

303-305 Bhanot House
17 Yusuf Sarai Community Centre
Gulmohar Extension
New Delhi 110 049, India
Phone: (011) 26966182, 32912568.
Fax: (011) 26531476
e-mail: bts@vsnl.com

BUSINESS & TOURIST SERVICES

Division of OKTA International Pvt. Ltd

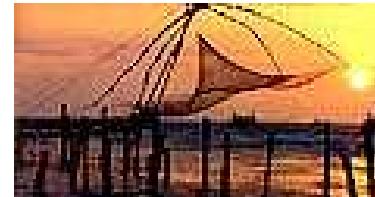


SPLENDOURS OF THE SOUTH

Day 1: Arrive COCHIN

Arrive Cochin. You are met at the airport and transferred to the hotel.

In the afternoon, visit **Cochin**, which comprises of a cluster of islands and towns. **Fort Cochin** is believed to be the oldest European settlement in India, with the Portuguese flag first hoisted here in 1500. **St Francis Church**, built in 1510 by friars brought to India by Vasco da Gama, is the first European church built in India and is the site where da Gama was buried.

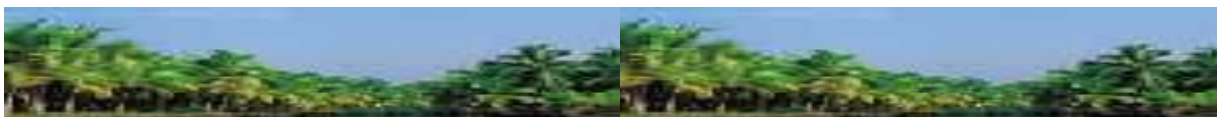


The **Jewish Synagogue** was built in 1568 and considerably embellished in the mid 18th century. The "**Dutch Palace**" was built in the 1550s by the Portuguese and taken over by the Dutch, who later presented it to the Rajas of Cochin. The palace contains excellent mythological murals and a rare example of traditional Keralaite flooring.



In the evening witness a **Kathakali** dance performance. This is the most developed dance drama art of India. Drums beckon an audience to a performance most magnificent - actors depict characters from the *Puranas* and the *Mahabharata*, the great Indian epics - demons, superhuman beings and ordinary men and women. The dancers, all male, adorn themselves in huge skirts and elaborate head-dress, wearing what must surely be the most

intricate make up known to any dance style in the world. Dialogue is combined with dance to bring myth and legend to life in the temple courtyards of Kerala. Overnight at the hotel.



Incredible India

Day 2: Drive COCHIN to ALLEPPEY - backwater cruise



After breakfast drive 56 km to **Alleppey**, known as the "Venice of the East". It is situated on the Vembabad 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. Coir yarn, mats and matting and a wealth of other coir products are manufactured here and are good buys.

Board the houseboat, a special delight Kerala offers. Take a leisurely cruise on the backwaters, through forests, and palm-shaded canals, enjoying the magnificent scenery along the waterways and stopping to admire what history and religion have left along the way. Your boat crew will prepare a delicious lunch and dinner for you on the houseboat. Overnight on the **HOUSEBOATS**.



Day 3: End cruise at KUMARAKOM



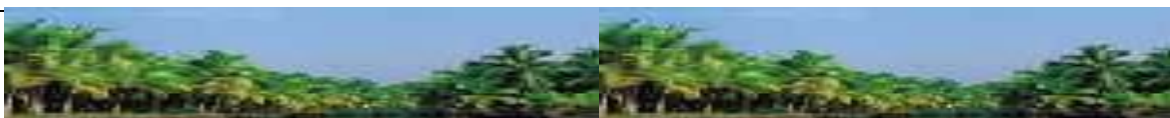
After breakfast disembark at **Kumarakom**, situated on an old rubber plantation set around the **Vembanad Lake**, the longest lake in Asia, which is today a bird sanctuary. Check in at the hotel.

The afternoon is at leisure. Overnight at the hotel

Day 4: Drive KUMARAKOM to PERIYAR

After breakfast drive past rubber, tea and spice plantations to the **Periyar National Park**, India's southernmost tiger reserve. On arrival check in at the hotel.

