



ASA

CULTURAL TOURS

2009
itinerary



Five Rathas, Mahabalipuram

SOUTH INDIA SOJOURN

from temple sculptures and spice gardens to
classical dance and canal cruises

3 January - 21 January 2009

TOUR CODE: 2901

TOUR PRICE: (Land Content Only)
\$6580.00 (early bird-special) or \$6780.00

PERSONAL ENDURANCE LEVEL: ****

GROUP LEADER/LECTURER: Bernard Hoffert

Save
\$200.00
Book before
31 August
2008

ABOUT THE TOUR

This tour traverses the bustling cities, rich countryside and diverse cultures of the Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Our tour starts in the lively, but relatively relaxed, South Indian capital of Chennai (Madras). Here we will experience the first of many magnificent Hindu temples to be encountered on this program, then wander through the bazaars and markets; beginning to absorb some of the aspects of every-day Indian life. One of the great discoveries you will make in Chennai, and be able to explore later at Tanjore, is the extraordinarily fine quality of Chola bronze sculpture. Chennai museum has the world's best collection of bronzes cast during the period of the Chola dynasty (10th–13th centuries). One of India's greatest ruling dynasties, the Chola's were also great temple builders. These exquisite bronzes, infinitely more naturalistic and sensual than their European Romanesque counterparts, are believed by a number of European and American art historians to constitute one of the greatest corpuses of sculpture in world history.

Days twelve to fourteen of this tour take place during the harvest festival of Pongal. This colourful festival is celebrated more prominently in Tamil Nadu than in any other part of India. It is a time when people give thanks for their crops and pay tribute to their animals. Other tour highlights include visits to ancient temples and forts, the verdant Periyar wildlife sanctuary, bustling bazaars, well trodden trade routes, traditional arts and crafts and, of course, the culinary delights of South Indian cuisine such as *thali*, *appam* (pancakes) and a range of seductive vegetarian and fish meals.

From Madras, we'll journey down the coast to explore the stunning, World Heritage listed, early medieval temple sculptures of Mahabalipuram, and then to the sacred mountain of Arunachala in Tiruvannamalai. During the early days of the tour you will encounter the first of a series of dance performances which are famous in south India. We know that the measured steps of these dances, which often derive from great Indian epics like the *Mahabharata*, have been set since dance treatises were published in the fourteenth century, but they probably are of far deeper antiquity. Many of them echo the poses of Chola bronzes. We also see village folk dances that counterpoint the high culture of formal

dance. One of these is performed by dancers on stilts. They carry about their waists large models of horses and so represent equestrian princes and princesses.

Next we'll head for Pondicherry to explore this last bastion of French culture in India. We will visit the cities of Tanjore, Trichy and Madurai to meander through some of India's most spectacular and ancient temples. These are vast and strictly geometrical in plan, echoing a palace-city in scale and space. Everywhere, especially in the best Chola temples, are to be seen a myriad of sculptures. The multitude of fine figure sculptures are complemented by crowds of worshippers, the women in brilliantly coloured saris, who proceed through the temple precincts toward the inner sanctum. This is like a dark cave and it is here that Vishnu or Shiva's lingam await the offerings (*puja*) of devotees. On their way to this sanctum, devotees often give the temple elephant a coin. After passing this to its owner the elephant blesses them by touching them lightly on the head with its trunk.

A counterpoint to these monumental temple complexes is a village temple, rarely visited by foreigners, where local gods, un-touched by formal Hindu culture, are worshipped. The way to the temple is lined with hundreds of brightly-coloured ceramic horses which 'guard' the village. Horses were not indigenous to south India, so these beasts are probably replicas of the mounts of powerful invaders whose potency, symbolised by horses, was appropriated as a quasi-magical defence by local communities.

The Tamil are extremely welcoming, and will usually engage you in conversation in their temples, shops and in the street. Their infectious openness to foreigners allows you to explore their culture far more intimately than in many places in the world.

After Madurai, the great temples are left behind as we travel towards Kerala, staying in the Periyar wildlife sanctuary on the way. This lush, beautiful mountain sanctuary will give you an opportunity for some bird watching and trekking, as well as a boat ride on the lake. At Periyar you may also care to shop for spices and fine tea.

Our final four days will be spent exploring the waterways of Kerala and the ancient city of Cochin. We begin at a wonderful resort deep in the maze of canals, lakes and tropical islands that were once havens for pirates plundering Arab and European ships. Cochin was fortified in part to stem piracy. Today it retains much of its original aspect, including an interesting fish market and great, picturesque 'Chinese' fishing nets on wooden frames which, when hanging above the water, filter the evening sun to make stunning patterns. We shall cruise the Cochin harbour and islands at sunset. Your stay here also includes a personalised cooking demonstration by one of India's most famous chefs, Nimmi Paul. In Kerala, a rich fusion of Hindu, Jewish, Islamic and Christian cultures offers us a truly kaleidoscopic experience of ancient and modern India all set in a lush, tropical landscape.

GEOGRAPHY AND CULTURE

South India can be defined geographically as well as culturally. The Vindhya Range lies approximately in line with the Tropic of Cancer and is the symbolic dividing

19 DAYS IN SOUTHERN INDIA

Overnight: Chennai (2 nights) • Mahabalipuram (3 nights) • Tiruvannamalai (1 night) • Pondicherry (1 night) • Tanjore (2 nights) • Trichy (1 night) • Madurai (2 nights) • Periyar (1 night) • Kumarakom (2 nights) • Cochin (3 nights).

Highlights & Activities: Fort St George • Kapaleeshwara Temple • Dakshinachitra Cultural Centre • National Art Gallery • Tamil Folk Dances • Mahabalipuram's 7th Century World Heritage Monuments (Shore Temple, Five Rathas, Arjuna's Penance, Krishna's Butterball) • Vedentangal Bird Sanctuary • Cingee Fort • French Quarter and Museum (Pondicherry) • Gangakondacholapuram and Dharasuram - Chola Temples • Tanjore vegetable market • Saraswati Mahal Library & Art Gallery • Brihadishwara Temple • Rituals on the

banks of the Cauvery river at Amma Mandapam • Sri Rangam Vishnu Temple • Rock Fort Temple and bazaar of Trichy • Jain Temple at Sittanavasal • Pudukotai Fort and Museum • Chettinad Palace & Museum • Tirumalai Nayak Palace • Teppakulum Tank • Home and gallery of Tanjore Artist, Dr Shobana Kumar • Meenakshi Temple • Spice Garden tour of Kerala • Cruise on Lake Periyar, Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary • Sunset cruise Vembanad Lake • boat ride along the canals of Alleppey and heritage tour by the Conservation Society • Fort Cochin • St Francis Church • Cochin: Fish Market, Synagogue, Mattancherry Palace, International Pepper Exchange, Hilltop Palace • Performance of Kathakali • Evening sunset cruise on Cochin Harbour and special seafood dinner at Brunton Boatyard • Cooking demonstration and meals by famed author Nimmy Paul).



line between north and south India. South of the Vindhya lies the Deccan Plateau, named from the Sanskrit word *dakshina*, meaning South.

The state of Tamil Nadu occupies the South Eastern and Southern part of the Indian land mass. This is the land of the Tamils and is often referred to as the cradle of the Dravidian civilisation, one of the oldest, continuous cultures in existence. This culture has its own unique language and customs, as well as visual forms such as the towering gateways (*gopurams*) of temples and intricate rock carvings. The major river of Southern India, known as the Cauvery, divides the state as it flows east and enters the sea in the ancient port of Poompuhar, 340km south of Chennai. To the east, Tamil Nadu looks out on the ocean, to the west (where it borders the state of Kerala) it is flanked by the Western Ghats – a rugged mountainous range that forms a unique biosphere. Our visit will mostly take in the coastal and relatively flat regions of the state.

Although Tamil Nadu is highly industrialised, most of its sixty-three million people live in approximately sixty thousand villages. It is a land rich in history, legend and culture. Sacred temple music flourishes and the delicious Tamil Nadu cuisine is one of the longest-standing traditions of vegetarianism in history. Debate continues as to the origins of the people of Tamil Nadu and their Dravidian culture. It has been speculated that the first Dravidians were remnants of the early Indus civilisation who migrated south after invasion or natural catastrophe destroyed northern cities like Harappa. With the emergence of the Pandya Dynasty (c. 100 BC) Dravidian language was celebrated in matchless Sangam poetry. Earlier wooden structures were translated into the inimitable stone monuments of the Pallava dynasty at their great port city of Mahabalipuram (7th c. AD).

Unlike Tamil Nadu, Kerala is a narrow fertile strip on the south-west coast, sandwiched between the Lakshadweep Sea and the Western Ghats. The history of Kerala has been defined by trade. For at least two thousand years, people have been sailing to Kerala in search of spices, sandalwood and ivory. In ancient times, trade links were established with the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Arabs and the Chinese. The Arabs originally controlled the shipping of spices to Europe, which motivated the Portuguese to find a sea route to India and break the Arab monopoly. When Vasco da Gama and his Portuguese fleet arrived on the Malabar Coast in 1498, the Zamarin of Calicut had already established a wealthy kingdom based on the spice trade. Da Gama's arrival marked the beginning of European contact with Kerala, as Portuguese, Dutch and English interests fought the Arab traders, and then each other, for control. The modern state of Kerala was formed in 1956 and it became one of the first freely elected communist governments in the world. The communist party has been in and out of office ever since. Decades of progressive social policies have resulted in Kerala boasting the highest literacy rate and the lowest infant mortality rate in India. Whilst it is one of the smallest states in India, Kerala is densely populated, being home to thirty-three million people. The main language is Malayalam, which derives from the ancient Dravidian of the south.

THE HARVEST FESTIVAL OF PONGAL

Pongal means 'to boil'. It is a word that the villagers cry out, when newly harvested rice begins to boil over in the new clay pots, to give thanks for all that the land and the animals provide. Pongal is, in fact, a secular festival that is celebrated by members of all the faiths in India. As well as giving thanks for the land and animals, it is a time to discard the old and embrace the new, particularly

Day 3: Dakshinakitra Cultural Centre, local dancer, Tamil Nadu



with regard to cooking utensils. This four-day festival is celebrated with great energy and spirit in the villages of Tamil Nadu and each day is given a particular emphasis. The first day is a time of frantic preparation: houses are swept clean, old utensils are discarded and new ones are purchased. In some villages, communal bonfires are lit and discarded goods are cast into the fire in a symbolic gesture of ridding the past and embracing the future. Special treats such as sugar cane are brought into the homes. On the second day, the new crop of rice is cooked until it boils over in the new pots, a symbol of abundance. People flock to the temples or churches and offer thanks for the harvest. The third day is given over to the animals that toil in the fields or transport goods on the roads. It is not unusual to see cows with brightly painted horns and garlands of flowers around their necks. The final day is a day of fun. Many villages dedicate this day to communal sports such as soccer, hockey or even a tug of war held in the middle of the road against a neighbouring village. More enterprising teams may even muster an elephant to assist! Pongal provides an abundance of photographic opportunities to capture important elements of village life.

GROUP LEADER

Professor Bernard Hoffert is the Senior Associate Dean in the Faculty of Art and Design at Monash University, with responsibility for the Faculty's Higher Degree by Research program and for Faculty's International and External profile. He is a former Head of the Department of Fine Arts, the Department of Applied Arts, and three other departments. He was the World President of the International Association of Art-UNESCO (1992-95) and has published several books on art and art theory including *Art and Diversity*, *Aesthetics and Art Criticism* and *Art Notes*.

Bernard first joined ASA in 1981 and has since led over 30 European tours including programs to Italy, France, Spain, Eastern Europe and the United Kingdom. In 2008 he led ASA's tour to Northern India entitled *Moghuls, Rajputs & Villages: The Cultural Heritage of North India*. Bernard has had a long involvement with India and has travelled extensively from the Himalayas in the north to the southern most tip of the subcontinent. He wrote the section on India in the 1987 edition of *Art and Diversity* (Longman) and has exhibited his paintings and presented his poetry at the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society Gallery in Delhi; his paintings are in several Indian collections. He has participated in art symposia and conferences in India and has lectured at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad. His research has been published in the Indian journal *Design Plus* and his research on craft revival in India has been published by UNESCO and the Network of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies. He contributed a chapter to the India text, *Design Education: Tradition and Modernity*, published late 2007. He has also lectured on Indian philosophy.

NATIONAL GUIDE / GUEST SPEAKERS

Bernard will be accompanied by a tour manager and a Government Approved Guide who is an expert in Indology, Art and Culture. The program also includes a visit to the home and gallery of Tanjore Artist, Dr Shobana Kumar who will talk on the traditions and processes

involved in this particular style of painting, a heritage tour in Alleppey conducted by the local Conservation Society, and a full day cooking course with Nimmy Paul.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Tour members will receive prior to departure practical notes which include information on visa requirements, healthcare, photography, weather, clothing and what to pack, customs regulations, bank hours, currency regulations, electrical appliances, food and religion. The Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade website has advice for travellers see: www.smarttraveller.gov.au

VISAS

Australian, New Zealand and British Passport holders will require a tourist visa for India. The tourist visa is valid for 6 months and permits multiple entries. Visa applications must be submitted in the state in which you reside, except for the Northern Territory who submit the application to the Consulate in Queensland.

Current visa costs:

If you are a resident of Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales or Tasmania:

Australian passport holder \$75.00 per person

New Zealand or UK passport holder \$90.00 per person

If you are a resident of Queensland, Northern Territory or Western Australia:

Australian passport holder \$90.00 per person

New Zealand or UK passport holder \$105.00 per person

Additional courier fees may apply. Participants will receive from ASA the relevant visa application forms prior to departure. Note: visa fees and rules are subject to change. If you are travelling overseas prior to this tour please remember that we will need your passport to obtain your visa. You should therefore contact ASA to arrange an appropriate time to organise your visa! For further information on visas see: www.visalink.com.au

WEATHER IN TAMIL NADU & KERALA

In Tamil Nadu in January the average maximum temperature is 29° C and the minimum is 20° C. It is cooler in coastal regions; away from the coast, the maximum can reach 34° C. January is the winter dry season here, but humidity on the coast can still be high. Kerala, on the opposite (western) side of the Ghat mountains, has similar temperatures but is more tropical and humid. The day is hottest in both regions at noon and in the early afternoon, and wherever possible to avoid the midday heat tour activities take place in the morning and late afternoon. It is essential to wear a hat and sun lotion during the day in both Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

TYPE OF TOURING

Short distance coach travel. The program also includes a number of boat cruises.

USE OF PROFESSIONAL VIDEO/CAMERA

EQUIPMENT

There are strict regulations with regard to the use of 'professional equipment' in India. For example, when using equipment such as a big video camera, shooting or filming materials normally associated with TV or movie shooting,



special authorisation from the government is required. Generally speaking the use of cameras, and tripods etc used by photography enthusiasts is not a problem.

PERSONAL ENDURANCE LEVEL: ****

All ASA tours are active programs that involve walking, whether strolling through an historic town, visiting outdoor archaeological sites or simply visiting an art gallery. Walking and climbing stairs cannot be avoided. Coaches regularly cannot drive into the historic centres of towns, and often cannot directly access the entrances of museums, palaces or concert halls.

The amount and quality of walking varies from one program to another. Most tours have a moderate amount of walking as the group moves from place to place within a town, with visits to historic buildings, art galleries and museums (many without elevators). Other programs include walking up steep streets in hill towns, walking on cobblestones, and many programs include visits to archaeological sites that, by their very nature, involve walking on ruins and rough ground.

It is important to remember that ASA programs are group tours, and slow walkers affect everyone in the group. As the group must move at the speed of the slowest member, the amount of time spent at a site may be reduced if group members cannot maintain a moderate walking pace.

ASA tours should not present any problem for active people who can manage day-to-day walking and stair-climbing. However, if you have any doubts about your ability to manage on a program, please ask your ASA travel consultant whether this is a suitable tour for you.

