



**Report on Bharat Darshan-Cum- Study Tour (Kerala) Held from**  
**28.04.2024 to 04.05.2024**

**PREPARED BY-**

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**OT CODE- A26**

**MINISTRY OF FINANCE**

## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to express our heartfelt appreciation to the Department of Personnel and Training for granting us the valuable opportunity to take part in the compulsory training program at the MCRHRD Institute of Telangana. Additionally, sincere thanks are extended to Smt. Usha Rani, the Course Director at MCRHRD, for her unwavering support.

Our gratitude extends to Mr. Saka Sir, Senior Faculty and Bharat Darshan Coordinator, for his invaluable guidance, continuous supervision, and provision of essential project- related information, as well as for his assistance in project completion.

Participating in the group activities during the visit to Kerala was an enriching experience. I thoroughly enjoyed the study tour and gained valuable insights during the NGO attachment.

I would also like to convey my appreciation to the Director General of MCRHRD for their indispensable support in ensuring the successful completion of this study tour. I would like to express my gratitude to all the staff members of MCRHRD IT for their dedication and hard work that make my stay in MCRHRD IT comfortable and wonderful.

## OBJECTIVE

As part of the mandatory ISTM Phase-1 Foundation Training Programme for Assistant Section Officers (ASOs) of 2023 Batch, 01-week Bharat Darshan was organized from **28.04.2024** to **04.05.2024** to **Kerala**.

There were **61 participants** from different Ministries participating in this Training Programme. This study tour was part of the Training Programme and has following objectives: -

The objectives of a study tour typically include:

- 1. Learning Experience:** To provide participants with an opportunity to gain practical knowledge and insights beyond what can be learned in a classroom or through traditional means.
- 2. Experiential Learning:** To allow participants to engage in hands-on activities, visit relevant sites, and interact with professionals in their field of study, facilitating experiential learning.
- 3. Cultural Immersion:** To expose participants to different cultures, traditions, and ways of life, fostering cultural awareness and sensitivity.
- 4. Enhanced Understanding:** To deepen participants' understanding of theoretical concepts by observing real-world applications and case studies.
- 5. Personal Development:** To promote personal growth, confidence-building, and independence by navigating new environments, overcoming challenges, and adapting to unfamiliar situations.
- 6. Skill Development:** To develop practical skills, such as problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and leadership, through participation in group activities and projects.
- 7. Critical Thinking:** To encourage critical thinking and analysis by exploring diverse perspectives, challenging assumptions, and evaluating different approaches to issues and problems.
- 8. Evaluation and Reflection:** To encourage participants to reflect on their experiences, evaluate their learning outcomes, and identify areas for further development or improvement.

Kerala, often referred to as "God's Own Country," is a mesmerizing state located in the southern part of India. Famous for its serene backwaters, lush greenery, exotic wildlife, and vibrant culture, Kerala attracts tourists from all over the world. This comprehensive report documents an extensive journey from 28th April 2024 to 04th April 2024 through Kerala, covering prominent destinations such as Trivandrum, Alleppey, Thekkady, Munnar, and Kochi, providing detailed insights into each location's attractions, socio-economic conditions, and cultural significance.

## Day 1

On the morning of 28th April at 06:10 hours, our group of 62 members boarded flight 6E 5278 of Indigo from Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, Hyderabad to Thiruvananthapuram. We landed on Thiruvananthapuram International Airport at 07:45 hours. The weather was hot and humid and the temperature was around 35°C.

### **Trivandrum:**



The first point in our itinerary was Padmanabhaswamy temple. The temple has a dress code for men and women. Women are required to wear sarees, Mundum Neriyathum (set-mundu), skirt and blouse, or half-saree. Young girls below the age of 12 may wear gowns. Men are similarly required to wear mundu or dhoti and bare their torso. Dhotis are easily available for rent at the entrance. We wore the attire and proceeded towards temple. The temple is located in the East fort of Trivandrum. After entering east fort, there is pond, padmatheertham on the right-hand side of the path and Kuthirmalika Palace on left hand side of the path. The temple is built in an intricate fusion of the Kerala style and the Dravidian style of architecture, featuring high walls and a 16th century gopuram. The gopuram of temple is 100 foot (30 m) high, it has 7-tier and it is built in pandyan style. The temple has 4 entrance- "kizakke nada, padinjare nada, vadakke nada and thekke nada" (means East, west, north & south). But the main entrance is Kizakke nada (East Entrance). The temple has a corridor with 365 and one-quarter sculptured granite-stone pillars with elaborate carvings. This corridor extends from the eastern side into the sanctum sanctorum. As it was Sunday, the temple had a lot of rush and the queue was very long. The queue runs through the corridor and then into the sanctum sanctorum. By the time we reached sanctum sanctorum, it was time for madhyanya Pooja or, so we had to wait for another 45 minutes for darshan. In the Grabhagriha, Padmanabha reclines on the serpent. The deity is visible through three doors – the visage of the reclining Padmanabha and Siva Linga underneath his hand is seen through the first door; Sridevi and Bhrigu Muni in Katusarkara, Brahma seated on a lotus emanating from the deity's navel, hence the name, "Padmanabha", gold abhisheka moorthies of Padmanabha, Sridevi and Bhudevi, and silver utsava moorthi of Padmanabha through the second door; the deity's feet, and Bhudevi and Markandeya Muni in Katusarkara through the third door. Inside the Temple, there are two other important shrines, Thekkedom and Thiruvambadi, for the Deities, Ugra Narasimha and Krishna Swami respectively. After having darshan we went to our buses. The time was around 1pm and we proceeded towards our hotel.

