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Craig
travel

SOUTH INDIA



SMALL GROUP
FEB 18-MAR 7, 2027 | 18 DAYS | 45 MEALS
JOURNEY LEADER

Cruise through the tranquil backwaters of Kerala.

This journey explores the profound cultural evolution of South India, tracing a path from the dynastic architectural legacy of Tamil Nadu to the maritime heritage and natural landscapes of Kerala. In the east, we immerse ourselves in the heritage of the Pallava Empire and Chola Empire, whose towering stone temples have served as centres of spiritual and social life for over a millennium. As we cross the Western Ghats, the narrative shifts to Kerala's history as a global spice hub. Here, culture is shaped by its relationship with the water and mountains, while colonial influences from Portugal, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom have blended with local traditions to create a distinct, multicultural identity. We have designed this tour to balance the grand stories of the past with the lived experiences of today, connecting you to the people and traditions that make South India so special.

SMALL GROUP EXPERIENCE
LIMITED TO 25 MEMBERS



Highlights

- **UNESCO World Heritage Sites:** Shore Temple and Five Rathas (Mahabalipuram); Gangaikonda Cholapuram and Airavatesvara Temple (Kumbakonam); Brihadeeswarar Temple (Thanjavur).
- **City Tours & Exploration:** Guided tours of Chennai, Pondicherry, Madurai, Thanjavur, and Cochin (Kochi)
- **Culinary Experiences:** Spice garden visit with cooking demonstration in Periyar; private cooking class with a local family in Cochin, tea plantation walk and tasting in Munnar
- **Nature & Cruises:** Private overnight Kerala backwaters cruise; scenic wildlife boat ride in Periyar
- **Artisan Workshops & Practices:** Traditional Rangoli practice; bronze statue-making and veena-making demonstrations
- **Temples & Ceremonies:** Meenakshi Amman Temple and an evening prayer ceremony in Madurai
- **Performance Arts:** Traditional Kalaripayattu martial arts show; Kathakali dance performance
- **Local Transport:** Rickshaw rides through the French Quarters of Pondicherry and the streets of Madurai, and bullock cart ride through a local village



Airavatesvara Temple in Kumbakonam

Inclusive Features

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

FEB 18, Thursday **DEPART CANADA**
Group members from across Canada gather in Toronto for the overnight flights to Chennai.

FEB 19, Friday **ARRIVE CHENNAI**
Upon arrival in the evening, we transfer directly to our hotel.
The Residency Towers (2 nights) D

FEB 20, Saturday **CHENNAI**
Today's city tour features the historical landmarks of Fort St. George, St. Mary's Church, the Government Museum, and the bustle of a local fruit and flower market. A highlight of our day is the Kapaleeshwarar Temple, a 7th-century architectural marvel dedicated to Lord Shiva (rebuilt in the 16th century), where we admire the massive, rainbow-hued gopuram covered in thousands of detailed carvings. We conclude our day with a welcome dinner to toast the start of our journey. BLD

FEB 21, Sunday **SHORE TEMPLE / PONDICHERRY**
We depart Chennai and drive south toward Pondicherry, stopping first at Mahabalipuram. Here, we explore the UNESCO-listed Shore Temple, carved from granite to withstand the salt air of the Bay of Bengal, and the Five Rathas, a series of monolithic temples each sculpted from a single massive rock to resemble ceremonial chariots.
Le Pondy Hotel (2 nights) BLD

FEB 22, Monday **PONDICHERRY**
Pondicherry is a unique coastal town where French colonial architecture meets Indian spirituality. Our morning tour features the Sacred Heart Basilica, celebrated for its

rare Gothic style, and a stop at the Raj Niwas, the official residence of the Lieutenant Governor. We also stroll along the Promenade, a scenic stretch along the Bay of Bengal. Later, we visit the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, a renowned spiritual community founded in 1926. In the afternoon, we enjoy a heritage walk through the French Quarter and a rickshaw ride along its charming streets. BLD

FEB 23, Tuesday KUMBAKONAM / THANJAVUR

Our journey continues inland toward Thanjavur, a city that served as the ancient capital for the mighty Chola Empire. Along the way, we visit the Gangaikonda Cholapuram and the UNESCO Airavatesvara Temple in Kumbakonam. The 12th-century Chola architecture of this temple features stone carvings so fine they resemble delicate lace. Following lunch, we enjoy a bullock cart ride through a local village, offering a slow-paced look at the rural way of life in this region. **Sangam Hotel** (2 nights) BLD

FEB 24, Wednesday THANJAVUR

We dedicate the morning to Thanjavur's history at the Brihadeeswarar Temple, part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the "Great Living Chola Temples." We also visit the Royal Palace Museum, home to an extensive collection of Chola-era artifacts. Spend the afternoon connecting with the living traditions that still thrive in the city's workshops. We witness the ancient lost-wax casting technique during a bronze statue-making demonstration and watch master artisans at a veena-making workshop. Here, the national instrument of India is meticulously hand-carved, preserving a craft that has defined Thanjavur for centuries. BLD

FEB 25, Thursday CHETTINAD / MADURAI

We depart for Madurai with a stop in Chettinad. This district is a culinary and architectural treasure, known for its unique cuisine and 19th-century palatial homes decorated with fine teak and Italian marble. After a glimpse into this opulent past, we complete our drive to Madurai, one of the world's oldest cities with a recorded history reaching back to the 3rd century BCE. **Courtyard by Marriott** (2 nights) BLD

FEB 26, Friday MADURAI

Experience the soul of Madurai with a city tour by rickshaw, starting at the Meenakshi Amman Temple. This spiritual masterpiece of Dravidian architecture features fourteen towers covered in thousands of colourful stone figures. We also explore the Thirumalai Nayakar Mahal, a royal palace famous for its towering white pillars and fusion of Italian and Rajput styles, followed by a walk through the local market. To connect with daily Tamil traditions, we enjoy a demonstration of rangoli, a sacred art form that involves creating intricate geometric patterns on the ground using dyed rice flour. You'll even have the chance to try your hand at this ancient practice. For those seeking a deeper spiritual connection, we gather for the evening prayer ceremony at Meenakshi Temple. BLD

FEB 27, Saturday MADURAI / MUNNAR

We bid farewell to the ancient plains of Tamil Nadu and cross into the lush, emerald landscapes of Kerala. Our journey takes us to Munnar, a serene hill station situated at an altitude of 1,600 metres, where the cooler climate and rolling hills provide a refreshing change of pace. As we enter this new state, we are greeted by beautiful tea plantations, mist-covered peaks and tranquil mountain air. **Fragrant Nature Munnar** (2 nights) BLD

FEB 28, Sunday MUNNAR

There is a rare magic to Munnar, a place where you might



Explore the UNESCO Shore Temple at Mahabalipuram



Take a guided walk through the tea plantations in Munnar



Kathakali dance performance, famous for its elaborate make up and facial expressions



Meenakshi Amman Temple

spot elephants roaming freely across the hills or share a cup of the most authentic chai with the workers in the tea plantations. We begin our day at Echo Point for picturesque views of the area. We then immerse ourselves in the world of tea with a guided walk through the picturesque plantations, followed by a factory tour to witness the delicate processing of the leaves and sample the refined brews that have made this region famous. The rest of the day is yours to embrace the quiet beauty of the Western Ghats and relax with our hotel's amenities. BLD

MAR 1, Monday **MUNNAR / PERIYAR**

We descend from Munnar towards Periyar, a region celebrated for its rich biodiversity. After checking in, we head to the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary for a scenic boat ride. Here we may have the chance to observe the sanctuary's residents, such as wild Asian elephants, sambar deer, and various bird species, as they come to the water's edge to drink and bathe.

Amritara Shalimar Spice Garden (2 nights) BLD

MAR 2, Tuesday **PERIYAR**

Following a relaxed morning in the heart of the Cardamom Hills, we are invited to a spice garden for a cooking demonstration and an authentic plantation lunch. Our day concludes with two powerful South Indian traditions: a Kalaripayattu show, featuring the world's oldest martial art, and a special dinner accompanied by the rhythmic storytelling of a Bharatanatyam dance performance. BLD

MAR 3, Wednesday **BACKWATERS CRUISE**

We travel to Alleppey to board our private houseboats for a cruise through the tranquil backwaters of Kerala. These traditional barges have been converted into floating retreats featuring comfortable bedrooms, a lounge, and a dining area. As we drift through the labyrinth of palm-fringed canals, we glide past small villages, fish markets and lush paddy fields, offering intimate glimpses of rural life along the water's edge. Relax on deck as the sun sets over the coconut groves while our onboard staff prepares a delicious meal. **Blue Jelly Cruises (1 night)** BLD

MAR 4, Thursday **ALLEPPEY / COCHIN**

Today we drive to the historic port city of Cochin. Along the way, we stop at the Coir Museum, dedicated to the history and production of coconut fibres. Upon arrival, we tour Fort Kochi, a seaside district defined by many foreign cultures. Highlights include St. Francis Church, one of the oldest European churches in India; the Mattancherry Palace, famous for its vibrant murals; and the 16th-century Jewish Synagogue. **Fragrant Nature Cochin (2 nights)** BLD

MAR 5, Friday **COCHIN**

After a leisurely morning, we join a local family for a cooking class, to learn the secrets of Kerala spices before enjoying a traditional home-cooked lunch. The afternoon is yours to explore the charming streets of Fort Kochi at your own pace. As evening approaches, we witness a Kathakali dance performance, Kerala's world-renowned drama famous for its elaborate make-up, costumes and intense facial expressions. Our journey culminates in a farewell dinner, celebrating the friendships and memories made across South India. BLD

MAR 6, Saturday **DEPART COCHIN**

Enjoy a final free day for last-minute exploration or shopping. We will have access to rooms to freshen up before our transfer to the airport for our journey home. BL

MAR 7, Sunday **ARRIVE CANADA**

Arrive in Toronto and continue to our homes across Canada.



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CT Rating 3.5/5 - Challenging: India offers diverse cultural experiences but requires an open mind to embrace its unique environment. Living standards often differ from those in Canada, and travellers should anticipate a high-energy atmosphere in busy districts. Traffic is frequently chaotic, and the itinerary includes several long travel days where roadside facilities may be limited. Air quality, particularly in larger cities, can be poor. Accommodations range from deluxe hotels to rustic heritage properties. Meals are primarily vegetarian or vegan, served buffet-style, and can be spicy. Due to the physical and cultural demands of the trip, members should be in good health and capable of managing their own luggage.

Tour Cost in Canadian Dollars Per Person

Land only* (Join/Leave at hotel)	\$6,095
Toronto	\$8,775
Montreal / Ottawa	\$8,995
Halifax / Winnipeg	\$9,095
St. John's	\$9,195
Regina / Saskatoon / Victoria	\$9,295
Calgary / Edmonton / Vancouver	\$9,245
Single Supplement	\$1,675

*Land only clients join at the Chennai hotel and leave the group at the Cochin hotel.

Airfares and air carriers are subject to change and will be confirmed prior to final payment. Airfares from other gateways are available on request. Refer to inclusive features for details. Prices are per person, based on double occupancy and a minimum of 15 members. Price is based on taxes, surcharges, and exchange rates effective April 2026 and are subject to change due to factors beyond our control. Group will be escorted with a minimum of 15 members.

A visa is required for India. For Canadian passport holders, the e-visa cost is included and assistance is provided for those needing individual applications. As of 2026, travellers must also complete a digital arrival card (e-arrival card) before departure; please contact us for details. Insurance is not included but is highly recommended, please contact our staff to receive a quote. Check our website for the most current information, and for terms and conditions.

Final payment is due on November 17, 2026

Deposit is \$800 per person

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

1092 Mount Pleasant Road, Toronto, ON M4P 2M6
416-484-0926 • 1-800-387-8890
tours@craigtravel.com • craigtravel.com



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