To assist your understanding of the physical requirements of each program ASA has developed a star system grading for all tours. The number of stars is an approximate guide to the degree of difficulty of tours

relative to each other. It is neither absolute nor literal. One star is given to the least physically taxing tours, six to the most. We have taken into account the following criteria: extremes of temperature; amount of walking and terrain covered (including steps); length of daily activities; amount of time standing still listening to talks (eg during site visits); risk of gastric problems and other ailments.

This 19-day tour involves:

- Some days of long coach travel on poor quality roads
- It is hot in the middle of the day; as far as possible we start early (ie 7.30am) and break at midday to avoid the heat, then resume site visits in the evening
- Moderate amount of walking each day, some steep walks up to sites, such as forts and temples, participants must be steady on their feet
- Some days involve 'optional trekking'
- A number of stairs without handrails at sites
- Food is often spicy
- Nine hotel changes
- Hot humid weather in Kerala
- Crowds including beggars and vendors can be confronting
- You should also note that you are required to take off your shoes to visit temples. You will be given special socks to wear, but sometimes bare feet are required.

These factors give this tour a four-star difficulty rating. Potential tour participants should note that this tour is not suitable for people of below-average fitness. Many of the sites are large and unsheltered, or accessed by climbing up slopes or steps. People who find walking in bright sunlight or high temperatures uncomfortable, who have foot, leg, or back problems,

Coconut Resort, Kerala



or are unsteady on their feet are advised not to enrol for this tour, for their own well-being and the undisturbed enjoyment of the rest of the group.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation ranges from 3 -star hotels to deluxe 5-star eco-resorts. All rooms have en suite bathrooms; several hotels have swimming pools and provide foreign exchange and internet service. Further information on hotels will be provided in the 'Tour Hotel List' given to tour members prior to their departure, in the meantime a summary list is given below. We recommend you visit the websites (given below) where you can review the hotels selected and gain further information about the beautiful eco-resorts!

- **Chennai (2 nights):** 4-star GRT Grand Hotel, a modern business class hotel conveniently located in the city centre, www.grtgrand.com/grand/index.htm
- **Mahabalipuram (3 nights):** 3-star Ideal Beach Resort, set in gardens with a private beach, along the picturesque Coromandel Coast. Accommodation is provided in spacious air-conditioned cottages equipped with excellent modern bathrooms and private balconies. The hotel has an onsite restaurant that offers a range of local and international cuisine. Due to the seaside location the chefs specialise in seafood dishes - crabs, lobsters and a wide variety of fish straight from the nets of local fishermen, www.idealresort.com/mresort.htm
- **Tiruvannamalai (1 night):** 3-star Hotel Sparsa set in gardens a few kilometres from town. It offers spacious, clean, air-conditioned rooms in a peaceful setting and a swimming pool, www.sparsaresorts.com
- **Pondicherry (1 night):** 3-star The Promenade, a boutique hotel on the waterfront, www.sarovarhotels.com

Day 4: Arjuna's Penance, Mahabalipuram



- **Tanjore (2 nights):** 3-star Ideal River View Resort, overlooking the Cauvery River, set in gardens, with a peaceful and relaxing ambience, three kms from the city of Tanjore. The hotel offers twenty deluxe air-conditioned cottages equipped with en suite bathrooms, www.idealresort.com/tresort.htm
- **Trichy (1 night):** 3-star Hotel Sangam located in the heart of the city, www.hotelsangam.com
- **Madurai (2 nights):** 4-star Fortune Pandiyan Hotel, fully renovated two years ago, located in a quiet part of town set amidst three acres of gardens, www.fortuneparkhotels.com
- **Periyar (1 night):** 4-star Spice Village Eco Resort, a deluxe resort consisting of fifty-two cottages, set in eight acres of respectfully tamed forest. The architecture is inspired by the jungle dwellings of the area, using the same materials in construction. The original inhabitants of these hills are the Mannans and the Ooralie tribes who still carry on their age-old practices of herding and bee keeping in perfect harmony with nature. They live in tree houses, or huts with a distinctive grey thatch. You'll see this reflected in your own cottage, with its brick, split bamboo & elephant-grass design. Consistent with the ecological theme accommodation, although modern and comfortable, does not include air-conditioning (it's not necessary as you are up in the hills, where it is cool!), TV or music. Facilities include: swimming pool, onsite restaurant, cooking demonstrations and explanations about spices and Ayurveda Centre (system of healing based on homeopathy and naturopathy, with an extensive use of herbs), www.cghearth.com/spice_village/spice_village.htm
- **Kumarakom (2 nights):** 5-star Coconut Lagoon Heritage Backwater Resort, one of the most sought after destinations in South India. The resort, reachable only by boat, is set around small canals, and nestles along the shores of Vembanad Lake, a 175 square km. expanse stretching between the backwaters of Kerala and the sea. It has various dining areas, professional Ayurvedic massage centre, swimming pool, open-to-sky deluxe bathrooms (a great feature of this hotel), www.cghearth.com/coconut_lagoon/index.htm
- **Cochin (3 nights):** the group will be subdivided between two heritage hotels both with traditional design but comfortable interiors and swimming pools: the Grande Residencia- www.abadhotels.com; and the Old Harbour Hotel - www.oldharbourhotel.com

Note: Hotels are subject to change. In this instance a hotel of similar standard will be provided.

MEALS & ENTRANCE FEES

The tour includes all meals: breakfast, lunch (or picnic lunch) & dinner daily. Meals included in the tour price are indicated in the detailed itinerary where: **B**= breakfast, **L**= lunch and **D**= evening meal. All entrance fees on the official program are included in the tour price.

THE ITINERARY

While all effort is made to keep the itinerary as printed, modifications to the itinerary may be made due to prevailing local conditions.



Day 1: Saturday 3 January, Arrive Chennai

On arrival in Chennai, participants travelling on the group flights will be met and transferred to GRT Grand Hotel (4*).

For those participants arriving before the tour officially begins, a sightseeing option may be a trip by taxi to Bessant Gardens (named after the British Suffragette). Theosophist Annie Bessant was a journalist and a 'spirited' thinker who made India her home in 1907 and who actively campaigned for the Indian movement for home rule. The gardens are also home to the Adyar library, which contains many ancient and rare manuscripts. Another option is a walk along the twelve kilometre Marina beach – a relaxing way to begin a journey in India. You could also stroll through the World Headquarters of the Theosophical Society where the 100 hectares of beautifully developed gardens have, as a centrepiece, a massive banyan tree that offers shade and an opportunity to reflect. **(Overnight Chennai, GRT Grand Hotel) D**

Day 2: Sunday 4 January, Chennai

- Fort St George Museum
- Kapaleeshwara Temple and Chennai Museum
- T-Nagar Shopping Precinct

Chennai, formerly Madras, has a population of around six million. It has grown from a number of small coastal villages and today it sprawls across more than seventy square kilometres. Although a bustling metropolis, it has a more relaxed pace than Delhi, Calcutta or Mumbai and it offers a fascinating gateway to an exploration of South India. Trade and commerce have helped shape Chennai into what it is today. Historically the city became a significant linchpin in the rapid expansion of the British Empire. The fort area is striking for its grand colonial architecture. Built in the mid-seventeenth century (around 1653), by the British East India Company, the

Fort currently houses the State Secretariat and the Legislative Assembly. Although access is restricted inside the Fort area, the Fort Museum houses memorabilia from both the British and the French East India Companies, as well as artefacts from the Raj and the Muslim administrators. Just outside the fort area is the High Court, a vast structure and one of the most splendid examples in Chennai of Indo-Muslim architecture. It is claimed to be the largest judicial structure in the world after the Courts of London.

Hindu temples are one of the highlights of this tour and the Kapaleeshwara Temple in Chennai is an excellent one to begin with. It typifies many of the Hindu temples in Tamil Nadu constructed in the classic Dravidian style with its *gopurams* (towers) and *tanks* (artificial lakes for bathing rituals). The original temple at this location is believed to be more than 1000 years old, however, the current buildings are said to date back around three hundred to four hundred years. During the January festival of Thai Pussam, the bronze statues of Shiva and Parvati (Shiva's wife) are floated on the temple tank. A labyrinth of narrow streets with bustling markets selling everything from the most gaudy trinkets to health products and dental equipment surround the temple area.

In the evening we will walk through the shopping precinct known as T-Nagar which offers a wonderful insight into the kaleidoscopic milieu of sari and jewellery shops. It isn't just the locals who come to buy their Saris or gold here! Members of the Indian Diaspora from Singapore, Malaysia and other countries make the pilgrimage. Don't worry if you're not buying, the spectacle of simply watching others do the buying provides an insight into a uniquely Indian experience.

Time permitting, an early evening stroll along the four-and-a-half kilometre Marina Beach offers a great perspective of the city. Many fishing families derive their

Day 4: Arjuna's Penance, Mahabalipuram



living from the waters off this beach. Sadly, many fishermen died and hundreds of boats were destroyed by the tsunami of December 2004. **(Chennai, GRT Grand Hotel) BLD**

Day 3: Monday 5 January, Chennai – Mahabalipuram

- National Art Gallery, Chennai
- Dakshinachitra Cultural Centre
- Tamil folk dances

This morning we explore the magnificent collection of Chola bronzes at the Chennai National Art Gallery, which constitutes a corpus equalling the quality of any great European collection. The bronzes, representing Shiva, Vishnu, their consorts, and other members of the pantheon like Ganesha, often adopt exquisite dancing poses. Their naturalism and sensuality – they evince an extraordinary sensitivity to the rendition of flesh – contrasts starkly to their stiff European medieval counterparts. Many of these images, their subjects inspired by poetry and dance, were carried in ancient temple processions.

After lunch, we drive the short distance from Chennai to Mahabalipuram. On the way, we stop to discover some aspects of traditional village life at the Dakshinachitra Cultural Centre. The name Dakshinachitra literally translates to 'Vision of the South' and this cultural centre is a living museum that offers visitors a historical perspective of South India. Spread over a four-hectare site, it comprises a fine collection of reconstructed houses from all over South India. There are also working craftsmen and well-described arts and artefacts which help set the scene for the start of your South Indian experience. There will also be a performance of a range of Tamil folk dances. We will be guided by a member of the Madras Craft Foundation that is the driving force behind this centre. There will be some free time in the late afternoon and evening to relax and enjoy the coastal town of Mahabalipuram. We stay for three nights in Mahabalipuram at a lovely resort by the seaside. Activities are designed to give you the middle of the day at leisure to cool off at the pool, or to read in the resort's shady garden or stylish pavilions. The resort is not large, and is distinctively 'Indian', so you will not feel that you have landed in some bland, international, 'placeless' hotel. **(Overnight Mahabalipuram, Ideal Beach Resort) BLD**

Day 4: Tuesday 6 January, Mahabalipuram

- The Five Rathas
- Bas Relief
- Arjuna's Penance
- Krishna's Butterball
- Shore Temples at Sunset

Mahabalipuram was the capital of the first Tamil dynasty of any real consequence to emerge after the fall of the Gupta Empire (c. 500 AD). It achieved the height of its power around the 5th-8th century AD. There are numerous temples and rock carvings to explore here, most of them completed during the reign of Narasimha Varam I (630-68) and Narasimha Varam II (700-28). Narasimha Varam I was also known as Mahamalla ('Great Wrestler') and it is from this that the town derives its name. The massive relief rock carving known as Arjuna's Penance shows animals, deities and other semi-divine creatures, as well as fables from classical Hindu texts. There are also a number of cave temples to see, as well

as free-standing temples. Of the latter, the most fascinating are the so-called Five Rathas, a group of five intricately fashioned buildings carved, like sculptures, from the living rock (the Dharmaraja, Bhima, Arjuna, Draupadi and the Sahadeva). This extraordinary, monumental group, was probably based upon wooden prototypes. Such elements as beams, eaves, brackets, door- and window frames, all carved from the living rock, reflect an earlier, lost, wooden temple tradition which may have preceded these masterpieces by many centuries. Mahabalipuram's age-old tradition of stone carving continues today. Some two hundred stonemasons live here and literally 'carve their living' by turning lumps of granite into statues of the gods. These are exported throughout the Hindu world.

After a break during the middle of the day, at dusk we shall visit the famous shore temple. The tsunami in 2004 caused loss of life and some damage to this temple, said to be one of the most photographed structures in India. However, the giant wave also unearthed some previously hidden structures, sparking a new burst of archaeological activity. One of the main attractions of the area's sculptures is that they reveal scenes of every day life as opposed to the usual depictions of gods and goddesses. This is a strong element in much Tamil sculpture, echoing the vivid naturalism of Tamil poetry. The view of the shore temple at sunset is breathtaking. Its warm stone colours (this temple is also carved from the living rock) are counterpointed by the brilliantly coloured saris of the many pilgrims who visit it each day. **(Overnight Mahabalipuram, Ideal Beach Resort) BLD**

Day 5: Wednesday 7 January, Mahabalipuram

- Morning at leisure
- Vedentanal Bird Sanctuary

Our second day in Mahabalipuram is devoted to a morning at leisure in which you may wish to enjoy the resort, where you can have a special massage, or walk through the town. In the afternoon there will be a leisurely walk through the magnificent Vedentanal Bird Sanctuary, where you will see some of the brilliantly coloured birds of Tamil Nadu. Often, to celebrate Pongal, the local government mounts a special dance evening. These are often not planned much in advance, but if there is a performance tonight, we shall join the local people in enjoying it. Performances often take place against the backdrop of the huge sculpted rock depicting Arjuna's Penance. **(Overnight Mahabalipuram, Ideal Beach Resort) BLD**

Day 6: Thursday 8 January, Mahabalipuram – Tiruvannamalai

- Arunachala Sacred Mountain
- Tiruvannamalai Temple

This morning we take a four-hour journey by coach to Tiruvannamalai. This city has a population of around fifty thousand, but during the November-December Full Moon Festival the number of people here can swell to almost one million with pilgrims from around the nation arriving for the Shiva Fire Festival. This is a venerable location where, according to the ancient scriptures, Shiva appeared as a pillar of fire. The sacred mountain known as Arunachala dominates its landscape. Sages and saints have resided on its escarpments for many centuries. The massive Shiva Temple is dedicated to the element of Fire and is one of the few such shrines that welcome non-Hindus into the innermost Sanctum to participate in the *Puja* (offering) ceremony.



After an early afternoon at leisure to avoid the midday heat and rest after our bus journey, we shall drive around the holy mountain, Arunachala. You will pass many small shrines along the way, and will note the different 'sacred' views of the mountain. We shall then visit the vast temple complex. The temples of Tamil Nadu are like cities. Not only are they as large as small towns, but also have strictly axial plans. A special feature is their magnificent gates, often the temples' most visually striking elements, topped by an intricate, almost overpowering multitude of richly painted figures. From these gates, visitors progress through carefully laid out pavilions and precincts until they reach the cave-like inner sanctum which holds the lingam of Shiva. Here a priest makes supplication for them and smears ash upon their foreheads. Indian temples are not quiet places and you will be as fascinated by the crowds as by their architecture. Outside, we shall also see the large, highly-decorated carts upon which sacred statues are carried during festivals. **(Overnight Tiruvannamalai, Hotel Sparsa) BLD**

Day 7: Friday 9 January, Tiruvannamalai – Pondicherry

- Cingee Fort
- French Quarter and Museum
- Evening dinner at the French restaurant " Le Club"

Today we drive from Tiruvannamalai to Pondicherry. Before reaching Pondicherry we stop for a walk through the ruins of Cingee Fort. Much of this vast complex is well preserved and although we won't have time to explore the whole area we see a number of pavilions, a gymnasium, and the twelve hundred steps of Rajagiri which lead to the upper temple precinct and bastion of last defence.

Cingee Fort owes its existence to its strategic location. It is an extensive and well-preserved fifteenth-century Vijayanagar citadel, only thirty-seven kilometres east of Tiruvannamalai. Various armies secured the fort over the centuries, including the army of Adil Shah from Bijapur who, in 1648, renamed the complex Badshahbad. Thirty years later it was claimed by the Marathas (1677) and twenty years after that the Mughals took it. They were eventually defeated, not by an invading army, but by a bout of malaria. The French held the fort from around 1760 but the British finally defeated them at Pondicherry at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Today the fort is claimed by the occasional tour group, local picnickers, or by a film crew using this dramatic location to shoot yet another good guy/bad guy Tamil blockbuster. The only permanent occupants of the fort seem to be eagles and lizards. The fort is constructed on three hilltops: Krishnagiri to the north, Chanrayandurg to the south, and Rajagiri to the east. The hilltop structures are joined by five kilometres of fortified walls, fifteen metres thick in some places. Buildings within the fort complex include a granary, a Shiva temple and a mosque. The most prominent building is the recently restored audience hall, Kalyana Mahal, which contains a pagoda-like structure that was used for wedding ceremonies. Elephant- and horse-stables are dotted throughout the complex.

After visiting this vast, citadel, we drive to Pondicherry in order to immerse ourselves in this bustling city that represents the final bastion of the French influence in India. There are some excellent French patisseries and restaurants in Pondicherry. A day of exploring will build up a serious appetite that will be well satiated by dinner at Le Club.

Pondicherry now has a population of around 800,000 souls. Although originally an earlier eighteenth-century French colony, it is now very much an Indian town, seemingly choked with cars and bicycles. There are, however, a few

Day 4: Shore Temple, Mahabalipuram



enduring pockets of French culture and influence, not least of which is the dress of the traffic police; with their red, peaked caps, they look like Parisian Gendarmes!

Archaeologists have evidence of two earlier settlements in this area. One was called Podhigal and was regarded as the abode of the Hindu saint, Agastya. The other settlement was called Vedapuri, a place where scholars would study the *Vedas* (sacred texts). Recent excavations have revealed significant trade connections with ancient Rome and Greece.

The French arrived here in 1673 but after only twenty years the Dutch defeated them. Four years later, however, the French reclaimed the area (1697). Many of them regarded their trading post as the germ of what would become a French empire in India. The British, however, were always keen to keep the upper hand in the empire stakes and they seized the settlement three times during the eighteenth century in a series of battles that became known as the 'Carnatic Wars'. Much of the conflict during this time was an unofficial war between the British and the French East India companies. Finally, in 1814, Britain returned Pondicherry to the French who secured their presence over the next one hundred and forty years. In 1954, six years after India achieved independence from the British, France finally relinquished control of Pondicherry to what became known as the 'Union Territory of India'. **(Overnight Pondicherry, The Promenade Hotel) BLD**

Day 8: Saturday 10 January, Pondicherry - Tanjore

- Gangakondacholapuram and Dharasuram - Chola Temples

Today we explore two of India's most magnificent Hindu temples. The two Chola temples date back to the tenth century and, like Chola bronzes, constitute masterpieces of Indian visual art. Gangakondacholapuram is a Shiva temple built by the

Day 8: Gangakondacholapuram Temple



Chola emperor Rajendra I (1012-1044). It includes splendid carvings, among them fascinating images of Shiva, Ganesh and Nataraja. The original temple was made up of three main sections, each of its four gates protected by the goddess Kali. The lush gardens of this temple are a testimony to its sophisticated watering systems. A stairway descends to a well through the sculptured body of a lion. It is thought that the Chola Kings poured water from the Ganges into it so that there would be a permanent source in which the gods could bathe.

Raja Raja II (1146-63) built the temple at Dharasuram. It is very well preserved with fine columns and a vast array of unique miniature sculptures, which echo the Chola bronzes in their vivaciousness and naturalism. One large sculpture at this temple depicts a lion attacking an elephant; this is said to symbolize the triumph of Hinduism over Buddhism. Another stunning feature of this temple is the Shiva lingam in the main shrine. It stands at the end of a long hall and is illuminated by natural light from sunrise to sunset. To the right of this is the saint Kannappa who sacrificed his eye to Shiva. Further along is Sarasvati, the goddess of wisdom and education. After visiting the temples, we drive to Tanjore, to the Ideal River Resort. This lovely, secluded hotel is located on the banks of the Vennar, a branch of Cauvery River. We shall eat on the terrace overlooking the river. **(Overnight Tanjore, Hotel Ideal River View Resort) BLD**

Day 9: Sunday 11 January, Tanjore

- Tanjore vegetable market
- Saraswati Mahal Library & Art Gallery
- Brihadishwara Temple

Today we explore the city of Tanjore, capital of the ancient Chola kings. After a visit to the vegetable market, we will focus on the ancient palace with its wonderful art gallery and library. The Tanjore Palace and Museum, with its vast halls, long corridors and shady courtyards was constructed around 1550 by the Nayaks of Madurai and completed by the Marathas. The art gallery is located inside one of the palace halls and has a superb collection of Chola bronzes dating from the ninth to the twelfth century that rival those you will have seen in Chennai. Also inside the palace complex is the Saraswati Mahal Library. Established around 1700, the library contains a collection of over thirty thousand palm-leaf and paper manuscripts, some of which are of great antiquity. Hopefully, the chief conservator of the library will be able to speak about the priceless palm-leaf collection to us.

Tanjore, also known as Thanjavur, is a small town with a population around 220,000. It was the ancient capital of the Chola kings. The town is dominated by the enormous tower of the Brihadishwara Temple that was built in 1010. This temple is regarded as the pinnacle of Chola architecture and is one of only a few places in India that has UNESCO World Heritage classification. After the middle of the day resting from the heat, we shall visit this temple at sunset.

The temple, dedicated to Shiva, possesses many examples of the dancing Shiva. Its construction represents an extraordinary achievement. There is very little building stone around Tanjore so all this construction material would have been transported from a great distance. The dome of the temple is made from a single piece of granite that was hauled into place along a four-kilometre earthwork ramp. There are two hundred and fifty lingams enshrined along the



outer temple wall and inscriptions on the wall record the names of dancers, poets and musicians – a reminder of the significance of this region to the development of classical art. A huge Nandi (bull) looks towards the inner sanctum of the temple. **(Overnight Tanjore, Hotel Ideal River View Resort) BLD**

Day 10: Monday 12 January, Tanjore - Trichy

- Rituals on the banks of the Cauvery river at Amma Mandapam
- Sri Rangam Vishnu Temple with views from the rooftop
- Evening visit the Rock Fort Temple and bazaar

Today we drive through fascinating landscapes observing village life and explore the Sri Rangam Vishnu Temple, one of the largest temple complexes in India. In the late afternoon a thirty-minute optional climb up the Rock Fort Temple provides a stunning finale to the day.

Trichy, also known as Tiruchirappalli, is a fascinating town with a relaxed ambiance and a deep history of more than two thousand years. The area changed hands many times between the Pallavas and the Pandyas during the first millennium AD. Eventually, in the 10th century, it fell into the hands of the Cholas. When the Chola Empire fell apart, Trichy came under the rule of the Vijayanagar emperors of Hampi until their defeat in 1565 by the armies of the Deccan Sultans. The present town, along with its most prominent landmark, the Rock Fort Temple, was built by the Nyaks of Madurai. In the eighteenth century it became one of the main centres around which, during the Carnatic wars, the British and French struggled for supremacy in India.

Sri Rangam Vishnu Temple is one of the largest temple complexes in India. Covering sixty hectares, the temple comprises seven concentric walls and twenty-one *gopurams*. This temple enshrines a statue of Vishnu reclining on a great serpent. There are many stories

surrounding this representation of Vishnu. One has it that this idol, known as Sri Ranganatha, was transported across India to Sri Lanka by the sage Vibhisana. To rest from his efforts, he placed the statue on the ground. After a short while, when he was ready to continue his journey, he found that the statue had somehow bound itself to the earth. A hundred hands could not budge the idol, so a small temple was built over it. The temple complex, which has since grown around the statue, has been rebuilt and enlarged many times over the centuries. Most of the extant buildings, including a grand hall of one thousand magnificently sculptured pillars, were constructed between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Vishnu, the second deity of the trinity of Hindu gods, is responsible for the sustenance, protection and maintenance of the created universe. A gentle, loving god representing the heart, he is the focus of intense devotional worship by a large percentage of the Indian population. To ward off the extraordinary perils that threaten creation, Vishnu frequently incarnates himself. He has appeared as Rama, Krishna, the Buddha and other incarnations. The Naanmugan Gopuram, is thirteen stories tall and completely covered with intricately carved, brightly painted statues of the many incarnations of Vishnu. These sculptures are not only very beautiful and extraordinarily expressive, but also function as three-dimensional story-books of Hindu mythology. They were intended, like the stained-glass windows of the European Gothic to communicate visually the myths to a largely illiterate population. For two thousand years the temples of Srirangam have been a centre of Bhakti Yoga, which may be defined as the practice of devotional love of God as a spiritual path leading to enlightenment. Generous financial support of the temple by numerous dynasties of ancient India, made Srirangam a haven for those wishing to dedicate their lives to the practice of meditation and

Buffalo Ploughing, Tamil Nadu



devotion. Many of India's most loved saints and sages have spent time at Srirangam, including the eleventh-century sage Ramanuja who lived and was buried in the temple grounds. Srirangam is also listed as one of the Nava Graha Sthalas, or temples representing the planets.'

This temple is superbly preserved with excellent carvings and countless shrines dedicated to a myriad of gods. Non-Hindus can journey as far as the sixth wall but are not permitted into the gold-topped sanctum. The outer four walls are filled with bazaars and houses for pilgrims. An annual cart festival (wooden chariot) is held here in January. The highly decorated chariot is pulled through the streets by dozens of devotees in homage to the gods.

The Rock Fort Temple is the most remarkable landmark in Trichy. Situated eighty-three metres up on a massive rock, this temple towers over the city. It is dedicated to Vinayaka (another name for Ganesh). The half-hour climb up the steps to the summit is well worth the effort. Those who do not wish to walk up these steps may like to visit Saratha's Sari Shop. Tamil women, unlike their northern counterparts, are still very much dedicated to brilliantly coloured saris and this vast department store, whose best saris are stunningly beautiful, claims to be the largest such emporium in India. **(Overnight Trichy, Hotel Sangam) BLD**

Day 11: Tuesday 13 January Trichy – Madurai via Chettinad

- Jain Temple at Sittanavasal
- Pudukotai Fort and Museum
- Lunch at the Chettinad Mansion
- Chettinad Palace & other heritage houses of the Karraikudi merchants

On our drive from Trichy to Madurai we explore a Jain temple and then move on to the Chettinad Museum and Palace where we have lunch in the grand surrounds of the Chettinad Mansion. The Sittanavasal Jain temple, high on a hill fifty-five kilometres south of Trichy, is said to contain some of the oldest paintings in South India. The name translates as 'Hill of the Yogis'. Many of the paintings are typical of the ninth-century Pandyan period and include exquisitely detailed pictures of animals, fish, ducks, people gathering lotuses from a pond, and two dancing figures. There are also inscriptions dating back to the ninth- and tenth-centuries. Fresco paintings from the seventh-century can be seen on the ceiling. They are of the same quality as the stunningly beautiful Buddhist paintings at Ajanta.

The fine architecture of the Chettinad Museum and Palace reflects the wealth of the merchant classes of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. The Chettinad Palace is a multi-coloured pastiche of architectural designs and flavours from many locales. Designed by Dr Chettiyar and constructed by local masons, its design in essence reflects the traditional architectural style of Chettinad. The construction material, decorative items and furnishings were mostly imported from East Asian countries and Europe. The marble was brought from Italy, chandeliers and teak from Burma, crockery from Indonesia, crystals from Europe, and wall-to-wall mirrors from Belgium. The woodwork and stonework were inspired by houses in France and other European countries.

We next drive to Madurai with a truly unique visit along the way. We stop at a village temple, rarely visited by travellers, and will have the shrine explained to us by villagers. In Tamil Nadu, whereas the triumvirate of Hindu gods, Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma dominate the religion of the city, in village worship we find memories of much older and more idiosyncratic local gods and goddesses. We shall visit one of these simple, outdoor shrines protected not only by huge trees that constitute its roof, but also by long rows of terracotta horses that line the entrance walk to the temple. The horse is rare in South India, and these horses, which represent power, probably owe their origins to those of invading cavalries from the north. **(Overnight Madurai, Fortune Pandiyan Hotel) BLD**

Day 12: Wednesday 14 January, Madurai

- Tirumalai Nayak Palace
- Teppakulam Tank
- Home and gallery of Tanjore Artist, Dr Shobana Kumar -talk on the technique of relief painting
- Meenakshi Temple

There's much to see around Madurai and today is spent visiting a palace, strolling through a temple complex and immersing ourselves in the bustling spice and vegetable markets. We also have a talk on the unique traditions of Tanjore painting from local artist, Dr Shobana Kumar.

We begin at the Thirumalai Nayak Palace, built by King Thirumalai Nayak to designs of an Italian architect in 1636 AD. The Palace Complex, a classic example of the Indo-Saracenic style, was originally four times bigger than the present structure. It is divided into two major parts: the Swargavilasa and Rangavilasa. The royal residence, theatre, shrine, apartments, armoury, carriage house, royal bandstand, quarters, pond and garden were situated in these two portions. The courtyard and the dancing hall are the major attractions of the palace today.

We shall also see the Teppakulam Tank built, like so many in Tamil Nadu, to preserve precious water during the dry season. This vast tank has an island temple at its centre, and is the focus of important rituals during local festivals. We end the morning with a visit to Dr Shobana Kumar's house and studio. Dr Kumar will demonstrate the technique of creating relief paintings which is traditional to Southern India.

After a break in the hottest part of the day, we shall visit the vast Meenakshi Temple, which spreads over six hectares and dates back more than two thousand years to the time when Madurai was the capital of the Pandyan Kings. The temple has twelve towers, and there is a thriving bazaar between the outer and the inner walls that offers a great opportunity to hone bargaining skills. There is also a 'tailoring hall' at the temple. If tailoring were an Olympic sport these tailors would certainly be in the gold medal stakes!

Just north of the temple is the Madurai spice and vegetable market. If we have time, a stroll through its labyrinthine laneways will be particularly stimulating to the olfactory senses and will offer a chance to experience something of the daily life of this town, away from the temple precinct. As well as a wide range of spices and vegetables there is also a large flower market where the temple flower sellers come to make their purchases. **(Overnight Madurai, Fortune Pandiyan Hotel) BLD**



Day 13: Thursday 15 January, Madurai - Periyar

- Spice Garden tour
- Cruise on Lake Periyar, Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary
- Kalaripayyat Demonstration

In the morning we leave the state of Tamil Nadu and enter the state of Kerala, driving through lush agricultural areas and then high up into the Ghat mountains to Periyar. The drive is dramatic, and amply demonstrates how this mountain range separated the very different societies of Kerala and Tamil Nadu for centuries, isolating Kerala, which avoided subjugation by the greater Indian dynasties throughout its history. On arrival at the Spice Village Plantation Resort we shall check in, and then there will be an optional tour of the eco-resort's Spice Garden and also take a cruise on Lake Periyar.

The seventy-seven square kilometre Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary is one of the most popular in India. It is rich with bird life, bison, antelopes, monkeys and an estimated seven hundred elephants. There are also thought to be around thirty tigers in the sanctuary but sightings are very rare indeed. The twenty-six square kilometre lake was built by the British in 1895 to provide water to Madurai and a slow boat ride across the lake is a perfect way to relax, slow down and observe the flora and fauna.

We return to our hotel and then drive a short distance to witness a demonstration of Kalaripayyat. This is the exclusive martial arts legacy of Kerala, taken to China by Buddhist monks where it became the model for the modern martial arts. *Kalaripayat* literally means 'acquired skill' or art. "*Kalari*" means school or arena, and "*payat*" is skill training, exercise or practice. It is arguably the most comprehensive personal combat training scheme anywhere in the world. The training includes exercises to develop sharp reflexes for unarmed combat and techniques of combat using mace, spears, daggers and

sword and shield. There is also a unique Kerala weapon - the lethal flexible sword, called the '*Urumi*' which can be concealed as a waist belt. The roots of the practice can be traced back to the twelfth-century. Masters of the art are called *Gurukkal* and they teach their students (male and female) inside a special arena called a *Kalari* which is a blend of gymnasium, school and temple. The *Kalari* is built according to ancient traditional principles; it is always rectangular in shape and aligned east-west. Hindu deities are represented at each corner. **(Overnight Periyar, Spice Village Eco Resort) BLD**

Day 14: Friday 16 January, Periyar - Kumarakom

- Optional trekking (3 hrs) with a forest guide, or elephant ride
- Sunset cruise on backwaters

In the morning there are options for trekking (for three hours) with a forest guide or you may prefer to ride an elephant. After lunch we drive down from the mountains and to the coast, to the stunning Coconut Lagoon Heritage Lakeside Resort, Kumarakom. You have now entered a unique tropical environment, far different from the comparatively dry plains of Tamil Nadu and the high Ghats. Much of Kerala is a deep labyrinth of waterways in which pirates who preyed upon Indian, Arab and later Portuguese shipping, could hide. Only when the Europeans fortified the area did local potentates, who thrived in Kerala's fragmented topography, and the pirates, lose power. The waterways are lined with coconut palms and there are exotic plants everywhere. Fishing boats ply the glassy lagoon waters, which have also been popularised by the famous Kerala houseboats. **(Overnight Kumarakom, Coconut Lagoon Heritage Lakeside Resort) BLD**

Temple Festival, Cochin, Kerala



Day 15: Saturday 17 January, Kumarakom

- Day at leisure
- Optional visit to the nearby Bird Sanctuary

Today will be a day at leisure in order to allow you to relax, visit a nearby bird sanctuary, enjoy an Ayurvedic Massage at the resort's professional treatment centre, take time for writing and photography, or just relax in the lovely, peaceful environment. There will be a sunset cruise on the backwaters before dinner. **(Overnight Kumarakom, Coconut Lagoon Heritage Lakeside Resort) BLD**

Day 16: Sunday 18 January, Kumarakom – Alleppey – Cochin

- Boat ride along the canals
- Heritage Walking Tour by the Conservation Society

After breakfast we transfer by boat across the Vembanad Lake to Alleppey through the area's smaller canals of the area. These waterways serve a large population living on its banks. You will see all kinds of craft and be able to take in the shore-side activities of the locals. The famous backwaters of Kerala comprise a vast network of lagoons, lakes, rivers and canals. They represent a unique geological formation and have led to an extraordinary way of life among the local inhabitants. A journey along these backwaters offers an understanding of the diversity and adaptability of the various communities. Although they are surrounded by water, many families still manage to keep livestock, including cows and pigs. They also cultivate lush vegetable gardens. Fishing is, of course, a mainstay and every conceivable device is used to lure the fish out of the water. Population growth and agriculture are adding pressures to the delicate ecology of these backwaters. There are twenty-nine major lakes in the Kerala backwater

Elephant, Pongol Festival



system, seven of which drain into the sea. Because of extensive land reclamation, the backwaters today are only a third of the size they were in the mid-nineteenth century and local environmental groups are lobbying to preserve what remains of this unique area.

On arrival at Alleppey we will be guided by the Conservation Society on a Heritage Tour of this historic backwater port which thrived on trade across the Arabian Sea. You will be introduced to the unique combinations of residence and warehouse that served local merchants by the society, which is working to conserve Alleppey's distinctive streetscapes.

We shall eat lunch with the Heritage Society and then drive for approximately eighty minutes to Cochin. On arrival we shall check into the Grande Residencia and The Old Harbroun in Fort Cochin. **(Overnight Cochin, Grande Residencia/The Old Harbour) BLD**

Day 17: Monday 19 January, Cochin

- Fort Cochin
- St Francis' Church
- Fish Market & Chinese Fishing Nets
- Synagogue and antique market
- Mattancherry Palace
- International Pepper Exchange
- Afternoon at leisure

With a population of around 60,000, Cochin city (also known as Kochi) has an eclectic mix of cultures, architecture and commerce, a pastiche of Portuguese, Chinese, Dutch, English, Jewish and, of course, Hindu influences. Here you will find the oldest Christian church in India as well as five hundred-year-old Portuguese houses. There are the famous cantilevered Chinese fishing nets (offering wonderful photographic opportunities), and the sixteenth-century Synagogue with a small congregation that forms part of a very ancient Jewish community in India.

Cochin is set on a cluster of islands and peninsulas and is home to one of India's largest ports as well as a major naval base. The harbour is busy, with ferries as well as large merchant ships carrying on a vibrant trade that has helped define this locale for centuries. The Portuguese navigator, Vasco da Gama died in Cochin in 1524 and was buried here for fourteen years before his body was returned to Lisbon. His tombstone lies inside St Francis Church, built in 1503 by the Franciscan friars.

First built in 1568, the Cochin Synagogue was destroyed by gunfire during a Portuguese raid in 1662 and was rebuilt two years later when the Dutch took over. The small structure has willow-pattern floor tiles brought from Canton in China in the mid-eighteenth century. There was a much earlier Synagogue built in Kochangadi around 1344 but it has since disappeared; all that remains is a stone slab. The area around the synagogue is known as 'Jewtown' and is one of the centres of the Cochin spice trade. This area is crowded with stalls and shop fronts selling every imaginable type of spice. The whole area is permeated with a pungent odour of ginger, cardamom, cumin, turmeric, cloves and many other exotic aromas. There are also a large number of magnificent antique shops that you will have time to visit. There are still a number of prominent Jewish families in the area, although most of the younger people have migrated to Israel or the United States.



In Cochin we shall also visit the International Pepper Exchange. Pepper has always played an important role in the development of Indian domestic and international trade. The International Pepper Exchange was established in 1997 as a means of capitalising on more than fifty years of vigorous trade in pepper. It has become a vibrant market place where buyers and sellers and even some growers gather to do deals and set prices. To watch this in action is to develop some understanding of the free market 'Indian style'.

Nearby is also the Mattancherry Palace. Also known as the Dutch Palace, this palace was built by the Portuguese and presented to the Raja of Kochi, Veera Kerala Varma (1537-65), in 1555 AD. Its current moniker was adopted after 1663, when the Dutch carried out some extensions and renovations. The rajas also made more improvements to it. Today, it is a portrait gallery of the Cochin Rajas and is notable for some of the best mythological murals in India, which are in the best traditions of Hindu Temple Art. The Palace, with two floors built around a central courtyard, follows the traditional Kerala style of architecture known as '*nalukettu*'. From the outside, it appears almost European in character. The interiors, panelled with wood, have exhibits from the Rajas of Kochi such as ceremonial robes, headdresses, weapons, palanquins and furniture, but the main feature is the series of astonishing murals, depicting scenes from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Puranic legends connected with Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna and Kumara.

The afternoon will be at leisure. **(Overnight Cochin, Grande Residencia/The Old Harbour) BLD**

Day 18: Tuesday 20 January, Cochin

- Hilltop Palace
- Evening sunset cruise on Cochin Harbour
- Evening Performance of Kathakali
- Special Seafood dinner at Brunton Boatyard overlooking the harbour

This morning we drive a small distance out of Cochin to visit the grand Hilltop Palace of the Rajas of Cochin. This vast, somewhat dilapidated complex of pavilions is surrounded by a European formal garden. It houses interesting, if a little eccentric, collections of the Rajas.

The afternoon will be at leisure, and in the evening there will be a sunset cruise followed by a sumptuous seafood dinner overlooking Cochin's magnificent harbour. Before dinner, we shall witness a performance of Kathakali. The word *Kathakali* literally translates to 'Story Play' and the Kathakali performance is actually a dramatized presentation of a narrative. Today around thirty plays are performed (originally there were around one hundred). Performances are based on the Hindu epics of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* as well as the *Puranas*. They address universal themes of good and evil, frailty and courage, poverty and prosperity, war and peace. They are performed across terrestrial or cosmic landscapes. These highly ritualised and vibrantly colourful plays can occupy many hours with every movement and every sound becoming a symbolic gesture that adds to the narrative. **(Overnight Cochin, Grande Residencia/The Old Harbour) BLD**

Day 19: Wednesday 21 January, Depart Cochin

- Cooking demonstration and lunch with Nimmy Paul

This morning is for exploring the flavours of Kerala with a personalized cooking demonstration with famed author, Nimmy Paul. Nimmy will host us at her home and will explain a range of dishes which we then eat for lunch. Lunch will be a traditional "*Sadhya*" which is served on a banana leaf at marriages and festivals. After lunch we shall return to the hotel to rest and to freshen up before transferring to the airport for our return flight home to Australia. Your rooms have been booked for day use until you leave for the airport. **BLD**

Day 17: Fishing nets, Cochin



TOUR PRICE

- \$6580.00** Land Content Only
(Early-Bird Special: book before 31 August 2008)
- \$6780.00** Land Content Only
- \$1890.00** Double (as single) room supplement

For competitive Economy, Business or First Class airfares and/or group airfares please contact ASA for further information.

Tour Price (Land Content Only) includes:

- Accommodation in twin-share rooms with private facilities ranging from 3-star hotels to 5-star deluxe eco-resorts.
- All meals, indicated in the tour itinerary where: **B**=breakfast, **L**=lunch, **D**=evening meal
- Bottled water during day excursions and all meals
- Transportation by deluxe air-conditioned 34-seater motorcoach
- Airport-hotel transfers if travelling on group flights
- Porterage at hotels
- Entrance fees to all National Parks, museums and other cultural sites; camera fees for still cameras, excursions by boat, special dance performances, full-day cooking course with Nimmy Paul
- Lecture and site-visit program
- Services of a National guide and specialist local guides
- An Indian tour manager will accompany the group to handle tour logistics
- All tips to National and local guides, guest lecturers, restaurant staff, driver and coach cleaner and shoe-keeping fees at temples.

Tour Price (Land Content Only) does not include:

- Airfare: Australia-Chennai, Cochin-Australia
- Beverages with meals other than bottled water
- Personal spending money
- Airport-hotel transfers if not travelling on group flights
- Luggage in excess of 20 kg (44 lbs)
- Travel insurance
- Tourist visa for India.

TO MAKE A RESERVATION

Please complete the ASA RESERVATION FORM and send it to Australians Studying Abroad together with your deposit of \$500.00 per person in cash or cheque (payable to Australians Studying Abroad). It is important that you read the Booking Conditions at this stage, and that you sign the reservation form. If you are booking within 75 days of the tour full payment is required.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of travel that you are covered by some form of international travel insurance. Note, travel insurance may not cover costs incurred due to a pre-existing illness or other conditions. Your insurance can be arranged through ASA. All participants must provide no later than 75 days prior to the commencement of the program:

- a copy of your travel insurance certificate
- the emergency telephone no. of your insurance company

Passport Details

All participants must provide no later than 75 days prior to the commencement of the program a photocopy of the front page of their current passport.

Paying the Balance

Balance of your tour price (full price minus \$500) must be paid to Australians Studying Abroad 75 days before you depart. You will receive an invoice from Australians Studying Abroad at this time. Upon receipt of payment we send you a receipt.

Note on the Airfare

When travelling on the group air package, you are not obliged to return home immediately your tour ends. You must, however, nominate a return date on your reservation form.

Single Supplement

Payment of the single supplement will ensure that you are provided with **a double or twin room (as single) throughout the program**. The number of single rooms available is extremely limited. People wishing to take the single supplement are therefore advised to book well in advance.



BOOKING CONDITIONS

Confirmation of Your Booking

When we have received your reservation form together with the deposit or full payment for the tour, and assuming there is a place available on the tour, we will send you confirmation of your booking and relevant travel details. It is from this moment that a firm contract exists between you and Australians Studying Abroad Pty Ltd (hereafter called ASA) on the basis of this itinerary, together with ASA's general brochure, and any brochure or itinerary amendments communicated to you, these booking conditions and the travel details sent to you. If a place is not available we will return your payment. ASA does however reserve the right to refuse to accept a booking without necessarily giving a reason.

What is included in the Tour Price

A list of what is included (and what is not included) in the price is given in the description of each tour in this brochure, and also in the detailed tour itinerary.

Changes in Tour Price

The price of ASA's tours may change with currency fluctuations, airfare increases, or if the group size is under fifteen. We shall, however, do all in our power to maintain the published price.

Cancellation Fees

Refund of deposit, less \$385.00 service fee (\$350.00 + \$35.00 GST), will be given when cancellation is made over 75 days in advance of the commencement of the tour (Day 1 of the itinerary). Cancellation received after that period will be subject to the following cancellation charges:

<i>Days Prior</i>	<i>Cancellation Fee</i>
75-46 days prior	25%
45-31 days prior	50%
30-15 days prior	75%
14-0 days prior	100%

We take the day on which you cancel as being that on which we receive written confirmation of cancellation.

Payment by Credit Card

Payment by credit card will incur the following card service fees:

- Mastercard, Visa or Bankcard: 1.85%
- American Express: 1.85%
- Diners Club: 2.7%

Terms & Conditions

ASA's tours require, on occasion, a substantial amount of physical exertion. The ASA RESERVATION FORM requests disclosure of all relevant medical conditions, physical or mental disabilities or any other related information which may affect the ability to fully participate in the activities forming a tour. The purpose of seeking this information is to assist ASA in determining the suitability of a tour participant for a particular tour, to identify those circumstances where unjustifiable hardship may result to ASA, and to address how ASA may be able to make 'reasonable accommodation' to cater for those tour participants, where only a minor modification may be needed.

To assist participants with what should be disclosed, ASA has graded its tours in terms of personal endurance. ASA also provides a detailed itinerary for each tour which describes the activities on a day-by-day basis. As indicated above, the itinerary should be considered as a guide to the educational program rather than as an exact and definitive list of activities.

The information provided in your reservation form will be treated in the strictest confidence. If ASA has any concerns based on the information provided by you, we shall contact you to discuss those concerns, and may request further information or clarification of the information previously provided.

It is a condition of travel that all participants agree to accept ASA's directions in relation to their suitability to participate in activities undertaken on the tour, and that ASA retains the sole discretion to direct a tour participant to refrain from a particular activity on part of the tour. Furthermore, ASA also reserves the right to reject a participant from further participation on its tours, or cancel the participation on a tour of any client whose behaviour is in the opinion of a representative of the company causing excessive distress, damage or annoyance to anyone or anyone's property. Our responsibility for that client will cease immediately and no compensation will be paid for any loss.

Australians Studying Abroad Pty Ltd (hereafter called ASA) gives notice that all tickets and coupons are issued through ASA, and all arrangements for transport or hotel accommodation are made by ASA as Agent upon the condition that ASA shall not be liable for any injury, damage, loss, accident, delay or irregularity caused by defect in any vehicle, or through the acts or defaults of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour, or otherwise in connection there with, or of any hotel proprietor or servant. The insurance of baggage and the care of personal articles is entirely the responsibility of the tour participant. The tour operator shall not be liable for any loss of or damage to personal property. ASA accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to the delays or changes in motor, air or other services, sickness, weather, strikes, war quarantine or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the passenger. The transport companies or firms, shall be exempt from all liability in respect of any detention, delay, loss, damage sickness or injury however and by whomsoever caused and of whatever kind occurring of or to the passenger at any time when the passenger is not on board a carrier or conveyance used or operated by the transport companies or firms. The passage contract in use by the transport companies or firms concerned shall constitute the sole contract between those firms and the passenger. All tickets, coupons and orders are issued subject to these terms and conditions. In the event of it being considered desirable to withdraw all of the arrangements, the net deposits paid will be returned to the members, and upon the tendering of the same, all liability of the organiser in respect thereof shall cease. ASA also reserves the right to modify the itineraries in any way thought desirable. The tour costs are based on fares and tariffs which will apply from date of booking but subject to unexpected price increases or exchange rate fluctuations. Any other IATA or non-IATA carrier may be used apart from the carriers featured in this folder. This brochure is issued on the sole responsibility of the tour operator. It is not issued on behalf of and does not commit the airline mentioned therein or any airlines whose services are used in the course of the tour.

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