

incredible indian tours

southern odyssey

trip-validity: 1/1/12—31/12/12

Beginning our journey in fascinating Panjim, the quaint and charming capital of Goa, we travel east to explore the ruins of the Vijayanagar Empire in Hampi. Heading south, we spend time in Mysore the old capital of the Wodeyar Dynasty where we witness the spectacular Mysore Palace lights and the colourful Devaraja markets before heading into Kerala – God’s Own Country. This extraordinarily beautiful part of India offers extreme diversity. Enjoy the breathtakingly beautiful Backwaters, beaches, tea, coffee and spice plantations and wildlife reserves. Watch fishermen in Cochin pull in the nets as they have done for centuries. Experience life along the tranquil islands of the backwaters. Trek through a wildlife park and maybe catch a glimpse of wild elephants, deer, giant squirrels or wild boar. Moving on to Tamil Nadu, considered to be the last bastion of traditional Hindu culture in India, we visit ancient monuments and temple towns before finishing our tour in Mahabalipuram resplendent with World Heritage rock cut temples and charming beach resorts.



highlights

- o discover the magical beauty of **Goa**
- o wander the **ruins** of the once majestic Vijayanagar empire in **Hampi**
- o smell the **sandalwood** in the **Palace City** of **Mysore**
- o be on the lookout for wild elephants or **tigers** in **Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary**
- o relax on a near-deserted **golden tropical beach** near **Kannur**
- o help the local fisherman bring in a catch in their Chinese fishing nets in **Cochin**
- o spend a night on a **traditional houseboat** in the backwaters near **Alleppey**
- o enjoy the hospitality of a local family during a **homestay** in the Kerala **Backwaters**
- o wander through verdant manicured **tea plantations** around **Munnar**
- o **Trek** through the jungle on foot in **Periyar Tiger Reserve**
- o witness the magnificent **Sri Meenakshi Temple** in **Madurai**
- o be charmed by the **French** colonial atmosphere of **Pondicherry**
- o marvel at the ancient rock-cut temples of **Mahabalipuram**

itinerary disclaimer

The itinerary attached is correct at time of printing. It may differ slightly during the tour. Occasionally itineraries need to change as we travel to allow for on the ground problems with transportation, Indian booking issues and travelers desires.

itinerary (21 nights/22 days)

Days 1-2 Panjim

We meet at 6pm for a short tour briefing before heading out for dinner at one of the quaint Portuguese-Goan restaurants in Panjim.

Goa is a small state with a strong Portuguese influence, thanks to the 400-odd years of occupation. Today, Goa is a tropical gem with stunning beaches, verdant rice paddies, rugged lush forested hills and spice plantations. There is a very strong Christian influence—played out most obviously in the historic sites of Old Goa, and in the sheer volume of churches dotted around the state. With it’s most infamous claim to fame being the incorruptible body of St Francis Xavier (on show once every 10 years), Goa is also famed for its hippy past and these days for the rave parties and tourist markets.

On Day 2, we start with a walking tour to explore the winding streets of the old Portuguese quarters of Fontainhas and Althino. We also visit Old Goa, an atmospheric relic of a once great Indo-European city. Other options here in Goa include cruising along the Mandovi River, visiting the Mapusa markets or heading to one of the nearby beaches.



Palolem Beach—South Goa

Days 3-4 Hampi

Arriving into nearby Hospet from an 8-hour train journey up the western Ghats through beautiful jungle and past stunning gorges and waterfalls, we have time to enjoy the relaxed ambience and marvelous sights of Hampi. Once buzzing with a population of nearly half a million, Vijayanagar was the capital of one of the largest Hindu empires in Indian history. After being sacked by Muslims in 1565, the city fast went into decline. Now a World Heritage site, there are 58 protected monuments around these fascinating ruins. The entire area encompassing 26 square kilometres is made all the more exotic with its boulder-strewn landscape softened by paddy fields and banana plantations, creating a quite magical atmosphere. We experience one of the famous sunsets Hampi is famous for before a day spent exploring the amazingly evocative sights.

