

WILD PHOTOGRAPHY HOLIDAYS



UNDISCOVERED SOUTH INDIA

TAMIL NADU & KERALA'S CARDAMOM HILLS

HIGHLIGHTS

- Ancient Cochin
- Chinese fishing nets
- Ancient Gingee Fort
- Arunachala Holy Mountain
- Tiruvannamalai Sadhus
- Visit to the famous temple of Thanjavur
- India's temple statues being made by hand
- The tropical forests of the Western Ghats
- Emerald green tea plantations
- Exciting cycle rickshaw ride through Old Madurai
- Coracle boats & fishermen
- Weavers of Madurai
- Tea plantations

- Flower and vegetable markets
- Rural cattle market
- Spice plantations

INTRODUCTION

This lovely trip is the perfect opportunity to photograph in parts of South India little known to the wider photographic community. Tamil Nadu is a part of India that is often forgotten in favour of its more well known neighbour, Kerala. We combine both to give a culturally fascinating and singularly beautiful insight into South India. There are abundant opportunities for landscape, people, street and architectural photography. This is one of our most popular trips and we look forward to it enormously.

This is an exciting photographic adventure visiting Tamil Nadu, The Cardamom Hills and Kerala's exotic coastal city, Cochin. For over two weeks we will be immersed in the vibrantly colourful, spiritual and bustling heart of this mystical sub-continent. South India's culture like its people is a rich mosaic both vibrant and chaotic. It is a land of incredible contrasts and paradoxes: a fantastic challenge to those of us hoping to capture its essence in images. By living in the moment and approaching each day with curiosity and flexibility we will come to understand that India is truly one of the world's most stunning photography locations. We will no doubt return home with some truly striking adventure travel images and some marvellous memories.

PHOTOGRAPHY TUTORS AND GUIDES

Accompanying us throughout will be [Martin Sammtleben](#) and [Geraldine Westrupp](#). Both know the area intimately and they will be introducing you to some locations that are not visited by tourists. They will be joined by various local experts including Geraldine's brother David Godman who has lived in Tiruvannamalai for over thirty years and is an expert on all things Indian especially Tiruvannamalai. Together they will ensure that you are in the right place at the right time to take some superb and unusual images. Although this is primarily a photographic trip, non-photographer spouses/partners will be welcome and will find this to be an interesting and culturally exciting trip.

THE LOCATIONS

Kerala: a region of South-West India well known for its lush natural beauty. Bordered by the tropical rain forest of the Western Ghats on the east, and the Arabian Sea on the west, Kerala is covered by tropical vegetation. We will also find the fragrant spice and tea plantations of the Cardamom Hills. We spend three days in the Western Ghats.

Tamil Nadu: home to an ancient and little changed Dravidian civilisation is less frequented than its more visited neighbour Kerala. It is a remarkable and intensely rewarding place to explore. Tamils are a welcoming, curious and friendly people. The coast of the Gulf of Bengal offers long and lovely beaches where traditional fishing aboard catamarans is common. You will find, rice-fields, coconut groves, market garden produce, cotton plantations, sugar cane, tobacco, mangoes and bananas.



DAILY ITINERARY

Day 1: Arrival in Kerala

When you arrive at Cochin International Airport there will be a car and driver waiting to transfer you to our first night hotel. We will meet together for the first time as a group in our hotel at 18:00 for introductions, welcome drinks and a trip briefing followed by dinner.

Hotel Secret Garden (D)

Day 2: Ancient Cochin, Kerala

Fort Cochin offers many outstanding and different photographic opportunities. Sunrise will be at a busy coastal harbour followed by photography in the spice markets and lunch in Matancherry. In the afternoon there will be an opportunity to witness a private traditional Kathakali performance preceded by the lengthy make-up ritual. Our hotel in Cochin is a 'beautiful secret', close to all our best locations but hidden away in a quiet, peaceful lane.



Here we can relax and laze in the pool.
Hotel Secret Garden (B, L, D)

Day 3–5: Munnar and Cardamom Hills

This morning we leave the coast. Gradually we drive high into the Western Ghats where the air of Kerala is fresh and cool. This is an interesting journey that takes us steadily uphill, through coffee and cardamom plantations, we will break our journey with photographic stops including an Ayurvedic spice plantation. Above these we will encounter huge expanses of symmetrical, emerald green tea plantations surrounded by granite domed mountains. The photographic opportunities here are di-

verse and will include atmospheric sunrises. We will photograph several of the highest tea estates in the world where women in colourful clothes harvest the tea shoots with deft fingers into large baskets. Planters houses dot the hillsides and the bustling vegetable, spice and meat markets of Munnar are well worth a visit. The surrounding hills are densely forested and they support a large number of exotic flora and fauna. Eravikulam National Park is home to a rare endangered species of mountain goat the Nilgiri Tahr; elephants and tigers also roam the forests here. We spend three nights in a lovely quiet eco resort with fabulous vistas over the Western Ghats. Accommodation mountain hotel (B,L,D)

Day 6,7: To Madurai

Today we have a busy schedule. Morning will see us setting off for Madurai. We will stop at photographic locations en route including atmospheric brickworks and the local women picking flowers destined for the temples. The city of Madurai is ancient, vibrant and bursting with remarkable places to visit. One of South India's great temple towns, Madurai is synonymous with the celebrated Meenakshi Temple. Situated on the banks of river Vaigai, Madurai has a rich cultural heritage passed on from the great Tamil era. The city is also famous for its Jasmine flowers. During our visit to Madurai we will explore and photograph some of some of the most import-



ant and iconic sights including the temple. We will take an exciting photographic trip using bicycle rickshaws to ride through the old part of the city with some superb and unusual locations including the banana market, weavers, bamboo workers, the laundry workers on the Vaigai river and a host of other interesting sights. Our Heritage Hotel is well situated, an oasis cocooned from the hustle and bustle of the city.
Accommodation Heritage Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 8,9: To Thanjavur

Leaving Madurai we travel to Thanjavur (Tanjore) the “Rice bowl of Tamil Nadu”. Thanjavur is an area at the confluence of several rivers resulting in an especially lush environment. It is also famous for the Bra-hadeeswarar Temple, an architectural marvel constructed more than thousand years ago by the King Rajarajan. Here we encounter and photograph a flourishing centre for unique bronze temple statues and painting. This is a remarkable location where we are able to wander freely around the statue making work areas and observe a craft that has been unchanged over the centuries. Our accommodation is superbly located along the banks of the River Vennar. This is a branch of river Cauvery and is just three kilometres away from the city limit of Tanjore. It is a cool and calm place surrounded by a landscape of semi-jungle paddy fields. At sunrise we will go down to the river’s edge to photograph the bullocks and carts being washed and prepared for the days work ahead. We will also visit and photograph a remote mud and thatch village settlement where life is simple and still there is no electricity. We will be here for Christmas day and it is our custom to take festive presents to the villagers. Tanjore Temple is architecturally very attractive. Built on the banks of the river Cauvery, where the water was diverted to the moat, this temple is made entirely of granite, and it stands tall amidst fortified walls. At this time of year there are large groups of women pilgrims dressed in very photogenic red saris.

Accommodation River-side Hotel (B,L,D)



Day 10: To Tiruvannamalai

This morning we head to Tiruvannamalai and our tranquil garden hotel. This is our base for the next four nights.
Accommodation Garden Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 11–13: Tiruvannamalai

