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## **South India Megafauna & Endemics** **(17 nights)**

### **Summary**

South India's Western Ghats are among the exciting wildlife destinations of the world, with well protected forests that are rich in megafauna and a number of smaller, endemic mammals. These mountains are also known for their fantastic birdlife - with potential sightings of over 400 species, including all of south India's endemics. The ecoregion abounds with wildlife that nature enthusiasts and keen birders from around the world, would wish to see in their lifetime. This list includes Tiger, Asiatic Elephant, Lion-tailed Macaque, Great Hornbill, Nilgiri Tahr and King Cobra among a vast diversity of animals and plants that are found nowhere else in the world.

We traverse a significant length of the south India's Western Ghats on this guided tour - from the Cardamom hills in the south, to the Nilgiris in the north, exploring south India's best wildlife destinations along the way and appreciating its 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 birders and wildlife enthusiasts who want a comprehensive experience of south India's natural riches, in a safe, comfortable and friendly environment.

### **Dates**

TBA

*Please note that we can customise schedule for independent travel*

### **Price (per person)**

TBC

### **Price inclusions:**

Accommodation

All Meals

Travel

Naturalist

Local Guide

Activity Charges (Guided Treks and Jeep Safaris)



WILDLIFE & NATURAL HISTORY TOURS

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Fees/Taxes

### **Itinerary Outline**

Day 1 & 2: Thattekad (Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary). Transfer from Cochin, Kerala

Day 3, 4 & 5: Thekkady & Gavi (Periyar Tiger Reserve)

Day 6, 7 & 8: Munnar (Pampadum Shola & Eravikulam National Parks<sup>1</sup> and Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary)

Day 9, 10 & 11: Anamalai Tiger Reserve

Day 12, 13 & 14: Bandipur Tiger Reserve

Day 15, 16 & 17: Kabini (Nagarhole National Park)

Day 18: Ranganathitoo Bird Sanctuary & Transfer to Bangalore, Karnataka

### **Facilities**

Accommodation: Quality accommodation in comfortable tented resorts, plantation bungalows & quaint resorts - all with a close to nature locations

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 - March (Excellent); April - May (good); June - Sep (doable, but rainy)

### **For Whom**

Wildlife and wildlife photography enthusiasts; Birdwatchers

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<sup>1</sup> Please Note that Eravikulam NP is closed in February and March for the breeding season of the Nilgiri Tahr. We will visit other locations around Munnar alternatively



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## Itinerary

**Day 1 & 2, Thattekad:** We leave Cochin, Kerala mid-morning and reach Thattekad (Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary) by noon on Day 1. We spend two days exploring the small sanctuary for a significant chunk of south India's bird specialities.

The Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary is located on the banks of the Periyar River on the foothills of the Western Ghats of Kerala. The habitat matrix of the location, which includes riverine, low-land evergreen and plantation forests, contain an amazing density of birds and offers excellent photographic opportunities for several Western Ghats bird specialities among an impressive bird-list of over 300 species. Some of the south India's endemic birds found here include the Grey-headed Bulbul, Malabar Grey Hornbill, Malabar Parakeet, Malabar Barbet, White-bellied Treepie, Wynaad Laughing Thrush (rare), White-bellied Blue Flycatcher and White-cheeked Barbet. Sightings of rarities such as the Black Baza, Crested Goshawk, Red Spur-fowl, Malabar Trogon and the Sri Lanka Frogmouth are not uncommon. Winter is interesting for several migrant flycatchers and warblers.

Elephants are regularly seen in and around the Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary, along with several other mammals including rare sightings of top predators such as Indian wild dogs and leopards. The wet, humid habitats of the location also contain an exciting diversity of plants, herpetofauna and invertebrates.

**Day 3, 4 & 5 Gavi:** We leave Thattekad after morning activity and breakfast and reach Thekkady for a late lunch. We spend a night around Thekkady and two nights at Gavi exploring the evergreen and moist deciduous forests of these scenic locations.

Thekkady, set amidst evergreen forest, is the tourist hub of the Periyar Tiger Reserve. Treks in the forests here provides an introduction to the rich wildlife of Periyar, more thoroughly experienced at Gavi. 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



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Laughing Thrush, Rufous Babbler, Malabar Grey Hornbill, White-bellied Blue Flycatcher and White-Bellied Treepie, among 250 plus species of birds recorded from these forests.

**Day 6, 7 & 8: Munnar:** We depart from Gavi after morning activity and breakfast and drive through an scenic ghat road to Munnar. We reach Munnar in the afternoon on Day 6 and spend the 3 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 - as well as a number of high altitude bird specialities of the Western Ghats.

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) for the extremely rare Nilgiri Marten - an endemic Mustelid, typically restricted to higher moist forests of the Western Ghats - and dry scrub/riverine forests of Chinnar for the Giant Grizzled Squirrel, another south Indian endemic.

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 Blue Robin, Broad-tailed Grassbird, Nilgiri Flycatcher, Nilgiri Wood Pigeon, Kerala Laughing Thrush, Nilgiri Pipit - 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 interesting for their floristic diversity as well.

**Day 9, 10 & 11, Top Slip:** We leave Munnar early, with packed breakfast, 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 9. We spend the next two days in and around Top Slip exploring the tropical moist forests for bird & 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-



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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, Malabar Barbet and Wynaad Laughing Thrush (rare) among others. The moist forests here typically engross naturalists with their fascinating diversity of herpetofauna, invertebrates, flora and forest scape.

**Day 12, 13 & 14 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. We reach Bandipur by evening on Day 12 and spend the next two days exploring the deciduous and scrub forests of Bandipur for a variety of large mammal specialities of south India, as well a few bird specialities of drier forests and montane habitats around Ooty (Nilgiri Blue Robin, Black-chinned Laughingthrush and Kashmir Flycatcher).

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 15, 16 & 17, 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 15 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



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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. Some of the bird specialities from these locations include the White-bellied Minivet, Jerdon's Bush Lark, Malabar Lark, White-bellied Woodpecker, Sirkeer Malkoha and a few south Indian endemics that we might have missed earlier on the tour. Mugger crocodiles are regularly sighted basking on the banks of the Kabini reservoir and otters are occasionally seen in the river.

**Day 18, 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.



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## **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.
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:



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Tel no:

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Signature and Date: