



# South India Sojourn

from temple sculptures and spice gardens  
to classical dance and canal cruises

*Featuring cooking and ceremonial activities taking place for the harvest festival of Pongal & our stay in several eco-resorts including one night at the Spice Village Eco Resort located in the tamed forest of Periyar and two nights at the 5-star Coconut Lagoon Heritage Backwater Resort in Kumarakom.*



Market, India

## *Itinerary* 13 January - 1 February 2007

**Tour Price (Land Content Only):** 📍 \$5580 (Early-Bird Special!) or \$5780.00

**Tour Code PT107**

**Personal Endurance Level** ★★★ Moderate walking during site visits, with some 'optional trekking'

**Type of Touring:** Short distance coach travel

**20 DAYS:** Chennai (1 night) • Mahabalipuram (2 nights) • Tiruvannamalai (2 nights) • Pondicherry (1 night) • Tanjore (2 nights) • Trichy (1 night) • Madurai (2 nights) • Periyar (1 night) • Kumarakom (2 nights) • Cochin (4 nights).

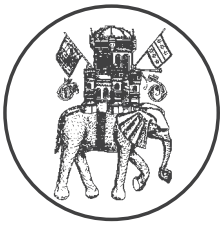
**SUMMARY OF HIGHLIGHTS & ACTIVITIES:** Fort St George • Kapaleeshwara Temple • Tamil Folk Dances • Dakshinachitra Cultural Centre • Mahabalipuram's 7th Century World Heritage Monuments (Shore Temple, Five Rathas; Krishna's Butterball) • Arunchala Sacred Mountain • Ashram of Ramana Maharshi • Cingee Fort • Aurobindo Ashram • French Quarter and Museum (Pondicherry) • Brihadishwara Temple • Saraswati Mahal Library & Art Gallery • Rituals on the banks of the Cauvery river at Amma Mandapam • Sri Rangam Vishnu Temple • Rock Fort Temple and bazaar of Trichy • Jain Temple at Sittanavasal • Pudukotai Fort and Museum • Chettinad Palace & Museum • Meenakshi Temple • Tirumalai Nayak Palace • Teppakulum Tank • Spice and vegetable market of Madurai • Home and gallery of Tanjore Artist, Dr Shobana Kumar • Spice Garden tour Kerala • Cruise on Lake Periyar, Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary • Sunset cruise Vembanad Lake • boat ride along the canals of Alleppey and heritage tour by the Conservation Society • demonstration of Kalaripayatu, Kerala Traditional Martial Arts • Fort Cochin • Spice Market of Cochin • International Pepper Exchange • Performance of Kathakali • Cooking demonstration and meals by famed author Nimmy Paul • Hilltop Palace • Evening sunset cruise on Cochin Harbour and special Seafood dinner at Brunton Boatyard.

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## About The Tour

This tour traverses the bustling cities, rich countryside and diverse cultures of the Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Along the way there will be numerous opportunities to capture with words, with images or simply – if you prefer – with colourful memories, something of the essence of South India.

Writer, photographer and academic, Peter Davis, has made several journeys through South India to contribute to *Lonely Planet* guidebooks and to document a range of Australian aid and development projects. Peter has written travel articles on South India for numerous publications, including a widely syndicated story about how he landed the role of a Catholic Priest in a Tamil movie. He has also been a visiting lecturer at the Centre for Australian Literature at Madras University.

The first three days of this tour take place during the harvest festival of Pongal. This colourful festival is celebrated more prominently in Tamil Nadu than in any other part of India. It is a time when people give thanks for their crops and pay tribute to their animals. Other highlights include visits to ancient temples and forts, the verdant Periyar wildlife sanctuary, bustling bazaars, well trodden trade routes, traditional arts and crafts and, of course, the culinary delights of South Indian cuisine such as Thali, *appam* (pancakes) and a range of seductive vegetarian and fish meals.

Our tour starts in the lively, but relatively relaxed, South Indian capital of Chennai (Madras). Here we will experience the first of many magnificent Hindu temples to be encountered on this program, then wander through the bazaars and markets; beginning to absorb some of the aspects of every-day Indian life. In the evening we will be treated to a display of traditional South Indian dance. From Madras, we'll journey down the coast to explore the stunning World Heritage sculptures of *Mahabalipuram*, the sacred mountain of Arunachala in Tiruvannamalai, and its famous Ashram. Next we'll head for Pondicherry to immerse ourselves in this last bastion of French culture in India. We will visit the cities of Tanjore, Trichy and Madurai to meander through some of India's most spectacular and ancient temples. After Madurai, the temples are left behind as we travel towards Kerala, staying in the Periya wildlife sanctuary on the way. This lush, beautiful sanctuary will give you an opportunity for some bird watching and trekking, as well as a boat ride on the lake. Our final four days will be spent exploring the ancient city of Cochin in Kerala – including a personalised cooking demonstration. It is here that the fusion of Hindu, Jewish, Islamic and Christian cultures offers us a truly kaleidoscopic experience of ancient and modern India.

## Geography and Culture

South India can be defined geographically as well as culturally. The Vindhya Range lies approximately in line with the Tropic of Cancer and is the symbolic dividing line between north and south India. South of the Vindhya lies the Deccan Plateau, named from the Sanskrit word *dakshina*, meaning South.

The state of Tamil Nadu occupies the South Eastern and Southern part of the Indian land mass. This is the land of the Tamils and is often referred to as the cradle of the Dravidian civilisation, one of the oldest, continuous cultures in existence. This culture has its own unique language and customs, as well as icons such as the towering gateways (*gopurams*) of temples and intricate rock carvings. The major river, known as the Cauvery, divides the state as it flows east and enters the sea in the ancient

port of Poompuhar, 340km south of Chennai. To the east, Tamil Nadu is surrounded by ocean, to the west (where it borders the state of Kerala) it is flanked by the Western Ghats – a rugged mountainous range that forms a unique biosphere. Our visit will mostly take in the coastal and relatively flat regions of the state.

Although Tamil Nadu is highly industrialised, most of its sixty-three million people live in approximately sixty thousand villages. It is a land rich in history, legend and culture. Sacred temple music flourishes and the delicious Tamil Nadu vegetarian cuisine is one of the longest-standing traditions of vegetarianism in history. Debate continues as to the origins of the people of Tamil Nadu and their Dravidian culture. It has been speculated that the first Dravidians were part of an early Indus civilisation and came south after invasion in the north from 1500BC. By 1200BC, a civilisation distinguished by huge stone monuments and sculptures existed in the south India.

Kerala is a narrow fertile strip on the south-west coast, sandwiched between the Lakshadweep Sea and the Western Ghats. The history of Kerala has been defined by trade. For at least two thousand years, people have been sailing to Kerala in search of spices, sandalwood and ivory. In ancient times, trade links were established with the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Arabs and the Chinese. The Arabs originally controlled the shipping of spices to Europe, which motivated the Portuguese to find a sea route to India and break the Arab monopoly. When Vasco da Gama and his Portuguese fleet arrived on the Malabar Coast in 1498, the Zamorin of Calicut had already established a wealthy kingdom based on the spice trade. Da Gamma's arrival marked the beginning of European contact with Kerala, as Portuguese, Dutch and English interests fought the Arab traders, and then each other, for control. The modern state of Kerala was formed in 1956 and it became one of the first freely elected communist governments in the world. The communist party has been in and out of office ever since. Decades of progressive social policies have resulted in Kerala boasting the highest literacy rate and the lowest infant mortality rate in India. Whilst it is one of the smallest states in India, Kerala is densely populated, being home to thirty-three million people. The main language is Malayalam.

