

Southern India's Traditions and Treasures



Blue Dot Travel
Go somewhere different

November 2027 | 23 Days
Cost to be confirmed

Tour Highlights

- Visit UNESCO World Heritage Sites at Mahabalipuram and Brihadisvara
- Pondicherry's unique French culture
- Madurai Palace's stunning collection of ancient bronze sculptures and coins
- Munnar's tea legacy
- Cruise the pristine backwaters of Kerala on a houseboat
- Uncover Cochin's spice trading history with Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, and British influences
- Kerala's rich tradition of performance arts
- Wildlife safari at Nagarhole National Park
- Mysore's heritage, culture and traditions



Southern India's TRADITIONS AND TREASURES



Tour overview

Travelling through Southern India is an immersion into a land of rich traditions, lush landscapes, and timeless heritage. From the palm-fringed backwaters of Kerala to the vibrant temple towns of Tamil Nadu, this region offers a tapestry of experiences that engage all the senses.

In Kerala, glide along tranquil waterways in a traditional houseboat, framed by coconut palms and village life unfolding on the banks. Venture inland to where spice plantations, tea gardens, and wildlife sanctuaries promise fragrant walks and encounters with wildlife.

You'll be in awe of the ancient temples—intricately carved marvels that echo with centuries of devotion. Explore a plethora of varied landscapes, regal palaces and bustling markets. Southern India is also a culinary paradise, where fragrant curries, dosas, and fresh seafood reflect the diversity of the region.

With its warm hospitality, deep spirituality, and natural beauty, travelling to this region is both enriching and unforgettable.



MODERATE

Activity rating: Moderate

You must be capable of walking up to 8,000 steps daily; occasionally ascending 3-4 flights of steps; standing at attractions for 1-2 hours; boarding and disembarking transport unaided and handling your own luggage.

DAY 01: DEPART AUSTRALIA – ARRIVE CHENNAI

Welcome to Chennai! The port of Chennai, with its thriving global trade in silks, spices, and jewels, was a capital for centuries of empires and colonies, and the region around it grew rapidly from a tiny town to the bustling metropolis it is today. Formerly known as Madras, Chennai's location along the coast offered great opportunities for industries, and like other ports in India, some of the first few industries were set up for textiles. Overnight: Chennai

DAY 02: CHENNAI – PONDICHERRY VIA MAHABALIPURAM

Today, we'll drive to Pondicherry, visiting Mahabalipuram en route (approx. 6 hours). The tiny seaside village of Mahabalipuram would have been unremarkable along a boulder-strewn stretch of the East Coast Road, had it not been for the Pallava dynasty that left its legacy behind in stone. From monolithic chariots, rock-cut caves, shore temples, and shrines, to a precariously balanced boulder left behind by the glaciers of the last Ice Age, Mahabalipuram is a study in architecture, recording the transition of dynasties and faiths, an evolution of sculpture styles and icons, and a witness to changing influences and regimes. After lunch, continue to Pondicherry and enjoy an official welcome dinner. Overnight: Pondicherry **B/L/D**

DAY 03: PONDICHERRY

Unlike many Indian cities that echo their past, Pondicherry stands apart for preserving the essence of its French colonial heritage, visible in its canary-yellow architecture and Creole cuisine. Once a French outpost in British-ruled India, the town's unique identity blends Tamil roots with a Gallic charm, giving it a distinctly cosmopolitan character. Pondicherry is also known for the Aurobindo Ashram, founded by philosopher-poet and freedom fighter Aurobindo Ghosh. Pondicherry is so much more than just a pretty town by the sea. Discover this little canary-coloured piece of France left behind in India, steeped in culture and heritage. Overnight: Pondicherry **B/D**

DAY 04: PONDICHERRY – KUMBAKONAM

After breakfast, depart for Kumbakonam and on the way, visit Chidambaram's Thillai Nataraja Temple. Continue to Kumbakonam (approx. 1.5 hours) and check in at the hotel. Later in the afternoon, we'll visit Airavateswara Temple in Darasuram (approx. 30 mins' drive). The second among the three 'Great Living Chola Temples'. Built in the shape of a chariot used during temple festivals, it has some intricate carving all along. Learn about the iconography of Dravidian architecture and the incredible way it was worked into the stone. Overnight: Kumbakonam **B/D**

