



**SOUTHERN INDIA:
WESTERN GHATS AND NILGIRI ENDEMIC**

12 - 25 JANUARY 2020



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Sri Lanka Frogmouth is one of our targets on this trip.

This two-week tour will focus on the many specialties that southern India has to offer. The tour commences at the city of Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore), the capital of the state of Karnataka, and finishes on the coast at Kochi (also known as Cochin), a large sea port city in the state of Kerala and an ancient city of high value on the old spice trading route. Our journey will take in the vast splendor of the Western Ghats and Nilgiri Hills, where we will also enjoy a steady stream of Western Ghats and Nilgiri endemic birds and other wildlife, as well as a decent supporting cast of overwintering migrants and resident birds.

Some highlights on this tour are likely to include **Black-and-orange Flycatcher, Indian Blue Robin, Nilgiri Blue Robin, White-bellied Blue Robin, Nilgiri Thrush, Nilgiri, Palani, and Wynaad Laughingthrushes, White-bellied Treepie, Malabar Woodshrike, Malabar Barbet, Nilgiri Wood Pigeon, Nilgiri Flycatcher, Nilgiri Pipit, Oriental Bay Owl, Malabar Whistling Thrush, Blue-winged Parakeet, Malabar Grey Hornbill, Malabar Trogon, Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Indian Pitta,** and, with luck, **Kashmir Flycatcher.**

During the tour we will visit some very exciting nature reserves and sanctuaries, such as Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary, Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary, and, most famous of all, Thattekad Bird Sanctuary. We will also visit some rather nice colonial hill stations, reminiscent of many countries formerly part of the British Empire such as Kenya, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka. Interestingly, these locations (chosen for their cooler climate from that of the lowlands) often offer access to wonderful higher-elevation birding sites. They also often provide an interesting window into the cultural history of the area. Southern India is also very exciting in terms of food, which is considered rather different from that of other areas of India and promises to be memorable.

You could combine this tour with our exciting set of Indian bird and wildlife tours that follow this tour, such as our very popular **Birding Tour India: The North - Tigers and Birds** tour that runs directly after this one (27th January – 12th February 2020), our **Birding Tour India: The Northwest – Lions and Desert Birding in Gujarat** (13th – 26th February 2020), and our **Birding Tour India: The Northeast – Birds and Mammals of Eaglenest, Nameri and Kaziranga**, which visits the mountains of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh (1st – 14th March 2020). We can also easily offer you extensions at each location if you'd like to extend your stay in this wonderful and vibrant country.

Itinerary (14 days/13 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Bengaluru (Bangalore) and travel to Mysuru (Mysore)

After your early morning arrival into Bengaluru we will immediately head to an area that is good for viewing **Indian** and occasionally **White-rumped Vultures**. If you cannot find a flight that arrives in the early morning we can arrange a hotel for the night before near the airport, so that you are ready to start the tour in the morning. Note that most flights arrive into Bengaluru between 4:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m.. We will then continue to the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary, where we will take a boat trip along the Cauvery (Kaveri) River. This small park is packed full of birds, and we will really get our trip list going. Among the common and widespread birds we will try to find **Spot-billed Pelican, Streak-throated Swallow, White-spotted Fantail, River**

Tern, and **Indian Eagle-Owl**. We are also likely to get some great views of **Painted** and **Woolly-necked Storks**. After finishing up our birding in the sanctuary we will continue our journey to Mysuru, our base for the night, where we will enjoy our first of many excellent local evening meals.

Overnight: Mysuru

Day 2. Mysuru to Mudumalai

We will travel between Mysuru and Mudumalai, stopping along the way at several sites that may yield a few interesting species such as **Blue-winged Parakeet** (formerly known as Malabar Parakeet), **Red-naped Ibis**, **Yellow-wattled Lapwing**, and **Small Pratincole**. We will aim to arrive at our accommodation for lunch, and after enjoying a siesta through the hottest part of the day we will head out into the local scrub to see if we can get a head start on some of the species listed below for day 3.

Overnight: Mudumalai

Day 3. Mudumalai

We will have the full day exploring the scrub habitat around the Mudumalai area, seeking out the following species (and many more): **Red Spurfowl**, **Indian Nightjar**, **Yellow-crowned Woodpecker**, **Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark**, **Jerdon's Bush Lark**, **Malabar Lark**, **Indian Nuthatch**, **Black-headed Cuckooshrike**, **Yellow-billed Babbler**, **White-browed Bulbul**, **White-bellied** and **Small Minivets**, **White-cheeked Barbet**, **Nilgiri Flowerpecker**, and the gorgeous **Red Avadavat**.

Overnight: Mudumalai

Day 4. Mudumalai to Ooty

We will have an early start this morning so we can make the most of our time in and around the old colonial British hill station of Ooty, our next destination. Our first stop is likely to be a local hotel where we will search for **Black-and-orange Flycatcher**, **Indian Blue Robin**, and **Nilgiri Laughingthrush** – all three are beautiful birds. Once we have had our fill here we will spend the remainder of the day checking out patches of shola forest, where there are many of our trip target birds to be found; some of these include **Nilgiri Blue Robin**, **Nilgiri Thrush**, **Malabar Whistling Thrush**, **Indian Blackbird**, **Jerdon's Leafbird**, **Yellow-browed Bulbul**, **Malabar Barbet**, **Nilgiri Wood Pigeon**, **Hill Swallow**, and **Painted Bush Quail**. Other more widespread species we may discover during the day could be **Vernal Hanging Parrot**, **Black Eagle**, **Square-tailed Bulbul**, and **Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike**. If we are very lucky we may even find a rare overwintering migrant such as **Kashmir Flycatcher**.

Overnight: Ooty

Day 5. Ooty to Top Slip

We will spend the majority of the day continuing our birding around the hill station of Ooty, at about 2200m, seeking the aforementioned species. Later in the day we will move to Top Slip, one of the best birding areas in southern India, situated in the Anaimalai Hills, ready to spend the full day there the next day.

Overnight: Top Slip

Day 6. Top Slip

This will be a full day spent birding in and around the excellent forest habitat of Top Slip. Some of our target birds here include **Indian Pitta**, **Grey-headed** and **White-browed Bulbuls**, **Malabar Starling**, **Jerdon's Nightjar**, **Asian Fairy-bluebird**, **Loten's Sunbird**, **Black-hooded Oriole**, **Common Emerald Dove**, **Brown-breasted Flycatcher**, **Black-rumped Flameback**, and **Thick-billed Warbler**. There is also likely to be some overlap with some of the species found at Ooty, and there will be lots of species to look out for.

Overnight: Top Slip

Day 7. Top Slip to Munnar via Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary

We will leave Top Slip after breakfast and will head to Munnar. However, along the way we will stop at Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary, where we will try and find the huge (and rather spectacular, yet very secretive) **Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl**. While looking for the owl we may also find **Malabar Whistling Thrush**, **Brown Fish Owl**, **Western Crowned Warbler**, and **Tickell's Blue Flycatcher**. We will also keep an eye in the trees for the Grizzled Giant Squirrel – a huge squirrel! After lunch near to the sanctuary we will continue our journey to Munnar, looking out for **Indian Roller** and **Chestnut-headed Bee-eater** along the roadside wires as we go.

The forests and montane grassland in the Munnar area are home to numerous southern specialties, and we will spend the remainder of the afternoon (if time) and the whole of the following two days looking for these. We will also look for Nilgiri Tahr, an endemic and Endangered (IUCN) ibex found high in the mountains of the Western Ghats. For some of the birds we will look for this afternoon (if we have time) see below.

Overnight: Munnar

Days 8 - 9. Munnar

There are a lot of high-quality birds at Munnar, and we will spend two full days looking for them. Top targets will include **Palani Laughingthrush**, **White-bellied Blue Robin**, **Broad-tailed Grassbird**, **Nilgiri Wood Pigeon**, **Nilgiri Pipit**, **Crimson-backed Sunbird**, **Nilgiri Flycatcher**, **Malabar Whistling Thrush**, **Indian Scimitar Babbler**, **Yellow-browed** and **Yellow-throated Bulbuls**, **Grey-fronted Green Pigeon**, **Malabar Barbet**, **Little Spiderhunter**, **Brown-cheeked Fulvetta**, **Vernal Hanging Parrot**, and **Rusty-tailed Flycatcher**. There will be plenty more to see beyond this small sample of birds listed.

Overnight: Munnar (two nights)

Day 10. Munnar to Thattekad

This morning we are likely to spend a couple of hours on foot, exploring the area along the road near our accommodation, and then drive to Thattekad after an early lunch. In the late afternoon we will be doing some local birdwatching near a signaling station. Here species might include **Fork-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo**, **Black-throated Munia**, **Red Spurfowl**, and the stunning **Black Baza**.

If time permits (and local conditions allow it), during the late afternoon we will visit a small water puddle that sometimes produces some good-looking passerine species, including **Indian Blue Robin**, **White-bellied Blue** and **Tickell's Blue Flycatchers**, **Puff-throated Babbler**, and **Orange-headed Thrush**. **Brown-breasted Flycatcher**, **Malabar Trogon**, and **Blue-winged**

Parakeet also occur locally here, and we will be looking for them. We will also have the next three full days in this wonderful area to fully explore and seek the area's specialties.

Overnight: Thattekad

Days 11-13. Thattekad Bird Sanctuary

Thattekad Bird Sanctuary is *the* prime birding destination in Southern India. We will have three full days and nights to thoroughly explore and enjoy the sanctuary and the superb surrounding local area. Diurnal and nocturnal specialties here are many and include **Indian Pitta, Grey Junglefowl, Flame-throated and Grey-headed Bulbuls, Wynaad Laughingthrush, White-bellied Treepie, Malabar Woodshrike, Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Malabar Trogon, Red Spurfowl, Indian Swiftlet, Jungle Owlet, Oriental Bay Owl, Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl, Rufous Babbler, Orange Minivet, Blue-faced Malkoha, and Brown-breasted, White-bellied, and Rusty-tailed Flycatchers.** Other species we will spend time concentrating on will be **Malabar Grey Hornbill, Malabar Whistling Thrush, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Black-throated Munia, and Brown Hawk-Owl.**

More widespread species we will likely see over our time here include **Indian Paradise Flycatcher, Lesser Yellownappe, Heart-spotted and White-bellied Woodpeckers** (on total different ends of the size spectrum), **Crested Goshawk, Mountain Imperial Pigeon, Plum-headed Parakeet, White-rumped Spinetail, Lesser Fish Eagle, Oriental Dollarbird, Brahminy Kite, Indian Golden Oriole, and Black-naped Monarch.** We will concentrate our efforts on the morning and afternoon sessions but will also take some night drives/walks with the aim of connecting with some of the incredible (yet difficult) night birds on offer, such as those listed already above plus **Great Eared, Jerdon's, Indian, and Savanna Nightjars.**

Overnight: Thattekad (three nights)

Day 14. Thattekad to Kochi (Cochin) for departure, tour concludes

After a final morning birding session in Thattekad we will depart this wonderful area and head to Kochi (Cochin). We will arrive in time for a final dinner together before your international flight home in the evening or continuation to our Birding Tour India: The North - Tigers and Birds. Most flights out of Kochi depart between 8:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m. If you need an additional night's accommodation after the tour to fly out the following day, we can easily arrange that.

Duration:	14 days
Date:	12 th – 25 th January 2020
Limit:	4-8
Start:	Bengaluru (Bangalore)
End:	Kochi (Cochin)
Price:	US\$6,230 per person sharing
Single supplement:	US\$915

Price includes:

All accommodation (as described above)

Meals (from lunch on day 1 until evening meal on day 14)

Drinking water – two bottles of mineral water per day per person from our tour vehicle (if taken

from a hotel this will be at your own cost)

Expert tour leader and local bird/wildlife guide fees

National park/birdwatching reserve entrance fees and jeep safaris

All ground transport and tolls while on tour, including airport pick-up and drop-off

Price excludes:

Flights

Visa

Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls, etc.

Optional tours (e.g. monument entrance fees)

Soft/alcoholic drinks

Camera (still/video) permits

Personal travel insurance

Gratuities

Please note that the itinerary above cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide to the one advertised due to tour scheduling.