

CRUISING THE KERALA BACKWATERS

14 - 25 FEBRUARY 2027

FROM
£3,645
PER PERSON

Tour Leader: Lisa Choegyal


The Ultimate
TRAVEL COMPANY

Join Lisa Choegyal on a pioneering cruise through Kerala, from the modern port city Cochin (Kochi) to the ancient port town of Alleppey (Alappuzha) passing through Kottayam, land of rubber and spices. Travel aboard a traditional nine-cabin wooden rice barge on what promises be an enlightening as well as an extremely relaxing holiday.

Kerala has an extensive network of waterways that lace its interior coastline, stretching along almost its entire length of around 600 kms. It is a land of copious rainfall which flows from the hills and mountain passes in freshwater canals and streams to join the 40 odd rivers in the state. This labyrinthine network of canals, streams and rivers, which converge to form lagoons, make up the Backwaters and give rise to a unique eco system which is a haven for nature.

The area has been named by National Geographic as the 'Green Venice of the East' due to the green coconut trees which turn the backwaters a vibrant emerald green, with the setting sun adding splashes of red, all contributing to the serenity of this tropical destination. The waterways teem with life as wooden boats are the only way of travelling between villages. Along the way we will visit temples, churches, marketplaces, paddy fields, beaches and boat yards. We will learn about and experience the vibrant culture of the region including coir handloom weaving, snake boat regattas, traditional toddy tapping, local dances, martial arts and festivals.





Chinese Fishing Nets Cochin



Taj Malabar Hotel



St. Francis, Mattancherry



Kumarakom Bird Life

12-DAY ITINERARY, DEPARTING 14 FEBRUARY 2027

14 February London / Cochin

Suggested flights (not included in the cost of the tour) Emirates EK 8 departing London Heathrow at 09.10 hrs and arriving in Dubai at 20.00 hrs. Connect to Emirates EK 532 departing Dubai at 21.45 hrs.

15 February Cochin

Arrive in Cochin at 03.05 hrs. Group transfer to the Taj Malabar Resort & Spa where two nights are spent. Situated on Willingdon Island with a magnificent view of Cochin harbour, the Taj Malabar Hotel combines old-world elegance with modern day convenience. The Heritage Wing of the hotel was built in 1935 and houses graceful Victorian interiors whilst the Tower Wing rooms mix the classic with the contemporary. With varied restaurants and a fantastic swimming pool this is an excellent hotel in which to relax. Lunch and dinner under own arrangements.

16 February Cochin

Walking tour of Mattancherry, the bustling part of Old Fort Cochin and the epicentre of the spice trade for centuries. The tour reveals Cochin's multi-layered past, a rich brew of Arab, Portuguese, British, and Dutch influences. Visit the Dutch Palace (Mattancherry Palace), originally built

by the Portuguese in 1555 as a gift for the Raja of Cochin. Continue to St. Francis Church, India's first European church famed as the original burial site of Portuguese explorer Vasco de Gama. Next visit the picturesque Chinese fishing nets, unique to Cochin, introduced by the Chinese explorer Zheng He in the 14th century. Lunch under own arrangements. Afternoon at leisure. Welcome dinner at the Rice Boat Restaurant.

17 February Cochin / Maradu / Vaikom

Check out and depart to witness a performance Kalaripayattu, the martial art form of Kerala. Drive to Maradu Jetty in the Ernakulam district of Cochin to embark on the river cruise boat RV Vaikundam. Traditional lunch on board. Set sail on the Backwaters of Cochin, a magnificent network of waterways formed along the coastal belt by the rivers from the Western Ghats before draining into the Arabian Sea. By evening arrive at the old village of Vaikom in Kottayam, the land of natural rubber latex and spices. Visit the ancient Temple of Shiva, one of the largest in Kerala, where following Kerala tradition each element of the temple represents an element of the human body. Dinner on board.

18 February Chenganda / Kumarakom

Cruise to Chenganda where there will be an opportunity to interact with coir weavers, shell harvesters and farmers. Return to the boat and cruise through the Thanneermukkom Barrage which divides the lake into two: one half with perennial saltwater and the other with freshwater enriched by the rivers.

Lunch at a farmhouse, hosted by a Syrian Christian family, located on an island reclaimed from the Backwaters. Return to the boat and continue cruising. Dinner on board.



