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## **Wildlife of the Nilgiris & Anamalais**

**(8 nights)**

### **Highlights**

South India is among the great wildlife destinations of the world, with good protected area networks that hold sustainable and visible populations of **megafauna**. The foothill forests of the **Western Ghats** of south India, an **extremely biodiverse**, mountainous ecoregion, are possibly the best locations to observe and photograph **Asian elephants** in wild. These forests also hold healthy populations of two globally endangered big cats – the **Tiger** and **Leopard** and of the **Indian wild dog**, another significant peninsular predator. **Gaur**, among the largest of bovids, are also found in these forests along with several species of deer and antelope making up an impressive list of large mammals that are found within this ecoregion.

The moist forests of the Western Ghats, globally recognized for their unique assemblages of flora and fauna, are home to their share of mammals that are found nowhere else in the world. Notably, the list includes two primates - the **Nilgiri langur** and the **Lion-tailed macaque**; **the Nilgiri tahr, an endemic mountain goat; and rarities like the Brown palm civet, Brown mongoose and Nilgiri marten**, among several species of squirrels, bats and rodents.

We traverse through some of south India's best wildlife destinations on this guided tour. These locations are also fascinating for their birds, smaller animals, floristic diversity and scenic beauty. In addition, south India's vibrant and historic culture and friendly people will be a charming addition to your overall travel experience. This tour is ideal for those who want to explore the best of south India's wildlife, within a limited time-frame and in a safe, comfortable and friendly environment.

### **For Whom**

Wildlife and wildlife photography enthusiasts; Bird enthusiasts

### **Costs**

INR 55000 (USD 1250; GBP 825)

*Please note that prices will increase for groups fewer than four persons*



WILDLIFE & NATURAL HISTORY TOURS

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## Facilities

Accommodation: High quality accommodation or comfortable home-stays with modern amenities

Food: Largely local and pan-Indian, with a few international dishes

Transport: Road transfers in A/C vehicles.

Difficulty level: Easy to moderate, with a little hiking in mountainous terrain involved

## Best time to visit

October - May (Excellent); June - September (Good)

## Itinerary

**Day 1 & 2, Rajamalai & Pampadum Shola:** We depart from Cochin after breakfast and drive through a scenic ghat road to Munnar. We reach Munnar in the afternoon on Day 1 and spend the next two days exploring the high altitude habitats around Munnar for two noteworthy endemic mammals of the Western Ghats - the Nilgiri Tahr and the rarely seen small carnivore, the Nilgiri marten.

Munnar is a small hill station town (1500m) nestled among tea plantations and wet montane forests (sholas) in of the Western Ghats of Kerala. Significantly, a short drive from Munnar will take us to Rajamalai (2000m), within the scenic, high altitude Eravikulam National Park, where the Nilgiri Tahr, an endemic mountain goat, are regularly sighted. Rajamalai is an excellent place to observe and photograph these normally shy animals. We will also visit a beautiful montane elfin forest within the Pampadam Shola National Park (1900m) on Day 9. Here we will make a special effort to find the extremely rare Nilgiri Marten - an endemic Mustelid, typically restricted to higher moist forests of the Western Ghats. While the sightings of the elusive marten is far from assured, we can expect see Malabar giant squirrel, Gaur and Sambar, in this extremely scenic location.

Munnar and surroundings are also excellent for high altitude bird specialities of south India. The unique montane forests and grasslands in the upper reaches around Munnar are floristically interesting.

**Day 3, 4 & 5, Top Slip:** After morning wildlife/bird-watching activity and breakfast, we leave Munnar on a scenic ghat road downhill through the deciduous forests of Chinnar Wild-



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life Sanctuary, towards Top Slip. As we drive through Chinnar, we will make a special effort to find the giant grizzled squirrel - an endangered animal with a highly restricted distribution in the Western Ghats. Potential for Elephant, Gaur and other smaller mammals as we pass through the sanctuary. We reach Top Slip by the evening on Day 3. We spend the next three days in and around Top Slip exploring the tropical moist forests for mammalian specialities of the Western Ghats.

Top Slip is a scenically located tourism zone within the Indira Gandhi Tiger Reserve - a major protected area within Anamalai Hills of Tamil Nadu. The Anamalais are among the the most interesting natural history locations in south India for their biodiversity rich, extensive mid-elevation and montane evergreen forests. Here we will make a special effort to look for endemic primates including the Nilgiri langur and Lion-tailed macaque and could come across other typically elusive mammals including the brown palm civet and brown mongoose, that are restricted to the moist forests of the Western Ghats. Megafauna such as Elephant and Gaur and several other herbivorous mammals are regularly sighted around Top Slip. Tiger and Leopard are found here, but are difficult to see in the area.

Top slip has fantastic birdlife and a good proportion of south Indian and sub-continental endemics and its forests are excellent habitat for nesting populations of great-pied hornbills among other species that require large tracts of mature forest. The moist forests here typically engross naturalists with their fascinating diversity of herpetofauna, invertebrates, flora and forest scape.