## The Harvest Festival of Pongal

Pongal means 'to boil'. It is a word that the villagers cry out, when newly harvested rice begins to boil over in the new clay pots, to give thanks for all that the land and the animals provide. Pongal is, in fact, a secular festival that is celebrated by members of all the faiths in India. As well as giving thanks for the land and animals, it is a time to discard the old and embrace the new, particularly with regard to cooking utensils. This four-day festival is celebrated with particular energy and spirit in the villages of Tamil Nadu and each day is given a particular emphasis. The first day is a time of frantic preparation: houses are swept clean, old utensils are discarded and new ones are purchased. In some villages, communal bonfires are lit and discarded goods are cast into the fire in a symbolic gesture of ridding the past and embracing the future. Special treats such as sugar cane are brought into the homes. On the second day, the new crop of rice is cooked until it boils over in the new pots, a symbol of abundance. People flock to the temples or churches and offer thanks for the harvest. The third day is given over to the animals that toil in the fields or transport goods on the roads. It is not unusual to see cows with brightly painted horns adorned with garlands of flowers around their necks. The final day is a day of fun. Many villages dedicate this day to communal sports such

# ASA

as soccer, hockey or even a tug of war held in the middle of the road against a neighbouring village. More enterprising teams may even muster an elephant to assist! Pongal provides an abundance of photographic opportunities to capture important elements of village life.

## Combine this tour with Sri Lanka

- 13 January: Arrive Chennai & join Tour PT107 *South India Sojourn: from temple sculptures and spice gardens to classical dance and canal cruises*
- 1 February: Tour PT107 concludes in Cochin.
- 1-6 February: Join South India extension program
- 6 February: Fly from Conchin to Colombo and join to join our program in Sri Lanka

Note: for further details on our tour to Sri Lanka, please contact ASA for a detailed itinerary or visit our website: [www.asatours.com.au](http://www.asatours.com.au)

## Group Leader

**Peter Davis** is a writer/photographer and a senior lecturer in Creative writing at Deakin University where he also coordinates N:ITT – Network, Image, Text & Technology – a research area dedicated to the examination of images, texts & their combinations. He publishes regular features and photographs in a variety of newspapers and magazines and he undertakes writing and photographic assignments in Australia, Asia and Europe. In 1995 he published (with his partner) a large format book of text and photographs titled *Aliya – Stories of the Elephants of Sri Lanka*. He has worked as an author and photographer for Lonely Planet books on South India and as a media trainer for APEC in Mexico. He undertakes regular assignments to document aid and development projects for AusAID in the Asia Pacific region.

Peter has received grants and awards from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the National Book Council and the Australia Indonesia Institute. He has been short listed for the 2000 United Nations Association of Australia Media Prize for his feature writing and photographs on the slums of Mumbai.

Peter first joined ASA in 2002 as a group leader for *Turkey: Photography and Travel Writing*. In 2004 he was group leader for *A Sri Lankan Odyssey – Elephants, Spices, Temples and Oceans*.

## National Guide / Guest Speakers

Peter Davis will be accompanied by a Government Approved Guide who is an expert in Indology, Art and Culture. The program also includes:

- A guest lecturer in Mahabalipuram on the history and practice of stone sculpting
- A visit to the home and gallery of Tanjore Artist, Dr Shobana Kumar who will talk on the traditions and processes involved in this particular style of painting
- Heritage tour in Alleppey conducted by the local Conservation Society
- Full day cooking course with Nimmy Paul.

## Type of Touring

Short distance coach travel. The program also includes a number of boat cruises.

## Photography & Travel Writing Option

Peter Davis' vast experience in the fields of travel photography and travel writing will enrich this tour. Although this is not strictly a photography or travel writing tour, participants wishing to discuss their creative reactions to the places they visit will have the opportunity to join discussion groups with Peter in evening discussion groups. Peter will also make special suggestions concerning capturing subject matter before you visit specific sites.

## Use of Professional Video/Camera Equipment

There are strict regulations with regard to the use of 'professional equipment' in India. For example, when using equipment such as a big video camera, shooting or filming materials normally associated with TV or movie shooting, special authorisation from the government is required. Generally speaking the use of cameras, and tripods etc used by photography enthusiasts is not a problem.

## University Credit (Deakin University)

Deakin University students studying professional and creative writing or media arts may be eligible to have this trip counted as a credit point towards their degree if they complete an associated assessment project. For further details contact Peter Davis, tour leader at: [davisp@deakin.edu.au](mailto:davisp@deakin.edu.au)

## Personal Endurance Level: ★★★★★

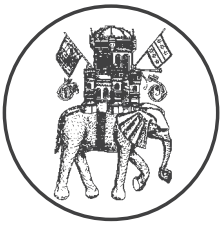
The number of stars is an approximate guide to the degree of difficulty of tours relative to each other. It is neither absolute nor literal. One star is given to the least physically taxing tours, five to the most. We have taken into account the following criteria: extremes of temperature; amount of walking and terrain covered (including steps); length of daily activities; amount of time standing still listening to talks (eg gallery visits); risk of gastric problems and other ailments. **This tour includes a moderate amount of walking each day. Some days involve 'optional trekking'.**

## Meals & Entrance Fees

The tour includes all meals: breakfast, lunch (or picnic lunch) & dinner daily. Meals included in the tour price are indicated in the detailed itinerary where: **B**= breakfast, **L**= lunch and **D**= evening meal. **All entrance fees** on the official program are included in the tour price.

## Practical Information

Tour members will receive prior to departure practical notes which include information on visa requirements, healthcare, photography, weather, clothing and what to pack, customs regulations, bank hours, currency regulations, electrical appliances, food and religion. The Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade website has advice for travellers see [www.smarttraveller.gov.au](http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au)



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## Visas

Australian, New Zealand and British Passport holders will require a tourist visa for India. The tourist visa is valid for 6 months and permits multiple entries. The cost of the visa is currently:

Australian Passport Holders:	\$90.00 AUD
New Zealand Passport Holders:	\$105.00 AUD
British Passport Holders:	\$105.00 AUD

Additional courier fees may apply. Participants will receive from ASA the relevant visa application forms prior to departure. Note: visa fees and rules are subject to change. If you are travelling overseas prior to this tour please remember that we will need your passport to obtain your visa. You should therefore contact ASA to arrange an appropriate time to arrange your visa! For further information on visas see: [www.visalink.com.au](http://www.visalink.com.au)

## Accommodation

Accommodation range from 2-star hotels to deluxe 5-star eco-resorts. All rooms have en suite bathrooms; several hotels have swimming pools and provide foreign exchange and internet service. Further information on hotels will be provided in the 'Tour Hotel List' given to tour members prior to their departure, in the meantime a summary list is given below. We recommend you visit the websites (given below) where you can review the hotels selected and gain further information about the beautiful eco-resorts!

**Chennai (2 nights): 4-star GRT Grand Hotel**, a modern business class hotel conveniently located in the city centre, [www.grtgrand.com](http://www.grtgrand.com);  
**Mahabalipuram (2 nights): 3-star Ideal Beach Resort**, set in gardens with a private beach, along the picturesque Coromandel Coast. Accommodation is provided in spacious air-conditioned cottages equipped with excellent modern bathrooms and private balconies. The hotel has an onsite restaurant that offers a range of local and international cuisine. Due to the seaside location the chefs specialise in seafood dishes - crabs, lobsters and a wide variety of fish straight from the nets of local fishermen.  
**Tiruvannamalai (2 nights): 2-star Hotel Aruna Anantha** set in gardens a few kilometres from town. As this is a very small town, there is only one modern hotel. It offers spacious, clean, air-conditioned rooms in a peaceful setting; **Pondicherry (1 night): 3-star Annamalai International Hotel**, a modern business class hotel located in the heart of the city, [www.hotelannamalai.com](http://www.hotelannamalai.com); **Tanjore (2 nights): 3-star Ideal River View Resort**, overlooking the Cauvery River, set in gardens, with a peaceful and relaxing ambience, 3 kms from the city of Tanjore. The hotel offers 20 deluxe air-conditioned cottages equipped with en suite bathroom; **Trichy (1 night): 3-star Hotel Sangam** located in the heart of the city, [www.hotelsangam.com](http://www.hotelsangam.com); **Madurai (2 nights): 4-star Fortune Pandiyan Hotel**, fully renovated 2 years ago, located in a quiet part of town set amidst 3 acres of gardens, [www.fortuneparkhotels.com](http://www.fortuneparkhotels.com); **Periyar (1 night): 4-star Spice Village Eco Resort**, a deluxe resort consisting of 52 cottages, set in 8 acres of respectfully tamed forest. The architecture is inspired by the jungle dwellings of the area, using the same materials in construction. The original inhabitants of these hills are the Mannans and the Ooralie tribes who still carry on their age-old practices of herding and bee keeping in perfect harmony with nature. They live in tree houses, or huts with a distinctive grey thatch. You'll see this reflected in your own cottage, with its brick, split bamboo & elephant-grass design. Consistent with the ecological theme, accommodation although modern and comfortable does