### **Veli village:**

Everyone was feeling full of energy after having lunch and taking some rest. In the evening we proceeded towards veli village. Veli tourist village lies where the veli lake meets the Arabian sea. It provides unique boating and picnicking opportunities. We returned from veli village by around 8pm and after having our dinner we took a good sleep.

# Day 2

## **Kovalam beach:**



In the early morning we went to kovalam beach to see sunrise. There we had the opportunity to meet some local fisherman. Fishing is one of the major business in Kerala. The catch consists of King Fish, Red Snappers, Pomfrets, shrimps, etc. They sell their lot mostly to local market. Communication with the locals gave brief idea of the social fabric exists there.

## **Alleppey (Kerala Backwaters):**

At around 9am we departed from Trivandrum to alleppey. We reached our destination at 2pm. Alleppey is famous for its canals, backwaters, beaches and lagoons. We had booked a backwater cruise to see the scenic man-made islands and beautiful sights of coconut fringed backwaters and paddy fields. All the staff of the cruise boat was local and they acted as our guide for the backwaters journey. The cruise started from pamba river and went Upto vembanad lake. Total distance covered was around 15km (to and fro). The path traversed by us is part of national waterway 3. The scope of road and railways development in alleppey is limited and that's why the development of waterway in this area has proved to be a boon for traditional industries such as coir, cashew and fishing. It is the first national waterway in the country with 24-hour navigation facilities along the entire stretch.



The economy of alleppey is based on paddy farming, tourism and coir industry. Alleppey is part of Kuttanad region, this region has the lowest altitude in India, and is one of the few places in the world where farming is carried on around 1.2 to 3.0 metres below sea level. The region is known as the rice bowl of Kerala and it is also the part of second largest Ramsar site in India. To stop the saltwater intrusion into the Kuttanad, a 1252m long saltwater barrier, Thanneermukkom has been built on Vembanad lake.

Besides its backwaters, Alleppey is also famous for its coir industry. Coir is extracted from the outer husk of coconut and is used to make ropes, twine, brooms and brushes, doormats, etc.

After disembarking from the boat, we went to our hotel and later in the evening we went to some coir shops to see the coir products.

## Day 3

### **Thekkady:**

At around 8am we proceeded towards Thekkady to visit Periyar National Park. People-oriented and park-centered community-based ecotourism is the hallmark of Periyar Tiger Reserve. These programmes are conducted by local people responsible

for the surveillance of the vulnerable parts of the reserve. Community-based and protection-



oriented ecotourism programmes (CBET) were initiated in PTR during the IEDP. These programmes were developed to ensure livelihood security and to reduce negative dependency on forests. Tickets for boating at Periyar lake were already booked by us. On reaching Thekkady, a bus of national park took us from our stop to Periyar National Park. There were 4 double decker boats waiting for the tourists at the lake. The boat journey was of 1 hour and during this boat journey we witnessed herd of deer, elephants, wild goats and wild buffaloes. There was no sight of tiger. On inquiring forest official about this, he said that it is a rare sight and in his 24 years of service, he has witnessed tiger only 12 times. The reason for this is that 925 sq. km of Periyar National Park is home to only 40 tigers. The forests of Periyar tiger reserve are pristine and unaffected from all outside disturbances, even after accommodating thousands of tourists every year. This is because of the management effectiveness of periyar tiger reserve. It also bagged first prize in the management effectiveness evaluation (MEE) of tiger reserves in India for the year 2022, released by ministry of environment, forest and climate change.