On the evening of day 4 we take an overnight train to Bangalore.



Hampi - Virupaksha Temple

Days 5-6 Mysore

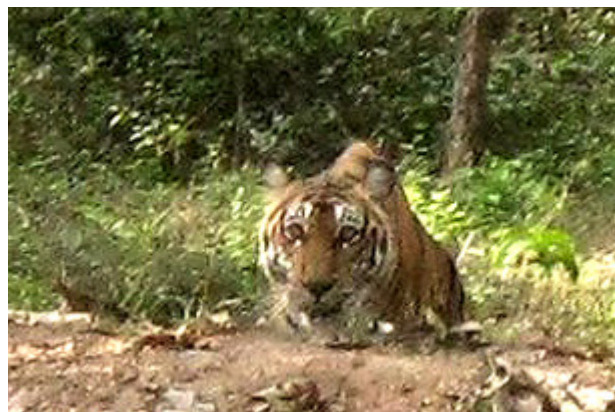


Mysore Palace Lights

Arriving early into Bangalore we transfer the 150km to Mysore by private vehicle. Mysore was once the capital of the Wodeyar Dynasty, and is known as the city of Palaces. We enjoy the splendour and majesty of the Mysore palace, the largest in India. Built in 1912 in the Indo-Saracenic style, this palace exudes a grandeur that is unmatched. On the evening of day 6 we witness the spectacular palace illuminations. Whilst in Mysore, we visit Chaumundi Hill with the 3rd largest Nandi Bull statue in India and the colourful Devaraja Market. We also drive out to the small village of Somnathpur to see the remarkably well preserved 13th century Keshava Temple built by the Hoysala rulers. The drive takes us past silk farms, jaggery factories and some of the most idyllic rural parts of Karnataka.

Day 7 Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary

We have a 4-hour drive today to Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary. We stay in a simple guesthouse situated right at the gates to the park and take an afternoon jeep excursion into the sanctuary, home to many species of wild and endangered animals including elephant, spotted deer, bison, tiger, cheetah, and boar. If you are keen to spot more wild animals why not take a night-time jeep ride, or head out into the sanctuary again in the morning - often the best time to see some of the more reclusive creatures.



Tiger near Wayanad National Park

Days 8-9 Kannur



Beach, South Kannur

Situated on the north Keralan Coast, Kannur is home to some of the most beautiful, tranquil and near-deserted beaches in India. We stay in simple home-stay-style accommodation about 10km south of Kannur.

Kannur is famous for *Theyyam*, a ritual of North Kerala which is a rare combination of dance and music and reflects important features of tribal culture. Most nights of the year, somewhere around Kannur there is a Theyyam program and hopefully we will get the opportunity to witness this fascinating show.

Kannur (previously known as Cannanore) has a history that dates back over a millennium. The ruins of the Portuguese/British Fort of St Angelo makes a worthwhile excursion, but then so too do the stunning beaches at our doorstep.

Days 10-11 Cochin

A 6 1/2 hour train ride this morning has us to Cochin in time for lunch. The oldest European settlement in India, known as the Queen of the Arabian sea, Cochin's charms are manifold. From the Chinese fishing nets and heritage buildings of Fort Cochin to the markets of Mattancherry and Jew Town and the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Ernakulam, buzzing with hotels, shops and restaurants, Cochin is a fascinating combination of laid back, charming, historic and bustling modern.

We wander the streets and lanes of Fort Cochin, visit the Mattancherry Palace and Jewish Synagogue, ride local ferries around the harbour and watch a world famous Kathakali dance-drama program including the extraordinarily makeup application beforehand.

Day 12 Alleppey

A short journey to Alleppey where we board our houseboat. Made in the traditional ricebarge or Kettuvallam style, and luxuriously fitted out, each boat typically has a few bedrooms, a living room, open lounge and deck. An oarsman, cook and guide are on hand to look after our every need. We spend the day drifting along coconut lined canals, past small villages that laze on the myriad islands along the backwaters. We see green rice paddies spreading away into the distance and coconut groves with the occasional temple or church. We pass chinese fishing nets, children waving from the banks, locals making coir, or toddy tapping. Life is carried on here at a pace that reminds us nothing much has changed here in centuries.



Traditional Kettuvallam (Ricebarge houseboat)

Day 13 Chennamkary



Exploring the island with our backwaters host.

The Keralan backwaters are a chain of brackish lagoons and lakes lying parallel to the Arabian Sea coast. The network includes five large lakes linked by canals, both manmade and natural, fed by 38 rivers, and extending virtually half the length of Kerala. There are over 900 km of interconnected waterways, rivers, lakes and inlets that make up the Keralan backwaters. After breakfast, our houseboat drops us in the heart of this picturesque region at the door of our next stop where our hosts welcome us to their simple yet stunningly located home.

Situated on a car-free island, the only way to get around is by foot, cycle or boat. We have the opportunity to do all three during our stay here as we are shown around the island, meet some of the locals and find out how life is lived here in the backwaters.

Days 14-15 Munnar

We have a 4 hour drive today high up into the western ghats (hills) to reach Munnar, situated 1600m above sea level. This hill station was originally the summer resort for the British administration in South India.

Now overrun with tea plantations, Munnar retains its old colonial charm. With sprawling estates, rolling hills, sparkling waterfalls, picture-postcard hamlets and undulating valleys, Munnar offers gentle walks, amazing photography options, trekking and boating. On day 15 we have a full day trek through the hills to get in and amongst the highest tea estates in the world with views that simply take your breath away.



Tea Plantations - Munnar

Days 16-17 Periyar Tiger Reserve

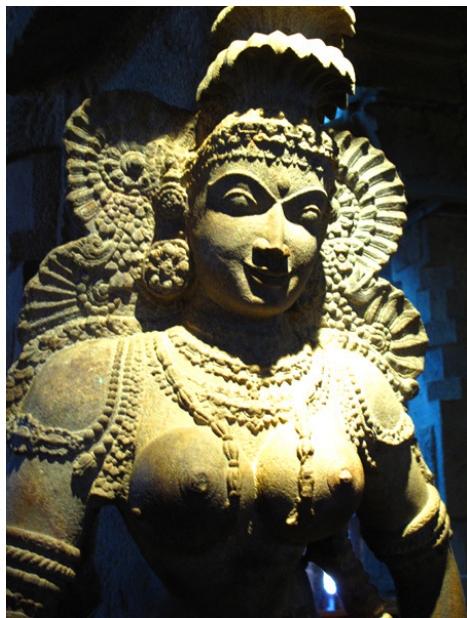
A spectacular morning drive through the Cardomom hills - lined with tea, cocoa, tapioca, bamboo, coconut, banana and spice plantations takes us to Thekkady, gateway to Periyar Tiger Reserve. Periyar was declared a Project Tiger park in 1978, and the Periyar river was dammed to form a lake in the park. The park covers 777 sq km.

There are currently around 1000 elephants and some 50 tigers in the park.

Here, at Thekkady we visit a spice plantation and trek the park on foot - a great way to get up close to the animals. There is also plenty of time to relax, shop for spices or handicrafts in the town or get an Ayurvedic massage.

Days 18-19 Madurai

We head east down the Western Ghats into Tamil Nadu. Our first stop is Madurai - famed for the awe-inspiring Sri Meenakshi Temple. Often referred to as the Athens of the east, and with a history dating back more than 2500 years, Madurai was an important cultural and commercial centre even as early as 550 AD. Today Madurai is a bustling, typically Tamil city where life revolves around the temple, but equally important are the sub industries of textiles, jasmine and Tamil culture. The Thirumalai Nayak Palace is worth a look, as is the Gandhi Museum.



Madurai - Sri Meenakshi Temple Statue

Day 20 Pondicherry

Once a colony of France, only becoming part of India in 1954, Pondicherry still bears much of the French influence, lending the town a charming colonial elegance. We spend the afternoon wandering the Bougainvillea lined avenues and discovering grand villas and heritage mansions, churches and temples. Pondicherry is also home to Auroville, the experiment in international living, and home to around 2200 people from 43 different countries.

We have an early morning train before a one-hour drive to Pondicherry where we arrive in time for a late lunch. After an afternoon wandering the streets of the old French quarter, there are plenty of interesting shops and markets here in Pondicherry, or why not join the locals promenading along the waterfront at sunset.



Pondicherry - French Quarter

Day 21 Mamallapuram



Mamallapuram

After visiting the two World Heritage sites of the 'Five Rathas' and the Shore Temple we wander around this small yet bustling beach-side village overrun with the most amazing rock carved temples and sculptures. Mamallapuram, also known as Mahabalipuram is a beautiful, open-air museum of 7th and 8th Century history. We enjoy a seafood dinner to end the trip in true south Indian style.

Day 22 Departure Day

There are no organised activities today. You may leave at any time.

general tour information

group size

10 maximum

days

22 days 21 nights

starts in

Panjim, Goa

finishes in

Mahabalipuram (Chennai)

price includes

Arrival and departure transfers

All accommodation as specified

All transportation between overnight stops and to and from included sightseeing

Entrance fees for all sites listed as part of the itinerary

Meals as specified

price does not include

Visa costs

Meals other than those listed

Drinks, meal tips, laundry and other items of a personal nature

International flights

accommodation

Hotels (15 nights), Guesthouse (3 nights), Homestay (1 night), Houseboat (1 night), Sleeper Train (1 night)

This tour uses a variety of accommodation. From simple guesthouses to heritage hotels, we experience a wide range of accommodation styles. Most hotel rooms are twin share with private bathrooms with western style toilets. Although many rooms will be air-conditioned, some will be fan-cooled. During our home-stay at Chennamkary, accommodation is in simple guesthouse rooms either with or without attached bathrooms.

single supplement

If you are a single traveller and do not wish to share accommodation, but would like your own room throughout the tour (not always available in homestay accommodation), a single supplement payment of AUD1450* will be payable. Please note that often, you might be the only single traveler, therefore automatically getting a room to yourself.

*Subject to exchange rate fluctuations

transport

Train, private vehicle, boat, jeep, auto-rickshaw, cycle-rickshaw.

Train travel in India is essential considering it is such an efficient and extensive network, and is also such a part of India's culture and heritage. For our overnight journey, we travel in air-conditioned sleeper carriages with either two or three levels of berths. They are arranged in door less sections each of four or six berths. Broad-gauge, three-tier sleeping carriages also have a row of two-tier (upper and lower) berths along one side. A conductor ensures that nobody without a reservation gets into the carriage. Each carriage has "squat" style toilets at either end. Bedding is supplied and is clean, but for peace of mind, you may wish to bring a sleeping sheet. Meals are not included during our overnight train journey, but food is usually available.

Train journeys by day will give us an opportunity to experience Indian life by rubbing shoulders with the locals. Travelling locally is always exciting and fascinating – you never know who you will meet. We will be taking private vehicles for most other journeys.

activities included

The following is a list of included activities on this trip. Other activities are optional and will be at your own expense.

Old Goa; Panjim Walking Tour (Goa)

Vitalla Temple; Royal Enclosure; Hampi Walking Tour (Hampi)

Mysore Palace; Palace Illuminations; Chamundi Hill; Keshava Temple (Mysore)

Jeep Safari (Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary)

Mattahcherry Palace; Jewish Synagogue; Kathakali Dance (Cochin)

Village Walk; Canoe Ride; (Alleppey)

Spice Plantation; Guided walk through Periyar Tiger Reserve (Periyar)

Day Trek (Munnar)

Sri Meenakshi Temple; (Madurai)

Shore Temple; 5 Rathas; Town Walk (Mahabalipuram)

meal inclusions

17 Breakfasts, 6 Lunches, 7 Dinners

meals

Traveling with Incredible Indian Tours we ensure that you will experience a vast array of the gustatory treats available in India. Generally, meals are not included in the trip price when there is a choice of eating options. This allows you to choose where, and what to eat. More often than not however we eat together as a group. Your leader will offer suggestions for favourite restaurants throughout the trip.

money exchange

As at Dec 2009

AUD1 = 41 INR

CAD1 = 44 INR

EUR1 = 67 INR

GBP1 = 74 INR

NZD1 = 33 INR

USD1 = 46 INR

There are many ATM machines (which accept both Cirrus/Maestro debit cards and Visa and MasterCard) throughout India. This is a safe and convenient way to access money in India, however we suggest that you bring some money as cash/travellers cheques in case there are times that ATMs are not available. The easiest currencies to exchange are USD or GBP, however AUD and other major currencies are no problem in general. Only bring Thomas Cook or Amex Travellers cheques. Visa & Mastercard credit cards are accepted in major shops and restaurants in the bigger cities.

spending money

Although entrance fees to specified sites are included in the tour price, there are additional sights that you may like to visit. Many sites levy camera and video fees.

Spending money requirements will differ from one person to the next. You will need to take into consideration your spending habits when allowing for drinks, shopping, and optional activities.

You will need to allow enough money for the following:

Meals – AUD350 (or equivalent)

Optional Activities – AUD35 (or equivalent)

Money for drinks, shopping and incidentals.

Tipping is an integral part of Indian life and is essential to a smooth trip. To make things easier we will collect money to cover tips for hotel room boys, local guides and for drivers of private transport we use. This does NOT cover restaurant tips.

Tips—allow AUD50 (or equivalent)

physical rating



You may need to carry your bag/ pack up and down railway station and

hotel stairs. There will be plenty of walking around towns or sites, which due to the warm to hot weather in India at this time of year will make general sightseeing a little more strenuous.

culture shock rating



Conditions in India are not always as comfortable as in other countries. You

may need to occasionally deal with a squat toilet, cold showers or power failure.

travel insurance

Travel Insurance is highly recommended whilst traveling to India and is compulsory for any group tour with Incredible Indian Tours.

visas

All foreign nationals require a visa to enter India. They are not available at port of entry and must be obtained in advance. Be wary however of applying for your visa too early as they are valid from the date of issue, not date of entry into India.

For information, or assistance with obtaining a visa, check out the following websites.

<http://www.vfs-in-au.net/>

<http://www.travcour.com/>

health

We recommend that you consult your doctor for current medical travel information about before departure. Your leader will be carrying a basic first aid kit, but we suggest you bring along your own as well as any personal medical requirements.

The following websites have up-to-date information about health requirements.

<http://www.travelvax.com.au/>

<http://www.travelhealth.co.uk/>

communications

Internet cafes are commonplace and cheap throughout India. Finding a café is usually not a problem, but speed can be. Connection times are often painfully slow, although this does vary from place to place. Wifi is becoming increasingly available in hotels.

Telephone shops are situated on nearly every street corner of India. Rates are reasonable and international lines are good. You can also purchase a local prepaid sim card relatively easily and inexpensively in India. Recommended are Vodaphone and Idea. Be sure to bring extra passport photos for this.

your group leader

Your group leader is there to organise and streamline your travels and to help you have the best trip possible. Whilst they are not a guide per se, they will share their local knowledge, give you suggestions for your free time and manage the day to day running of the tour. They will introduce you to their local friends and recommend great local restaurants and experiences. They will have a broad general knowledge of India, so do feel free to tap into their wisdom. At some sites, local guides may be hired where we think more specific knowledge will add to the enjoyment of the places we are visiting.