not include air-conditioning (it's not necessary as you are up in the hills, where it is cool!), TV or music. Facilities include: swimming pool, onsite restaurant, cooking demonstrations and explanations about spices and Ayurveda Centre (system of healing based on homeopathy and naturopathy, with an extensive use of herbs), [www.cghearth.com](http://www.cghearth.com); **Kumarakom (2 nights): 5-star Coconut Lagoon Heritage Backwater Resort**, one of the most sought after destinations in South India. The resort, reachable only by boat, is set around small canals, and nestles along the shores of Vembanad Lake, a 175 square km. expanse stretching between the backwaters of Kerala and the sea. It has various dining areas, professional Ayurvedic massage centre, swimming pool, open-to-sky deluxe bathrooms (a great feature of this hotel); [www.cghearth.com](http://www.cghearth.com); **Cochin (4 nights): 4-star Casino Hotel**, a heritage style building, located on Willingdon Island. The earliest of the CGH Earth group, contrary to its name, it is not a casino! The hotel offers two fine dining restaurants, Fort Cochin, one of the most famous seafood restaurants in India, and Tharavad offering a wide range of oriental and Indian food and extensive buffet, [www.cghearth.com](http://www.cghearth.com)

*Note: hotels are subject to change, in which case a hotel of similar standard will be provided.*

## The Itinerary

While all effort is made to keep the itinerary as printed, modifications to the itinerary may be made due to prevailing local conditions.

### Day 1: Saturday 13 January, Arrive Chennai

On arrival in Chennai, participants travelling on the group flights will be met and transferred to GRT Grand Hotel (4\*).

For those participants arriving before the tour officially begins, a sightseeing option may be a trip by taxi to Bessant Gardens (named after the British Suffragette). Theosophist Annie Bessant was a journalist and a 'spirited' thinker who made India her home in 1907 and who actively campaigned for the Indian movement for home rule. The gardens are also home to the Adyar library, which contains many ancient and rare manuscripts. Another option is a walk along the twelve kilometre Marina beach – a relaxing way to begin a journey in India. You could also stroll through the World Headquarters of the Theosophical Society where the 100 hectares of beautifully developed gardens have, as a centrepiece, a massive banyan tree that offers shade and an opportunity to reflect. **(Overnight Chennai, GRT Grand Hotel) D**

### Day 2: Sunday 14 January, Chennai

- Fort St George
- Kapaleeshwara Temple and Chennai Museum
- T-Nagar Shopping Precinct
- Valluvar Kottam
- Evening Classical Dance and Live Music Performance

Today we immerse ourselves gently in India's fourth largest city. There will be plenty of time to walk around the historic Fort area, the Hindu temple and the splendid shopping precinct at T-Nagar. There will be some time to relax in the evening before a special music and dance performance held especially for the group.

# ASA

Chennai, formerly Madras, has a population of around six million. It has grown from a number of small coastal villages and today it sprawls across more than seventy square kilometres. Although a bustling metropolis, it has a more relaxed pace than Delhi, Calcutta or Mumbai and it offers a fascinating gateway to an exploration of South India. Trade and commerce have helped shape Chennai into what it is today. Historically the city became a significant linchpin in the rapid expansion of the British Empire. The fort area is striking for its grand colonial architecture. Built in the mid-seventeenth century (around 1653), by the British East India Company, the Fort currently houses the State Secretariat and the Legislative Assembly. Although access is restricted inside the Fort area, there are plenty of opportunities to walk around the outside and take photographs. The Fort Museum houses memorabilia from both the British and the French East India Companies, as well as artefacts from the Raj and the Muslim administrators. Just outside the fort area is the High Court, a vast structure and one of the most splendid examples in Chennai of Indo-Muslim architecture. It is claimed to be the largest judicial structure in the world after the Courts of London.

Hindu temples are one of the highlights of this tour and the Kapaleeshwarar Temple in Chennai is an excellent one to begin with. It typifies many of the Hindu temples in Tamil Nadu constructed in the classic Dravidian style with its *gopurams* (towers) and tanks (artificial lakes for bathing rituals). The original temple at this location is believed to be more than 1000 years old, however, the current buildings are said to date back around three hundred to four hundred years. During the January festival of Thai Pussam, the bronze statues of Shiva and Parvati (Shiva's wife) are floated on the temple tank. The vast temple area is surrounded by a labyrinth of narrow streets with bustling markets selling everything from the most gaudy trinkets to health products and dental equipment.

After our temple visit, we will drive to the Valluvar Kottam, a vast memorial dedicated to the acclaimed Tamil Poet, Thiruvalluvar, whose classic work, the Thirukkural, is a complex text of moral and ethical issues dating back some two thousand years. This structure was opened in 1976 and the auditorium is said to be one of the largest in Asia. All thirteen hundred and thirty verses of the Thirukkural are inscribed on the granite pillars that surround the auditorium. There is a ten-foot high temple chariot structure containing a life-size image of Thiruvalluvar and the base of the chariot shows, in bas-relief, the one hundred and thirty three chapters of the Thirukkural. This chariot is a replica of the temple car of Thiruvalluvar in Tamil Nadu and more than 3,000 blocks of stone were used in the creation of this memorial to Tamil culture.

Next we will walk through the shopping precinct known as T-Nagar which offers a wonderful insight into the kaleidoscopic milieu of sari and jewellery shops. It isn't just the locals who come to buy their Saris or gold here! Members of the Indian Diaspora from Singapore, Malaysia and other countries make the pilgrimage. Don't worry if you're not buying, the spectacle of simply watching others do the buying provides an insight into a uniquely Indian experience.

Time permitting, an early evening stroll along the four-and-a-half kilometre Marina Beach offers a great perspective of the city. Many fishing families derive their living from the waters off this beach. Sadly, many fishermen died and hundreds of boats were destroyed by the tsunami of December 2004. **(Chennai, GRT Grand Hotel) BLD**

## Day 3: Monday 15 January, Chennai – Mahabalipuram

### • Dakshinachitra Cultural Centre

### • Traditional Lunch

### • Tamil Folk Dances

Today we drive the short distance from Chennai to Mahabalipuram. On the way, we stop to discover some aspects of traditional village life at the Dakshinachitra Cultural Centre. The name Dakshinachitra literally translates to 'Vision of the South' and this Cultural Centre is a living museum that offers visitors a historical perspective of South India. Spread over a four-hectare site, it comprises a superb collection of reconstructed houses from all over South India. There are also working craftsmen and well-described arts and artefacts which help set the scene for the start of your South Indian experience. We will have the opportunity to observe and photograph various cooking and ceremonial activities taking place for the harvest festival of Pongal. Lunch will include traditional Pongal delicacies and there will be a private performance of a range of Tamil folk dances. We will be guided by a member of the Madras Craft Foundation which is the driving force behind this world-class centre. There will be some free time in the late afternoon and evening to relax and enjoy the coastal town of Mahabalipuram. **(Overnight Mahabalipuram, Ideal Beach Resort) BLD**

## Day 4: Tuesday 16 January, Mahabalipuram

### • The Five Rathas

### • Bas Relief

### • Arjuna's Penance

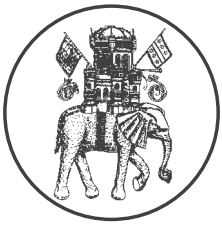
### • Krishna's Butterball

### • Lecture on the traditions of stone sculpting

### • Optional Writing and Photography workshop

Mahabalipuram is regarded as having given birth to the first Tamil dynasty of any real consequence to emerge after the fall of the Gupta Empire. It achieved the height of its power around the 5th-8th century AD. There are numerous temples and rock carvings to explore here, most of them completed during the reign of Narasimha Varam I (630-68) and Narasimha Varam II (700-28). Narasimha Varam I was also known as Mahamalla ('Great Wrestler') and it is from this that the town derives its name. The tsunami in 2004 caused loss of life and some damage to the building around Mahabalipuram, including the famous shore temple – said to be one of the most photographed structures in India. However, the giant wave also unearthed some previously hidden structures, sparking a new burst of archaeological activity. One of the main attractions of the area's sculptures is that they reveal scenes of every day life as opposed to the usual depictions of gods and goddesses. The massive relief carving known as Arjuna's Penance shows animals, deities and other semi-divine creatures as well as fables from classical Hindu texts.

This morning you may wake up in Mahabalipuram to some unique sounds that echo along the street of this small coastal town. They are the sounds of tapping ... the sounds of chisel on stone. Mahabalipuram is famous not only for its shore temple but also for the two hundred stonemasons who live here and literally 'carve their living' by turning lumps of granite into statues of the gods. There will be much to see today as we wander around the town looking at the intricate and ancient carvings as well as seeing some of the modern and highly derivative work. We will have a lecture on the traditions of stone sculpting by Mr R Natesan who has worked within the Archaeological Society and has also written a guidebook on the heritage monuments at Mahabalipuram. The afternoon



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will be at leisure for strolling or, for those interested, there will be a writing and photography workshop. **(Overnight Mahabalipuram, Ideal Beach Resort) BLD**

## Day 5: Wednesday 17 January, Mahabalipuram – Tiruvannamalai

- Arunachala Sacred Mountain
- Ashram of Ramana Maharshi

This morning we take a four-hour journey by coach to Tiruvannamalai. This city has a population of around fifty thousand, but during the November-December Full Moon Festival the number of people here can swell to almost one million with pilgrims from around the nation arriving for the Shiva Fire Festival. This is a venerable location, where according to the ancient scriptures Shiva appeared as a pillar of fire. The sacred mountain known as Arunachala dominates its landscape. Sages and saints have resided on its escarpments for many centuries. The massive Shiva Temple is dedicated to the element of Fire and is one of the few such shrines which welcome non-Hindus into the Sanctum to participate in the Puja (offering) ceremony.

We will next spend some quiet and reflective time at the Ashram of Ramana Maharshi. Ramana Maharshi was a guru who died in 1950 after fifty years of peaceful contemplation, including twenty years spent in caves on the slopes of Arunachala. His writings appeal through their universal yet non-didactic messages. The literature concerning the Ashram states: 'There are no rigid rules or schedules for activities and the homely environment leaves visitors free to pursue their individual spiritual practice'. Even the monkeys and the peacocks that amble through the grounds of this ashram seem to be in a state of contemplation. **(Overnight Tiruvannamalai, Hotel Aruna Anantha) BLD**

## Day 6: Thursday 18 January, Tiruvannamalai

- Walk around sacred mountain (3-4 hrs)
- Walk up Skandashram for panorama

Today is a walking day. In the morning we do the three-to-four hour walk around the base of the sacred mountain. This will take us through a number of villages and many small shrines and temples.

After lunch, there is an option either to relax around the Ashram or walk up to Skandashram where there is a vast, visually stunning panorama of the temple and an excellent opportunity to photograph the perspective of the concentric walls and the nine gopurams representing the nine orifices of the body. The view also takes in the expansive gardens which now nurture the nurseries of the Reforestation Society. **(Overnight Tiruvannamalai, Hotel Aruna Anantha) BLD**

## Day 7: Friday 19 January, Tiruvannamalai – Pondicherry

- Cingee Fort
- Aurobindo Ashram
- French Quarter and Museum
- Evening dinner at the French restaurant "Le Club"

Today we drive from Tiruvannamalai to Pondicherry. Before reaching Pondicherry we stop for a walk through the ruins of Cingee Fort. Much of this vast complex is well preserved and although we won't have time to explore the whole area we will climb the twelve hundred steps of Rajagiri. This will take about one hour. Those not wanting to climb can amble along the base of the fort.

Cingee fort, an extensive and well-preserved fifteenth-century Vijayanagar citadel, is only thirty-seven kilometres east of Tiruvannamalai. Various armies secured the fort over the centuries, including the army of Adil Shah from Bijapur who, in 1648, renamed the complex Badshahbad. Thirty years later it was claimed by the Marathas (1677). Twenty years later the Mughals took it. They were eventually defeated, not by an invading army, but by a bout of malaria. The French held the fort from around 1760 but they were eventually defeated by the British at Pondicherry at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Today the fort is claimed by the occasional tour group, by local picnickers, or by a film crew using this dramatic location to shoot yet another good guy/bad guy Tamil blockbuster. The only permanent occupants of the fort seem to be the eagles and lizards. The fort is constructed on three hilltops: Krishnagiri to the north, Chanrayandurg to the south, and Rajagiri to the east. The hilltop structures are joined by five kilometres of fortified walls, fifteen metres thick in some places. Buildings within the fort complex include a granary, a Shiva temple and a mosque. The most prominent building is the recently restored audience hall, Kalyana Mahal, which contains a pagoda-like structure which was used for wedding ceremonies. Elephant- and horse stables are dotted throughout the complex.

After visiting this fascinating, vast, citadel, we drive to Pondicherry in order to immerse ourselves in this bustling city that represents the final bastion of the French influence in India. There are some excellent French patisseries and restaurants in Pondicherry. A day of exploring will build up a serious appetite that will be well satiated by dinner at Le Club. Before the dinner however, we will have the opportunity to visit the world-famous Aurobindo Ashram and photograph some of the activities including the paper-making enterprise.

Pondicherry now has a population of around 800,000 souls. Although originally an earlier eighteenth-century French colony, it is now very much an Indian town, seemingly choked with cars and bicycles. There are, however, a few enduring pockets of French culture and influence, not least of which is the dress of the traffic police; with their red, peaked caps, they look like Parisian Gendarmes!

Archaeologists have evidence of two earlier settlements in this area. One was called Podhigal and was regarded as the abode of the Hindu saint, Agastya. The other settlement was called Vedapuri, a place where scholars would study the Vedas (sacred texts). Recent excavations have revealed significant trade connections with ancient Rome and Greece

The French arrived here in 1673 but after only twenty years the Dutch defeated them. Four years later, however, the French reclaimed the area (1697). Many of them regarded their trading post as the germ of what would become a French empire in India. The British, however, were always keen to keep the upper hand in the empire stakes and they seized the settlement three times during the eighteenth century in a series of battles that became known as the 'Carnatic Wars'. Much of the conflict during this time was an unofficial war between the British and the French East India companies. Finally, in 1814, Britain returned Pondicherry to the French who secured their presence over the next one hundred and forty years. In 1954, six years after India achieved independence from the British, France finally relinquished control of Pondicherry to what became known as the 'Union Territory of India'.

Aurobindo Ashram, the ashram we visit, was founded by Sri Aurobindo in 1926. This ashram is one of the most popular in India with western visitors. It is also one of the wealthiest. The teachings here

combine the spiritual tenets of yoga with aspects of modern science and philosophy. After Aurobindo's death the spiritual authority of the ashram passed to one of his devotees, a French woman who became known as The Mother. She died in 1973 at the age of ninety-seven.

