



Study tour (Bharat Darshan)
of FTP for ASO of 2023 Batch
(28.04.2024-04.05.2024)

REPORT ON STUDY TOUR
KERALA

Prepared by –

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MINISTRY OF FINANCE

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This was the most wonderful experience to explore as a group during the visit to Kerala. I enjoyed the study tour and learned many things during the NGO attachment, visiting to Kovalam, Munnar, Alleppey and Cochin and also visiting shree Padmanabhaswamy Temple.

Objective of the Tour

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 at Kerala under the guidance of Shri Saka Venkateshwara Rao, Senior Faculty (FTP).

There were 62 participants from different Ministries participating in this Training Programme. This study tour was part of the Training Programme and has following objectives: -

- To make the trainees learn about the functioning and development work being done by the NGO;
- To familiarize the trainees with India's rich cultural heritage and arts;
- To develop team spirit, time management, management of crisis and adaptability to various odd situations.

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Introduction:

Our study tour to Kerala, popularly known as "God's Own Country," was a captivating journey filled with discovery, learning, and cultural immersion. Kerala, situated in the southern part of India, is renowned for its natural beauty, rich history, and vibrant culture. Our visit provided a unique opportunity to delve into various aspects of Kerala's geography, culture, economy, and environment, while also experiencing its warm hospitality and scenic landscapes.

Overview: During our study tour, we explored diverse destinations across Kerala, each offering unique insights into the state's heritage and traditions. Our itinerary included visits to historic cities like Kochi, serene backwater destinations like Alleppey, picturesque hill stations like Munnar, and tranquil beaches like Kovalam. Through guided tours, interactive sessions, and cultural experiences, we gained a comprehensive understanding of Kerala's significance and allure.

Objectives: The primary objectives of our study tour to Kerala were to:

1. Gain insights into Kerala's geography, including its diverse landscapes, ecosystems, and natural resources.
2. Explore Kerala's rich cultural heritage, including its art forms, cuisine, festivals, and traditional practices.
3. Understand the economic significance of key industries in Kerala, such as tourism, agriculture, and fisheries.
4. Study Kerala's environmental conservation efforts and sustainable development initiatives.

Methodology: Our study tour employed a combination of methods to achieve our objectives, including:

- Guided tours of significant landmarks, historical sites, and cultural institutions.
- Interactive sessions with local experts, artisans, and community members.

- Hands-on experiences, such as cooking demonstrations, handicraft workshops, and traditional performances.
- Field visits to agricultural farms, spice plantations, fishing villages, and eco-tourism projects.
- Group discussions, reflections, and documentation of observations, insights, and experiences.

Report Structure: This report is structured to provide a comprehensive overview of our study tour experiences, organized by destination. Each section will highlight key learnings, observations, and reflections from our visits to Kochi, Alleppey, Munnar, and Kovalam. Additionally, the report will discuss overarching themes, challenges, and recommendations derived from our study tour, contributing to a deeper understanding of Kerala's cultural, economic, and environmental dynamics.

DAY 1

THIRUVANANTPURAM



SREE PADMANABHASWAMY TEMPLE



About:-

The **Padmanabhaswamy Temple** is a Hindu temple dedicated to Vishnu in Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of the state of Kerala, India. It is one of the 108 Divya Desams which are considered the sacred abodes of Vishnu in the Shri Vaishnava tradition.

- According to Historians, the temple dates back to the 8th century but the present structure was built in the 18th century by the then Travancore Maharaja Marthanda Varma.

- The temple was initially made of wood but later it was constructed with granite.

- The temple is built in the unique Chera style of architecture, and its main deity is Lord Vishnu who is found in the Anantha Shayana posture (reclined posture of eternal yoga) on Adishesha or king of all serpents.

My experience:-

- The temple sits like a precious gem on the crown. It is wrapped in mystery as much as it is in beauty, the experience of visiting this temple begins long before the sight of the intricate gopuram catches your eye. On each side of the busy and crowded road are shops selling vibrant clothes, fresh flowers and incense sticks.

- We found vendors on cycles selling loin cloths as temple rules forbid worshippers from entering without appropriate attire. We got lungi and gamcha (cost 80 Rs each) before entering the temple premises.

- Heavy crowd were there for darshan and we had to wait for three hours for darshan. But all my exhaustness vanished as I saw Deity which was visible through three doors.
- After we had prasadam which took away all my tiredness and also quenched my hunger.
- After we went to hotel for rest.

VELI VILLAGE



Veli village is kind of little away from the Trivandrum city and located in a not so crowded area amid the backdrop of the Veli Lake.

