India - Southern

Birding & Wildlife of the Western Ghats

Andaman Islands Endemics Extension



Palani Laughingthrush by Glen Valentine

Hemming the rugged lands of southern India are the impressive Western Ghats Mountains, a land of endless valleys, rolling tea estates and breathtaking highland vistas, well-known for harbouring a superb range of highly localised endemic birds and a host of special mammals. This comprehensive tour showcases many of these special creatures: the gorgeous Indian Pitta, Nilgiri Laughingthrush, Nilgiri Wood Pigeon, rare Sri Lanka Frogmouth, exquisite Malabar Trogon, Malabar Whistling Thrush, and Heart-spotted Woodpecker are just some of the incredible birds we will search for. The mammal possibilities are no less enticing, with the stunning Lion-tailed Macaque, Bengal Tiger, Chole Indian Elephant and Gaur (Indian Bison) all high on our target list. Join us for an unbeatable birding exploration to the southern part of this immense and extremely rewarding nation!

Our extension to the Andaman Islands will see us flying across the Bay of Bengal to Port Blair, Andaman Islands. Located some 1,100 kilometres to the east of peninsula India, this archipelago is far closer to southern Myanmar and Sumatra. Consequently, the many endemic species present have more in common with the Malaysian sub-region than with the Indian sub-continent. The archipelago is made up of 200 or so small islands with patches of pristine tropical rainforest and palm-fringed sandy beaches! Based in a single location for the duration of our time on the islands, this is a relaxed and easy birding destination.

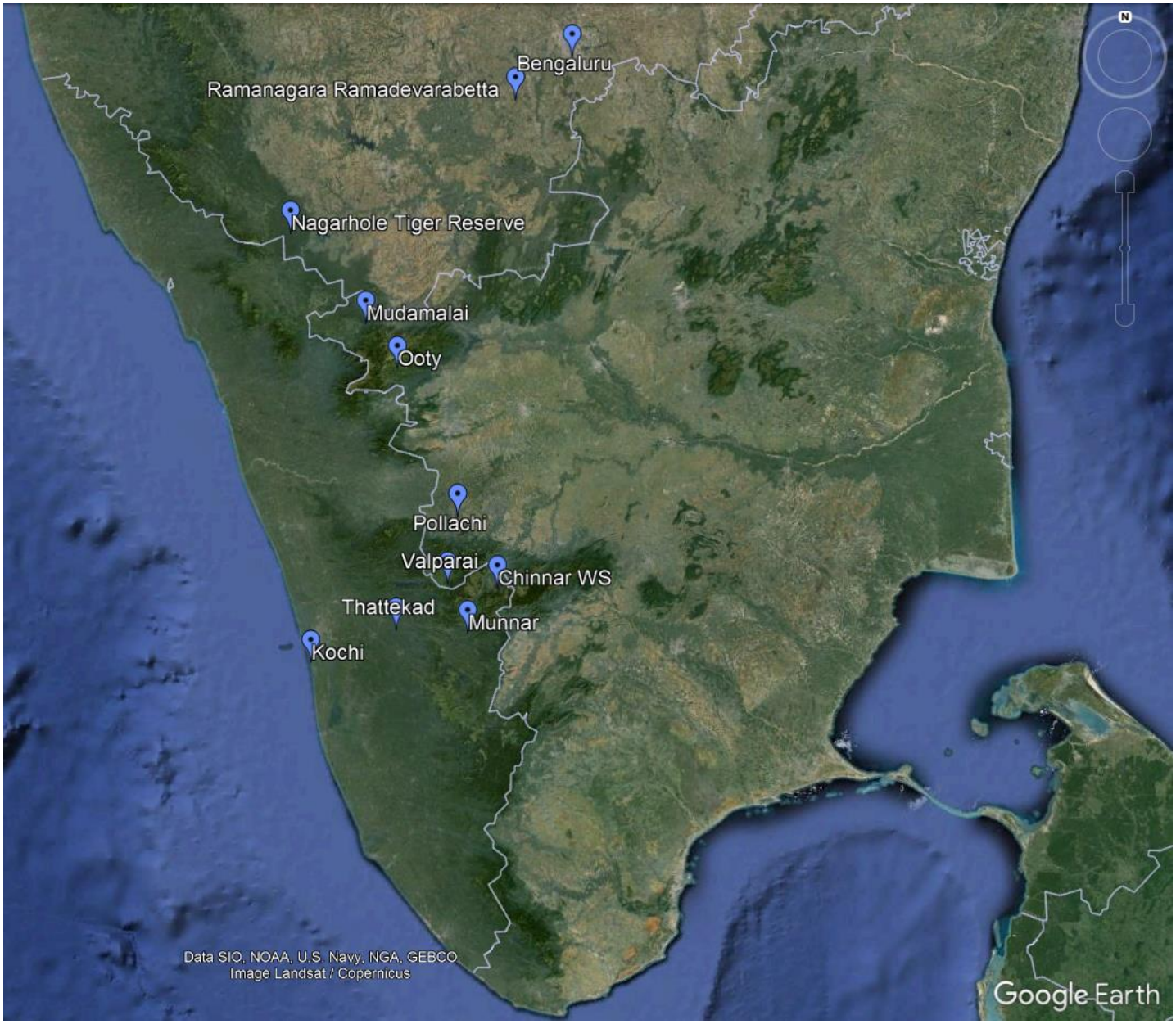
Itinerary & Map

Andaman Islands Endemics Extension

Day 1	Arrival in Port Blair
Days 2 to 5	Mount Harriet, Chidiyatapu & Port Blair area
Day 6	Port Blair area & final departure

Birding & Wildlife of the Western Ghats

Day 1	Arrival in Kochi, transfer to Thattekad
Day 2	Thattekad Bird Sanctuary
Day 3	Thattekad to Munnar
Day 4	Munnar
Day 5	Munnar to Pollachi via Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary
Day 6	Valparai Range
Day 7	Pollachi to Udhagamandalam (Ooty)
Day 8	Ooty area
Day 9	Udhagamandalam to Mudamalai
Day 10	Mudamalai to Nagarahole Tiger Reserve
Days 11 & 12	Nagarahole Tiger Reserve
Day 13	Nagarahole Tiger Reserve to Bengaluru via Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary
Day 14	Ramanagara Ramadevarabetta Vulture Sanctuary & final departure


Bengaluru
Ramanagara Ramadevarabetta
Nagarhole Tiger Reserve
Mudamalai
Ooty
Pollachi
Valparai
Chinnar WS
Thattekad
Munnar
Kochi
Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO
Image Landsat / Copernicus
Google Earth


Chennai
Andaman Islands
Kochi
Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO
Image Landsat / Copernicus
Google Earth

Birding sites in detail



Andaman Woodpecker by David Hoddinott

Port Blair area. Port Blair, the capital city of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is Located at the juncture of the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, these two island groups are politically part of India. Possibly formed due to the subduction of the Indian tectonic plate below the South-east Asian Plate, the islands at one point may have provided a contiguous land route between Myanmar and Indonesia.

They are host to a veritable treasure trove of endemic wildlife, with most having stronger affinities with the Malaysian sub-region than that of the Indian sub-continent. One of the islands is also home to the Sentinelese (the only known surviving Palaeolithic people). Despite several contact attempts in the 20th century, the locals have reacted only with hostility. As such, they have had very little contact with outsiders. From what is known by distant observation, the Sentinelese maintain a hunter-gatherer existence, with no evidence of agricultural practices or even the use of fire.

Much of the Andamans are still covered in pristine forest and we will concentrate much of our time inside the forests during our time here. We will also make excursions to the mudflats and mangroves for waders and other coastal species.

