



# CLASSIC SOUTH INDIA TOUR

**Chennai \* Mahabalipuram \* Pondichery \* Tanjore \* Madurai \*  
Thekkady \* Kumarakom \* Cochin**

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## Sketch Itinerary

DAY 01:	ARRIVE CHENNAI	BY: INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT
DAY 02:	CHENNAI – MAHABALIPURAM	BY: SURFACE
Day 03:	MAHABALIPURAM	
DAY 04:	MAHABALIPURAM – PONDICHERRY	BY: SURFACE
DAY 05:	PONDICHERRY – TANJORE	BY: SURFACE
DAY 06:	TANJORE – MADURAI	BY: SURFACE
DAY 07:	MADURAI	
DAY 08:	MADURAI – THEKKADY	BY: SURFACE
DAY 09:	THEKKADY – KUMARAKOM	BY: SURFACE
DAY 10:	KUMARAKOM	BY SURFACE
DAY 11:	KUMARAKOM – COCHIN	BY SURFACE
DAY 12:	COCHIN	
DAY 13:	DEPARTURE COCHIN	BY: INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT

**\*\*\* END OF TOUR \*\*\***

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## Detailed Itinerary

### **DAY 01: ARRIVE CHENNAI      BY: INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT**

You will arrive today at Chennai International Airport. Following customs, immigration formalities and baggage collection, a representative will meet you as you Exit of the ARRIVALS TERMINAL building after which you would be transferred to your hotel.

The East India Company established its presence in southern India on the Bay of Bengal in 1639 with the establishment of Fort St. George. The city of Chennai, formerly known as Madras, grew up around the fort area. It now serves as the capital of Tamil Nadu and is the fourth largest city in India, with over six million inhabitants. It sprawls over a large area yet, in spite of recent industrial growth, seems less congested than other large Indian cities. Its role as a trade centre is furthered by rail, road, and air connections in addition to its seaport. It presents both modern and traditional charm, its many British influences juxtaposed with Tamil-Hindu traditions.

Upon arrival at the hotel check-in to your hotel.



### **DAY 02: CHENNAI – KANCHIPURAM - MAHABALIPURAM**

**[BY SURFACE 75 + 65 kms / 02½ + 02 hrs]**

In the morning proceed for sightseeing of Chennai.

Start with a visit to (closed on Fridays & Public holidays), which is presently, is being used by the Tamil Nadu Government. Within the compound is a Museum holding many remembrances of the East India Company and the British period. From the British hold of centre, you will proceed to Mylapore, which was inhabited in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the Portuguese; visit the San Thome Church, named for the Christian disciple ("Doubting Thomas") who lived and taught here in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

Also visit Kapaleeswarar Temple dedicated to Lord Shiva; it dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE and is the biggest temple in Chennai. Drive past the famous Marina Beach; it is the second longest beach in the world, stretching for several kilometers.

In the afternoon drive to Kanchipuram.

Kanchipuram is a busy pilgrimage centre, humming with activity around its extraordinary temple precincts. Established by the Pallava kings in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, Kanchipuram served as their capital for five hundred years and continued to flourish throughout the Chola, Pandya and Vijaynagar eras. Under the Pallavas, it was an important scholastic forum and meeting point for Jain, Buddhist and Hindu cultures. Today Hindu temples alone dominate the town, spanning the years from the peak of Pallava construction to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when ornamentation of the Gopurams and pillared halls was at its most elaborate. The Kailasanatha

temple at Kanchipuram with a four-storied tower and octagonal shikhara is a commendable piece of creativity. Also famous here are the world-renowned Kanchipuram hand woven silk & cotton fabrics.

After visiting Kanchipuram, you will be driven to Mahabalipuram. Upon arrival proceed for check-in at hotel.

Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram) built in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, is an ancient Pallava Port. Today it is the site of several antique sculptural marvels. Declared as the 'World Heritage Site' by UNESCO, it boasts of some of India's most sublime rock-cut art. The town was earlier called Mahabalipuram, but was later renamed as Mamallapuram or the place of the great wrestler - Narasimhavarmam I. He made this port a flourishing trade center. The only shore temple, which remains here, is the spectacular two-spired shrine, which is unique in that it houses both Vishnu and Shiva in its sanctum. The Pallavas perfected the art of sculpting rocks to build temples without brick, mortar or timber. The open-air bas-reliefs, structured temples, man-made caves and the five monolithic "Rathas" (chariots carved from single processions) reflect this art at its best.



### **DAY 03: IN MAHABALIPURAM**

In the morning do the sightseeing of Shore Temple, Arjuna's Penance & the Cave Temple.

The Shore Temple: Though known as the land of Seven Pagodasm, there is only one remaining today. The five-storied Sore Temple on the sea beach was built by the Pallava King Raja Singha at the end of seventh century in pure Dravidian sculpture. This temple was the last work of Pallava dynasty. Guarding the temple is Lion-King Nandi or the row of Oxens. Recently, Sore Temple Complex has been enlisted in the recorded history of World Heritage. This is one of the oldest temples in South India. Arjuna's Penance- This skilfully carved rock of 29X7 metre, is the largest vas - relief sculpture in the world. It gets its name from the figure of an ascetic who is believed to be Arjuna, the hero of Mahabharata, doing penance to obtain a boon from Lord Siva. However, there are others who think that the figure is actually Bhagiratha who entreated Siva to let the river Ganges flow over the earth. Among the other carvings on the rock are animals and heavenly beings witnessing the descent of the Ganges from the Himalayas and some episodes from the Panchantantra tales.

Mandapams / Cave Temples: The temples are finely sculptured & carved out in Mahabali. Krishna Temple is the oldest temple. The decorated Krishna stall is depicted with the episodes from Lord Sri Krishna's life and the lifting up of Goverdhan Hill to give protection Gops & Gopis from the curse of the rain God. The rectangular Ganesh Mandapam was also built carving out of a whole rock and is worshipped still daily.

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### **DAY 04: MAHABALIPURAM – PONDICHERY [BY SURFACE 135 kms / 04 hrs]**

In the morning you will be driven to Pondichery. Upon arrival check-in at hotel

Pondichery has a rich French cultural heritage, having been the capital of the French colonies in India since the 17th century. The French legacy is visible in the well-planned town, neatly laid roads, wide and vibrant beaches, beautiful promenades, architecturally imposing churches and public buildings and the statues. Split into two parts, Pondichery is, on one hand a bustling Indian Market town, and on the other hand, towards the sea, the streets are emptier, cleaner and decidedly European.



Later you will proceed for sightseeing tour of Pondichery - visit Sri Aurobindo Ashram, located on Rue de la Marine is the most popular attraction in Pondichery. The Ashram was founded by Sri Aurobindo Ghose in 1926. Sri Aurobindo, the poet philosopher founded the Ashram to help man reach the zenith of his evolution through spiritual exercises and yoga, combined with physical activity and productive work.

### **DAY 05: PONDICHERY – CHIDAMBARAM – TANJORE [By Surface 187 kms / 05 hrs]**

Today you will be driven from Pondichery to Tanjore. En-route visit Chidambaram Temple.

Chidambaram was the capital of the Cholas from AD 907 to 1310. It is one of Tamil Nadu's most important holy towns. In Chidambaram temple the Dancing Shiva (Nataraja) is the presiding deity and all rituals are conducted on the basis of the Vedic doctrine. These are the two features which distinguish the Shiva Nataraja temple from all other temples in India. Shiva Nataraja's dance is seen as the visualization of the processes of cosmos.

Note: *Foreigners (Non Hindus) are not allowed inside the inner sanctum of the temple.*

After visiting Chidambaram, continue your drive to Tanjore.



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About a thousand years ago, Tanjore, or Thanjavur was the capital of the powerful Chola dynasty. Today, it is the little town set amidst the lush green rice fields of the Cauvery delta. Magnificent temples still bear witness to the splendour of Chola architecture. The Chola kings built the majority of Tanjore's (also known as Thanjavur) 93 temples.

Upon arrival, proceed for check-in at your hotel.

In the afternoon proceed for sightseeing of Tanjore which will start with visit to Brihadeshwara Temple, built in the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE by Raja Chola. It is considered to be artistically the most perfect of Dravida temples. Besides the temple, you will visit the Palace most of which is in ruins housing the Tamil University Museum, the Art Gallery, the Saraswati Mahal Library which houses palm leaf & paper manuscripts.

### **DAY 06: TANJORE – TRICHY – MADURAI [By Surface 195 kms / 06 hrs]**

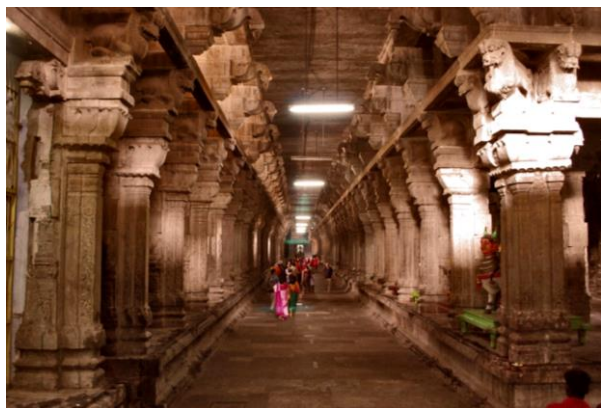
In the morning you will be driven to Madurai visiting Trichy enroute.

Trichy or Tiruchirappalli is situated on the banks of the river Cauvery; it is the fourth largest city in Tamil Nadu. It was a citadel of the early Cholas, which later fell to the Pallavas. Trichy is a fine blend of tradition and modernity built around the Rock Fort. Apart from the Fort, there are several Churches, Colleges and Missions dating back to the 1760s. The town and its fort, now in Trichy were built by the Nayaks of Madurai.

Visit the Rock Fort, which is a landmark of Trichy. The rock is one of the oldest in the world-approximately 3.800 million years, which makes it as old as the rocks of Greenland and older than the Himalayas. A climb of 434 steps leads to the ancient temple of Ganapati on top and a further climb to a Shiva Temple. You will visit Srirangam Temple.

After the tour of Trichy, you will be driven to Madurai. Upon arrival, proceed for check-in at your hotel.

One of the oldest cities in South India, Madurai has been the centre of learning and pilgrimage for centuries. Spread along the rocky banks of the river Vaigai in the state of Tamil Nadu, this modern industrial city is today famous as a temple town.



### **DAY 07: IN MADURAI**

In the morning proceed for a sightseeing tour of Madurai.

Madurai - The temple town is unique in that all its temples are living temples and it remains a major religious centre attracting pilgrims the year round. Madurai's main attraction is the famous Meenakshi temples in the heart of the old town, a riotously baroque example of Dravidian architecture with gopurams (towers) covered from top to bottom with a breathless

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profusion of multi-colored images of gods, goddesses, animals and mythical figures. The temple complex is a city within a city and one can spend days exploring its labyrinthine corridors and halls. Another attraction is the Tirumalai Nayak Palace (1636) restored by Lord Napier, dance drama concerts are performed daily.

Return to your hotel after the tour.

In the evening proceed to visit Meenakshi Temple to witness the closing ceremony.

*Note: Foreigners (Non Hindus) are not allowed inside the inner sanctum of the temple.*

### **DAY 08: MADURAI – THEKKADY [By Surface 142 kms / 05 hrs]**

Today you would be driven from Madurai to Thekkady. Upon arrival proceed to check in at your hotel

In the afternoon, proceed to Periyar National Park to view the wildlife by boat. Situated within the confines of the Western Ghats in the southern Indian state of Kerala, Periyar National Park and Tiger Reserve is one of the most captivating wildlife parks in the world. The park has a picturesque lake at the heart of the sanctuary. Herds of elephant and sambar, gaur and wild pigs and wander down to the lakeside. Periyar also harbours the leopard, wild dog, barking deer and mouse deer.

Observe the wildlife from the launches (boats) that cruise the lake.



### **DAY 09: THEKKADY – KUMARAKOM [By Surface 130 kms / 04 hrs]**

In the morning you will be driven from Thekkady to Kumarakom.