In the afternoon take a boat ride on the lake. Among the game found here are **gaur** (the largest of the world's wild oxen), elephant, wild pig, **sambar**, barking deer, mouse deer, the rare and endangered lion-tailed macaque, the Nilgiri langur, the common langur and the bonnet macaque, porcupine, Malabar squirrel, wild dog and the elusive tiger. Among the birds commonly seen are darters, cormorant, osprey, kingfisher and kite, great hornbill, grey hornbill, hill mynahs, orioles and racket-tailed drongos. Overnight at the hotel.



Day 5: Drive PERIYAR to MADURAI

After breakfast depart on the 3-hour drive to **Madurai**, known as the City of Festivals. It is the most ancient home of culture, with the first Tamil Academy being founded here by scholars and pious kings. On arrival check in at the hotel.

In the evening witness the puja ceremony at Meenakshi temple, when the image of Lord Shiva is ceremoniously carried in an ornate palanquin to the bedchamber of his beloved wife Meenakshi, the Fish-eyed Goddess. Overnight at the hotel.



Day 6: In MADURAI



After breakfast spend the day exploring the town, which has developed around the famous **Meenakshi** temple, built in the Dravidian style, dedicated to Lord Shiva and his spouse Meenakshi. The massive **gopurams** are profusely decorated with as many as 33 million carvings, including an encyclopaedia of dancing poses. The **Court of Thousand Pillars**, built in 1560, has lovely sculptures. Outside the temple are the **Musical Pillars** which produce different 'swaras' (notes), when tapped.

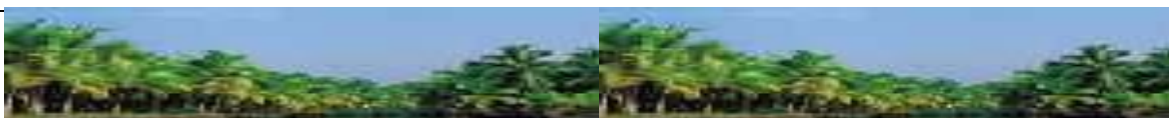
The **Vasanth Mandapam** has life-size statues of the **Nayakas** of Madurai. The **Thirumalai Nayaka Palace**, a 10-minute walk from the temple, was built in 1636 in the Indo-Mughal style. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 7: Drive MADURAI to TANJORE via TIRUCHIRAPALLI (TRICHY)

After breakfast depart on the 3-hour drive to Tiruchirapalli, also known as Trichy. Visit the **Trichy Fort**, which played an important part in the battles waged between the English and the French to gain power. The **Rock Fort** is a landmark of Trichy and contains excavated cave temples dating back to the 7th century, the **Hall of a hundred Pillars** and a **Ganesha** temple on its summit. On the island of Srirangam is a massive **Vishnu** temple with seven walls.



Continue on the 1-hour drive to Tanjore. On arrival check in at the hotel. Overnight at the hotel.



Day 8: In TANJORE



After breakfast, visit **Tanjore**, which was the capital of the Chola empire from the 10th to the 14th centuries. Later it became part of the Vijayanagar kingdom, then passed into the hands of the Marathas and later still went to the British. For ages it has been the chief political, literary and religious centre of the south. The celebrated temple of **Brihadeshwara**, built by the Chola king Raja the Great during the 11th century, is its major attraction. The **Saraswasti Mahal** library, dating from the time of the Marathas, contains a rare collection of books and manuscripts on paper and palm-leaf. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 9: Drive TANJORE to PONDICHERRY

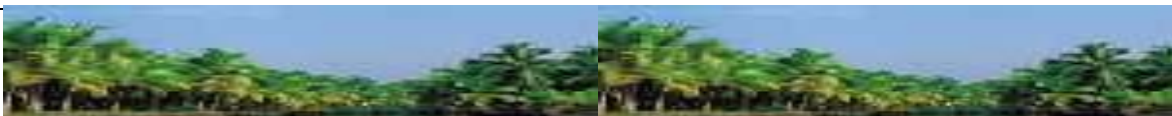
After breakfast depart on the 4-hour drive to **Pondicherry**. The road passes through villages and small towns.

Of particular interest is **Darasuram**, just outside the bustling town of Kumbakonam. **Darasuram** has a magnificent Shiva temple, the **Airavateswarar** temple built in the 12th century. The main shrine with a 26-m tall **vimana** (super-structure) and the shrine of the goddess are in a fair state of preservation. The entrance hall is shaped like a chariot and the steps leading up to it give out musical notes.



