TOUR CODE

I22

ADVENTURESABROAD

SOUTHERN INDIA IN DEPTH

Kochi • Kerala • Mysore • Hassan • Pondicherry

18 days

Updated 11/12/2013

Day 1 *Arrive in Bangalore*

Today we arrive in Bangalore. Transfer to our hotel.

Overnight in Bangalore. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Bangalore - Shravanabelagola - Hassan*

This morning we depart by road for Hassan.

En route we stop at Shravanabelagola, the famous Jain pilgrimage center and one of the oldest in India. The place is known as one of the greatest monuments of Jain art. The collosal statue of Gomateswara (57 feet) is situated on the summit of Indragiri hill from which we can enjoy expansive views. After our visit we drive further to reach our hotel in Hassan.

Overnight in Hassan. Hoysala Village or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Hassan - Belur & Halebid - Hassan*

Today we have a day-trip to Belur and Halebid.

Belur and Halebid were both capitals of the medieval Hoysala kings who built the exquisitely carved temples in the 12th & 13th centuries. Belur is famous for it Hoysala architecture; its Temple of Lord Channakeshava is embellished with carving which has few equals in the world. It took 103 years to complete and you can see why. The facade of the temple is filled with intricate sculptures and friezes with no portion left blank -- elephants, episodes from the epics, sensuous dancers -- awe-inspiring in their intricate workmanship.

Halebid was the seat of Hoysala Kingdom; its great Hoyaleswara Temple was built in the typical Hoysala style architecture. The temple, dating back to the 12th century, is astounding for its wealth of sculptural details. The walls of the temple are covered with an endless variety of gods and goddesses, animals, birds and dancing girls. Yet no two facets of the temple are the same. This magnificent temple -- guarded by a Nandi Bull -- was never completed, despite 86 years of labour.

We return to Hassan.

Overnight in Hassan. Hoysala Village or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Hassan - Mysore*

Today we travel by road to Mysore.

Our sightseeing of this princely town will include the famous Palace of Mysore, once the residence of Wodeyar kings and one of the largest of its kind in India. Built in 1912 in the Indo Saracenic style, this palace has a grandeur that is unmatched. We will visit the Jayachamsrajendra Art Gallery housed in the Jaganmohan palace. This gallery has a collection of exquisite paintings dating back to 1875 and then we drive to Chamumdi Hill Temple at a height of 1062 m (3,500 ft). The 2,000-year-old temple is dedicated to Goddess Chamundi. A seven storey, 40 m (130 ft) high tower, dominates the temple. A view of the entire city from this hilltop is impressive.

Overnight in Mysore. Sandesh the Prince Hotel or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Mysore - Srirangapatna - Mudumalai*

After breakfast we drive to Mudumalai, via a tour of Srirangapatna, one of the most important Vaishnavite centers of pilgrimage in south India, built by the Chieftain Thirumalaiah in 894 AD.

We continiue to Mudumalai, one of South India's largest wildlife reserves. Situated in the foothills of Nilgiris, Mudumalai and Bandipur is a large reserve (3000 sq km) with ranges in vegetation from semi-evergreen forests to swamps and grasslands. In Mudumalai the dense forest is home to spotted deer, Indian bison, tiger, panther, wild boar, sloth bear, and herds of wild elephants. The elephant population, estimated around 600, is one of the largest in India.

On arrival we check in to our hotel. This evening we view the Elephant Worship (Pooja) ceremony.

Overnight in Mudumamai. Jungle Retreat. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Mudumalai Wildlife Reserve*

Mudumalai Wildlife Reserve was the first sanctuary in South India. The terrain is extremely varied with hills, valleys, ravines, watercourses and swamps. The vegetation comprises of tropical moist deciduous forests, dry deciduous forests and scrub forests. Wild elephant, gaur, deer and primates, like the bonnet macaque and langurs, all inhabit the park. The predators include the tiger, leopard and the dhole -- the Asiatic wild dog, which hunts in packs.

In the cool of the dense forests, among the stands of teak and bamboo thickets, are colourful birds hornbills, the great black woodpecker with its dramatic red-crested mynahs, barbets and parakeets. The tiny eared owl, the scops owl and the little scops owl are more heard than seen.

In the morning we have a jeep safari in the forests of Mudumalai. You can enjoy elephant ride to areas inaccessible by vehicles (if available).

Overnight at Mudumalai. Jungle Retreat. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Mudumalai - Ooty - Train to Mettupalayam*

Today we travel to Ooty where we visit the Botanical Gardens.

After a lunch break we catch the Nilgiri Mountain Railway, a steam train to Mettupalayam (1500 hrs to +/- 1800 hrs).* The railway is one of the oldest mountain railways in India. Under consideration since 1845, the line was finally opened by the British in 1899, and was initially operated by the Madras Railway Company. The railway is one of the few in the

world dependent on steam locomotives. This narrow gauge mountain train winds through 46 km of forests, tea plantations, 16 tunnels, and more than 250 bridges. Moving at a pace little faster than walking, the journey takes a while, but is more than compensated by stunning views.

Mettupalayam is the starting point for two of the Ghat Roads into the Nilgiri Hills. Subsequently it has established itself for the trade of fresh fruits and vegetables coming down from the hills and also for produce that grows in the plains and is destined for the hills.

* NOTE: Train operation is occasionally curtailed due to heavy rains or landslides.

Overnight in Mettupalayam. Black Thunder Resort (best available). Breakast and Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Mettupalayam - Kochi*

Today we travel by road to Kochi (Cochin).

The history of European involvement in Kochi, from the early sixteenth century onwards, is dominated by the aggression of, successively, the Portuguese, Dutch and British, competing in their desire to control the port and its lucrative spice trade. From 1800, the state of Cochin was part of the British Madras Presidency; from 1812 until Independence in 1947, its administration was made the responsibility of a series of diwans, or financial ministers. In the 1920s, the British expanded the port to make it suitable for modern ocean-going ships; extensive dredging created Willingdon Island, between Ernakulam and Fort Cochin.

This evening we attend the famous dance drama of Kerala, the "Kathakali". This dance is characterized by grotesque gesticulations, amazing costumes and very extensive make-up. The stories are mostly taken from the epics Mahabharatha and Ramayana.

Overnight in Kochi. Fort Heritage Hotel or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Kochi: City Tour*

Today we have a tour of Kochi, including: Chinese fishing Nets - A legacy of one of the earliest visitor to the Malabar Coast, these nets are unmistakable as one enters the harbour. Records show that they were first erected between AD 1350 and 1450. Constructed out of teak wood and bamboo poles, they work on the principle of balance. The best place to watch is from Vasco Da Gama square, a narrow promenade that parallels the beach with little stalls that serve fresh seafood, tender coconuts and so on.

Santa Cruz Basilica: Built by the Portuguese, the church was elevated to a Cathedral by the Pope Paul IV in 1558. Spared by the Dutch conqueror of Cochin who destroyed many Catholic buildings in 1663, it later fell into the hands of the British who demolished it when they took over Cochin in 1795. For almost 100 years there was no church on the site, until the Bishop Dom Gomez Vereira commissioned a new building in 1887.

Also at Mattancherry is the Jewish Synagogue built in 1568 AD by the prosperous Jewish trading community whose links with Kerala begin in Kodungallor (Cranganore) in the north of the state. This is the oldest synagogue in India. It was partially destroyed in the war of 1662 and was rebuilt by the Dutch. In the mid-18th century the clock tower was added and the floors paved with exquisite hand-painted blue willow tiles from China.

Overnight in Kochi. Fort Heritage Hotel or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Kochi - Alappuzha - Houseboat Cruise*

Today we drive to Alappuzha (Alleppey), known as the "Venice of the East", situated on the Vembanad Lake, the longest lake in India. A maze of canals and a network of bridges give this busy commercial town its descriptive sobriquet. Alleppey is known for its coir, the retted fibre of the coconut husk and for black pepper.

Today we board our houseboat for a very special Kerala delight -- a slow boat cruise through its forests and palm-shaded canals. We take a leisurely cruise on the beautiful backwaters, enjoying the magnificent scenery along the waterwaysand stopping to admire what history and religion have left along the way.

THE HOUSEBOAT will be approx 60 feet long and 13 feet wide in the middle. There are two bedrooms on each boat with one bathroom with shower; comfortable beds, and traditional lanterns. There will be a sundeck for daytime relaxation. The boats are made of local natural fibres that truly echo the villagers' harmony with the natural surroundings. We will enjoy the magnificent scenery along the waterways and stop to view working villages and witness locals fishing, swimming, crafting, and bathing. The houseboats have the provision for air-conditioning, but most travellers do not care for the all-night gasoline engine noise required to run the units. Most people find that the peace and quiet, and comfort provided by a fan, are preferred.

NOTE: Single cabins are NOT available on the houseboat. Single supplements reflect sharing for these nights.

Overnight houseboat cruise. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Houseboat Cruise*

We have a full day cruising during which you can relax on the shaded deck or observe the landscape from the cabin. Much of the local population's whole life takes place here on the water; the people sail, fish, swim and bathe here. Countless water birds wait for their chance to catch a fish. Our trip goes through a wonderful area full of palm trees and rice fields, and we stop along the way, walk through some villages and observe local life close up.