In the lush backwaters of Kottayam in Kerala, lies a veritable paradise, which is called Kumarakom, or the 'Venice of the East'. Palm fringed narrow canals winding through the vast expanse of paddy fields, and the neat tiny hamlets lined up along either side of the canals are panoramic sights one can never forget. Kumarakom is Kerala's heartland of lagoons, palm fringed lakes and paddy fields, inter-linked with hundreds of winding canals, with the typical low slung country boats that carry everything from people to fish, rice and coconuts to the milkman and newspaper boy, local politicians and priests to wedding parties.

Upon arrival proceed to check in at your hotel

Remaining day is free for relaxation. Lie in a hammock on this lakeshore, and allow your senses to possess you. Before you is a great Vembanad Lake, rippling under the vault of an impossibly large sky.

Sunlight sparkles on her waters, tearing the reflection of a passing houseboat into crystal shards. Darter birds go about their fishy business. You relax in Peace. Of course there is peace here, but not silence. Silence is not nature's way. And the Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary next door is full of raucous neighbors. You sway a little, and the image changes; to a timber and tile mansion that seems to belong to this earth, but to another time. If you left the comfort of your hammock for a closer look, you'd see that it is authentic reconstruction.

### **DAY 10: IN KUMARAKOM**

Full day free at leisure, for independent activities.

### **DAY 11: KUMARAKOM – COCHIN [By Surface 90 kms / 02 hrs]**

Today you will be driven from Kumarakom to Cochin

Kochi, or more familiarly, Cochin is a city of many parts. Around for a long, long time, Kochi played a pivotal role in the development of shipping and trade in the region. Kochi's prime location on the west coast, its fine bay and protected harbor made it popular with seafarers and merchant ships who made frequent stops to stock up on spices, coffee and wood enroute to the rich markets of Europe and West Asia. And so down the ages, Kochi prospered as a busy port city and commercial centre. Its seafront is still extremely relevant to Cochin and to India: it houses a Naval Base and one of India's busiest ports. Its twin city, Ernakulam, is an important railhead and industrial centre.

Upon arrival proceed for check-in at the hotel.



### **DAY 12: COCHIN**

In the morning proceed for a sightseeing tour of Cochin.

You will first proceed to Mattancherry and visit the oldest Jewish Synagogue (closed on Fridays Saturdays & All the Jewish holidays) in India, built in 1568. It was destroyed by the Portuguese and rebuilt by the Dutch a century later. You will also visit The Dutch Palace (Closed on Fridays) - which was built in 1555 and its coronation hall and murals at Ramayana are noteworthy features. Continue your drive to Chinese fishing nets. The cantilevered fishing nets line the entrance to the Harbour mouth. Chinese traders are believed to have originally introduced them in the 14th century although, today parts of the nets are known by Portuguese names. Your next stop will be St. Francis Church, originally named after Santo Antonio and dedicated to him as the Patron Saint of Portugal; St. Francis Church is the first church to have been in the new European influenced tradition. Originally a wooden building was replaced by the present stone building. Vasco De Gamma died on the site in 1524 and was originally buried in the cemetery. 14 years later his body was removed to Portugal. The church was renamed St. Francis in 1663.



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In the evening, you will be taken to a Kathakali dance centre where you will witness the most elaborate of the dance forms in southern India. Here you will witness the artists readying themselves up with the make up for the final performance. Kerala owes its transnational fame to this nearly 300 years old classical dance form, which combines facets of ballet, opera, masque and the pantomime. It is said to have evolved from other performing arts like Kootiyattam, Krishnanattam and Kalaripayattu. Kathakali explicates ideas and stories from the Indian epics and Puranas. Presented in the temple precincts after dusk falls Kathakali is heralded by the Kelikottu or the beating of drums in accompaniment of the Chengila (gong).

### **DAY 13: COCHIN – DEPARTURE [BY: INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT]**

Today in time a representative will meet you in the hotel lobby and transfer you to International airport to board your flight for back home.

**\*\*\* End of Tour \*\*\***

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