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BHARAT DARSHAN REPORT

(29-04-2024 to 03-05-2024)

(Kerala)

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GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
INSTITUTE OF SECRETARIAT TRAINING & MANAGEMENT
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Acknowledgement

"I want to extend my heartfelt appreciation to ISTM and MCR HRD IT for orchestrating an exceptional educational excursion, the Bharat Darshan tour in Kerala. This incredibly enriching experience stands as a testament to the meticulous planning and dedicated commitment exhibited by both institutions.

A special acknowledgment goes to Dr. K. Usha Rani Ma'am, our Course Director, whose steadfast support ensured a seamless and enlightening journey.

I'm immensely grateful to the organizing committee and tour coordinators whose unwavering dedication, meticulous planning, and flawless execution contributed to the tremendous success of this tour.

Beyond its intellectual pursuits, the Bharat Darshan/study tour fostered enduring memories and fostered camaraderie among us. It wasn't just an educational journey; it was a platform that created lasting bonds and cherished moments.

The thoughtfully curated tour and immersive experiences have significantly broadened our horizons. Exploring the historical marvels of Kochhi and the natural beauty of Munnar and Alleppy has enriched our understanding of the subjects we've been studying.

Once again, my deepest gratitude to ISTM and MCR HRD IT for granting us this invaluable opportunity to learn, explore, and forge indelible connections."

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OVERVIEW	
28.04.2024	Departure from Hyderabad
29.11.2023	Padmanabhaswamy Temple(Trivandrum), Velly Village
30.11.2023	Alleppey Boat House, Periyar Tiger Reserve (Thekkady)
01.11.2023	Tea Garden & Tea Museum and Spice Route (Munnar)
02.11.2023	Eravikulam Nation Park, Kalaripayattu
03.11.2023	Marine Drive , Kochhi Fort , Cherai Beach (Kochhi)
04.11.2023	Theruvoram NGO , Return to hyderabad

Day-1 Trivandrum:- Trivandrum, also known as Thiruvananthapuram, is the capital city of the southern Indian state of Kerala. Here's an overview of Trivandrum.

Kathakali: Trivandrum is a hub for Kathakali, a traditional dance-drama form that originated in Kerala. You can witness Kathakali performances at various cultural centers and theaters in the city.

Classical Music and Dance: The city is also known for its classical music and dance performances. Bharatanatyam, Mohiniyattam, and Carnatic music are integral parts of the cultural fabric of Trivandrum.

Temples and Religious Festivals: Trivandrum is home to several temples, and religious festivals are celebrated with great pomp and splendor. The Attukal Pongala, a unique festival dedicated to the goddess Attukal Bhagavathy, is one of the largest all-women religious gatherings in the world.

We Visited following places in Trivandrum:-

(a) The Padmanabhaswamy Temple:- The Padmanabhaswamy Temple is a renowned Hindu temple located in the heart of Trivandrum, the capital city of Kerala, India. Here's some key information about this iconic temple:

History: The temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu, particularly in the form of Padmanabhaswamy (Lord Vishnu reclining on the serpent Adi Shesha). It is believed to have been constructed in the 6th century AD by the rulers of the Travancore kingdom and has since undergone several renovations and expansions.

Architecture: The temple showcases a blend of Kerala and Dravidian architectural styles. It features a towering gopuram (entrance tower), intricate carvings, and a massive tank called Padma Theertham. The sanctum sanctorum houses the deity of Lord Padmanabhaswamy in a reclining posture on the serpent Anantha.

Significance: The Padmanabhaswamy Temple is one of the 108 Divya Desams (sacred abodes of Lord Vishnu) mentioned in Hindu scriptures. It holds immense religious significance for devotees, and the deity is considered to be the protector of the city of Trivandrum and its people.



(b) Kovalam Beach:-

Kovalam Beach is a world-renowned coastal destination located about 16 kilometers from Trivandrum (Thiruvananthapuram), the capital city of Kerala, India. Here's an overview of Kovalam Beach:

Location: Kovalam is situated along the Arabian Sea coast in the southern part of Kerala. It is easily accessible from Trivandrum city, with a travel time of around 30 minutes by road.

Lighthouse Beach: The main beach in Kovalam is known as Lighthouse Beach, named after the iconic Vizhinjam Lighthouse located atop a nearby hill. The lighthouse provides panoramic views of the coastline and is a popular tourist attraction.

Ayurvedic Massage Centers: Kovalam is renowned for its Ayurvedic massage centers and wellness spas, where visitors can indulge in rejuvenating therapies and massages using natural herbs and oils.

Ayurvedic treatments offer relaxation and rejuvenation, making



Kovalama popular destination for wellness tourism.

Day 2 - Thekkady, Kerala

Thekkady is a popular tourist destination located in the Idukki district of Kerala, India. It's renowned for its wildlife sanctuary, Periyar National Park, which is home to a variety of flora and fauna, including elephants, tigers, sambar deer, and wild boar. Apart from its wildlife, Thekkady is also known for its picturesque landscape of dense forests, spice plantations, and rolling hills.

1. Periyar National Park

Periyar National Park is a renowned wildlife sanctuary located in the Western Ghats of Kerala, India. It spans across the districts of Idukki and Pathanamthitta and covers an area of about 925 square kilometers. The park is named after the Periyar River, which flows through it.

Established in 1950, Periyar National Park is one of the oldest and most well-maintained wildlife reserves in India. It is famous for its diverse range of flora and fauna, including elephants, tigers, leopards, sambar deer, wild boar, and several species of birds. The park is also home to rare and endemic species like the Nilgiri langur and lion-tailed macaque. The centerpiece of Periyar National Park is the Periyar Lake, which was formed by the construction of the Mullaperiyar Dam across the Periyar River. Boat cruises on the lake are a popular activity for visitors, providing opportunities to spot wildlife, especially elephants, as they come to the water's edge to drink.

Apart from boat safaris, the park offers various other activities such as nature walks, trekking, bamboo rafting, and camping. There are also several watchtowers and viewpoints within the park that offer panoramic views of the surrounding landscape.

Periyar National Park is not only a biodiversity hotspot but also an important conservation area, playing a crucial role in the protection of the Western Ghats ecosystem. It attracts thousands of tourists and nature enthusiasts from around the world who come to experience its natural beauty and wildlife.



2. Alleppey

- In the early first decade of the 20th Century the then Viceroy of the Indian Empire, Lord Curzon made a visit in the State to Alleppey, now Alappuzha. Fascinated by the Scenic beauty of the place, he exclaimed “*Alleppey, the Venice of the East*”
- The town's proximity to coconut groves and backwaters made it an ideal location for the coir industry. Today, Alleppey is known as the "Coir Capital of India.
- In recent decades, Alleppey has emerged as a popular tourist destination, particularly for its backwaters, houseboat cruises, and cultural attractions.

The annual Nehru Trophy Boat Race, held on the Punnamada Lake in Alleppey, is a major tourist attraction that draws visitors from around the world.

- The town is home to several temples, churches, and mosques, each with its own historical significance. Traditional art forms such as Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, and Theyyam are also celebrated in Alleppey.



Day 3– Eravikulam, Kerala

1. Eravikulam National Park:

Location: It is situated in the Western Ghats, near Munnar, a popular hill station in Kerala.

Flora and Fauna: The park is renowned for being the habitat of the endangered Nilgiri Tahr, a mountain goat species endemic to the Western Ghats. Apart from the Nilgiri Tahr, the park is home to a variety of other wildlife species, including gaur, Indian muntjac, Indian leopard, sambar deer, and a wide array of bird species.

Landscape: The park is characterized by rolling hills, grasslands, shola forests, and rugged terrain typical of the Western Ghats. It is also known for the Neelakurinji flowers, which bloom once every twelve years, covering the hillsides in a vibrant blue hue.

Tourism: Eravikulam National Park is a popular tourist destination, attracting nature enthusiasts, wildlife photographers, and tourists seeking to experience the natural beauty of the Western Ghats. The park offers guided trekking trails and wildlife safaris, allowing visitors to explore its biodiversity and scenic landscapes.

Conservation: The park plays a crucial role in the conservation of the Nilgiri Tahr and other endemic species of the Western Ghats. Efforts are made to protect the fragile ecosystem of the park and mitigate human-wildlife conflicts in the surrounding areas.

Overall, Eravikulam National Park offers a unique opportunity to experience the rich biodiversity and natural heritage of the Western Ghats, making it a must-visit destination for anyone traveling to Kerala.



