




Ancient Kingdoms of South India: Forts, Palaces, Temples & Spice Gardens 2026

24 JAN – 13 FEB 2026

Code: 22602

Tour Leaders Em. Prof. Bernard Hoffert

Fitness Level 

Level 3 - Challenging

Among our most physically demanding

Explore South India's most important and spectacular Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Islamic, and Christian monuments, spanning the 2nd century BC to the 18th century AD.

Overview

Led by [Emeritus Professor Bernard Hoffert](#), former World President of the International Association of Art-UNESCO (1992-95), this tour explores India's most important and spectacular Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Islamic, and Christian monuments, spanning the 2nd century BC to the 18th century AD.

Visit UNESCO World Heritage sites of South India including:

- Mahabalipuram, the ancient port and centre for the Pallava kings during the 7th and 8th centuries, including the famous Shore Temple and the unique rock-carved temples called the 'Five Rathas'.
- 'Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas': two magnificent examples of Hoysala architecture – the Channakeshava Temple at Belur and the Hoysaleswara Temple of Halebid – both abundantly covered with intricate carvings representing gods, celestial beings, and humans.
- Monuments of Hampi – the last capital of the great Hindu Kingdom of Vijayanagar, with extensive remains including forts, royal and sacred complexes, temples, shrines, gateways, defence check posts, stables and various water structures.
- The finest examples of Chalukyan art and architecture with visits to **Pattadakal**, including the famed Temple of Virupaksha, the red sandstone rock-cut cave temples of **Badami**, and the stone temple complex of **Aihole**.
- 'The Great Living Chola Temples': including three great 11th- and 12th-century temples: the Brihadisvara Temple at Thanjavur, the Brihadisvara Temple at Gangaikondacholisvaram and the Airavatesvara Temple at Darasuram. These temples testify to the Cholas' brilliant achievements in architecture, sculpture, painting and bronze casting.
- The Qutb Shahi monuments of Hyderabad including the Golconda Fort, Qutb Shahi Tombs and Char Minar.

Further highlights include:

- The 12th-century Chola bronze masterpieces in the Chennai Museum and Thanjavur's Bronze Museum; and rare palm leaf manuscripts in the Saraswati Mahal Library, Thanjavur.
- Tipu Sultan's fabulous palace and mosque in Srirangapatnam.
- Mysore's City Palace, designed by British architect Henry Irwin to house the Wodeyar royal family in a florid Indo-Saracenic style.
- Kochi's St. Francis Church and the 16th-century Portuguese Mattancherry Palace (Dutch Palace) which features murals from the *Ramayana* as well as collections of royal costumes.
- The celebrated South Indian cuisine with its regional differences across 5 states: Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Testimonials

The tour was thoughtfully planned to take in the South's living culture against the background of exceptional temples. Being able to observe temple ceremonies with pilgrims dressed in colourful finery complete with flowers, created a wonderful atmosphere. Activities were well balanced with plenty of private time to soak up the cultural riches. Mirta, VIC.

A most excellent tour and it gave an opportunity to see the 'real India'. We saw remarkable ancient history, recent history of British, Portuguese, Dutch and French colonial history. We saw old princely states and modern India. The accommodation and food were excellent and with excellent organization all we needed to do was enjoy it all. John, QLD.

Overnight Mahabalipuram (2 nights) • Pondicherry (1 night) • Tanjore (2 nights) • Madurai (2 nights) • Periyar (1 night) • Fort Cochin (2 nights) • Mysore (3 nights) • Hassan (1 night) • Hampi (3 nights) • Badami (1 night) • Hyderabad (2 nights).

Leaders



Em. Prof. Bernard Hoffert

Art historian and artist, former World President of the International Assoc. of Art-UNESCO and former Associate Dean, Art & Design, Monash University. Bernard established Monash art & design programs in Prato, Italy. He currently leads ASA tours to India & Sri Lanka.

Bernard Hoffert is Emeritus Professor in the Faculty of Art Design & Architecture at Monash University. He was formerly Associate Dean in the Faculty of Art and Design, with responsibility for the Faculty's Higher Degree by Research program and the Faculty's International and External profile. He headed five departments while at Monash including the art school. He was the World President of the International Association of Art-UNESCO (1992-95) and remains an Honorary President; he has been Honorary President of the Asia-Pacific Regional Council of the International Association of Art- UNESCO and has continued involvement with UNESCO through the International Society for Education through Art (InSEA). He has been a member of the Global Advisory Board of the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies Network, Columbia University since 2006 and a member of their Research Committee. He was Vice President of the Academic Board of Monash University (2008-2010). He has been a member of the Review Boards of the *Art Education Research Journal*, Melbourne University (2004-12), the *Art Education Australia Research Journal* (2004-12), and a member of the Monash Asia Institute Publication Board (MUP) from 2001-11. He has been a member of the Executive Committees of the Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools (ACUADS) and Art Education Australia (AEA), and coordinated AEA's research development. He has also contributed to standing committees of Art Education Victoria and the National Association of the Visual Arts.

Bernard first joined ASA in 1981, and is ASA's second longest standing group leader/lecturer. He has led over 50 tours to Europe, including programs to Italy, France, Spain, Eastern Europe and the United Kingdom. He has led ASA tours to most regions of Italy, including Lombardy, the Veneto, Tuscany, Umbria, Lazio (Rome) and Sicily, and has a deep knowledge of the rhythms of Italian art history and Italy's profound contribution to the Western tradition. Bernard has nurtured ASA's long and fruitful relationship with Monash University, and has played a key role in the great success of Monash University's Centre in Prato, near Florence.

Bernard also has a long involvement with India and has travelled extensively from the Himalayas in the north to the southernmost tip of the subcontinent. He has led eight ASA tours to India including *Mughals, Rajputs & Villages: The Cultural Heritage of North India (2008-2016)*, *South India Sojourn: from temple sculptures and spice gardens to classical dance and canal cruises (2009, 2012)*, and *Ancient Kingdoms and Empires of Southern India (2017)*. 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 Indian text, *Design Education: Tradition and Modernity*, published late 2007.

Combine this tour with

Mughals, Rajputs and Villages: The Cultural Heritage of North India 2026
31 DEC 2025 – 20 JAN 2026



Itinerary

The detailed itinerary provides an outline of the proposed daily program. Participants should note that the daily activities described in this itinerary may be rotated and/or modified in order to accommodate changes in museum opening hours and flight schedules. All meals are included in the tour price and are indicated in the itinerary where: B=breakfast, L=lunch and D=dinner. Bottled water is also included. All entrance fees and permits are included in the tour price.

Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram), Tamil Nadu - 2 nights

Day 1: Saturday 24 January, Tour commences in Chennai; afternoon transfer to Mamallapuram

- The tour commences at 9.00am in the foyer of the [The Residency Towers](#), Chennai
- Fort St George
- Chennai Museum
- Welcome Dinner

Meeting Point: The tour commences at 9.00am in the foyer of the [The Residency Towers](#), Chennai. Please contact ASA if you require assistance with arrival airport transfers or pre-tour accommodation at this hotel.

Chennai, formerly Madras, has a population of around 6 million. It grew by uniting geographically a number of small coastal villages and today sprawls across more than 70 square kilometres. Although a bustling metropolis, it has a more relaxed pace than Delhi, Calcutta (Kolkata) or Mumbai and it offers a fascinating gateway to our exploration of South India. As a port, trade and commerce have shaped 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 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 stands 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.

After exploring the Fort St George area we take a short coach tour of the colonial architecture of this city, noting especially the mix of European, Hindu and Islamic styles that contributed to the fascination of the architecture of the Raj.

Following lunch at a local restaurant, we explore the magnificent collection of 11th- to 13th-century Chola bronzes at the Chennai Museum, 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 – contrast starkly to their stiff European medieval counterparts. Many of these images, their subjects inspired by poetry and dance, were carried in ancient temple processions. A change in religious thought around 1000 AD led to the bronzes being incorporated into human activity, especially processions, when they were paraded clothed in precious garments.

In the late afternoon we continue south to the coastal town of Mamallapuram. This evening we enjoy a Welcome Dinner at the hotel. (Overnight Mamallapuram) BLD

Day 2: Sunday 25 January, Mamallapuram

- The Five Rathas
- Shore Temple
- Arjuna's Penance
- Krishna's Butterball
- Time at leisure

Mamallapuram was the capital of the Pallava Dynasty, 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 from the 5th to 8th centuries 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 Mahamall ('Great Wrestler') and it is from this that the town derives its name.

We begin this morning with a visit to the fascinating so-called Five Rathas (the Dharmaraja, Bhima, Arjuna, Draupadi and the Sahadeva), a group of five intricately fashioned buildings carved, like sculptures, from the living rock. 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 that may have preceded these masterpieces by many centuries. Mamallapuram's age-old tradition of stone carving continues today. Some 200 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.

Next, we visit the two-towered Shore Temple, said to be one of the most photographed structures in India. The tsunami in 2004 caused loss of life and some damage to this temple, 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 everyday 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 massive relief rock carving known as *Arjuna's Penance* shows myriad animals, deities and other semi-divine creatures, as well as fables from classical Hindu texts. It is thought to symbolise the triumph of

Hinduism over Gupta Buddhism. According to myth, *asuras* (demons) sent a boar to kill Arjuna. Shiva protected Arjuna in the form of *Kirata* (a hunter). Arjuna and Shiva killed the boar and then fought over who had succeeded in the killing. Shiva won and then revealed his true self to Arjuna. He blessed him and gave him the weapon for which Arjuna is shown performing his penance. The huge sculpture, which also shows the descent of the Ganges, is astounding in its finesse and intricacy.

Following lunch at a local restaurant we visit the 'butterball', a giant precariously perched rock, 5 metres in diameter. In Hindu mythology Lord Krishna had an insatiable appetite for butter and as a child would steal a handful from his mother's butter jar. The rock is reputedly a bolus of butter he stole.

We return to our hotel in the mid afternoon for some time at leisure to enjoy the facilities of the hotel.
(Overnight Mamallapuram) BLD

Puducherry (Pondicherry), Tamil Nadu - 1 night

Day 3: Monday 26 January, Mamallapuram – Gingee Fort – Puducherry

- Gingee Fort
- Puducherry's colonial architecture

Today we drive south from Mamallapuram to Puducherry via Gingee Fort. Gingee Fort is a remarkable example of military engineering with its three citadels perched atop separate hills marking out a triangle protected by walls that are still largely intact. The fort is almost 1.5 kilometres from north to south, and scattered with the ruins of mosques, *mandapas* (a pillared outdoor hall or pavilion for public rituals), shrines, water tanks and granaries. Spectacular examples, of the once grand buildings, include the Krishna Temple and Durbar Hall, the Venkataramana Temple and the huge Kalyana Mahal and watchtower. Several temples mostly dedicated to Vishnu also survive; built in the 15th and 16th centuries by the Nayaka governors of the Vijayanagar empire. The fort saw many battles and was occupied by the Muslim sultans of Bijapur, the Marathas, the French and the British, as the East India Company expanded its hold on Southern India.

We shall have a boxed lunch at the site of Gingee Fort before heading to the coastal city of Puducherry (formerly known as Pondicherry). Founded in 1674 as the capital of the French Territories in India and a base for trade in textiles and spices, Puducherry is laid out as an ordered grid along 3 kilometres of the Bay of Bengal. The streets adjoining the waterfront abound with elegant French mansions, tree-lined boulevards, parks and cafes. The town is integrally associated with Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), the Bangali poet, freedom fighter and mystic. Educated at Cambridge University, he returned to India to work in the administrative service of the Maharaja of Baroda and then the British Civil Service. He became increasingly active in political resistance in Bengal and after a period in prison fled British India to settle in French territory. In 1926 he established an Ashram where he wrote on and popularised the principles of yoga; the essence of his spiritual philosophy was that the humanity could further evolve in the spiritual sense through yogic practice, much as Darwinian theory sees human evolution. The Ashram remains a centre for charitable activities and spiritual devotion with many international devotees.

On arrival in Puducherry we take an orientation tour to view the town's elegant colonial architecture. We then proceed to our charming hotel which is built in the French Colonial style. (Overnight Puducherry) BLD

Thanjavur (Tanjore), Tamil Nadu - 2 nights

Day 4: Tuesday 27 January, Puducherry – Gangaikonda Cholapuram – Darasuram – Thanjavur

- Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple

- Dharasuram Airavatesvara Temple

Today we explore two of India's most magnificent Hindu temples. These two Chola temples date back to the 10th century and, like Chola bronzes, constitute masterpieces of Indian visual art.

Gangaikonda Cholapuram is a Shiva temple built by the 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 Airavatesvara temple at Darasuram. 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 symbolise 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 image of saint Kannappa who sacrificed an eye to Shiva. Further along is Sarasvati, the goddess of wisdom and education.

In the late afternoon we continue our journey south to the Great Trails River View Resort. This lovely, secluded hotel is located on the banks of the Vennar, a branch of Cauvery River. We shall dine on the terrace overlooking the river. (Overnight Thanjavur) BLD

Day 5: Wednesday 28 January, Thanjavur – Srirangam – Thanjavur

- Sri Ranganathaswamy (Ranganatha) Temple, Srirangam
- Brihadishwara Temple, Thanjavur

This morning we drive through fascinating landscapes observing village life and explore the Sri Ranganathaswamy (Ranganatha) Temple, one of the largest temple complexes in India. Covering 60 hectares, the temple comprises seven concentric walls and 21 *gopurams* (monumental sculpted towers). 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 a sage aimed to transport the Vibhisana idol, known as Sri Ranganatha, across India to Sri Lanka. 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 14th and 17th 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 13 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 a three-dimensional storybook of Hindu mythology. They were intended, like the stained-glass windows of European Gothic churches to communicate visually the myths to a largely illiterate population.

For two thousand years the temples of Srirangam have been centres 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 ancient Indian dynasties made Srirangam a haven for those wishing to dedicate their lives to the practice of meditation and devotion. Many of India's most loved saints and sages spent time at Srirangam, including the 11th-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 myriad 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 wooden chariot festival is held here in January. The highly decorated chariot is pulled through the streets by dozens of devotees in homage to the gods.

After lunch in Srirangam we return to Thanjavur to visit the enormous tower of the Brihadishwara Temple (1010). This temple is regarded as the pinnacle of Chola architecture. We shall visit this temple at sunset. The temple, dedicated to Shiva, possesses many examples of the dancing Shiva. There is very little building stone around Thanjavur so all construction material would have been transported a great distance, an extraordinary feat. The temple's dome is fashioned from a single piece of granite that was hauled into place along a four-kilometre earthwork ramp. There are 250 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 Indian classical art. A huge Nandi (bull) looks towards the inner sanctum of the temple. (Overnight Thanjavur) BLD

Madurai, Tamil Nadu - 2 nights

Day 6: Thursday 29 January, Thanjavur – Chettinad – Athangudi – Madurai

- Shivappa Nayaka Palace: Saraswati Mahal Library & Art Gallery, Thanjavur
- Chettinad Cuisine
- Athangudi Palace

This morning we explore the small city of Thanjavur (formerly Tanjore: pop. c.30,000), capital of the ancient Chola kings. We begin with a visit to the Shivappa Nayaka Palace and its wonderful art gallery and library. The palace 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 9th to the 12th 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 30,000 palm-leaf and paper manuscripts, some of which are of great antiquity.

Mid-morning we depart Thanjavur for Chettinad, whose cuisine is perhaps the most renowned fare in the Tamil Nadu repertoire. Dishes are made with freshly ground masalas and contain a variety of spices, sun-dried meats and salted vegetables, reflecting the dry environment of the region. The region is also known for its stately mansions, a statement of the affluence the mercantile community enjoyed at the height of its prosperity during the British Raj.

After lunch we visit the Athangudi Palace whose 64 grand rooms are decorated with over 600 ornate windows, tiles imported from Italy and coloured glass from Belgium. The highlight of the palace however, is the locally made Athangudi tiles. These handcrafted tiles are famous for their colourful and intricate patterns, mostly created in shades of red, blue, emerald, mustard and grey.

In the late afternoon we drive south to Madurai, our base for the next two nights. (Overnight Madurai) BLD

Day 7: Friday 30 January, Madurai

- Meenakshi Temple
- Thirumalai Nayak Palace
- Ghandi Memorial Museum

We begin today with a visit to the vast Meenakshi Temple, which spreads over six hectares and dates back more than 2000 years to the time when Madurai was the capital of the Pandyan Kings. The temple has 12 *gopurams*, and there is a thriving bazaar between the outer and the inner walls that offers a great opportunity to hone your 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!

After a break in the hottest part of the day we visit 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 larger 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, living 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 also visit the Ghandi Memorial Museum housed in the 17th-century Tamukkam Palace. Inaugurated by Jawaharlal Nehru on 15 April 1959, exhibits include a part of the blood-stained garment worn by Gandhi when he was assassinated by Nathuram Godse. Also on display is an original letter written by Gandhi to Shri Narayanan Sathsanghi of Devakottai, and a congratulatory message sent by Gandhi to freedom fighter and poet Subramania Bharati. (Overnight Madurai) BLD

Thekkady, Kumily, Kerala - 1 night

Day 8: Saturday 31 January, Madurai – Thekkady

- Thekkady Spice Plantation

This 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 Thekkady, a mountain sanctuary that is famous for its dense evergreen, semi-evergreen, moist deciduous forests and savannah grass lands. 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 Thekkady Spice Village Resort we shall check in and have lunch. After lunch we shall drive by jeep to a 45-hectare spice plantation, whose owner will introduce the plantation and teach us the various uses to which spices like pepper, cardamom and cinnamon are put. We return to the resort in good time for you to enjoy its lovely gardens. (Overnight Thekkady) BLD

Kochi (Fort Cochin), Kerala - 2 nights

Day 9: Sunday 1 February, Thekkady – Alleppey – Kochi

- Tea Plantation
- Cruise on backwaters of Vembanad Lake, Kumarakom

- Evening Performance of *Kathakali*

We begin today with a short visit to a working tea factory and plantation where we may view the tea-making process, the tea garden, and enjoy a tea-tasting. We then drive down from the mountains to the lush lakeside resort of Kumarakon. We have now entered a unique tropical environment, very different from the comparatively dry plains of Tamil Nadu, and the high Ghats. Much of Kerala consists of a deep labyrinth of waterways in which pirates who preyed upon Indian, Arab and later Portuguese shipping once hid. Only when the Europeans fortified the area did local potentates, who thrived in Kerala's fragmented topography, and the pirates, lose their power.

In the afternoon we cruise the backwaters of Vembanad Lake. These 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 Keralan houseboats. In the late afternoon we continue our drive north for approximately 50 kilometres to the famous port of Kochi.

On arrival in Kochi we shall witness a performance of *Kathakali*. The word *Kathakali* literally translates to 'Story Play' because the *Kathakali* performance is actually a dramatised presentation of a narrative. Today around 30 plays are performed (originally there were around 100). 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 Kochi) BLD

Day 10: Monday 2 February, Kochi

- Pardesi Synagogue
- Mattancherry Palace
- Fort Kochi area including St Francis' Church & Chinese Fishing Nets
- Sunset Cruise on Kochi Harbour

Kochi (pop. c. 60,000) 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 bustling trade that has helped define this locale for centuries. The Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama died in Kochi in 1524 and was buried here for 14 years before his body was returned to Lisbon. His tombstone lies inside St Francis' Church, built in 1503 by the Franciscan friars.

We begin today with a visit to the 16th-century Pardesi Synagogue. Its small congregation forms part of a very ancient Jewish community in India. First built in 1568, the synagogue was destroyed by cannon fire during a Portuguese raid in 1662 and was rebuilt two years later when the Dutch took Cochin. The small structure has willow-pattern floor tiles brought from Canton in the mid-18th century. A much earlier synagogue built around 1344 has since disappeared; all that remains is a stone slab. The area around the synagogue is known as 'Jewtown' and is a centre of the Kochi 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.

Nearby is the Mattancherry Palace. Also known as the 'Dutch Palace', it was built by the Portuguese and presented to the Raja of Kochi, Veera Kerala Varma (1537-65), in 1555. Its current moniker was adopted after 1663, when the Dutch carried out extensions and renovations. The rajas also made improvements to it. Today, it holds a portrait gallery of the Cochin Rajas and is notable for some of the best mythological

murals in India, which are in the finest 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, also hold 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 *Puranas* connected with Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna and Kumara.

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 500-year-old Portuguese houses. There are also the famous cantilevered Chinese fishing nets (offering wonderful photographic opportunities). We end our day with a sunset cruise on Kochi Harbour. (Overnight Kochi) BLD

Mysuru (Mysore), Karnataka - 3 nights

Day 11: Tuesday 3 February, Kochi – Bengaluru – Mysuru

- Morning flight from Kochi to Bengaluru
- Travel by coach from Bengaluru to Mysuru

Early this morning we transfer to Kochi airport for our flight to Bengaluru. On arrival in Bengaluru we journey 187km south to our hotel located in the centre of Mysuru, the former capital city of the Wodeyar Maharajas. (Overnight Mysuru) BLD

Day 12: Wednesday 4 February, Mysuru – Seringapatam – Somanathapura – Mysuru

- Seringapatam Fort
- Daria Daulat Bagh
- Tomb of Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan
- Chennakesava Temple, Somanathapura

This morning we drive to the very ancient trade and pilgrimage town of Seringapatam (pop. c. 25,000), which is separated from the mainland by a larger and smaller branch of the River Kaveri. A number of island temples on this river, like that of Seringapatam, are dedicated to Sri Ranganathaswamy, a manifestation of Lord Vishnu. The Seringapatam temple was founded in the 10th century and added to in the styles of the Vijayanagar Empire, and of the Wodeyar Maharajas of Mysuru who asserted their independence (1399) when the Vijayanagar Empire began to disintegrate. In the 18th century the Muslim leader Hyder Ali (1721-1782), Dalavayi (commander-in-chief) of the Wodeyar leader Krishnaraja Wodeyar II, wrested power from his lord and made Srirangapatna his *de facto* capital. His son Tipu Sultan (1750-1799) succeeded him.

Several Indo-Islamic monuments such as Tipu Sultan's palaces, the Daria Daulat and the Jumma Masjid (Friday congregational mosque), date from this period. We shall explore the town's fort as well as the Daria Daulat Bagh, a pleasure pavilion built by Tipu Sultan to celebrate Hyder Ali's defeat of Colonel Baillie at Pollilore, during his clashes with the British. It sits in a huge park and is approached by a typically Islamic long path and pool. Within the pavilion there is a fascinating mural depicting Hyder Ali at court. Nearby, we visit the Tomb of the two leaders.

On our return to Mysuru we drive 35 kilometres to Somanathapura to visit the Chennakesava Temple, one of the finest examples of Hoysala architecture, dating back to the 12th century. (Overnight Mysuru) BLD

Day 13: Thursday 5 February, Mysuru

- Maharaja's Palace
- Shweta Varahaswamy Temple, Maharaja's Palace
- Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery
- Devaraja Market
- Time at leisure

This morning we explore the vast City Palace of the Maharajas of Mysuru that was designed by British architect Henry Irwin for Mumtaz Ali Wodeyar, who took power after the death of Tipu Sultan and reigned from 1799 to 1868. It remained the family palace of the Wodeyar royal family. Henry Irwin designed this vast palace in a florid Indo-Saracenic style that blended Hindu, Muslim, Rajput, and Gothic elements. Today there is a museum within the palace, and its numerous carved wooden and silver doors, stained glass mirrors, and history paintings attest to the wealth and prestige attained by the Wodeyar family during their long rule.

Within the palace grounds we visit the Shweta Varahaswamy temple in the Hoysala architectural style. The shrine of the Goddess has an elegant doorway and intricately carved pillars and tower. There are fine stucco niches and beautiful mural paintings depicting incidents from the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavata* concentrating on the exploits of Lord Krishna.

We next visit the Jaganmohan Palace, which houses the Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery, one of the largest and finest in Southern India. It is especially known for its collection of paintings by Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906), an artist from Travancore (Kerala) who achieved recognition for his depiction of scenes from the epics of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. His paintings are considered to be among the best examples of the fusion of Indian traditions with the techniques of European academic art.

We end the day with a visit to Devaraja Market, one of India's most colourful and lively bazaars. (Overnight Mysuru) BLD

Hassan, Karnataka - 1 night

Day 14: Friday 6 February, Mysuru – Belur – Halebid – Hassan

- Channakeshava Temple, Belur
- Hoysaleswara Temple, Halebid

Today we drive this morning to the city of Hassan for lunch and then continue north a short distance to visit two magnificent Hoysala style temples, noted for their intricate carving, and both UNESCO listed World Heritage Sites.

Hoysala temples are distinct because they don't have the soaring *gopurams* (towers). Built on raised platforms that serve as *mantapas* (prayer halls), they eschew the more common four-sided Indian temple layout for a multi-sided polygon with entryways in the four cardinal directions. The *shikhara* (tower) here has a pyramidal structure studded with carvings.

The Hoysala King Vishnuvardhana built the Channakeshava Temple on the banks of the Yagachi River in Belur (Beluru), an early Hoysala capital. Channakeshava (lit, 'handsome Kesava') is a manifestation of Vishnu. It was commissioned in 1116 AD to commemorate the Hoysalas' victory over the neighbouring Cholas. The facade of the temple is filled with intricate sculptures of elephants, lions, horses, episodes from the Indian

mythological epics, and sensuous dancers (*Shilabalikas*). Inside, every inch of the space on the walls and ceilings of the temple have been sculpted. The ornate friezes include the *Darpana Sundari* showing a woman admiring herself in a hand-mirror; another depicts the churning of the ocean by the Asuras and Devas for the coveted pot of nectar.

The Hoysaleswara Temple in Halebid (Halebeedu), on the other hand, is dedicated to Shiva. Construction also began during the rule of King Vishnuvardhana around 1121 AD and went on for more than 190 years. It was never completed, but nonetheless stands today as a masterpiece of Hoysala architecture. The interior of its inner sanctum, chiselled out of black stone, is marvellous. On the outside, the temple's richly sculpted walls are covered with a flurry of Hindu deities, sages, stylised animals and friezes depicting the life of the Hoysala rulers.

Tonight we stay in an eco-resort located just north of Hassan. (Overnight Hassan) BLD

Hampi, Karnataka - 3 nights

Day 15: Saturday 7 February, Hassan – Chitradurga Fort – Hampi

- Chitradurga Fort

We drive north east today to Hampi via Chitradurga Fort. This citadel straddles several hills and a peak overlooking the flat Vedavati river valley in the Chitradurga District. The fort's name, 'Chitrakaldurga', which means 'picturesque fort' in Kannada, gave its name to the adjacent town on the Vedavati and its administrative district. The fort, built by various dynasties between the 15th and 18th centuries, comprises a series of seven concentric walls with various passages, a citadel, mosque, warehouses for grains and oil, water reservoirs and 19 ancient temples; 18 temples lie in the upper fort and one huge temple in the lower fort. Among these temples the oldest and most interesting is the Hidimbeshwara temple. Hyder Ali added the mosque after he defeated the Nayakas of Chitradurga in 1779. (Overnight Hampi) BLD

Day 16: Sunday 8 February & Day 17: Monday 9 February, Hampi World Heritage Site

- Hampi Bazaar
- Virupaksha Temple
- Hemakuta Hill
- Nandi Statue
- Vittala temple
- Zenana Enclosure
- Lotus Mahal
- Queen's Bath
- Archaeological Museum

We spend two days exploring the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Hampi-Vijayanagara, which has a special connection with Australia, having been studied, measured and drawn by teams led by Melbourne architectural historian, Professor George Michell. The Hindu Vijayanagara Empire on the Deccan Plateau rose to power when the southern states fought to ward off Islamic invasions. For 200 years until it declined after military defeat (1565) by the Deccan sultanates it prospered through trade and conquest. It attracted merchants and travellers from Arabia, Portugal, China, and even Russia. The Empire is named for its capital city of Vijayanagara, whose vast 13 square kilometre ruins surround present day Hampi; the Tungabhadra River runs through the hills on which myriad temples and royal monuments were built. Previous South Indian temple building traditions coalesced in the Vijayanagara architecture style. Innovative temple construction

developed from the mingling of faiths and vernacular styles as well as influences brought about by the Empire's substantial trade networks. Seven lines of fortifications with many bastions and gateways originally defended the city of Vijayanagara; the innermost enclosing the city core is the best preserved. The city's monuments include religious, civil & military buildings. Jain temples on Hemakuta hill, two Devi shrines & some structures in the Virupaksha temple complex predate the Vijayanagara Empire; the Shiva shrines with their stepped superstructures are Chalukyan (9th-10th centuries). Of the Vijayanagaran monuments, the Vittala Temple Complex is arguably the most famous. The road leading to the temple is lined by the ruins of the original horse market; the temple contains images of foreigners like Persians selling horses. Nearby is a great stone chariot. Within the temple are famous 'musical' pillars. The British cut two pillars in an attempt to divine the source of the sound; they found nothing but hollow pillars.

Hemakuta Hill lies to the south of Hampi village. Several small temples here predate the construction of the capital, some being as early as the 10th century. The hill was fortified when the main city was constructed and a number of more recent temples, tanks, entrances, and *gopurams* built, some of which were never completed.

The Lotus Mahal in the Zenena enclosure is a two-storied symmetrical structure that is a fine example of Indo-Islamic architecture. The base of the structure is in a Hindu style typical of Vijayanagara architecture while the superstructure is Islamic with pyramidal towers instead of regular domes. This gives it a Lotus-like look, hence its name. It is one of the very few buildings with intact plaster decoration. The carvings on the pillar arches including those of birds are exquisite. Pipes running between the arches of the Mahal cooled this palace with fresh air during summer. A rectangular wall surrounds the entire monument; its corner watchtowers served to guard the women's chambers. (Overnight Hampi) BLD

Badami, Karnataka - 1 night

Day 18: Tuesday 10 February Hampi – Aihole – Pattadakal – Badami

- Aihole Stone Temple Complex
- Pattadakal Mallikarjuna, Virupaksha & other temples
- Badami Cave Temples

Today we travel north to visit three spectacular examples of Chalukyan architecture: the stone temple complex of Aihole, the great cave temples at Badami and the UNESCO heritage-listed structural temples at Pattadakal.

We are now in the heartland of the Chalukya Dynasty that ruled much of the Deccan and Southern India between the 6th and the 12th centuries as three related yet individual dynasties. The earliest dynasty, known as the Badami Chalukyas, ruled the western Deccan coastal plain from their capital Vatapi (modern Badami) from c. 540 to 754 AD. It is said that Aihole (old Aryapura) had the honour of being the first capital of the Chalukya dynasty before the capital moved to Badami. Nearby Pattadakal, was their coronation city. The early Chalukyas benefitted greatly from conquering coastal cities like Elaphanta (on an island in Mumbai harbour) and exploiting their trade networks. After their rise to power they came into conflict with the Pallavas and Pandyas of Tamil Nadu and brought about a critical change in Southern India from these smaller kingdoms to a large empire.

The Chalukyas were ardent practitioners of Hinduism, more specifically Shaivism, or followers of Shiva; and to a lesser extent, Vaishnavism, followers of Vishnu. In particular, deities such as Shiva, Vishnu, Karikeya, and the Sapta Matrikas, also known as the Seven Mothers, were worshipped, and many temples were built around the region in their dedication. Despite Hinduism's popularity as the religion of choice by both the

Chalukyan royal family and the masses at large, the Chalukyan dynasty was tolerant of other religions and coexisted with followers of Jainist and Buddhist traditions, although Buddhism was becoming less popular in the region.

Famously termed the 'Cradle of Hindu Rock Architecture', Aihole, which was established in 450 AD, lies to the east of Badami and is the site of around 125 stone temples, the earliest dating from the 6th century. Here, architects experimented with different architectural styles, blended the Nagara and Dravidian styles, and evolved their own distinctive style. The experimentation of the Chalukyan artisans is evident in the variety of relief sculpture and the innovative approaches to building which culminate in the great structures of Pattadakal.

The Chalukyas built 10 temples in their coronation city, Pattadakal, between the 7th and 8th century; one of them is a Jain sanctuary. They, like the Badami caves, experiment with a number of styles and thus are extremely important for the evolution of Hindu temple design. Four temples were built in Chalukya Dravidian style, four in Nagara style of Northern India, while the Papanatha temple is a fusion of the two idioms. It is this blending of styles that makes them so significant. We shall pay special attention to the largest of all the temples, the Virupaksha temple.

The Badami cave temples are extremely important as some of the earliest known experiments in Hindu temple design and were critical for the development of temple design elsewhere in India. There are five important caves in all. Caves one to three are dedicated to Shiva and Vishnu, while Cave four features Jain images. There is also a Buddhist Cave that has been converted to temple dedicated to Vishnu. Another cave identified in 2013 has a number of carvings of Vishnu and other Hindu deities; water constantly gushes out through this cave. (Overnight Badami) BLD

Hyderabad, Telangana - 2 nights

Day 19: Wednesday 11 February, Badami – Gulbarga – Hyderabad

- Brief visit to Kalaburagi (formerly known as Gulbarga)

Today we journey across the heart of the Deccan to Hyderabad. Muhammad Quli, fifth sultan of Golconda, founded Hyderabad in 1589. He was a highly intelligent and cultured man endowed with immense creative energy. The city fell to the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in 1687 when he annexed the Golconda state. The governorship of this wealthy and extensive new Mughal province was entrusted to Mir Kamruddin Khan, who had helped Aurangzeb push the Mughal Empire to its southern geographical limits. He remained in Hyderabad as governor of the Mughal Deccan with the title Nizam-ul-mulk, 'Manager of the State'. Ironically, it was his conquests that pushed the Mughal Empire beyond its manageable limits and triggered its collapse. When the empire began to crumble after Aurangzeb's death in 1707, Mir Kamruddin Khan declared his independence, retained his Mughal title, and ruled as the first Nizam of Hyderabad.

After a shaky start, during which the new state was worsted by the Marathas, British and French, all of whom had an all-India imperial agenda, Hyderabad emerged under the *pax Britannica* to become India's premier princely state, its ruler addressed by the British as 'His Exalted Highness' and accorded a salute of 21 guns. His state outlasted the British occupation of the sub-continent to be annexed in 1949 by the fledgling Republic of India.

With the rapid decline of the old Mughal capital at Delhi and the overthrow of other Islamic princes and governors across India, many Muslim nobles, intellectuals and artists moved south to settle in Hyderabad. Immigrants were attracted from Persia, Turkey and Arabia. Some were traders and soldiers of fortune.

Others were poets, craftsmen and musicians. Hyderabad emerged as the premier centre of Islamic learning and culture in India, a cosmopolitan city ruled by a man whose genealogy was one of the most ancient and illustrious in the Islamic world, with a direct line of descent on the male side from the first Caliph, the Prophet Muhammad's successor Abu Bakr, and a direct line on the female side from the Prophet himself. (Overnight Hyderabad) BLD

Day 20: Thursday 12 February, Hyderabad

- Chowmahalla Palace
- Mecca Masjid (exterior only)
- Char Minar
- Salar Jung Museum
- Farewell Dinner

We begin today by visiting the opulent 18th- and 19-century Chowmahalla Palace, the official residence of the Nizams while they ruled their state. Salabat Jung initiated its construction in 1750, while Afzal ad-Dawlah (Asaf Jah V) ensured its completion between 1857 and 1869. In Persian, *Chahar* means 'four' and in Arabic *Mahalat* (plural of *Mahal*) means palaces, hence the name Chowmahalla/four palaces. This vast palace with grand gardens is believed to have been modeled on the Shah of Iran's palace in Tehran.

We next visit the the Mecca Masjid, the principal mosque in the city and one of the largest in the world, built in stages over almost the whole of the 17th century and completed by Aurangzeb in 1692. The mosque derives its name from the fact that some of the small red bricks in the central arch were baked from clay brought from Mecca.

Our next stop to the east of the mosque will be Hyderabad's world famous landmark, the Char Minar (four towers), a ceremonial archway built in 1591 and a masterpiece of the later Deccani (Qutb Shahi) school of architecture, with its graceful synthesis of Hindu and Mughal styles. The Char Minar is the starting point for a walking tour that will take us into the heart of old Hyderabad as we explore the bazaar area, famous for its silks, pearls, spices, ikat textiles and old books.

We end our tour of Hyderabad at the Salar Jung Museum, named after an extremely able chief minister to the Nizams of Hyderabad (1853-83), who was noted for his collection of antiques and rare art treasures. Recently raised to the status of a national museum, it has a unique collection of armour and weaponry, Mughal uniforms and imperial clothing, Deccani miniature paintings and illuminated manuscripts, including some priceless copies of the Koran.

Tonight we celebrate the end of our tour with a Farewell meal at the Taj Krishna restaurant. (Overnight Hyderabad) BLD

Day 21: Friday 13 February, Depart Hyderabad

- Golconda Fort
- Tombs of Qutb Shahi Kings
- Airport transfer for participants departing on the 'ASA designated' flight

The sultanate of Golconda was founded from the crumbling Bahmani kingdom when its Turki governor, Quli Qutb Shah, proclaimed his independence in 1518. His Shi'ite dynasty, which lasted 170 years, was one of the most liberal and cosmopolitan of India's ruling houses. Hindus and Muslims lived peaceably together, men of both religions holding high offices of state. The Qutb Shahis distinguished themselves with their

grand civic projects and their patronage of architecture, painting, calligraphy and the decorative arts.

Huge quantities of diamonds were mined in the Qutb Shahi territories and Golconda was a flourishing city in the 17th century, trading with Safavid Persia and Ming China. Its wealth was legendary in a land fabled for its riches.

Apart from its constant rivalry with Bijapur, Golconda's only wars were with the Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar to the south. In 1565 a confederate army of Golconda, Bijapur and Ahmadnagar destroyed this last great Hindu empire in India, vastly increasing Golconda's wealth and territory. By diplomacy and strong military posturing Golconda kept the Mughals at arms length until Aurangzeb was appointed governor of the Deccan. He laid siege to Golconda in 1656 but had to leave the Deccan precipitately to fight his three brothers for succession to the imperial throne. He returned thirty years later, captured Hyderabad and again besieged the Sultan of Golconda in his own fortress. Abul Hassan held out for 8 months, through summer heat and monsoon rain, against mining, bombardment and infantry assault. The fortress was eventually taken by treachery and the last ruler of the Qutb Shahi dynasty was sent as a state prisoner to the great fortress of Daulatabad, where he died 17 years later.

The fortress of Golconda, which we will visit this morning, is surrounded by almost two kilometres of solid granite walls. In the centre is the citadel, the Balar Hissar, crowning a rocky outcrop 110 metres high. Inside the walls are the ruins of mosques, palaces and *zenanas* (the part of the house in which the women of a family are secluded), begun by Quli Qutb Shah and extended by his successors. Here we can see a rare surviving example of Mughal technology: parts of the hydraulic machinery for lifting water from ground level to the roof pavilions for irrigation and cooling are still visible.

The most impressive monuments on the citadel are the 21 tombs of the rulers of Golconda. The architecture of these domed granite mausoleums is pure Deccani: large ornamental façades, bulbous domes and extensive use of stucco work on the minarets.

Following some time at leisure, we take an early evening transfer to the Hyderabad Airport. Estimated time of arrival is 2030hrs (8.30pm). If you wish to stay in Hyderabad or are taking different flights, please contact ASA for assistance. BLD

Accommodation

Accommodation is in a range of 3-5-star hotels. All rooms have en suite bathrooms; several hotels have swimming pools and provide foreign exchange and internet service.

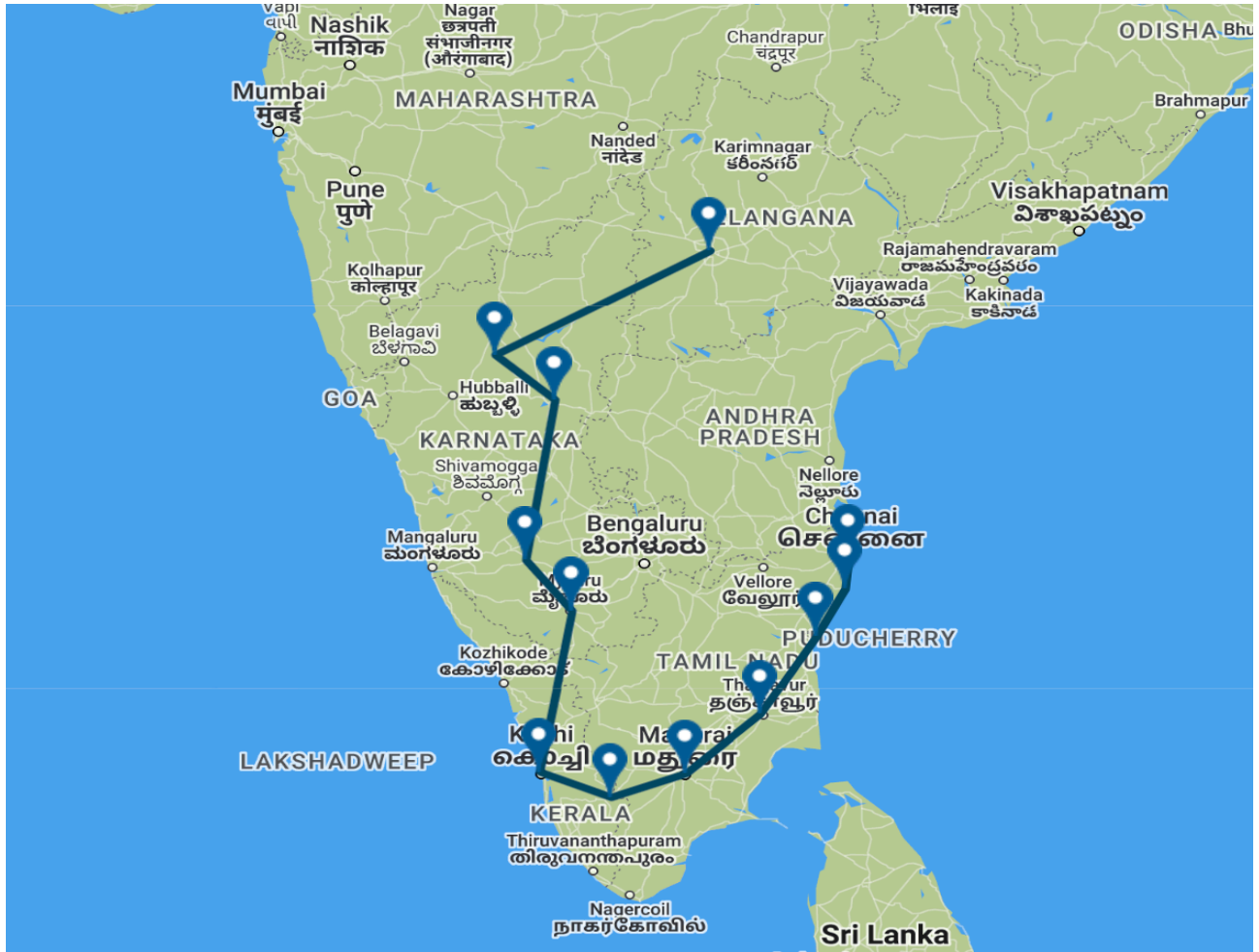
- Mahabalipuram (2 nights): 5-star [Radisson Blu Resort Temple Bay](#) – spread across 44 acres overlooking the Bay of Bengal. Room type: Chalet Pool View
- Pondicherry (1 night): 4-star [Palais de Mahé](#) – a charming hotel of the French Colonial period, located within walking distance of the city's main square. Room type: Deluxe
- Tanjore (2 nights): 3-star [GRT River View Resort](#) – offering accommodation in air-conditioned cottages with river views. Room type: Garden room
- Madurai (2 nights): 5-star [Courtyard by Marriott Madurai](#) – located 3.2km from the Meenakshi Amann Temple. Room type: standard
- Thekaddy (1 night): 4-star [Spice Village](#) – set in eight acres of forest. Consistent with the ecological theme, accommodation although modern and comfortable, does not include air-conditioning (not necessary as you are up in the hills), TV or music. Room type: Spice Garden Cottage.
- Fort Cochin (2 nights): 5-star [Hotel Fragrant Nature Fort Cochin](#) – a boutique hotel located in Fort Cochin. Room type: Dukes Chamber.
- Mysore (3 nights): 5-star [Grand Mercure Mysore](#) – located in the city centre. Room type: Deluxe
- Hassan (1 night): 3-star [Hoysala Village Resort](#) – set in a tranquil landscape, built like a traditional village with individually designed cottages. Room type: Superior Cottage
- Hampi/Hospet (3 nights): 4-star [Hotel Heritage Resort Hampi](#) – located 6kms from Hampi – the UNESCO World Heritage site. Room type: Deluxe
- Badami (1 night): 3-star [Badami Heritage Resort Hotel](#) – opened by Sterling in 2024, this 10 acre property features spacious accommodation and is located 2.5kms from the rock-cut Badami Cave Temples. Room type: Deluxe
- Hyderabad (2 nights): 5-star [The Leela Hyderabad](#) – set amidst landscaped gardens; located in the neighbourhood of Banjara Hills. Room Type: Orlov

Note: Hotels are subject to change, in which case a hotel of similar standard will be provided.

Single Supplement

Payment of this supplement will ensure accommodation in a double (or twin) room for single occupancy throughout the tour. The number of rooms available for single occupancy is extremely limited. People wishing to take this supplement are therefore advised to book well in advance.

Tour Map



Tour Price & Inclusions

AUD \$13,280.00 Land Content Only - Early-Bird Special: book before 30 June 2025

AUD \$13,680.00 Land Content Only

AUD \$2980.00 Single Supplement

Tour Price (Land Content Only) includes:

- Accommodation in twin-share rooms with private facilities in 3-5-star hotels
- All meals, indicated in the tour itinerary where: B=breakfast, L=lunch & D=dinner
- Drinks at welcome and farewell meals. Other meals may only include tea, coffee and bottled water
- Transportation by air-conditioned coach; Domestic flight: Kochi (Cochin) to Bengaluru
- Departure transfer to Hyderabad Airport if travelling on the ASA 'designated' flights
- Porterage of one piece of luggage per person at hotels (not at airports)
- Lecture and site-visit program
- Bottled water provided daily during site excursions
- Services of a National Indian Tour Manager and local guides
- Entrance fees
- Tips for the coach driver, guides and restaurants for included meals.

Tour Price (Land Content Only) does not include:

- Airfare: Australia-Chennai, Hyderabad-Australia
- Personal spending money
- Arrival Airport transfer from Chennai Airport
- Luggage in excess of 20 kg (44 lbs)
- Travel insurance
- Visas as applicable.



Fitness Criteria & Practical Information

Fitness Level



Level 3 - Challenging

Among our most physically demanding

You must be able to:

- manage at least five to seven hours of physical activity per day with ease.
- walk at a regular to moderate pace; some days for at least 5-7km.
- negotiate challenging historic and archaeological sites. This tour includes extensive walking often through crowded, narrow streets and busy markets and around archaeological sites (eg temples and fortresses) that are large and unsheltered and may include rocky and uneven terrain with several flights of stairs. The most challenging site is Hampi which is a very large site spread over uneven terrain.
- navigate narrow gangplanks to get on and off small boats.
- cope with a demanding tour schedule which may involve longer days, regular early morning starts, long distance coach travel over variable road conditions and internal flights.
- tolerate cuisine which may be significantly different from your usual diet, and where catering for special dietary requirements may be limited. There is a risk of gastric ailments.
- withstand varying climatic conditions such as humidity and heat.

Fitness Levels

Please also view the fitness criteria required for our tours, graded from Level 1 to Level 3, at www.asatours.com.au/fitness-level/

All ASA tours are active programs suitable for people with a good level of mental and physical fitness and good mobility. They are not suitable for people who lack stamina, have difficulty walking at the group's pace or who have mobility issues. An unavoidable aspect of every tour is the need to manage walking, stair-

climbing and standing for long periods of time.

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. Before enrolling on an ASA tour please read the fitness requirements carefully.

Visas

Australian, New Zealand and British passport holders will require a tourist visa for India. You must apply for a visa before arrival. Check your eligibility and apply online for an e-visa by visiting the Government of India's [Indian Visa Online website](#).

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, photographic 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.

Weather in Southern India

The best time to visit is during the dry season, typically from December to March, with comfortable temperatures between 20°C and 32°C. Extending from December to March is the winter season.

Booking Conditions

ASA RESERVATION APPLICATION FORM

Please complete the ASA RESERVATION APPLICATION and send it to Australians Studying Abroad together with your non-refundable deposit of AUD \$1000.00 per person payable to Australians Studying Abroad.



Reservation Application

TOUR NAME Ancient Kingdoms of South India: Forts, Palaces, Temples & Spice Gardens

TOUR DATES 24 January - 13 February 2026

Please complete **one application, per person in block letters and sign**. Parental signature is required for participants under 18 years of age. Please mail this form with the appropriate deposit to: **P.O. Box 8285, ARMADALE, VICTORIA, 3143**. On receipt of this Reservation Application and deposit, ASA will process your booking and if approved, send you a tour confirmation.

Applicant Details (as in passport)

TITLE Mr ☐ Mrs ☐ Ms ☐ Miss ☐ Dr ☐ Other _____

FIRST NAME _____ Preferred FIRST NAME _____

MIDDLE NAME _____ SURNAME _____

POSTAL ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ COUNTRY _____ POSTCODE _____

TEL. (AH) () _____ TEL. (BH) () _____ Mobile Tel: _____

EMAIL address _____

Date of birth ____ / ____ / ____ GENDER Male ☐ Female ☐

Passport Number _____ Expiry date ____ / ____ / ____ Nationality _____

☐ Colour copy of my current valid passport enclosed ☐ I'm renewing my passport ☐ ASA has a colour copy of my current passport

Covid Certificate ☐ A copy of my current international certificate enclosed

Travel Plans

☐ I plan to leave Australia before the tour commences. Planned departure date ____ / ____ / ____

☐ I will be arranging my airfare independently and taking the Land Content Only option.

Tour Accommodation (rooming preferences)

I/we would like: ☐ a twin-bedded room ☐ a double-bedded room ☐ a room for sole occupancy

I am travelling: ☐ on my own ☐ with a friend/family member Travel Companion _____

Meals

☐ I do not have any specific dietary requests

Please **X** the box if you **CAN NOT** eat any of the following:

☐ fish ☐ poultry ☐ red meat ☐ dairy products

☐ eggs ☐ pork ☐ nuts

☐ Other _____

Allergies: Refer to the Medical Information

Correspondence

Your preferred method of correspondence ☐ Postal Mail ☐ Email Address _____

Emergency Contact Details

Note: this person **MUST** be available by telephone and be present in Australia for the duration of your tour with ASA

Name _____ Relationship to Traveller _____

Address _____

TEL. (AH) () _____ TEL. (BH) () _____ Mobile Tel: _____

EMAIL address _____

The purpose of seeking this information is to assist ASA to determine, where necessary, whether ASA is able to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate your specific needs and whether your health and safety (or that of your fellow travellers) is likely to be compromised given your choice of tour. It will also assist you and ASA if you fall ill or have an accident whilst travelling.

- ASA reserves the right to decline your Reservation Application if this Medical Information section is not completed properly and may reject or cancel your reservation, or terminate your participation on any tour, if ASA subsequently learns that you have failed to make full and proper disclosure.
- ASA is committed to protecting the privacy of your personal information. ASA's privacy policy is available for viewing at www.asatours.com.au
- If ASA has any concerns about the information you have provided, it will contact you to request clarification before considering your Application.
- ASA requires you to consider carefully your limitations in light of ASA's Physical Endurance Star Rating System in ASA's Brochure and Itinerary when choosing your tour.
- If you are not likely to satisfy ASA's Participation Criteria (see below), ASA, in its sole discretion, may reject your Reservation Application.
- It is a condition of your tour that you agree to accept the directions of ASA's Tour Leaders in relation to your suitability to participate in activities planned on tour.
- ASA reserves the right to cancel your participation on a tour if your behaviour is in ASA's opinion causing undue distress or damage to any person or their property.
- If your participation is discontinued during a tour, ASA will assist by arranging your onward travel (if required) at your own cost, but you will not be refunded for forfeited parts of the tour.
- ASA tour groups are not accompanied by a medical practitioner. ASA recommends that you see your doctor for advice about your specific needs while overseas. You may also wish to contact a travel and vaccination clinic for advice. www.traveldoctor.com.au tel: 1300 658 444; www.travelvax.com.au tel: 1300 360 164.
- Travel insurers require you to declare all existing medical conditions.
- Please carry a complete list of medications with you during the ASA tour. Include **generic names** of each medication (consult your local pharmacy for information).

Please mark **X** in the YES or NO box to every question below and provide details where necessary:

Participation Criteria

To participate in an ASA tour, you must be reasonably fit, in good health and able to participate in all activities without assistance from Tour Leaders or other tour members. **You must also be fully vaccinated against Covid-19.** If you require assistance, a fit and able travel companion must undertake to accompany and assist you with all tasks for the duration of the whole tour. The responsibility of the Tour Leader is to ensure that the larger group enjoys a relaxing and informative journey, and he or she cannot be relied upon to provide ongoing individual assistance to any one guest.

- | | YES | NO |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Can you walk and stand unassisted for at least 2-3 hours a day in hot, humid conditions? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. Can you walk unassisted on and over uneven surfaces? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. Can you climb at least 3 flights of stairs and/or walk up and down steep slopes unassisted? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. Can you walk at a steady pace and no less than 1km every 15 - 20 minutes unassisted? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. Can you organise, manage and carry your own luggage? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. Can you follow and remember tour instructions and meet punctually at designated times and places? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. Can you administer your own medication? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. You do NOT have impaired vision or hearing which may impact your capacity to participate on this tour? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Mobility and Fitness

As many of ASA's international sites do not provide access to wheelchairs or similar mobility aids, we regret that ASA tours are not suitable for people who require the use of a walking frame, wheeled walker, wheelchair or motorised scooter.

1. Do you suffer from any medical conditions that may compromise your mobility and/or fitness to participate on this program? YES NO ☐ ☐
- If yes, please specify

If yes, how will you manage this on tour?

Allergies and/or Food Intolerances

ASA will make reasonable endeavours to organise meals to suit you, provided that you give ASA adequate notice of your specific dietary requirements or allergies. You may be required to research dietary alternatives, as not all destinations may be able to offer suitable food substitutes.

1. Do you have any food allergies or intolerances? YES NO ☐ ☐
- If yes, please specify

2. Have you ever had an anaphylactic reaction to anything? ☐ ☐
- If yes, please specify

Do you carry an epipen? ☐ ☐

3. Do you have any other allergies or reactions to anything, including medical drugs? ☐ ☐
- If yes, please specify

Existing Medical Conditions

You alone are responsible for managing any existing medical conditions, your medication and any medical equipment that you may need when on your tour. Please plan for contingencies and take extra medication, dietary supplements and/or fully charged batteries for medical equipment if your health and safety depends on these. You should take into consideration that power sources at some destinations may be unavailable, inadequate, inconvenient or unreliable.

