spend time with artists, their families and friends. Listen to magical myths. Enhance your sensory experience through the cuisines of the region. This journey is the story of a river and its people. Stories that will stay close to your heart, all your life.

The Second phase of the journey is literally a deep dive into the unknown. A mystic land, with mystic appeal to everything from spirituality to lifestyle, this journey takes you to another world literally.

Experiences and Activities:

Kayaking - Country Boat Cruise - Cycling - Walking - Organic Farm Visits - Culinary Trail - Cook With a Local - Dine With a Local - Fishing - Mudi yettu - Chavittu Nadakam - Yoga - Wild River Swimming - Monsoon Games - Bell Metal Crafting - Waterfall Visits - Literary Trail - Weaving - Music Trail - Folk Expressions - Conservation Walks - High Altitude Treks - Storytelling - Glove Puppetry - Heritage Homestays - Boutique Resorts - Bathing in Local Ponds - Kathakali Koppu Making - Day With The Masters - Folk Expressions - Mat Weaving - Martial Arts - Architectural Trail - Mudi yettu - Mask Masking - Face Painting - Festival Hopping - Interactive session with artists - Theyyam - Compassionate Kozhikode.

Feedback from previous trips:

"A fantastic cultural immersion experience" - Neelima Vellangi

"Witnessing the natural beauty and tradition that follows along River Nila was both eye-opening and awe-inspiring." - Sumedha Niranjana

"It's magic that beckons you into the wide blue yonder. Peaceful and profound, emotional and wonderful." - Arun Shantinilayam.

"To expand your horizons, To hear a river speak to you, To believe you made a difference." - Kiron Mahesh

"Nourished and enriched my soul, to say the least. One of my best and memorable travel experiences." - Mohan Kumar

"A fabulous storytelling journey that captures the vibrant traditions of an ancient culture. In all my living in Kerala, I have never quite experienced the rich, artistic heritage as I did during this trip." - Sangeetha Swaroop

"A life changing experience." - Fanny



WHAT IS IN THIS JOURNEY:

The Villages in Malappuram, Thrissur and Palakkad Districts

The trip passes through villages in Thrissur, Palakkad and Malappuram districts. Stay in traditional "boutique heritage" properties, eat local cuisines, explore farmlands and ethnic toddy shops including in Malappuram Districts.

The Mountains & Hills

Explore photography vantage points of Nelliampathy hills and Nilambur and many hillocks dotting the river. This is your opportunity to take out your wide lenses and create beautiful panoramas.

The River

Travel along the banks of Periyar, Chalakudy river, River Nila and Chaliyar . Meet people, click portraits. Visit local tea shops. Document Nila amidst monsoons. Central theme of this trip would be the river and its influences and vice versa on local culture, nature and heritage.

Temples, Mosques, Myths & Rituals

Visit temples and mosques, listen to the legends and myths from the people of the region. Experience rituals like Kalamezhuthu Paattu and Pulluvan Pattu and explore the still remaining Sufi traditions which are exclusive cultural symbols of Kerala's rich tradition. Where else can you hear stories of a 600 year old Muslim mosque that was built by a Hindu carpenter whose tomb is still taken care of inside the mosque?

Art, Artists, Craft, Craftsmen

Meet various artists and craftsmen while they perform. The man who creates Kathakali Koppu, the only family who creates Adakkaputhur Kannadi, magical shadow puppetry and Glove puppetry performances are just some of them.

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Music

Experience the music of the river from the mountain to the sea that nurtured this civilisation. Follow us on a musical trail.

Nature, Landscapes

Follow the river, explore natural ponds, farmlands, mangroves. Join our local friends in their conservation efforts.

Forest Train

Experience a train journey through villages to reach Nilambur forests. Visit Railway stations canopied by trees and shrub

The Architecture

Stay in some of the largest remaining traditional households in Kerala, study the intricate designs of sustainable architecture. Understand the future plans of handing over this knowledge to the next generation.

The Sea

Nila ends at Ponnani, where she flows into the Arabian sea. Visit villages in Ponnani, that predominantly houses Muslim communities in contrast to the other villages of Nila.



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Some of the awards and recognitions for this tour.

- "8 Great Trips" – Conde Nast Traveler
- "Gold for Best Cultural Immersion" – WTM London Outlook Traveller
- "Very Best Sustainable Tourism initiative" – Footprint Handbook to India
- "Honourable Mention WTM Responsible Tourism" for Poverty Reduction initiatives.
- "Das Goldene Stadttor" / Golden City Globe aka Tourism Oscars - Berlin, Germany
- "Honourable Mention for Cultural Preservation" – PATA Inspire Award
- "Winner – Socially Responsible Tourism Award" from TODO, Germany
- "Top 10 Green Holidays" – British Airways
- "15 Healthy Things To Do" – The Week
- "5 Great River Journeys in India" – Outlook Traveller.



DAY to DAY ITINERARY

Day ONE:

Location: Muziris / Pokkali:

This location is accessible by car or water in 45-60 minutes from Fort Kochi / Ernakulam.

Activities: *Cycling - Kayaking, Walking - Farm Visits - Lunch with Farmers - Pokkali The Story of a Rice - Thoni Cruise - Chinese Fishing Net*



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Pokkali – The Story of a Rice is a unique community-based initiative to preserve and conserve a one of its kind, the saline-tolerant strain of rice, threatened by extinction. In a stunning backwater setting, this tour gives an opportunity to understand one of the oldest known crops cultivated through a symbiotic farming tradition. It's known for its tolerance to salinity and hence positioned as a climate change resistant food.

The highlight of the day excursion involves interaction with farmers and community leaders who sustain the tradition against many constraints. This trip also gives an insight into sustainable prawn culture and visits to other organic farms. Involves activities like organic farm visit, culinary trail, lunch with farmers, and a country boat cruise circumnavigating the island. The visit is done by walk, kayaks, cycles, canoes and country boats. Details below.

Day at the Pokkali Farm

Meet at the project centre by the river. Walk through the campus to know the story of Pokkali. Cycle or walk to other farms to see multiple crops and fruits and dairy products produced in the villages. Meet at the Kayak station. Explore the backwaters and narrow lanes using kayaks either solo or with a trained farmer.

Lunch with farmers

Rest and relax at the farm house on hammocks by the water. Use one of the village e-libraries. Walk through the Pokkali farms. Taste some of the snacks made out of Pokkali rice as well as local drinks. Board a country boat to circumnavigate the island. Try some local toddy. Conclude the boat trip by one of the Chinese Fishing Nets. Fish with the locals. Relax and watch the sunset from the fishing net platform. Option to have simple snacks on the fishing net.

Transfer to Muziris 30 mins drive. Accommodation at Cranganor. Dinner at the property.

DAY TWO, Muziris

Activities: *Textile Walk - Cycling through Muziris*

About Muziris:

Muziris is an ancient port town in Kerala that still holds a kind of beauty that is filled with history and culture. In Muziris the remnants of its past glory are observable in features like place-names, architecture, and diet still remain. The region is dotted with numerous monuments of a bygone era that conjure up a vast and vivid past. The destinations highlights the cohabitation of Jews, Muslims and Hindus in the past, the emotions of which still continues. Important sites to visit are various churches, mosques and temples, markets like Pattanam and Kottappuram and Chavittu Nadaka performance centres.

Breakfast at Cranganor

MUZIRIS – Textile Walks

We begin at 8 am, heading towards Thazhanjira Paadam to see textile workers stretch and layout the warp threads. The yarn is stretched 100 metres, separated and ushered through the reed or the comb. At the weaving centre are 100 odd looms with 50 functioning. All manned by women and a few older men. We see how warp spooling happens- watch how Ammini Chechi skilfully loops all her fingers and wrist around the threads and skilfully places them in the right nook. A few old ladies spin the weft bobbins meditatively.

The weaver women can pull the comb with one hand, skilfully pass the weft shuttle back and forth, change frames with their feet and catch up on gossip at the same time without missing a beat. Leela Chechi will show you how to tie the weavers knot. It'll be at least ten takes before you figure out what's going on.

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Let's move across the river to The Kaithari Project workshop. A tiny studio by the river - you'll meet Jose the cutter, his hands expertly slicing through the fabric, for over 45 years now. You'll see the workings of a tiny garment studio - paper patterns, thread, scissors, tape, chalk, Jose the cutter and finally Ashokettan the tailor.

From yarn to finished garment all on the banks of the Periyar.

Lunch at the property.

Bike Trails

Ride across the river on the ferry to Chendamangalam and take the quaint winding road up to the synagogue. A little ahead climb up the steep stairs to one of the oldest temples of the region and come full circle at the ruins of the Vypinkota seminary. There are rumours of a caved in tunnel that would take you all the way to Kochi.

The more adventurous could brave the dense undergrowth on the path leading to the cemetery of the Jews. Or you could ride to the lush green paddy fields of Thazhanchira, now home to a few hundred migratory birds. Ride along the canal right until the end where the family of ducks live.

Sometimes the fields are dotted white with a white lotus bloom spreading right up to the horizon. At the edge of the field you can see the tiny old temple with the old oak tree spreading umbrella like over it. Come monsoon the fields are flooded and you will see village women rowing boats to the temple for the special monsoon festival.

Dinner at the property.





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DAY THREE

Transfer to Chalakudy after breakfast.

Activities: Yoga - Bell Metal Casting - Swim in the river - Monsoon Games in the Paddy Field

Rasa Gurukul the village resort set on the Chalakudy river, is a quaint place to unwind and reflect. The resort gives you access to their paddy field and village lifestyle in the most authentic way possible. Options to learn traditional South Indian vegetarian dishes, swimming in the river and playing monsoon games in the paddy fields while interacting with the resident masons and blacksmiths who practice their craft on the campus. Resident Yoga teachers can help you relax and practice during the stay.

Yoga

The resident yoga teacher can help you with basics or additional guidance if you are already a practitioner. There are many locations within the resort and by the river where individual or small group meditation and stretches could be done. Private sessions are possible with advance notice.

Bell Metal Casting

Brief but in-depth interaction with craftsmen who work on bronze-copper casting where they make traditional vessels that are still in use in many homes in Kerala. The intricate and scientific process of making is interesting to watch. The food in the kitchen at the resort is in fact made in many such vessels. An interesting way to ensure that the art and craft and lifestyle is maintained while ensuring the locals can earn in a sustainable fashion.

DAY FOUR

At Rasa Gurukula

Activities: Culinary Sessions - Waterfall Visits - Swimming in River
Breakfast

Culinary Sessions & Lunch

The owner of the property Rasa Gurukul owns the famous South Indian chain called Rasa in London. As a teenager who left his village in pursuit of jobs abroad Rasa says that the village and the recipes his mother used have never left him. The resort for him is a reliving of his childhood and recreation of memories of how his village life used to be. Most of the food at the resort come from the fields within and nearby. Rasa and his staff invite you to the open kitchen where you can learn the basics of Kerala cooking. One of our storytellers will accompany you assisting in sharing the relevance of each food introduced to you.

Waterfall Visits

Athirampilly, Vazhachal and Charpa are two waterfalls of which, Athirampilly is the largest waterfall in Kerala and the latter acts as feeder for the first. Originating in the Western Ghats, Chalakudy river with its rich biodiversity, faces many challenges due to political attempts to dam the river for hydropower. One realizes how much emotional value this place holds for locals and especially the indigenous tribe. During the rains and immediately after the rains, it's a mesmerising experience, especially when we trek down through with assistance from our trackers and forest guides. However any season of the year it is worth a visit.

Drive through the rainforests to interact with local tribal leaders working on river conservation. Hear local stories through them to understand the struggles to sustain their land and water.

Dinner at the property.



DAY FIVE

Transfer to Palakkad after breakfast:

Activities: *Legends of Khazak - Visit to Weaver's Village - Instrument Making and Folk Expressions of Kaniyarkali*

About Palakkad: A destination interesting for its geological relevance also is the gateway of migration for eons through the 'Gap' in the Western Ghats hence making it a cultural hotspot. Older than the Himalayan mountains, the mountain chain of the Western Ghats are well known for their rich and unique flora and fauna. Geological studies have found the west coast broke away from Madagascar 100 million years ago and appeared as cliff with an elevation ranging at 3,300 feet. One of the hottest hotspots of biodiversity in the world, Western Ghats is a UNESCO heritage site as well.

Legends of Khazak

An interactive storytelling session at the imaginary village made popular by the writings of O.V Vijayan, the legendary novelist. This visit involves visits to houses where the characters lived, stories from the novel as well as about the village called Tasarak that influenced the novelist. It's living through the magical realism in real time.

Musical Instruments:

Visit to ancient villages where traditional musical instruments are made. There are very few community members who are involved in this craft lately.

Before lunch, we have another interactive session with weavers in nearby villages who continue to create intricate textile. There are opportunities for purchase of what they produce at fair price directly from the weavers co-operative or individually from the weavers family.

Lunch at one of the traditional family homes.

Option to walk along the paddy fields, water canals and for those who love to swim in traditional ponds, this is also possible with assistance and guidance from our villagers.

Kaniyarkali:

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Evening is dedicated to watching and being part of Kaniyarkali. A folk dance ritual practised only in the few villages of Palakkad. Conducted mostly as a post harvest festival during the summer seasons, there are efforts being taken by some of the families and not for profit trusts to sustain this tradition. Kaniyarkali has various aspects to this which are generally called 'Porattu', some of which includes a circular singing and dancing rituals with movements influenced by the ancient martial arts of Kerala, The Kalaripayattu. Some others include Porattu which depicts the lifestyle and community living amongst various caste communities, their humour and sarcasm (which will be interpreted live for our guests). Dinner with host family.

Accommodation at one of the business hotels or Kandath Heritage Homestay.

DAY SIX:

Transfer to Nelliampathy, early morning. Breakfast enroute.

Activities: *Soft trek and estate Bungalow stay*

About Nelliampathy:

Nelliampathy is an ecologically fragile and sensitive part of the Western Ghats. Now dotted with tea, coffee and spice gardens, it was apparently the estates of Nelliampathy that supplied oranges to the Queen of England! Various trek routes within the private estates as well as those managed by Forest Department in this region give unique viewpoints to surrounding Parambikulam Tiger Reserves and Silent Valley National Park. Many times we have visited the site, even a casual walk or drive through the estate roads have resulted sighting of Wild Gaur, and Elephants to name a few during day and night.

Accommodation will be organized in one of the Colonial Estate Bungalows.



Day SEVEN

Transfer to Vellinezhi

Activities: *Glove Puppetry - Adakkaputhoor Kannadi - Farm Visit - Ancestral Property Guided Tour*

About Vellinezhi:

A quaint village declared as a heritage village by the state of Kerala is known to many Kathakali, the classical performing art of Kerala. Locals proudly claim that there's hardly a house in this village that doesn't have something to do with the art form. At least one member of the family would be associated with the art form. Be it a singer or a performer or the tailor who stitches the dresses for the artist. One of the discipline / styles followed by present day Kathakali artists comes from the village of Kalluvazhu in Vellinezhi and hence named after the place. Dotted with majestic heritage houses, architectural marvels in the forms of temples, Vellinezhi is on the banks of Tootha river, one of the main tributaries of River Nila, that originates in the Silent Valley National Park.

Village Walk:

This is an ideal village to explore through walks. All the details that we miss normally when we are in a vehicle can be explored during these walks. Narrow lanes, earthen streets, bio fences, access to the traditional ponds, rivers and beautiful houses are a soothing sight for the soul.

Enroute from Nellyampathy, we visit the home of the Glove Puppeteer.

Glove Puppetry:

Originally from Renigunta in Andhra Pradesh, KC Ramakrishnan Pandaram's ancestors migrated to Palakkad centuries ago. When they moved their art also transformed – Aryamaala, the folk drama they presented soon changed to Kathakali since that was the popular form in Kerala. From this was born a new form of glove puppetry that combined aspects of puppetry as well as traditional play acting. As the puppets come alive Aandipandaram becomes the character himself emoting the characters and presenting their lives. He belongs to one of the four families of Paruthipully village who practice the craft taking it to the many hamlets in the three districts around the Nila.

Vegetarian lunch with the host family.

Later afternoon, Visit the Bell Metal Craftsman who specialises in making 'mirrors'.

Transforming metal into mirrors: There are only handful of people who make bell metal crafts based mirrors in Kerala. Popular one's are all in the village of Aranmula. What many don't know is the existence of one such workshop on the banks of River Nila. Krishnakumar, was taught by his father the craft of making mirrors by melting Bronze, Copper and a bit of Zinc in a secret formula. Once the metals are molten into the shape they need, the same, once cold, is polished to perfection giving a non distortive reflective metal that looks as good as conventional mirror. This is an interactive visit to see the workshop, meet the craftsman and learn about the intricacies of the art. Guests are also welcome to plan an order for the same directly with the artisan.

Quiet evening in the house and surrounding farm followed by Kalamezhuthu Pattu

Kalamezhuthu Pattu:

A ritualistic painting and performance showing the success of right over wrong depicted through one of the 'Kali' myths of Kerala. Run by many different community members, mana is one of the few places that continues to pursue this tradition of worship and ritual. A ritualistic drawing of mother Goddesses, using organic colours from charcoal, rice powder, dried green leaves, turmeric and lime. The ritual is accompanied by drumming, invoking gods by the temple oracle and recital with a unique one string musical instrument. Locals might join when they know of ritual happening. An authentic, spiritual and artistic experience in the inner courtyard of an ancient building.

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Dinner with the family.

DAY EIGHT, Vellinezhi

Activities: Visit Master Craftsman who makes Kathakali Koppu - Walk to Tootha River - Visit to Kathakali Costume Gallery

Breakfast with the family.

Kathakali Koppu: Most villages in Kerala would have seen Kathakali Performances. This traditional classical dance drama has been popular for centuries and the style of performance varies between the school of practices. However what's interesting is that most of the gears and accessories for the same comes from one family in the last two generations. Today we meet one such unique families where they work hard to preserve this tradition as well as train the younger generation. This interactive session involves observing their work and knowing more about their crafts. Latter part of the day we can **organise** a visit to see the completed versions of the accessories (in a private collection of costume gallery) as it would look like during a performance.

Lunch with the family.

Tootha River: Tootha is one of the richest tributaries of River Nila (Bharatapuzha) that originates in the Silent Valley National Park. While other tributaries dry up during summer months, Tootha continues to flow and passes through many villages including Vellinezhi before it joins the River Nila. Walking distance from the house the banks are a good place to rest and relax.

Dinner with the family.



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DAY NINE:

Activities: *Shadow Puppetry - Swim in the natural pond - Walk in the field - Storytelling*

Transfer to Vaaniyankulam, a village on the banks of River Nila. Enroute, we stop by a beautiful Shiva Temple by the river banks in the middle of an equally beautiful paddy field. Interestingly there's a theatre for shadow puppetry in the middle of the field as well.

Shadow Puppetry

There are 85 temples in Kerala where Shadow Puppetry is still practised, all of these are on the banks of #RiverNila. Performed only by a handful of families, many have performances booked for the next ten years in all these temples. Unfortunately, irrespective of local families offering these puppetry as offerings in the temple, the dwindling number of people in the audience is a worrisome factor. However there are two families who are trying to revive the art form and relating it to modern life. The interactive sessions involves watching a performance, interaction with the masters and practitioners and depending on the season of the year even visiting one of the temples in the village to see the traditional performance with the locals.