The coastal mudflats are of interest for many wader species. Birding the flats will no doubt cause some interest from the local people who are always keen to find out just what it is that we are so interested in. While explaining the finer aspects of birdwatching, we will pan through the commoner waders looking for such



White-headed Starling by David Hoddinott



Andaman Bulbul by David Hoddinott

interesting species as Greater and Lesser Sand Plovers, Terek Sandpiper, Great Knot, Little Tern and possibly White-bellied Sea Eagle overhead. Moving to mangrove margins should elicit Mangrove Whistler, Collared Kingfisher and Watercock, while we also stand good chances of finding Andaman Teal, Cinnamon, and Yellow Bitterns, Dusky, Clamorous Reed, Blyth's Reed, Black-browed and Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers, and possibly Ruddy-breasted Crake or Slaty-breasted Rail. Commoner species along the littoral zone include the recently split Grey-headed Swamphen, Chinese Pond Heron, Pacific Golden Plover, Long-toed Stint and Stork-billed Kingfisher.

Night birding here is a must, with a bevy of endemic species that include Andaman Masked Owl, Andaman Scops Owl, Hume's and Andaman Hawk-Owl, Andaman Nightjar as well as the *modestus* sub-species of Oriental Scops Owl, which is liable to be split in the future as Walden's Scops Owl.

Mount Harriet. Mount Harriet generally produces several mixed species flocks containing Andaman and Greater Racket-tailed Drongos, White-headed Starling, Andaman Treepie, Freckle-breasted Woodpecker, the eye-searing Scarlet Minivet, Andaman Flowerpecker, Black-naped Monarch, and Andaman Cuckooshrike.

Alarm calls may give away the location of the highly attractive Violet Cuckoo or rare Andaman Serpent Eagle. We must also pay very close attention to disturbances in the leaf litter where Forest Wagtail is common, and both the cryptic Orange-headed Thrush and the mega Andaman Crake are also known to occur. We will also spend some late afternoons here trying to catch sight of two of the more difficult denizens; Andaman Cuckoo-Dove and Andaman Wood Pigeon as they return to their roost sites.

Chidiyatapu. The forest patches around Chidiyatapu provide steady forest birding, and perhaps our only chance to find the elusive and rarely seen Andaman Crake – though this would be considered a major bonus should we be so lucky. Aside from the near-mythical crake, we will see many of the commoner endemics here with Andaman Coucal and Andaman Woodpecker being particularly evident. *Psittacids* are well represented with Vernal Hanging Parrot rather commonly seen alongside three species of *Psittacula* parakeets: Alexandrine, Red-breasted and Long-tailed. Andaman Shama, Andaman Bulbul, and White-headed Starling make up the remaining endemics in this forest. We will also be keeping a keen eye overhead for Edible-nest and White-bellied Swiftlets and the much larger Brown Needletail.



Andaman Crake by David Hoddinott

If the Andaman Extension is not availabale as a scheduled tour option, it can be taken as a Tailor-made Tour.



Nilgiri Wood Pigeon by Stephan Lorenz

Thattekad Bird Sanctuary. This very productive site is only a short drive from Kochi. Here, we might find notable species such as Lesser Whistling Duck, Purple Heron, Medium Egret, Crested Honey Buzzard, Crested Serpent Eagle, Crested Goshawk, Grey-headed Swamphen, Bronze-winged Jacana, Whiskered Tern, Banded Bay Cuckoo, White-rumped Needletail, Indian Swiftlet, Malabar Gray Hornbill, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Indian Roller, Oriental Dollarbird, Malabar Barbet, Brown-capped Woodpecker, Vernal Hanging-Parrot, Malabar Woodshrike, Ashy Woodswallow, Small Minivet, Indian Golden and Black-naped Orioles, Southern Hill Myna, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Nilgiri Flowerpecker and Little Spiderhunter.

Thattekad is also an excellent site for several of South India's tricky endemics and near-endemics, and these include Grey-headed and Flame-throated Bulbuls, Sri Lanka Frogmouth (for which the local guides often have a roosting site), White-bellied and Blue-throated Blue Flycatchers and Malabar Trogon.

Eravikulam National Park. This scenic reserve is located high in the Cardamom Hills of the Western Ghats. Originally established to protect a sure-footed goat called the Nilgiri Tahr, the park supports a good selection of birds that includes several extremely range-restricted and specialised species. These include the scarce and unobtrusive Painted Bush Quail, White-bellied Blue Robin (Sholakili), Nilgiri Flycatcher, migratory Tickell's Leaf Warbler, and the localised and habitat-specific Nilgiri Pipit. The shy and difficult Broad-tailed Grassbird inhabits the steeply grassed mountain slopes in the area but can be a serious challenge to locate and see, while the beautiful Palani Laughingthrush is fairly common and obtrusive in the forested ravines. Other species we might come across as we bird the mountainside include Red-rumped and Hill Swallows, the exquisite Blue Rock Thrush, Black and Booted Eagles, Dusky Crag Martin, and Loten's Sunbird.



Blue-winged (Malabar) Parakeet by Glen Valentine

Munnar area. We'll bird several small localities around the outskirts of Munnar. The combination of montane forest, secondary growth, thickets and grassy slopes usually produces a number of excellent species and we'll particularly be on



Yellow-throated Bulbul by Stephan Lorenz

the lookout for Nilgiri Wood Pigeon, Indian Black-lored Tit, Crimson-backed Sunbird, Black-throated Munia, Indian Scimitar Babbler, Palani Laughingthrush, the extremely difficult Broad-tailed Grassbird, the rarely seen Tytler's and Western Crowned Warblers, Chestnut-tailed Bee-eater, Common Rosefinch, Nilgiri Flowerpecker and possibly even Common Grasshopper Warbler.

Pollachi. Located on the lower plains of Tamil Nadu, the coconut groves are secondary forest is a good base of operations. Time permitting, we may spend an hour or two enjoying Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Purple-rumped and Loten's Sunbirds, Blue-faced Malkoha, Oriental Magpie-Robin and Indian Roller.

Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary. We'll make quick stops at any fruiting fog trees to search for White-browed and Yellow-throated Bulbuls. The park is also a good site to find Grizzled Giant Squirrel.

Valparai Range. We'll climb the foothills up to the charming tea town of Valparai. Our winding journey ascends through diverse landscapes, starting with dry scrub and culminating in the misty embrace of wet montane forests known as sholas. We'll keep an eye out for Nilgiri Tahr which often stands basking in the morning sun right on the steep roadsides.

Higher up the road, we pass through the transition zone from dry scrub habitat to montane forest, giving us more chances for Yellow-throated Bulbul if we still need it and two key raptors, Legge's Hawk-Eagle, and Rufous-bellied Eagle.

We'll work out way through some sholas, searching for the endemic Wayanad Laughingthrush and elusive Nilgiri Langur. The highlights are likely to keep coming, as we search specific roadside forest patches for the incomparable Lion-tailed Macaque, with some habituated troops offering close roadside views.



Lion-tailed Macaque by Clayton Burne

There will be a strong supporting cast that may include Crested Honey Buzzard, Malabar Trogon, Malabar Imperial Pigeon, Malabar Barbet, Malabar Flameback, White-bellied Drongo, Palani Laughingthrush, Malabar

Starling, Nilgiri Flyctacher, Nilgiri Flowerpiercer and Crimson-backed Sunbird.



Black-and-orange Flycatcher by Adam Riley

Udhagamandalam (Ooty). We will drive towards the Blue Mountains near Udhagamandalam, among the highest mountains in all Southern India. The scenery is superb within a garden-like settings of rhododendron and magnolia forests draped with an assortment of orchids. The small hill station here was once a very popular, charming, and thriving location during the time of British occupation. The town has certainly changed quite a bit since these times, yet the odd grand building and luxurious hotel remains and provides some insight into what it may once have looked like. The higher elevations of the Western Ghats are dotted with patches of moist evergreen forest, locally known as *sholas*, and it is these forests that hold many of the region's most desirable endemics.

We will spend the day soaking in our surroundings while looking for geographically restricted species. These could include the gorgeous Nilgiri Laughingthrush, Black-and-orange Flycatcher, flashy, White-spotted Fantail, Nilgiri and Rusty-tailed Flycatchers, the secretive Nilgiri Blue Robin (Sholakili), the rare and migratory Tytler's and Western Crowned Warblers, Indian Blackbird, Blue-capped Rock Thrush, Malabar Flameback, Nilgiri Wood Pigeon and the rare and secretive Nilgiri Thrush.

The stunted forest in this area is an absolute delight to bird, and it is interesting to note that this immense mountain range was once completely blanketed by these forests, contributing to what was once the largest tract of rainforest in all of Asia. The eventual realisation of the value of teak and rosewood in Europe, however, meant that these forests have been harvested to a mere fraction of their former glory but are still rich in avian specialties and endemics.

Mudumalai. The Mudumalai hills, much of which is protected within the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, are one of the largest areas of protected forests in India. Our birding outings will take us into the broad-leaved riverine and bamboo forests, woodland, scrub, and secondary growth of both Mudumalai and Masinagudi. Several endemics and localised specialities occur here and we'll be searching for such gems as Malabar Whistling Thrush, Malabar Grey Hornbill, Grey Junglefowl, Blue-winged and Plum-headed Parakeets, the vocal Indian Scimitar Babbler, Puff-throated Babbler, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Nilgiri, Thick-



Malabar Flameback by Glen Valentine



White-bellied Treepie by Glen Valentine

billed and Pale-billed Flowerpeckers, the gorgeous, white-throated race of Orange-headed Thrush, Indian Pitta, Malabar Flameback, the scarce White-naped Woodpecker, Indian Nuthatch, Rufous and Tawny-bellied Babblers, Malabar Woodshrike, Loten's Sunbird and with exceptional luck, the very rare and secretive Nilgiri Thrush.

The continuous calls of the endemic White-cheeked Barbet and more widespread Coppersmith Barbet can be heard as we keep a look out for other more regular and widespread species such as Jungle and Spotted Owlets, Black-rumped Flameback, Vernal Hanging Parrot, Crested Treeswift, White-browed Fantail, Yellow-crowned, Brown-capped Pygmy, Rufous and Streak-throated Woodpeckers, White-browed and Yellow-browed Bulbuls, Hume's Whitethroat, Indian Golden Oriole, Indian Blue Robin, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Bay-backed Shrike, Jerdon's and Golden-fronted Leafbirds, Orange and Small Minivets, Yellow-eyed and Yellow-billed Babblers, Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, Yellow-throated Sparrow, Bronzed and Greater Racket-tailed Drongos and Common Woodshrike.

Sometimes, our local guide knows the whereabouts of roosting Brown Wood Owl, Brown Fish Owl, or the rare Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl, and at dusk we'll position ourselves in areas that might reveal Indian, Savanna, Jungle, and the near-endemic Jerdon's Nightjars.

This area is us usually a reliable site for Indian Elephant and we hope to come across these magnificent animals. Additional mammal possibilities include the rarely sighted Dhole (Indian Wild Dog), Sloth Bear, Leopard, Jungle Cat, and even Bengal Tiger, though we will need a hefty dose of luck to spot any of these beasts!

Areas of dry savanna and woodland support small populations of Yellow-wattled Lapwing, endemic Malabar Lark, several species of pipit, Blue-faced Malkoha, Shikra, Grey Francolin, Rufous Treepie and the rare and localised, White-bellied Minivet. If the weather cooperates, we'll scan the skies where we might encounter the critically endangered Red-headed, Indian and White-rumped Vultures soaring in the thermals, together with Indian Spotted Eagle.



Nilgiri Flycatcher by Stephan Lorenz



Bengal Tiger by Adam Riley

Nagarahole Tiger Reserve. Located in the state of Karnataka, this is one of the most important tiger reserves in the country, boasting a tiger density inferior only to Corbett and Kaziranga. Home to more than 300 bird species, we'll be searching for regional specialties such as Grey Junglefowl, Malabar Parakeet, Malabar Woodshrike, and White-cheeked Barbet whilst we are likely to come across several more widespread species such as Red Spurfowl, stunning Indian Peafowl, Painted Stork, recently split Asian Woolly-necked Stork, wintering Indian Pitta, Malabar Pied Hornbill and White-bellied Woodpecker.

Mammals will keep us equally entertained, with good populations of Asian Elephant, Dhole, Leopard, Sloth Bear, Chital, Sambar, Barking Deer, Stripe-necked Mongoose and Indian Giant Squirrel.

Nagarhole National Park promises a rewarding exploration of the Indian wilderness, offering diverse wildlife encounters.

Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary. We will then make our way to the famous bird sanctuary at Ranganathittu, where we board a small rowboat on the Cauvery River. From the boat, the roosting and/or nesting sites of Great, Indian and Little Cormorants, Black-headed Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Spot-billed Pelican, Asian Openbill and Painted Stork can be enjoyed at close range, along with a variety of other species, including the impressive Great Stone-curlew, Oriental Darter, River Tern, the attractive, Red-wattled Lapwing, the scarce Streak-throated Swallow and Marsh Crocodile. Walking along the banks of the sanctuary might produce the endemic, White-spotted Fantail, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Pale-billed Flowerpecker, Indian Grey Hornbill, Jerdon's Leafbird and White-cheeked Barbet.



Dhole by David Hoddinott



Malabar Whistling Thrush by Adam Riley

Ramanagara Ramadevarabetta Vulture Sanctuary. Soon after leaving Bengaluru, a visit to this small sanctuary, dominated by granite outcrops and dry woodland, allows us a reasonable chance of finding both Egyptian and Indian Vultures, as well as Common Hawk-Cuckoo, the localised, endemic Yellow-throated Bulbul, White-browed Bulbul, Indian Paradise Flycatcher, the stunning Purple-rumped and Loten's Sunbirds, Blue-faced Malkoha, Indian Golden Oriole, the endemic White-cheeked Barbet, Pale-billed Flowerpecker, Jungle Babbler and Crested Honey Buzzard, Booted Eagle and Dusky Crag Martin soaring overhead.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease	■ ■ ■	Moderate to comfortable. Suitable for most birding / wildlife interest levels. India is an assault on the senses first time around, requiring a little tolerance to begin with.
Birding Ease	■ ■ ■	Moderate. Mostly forest & forest edge, some open savanna. Several key endemics & localised species that may require repetitive effort.
Accommodation	■ ■ ■	Comfortable.
Walking / Trails	■ ■ ■	Mostly short walks, several slopes. Some trails are narrow & may be muddy.
Vehicles / Roads	■ ■ ■	Average quality roads. Some long drives due to topography. Vehicles are manufactured to local requirements, so tend to be a squeeze/on the small size for Western foreigners. Several winding drives with many switchbacks.
Photography	■ ■ ■	Worthwhile to good. No dedicated hides.
Annoyances	■ ■ ■	Spicy food, strong smells of various types. Can be cool at altitude & early mornings. Land leeches will be present, numbers depend on rain fall.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 6 of the Andaman Extension;
- All meals from lunch on day 1 to lunch on day 14 of the Main tour;
- All lodgings during the tours;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Any accommodation needed between the Andaman Extension & the Main tour;
- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Camera fees;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.
- Fitness: The Andaman Extension and Southern India tours do not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health and reasonably fit as most of the birding will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time.

- Accommodation throughout the tours vary from very comfortable to rather basic hotels and lodges. There is no camping on this trip. Please note that accommodations used are of the best quality that the area has to offer but are, at times, well below the standard of what you may have come to expect from the developed world.

Arrival and Departure Details

The Andaman Extension will depart from Port Blair on day 1 and conclude at Port Blair after breakfast on day 6.

The main tour will depart from Kochi on the morning of day 1. Please arrive the day before the tour starts to ensure there are no delays. The tour will conclude by early afternoon at Bengaluru International Airport on day 14.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Veer Savarkar International Airport, Port Blair (IATA: IXZ) is the main port of entry for those beginning their travels with the Andaman Islands Extension and is most easily reached via Chennai International Airport (IATA: MAA).

Cochin International Airport (IATA: COK), Kochi and Kempegowda International Airport, Bengaluru (IATA: BLR) and the primary points of entry and departure. Both airports have regular international service, as well as domestic services via Delhi and Mumbai.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.