My Experience

This place has an awesome all-around view from the middle of the lake with an option to use pedal boat and motor boat. It also has a nice children's park for young kids thus offering something for everyone in the family and ideal to have a daylong picnic. There are couple of food stalls and ice-cream shops priced typical of any tourist place. This was the first time I saw beach and after experiencing it my mind and heart was filled with joy and enthusiasm. Overall a great experience and one of the not to miss tourist places in Trivandrum city.

Day 2

Varkala – Alleppey

Varkala Beach



Varkala is the major beach in Southern Kerala. though it possesses a beach-resort atmosphere, is not entirely like the other beaches. It harbours a calm ambience and is devoid of the hustle and bustle that is usually associated with Kovalam. Apart from holding the charms of a quiet beach, Varkala is also a major pilgrim destination with the presence of Sivagiri Mutt and various ancient temples including Janardhana temple. One of the key factors that set apart Varkala from other beaches of Sothern Kerala is the fascinating stretch of cliffs. Kerala coasts are generally flat in nature. Varkala alone is the only beach in southern Kerala where cliffs are found adjacent to the Arabian Sea

My Experience:-

One of the best spots to enjoy the sea. I walked around a lot enjoying the sea view. Experience this early in the morning, it was very less crowded then and it was a great experience. Start walking from the south cliff entrance and walk through the cliff till the end. You will see cafes getting ready to open, to your right and a great sea view to your left. You should experience it.

Alleppey



Alleppey is basically famous for its amazing back-waters where you would start your journey from a back-water canal in midst of the alleppey town and go onto explore the near back-waters & rivers surrounding it. The best is to take a journey of 3 to 4 hours as its mostly covers the important spots in that backwaters. The experience is memorable for life as you would go through the waters between coconut trees and agricultural fields. You can also get to know about the life-style of those people who are surrounded by waters but still living happily with this magnificent tourism. This is the best destination where you can actually just sit relax and enjoy. The entire experience was fabulous, everything was great except that they didn't serve sea food, although the food quality and service was great, the quantity offered was less than required, overall a must and different experience for the Kerala trip.

Day 3

Alleppey – Thekkady – Munnar

Periyar Tiger Reserve



The Periyar Tiger Reserve, situated in the southern Indian state of Kerala, is a haven for diverse wildlife.

- The reserve spans across an impressive 925 square kilometres within the Western Ghats
- It is a sanctuary for a wide range of animals, including tigers, elephants, leopards, and a myriad of bird species.
- The Periyar Lake, a major attraction within the reserve, is renowned for its beauty.
- The reserve has been recognized by UNESCO as part of its World Network of Biosphere Reserves.
- However, it faces challenges such as human-wildlife conflicts, poaching, and habitat destruction, among others.

My Experience

It's quite a very large Reserve and is home to lots of animals, birds and reptiles, including deer, gaur (Indian bison), elephants and apparently also a few

tigers. Probably the most popular way of seeing the Park for local and international tourists is to take a two hour boat cruise. However this means that you are necessarily quite a distance from any wildlife you may be lucky enough to spot (only a few deer and gaur were at the water's edge on the afternoon we visited, and some cormorants and kingfishers darted across the water). The boats are reasonably large and very crowded, Even though there is a roof over the seating area it's difficult to avoid the sun in some spots so it can get pretty hot. You must remain seated at all times, so it can be hard to see very much anyway. The scenery is very pretty and it's quite a restful way to spend a couple of hours just drifting along, if you rein in your expectations

Spice Garden



Visiting a spice garden is a delightful and educational experience, especially in regions like Kerala, India, which are renowned for their rich biodiversity and spice cultivation. Here's what you can expect from a visit to a spice garden:

Visiting a spice garden offers not only a sensory delight but also a deeper understanding of the region's culture, history, and natural bounty. It's a must-do experience for anyone interested in culinary traditions, herbal medicine, or simply exploring the wonders of nature.

Thekkady to Munnar journey



Traveling from Thekkady to Munnar by bus offers a scenic journey through the picturesque landscapes of Kerala. The route takes you through the Western Ghats, offering stunning views of lush green hills, tea plantations, and cascading waterfalls along the way.

We took almost 5 hours, but it felt like we had just started the journey as the route's landscape was so heartwarming and the breathtaking vistas and unique sights pleasant to watch.

Once you reach Munnar, you'll be greeted by its cool climate and serene atmosphere, making your bus journey well worth the scenic experience. Munnar is famous for its tea estates, wildlife sanctuaries, and panoramic viewpoints, offering plenty of opportunities for exploration and relaxation.

Day 4

Munnar

Eravikulam National Park:



Visiting Eravikulam National Park offered an immersive experience in the natural beauty of the Western Ghats.

