



## INDIAN SOUTH: COAST TO COAST

From the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea,  
South India is an endless and vibrant sensory  
feast.

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Tailor-Made Journeys, Suggested Itineraries



Indian Subcontinent, India



16 days from AU\$7,870 pp



Private

## Journey Overview

From the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea, South India is an endless and vibrant sensory feast. With its colonial ports, steamy landscapes, tea-covered hills, lazy backwaters and world-famous beaches, it offers a vibrant contrast to the north. From the French influence of Puducherry to the tranquil backwaters of Kerala, the cultural charms of Kochi to the ancient temples of Tamil Nadu, expect a slower pace, extraordinary wildlife, an enthralling ancient history and colonial-influenced culinary delights.

### Journey Highlights

- Experience the intoxicating chaos of sounds, aromas, colours and haggling at the bustling George Town market
- Discover the unspoiled beaches, colonial ambience, French and Tamil quarters, and ancient temples and churches of Puducherry
- Learn about the dizzying historical legacy and temples of Thanjavur, one of the most remarkable bedrocks of Chola and Dravidian civilization
- Witness an evocative *aarti* prayer ceremony at the 12th century Meenakshi Temple, a sensory extravaganza
- Glimpse spectacular wildlife and birdlife in Periyar National Park, keeping your eyes peeled for the elusive Bengal tiger
- Cruise the beautiful Kerala backwaters on a traditional houseboat, passing sleepy rural villages shaded by coconut palms as you glide through canals and lagoons
- Uncover magnificent Kochi, as you explore the delightful blend of Portuguese, Dutch and Chinese influences in this atmospheric Kerala gem



## Itinerary

### **Day 1: Arrive Chennai**

Welcome to Chennai. Upon arrival, meet your A&K driver and enjoy a private transfer to your hotel.

#### ***The Leela Palace Chennai***

### **Day 2: Chennai**

Explore the cultural capital of South India at your own pace with your A&K expert. Listen as your knowledgeable guide decodes the city's colonial evolution via its distinct Indo-Saracenic architecture — a vibrant blend of Indian, Islamic and Gothic revival — sharing fascinating stories of grand ambitions and unexpected revolutions, determined idealists and rascal traders. Here, Hindu Gods sit under Muslim domes, stained glass pops on slanted terracotta roofs, and majestic Greek columns stand next to sleek Art Deco edifices. Finish at the Government Museum, home to one of the finest collections of bronze sculptures in the country.

This evening, wander through a bustling George Town marketplace, experiencing the intoxicating chaos of sounds, smells, colours and haggling, before watching the sun set over Marina Beach.

#### ***The Leela Palace Chennai / Meals: B***

### **Day 3: Chennai – Puducherry**

Travel south to the ancient Pallava capital of Mahabalipuram, site of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed cave temples, bas-relief sculptures, carved pillared halls and the delightful shore temple. After a lunch at the local restaurant, head to the French colonial settlement of Puducherry with its tree-lined streets, mustard-coloured colonial villas and chic boutiques. Brimming with unspoiled beaches, colonial ambience, French and Tamil quarters, and ancient temples and churches, prepare to explore the 'Côte d'Azur of the East'. Perhaps tuck into some delicious French food, do some local shopping, or try your hand at one of the many meditation and yoga classes for healing and relaxation.

#### ***Palais de Mahe / Meals: BL***

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**Day 4: Puducherry**

Explore 'Pondy' on foot with your expert A&K guide, wandering through the wide shady streets and soft pastels of the French Quarter, making your way to the world-renowned Sri Aurobindo Ashram, now home to 1,600 devotees from around the world. The main building houses the mortal remains of Aurobindo and his spiritual collaborator 'The Mother' in a marble mausoleum.

This afternoon dive into 'pondi' culinary history in a Creole cooking class. Accompany your chef to a local marketplace, learning how to discern fresh local produce, before creating your own delicious traditional dish. Afterwards feast on your creations.

***Palais de Mahe / Meals: BD***

**Day 5: Puducherry**

This morning, visit the 'City of Dawn', Auroville, an experimental, New Age community, that attracts devotees from over 45 nations who come to follow the teachings of 'The Mother'. Gaze upon the vast and spectacular Matrimandir hall, a huge golden globe used as a meditation centre, and tour the utopian community for a deeper understanding of its colourful bohemian residents — 60% of whom are internationals.

This afternoon is at leisure to relax or further explore. Alternatively you can choose to enjoy an insightful visit to the Mohanam Cultural Centre, housed in one of the last traditional houses of the village. Allow your guide to expose how this fascinating community is preserving traditional performing arts and crafts, and advocating for indigenous rights, sustainable development and agriculture, peacebuilding, human rights, youth culture and empowerment. A truly rewarding experience.

***Palais de Mahe / Meals: B***

**Day 6: Puducherry – Thanjavur**

Drive further south to Thanjavur (formerly Tanjore), the ancient Chola capital, stopping on the way at Chidambaram to visit the vibrant 10th century Nataraja Temple, famed for its bronze and bejeweled dancing Shiva. Learn about this mammoth architectural feat, and how the temple is designed to mirror different parts of the spiritual body, and observe the daily Brahmin rituals throughout the 40-acre marvel.

***Svatma / Meals: B***

**Day 7: Thanjavur**

Uncover the dizzying historical legacy of Thanjavur, one of the most remarkable bedrocks of Chola history and Dravidian civilization, and home to ancient temples, artisans, performers and exquisite handcrafts. Discover one of India's most spectacular sites, the evocative UNESCO World Heritage-listed Brihadisvara Temple. Let your guide reveal how this engineering triumph was constructed out of hard granite 1000 years ago, intricately carved and sculptured by the Chola Dynasty, and how it has withstood multiple earthquakes. Later visit the rambling and fortified 14th century Royal Palace, before stopping for a delicious lunch at a local restaurant. This afternoon, continue on the temple trail, exploring Trichy with its massive Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple, home to 49 separate shrines, and the Rock Fort Temple perched on a rocky outcrop overlooking the city.

***Svatma / Meals: BL***

**Day 8: Thanjavur — Madurai**

Your destination today is Madurai, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. En route stop in Chettinad for a bull cart ride to a stunning restaurant for a classical Tamil lunch followed by a visit to a tile factory and a weaving centre to admire soft cotton sarees. Continue to the colourful towers of the Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple, and the bustling modern town that surrounds it, as your guide reveals the history and mythology of the city and its enthralling links with the Roman Empire.

***Gateway Pashumalai / Meals: BL***

**Day 9: Madurai**

Discover Madurai's dazzling maze-like markets, temples, palaces and museums, on a tour of the city's most iconic sites, before venturing out on your own for an afternoon at leisure.

This evening, witness an *aarti* Hindu prayer ceremony at the 12th century Meenakshi Temple, a multi-tiered, technicolour wonder, heaving with carved mythical figures and devoted pilgrims. Hear the prayerful hymns and rhythmic drumming, and let the incense swirl around you as the candle-bearing priests bid the gods and goddesses a restful slumber.

***Gateway Pashumalai / Meals: B***

**Day 10: Madurai – Periyar National Park**

Drive west into the state of Kerala and the verdant Western Ghats to Periyar National Park. Nestled in the Cardamom Hills around the glistening Lake Periyar, the sprawling Periyar National Park is a nature lover's dream. Settle into your cottage in Spice Village surrounded by fruit trees, rare herbs and a profusion of flowering plants.

This afternoon, visit a local spice plantation — a sensory feast — where you'll learn all about spice cultivation. Stroll through the lush green estate and enjoy the exotic aroma of harvested spices, including cinnamon, cardamom, clove, black pepper, ginger, turmeric, vanilla and nutmeg. Learn how to cultivate your own and pick some aromatic sprigs to take back to your hotel.

***Spice Village / Meals: B***

**Day 11: Periyar National Park**

Rise early and join your expert tribal guide for a walk through lush forests and sprawling grasslands. Keep your eyes peeled for colourful birdlife darting and flying overhead, elephants, rare lion-tailed macaque and even the occasional big cat catching the sun's first rays. Return to your accommodation for breakfast and spend some time relaxing in your spectacular surrounds.

***Spice Village / Meals: B***

**Day 12: Periyar National Park – Kumarakom**

Journey onwards to the village of Kumarakom, stopping en route for a local lunch in Kanjirappally, the gateway to Kerala's hill country. Feel your whole body relax as you arrive at Kumarakom, an entrancing set of back-water islands surrounding Lake Vembanad and a perfect paradise for nature enthusiasts. Spend the afternoon and evening at leisure relaxing at your scenic luxury resort on the banks of lake, complete with ayurvedic spa, yoga, two restaurants and its own houseboats spread over 25 acres of idyllic tropical gardens.