Kunnathu Veedu

This 175 year old tharavadu is well preserved. The 10 acre organic farm is blessed with natural ponds and water harvesting systems, and ideal place to rest and relax. There are 5 bedrooms on the property and loads of places that would give 'me time'.

Afternoon is dedicated to spend time in and around the house.

Lunch and Dinner at home.

DAY TEN:

Continue the stay at Kunnathu house

Ottanthullal

Amongst many of the classical dance performances in Kerala, Ottanthullal stands out for its simplicity and humour. The performers wit, sense of humour and satire including criticism of happenings in the society are well received amongst the audience. Irrespective of lack of local knowledge, it's an art form that can be thoroughly enjoyed. All the performances that we organise are in partnership with local schools so that kids can also watch the performances. Instead of a city auditorium, or a hotel, such authentic experiences are much appreciated by our guests.

Afternoon Rest.



DAY ELEVEN

Short transfer to Cheruthuruthy after breakfast.

Village of Cheruthuruthy is set literally on the banks of River Nila. Cheruthuruthy was chosen by Sri Vallathol, the great Malayalam Poet, when he proposed to set up a art school (which later became Kerala Kalamandalam) to preserve classical dance forms of Kerala. Shornur railway station, which is one of the major railway junction in Kerala is 5 minutes away. Memories of River Nila for quite of a lot of locals are from their train journeys where they see the river while crisscrossing the river in the train.

Day With The Masters

A rare opportunity to visit classes where various art forms ranging from classical kathakali to percussions are taught. In this 3 hour walk through the campus, Kerala Kalamandalam, one will see the strenuous effort taken by teachers and students in this residential school. All visits will be accompanied by storytellers from our company who will help interpret art forms and their present relevance. Anyone with a slight interest in music and art will love the energy and ambiance of the place. Haven't met a single guest who left without saying 'WOW'!

Killimangalam Mat Weaving

Revived recently through community participation and interventions from sustainable tourism stakeholders, the cooperative of Killimangalam produces exquisite and hand crafted Killimangalam mats. A one woman army stood her ground and trained other villagers to the dying art of Killimangalam mat weaving. Organically produced, designed and dyed, these mats are a sight to behold. A visit will not be complete without trying your hand on one of the looms with the weaver's permission. A great souvenir option to take back home.

Pottery Workshop:

Most potters along #RiverNila are people who either migrated from villages in Andhra Pradesh or in Tamil Nadu. They not only brought their skills, they also brought their culture, language and rituals. So even in 21st century Kerala, it's normal to hear Telugu and Tamil spoken in the hinterlands of these villages. The visits includes interactive workshops with master potters where you learn to make small household objects. Souvenirs might also be available to pick up during the visit.

Gopalan Ettan is a potter. Just like his father and his grandfather before him he spends his days at his wheel shaping clay brought from the Nila's banks into bowls and water jugs to sell. There are still plenty of potters along the banks of the Nila; small family-run cottage industries that survive despite factory production lines. But when the last of this old generation of potters dies, we are concerned there may be no one left to continue the craft.

Sunset on the banks of River Nila.

Just before the Folk Expressions, sit quietly by the river banks, listening to the lore of the river and her people.

Folk Expressions

There's no way one can simply sit and observe these performances. This evening is dedicated to rhythmic music and folk art forms that will make you want to dance along with the locals. Irrespective of age, culture and background, this evening is dedicated to coming together and positive energy. Started as an initiative to document local art forms and folk expression this is one of the best ways now to understand the rhythm of #RiverNila. Organised with the village community, the performance happens in one of the artist's household. This initiative has revived many art forms in the past decade and provides a livelihood option with dignity to many youngsters.



DAY TWELVE:
Transfer by train to Wandur

Activities: Train Journey - Exploratory Visit to the Largest Remaining House in Kerala - Visit to a Royal House - Special Lunches and Dinners

The Train Journey:

This 90 minutes train journey goes through paddy fields and teak forests. One of the initial railway lines built by the British in Kerala, this route was used to transport teak wood used to line 'sleepers' in Europe before the war. One of the tallest teak trees ever recorded in the country / world is also in Nilambur forests. The Teak Museum is an interesting place to visit during your stay here. Adorned with trees and canopies, railway stations are simple and a delight to spend time.

Wandoor isn't your average travel destination. We wonder how many in Kerala might know this place. Deeply rooted with freedom struggles and many secular movements against the British, this crop rich, forest rich area lost its authority post independence. Wandoor is known for many royal lineage, freedom **fighters** and is proud of having 'The' single household belong to a Namboothiri Family. Maranat Mana is a proof of ancient wisdom and the architectural marvel that is still maintained brilliantly by the young generation. Ideal place for someone who likes to rest, relax and take in the surroundings. Ideal for reflections and understanding of various practices, rituals and traditions. A place where you find how modernity and traditions find a balance. The sort of struggle we all attempt and mostly fail. Welcome to a place that's steeped in it's past, but balancing well enough sustainably in this new age.

Maranat Mana is a traditional Namboothiri Illam (Kerala Brahmin House-hold) which is situated in central Kerala at the foothills of the Western Ghats. Maranat Mana is one of the last imposing structures with "pathinaru kettu"(4 courtyards)built in the traditional Kerala architecture and vasthushastra, occupying a

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plinth area of 1 acre. Sitting pretty on an 8 acre plot filled with coconut, cashew, mango, jackfruit, nutmeg, vanilla and medicinal plants, it is home to a family of more than 30 members.

Visit to Puthiya Kovilakom:

Part of the erstwhile Royal Family of Nilambur, this house is preserved to be handed over to the next generation. Located closer to the town as well as by the river banks of Chaliyar, Puthiya Kovilakam is ideal for someone who loves slow pace of life. Well travelled hosts and unmatched hospitality.

DAY THIRTEEN, Wandur

Activities: Waterfall Visit - Soft Treks - Dinner with local family

Waterfall Visit:

Keralaamkundu is one of the best kept secrets of Kerala. Pitched inside thick forest, this waterfall is a great place to relax. Depending upon the season one can also enter into the water. Make the drive up to the waterfalls in a four wheel drive vehicle or walk up - both are great experiences.

Dinner with a local family:

After having eaten vegetarian food continuously for many days, many guests who are non vegetarian prefer will enjoy this meal. This is a great opportunity to try and taste Malabar food which consist of various preparations of fish and meat. More than the food, what struck our guest the most is the hospitality of the families who host them. Great opportunity to socialise with local families.

Rest of the time at the homestay.



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DAY FOURTEEN:

Transfer to Tirunavaya:

Activities: Naduvattom Village Visit - Farm House Exploration - Poothanum Thirayum Performance

About Tirunavaya

Mamaankam , a once in twelve year festival which originally started as a Buddhist festival was later taken over by the Zamorin of Calicut. This led to internal fights amongst local kings for the authority. When Zamorin attempted to install himself as the emperor of the land that became present Kerala, it resulted in bloodbath, where suicidal warriors trained in traditional martial arts of Kalaripayattu would attempt to kill him during the festival that used to happen in the Malayalam month of Maakam. The small village along the banks of River Nila is dotted with historical relics and stories.

The latter part of colonisation also saw, Swiss German Basel Mission entering the area as part of religious conversion and trade. Remnant of the tile factories, the houses of Rev Gundert, who created the first dictionary in Malayalam can all be seen here. Tirunavaya is also important for Hindus because of the requiem they do for the dead on the banks of the river. Islamic influence in martial arts, Ayurveda and lifestyle is another highlight of the region.

About Kodeeri Mana (Farm Stay)

Secluded in a village surrounded by paddy fields, this farm house is managed by a couple who have retired into village life after having travelled across the country. They live here to make a point that a life towards sustainability can be achieved by being responsible citizens. They grow their own food as much as it's possible and they are trying their best to train other locals as well. A great place to wind down and do nothing. (or dabble in a bit of farming or any other nature based activities that you might like to engage)

Poothanum Thirayum

An interactive session with local artists who perform Poothan and Thira. One of the unique and popular folk expressions that are seen in the three districts of Malappuram, Palakkad and Thrissur district. Active normally during the festive summer season.

Village walk in Naduvattom:

Naduvattom is a historic village that still lives in it's past. Communities that came from across South India as part of the army who fought for either Zamorin of Calicut or his opponents, they left behind amazing array of architecture, and houses. This quaint village also borders another marvel unknown even within Kerala, the 5000 acres of Lotus Pond! Various stretches of this can be seen and walked to from different parts of the village. A great place to unwind and just do nothing.

DAY FIFTEEN, Tirunavaya

Activities: Legend Trails - Visit to Literature Park - Musical Trail - Country Boat Cruise in Tirur River - Visit to Ponnani

Legend Trails

The Kerala Legends Trails is a trip down the rich history of Kerala which goes back several centuries; naturally, its bounty of stories, legends and civilizations is wholesome and plentiful.

Our skilled storytellers and interpreters will introduce you to stories that talk about the River Nila civilization as we travel through historical places. Become acquainted with the strong connection between the Nila and Buddhism! Learn about Mamangam – a festival celebrated once in 12 years by the ancient kings of Kerala to choose an Emperor; discover the rich diversity of faiths in Kerala and spend a tranquil



moment at the spot where German missionary Dr. Hermann Gundert wrote the Malayalam-English dictionary. The Kerala Legend Trails is a spectacular journey through time, uncovering secrets of Kerala's rich history!

Thunjan Parambu

Literature park based in Tirur in memory of father of Malayalam Literature. This is also the place where children 3 or older are initiated into learning by learned people from different parts of the society. Place also has the exhibit of what's believed to be the original palm leaves of Malayalam Ramayana and the stylus with which Poet wrote the classic. The museum displays the evolution of the language and culture.

