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The Kerala Spice Trail Tour (as shown on BBC) - 13 Nights and 14 Days

BBC presenter and traveller Kate Humble embarked on a journey along India's Spice Coast, Kerala, to uncover the story of pepper, a spice once known as black gold. Sought after across the world, few know of its real story and origins. As Kate went from one region to another in Kerala following the spice trail, she discovered the history of this amazing spice and how it enticed European invaders to come to the shores of Kerala. Amongst other things, Kate discovered the pepper dance used to shake the berries from the stalk, saw first hand the use of the spice in cooking and learnt the old secret language of pepper traders while at the same time discovering Kerala. Kerala Travel Centre is proud to present its Spice Trail Tour which gives you the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of the presenter and go on a fascinating journey of discovery. As you unravel the many mysteries of spices in Kerala, you will also get to enjoy the region's many delightful highlights including its mesmerising tea plantations, enchanting backwaters, captivating wildlife and vibrant culture. Explore spice plantations, witness actual spice trading, indulge in some fantastic culinary experiences and visit places that became historical for its spice.

Detailed Itinerary:

Day ONE

- DAY 01: Arrival – Cochin

You will be greeted at the airport with a traditional welcome by the Kerala Travel Centre team and escorted to the Koder House hotel in Fort Cochin. A port town since early centuries Cochin, now called Kochi, attracted traders and invaders from the world over for one main reason - Kerala's spices, particularly its pepper. Once known as black gold, pepper commanded a very high price in the international markets making Kerala a sought-after destination for those wanting to control international spice trading. Today, you can see snippets of the different eras and influences in the many attractions in Cochin. The place is broadly divided into two areas - Ernakulam, the bustling cosmopolitan metropolis, and Fort Cochin, the cultural hub where the hotel is located. Step out of the hotel and you are within walking distance of other attractions like the Chinese fishing nets, said to have been left behind by Chinese traders in the 15th century. Relax and unwind on the first day of your spice trail tour. In the evening, enjoy a relaxing sunset cruise along the Cochin harbour.

Overnight at the Koder House with a vehicle at your disposal.

Day TWO

- DAY 02: Cochin

Go for a sightseeing tour to explore the many fascinating highlights of Cochin; including, the Jewish Synagogue; St. Francis Church, the oldest European Church in India; the Santa Cruz Basilica, which was built in 1557 by the Portuguese; the Dutch Palace; the Spice Market; and the 15th century Chinese fishing nets believed to have been brought by Chinese traders. The main highlight of the day will, however, be a visit to the Spice Markets of Cochin. Witness first hand how spice trading is done and how the traders still use an old, secret hand language to arrive at the final deal. You will visit the Mattancherry spice godowns (warehouses) where the open spaces between the godowns are used to dry and pack various spices including coriander, pepper and ginger. In the latter half of the day, spend time at the home of Nimmy and Paul who belong to the traditional Syrian Christian community in Kerala. Nimmy has been a professional cooking instructor for more than 20 years and, in keeping with family traditions, is very passionate about serving great Kerala food. You will have the opportunity to participate and learn how traditional spices are used in typical Travancore vegetarian food.

Overnight at the Koder House with a vehicle at your disposal.

Day THREE

- DAY 03: Cochin – Munnar (135 km / 3.5 hrs)

Drive to Munnar - a hill station located some 1,600 metres above sea level. Once the summer resort of the British administration in South India, Munnar still retains its colonial charm and is famous for its tea plantations, most of which are privately owned. With its sprawling estates, rolling hills, sparkling waterfalls, picture postcard hamlets and undulating valleys, Munnar is an ideal holiday destination. Check into your hotel and unwind. Spend the rest of the day enjoying the ambience of Munnar.

Overnight at the Windermere Estate.

Day FOUR

- DAY 04: Munnar

Today, visit a tea museum, take a short trip to the Eravikulam National Park - home to the endangered Nilgiri Thar mountain goat amongst others - or simply walk through the enchanting tea estates on the verdant hills and enjoy the tranquillity it provides. Have a day to relax.

Overnight at the Windermere Estate with a vehicle at your disposal.

Day FIVE

- DAY 05: Munnar – Periyar (110 km / 4 hrs)

Drive to Periyar, an area known for its undulating hills, spice plantations and elephant sightings. One of the 27 tiger reserves in India, the Periyar valley in Thekkady is the oldest. Check into your hotel, and go on a spice plantation tour where you will be enticed by the aroma of spices like cinnamon, cardamom, pepper and nutmeg and learn how they are grown, harvested and processed before they reach the supermarkets. You could also experience how the farmers separate the pepper cherry from its stalk using their legs.

Overnight at the Shalimar Spice Garden Resort with a vehicle at your disposal.

Day SIX

- DAY 06: Periyar

Enjoy an escorted trekking tour of Periyar today. In the evening, enjoy a rejuvenating full body Ayurveda massage.

Overnight at the Shalimar Spice Garden Resort with a vehicle at your disposal.

Day SEVEN

- DAY 07: Periyar – Kumarakom – Houseboat (135 km /

Drive to Kumarakom to embark on your private houseboat and cruise the backwaters, a splendid area full of canals, lakes and coves. Your houseboats, or Kettuvalloms, are luxurious boats with well-appointed bedrooms and ensuite bathrooms. You can sunbathe on the deck or observe the palm-fringed landscape from your cabins. Apart from the mesmerizing surroundings, it's the life along the coast that adds a touch of exotica to this experience. The locals travel in canoes, and you will find vegetable sellers, fishermen and other traders bringing household goods door-to-door in small wooden boats. A small crew will be available at all times to assist you during the cruise. The crew includes the captain who mans the boat, a chef and a housekeeping staff member. The local food prepared by the chef is another delight not to miss. As you cruise along the backwaters you can ask your captain to stop at villages, paddy fields and other places, enroute where you can choose to go on a village walk.

Overnight on board with full board.

Day EIGHT

- DAY 08: Alleppey – Cochin – Tellicherry (110 km /

Today we embark on the spice trail to the Northern parts of Kerala starting with the vibrant town of Tellicherry. Drive to Ernakulam railway station to board a train to Tellicherry. Thalassery, or Tellicherry as the British christened it during their rule, is a vibrant fishing town in the north of Calicut which is famous for the 3 C's- circus, cricket and cakes. It is known for being the first British settlement in Kerala, and needless to say, cakes and cricket were both introduced by the British. Here you will check into the majestic Ayesha Manzil. Built in 1862 by an English gentleman called Murdoch Brown, this mansion by the sea still retains its colonial charm. Overnight at the Ayisha Manzil with full board and a vehicle at your disposal.

Day NINE

- DAY 09: Tellicherry

Visit the bustling fish markets of Tellicherry or visit the ancient fort built by the British. Tellicherry is one of the most famous trading centres for spices, especially pepper. In fact, Tellicherry Pepper can still be bought off the supermarket shelves in Europe and is renowned for its flavour. You could also drive to the fascinating Muzhipillangad Beach which is Kerala's only drive-in beach. Drive along miles of virgin white sands or laze on the beach and be mesmerised by the beauty of the place. The region is a rich source of spices and seafood, and the cuisine reflects these excesses. You'll be staying at the Ayesha Manzil, famous for your hostess Faiza, a legendary cook, and you will learn how spices are used in the Mopilla (muslim) style of cooking which is prevalent in the region. Fresh prawns, shrimp, crab, mussels and oysters are served in sumptuous sauces and spicy curries. In the evening, take part in a cooking demonstration with Faiza or simply enjoy the mouth-watering cuisine on offer. Overnight at the Ayisha Manzil with full board and a vehicle at your disposal.

Day TEN

- DAY 10: Tellicherry – Sulthan Batherry (130 km / 3 hrs)

Drive through winding roads in verdant hills covered with thick forests, coffee, rubber and tea estates to the region of Sulthan Batherry. Check into a plantation estate tucked away in a 400-acre coffee and spice plantation. Later, go on a short spice plantation tour. Tranquil is managed by the Deys, who have been planters for generations. Victor Dey is a man who knows his spices - he appears on several TV programs including the BBC spice trails documentary - and you can be assured you'll learn everything there is to know about spices while staying at the resort. There are various kinds of spices cultivated in Wayanad; coffee, tea, cocoa, pepper, ginger, plantain and vanilla are the main cash crops of the region. The coffee-based farming system is a noteworthy feature of Wayanad. Coffee is grown both as a pure crop and as a mixed crop along with pepper. The black pepper produced here is renowned in the world of spices because of its unique quality and aroma. Overnight at the Tranquil Plantation Hideaway with full board and a vehicle at your disposal.

Day ELEVEN

- DAY 11: Sulthan Bathery

Visit the Muthanga Sanctuary, also known as the Wayanad Sanctuary. This lush expanse of land is a haven for many animals including sloth bears, sambhar (a deer-like animal), elephants, monkeys, tigers, reptiles, deer, panthers and many species of rare birds.

Overnight at the Tranquil Plantation Hideaway with full board and a vehicle at your disposal.

Day TWELVE

- DAY 12 – SulthanBatherry – Calicut (80 km / 3hrs)

Drive to Calicut. It was in Calicut that the great voyager Vasco Da Gama landed in the 14th century in his quest for spices thus putting it on the world map. The traditional capital of North Kerala and a leading trading centre for spices on the west, the city has retained its glorious past and presents travellers with historic sites and a unique culture. Today you can visit Hindustan Kalari Centre; where you can witness the 'Kalaripayattu'- Kerala's ancient martial art form which is said to be one of the oldest martial art forms in the world. Evening at leisure. Overnight at the Kadavu Resort. (Vehicle at disposal)

Day THIRTEEN

- DAY 13: Calicut

Drive to Beypore, a prominent port and fishing harbour of ancient Kerala. Wander through the fish markets or venture into town and visit the Sweet Meat Street and the many colourful shops. Time permitting, visit the boatyards in Beypore, which have been building vessels since the early centuries for legendary seamen. What is astounding, and different, about these craftsmen is they build the boats based solely on experience - without any drawings or charts. Spend your last evening relaxing.

Overnight at the Kadavu Resort with a vehicle at your disposal.

Day FOURTEEN

- DAY 14: Calicut – Departure

Departure transfer to the airport for your return flight with a vehicle provided to drive you to the airport.