

# South India Explorer



Days:	20
Price from:	1905 USD International flight not included
Comfort:	★★★★★
Difficult:	★★☆☆☆
📌 Culture	

## STUNNING CULTURE, SYLVAN WOODS, SERENE BACKWATERS

This fascinating journey through India's Deep South showcases its incredible architecture, rich culture and its simple way of life. Visit exotic destinations, enthralling hill stations, exquisite temples, marvelous palaces and abundant wildlife reserves. Glide along the backwaters of Kerala on a houseboat and enjoy delicious Keralan specialties.

Our journey commences at the charming old port city of Kochi and finishes on the golden beaches of Kovalam. Visit the beautiful hill station of Ootacamund, marvelous palaces of Mysore, and the beautiful temples of Belur and Halebid en route to Bangalore, from where we take the train southward to Chennai. After a day's sightseeing in India's fourth - largest city our next destination is Mahabalipuram, famous for magnificent monolithic beach temples. We also visit the old French enclave of Pondicherry and the arts centre of Thanjavur before arriving in Madurai, with its large and alluring temple-complexes full of exquisite carving. We then travel back into the hills to the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary with its abundance of birds and wildlife. Fascinating equally are the spice markets of Thekkady. Finally, we embark on a memorable houseboat cruise on the backwaters of Kerala around Alleppey before we finish at Kovalam with its sandy golden beaches.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Fort Kochi- an amalgam of Old Portuguese, British and Dutch colonial architecture
- The spectacular Maharaja's Palace, Mysore
- Larger than life rock temple carvings in Mahabalipuram and Kanchipuram
- Thanjavur and Madurai – for their different architectural styles
- Elephants and wildlife at Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary

## Day 1. Traditional welcome on arrival



Cochin (Kochi) 📍

- Arrive at Kochi **International airport**. After a traditional welcome 'Swagat' we transfer to the hotel for check-in. Kochi has a historical sea trade connection with the **Middle East, Mediterranean and northern Europe** and its cosmopolitan past is reflected in the buildings and structures which represent different parts of the world - a blend of the **old Portuguese, Dutch and British influences**.

🏠 Accommodation

Fort Queen

## Day 2. Sightseeing in Cochin



- Today we visit Fort Kochi, founded by the Portuguese in 1503 and it is considered to be one of the earliest site chosen by European colonial power. An odour of spice emerges from warehouses and food stalls offering different delicacy is common sight in each nook and corner of the town. In the afternoon we enjoy a sightseeing tour of Mattancherry Palace, built by the Portuguese as a gift for the Raja of Kochi, the Jewish synagogue dating from 1568 and **St Francis church**. We also explore the town of Kochi, its bazaars and old harbour area. In the evening there is the chance for an **optional visit** to see a display of Kathakali, a form of classical dance unique to Kerala.

Cochin (Kochi) 📍

🍳 Breakfast

Fort Queen

🏠 Accommodation

Fort Queen

## Day 3. Head towards Queen of Hills



Cochin (Kochi) 📍

🚗 280km - ⌚ 8h

Ooty 📍

### Cochin (Kochi) - Ooty

- Today we leave **Kerala** behind and enter **Tamil Nadu** as the road winds up through forested hillsides to Coimbatore. The road up to Coonoor is one of the most scenic in South India providing superb views of the plains below and magnificent groves of the tall and slender areca nut palm trees lining the road. Upon arrival in Ooty, as Ootacamund is fondly known, and checking into the hotel, it's time to move about and enjoy the beauty of this Queen of Hill Stations that is situated in the heart of the **Nilgiri hills**.

🍳 Breakfast

Fort Queen

🏠 Accommodation

The Monarch

## Day 4. Exploration of the town



Ooty 📍

- In the morning, we enjoy a **Toy-train** journey. In the afternoon, we leave for the sightseeing tour of Ootacamund (Ooty). We visit the Ootacamund Botanical Garden, laid out at an elevation of 2400 meters in 1847 and spread over 22 hectares of land with some 650 species of plants and trees. We also visit the **Doddabetta Peak** which stands at an altitude of 2623 meters. Merely 10 kms from Ooty it is the highest point in the district, making it possibly the **best vantage point** around Ooty.

🍳 Breakfast

The Monarch

🏠 Accommodation

The Monarch

## Day 5. Drive to Mysore via Madumalai and Bandipur



Ooty 📍

🚗 125km - ⌚ 4h

Mysore (Mysuru) 📍

### Ooty - Mysore (Mysuru)

- After the breakfast, we drive to Mysore. The route winds down the eastern side of the **Nilgiri Hills** back to the plains – a very scenic journey. We drive through the Mudumalai National Park and Bandipur National Park as we cross the border from **Tamil Nadu** to **Karnataka** with the chance to spot deer and monkeys and elephants as we pass. After arriving in Mysore and checking into our hotel, we visit Chaumundi Hill where there is a temple dedicated to Durga. On the road up to the temple there is a giant stone **Nandi bull** carved from single piece of granite in 1659.

🍳 Breakfast

The Monarch

🏠 Accommodation

Hotel Southernstar Mysore

## Day 6. Explore the town in its authentic form



Mysore (Mysuru) 📍

- In the morning, we embark on a sightseeing tour of Mysore. We drive to Srirangapatna (the historic capital of **Tipu Sultan** who was known for his struggle against the British rule), where we visit Daria Daulat Bagh, the **Summer Palace** of Tipu Sultan. It is situated in scenic surroundings on an island formed by two branches of The River Cauvery. Several monuments relating to the sultan's rule are scattered across the island. We then return to Mysore and visit the Palace of the Maharaja (Emperor), a harmonious synthesis of Hindu and Saracenic styles of architecture – with a plethora of magnificent archways, domes, turrets, colonnades and sculptures. We also visit the **Chaumundi Hill** with its temple dedicated to Durga. On the road up to the temple there is a giant monolithic **Nandi bull**, carved from a single piece of granite in 1659. Known for its sandalwood, Mysore is also famous for some of India's finest crafts, such as printed silk, inlaid furniture and ivory carvings.

☕ Breakfast

Hotel Southernstar Mysore

🏠 Accommodation

Hotel Southernstar Mysore

## Day 7. Excursion to Halebid and Belur



Mysore (Mysuru) 📍

🚗 120km - ⌚ 3h

Hassan 📍

### Mysore (Mysuru) - Hassan

- Today, we will drive to Hassan. On arrival, transfer to the hotel.
- Depart for an excursion to Belur and Halebid for their temples carved with scripts from Hindu mythology having mythological characters from the **Ramayana** and the **Mahabharata**, the two famous Epics. In Halebid, we visit the Hoysaleswara Temple where we see half-life size statues of Hindu deities with minute details in each all around the temple. At Belur, we see the Chennakesava Temple, famous for its architecture and sculptures. Later we drive back to the hotel in Hassan.

☕ Breakfast

Hotel Southernstar Mysore

🏠 Accommodation

Stay Simple Riverdale Resort

## Day 8. Drive to Bengaluru and board the train to Chennai



Hassan 📍

🚗 185km - ⌚ 4h

Bangalore (Bengaluru) 📍

🚆 360km - ⌚ 5h

Chennai 📍

### Hassan - Bangalore (Bengaluru)

- After breakfast, we drive to Bangalore (Bengaluru); stopping en route at Shravanabelagola, a city sacred to the Jains and famous for its 18-meter Jain colossus. Standing on **Vindhyagiri Hill**, the statue of **Gomateshwara** is said to be the tallest and most graceful monolithic statue in the world. The site is visited by hundreds of pilgrims daily. We later arrive in Bangalore.

### Bengaluru - Chennai

- Transfer to the **Railway station** to board our train to Chennai. Upon arrival in the late evening, we transfer to the hotel.

☕ Breakfast



Stay Simple Riverdale Resort

🏠 Accommodation

The Pride Hotel Chennai

## Day 9. Way to Mahabalipuram en route visiting Kanchipuram



Chennai   
🚗 60km - ⌚ 1h 40m  
Mahabalipuram 

## Chennai - Mahabalipuram

- After a refreshing breakfast we take a sightseeing tour of Chennai, the fourth largest city in India and the capital of Tamil Nadu to visit Kapaleeswarar Temple, Government Museum and San Thome Basilica.
- Next, we drive down to Kanchipuram, one of the seven holy cities in the country and famous all over India for its hand-woven silk sarees. We visit the Kailasanathar Temple famous for exquisite carvings with 58 small shrines situated around the main shrine. Next in our programme is **Kamakshi Amman Temple** housing the statue of Kamakshi who is said to be the Super-goddess, Parasakti, having Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati as her eyes. She blesses all who dedicate themselves to her. We later drive to Mahabalipuram and check into the hotel.

🍽️ Breakfast	The Pride Hotel Chennai
🏠 Accommodation	Hotel Mamalla Heritage

## Day 10. Town famous for temple of Five Rathas





Mahabalipuram 

- Today we take a tour of Mahabalipuram, once the main port and naval base of the great Pallava Kingdom. The Rock carvings at Mahabalipuram are notable for the delightful freshness and simplicity of their folk art origins. We see the skillfully carved rock of Arjuna's Penance - the largest bas-relief sculpture in the world. The **Five Rathas, five monolithic temples**, each created in different exquisite styles, and also the Shore Temple built on the seashore of **Bay of Bengal** with blocks of granite are also a feast to the eye. Built in **Dravidian style** the temple dates back to the 8th century CE. The monuments are mostly rock-cut and monolithic representative of the early stages of **Dravidian architecture** with **Buddhist elements** clearly visible.

🍽️ Breakfast	Hotel Mamalla Heritage
🏠 Accommodation	Hotel Mamalla Heritage

## Day 11. Drive to Puducherry



Mahabalipuram   
🚗 100km - ⌚ 3h 50m  
Pondicherry (Puducherry) 


### Mahabalipuram - Pondicherry (Puducherry)

- Today we proceed to Pondicherry, which retains a strong sense of the former French presence in India: grid pattern streets, distinctive police uniforms and the occasional colonial building around everywhere.
- After we check into the hotel and enjoy lunch we embark on a sightseeing tour of the town to explore its Gallic heritage. Places of tourist interest include the **Shree Aurobindo Ashram**, Auroville, the **French Institute and Colony, Museum and Church**.

🍽️ Breakfast	Hotel Mamalla Heritage
🏠 Accommodation	Grand Serenaa

## Day 12. Way to Thanjavur via Kumbakonam



Pondicherry (Puducherry) 

### Pondicherry (Puducherry) - Thanjavur

- After breakfast, we drive to Thanjavur through the wonderfully fertile **Kaveri Delta** - an area of lush emerald paddy fields. En-route we visit the famous **Darasuram Temple** in Kumbakonam, a superb example of 12th century **Chola architecture**. We later arrive in Thanjavur and check into the hotel. Thanjavur is well known for its exquisite handicrafts such as bronze work and classical **South Indian musical instruments**.

🍽️ Breakfast	Grand Serenaa
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## Day 13. Journey to Madurai



Thanjavur 📍  
🚗 190km - ⌚ 4h  
Madurai 📍

### Thanjavur - Madurai

- In the morning, we visit Brihadeeswarar Temple which dates from the 10th century CE. A **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, it is a brilliant example of **Dravidian Temple architecture**.
- After the visit, we continue our drive to the colourful city of Madurai famous for its intricate temples. One of the oldest and most fascinating cities in **Tamil Nadu**, Madurai is also a thriving cultural center with a rich past. After arrival, we check into our hotel and relax for the rest of the day.

🍳 Breakfast

Hotel Star Residency Thanjavur

🏠 Accommodation

Germanus

## Day 14. Sightseeing of Madurai



Madurai 📍

- The most famous sight in Madurai is the Meenakshi Amman Temple - an outstanding example of Vijayanagar Temple architecture. Built during the **Nayaka period** between 16th and 18th centuries it is one of the largest temple-complexes in India. The gopurams that surround the temple are known for their colourful stucco images of Gods, Goddesses and animals. Later we visit the Thirumalai Nayak Mahal built in 1636 in Indo-Mughal style by the Nayaka Dynasty. The main temple is dedicated to Meenakshi, the 'fish-eyed Goddess' and consort of Shiva. Madurai is a perfect place to wander around and to experience Hindu culture with the temples and bazaars in the heart of the vibrant city. The evening is free to explore.

🍳 Breakfast

Germanus

🏠 Accommodation

Germanus

## Day 15. Scintillating route through western ghats



Madurai 📍  
🚗 140km - ⌚ 4h  
Periyar (Thekkady) 📍

### Madurai - Periyar (Thekkady)

- In the morning, we drive to [Periyar(Thekkady)](periyar thekkady) and re-enter the state of Kerala. The drive is spectacular as the road climbs through the Western Ghats and commands fantastic views across Tamil Nadu. We arrive in the small bustling village of Thekkady and check into the hotel. This whole area is a center for spice cultivation. After lunch, we take a short walk around a spice garden where we see many different spices growing. There is plenty of time in the afternoon to explore the bazaar where a large number of shops selling cardamoms, vanilla, peppercorns, chilies, turmeric and other spices flank the road.

🍳 Breakfast

Germanus

🏠 Accommodation

Hotel Karar Garden

## Day 16. Periyar Wildlife Sancturay



Periyar (Thekkady) 📍

- In the early morning, we take a **Jungle walk** in the park along with our forest guides to admire abundance of birdlife that includes kingfishers, storks and hornbills which are the most commonly spotted birds. Periyar National Park is one of the largest reserves in South India and is set around a large man-made lake. We return to the hotel for breakfast. In the afternoon, there is a possibility to do an **Optional Boat Ride** on Periyar Lake. This is an ideal opportunity to get close to the animals and a good opportunity to spot elephants, otters, wild pigs and buffaloes. On offer here is **Ayurvedic massage (optional)**, which can be arranged in the nearby **Ayurvedic massage center**.

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☕ Breakfast	Hotel Karar Garden
🏠 Accommodation	Hotel Karar Garden

## Day 17. Enthralling experience of houseboat



Periyar (Thekkady) 📍

🚗 150km - ⌚ 5h  
Alappuzha (Alleppey) 📍

### Periyar (Thekkady) - Alappuzha (Alleppey)

- After breakfast we drive to Alleppey. Also known as Alappuzha, the town is a principal center for backwater cruises in **Kerala**. We board our houseboats and begin our cruise along the backwaters of Kerala; one of the highlights of the trip. These enchanting boats have been decorated and made into comfortable cruise vessels. We meander along the waterways flanked by lush tropical vegetation, catching glimpses of dazzling tropical birds and watching idyllic villages. Our overnight stay is on the boats in the middle of the famous **Vembanad Lake**.

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☕ Breakfast	Hotel Karar Garden
🍴 Lunch	ATDC Houseboat
🍷 Dinner	ATDC Houseboat
🏠 Accommodation	ATDC Houseboat

## Day 18. Serene water along the coast



Alappuzha (Alleppey) 📍

🚗 140km - ⌚ 4h  
Kovalam 📍

### Alappuzha (Alleppey) - Kovalam

- After a relaxing breakfast on the houseboats we disembark and drive to Kovalam. Kovalam is an extremely popular beach resort due to shallow water and low tidal waves. It offers an excellent diversity to suit all desires and occasions. A massive rocky promontory on the beach has created a beautiful bay of calm water ideal for sea bathing. The beaches are backed by precipitously mounting headlands and covered by fertile coconut palms. The southernmost part of light house beach is more beautiful. Some of the leisure options at this beach are **sunbathing, swimming, herbal body toning massages, special cultural programs, catamaran cruising**, etc.

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☕ Breakfast	ATDC Houseboat
🏠 Accommodation	Jasmine Palace

## Day 19. Optional tour of Kanyakumari



Kovalam

- We have a free day to enjoy the idyllic soft sandy beaches and warm clear waters of Kovalam. There is also the opportunity to enjoy an optional day's sightseeing tour by taxi from Kovalam to Kanyakumari, the extreme southern tip of India where the Indian Ocean meets the **Arabian Sea** and the **Bay of Bengal**. The trip also takes in the old wooden palace of the rulers of Travancore at **Padmapuhamban**- a marvelous building with fantastic woodcarvings, and the **Hindu temple at Suchindram** with its amazing stone carvings (this trip can be booked and paid for locally).

☕ Breakfast

Jasmine Palace

🏠 Accommodation

Jasmine Palace

## Day 20. Transfer to airport of Trivandrum for boarding the return flight



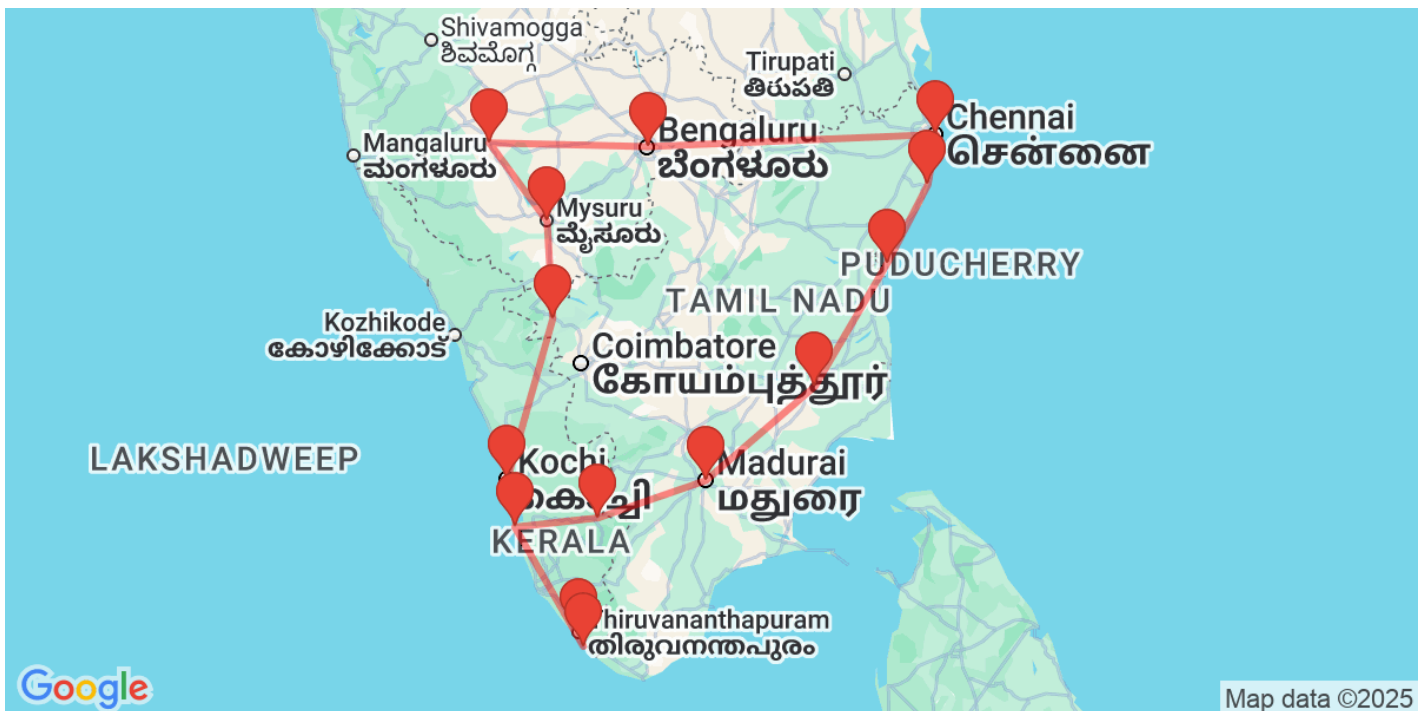
Thiruvananthapuram  
(Trivandrum)

- Today we check out from the hotel and are transferred to the **International airport** of Trivandrum for our onward journey.

☕ Breakfast

Jasmine Palace

## Itinerary map



## Individual price per person

2-3	4-5	6-8
2985 USD	2235 USD	1905 USD

## Included

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- Accommodation for 18 nights in a double room in the hotels mentioned or equivalent on breakfast basis
- 01 night on Full board in a houseboat in Alleppey
- All ground transportation included in the program using private air-conditioned vehicle with English speaking driver
- Entrance fees to the park and monuments as described in the program
- Train tickets in 1st Class AC for the sector as mentioned below: (Bangalore - Chennai)
- Guided forest walk at Periyar (Thekkady)
- Toy Train ride in Ooty
- Professional English-speaking tour leader throughout India
- Govt. Taxes

## Not included

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- International flights tickets
- Travel insurance
- These rates will not be valid for peak season from 20 December 2019 to 10 January 2020 , Christmas and New Year's extra supplement cost will be charged during this period
- Any optional activities
- Lunches and dinners during the trip except Full board in Alleppey
- Miscellaneous Expenses - drinks, souvenir, personal expenses etc.
- Tips for driver and other local staff
- Charges for Camera in the monuments and Parks
- The cancellation and baggage insurance, assistance and repatriation
- Indian Visa
- All services not mentioned in "inclusion"