For the next three days we are based in Tiruvannamalai at the foot of the mountain Arunachala. Here there are many fine opportunities to experience Southern India at its best. The holy mountain of Shiva, Arunachala rises directly for almost one thousand metres from the flat

plain. The majestic Goparams of Arunachaleswara Temple dominate the skyline. During our four days here we have an opportunity to capture colourful bustling markets, the peaceful tranquility of Sri Ramana Ashram at dawn and dusk. We witness women in brightly coloured saris planting rice. There are orange robed Sadhus, weird fortresses rising abruptly from shimmering forested hills, ancient shrines, peacocks, monkeys and hermits caves. We wander through one of India's most important temples, Arunachaleswara and visit communities where the villagers live in thatched mud huts. We witness fishermen who go out each night in coracle boats returning in the morning with huge catches of large fish which they butcher and sell on the local markets. We visit local cattle markets and wander the tiny local streets to interact with the locals who are both welcoming and friendly. The unique Dravidian culture and language of this area demonstrates some unique and fascinating throw-backs in time. In all this is an incredibly rich area photographically. Our own knowledge of this area together with that of our specialist guide David Godman will ensure that our participants get the most out of this area both photographically and culturally. Our lovely relaxing garden hotel has an excellent swimming pool.

Accommodation Eco Garden Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 14: To Mahabalipuram

After breakfast we drive to Mahabalipuram. En route we will visit one of Tamil Nadu's important bird reserves. Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary was established in 1798 by the British and has ever since been a spot of great fascination. The view of thousands of birds flying around the sanctuary, some at high altitudes and others at lower



ones, is indeed a sight to behold. More than 4000 species of birds including migratory ones have been identified from this area. Some of the species here include Grey Wagtail, Garganey, Blue-winged Teal, Common Sandpiper, Pintail, Snake Bird, Moorhen, Darter, Spot-billed Duck, Large Egret, Little Egret, Painted Stork, Shoveler, Grey Pelican, Cormorant and so goes the extensive list. Apart from birds, the dry, evergreen scrub and thorn forests are also home to monkeys.

Mahabalipuram is a town built on a strip of land between the Bay of Bengal and the Great Salt Lake. It's known for its temples and monuments built by the Pallava dynasty in the 7th and 8th centuries. The seafront shore temple comprises 3 ornate granite shrines and the rock art is quite simply remarkable. Krishna's Butter Ball is a massive boulder balanced on a small hill near the Ganesha Ratha stone temple. The town is bustling and vibrant, stone workers creating impressive granite statues are everywhere. We will spend a couple of hours in late afternoon/early evening exploring the town before returning to our Beachside hotel for a final celebratory dinner together.

Accommodation Beach Hotel Mahabalipuram (B,L,D)

Day 15: Transfer to Chennai

This morning after breakfast there will be a transfer to Chennai airport for homeward flights.

(B)

NEW YEARS EVE EXTENSION

You have the option to extend this tour to 1st January. Please enquire about the price when booking.



Day: 1,2 Mahabalipuram

If you would like to stay on at the hotel 30 & 31 December in order to celebrate New Years Eve in grand Indian style then this can be arranged. A guide can be provided to explore in more depth the surrounding area including the ancient temples of Mahabalipuram. Alternatively just chill out on the beach and enjoy an Ayurvedic massage treatment.

(B,L,D)

Day 3: Transfer to Chennai Airport (1 January)

After Breakfast our driver will transfer you to Chennai airport.

(B)

JOINING ARRANGEMENTS AND TRANSFERS

Participants generally arrive at different times of the day/night as they will book their own flights opting for the best deals available. It is possible for participants to fly in and out of Chennai International airport on day one. There are several connecting domestic flights from Chennai to Cochin International airport (flight time 1hr 10 mins). The first night hotel will be available for check-in at mid-day on Day 1. If participants arrive several hours before this they may prefer us to book them in for an early check-in to get some valuable rest. Or you may like to arrive a day early to make the most of the

Secret Garden Hotel, please ask about this add on when booking.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- All meals
- All accommodation (14 nights)
- Indian guide
- Spacious AC transport
- Bicycle rickshaw tour through Madurai
- Photography tuition
- English tour guide/co-ordinator
- Location guides
- All entrance fees
- Camera fees except for any video equipment
- Water while travelling
- Airport transfers in Cochin and Chennai

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- International Flights
- Travel-/medical Insurance
- Alcoholic-, soft drinks, snacks between meals
- Tips for local staff
- Indian visa
- Any spa treatments or similar
- Anything else not listed as included

ACCOMMODATION

We have chosen accommodation carefully to allow us both access to some exciting locations and as peaceful good standard retreats away from the hustle and bustle of daily life in India. If you require a single room

throughout, please refer to the single supplement price on our website.