From Periyar tiger reserve, we proceeded to our next destination Munnar and reached there by 11pm. On the way from Thekkady to Munnar we witnessed many tea, spice and rubber plantations.

## Day 4

### **Munnar:**

In the morning we departed for Eravikulam national park which was 15km from our hotel. It is situated in the Kannan Devan Hills of the southern western Ghats. The wildlife park has an area of 97 sq. km. and it is the first national park in Kerala. It is divided into three regions- the core area, the buffer area and the tourism area. Visitors are allowed only to the tourism area. After reaching main entrance of tourism area, a bus of Kerala forest and wildlife department took us to the starting point of Kurinji trail. The magnificent view of beautiful tea plantations on our way was a sight to behold. The trek from to kurinji is of one hour and the on the way one can witness herds of nilgiri tahr, the endangered mountain goat, for which Eravikulam is a natural habitat. The national park has the highest density and largest population of Nilgiri Tahr. The trekking journey also provides a mesmerizing view of the largest stretch of undisturbed montane shola-grassland eco system in the western ghats. Anamudy (2695m), the highest peak south of Himalayas, is also located within the park.



At the ending of the trek is the highly admired plant species *strobilianthes kunthiana*, which is locally known as Neelakurinji. Neelakurinji is an endemic species of Western Ghats and it is under threat because of being plundered from the grasslands of High Ranges by ignorant/berserk people. It blooms once in 12 years. It last bloom in 2018 and hence it will bloom again in 2030. After spending some time on the top, we came back to the starting point of the trek and visited "story of the park". it shows brief history of the park and the flora and fauna which are found in the park with special attention to niligiri tahr.

## Day 5

### **Mattupetty Dam:**

In the morning we visited Mattupetty dam. Mattupetty is more than just a water storage facility. The water body that forms as a result of this gravity dam is often termed as Mattupetty lake. Mattupetty lake is a perennial lake which never dries up even in the summers. the dam is an important source of electricity and the lake hosts various water based recreational activities which adds to the tourism. The water of mattupetty lake is also used for irrigation purpose in the nearby fields.



## **Tata tea museum**

Tea has played an integral part in the history of Munnar. Tata tea museum has photographs and machineries, which chronicle the journey of tea in the area. The museum set up at the Nallathanni Estate of Tata Tea ensures that the legacy of those who worked hard to ensure the tea plantations survived this long is recognised publicly. We got to watch the transition from the rudimentary tea roller to the modern fully automated tea factory. Various stages of tea processing can be seen, which includes the making of black tea. There was a sundial, placed on a granite block, which was made in 1913 by the Art Industrial School at Nazareth, Tamil Nadu. It has other attractions like the 'Pelton Wheel' used in the power generation plant in the 1920s, tea roller and a rail engine wheel of the Kundale Valley Light Railway.

A demonstration room for tea tasting is another attraction where we came across different varieties of tea. We tasted some of the most exotic varieties of tea available around the world here.

## **Tea Gardens:**

The tea museum is situated in the Nallathanni Estate, which is owned by Kanan Devan Hills Plantations Company Private Limited. Some of the plantations of KDHP are open to public. We visited some of the tea estates and saw how the tea workers plucked tea leaves. For plucking the pluckers take first two leaves and a bud. Plucking is a labour intensive business and hand plucking is economical than machine plucking.



## Day 6

### **Kochi- Queen of the Arabian Sea**

In the Kochi we spent 2 days. On first day at 8:00 AM we left for Cherai Beach.

### **Cherai Beach: Tranquility by the Sea**

Cherai Beach, located in the northern part of Kochi, is renowned for its golden sands, clear blue waters, and tranquil surroundings. Nestled between the Arabian Sea and the backwaters of Vypeen Island, Cherai Beach offers visitors a perfect retreat from the hustle and bustle of city life.

The beach is known for its shallow waters, making it ideal for swimming and water sports. Visitors can indulge in activities like beach volleyball, parasailing, and speed boating, or simply relax on the soft sands and soak in the breathtaking views of the sea and sky.

Cherai Beach is also famous for its unique blend of cultures, with fishing communities coexisting alongside tourists and beachgoers. Local fishermen can often

be seen casting their nets or repairing their boats along the shoreline, adding to the picturesque charm of the beach.



For nature lovers, Cherai Beach is a paradise, with opportunities for birdwatching, dolphin spotting, and exploring the nearby mangrove forests and estuaries. The beach is also known for its stunning sunsets, offering visitors a magical experience as the sun dips below the horizon, painting the sky in hues of orange and pink.

