



SOUTH INDIA EXPLORER

Chennai/Pondicherry/Kumbakonam/Thanjavur/ Cochin/Kumarakom

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Curated walks to see the multi cultural heritage of Southern India
- Visiting master crafts people
- Lecture demonstration of two Southern Indian dance styles
- Introduction to the various Southern Indian cuisines

Day	City	Description	Hotel
1	Chennai	Arrive Chennai. You clear immigration and custom formalities and you are transferred to your hotel near the airport	Taj Connemara
2	Chennai	The Morning is at leisure. In the afternoon you will tour one of the oldest and one of the more interesting and oldest areas of Chennai – the City of Mylapore . The <i>two hour walking tour</i> starts at the temple, a center of social interaction as are most temples in Southern India. Marriages, engagements, gossip and showing off jewelry and clothes are all a part of the daily meetings here.	Taj Connemara
3	Pondicherry	When you are ready you drive along the coast to Mahaballipuram , the world heritage site, home to some extraordinary rock cut sculptures, the jewel of the collection being the shore temple. After lunch you continue to Pondicherry.	Palais De Mahe
4	Pondicherry	Pondicherry was the former capital of the French territories in India and still retains much of its French character. You will spend the day visiting the French and Tamil quarters as well as the Auroville Ashram	Palais De Mahe
5	Kumbakonam	The morning is at leisure. After lunch you drive to the rice bowl of Tamil Nadu and the village of Veppathur where you stay at the charming Mantra Koodam	Mantra Koodam
6	Kumbakonam	You spend two nights here exploring the temples, walking in the farmlands or traveling by bullock cart and visiting a Vedic school and seeing the lost art of Kalamkari and lost wax bronze sculpting	Mantra Koodam
7	Thanjavur	You drive through the heart of the lush and green delta of the Kaveri river to the temple town of Thanjavur. This evening you watch a lecture demonstration of the classical dance – Bharatnatyam	Svatma

8	Thanjavur	Today you visit the Brihadisvara also known as the “Big Temple” and a UNESCO world heritage site. You will stop at a simple no frills restaurant operated by village women where everything is made fresh (even the oil is ground on site) and cooked in clay pots. This extraordinary 41 course lunch served on banana leaves and is a culinary treat. Later you take a walking tour of the Old City	Svatma
9	Cochin	You transfer to the airport and you depart for the harbor town of Cochin. You are met and you transfer to your hotel. The rest of the day is at leisure	Brunton Boatyard
10	Cochin	<p>Today you visit Fort Cochin and the area still referred to as “Jew Town” dating back to the time when the area was home to a substantial Jewish population. The Synagogue is one of the oldest in India. Later you stroll through the spice market and visit the Mattancherri Palace, a wooden palace built by the Dutch for the Raja of Mattancherri and which has perhaps the best examples of Kerala mural paintings in existence.</p> <p>After lunch you take a walking tour of the of the heritage zone which with its varied architectural styles highlights Cochin’s history of being a busy trading port and thus occupied by various foreign rulers. You will walk along the sea front where local people come with their families resulting in the most fascinating range of vendors selling everything from plastic toys to wigs!</p> <p>In the evening at you will watch a short performance of the famous Kerala dance – Kathakali. The session is interactive with your having an opportunity to be made up and learn some of the basic movements and expressions.</p>	Brunton Boatyard
11	Kumarakom	Leaving behind the town of Cochin you will head out for a two night stay in the beautiful and serene countryside exploring the unique lifestyle of the backwaters. You will have lunch on a private island and later explore the village before continuing to your resort nestled in the backwaters with superb views of the picturesque Vembanad Lake	Kumarakom Lake Resort
12	Kumarakom	A visit to Kerala is incomplete without a tour of the famous Kerala backwaters. You will explore the narrow canals, visiting areas where the tourist footstep is very light. The photography opportunities are exceptional as you stop at small villages and watch coir rope being made; toddy tappers at work; women making thatched roofs and yoga mats. Along the way are men throwing out fishing nets; washing utensils, doing laundry and	Kumarakom Lake Resort

		bathing. It is a panorama of life you cannot see from the larger houseboats. You return to your resort for lunch and an afternoon at leisure to use the spa and enjoy the views	
13		You transfer to Cochin airport and you are assisted with checking in for your onward flight	



**Day 1
Chennai**

Arrive Chennai. You are met as you exit the aircraft and you are assisted with immigration and custom formalities. You transfer you to your hotel

Chennai

Formerly known as Madras, Chennai is a conglomeration of several fishing villages and therefore has o single centre. It began taking shape as a city under the British, a transformation which began in 1640w with the establishing of the fortified settlement which came to be known as Fort St George. It is also believed that St Thomas was martyred here in Madras and his tomb is housed in the impressive Basilica of San Thome in the historic Mylapore area. Chennai today is considered to be the cultural capital of Southern India and is the fourth largest city in India.

**Hotel
Room**

**Taj Connemara
Luxury Room**

**Day 2
Chennai**

The morning is at leisure



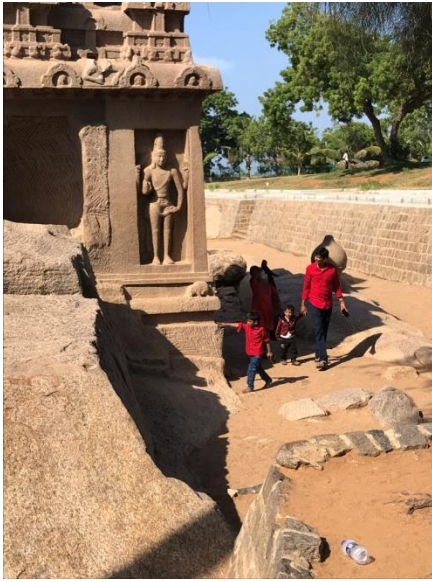
In the afternoon you will tour one of the oldest and one of the more interesting and oldest areas of Chennai – the City of Mylapore. The *two hour walking tour* starts at the temple, a center of social interaction as are most temples in Southern India. Marriages, engagements, gossip and showing off jewelry and clothes are all a part of the daily meetings here. Visiting a temple is a wonderful insight into a traditional society.

From the temple, the walk continues through the narrow lanes of Mylapore stopping at a house of priest, once again a behind the scene glimpse at life of the ordinary people; you learn the significance of the kollams which decorate the doorstep of every home in the area.

The area is also important to Christianity and Mylapore links go back to the 1st century AF to the time of St Thomas who brought Christianity to the shores of India landing first in Kerala. The present Basilica of San Thome built over his burial site is an impressive Gothic style structure. The ornate exteriors are complimented by magnificent stained glass interiors



Hotel	Taj Connemara
Room	Luxury Room
Meals	Breakfast



Day 3
Chennai/Pondicherry

After breakfast you will drive to the Indian Ocean and the UNESCO site of **Mahaballipuram. Mamallapuram** as it is known today is an extraordinary experience. This open-air museum of Tamil art in living rock is the work of students under the patronage of the Pallava rulers. Strewn along the coast are some outstanding examples of 7th century sculpture – **cave temples**, an enormous **bas-relief** depicting scenes from the Indian epic the Mahabharata, and an **amphitheater of chariot shaped temples**.

The landmark of this marvelous collection is the **Shore Temple**, a world heritage monument, and the only surviving one from a complex, the other's having been claimed by the sea.

You continue to Pondicherry after lunch

Hotel	Palais de Mahe
Room	Deluxe
Meals	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 4
Pondicherry

Pondicherry served as the capital for the French territories in India and was established in the 17th century. Pondicherry has three distinct sections: The French quarters which runs along the Bay of Bengal has elegant colonial mansions, parks, bars and cafes. The Tamil quarters where the local population lived is demarcated by a now dry canal.



The third section is the Ashram which dominates the town. Founded in 1926 by Sri Aurobindo, who came to Pondicherry to escape being imprisoned by the British, he was drawn by its spiritual atmosphere. He established an Ashram here along with his disciple Mirra Alfassa who was later known as The Mother. Today this international commune encourages and helps local develop and sell handicraft, and the craft from Pondicherry is much sought after throughout India.

Hotel	Palais de Mahe
Room	Deluxe
Meals	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5
Pondicherry/Kumbakonam

The morning is at leisure.

After lunch you will travel today to the village of Veppathur (4 hours drive). Lying at the edge of the area which houses some magnificent temples, you will stay at Mantra Veppathur which incorporates the architecture of the nearby Chettiar area, which is a tribute to the region's history and culture

Hotel	Mantra Koodam
Room	Mantra Cottage
Meals	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 6
Kumbakonam

Today you will explore the great temples of Tamil Nadu and the local villages to see the rich heritage of craft many of them indigenous to this region. The days are a blend of art, craft and architecture.

Kumbakonam lies in the rich delta of the Kaveri River, and on one of the mornings you will visit the farmlands and paddy fields. While in Kumbakonam town you visit the **Raja Vehda Kavya Patshala, a Vedic school** established in 1542. You will listen to Vedic chants, a meditative practice and learn the meaning of these chants.

Hotel	Mantra Koodam
Room	Mantra Cottage
Meals	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 7

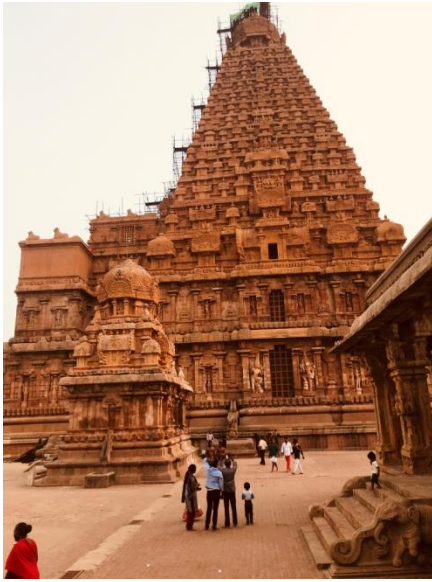
Kumbakonam/Thanjavur

You will drive to Thanjavur today.

On the way you will stop to see the bronze workers who use the lost wax method to make representations of the Chola bronzes. This is a small sleepy village, and the work shop is in a small house with the baking and waxing done in the backyard. The methods are simple and basic – an oven dug into the mud ground to bake the clay, hammers, nails and a

file and the results are exquisite and intricately carved statues ranging from one foot to three feet.

Hotel	Svatma
Room	Millennium Deluxe room
Meals	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 8

Thanjavur

In the morning you visit the “Great Temple” the **Brihadisvara Temple**. This monumental granite temple, one of the finest examples of Chola architecture is a world heritage monument. Completed in AD 1010 the temple is a symbol of Chola power. The main temple stands in the middle of a rectangular courtyard surrounded by subsidiary shrines with superb sculptures and murals

You will stop at a simple no frills restaurant operated by village women where everything is made fresh (even the oil is ground on site) and cooked in clay pots. This extraordinary 41 course lunch served on banana leaves is a culinary treat.

Later the heritage walk cum driving tour of the City takes you to the Museum and Art Gallery which has a superb collection of Chola bronzes and stone idols dating from the 7th to the 20th century. Particularly noteworthy are the images of Shiva such as the one which depicts the wedding of Shiva and Parvati. There are also some excellent bronzes of the Nataraj, the dancing form of Shiva. You also visit the Royal Palace which has splendid Maratha Durbar Hall with painted and decorated pillars and walls.



This evening you will have a dance demonstration of the classical Bharatnatyam dance. **Bharatnatyam** is a dance that encompasses music, rhythm and expressional dance or Abhinaya and strictly adheres to the Natyashastra (the scripture of classical Indian dance).

Hotel
Room
Meals

Svatma
Millennium Deluxe room
Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 9

Thanjavur/Trichy/Cochin

You drive an hour to Trichy Airport and you depart for the harbor town of Cochin.

COCHIN

Kochi, better known as Cochin is Kerala's most cosmopolitan city. It was the main trading centre for spices and seafood, the town is in fact a collection of narrow islands. Whilst the more modern Ernakulum boasts restaurants, new built modern shopping malls and commercial complexes, the Mattancherri and Fort Cochin area is still traditional and retains much of its original architecture and old world charm. The area is a blend of Dutch, Portuguese and British architecture, narrow streets crowded with spice shops, galleries and cafes' and the Jewish synagogue, the oldest in India. The architecture and cuisine reflects the influences of the many traders who came and visited and ultimately settled.

**Hotel
Room
Meals**

**Brunton Boatyard
Standard Sea View
Breakfast**



Day 10

Cochin

Today you will take a tour of **Fort Cochin**. You stop at the dhobi Ghats (open air laundries), temples, churches, and the beach. You continue past spice warehouses, the air rich with the smell of dried ginger, cardamom and pepper. This area is very diverse, home to a variety of communities. The architectural

differences of the houses, dress and language are some of the aspects the guides will talk about and how these communities came to be associated with the area. You can do this either as a biking tour or driving/walking tour

You will visit the area still referred to as Jew Town. The narrow lanes a mass of antique and souvenir shops, leading to the main attraction of the area – **the Pardesi Synagogue**, amongst the oldest in India, the interiors are decorated with blue tiles imported from China.





You will stop at the **Mattancherri Palace** which was commissioned by the Portuguese for the Raja of Kochi in exchange for trading rights. The palace is two storey's high and is built in the traditional Kerala style known as "*nalukattu*" (four buildings around a central courtyard). Made of wood and richly carved, the palace exhibits memorabilia from the Raja of Kochi's collection, but it is best known for its

outstanding murals painted on the walls. Fast fading, one can still see some of these excellent 16th century paintings illustrating episodes from the great Indian epic – The Ramayana.

In the afternoon you can explore the heritage zone where your hotel is located. You can stop at art galleries and the walking tour will introduce you to the historical and cultural diversity of the area. You will walk along the sea front where local families gather. The area is lined with vendors selling food, brightly colored drinks, plastic toys and even wigs. It is a great panorama of life in the city.





You end the day meeting with the dancers who perform the classical Kathakali. The essence of the dance is relating stories through the dramatic make up and every emotive hand and eye movements. During this interactive session you have the option of having the makeup applied and learning some of the expressions used to illustrate moods from anger and fear to joy

**Hotel
Room
Meals**

**Brunton Boatyard
Standard Sea View
Breakfast**

**Day 11
Cochin/Kumarakom**

You will head out today for a two night stay exploring the serene and beautiful Kerala countryside. Tropical, lush and in shades of green with splashes of colors from the flowering trees, birds and lotus that flourish in the backwaters, the area has a rhythm and lifestyle which is unique – one dictated by the waters



You will stop on Kayal Island, tucked away in the heart of the backwaters, and you will have a hands on outdoors cooking lesson using produce sourced on the island. Later you explore the island and the small village.

Hotel Kumarakom Lake Resort
Room Meandering pool villa
Meals Breakfast, Lunch



Day 12

Cochin/Kumarakom

A visit to Kerala is incomplete without a tour of the backwaters. A labyrinthine maze of canals which wind their way through the state, they support a unique lifestyle, one which is dictated by the waters. You will depart at **7:30 AM**

You will explore the famous Kerala backwaters today traveling the very narrow channels where no tourist visits. You will do this tour in a Shikara, or small boat. This is an interactive tour and you will stop at small villages and where you join fisherman throwing out nets to catch fish; women making thatch roofs and weaving mats; watch a toddy tapper who gathers the sap from the flower of the tree to make a local alcoholic drink, try making coir ropes and all the while interacting with the simple and very friendly who make the lives along these waters





You return for lunch and an afternoon at leisure to enjoy the serenity and the traditional spa of the resort

Hotel	Kumarakom Lake Resort
Room	Meandering pool villa
Meals	Breakfast, Lunch

Day 13

Kumarakom/Cochin

After breakfast you depart for Cochin Airport and you will be assisted with checking in for your onward flight

Meals	Breakfast
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