



ANCIENT INDIA: LEGENDS OF THE SOUTH

Uncover the cultural heritage of Southern India, where the splendid relics of ancient civilisations combine to bring you some of the most magnificent palaces, shrines, forts, temples and ruins on the subcontinent.

Tailor-Made Journeys, Suggested Itineraries



India, Indian Subcontinent



13 days from AU\$9,525 pp



Private

Journey Overview

Uncover the cultural heritage of Southern India, where the splendid relics of ancient civilisations combine with the confluence of six faiths, to bring you some of the most magnificent architecture, palaces, shrines, forts, temples and ruins on the subcontinent. Wherever you go in the south, you'll uncover breathtaking diversity in a land that has been inhabited for more than two millennia. From buzzing Mumbai and the cave temples of Ajanta to the extraordinary ruins of Hampi, and onto the delicious culinary delights of Bengaluru, immerse yourself in the legends of the south on this unforgettable luxury journey.

Journey Highlights

- See the real Mumbai at dawn, just like a local, discovering a kaleidoscope of colour as the sun rises over a city bustling with life
- Brave the darkness of the 29 Ajanta Cave temples as your expert guide unravels thousands of years of ancient Buddhist history
- Explore the extraordinary archaeological feat of the carved Kailasa Temple, twice the size of the Parthenon in Greece
- Savour an evening culinary tour of the aromatic spice and vegetable markets of Hyderabad, before joining a local to learn the art of cooking Biryani
- Discover the magnificent and expansive ruins of the Vijayanagara Empire in Hampi, a must-do for the discerning history buff
- Glide down the serene waters of the River Tungabhadra by coracle, for a true historical immersion
- Uncover an eclectic mix of old and new in cosmopolitan Bengaluru, with its charming old-world neighbourhoods and modern marvels



Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Mumbai

Welcome to Mumbai (formerly known as Bombay), the gateway to India, and home to the prolific and world-famous Bollywood industry. Brimming with some of the country's finest culinary hotspots, architecture and history, Mumbai captivates at every turn. Receive a warm A&K welcome and transfer privately to the Taj Mahal Palace & Towers, set on the waterfront opposite the Gateway of India. Settle into your luxury accommodation or step out on your own to discover more of this pulsating city.

The Taj Mahal Palace

Day 2: Mumbai

Embark on an expertly guided walking tour with a true local, discovering a kaleidoscope of colour and a rich colonial history. Starting from the Gateway of India, unpeel layers of history as you explore the Royal Mumbai Yacht Club, the Police Headquarters and the City Museum. Navigate Mumbai's vibrant art area, Kala Ghoda, filled with museums and galleries, gaze up at the soaring Raja Bhai towers, the Big Ben of Mumbai, and hear chimes of old British tunes. Then take in the World Heritage-listed Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, an architectural masterpiece made famous by the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*. Soak up the lively vibe of the market over a delicious glass of Falooda (sweet milk-based drink), before lunch in the world-renowned Bombay Canteen. Spend the afternoon your way. Relax in the luxury of your hotel, choose a half-day cruise to the 8th century Elephanta Caves or explore more of Mumbai on a guided tour of the Hanging Gardens (additional charges).

The Taj Mahal Palace / Meals: BL

Day 3: Mumbai - Aurangabad

Rise early to greet Mumbai by dawn. Witness the real Mumbai unfolding in the clamorous and chaotic Sassoon docks, where you'll see a fish auction and meet the local traders who keep the city running. End your tour on a cricket ground to learn how this game captured the hearts of billions, before returning to your hotel for a morning at leisure. Later, en route to the airport, stop at the famous 140-year-old Dhobi Ghat, India's human-powered washing machine, to observe the hundreds of laundrymen washing clothes.

Vivanta Aurangabad / Meals: B

Day 4: Aurangabad

Journey to the ancient UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ajanta Caves, a series of 29 cave temples and monasteries carved out of a sheer cliff along the Waghora River. Marvel at the intricate Buddhist sculptures, wall art, ceiling paintings and frescoes carved into solid rock depicting the life of the Buddha. Discover how these amazing caves, built by monks between 2nd century BC and 7th century AD, were rediscovered by British Officers on a hunting trip after being forgotten for 100 years. Brave the darkness as your expert guide lights the way and unravels thousands of years of ancient Buddhist history.

Vivanta Aurangabad / Meals: BL

Day 5: Aurangabad - Hyderabad

Venture into the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ellora Caves — an incredible technological feat that illustrates the spirit of co-existence and religious tolerance that was characteristic of ancient India. Dating back to the 4th and 9th centuries, the complex comprises 33 different Hindu, Buddhist and Jain cave temples dug side by side in the wall of a high basalt cliff. Head to Cave 16 to see the headline act: the mysterious Kailasa Temple, one of the oldest single-rock carving, multi-storeyed complexes in the world. During an archaeological survey, the temple astounded Western archaeologists who found it to be double the size of the Parthenon in Athens. Later, fly to Hyderabad where you'll be staying at the exquisite palace-turned-hotel, Taj Falaknuma Palace. Perched on a hill overlooking the city below, this original residence of the Nizams is one of the most remarkable sights of Hyderabad. Settle in before an evening at leisure.