Today Aurobindo Ashram is the biggest show in town and wields extraordinary influence over the cultural and even political affairs of Pondicherry. It operates many enterprises, including high quality handmade paper which is exported around the world. We will have an opportunity to see and photograph the paper being made. **(Overnight Pondicherry, Hotel Annamalai International) BLD**

#### **Day 8: Saturday 20 January, Pondicherry - Tanjore** **• Gangakondacholapuram and Dharasuram - Chola Temples**

Today we explore two of India's most magnificent Hindu temples. The two Chola temples date back to the tenth century. These quiet places with some unique architecture are a little off the main tourist track but are well worth the time we spend here.

Gangakondacholapuram is a Shiva temple built by the Chola emperor Rajendra I (1012-1044). It is no longer used for Hindu worship but it's well worth the time to explore the splendid carvings of Shiva, Ganesh and Nataraja. The original temple was made up of three main sections, with each of its four gates protected by the goddess Kali. Now only the main section remains. The ornate gardens of this temple are a testimony to its sophisticated watering systems. A stairway descends to the well through the sculptured body of a lion. It is thought that the Chola Kings poured water from the Ganges into it so that there would be a permanent source in which the gods could bathe.

The temple at Dharasuram was built by Raja Raja II (1146-63). It is very well preserved with fine columns and unique miniature sculptures. One large sculpture at this temple depicts a lion attacking an elephant, this is said to symbolize the triumph of Hinduism over Buddhism. Another stunning feature of this temple is the Shiva lingam in the main shrine. It stands at the end of a long hall and is illuminated by natural light from sunrise to sunset. To the right of this is the saint Kannappa who sacrificed his eye to Shiva. Further along is Sarasvati, the goddess of wisdom and education. After visiting the temples, we drive to Tanjore. **(Overnight Tanjore, Hotel Ideal River View Resort) BLD**

#### **Day 9: Sunday 21 January 21, Tanjore**

- Brihadishwara Temple**
- Saraswati Mahal Library & Art Gallery**

Today we explore the city of Tanjore, capital of the ancient Chola kings. We will focus on the ancient palace as well as the library of thirty thousand palm-leaf manuscripts. In the early evening we retreat to the Ideal River Resort for some relaxation, discussion and, for those interested, a writing/photography workshop.

Tanjore, also known as Thanjavur, is a small town with a population around 220,000. This place was the ancient capital of the Chola kings. The town is dominated by the enormous tower of the Brihadishwara temple that was built in 1010. This temple is regarded as the pinnacle of Chola architecture and is one of only a few places in India that has UNESCO World Heritage classification.

The temple is dedicated to Shiva and it possesses many examples of the dancing Shiva. The construction of this temple represents an extraordinary achievement akin to the building of the Egyptian pyramids.

There is very little building stone around Tanjore so all the building stone would have been transported over a great distance. The dome of the temple is made from a single piece of granite which was hauled into place along a four kilometre earthwork ramp. There are two hundred and fifty linghams enshrined along the outer temple wall and inscriptions on the wall record the names of dancers, poets and musicians – a reminder of the significance of this region to the development of classical art. A huge Nandi (bull) looks towards the inner sanctum of the temple.

The Tanjur Palace and museum, with its vast halls, long corridors and shady courtyards is a very rewarding place to explore. It was constructed around 1550 by the Nayaks of Madurai and partly by the Marathas. The art gallery is located inside one of the palace halls and has a superb collection of Chola bronzes dating from the ninth to the twelfth century. Also inside the palace complex is the Saraswati Mahal Library. Established around 1700, the library contains a collection of over thirty thousand palm leaf and paper manuscripts. **(Overnight Tanjore, Hotel Ideal River View Resort) BLD**

#### **Day 10: Monday 22 January, Tanjore - Trichy**

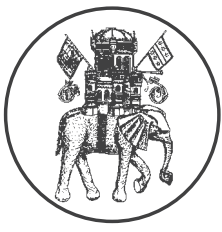
- Rituals on the banks of the Cauvery river at Amma Mandapam**
- Sri Rangam Vishnu Temple with views from the rooftop**
- Evening visit the Rock Fort Temple and bazaar**

Today we drive through fascinating landscapes observing village life and exploring the Sri Rangam Vishnu Temple, one of the largest temple complexes in India. The late afternoon thirty-minute climb up the Rock Fort temple provides a stunning finale to the day.

Trichy, also known as Tiruchirappalli, is a fascinating town with a relaxed ambiance and a deep history of more than two thousand years leading back to an original Chola citadel. The area changed hands many times between the Pallavas and the Pandyas during the first millennium AD. Eventually, in the 10th century, it fell into the hands of the Cholas. When the Chola Empire fell apart, Trichy came under the rule of the Vijayanagar emperors of Hampi until their defeat in 1565 by the armies of the Deccan Sultans. The present town, along with its most prominent landmark, the Rock Fort Temple, was built by the Nyaks of Madurai. In the eighteenth century it became one of the main centres around which, during the Carnatic wars the British and French struggled for supremacy in India.

Sri Rangam Vishnu Temple is regarded as one of the largest temple complexes in India. Covering sixty hectares, the temple comprises seven concentric walls and twenty-one gopurams. This temple enshrines a statue of Vishnu reclining on a great serpent. There are many stories surrounding this legend. One has it that this idol, known as Sri Ranganatha, was being transported across India to Sri Lanka by the sage Vibhisana. To rest from his efforts, he placed the statue on the ground. After a short while, when he was ready to continue his journey, he found that the statue had somehow bound itself to the earth. A hundred hands could not budge the idol, so a small temple was built over it. The temple complex which has since grown around the statue has been rebuilt and enlarged many times over centuries. Most of the extant buildings, including a grand hall of one thousand magnificently sculptured pillars, was constructed between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries.

This temple features on the Sacred Sites website [www.sacredsites.com/index.html](http://www.sacredsites.com/index.html) which provides the following information: 'Vishnu, the second deity of the trinity of Hindu gods, is responsible for the sustenance, protection and maintenance of the created



# South India Sojourn

from temple sculptures and spice gardens  
to classical dance and canal cruises

universe. A gentle, loving god representing the heart, he is the focus of intense devotional worship by a large percentage of the Indian population. To ward off the extraordinary perils that threaten creation, Vishnu frequently incarnates himself. He has appeared as Rama, Krishna, the Buddha and other incarnations. The Naanmugan Gopuram, is thirteen stories tall and completely covered with intricately carved, brightly painted statues of the many incarnations of Vishnu. More than being just an extraordinary expression of art, these sculptures function as three-dimensional story-books of Hindu mythology. Similar in purpose to the stained glass windows of Europe's medieval cathedrals, these beautiful sculptures were intended to visually communicate religious myths to a largely illiterate population. For 2000 years the temples of Srirangam have been a centre of Bhakti Yoga, which may be defined as the practice of devotional love of God as a spiritual path leading to enlightenment. Because of the generous financial support of the temple by numerous dynasties of ancient India, Srirangam has always been a haven for persons wishing to dedicate their lives to the practice of meditation and devotion. Many of India's most loved saints and sages have spent time at Srirangam, including the eleventh-century sage Ramanuja who lived and was buried in the temple grounds. Srirangam is also listed as one of the Nava Graha Sthalas, or temples representing the planets.'

This temple is superbly preserved with excellent carvings and numerous shrines to numerous gods. Non-Hindus can journey as far as the sixth wall but are not permitted into the gold-topped sanctum. The outer four walls are filled with bazaars and houses for pilgrims. An annual car festival (wooden chariot) is held here in January. The highly decorated chariot is pulled through the streets by dozens of devotees in homage to the gods.