2.Munnar, Kerala

Munnar, a picturesque hill station in the Western Ghats of Kerala, India, is renowned for its sprawling tea estates and the fascinating Tata Tea Museum. Here's a bit about each:

(a)Tea Garden in Munnar:

Munnar is famous for its extensive tea plantations that stretch across vast expanses of rolling hills. These tea estates are not only a breathtaking sight to behold but also a significant part of Munnar's economy and cultural identity. Visitors to Munnar often enjoy taking leisurely walks or guided tours through the tea gardens, where they can witness the tea-picking process and learn about the cultivation and processing of tea leaves. The lush greenery of the tea gardens combined with the mist-covered hills creates a serene and tranquil atmosphere that attracts tourists from far and wide.



(b)Tea Museum, Munnar

The Tata Tea Museum, located in Munnar, offers visitors a fascinating insight into the history and evolution of the tea industry in the region. The

museum is housed in an old tea factory that dates back to the late 19th century and was operated by the Tata Group. Inside the museum, visitors can explore various exhibits showcasing antique tea-processing machinery, photographs, and historical artifacts related to the tea industry. There are also informative displays detailing the tea-making process, from cultivation to packaging. One of the highlights of the museum is the demonstration of tea leaf processing, where visitors can observe the different stages of tea production firsthand. Additionally, the museum provides panoramic views of the surrounding tea estates, offering visitors a glimpse into the scenic beauty of Munnar's landscape.



Both the tea gardens and the Tata Tea Museum offer visitors a unique opportunity to learn about the rich heritage and significance of tea cultivation in Munnar while immersing themselves in the natural beauty of the region.

DAY 4 . (a)Spice Route, Munnar

The Spice Route in Munnar refers to the region's rich history and heritage associated with spice cultivation and trade. Munnar, located in the Western Ghats of Kerala, India, has a long-standing tradition of cultivating various spices, including cardamom, pepper, cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg. These spices have been integral to the region's economy and cultural identity for centuries.

Exploring the Spice Route in Munnar offers visitors a chance to learn about the cultivation, processing, and trading of spices through guided tours, spice plantations visits, and cultural experiences. Here are some key aspects of the Spice Route in Munnar:

1. ****Spice Plantations****: Munnar is dotted with numerous spice plantations where visitors can witness the cultivation of various spices amidst the lush greenery of the Western Ghats. Guided tours of these plantations provide insights into the cultivation techniques, harvesting methods, and medicinal properties of different spices.

2. ****Spice Markets****: Munnar boasts vibrant spice markets where visitors can purchase a wide range of fresh and aromatic spices directly from local farmers and traders. These markets offer a sensory experience with the sights, sounds, and aromas of various spices filling the air.

3. ****Cultural Experiences****: Many spice plantations in Munnar also offer cultural experiences such as traditional dance performances, spice-cooking demonstrations, and Ayurvedic wellness sessions. These experiences allow visitors to immerse themselves in the local culture and heritage associated with spice cultivation.

4. ****Historical Significance****: The Spice Route in Munnar has historical significance as it was part of the ancient trade routes that connected Kerala with other regions of India and the world. Munnar's strategic location in the Western Ghats made it a crucial hub for the trade of spices, attracting merchants and traders from far and wide.

Exploring the Spice Route in Munnar provides visitors with a deeper understanding of the region's agricultural heritage, cultural traditions, and the importance of spices in Kerala's history and economy. It's a fascinating journey through time and culture amidst the natural beauty of the Western Ghats.



(b). Kalaripayattu:

Kalaripayattu is an ancient Indian martial art form that originated in Kerala, a state in South India. It is considered one of the oldest fighting systems in existence, with roots dating back over 3,000 years. Kalaripayattu incorporates a combination of strikes, kicks, grappling, weaponry, and healing methods.

The practice of Kalaripayattu is deeply intertwined with Indian culture, history, and spirituality. It is not just a means of self-defense but also a form of physical and mental discipline. Practitioners of Kalaripayattu undergo rigorous training, which includes mastering various techniques, forms (known as "katas" or "meipayattu"), and exercises to develop strength, agility, flexibility, and focus.

One unique aspect of Kalaripayattu is its emphasis on Marma points, which are vital points on the body where significant nerves, veins, arteries, and joints converge. Practitioners are trained to strike these points precisely for both offensive and defensive purposes.

In recent years, Kalaripayattu has gained recognition not only as a martial art but also as a form of physical fitness, with practitioners around the world learning and practicing its techniques. It has also influenced other martial arts styles, including some forms of Chinese martial arts.



Day 5- Kochi, Kerala

Kochi, also known as Cochin, is a vibrant city located in the southwestern coastal region of India, in the state of Kerala. It is often referred to as the "Queen of the Arabian Sea" due to its scenic beauty and rich cultural heritage. Kochi is a major port city and has been a significant center of trade and commerce for centuries, attracting merchants and traders from around the world.

One of the most distinctive features of Kochi is its diverse cultural influences, shaped by its long history of trade with various civilizations including Arabs, Chinese, Dutch, Portuguese, and British. This multicultural heritage is reflected in the city's architecture, cuisine, and festivals.

Some notable attractions in Kochi include:

(a)Fort Kochi: This historic area is known for its well-preserved colonial-era buildings, narrow streets, and bustling waterfront. The iconic Chinese fishing nets, St. Francis Church (India's oldest European-built church), and Mattancherry Palace (Dutch Palace) are among the highlights of Fort Kochi.



(b) Jew Town and Mattancherry: These neighborhoods are famous for their Jewish synagogue (Paradesi Synagogue), spice markets, and vibrant street life. The area is a testament to Kochi's role as a hub of the spice trade in ancient times.

(c) Marine Drive: A picturesque promenade along the waterfront, offering stunning views of the Arabian Sea, sunset cruises, and recreational activities.

(d) Kerala Kathakali Centre: Visitors can experience the vibrant performing arts of Kerala, including Kathakali (classical dance-drama), Kalaripayattu (martial art), and classical music concerts.

(e) Kerala Folklore Museum: A showcase of Kerala's rich cultural heritage, featuring traditional artifacts, costumes, and art forms.

(f) Cherai Beach: A serene beach destination located on the outskirts of Kochi, known for its golden sands, tranquil waters, and scenic beauty.



Visit to Theruvoram NGO

"Theruvoram," it's a non-profit organization based in Kerala, India, focused on the welfare of homeless individuals. Theruvoram translates to "street" in Malayalam, the local language of Kerala. The organization works towards providing various forms of support and assistance to those living on the streets, including shelter, food, healthcare, and vocational training to help them reintegrate into society. Theruvoram's initiatives often involve volunteers and community outreach efforts to address the needs of the homeless population. Theruvoram is an NGO founded by Murukan S Theruvoram, a social worker, for the rehabilitation of street people in Kochi. It was established in the year 2007. Theruvoram had been in service in the past years without accepting fund or grants from Government and public. Even when our organization is operating in Kochi, we have made our services available all over Kerala. Theruvoram aims to reach out to the most marginalized children and old age people to provide interventions of shelter, medical, repatriation, rescue, death related, sponsorship, emotional support and guidance.



Conclusion

In summary, the Bharat Darshan/Study Tour to Trivandrum, Thekkady, Munnar and Kochi has proven to be a comprehensive and enriching encounter, seamlessly integrating educational aspects with the exploration of culturally vibrant and naturally captivating destinations. Munnar, characterized by its tranquil landscapes, tea plantations, and lively gardens, served as a distinctive setting for delving into topics related to biodiversity and environmental conservation. A tour of Kerala offers a captivating journey through a land blessed with natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and vibrant traditions. From serene backwaters to lush greenery, historic landmarks to colorful festivals, Kerala delights travelers with its diverse experiences.

Throughout Kerala Darshan, I have the opportunity to:

Explore the Backwaters: Glide through the tranquil backwaters on a traditional houseboat, witnessing picturesque landscapes, charming villages, and abundant birdlife.

Experience Ayurveda: Immerse yourself in the ancient healing traditions of Ayurveda, with rejuvenating massages, yoga sessions, and wellness therapies.

Witness Cultural Diversity: Encounter Kerala's multicultural heritage through visits to historic sites, museums, and traditional villages, where you can experience local art forms, cuisine, and customs.

Enjoy Scenic Beauty: From the misty hills of Munnar to the palm-fringed beaches of Kovalam, Kerala's natural landscapes enchant with their breathtaking beauty and tranquility.

Savor Culinary Delights: Indulge in the flavors of Kerala's cuisine, with its aromatic spices, fresh seafood, and traditional dishes served on banana leaves, providing a culinary journey to remember.

Connect with Nature: Discover Kerala's diverse wildlife at national parks and sanctuaries, where you can encounter elephants, tigers, birds, and other fascinating creatures in their natural habitats.

Overall, a tour of Kerala leaves us with unforgettable memories of a land that captivates the senses and nourishes the soul, offering a truly enriching and rejuvenating experience. Whether we are seeking relaxation, adventure, or

cultural immersion, Kerala welcomes us with open arms, promising an unforgettable journey of discovery and wonder.