



BHARAT DARSHAN-CUM-STUDY TOUR

For FTP for ASO (2023 BATCH)

**REPORT ON STUDY TOUR OF KERALA
(GOD'S OWN COUNTRY)**

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MINISTRY OF INFORMATION & BROADCASTING

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I am sincerely grateful to the Department of Personnel and Training for the opportunity to participate in the training program at the MCR HRD Institute of Telangana. My heartfelt thanks go to Smt. Usha Rani, Course Director, for her invaluable support.

I extend my appreciation to Mr. Saka Venkateshwara Rao for his guidance and supervision during the project. The group experience in Kerala was invaluable, and I learned a great deal during the study tour.

I also want to thank the Director General of MCR HRD Institute for the support in completing this study tour.

OBJECTIVES OF THE TOUR:

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the organizers of the ISTM Phase-1 Foundation Training Programme for Assistant Section Officers (ASOs) of the 2023 Batch. The 01-week Bharat Darshan conducted from 28.04.2024 to 04.05.2024 in Kerala, under the guidance of Dr. Saka Venkateshwara Rao, Senior Faculty (FTP), was an enriching experience.

With 61 participants from various Ministries, and 5 Group Leaders for the smooth functioning for this study tour, this study tour was an integral part of the Training Programme, aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- Exposing the trainees to the research and development work undertaken by NGOs.
- Familiarizing the trainees with India's diverse cultural heritage and arts.
- Developing crucial skills such as team spirit, time management, crisis management, and adaptability to diverse situations.

The details of the tour can be seen in the following pages.

DAY 1

On 28th April at 06:10 hours, our group of 62 members reached Thiruvananthapuram International Airport at 07:45 hours. The weather was hot and humid and the temperature was around 35°C.

i. **Padmanabhaswamy temple:**

The first point in our itinerary was Padmanabhaswamy temple. It was highly revered by the devotees and pilgrims. There was a strict 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 were to wear gowns. Men are similarly required to wear mundu or dhoti and bare their torso. Dhotis were 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.

Now, that the Darshan was over, it was time to get to our hotel, as we very very tired, but still had a rich and rewarding experience. We left around 1 pm towards the hotel.

ii. Veli village:

After the much needed rest and a great lunch, everyone was feeling full of energy. It was the evening and the ASOs, we set towards Veli Village which was said to be beautiful, and it didn't fail our expectations. 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. We had dinner, exchanged conversations about the day we had, and everybody went to their rooms.

DAY 2

i. Kovalam Beach

Our visit to Kovalam Beach at dawn offered us a captivating glimpse into the lives of the local fishermen. We were privileged to learn about the significance of fishing in Kerala, a cornerstone of the region's economy. The fishermen shared insights into their trade, highlighting the variety of fish they catch, including King Fish, Red Snappers, Pomfrets, and shrimps, which are primarily sold in local markets.

ii. Alleppey (Venice of the East)

Departing from Trivandrum at 9 am, we reached Alleppey by 2 pm, ready to explore its famed canals, backwaters, and beaches. Our highlight was a backwater cruise, spanning from the serene Pamba River to the expansive Vembanad Lake, covering approximately 15 km round trip along National Waterway 3. This waterway, a boon to Alleppey's limited road and rail infrastructure, supports traditional industries like coir, cashew, and fishing.



Alleppey's economy thrives on paddy farming, tourism, and its robust coir industry. Situated in the low-lying Kuttanad region, known as the rice bowl of Kerala, the area's innovative farming practices persevere at depths of

1.2 to 3.0 meters below sea level. Notably, the Thanneermukkom saltwater barrier protects against saltwater intrusion, preserving the region's fertility.

Exploring beyond the backwaters, we visited local coir shops, marveling at the craftsmanship of coir products. As the day concluded, we retired to our hotel, enriched by the natural beauty and cultural heritage of Alleppey.

DAY 3

i. Periyar National Park & Periyar Tiger Reserve

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.

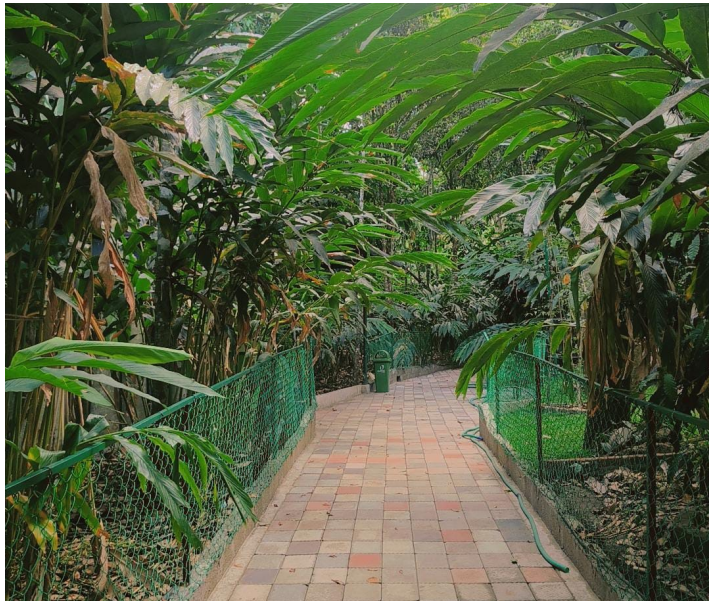


After we booked the ticket for boating at Periyar Lake, a bus of national park took us from our stop to Periyar National Park. There were 4 double decker boats waiting for the tourists at the lake. The boat journey was of 1 hour and during this boat journey we witnessed herd of deer, elephants, wild 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.

ii. **Spice Garden**



From Periyar tiger reserve, we proceeded to our next destination Munnar and reached there by 11 pm. On the way from Thekkady to Munnar we visited Spice Garden. It offers a captivating journey into the heart of India's spice trade. Nestled amidst lush greenery in Kerala's scenic landscape, this aromatic haven invites visitors to explore the rich history and diversity of spices. From cardamom and cloves to cinnamon and pepper, the garden showcases a vibrant array of flora, each contributing to India's culinary and cultural tapestry. Guided tours offer insights into cultivation techniques, medicinal uses, and the spice trade's global significance. Visitors can engage in interactive experiences, such as spice tastings and traditional cooking demonstrations, making it a sensory delight for all who visit.