The Rock Fort Temple is the most stunning landmark in the area. Situated eighty-three metres high on a massive rock, this temple towers over the city. It is dedicated to Vinayaka (another name for Ganesh). The half-hour climb up the steps to the summit is well worth the effort. **(Overnight Trichy, Hotel Sangam) BLD**

## Day 11: Tuesday 23 January Trichy – Madurai via Chettinad

- Jain Temple at Sittanavasal
- Pudukotai Fort and Museum
- Lunch at the Chettinad Mansion
- Chettinad Palace & other heritage houses of the Karraikudi merchants

On our way to Madurai we explore a Jain temple and then move on to the Chettinad museum and palace where we have lunch in the grand surrounds of the Chettinad Mansion.

The Sittanavasal Jain temple, high on a hill fifty-five kilometres south of Trichy, is said to contain some of the oldest paintings in South India. The name translates as 'Hill of the Yogis'. Many of the paintings are typical of the ninth-century Pandyan period and include exquisitely detailed pictures of animals, fish, ducks, people gathering lotuses from a pond, and two dancing figures. There are also inscriptions dating back to the ninth and tenth-centuries. Fresco paintings from the seventh-century can be seen on the ceiling.

The fine architecture of the Chettinad museum and palace reflects the wealth of the merchant classes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century. The Chettinad Palace is a multi-coloured pastiche of

architectural designs and flavours from many locales. Designed by Dr Chettiyar and constructed by local masons, its design in essence reflects the traditional architectural style of Chettinad. The construction material, decorative items and furnishings were mostly imported from East Asian countries and Europe. The marble was brought from Italy, chandeliers and teak from Burma, crockery from Indonesia, crystals from Europe, and wall-to-wall mirrors from Belgium. The woodwork and stonework were inspired by the houses in France and other European nations. **(Overnight Madurai, Fortune Pandiyan Hotel) BLD**

## Day 12: Wednesday 24 January, Madurai

- Meenakshi Temple
- Tirumalai Nayak Palace
- Teppakulam Tank
- Spice and vegetable market
- Home and gallery of Tanjore Artist, Dr Shobana Kumar who will talk on the traditions and processes involved in this particular style of painting

There's much to see around Madurai and today is spent strolling through the temple complex and immersing ourselves in the bustling spice and vegetable markets. We also have a talk on the unique traditions of Tanjore painting from local artist, Dr Shobana Kumar.

The vast Meenakshi Temple is spread over six hectares and dates back more than two thousand years to the time when Madurai was the capital of the Pandyan Kings. The temple has twelve towers, and there is a thriving bazaar between the outer and the inner walls which offers a great opportunity to hone bargaining skills. There is also a 'tailoring hall' at the temple. If tailoring were an Olympic sport these tailors would certainly be in the gold medal stakes.

Just north of the temple is the Madurai spice and vegetable market. A stroll through its labyrinthine laneways will be particularly stimulating to the olfactory senses and will offer a chance to experience something of the daily life of this town, away from the temple precinct. As well as a wide range of spices and vegetables there is also a large flower market where the temple flower sellers come to make their purchases. **(Overnight Madurai, Fortune Pandiyan Hotel) BLD**

## Day 13: Thursday 25 January, Madurai - Periyar (Kerala - 4hrs)

- Spice Garden tour
- Cruise on Lake Periyar, Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary

In the morning we leave the state of Tamil Nadu and enter the state of Kerala, driving through lush agricultural areas to Periyar, where we check into the Spice Village Plantation Resort. In the afternoon we shall tour its Spice Garden and also take a cruise on Lake Periyar.

The seventy-seven square kilometre Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary is one of the most popular in India. It is rich with bird life, bison, antelopes, monkeys and an estimated seven hundred elephants. There are also meant to be around thirty tigers in the sanctuary but sightings are very rare indeed. The twenty-six square kilometre lake was built by the British in 1895 to provide water to Madurai. A slow boat ride across the lake is a perfect way to relax, slow down and observe the flora and fauna. **(Overnight Periyar, Spice Village Eco Resort) BLD**

## Day 14: Friday 26 January, Periyar - Kumarakom

- **Optional trekking (3 hrs) with a forest guide, or**
- **Bullock cart visit to nearby villages**
- **Sunset cruise on backwaters**

In the morning there are options for trekking (for three hours) with a forest guide or you may prefer to visit nearby villages by Bullock cart. We drive then to the stunning Coconut Lagoon Heritage Backwater Resort, Kumarakom. There will be a sunset cruise on the backwaters. **(Overnight Kumarakom, Coconut Lagoon 5-star Heritage Backwater Resort) BLD**

## Day 15: Saturday 27 January, Kumarakom

- **Day at leisure**
- **Optional visit to the nearby Bird Sanctuary**

Today will be a day at leisure in order to allow you to relax, visit the nearby bird sanctuary, enjoy an Ayurvedic Massage at the resort's professional treatment centre, take time for writing and photography, or just relax in the lovely, peaceful environment. **(Overnight Kumarakom, Coconut Lagoon 5-star Heritage Backwater Resort) BLD**

## Day 16: Sunday 28 January, Kumarakom – Alleppey – Cochin

- **Boat ride along the canals**
- **Evening demonstration of martial arts**

After breakfast we transfer by boat across the Vembanad Lake to Alleppey and visit the smaller canals of the area. Here we will be guided by the Conservation Society on a Heritage Tour of this historic backwater town. The famous backwaters of Kerala comprise a vast network of lagoons, lakes, rivers and canals. They represent a unique geological formation and have led to an extraordinary way of life among the local inhabitants. A journey along these backwaters offers an understanding of the diversity and adaptability of the various communities. Although they are surrounded by water, many families still manage to keep livestock, including cows and pigs. They also cultivate lush vegetable gardens. Fishing is of course a mainstay and every conceivable device is used to lure the fish out of the water. Population growth, tourism and agriculture are adding pressures to the delicate ecology of these backwaters. There are twenty-nine major lakes in the Kerala backwater system, seven of which drain into the sea. Because of extensive land reclamation, the backwaters today are only a third of the size they were in the mid-nineteenth century and local environmental groups are lobbying to preserve that which remains of this unique area.

After our cruise we shall drive for approximately eighty minutes to Cochin. On arrival we shall check into Hotel Casino. There will be an evening demonstration of Kalaripayatu, Kerala Traditional Martial Arts. To watch this traditional martial art is almost to suspend belief. The swiftness and precision of movement is seriously mind-boggling. Many people believe that Kalaripayatu is in fact the source of all martial arts, though this has yet to be substantiated. The roots of the practice can be traced back to the twelfth-century. Masters of the art are called Gurukkal and they teach their students (male and female) inside a special arena called a Kalari which is a blend of gymnasium, school and temple. The Kalari is built according to ancient traditional principles; is always rectangular in shape and aligned east-west. Hindu deities are represented at each corner. **(Overnight Cochin, Casino Hotel) BLD**

## Day 17: Monday 29 January, Cochin

- **Fort Cochin,**
- **Spice Market**
- **International Pepper Exchange**
- **Afternoon at leisure**
- **Evening Performance of Kathakali**

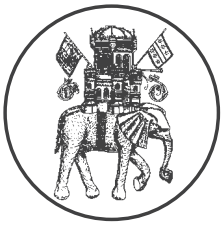
We spend four nights in Cochin (also known as Kochi) but it would take a lifetime to explore this place in depth. With a population of around 60,000, Cochin city has an eclectic mix of cultures, architecture and commerce, a pastiche of Portuguese, Chinese, Dutch, English, Jewish and, of course, Hindu influences. Here you will find the oldest Christian church in India as well as five hundred-year-old Portuguese houses. There are the famous cantilevered Chinese fishing nets (offering wonderful photographic opportunities), the sixteenth-century Synagogue with a small congregation that forms part of a very ancient Jewish community in India.