**Day 6, 7 & 8 Bandipur:** We leave Top Slip after breakfast and drive through the Palghat Gap towards the Nilgiris - another large, distinct hill range of the Western Ghats. We climb the southern slopes of the Nilgiris, towards Ooty, passing through progressively montane habitat and descend the northern slopes towards the wildlife rich Masinagudi Plateau and Bandipur National Park & Tiger Reserve. As we descend, we drive through the scrub habitat of the hill slopes and the plateau with good chance of sighting gaur and elephant and several dry habitat birds. The habitat becomes progressively wetter and deciduous as we drive towards Bandipur. We reach Bandipur by evening on Day 6 and spend the next two days exploring the deciduous and scrub forests of Bandipur for a variety of large mammal specialities of south India.

The foothill forests of the Nilgiris are among south India's oldest protected areas and among its best locations for viewing and photographing large mammals. Bandipur, lies within this vast, wildlife rich landscape that includes Nagarhole, Mudumalai and Wynaad, among numerous smaller protected areas of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve.

The area is especially interesting within this large protected area network of the NBR, when hundreds of Asian elephants and much other wildlife, congregates around the reservoir during the dry season. Bandipur's relatively open deciduous forests are very good for wildlife view-



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ing and megafauna, including Asian Elephant, Tiger, Leopard and Gaur are regularly sighted, all year round. Other notable wildlife that are often seen in Bandipur include the pack hunting Indian wild dogs, sloth bear and several species of deer, primates and small mammals.

Over 250 species of birds have been recorded from deciduous, riverine and scrub forests of the location. Notable sightings include dry habitat specialities such as the White-bellied Minivet and Sikeer Malkoha as well as several south Indian endemics.

**Day 9, Ranganathitoo/Bangalore:** After some early morning activity and breakfast, we head towards Bangalore, a major city well connected by road, air and rail networks. En-route we stop at the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary - a famous heronry on islands in the Cauvery River. The sanctuary is excellent for close views, especially of Eurasian spoonbills and night herons among several species of terns, cormorants, herons and storks. We reach Bangalore in the evening, from where you can transfer to onward destinations.

### **FYI and Guidelines**

1. South India is politically stable and is a very safe and tourist friendly region. While petty crimes occur sporadically, crimes rates, are generally low in the region.
2. Climate in south India is generally tropical and constant. However, due to broad elevational range that we cover during the tour, weather conditions can be quite variable based on where you are and when you travel. We will advice you on weather conditions, clothing etc dependent on when you choose to travel.
3. Please bring your binoculars or spotting scope.
4. Please note that wildlife sightings are often a matter of chance. Please be assured that the destinations and personnel have been chosen to maximise chances of wildlife sightings on this tour.
5. Wildlife viewing will be both from safaris in vehicles as well as on foot. We recommend you wear comfortable walking/trekking for walks in mountainous terrain.
6. A hat and sunblock are highly recommended and sunglasses will be useful.
7. Please bring essential medication with you, since the local outlets will not always carry what you are looking for. Do check with your doctor on medication and medical safety before you travel to the region.

### **Terms and Conditions**

1. Costs are calculated based on minimum 4 persons traveling. We can work out a costing for smaller groups, once we have details from you. Maximum group size for this tour is 10.
2. Tour costs are per person based on twin sharing basis ex-Bangalore and is all inclusive (transport, accommodation, food, personnel and all taxes and fees). Personnel includes an a



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tour leader/naturalist and local resource persons as appropriate.

Alcoholic beverages, porter charges, laundry and ala carte snacks are extra. Please check with us on specific items to make sure if it is included in the published tour costs.

3. If you are paying in foreign currency, we might have apply a currency surcharge if the INR appreciates against the USD by the time you travel.
4. Bookings are confirmed only upon full payment of the tour cost and at least 1 month in advance from the proposed departure date
5. We reserve the right to cancel the tour at anytime due to unforeseen circumstances. We will refund the entire booking amount under these circumstances.
6.
  - a. We accept demand drafts in Indian Rupees and online credit card payments in US Dollars through Paypal.
  - b. We accept personal cheques in Indian Rupees, but your reservations will be confirmed only after your cheque is cleared by the bank.
  - c. Indian customers can also use a credit card to pay online through Paypal, but please be aware that you will be charged an additional currency conversion fee for the same.
  - d. Demand drafts/cheques are payable to "Ficus Wildlife and Natural History Tours" located in Chennai.
7. In case you want to cancel your booking:
  - a. A 100% refund if cancellation requested more than one month before the proposed date of departure
  - b. A 15% refund if cancellation requested less than one month from the proposed date of departure.

### Disclaimer

Participants should be aware of unlikely, but potential risks involved during wildlife tours and general travel. This may include, among other things, injuries or fatalities associated with general travel, snake bites, field activities and encounters with wildlife. We require that all tour participants sign this disclaimer that acknowledges the risks associated during our conducted tours and relieves us of any liabilities arising out of the same. This also acknowledges that you have read and abide by the terms and conditions mentioned in the document.

Name of participant:

Signature and Date: