

Southern India

Blue Dot Travel

Go somewhere different





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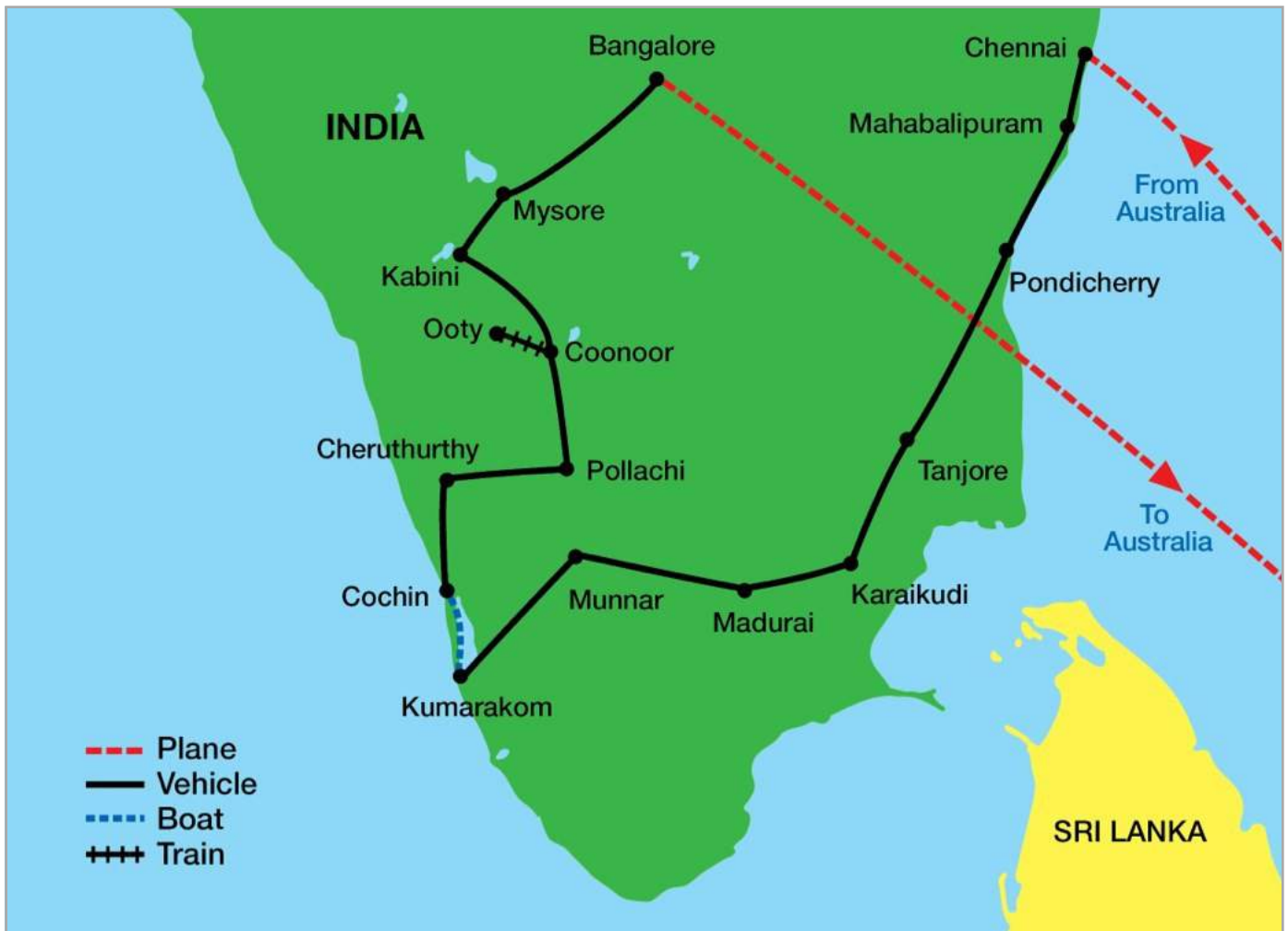
SOUTHERN INDIA

Southern India is dramatically different to the North. It has wide open spaces, is generally very green and very fertile. There is much variation of history, landscapes and people. On this tour, you'll learn about the region's ancient, medieval and more recent colonial history. You will visit small villages, larger townships and even larger cities and observe the locals go about their day. In the villages you'll be greeted with wonderful smiles from children and adults alike. You'll also see a plethora of wildlife in world class national parks. If you appreciate your food, the dishes from this part of the world are outstanding. You'll have the opportunity to try the different cuisines from the many regions that Southern India offers. Every day could be considered a highlight however, the "highlight of the highlights" could be summarised as following;

- The surreal, house boat experience on the tranquil backwaters of Kerala. The sun set will blow your mind away!
- The stunning sounds, smells and amazing scenes of the elephant festival at Wadakancherry. The festival is relatively undiscovered from a tourist perspective and you're unlikely to see another European person amongst the thousands of locals.
- The tranquility of Kumarkom. Indulge yourself in a local style massage and then "float" away.
- Cochi's Chinese fishing port and the overall buzz of this wonderful colonial city. A great city to stroll and soak up the atmosphere.
- Nagahole National Park. You may think you are in Africa!
- Mysore's markets and Palaces.