1. **Scenic Beauty:** The park was adorned with greenery, rolling hills, and breathtaking vistas. The landscape is especially picturesque during the monsoon season when the hills are covered in a blanket of mist.
2. **Wildlife Encounters:** One of the main attractions of the park was the opportunity to spot the Nilgiri Tahr, an endangered species of mountain goat.
3. **Nature Trails:** Eravikulam offers well-maintained nature trails that took us through different ecosystems within the park. These trails offered opportunities for birdwatching, photography, and experiencing the tranquility of nature.
4. **Flora Diversity:** The park is home to a rich variety of flora, including rare orchids, ferns, and grasslands. Botany enthusiasts will appreciate the opportunity to observe and learn about these plant species.

5. **Rajamalai:** This area within the park is known for its scenic beauty and abundant wildlife. It's a popular spot for visitors to embark on guided treks and wildlife safaris.

Overall, a visit to Eravikulam National Park promises a memorable experience immersed in the tranquility of nature and the thrill of wildlife encounters.

Kalaripayattu



- Kalari Shetra is a traditional martial arts center located in Kerala, India, known for preserving and teaching the ancient art of Kalaripayattu.
- We experience live demonstrations of Kalaripayattu, which include various forms of combat, self-defense techniques, and graceful movements.
- Trained instructors at Kalari Shetra demonstrate the agility, strength, and precision required for Kalaripayattu, captivating audiences with their skill and athleticism.
- Guests have the opportunity to learn about the history and philosophy behind Kalaripayattu, as well as its significance in Kerala's cultural heritage.

In summary, Kalari Shetra offers visit an engaging and educational experience, showcasing the rich tradition of Kalaripayattu and its importance in Kerala's cultural heritage.

Day 5

Mattupatty-Tea Estates and Museum

Mattupatty Dam



The Mattupetty Dam is a popular tourist attraction located in the Munnar region of Kerala, India. It's a large concrete gravity dam built across the Mattupetty Lake, which is nestled amidst scenic hills and tea plantations. The dam was constructed for water conservation and hydroelectric power generation purposes.

Visitors come to the Mattupetty Dam to admire the breathtaking views of the surrounding landscape, which includes lush green valleys and forests. Boating facilities are available at the dam, allowing tourists to enjoy leisurely rides on the serene waters of the lake.

Overall, the Mattupetty Dam offers a peaceful retreat amidst nature's beauty, making it a must-visit destination for travelers exploring the Munnar region.

Tea Estates of Munnar:



- Munnar is famous for its sprawling tea estates, which stretch across the rolling hills of the Western Ghats in Kerala, India.
- These tea estates produce some of the finest varieties of tea in the world, renowned for their aroma and flavor.
- Visitors can take guided tours of the tea estates to learn about the tea cultivation process, from planting and plucking to processing and packaging.
- The lush greenery of the tea plantations provides a picturesque backdrop for photography and leisurely walks.
- Many tea estates also have tea shops where visitors can sample and purchase different varieties of tea, including black, green, and flavored teas.

Tata Tea Museum:

- The Tata Tea Museum is located in Munnar and offers insights into the history and evolution of the tea industry in the region.
- The museum showcases vintage machinery and equipment used in tea processing, providing a glimpse into the traditional methods of tea production.
- Visitors can learn about the pioneering efforts of companies like Tata Tea in establishing tea plantations in Munnar and their contributions to the local economy.
- The museum also features exhibits on the life of tea plantation workers and the social impact of the tea industry on the region.

These attractions offered us a fascinating insight into the world of tea cultivation and its significance in the scenic landscapes of Munnar.

Day 6

Kochi City: A Tapestry of Heritage and History



Our journey commenced amidst the bustling streets and vibrant markets of Kochi City, where echoes of its storied past reverberate through the centuries-old architecture and cultural landmarks. As we wandered through the labyrinthine alleys of Fort Cochin and Mattancherry, I was struck by the palpable sense of history that permeated the air.

Kochi's strategic location along ancient trade routes has made it a coveted destination for merchants, explorers, and colonial powers throughout history. The city's rich tapestry of heritage bears testament to this legacy, with influences from Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial rule blending seamlessly with indigenous traditions and customs. From the iconic Chinese fishing nets dotting the coastline to the ornate palaces and synagogues nestled amidst the urban sprawl, Kochi's architectural landmarks offer glimpses into its multicultural past and cosmopolitan present.

Fort Cochin: A Gateway to Kochi's Colonial Legacy



Our exploration of Kochi's historical heritage led us to the iconic Fort Cochin, a bastion of colonial architecture and maritime history. Built by the Portuguese in the 16th century, the fort served as a strategic outpost for European powers vying for control of India's lucrative spice trade.

As we strolled along the cobblestone streets and colonial-era buildings, I was transported back in time to an era of maritime adventure and cultural exchange. The remnants of Portuguese churches, Dutch cemeteries, and British residences stand as silent witnesses to Kochi's colonial past, while the bustling markets and vibrant art scene reflect its dynamic present. Our interactions with local historians and heritage experts provided valuable insights into the preservation efforts aimed at safeguarding Fort Cochin's architectural treasures for future generations.