Musical Trail

Along the banks of River Nila in Kerala, thrived many forms of art in the years gone by! One such incredible art-form is enchanting percussion-based music; traditionally restricted to be performed within the confines of the temple sanctum sanctorum, find out the story of how one inspirational proponent of this art took the music to the masses. Our Musical Trails are built with the objective to bring travelers an authentic, rare piece of art that goes centuries back in time. The local community of students at the Sopanam School of Music will provide an introduction to the history and nature of their music and how an entrepreneur manages to train more than 800 students out of 21 schools in the region. An enthralling and inspiring interactive session.

Thonicruise

The dynamics of River Nila are complex and precarious. Vibrant and thriving communities flourished around its banks for centuries. Yet, the strain of fast-changing economics and lack of sustainable sources of income was threatening to ruin the fine balance between nature and humans in this wonderful ecosystem. River Cruises on Nila are aboard local 'thoni' boats. They are guided by oarsmen from the

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local communities. These cruises act as a source of alternative, supplementary income for these people. Many of the oarsmen were otherwise engaged in disruptive practices such as mining sand illegally from the river bed for lack of income sources. Join us on a cruise aboard the Thoni, in the company of these natural storytellers. Meander along the course of this beautiful river and look at life in the villages along its bank from a distance!

Visit to Ponnani

The boat trip ends in Ponnai that reflects the islamic culture of Bharatapuzha. From Sufi tradition that came from Yemen to the majestic mosque built by a Hindu carpenter are some of the highlights along with the estuary and bazaars which are still alive with trade activities.

DAY SIXTEEN

Enroute to Kozhikode, Visit one of the two remaining wooden ship building yard in India. Still making large ships for the traders and Sheiks in the Middle East, the handcrafted ships of Beypore and the practice of making are an amazing sight to behold.

Interaction with **Compassionate Kozhikode** volunteers. What's CK?

"The collective consciousness of a place is as important as our own individual consciousness. Kozhikode over the years has captured the imagination of the public when it comes to its warmth, hospitality and compassion. An often highlighted example of 'Kozhikodan' characteristic is the typical auto driver story we constantly hear. The drivers are known for their honesty and hospitality. They are famously known to advice you as a passenger to take a public bus because its one tenth the price and the frequency is better. We have seen socially responsible youngsters in Palliative Care Units helping the ailing patients. Compassionate Kozhikode is a platform to celebrate the lives of such people and to bring together like minded people who can create a holistic destination out of Kozhikode. This is an attempt to 'Create Better Places for People to Live & Visit in partnership with Civil Society and District Administration.

Join the volunteers to paint one of the many walls they paint with murals. A great experience in a city that's known for its hospitality.

Lunch and Dinner at one of the many social enterprises that ensures that Kozhikode is a hunger free city. It might be difficult for someone from outside to beleive that there are restaurants in Kozhikode, where you can just walk in without money and food will be served with dignity.

Evening visit one of our traditional martial arts centre to see students practice Kalariyattu in a sunken earth classroom. A choreographed performance is also organised for your personally on this day.



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DAY SEVENTEEN
Thirayattam Trail.

The day (and night) is dedicated to understand the intricacies of Thirayattm and ancient , ritualistic dance drama enacted in courtyards of Sacred Groves and temples of Kozhikode and Malappuram districts of north Kerala, to attain the grace and blessings from the deities of the land.

Traditionally the Peruvannan community has the inherent right to perform this magnificent art form in Kaavukal and temples. Today, the members of Panan and Cherumar communities also perform Thirayattam. The legends of this art form are same, but each community has their own unique beliefs, styles, costumes and customs for performing Thirayattam.

Thirayattam is usually performed in the midst of strident musical instruments like Chenda (Big drums), Ilathalam (cymbals), Thudi (Small drums), Kombu (pipe) and Kurum kuzhal (flute). The enthralling music of the instruments, the festive mood of the believers and the excitement in the air, incite the Thirayattam performers to assume the roles of the divinities they hold in veneration and create a virtuous ambiance. The spiritually frenzied Thirayattam performer kicks and even walks on the glowing jack wood ember.

Each Koolam or Moorthy has their on unique costumes and ornaments that are colorful and attractive. Mughamezhuthu (facial paintings) and melezhuthu (body paintings) are two vital aspects of the koolam's costume and it can be done only by a seasoned artist with skill and experience. Naturally derived colors and articles are used in the make up, usually leaves and barks of Bamboo, Coconut and Arecanut trees are used to make masks, hairs and beards.

Our story tellers from the community will introduce you to artists, practitioners, who do the face make ups, dressing, and rituals. We will follow one or many of the masters for the whole day from festival to festival, household to house-holds.