After spending a rejuvenating time at Cherai Beach, we continued our exploration of Kochi's cultural heritage by visiting Fort Kochi, a neighborhood steeped in history and colonial charm.

## **Fort Kochi**

After visiting Cherai Beach, we moved towards Fort Kochi. Fort Kochi is a neighbourhood of Cochin city. Fort Kochi takes its name from Fort Manuel of Cochin. It was the first European Fort on Indian soil and was controlled by the Portuguese East Indies. The European architecture of many buildings and structures can still be seen in Fort Kochi. Various cultures blend at Fort Kochi. More than 30 communities co-exist here and more than 16 languages are spoken in the town. The influence of various European colonies can be seen here.eg-

The Portuguese influence-it can be seen in Fort Manuel of Cochin and St. Francis Church (one of the oldest churches in India). Both these structures are extremely beautiful.

The Dutch influence-it can be found in Dutch cemetery near St. Francis Church and Bolgatty palace.

The British influence-it can be seen at Jew town and Princess Street.

## Day -7

On the second day at Kochi we left for Mattancherry Palace at 8:30 AM.

### **Mattancherry Palace**

This palace is popularly known as the Dutch Palace. It is a quadrangular structure built in Nalukettu style, the traditional Kerala style of architecture, with a courtyard in the middle. Certain elements of architecture, as for example the nature of its arches and the proportion of its chambers are indicative of European influence in basic Nalukettu style. There is large number of murals on the walls of the palace, executed in the traditions of Hindu temple art, which are religious, decorative and stylized.



### **St. Francis church**

St. Francis Church, located in Fort Kochi, holds a special place in Kerala's cultural heritage. Originally built by the Portuguese in the early 16th century, it is one of the oldest European churches in India. The church underwent renovations and reconstructions over the centuries, reflecting the evolving architectural styles and cultural influences.

The church's architecture blends elements of European and traditional Kerala styles, with its distinctive facade and interior design. Inside the church, visitors can admire the intricate woodwork, ornate altars, and historical artifacts that tell the story of Fort Kochi's rich religious and cultural heritage.



St. Francis Church also has historical significance as the final resting place of the explorer Vasco da Gama, whose remains were interred here before being transferred to Portugal. The church stands as a symbol of Kerala's multicultural identity and the enduring legacy of its colonial past.

## **NGO-THERUVORAM**

Then we visited the NGO named ' **THERUVORAM** ', there we met the NGO as well as the local people. Theruvoram, operates with a mission to address the multifaceted challenges faced by marginalized communities, particularly focusing on issues related to urban poverty, homelessness, and social exclusion. Situated in the urban landscape of Kochi, the organization strategically engages in various welfare programs and advocacy efforts to uplift the underprivileged sections of society. Theruvoram conducts regular outreach programs aimed at identifying and assisting individuals and families living in destitution on the streets of Kochi. These initiatives involve providing essential resources such as food, clothing, and healthcare services. The visit to Theruvoram provided valuable insights into the organization's commendable efforts in addressing urban poverty and social exclusion in Kochi.

Through a holistic approach encompassing community outreach, skill development, and advocacy, Theruvoram demonstrates a commitment to fostering sustainable change and improving the lives of marginalized individuals and families. Moving forward, continued support and collaboration with stakeholders will be essential in furthering the organization's mission and expanding its reach to serve a broader segment of the population. It was really very inspiring and motivating interaction.



Then after having the lunch we left for the Kochi airport to board our flight back to Hyderabad on 4th April 2024.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Some of the key learnings from the tour are:

- India is a land of contrasts and contradictions, where the ancient and the modern, the rural and the urban, the rich and the poor, the traditional and the contemporary coexist and interact.
- India has a rich and glorious history and culture, which is reflected in its monuments, temples, forts, palaces, museums, art, literature, music, dance, festivals, cuisine and customs.
- India has a diverse and rich ecology and biodiversity, which is manifested in its forests, mountains, rivers, lakes, deserts, islands, coasts, wetlands, grasslands and wildlife.



In conclusion, Kerala's diverse landscapes, vibrant culture, and rich heritage make it a captivating destination for travelers seeking immersive experiences and unforgettable memories. From the historic landmarks of Trivandrum to the tranquil backwaters of Alleppey, the wilderness of Thekkady, the tea gardens of Munnar, and the colonial charms of Kochi, each destination offers a unique blend of attractions and experiences that showcase Kerala's timeless allure and cultural richness. As one of India's premier tourist destinations, Kerala continues to enchant visitors with its breathtaking beauty, warm hospitality, and unparalleled experiences, leaving an indelible mark on all who journey through its lands.