

## Traditions and Temples of South India

*Chennai-Covelong-Pondicherry-Tanjore –Karaikudi-Madurai- Thekaddy- Alleppey- Cochin*

### DAY 1 ARRIVE CHENNAI

Arrive Chennai. Upon arrival you will be met by our representative and escorted to your resort in Covelong (approx 45 minutes drive).

Meals Included: None

Overnight :

### DAY 2 CHENNAI

Today morning after a leisurely breakfast, you will leave for city tour of Chennai, visiting the art gallery of the Government Museum. From here, drive to see the Flower and Fruit Market, High Court, Fort Museum, Marina Beach and San Thome cathedral.



After lunch, you will be driven to Kanchipuram, known as the Golden City of a Thousand Temples and one of the oldest towns in India. It is famous for silk saris, shrines and saints. Visit Ekambareshwar, Kamakshi, Vaikunthaperumal and the Kailashnath Temples, all built in the 7th and 8th centuries.

Meals Included: Breakfast

Overnight:

## DAY 3 CHENNAI – MAHABALIPURAM - PONDICHERRY



Today morning you will have a slightly early breakfast and then drive to Mahabalipuram, a coastal temple town an hour's drive from Chennai. Mahabalipuram is India's stone-carving capital, famous for its romantic Shore Temple — a World Heritage Monument. A long, beautiful white sand beach, crocodile farm, snake venom extracting centre, schools of art and sculpture and many resorts attract tourists to this busy village. After sightseeing you will continue the drive to Pondicherry ( approx 3 hour 30 minutes drive).

Later in the afternoon you will be taken for a visit to the famous Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Its spiritual tenets represent a synthesis of yoga and modern science. This ashram, one of the most popular in India with Westerners, and also one of the most affluent, wields an enormous influence over the culture and economy of Pondicherry. During your sightseeing you will also have the opportunity to visit the Pondicherry museum, which has sculptures and memorabilia of the French colonists, and the Sacred Heart Church with its Gothic architecture and stained glass windows.

Meals Included: Breakfast

Overnight:

## DAY 4 PONDICHERRY - TANJORE

Today you will be drive to Tanjore or Thanjavur (as called in local language) visiting temples at Kumbakonam and Darasuram en-route (approx 5 hour 30 minutes drive). On arrival you will check - into your resort.

Meals Included: Breakfast

Overnight:

## DAY 5 TANJORE – TRICHY -KARAIKUDI

After breakfast, you will visit Brahdeeshwara Temple, Palace and Museum.

Thanjavur district with its ubiquitous green stretches is called the “Granary of the south”. Once the majestic capital of the Chola kings, it retains their glorious legacy with over 74 shrines including the renowned temple of Lord Brahadeeswara. The Brahadeeswara temple or Big Temple was built by the greatest Chola emperor Raja Rajan Chola and is the dynasty’s finest contribution to Dravidian architecture. Also visit the palace and the art gallery, housing granite and bronze statues of the Chola period

Later you will be driven to Trichy (approx 1 hour drive) where you will enjoy a short sightseeing tour.

Tiruchirapalli is located on the banks of the Cauvery River. You will visit the Rock Fort, which sits on a massive sand-coloured rock that towers above the old town. At its summit, reached by climbing 437 rock-cut steps, is a temple dedicated to Lord Ganesha. There is also a Shiva Temple and several cave temples with beautifully carved pillars and panels. Later visit the Ranganathaswamy Temple at Srirangam, one of the most revered shrines of Lord Vishnu in the south, and also one of the largest and liveliest.

Later drive to Karaikudi (approx 2 hour 30 minutes drive).

Rest of the day will be at your leisure.

Meals Included: All meals

Overnight:

## DAY 6 KARAIKUDI

After early breakfast you will be taken for a visit some of the old Chettiar mansions and then the famous Chettiar Palace and Museum



Karaikudi is the heartland of the old Chettiar trading community, in an area known as Chettinadu. The town is characterized by the eccentric mansions of the Chettiars, which are well worth a visit.

The people who became the Chettiars of Tamil Nadu were originally gem and salt merchants and ship-chandlers operating on the coasts of the state when it was a Chola kingdom. In course of time the coastal merchants became financiers and, thanks to their reputation for scrupulous integrity, acquired wealth and power. From being mere Shetty or Chetty merchants, derived from the Sanskrit “shresthi,” the most powerful group among them were accorded the respectful suffix “ar” to their caste names. They became the “Chettiars”.



For some unknown reason, the Chettiars had decided to settle in a rather parched and arid land extending westwards into the hinterland of the Bay of Bengal. Here, their great trade-financed mansions rose, spurring the growth of villages into urban centres. Then as the riches of distant lands

continued to pour in, and most of the men spent much of their time overseas, it became necessary to secure their wealth, and ensure the safety of their families, by building high walls around their mansions. Thus, the mansions of Chettinad are not just the extravagant follies of a rich community. They are assertive expressions of their history and lifestyles

Later in the evening you will enjoy a cooking demo of famous **Chettinadu Cuisine**.

*Chettinadu cuisine is originated in the southern parts of Tamil Nadu state comprising of Madurai, Tirunelveli and Karaikudi regions. One of the rare non-vegetarian cuisines of South India, Chettinadu Cuisine hails from the kitchens of the Chettiars. This cuisine is well known for its spices and aromatic non vegetarian dishes like Chicken Chettinad, Pepper Chicken, and Fish Varuval etc. Chettinadu cuisine is so different from the traditional healthy vegetarian cuisine of the Tamil Brahmins and like other south Indian cuisines, a typical Chettinad menu is served on a banana leaf.*

Meals Included: All meals

Overnight:

**DAY 7 KARAIKUDI - MADURAI**

Today morning you will be driven to Madurai (approx 3 hours) where you will check in at your hotel.

Later in the day you will enjoy a city tour of Madurai, visiting the spectacular Sri Meenakshi Temple, which is one of the largest temple complexes in India and dedicated to the consort of Lord Shiva and powerful goddess Meenakshi. Also visit the Tirumala Nayak Palace, a gracious building in the Indo-Saracenic style famous for stucco work.



Evening is at your leisure; later in the night you will be again taken to the famous Sri Meenakshi Temple to witness “going to bed ceremony”.

Meals Included: Breakfast

Overnight:

### **DAY 8 MADURAI - PERIYAR**

After breakfast, you will be driven to Periyar (approx 4 hours drive).

Set amidst tea, coffee & spice plantations, One of the largest wildlife reserves in India, the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary occupies 777 square kilometers of the Cardamom Hills region of the Western Ghats. At sunrise & sunset one can watch wildlife in their natural habitat while cruising on the lake Periyar, which is an experience by itself.

Later in the afternoon you will be taken for visit to Spice Plantation where your will learn the taste and aromas of various spice grown in the region .

Meals Included: Breakfast

Overnight:

### **DAY 9 PERIYAR -ALLEPPEY**

In the early morning enjoy jungle walk followed by a boat ride on Lake Periyar to see the wildlife around river Periyar.

After breakfast, drive to Alleppey, the scenic backwaters of Kerala (approx 3 hour 30 minutes drive) to board your Houseboat “Kettuvallam” for overnight cruise on the backwaters.

Kettuvallams (which translates literally into ‘sewn canoes’) are large roomy canoes, which were once used to transport spices, chilies, coconuts, coir, rice etc; to the big trading vessels waiting at Kochi harbor as many as two thousand years back. These also doubled as floating homes for the oarsman and his family. Today, these have been converted into cozy yet eco-friendly houseboats which are perfect to explore the mesmerizing waterways of Kerala and observe the unhurried pace of kaleidoscopic everyday life along her banks.

Traveling on the backwaters by traditionally designed houseboat is one of the highlights of a visit to Kerala. The boats cross shallow, palm-fringed lakes studded with cantilevered Chinese fishing nets. You will see how the local population lives on narrow spits of reclaimed land only a few meters wide.

Meals Included: All meals

Overnight:

## DAY 10 ALLEPPEY - COCHIN



After Breakfast you will cruise back to the Alleppey boat jetty, where you will disembark and driven to Cochin (approx 1 hour 30 minutes).



Cochin, formerly a princely state beckoned travelers from distant shores. This commercial city, also called “The Queen of the Arabian Sea” is famous for its exquisite designer Gold Jewelry. The Indian Navy, the Port and the Airport share the largely man-made Willingdon Island.

Rest of the day is to sit back and relax by the pool or enjoy a Kerala ayurvedic message.

Later in the evening you will be taken for Kathakali Dance Performance at a nearby theater.



The most popular and sacred dance-drama of Kerala, Kathakali evolved across the last 400 years. This classical dance requires lengthy and rigorous training to attain complete control of the body and sensitivity to emotion so as to be able to render all its nuances through facial expressions and hand gestures. Themes centre on the two great Indian

epics - the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. We suggest arriving early in order to witness the artists putting on their make-up which is one of highlights of this performance.

Meals Included: Breakfast

Overnight:

## DAY 11 COCHIN

Today you will be taken for sightseeing for Fort Cochin.

The sightseeing includes the visit to Dutch Palace built by the Portuguese for a local King in 1555 A.D. The famous Jew Street, a cul-de-sac leading to the beautiful Synagogue built in 1568. A walking tour of Fort Cochin will take you through the streets still graced with traces of Portuguese, Dutch & British colonial architecture, including a few old trading factories, the only ones still standing anywhere in the world.

In the evening you will be taken for a cooking demo and dinner with an expert in Kerala's Syrian Christian cuisine.

*The Syrian Arab Christians fled to India and took refuge under the king of Kerala around 1000 year ago. They settled in various part of kerala and their own cusine was greatly influenced by the local keralan cuisine and developed into what is now knowm as Syriyan Christian Kerala cuisine. Syrian Christian dishes are richly flavoured and food such as fish, seafood, duck, lamb and chicken dishes are included.*

Meals Included: Breakfast

Overnight:

## **DAY 12 COCHIN- ONWARD DESTINATION**

Today early morning (or as your flight schedule maybe) you will be driven to Cochin Airport for your onward flight back home.

Meals Included: Breakfast

\*\*\*\*\* End of the Arrangements\*\*\*\*\*