FOOD

Western and continental type food is readily available and the Indian cuisine will be of a good standard. We will always take care to eat in establishments that have a high standard of hygiene. Bottled water is always available.

SPENDING MONEY

This always depends on personal spending habits. Prices in India tend to be cheaper than the West, although some things like bottled beers can be similar. £200 should be allowed for miscellaneous expenses including approximately £70 for tips for hotel porters, waiters and our accompanying Indian staff. This amount will allow money for soft drinks and/or beer. If you are intending to buy expensive souvenirs there are cash machines in all of our locations. Bulky items can often be shipped by the seller for a small additional cost.

GUIDANCE ON TIPPING

Tipping is an accepted and expected part of Indian culture, although you should only tip for services that are well done. The total amount that you can expect to pay in tips for your local guide and drivers, as well as hotel staff, railway porters, etc. is around £70. We will collect this amount at the beginning of the trip and take care of the tipping for you.



TRAVEL INSURANCE

It is recommended that you take out appropriate insurance to cover personal accident, medical costs, repatriation, loss of baggage and holiday cancellation. We will need a copy of your travel insurance at the time of booking.

VACCINATIONS

You should attend your own doctor and dentist for a check-up. Your doctor will have access to the most up to

date information on the required vaccinations for India. A very good online resource is the Scottish National Health FitForTravel website

PASSPORT & VISAS

A passport with at least six months remaining validity at the time of arrival in India and a current Indian visa are required for this trip. Please note that your passport needs to be machine-readable.



You will need to apply for your Indian visa in advance. Citizens of most countries are eligible for the Indian eVisa. Apply online at indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/ at least 10 days before your planned arrival in India. If your country is not listed as eligible for the eVisa, you will need to apply for a standard visa from the relevant issuing authority in your home country. Standard visas can take quite a bit longer depending on your location. We recommend you make enquiries and apply well in advance. Obtaining a visa is not the responsibility of WPH.

HEALTH

We will have a first aid kit to hand at all times. Please bring your own small personal first aid kit together with

any medication for personal use. Hand wash that can be applied without water is always useful for getting rid of germs and removing greasy traces from fingers that will be taking photographs! Nowadays it is relatively easy to stay healthy and well in India, we will be giving you a full brief in our Day 1 introduction and get together.

CLIMATE

The climate in Tamil Nadu and Kerala is tropical and often moderated by sea breezes. The most comfortable months are from November to March when daytime temperatures are around 24–30° C. The climate in December and January is very reliable often with clear blue skies, balmy evenings, perhaps a little chilly in the early

mornings. With the added altitude the hills of Kerala are cooler, chill mists sometimes sweep in dramatically. By January there is virtually no rainfall. On some of our trips we have had unbroken sunshine every day. Short sharp tropical rainstorms are always a possibility.

CURRENCY

Indian Rupee. Money can be exchanged either at the airport or the first night hotel. There are ATM machines in all our locations.

LANGUAGE

The national language of India is Hindi, although there are around 15 other languages spoken (and listed on



some of the bank notes). In Tamil Nadu 'Tamil' is spoken and 'Malayalam' in Kerala; both are ancient Dravidian languages. Generally in India many people speak some English and India is therefore an easy place to make friends and get to know local people. We recommend that you take a pocket phrase book and learn some basics such as common greetings. Your efforts to speak a few words of the local language will pay dividends in terms of the warm reaction you receive from the people you meet along the way.