Enough said – go see them for yourself!

SOUTHERN INDIA - ITINERARY



Day 1 DEPART AUSTRALIA

Welcome to Chennai! (Flight schedule to be advised). Arrive at Chennai International airport and after clearing immigration and customs, you will be met by your guide and transferred to your hotel. Overnight at The Residency Tower. Meals in flight and in hotel subject to arrival times.

Day 2 CHENNAI / MAHABALIPURAM (01 hour)

This morning you'll explore the city of Chennai beginning with the Kapaleeshwar Temple, St Thomas Cathedral and Marina Beach Drive. Kapaleeshwar Temple is a fine example of eight century Pallavan architecture and is the oldest temple in the city – fragments of inscriptions dating back to 1250 AD can be found here. St Thomas Cathedral is an impressive Gothic style structure built in 1898. It has an ornate interior and magnificent stained-class windows and a towering steeple. Marina Beach connecting Fort St George and St Thomas Basilica (almost 5 kms) was built between 1881 and 1886. It has been described as "one of the most beautiful marine promenades in the world" Optional: Peacock Trail: An easy walk through Mylapore, exploring fascinating stories hidden away in the mundane rituals of daily life. Stories behind everyday sights, stories of Gods and demons, of ancient customs and symbolisms, and of Mylapore and Madras. This afternoon drive to

Mahabalipuram and on arrival check into your hotel. Overnight - Radisson Blu Resort Temple Bay. *B/D*

Day 3 MAHABALIPURAM

This morning after breakfast begin your sightseeing of Mahabalipuram with a visit to the 7th Century Mahabalipuram's sculpture-rich landscape - from the ruins of the Shore Temple with hundreds of Nandi bull statues looking seaward, to the Krishna's butterball, a glacial erratic precariously perched upon the bedrock. Continue on past Arjuna's Penance - a beautiful narrative sculpted onto a single rock-face narrating a story from the epic poem, Mahabharata, optimizing the rock fissures and cracks. Then visit the ruins of the rest of the Panch Rathas remain in silent testimony to the skill of the carvers who created them. Named for the Pandava brothers who are the heroes of the Mahabharat epic, they are architecturally ambitious and significant for the level of intricacy they sought to replicate in stone. Finally, listen to the legend of the vanquishing of the buffalo-demon, Mahishasura by Goddess Durga at the rock-cut mandapas or cave temples at the far-end of the



town. Return back to you hotel. Afternoon will be at your leisure to enjoy the facilities at the hotel. Overnight - Radisson Blu Resort Temple Bay. *B/D*



Day 04
MAHABALIPURAM /
PONDICHERRY (2 hours)

After breakfast this morning you'll drive to Pondicherry and on arrival, check into your hotel. This afternoon you'll spend time at Auroville, the

"City of Dawn" conceived as a utopian, futuristic city by The Mother, Mirra Alfassa, where people from different religions and nations could live together in peace. Its most iconic landmark is a beautiful golden circle that was undertaken as a community project by others who shared the vision of utopia. The meditation centre reflects the Mother's spiritual beliefs and a marble chamber with the largest manmade crystal in the world. Auroville is a tranquil community that engages in a wide variety of crafts from musical instruments to pottery, as also has cottage industries for textiles, aromatic products, cheeses, among others. Overnight - Maison Perumal. *B/D*

Day 05
PONDICHERRY

After breakfast you'll explore Pondicherry. Spend the day imbibing the quintessential colonial flavour of Pondicherry, a former colony of France. Walk through the canary-coloured town along streets bearing French names lined with structures erected by French historical personages. Tucked away amidst the colonial quarter, White Town are a few distinct grey structures that belong to the Aurobindo Ashram - a spiritual centre that has drawn followers from far and wide, and where the remains of Sri Aurobindo, a fiery revolutionist and philosopher-poet lie. Then continue onto the Manakula Vinayagar Temple dedicated to Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed god in Hindu mythology - and perhaps have a chance to be blessed by the temple's benign pachyderm. Return back to you hotel. Afternoon will be at your leisure to enjoy the facilities at the hotel. Overnight - Maison Perumal. *B/D*



Day 06
PONDICHERRY /
TANJORE (4 hours)

Today we drive to Tanjore with a stop along the way at Chidambaram Temple. The temple has influenced worship, architecture, sculpture and performance

art for over two millennium, and renovations have been carried out successively by the Pallava, Chola, Pandya, Vijayanagara and Chera royals throughout the ancient and pre-medieval periods. Chidambaram is the birthplace of the sculpture and bronze image representation of Lord Shiva as the cosmic dancer, Nataraja that has since become notable as a symbol of Hinduism. Then visit Gangaikonda Cholapura, built during medieval India and erected as the capital of the Cholas by Rajendra Chola I, the son and successor of Rajaraja Chola. Today, the ancient city exists as a small forlorn village in the Ariyalur district of Tamil Nadu, India. Continue your drive to Tanjore and on arrival check into your hotel. Overnight at Svatma. *B/D*

Day 07
TANJORE

This morning your guide will take you to the ramparts of the Shivaganga Fort to visit the magnificent Brihadeshvara Temple Complex. Considered to be among the finest examples of Chola architecture, this carved granite tribute to Lord Shiva was designed to evoke the power and strength of the Chola Empire in 1010 AD. The octagonal pinnacle of the temple is intricately carved out of a single granite block. Even though the temple is a designated UNESCO world heritage site, it continues to function as a regular temple and is open for worship. Return to your hotel then in the afternoon visit the Bronze Casting + Bronze Gallery and Veena makers. Of Thanjavur's many local arts, the ancient techniques of bronze casting is still practised in small communities. Watch the process of bronze casting, as intricate mud sculptures are dipped into molten brass, to create beautiful artefacts. The veena is a stringed instrument, somewhat akin to a zither, which is vital to Carnatic and Hindustani styles of music. For generations, master craftsmen from this city have made this instrument by hand and supplied it to maestros and exponents of Carnatic music across the peninsula. Overnight - Svatma. *B/D*

Day 08
TANJORE / KARAIKUDI (2 hours 30 mins)

This morning you will attend the chanting of Veda by priests with the inherent meanings explained, training to chant Gayathri Mantra and Shanti Mantra. After breakfast depart to Karaikudi by road and on arrival check into the hotel. This afternoon, visit a traditional Chettinad home to learn about the customs and traditions that guide the design of these beautiful edifices. Most Chettinad mansions have a formal pillared hall which is usually the domain of the males in the house where they receive guests and business associates. Each pillar is created out of a single trunk! Burma Teak and Rosewood dominate in these mansions and create warm spaces for the family which are an architectural delight. Overnight - The Bangala. *B/D*

Day 09
KARAIKUDI

You'll visit Karaikudi, Devakottai and tile factory. The region of Tamil Nadu that surrounds the towns of Karaikudi and Devakottai is what is collectively known as Chettinad. The Chettians are known for their business prowess and make up the wealthy merchants of the South, and who made their fortunes not only in India but also in Burma, Malaysia, Vietnam and Sri Lanka. While many of them have moved to larger metros, their ancestral homes remain in Chettinad. Start your sightseeing with the town of Chettinad, hosting grand mansions with pillared hallways, marble floors, and other embellishments. Follow this, with a visit to a tile factory where you can watch the process that went into the making of the ornate floors of the Chettinad mansions. Late afternoon meet the hotel chef for an exploratory journey of Chettinad cuisine at the The Bangala kitchen. You'll enjoy a cooking demonstration plus meal. Chettinad is best known for its fiery cuisine that makes the most of the spices traded over the peninsula. Overnight - The Bangala. *B/D*

Day 10

KARAIKUDI / MADURAI (2 HOURS)

This morning after breakfast drive to Madurai and on arrival check into your hotel. After lunch explore the Meenakshi Temple Complex. The temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva – who in this context is known as Sundareshvara (the Handsome One) and his consort, Parvati who is known in this region as Meenakshi (the Fish-Eyed Goddess). Then, you'll take a heritage walk of Madurai. Madurai, a flourishing market town since at least the 2nd century BC, the centre of power for many dynasties and a seat of divinity from time immemorial. In a city that has been so much to so many, is it any wonder that you stumble upon stories wherever you go? Join Story trails on a short walk through this ancient city. Overnight - The Gateway Hotel Pasumalai. *B/D*

Day 11

MADURAI / MUNNAR (5.5 hours)

After breakfast this morning drive to Munnar and on arrival check into your hotel. Afternoon at your leisure to enjoy the hotel facilities. Overnight - Windermere Estate Plantation And Retreat. *B/D*

Day 12

MUNNAR

This morning after a leisurely breakfast you'll take a trek towards Dolmen Houses (2 hours) and on the return enjoy a Picnic lunch at a scenic spot. Return to your resort. This afternoon proceed on a tea trail, from a visit to the lush, verdant slopes of a tea estate where you can get a glimpse into an industry that is over a hundred years old and learn the story behind your morning "cuppa". Next is a visit to the Tea Museum, which houses curios, photographs and machineries representing a turning point for the tea industry in the region, as also some colonial-style furniture. Overnight at Windermere Estate Plantation Retreat. *B/L/D*

Day 13

MUNNAR / KUMARAKOM (5.5 Hours)

After breakfast this morning depart to Kumarakom. Upon arrival check into the hotel and enjoy the wonderful hotel facilities and gardens.. Overnight at Coconut Lagoon. *B/D*

Day 14

KUMARAKOM

The tranquil backwaters are the perfect destination to relax, meditate and stretch your body mind and spirit to a new dimension. Enjoy a privately guided yoga session in the peaceful haven of your surroundings. Kerala is also home to the ancient science of Ayurveda. Relax your body under the expert hands of an ayurvedic masseuse. After breakfast, drive out to Vechoor village and visit the charming Phillip Kutty Farm. Beautifully situated along the backwaters, the farm grows coconut, spices, fruit, and much more. The backwaters add their influence to the food at the farm with fish, duck, and poultry featuring prominently alongside fruit and vegetables. Enjoy the sunset with a cruise. Overnight at Coconut Lagoon. *B/D*



Day 15

KUMARAKOM / BACKWATERS

After breakfast this morning drive to Alleppey and on arrival, board your houseboat. One of the most memorable experiences for any traveller is the opportunity to take a boat journey on the backwaters of Kerala. This bewildering labyrinth of shimmering waterways, composed of lakes, canals, lined with dense vegetation preserves rural Keralite lifestyle that is completely cut off from the outside world. While on the cruise you will get to witness the real culture and life style of Kerala countryside, where you will see the wealth of paddy crops as you relax in the comfort of your houseboat and watch the lives of people on the banks of the lake. Overnight - Houseboat. *B/L/D*

Day 16

BACKWATERS / COCHIN

After breakfast this morning disembark from the Houseboat and drive to Cochin. A true melting pot in every sense, Cochin or Kochi, is one of the most dynamic, vibrant and



energetic cities in South India. One of the most important trading posts on the Spice Route, Cochin sports several vestiges of its multi-cultural past – Chinese fishing nets mingle with Dutch Palaces, Sephardic Synagogues and Portuguese forts – all jostling for space along the shores of the Arabian Sea. Today, Cochin has a thriving arts and cultural scene and hosts the Cochin Biennale – a major art event in Asia, every winter. Several galleries, boutiques, and artisanal restaurants stand cheek by jowl with one another, especially in the Fort Cochin area, while the spice, fish and antique markets continue to flourish side by side. This evening witness the Kaleidoscope of Kerala Dances, a combination of 4 style dance forms which includes Kathakali, Mohiniattam, Bharatnatyam and the martial art form Kalaripayattu. Overnight - Fragrant Nature. *B/D*

Day 17

COCHIN

This morning take a stroll with your guide through the by-lanes of Fort Cochin which bears a marked European influence from Cochin's British and Dutch colonial



era. Fort Cochin is distinguished by its long line of Chinese fishing nets, which according to local legend, were introduced on the Malabar Coast by the emissaries of Kubla Khan's court. You'll visit St Francis church, with its colonial past evident even today. There are men who operate the church's enormous punkha fans by pulling on their ropes by hand. Of special significance is the Jewish synagogue, the one monument to the family of Jews in Cochin who can trace their origins to King Solomon. Later, a harbour cruise along Cochin's coastline, to take in the sights of a city that thrives on a port economy. Watch the barges and boats bring ashore goods from far and wide, the Cochin lagoon open out into the Arabian Sea, and the quaint cantilever Chinese fishing nets against the backdrop of a splendid sunset. Overnight - Fragrant Nature. *B/D*

Day 18
COCHIN / CHERUTHURTHY (4 hours)

Today after breakfast you'll enjoy the drive to Cheruthurthy and on arrival check into your hotel. This evening proceed on a short drive to the festival area "Wadakancherry" to witness ornaments on display used to decorate Elephants and other festivities gearing up for the event next day. Return to the hotel. Overnight - River Retreat. *B/L/D*

DAY 19
CHERUTHURTHY

After breakfast drive to Wadakancherry for the opening ceremony of the Elephant Festival. This is a spectacle not to be missed. The sounds, sights and colours will blow your mind. Drive back to your hotel. After lunch at hotel visit the Pottery Village. Overnight - River Retreat. *B/L/D*

DAY 20
CHERUTHURTHY / POLLACHI (3 hours)

Today after breakfast drive to Pollachi and on arrival check into the hotel. Afternoon you can set off for visit of Organic farm and Handloom Weaving village. "Ancient traditions, Rustic villages and lush green Coconut Fields. Come experience the South Indian warmth and hospitality as Thadam takes you on an unforgettable journey to experience the charms of Rural India". Optional Cycling Experience: Pollachi is an epitome beautiful landscapes, scenic roads, lush green lands with majestic mountain backdrops, lakes, streams and rivers. You are invited to participate in a lovely sociable 25km bike ride that will energize your body and refresh your senses". Overnight – Coco Lagoon. *B/L/D*



DAY 21
POLLACHI / COONOOR (4 hours)

This morning drive to Aliyar Ashram or Temple of Consciousness, located 28 Kms from Coco Lagoon Resort and is the focus for a silent revolution.

It is set in the beautiful natural setting at the foothills of the Western Ghats. Vethathiri Maharishi, born of humble origins into a weaver's family, was the founder of the ashram. After breakfast drive to Coonoor and on arrival check into the hotel. Rest of the afternoon free to enjoy hotel facilities. Overnight - The Gateway Hotel Church Road Coonoor. *B/D*

DAY 22
COONOOR

This morning accompanied by your guide board the toy train to Ooty. The ride on the UNESCO World Heritage train provides breathtaking views of forests, sloping hillocks and verdant tea gardens. On arrival disembark at Ooty and visit the museum dedicated to conservation of the local kurumba customs, Botanical gardens and finally, see how honey is collected using age-old techniques. Drive back to Coonoor and overnight. Overnight - The Gateway Hotel Church Road Coonoor. *B/L/D*

Day 23
COONOOR / KABINI (6 hours)

This morning you'll drive to Kabini and on arrival check into your hotel, with its stunning surroundings and gorgeous swimming pool. Overnight in Kabini. *B/L/D*

DAY 24
KABINI

Nagarhole National Park named after the river of the same name that flows through it, was converted from a game reserve to a national park. Forming a corridor for wildlife along with nearby national parks, Nagarhole's dry deciduous habitat offers a refuge for a great variety of wildlife, with a rich mammal and bird population, more renowned for the Royal Bengal Tiger, Asian Elephant, Leopard and Dhole (wild dogs). Today you'll enjoy a Jeep Safari in the morning and Boat safari in the afternoon through the national park accompanied by a naturalist guide. The scenery is stunning and the wildlife is in abundance. You'll spot dozens of species of birds and animals – keep a tab. All in all, a magic day! Overnight in Kabini. *B/L/D*

Day 25
KABINI / MYSORE (2.5 hours)

This morning drive to Mysore, the city of spice, silk and sandalwood has a charm of old-world royalty and religion. A capital of the Mysore Princely kingdom, where a legendary half-human, half-buffalo demon was vanquished by a goddess, the city is best known for the Mysore Palace – in its nightly avatar lit-up by 96000 lights, and the Dasshera festivities – celebrating the victory of good over evil.

Afternoon free to enjoy hotel facilities and surrounds. (Time permitting and at a small extra cost, your guide can arrange for an optional tour of the main Mysore Silk Factory. Well worth the visit if you like this kind of thing). Overnight - Hotel Royal Orchid Metropole. *B/L/D*



Day 26
MYSORE

This morning after breakfast you'll take a walking tour of Mysore. Let us take you on a guided tour into the heart of the city, as we walk by some grand old structures and unfold the story of Mysore. Learn about the opulent lives of the Maharajas, explore a century-old market, as you learn about the history of the city through some quirky anecdotes and incredulous facts. This afternoon visit the Mysore City Palace designed by an English Architect and completed in 1912. A part of the Palace is still occupied by the former Maharaja from the Wodeyar Family. Built in Indo-Saracenic style with domes, turrets, arches and colonnades, the Palace is a treasure house of exquisite carvings and works of art from all over the world. The collection of stained glass mirrors and intricately carved rosewood doors inlaid with ivory is magnificent. Overnight - Hotel Royal Orchid Metropole. *B/D*

Day 27
MYSORE / BANGALORE DEPART (3 hours)

After breakfast the group will drive to Bangalore. On arrival Bangalore transfer with assistance to international airport to board flight for your home (or your next destination). All flights are to be confirmed. *B*

Day 28
ARRIVE HOME