DAY 05: KUMBAKONAM –KARAIKUDI via TANJORE

Today, we drive towards Chettinad (approx 3 hrs), stopping at Tanjore to visit the Brihadeeswarar Temple, dating back to the 11th Century, classified as a UNESCO World Heritage monument, one among three 'Great Living Chola Temples'. This will be followed by a visit to the Bronze Gallery at the Palace, which showcases some interesting pieces of bronze work, inspired mainly by mythology, with some modern-day influences. We'll walk Thanjavur's streets to delve further into its cultural heritage; pass the traditional instrument makers as they carve wood into the stringed veena, visit homes of local folk to learn more about their ways of life, meet Tanjore painting artisans and discover the techniques behind this age-old style. Continue to Karaikudi, and in the evening, participate in a cooking demo at the hotel. Overnight: Karaikudi **B/L/D**

DAY 06: KARAIKUDI

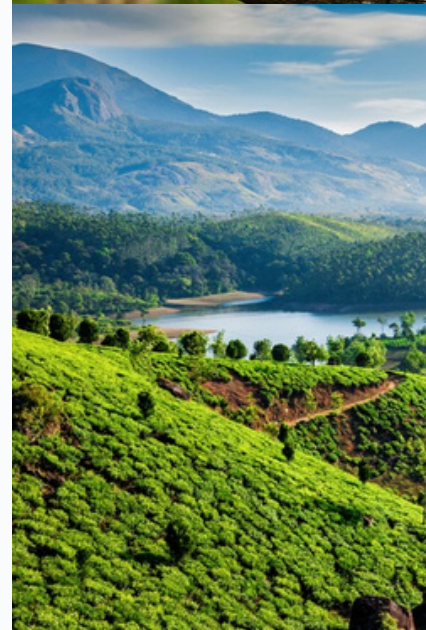
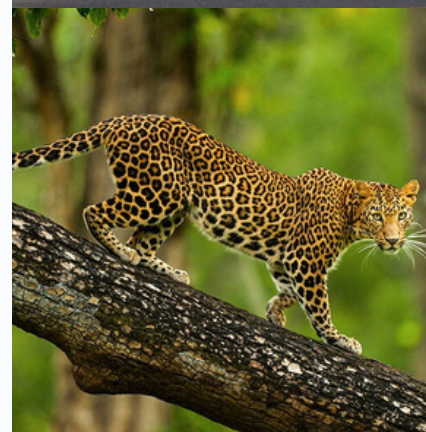
Today, we'll explore Karaikudi. The region of Tamil Nadu, encompassing the towns of Karaikudi and Devakottai, is known as Chettinad, home to the Chettiars –a prosperous community of South Indian merchants renowned for their business acumen. Most Chettinad mansions feature a formal pillared hall, typically the domain of the male members of the household, where they receive guests and business associates. Visit the sacred grove temples dedicated to Ayyanar, the guardian deity of rural Tamil Nadu, where towering terracotta horses stand watch amid tranquil forest paths. In the afternoon, visit Thirumayam Fort – a hidden gem that offers a glimpse into the state's layered history. Built in the 17th century by a local ruler of the Sethupathi dynasty, the fort sprawls across seven acres and is perched on a rocky hill, offering panoramic views of the countryside. Inside, we will find remnants of secret escape routes, shrines carved into the rock, and a striking blend of Hindu and colonial-era influences. The lesser-known fort involves a lot of walking and is for those seeking off-the-beaten-path heritage and dramatic landscapes in the Chettinad region. Overnight: Karaikudi **B/D**

DAY 07: CHETTINAD – MADURAI

After breakfast, drive to Madurai – about 2 hours. Madurai, the oldest city in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, has a history of global trade recorded by the Greek scholar and ambassador, Megatheres. With a two-thousand-year-old tradition of literary and art gatherings, Madurai is a stronghold of culture, often referred to as the Athens of the East. In the afternoon, head out to explore Madurai, beginning with a visit to Thirumalai Nayakar Palace. Once a grand palace built in 1636, the palace showcases the power and wealth of the Nayakas. Then visit the Meenakshi Temple, a magnificent temple of goddess Meenakshi and Lord Sundaram, a form of Lord Shiva, which has the tallest 'gopuram' or temple gateway in the world. Overnight: Madurai **B/D**

DAY 08: MADURAI – MUNNAR

Today, we'll drive to the picturesque town of Munnar (4.5 hours), once the summer retreat of the British Government in South India. Its name, meaning "three rivers", stems from its location at the confluence of three mountain streams. Besides tea, Munnar is also renowned for spices like cardamom and pepper, and the local infusions of tea and spices offer a warm respite from the chilly mountaintop climate. Munnar's rugged landscape provides opportunities for walks and treks through the town and nearby villages. On arrival, check into your hotel with the rest of the day at leisure. Later this afternoon, take a guided walk through the in-house cardamom plantation with your naturalist. Since cardamom thrives in filtered sunlight, the plantation is shaded by evergreen trees and lush foliage, creating a cool, green canopy. Many of these trees are planted specifically to attract butterflies and birds, making the walk as enriching for nature lovers as it is for those curious about spice cultivation. Overnight: Munnar **B/L/D**



DAY 09: MUNNAR

This morning, embark on a Tea Plantation tour. Visit the lush, verdant slopes of a tea estate to get a glimpse into an industry that is over a hundred years old and learn the story behind your morning cuppa. Follow this with a visit to the Tea Museum, which houses curios, photographs, and machinery that mark a turning point for the tea industry in the region, as well as some colonial-style furniture. Then, drive to Lockhart Tea Plantation and Processing Unit. Set on the historic Lockhart Estate, one of the earliest tea plantations in the region, the site features a traditional working tea factory dating back to 1936, where orthodox processing methods like withering, rolling, oxidation, and drying are still demonstrated. On the way back, we will visit Srishti – a handmade paper crafts centre by people with disabilities. The paper is made from a variety of materials, including the leaves of eucalyptus, lemongrass, lantana, and pineapple. It is then crafted into delightful objects from notepads to containers – a haven for the stationery shopaholic! What’s more, the centre has a social conscience – it is a unique venture by the corporate giant Tata for the rehabilitation of the physically challenged dependants of its employees. Overnight: Munnar **B/D**

DAY 10: MUNNAR – KUMARAKOM

Today, after breakfast, drive to Kumarakom, a 4.5-hour drive. Tucked snugly into the banks of Vembanad Lake, Kumarakom is a delight for the senses. With the backwaters mirroring the blue skies and green palms overhead, few places can offer the quiet calm, tranquillity and serendipity of Kumarakom, making it a haven for those who want to get away from the urban hustle and bustle. Rich in tropical fruit and vegetation, bananas, mangoes, coconuts, and pineapples jostle for space with brightly coloured hibiscus and bougainvillea, which spill over into the backwaters. On arrival, we will check into your Resort, the Coconut Lagoon, for two nights and have time to enjoy the beautiful surroundings. Overnight: Kumarakom **B/D**

DAY 11: KUMARAKOM

Early morning (around 6 am), the group will take a 2.5-hour boat ride in the narrow canals on the Kumarakom aboard a Kerala Shikara boat. The charming backwaters gracefully remind us to pause, breathe and appreciate the bounty of nature. Its canals give way to lagoons, lakes and backwaters which meander through lush green coconut plantations and emerald rice fields. Waterways take precedence over roads, and one of the best ways to explore this gorgeous district is by skimming along the narrow canals by boat. As you gently move along these waters, you witness the abundance nature has bestowed on this land, including the abundant birdlife and how the local community draws on its environment. Every plant and tree is put to use in sustaining daily life. Return to your resort for breakfast. Late morning visit to Philip Kutty farm. Drive a short distance to Vechoor village to visit the charming Phillip Kutty Farm. Beautifully situated along the backwaters, the farm grows coconut, spices, fruit, and much more. The farm is run by the family who owns it, and you can enjoy a delightful interactive session on Syrian Christian cuisine and learn how to cook some of these delicious dishes. The backwaters add their influence to the food at the farm, with fish, duck, and poultry featuring prominently alongside farm fruit and vegetables. Return to your hotel post lunch. Overnight: Kumarakom **B/L**

DAY 12: KUMARAKOM – ALLEPPEY

This morning, take the hour's drive to Alleppey. Board a private luxury houseboat and begin your exploration of this pristine backwater country. 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 and canals, is lined with dense vegetation and preserves the rural Keralite lifestyle that is completely cut off from the outside world. While on the cruise, we will get to witness the authentic culture and lifestyle of Kerala countryside, where we will see the wealth of paddy crops, coconut groves and tiny hamlets as you relax in the comfort of your houseboat and watch the lives of people on the banks of the lake. This evening, enjoy your musical performance and wonderful food on board. Overnight: Luxury Houseboat **B/L/D**

DAY 13: ALLEPPEY – COCHIN

This morning, after breakfast, disembark the houseboat and drive to Cochin, which will take around two hours. En route, stop at Kerala Folklore Theatre and Museum, a unique venture to preserve the splendid folklore traditions of the state. From artefacts like masks and sculptures in wood, stone and bronze, to costumes of traditional and ritual art forms, from musical instruments and traditional jewellery to manuscripts of rare medicinal and astrological secrets (even Stone-Age utensils!), all are preserved in this museum with the utmost care. This afternoon we will be taken to a theatre to witness a Kathakali Dance Performance. The most iconic images of Kerala, apart from its backwaters, are those of the traditional Kathakali dancers with their painted masks of green and white. Learn more about the Kathakali dance forms and the artists who perform it, with a behind-the-scenes look at their make-up rituals. Overnight: Cochin **B/D**

DAY 14: COCHIN

In 1498, Vasco da Gama landed at Kappad, a port city a little to the north of Cochin, and this city's trade ties to the rest of the world were established and mapped. 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. This morning, begin with a stroll through the by-lanes of Fort Cochin, which bears a marked European influence from Cochin's British and Dutch colonial era. Explore Mattancherry Palace, built by the Portuguese as a gift of tribute to the Raja of Cochin. The Palace was later renovated by the Dutch and became known as the Dutch Palace. Today it houses a small but exquisite museum of royal artefacts, some of which are highly unusual. We'll visit the Mattancherry Spice Market and Kochi International Pepper Exchange, a riotous warehouse where traders stake bids at the daily pepper auction. Stroll the Jewish quarter in Cochin, with the synagogue at its centre.. In the afternoon, take a boat ride 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: Cochin **B/D**

DAY 15: COCHIN - THRISSUR

Our drive to Thrissur will take around three hours, as it is a city in Kerala known for its sacred sites and colourful festivals. It is also known as the city of celebrations and is the cultural capital of Kerala because of its artistic, spiritual and religious history. On arrival in Thrissur, visit Vaidyaratnam Ayurveda Museum, which showcases the evolution of Ayurveda through multimedia exhibits, dioramas, and a library of ancient texts, preserving Kerala's traditional healthcare legacy. In the afternoon, drive to Guruvayoor to witness a Kalaripayattu martial art performance by an award-winning artist at his residence. Dinner is at the hotel. Overnight: Thrissur **B/D**



DAY 16: THRISSUR – WAYANAD

Today is a long journey to Wayanad which will take about 6.5 hours. We'll Visit Kerala Kalamandalam, a premier public institution dedicated to preserving and promoting Kerala's rich tradition of performing arts. Since its founding, it has served as a vibrant hub for artists, scholars, historians, theatre directors, choreographers, and art enthusiasts from across the globe, fostering learning, exchange, and appreciation of Kerala's cultural heritage. Upon arrival, check in to your accommodation. Overnight: Wayanad **B/L/D**

DAY 17: WAYANAD

The group will visit Banasura Sagar Dam today, which is India's largest earth dam and Asia's second-largest dam. Then, drive to the Meenmutty Waterfalls, a three-tiered waterfall with a height of 1000 feet on the Banasura Hills. Later, drive to the tea museum in Wayanad near Pozhuthana. It was a wooden factory built in 1911 and has since been converted into a museum. Overnight: Wayanad **B/D**

DAY 18: WAYANAD – KABINI

Today, after breakfast, commence the drive to Kabini, which will take about two hours. On arrival, we will check into your Resort. Rest of the day at your own leisure. A wildlife documentary is screened every evening. Overnight: Kabini **B/L/D**

DAY 19: 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). Snaking its way through dense canopied forests, the east-flowing Kabini River is a lifeline for the forests and the biodiversity. In peak summers, when all the other waterholes dry up, the Kabini reservoir hosts lush, grassy meadows on its banks and attracts wildlife from far and wide. Kabini was once a hunting ground for the Maharajah of Mysore, other Indian royalty, and the British viceroys, as elephant herds flock there in huge numbers. Today, it offers refuge and a corridor for these lovable creatures, as also for many others, and is arguably Karnataka's best-loved wildlife sanctuary. This morning, proceed on a Canter Safari through the national park accompanied by a naturalist guide. Running through the Nagarhole forests is the Kabini River, an artery for wildlife. Take a boat safari along the Kabini, accompanied by a naturalist guide, to watch the wildlife along its banks. From those who come to quench their thirst to others who depend upon the river for their daily sustenance, this is a tranquil way to experience the forest and all it has to offer. The scenery is stunning, and the wildlife is in abundance. All in all, a magic day! Overnight: Kabini **B/L/D**

DAY 20: KABINI – MYSORE

Today, after a leisurely breakfast, start the drive to Mysore, which will take around two hours. 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 Dusshera festivities – celebrating the victory of good over evil. On arrival, we will check into your hotel. In the late afternoon, visit the colourful Devaraja market, an ancient market from the days of King Tipu Sultan that today sells everything from fruits and vegetables to flowers and spices. There's an option of visiting the illuminated Mysore or the Maharaja Palace on Sunday evening. Overnight: Mysore **B/L/D**

DAY 21: MYSORE

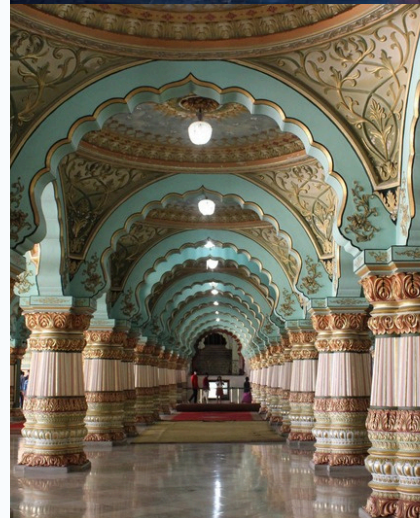
Start the day with a drive to the temple atop Chamundi Hill, with its iconic Nandi bull statue, the sacred vehicle of Lord Shiva, from where you can have sweeping views of the city below. Later, start a guided Silk tour with a specialised tour leader, with a visit to the Mysore silk factory that produces one of the most popular silks in India – The Mysore Silk. These gorgeous sarees, exclusively made in Mysore, are light to wear, soft, classy and Regal, made in the most beautiful hues. No wonder Mysore silk sarees were synonymous with Royal women! Witness the entire process of creating these beauties, all the way from the silk yarn to the woven Saree. It doesn't end here; you get to meet a local host over a cup of coffee and learn to drape a sari the traditional South Indian way. In fact, today, Mysore Silk boasts a Geographical Indication(GI) to its name! Later, visit the Maharajah's Palace with your Accompanying guide. Mysore is peppered with palaces – each telling a different story, each with its own unique style. The most regal amongst them is the Maharajah's Palace, a lavish residence of the Wodeyar dynasty princes who ruled Mysore from the 14th to the 20th Century. Get to know what it took to build the country's most magnificent palace, which was an engineering marvel for its time and is still home to the erstwhile royal family. The tour takes you through the palatial delights kings were used to, giving us a glimpse of what it was to be a Maharaja back then. Overnight: Mysore **B/D**

DAY 22: MYSORE – BANGALORE

Today, after a leisurely breakfast, we'll drive to Bangalore. Along the way, we'll stop at Srirangapatna and visit Tipu Sultan's summer palace. The palace is located amidst the Daria Daulat Bagh, which also houses the Tipu Sultan museum. Built in the year 1784 and constructed primarily of teakwood. The most striking feature of this palace is that every inch of space on the walls, pillars, canopies and arches is painted colourfully and artistically. The museum, which focuses mostly on Tipu Sultan, exhibits oil paintings, pencil sketches, aquatints and engravings, coins and medals, costumes, furniture, and arms. Lunch at Srirangapatna and continue your drive to Bangalore. Check in to the Airport hotel for your final night and farewell dinner. Overnight: Bangalore **B/L/D**

DAY 23: BANGALORE – HOME

After breakfast, check out of the hotel and head home or to your next destination. **B**





Accommodation

Our hotels are carefully chosen to capture the local atmosphere and set you up in an ideal location. You can expect accommodation that comprises a mix of standard hotels, boutique-style hotels, and smaller, independently owned establishments. Below are sample hotels on this tour:

Royal Orchid, Mysore
www.royalorchidhotels.com/mysuru

Gateway Hotel, Madurai
www.eurostarsmetropole.com

Taj Wayanad Resort, Kerala
<https://www.tajhotels.com/en-in>

Hyatt Regency, Thissur
www.hyatt.com/hyatt-regency

Why Blue Dot?

Travel is more than just moving from one place to another; it is an opportunity to explore this vast planet, connect with its people and marvel at its beauty. We have established a group of loyal, like-minded travellers who share this feeling and have taken multiple tours with us. With Blue Dot, you'll experience

- Thoughtfully designed itineraries with unique experiences
- Small, inclusive groups with a maximum of 16 travellers on most tours, and often fewer
- The support of both an Australian tour leader* and experienced local guides
- Programs designed to meet the needs of mature-age travellers
- Hands on, personalised service including customised flight bookings
- Tipping included in your tour cost

*Australian leaders accompany groups with more than 10 travellers.

Blue Dot welcomes solo travellers

In fact, over half of our clients are solo travellers. We understand it can be daunting to travel on your own, and we'll ensure your travel is inclusive and enjoyable, while prioritising your safety. You can confidently join our groups, knowing that we bring solo travellers together to share the camaraderie of an unforgettable adventure.

Enquiries and bookings

A \$500 deposit is required to secure your booking.

For more information:

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