

# SOUTHERN INDIA

DETAILED ITINERARY

Nov 21/24



Marvel at ancient temples dedicated to Hindu gods and goddesses. Visit national parks, tea factories and cruise backwater canals.

Explore southern India's vast cultural heritage, from British, French, Portuguese and Jewish influences, to the ancient capitals of the Chola and Pallava Kings.

Our journey begins in Chennai (Madras), where we visit the Fort Museum, housing relics of a bygone era. We visit several World Heritage sites, including the Shore Temple, constructed around the 7th century, and the Brahadeeswara Temple, with its massive granite dome.

Periyar National Park provides wildlife viewing by boat and foot as we look for tigers, leopards, barking deer, wild pigs, wild dogs, flying squirrels and sloth bears. Tea, coffee, coconut and rubber plantations dot the lush, green countryside around Cochin, where we also take in a performance of the famous Kathakali dancers.

## FACTS & HIGHLIGHTS

- 19 land days • Maximum 16 travelers • Start in Chennai and finishes in Mumbai • All meals included • Includes 2 internal flights • Explore Puducherry - French Riviera of the East
- Visit the ancient city of Madurai and enjoy an evening prayer ceremony • Game viewing in Periyar National Park • Houseboat adventure on the backwaters of Kerala • Enjoy the famous Kathakali dances in Cochin • Explore the heritage trail of Goa • Enjoy cooking interactions with local families • Learn about the dabbawalla tradition of Mumbai

## DEPARTURE DATES & PRICE

**Jan 06 – Jan 24, 2025** - \$7495 USD

**Jan 05 – Jan 23, 2026** - \$7995 USD

**Activity Level: 2**

**Comfort Level:** Some long drives.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

Comfortable hotels with private bathrooms. Features 1 night on a houseboat with 1 - 3 bedrooms, private bathrooms and AC at night.

**ELDERTREKS**



SMALL GROUP  
**EXOTIC ADVENTURES**  
FOR TRAVELERS 50 PLUS

An overnight houseboat adventure is the perfect way to explore the small canals, villages and rice fields of the backwaters. Explore the 14 acre bird sanctuary and see rare and unique species of birds.

Visit one of India's most popular seaside destinations, Goa, which offers a heady mix of warm azure waters, white-sand beaches, atmospheric cafes, vibrant markets, white washed churches and antiquated colonial architecture.

Our journey concludes in the large bustling city of Mumbai where we see the important highlights of this thriving metropolis, and learn about the 120 year old dabbawalla tradition, which serve as the Mumbai lunchbox delivery runners.



## DAY 1 ARRIVAL CHENNAI

You will be met on arrival and transferred to your hotel. The day is free to explore on your own before meeting with the group for dinner and an orientation meeting this evening.

Overnight in Chennai.

## DAY 2 CHENNAI SIGHTSEEING - KANCHIPURAM AND MAHABALIPURAM

After breakfast, we begin our sightseeing with a visit to the ancient town of Kanchipuram, known for its high quality silk fabric, including pure Mulberry Silk.

After lunch we continue on to Mahabalipuram, which is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site and where we will see the Five Rathas which were exquisitely carved from large single rocks and dedicated to a Hindu god. The Rathas were hidden in the sand until excavated by the British 200 years ago. We will see Arjuna's Penance which stands at approximately 43 feet. It is said that this structure



Beautiful white beaches at Chennai.



Traditional music and dance surrounds you.



cannot be fully enjoyed if it is seen in photographs and that standing before it is an experience of its own. We return to Chennai in the late afternoon.

Overnight in Chennai. Museum.

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### DAY 3 PUDUCHERRY

Puducherry – previously known as Pondicherry – is made up of four entirely separate enclaves along the Indian coast, all of which were colonized by the French in the 18th century. It has retained a strong European culture that makes it unlike any other place in India and is often dubbed the ‘French Riviera of the East’. Antiquated colonial buildings line the quiet cobbled streets and tree-lined avenues of the old town, and many people still speak French as their first language.

On the way to Puducherry we will visit Auroville, a center to promote human unity and transformation of consciousness. We will stop for lunch in a local restaurant and continue on with sightseeing of Puducherry. We will visit Sri Aurobindo Ashram which was founded in 1910 by Sri Aurobindo and

has grown from two dozen disciples to almost 1600 members today. We will walk through the French Quarter, seeing well preserved heritage buildings and the city’s magnificent beach promenade, exclusive for pedestrian use.

Overnight in Puducherry.

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### DAY 4 TO KUMBAKONAM

After breakfast we will check out and drive (approx 3 hours) to the charming temple town of Kumbakonam. One of India’s oldest cities, temples adorn every street, and the city is known for its rich Hindu heritage.

On the way we will stop at ancient Chidambaram Nataraja Temple, built by the Chola emperors in the 10th century BC for Lord Shiva and known for its colorful wall artwork depicting various legends. After the Chola dynasty, the Vijayanagara rulers played a major part in protecting the temple until the 17th century. It has stood the test of time for over a millennium.

We will also visit the ruins of Gangaikonda Cholapuram, which means “the town of the Chola king who conquered the river Ganges” in Tamil. The old city has been destroyed in several wars over the years. The only reminder of its glorious past is the 9-storey, 55-meter tower Lord Maha Shiva Temple, which must be seen to be believed. We will arrive in Kumbakonam in the late afternoon.

Overnight in Kumbakonam.

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### **DAY 5 KUMBAKONAM - WEAVING OF PATTU SILK, BULLOCK CART RIDE**

After breakfast we will enjoy sightseeing around the narrow streets of Kumbakonam. We will visit a weaving center where the timeless technique of ‘Pattu’ silk weaving is alive and thriving in the hands of these master craftsmen. Watch them weave intricate designs into silk saris with fine gold thread. The entire process of hand-assembled wooden machines meticulously weaving silk is a mesmerizing experience.

We will visit the ancient town of Swami Malai which is home to a group of artisans called “Sthapathis” who are known for their timeless sculptures. We will visit

their workshop and witness the master craftsmen use the “Lost Wax” technique.

Later we will enjoy a bullock cart ride where we can catch glimpses of the rustic village life with a ride across the countryside. As your driver traverses expertly through the narrow lanes, you will be waved at and even joined by excited kids with contagious smiles. Get a first-hand experience of the charm of rural life amidst acres of paddy fields and warm-hearted locals. Afterwards, we visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site Airavatesvara Temple located in a nearby town.

Overnight in Kumbakonam.

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### **DAY 6 MADURAI - BRIHADEESHWARA TEMPLE AND EVENING PRAYER CEREMONY**

After breakfast we check out and drive (approx 4.5 hours) to Madurai, known as ‘the city of temples’ due to its countless ancient Hindu shrines. Enroute we will stop at Brihadeeshwara Temple. The massive temple built by Rajaraja Chola reflects the Cholas’ contribution to the development of arts in this area. It is also regarded as the Chola dynasty’s finest



Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple in Tiruchirapalli.



contribution to the Dravidian temple architecture. The art gallery has a rich collection of 250 Chola bronze statues and 150 stone statues dating from the 9th to 12th centuries. We will enjoy lunch at a local restaurant before continuing on to Madurai where we have the afternoon at leisure.

This evening we will enjoy dinner at a local restaurant and afterwards witness the incredible pooja (prayer) ceremony at the Meenakshi Temple. During the ceremony, the idols of Sundareswar (an avatar of Lord Shiva) and his consort Meenakshi (an avatar of Parvati) are carried in a grand procession to the bed-chamber, where they are kept for the night.

Overnight in Madurai.



## DAY 7 MADURAI

Today we will enjoy sightseeing in Madurai starting in the old town. We will visit the 2000 year old Meenakshi Temple - a splendid example of Dravidian architecture. The present temple was designed in 1560 and has four entrances to the temple, covering an area of six hectares. Each of its 12 towers has a height of 45 to 50 meters. The temple museum has 985 richly carved pillars and each one surpasses the other in beauty.

While in town, we will enjoy a visit to the local market, an aromatic experience where flowers, fruits and spices are sold. We'll see the palatial Tirumalai Nayak Palace, a 17th-century complex built by an Italian architect in a classic fusion of Dravidian, Islamic and European styles. The Gandhi Museum is one of the rare living memorials of "The Father of India".

This afternoon we'll enjoy a rickshaw ride through the streets of Madurai to explore the mysteries of this ancient city. There are many options available for exploration - the temple, the palace, St. Mary's Church, Gandhi Museum, bamboo and vegetable markets or a workshop where locals make metal



pots on the furnace, spinning yarns and sewing towels etc. Madurai's nooks and crannies await you.

Overnight in Madurai.

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### **DAY 8 MUNNAR - AFTERNOON SAFARI**

Today we leave city life behind as we drive (approx 4 hours) towards the mountainous region of Munnar which is idyllically set at the confluence of three mountain streams. Munnar is a beautiful hill station in the Western Ghats mountain range in India's Kerala state. The village once served as a popular vacation resort for the British Raj elite who flocked to here to enjoy the pleasant cool climate and the scenic natural surroundings characterised by rolling hills dotted with colonial bungalows, streams, waterfalls and 19th-century tea plantations.

The main attraction in the area is the extraordinary Eravikulam National Park, which is famous for its diverse array of wildlife including the endangered mountain goat known as Nilgiri tahr. We will enjoy an afternoon safari where we may see several species of rare animals, birds and butterflies.

Overnight in Munnar.

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### **DAY 9 TEA PLANTATION, DRIVE TO THEKKADY**

Following breakfast we will visit the local tea factory and gardens, where we will learn about the various aspects of these estates and tea cultivation.

This afternoon we drive (approx 3 hours) to Thekkady which is located within Periyar National Park. Thekkady is comprised of evergreen forests and savanna grasslands and is known for its natural spices such as black pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger and clove. Elephants, tigers, sambar and many other species inhabit the park. We have

the afternoon at leisure before out dinner at a local restaurant.

Overnight in Thekkady.

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### **DAY 10 THEKKADY - PERIYAR TIGER RESERVE BOAT SAFARI AND SPICE PLANTATION**

This morning we will enjoy a 1.5 hour boat safari on the lake at Periyar Tiger Reserve. A herd of elephants or a group of sambar deer are common sights near the lake. You may be able to spot herds of gaur and wild boars in the grasslands adjacent to the shores. A variety of avian fauna such as darters, egrets and kingfishers can be seen resting on dead tree trunks that stick out over the lake. During your boat ride, there is also a high probability of observing the antics of the smooth Indian otter.