CLOTHING

Generally speaking light cotton clothing allowing freedom of movement will be best suited to the temperatures. Cotton scarves, a sun hat and good sunglasses will protect from the sun. A warm jumper or lightweight fleecy jacket could be useful for the Ghats around Munnar. Very occasionally there may be a tropical rain so a lightweight waterproof jacket should be added. We will sometimes be walking across rough terrain so some quality lightweight walking shoes like trainers are recommended. Although the temperatures will be suitable for shorts,

mostly these will not be appropriate for women to wear in certain areas. Cheap good quality cotton clothing is readily available in the local shops and bazaars.

SUN PROTECTION

Temperatures during the day can be high and the sun is especially penetrating at higher altitudes so please ensure that you have some sort of sun protection. Sun Lotion with an SPF for UVA & UVB of 15+; good sunglasses with high quality non-tinted lenses and high degree of UV protection.

DAILY ROUTINE

You will need to have adventurous approach in both mind and body. We will be walking in both towns, villages and some well-defined trails. We will often photograph when and where opportunities arise requiring a certain degree of spontaneity from participants. There will also be opportunities for some early morning rises to make the best of the dawn light, conditions and locations. The sun sets early and dramatically around 18:00, so evenings will be relaxed and focused on socialising, dinner and the opportunity to view the days images. We will always be happy to answer your technical questions and demonstrate programmes such as Lightroom.

PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT AND INFORMATION

- In addition to your chosen camera equipment you will need to carry a day pack that will also hold a few extra items such as water, spare layer etc. Specially designed camera bags or rucksacks like F-Stop, Lowepro and Peak design will be fine.

- A camera with interchangeable lenses such as a digital SLR or a mirrorless system camera.
- A set of lenses to cover the whole range from wide-angle to telephoto, for example...
For full-frame cameras: 16–35mm wide-angle, 24–105mm mid-range and a 70–200mm or longer tele zoom. For crop format cameras: 10–20mm wide-angle, 17–50mm mid-range and a 70–200mm or longer tele zoom. See also ‘Special Lens Considerations’ below.
- Spare camera
- Travel tripod
- Filters – neutral density, graduated filters and polarisers if you use these.
- Lens cloth & brush
- Sensor cleaning device (optional)
- Lightweight ‘trekking’ absorbent towel for drying cameras and equipment
- Sufficient memory cards for the whole holiday as it may not be possible to buy more during the trip.
- A laptop with the image editing applications of your choice, essential for checking and presenting images during the trip and for one-on-one sessions with the tutor. Most of the places we stay in have Wi-Fi, but it can be flaky.
- Backup storage device (optional)
- Spare batteries and chargers
- All the electrical sockets are compatible with European two-pin, so you might need a travel plug adapter.



SPECIAL LENS CONSIDERATIONS

If you own any fast (f/1.4 or f/2.0) prime lenses such as 24,35,50 or 85mm (on full-frame), pop them in your bag. They will be very useful for photographing handheld at dusk & dawn and in dimly lit locations such as temples and markets. As a general rule the 85 makes a fabulous portrait lens while the 24 and 35 are excellent for capturing wider views.

KNOW YOUR CAMERA

It's important that you are familiar with the basic operation of your camera such as setting exposure/AF modes, aperture, shutter speed, ISO etc. Nowadays there is a huge variety of cameras and systems and while we will always do our best to help, it's impossible to know every model.

PARTNERS

Although this is primarily a photography holiday non photographer partners will be very welcome as there are many options and interesting possibilities for a festive, relaxing and culturally rewarding holiday in addition to taking photographs.

MORE QUESTIONS?

While we hope that this information has answered most of your questions about the holiday, we know it will not give you all the information you need. If you have any more questions, please get in touch. Talking to us on the phone (we will always call you back) can often be a quick way of sorting out individual questions. It also helps us to get to know each other before the holiday.

BOOKING THIS HOLIDAY

Fill in the [online booking form](#), or give us a call on +44 (0)1270 440222.

LINKS

View [images and information for this tour](#) on the website.

Read about [our approach to teaching photography](#)

