

INCREDIBLE SOUTH INDIA

11 NIGHTS / 12 DAYS

Chennai – Kanchipuram – Mahabalipuram – Pondicherry – Tanjore – Trichy –
Madurai – Thekkady – Houseboat – Cochin – Departure

Explore the Dravidian Culture, which has always laid claim to its own unique long history, ruling empires, traders from various countries and conquerors arriving by sea.

Experience the majestic & ancient temples, backwaters, the amazing hill stations, lush green forests, the white sand long beaches, wildlife and more over enjoy the vibrant culture and delicious food.

One can rejuvenate their senses by visiting serene places like Kerala, God's own country and witness the hidden architecture which cannot be find anywhere else.



ITINERARY

Day 01 **Arrival Chennai**

Welcome to India – A country of countless destinations. A land of rich and ancient heritage. The charm of India is its 5000 year history, its philosophy, its religions, its fabulous monuments that increase its diversity to create the unique and colorful mosaic. This is the wonder of India, we invite you to enjoy it and feel it.

Meet upon arrival and transfer to your hotel for overnight stay. Rest of the day free. Night in Chennai.

Day 02 **Chennai – Kanchipuram - Mahabalipuram** **(car, approx. 5h)**

After breakfast visit Chennai which includes Fort St George. St Marys Church/ National Art Gallery/ Fort Museum / Government Museum, Kapaleeswarar Temple at Mylapore / Sant home Cathedral / Big Banyan Tree.

Afternoon transfer to Mahabalipuram, stopping on the way to visit Kanchipuram, which is a temple town and one of the seven sacred cities in India and the temples are dedicated to both Lord Shiva as well as Lord Vishnu. Your visit will include the Sri Ekambaranathar Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva and one of the largest in the city, the Kamakshi Amman temple, Devaraj swami and the Vaikunta Perumal temple. From the original 1000 temples there are now just over 200 left. Kanchipuram is also one of the most important centres for hand woven silk and the favourite choice of Indian brides. Night stay at Mahabalipuram.

Day 03 **In Mahabalipuram**

After breakfast visit Mahabalipuram. This tiny town on the shores of the Coromandel coast is famous for its 7th Century Shore Temples and Arjuna's Penance, a large relief carving on a rock twelve metres high and thirty metres long. There is also a cluster of smaller temples scattered over the main area. Night stay in Mahabalipuram.

Day 04 **Mahabalipuram – Pondicherry** **(car, approx. 2 ½ h)**

After breakfast transfer to Pondicherry. Previously a French State, this small Union Territory has some different features to the surrounding area of Tamil Nadu. In the French Quarter there are wide well paved roads with shady sidewalks to explore the remaining French Architecture. In this area is the Aurobindo Ashram, parts of which are open to visitors. The Samadhi of Aurobindo and The Mother are set in an open courtyard in the main Ashram building. In the

surrounding streets are various working departments of the Ashram open to visitors. Night stay in Pondicherry.

In the evening it is a pleasant activity for the clients is to walk on the foreshore overlooking the ocean. It is possible to arrange short boat trips on the sea front looking for dolphins. (Optional & Not included)

Day 05 Pondicherry – Tanjore (car, approx. 5h)

Continue the drive inland to Tanjore, the ancient capital of the Chola kings. Enroute Visit the temples of Darasuram, Kumbakonam, Gangaikonda Cholapuram and Chidambaram.

Upon arrival check in at your hotel for overnight stay. Rest of the day at leisure. Night stay in Tanjore.

Darasuram: This temple is a storehouse of art and architecture. The vimana is 85 feet high. The front mandapam itself is in the form of a huge chariot drawn by horses. The temple has some exquisite stone carvings.

Kumbakonam: Kumbakonam dates to the Sangam period and was ruled by the Early Cholas, Pallavas, Medieval Cholas, Later Cholas, Pandyas, the Vijayanagar Empire, Madurai Nayaks, Thanjavur Nayaks and the Thanjavur Marathas. It rose to be a prominent city between the 7th and 9th centuries AD, when it served as a capital of the Medieval Cholas. The town reached the zenith of its prosperity during the British Raj when it was a prominent center of European education and Hindu culture; and it acquired the cultural name, the "Cambridge of South India". In 1866,

Gangaikonda Cholapuram: Gangaikonda Cholapuram was erected as the capital of the Cholas by Rajendra Chola I, the son and successor of Rajaraja Chola, the great Chola who conquered a large area in South India at the beginning of the 11th century C.E. It occupies an important place in the history of India. As the capital of the Cholas from about 1025 C.E. for about 250 years, the city controlled the affairs of entire south India, from the Tungabhadra in the north to Ceylon in the south. The great temple of Siva at this place is next only to the Brihadisvara temple at Thanjavur in its monumental nature and surpasses it in sculptural quality.

Chidambaram: The ancient Chidambaram Temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva in his form of the cosmic Dancer (Nataraja). It is one of the five dancing halls (Sabha) of Nataraja and the most famous one. The temples at Kalahasti, Kanchipuram and Chidambaram all stand on a straight line at 79° 45" east longitude - truly an engineering, astrological and geographical wonder. The Chidambaram temple houses the Akasha Lingam of Shiva and is considered one of the greatest Shiva Temples of Tamil Nadu.

Day 06 in Tanjore

Whole day to visit Tanjore which is famous for its distinctive art style. Morning visit to the Archaeological Museum which houses sculptures and photographs of the temple prior to restoration and the Thanjavur Palace in the old town. A visit to the Brihadishwara Temple and Fort is a must. Built by Raja Raja in 1010 it is one of the few temples in India with a World Heritage listing and dedicated to Nataraja, the dancing Shiva. Two hundred and fifty lingams are enshrined along the outer walls. This temple is open from 6am – 1pm and again from 3pm – 8pm. Overnight stay at Tanjore.

Day 07 Tanjore – Trichy – Madurai (car, approx. 6h)

Transfer to Madurai Enroute Visit Trichy, Temple and Rock Fort. Trichy was a Chola citadel long before Christianity. Later it became a part of the Vijayanagar dynasty. Its most famous landmark is the Rock Fort Temple. Perched 83 m high on a massive outcrop it dominates the landscape. The climb is stiff but very much worth the effort.

Also make a visit to the Sri Ranganatha Swamy and Sri Jambukeshwara Temples just 3 km north of the Rock Fort.

Continue drive to Madurai, check in at your hotel for 02-night stay. Rest of the day at leisure. Night stay in Madurai.

Day 08 in Madurai

Full Day Sightseeing of Madurai including Thiruparamkuntam. Madurai is famous for the Sri Meenakshi temple complex. The gopurams are covered by a coloured profusion of Hindu gods and goddesses, animals and mythical figures. A visit to Madurai shows the visitor the spiritual side of South Indian culture. The temple complex is a hive of activity from early morning until evening, attracting pilgrims and tourists alike. For 10 rupees the resident elephant will place a "tilak" on your forehead with his trunk. Night stay in Madurai.

Day 09 Madurai – Thekkady (car, approx. 4h)

After breakfast drive to the village of Thekkady, which is just on the rim of the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary. The drive is through lush green coconut groves, rubber plantations and finally tea plantations. Thekkady is nestled in the Nilgiri Hills at 3000 ft and famous for its spice plantations and the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary.

Afternoon boat safari at the artificial lake near the sanctuary. A herd of elephants or a wandering family of deer are common sights near the lake. In the hot months of March and April, visitors stand a better chance of viewing wildlife as the animals come to the lake frequently for drinking water. You may be able to spot herds of Gaur, Sambar and wild boars in the grasslands adjacent to the shores. A variety of avian fauna such as darters, egrets and kingfishers can be seen resting on dead tree trunks that stick out over the lake. Night stay in Thekkady.

Day 10 Thekkady – Houseboat (car, approx. 4h)

Morning visit to a private spice plantation. Wear closed shoes – it feels like a jungle walk. Spices growing here include vanilla, black pepper, cloves, cardamom, nutmeg and mace, surrounded by coconut palms, bananas and jackfruit.

Later drive down to the small town of Alleppey. Your overnight stay will be at the houseboat, which includes all meals. The spectacular beauty of Kerala's backwaters needs no introduction.

Houseboat:

Traditionally, the houseboat was called Kettuvalam, which means a boat made by tying together pieces of wood. Unbelievable as it may sound, not a single nail is used in the making of a Kettuvalam. Jack wood planks are joined with coir rope and then coated with black resin made from boiled cashew nut shells. The materials that go into the making are all local and Eco friendly bamboo poles, coconut fibre ropes, bamboo mats, coir carpets etc these traditional country boats were used as the mode of transport in the early times from the isolated interior villages to the towns. But these boat services have been laid off with the developments taken place in the transport services in the recent past. Today these giant 80-foot long crafts have been adapted into luxuriously furnished houseboats. A Kettuvalam usually has one or two bath attached rooms, an open lounge, deck, kitchenette and a crew comprising two oarsmen and a cook. Traditional lanterns are used as lights. Your holiday in this tranquil world is the comfortably furnished houseboats.

Day 11 Houseboat – Cochin (car, approx. 1h)

After breakfast drive to Cochin and you will be in one of Kerala's most fascinating towns right on the Arabian Sea.

Check in at your hotel first. Rest of the day sightseeing including Kathakali dance. The tour should include a visit to the Jewish Synagogue, the Dutch East India buildings, St Francis Church (Portuguese) Mattancherry Palace and the Santa Cruz Basilica.

Your visit to Cochin would not be complete without a visit to a performance of Kathakali. This 500-year-old dance drama is performed by all male dancers, accompanied by music, who play out a story, using their eyes, face muscles, hands and feet. A must is to reach the theatre ahead of time, in order to see the performers putting on their incredible make-up and their magnificent costumes. Night stay in Cochin.

Day 12 Final departure

Depending on your flight, transfer to Cochin airport for onward destination.

End of our services....

SOME OPTIONAL SUGGESTIONS.

These are some optional suggestions and are always subject to change. Advance booking required at most of the places.

1. If required, the itinerary can be modified as per your wish.
2. If you wish you can experience an Ayurvedic Massage during your trip.
3. You can have an experience of yoga and meditation as well.
4. You can enjoy dinner at The Brunton Boatyard in Cochin.
5. If you wish enjoy meal on Banana leaf in Keralan Style.
6. You can have mock wedding during the tour. (No legal value)
7. If you wish you can add few days at Marari beach.