***Kumarakom Lake Resort / Meals: BL***

**Day 13: Kumarakom**

Indulge in a full day at leisure. Take part in yoga sessions or relax in your private pool. Alternatively choose to enjoy an island farm visit, a cooking demonstration and lunch, or a tour of the Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary. Alternatively, a walk through the Kumarakom Village offers an immersive chance to witness traditional village activities from coir making to coconut tree climbing, toddy tapping and fishing, as you make conversation with the welcoming villagers (additional charge, paid locally).

***Kumarakom Lake Resort / Meals: B*****Day 14: Kumarakom — Kochi**

No visit to the south would be complete without cruising the beautiful Kerala backwaters on a traditional houseboat. Glide through canals and lagoons shaded by coconut palms and pass sleepy rural villages, enjoying a locally inspired lunch as you go.

Disembark and continue overland to Kochi. The magnificent estuary setting has been drawing traders and explorers here for hundreds of years. Get ready to explore the delightful blend of Portuguese, Dutch and Chinese influences in this atmospheric Kerala gem. This evening is yours to enjoy at leisure soaking up the serene beauty of Kochi. You may wish to witness Kerala's Hindu culture at a Kathakali performance, one of the oldest dance forms in the area. See the elaborate make-up process before the show, then watch this unforgettable art form combining classical dance, theatre, opera and pantomime (optional, additional cost).

***Brunton Boatyard / Meals: BL*****Day 15: Kochi**

Experience local life in Kochi with your expert A&K guide. Visit one of the oldest Jewish synagogues in India, decorated with blue ceramic Chinese tiles and surrounded by an aromatic spice market. On the harbour shore, see the cantilevered fishing nets brought from southern China by traders. Take a tuk tuk to the Dhobi Khana (laundry station), established by the Dutch in 1720, before continuing through the crumbling historic quarters of Mattancherry discovering narrow lanes infused with the scents of turmeric, clove and cardamom. Arrive at the local fruit and spice markets and pause for a 'meter tea'. Later, step inside the home of a local Brahmin family, the highest of the four Hindu castes. Finish with a beautiful Kolam demonstration of a traditional drawing to invite the Goddess Laxmi to bring you luck and prosperity.

***Brunton Boatyard / Meals: B***

**Day 16: Depart Kochi**

With your Southern Indian adventure at its end, enjoy a private transfer to the airport for your onward journey.

***Meals: B***



## Map



## Accommodation

### Palais de Mahe, Puducherry



A freshly crafted gem in the heart of Puducherry's French Quarter, Palais de Mahe combines the flavours of Southern India with French flair. Resembling a charming French mansion, the luxury hotel is a lovely edition to the CGH Earth family owned hotel group and just steps away from the seaside promenade along the Bay of Bengal and the charming colonial villas of the French Quarter.

With high ceilings, arched doorways, tiled floors and deep verandahs throughout, the hotel boasts 18 spacious rooms with modern room appointments. Large free-standing four poster beds, flat-screen TVs, air-conditioning and tea-and-coffee making facilities come as standard.

The hotel also offers an inviting swimming pool within the courtyard – the perfect place to cool off. While the hotel's Ayurveda centre is a must after a busy day of sightseeing. Only in Puducherry can you order a rich fusion of Indo-French cuisine, and there's no better place to enjoy it than in the hotel's rooftop restaurant Les Alice, complete with sea breeze and sweeping views.

#### Why we like it

- Perfect setting in the French Quarter, just steps from the seaside promenade
- The spa offers legendary CGH Earth Ayurveda treatments

- Enjoy the unique and enticing fusion of Indo-French cuisine in the rooftop restaurant
- Hotel bar is open all day with a large menu of cocktails and mocktails

## Svatma Thanjavur



The Svatma experience is designed as a voyage to discover the mind. Experience this magical journey by indulging in the luxury of leisure while experimenting with arts in a beautiful home environment. The five star accommodation that was the former residence of a wealthy local family and has been restored by its owner, architect and designer, into a delightful boutique hotel. The hotel has the excellent location with the biggest attractions within reach.

Part of Relais & Châteaux, this unique hotel is dotted with antiques and vintage photographs, verandas and patios, and objects and artwork which reflect the rich culture of Tamil Nadu. Offering 38 heritage rooms, all equipped with a flat-screen television, private bathroom including bathrobes, slippers and complimentary toiletries.

There are verandas, hallways, lounges and spaces to congregate for the sociable and nooks, bowers and secluded corners for those wanting to retreat. Featuring a luxury spa, gym and yoga centre on site plus a choice of restaurants serving southern Indian vegetarian food prepared from organic ingredients by trained specialist chefs.

### Why we like it:

- In the Svatma Thanjavur you can feel the rich fullness and comfort coupled with warm hospitality the native way
- Features a luxury spa, gym, yoga centre, outdoor pool and a choice of restaurants
- With unique spots to match your every mood, Svatma flaunts a regal personality



## Spice Village, Periyar National Park



Curling around a misty ridge in the Periyar vastness, an arboretum of fruit trees, rare herbs and a profusion of flowering plants is home to the Spice Village, a truly magical destination. Recreating the architecture and atmosphere of a tribal village, it is a pure, unadulterated escape in truly astonishing landscapes.

The cottages are constructed using natural materials and local woodcraft, roofs are thatched with the same elephant grass used in tribal huts - woven using the same traditional techniques. The comforts of a modern hotel exist, but they never intrude. Modern plumbing, comfortable beds and hot showers find their place, but in a setting stripped down to its natural essence - with birdsong replacing television.

A perfect mix of the traditional and the contemporary, the property is always the perfect location from which to explore the tiger reserve and plantations - accompanied by the heady scent of spices.

### Why we like it

- All the cottages have private verandas
- Highland location amidst valleys which are home to plantations of teak, cardamom, tea, rubber and coffee
- Imaginative South Indian cuisine on offer
- Ayurvedic treatments are available as well as a Yoga and meditation centre
- The resort has a swimming pool

## Kumarakom Lake Resort, Kerala



With a tranquil setting amidst swaying palm groves and silvery canals beside Lake Vembanad, Kumarakom Lake Resort offers a wondrous retreat in the heart of Kerala.

Spread over 25 acres of beautiful landscaped gardens, red-tiled, wood-walled villas have been carefully reconstructed from traditional 16<sup>th</sup> century Keralan homesteads. Each villa is beautifully furnished using teak interiors and earthy tones, with open roofed bathrooms and intimate private courtyards. The Meandering Pool Villas are a highlight of the resort, offering access to the pool from a private bathing cove and peaceful lounge area. The Heritage Villas and Presidential Suites all have their own private pools, Jacuzzis and courtyards, with some offering lake views.

When it comes to relaxing, the biggest choice you need to make is between the variety of swimming pools on offer, or the extensive menu of treatments in the ayurvedic spa. There's also a fully-equipped health club and daily yoga sessions, not to mention a range of activities to choose from, such as boating, cycling and water skiing.

The resort's four restaurants, including a traditional teashop, offer a taste of true Keralan delicacies, along with north Indian, Chinese and continental flavours. Seafood lovers will find plenty to indulge their appetite at Vembanad, the seafood bar on the banks of the backwaters.

### Why we like it

- Peaceful setting within extensive landscaped gardens
- Beautifully appointed villas reconstructed from traditional 16<sup>th</sup> century Keralan homesteads

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- Extensive ayurvedic spa, health club and swimming pools
  - Taste true Keralan delicacies in the resort restaurant



## Brunton Boatyard, Kochi



Although a new building, this hotel perfectly echoes the Dutch and Portuguese colonial architecture of old Fort Kochi. With lime-washed walls and terracotta floors, fine public areas and bedrooms featuring antique four poster beds, it is a perfect fusion of old and new.

The lobby sets the tone - a vault of sunlight and air, it is framed by arches and overhung with punkahs - enormous, old-fashioned fans of Indo-Portuguese origin. The rooms meanwhile are simple, yet comfortable spaces, with décor dominated by exposed wood, white walls and local craft pieces. All afford superb views, not least of Kochi's famed fishing nets, which date back to 1350 and whose preying-mantis shapes are one of the city's most enduring images.

### Why we like it

- All rooms and suites have sea views
- The History restaurant serves a menu reflecting the cultural diversity of the region - Portuguese, Dutch, English, Arab, Syrian Christian and Jewish. The Terrace Grill specializes in fresh seafood
- An outdoor heated pool is located on the seafront
- Ayurvedic massage services are available



## Dates & Pricing

From \$7,870 per person twin share (low season) and from \$9,565 per person twin share (high season). Solo travellers on request.

As this Tailor Made Journey can be personalised to your specific requirements, it is not available for online booking. Depending on your preferred dates and arrangements, final pricing will vary.

Please call A&K on 1300 851 800, send us a **booking enquiry** to book this journey or contact your travel advisor.

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