

AYURVEDIC EXPERIENCE & TOUR OF SOUTH INDIA

A TWO OR THREE WEEK UNIQUE HOLIDAY HELD IN FEBRUARY ANNUALLY
LED BY VICKY GAUGHAN



EXPLORE NEW TERRITORY AND TASTE, FEEL AND LIVE THE WISDOM OF AYURVEDA

KOVALAM

Do you challenge yourself to slow down? Slow down even to a pace that is at the same time welcome and unfamiliar. Come and go with the flow of life. Go and come to yourself and open. Open your heart and connect with the heart of Kerala. In Kovalam you will see before you a rich and diverse community made up of locals and travellers...

... a symbiotic relationship. We need each other. Indian culture; old and new meeting the foreigner. The seeker will be at home here. The one who is found, the one who has reached where they want to be and is fathomed, will not stay. Us, who are looking for the unnameable, who are on a path of curiosity and who lean toward the wildside, will enjoy the edginess of this part of the world. Join the morning constitutional at sunrise, while the Arabian Sea laps the shore, invite your self to a few laps and meet others from all walks of life. Brave the swell and plunge into the waves for an exhilarating swim in the bay. Witness the fisherfolk haul their net and transport the days catch to the beach restaurants for same day lunch delights. Hang loose or lose yourself in the labyrinth of tiny stalls jam packed with fascinating items to buy. Take time out and do nothing or spend time doing everything; there is time here to do whatever you choose.

"Oh the beach. That was simply divine having the first week relaxing by those amazing waves. The guys at Little Elephant were so nice, so friendly, so helpful. Lovely having time to ourselves to unwind and do our own thing. Chatting to the fruit lady and the beach hawkers, tradespeople and shopkeepers. A wonderful start to an amazing experience" - Helen



ON THE MOVE

TRAIN TO COCHIN

After the beach we travel by rail to our next destination. It's hard to leave Kovalam and The Little Elephant home we've made for ourselves. Accompanied by Sunita, we experience the hustle and bustle of Thiruvananthapuram railway station and travel to our next corner in South India, Cochin. We scramble on, take our seats and settle in to our comfy carriage.

This five hour journey is unhurried. Through dusty windows we see Kerala life go by or join in the conversations and process the holiday so far. Questions arise from being in India; lots of questions. From the seasoned traveller to the complete beginner, this is a holiday where the heart and soul are blasted open. Resistance is futile. Do not take this trip if you don't want to be moved from your established comfort.

While the outside can be easily viewed, our inner experience of this trip requires attention to find settlement.

So taking time to explore with your fellow travellers is all part of the journey and can enrich your time. Sitting on the train without sitting on your impressions and concerns and talking things through, might not find definite answers. The contributions to a shared experience, where we all support each other however, is welcomed.

ENOUGH SPACE ON THE TRAIN TO PRACTICE YOGA

TRAVELLING IN AN AIR
CONDITIONED CARRIAGE

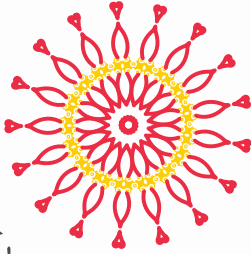


The organised trips gave us a taste of India and covered all peoples interests

- Ann



COCHIN ARTS & CULTURE

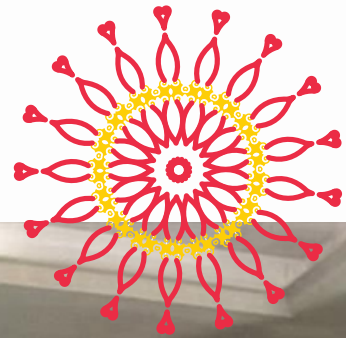


VIBRANCY & COLOUR

Find an insight into Kerala history and also modern life, from the evolution of religion & spirituality to current open mindedness on subjects such as sexuality, fashion and food. You only have to read the Anglo Indian newspaper, The Hindu, to gain a

window into the lifestyles of the people and learn about what is on the minds of the population of Kerala. We all want something different out of this holiday and India has something different to offer each traveller. Come with an open mind though, watch and listen. Take time, maybe a long time, to draw your conclusions. Let the experience plant seeds that require careful cultivation. You will get more out of this trip if you leave your western mind behind as much as possible and pick it up when you get back home.

What some conclude as backward, discordant, dirty, childish and prefer the more sterile kind of holiday may be missing that India plays their tune by a different scale. If you are seeking a holiday of contrasts; a rainbow of colours, a sea of hues, a landscape of natural beauty and a deep connection, to the people and to yourself then this holiday is for you.



THINGS TO DO IN FORT KOCHI

KATHAKALI

Kathakali is a form of dance that tells a story. It is distinguished by the elaborately colorful make-up, costumes and face masks that the traditionally male actor-dancers wear. Kathakali is a Hindu performance art in the Malayalam-speaking southwestern region of India.



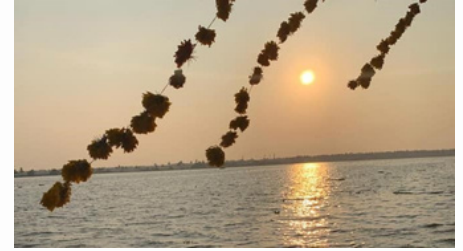
HOUSEBOAT HOME

A NIGHT ON A KETTUVALLAM

From the bustle of Cochin we headed to Alappuzha aka Alleppey, found on the Laccadive Sea in the southern Indian state of Kerala. It's best known for houseboat cruises along the stunning backwaters, a network of canals and lagoons. Words like tranquil and serene were used by our party,

to name the experience, but they don't really begin to describe it either. Our trip is indescribable and trying to use words is impossible. Standing on the boat looking out on the spacious expanse of silken surface, we are silently floating into heaven or some other divine place. We witness silver & gold shimmers as the rise of the sun tenderly settled rays over the water it touched. Cliches arise as we attempt to share our experience with words

and then there was the Sanskrit chant we sing also striving to express our feelings. Chidonanda roopaha shivoham shivoham Translated it means that eternal knowing and bliss, Shiva, love and pure consciousness.



MAIDEN VOYAGE



THE HERON

This year we were lucky to be staying on a brand new houseboat. It is traditional in India to make a big fuss over anything new; new babies get to symbolically suck on gold for strength and trans folk bless newly married couples. We were delighted to be invited to light the precious, shiny Kerala lamp. An inauguration was called for and we all took it in turns to humbly light an oil soaked wick.



BITTEN IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE



LOWS & HIGHS

From Allepy to Thekkady. Signs and shops and evidence of people and their daily occupations morph into flora of many different types. Stunning sights, but the highlight while on this trail, is a snake crossing the road! The driver assured us, 'it's only a little bit poisonous'. After a while we take a tea break with drinks and papaya. Anita, today's guide, hates fruits but the man insists she try theirs, I thought it was perfect but it doesn't convert her. Back in the coach, climbing ever higher into mountains and more sights tinged with familiarity for me and I eventually succumb to travel weariness. My energy is low and I'm overwhelmed by the irritation in my

lower body from too many insect bites. I want to scratch my legs until the skin is relieved but this is a mistake.

I've been bitten in more ways than one though and I distract myself by silently naming what I can see out of the coach window; papaya, tapioca, banana, pineapple, jack fruit, rubber, morning glory, the sights of this glorious journey. Lush and verdant are words that describe the sights on this moving picture. Just when my back can't take anymore we reach Thekkady and pause to receive permission to enter into the next stop. I know that the giant resin cat underneath the sign for Periyar Tiger reserve will be the only one we see, these animals are reserved too. There will be plenty of other animals to look out for though and the ubiquitous monkey comes into view. We arrive at Aryanivas, our hotel and are shown straight to lunch, while rooms are allocated and luggage is installed.

In this home we are to stay for three nights. It's time to use our eyes for the type of moving, living sights and places that they call eco tourism. On route I picked up an Ayurvedic remedy for swollen ankles and cream for mossier bites. I need to feel more physically comfortable so I begin my regime. Easing the stinging of my legs gave relief enough for an afternoon nap. First put some roots down and rest to refresh for this next phase of the holiday. My first priority; erecting the mosquito net, done, I lay my travel tired body down to rest. Even though the clattering of monkey feet on the tin roof and the diverse array of birds were calling me to look outside, some internal attention is required first. The delights of the Western Ghats would be there once I'd recharged for a couple of hours.



POP UP ONES ARE THE BEST!

RESTING UNDER PROTECTIVE NET

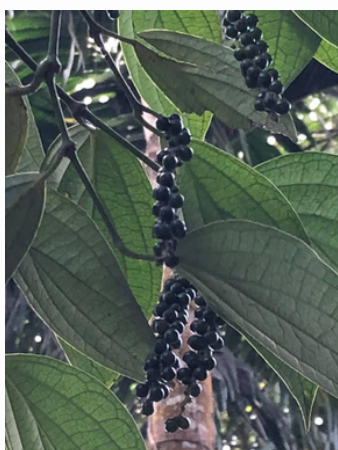
The seasoned traveller might think it's a faff but taking a mosquito net is a really good idea. It's highly unlikely that you will catch a horrible disease from a mosquito sting and Kerala is a low risk Indian state for Malaria. The reason I take a net is because the little buggers make my legs very itchy.



SPICE GIRLS ALIVE & KICKING!

PEPPER ON THE VINE & THE QUEEN OF SPICES

Visit to the spice plantation. At first I thought we were being taken to a different place. When Jigeesh pulled in I asked about this, it seemed they had misunderstood where to take us. So after a little detour we were back on track for the Hindustan, which is now an annual visit. I'm glad about that as the other place was just selling spices etc without the plantation to look at where these plants are found in their natural habitat.



Pepper growing on its vine, cardamom aka queen of spices, where we find emerald jewels of not yet ripened fruit sprouting from the root crown. Leaves for hypertension and cones to regulate diabetes. As we walk on up we see the natural viagra plant as well as shatavari to balance female hormones. Inside, there on the stall for culinary use is the giant Indian bay leaf as well as fresh cinnamon bark. I also stock up on the peculiar named asofoiteda spice for adding to our curries to reduce the gas causing properties in our westernised cooking



NIGHT TIME TREK

LED BY "THE BOSS"

Thought: the boundaries and curfew of 6pm inside our hotel, in Periyar, must be to help reduce the impact that us humans have on the wildlife and nature. I imagine the presence of people brings the revenue to keep the reserve going. The boundaries, perhaps are required to allow enough wild to return to the animals. But they do make exceptions.

The night time trek is unmissable and has got to be one of the highlights of the stay in the wildlife reserve. Like last year, the first animal we set our eyes on was the porcupine. This nocturnal animal is a huge rodent but it is made welcome at the Aryanivas as it feasts on left over vegetables and bread.

We had two guides, the lady whose name I can't remember, carried the rifle. I was delighted that a female had been given such a responsible role. The man introduced himself, tongue in cheek I think, as The Boss. He didn't speak much English but enough for us to understand.

Immediately I saw him I felt safe. He reminded me of Garry, my husbands friend, in height and gait, a tall fellow and very laid back. The Boss was caring; perhaps more for the animals than us even. Walking in the dark is both exciting and scary but not to be missed. This night time walk, for me, took on a kind of moving meditation. Feeling my feet on the ground, my senses alert and very present to the moment.

Through the forest we saw a few animals grazing, I guess it's cooler to eat when the sun has set and in any case they'll be less disturbed. We were in their dining area now though.

The Boss, who had a torch tucked in his bandana, over one ear, carefully moved his beam around looking for wildlife. When he spotted an animal the woman ranger would also shine her light too. Boss explained how they did this with the least effect on the creature and told us not to shine our torches in the animals eyes, especially the elephants. After last year I thought we probably wouldn't be that lucky to see those big beasts again, but I was wrong. About an hour and half into the trek, there they were, first one, then another and then a couple more. Again that surge of emotion and awe at getting to be close ish to this amazing animal.

We got back from our trek just before 1am. We'd been out in the dark in this wildlife reserve for nearly 3 hours. To bed..

INDIAN ELEPHANT

ELEPHAS MAXIMUS INDICUS

The average height of the Indian Elephant is estimated to be about 7 to 12 feet and weighs anything between 3,600 kg to 5000 kg. There are probably less than 60,000 Indian elephants left alive, one third of which are domesticated.



AYUR = LIFE VEDA = SCIENCE

REVITALISE REJUVANATE REFRESH

From seeing the plants used in Ayurvedic medicine growing in the plantation, now to learning the theory of Ayurveda and then putting it into practice. You do not have to be a therapist to participate. This is a fascinating aspect of our holiday and gives depth and meaning as well as background and context, to the treatments you'll receive.

You'll experience two hours per day of engaging, absorbing and enjoyable teaching by Dr Anand who is a wonderful storyteller as well as educator.

How did Ayurveda come into the world? Dr Anand will tell you how!



Copious amounts of herbal infused oil is the medicine



**DR ANAND P NAIR
BSC BAMS**

DOCTOR, TEACHER, STORY
TELLER AND FINE FELLOW

“

I got a lot out of the training, which allowed me to be more relaxed about the treatments as well as understanding of ayurvedic principles

- Liam

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YOGA AT SUNRISE

ACCOMPANIED BY BIRDSONG

Outdoors before the heat of the day, we gather for our morning stretches. Any brave ones who'd like to try the inversion are guided step by step into a supported head stand by our teacher. A combination of Hatha and Sivananda styles are on offer with gentle pranayama aka breath work.



Subash turned my life upside down
- Sam



ECO & LUXURY IN ONE IDYLIC PLACE

AMARA IS SANSKRIT FOR ETERNAL

Is it possible to combine eco concern with comfort? Can we take care of our environment and find enjoyment? Our retreat centre seems to think so. From the spacious red brick en suite rooms to the carefully selected plants that edge all the paths, beauty abounds.

Only four kilometres from the ocean, Amara is a brand new Ayurvedic Retreat Centre whose doors opened January 2020. This is where our group settles for a week as we tend to our health & wellbeing. There is daily yoga, daily Ayurvedic information classes and daily personal treatments.

Nourishment for body, mind and soul are what is on offer here.

As mentioned on the Amara website, *Responsible Tourism generates greater economic benefits to local people and enhances the wellbeing of local communities.*



FROM HERE TO ETERNITY

REDUCE REUSE RECYCLE MANTRA

Responsible Tourism is mainly conceived with three kinds of responsibilities which are termed the 'triple bottom-line': economic responsibility, social responsibility and environmental responsibility. It also makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and maintenance of the world's diversity. See more at www.amaraayurveda.com



IN PRAISE OF...

...HERE IS SOME FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

"If you ever get chance to make this eye opening and soul widening journey then do it without hesitation. Your soul is calling!" - Eni

"We would certainly recommend this trip as a wonderful way to be introduced to India & or Ayurveda".

- Liam & Dom

"Travelling with a wonderfully rich group of people, we really became a little family for the duration of our experience" - Richard

"Your itinerary for the three weeks was detailed and it was varied. I enjoyed every experience" - Ann

"The second week, provided an excellent opportunity to deepen my knowledge and interest in ancient Ayurvedic treatments and lifestyle in the most beautiful and serene environment; which has to be seen to be believed" - Rachel

"Three years in a row - speaks for itself really!" - Pennie



2018



2019



2020

Trekking in the dark and other brave steps...

"Tiger reserve... the night trekking although very tiring was a marvellous event in my life that I will never forget. I thought we all pulled together and made sure everyone was ok. It was a little scary thinking that we were out in the dark surrounded by huge wild animals and I was trying to stick like glue to our guide! Just amazing seeing the elephants eating alongside their baby" - Helen



Treading carefully over slippery stones to get to the natural shower that is Tirparappu Waterfall in Kanyakumari ...another brave step for Helen!

IT ALL BEGAN...

...in 2008 when an unexpected collaboration was formed. Mr Prasad Ninan of Relax Herbals, Thiruvanthapuram, contacted me all the way from Kerala, South India. He asked if I might be interested in hosting some Ayurvedic massage training in the UK? I said yes...

...needless to say Prasad, Dr Anand; his associate and I have become great friends. In the summer of 2017 in my front room in a little village near Barnsley UK, we hatched an exciting plan. **Vicky, Prasad & Anand** created the **VPA** group and in February 2018 we ran our first two-week long unique holiday in Kerala. This venture has grown and we now offer two options; two weeks or three.



PRASAD NINAN 1957 - 2019



GOOD WHERE WE'VE BEEN  GOOD WHERE WE'RE GOING TO

VPA Group