DAY EIGHTEEN

Transfer to Thalassery. Heritage Walk and Food Trail,
Stay at Aysa Manzil



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DAY NINETEEN, DAY TWENTY, DAY TWENTY ONE in Kannur

Three days dedicated to get to know the magical spell of a variety of Theyyam. Our story tellers, some of them who have Theyyams at home, will give you insight into their lifestyle, beliefs, rituals and art. Though you will see quite a lot of similarity to Thirayattam of previous day in Kozhikode, sheer volume of different variety of Theyyams will be hard to believe. Other than the popular 100s, there are more than 500 different varieties of Theyyam. At least one day and night should be dedicated to move from one temple festival to another, small festivals to large festival to get a pulse of the land and it's people.

-TRIP ENDS-

Accommodations:



Maranat Mana



Rasa Gurukul



River Retreat



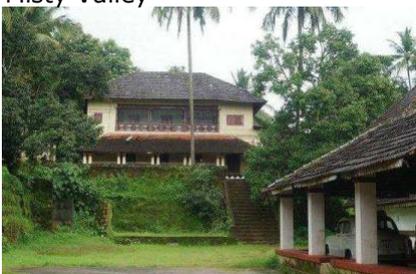
Misty Valley



Kunnathu



Kandath Tharavadu



Olappamanna Mana



Cranganor



Kodeeri Mana



Kadavu Resorts



Chera Rocks

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Location	1 st preference for the activities proposed.	Options nearby		
1. Muziris	Cranganor	Fort House	Malabar House	Brunton Boatyard
2. Chalakudy	Rasa Gurukula	Rainforest		
3. Palakkad	Kandath Tharavad	Palakkad Heritage	Hotel Srivatsa	
3.1 Nelliampathy	Misty Valley			
4. Vellinezhi	Olappamanna Mana	Palakkad Heritage	Kandath Tharavadu	Hotel Srivatsa
5. Vaniyamkulam Gardens	Kunnathu House	River Retreat	Eco	
5.1 Cheruthuruthy	River Retreat	Eco Gardens		Great Hornbill Resort
6. Wandur	Maranat Mana	Puthiya Kovilakam	Teak Town- Nilambur	
7. Tirunavaya	Kodeeri Mana	Rouba Ponnani		
8. Kozhikode	Kadavu	Hari Vihar		
9. Kannur	Chera Rocks			

PRICES:

On request

Vehicles: Innova / Luxury Tempo Traveller / Mini Bus depending on the size of the group.



Points to PONDER

This is a trip designed for any traveller who's keen on an experiential holiday.

The trip starts in Kochi and ends in Kochi. Guests are free to come early and take some extra days as well as extend their stay. Please ask for prices. If you don't have two weeks time to travel, you have an option to **choose** shorter duration of 2-4-6-8-10- 12-14 at your convenience. Pick ups and drop during the hop-on and hop-off can be organised at extra cost.

You will be travelling with a group and not all accommodation can provide single rooms. Please check so that we can recommend alternative accommodation.

Though you will be provided comfortable stay in heritage houses, and **boutique** resorts, the focus of the trip is on the experience itself and NOT ONLY on the comfort of stay.

Though most part of the day will be based on plans designed by lead story tellers and tour leader, we are keeping the schedule for flexible activities.

Bring your own umbrellas and rain cheaters. Carry slippers and good walking shoes. Please note that most households will expect you to remove your footwear, so it's practical to have easily removable footwear.

Group communication language will be English. Let us know in advance if you need other language interpreters. We can assist in French, German, Italian, Spanish, Arabic, Russian and some Indian languages including Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam.

Idea of the trip is to capture the experience as it flows and very rarely would there be 'photo sessions'. Our presence shouldn't be a liability for local people, but an enjoyable experience. Occasionally, there will be one person from our team who will be travelling to capture impromptu moments and behind the scenes.

Participants should keep an open mind towards local cultures and traditions and in doubt, should always consult the team leaders. Community acceptance is the key to this trip.

Our trip will go through conservative areas practicing centuries old tradition. We are here to observe and not judge, so be attentive to the briefing.

Participants should keep time and schedule with punctuality as it's a group trip and your one action might compromise rest of the team

There will be daily briefings either towards the end of day or beginning.

Though there will be a dedicated vehicle for group movement **throughout** the trip, you should expect travelling in public buses, trains, country boats and auto rickshaws. There will be fair amount of walking in rural settings.

None of the areas we are travelling have plastic recycling facility. We request **everyone** to bring their own drinking water bottles to carry through the entire trip. Hygienic, safe drinking water will be provided to all participants to refill throughout the journey. In case you need bottled water, you have to purchase on your own and carry it back with you.

Some of the locations and places of stay need not allow alcohol consumption, cigarette smoking or non vegetarian food. We will give you daily briefing on the same.

Don't be surprised if no one else knows about a place called Nila as a destination. This is a branding exercise we are doing to bring together people and places associated with the unique river valley civilisation of Bharatapuzha which many locals passionately and poetically refer to as 'Nila'. So any mention of #RiverNila will give a boost to the campaign and we greatly appreciate it.

Both Thirayattom and Theyyam have to be seen and experienced with respect and reverence. These are not tourism shows, but real life authentic experiences.



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Routing:

