

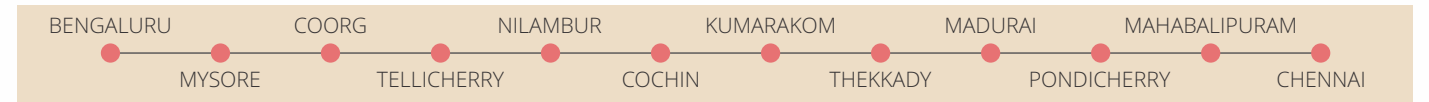
INDIA
SOUTH



STH4 > 21 DAY TOUR

THE MASALA MIX

If you had to look for a definition of Tamil-Carnatic culture, it would be found in the smells, sights and sounds, in its distinctive cuisine, people and temples. Women in bright silk sarees, their hair threaded with white and orange flowers; the men in white dhotis, foreheads smeared with holy ash. The restaurants smell of curry leaves and coconut, temples of white jasmine flowers and sandalwood incense; the rhythmic chanting of prayers reverberates in the air. This itinerary is a heady mix of religion, culture and heritage of the three states of south India – Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Along the way, explore the plains and the hills, the coffee, spice and rubber plantations, the eternal rainforests, the bougainvillea-lined cobbled streets, the backwaters and the coast where the Romans and the Arabs arrived in peace to trade, meet and stay with some of south India's oldest and most distinctive communities. Get a personal insight into the life and times of these custodians of age-old traditions and practices in a modern world.



Insider Tips:

- This itinerary is best done during the months of December, January, February, and March.
- It rains in Tamil Nadu during the months of October and November and again from June to September. In Kerala and Karnataka, monsoons last from June to September.
- The 15th century Mysore Dasara is celebrated in the month of September/October every year in Mysore for ten days. It is the state festival of Karnataka and the Mysore Palace remains illuminated during the entire period.
- Between mid-March and early-April, Coorg is bedecked in a sea of white blossoms. This is when the coffee flowers bloom. Though the flowering season is short lived, it is the best time to go for a walk in a coffee plantation here.
- Theyyam season in north Kerala starts mid-November and lasts till the end of March.
- The quirky Cochin Carnival is held at Fort Cochin on January 01 every year. It was started by the Portuguese in the 16th century as a celebration to welcome the new year.
- The International Yoga Festival of Pondicherry is held every year from 4th to the 7th of January.
- Cooking lessons in Franco-Pondicherry or Creole cuisine are available to only those guests who opt to stay at the Dune Eco Village and Spa in Pondicherry.
- The month long Mahabalipuram Dance Festival, which showcases classical and folk dances from all over India, is held every year in Mahabalipuram during the month of January/February.





TOUR ITINERARY | STH 4

DAY 01 ARRIVAL BENGALURU - MYSORE

Warm welcome at the airport by our representative and transfer to Mysore, the erstwhile capital of the Wodeyar Kings, the birthplace of Ashtanga Yoga, one of India's most pedestrian friendly cities and everything that is quintessentially Karnataka. Visit the Mysore Palace in the evening to see it illuminated by a hundred thousand bulbs (Sunday only). Mysore has the distinction of being the first city in Asia to produce hydroelectric power.

DAY 02 IN MYSORE

Early risers may want to explore Mysore on bicycles and witness the city waking up and having the famed Mysore *Dosa* for breakfast. Those who don't want to wake up early, can opt for a walking tour, which is a great introduction to the city, its history, culture, markets and culinary delicacies including the *dosa*! In the afternoon, we suggest the Mysore Silk Walk for textile enthusiasts that includes meeting the artisans. Foodies may want to visit the market, shop for ingredients and later cook dinner with a local family.

DAY 03 IN MYSORE

Birders may want to head out early for a boat ride at the Ranganathithu Bird Sanctuary to explore the largest bird sanctuary in Karnataka, home to 170 species of birds. Alternatively, go straight to Srirangapatnam to hear stories about Tipu Sultan's ingenious war tactics. Post lunch, drive to Somnathpur to admire the

magnificent 12th century Chennakesava Temple with its outstanding carvings.

DAY 04 MYSORE - COORG

Drive to Coorg, which is essentially a large tree-shadowed coffee estate cut up by winding hill roads. Some of the world's best coffee is grown here and it is home to the ancestor-worshipping Kodava community. Spend your afternoon taking a leisurely stroll in a coffee plantation. The lush vegetation that provides shade for the coffee plants also has amazing bird life.

DAY 05 IN COORG

Visit a Kodava family in their coffee estate and see the unique *Ain-mane* (ancestral home). Witness their unique culture and customs which are a very interesting mix of Animism and Hinduism. Later, enjoy a traditional lunch with the family. Alternatively, help the workers in a coffee plantation - from pruning coffee plants to harvesting ripe red coffee berries.

DAY 06 COORG - TELlichERRY

Drive to Tellicherry in north Kerala for an insight into the life and times of the Moppila Muslims, descendants of the Arab traders who came to Kerala for pepper and other spices as early as the 4th century AD. Between November and March, a must-attend in the evening is a *Theyyam* - the dance of the Oracle, unique to north Kerala. Watch ordinary men transform into gods in a cacophony of hypnotic

chants and music.

DAY 07 IN TELlichERRY

Visit the local market to shop for the Moppila cooking lesson. Listen to stories of how the Arab traders intermarried with the locals and forged unique traditions in literature, art, music, history and really good food. If in season, head out again for a *Theyyam* performance. It changes from village to village.

DAY 08 TELlichERRY - NILAMBUR

Drive to Nilambur, one of India's oldest rubber-growing areas for an insight into the life of the Namboothiri Brahmins, the indigenous, elite priestly class of Kerala who are custodians of some of the oldest rituals known to mankind. Spend two nights here in a heritage homestay with the Namboothiri hosts. Visit the temple where close to 300 devotees turn up every day to pray.

DAY 09 IN NILAMBUR

The hosts run a school and it is fascinating to interact with local children. Take a slow train ride with the host from Thuvur to Nilambur (30 minutes) to visit the Dawson Teak Museum followed by a trip to Connolly's Plot - the world's oldest teak plantation. Post lunch, learn about the elegant terracotta murals and irresistible earthenware. Try your hand at pottery.

DAY 10 NILAMBUR - COCHIN

Drive to Cochin. Spend the afternoon relaxing and enjoying the

This is a primordial Kerala festival which comes alive in the night, combining ancient customs and traditions. Ordinary men transform to Gods in a cacophony of hypnotic chants and music. With its psychedelic colours and pageantry, it is a rare and an unforgettable experience of the strange, ancient and private universe of the simple country folks of North Kerala. It is believed by the locals that the Oracle of a Theyyam possessed by spirits can cure an illness, ensure a good harvest or drive away evil spirits.

facilities of the hotel in Fort Cochin.

DAY 11 IN COCHIN

Get acquainted with the city's history and heritage which is a wonderful mix of Dutch, Portuguese, British and Jewish influences. In the evening, take lessons in Syrian Christian cuisine from a local and enjoy dinner with the family. Syrian Christians are the descendants of the first converts and trace their origins to the evangelistic activity of Saint Thomas in the 1st century. They are one of the oldest Christian communities in the world.

DAY 12 COCHIN - KUMARAKOM

Drive to Kumarakom. Take a day cruise on a Kettuvallam. Originally these boats were used to ferry rice in the backwaters. Lunch on board. Spend the night in a charming backwater hotel.

DAY 13 KUMARAKOM - THEKKADY

Drive to Thekkady with its eternal rainforest, spice plantations and canopies. The adventurous may want to go on a night walk in the buffer zone of the Periyar Tiger Reserve, shining flashlights to spot animals in the dark. It lasts for about three hours. Not for the faint hearted.

DAY 14 IN THEKKADY

Depending upon the interest and fitness, one could either choose a walking tour, rafting on the Periyar Lake or cycling around the fertile plains bordering Tamil Nadu. For lunch, visit a local plantation.

DAY 15 THEKKADY - MADURAI

Drive to Madurai, the 2500 year old, bustling, little temple town. Enjoy a walking tour to hear stories of Madurai's inspirational culture, heritage and food. Later, visit the Meenakshi Temple at night for its 'going to bed' ceremony where the deities are put to bed.

DAY 16 MADURAI - PONDICHERRY

Take the early morning train to Villupuram, the nearest railway station to Pondicherry. Spend the afternoon relaxing and later enjoy a walk at the promenade and a coffee at the terrace of Le Café by the sea, open 24 hours.

DAY 17 IN PONDICHERRY

Walk around and explore the French quarter, with its cobbled streets lined with bougainvillea, chic shops and restaurants. Don't forget to stop by Cottage Naturals for incense sticks, organic soaps and lots of other handcrafted things, and at Zuka for its desserts and quick bites. In the evening, take lessons on Franco-Pondicherry or Creole cuisine which is a fascinating amalgamation wherein the dishes are invariably Tamil, cooked the French way - slow, meticulous, elaborate and mild.

DAY 18 PONDICHERRY - MAHABALIPURAM

Drive to Mahabalipuram for a lovely, enjoyable, and relaxing three nights by the beach. It was once an ancient port for the Romans who came to south India in search of spices, gemstones, silk fabrics, ivory,



The three states of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu are hot and humid.



All our Guides are fluent in the local language of the region. While most locals understand English, it may not be understood by all.

sandalwood, iron and steel, peacocks and dancing girls. In return, they exported wine, gold and silver. Mahabalipuram is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site famous for its shore temples.

DAY 19/20 IN MAHABALIPURAM

Spend time relaxing on the beach, the pool or the spa. Explore the shore temples and the fishing village.

DAY 21 MAHABALIPURAM - CHENNAI - DEPARTURE

Transfer to Chennai airport for the onward flight.