Mattancherry Palace: A Glimpse into Kochi's Royal Legacy



Our journey through Kochi's historical landmarks brought us to the enchanting Mattancherry Palace, a testament to the city's royal heritage and architectural splendor. Originally built by the Portuguese as a gift to the Raja of Kochi, the palace was later renovated and embellished by the Dutch, who bestowed it with its distinctive Kerala-style architecture and ornate murals.

Stepping into the opulent halls and intricately adorned chambers of the palace, I was mesmerized by the timeless beauty and grandeur of its architectural design. The vibrant frescoes depicting scenes from Hindu mythology and the life of the Kochi royal family offered a glimpse into the cultural ethos and artistic legacy of the region. Our guided tour of the palace provided a deeper understanding of Kochi's royal legacy and the enduring influence of indigenous craftsmanship and aesthetics.

Chinese Fishing Practice: Sustaining Coastal Livelihoods



Our exploration of Kochi's cultural heritage extended to the iconic Chinese fishing practice that has sustained coastal communities along the Malabar Coast for centuries. As we observed fishermen working in tandem to operate the massive cantilevered nets, known locally as "Cheena Vala," I was struck by the ingenuity and communal spirit that underpins this age-old tradition.

The Chinese fishing nets are not only a testament to Kochi's maritime heritage but also a vital source of livelihood for local fishermen and their families. However, the practice faces challenges such as declining fish stocks, environmental degradation, and competition from modern fishing methods. Our discussions with fishermen and conservationists highlighted the need for sustainable fishing practices and community-based management strategies to ensure the long-term viability of this iconic tradition.

Day 7



Study of Theruvorum NGO and its impact on society

Nestled amidst the bustling streets of Kochi, Theruvoram NGO stands as a beacon of hope and compassion in the community. Intrigued by its reputation for transformative work, I embarked on a journey to uncover the inner workings, notable achievements, and profound impact of this remarkable organization on society.

Discovering the Heart of Theruvoram:

Entering Theruvoram's modest office, I was greeted by a sense of warmth and purpose that permeated the air. Founded with a vision to take care of homeless child, Theruvoram has become synonymous with grassroots activism and community empowerment. Its mission is simple yet profound: to create a more equitable and inclusive world for all.

A Tapestry of Initiatives:

As I delved deeper into Theruvoram's activities, I was astounded by the breadth and depth of its initiatives. From educational programs and healthcare services to livelihood support and environmental conservation efforts, the NGO's interventions spanned a wide spectrum of social issues, each meticulously crafted to address the needs of the communities it serves.

Empowering Lives, Transforming Communities:

My interactions with beneficiaries of Theruvoram's programs offered poignant insights into the profound impact of its interventions. From empowered women entrepreneurs breaking barriers in traditionally male-dominated industries to marginalized youth finding their voice through arts and culture, the stories of transformation were both inspiring and humbling.

But perhaps most striking was the sense of agency and dignity restored to individuals who had once been marginalized and overlooked by society. Through skill-building workshops, vocational training programs, and microfinance initiatives, Theruvoram has empowered countless individuals to chart their own path to success and become agents of change in their communities.

CONCLUSION

A journey to Kerala offers a diverse and enriching experience of its beauty, culture, and heritage.

Starting in Kovalam, the golden beaches and tranquil waters provide a serene retreat, perfect for relaxation and rejuvenation. The vibrant local culture, with its traditional dance forms and delicious seafood, adds a delightful flavor to the coastal charm.

Moving to Alleppey, the mesmerizing backwaters beckon with their serene beauty and idyllic houseboat cruises. Navigating through the labyrinthine network of canals, surrounded by lush greenery and glimpses of rural life, offers a unique and immersive experience.

In Munnar, the mist-covered hills and verdant tea plantations create a breathtaking landscape that captivates the soul. Exploring the lush valleys, trekking through the spice-scented forests, and savoring the aromatic flavors of freshly brewed tea provide moments of pure bliss in nature's embrace.

Finally, Cochin enchants with its blend of history, culture, and modernity. From the colonial charm of Fort Kochi to the bustling markets of Jew Town, the city's eclectic mix of influences leaves a lasting impression. Exploring its vibrant streets, sampling its diverse cuisine, and witnessing its rich heritage unfold offer a glimpse into Kerala's dynamic spirit.

Together, these destinations weave a tapestry of experiences that celebrate Kerala's natural wonders, cultural treasures, and warm hospitality. Whether seeking tranquility by the sea, serenity on the backwaters, solace in the hills, or stimulation in the city, a journey through Kovalam, Alleppey, Munnar, and Cochin promises unforgettable memories and a deep appreciation for the beauty of "God's Own Country."