

TRIP TO SOUTH INDIA WITH ANDREW HARVEY - 2012

Tamil Nadu, once known as the Coromandel Coast, has a language over 2,000 years old and poetry dating back to before birth of Christ. It also boasts some of the most remarkable temple architecture in India, and, with a living tradition of music and dance, is culturally very rich. Temple towns and historic sites are dotted across the plains, especially in the fertile Thanjavur delta. Together with the former French territory of Pondicherry, with its own distinctive colonial inheritance, Tamil Nadu is one of India's most rewarding states to visit.

*A foot in the door

Stand facing the sea at **Mahabalipuram's** shore temple at dawn, then walk down the rock carving, the descent of the Ganges, to catch it in the early morning sun.

Watch the silk weavers of **Kanchipuram**.

Talk your way into a trip of a fishing catamaran.

23 Jan - Arrive Chennai.

Under Own arrangements to reach Hotel Taj Coromandel.

Arrangements can be made for individual travelers to be met upon arrival at Airport and transferred to hotel.

Afternoon city sightseeing tour.

Before we commence our sightseeing tour we will meet in a small room wherein we get to know each other.

We will visit Fort St George, St Mary's Church, Kapaleeswarar Temple, is a 16th century Siva temple with a 40 meter gopuram, built after the original was destroyed by the Portuguese in 1566. This temple is sacred to Saivites.

Dinner and overnight at hotel.

24 Jan - Chennai / Tiruvannamalai. Drive 160 Kms. Approximately 5 hours drive.
The first 100 kms drive is on the main highway and the last 60 kms is drive through the country side.

Upon arrival check in to hotel.

Late in the evening visit the ashram of Swami Rammana Maharishi.

Dinner and overnight at hotel.

25 Jan - In Tiruvannamalai - In a striking setting at the foot of the rocky Arunachala Hill this town is one of the holiest towns of Tamil Nadu, and is considered the home of Siva and his consort Parvati. It is a major pilgrimage centre.

Rest of the day free for independent activities and all those who wish to go back to Ashram and wander around spend time at the library.

In the evening walking tour of Mount Arunachala... the circumambulation of Arunachala , known as Pradakshana (pra signifies the removal of all sins, da the fulfillment of all desires, shana the freedom from the cycle of of rebirth. Along the way, offerings are made at a string of shrines, tanks, temples, lingams,sacred rocks, springs, trees, caves, etc.

Arrive late in the evening for dinner.

Overnight at hotel.

26 Jan - Tiruvannamalai / Pondicherry. Drive 110 Kms. 3 hours.

Upon arrival check in to hotel Kailash Beach Resort.

After lunch visit the town.

Pondicherry is now renamed as Puducherry and this place still enjoys a hint of its French colonial atmosphere in the grid patterns streets, distinctive police uniforms and the occasional colonial building. Yet despite its invigorating seafront and relaxing atmosphere the town is visited above all for the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Dinner and overnight at hotel.

27 Jan - In Pondicherry.

After breakfast drive to Auroville.

Futuristically designed, the lay out of the Auroville and its major buildings were to reflect the principles of Sri Aurobind o's philosophy. Far from fully complete, it is nonetheless a striking living experiment.

The Matrimandir (started in 1968) at the centre is a 30 meter high globe with the lotus bud shaped foundation urn in the meditation room with 12 hollow pillars and the centerpiece crystal, said to be largest in the world.

Rest of the day at leisure to walk around the sea or swim in the pool.

Dinner and overnight at hotel.

28 Jan - Pondicherry / Tanjore. via Chidambaram Drive 170 Kms.

After an early breakfast drive to Chidambaram (70 Kms).The capital of the Cholas from AD 907 to 1310. Visit the Natraja Temple, dedicated to the dancing Lord Shiva, a favourite deity of the Chola Kings. One legend surrounding its construction suggest that it was built by "the golden colored Emperor", Hiranya Varna Chakravati, who suffered from leprosy. He came to Chidambaram on a pilgrimage from Kashmir in about AD 500.After bathing in the temple tank he was reputed to have recovered from the disease, and as a thanks-offering rebuilt and enlarged the temple. This is a very highly active temple.

Lunch at a local hotel and drive to Tanjore enroute stopping for tea / coffee.

A long and a satisfying day.

Dinner and overnight at Hotel.

29 Jan - Tanjore.

Tanjore's ' Brihadisvara Temple', a world Heritage Site, is one of the great monuments of South India. This temple known as "Big Temple" is the achievement of the Chola King Rajaraja 1 (ruled AD 985 - 1012). The magnificent main temple has a 62 meter vimana (the tallest in India), topped by a dome carved from a 80 ton block of granite, which needed a 6.5 km ramp to raise it to the top. The attractive gardens, the clean surroundings make a rewarding experience.

Visit the museum.

In the evening witness the classical South Indian Dance.

Overnight at hotel.

30 Jan - In Tanjore.

Visit Darsuram which is a small town 4 km west of Kumbakonam. The temple Airatesvara Temple built by Raja Raja II (1146-63) is a superb example of 12th century Chola architecture. The temple is fronted by columns with unique miniature sculptures.

Dinner and overnight at hotel.

31Jan - Tanjore / Shantivanam. Drive 3 hours.

Upon arrival check in to Ashram.

Lunch at Ashram.

Saccidananda Ashram, Shantivanam, the ashram of the Holy Trinity, was founded in 1950 by two French fathers, Jules Monchanin and Henri La Saux. The "search for god" the quest of the Absolute, which has inspired monastic life in India from the earliest times. The aim of ashram remains to establish way of contemplative life, based like on the traditions of Christian monasticism and of a Hindu Sannyasa. Hinduism has a tradition of Sannyasa, renunciation of the world in order to seek God or in Hindu terms, "liberation" which goes many centuries before the birth of of Christ.

Given below is the time table of the Ashram.

3.30 PM Tea

4.00 PM Talk by Br. Martin on scheduled days.

6.00 PM Meditation, Silence.

7.00 PM Evening prayer, Super

9.00 PM Namajapa, Silence.

01 Feb - In Shantivanam .

The accommodation in Shantivanam will be very basic and the meals would be Vegetarian and very humble. You are expected to sit on the floor and eat with hands .

In the mornings and evenings we shall go a walks to the nearby village and the river bank.

The local village tailor who will come to our ashram and all those who wish to get cotton Indian dresses can order.

Meals and overnight at the ashram.

02 Feb - Shantivanam / Mahabalipuram. Drive 8 hours.

The longest drive of the tour.Upon arrival checks in to a beach hotel.
Dinner and overnight at hotel.

03 Feb - In Mahabalipuram.

Morning sightseeing tour. Mahabalipuram (renamed as Mamallapuram), famous for its shore temple, was the second capital and seaport of the Pallava Kings of Kanchipuram. This beautiful and romantic temple, ravaged by wind and sea, the final phase of Pallava art. Originally constructucted around the middle of the 7th century.

Arjuna's Penance :

This relief carving on the face of a huge rock depicts animals, deities and other semi divine creatures. Varying accounts relate the meaning of the Arjuna's Penance relief. One of them is of Arjuna who does penance to Shiva in order to secure the weapon that will destroy his opponents .Many interpretations can be read into the stories, but whatever the carvings depict,it's one of the most realistic and unpretentious rock carvings in India.

Rest of the day free for independent activities. You could shop in local bazaars Or walk on the beach.

Dinner and overnight at hotel.

04 Feb – Mahablipuram / Kanchipuram. Drive 2 hours.

Have a leisurely breakfast and lunch. Free time till lunch.

Drive to Kanchipuram. Upon arrival check in to hotel.

In the evening visit temples and shop for silk. The temple town of Kanchipuram is one of the seven sacred cities of India. Of the original 1000 temples, there about 200 left. By the 3rd century AD Kanchipuram was reputedly a sophisticated city with diverse cultures and languages. It was significant for Buddhist scholarship, although Hinduism and Jainism were also prevalent.

Dinner and overnight at hotel.

05 Feb – Kanchipuram / Chennai. 80 Kms .2 hours drive.

After a leisurely breakfast drive to Chennai.

Upon arrival check in to hotel. Dinner and overnight at hotel.

06 Feb – Chennai / Out.

END OF SERVICES .

What to Take

Travel light. Most essentials are available in the larger cities, items are cheap laundry services are generally speedy. Here are some items you might find particularly helpful in India.

Loose-fitting, light cotton clothes are good for traveling at this time of the year. Being cool and comfortable with the added advantage of being quick drying.

Sarongs are useful – they can be used as skirt, scarf, towel, etc. Women should dress modestly. Brief shorts and vest tops are best avoided though on beach 'modest' swimwear is fine.. Locally bought, inexpensive and cool kurta pyjama for men and shalwar kameez for women are excellent options. Comfortable shoes, sandals or trainers are essentials. As you would be visiting many temples and you are expected to remove shoes at the entrance of temples and best would be wear sandals as each time one does not have to tie and untie shoe laces and remove socks.

It is best to take sufficient supply of personal medicines from home, including inhalers and anti-malarial drugs -Proguanil is not available from pharmacists. Most toiletries, contact lenses, cleaners, tampons are available in the larger cities.

Photocopies of essential documents, passport identification and visa pages are spare photos are useful when applying in case of loss or theft.