



South India

EXQUISITE TEMPLES & TROPICAL LANDSCAPES

November 17 – 29, 2017



OVERVIEW

Lush tropical landscapes, neat colourful villages, world-renowned temple complexes, gorgeous heritage accommodation, and a subtle, distinctive cuisine are highlights of this tour. Gentler, more relaxing, more authentic – the south is the perfect introduction to the wonders of India. A multitude of varied experiences from the Life of Pi's Indian Cote d'Azur in Pondicherry to the thriving technicolour temples in the power centre of Madurai, the extravagant courtyard mansions of Chettinad, and the fragrant spice gardens and tea plantations of Periyar. Cooking demonstrations, privately hosted lunches, and presentations on temple architecture, early Indian painting, Ayurveda practice, and the continuity of cultural practices. Views are extraordinarily rich, full of colour and life. Optional extension to the palm-fringed Backwaters of Kerala.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Friday, Nov. 17: Arrive Chennai (Madras)

We are met upon arrival in Chennai. Most flights arrive in Chennai late at night, transfer to our luxury hotel and settle in for a good night's sleep.

Overnight: The Leela Palace, Chennai

Saturday, Nov. 18: Chennai

Start the day with an exploration of one of Chennai's most characterful neighbourhoods. Visit the Kapaleeshwarar Temple displaying all the vibrant characteristics of Tamil Nadu's temples with rainbow-coloured gateways, pillared pavilions and a huge tank. Visit Fort St. George finished in 1653 by the British East India Company and St. Mary's Church, India's oldest surviving British church. Visit the Indo-Saracenic style Madras High Court with its beautiful painted ceilings and stained-glass door.

Overnight: The Leela Palace, Chennai

Meals: Breakfast, Welcome Dinner

Sunday, Nov. 19: Along the Coromandel Coast to Pondicherry

Drive south along the coast to Mamallapuram to visit the magnificent Shore Temple, the height of Pallava architecture. Dating from the 8th century, this is the earliest free-standing stone temple in Tamil Nadu. Visit Auroville, a universal township in the making for a population of up to 50,000 people from around the world. "The City of Dawn" was built by the flower-power generations of the 1960s and exists as a fascinating utopian ideal. Continue on to the former French colony of Pondicherry; the city was under French rule until 1954 and now reflects a bohemian-chic feel with quiet cobbled



streets lined with mustard-yellow colonial houses.

Overnight: Palais de Mahe, Pondicherry

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Monday, Nov. 20: Explore the capital of French India

Start the day with a walk in the 'Ville Noir' to get a feel for the unique Franco-Tamil ambience and the restored heritage buildings. Visit the Hindu temple of Manakula Vinayagar, which has 40 different forms of Lord Ganesha and a temple elephant that blesses devotees. This afternoon is free to explore on your own; 'Pondy' is easy to navigate and there is a huge selection of galleries, museums and shops to enjoy.

Overnight: Palais de Mahe, Pondicherry

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Tuesday, Nov. 21: Drive to Tanjore's temple complex

Our drive today (about four hours) takes us inland to Tanjore known as the 'rice bowl' of Southern India. The city of Tanjore is also the birthplace of the great Chola Empire, the most remarkable civilisation in Dravidian history that expanded Hinduism from here to the banks of the Mekong River. Visit the Royal Palace, a mix of decrepit building and glorious art and end the day at the World Heritage-listed Brihadishwara Temple as the sunset captures the palette of reds, oranges, yellows, and pinks over the magnificent temple.

Overnight: Ideal River View, Tanjore

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Wednesday, Nov. 22: Trichy, Chettinad

Drive (about 90 minutes) to Chettinad. On the way stop in Tiruchirappalli (Trichy) to visit the Sir Ranganathaswamy Temple – this is the temple-maniac's temple! It's possibly the biggest temple in India with 49 separate shrines all dedicated to Vishnu, the preserver of the universe. Chettinad is the cultural home of the Chettiars who made their fortune as money lenders, merchants and jewellers. Most migrated in the 19th and 20th centuries to new business ventures throughout Southeast Asia from where they sent back lavish furnishings to outfit their magnificent mansions. We're staying in one of these splendidly restored mansions for two nights. The hotel's kitchen is presided over by one of the local ladies who have carefully maintained the traditions of the distinctive Chettinad cuisine.

Overnight: Visalam Hotel, Chettinad

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Tuesday, Nov. 23: Chettinad

The Indian adage has it that "one is lucky to eat like Chettiar". Food in Chettinad is one of the most distinctive in the country. Much of it is non-vegetarian and uses a distinctive set of spices including star anise seed, peppercorns, cinnamon, bay leaves, nutmeg and unusual local ingredients such as "black stone flower," a dried herb, and marathi moku, a kind of sun dried caper. We'll have a cooking class this morning and learn to prepare a traditional meal. There's time this afternoon to relax and explore the lost grandeur of this striking village.