Cochin is set on a cluster of islands and peninsulas and is known for its narrow winding streets. It is also home to one of India's largest ports as well as a major naval base. The harbour is busy, with ferries as well as large merchant ships carrying on a vibrant trade that has helped define this locale for centuries. The Portuguese navigator, Vasco da Gama died in Cochin in 1524 and was buried here for fourteen years before his body was relocated to Lisbon. His tombstone lies inside St Francis Church, built in 1503 by the Franciscan friars.

First built in 1568, the Cochin Synagogue was destroyed by fire gunfire during a Portuguese raid in 1662 and was rebuilt two years later when the Dutch took over. The small structure has painted willow pattern floor tiles brought from Canton in China in the mid-eighteenth century. There was a much earlier Synagogue built in Kochangadi around 1344 but it has since disappeared; all that remains is a stone slab. The area around the synagogue is known as 'Jewtown' and is one of the centres of the Cochin spice trade. This area is crowded with stalls and shop fronts selling every imaginable type of spice. The whole area is permeated with a pungent odour of ginger, cardamom, cumin, turmeric, cloves and many other exotic aromas. There are still a number of prominent Jewish families in the area, 'though most of the younger people have migrated to Israel or the United States.

In Cochin we shall also visit the International Pepper Exchange. Pepper has always played an important role in the development of Indian domestic and international trade. The International Pepper Exchange was established in 1997 as a means of capitalising on more than fifty years vigorous trade in pepper. It has become a vibrant market place where buyers and sellers and even some growers gather to do deals and set prices. To watch this in action is to develop some understanding of the free market 'Indian style'.

After an afternoon at leisure for shopping and exploring we shall witness a performance of Kathakali. The word Kathakali literally translates to 'Story Play' and the Kathakali performance is actually a dramatized presentation of a narrative. Today around thirty plays are performed (originally there were around one hundred). Performances are based on the Hindu epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata as well as the Puranas. They address universal themes of good and evil, frailty and courage, poverty and prosperity, war and peace. They are performed across terrestrial or cosmic landscapes. These highly ritualised and vibrantly colourful plays can occupy many hours. Every movement and every sound becomes a symbolic gesture that adds to the narrative. **(Overnight Cochin, Casino Hotel) BLD**



# South India Sojourn

from temple sculptures and spice gardens  
to classical dance and canal cruises

## Day 18: Tuesday 30 January, Cochin

### • Cooking demonstration and meals by Nimmy Paul

Today is for exploring the flavours of Kerala with a day of personalized cooking demonstration with famed author, Nimmy Paul. Nimmy will host us at her home and explain a range of dishes which we then eat for lunch and dinner. Lunch will be a traditional "Sadhya" which is served on a banana leaf at marriages and festivals. Dinner will be a range of traditional Keralan dishes. **(Overnight Cochin, Casino Hotel) BLD**

## Day 19: Wednesday 31 January, Cochin

### • Morning visit to the Hilltop Palace

### • Afternoon conclusion, 'wrap up' session with Peter

### • Evening sunset cruise on Cochin Harbour and special Seafood dinner at Brunton Boatyard overlooking the harbour

Today we shall visit the hilltop palace at Cochin and this will be followed by a 'wrap up' session with Peter, discussing your own impressions of the extraordinary environment in which you have been travelling, your travel writing and/or photography. In the evening there will be a sunset cruise followed by a sumptuous seafood dinner overlooking Cochin's magnificent harbour. **(Overnight Cochin, Casino Hotel) BLD**

## Day 20: Thursday 1 February, Depart Cochin

The day is at leisure until your departure transfer to the airport to take your return flight to Australia. **B**

## Extension Tour - designed for those wishing to combine this tour with Sri Lanka, or further explore South India

### Day 1: Thursday 1 February, Cochin – Trissur – Guruvayoor – Cheruthery

After breakfast drive via Trissur and visit the Palace, continue to the Elephant Training centre and Guruvayoor (attached to the temple) and onto Cheruthery. **(Overnight, Cheruthery, 3-star heritage hotel, Hotel River Retreat) LD**

### Day 2: Friday 2 February, Cheruthery – Wyanad

Morning visit the Kerala Kalamandalam school of Performing Arts of Kerala. Here there will be a guided tour "Day with the Masters" to see various classes for dance and music in progress. Traditional lunch back at the hotel. In the afternoon drive four hours to Wyanad district and check into the Vythiri Resort. **(Overnight Wyanad, 3-star Vythiri Resort, set in virgin rainforest – Kutteram Cottages) BLD**

### Day 4: Saturday 3 February, Wyanad

Morning to relax at the resort, go for a short walk or enjoy a massage. On site there is "Serena Spa" for Aromatherapy, Marma and Thai style massage and an Ayurvedic massage centre. In the afternoon we travel by jeep to Tholpetty Sanctuary where there are good chances for seeing elephant, various deer and sloth bears. On the way back visit the Tirunelli Temple. **(Overnight Wyanad, 3-star Vythiri Resort) BLD**

## Day 5: Sunday 4 February, Wyanad

The day is free either to relax with more massage or go for a trek up to the Edakkal Caves, this ancient natural cave is at 1000m above sea level exhibits Stone Age carvings, paintings and inscriptions. Note: part of the walk is quite steep. **(Overnight Wyanad, 3-star Vythiri Resort) BLD**

## Day 6: Monday 5 February, Wyanad – Calicut – Cochin

After breakfast descend from the hills to Calicut, visit the boat building yard and weaving centre at Beypore. After lunch at Kadavu Resort, drive 4 hours to Cochin and check into Kamyakam Haven Resort (3\*). This quiet resort overlooks the backwaters and is closer to the airport for the 7am check in the next morning for the flight to Colombo. **(Overnight Cochin, Kamyakam Haven Resort) BLD**

## Day 7: Tuesday 6 February, Cochin – Colombo

Early breakfast and transfer to Cochin airport for the Sri Lankan airlines flight to Colombo at 1000hrs, or return to Australia. **B**

**Tour 2701 A Sri Lankan Odyssey: Elephants, Spices, Temples & Oceans** commences today. For the detailed itinerary please contact ASA or refer to our website where you can download the detailed itinerary in PDF format.

## Extension Program Tour Price

The cost of the extension program will depend on the number of people travelling as follows:

\$2215.00	1 person travelling by air-conditioned Ambassador car or
\$1460.00	2-3 people travelling by air-conditioned Toyota Qualis
\$1170.00	4-6 people travelling by air-conditioned 11 seater tempo Traveller
\$1050.00	7-10 people travelling by air-conditioned 14 seater Tempo Traveller
\$250.00	Single supplement

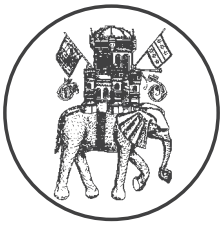
### Above program cost includes:

- Accommodation in twin-share rooms at the 3-star heritage Hotel River Retreat [www.riverretreat.in](http://www.riverretreat.in); 3-star Vythiri Resort [www.vythiriresort.com](http://www.vythiriresort.com) and 3-star Kamyakam Haven Resort [www.kallarackalresorts.com](http://www.kallarackalresorts.com)
- Trained escort to accompany you
- All meals during the trip
- All entrance fees for sightseeing places
- Jeep safari and guided trip to Edakkal Caves
- Day with the Masters at Kerala Kalamandalam
- Bottled water on board the vehicle and at meals
- Tips for trekking and park guides, portage on check in and out of hotels.

### Above program does not include:

- any massages or health treatments at Vythiri Resort
- Beverages with meals other than bottled water
- Personal spending money
- Airport-hotel transfers if not travelling on group flights
- Luggage in excess of 20 kg (44 lbs).

**For booking conditions - please refer to page 11 of this itinerary.**



# Terms & Conditions

## TOUR PRICE

**\$5580.00 Land Content Only** (📅 book before 30 June 2006)

**\$5780.00 Land Content Only**

**\$1380.00 Single Supplement**

**TBA Economy Class airfare, Singapore Airlines**

**Departures:** MEL/SYD/BNE/ADL

**Note:** for the Extension program price - refer to previous page

### Tour Price (Land Content Only) includes:

- Accommodation in twin-share rooms with private facilities ranging from 2-star hotels to 5-star deluxe eco-resorts.
- All meals, indicated in the tour itinerary where: **B**=breakfast, **L**=lunch, **D**=evening meal
- Bottled water during day excursions and all meals
- Transportation by deluxe air-conditioned motorcoach
- Airport-hotel transfers if travelling on group flights
- Porterage at hotels
- Entrance fees to all National Parks, museums and other cultural sites; camera fees for still cameras, excursions by boat, special dance performances, full-day cooking course with Nimmy Paul.
- National guide to accompany the group throughout the tour
- Lecture and site-visit program
- All tips to National and local guides, guest lecturers, restaurant staff, driver and coach cleaner and shoe-keeping fees at temples.

### Tour Price (Land Content Only) does not include:

- Airfare: Australia-Chennai, Cochin-Australia
- Beverages with meals other than bottled water
- Personal spending money
- Airport-hotel transfers if not travelling on group flights
- Luggage in excess of 20 kg (44 lbs)
- Travel insurance
- Tourist visa for India.

## BOOKING CONDITIONS

### Confirmation of Your Booking

When we have received your reservation form together with the deposit or full payment for the tour, and assuming there is a place available on the tour, we will send you confirmation of your booking and relevant travel details. It is from this moment that a firm contract exists between you and Australians Studying Abroad Pty Ltd (hereafter called ASA) on the basis of this itinerary, together with ASA's general brochure, and any brochure or itinerary amendments communicated to you, these booking conditions and the travel details sent to you. If a place is not available we will return your payment. ASA does however reserve the right to refuse to accept a booking without necessarily giving a reason.

### What is included in the Tour Price

A list of what is included (and what is not included) in the price is given in the terms & conditions section of this itinerary (see above).

### Changes in Tour Price

The price of ASA's tours may change with currency fluctuations, airfare increases, or if the group size is under fifteen. We shall, however, do all in our power to maintain the published price.

### Cancellation Fees

Refund of deposit, less \$385.00 service fee (\$350.00 + \$35.00 GST), will be given when cancellation is made over 75 days in advance of the commencement of the tour (Day 1 of the itinerary). Cancellation received after that period will be subject to the following cancellation charges:

Days Prior	Cancellation Fee
75-46 days prior	25%
45-31 days prior	50%
30-15 days prior	75%
14-0 days prior	100%

**We take the day on which you cancel as being that on which we receive written confirmation of cancellation.**

## TO MAKE A RESERVATION

Please complete the **ASA RESERVATION FORM** and send it to Australians Studying Abroad together with your deposit of \$500.00 per person (or \$600.00 AUD per person if taking the extension program) in cash or cheque (payable to *Australians Studying Abroad*). It is important that you read the Booking Conditions at this stage, and that you **sign the reservation form**. If you are booking within 75 days of the tour full payment is required.

### Travel Insurance

It is a condition of travel that you are covered by some form of international travel insurance. Note, travel insurance may not cover costs incurred due to a pre-existing illness or other conditions. Your insurance can be arranged through ASA. All participants must provide no later than 75 days prior to the commencement of the program:

- a copy of your travel insurance certificate
- the emergency telephone no. of your insurance company.

### Passport Details

All participants must provide no later than 75 days prior to the commencement of the program a photocopy of the front page of their current passport.

### Confirmation

Upon receipt of your reservation form and our acceptance of your deposit payment we will send you confirmation of your booking. It is from this moment that a firm contract exists between you and Australians Studying Abroad. After this you are subject to the cancellation fees as stated in the Booking Conditions. With the confirmation we send details of flights. During the year you will also receive tour documents relevant to this tour (eg hotel lists, reading lists, tour handbooks etc).

### Paying the Balance

Balance of your tour price (full price minus \$500) must be paid to Australians Studying Abroad 75 days before you depart. You will receive an invoice from Australians Studying Abroad at this time. Upon receipt of payment we send you a receipt.

### Note on the Airfare

When travelling on the group air package, you are not obliged to return home immediately your tour ends. You must, however, nominate a return date on your reservation form.

### Single Supplement

Payment of the single supplement will ensure that you are provided with a **double or twin room (as single) throughout the program**. The number of single rooms available is extremely limited. People wishing to take the single supplement are therefore advised to book well in advance.

### Payment by Credit Card

Payment by credit card will incur the following card service fees:  
Mastercard, Visa or Bankcard: 1.85%  
Diners Club: 2.7%

### Terms & Conditions

ASA's tours require, on occasion, a substantial amount of physical exertion. The ASA RESERVATION FORM requests disclosure of all relevant medical conditions, physical or mental disabilities or any other related information which may affect the ability to fully participate in the activities forming a tour. The purpose of seeking this information is to assist ASA in determining the suitability of a tour participant for a particular tour, to identify those circumstances where unjustifiable hardship may result to ASA, and to address how ASA may be able to make 'reasonable accommodation' to cater for those tour participants, where only a minor modification may be needed.

To assist participants with what should be disclosed, ASA has graded its tours in terms of personal endurance. ASA also provides a detailed itinerary for each tour which describes the activities on a day-by-day basis. As indicated above, the itinerary should be considered as a guide to the educational program rather than as an exact and definitive list of activities.

The information provided in your reservation form will be treated in the strictest confidence. If ASA has any concerns based on the information provided by you, we shall contact you to discuss those concerns, and may request further information or clarification of the information previously provided.

It is a condition of travel that all participants agree to accept ASA's directions in relation to their suitability to participate in activities undertaken on the tour, and that ASA retains the sole discretion to direct a tour participant to refrain from a particular activity on part of the tour. Furthermore, ASA also reserves the right to reject a participant from further participation on its tours, or cancel the participation on a tour of any client whose behaviour is in the opinion of a representative of the company causing excessive distress, damage or annoyance to anyone or anyone's property. Our responsibility for that client will cease immediately and no compensation will be paid for any loss.

Australians Studying Abroad Pty Ltd (hereafter called ASA) gives notice that all tickets and coupons are issued through ASA, and all arrangements for transport or hotel accommodation are made by ASA as Agent upon the condition that ASA shall not be liable for any injury, damage, loss, accident, delay or irregularity caused by defect in any vehicle, or through the acts or defaults of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour, or otherwise in connection therewith, or of any hotel proprietor or servant. The insurance of baggage and the care of personal articles is entirely the responsibility of the tour participant. The tour operator shall not be liable for any loss of or damage to personal property. ASA accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to the delays or changes in motor, air or other services, sickness, weather, strikes, war quarantine or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the passenger. The transport companies or firms, shall be exempt from all liability in respect of any detention, delay, loss, damage sickness or injury however and by whomsoever caused and of whatever kind occurring of or to the passenger at any time when the passenger is not on board a carrier or conveyance used or operated by the transport companies or firms. The passage contract in use by the transport companies or firms concerned shall constitute the sole contract between those firms and the passenger. All tickets, coupons and orders are issued subject to these terms and conditions. In the event of it being considered desirable to withdraw all of the arrangements, the net deposits paid will be returned to the members, and upon the tendering of the same, all liability of the organiser in respect thereof shall cease. ASA also reserves the right to modify the itineraries in any way thought desirable. The tour costs are based on fares and tariffs which will apply from date of booking but subject to unexpected price increases or exchange rate fluctuations. Any other IATA or non-IATA carrier may be used apart from the carriers featured in this folder. This brochure is issued on the sole responsibility of the tour operator. It is not issued on behalf of and does not commit the airline mentioned therein or any airlines whose services are used in the course of the tour.