En route also visit **Chidambaram**, where the celebrated **Nataraja** (the temple of the Dancing Shiva) is situated. The god Shiva performed his cosmic dance after humbling several conceited **rishis** (sages), who believed they had acquired extraordinary powers through their rigorous austerities. There are several shrines in the temple complex, including one for the god Vishnu. The sanctum sanctorum enshrines the god in his dance pose. Adjacent to it is the sanctum of the goddess whose name here is **Shivakamasundari** - "the beautiful woman who evoked the love of Shiva". An unusual shrine is one without an image in it; this is known as the secret of Chidambaram - the implication being that god is to be found everywhere, especially in the heart.

On arrival in Pondicherry check in at the hotel. Overnight at the hotel.



Day 10: Drive PONDICHERRY to MAHABALIPURAM

In the morning take a tour of Pondicherry. Places of interest include the **Raj Nivas**, residence of the Lieutenant Governor of Pondicherry, a handsome 200-year old building that was once the residence of the redoubtable Marquis Joseph-Francois Dupleix, the builder of Pondicherry. The **Romain Rolland Library** has over 60,000 volumes of rare French and English books on its shelves. The **Pondicherry Museum** has an outstanding collection of artefacts, especially relating to all aspects of the French Indian past and retains a French ambience. The **Institute of Indology** was established in the mid-1950s and is today an internationally renowned research organisation providing an abiding link between France and India. **Ananda Ranga Pillai's House**, architecturally a fusion of the French and Indian styles, is a graceful building, lavishly furnished and decorated, which has been converted into a museum.



In the afternoon spend some time at the **Aurobindo Ashram**, the best-known landmark of Pondicherry, before departing on the 3-hour drive to Mahabalipuram. On arrival check in at the hotel. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 11: In MAHABALIPURAM

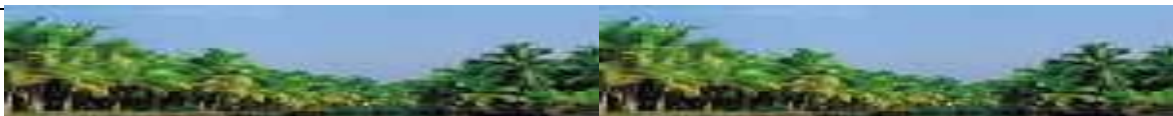
After breakfast visit **Mahabalipuram**, the port city of the Pallavas in the 7th century. In this picturesque setting of sandy beaches and the sea can be seen some 70 monuments that influenced temple architecture in Tamil Nadu for centuries to come.

The first important group is formed by the five **rathas** - rock-cut monoliths named after the heroes of the **Mahabharata** which simulate ceremonial chariots. Some of these **rathas** are unfinished and in them can be seen the carving technique used to form temples out of living rock. Also within this complex are large sculptures of a lion, an elephant and a seated **Nandi** (the bull) Lord Shiva's mount.



The other cave temples of **Mahishasuramardini** and **Olakkannesware** (God of the Flaming Eye) are carved out of the hillside to form pillared halls and enclosed shrines within which are some magnificent sculptures, some larger than life, of gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon.

The afternoon is at leisure. Overnight at the hotel.



Day 12: Drive MAHABALIPURAM to CHENNAI

After breakfast depart on the 70-km drive to Chennai. On arrival check in at the hotel.



In the afternoon take a tour of the gateway to the sunny south. **Madras**, (now called **Chennai**) the capital of Tamil Nadu, is also a seat of ancient civilization, with a rich heritage of fine arts, sculpture and architecture. The British East India Company established one of its earliest seats of power in India in Madras. The construction of **Fort St. George** was begun around 1650. Today the old buildings in the fort house the Tamil Nadu Government **Secretariat** and the **Legislative Assembly**.

St. Mary's Church, consecrated in 1680, is the earliest English building surviving intact in India and also the earliest Anglican Church in the east. **San Thome Church** is associated with the Apostle St. Thomas. It is believed that he was martyred on **St. Thomas' Mount** and his remains are enshrined in this church. The **Marina**, is a 13-km long sandy beach running along the whole length of Madras, fringed with palms and casuarinas.



One of the most important localities of Chennai is the unified complex of **Mylapore**, where the **Kapaleswara Shiva temple**, the tank, market area and old Brahmin residential houses are situated. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 13: Depart CHENNAI

After breakfast transfer to the airport for your onward flight.

END OF OUR SERVICES

