

A Private Journey to Southern India



Specially prepared for Maxine Relton and
Sketchbook Journeys

Sunday 10 February to Sunday 24 February 2013

A SKETCHBOOK JOURNEY TO SOUTHERN INDIA

This very special journey to southern India has been designed for those who wish to experience a fascinating culture with a chance to develop the art of quick and vivid sketches. Complete beginners and non-sketchers are equally welcome to join the trip.

During your first week you focus on developing and practising your drawing skills, whilst based at the college campus of SCAD (Social Change and Development). This environment has been chosen as it provides wonderful opportunities for drawing and fascinating insights into SCAD's impressive work with the rural communities of Tamil Nadu. Part of the cost of your trip will make an important contribution to their work. Each day will be led by Maxine Relton as you visit the local initiatives and villages in the area and receive guidance as you choose your subjects to draw.

The second week in contrast is not so focussed on sketching but allows you to travel through the beautiful region of Kerala, experiencing stunning mountains and river scenery which will hopefully continue to inspire you to practise your drawing skills. Maxine will be on hand to assist if need be but in a less structured way than in week one. The journey ends with a few days to relax on the Keralan Backwaters.



MAXINE RELTON - Artist Guide

Maxine is a full-time, independent artist. She lives and works in Gloucestershire, teaches and lectures at home and abroad and exhibits widely. Her paintings, prints, drawings and travel journals can be viewed at her studio gallery any time by arrangement. She is an elected Academician at the Royal West of England Academy. Some of the sketches shown in this itinerary illustrate her first visit to India which she described on her return as *“one of the richest experiences of my life in so many ways and one that I want to continue to share through my work”*.

SCAD - SOCIAL CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

This thriving NGO was established in 1985 by an extraordinary man called Cletus Babu and a small group of friends. Together they committed themselves to “reach the unreachable”, freeing some of India's poorest and most neglected people from a life of grinding poverty, debt and hopelessness.

Their initial vision was to provide education in remote rural communities so that people could become economically self-sufficient and inspired to help themselves. Having begun in one tiny village, SCAD now works with nearly 500,000 villagers through projects that cover five key areas of development: education, health, community, agriculture and animal husbandry.

For more details, visit www.scad.org.in

QUICK REFERENCE ITINERARY

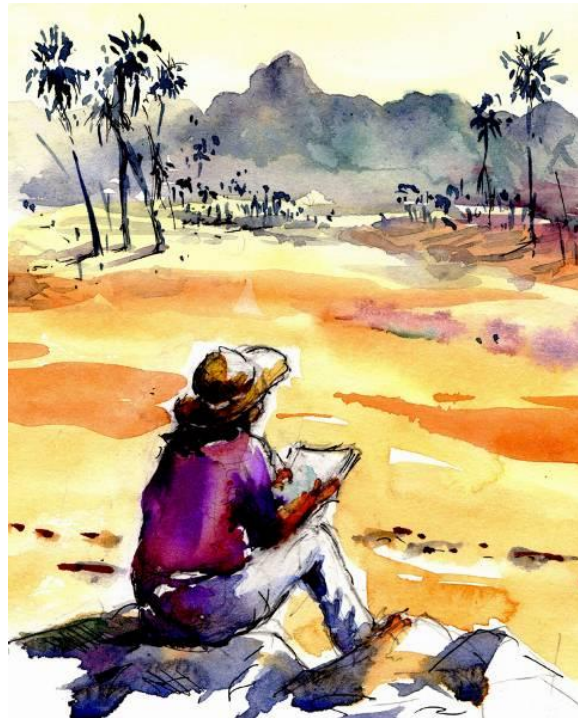
10/02/2013	Fly London Heathrow / Dubai Fly Dubai/Trivandrum (Emirates Airlines)
11/02/2013	Trivandrum/Kovalam
12/02/2013	Kovalam/Thirunelveli
13/02/2013	Thirunelveli
14/02/2013	Thirunelveli
15/02/2013	Thirunelveli
16/02/2013	Thirunelveli
17/02/2013	Thirunelveli
18/02/2013	Thirunelveli/Madurai
19/02/2013	Madurai/Thekkady
20/02/2013	Thekkady
21/02/2013	Thekkady/House Boat
22/02/2013	House Boat
23/02/2013	Houseboat/Cochin
24/02/2013	Cochin/Dubai/London Heathrow

SUGGESTED INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT SCHEDULE

Date	Route	Flt No.	Check in	Depart	Arrive
10/02/2013	London Heathrow Terminal 3/Dubai (Emirates Airlines)	EK0008	06:50	08:50	19:35
11/02/2013	Dubai/Trivandrum	EK522	In Transit 2.5 hours	21:10	02:30
24/02/2013	Cochin/Dubai (Emirates Airlines)	EK531	07:30	09:30	12:00
24/02/2013	Dubai/London Heathrow Terminal 3	EK0003	In Transit 2.5 hours	14:30	18:15

Times subject to change.

This is the suggested flight schedule for the trip. If you would like Steppes Travel to book your flights please contact us. Alternatively you can book your flights through an independent flight centre.



DETAILED TRIP ITINERARY

Sunday 10 February

London/Dubai

Depart London Heathrow on the Emirates flight to Dubai. Connect with the Emirates Airlines flight to Trivandrum, flying overnight.

Monday 11 February

Dubai/Trivandrum/Kovalam

On arrival at Trivandrum Airport, you will be met by our local agent and assisted with your transfer to Surya Samudra in nearby Kovalam where you have rooms booked for immediate use.



Time at leisure today to acclimatise, recover from the flight and meet the remainder of the group.

In a peaceful, exotic beachside setting, Surya Samudra is set in 20 acres of landscaped gardens surrounded by coconut plantations. The individual cottages of polished hardwood have been reconstructed by local craftsmen from 100-year-old traditional Keralan homes and are set well apart, overlooking the Arabian Sea. The beautifully furnished rooms include your own writing desk for quiet focus on your travel diary if you feel inspired, and are soundproofed to ensure a deeply relaxing space. While the two beaches to either side of the rocky promontory on which the hotel sits are not private, they are very quiet and secluded and fishermen can be seen here hauling in their catch by hand to the sound of rhythmical chanting. There's also a delicious jade-coloured infinity pool, a stunning Ayurvedic spa and a cliff-edge yoga platform overlooking the ocean. The hotel's two sea-view restaurants serve delicious feasts of Keralan and Western dishes. And, as an added bonus, you can rest assured that the management is dedicated to minimising the hotel's environmental footprint.

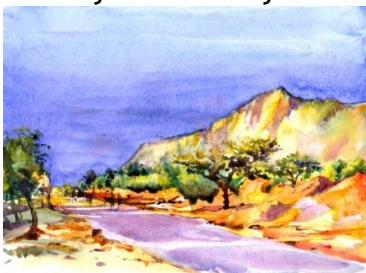


Overnight at Surya Samudra in a heritage classic room on a full board basis.

Tuesday 12 February

Kovalam/Thirunelveli

This morning after breakfast, you will be transferred by private air-conditioned mini bus to SCAD. Social Change And Development (SCAD) is a Non-Governmental Organisation founded by Dr. S. Cletus Babu and a dedicated team of people to uplift the very poor and underprivileged people of Thirunelveli and Tuticorin District. SCAD works in around 500 villages in the sphere of Rural Education, Holistic Health Service, Community Organisation and Development, Agricultural Promotion, Veterinary Care, Water Management, Sustainable Energy Development, Emergency Relief and Disaster Management etc.



The actual travelling time will be under 4 hours, but you will have breaks on the journey, including a picnic and visit to a beautiful small Hindu temple in Thirukkurunkudi where you might like to do some sketching and photographing. Continuing from there up the eastern flank of the Ghats mountains, you will arrive at the SCAD campus in the afternoon. Before the



evening meal, you will be given an orientation from SCAD and Maxine, with a chance to look at plans for the week in more detail.

During your stay, you will be able to develop your drawing skills with the help of Maxine Relton's expert tuition, demonstrations and support. Different social aspects of the important work that SCAD undertake will be explored and visited. This opportunity will provide you with a unique and authentic backdrop for your art work.

Throughout this first week, Maxine will be helping you capture your impressions with quick sketches of all kinds, even if you have little or no drawing experience. With her guidance and inspiration, you will have many wonderful opportunities to draw during these visits to various SCAD initiatives and locations.



If you would prefer to enjoy the trips without sketching, this is also fine, of course. Please note that due to the nature of the initiatives and projects you may visit during your stay, the day-to-day programme may be amended at short notice.

Your accommodation, although basic, is clean and comfortable with guest lodges providing separate single/double rooms with individual attached bathrooms.

Overnight at SCAD Guest House in a standard room on a full board basis.

Wednesday 13 February



Thirunelveli

This morning the group will meet for a brief talk by Maxine to run through the day's programme.

This will be followed by a guided walk around the campus to orientate you and to visit the various SCAD projects, including a remarkable school for children with special needs.

After lunch at SCAD, there is an opportunity to visit Thirunelveli town where you can experience Pothi's impressive sari emporium. There are more colours than you can shake a paintbrush at and it's a lovely opportunity to choose fabrics for anything you wish to have made up.



The local tailor will visit SCAD this evening to take any orders if you wish clothes to be made up from the fabrics you purchased at Pothi's Emporium.

Dinner at SCAD.

Overnight at SCAD Guest House in a standard room on a full board basis.

Thursday 14 February

Thirunelveli

You start the morning, after breakfast, with a half-hour drive to visit a very special village project. This is a gypsy village and SCAD School for Children of marginalised groups including snake catchers! Return to campus for lunch.

This afternoon you can spend sketching around the campus with

Maxine's guidance or if you prefer, spend some time at leisure.

Overnight at SCAD Guest House in a standard room on a full board basis.

Friday 15 February



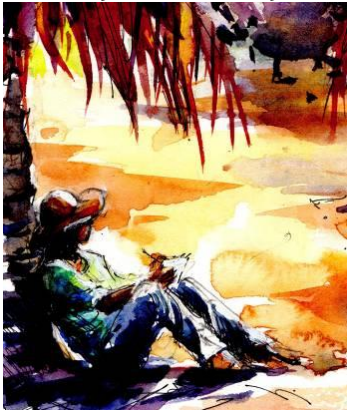
Thirunelveli

After breakfast today, you visit a tiny 7th century ruined Hindu temple just 20 minutes by road from the campus. From the shade of its colonnade you can enjoy views across the paddy fields and banana plantations - a chance to absorb the sights and sounds of rural life with your sketchbooks and cameras. A stop in Cheranmadevi on the way back to campus for lunch gives an opportunity to take in a small but bustling and colourful town and perhaps a refreshing drink.

The remainder of the afternoon at leisure around the campus and a sketching session with Maxine before dinner.

Overnight at SCAD Guest House in a standard room on a full board basis.

Saturday 16 February



Thirunelveli

This morning after breakfast, the group will congregate to visit one of the nearby villages that SCAD has been working with for the last 18 years, helping to form groups of women entrepreneurs and other initiatives. This village has now become well known for its sari weaving.

You return to the campus for lunch.

Afternoon at leisure to relax or participate in a sketching session with Maxine.

Dinner at SCAD.

Overnight at SCAD Guest House in a standard room on a full board basis.

Sunday 17 February



Thirunelveli

A day at leisure to spend in your own way. Relax at the campus, take hikes in the local area or continue practising the skills that you have acquired during the week's tuition from Maxine.

Meet for an early evening walk to a local temple.

Overnight at SCAD Guest House in a standard room on a full board basis.

Monday 18 February



Thirunelveli/Madurai

After breakfast this morning you will be met by our local representative and driven as a group to Madurai. The drive is approximately 3 hours. On arrival you check in to your hotel in time for lunch and some quiet relaxation.

In the afternoon, you will be taken for a visit to the Great Temple thronged with pilgrims, wedding parties, stalls and shrines.



Madurai, built on the banks of the Vaigai River, is the second largest city in Tamil Nadu and was once the capital of the Pandya dynasty (7th to 13th century AD). Known as the Temple City and one of India's most sacred pilgrimage centres, Madurai was laid out in accordance with an ancient temple custom whereby the Great Temple dedicated to the goddess Meenakshi was placed at its centre. Considered to be the finest of its kind in Tamil Nadu, this Great Temple's towering gopurams are covered in a riot of gaily painted, dancing and cavorting gods and goddesses. Inside the labyrinth of great pillared halls, you will encounter a whole world of fascinating activity, with music and singing, pujas and processions.

The Heritage Hotel is centrally located in Madurai and convenient for visiting the main sites of the city.

Overnight at The Heritage Hotel in a villa on a full board basis.

Tuesday 19 February



Madurai/Thekkady

Your driver will meet you to depart from Madurai and take you to Thekkady, a journey of approximately 5 hours. You cross from Tamil Nadu into the state of Kerala. There is plenty of opportunity to stop en-route to take photos and stretch your legs. A delicious lunch awaits you on arrival at your hotel, after which you have the remainder of the afternoon at leisure.

Cardamom County is a four-star resort perched on the gradient of a gently sloping hill. The architecture and landscaping of the entire resort has been thoughtfully created to reflect the ethereal beauty of its natural surroundings. The interiors of the resort have been aesthetically designed and furnished in an appealing blend of contemporary styling.

Overnight at Cardamom County in a country cottage room on a full board basis.

Wednesday 20 February



Thekkady

This morning, your local guide will take you to meet your elephant. Climb on its great back for a gentle, guided amble through the fragrant spice plantations of vanilla, coffee, pepper and cardamom. A specialist local guide will talk about their various culinary and medicinal uses.

Back to the hotel for lunch and perhaps a swim in the pool and a siesta.

Early evening offers the chance to attend a spectacular performance of the ancient martial arts of Kerala.

Overnight at Cardamom County in a country cottage room on a full board basis.

Thursday 21 February

Thekkady/House Boat

This morning you will make an early start to arrive at the backwaters in good time to reach your House Boat at lunch time. The house boats will be provided from the same company and travel together.



These extraordinary boats have plied the backwaters for hundreds of years, weighed down with their cargoes of rice, coir, fruit and other crops. They have been the main source of transport between the villages of this area that are not accessible by road. From your vantage point on board, you will see fishermen delicately balancing on their narrow canoes, women weaving and chatting on the shore and you will be accompanied by the happy sounds of children either playing in the canals or at the water's edge. Undisturbed by the sound of traffic, the birdlife is exceptional and you are offered a chance to experience a way of life that has changed little over the passing years. The boats themselves comprise two or three bedrooms with attached bathrooms and a larger, open-sided sitting area from where you can watch the world go by. They are fully staffed with a captain and a cook who will serve you up delicious and varied meals of fresh fish and local specialities.



Overnight on board a 2 or 3 bedroomed house boat on a full board basis, including all meals prepared by your chef.

Friday 22 February

House Boat

You will spend the day leisurely cruising the backwaters, stopping off to visit local villages and experience the daily life taking place on the river banks.

Overnight on board a 2 or 3 bedroomed house boat on a full board basis, including all meals prepared by your chef.

Saturday 23 February



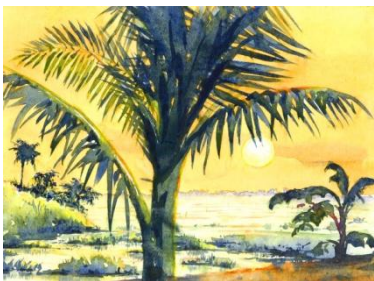
House Boat / Cochin

This morning you disembark from your house boat and rejoin your driver for the 1.5 hour journey to Cochin. **PLEASE NOTE: the disembarkation point is a temporary jetty with gaps between the boat, jetty and shore.**

The afternoon may be spent exploring Cochin in your own time or finding a quiet corner to sketch.

A fascinating city set on a cluster of islands and narrow peninsulas, the port city of Cochin (Kochi) perfectly reflects the eclecticism of Kerala. With a rich past and a bustling present, it has been the trading centre of the region from ancient times.

The influence of Chinese, Jews, Arabs and Europeans is evident in Cochin and its people. The oldest church in India, 500-year old Portuguese houses, old tiled houses built in the Chinese pagoda style, the famous Chinese fishing nets, a Jewish community whose roots go back to the Diaspora, synagogues and mosques: all tell the fascinating story of this harbour town, the cultural capital of Kerala.



The older parts of Fort Cochin and Mattancherry are an unlikely blend of medieval Portugal, Holland and an English country village grafted onto the tropical Malabar coast. Cochin is one of India's largest ports and a major naval base.

Have a final farewell dinner tonight at the Tea Bungalow.

The Tea Bungalow is an elegant colonial bungalow, set in a lovely garden with a swimming pool in an excellent location in the heritage area of Fort Kochi. Almost a hundred years old,

Tea Bungalow has been lovingly restored to its classical colonial elegance, offering ten spacious en suite rooms.

Overnight at the Tea Bungalow in a deluxe room on a full board basis.

Sunday 24 February

Cochin/Dubai/London Heathrow

Early this morning you are met and driven 1 hour to Cochin Airport in order to board the Emirates flight back to Dubai. Connect in Dubai with the Emirates flight to London Heathrow.

TRIP PRICE

Price per person:

£2,320.00 on a twin/double share basis
£3,080 on a single room basis. If you would like to share accommodation, Steppes Travel will put you in touch with any others on the trip who would also like to do so to avoid the single supplement.

(These costs are based on 10 people travelling **)

Includes:

- Accommodation in rooms as described in itinerary
- Full board throughout and full board at SCAD and on Houseboat
- Transport and transfers by private air-conditioned Tempo Traveller (2 tempo travellers will be used for 10 people).
- Sightseeing and activities with English-speaking local guides
- Services of an English-speaking escort from Kovalam to SCAD and again from SCAD to Cochin
- Daily sketching lessons led by Maxine Relton in first week
- Maxine Relton's daily fee
- Experienced senior staff escorts at SCAD and private mini-bus at SCAD
- SCAD Charitable Donation
- Entrances to all parks, museums and monuments mentioned

Excludes:

- International flights
- Items of a personal nature
- Additional meals/drinks
- Gratuities
- Travel insurance
- Visa charges

NOTES

The above price is subject to currency and fuel fluctuations. This trip will run with a maximum of 10 people (plus Maxine Relton and an English-speaking escort).

****If we do not have suitable numbers on the trip at 8 weeks before departure you will be given the option to cancel and will be refunded. Alternatively we can run the trip but an additional charge will be due in order to run the trip with fewer people.**

PLEASE CAN YOU PROVIDE DETAILS OF ANY MEDICAL CONDITIONS WHEN SENDING IN YOUR BOOKING FORM. ALL INFORMATION IS TREATED AS CONFIDENTIAL.

Health & Travel Advice

Steppes Travel sends detailed Travel Notes, including health and general travel advice, once a booking has been confirmed. We recommend that you see your G.P. or a travel clinic to ensure that you are aware of the health precautions advised for your specific destination(s). Since some destinations require a course of injections or pills, it is recommended that you organise a visit at least 6 weeks prior to departure.

The MASTA organisation (Medical Advisory Service for Travellers Abroad) offers travel health advice, at a price. They can offer travel advice or direct you to your nearest MASTA-associated travel clinic either by telephone or through their website. For advice over the telephone, the number is 09068 224 100 and the charge is £1 per minute. You can also pay for advice through their website: www.masta.org. The following website offers useful free health advice for travellers: www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk.

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) provides current information on overseas destinations and safety advice to British travellers. Steppes Travel receives a great deal of information about destinations from its local representative offices however, when deciding whether countries or regions are safe for travel, the final decision is dependent on the guidance of the FCO. If you would like to know the current travel advice for any country in the world, you can visit www.fco.gov.uk or call 0870 606 0290.

Indian Visas

British citizen passport holders travelling to India require a visa which must be obtained prior to departure. A multiple entry visa costs £38 and is valid for 6 months from the date of issue. Holders of any other type of British passport (eg British Subjects) or of any other nationality must check their visa requirements with the relevant embassy. We recommend obtaining your visa via CIBT visa services or directly through the VFS Global website. Please request details.

Airlines

Steppes Travel use scheduled flights on airlines with good reputations for service, reliability and punctuality. Your consultant will advise the choice of airlines for your particular destination and you can choose your preferred option based on duration, preference of carrier, number of transits etc.

Many flights depart early in the morning; necessitating a very early check-in. Please see your specific itinerary for timings. Please note that airlines frequently change their schedules. Generally, changes are minor and will not affect an itinerary however they can be more serious. If the change happens after your booking is confirmed, we will notify you and do our best to amend your itinerary accordingly. In some cases, changes can result in additional costs, which may have to be met by the client.

Airport hotels, lounges & Parking

Steppes Travel works with Holiday Extras who offer good rates for airport hotels. There are also rates for airport parking and use of Business Class Lounges. Details will be sent with your confirmation pack along with a reference number to quote to obtain discounted rates for these services.

Domestic Flights

Internal flight schedules are often changed at short notice, however these are usually minor changes. If there is a flight time change while you are on holiday, your representative will advise you of this. Should any changes to the itinerary be necessary as a result of a schedule change, our local representatives will make any alterations required while endeavouring to ensure that your holiday has the minimum possible disruption.

Room Types

The room types quoted are generally based on a standard category, unless otherwise stated in your itinerary. Should you wish to upgrade to a superior category, please ask your consultant for the available options and supplements, and we will be happy to provide these.

Check-In / Check-Out Times

Most hotels work on a midday-to-midday check-in / check-out system. If flights arrive very early in the morning, you may be taken for breakfast or sightseeing before being allocated your room. Steppes Travel will endeavour to have your room available as early as possible in these instances. Should your flight depart late in the evening, and you wish to hold your room for a late check-out, this will need to be requested and there are likely to be cost implications.

Insurance

It is mandatory that every client holds travel insurance and this must include repatriation cover. We strongly recommend that all members of your party are adequately insured as soon as you book your holiday, so that in the event of cancellation you will be covered by your insurer.



Sketchbook Materials for India Notes from Maxine Relton

It is best to buy all you need before you go, as art supplies will be very limited in our part of India. I have made a general checklist below which I hope will prove useful.

All these items are readily obtainable from art shops but if you have any queries or problems, please call me on 01453 832597 or email maxine.relton@tiscali.co.uk.

Sketchbook

I recommend a spiral-bound, rigid-back format of a size you can comfortably hold in your hands. The paper needs to be good-quality cartridge, minimum 160 gsm weight to withstand any vigorous rubbing-out as well as light water-based washes of colour without disintegrating or buckling.

If using watercolour paints, it's worth taking a separate spiral-bound pad of watercolour paper in a medium texture known as NOT. Here a heavier weight is better, ideally 300 gsm (140 lb).

Alternatively, a pad of smooth watercolour paper known as "hot pressed" will take both fine-line drawings and water, although the NOT texture is easier to handle if you haven't done much watercolour.

Drawing Tools

Pencils: A minimum range of ordinary graphite pencils, say HB, B, 2B and 5B. Take some spares. If you like finely detailed work, you may want to add a 2H, and I like to use a very dark tone, such as 8B or 9B. Held bunched in a rubber band makes them easy to select.

If you are interested in tonal effects, you might enjoy using a soft water-soluble pencil (eg 3B). A water pen (a synthetic brush with a plastic, water-filled handle) is inexpensive (£5 - 7 depending on the brush size) and is a practical way to create a tonal wash by adding water to your drawing.

Pens: I take 2 fine-liners, a medium and a broad black pen, all spirit-based (most are).

Pencil sharpener: an ordinary sharpener for carry-on luggage if you want to be sketching on your outward journey. Choose a box format to hold the shavings. I take in my hold luggage a retractable lightweight knife with snap-off, segmented blade (eg Olfa) for use on arrival.

Pencil rubber: I use a Staedtler plastic rubber (and take a couple of spares, they're easily lost).

Clips and White-tak: several miniature bulldog clips or similar are useful to hold down the pages in windy conditions, or rubber bands. White-tak (stickier than blu-tak!) is useful for various purposes.

Drawing in colour

- Coloured pencils ("crayons") are convenient and easy to use in hot climates. I suggest a basic colour range in a water-soluble form so that your drawing can be turned into a painting if you wish. There is a make of water-soluble pencils called Inktense that are particularly vibrant, transparent colours - useful for those dazzling saris! These can all be mixed on the paper for additional colours.
- Water-soluble pastels - I recommend Neocolor, lovely intense colours, can be bought in boxed sets, or individually as can the coloured pencils above.
- Coloured felt or marker pens.

Painting

Watercolour is the best painting medium for sketchbook work. If you would just like to do a simple colour wash over your drawings, a good basic kit would consist of a small paintbox with a warm and cool version of the 3 primaries red, blue and yellow, plus the 2 earth colours raw

sienna and burnt sienna, and a tube of white gouache. In addition, you will need a full-bodied, round brush that points well, a cotton rag and 2 plastic water containers with watertight lids (from a kitchen shop). Winsor & Newton paints are a good make and the most readily available.

The cheapest way is to buy an empty, lightweight plastic paintbox and fill this with your own choice of individual colours. Pigments can be bought as half-pans (small square cakes) or 50 ml tubes. I prefer the tubes and squeeze a little pigment out each day into my paintbox. I use a box with a thumbhole (held like a palette) and a generous, compartmented mixing area in the lid.

A range of coloured brush pens offers a convenient alternative to a painting kit, although quite expensive if you buy a wide range of colours.

I would suggest a fuller painting kit with some additional brushes if you are interested in spending time on straight watercolours. Please contact me to discuss this if you would like fuller information on particular colours or other materials to take.

Other useful items

- A small rucksack, plus a waistbelt bag for smaller items
- Prittstick or similar, a small pr of scissors, a roll of masking tape
- A small lightweight folding stool
- A visor or sunhat with a good brim
- A small empty spray bottle (from Boots or other chemist)
- A protective cover for your paintbrush/es (eg small length of plastic pipe or a fabric roll)
- Small can of hairspray for use as fixative, pack in hold luggage (L'Oreal Elnett do a v. neat 75ml can, the only small travel size I know. Fixative is not allowed in the hold but hair spray is and is just as effective)
- Camera
- Some empty plastic bags

I also recommend that you have a trial run with your painting kit somewhere outdoors before you go. This will reassure you that your chosen combination works for you and gives you the chance to make any amendments.

WHY TRAVEL WITH STEPPES?

Steppes Travel (or Steppes East as it was then) was founded in 1989 with the objective of creating a travel company where service and knowledge are of the highest priority. We aim to design itineraries, which, while including the highlights of any country, additionally take travellers off the beaten track to see lesser known, but equally interesting places not frequented by large numbers of tourists.

We offer individuals the ability to travel safely in remote areas in the knowledge that one of us has been there before. Furthermore we run a 24-hour emergency service, which ensures that at any time, a member of staff is on call to help resolve a local difficulty. It is our belief that these little details make the difference between a good travel company and an exceptional travel company.

To achieve this we demand a very high calibre of staff who on the one hand, through a combination of upbringing and education, can objectively analyse and appreciate the finest hotels and resorts in the world and yet who will, at a moment's notice, disappear off to some far flung remote corner to visit a particular treasure which, for whatever reason, has grabbed their attention. Additionally they must have the intellect and education to absorb the culture and history of a country, so that in turn they can produce interesting and stimulating ideas for you the traveller.

We have a sales staff of 18 in the office all of whom have a wealth of travel experience under their belts and who revisit their own particular areas of expertise each year to refresh their minds and discover new opportunities. Some have now been with us for more than 10 years and have developed a following of clients who trust their judgement and will travel with no one else. We hope you will join those ranks.

FINANCIAL PROTECTION

Steppes Travel is a fully bonded tour operator that complies with the Civil Aviation Authority bonding conditions of the UK, which fully guarantees your money in the unlikely event of us going out of business before you depart on holiday. Our ATOL number is 6945.

In addition all accommodation (hotels, lodges, boats) only bookings are also financially protected with payments held in a separate trust account, in accordance with the Package Travel Regulations Act 1992.

SPECIALIST KNOWLEDGE

Our staff have travelled extensively throughout their regions and in many cases have lived there, so you can rely on their first hand knowledge and enthusiasm. They will tell you about those intimate, friendly hotels and introduce you to charismatic guides - those little extra qualities that make your holiday both unique and special.

We insist that they regularly visit the regions they cover, meticulously inspect hotels and keep abreast of all issues relating to travel. Our sales staff will be out of the office for approximately a month a year refreshing their knowledge and discovering new areas and places to stay.

QUALITY PERSONAL SERVICE

Every client is looked after by one consultant committed to offering you a very personal service. They will remain your point of contact and are happy to answer any questions or queries that you might have regarding your trip. In turn each consultant is supported by an experienced and professional administration team.

A TAILORMADE JOURNEY

An entire holiday designed around your requirements. This allows you to explore your own interests, select your own style of accommodation and travel at your own pace. You are not beholden to a group itinerary or schedule. All local travel arrangements are made using private

guides and drivers wherever possible. As ever, our specialists' knowledge is always at your disposal.

After an initial discussion with you, one of our specialists will create a unique itinerary for your trip, complete with background information. We are of course delighted to fine tune the itinerary until you are completely satisfied with it. Your trip will be dealt with by the same specialist throughout and you are welcome to call him or her at any time. Or alternatively please come and see us in the office or make an appointment for us to come and see you.

QUALITY LOCAL SUPPORT

Tour operators subcontract the handling and their logistics of their clients to a third party in the country of destination. The essence is to find a ground handler who has the same ethos as oneself so that clients are looked after in the way in which we would want them to be looked after. With twenty years of experience and knowledge we have built up many longstanding relationships with our agents, ensuring that they deliver the level of service that our clients expect.

The quality of your guide can make the difference between a good trip and an outstanding one. The guides we use have been picked by us, or by our local representatives, as the best available and great care has been taken over their training. They provide more than just dates or names; they strive to offer a real insight into their country and region. Some may even welcome you into their home and many Steppes clients do keep in contact long after they return home.

It is little extras and personalised touches like these on the ground that make your holiday with us both distinctive and individual.

24 HOUR EMERGENCY SERVICE

We have a 24 hour emergency service to give you, our valued clients, added security and peace of mind. In the unlikely event of an emergency we are contactable 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

RECOGNITION

Rather than beat our own drum, the fact that 70% of our business is repeat and referral is, for us, the highest endorsement we could have. Plus being twenty years in the business confirms our expertise and professionalism.

YOUR CONSULTANT

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Following a childhood in Nepal and extensive travel throughout India, Bhutan and other Himalayan regions, Charlotte specialises in creating tailor made itineraries to the Indian subcontinent. Being so passionate about these regions, she travels 2 or 3 times a year to keep her knowledge fresh and current and has recently returned from an extensive trip to Bhutan.