



Study tour (Bharat Darshan)
of FTP for ASO of 2023 Batch
(28th Apr, 2024 to 04th May, 2024)

FOR
ASSISTANT SECTION OFFICERS OF CSS

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

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Acknowledgement:

At the outset, I would like to convey our sincere gratitude to the Department of Personnel and Training for giving me this unique opportunity to participate in the mandatory training programme at the MCR HRD Institute of Telangana. I would also like to convey my sincere thanks to Smt. Usha Rani, Course Director, MCR HRD IT for giving great support.

We are highly indebted to Mr. Saka Venkateshwara Rao, Senior Faculty and Bharat Darshan Co-ordinator for his guidance and constant supervision as well as for providing necessary information regarding the project & also for his support in completing the project.

This was a unique experience to work as a group during the visit to Kerala. I enjoyed the study tour and learned many things during the NGO attachment and Tea Factory Visit as well.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Director General, MCR HRD IT for providing all necessary support for successful completion of this study tour.

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 Dr. Saka Venkateshwara Rao, Senior Faculty (FTP).

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: -

- To expose the Trainees to research and development work being done by the NGOs;
- 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.

Bharat Darshan Group-3 Schedule
**(Hyderabad -Thiruvananthpuram-Alleppey-Veli village-Munnar-Kochi-
Hyderabad)**

Day 1 (28th April,2024)

- Reached Thiruvnananthpuram Airport
- Visited Padmanabhaswamy Temple
- Visited Veli Village

Day 2 (29th April,2024)

- Reached Alleppy (Allapuzha)
- House Boating in Alleppy Backwaters
- Visited Alleppey Beach

Day 3 (30th April,2024)

- Boating Safari at Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary
- Visited Spice Plantation area

Day 4 (01st May, 2024)

- Visited Eravikulam National Park in Munnar
- Visited Kuringi (Neelakuringi) Trail
- Watched the local Martial Arts Program “Kalaripayattu”

Day 5 (02nd May,2024)

- Visited Mattupetty Dam
- Visited Tea Estate

Day 6 (03rd May,2024)

- Visited Cherai Beach

Day 07 (04th May, 2024)

- Visited Theruvoram NGO
- Visited Local market (Marine Drive) in Kochi

Day 1.

1. Shree Padmanabhaswamy Temple

As I reflect on our enriching study tour through Kerala, each destination unfolded like a chapter in a captivating novel, revealing the rich tapestry of this vibrant region. Our journey began with the majestic Padmanabhaswamy Temple, its intricate architecture and spiritual ambiance setting the tone for our exploration. Located inside the East Fort in Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city of the State of Kerala in India is the Shree Padmanabhaswamy Temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu. This temple is a blend of the Kerala and Dravidian styles of architecture. It is believed to be the world's richest temple.

The history of Shree Padmanabhaswamy Temple dates back to 8th century. It is one of the 108 sacred Vishnu temples or Divya Desams in India. *Divya Desams* are the holiest abodes of Lord Vishnu that are mentioned in the works of the Tamil Azhvars (saints). The presiding deity of this temple is Lord Vishnu, reclining on *Anantha*, the hooded Serpent. The divine glimpse of Lord Vishnu was extremely peaceful and invigorating.



2. Veli Village

Next, we ventured to the Veli Tourist Village which lies where the Veli Lake meets the Arabian Sea provides for unique boating and picnic opportunities. Visitors can hire pedal boats or paddleboats as per their convenience. One can also roam the gardens and have a nice picnic or choose to employ the boats for the entire duration of the trip. Veli Village is a famous tourist destination located in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India. It's renowned for its picturesque beauty and serene surroundings. One of its main attractions is the Veli Lake, which is surrounded by lush greenery and offers boating facilities. The village is also home to a beautiful garden and a floating bridge that connects the village to the beach. Visitors can enjoy activities like pedal boating, swimming, and picnicking in this tranquil setting. Overall, Veli Village is a perfect getaway for those seeking relaxation amidst nature's beauty. The most peaceful sight was the sunset on the beach. It took away the fatigue of the whole day and re-energized us.



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Day 2.

1. Kovalam Beach

In the early morning we went to the Kovalam Beach, to see sunrise. Nestled along the Arabian Sea coast in Kerala, it captivates with its serene beauty and golden sands. Renowned for its crescent shape and lush palm-fringed shores, it's a heaven for travellers seeking tranquillity. The crystal-clear water offer opportunities for swimming, surfing, and sunbathing, while Ayurvedic massages at the beachside spas provide relaxation. Local fishermen often dot the horizon, adding to the picturesque charm. The iconic lighthouse perched atop the cliffs offers panoramic views of the coastline. With vibrant shacks serving delectable seafood and cultural performances, Kovalam is not just a beach destination but a cultural experience, enchanting visitors worldwide. Visiting this serene place was like a blessing. Also, as the beach was just behind the resort where we stayed at night, we also got a glimpse of the beach in the moonlight.





2. Alleppey

On Day 2 we departed from Trivandrum to Alleppey. Alleppey is famous for its canals, backwaters, beaches and lagoons. 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.

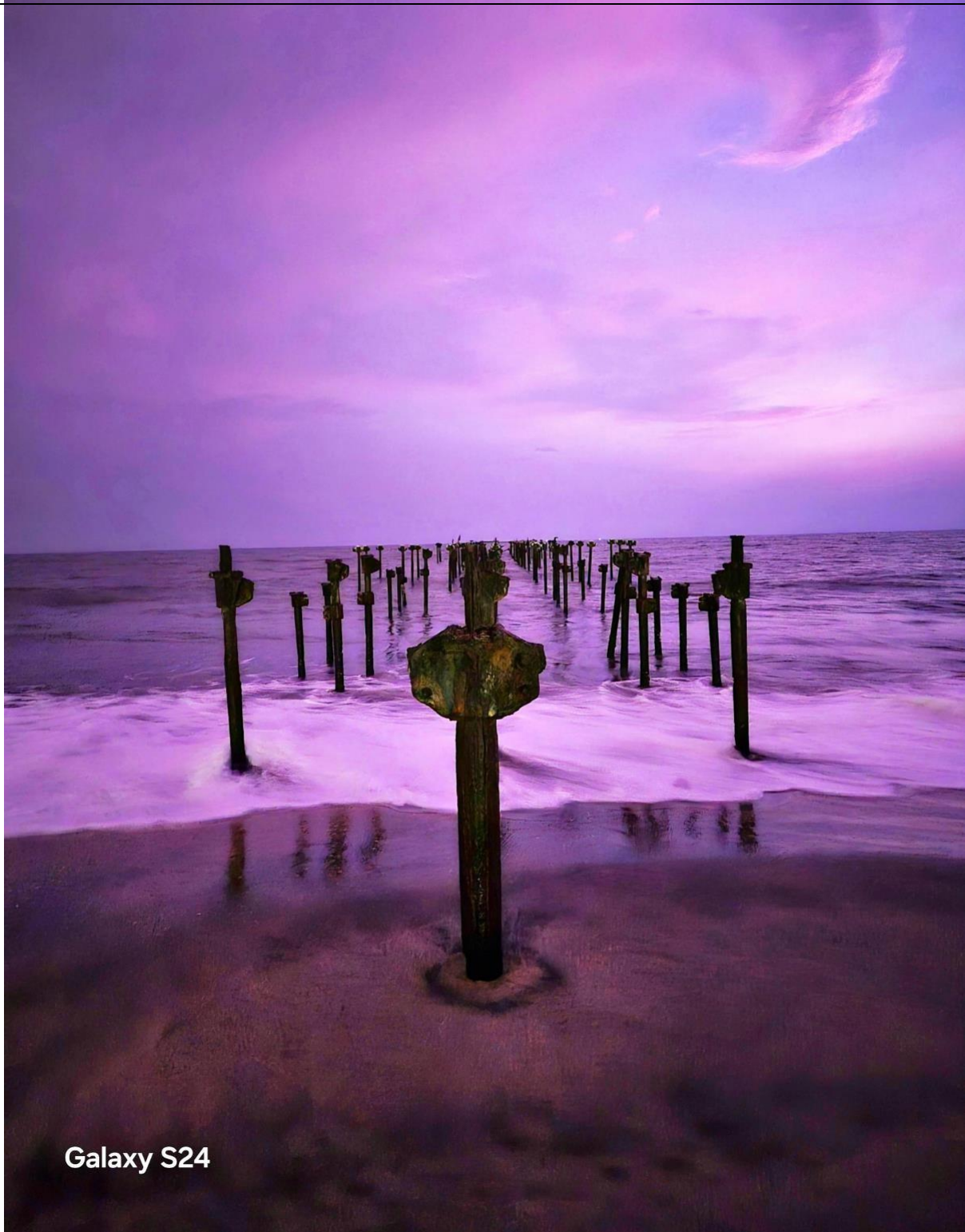
Overall, the Vembanad Lake backwaters offer a peaceful retreat amidst nature's bounty, making it a must-visit destination for travelers seeking tranquility and natural beauty in Kerala.





3. Alleppey Beach

One of the most popular picnic spots in Alappuzha, this beach is famous for an ancient pier and a lighthouse. The pier is over 140 years old and breathes history. Built by Captain Crawford, this structure gives you a rare experience of walking right into the sea. The old lighthouse here is another fascinating feature that draws people to the beach. Since we reached the Pagoda resort quite late, we went to take a look at the famous lighthouse and the view was extremely breathtaking.



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Day 3

1. Periyar Tiger Reserve

The next day, we proceeded towards Thekkady to visit Periyar National Park. The park is famous for its rich biodiversity, including a diverse array of flora and fauna. It's particularly known for its population of Asian elephants, which

roam freely in the forested areas. Apart from elephants, Periyar is home to other wildlife such as tigers, leopards, sambar deer, barking deer, wild boar, and various species of birds and reptiles.

One of the unique features of Periyar National Park is the Periyar Lake, which was formed by the construction of the Mullaperiyar Dam across the Periyar River. Visitors can enjoy boat cruises on the lake, providing opportunities for wildlife sightings and breath-taking views of the surrounding forests.

In addition to boat safaris, the park offers guided nature walks, bamboo rafting, and trekking opportunities, allowing visitors to explore the wilderness and appreciate the natural beauty of the Western Ghats.

Periyar National Park is not only a haven for wildlife enthusiasts but also plays a crucial role in conservation efforts, protecting the delicate ecosystem of the region and providing a sanctuary for endangered species.

We did boating safari in the Periyar lake and got fortunate to locate a few



species of Deer, a herd of elephants playing and a Tusker wandering along, opposite to their basic nature of living in herds.



2. 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

1. Eravikulam National Park

In the morning, we departed for Eravikulam National Park which was 15 km from our hotel. It is a famous wildlife sanctuary located in the Idukki district of Kerala, India. Established in 1978, it covers an area of approximately 97 square kilometers in the Western Ghats, a UNESCO World Heritage Site renowned for its biodiversity.

The park is best known as the habitat of the **Nilgiri Tahr**, an endangered mountain goat species endemic to the Western Ghats. One of the highlights of visiting Eravikulam National Park is the opportunity to trek to the highest peak in South India, Anamudi, which stands at an elevation of 2,695 meters (8,842 feet). The park offers well-maintained trekking trails that lead visitors through

the pristine wilderness, allowing them to immerse themselves in the natural beauty of the Western Ghats.





The abundance of Nilgiri Tahrs in the region made it easy for us to spot many of them.



2. Kurunji Trail

The Kurunji Trail is a trekking route located in the Western Ghats of Kerala, India. It's named after the Kurinji flower (*Strobilanthes kunthianus*), which blooms in abundance along the trail once every twelve years, painting the hillsides with a mesmerizing shade of blue.