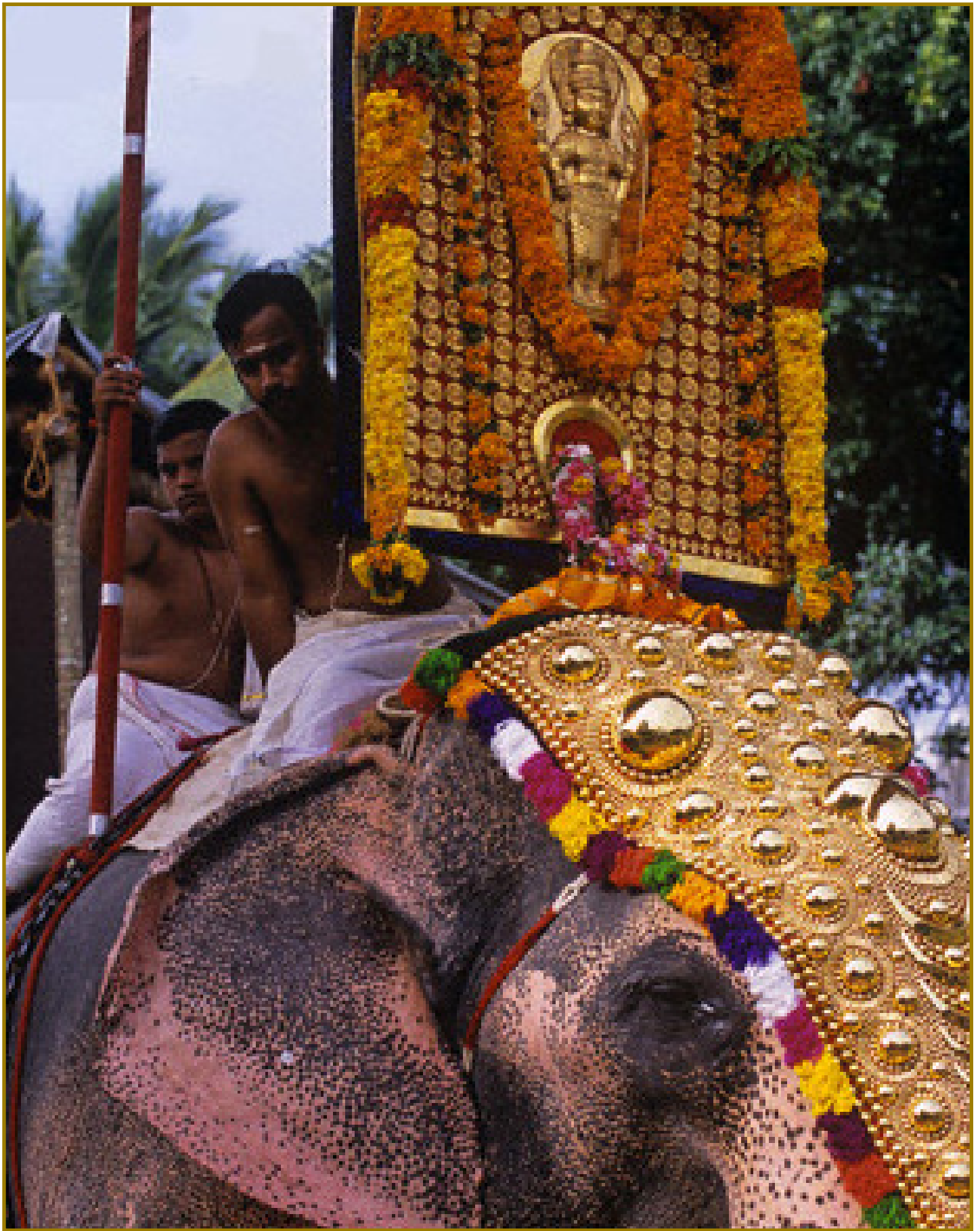
Later we will have the opportunity to wander around the spice plantations of Kerala where different sections of each plantation are dedicated to certain spices. Apart from spices traditionally grown in India such as pepper, cinnamon, ginger and cardamom, farmers in Kerala have taken to growing spices that are used worldwide. Some spices cultivated in spice plantations are vanilla, oregano, rosemary, thyme, basil, mint, bay leaf and sage. We may also have the opportunity to visit a local school to interact with the children.

This evening we will witness a show of the traditional martial art of Kerala "Kalaripayattu".

Overnight in Thekkady.









## **DAY 11 HOUSEBOAT ON KERALA BACKWATERS**

This morning we drive to Alleppey (approx 4.5 hours). Upon arrival we will board our individual houseboats where we will cruise down the backwaters of Kerala, through a network of lagoons and lakes. These are slow-moving, exotic barges used for leisure trips - the reworked kettuvallams of olden times. The original kettuvallams were used to carry tons of rice and spices - a standard kettuvallam can hold up to 30 tons - from Kuttanad to the Kochi port. The kettuvallam or 'boat with knots', was so called because the entire boat was held together with coir knots only - not even a single nail is used during the construction. The boat is made of planks of jack-wood joined together with coir. This is then coated with a caustic black resin made from boiled cashew kernels. With careful maintenance, a kettuvallam can last for generations.

We will enjoy lunch and dinner aboard our houseboat prepared by the crew.

Overnight on the houseboat.

## **DAY 12 KUMARAKOM, KUMARAKOM BIRD SANCTUARY**

After breakfast and docking of the houseboat, we will make our way to Kumarakom (approx 1 hour). Upon arrival, we will visit Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary which is among the most popular bird-watching spots in the country. Spread out over 14 hectares, the sanctuary is home to a great variety of migratory birds that flock in thousands, ranging from places like the Himalayas to Siberia.

This evening we will enjoy a slow river trip by boat and see the locals fishing, weaving and working in the paddy fields, and children swimming in the lake.

Overnight in Kumarakom.

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## **DAY 13 TO COCHIN, KUMBALANGI ISLAND, KATHAKALI DANCE PERFORMANCE**

After breakfast we will drive to the city of Cochin (approx 1.5 hours). Cochin has served as a port for over 600 years and is known for its eclectic architecture and its array of religious monuments, museums, galleries, cafes and antique shops. We will



make a stop at the village of Kumbalangi located on an island. The village is part of a unique initiative to transform the tiny island of Kumbalangi into a model fishing village and tourism spot. Surrounded by backwaters and natural wonders, fishing nets cover the island and the village boasts of rich aquatic life. An array of mangroves separate land from water and provide a good breeding ground for prawns, crabs, oysters and small fish.

Later we will experience the traditional Kathakali dance performance, followed by dinner at a local restaurant.

Overnight in Cochin.

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### **DAY 14 COCHIN SIGHTS - JEWISH SYNAGOGUE, DUTCH PALACE, FISHING NETS**

Today we enjoy sightseeing in the charming city of Cochin. If opening hours permit, we will visit the Jewish synagogue. The synagogue, built in 1568, is magnificently decorated with Chinese tiles and Belgian chandeliers. Giant scrolls of the Old Testament can be found here.

We will also visit the Dutch Palace, originally built by the Portuguese. Later, in the 17th century, the Dutch modified it and presented it to the Raja of Kochi. The coronation of many Rajas of Kochi was held here. The palace has a fine collection of mural paintings depicting scenes from the Hindu epics Mahabharatha and Ramayana. We will visit the Dutch cemetery as well.

The Chinese fishing nets (Cheenavala) are distinctly unique to Cochin. It is believed that traders from the court of the Chinese ruler Kublai Khan introduced these nets here. Oddly, these nets are found only in Kochi, outside of China! Many fishermen earn

their livelihood by fishing using these massive nets. A whole stretch of the coast along Fort Kochi and Vypeen is dotted with these nets.

This evening, we will visit a local family to experience the Kerala cooking experience, followed by dinner.

Overnight in Cochin.

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### **DAY 15 FLY TO GOA**

We have some time to relax this morning before our midday flight to Goa.

Goa is a state in western India with coastlines stretching along the Arabian Sea. Its long history as a Portuguese colony prior to 1961 is evident in its preserved 17th-century churches and the area's tropical spice plantations. Goa is also known for its beaches, hippy culture and as a spiritual sanctuary.

Upon arrival in the late afternoon, we will check in to our hotel.

Overnight in Goa.

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### **DAY 16 GOA - HERITAGE TRAIL**

Today we explore the old Goa heritage trail and its unique Portuguese history. Experience the grand churches of St. Francis Xavier, Se Cathedral, Basilica of Bom Jesus. Nearby we can also see other sacred and prominent monuments of St. Cajetons Church, St. Catherines Church, Tower of St. Augustine and the nunnery/convent of St. Monica. Later we drive to the capital of Goa - Panjim city and walk through the Latin Quarter of Goa. At the end of the tour we will have the opportunity to explore the markets of Panaji.

This afternoon we will visit a local spice garden. The guide will take us through a brief walk through





the lush green aromatic plantation and explain the various spices grown there, their origin and their care. We will see cashew nuts, coconut, nutmeg, cinnamon, coriander, cumin, vanilla, mace and many others. After we've worked up an appetite walking through the gardens, we will enjoy lunch accompanied by the famous Goan drink, the Feni. After dinner in a local restaurant, the evening is to explore the local market and shop in Goa.

Overnight in Goa.

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## **DAY 17 GOA TO MUMBAI**

This morning, we will take a flight to Mumbai, formerly known as Bombay.

This afternoon we will embark on an orientation tour of the city and witness the bustling city that never sleeps. We will see many buildings built in the the grand Indo-Saracenic style (Art Deco) which is typical to Mumbai, including the Prince of Wales Museum. We will make a stop at Mani Bhavan (Gandhi Museum) followed by a visit to the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus. Drive through the breezy Marine Drive to reach Hanging Gardens, a popular hangout spot for the locals. We'll check out the world's largest open-air laundromat in Mumbai, Dhobi Ghat. This vision will leave a lasting impression on you the next time you do your laundry.

Dinner at the local restaurant.

Overnight in Mumbai.

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## **DAY 18 MUMBAI - THE DABBAWALLA TOUR**

Today we will begin with a unique dabbawalla tour. The word "dabbawalla" in Hindi means "one who

carries a box" and is a profession lasting nearly 120 years. The closest meaning of the dabbawalla in English would be the "lunch box delivery man". We will learn about these approx 5,000 dabbawallas in Mumbai who pick up some 130,000 filled dabbas from the households that prepare them and deliver the boxes to the requisite offices. They then retrieve the empty dabbas from these delivery points and return them to the originating households, in order to begin the process again the next day. This is an absolute miracle of logistics.

Later we embark on a boat journey to Elephanta Island (a UNESCO World Heritage Site). The island is famous for its great cave shrine, excavated in the sixth century, dating back to when it was known as Gharapuri, the Fortress City. With the arrival of the Portuguese, the island was renamed Elephanta after the giant carved elephant found where they landed. The cave temple, which is the pride of Elephanta, sprawled over an area of approximately 5,000 square meters, is reached by climbing a flight of more than 100 steps. One's attention is immediately drawn to the series of marvellous sculptured panels, nine in all, which are set like tableaux on the walls.

Tonight we enjoy our farewell dinner at a local restaurant.

Overnight in Mumbai.

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## **DAY 19 DEPART**

Today we bid a fond farewell to southern India as we transfer to the airport for our flights home.





## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

### 1. HOW BIG ARE THE GROUPS?

Each group is limited to 16 participants. Small groups are an important ingredient in adventure travel. They allow for more interaction and more personalized service throughout the itinerary.

### 2. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

All accommodations throughout; all meals, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); bottled drinking water throughout the trip; all internal transportation; airport transfers on day 1 and departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); all day trips and entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary; tips for hotels (portage), restaurants and spot guides; services of a trip leader.

### 3. WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

International flights, tips to ElderTreks tour leader, national guide bus driver, alcoholic drinks, visa's and travel insurance.

### 4. ARE THESE "EDUCATIONAL" TOURS?

Yes, in the broadest sense of the word, "educational". We visit many temples and historical sites, and develop an overview of Indian history and culture. But this is only a portion of the educational experience. We believe that it is equally educational to meet local people on a non-commercial basis, visit their homes and even try to learn a few words in Hindi. Sometimes the most "educational" moments are spent sipping a cold drink in a street market.

### 5. HOW DO WE TRAVEL DURING THE TOUR?

Trip includes 2 internal flights. All local transportation is included in the land price of the trip. Most of the transportation is in minivans or bus, although we also travel by houseboat. Of course, we also explore on foot.

### 6. WHAT ARE OUR ACCOMMODATIONS LIKE?

Comfortable well located accommodation with private bathrooms throughout. Includes 1 night on a houseboat (private bath).

### 7. WHAT ABOUT THE WEATHER?

There are wide variations in climate in Southern India with winter, spring, summer, monsoon and autumn experienced in all regions. Generally, December and January are cool, with maximum temperatures around 70°F - 75 °F (21°C-23°C), and

minimum temperatures as low as 40°F (4°C). February and March are very pleasant, with temperatures starting to heat up in April, and peaking in late May at around 90°F. June to September bring the monsoon rains, followed by the October to December period that brings clear skies and cool weather.

### 8. WHEN IS PAYMENT DUE?

A non-refundable deposit of \$500 (plus insurance if you require it) is due at time of booking and will reserve your place on the tour. Payment of the full land cost is due 100 days before departure. Cancellation charges are applicable and are outlined in the "Terms & Conditions" section of our brochure.

### 9. IS MEDICAL INSURANCE REQUIRED?

Insurance coverage is not included in the cost of your trip. Please note that medical insurance is not required for this adventure but is recommended. ElderTreks offers comprehensive travel insurance and we are happy to provide you with a quote if you call our office. If you are purchasing insurance elsewhere, please ensure you provide the details to ElderTreks as soon as possible.

### 10. WHAT SHOULD I TAKE ON THE TOUR?

There is a detailed "What to Take" list in our Trip Kit, which we will send to you after receiving your booking deposit for the trip.

### 11. WHAT MEALS ARE INCLUDED?

All meals during the itinerary are included, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day. We eat a variety of local foods prepared in a wide range of settings. In many cases, we simply order a number of dishes and share, allowing you to sample new foods and decide what you enjoy best.

### 12. CAN YOU ARRANGE MY FLIGHTS?

We would be happy to take care of your air arrangements. ElderTreks offers personalized flight itineraries — not group flights. Stop over en route, come in a few days early, or extend your stay. Call us for a customized itinerary.

### 13. WHAT IF I WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION?

If you have any further questions about the trip, please do not hesitate to contact our office or your travel agent for additional information. A Trip Kit containing further details on the destination will be sent to you once you have booked on the tour.