Taj Falaknuma Palace / Meals: B

Day 6: Hyderabad

After a leisurely morning take a tour of the graceful tombs of the Qutub Shahi kings. The entire dynasty is buried here in 21 granite and stucco sepulchres set among beautifully landscaped gardens. Continue to the sprawling Golconda Fort, built between the 14th and 16th century and filled with pavilions, gates, colonnades, cupolas and fortifications, which was the seat of power for a region once famed for its diamond mines. Later this evening, with a glass of champagne in hand, enter the opulent world of the Nizams on a fascinating walk around the palace led by the hotel butlers.

Taj Falaknuma Palace / Meals: B

Day 7: Hyderabad

Once home to the richest man in the world (the Nizam of Hyderabad), the city offers an enthralling fusion of old and new. Uncover these rich contrasts on a guided walk. See the splendid palaces of Hyderabad's Nizams, the bustling bazaars and Muslim monuments, including the stunning Jama Masjid and the famous symbol of the city, the Charminar (four minarets). Spend the afternoon at leisure before an evening treat for your tastebuds with a culinary adventure. Weave through the aromatic stalls of the local spice and vegetable markets, before joining your host in her family kitchen to prepare your feast. Learn the closely guarded secrets behind a traditional Hyderabadi Biryani, considered to be one of the world's best biryanis, then enjoy your creation.

Taj Falaknuma Palace / Meals: BD

Day 8: Hyderabad - Hampi

Take to the skies today for Hubli, before your private transfer overland to Hampi, with its magnificent ruins, shady palm groves, rich banana plantations and sun-swept paddy fields.

Settle into your haven of luxury, your base for the next three nights. This evening, participate in a fascinating lecture on the history and architecture of UNESCO World Heritage site Hampi — the perfect way to whet your appetite for the adventures to come.

Evolve Back / Meals: BD

Day 9: Hampi

Explore extraordinary Hampi. Now a city in ruins, this magical landscape of the Vijayanagara Empire was once the 'second-largest medieval-era city after Beijing'. Its prosperity attracted traders and artists from far and away, and has continued to attract explorers, history lovers and archaeologists for centuries. Set off on a full day of discovery, from fascinating architectural ruins to the relics and vestiges of the once prosperous capital. Your guide will unravel the archaeological mysteries of the Virupaksha and Vittala temples, the iconic stone chariot, Maha Mantapa, the musical pillars of the Ranga Mantapa and the Elephant Stables, before a tour of the remains of the queen's sprawling recreational mansion. To top it off enjoy a picnic lunch on the banks of the scenic and holy Tungabhadra River.

This evening return to the serene waters of the river for an authentic coracle ride, just like the ancient peoples of the Vijayanagara Empire. Your coracle is a round, bowl-shaped boat made from strips of bamboo, and a ride aboard one of these makes for a true historical immersion.

Evolve Back / Meals: BLD

Day 10: Hampi

Enjoy a full day discovering Hampi and the surrounding region at your own pace, depending on your individual interests. Choose to continue on the temple trail, heading out to the cave sites of Aihole, Pattadakal and Badami. These significant centres of the Chalukya Dynasty feature extraordinary temple architecture, stone artwork, and construction techniques — an absolutely must-do for the discerning history buff. For an immersive slice of living culture marvel at the brightly coloured nomadic tribe of the Lambanis in their village. Be dazzled by their flamboyant garb of exquisite embroidery of glittering sequins, coins, mirrors and shells along with their trademark bright jewellery and be invited into a home for a meal. For a wildlife experience head to the Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary for the chance to see these beautiful creatures in their natural habitat. Alternatively, get active and stretch your legs as you hike your way through Hampi's unearthly landscapes taking in sweeping views where giant boulders perch precariously, their rusty colour a stark contrast to the emerald-green paddy fields (additional charges).

Evolve Back / Meals: BD

Day 11: Hampi - Bengaluru

Drive to progressive and cosmopolitan Bengaluru (also known as Bangalore), the 'Garden City of India' – with its burgeoning nightlife, modern shopping and diverse culinary scene, as well as an eclectic mix of modern marvels and historic monuments. After a day of travel, settle into your lush heritage sanctuary, nestled on 20 acres of landscaped gardens. This ambient stay is housed in an expansive colonial building with charms of a bygone era. Your evening is at leisure.

Taj Westend / Meals: BL

Day 12: Bengaluru

Discover the living history of the Lalbagh Botanical Gardens with its exotic plants, majestic 100-year-old trees and glistening, peaceful lakes. Follow the footsteps of your charming and knowledgeable local as they unfurl ancient legends of the Bull Temple, carved from a single grey granite boulder and polished with oil and charcoal, and navigate the more than 1000 plant species. Continue to the Vidhana Soudha, with its exquisite Dravidian and Indo-Saracenic architectural styles, then carry on exploring with an afternoon at leisure.

This evening, discover authentic Bengaluru culture on a tour through the 'old' neighbourhoods. Hear stories of Bengaluru's age-old intellectuals and see popular hangouts of the rich and famous, discovering the lives and ideals of the people that once called these streets home. Rest your feet and tuck into traditional South Indian fare, with interesting modern twists on the timeless classics.

Taj Westend / Meals: BD

Day 13: Depart Bengaluru

Today your South Indian adventure has come to an end. Enjoy a private transfer to the airport for your onward flight.

Meals: B

Map



Accommodation

The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai



The history of Mumbai and The Taj Mahal Palace are dramatically intertwined. The hotel is Mumbai's first harbour landmark (built 21 years before the Gateway of India) and the site of the first licensed bar in the city. For more than a century, the Taj has played an intrinsic part in the life of the city, hosting Maharajas, dignitaries and eminent personalities from across the globe. Today it is a Leading Hotel of the World and favourite destination for discerning travellers.

Whether you choose a room in the Palace or Tower, your accommodation is certain to be a remarkable blend of old-world elegance and modern facilities. Mixing traditional touches with stylish, contemporary design, all are decidedly upscale, in the style of a spacious luxury apartment. What's more, all afford superb views.

The Taj Mahal Palace is also home to 44 generously appointed suites, each adorned with original paintings and period furniture to evoke the grandeur of another age. Combining contemporary and classic styles, the richly hued interiors exemplify luxurious living, a sense re-enforced by perfect service - personal butlers can be summoned at the touch of a button - attending to every request from check-in to departure.

Why we like it

- Choice between old-world Heritage Wing rooms and those in the contemporary Tower Wing
- Excellent location with front-row seats to the Gateway of India
- Range of award-winning restaurants with cuisines ranging from contemporary Indian to fine-dining
- Jiva Spa offers traditional Indian treatments, from the relaxing Vishram to Pehlwan Malish warrior massage
- Hotel has a large courtyard swimming pool surrounded by sundecks

Taj Falaknuma Palace, Hyderabad



Taj Falaknuma Palace is also known as the 'mirror of the sky' because it was built in the clouds and reflects the ever-changing moods of the sky. Set in 32 acres and spread over 19,400 square metres, the Palace is one of the most remarkable sights of Hyderabad - this sumptuous palace hotel underwent a sensitive 10-year restoration.

The hotel is superb in every detail, from the stunning neo-classical façade to its 60 exquisite rooms and suites. Large Venetian chandeliers, rare furniture, grand marble staircases, priceless statues, and objets d'art reflect its palatial origins along with the stained-glass windows and the Palace Library, a replica of the one at Windsor Castle and home to the rarest of manuscripts, books and one of the most acclaimed collections of the Holy Quran in the country.

Why we like it

- Rooms and suites overlook manicured gardens
- Situated on a hill, the Taj Falaknuma Palace overlooks the city of Hyderabad below
- Six restaurant choices offer a range of superb Hyderabadi specialities as well as Italian, Mediterranean and light lunches
- Jiva Spa offers rejuvenation experiences are masterminded by well-trained experts armed with exclusive natural products and a gentle approach to all round healing
- Heated swimming pool is set in wonderful gardens

Evolve Back Kamalapura Palace



Set amongst the stunning boulder-strewn landscape, Evolve Back Kamalapura Palace is located just four kilometres from the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Hampi. Step inside its fort-like entrance to discover arched hallways, regal chambers, ornate architecture, landscaped gardens and opulent interiors that mirror the famed palaces of a glorious era.

There are four types of suite, each exuding luxury and understated elegance that permeates the resort's Indo-Islamic style. The spacious and elegantly designed guest rooms feature separate living, sleeping and dining areas, a large en suite bathroom and a balcony with private Jacuzzi. Some suites boast their own open courtyard and deck overlooking a private pool – the perfect setting for an intimate dinner.

There are two pools: a family pool and an Olympic-sized infinity pool, which is exclusively for adults and overlooks the stunning landscape. The resort also has a Spa, where trained physicians and masseurs can prescribe a customised regimen suited to your specific needs. When it comes to dining, both the Bahmani and the Tuluva restaurants promise a fine selection of continental and Indian cuisine in a breathtaking setting. But for a truly memorable experience, savour a private four-course meal in a 'Mantapa' overlooking the lotus pond and the Infinity Pool.

Why we like it

- Located just 4km from the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Hampi
- Locally inspired grand architecture to mirror the famed palaces of a bygone era
- Adult-only infinity pool overlooking the lunar landscape
- Ayurvedic spa treatments
- Unforgettable dining experiences, including an intimate dinner in a 'Mantapa'

Abercrombie & Kent

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