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South India Megafauna & Endemics **(13 nights)**

Summary

South India is among the exciting wildlife destinations of the world, with well protected forests that are rich in megafauna and a number of smaller, endemic mammals. The foothill forests of the Western Ghats of south India, a biodiverse 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 a significant length of the south India's Western Ghats on this guided tour - from the Nilgiris in the north to the Cardamom hills in the south, exploring south India's best wildlife destinations along the way. These locations are also fascinating for their birds - with potential sightings of over 300 species and most south Indian endemics - 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 a wildlife-rich ecoregion in a safe, comfortable and friendly environment.

Dates

TBA

Please note that we can customise schedule for independent travel

Price (per person)

For 2 persons

INR 155000 (USD 3250/GBP 2000/EUR 2450)



WILDLIFE & NATURAL HISTORY TOURS

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For 4 persons and above

INR 117500 (USD 2500/GBP 1540/EUR 1960)

Single supplement

INR 20000 (USD 420/GBP 260/EUR 320)

Price inclusions:

Accommodation
Meals
Travel
Naturalist
Local Guide
Activity Charges (Guided Treks and Jeep Safaris)
Fees/Taxes

Itinerary Outline

Day 1 & 2: Gavi (Periyar Tiger Reserve). Transfer from Cochin, Kerala
Day 3 & 4: Munnar (Pampadum Shola & Eravikulam National Parks)
Day 5, 6 & 7: Anamalai Tiger Reserve
Day 8, 9 & 10: Bandipur Tiger Reserve
Day 11, 12 & 13: Kabini (Nagarhole National Park)
Day 14: Ranganathitoo Bird Sanctuary & Transfer to Bangalore, Karnataka

Facilities

Accommodation: Quality accommodation in comfortable home-stays, plantation bungalows & quaint resorts

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

Transport: Road transfers in A/C vehicles.



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

Best time to visit

October - May (ideal), June - Sep (good)

For Whom

Wildlife and wildlife photography enthusiasts; Bird-watchers

Itinerary

Day 1 & 2 Gavi: We leave Cochin, Kerala after an early breakfast and reach Gavi in the afternoon on Day 1. We spend two nights exploring the evergreen and moist deciduous forests of this scenic location.

Gavi (1100m) is located among moist tropical forests and grasslands, adjacent to the famous Periyar Tiger Reserve, in the Western Ghats of Kerala. Mid-elevation moist forest, such as the dominant type in Periyar & Gavi, are among the most biodiverse in the Western Ghats. In addition, the hill forests interspersed with grassland make Gavi an extremely scenic locations.

Gavi's wildlife is similar to that of the the world famous Periyar Tiger Reserve. Notably, the location is home to megafauna, including Asian Elephant, Tiger, Leopard and Gaur. Significantly, the forests here also supports wildlife that is unique to the Western Ghats, including the endangered Lion-tailed Macaque, Brown Palm Civet, Brown Mongoose and Nilgiri Marten. Bird diversity is fantastic, with several Western Ghats specials including the Wynaad Laughing Thrush, Malabar Grey Hornbill, White-bellied Blue Flycatcher and White-Bellied Treepie, among 250 plus species of birds recorded from these forests.

Day 3 & 4, Rajamalai & Pampadum Shola: We depart from Gavi after a morning wildlife trek and late breakfast and drive through an scenic ghat road to Munnar. We reach Munnar in the afternoon on Day 3 and spend the 2 days exploring the high altitude habitats around Munnar for two noteworthy endemic mammals of the Western Ghats - the Nilgiri Tahr and 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 ex-



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cellent 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 3. 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 scenic location.

Munnar and surroundings are also excellent for high altitude bird specialities of south India and the bird list includes several endemics - Black and Orange Flycatcher, White-bellied Shortwing, Broad-tailed Grassbird, Nilgiri Flycatcher, Grey-breasted Laughing Thrush - and other specialities among winter migrants (warblers, thrushes), and rarities such as Yellow-throated Bulbul and Painted Bushquail. The unique montane forests and grasslands in the upper reaches around Munnar are floristically interesting.

Day 5, 6 & 7, 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 Wildlife 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 5. We spend the next two 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 Hornbill among other species that require large tracts of mature forest. Sri Lanka Frogmouth are regularly sighted here, and other endemics include White-bellied Blue Flycatcher, Malabar Grey Hornbill, Rufous Babbler, Malabar Parakeet and Wynaad Laughing Thrush among others. The moist forests here typically engross naturalists with their fascinating diversity of herpetofauna, invertebrates, flora and forest scape.



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Day 8, 9 & 10 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 8 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 wildlife in Bandipur is largely similar to that found in Kabini (please see below). However Bandipur's hillier terrain, and adjacent scrub habitats not only provide a contrasting setting for wildlife, but also enhances chances of sighting species such as the shy four-horned antelope and striped hyena, which are very difficult in Kabini. The panoramic mountainscape of the Nilgiri hills, visible from Bandipur, adds to the charming scenery of the location.

Day 11, 12 & 13, Kabini: We leave Bandipur after breakfast and drive to Kabini through charming countryside of rolling hills and farmland. We reach Kabini in the afternoon on day 11 and spend three days exploring the lowland deciduous forests here primarily for a variety of large mammal specialities of south India.

Named after the Kabini river, the area forms the eastern fringes of the Nagarhole National Park. The Kabini river, which forms a reservoir here, defines the eastern boundary of Nagarhole with Bandipur National Park, two of south India's finest wildlife destinations and contiguous with several other protected areas of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR). Kabini 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. Kabini's flat terrain and the relatively open deciduous forests are very good for wildlife viewing and photography and megafauna, including Asian Elephant, Tiger, Leopard and Gaur are regularly sighted, all year round. Other notable wildlife that are often seen in Kabini include the pack hunting Indian Wild Dog, Sloth Bear and several species of deer, primates and small mammals.

Both Bandipur and Kabini are excellent for birds with over 250 species recorded from deciduous, riverine and scrub forests of these location. Notable species include Malabar Lark, Sirkeer Malkoha, Grey-headed Bulbul, White-bellied Minivet, Malabar Parakeet, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Rufous-bellied Eagle and Malabar Grey Hornbill. Mugger crocodiles are regu-



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larly sighted basking on the banks of the Kabini reservoir and otters are occasionally seen in the river.

Day 14, 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. Maximum group size for this tour is 6
2. Tour costs are per person based on twin sharing basis ex-Cochin and is all inclusive (transport, accommodation, food, personnel and all taxes and fees). Personnel includes an expert birding guide/a tour leader and resource persons from the local community. Alcoholic beverages, porter charges, laundry and room service are extra. Please check with us on specific items to make sure if it is included in the published tour costs.
3. Our preferred mode of payment is through electronic transfers into our bank account. Relevant details will be provided to you once you are ready to make the payment. Alternatively we accept demand drafts/cheques in the currency of your choice.



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4. If you are paying in foreign currency, we might have apply a currency surcharge on the published rates, if the INR appreciates against your currency at the time of payment.
5. In the unlikely event in which we are forced to cancel the tour we will refund you the entire booking amount. In case we are unable to conduct the tour due to circumstances beyond our control (for e.g. forces of nature, political conditions), we will make every effort to refund as much of the booking amount as possible.
6. In case you to cancel your booking more than one month in advance from the tour date, we will refund *at least* 50% of the tour cost (assuming tour costs are fully paid). The precise refund beyond this will be dependent on the refund policies of our travel partners that we use on tour. In case you cancel your booking less than 1 month from the start of the tour, we will refund 10% of your booking amount

Disclaimer and Emergency Contact

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:

Age:

Emergency contact person:

Relationship:

Tel no:

Email:

Signature and Date: