

THE 3-DAY VARKALA WEEKEND RUN

A cliffside guide to surf, mangrove kayaks, and golden-hour cliffs.

Here's the thing about Varkala — it's the one place in Kerala where you get actual cliffs dropping straight into the sea, a row of cafés perched right on the edge, and almost none of the chaos of a bigger beach town. No traffic to fight, no fifty things to tick off — just cliffs, good coffee, and a sunset that genuinely earns the hype every single evening. If you want a weekend that feels like it slowed you down, this is it.

Getting there's the easy part. Coming from Bangalore, the Island Express runs straight to Varkala Sivagiri station, no change needed — it's a long one at 17 to 19 hours, but it's cheap (₹450 Sleeper, ₹1,200 3AC, ₹1,750 2AC — check IRCTC closer to your date since fares shift around). An overnight AC sleeper bus works just as well, 13 to 16 hours for ₹1,200 to ₹2,700. Flying in instead? Land in Thiruvananthapuram (TRV), about 50 km out, then a quick train or cab the rest of the way.

My personal suggestion? Book your stay on the South Cliff, not the North. North Cliff has all the shops and the crowd energy — fun for an evening, but not where you actually want to sleep. South Cliff is quieter, the sunsets hit exactly the same, and you're still a 10-minute walk from Papanasam Beach.

This itinerary is 3 days, 2 nights, built around a surf lesson and a mangrove kayak session, with real costs marked the whole way through, plus the cafés on both cliffs actually worth your time. Want to add paramotoring or a Jatayu Earth's Center detour too? Those are their own thing — see "Want to Do More" further down.

Day 1: Cliffs, Temples, and That First Sunset

Check into your South Cliff stay, drop your bags, and head straight to Papanasam Beach. Honestly, that's it for the plan — let the quiet of South Cliff set the pace before things pick up tomorrow.

If you've got the afternoon free, auto over to Sivagiri Mutt or Janardhana Swamy Temple. Even if temples aren't usually your thing, Sivagiri's wide stone steps and the hilltop view over the coconut groves are worth the short climb on their own.

My personal suggestion: save the back half of your evening for Cafe Sarwaa, right on the South Cliff. Get there a little before golden hour, order something cold, and just sit with the view — the whole sky turns orange over the Arabian Sea and it's genuinely the moment everyone comes to Varkala for. Stay on for dinner right there too — you've already got the table, no reason to move on night one.

Day 2: Surf, Then Backwaters

Morning is for the water. Book a beginner surf lesson at Papanasam Beach with Soul & Surf — a single 1.5 to 2-hour session runs about ₹1,800 to ₹2,200 INR, board and basics included. **My personal suggestion:** do this early, before the beach fills up and the wind picks up — you'll also catch calmer water.

Head back, shower the salt off, and take a proper lunch break — there's a 30 to 40-minute drive ahead to Paravur, so don't rush it. By mid-afternoon, head out to the Edava–Nadayara–Paravur backwaters for a shorter mangrove kayak session, about 1.5 to 2 hours, running ₹1,200 to ₹1,500 INR per person.

My personal suggestion: don't go in expecting a sunset paddle — the mangrove tunnels are narrow and canopy-covered, so you genuinely need daylight in there, not dusk. Ask for the latest slot that still gets you out before the light drops, and let golden hour on the open water on your way back be the little bonus, not the plan.

Head into Varkala as the sky turns, and keep dinner easy — Coffee Temple or Sun Francisco on North Cliff, nothing fancy needed after a day like that.

Day 3: One Last Cliff, Then Go

Last morning, so keep it slow — you've already had your water fix this trip. Start with one more cliff walk, then breakfast at Bindu's Café on North Cliff; it's the kind of place you linger at, not rush through.

After, auto up to Kappil Beach, about 20 to 25 minutes away — the one spot where the sea and the backwaters run parallel, split by a thin strip of sand. Climb up to Kodi Cliff for the view: the Arabian Sea on one side, the lagoon on the other, from the same ridge — you don't get that angle anywhere else on this trip.

My personal suggestion: don't rush back down. Grab a coconut at the top and just sit with it for a bit.

Head back to Varkala, pack up, grab one last meal, and start the drive to Trivandrum.

Where to Eat — Cliffside Cafés

SOUTH CLIFF

Cafe Sarwaa

The sunset spot. Order something cold, grab a table facing the water, and just wait for the sky to turn.

Cafe Trip Is Life

Sunset dining right over the water, gluten and lactose-free options if you need them — book a table and don't rush it.

NORTH CLIFF

Bindu's Café

Best for mornings — go for the coffee and the view, stay longer than you'd planned to.

Cafe del Mar

Breakfast by day, live local music some evenings in an open garden right over the ocean.

Coffee Temple

Good coffee, better prices than its cliff neighbors, and an odd little Indian-Mexican menu that works.

InDa Café

The breakfast call. Nutella pancakes, thin-crust pizza, and coffee refills that don't stop.

Sun Francisco

For when you want something properly South Indian — dosas, thalis, real masala chai.

Want to Do More?

PARAMOTORING — ₹3,000 TO ₹4,500

A tandem flight with a certified pilot strapped in next to you, about 10 to 15 minutes in the air — genuinely one of the best ways to actually see Varkala, the red cliffs, the beaches, the whole coastline from above. It's seasonal though — October to March is when the wind actually cooperates. If you're adding it, swap it in for the temple visit on Day 1 afternoon, or the Kappil Beach detour on Day 3.

JATAYU EARTH'S CENTER — ₹300 TO ₹550

About 45 minutes away in Chadayamangalam, built around a massive sculpture of Jatayu, the mythical bird from the Ramayana. Do the walkway, the cable car, or go all in with the zip line (adventure packages run ₹1,000 to ₹3,500+). It eats a bigger chunk of time than anything else here, so swap it in for the whole Day 3 morning instead of Kappil Beach.

Where to Stay — South Cliff

BUDGET — ₹800 TO ₹1,500 / NIGHT

Villa Akasa is a quiet 5-room homestay tucked into South Cliff, a short walk from a stretch of beach well away from the North Cliff crowds. Off-season rates start around ₹1,250 a night, climbing up near ₹5,000 in peak season — so book ahead if you're going in winter. Southern Cliff House, a renovated homestay closer to the temple, is another solid option in the same bracket.

MID-RANGE — ₹2,000 TO ₹3,500 / NIGHT

This is the one I'd actually book.

Sanctum Spring and Skylar Seaview Beach Resort and Spa both sit right on South Cliff with pools, Ayurvedic treatments, and proper cliff-and-sea views. Expect rates to swing with the season — closer to ₹2,000–2,500 off-season, and up toward ₹4,000–4,500 in peak months — so check your exact dates before locking it in.

Cost of Everything, at a Glance

WHAT	ESTIMATED COST
GETTING THERE (ONE-WAY, FROM BANGALORE)	
Train — Island Express, Sleeper / 3AC / 2AC	₹450 / ₹1,200 / ₹1,750
Bus — overnight AC sleeper (KSRTC or private)	₹1,200–2,700
IF FLYING IN INSTEAD	
Trivandrum ⇌ Varkala local transfer (train, round trip)	~₹100–200
WHILE YOU'RE THERE	
Stay — South Cliff, budget (per night)	₹800–1,500
Stay — South Cliff, mid-range (per night)	₹2,000–3,500
Food (per day, cafés + local spots)	₹700–1,000
Local transport (auto / scooter, per day)	₹300–500
Surf lesson (Day 2)	₹1,800–2,200
Mangrove kayaking (Day 2)	₹1,200–1,500
OPTIONAL ADD-ONS	
Paramotoring	₹3,000–4,500
Jatayu Earth's Center	₹300–550

The surf lesson and the mangrove kayaking are the two activities this itinerary is actually built around. Paramotoring and Jatayu Earth's Center are both genuinely worth doing — they just sit on top as add-ons, not folded into the day plan. Train and bus fares above are indicative; both move with quota, season, and operator, so check the live fare closer to your date rather than treating these as locked-in numbers.

Follow for more weekend-sized trips and travel stories

[@devsmita_verma](#)