Kalaripayattu



Snake Boat



Champakkulam

19 February Kumarakom / Lake Vembanad / Kavalam

Early morning, explore Kumarakom's wetlands by country boat, spotting migratory and endemic birds. Waterfowl, cuckoo, owl, egret, heron and the water duck are some of the endemic species seen here. Parrots, teal, larks, flycatchers, wood beetle, and other birds are seen here during their respective migratory seasons. Return to the boat for breakfast. Cruise on Lake Vembanad to Kavalam Village.

Lunch on board. Explore Kavalam Village, paddy fields, and meet local farmers and the Kudumbashree women's collective. Evening Mohiniyattam and Bharatanatyam performance. Dinner on board.

20 February Kavalam / Kainakari / Pulinkunnu

Sail through the interiors of Kuttanad – the regions below sea level. Cruise to Kainakari Village and explore the narrow remote canals by country boat, watching up close the laid-back, yet harmonious, life along the way. Stop at Chavara Bhavan, the ancestral home of Saint Kuriakose Chavara, the first canonised Catholic male saint of Indian origin. The ancestral home of the Saint has now been preserved as a museum.

Lunch on board. Continue cruising to the remote scenic village of Pulinkunnu. Dinner on board.

21 February Pulinkunnu / Champakkulam / Changankari

Drive to Aranmula Village, famous for its unique metal mirrors crafted by master artisans. Visit the ancient Aranmula Sree Parthasarathy Temple, dedicated to Lord Krishna, situated on the banks of the Pampa River, the

holy river of natives.

Traditional lunch at a local house on the riverbank and see the Palliodom, the village's divine vessel. Drive to Champakkulam Village, settled more than 1000 years ago by Syrian Christian traders, who later converted to Roman Catholicism under the Portuguese. Visit the monumental St. Mary's Church on the riverside, believed to be one of the seven established by St. Thomas in AD 427, and the ancient open-air Rock Cross (AD 1151). Interact with local artisans, school children, and small entrepreneurs. Cruise on to the remote village of Changankari. Dinner on board.

22 February Changankari / Thottappalli

Early morning walk in Changankari Village. Continue sailing towards the coastal village of Thottappalli, passing by the spillway in the southern area of Kuttanad, which prevents the saline water at river mouth from flooding the low-lying paddy fields. Short drive to an ancient sacred grove to visit the only temple in Kerala with female priests and observe snake worship rituals, an integral part of local culture. Continue to Mannar Village, renowned for bell metal craft, to see the casting of traditional lamps, bells, cauldrons, and temple vessels using the lost-wax method.

Lunch on board. Arrive in Thottappalli and take an evening walk along the beach to see local coastal life. Dinner on board.

23 February Thottappalli / Karumadi / Kanjippadom

As a tribute to your cruise, plant a coconut sapling, revered as the

'Kalpavriksha' or Divine Tree of Kerala, whose every part supports local livelihoods – from coconut water and kernel in cuisine, coir from husks, palm fronds for thatching, wood for furniture, to toddy for field labourers. Return to the boat for breakfast. Arrive in Karumadi Village. Here an 11th-century statue of Buddha is preserved in a small shrine. Onboard, enjoy a presentation on Kerala's cultural history.

Lunch on board. Cruise to Kanjippadom Village and take a walk to visit a boat yard where traditional wooden boats are built and repaired. You might be able to see the art of traditional Kettuvallum or coir rope lashed wooden plank boat building. Return to the boat for a farewell dinner.

24 February Kanjippadom / Punnamada / Alleppey / Cochin

Cruise to Punnamada Lake, where the annual Snake Boat Race is held using traditional boats, once maritime war boats, decorated in Kerala style. Cruise to Alleppey, the ancient port town, criss-crossed by rivers, lakes, canals, lagoons and paddy fields, known as the Venice of the East. Disembark and transfer to Cochin. Check into the Courtyard by Marriott Hotel where one night is spent.

Lunch at the hotel. Afternoon at leisure. Dinner under own arrangements.

25 February Cochin / London

Group transfer to Cochin Airport for suggested flights (not included) Emirates EK 531 departing at 09.40 hrs arriving Dubai at 12.10 hrs. Connect to Emirates flight EK 3 departing Dubai at 14.30 hrs arriving London Heathrow at 18.20 hrs.



RV Vaikundam

The river boats of today are modified versions of the traditional Kettuvalloam or rice barges, which in past years were used for transporting produce from farms in the interior of Kerala to the markets. Today they are comfortable cruising homes allowing guests to unwind, relax and immerse themselves in the pristine nature and captivating local activity along the meandering network of the Backwaters.

RV Vaikundam has nine well-appointed cabins, with ensuite bathrooms, on its lower deck and a well-appointed kitchen, an air-conditioned and exquisitely furnished dining room and an open-air lounge on its upper deck. The wooden hull of the boat has been fashioned by joining planks of local 'Aanjili' wood, using strong coir rope on the sections above the waterline while, below the waterline, copper tacks are used for added strength in keeping with traditional methods. The wood is coated with caustic black resin made by boiling cashew kernel and fish oil and is periodically treated with neem oil and fish oil. The rooms are made using wooden panels, bamboo poles and bamboo mats, following the traditional practices.

TOUR PRICES PER PERSON

Tour Price	£3,645
Single Supplement	£1,290
Upgrade to Cabin 1	£100 (£200 single basis)

Please note we have not included the cost of the flights in the tour price. Please contact us for prices should you wish to book them through us.

PRICE INCLUDES

- Accommodation throughout as shown in the itinerary
- Breakfast daily; 8 lunches; 8 dinners
- All entrance fees, visits, excursions and transportation as per the itinerary
- Gratuities in restaurants for included meals
- Gratuities to driver/s
- Porterage
- Gratuities to guide/s
- Local English-speaking guide/s
- The services of your tour leader throughout

PRICE EXCLUDES

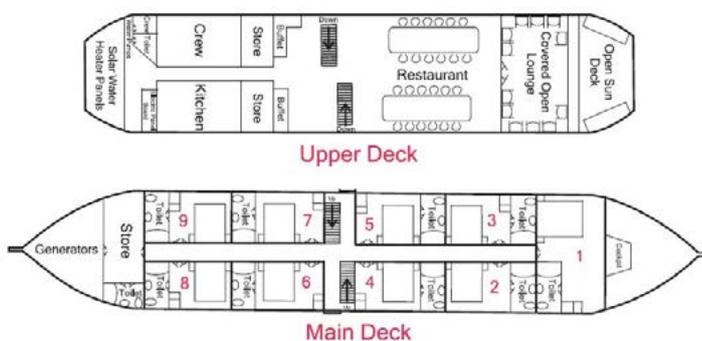
- International flights
- Travel insurance
- Visas
- Items of personal expenditure (e.g. telephone calls / laundry etc.)
- Government levies or taxes introduced after costing and publication of this programme on 27/10/25

ON BOARD

- The boat has two decks. The upper deck offers the open sun deck with a 360-degree view, an open lounge deck looking forward and an indoor, air-conditioned restaurant seating 22 guests.
- There is a small on-board library.
- Indian and international cuisine is offered on board in the restaurant.
- The lower deck has nine cabins with the first cabin being the deluxe cabin and the balance eight being superior cabins. All cabins are air-conditioned with ensuite washroom and toilet facilities.
- Each cabin has large windows, have twin and double beds, a cupboard and side tables.
- The electricity is run 24 x 7 and there is always running hot and cold water.
- There is an on-board destination manager, cruise director and chef and there is a complete crew of ten people for eighteen guests.

FOOD AND DINING

- Well equipped kitchen managed by experienced Chef and service team.
- Buffet Menu: Traditional Indian cuisines Vegetarian and non-vegetarian Indian food using locally available fresh products.
- Beverages: Authentic Indian Wine and beer is available on-board.
- A special chef's meal is arranged serving Kerala Cuisine with fresh catch of seafood in a traditional style on a banana leaf.





Lisa Choegy

Lisa Choegy, sister of Nick Van Gruisen, is a writer, traveller and international sustainable tourism specialist based in Kathmandu for the past 50 years. With a background in the private sector, she worked as marketing director with Tiger Tops and Mountain Travel Nepal, pioneering wildlife, culture, trekking and adventure tourism in South Asia, and is director of the award-winning Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. Since the early 1990s, Lisa has undertaken tourism consultancy roles in Nepal and throughout the Asia Pacific region, often in World Heritage Sites, national parks and protected areas. Lisa has edited and produced a number of books, was a columnist for Nepali Times, and writes regularly on tourism and conservation (www.lisachoegy.com). She is widely experienced in production liaison for documentary and feature films, serves on a number of boards for Nepali, UK and USA not-for-profit organisations, and since 2010 is New Zealand Honorary Consul to Nepal.

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