DAY 4

i. Eravikulam National Park

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 *strobilanthes 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

i. Mattupetty Dam and Lake

In the morning, we embarked on a visit to Mattupetty Dam, a marvel of engineering that serves as more than just a water storage facility. This gravity dam creates the picturesque Mattupetty Lake, a perennial body of water that defies the harshness of even the hottest summers. Beyond its essential function as a water source, the dam also contributes significantly to electricity generation. Moreover, the lake's tranquil waters provide a hub for various water-based recreational activities, enriching the region's tourism. Additionally, the waters of Mattupetty Lake play a vital role in irrigation, nurturing the fields nearby.

ii. Tata Tea Museum

Our itinerary led us to the Tata Tea Museum, a tribute to the integral role that tea has played in Munnar's history. Nestled within the Nallathanni Estate of Tata Tea, this museum encapsulates the journey of tea through captivating photographs and vintage machinery. From the humble beginnings of tea production to the sophisticated processes of today's fully automated factories, the museum vividly illustrates the evolution of tea cultivation. Visitors are treated to a fascinating display of tea processing stages, including the intricate art of black tea production. Among the museum's treasures is a sundial crafted in 1913 by the Art Industrial School in Nazareth, Tamil Nadu, alongside relics such as the historic 'Pelton Wheel' and remnants of the Kundale Valley Light Railway. A highlight of our visit was the tea tasting demonstration room, where we indulged in sampling some of the world's most exotic tea varieties.



iii. Tea Estates Exploration

Immersing ourselves further in Munnar's tea culture, we ventured into the lush tea estates, many of which belong to the Kanan Devan Hills Plantations Company Private Limited (KDHP). Here, we witnessed first-hand the meticulous process of tea leaf plucking, where skilled workers carefully select the tender topmost leaves and buds. This labour-intensive task underscores the economic advantage of manual plucking over mechanized methods. The opportunity to explore these estates offered a deeper appreciation for the dedication and skill of those involved in the production of Munnar's renowned tea.

DAY 6

i. Cherai Beach

Cherai Beach is one of the most famous beaches in Cochin. It is located in Cherai in the northern side of the Vypin Island. This beach is nearly 10 kms long and ideal for swimming and water sport activities as tide here is mostly low and the waves are gentle. We participated in water activities organised by the tourism, and it was truly a rewarding experience.



Cherai Beach is one of the few places where the backwaters and the sea can be seen in a single frame. Cherai Beach is famous for frequent Dolphin sighting. It is recommended to visit Cherai Beach between September to May for dolphin sighting. We were hopeful of seeing dolphins but sadly we weren't fortunate to sight any.

ii. Fort Kochi

Exploring Fort Kochi was like delving into a living museum of maritime history. The streets echoed with the footsteps of countless travelers who had traversed this port city over the centuries. Colonial influences were evident in the well-preserved Portuguese and Dutch architecture, standing as enduring reminders of a bygone era. Along the waterfront, the iconic Chinese fishing nets loomed large, their intricate mechanisms a testament to ancient fishing techniques still in use today. Amidst the bustling spice markets, the air was heavy with the scent of cardamom, pepper, and cinnamon, reflecting Kochi's historic

role as a trading hub for spices. At every turn, there was a new discovery waiting to be made, whether it was stumbling upon a hidden courtyard or stumbling upon a bustling street market. Fort Kochi's blend of history, culture, and commerce offered a captivating glimpse into the vibrant tapestry of India's past and present.



DAY 7

i. Organisation for the Development of People (NGO), Theruvoram



Established in 2007, Theruvoram operates in Kochi, Kerala, without relying on government funding. Their services extend across the state, aiming to assist marginalized children and the elderly with shelter, medical aid, repatriation, rescue operations, emotional support, and guidance.

Theruvu Vellicham, a branch of Theruvoram, has rehabilitated 1,356 individuals since its inception. Unlike the 194 other orphanages and shelter homes in Ernakulam district, Theruvoram doesn't discriminate based on age, gender, or any other factor.

This organization stands out for its inclusive approach and comprehensive services, providing a lifeline for those in need across Kerala.

The tour ends here. After the amazing and enriching experience, we made our way to the Kochi International Airport. Since 62 people were a big batch, we were separated into two groups, to depart for Hyderabad in two different flights.

CONCLUSION

The study tour was a memorable and enriching experience for all of us. We learned a lot about Kerala as a state, about its diversity, unity, history and culture of different regions, the ecology and biodiversity of different ecosystems, the development and governance of states etc. We did experience a bit of language barrier with the locals, but we also had a nice time mingling with the people there. Also since it was a big group of 61 people, we also had the chance to develop our skills and competencies in team work, time management, crisis management and adaptability. One thing is for sure, we will always cherish the memories and the bonds we strengthened.

Some of the key learning for the tour is as follows:

- 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.

It was a valuable part of our FTP programme. We learnt a lot, which added to personalities, and our life working as an ASO. We hope to apply and share our learning and experiences from this tour in our work and life. We also hope to have more of such experiences.