Overnight houseboat cruise. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 12 *Alappuzha - Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary*

Today we disembark our boat and travel by road to a lower lying part of the mountain range where tropical rainforest still holds its own in the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary (travel time +/- 6 hours). En route we can visit a plantation. On arrival we check in to our hotel.

Overnight in Periyar. Silver Crest Hotel or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Periyar: Nature Excursions - Madurai*

This morning we board a boat for a tour of the park. With luck, there are many animals to see, including herds of elephants, bison and packs of wild boar that roam through the woods and parade along the shores of the lake just before sunrise and sunset. You can also see different species of apes. Other animals often observed are otters and porcupines, while turtles can often be seen sunning themselves on the pieces of wood that stick out of the water.

This afternoon we have a guided forest walk in the Periyar Tiger Reserve. This 3 hour walk gives you an opportunity to

see the wild life at a very closer distance. You can have a (slim) chance to spot a leopard or tiger.

We then return to the hotel for refreshment and check out before driving to Madurai.

Overnight in Madurai. Germanus Best Western Hotel or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Madurai: City Tour*

Today we have a tour of Madurai, visiting the Sri Meenakshi Temple where thousands of priests and worshippers come daily. People are blessed by the temple elephant and astrologists read the stars and hands. You can also get your fortune read by parrots that pick tarot cards out of a pile. All the believers bathe themselves in the temple baths. The temple in-houses a thousand pillared hall and is one of the major attractions of the temple. In the evening sermons are held within the walls of the temple and concerts are often given in honour of the gods.

Optional: Later you might choose to participate in a local rickshaw tour. Over the years the local rickshaw wallas have been trained to show clients the town of Madurai in their cycle rickshaws to earn a living. This tour takes you to the local oil mill run with cattle, the local vessel merchants and many interesting sites.

Overnight in Madurai. Germanus Best Western Hotel or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Madurai - Villupuram - Pondicherry*

We depart the hotel early this morning and transfer to the railway station and board the train to Villupuram. On arrival in Villupuram we drive to Pondicherry (01 hour). On arrival we check in to our hotel.

Overnight in Pondicherry. Anandha Inn or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Pondicherry: City Tour*

Pondicherry is a well-planned and well-built town. This is a typical example as one can learn the way the French people gave importance to order and flair. They are known for their rich and quality living. The French too had an eye on the wealth and the fertility of India. Thus the French dream of Indian empire began and got over by establishing their supremacy in Pondicherry. The French constructed many buildings based on their craft and grand architecture. They developed an oval shaped, lovely 'boulevard town' -- the French quarter.

After breakfast we proceed for Pondicherry sightseeing. Pondicherry is a former French enclave especially famous because of the mystic, Sri Aurobindo. Followers founded temples, Ayurvedic clinics and a number of other businesses. Pondicherry still features French street names, croissants and policemen in French-style uniforms.

Overnight in Pondicherry. Anandha Inn or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Pondicherry - Mamallapuram*

Today we travel by road to Mamallapuram. Upon arrival and check we have a guided tour of this important site, including Arjuna's Penance (Bass Relief), and the monuments of Krishna's Butterball, Lion's throne, Five rathas (symbolising equality of men and women), ending with at the famous Shore Temple.

Overnight in Mamallapuram. Ideal Beach Resort or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Mamallapuram - Chennai (Madras) - Depart*

Today we transfer to Chennai and embark on a city tour.

After breakfast we embark upon a colonial tour of Chennai, located in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. Chennai is a comparatively modern creation. It was founded by the British East India Company in 1639, on a narrow five-kilometre strip of land between the Cooum and Adyar rivers. The British were repeatedly challenged by the French who, in 1746, destroyed much of the city.

Our city sightseeing of Chennai includes a visit to the National Art Gallery and Museum which has a selection of ancient paintings from almost all schools of art, as well as a section entirely devoted to modern art. We will visit Fort St George, once a stronghold of the British; St Mary's Church, the oldest Anglican church in India; the San Thome Cathedral where the remains of St Thomas the Apostle are believed to have been buried; the Mylapore Temple dedicated to Lord Shiva and the Light House which is the only one of its kind in the world to be located on top of a High Court. We drive along the Marina, the thirteen kilometre-long beach which, with its shining white sands, aqua blue sea and violet lights at night, is the pride of Chennai.

After dinner, transfer to the airport for homeward flights (most flights leave in the evening -- Land Only customers please take note.)

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.