



**NEW** LIMITED EDITION SMALL GROUP JOURNEYS

## India: The Beautiful South 2019

16 days from \$7,795

Limited to 18 guests

**This journey is a unique opportunity to travel with other international guests on a limited-edition itinerary operated by A&K Australia.**

Immerse yourself in the beauty of Peninsular India on this journey through the gentler, more relaxed southern states of the kaleidoscopic sub-continent. Prized for millennia for its aromatic spices and other natural resources and cultural treasures, India's beautiful south remains a feast for the senses with all the right ingredients for a wonderful trip, fragrant cuisines, friendly people, and fascinating cultures. The colour and movement of bustling, increasingly sophisticated cities yields to sleepy fishing villages, tropical coastlines and lush hinterlands. You'll be astonished by the inspired Pallava sculptures and towering Chola temples of Tamil Nadu, enchanted by the colonial charms of Pondicherry, and lulled to restful sleep by the tranquil backwaters of Kerala. It's an India still largely untrammelled by tourists that will stay in your heart forever.

### A&K Advantages

Historic Chennai (formerly Madras), for centuries the British East India Company's most important seaport, and still the cultural, culinary and artistic hub of Southern India

The colourful port city of Kochi (Cochin), Queen of the Arabian Sea

The Monuments of Mahabalipuram, a UNESCO World Heritage listed site that includes extensive cave temples, and enormous bas-relief sculptures of life-sized animals, saints and gods

Delightful, tranquil Pondicherry, a quaint reminder of colonial France on the Indian Peninsula

A visit to Auroville, the experimental, New Age community founded in 1968 that attracts devotees of the Indian philosopher Sri Aurobindo from over 45 nations

The magnificent 14th century Tanjore Palace in Thanjavur

The Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple, so large it feels like its own city

The sensory immersion of a visit to a family-owned spice plantation, followed by a cooking demonstration and delicious meal prepared using plantation ingredients

Watching the elephants frolic in the lake in the scenic Periyar National Park

Relaxing amidst the palm groves poolside at the Kumarakom Lake Resort

A traditional houseboat cruise on the beautiful backwaters of Kerala

**DAY 1 ARRIVE IN CHENNAI, INDIA**

Arrive in Chennai where you will be met by A&K and transferred to your hotel. Situated on the Bay of Bengal, Chennai (formerly Madras) is the capital of the state of Tamil Nadu and India's southern gateway. It is also a major centre for music, art and culture, revered for its classical dance and Hindu temples. It is also known as 'The Detroit of Asia', with a major chunk of India's automobile manufacturing industry based in and around the city.

Taj Coromandel

**DAY 2 CHENNAI**

This morning is at leisure. At noon, assemble in the club lounge for a short tour briefing before beginning your sightseeing of Chennai. Once the most important seaport for the East India Company, and recognised as Southern India's cultural, culinary and artistic hub, Chennai is a fascinating mix of old and new with a collection of urban villages and neighbourhoods and a new cosmopolitan appeal seen in the assortment of boutiques, quirky cafés, contemporary restaurants, and a smattering of glamorous bars and clubs. Our tour will visit the city highlights including the ancient Shiva Temple; the San Thome Cathedral; where the remains of St. Thomas are said to be housed; Fort St. George, built in 1653 by the British East India Company; and the Government Museum which is home to one of the finest collections of bronze sculptures in the country. A welcome dinner is held tonight in the hotel.

Taj Coromandel | Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

**DAY 3 CHENNAI – MAHABALIPURAM – PONDICHERRY**

This morning, we head southwest to Pondicherry, with a visit en route to the ancient Pallava capital of Mahabalipuram to see its Group of Monuments, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Visit Bhagiratha's Penance, a bas-relief sculpted over enormous rocks that depicts life-size figures of animals, gods and saints, all watching the holy Ganges River flow from the Himalaya. Nearby, see its shallow mandapas (pillared halls), sculpted out of the rocky hillside and portraying stories of Indian mythology. Finally, stop at the Shore Temple, surrounded by gardens designed according to ancient texts and the site of some remarkable seaside monuments including the 7th century open-air Tamil art museum and the famous Shore Temple. Enjoy a lunch of southern Indian delicacies before proceeding to Pondicherry and check in to your hotel in the French Quarter. Pondicherry, known affectionately as Pondy, is one of India's most tranquil cities and was a location in Ang Li's film 'Life of Pi'. Established as the headquarters of the French East India Company in 1674, it is awash with yellow and white houses and colourful bougainvillea. This afternoon we wander through the 18th-century French Quarter which is full of colonial mansions, tree-lined bicycle routes, parks, cafés and boutiques.

Palais de Mahe | Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

**DAY 4 PONDICHERRY**

Today we tour Pondicherry, starting with Sri Aurobindo Ashram, founded by the Indian philosopher, yogi, guru, poet and nationalist Sri Aurobindo in 1926. The ashram is home to 1,200 devotees, including the 400 students of the Centre of Education, who live and work in the complex. The focus of community life is the Ashram's main building, in which Sri Aurobindo and his spiritual collaborator Mirra Alfassa, who came to be known as 'The Mother', dwelt for most of their lives. At its centre, under a tree-shaded courtyard, lies the Samadhi, a white-marble shrine where their bodies are laid to rest. We also visit Manakula Vinayagar Temple, more than 300 years old and dedicated to the elephant-headed deity Ganesha. It has a golden spire and walls portraying forty different forms of Ganesha. The temple also has a smaller shrine dedicated to Lord Murugan, Ganesha's younger brother. Over 5,000 devotees flock to this site every day. The temple compound also plays host to 'Lakshmi', the temple elephant, who uses her trunk to dispense blessings and to collect coins from the devotees. Before lunch, we tour Pondicherry museum, home to a superb collection of sculptures in the Bharathi Park. This museum also houses relics excavated from the nearby archaeological site of Arikamedu, a Roman settlement that dates from the second Century BCE. Lunch at the hotel is followed by a walk through the French Quarter, where the strong French influence in Pondicherry is most evident. The roads are lined with elegant Mediterranean-style houses and the bakeries are certainly worth a visit.

Palais de Mahe | Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

**DAY 5 PONDICHERRY**

This morning, visit Auroville, just outside Pondicherry. This experimental, New Age community, designed by architect Roger Anger, was founded in 1968 and attracts devotees from over 45 nations who come to follow the teachings of the great Indian philosopher and long-time Pondicherry resident Sri Aurobindo. Particularly impressive is the Matrimandir, a huge golden globe used as a meditation centre. Later, visit Mohanam Cultural Centre, the work of a group of young men from the villages surrounding Auroville, designed to bridge the gap between the old and the young, traditional and modern. Cultural events and festivals are conducted here throughout the year, aiming to protect and preserve the rich cultural heritage of South India.

Palais de Mahe | Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

**DAY 6 PONDICHERRY– THANJAVUR**

Today we drive further south to Thanjavur (formerly Tanjore), the ancient Chola capital, stopping on the way in Chidambaram to visit the vibrant Natraja Temple, famed for its bronze dancing Shiva and one of the holiest of all Shiva sites. Observe the daily Brahmin rituals at shrines throughout the 40-acre complex before continuing our journey to Thanjavur.

Svatma, Thanjavur | Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

**DAY 7 THANJAVUR**

Thanjavur is the home of one of India's most spectacular temples, the ochre-coloured granite Brihadisvara Temple, which we'll visit this morning. A UNESCO World Heritage site, built by King Rajaraja I to celebrate a military victory between 1003 and 1010, the temple exhibits architectural excellence: from the musical pillars, Chola-style murals and lime plaster frescoes to stucco sculptures of Lord Shiva's various incarnations and ancient Tamil inscriptions. The central tower has 16 tiers rising to a height of 66 metres, making it one of the tallest of its kind in the world. Several shrines dot the sprawling lawns of the complex, including one of India's



largest statues of Nandi (Shiva's sacred bull) carved out of a single rock. Later, we visit the magnificent 14th-century Tanjore Palace built for Maratha royalty and surrounded by huge fortress walls. Wander through its huge corridors, spacious halls and decorated rooms, and admire its beautiful stucco works, frescoed wall paintings and intricate carvings. Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant before an afternoon drive to Trichy for a tour of this thriving riverfront city in the heart of Tamil Nadu. Visit Srirangam, famous for its massive Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple, which has 49 separate shrines dedicated to Vishnu and is so large it feels like its own city. You also view the Rock Fort Temple, a spectacular monument perched on a massive rocky outcropping that towers over the old city. Later, return to Thanjavur.

Svatma, Thanjavur | Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

#### **DAY 8 THANJAVUR – MADURAI**

After breakfast, drive to Madurai, one of the oldest cities in South Asia, where the hilltop Gateway Hotel will be your base. En route, visit a Chettinad village and lunch at a local restaurant. Madurai is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Madurai's recorded history goes back to the third century BC. The city is famous for its temples built in the Dravidian style of architecture. It is also one of India's prominent Hindu pilgrimage centres.

The Gateway Pasumalai | Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### **DAY 9 MADURAI**

This morning, enjoy a half-day city tour of Madurai. The temple town of Madurai is known as the 'Athens of the East' with its rich cultural heritage spanning more than 2,500 years. Madurai is home to a maze of markets and museums. After your city tour, return to your hotel with the afternoon at leisure. This evening, witness a Hindu prayer ceremony ('aarti') at the 12th-century Meenaskshi Temple, a multi-tiered, technical wonder of a building, heaving with carved mythical figures and devoted pilgrims.

The Gateway Pasumalai | Meals: Breakfast

#### **DAY 10 MADURAI – THEKADY (PERIYAR NATIONAL PARK)**

After breakfast, travel overland into the state of Kerala to Periyar, checking in to your accommodation on arrival. Your journey takes you into the Western Ghats, a lush mountain range that rises parallel to India's Arabian Sea coast. Late afternoon, visit a local spice plantation where you enjoy the sights and smells of fresh spices and learn about their cultivation process. A visit to the spice plantations of Periyar is a treat for the senses. Take a stroll in the refreshing and lush green estates and enjoy the exotic aroma of the spices grown here, including cinnamon, cardamom, clove, black pepper, ginger, turmeric, vanilla and nutmeg. You can even pick some fresh spices to take home.

Spice Village | Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### **DAY 11 THEKADY (PERIYAR NATIONAL PARK) – KUMARAKOM**

After a leisurely breakfast, proceed to Periyar National Park for game viewing by boat. The scenic Periyar Lake in the middle of the sanctuary is a great place for boating and watching the elephants frolic. The calmness of the lake and the skeletal remains of the trees that protrude from its waters give the area a picturesque look. You can enjoy the beauty of the waters and watch a variety of birds and other animals in the National Park. There are 45 different kinds of reptiles and 27 different kinds of amphibians in the Periyar National Park, many of which can be spotted basking in the sun on the rocks along the lake shore. Later, descend a dramatic escarpment as you journey overland to the village of Kumarakom. Stop en route for lunch at a local restaurant in Kanjirappally, considered the entrance to Kerala's hill country. Upon arrival, check in to your beautiful lakefront resort.

Kumarakom Lake Resort | Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### **DAY 12 KUMARAKOM**

This morning, visit a local farming family. Learn something of their way of life before a cooking demonstration and lunch. A tour of their spice plantation is an extremely sensory experience, different parts of the plantation are used for growing different spices. A walk through the aromatic winding pathways of the plantation can be a truly relaxing experience. Complete the experience with a delicious meal made using these fresh spices. The taste and the memory is sure to stay with you for a long time. Later, return to the resort, with the rest of the day at leisure to relax and enjoy the many resort activities.

Kumarakom Lake Resort | Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

#### **DAY 13 KUMARAKOM**

Enjoy a full day at leisure. Relax at the resort with a rejuvenating Ayurvedic treatment (extra charge), walk or cycle down to the local village, or try a spot of fishing. Activities are at additional cost.

Kumarakom Lake Resort | Meals: Breakfast

#### **DAY 14 KUMARAKOM – ALLEPPEY – KOCHI**

After a leisurely morning, board a traditional houseboat for a cruise on the beautiful backwaters. Glide through canals and lagoons shaded by coconut palms and pass sleepy rural villages. You are treated to a lunch of local specialties as you cruise. Disembark and journey overland to Kochi, also known as Cochin, where you check in at your hotel. Tonight is at leisure or you may wish to visit the Greenix Theatre for a performance by the extravagantly costumed Kathakali dancers (optional, at extra cost).

Brunton Boatyard | Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### **DAY 15 KOCHI**

Spend the day exploring the tropical coastal city of Kochi, where you discover an intriguing mix of cultural influences. Visit one of the oldest Jewish synagogues in India, decorated with blue ceramic Chinese tiles and surrounded by an aromatic spice market. See the story of Ramayana depicted in the wonderful murals at charming Mattancherry Palace (Dutch Palace) and visit St. Francis Church, both of which were erected by the Portuguese in the 16th century. At the entrance of Kochi harbor, see the cantilevered fishing nets brought from southern China by traders — a testament to the centuries-old link between these regions. This evening you can opt to take a complimentary harbour cruise from the hotel before a farewell dinner.

Brunton Boatyard | Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

#### **DAY 16 KOCHI**

After breakfast, drive to the airport for your flight home. We'll see you again soon!

Today, your A&K arrangements come to a conclusion as you are transferred to the airport for your departure flight.

**Program Note:** Travel in this remote region entails long travel days; best available accommodations; and limited access to Western cuisine.

## Dates & Prices

Prices are in USD, per person, based on double occupancy.

Dates	Prices	Single Supplement	Availability
Oct 10 - Oct 25, 2019	\$7,795	\$2,995	Call for Availability

### Journey Details

**Minimum number of guests to guarantee operation:** Departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 2 guests.

**Maximum number of guests:** Limited to 18 guests.

**First group event:** Welcome briefing at 12:00 p.m. (noon) on Day 2.

**Last group event:** Farewell dinner at 7:30 p.m on Day 15.

**Tour inclusions:** All accommodation as detailed on a double occupancy with private facilities; meals as specified; bottled water during transfers and touring; airport welcome; assistance with luggage and group transportation by private air-conditioned vehicle; services of English speaking A&K Resident Tour Director; economy flights only if specified as included in itinerary, all entrance fees, planning, handling, operational and communication charges, all tipping.

**Tour Exclusions:** International flights not specified as included, visas, insurance coverage of personal loss, injury, illness or damages incurred during your trip; items of a purely personal nature such as drinks, laundry, dry cleaning, internet, fax or phone charges; transfers, sightseeing or meals not specified in itinerary; excess baggage charges.

Prices are per person based on double occupancy. Internal and international air not included. See complete terms and conditions [here](#).