responsible travel

We believe strongly in responsible travel. This includes being respectful to the local culture (ie dressing appropriately, and learning a few basic cultural do's and don'ts), being mindful of the environment, and leaving a positive image behind. Remember we are ambassadors for our country. Bringing a few photos of your family and home with you is a great way to interact with the locals by giving them a glimpse of your world whilst you visit theirs.

joining hotel

Panjim Inn

E-212, 31st January Rd

Fontainhas, Panjim, Goa 403 001

Ph: +91 0832 222 6523/7169/8136

Fax: +91 0832 243 5220

transfer/joining instructions

Your airport transfer pickup will await you holding a sign with your name when you exit the baggage claim area of the arrivals hall. There may be large crowds here so please look carefully for your transfer.

arriving early

Panjim is the atmospheric small capital of Goa, situated on the banks of the Mandovi river just 3 km from the closest beach. There is plenty to do in Panjim from wandering the Latin Quarter areas of Fontainhas and Althino as well as side trips further afield to the beaches or national parks of Goa. Our hotel is situated in the heart of Fontainhas and is surrounded by quaint by-lanes, and aristocratic houses. The Panjim Inn has a fantastic restaurant serving local Goan/Portuguese fare and also has an atmospheric outdoor bar area. Rooms are equipped with minibar and tea/coffee making facilities.

early arrival information

If you are arriving earlier than day 1, extra accommodation is available in Panjim at the Panjim Inn at AUD90/100 (or equivalent) Single/Double occupancy per night per room. Please notify us as early as possible if you require extra accommodation as hotels in India tend to be heavily booked up well in advance. Flights from Mumbai, Delhi or other cities can be arranged conveniently and inexpensively over the internet using one of India's regular or budget airlines:

Jet Lite www.jetlite.com

Kingfisher www.flykingfisher.com

Spice Jet www.spicejet.com

Go Air <http://www.goair.in>

Indigo: www.goindigo.in

finishing point

Ideal Beach Resort

Mahabalipuram 603 104

Tamil Nadu

Ph: +91 044 2744 2240/443

Mahabalipuram is situated 60km (1 hours drive) south of Chennai. Ideal Beach Resort is 3.5 km from the town of Mahabalipuram. With a beautiful garden setting right on the beachfront, Ideal Beach Resort is a peaceful oasis with a delicious seafood restaurant and beautiful pool. Shuttles are available for journeys into town, or cycles are available for hire.

staying on

If you are staying on in Mahabalipuram after the tour, extra accommodation at the Ideal Beach Resort is available at AUD140/160 (or equivalent) Single/Double occupancy per night per room.

what to take

We will be on the move a lot, so try to pack as lightly as possible. The smaller your bag in India the better, as the various modes of transport we use tend to have limited storage space.

India is very conservative and we ask that you dress accordingly. As a guideline, shoulders and knees should always be covered. The wearing of shorts is looked upon by locals as akin to wearing your underwear and will limit your entry into mosques, temples and other places of worship. Loose, lightweight, long clothing is both respectful and cool. Singlets, tank tops and shorts are not suitable attire for India.

laundry

Inexpensive laundry facilities are offered by most hotels we use.

weather

The weather during our journey should be fabulous. Daytime temperatures will be warm to hot, in the range 23-35°C and humid. Bring an umbrella and also sun protection and a hat. Bring a jacket for the cooler nights in the hills.

checklist

Travel documents: passport, visa, travel insurance (don't forget your emergency insurance contact details), air tickets.

Photocopy of above documents

Day pack

Health vaccinations/medication

First aid kit

Money: ATM card (widely available and easy to access); credit cards (widely accepted in big cities); cash and travellers cheques (for emergencies)

Money pouch

Alarm clock and torch/flashlight

Mosquito repellent

Ear plugs can be useful if you are a light sleeper

Lock for your back pack or bag

We recommend the use of a neck wallet or money belt to store your passport, air tickets, credit cards and cash. Avoid bringing valuable jewellery with you. Some hotels we use have safety deposit boxes. A lock and chain are useful for securing your luggage on overnight train journeys.

Updated on: 31/01/2011