Overnight: Visalam Hotel, Chettinad

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Wednesday, Nov. 24: Madurai

Drive through the Tamil countryside to Madurai (about four hours). Madurai is the soul of Tamil Nadu, a metropolis that traded with Ancient Rome. Visit the Tirumalai Nayak Palace in the city centre. The spiritual heart of the city is the massive Hindu temple complex dedicated to Meenakshi, the "fish-eyed goddess." Outside, 14 pyramidal towers are encrusted with a mind-boggling array of gods, goddesses, demons, and heroes, while inside priests perform rituals at multiple shrines.

Overnight: Taj Gateway, Madurai

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Thursday, Nov. 25: Across the Western Ghats to Periyar

We head out across the scenic hills of the Western Ghats, the chain of mountains older than the Himalayas and a hotspot of biological diversity recognized by UNESCO as of outstanding universal value. This afternoon we arrive to our gorgeous resort in the heart of the Periyar spice jungle. Our resort features a fine ayurvedic facility.

Overnight: Spice Village

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Friday, Nov. 26: Periyar's spice gardens

Visit nearby spice plantations; pepper, cardamom, cloves, and cinnamon are all cultivated here. Tea is another of Periyar's famed exports. The undulating hills of Kumily, a short drive from Periyar, are home to a number of both tea and coffee plantations. We'll visit plantations here today and learn what it's all about from plucking to processing. Later enjoy a boat ride in the Periyar backwaters.

Overnight: Spice Village

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Saturday, Nov. 27: Kochi

Drive to Kochi (four hours) this morning. Explore the city's intriguing mix of ancient mosques, Portuguese houses, a 400-year-old synagogue, the remains of the Raj, and giant fishing nets from China by the waterfront.

Overnight: Eighth Bastion

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Sunday, Nov. 28: Kochi

This morning is at leisure explore the old town independently. This afternoon we'll attend a Kathakali performance, the traditional dance of Kerala, then cruise the harbour for iconic photos of the Chinese fishing nets at sunset. We celebrate our South Indian sojourn at dinner.

Overnight: Eighth Bastion

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Monday, Nov. 29: Depart Kochi

The morning is at leisure to do a little last-minute shopping before we transfer to the airport for homeward-bound flights. With a little more time available, consider a relaxing stay in Kerala's backwaters.

Meals: Breakfast

Note: The itinerary and accommodation described in this tour brochure are subject to change due to logistical arrangements and to take advantage of local events.

TOUR DETAILS

Tour Cost (per person): US\$4995

Single Supplement: US\$1895

If you are travelling on your own and would like to share accommodation, we would be happy to try to match you with a suitable roommate.

Maximum Number of Participants: 22

What's Included:

- Airport transfers for passengers arriving and departing as per the group itinerary
- Accommodation based on double occupancy in hotels listed or similar
- Meals as indicated in the itinerary
- All internal transportation by private coach
- Sightseeing with qualified English-speaking guides
- All activities and entrance fees
- One cooking class
- Kathakali dance performance
- Taxes and gratuities (for guides, drivers, hotels, restaurants)
- Fully escorted by your Worldwide Quest tour director

WHAT TO EXPECT

Level of Activity: Moderate

A good level of fitness is required to enjoy this trip. You should be able to walk up to three hours at a time over uneven terrain both in rural areas and in crowded cities. In some places access to temples and forts is only on foot with some steep ascents. Shoes must be removed to enter some temples. Should you have any questions about your ability to take part in this tour, please give us a call.

Accommodation

We are staying in a mix of Western style hotels and restored heritage inns. We begin our trip at the luxury Leela Palace Hotel in Chennai. We have three one-night stays in four star level Western hotels in Tanjore, Madurai and Kochi. Where we stay longer (in Pondicherry, Chettinad, and Periyar) we are staying in particularly lovely inns that beautifully reflect the character and charm of their locations.

Transportation

We will be travelling in a comfortable air-conditioned vehicle driven by a professional driver. While roads are mostly paved except on rural back roads, there are few divided highways, therefore, we cannot expect to cover distances as quickly as we might in North America. There are some long driving days but roadside scenery provides a quintessential Indian experience.

Not Included:

- Airfare from your home to join the tour
- Visa fees (obtained prior to departure, US\$50)
- Meals other than those mentioned above
- Beverages with meals
- Fuel surcharges, if applicable
- Travel insurance
- Excess baggage charges
- Items of a personal nature
- Additional arrangements required due to any emergency or other situation

Payment Details:

A non-refundable deposit of US\$500 per person is required to reserve a space on this tour. A second deposit of US\$1000 is due six months prior to departure. Final payment is due 90 days prior to departure.

Terms and Conditions

For additional information about our terms and conditions, please refer to your booking form, the current brochure or our website. All participants booking with Worldwide Quest are covered by the terms of the Ontario Travel Industry Act (Worldwide Quest Int'l, Ontario - Licence # 2667946).

Weather

We expect sunny skies and lovely warm weather throughout our South India trip. Temperatures will likely range from highs of 30°C to overnight lows of 20°C.

Travel Documents:

You will require a passport for this trip. Please ensure it is valid for at least 6 months beyond your scheduled return home. You will require a visa for India which must be obtained prior to arrival. The current cost of this visa is US\$50.

HOW TO BOOK

For more information and to reserve your spot, please contact Amanda at Worldwide Quest:

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TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS BY:



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