Tour Code
IA5

ADVENTURESABROAD

SOUTHERN INDIA

15 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Goa

Welcome to India! This vast subcontinent enthralls visitors with its extraordinary cultural diversity, ancient history, and natural beauty from the Himalayas to tropical coastlines. Goa reflects a singular chapter in that story — a former Portuguese colony where whitewashed Baroque churches face Hindu temples across narrow lanes, where the Arabian Sea shapes daily life as much as any empire ever did, and where four and a half centuries of European presence left an accent on Indian culture found nowhere else in the country.

This evening we gather with fellow travellers for our first meal together, beginning what promises to be an unforgettable journey through one of the world's most captivating countries.

Overnight in Goa.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Goa Area Touring

This morning we tour Panaji, a former fishing village elevated to capital status by decree from Lisbon. The city feels distinctly un-Indian, its skyline of sloping red-tiled roofs, whitewashed churches, and pastel-painted houses stacked around lush terraced hillsides at the mouth of the Mandovi River. Portuguese architectural influence appears everywhere, particularly in Altinho, the residential area with colonial-era bungalows. The Patriarch's Palace, with its statue of Christ the King on the lawns, dominates the skyline. The Idalcao Palace, built in 1490, stands as Panaji's oldest monument, while the Church of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception offers the best views across the city.

We drive through Fontainhas, the atmospheric Latin Quarter, passing colourful old villas and pausing at St Sebastian Chapel to view statues including the Roman Catholic monk Abade Faria, Goa's most famous son.

Our tour continues to Old Goa, once called "Rome of the East" and now a UNESCO World Heritage site. This former metropolis, though largely in ruins, contains an extraordinary concentration of churches and cathedrals dating from the 16th century. The profusion of religious architecture showcases late Renaissance, early Baroque, Manueline, and Gothic styles, creating one of Asia's most impressive Christian architectural complexes.

At midday we visit Sahakari Spice Farm, an award-winning plantation set amidst lush greenery. A guide explains the cultivation and uses of spices, tropical fruits, herbs, and roots grown here: cashew, areca nut (betel nut), star fruit, jackfruit, custard apple, banana, papaya, and pineapple. We then enjoy an exquisite traditional Goan lunch served in authentic style.

The remainder of the day is yours to explore this laid-back town at leisure.

Overnight in Goa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 3 Goa: Heritage Tour

This morning we explore several sleepy villages, stepping back in time to glimpse historic remnants of Portuguese Goa.

Our first stop is Loutolim village and a grand mansion built in 1590, predating the Taj Mahal by decades. Jesuit priests from nearby Rachol Seminary designed it for the newly-converted Figueiredo family. The sumptuous interior, with its period furniture, Chinese porcelain, and Belgian chandeliers, contrasts beautifully with the paddy fields and coconut groves surrounding the property. The house expanded in the 18th century as the family's power grew, achieving its current impressive proportions.

We continue to Chandor village to visit the Menezes Braganza Mansion, Goa's largest Portuguese mansion. Built in the 17th century and stretching along one entire side of Chandor's village square, it exemplifies the grand lifestyle enjoyed by Goa's colonial elite. Finally, we visit

Palacio do Deao, a 250-year-old mansion built by a Portuguese nobleman and renowned for its beautiful pleasure gardens, considered the most exquisite in Goa.

We enjoy traditional lunch at Palacio do Deao, savouring Goan cuisine that blends ancient Hindu roots with Portuguese and Muslim influences. The tropical setting intensifies the spices and flavours that make Goan food distinctive.

The remainder of the day is yours for further exploration, shopping, or visiting one of the area's many beaches. Owing to our included lunch and the open-ended nature of the afternoon, dinner is on your own account this evening.

Overnight in Goa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 4 Goa - Badami

Today we embark on a long but scenic drive northeast to Badami, arriving late afternoon. Once we've settled into our hotel, we set out to explore Badami's remarkable rock-cut cave temples.

These 6th-century temples, carved directly from towering sandstone cliffs, represent some of India's earliest and finest rock-cut architecture. Four main caves contain intricate sculptures depicting Hindu deities including Shiva, Vishnu, and various manifestations of the divine. The Badami Chalukya dynasty, which ruled this region from 543 to 757 AD, created these masterpieces by removing thousands of tons of solid rock to reveal the temples within.

The setting adds drama to the artistry: the caves overlook Agastya Lake, with the ancient town spreading below and red sandstone fortifications climbing the surrounding hills. Depending on our arrival time, we may continue exploring Badami's historical sites tomorrow morning.

Overnight in Badami.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Badami - Aihole - Patadakkal - Hospet

After breakfast we travel by road to Hospet, stopping at two significant archaeological sites en route.

At Aihole, we explore a remarkable concentration of over 70 temples spanning the 4th to 12th centuries, earning the site recognition as the "cradle of Indian temple architecture." The experimental nature of these structures shows artisans testing different styles and forms that would later be refined at Pattadakal and elsewhere. The Durga Temple, with its unusual apsidal plan and pyramidal roof, features exceptional sculptural work, while the Jain Meguti Temple consists of 630 precisely fitted stone blocks assembled without mortar.

We continue to Pattadakal, a UNESCO World Heritage site where Chalukyan kings held their coronation ceremonies. The temples here represent the culmination of architectural experiments begun at Aihole. The Papanath Temple, built around 680 AD, contains a ceiling carving of a smiling Shiva whose outstretched palm appears to offer blessing from every viewing angle, a remarkable sculptural achievement. The larger Virupaksha Temple features a curious figure appearing as an elephant from one side and a buffalo from the other, demonstrating the sculptors' playful mastery of form.

We arrive in Hospet by late afternoon.

Overnight in Hospet.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Hospet - Hampi - Hospet

After breakfast we depart for a full-day excursion to Hampi, the ruined capital of the Vijayanagara Empire. This vast city, which flourished in the 14th to 16th centuries, commanded the largest empire in post-Mughal India, controlling territory across several modern states. Although now in ruins, the capital once boasted wealth and splendour known far beyond India's shores, with visiting Persian and Portuguese chroniclers recording their amazement at its markets, palaces, and temples.

The ruins scatter across 26 sq km/10 sq mi amidst giant boulders and scrubby vegetation. The Tungabhadra River protects the north, while rocky granite ridges shield the other three sides, creating a natural fortress. The site's surreal landscape of massive rounded boulders appears almost otherworldly, as if deposited by giants rather than shaped by geological forces.

The scattered remains of palaces, gateways, temples, stepped tanks, and sophisticated hydraulic systems silently chronicle a tale of extraordinary architectural achievement and creative power alongside catastrophic destruction. When a coalition of Deccan sultanates conquered and sacked Vijayanagara in 1565, the city never recovered, left to the elements and gradual ruin. The broken city's splendid remains nonetheless convey the scale and sophistication of a civilization that dominated southern India for over two centuries.

We return to Hospet in the late afternoon.

Overnight in Hospet.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Hospet - Hassan

After an early breakfast, we embark on a long but scenic drive through rural Karnataka to Hassan, a journey of approximately 7 hours. The route takes us through changing landscapes: cotton fields giving way to sugarcane plantations, small market towns bustling with morning commerce, and stretches of scrubland punctuated by granite outcrops.

This is rural India at its most authentic, far from tourist circuits. We pass bullock carts sharing the road with modern trucks, roadside temples adorned with fresh marigolds, and villages where daily life unfolds at a pace unchanged for generations. The drive provides a window into the agricultural heartland that sustains much of India's population.

We arrive in Hassan by late afternoon, with time to settle into our hotel and rest after the journey.

Overnight in Hassan.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Hassan: Belur & Halebid

Today we visit Belur and Halebid, twin capitals of the medieval Hoysala dynasty, renowned for temples built in the 12th and 13th centuries that represent the pinnacle of South Indian sculptural art.

At Belur, the Chennakeshava Temple took 103 years to complete, and the reason becomes immediately apparent. Not a single surface remains undecorated: the facade carries intricate sculptures and friezes depicting elephants in procession, episodes from Hindu epics, celestial dancers frozen in graceful poses, and mythological narratives rendered in extraordinary detail. The artisans left no portion blank, creating what amounts to a complete encyclopedia of Hindu mythology and medieval life carved in stone.

Halebid's Hoysaleswara Temple, though never completed despite 86 years of construction, astounds with its wealth of sculptural detail. The temple walls carry an endless variety of gods and goddesses, animals both real and mythical, birds, and apsaras (celestial dancers). The remarkable aspect is that no two sections repeat: each band of carvings tells different stories, depicts different deities, explores different artistic themes. A massive Nandi bull guards the entrance, eternally patient before a temple that remained unfinished when the Hoysala kingdom fell to invaders from the north.

The intricacy of the carving rivals anything found in India. Working in soft soapstone that hardens over time when exposed to air, Hoysala sculptors achieved a level of detail more common in ivory or wood than in stone architecture.

We return to Hassan in the late afternoon.

Overnight in Hassan.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Hassan - Mysore

This morning we drive to Mysore, arriving around midday with the afternoon devoted to exploring this elegant city.

Mysore's fame rests on silk, sandalwood, and spectacular palaces set along tree-lined boulevards and well-maintained parks. The Maharaja's Palace stands as the city's crowning jewel, a modern edifice built in 1897 after fire destroyed the previous wooden palace. One of India's largest palaces, it represents an exuberant synthesis of Hindu and Muslim architectural styles where oriental decorative imagination runs gloriously unchecked. The royal family's private chambers, including the impressive Durbar Hall, open to visitors. The Marriage Hall displays vivid paintings of the Dussehra procession, while the museum houses the ruler's golden elephant throne, used during festivals and state occasions.

We ascend Chamundi Hill, 10 km/6 mi from Mysore and named for Chamundeshwari, consort of Lord Shiva and patron goddess of Mysore's royal family. Partway up stands a colossal Nandi bull carved from a single rock in 1659, one of the largest such sculptures in India. The view from the hilltop temple extends across Mysore's orderly grid of streets and the surrounding plains, explaining why this site has held religious significance for centuries.

Overnight in Mysore.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Mysore - Bangalore: City Tour

Today we travel by road to Bangalore, the cosmopolitan capital of Karnataka, arriving with time for an afternoon city tour.

Bangalore earned its nickname "Garden City" from the delicate blossoms and lush greenery that soften this sprawling metropolis. The city enjoys India's most pleasant climate, with moderate temperatures year-round that attracted both the Raj-era British and modern tech companies seeking comfortable working conditions. The name Bangalore derives from "benda-kaal-ooru," meaning "town of boiled beans," though the city's character today extends far beyond this humble etymology.

Founded around the 16th century by Kempe Gowda, a chieftain of the Vijayanagara Empire, the city's original boundaries were marked by four towers built in the cardinal directions. Modern Bangalore has expanded exponentially beyond these markers, becoming India's tech hub and fifth-largest city.

We visit Lal Bagh Botanical Gardens, a green oasis featuring centuries-old trees, fountains, lotus pools, terraced gardens, and an impressive collection of tropical and subtropical plants. The gardens were commissioned by Hyder Ali in 1760 and completed by his son Tipu Sultan, creating a 240-acre sanctuary that remains the city's favourite retreat. We also view the imposing government buildings constructed during the British period, their Indo-Saracenic architecture reflecting the colonial administration's attempt to blend European and Indian styles.

Overnight in Bangalore.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Bangalore - Fly to Kochi - Allaphuza: Houseboat

Early this morning we fly to Kochi, then continue by road to Alappuzha (Alleppey), known as the "Venice of the East." This bustling commercial town sits on Vembanad Lake, India's longest, where a maze of canals and network of bridges justify its evocative nickname. Alappuzha thrives on coir production, the retted fibre of coconut husks, and serves as a major black pepper trading centre.

Today we board our houseboat for a quintessential Kerala experience: a leisurely cruise through the backwaters' forests and palm-shaded canals. Our vessel measures approximately 60 feet long and 13 feet wide, with comfortable beds, traditional lanterns, air conditioning, and a

sundeck for daytime relaxation. Constructed from local natural fibres including coir, bamboo, and palm fronds, these boats echo the harmony between villagers and their aquatic environment.

As our oarsman silently propels us along the waterways (some boats use silenced motors), we glide past working villages where life unfolds along the water's edge. Locals fish, bathe, wash clothes, craft coir rope, and tend small gardens on canal banks. Children wave from doorways of homes accessible only by boat. Kingfishers dart across the water while egrets stand motionless in the shallows. The pace slows to match the gentle current, creating a tranquil interlude far removed from India's usual intensity.

Overnight on Kerala houseboat.

NOTE: Single cabins are not available on houseboats. Single supplements reflect sharing for this night.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 12 Return to Kochi: City Tour

This morning we disembark from our houseboat and return to Kochi for a city tour.

Kochi's history chronicles European competition for control of India's lucrative spice trade. Portuguese, Dutch, and British powers successively dominated the port from the early 16th century onward, each leaving architectural and cultural marks. From 1800, Cochin became part of the British Madras Presidency, administered by a series of diwans (financial ministers) from 1812 until Independence in 1947. In the 1920s, the British expanded the port for modern ocean-going vessels, with extensive dredging creating Willingdon Island between Ernakulam and Fort Cochin.

We explore the Chinese fishing nets, an unmistakable harbour landmark. Records indicate these massive cantilevered nets were first erected between 1350 and 1450 AD, introduced by traders from the court of Kublai Khan. Constructed from teak wood and bamboo poles working on the principle of balance, they require four to six people operating counterweights to raise and lower them. The best viewing point is Vasco da Gama Square, where small stalls serve fresh seafood and tender coconuts.

We visit Santa Cruz Basilica, built by the Portuguese and elevated to cathedral status by Pope Paul IV in 1558. Spared when the Dutch destroyed many Catholic buildings in 1663, it later fell victim to the British, who demolished it in 1795. The present building, commissioned in 1887, recreates the grandeur of its predecessor with soaring Gothic arches and vibrant ceiling paintings.

Overnight in Kochi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Kochi - Fly to Chennai: City Touring

Today we fly to Chennai (formerly Madras), capital of Tamil Nadu.

Unlike India's ancient cities, Chennai is a relatively modern creation, founded by the British East India Company in 1639 on a narrow strip of land between the Cooum and Adyar rivers. The location lay just north of the ancient Tamil port of Mylapore and the Portuguese settlement of San Thome, established in 1522. The British faced repeated challenges from the French, who destroyed much of the city in 1746 and took Robert Clive prisoner. This experience reportedly inspired the clerk to become a military campaigner. Clive helped retake Chennai three years later and used it as his base for expanding British power in India.

Following the French siege of 1759, fortifications were strengthened and completed by 1783, though by then Calcutta had eclipsed Chennai's importance as Britain's primary Indian port.

We visit Fort St George, the British stronghold that anchored their presence in southern India, and St Mary's Church, the oldest Anglican church in India, dating to 1680. At San Thome Cathedral, we view the site where St Thomas the Apostle's remains are believed to rest. The Mylapore Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, showcases Dravidian temple architecture with its towering gopuram gateway. We drive along the Marina, Chennai's pride: a 13 km/8 mi beach of white sand and azure waters stretching along the Bay of Bengal.

Overnight in Chennai.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Chennai & Mahabalipuram

Today we drive approximately 60 km/37 mi south to Mahabalipuram, an ancient seaport and once-thriving centre of the Pallava dynasty.

This coastal town is renowned for rock-cut temples and intricate sculptures dating to the 7th century, when Pallava kings ruled much of southern India from their capital at Kanchipuram. Unlike the soaring gopurams of later Tamil temple architecture, Mahabalipuram's monuments embrace elegant simplicity and human scale. The famous Shore Temple, standing sentinel on the beach with waves breaking around its base, represents one of India's oldest structural stone temples, predating most northern Indian temple architecture by centuries.

The Five Rathas (chariots) are actually five temples carved from single boulders, each demonstrating a different architectural style. Nearby, the massive relief carving known as "Arjuna's Penance" or "Descent of the Ganges" covers a rock face 27 m/89 ft long and 9 m/30 ft high, depicting gods, humans, animals, and celestial beings in exquisite detail. The sculptures depict everyday life alongside divine narratives, offering remarkable insights into Pallava society and artistic vision.

What distinguishes Mahabalipuram is the experimental nature of the work: artisans here were innovating, testing forms and styles that would influence South Indian temple architecture for centuries to come.

After lunch by the serene Bay of Bengal, we return to Chennai, carrying with us the memory of these extraordinary monuments that helped shape an entire architectural tradition.

Overnight in Chennai.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Departure

This morning we depart Chennai, our India journey complete. The memories we carry home reflect India's extraordinary ability to overwhelm and enchant, challenge and inspire, all while revealing layers of history, spirituality, and culture that continue to unfold long after departure.

Bon Voyage! Namaste!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast