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SOUTH INDIA



SMALL GROUP
SILK, SPICE & SAND
FEB 11-28, 2026 | 18 DAYS | 44 MEALS
JOURNEY LEADER

The lands of India have long fascinated world travellers for their immense diversity. India is home to a diverse range of religious and cultural traditions, including ancient Hindu and Buddhist beliefs, as well as early Christian and Islamic influences.

This unique journey has been planned to bring us to the less visited regions of southern India, where lifestyles have been less affected by outside influences. India's deeply religious roots, whether they be Hindu or Christian, are very easily observed on a daily basis.

We will discover magnificent rock carvings by the seashore, stroll through bustling temple complexes of Thanjavur and Madurai, marvel at the spice markets, wildlife preserves, and wonderful beaches in Kerala. Everywhere we go, we will admire the magnificent scenery, religious traditions, and uncomplicated lifestyles of India. Designed for adventurous travellers, this itinerary is for those who are looking to discover something new and different and who are willing to accept and to appreciate the cultural and physical differences that they will encounter.



SMALL GROUP EXPERIENCE

LIMITED TO ONLY 25 MEMBERS

Highlights

- Visits to a host of UNESCO World Heritage Sites including Kanchipuram, Mahabalipuram, Shore Temples, Chola Temples of Airavatesvara, Darasuram, Western Ghats of Kerala
- Chennai, once home of the East India Company
- Pondicherry, France's former foothold in India
- Madurai, Temple city of South India
- Cruise in Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary
- Discover the spice plantations of the Western Ghats
- Overnight houseboat cruise in the backwaters of Kerala
- Historic Cochin with its 500 year old Dutch and Portuguese buildings
- Traditional Kathakali Dance in Kerala

Inclusive Features

- Return economy group airfare from Canada to India with Etihad Airways
- Accommodations in traditional, first class and deluxe hotels and resorts as indicated or similar
- 44 meals included as noted in the itinerary (B - 15 breakfasts, L - 15 lunches, D - 14 dinners)
- All gratuities, surcharges, taxes and fees for included services
- Visa fee for India for Canadian passport holders
- Airport transfers in Canada or equivalent value with purchase of group airfare
- Services of our Canadian journey leader plus professional guide throughout India

FEB 11, Wednesday

DEPART CANADA

Group members from across Canada gather in Toronto for the direct overnight Etihad Airways flight to Abu Dhabi.

FEB 12, Thursday

ABU DHABI / CHENNAI

Following a direct connection, we continue our journey to Chennai. On arrival in the early evening, we transfer directly to our hotel. **The Residency Towers** (2 nights)

FEB 13, Friday

CHENNAI

After breakfast we explore Chennai, capital of the East India Company from the 17th century onwards. Highlights include Fort St. George, the foundation on which the company grew and St. Mary's Church, the first and oldest English church in India dating from 1680. In Mylapore, visit the 16th century Kapaleeshwarar Temple as well as the fruit and flower market. In the Government Museum and Art Gallery, we shall see galleries dedicated to traditional art and bronzes. The remainder of the day is at leisure. BLD

FEB 14, Saturday KANCHIPURAM / MAHABALIPURAM

Visit San Thome Basilica containing the Apostle, known as "Doubting Thomas", who in later life, lived and preached here. Continue to Kanchipuram, one of Hinduism's seven most sacred cities. This "Golden City of a Thousand Temples" dating back from the early 7th century and onwards, is one of early India's richest dynasties. Only 70 of the original 1,000 temples remain, the most important one being the Kailasanathar Temple. Kanchipuram is also known for its silk weaving. Visit a village to see the



Elaborate make up and costume at a Kathakali dance show

craftsmen at work on their looms. Continue to Mahabalipuram with time to relax by the sea. (60 km /2 hrs)
MGM Beach Resort (2 nights) BLD

FEB 15, Sunday SHORE TEMPLE

Visit the UNESCO World Heritage site of Mahabalipuram, home to remarkable 7th-century rock-hewn monuments, including the iconic Shore Temple. Unlike the nearby rock-cut structures, the Shore Temple is one of the earliest stone-built temples in South India and the only surviving structure of the legendary "Seven Pagodas" once believed to stand along the coast. The most important carving is the immense bas-relief sculpted in amazing detail on a huge whaleback-shaped rock depicting the descent of the Ganges to the earth. Another highlight is the Five Rathas, a set of monolithic carved temples that display the evolution of Dravidian style architecture. The remainder of the day is at leisure. BLD

FEB 16, Monday PONDICHERRY

A short drive brings us to Pondicherry, the only French colony in South Asia and a state where we can still experience the Parisian influence in both buildings and lifestyles. Visit Auroville, the City of Dawn, an experimental community from the 1960's as well as Sri Aurobindo Ashram, a spiritual community founded by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Highlights in Pondicherry include Raj Niwas, Romain Rolland Library and the museum. Enjoy a leisurely walk in the French Quarter. (125 km/2.5 hrs)

Le Pondy Hotel (1 night) BLD

FEB 17, Tuesday KUMBAKONAM / THANJAVUR

Since ancient times, the Ganges has always been the most sacred river to Hindus. Visit a temple dedicated to the king who brought waters from the Ganges to the south and attend the morning prayer ceremony. After lunch, we will visit Darasuram and the Airavatesvara Temple, a Dravidian temple considered as a "sculptor's dream in stone". Built by Rajaraja Chola in the 12th century, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is a storehouse of art and architecture dedicated to Lord Shiva. (185 km /6 hrs)

Sangam Hotel (2 nights) BLD

FEB 18, Wednesday THANJAVUR

Visit a local village to explore its market and take a ride in a bullock cart. The Raja Museum contains a collection of Chola sculptures in bronze and granite while the Sarasvati Mahal Library contains over 40,000 rare books and palm leaf manuscripts. The Brihadeeswarar Temple, another UNESCO World Heritage Site, built in the 10th century by Chola Emperor Rajaraja I, will amaze us with its very sacred inner sanctum. The Gopuram of the temple was carved from a single piece of granite weighing around 80 tonnes. BLD

FEB 19, Thursday CHETTINAD / MADURAI

We take a leisurely drive to the dream-land of Chettinad, noted for its majestic temples and palatial country mansions. Visit one of these estates to see how the wealthy once lived. The delectable Chettinad cuisine, made with freshly ground masala spices, has amazing flavours to tantalize your taste buds. Savour the Chettinad cuisine at lunch today which will be served in authentic style on a banana leaf. Continue to Madurai known as the temple city of South India. This evening, we visit Meenakshi Temple to witness the candle lit prayer ceremony when the temple bronze of Lord Shiva is carried to the bed chamber of Parvati. (180km/5 hrs) **Courtyard by Marriott** (2nights) BLD

FEB 20, Friday MADURAI

We visit the remains of the Tirumala Nayak Palace. Explore the busy city centre by rickshaw, passing through



Admire magnificent temples. Credit Janet Williams



Unique Chinese fishing nets in Cochin



Colourful fashionable Sarees

the various markets en route to the massive Meenakshi Temple dedicated to Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati. The temple's towering stonewalls and 12 towers, called 'Gopurams', were built in the 17th century by Nayak rulers. The high point of the temple is the Hall of a "Thousand Pillars", built in the 16th century. Every pillar is unique and sculptured in Dravidian style. The 'Musical Pillars', when struck, produce a different musical note. Around the temple is a massive bazaar, functioning as it has for centuries. This is an opportunity to step into the past. BLD

FEB 21, Saturday MADURAI / PERIYAR

Take in the scenic farmland views before ascending into the Western Ghats, or hills, taking us to the former hill station of Periyar. After settling at our hotel, transfer to the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary for a boat cruise deep into the park. In times past, Periyar was noted for its tiger population. While tigers are extremely rare, we can hope to see herds of elephants, wild boar, sambar deer and varieties of birds by the water's edge. (160 km/4 hrs)

Shalimar Spice Garden Resort (2 nights) BLD

FEB 22, Sunday PERIYAR

We'll learn why these exotic and fertile hills are known as the land of spices. This landscape is diffused with exotic spice plantations, green carpets of endless tea gardens and lush tropical forests. Following our guided introduction to the spice gardens we will be given a cooking demonstration at the plantation followed by lunch. Remainder of the day is at leisure. BLD

FEB 23, Monday PERIYAR / KUMARAKOM

We descend from the highlands this morning, passing coffee, tea, and coconut plantations on our way back to the backwaters of Kerala, the region this coastal state is best known for. Set on the shores of Vembanad Lake, with its own private lagoon, our deluxe resort is noted for its beautiful grounds and spa facilities. It's the perfect place to unwind with a relaxing massage. (120 km / 4 hrs)

Zuri Kumarakom (1 night) BLD

FEB 24, Tuesday EMBARK HOUSEBOAT

After a leisurely morning at our resort, we board our houseboat for a roundtrip Alleppey overnight cruise. This is the most romantic way to experience the backwaters of Kerala. Each barge has 2 to 4 comfortable bedrooms, a lounge, a dining area, a small bathroom and a kitchen where the staff will prepare our delicious meals. The cruise will take us through canals, lagoons, and past small villages providing glimpses of daily life such as locals washing clothes, cleaning dishes, harvesting coconuts and dates. Enjoy a drink of fresh coconut water while toddy is made for the locals. Relax onboard as the sun sets amongst the coconut palms while the staff prepare a home cooked meal. Anchor for the night and enjoy a quiet and relaxing evening on board. **Blue Jelly Cruises** (1 night) BLD

FEB 25, Wednesday ALLEPPEY / COCHIN

After a delicious breakfast while cruising to Alleppey, we rejoin our coach for the drive into Cochin, Kerala's oldest and most picturesque city. On arrival, we will be treated to an introduction to typical Syrian Christian cooking at the residence of Nimmy and Paul. Nimmy is a cookery instructor with more than 10 years' experience, teaching traditional Kerala cuisine to visiting travellers. We then enjoy the lunch that Nimmy has prepared for us. This afternoon we have a brief introduction to the old city en route to our hotel. **Fragrant Nature Cochin** (2 nights) BLD

FEB 26, Thursday COCHIN

We explore Old Cochin beginning with St. Francis Church which was the first European Church in India built in 1562 by St. Francis. Explore the traditional Mattancherry Palace, a double-storied wooden palace particularly noted for its murals with scenes from the Ramayana. Later, we will continue to the Jewish Synagogue constructed in 1568, the oldest in the commonwealth. By the water's edge, see the unique Chinese fishing nets introduced by Chinese traders. Walk through the Fort Kochi area with its historic 500 year old Dutch and Portuguese buildings, still amazingly well preserved. This evening we are in for a special treat, a Kathakali dance performance, one of India's most spectacular dances. Experience the artistry of the performers as they transform through intricate makeup, costumes, and accessories, bringing their characters to life. BLD

FEB 27, Friday COCHIN / ABU DHABI

After a free morning to explore the heart of the city, have a late lunch and a harbour cruise before we transfer to the airport to catch our flights back to Canada. BL

FEB 28, Saturday CANADA
Arrive in Toronto and continue to our homes across Canada.

EFF31MAR25

 **Book by October 29, 2025**
and save \$200 per person 

CT Rating 3/5 - Moderately Challenging: While relatively easy, this journey features long flights, a number of walks over uneven ground (some with steps) and some hot humid days. Members should be physically active to fully enjoy this tour. Hotels are comfortable, roads are good and the food is excellent throughout the region.

Tour Cost in Canadian Dollars Per Person

Land only* (Join/Leave at hotel)	\$5,695
Toronto	\$7,845
Montreal / Ottawa	\$8,045
Halifax / Winnipeg.....	\$8,145
St. John's.....	\$8,245
Regina / Saskatoon / Victoria	\$8,345
Calgary / Edmonton / Vancouver.....	\$8,295
Single Supplement	\$2,095

Land only excludes all flights. Airfares from other gateways are available on request. Airfares and air schedules will be confirmed prior to final payment. Air prices are estimated (subject to confirmation). Final pricing will be advised once flights are confirmed. Refer to inclusive features for details.

Tour price is based on sharing a twin-bedded room at hotels. Prices are based on a minimum 20 members and on rates, taxes and fees effective February 2025 and are subject to change due to factors beyond our control. An escort will accompany the group with a minimum of 20 travelling.

Note: Members will require a Visa for India. Visa cost is included however some members may be required to obtain their own visa depending on location of residence.

Insurance is NOT INCLUDED but is highly recommended. Premiums are calculated based on the individual's age, destination (country), trip length, and trip booking window – please contact our staff to receive a quote. Your coverage starts on the effective date of your confirmation of coverage. Please discuss your insurance coverage prior to booking. Check our website for the most current information. Refer to the enrollment form for terms and conditions.

Final payment is due on November 6, 2025
Deposit is \$700 per person

To reserve your spot on this tour, you can either book online through our website or submit an enrollment form along with your deposit to:



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