1. Have you any significant medical conditions that may impact your capacity to complete this tour? YES NO ☐ ☐
- If yes, please specify

If yes, how will you manage this on tour?

2. Do you require some form of powered medical aid, such as a CPAP machine? ☐ ☐

These machines may not be operable on certain international flights, modes of transport, in remote or other areas with inadequate or unreliable power sources without a fully charged independent long life battery or batteries.

Diabetics: You may be travelling and sightseeing for many hours at a time. Insulin dependent diabetics must carry extra supplies of insulin (as this medication cannot be obtained in some destinations), regulators, applicators, storage and refrigeration equipment, as well as any necessary supplements. Accommodation may not provide refrigerators in rooms.

3. Are you diabetic? ☐ ☐
- Are you insulin dependent? ☐ ☐
4. Do you suffer from travel sickness? ☐ ☐
- Remember to use an appropriate medication while on tour.

Declaration

I declare that: I have read and understood the ASA Tour Itinerary, Reservation Application and Booking Conditions. I am aware of ASA's terms as relating to refunds, cancellations, responsibility and liability. I understand that ASA relies upon this declaration when considering this Application. I accept the inherent dangers, risks and uncertainties in travel and those beyond ASA's control and understand they may occur before or during any tour. I have made full and complete disclosure and have not knowingly withheld any medical information about myself from ASA. I have completed this Reservation Application honestly and accurately. I warrant that I am able to participate independently in all activities described by ASA in the itinerary without assistance from any person.

I will advise ASA in writing if any aspect of my fitness and or health conditions change materially at any time before my departure date. I understand and accept that the itinerary, accommodation and lecturers scheduled for this tour may change.

I agree and consent that ASA may give my personal information in this Reservation Application to tour service providers and relevant authorities as required by law, but only for the purpose of making bookings with and engaging services associated with the tour. I understand that if I do not consent to the use of my personal information for this purpose, ASA will decline my Reservation Application.

In consideration of ASA's acceptance of my Reservation Application, I irrevocably release and indemnify ASA from all claims that I, or any other party, may have against ASA its employees, invitees, agents and contractors, however arising in respect of any loss, damage, injury, death or expense incurred in the course of booking, preparing for, travelling to, on and from or cancelling any tour.

I release and indemnify ASA with respect to:

1. Every general risk to which I or my personal belongings may be exposed in the course of preparing for, travelling to, on or from any ASA tour;
2. Every special risk, in particular medical risks, to which I may be exposed in the course of preparing for, travelling to, on or from any ASA tour arising from, including, but not limited to:
 - a. intermittent power cycles and/or the temporary or permanent loss of power (beware CPAP or any other medical machine users);
 - b. dietary, food or other allergies (ASA cannot guarantee that traces of items to which you are allergic are not present in food or drink you are served, medication you are administered or other substances with which you may come into contact);
 - c. any event or situation that may compromise the administration of necessary medication or my health, safety and wellbeing generally; and
 - d. any event or happening beyond ASA's control
3. All claims arising as a result of my or ASA's cancellation or termination of any tour, part of a tour or of my continued participation on a tour for any reason (subject to ASA's refund conditions below).

Limitation of Liability

ASA is not a carrier, event or tourist attraction host, accommodation or dining service provider. All bookings made and tickets or coupons issued by ASA for transport, event, accommodation, dining and the like are issued as an agent for various service providers and are subject to the terms and conditions and limitations of liability imposed by each service provider. ASA is not responsible for their products, services, terms and conditions. If a service provider cancels or does not deliver the product or service for which you have contracted, and does not give a refund, your remedy lies with the service provider, not ASA.

ASA will not be liable for any claim (e.g. sickness, injury, death, damage or loss) arising from any change, delay, detention, breakdown, border closures, cancellation, failure, accident, act, omission or negligence of any tour service provider or authority however caused (contingencies). You must take out such travel insurance as is available against such contingencies.

ASA's liability in respect of any tour cancelled or changed will be limited to the partial refund of amounts you have paid, less an administration fee of \$500 and other costs and charges of third party service providers. No compensation will be payable to you by ASA where ASA cancels or changes a tour, or any part of a tour.

ASA reserves the sole discretion to cancel any tour or to modify itineraries in any way it considers appropriate and in the best interests of health, safety and wellbeing of tour participants. Tour costs may be revised, subject to unexpected price increases or exchange rate fluctuations.

Booking Conditions

DEPOSITS

A non-refundable deposit of \$1000.00 AUD per person is required to reserve a place on an ASA tour.

CANCELLATION FEES

If you cancel your booking the following charges apply:

More than 120 days before departure: your initial deposit of \$1000.00 is non-refundable.**

120-46 days prior 30% of total amount due

45-0 days prior 100% of total amount due

**\$500.00 of this amount (ie 50% of your deposit) may be credited to another ASA tour departing within 12 months of the original tour you booked. We regret, in this case early-bird discounts will not apply.

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

UNUSED PORTIONS OF THE TOUR

We regret that refunds will not be given for any unused portions or services of the tour, such as meals, entry fees, accommodation, flights or transfers.

WILL THE TOUR PRICE OR ITINERARY CHANGE?

If the number of participants on a tour is significantly less than budgeted, or if there is a significant change in exchange rates ASA reserves the right to amend the advertised price. We shall, however, do all in our power to maintain the published price. Occasionally circumstances beyond the control of ASA make it necessary to change airline, hotel or to make amendments to itineraries. We will inform you of any changes in due course.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

ASA requires all participants to obtain comprehensive travel insurance. A copy of your travel insurance certificate and the **reverse charge** emergency contact phone number must be received by ASA no later than 120 days prior to the commencement of the tour.

FINAL PAYMENT

The balance of the tour price will be due 120 days prior to the tour commencement date.

PLEASE READ THE ABOVE CAREFULLY, PRINT AND SIGN BELOW

☐ I accept the conditions on this booking form ☐ I have read the information about the physical requirements of the tour in the detailed itinerary and confirm that I am able to meet these requirements

Applicant's Signature

Print Full Name

Dated

Tour / Course Name _____

Name of Traveller 1 _____

Name of Traveller 2 _____

I have enclosed a payment to the value of \$ _____ (including CC or bank fee if applicable) for this tour

The above amount is payable for:

- ☐ Intention to Travel ☐ Tour Deposit
- ☐ Balance of Payment ☐ Upgrade from Intention to Travel to a Deposit
- ☐ Travel Insurance ☐ Other (eg. Airfares, Accommodation) _____

International Payments

Welcome to our international travellers! If you are making a payment and do not have an Australian bank account/credit card, we can only accept payment as follows:

- via credit card with the applicable fee - the credit card company/bank will set the exchange rate
- via bank transfer; please give your surname and tour code (eg. Smith 21705) as a reference and ask your bank to allow for all charges.

Bank cheques or personal cheques will not be accepted.

By Cheque (accept Australian cheques only)

Please make cheques payable to *Australians Studying Abroad*

Direct Deposit or Internet Banking

You will need to:

1. Provide your bank with ASA's bank details (see below) and the amount you wish to transfer OR make a direct deposit through any ANZ branch
2. Include any fees levied by the banks
3. Provide a reference number (Mobile or last name recommended).
4. Complete section below, including confirmation no. (given when transaction completed).

Australians Studying Abroad bank details

Bank ANZ
Branch 420 St Kilda Road, Melbourne Vic
Swift Code ANZBAU3M
BSB 013-423
Account No 3472-32759

Bank confirmation No. _____

Reference used: Mobile or last name recommended
_____Date Money Transferred

Credit Card Payment

Credit card fees apply: Mastercard, Visa & American Express 2%

Please debit my: ☐ Mastercard ☐ Visa ☐ American Express

I authorise ASA to debit my credit card for the amount due plus the applicable fee as above

Credit Card Number _____

Expiry Date _____ Security Code (CVC) _____

Bank the Card is linked to (eg. NAB or ANZ) _____

Cardholders Name _____

Cardholders Billing Address _____

Postcode _____

State _____ Country _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Cardholders Signature _____