The trekking route winds through the picturesque landscapes of the Western Ghats, offering breath-taking views of lush forests, rolling hills, and cascading waterfalls. Hikers often encounter a rich variety of flora and fauna endemic to the region, including rare species of birds, butterflies, and small mammals.

The Kurunji Trail is not only a feast for the eyes but also a journey through the natural and cultural heritage of the area. Along the way, trekkers may come across indigenous tribal communities with unique traditions and lifestyles.



3. Kalaripayattu Martial Arts

Kalaripayattu is an ancient Indian martial art that originated in Kerala, South India, and is often regarded as one of the oldest fighting systems in existence. The name "Kalaripayattu" is derived from the Malayalam words "Kalari," which means battlefield, and "Payattu," which means training or practice. It encompasses a comprehensive system of physical training, self-defense techniques, and weaponry skills.

Today, Kalaripayattu continues to thrive as both a martial art and a fitness regimen, attracting practitioners and enthusiasts from around the world who seek to learn its techniques, philosophy, and traditions. It serves as a testament to the enduring legacy of India's martial arts heritage and its relevance in the modern world.



Day 5

1. Mattupetty Dam

Mattupetty Dam is a popular tourist destination located near Munnar in the Idukki district of Kerala, India. It is situated at an altitude of about 1,700 meters above sea level and is surrounded by picturesque hills, lush tea gardens, and dense forests, offering breath-taking views of the Western Ghats.

The dam was constructed in the late 1940s for hydroelectric power generation and water storage purposes. It is built across the Mattupetty River, a tributary of the Periyar River, and is a key source of water for irrigation in the region.

Apart from its utilitarian function, Mattupetty Dam is a major tourist attraction in Munnar, drawing visitors with its scenic beauty and tranquil ambiance. The reservoir formed by the dam is a popular spot for boating, allowing tourists to enjoy leisurely rides amidst the stunning natural surroundings.

In addition to boating, Mattupetty Dam offers opportunities for picnicking, nature walks, and photography, making it an ideal destination for families, couples, and solo travellers alike. The cool climate and serene atmosphere add to the charm of this scenic spot, making it a must-visit attraction in Munnar.





2. Tea Estates

The tea estates around Eravikulam National Park are part of the Munnar region, which is famous for its tea plantations. Munnar is one of the largest tea-producing regions in India, and its picturesque tea estates attract tourists from all over the world.

Overall, the tea estates around Eravikulam National Park add to the allure of the region, offering a delightful blend of scenic landscapes, cultural experiences, and gastronomic delights for visitors to enjoy.



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Day 6

1. 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. It 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 fortune to sight any.

Day 7

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

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.

THERUVU VELLICHAM has rehabilitated around 1,356 people since inception, which would amount to a year and a half in time span. THERUVU VELLICHAM is the only organization which provides shelter for the destitute as well as the homeless; regardless of age, gender or any other form of discrimination even when there are 194 other orphanages and shelter homes located in Ernakulam district.



2. Kochin Market

Look for spicy dishes flavoured with tamarind and coconut in Kochi, and don't be surprised if your dinner is served up on a banana leaf. The region is a major banana-growing area, and traditional Kochi cuisine employs the fruit in many dishes, both sweet and savoury. Coconut water provides a refreshing and sweet contrast to the piquant food.

Conclusion and Learnings

The study tour was a memorable and enriching experience for all of us. We learned a lot about the diversity and unity of India, the history and culture of different regions, the ecology and biodiversity of different ecosystems, the development and governance of different states, and the challenges and opportunities of different sectors. We also developed our skills and competencies in team work, time management, crisis management and adaptability. We also made some lifelong friends and memories.

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.

The study tour was a valuable and enjoyable part of our cadre training programme. We are grateful and thankful to the MCR HRD IT, the Course Director, the Study Tour Committee, and Officials for making this tour possible and successful. We are also thankful to our fellow participants for making this tour fun and friendly. We hope to apply and share our learnings and experiences from this tour in our future work and life. We also hope to visit these places again and explore more of our incredible India. Jai Hind!