

Spice of the South

Duration
15 days

Guaranteed
4 travellers

Group size
16 travellers

Price
From AUD \$ 5,133



WHAT TO EXPECT

Visit DakshinaChitra, an enchanting cross-cultural living museum that beautifully portrays the art, architecture, lifestyles, and crafts of South India. Immerse yourself in the rich heritage as you stroll through the French Quarter of Pondicherry, marvelling at the captivating blend of Indian and French architecture. Explore the breathtaking beauty of Munnar by taking a leisurely walk through its lush green plantations. Discover the essence of South India through these captivating experiences.

Day 1: Arrival in Chennai

Welcome to India! Upon arrival in Chennai, a transfer will take you to your hotel. In the evening, gather in the reception area of your hotel to meet your tour leader and the rest of your group for welcome drinks and a tour briefing. Please note it is common for international flights to arrive in Chennai late at night, so your tour briefing may take place tomorrow.

Day 2: Chennai to Mahabalipuram

This morning enjoy a short orientation tour of Chennai with visit to the local fish Market followed by Fort St. George & Museum. Drive past the Marina Beach, covered with glittering golden sand and a clear strip of blue sea, which is among the most magnificent beaches in India. Later drive to Mahabalipuram and visit Dakshinachitra en route. Continue the drive to Mahabalipuram and enjoy an afternoon at your leisure.

- Meals included: Breakfast
- Activities included: Visit of a local fish Market, Visit of Dakshinachitra

Day 3: Mahabalipuram

Rise early and make your way to Kokilamedu Village, here you will see the village life, local houses and beautiful landscapes. This is a fisherman village. Later visit the Five Rathas also known as Pancha Rathas, a set of rock temples. Arjuna's Penance – The Arjuna's penance is one of the most famous stone carvings at Mahabalipuram. Mandapams & Shore Temple – This beautiful and romantic temple, ravaged by wind and sea. Enjoy the rest of the day at leisure, perhaps take a visit to the beach.

- Meals included: Breakfast
- Activities included: Excursion to Kokilamedu village, Visit of the Pancha Rathas (Five Rathas) temples

Day 4: Mahabailpuram to Pondicherry

After breakfast drive to Pondicherry. On the way visit Auroville, which is also known as “the City of Tomorrow”. The purpose of Auroville is to realize human unity in diversity. Continue the drive to Pondicherry, enjoy a pleasant walk through the French quarters of Pondicherry. Later, visit the spiritual community of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The ashram grew out of a small community of disciples who had gathered around Sri Aurobindo after he retired from politics and settled in Pondicherry in 1910. On 24 November 1926, after a major spiritual realization, Sri Aurobindo withdrew from public view in order to continue his spiritual work. At this time, he handed over the full responsibility for the inner and outer lives of the sadhaks (spiritual aspirants) and the ashram to his spiritual collaborator, “the Mother”, earlier known as Mirra Alfassa.

- Meals included: Breakfast
- Activities included: Visit Auroville, also known as “the City of Tomorrow”, Walk through the French quarters of Pondicherry, Spiritual - Visit the spiritual community of Sri Aurobindo Ashram

Day 5: Pondicherry to Kumbakonam

This morning, depart for the lowlands of Kerala. On the way, enjoy a visit of Nataraj Temple. The Chidambaram Nataraja Temple is an excellent example of a unique amalgamation of a number of architectural styles. Continue the drive to Kumbakonam and visit Gangaikonda Cholapuram en route.

- Meals included: Breakfast
- Activities included: Visit of Nataraj Temple, Visit Gangaikonda Cholapuram

Day 6: Kumbakonam

Visit Mr. Ramamohan’s house in Kumbakonam. This is the home to the ancient art form of Kalamkari alive and thriving. Also visit the Dharasuram Airavateshwara Temple – The town of Darasuram is located near Kumbakonam. The temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, is a well-preserved example of 12th century Chola architecture. In the evening enjoy a ride on the bullock cart, piercing through the little village.

- Meals included: Breakfast
- Activities included: Arts & Craft - Ancient art form of Kalamkari and interaction with Mr. Rammohan in Kumbakonam, Visit of Dharasuram Airavateshwara Temple, Bullock cart ride through the village

Day 7: Kumbakonam to Chettinad

After breakfast, drive to Chettinad. En route enjoy a visit of Thanjavur, Brihadeswara Temple & Fort, it is an outstanding example of Chola architecture and is listed in world heritage. Continue driving to Chettinad. Chettinad is a region which includes Karaikudi and 74 other villages in Sivaganga district of southern Tamil Nadu state. This evening, discover the region of Chettinad and see the Chettinad Mansions and the local houses as well as the colourful surroundings.

- Meals included: Breakfast
- Activities included: Visit of Thanjavur, Brihadeswara Temple & Fort, Walk through Chettinad to see the beautiful Chettiar houses

Day 8: Chettinad to Madurai

Start your day with a drive to Madurai. Discover the superb Meenakshi Temple which is approx. 2,000 years old located in the heart of the old town - a splendid example of Dravidian architecture. Later, visit Thirumalai Nayakar Mahal (the palace) which was built by Tirumala Nayaka, the greatest of Nayakkar kings of Madurai. In the late evening, enjoy the ceremony ‘Bedtime of the God’ at Meenakshi Temple – A colourful procession, in which the image of Shiva is carried & accompanied by musicians, temple singers and priests from his shrine and entering in to Parvati’s (Meenakshi) temple to sleep with her for the night.

- Meals included: Breakfast
- Activities included: Visit of the Meenakshi Temple, Visit of the Thirumalai Nayakar Mahal, Spiritual - 'Bedtime of the God' ceremony at Meenakshi Temple

Day 9: Madurai to Munnar

After breakfast drive to Munnar. The queen of hill stations, Munnar has the highest peak in South India – Anamudi – which towers 2,695 meters above sea level. Today's Munnar has unending expanse of tea plantations – pristine valleys and mountains- exotic species of flora and fauna in its wild sanctuaries and forests – aroma of spice scented cool air.

- Meals included: Breakfast

Day 10: Munnar

Munnar is a pleasant hill station, set amongst dramatic hills with a patchwork of tea plantations, precariously perched on the side of steep embankments. The prevalence of the surrounding tea industry and the quality of the tea make Munnar one of the most important commercial centres for the tea trade. After early breakfast, enjoy a walking tour through the tea plantation in Munnar – We will walk through some of the lush green plantations to experience the beauty of this place. Visit the Srishti welfare centre. Later visit a Tea Factory and see the process of tea-making up close, with the opportunity to sample different blends and leaves – There are several tea factories in Munnar and vicinity that can be explored.

- Meals included: Breakfast
- Activities included: Walking tour through the tea plantations in Munnar, Social - Visit the Srishti welfare centre, Taste - Visit a Tea Factory to see the tea-making process and sample different blends

Day 11: Munnar to Kumarakom

This morning after breakfast we depart for the lowlands of Kerala. Stop en route at a family-run plantation which grows pineapples and rubber. Following a walk around the plantation, the family will invite you into their home, a sprawling plantation house which was built by their ancestors over one hundred years ago. Here we enjoy a delicious Keralan lunch, featuring some of the famous fresh vegetables and delicious local spices so typical of the state's cuisine. Set in rich lakeside gardens, Coconut Lagoon features beautiful Keralan architecture in its bungalows and common buildings and incorporates organic farming and local Ayurvedic traditions and culture into its operations and services. Relax for the remainder of the afternoon and enjoy the resort with its simple but stylish facilities, natural Keralan feel, and glorious lake views.

- Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch
- Activities included: Social / Taste - Visit a family-run plantation and enjoy lunch at their house

Day 12: Kumarakom

Today is at leisure to savour this beautiful setting and soak up the views and atmosphere of the backwaters. Enjoy a day cruising at backwaters along with the traditional lunch at House boat. This afternoon join-in a short cooking demonstration by one of our hotel's chefs, showcasing the delicious fresh spicy flavours of Keralan cuisine – perhaps a simple beetroot curry or a shrimp stir-fry. Following this, move to the lakeside gardens for special sundowners with a local touch, perfect for enjoying this superb location. There are other unique local activities available if you wish to take part, including birdwatching and butterfly garden walks in the hotel's lush grounds, ayurvedic massage, canoe rides, sunset cruise and evening cultural performances.

- Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch
- Activities included: Day Cruising in Backwaters with traditional lunch at House boat, Cooking demonstration showcasing the flavours of Keralan cuisine, Sundowners drink in the lakeside gardens

Day 13: Kumarakom to Cochin

After breakfast we will take you for a walk of Allapuzha (Alleppey) Town including a local lunch at one of the Volunteer's home. Later, sit back and relax as we continue our Journey to Cochin. Cochin has long been eulogized in tourist literature as the 'Queen of the Arabian Sea'. Cochin (now officially known as Kochi) is one of India's most attractive, unusual and pleasant cities. Built on a series of islands and surrounded by water, it is a port town with a complicated mix of influences and history, and is India's oldest 'European' city. Many cultures including Portuguese, Syrian, Chinese, Islamic and Jewish have had a huge impact on the city. It is home to some beautiful colonial architecture, the distinctive large Chinese fishing nets which are suspended from the quayside and the charismatic Jewish Town. With most main attractions based on Fort Cochin island, this is a great place for exploring, shopping for souvenirs and antiques and also for delicious culinary experiences – all accessible by foot from your hotel. We visit a cultural centre for a short demonstration of some of the famous Keralan performing arts, including thevams and kathakali, with their lavish costumes and subtle body language.

- Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch
- Activities included: Heritage walk in Allapuzha (Alleppey), Arts & Craft - Demonstration of Keralan performing arts, including thevams and kathakali

Day 14: Cochin

Enjoy a walk around Fort Cochin area – This walking tour gives you a glimpse into Cochin's rich history and heritage, showcasing the mixed Dutch, Portuguese, and British and Jewish influences that make the city unique. You will visit the St. Francis Church: it is the oldest church built by Europeans in India. After a short walk reach at Santa Cruz Basilica – a Roman Catholic Church with beautiful paintings on the ceiling – continue the walk and visit Dutch Cemetery, housed in the intriguing Matancherry Palace, an interesting old building circa 1555, containing detailed murals and costumes worn by Rajas from past centuries. Continue on to discover the Chinese Fishing nets (Cheenavala) which are distinctly unique to Cochin. In the evening, join your fellow travellers and tour leader for your farewell dinner and reminisce about the fabulous memories you will take with you after this journey.

- Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner
- Activities included: Walking tour of Cochin

Day 15: Depart Cochin

It's time to say goodbye, but just think of all the wonderful stories you will take home. Your journey ends after breakfast with a transfer to the airport for your onward flight to Delhi.

Meals included: Breakfast

Inclusions

Insider Experiences

- Arts & Craft – Ancient art form of Kalamkari and interaction with Mr. Rammohan in Kumbakonam
- Arts & Craft – Demonstration of Keralan performing arts, including thevams and kathakali
- Social – Visit the Srishti welfare centre
- Social / Taste – Visit a family-run plantation and enjoy lunch at their house
- Spiritual – ‘Bedtime of the God’ ceremony at Meenakshi Temple
- Spiritual – Visit the spiritual community of Sri Aurobindo Ashram
- Taste – Visit a Tea Factory to see the tea-making process and sample different blends

Accommodation

14 nights in 3-4 star hotels

Transport

- Airport transfer on arrival and departure
- Air-conditioned vehicle

Meals

- Daily breakfast
- 3 local lunches
- 1 local dinner

Touring

- English speaking tour guide
- All entrance fees
- All tipping

Contact your local travel agent