

Specialized - Customized - Personalized Journeys to India & Beyond

Our expertise is your advantage

CST 209-9942-40



Escorted by
Tara Gupta, CTIE
President

MEMBER
NSA
NATIONAL SPEAKERS ASSOCIATION

 india by design



South India - Of Temples, Backwaters & the Seas

An Insider's Perspective (limited to 12 guests)

Day by Day Itinerary – 15 Nights

Tour begins in Chennai on Saturday 28th January 2012

Tour Ends in Trivandrum on Sunday 12th Feb 2012

On a Journey with Tara, the Possibilities are Endless & the Discoveries Magical!



Specialized – Customized – Personalized Journeys to India & Beyond

Pre-tour days in Chennai – When you arrive in Chennai, we will gladly provide a private transfer to your hotel in the city center (nominal charge)

Day/s at leisure to recover from jet lag, enjoy the several amenities of your hotel, the dining options of this fast growing metropolis or to explore the city on your own or with Tara.

Meals: Breakfast **Hotel:** The Taj Connemara (Heritage Room)

Day 1 Chennai – Saturday 28th January 2012:

Our representative awaits your group arrival at the airport to escort you to your hotel in the city center.

After a leisurely breakfast, we set out to explore this city, the bastion of the East India Company. **Chennai** formerly known as **Madras**, the largest city and gateway to South India is a comparatively new city – only 350 years old. Chennai is famous for its confluence of cultures, and is one of the few places on earth with national celebrations for almost all major religious holidays. To highlight this region’s rich European-flavored history, we’ll take a heritage walk in Georgetown and Egmore Railway Station. We will visit Santhome Cathedral the final resting place of Saint Thomas, which was visited by Marco Polo during his epic travels. A scenic drive along Marina Beach, the pride of Chennai, is a sandy oasis just north of Fort George. We visit Fort St. George which houses Saint Mary's Church and Fort museum. Saint Mary's Church the oldest Anglican Church built in 1680 and the tombstones in its courtyard are the oldest British tombstones in India. The Government Museum previously known as Pantheon Complex in British period, today houses the Government Museum, Connemara Public Library and the National Art Gallery. The museum contains exhibits ranging from contemporary artifacts to pre-historical findings.

This afternoon we’ll travel south along the coast, stopping at the Dakshina Chitra museum for “A Picture of the South,” as the name *Dakshina Chitra* means in Tamil. Here we’ll get a glimpse of the art, architecture, crafts and performing arts of this region through ten beautiful acres of recreated villages, bustling streetscapes, and 17 heritage houses that bring local tradition alive.

The evening is at your leisure to perhaps enjoy an Ayurvedic massage, relax at local pub or enjoy the fine dining options of the hotel. Perhaps join Tara for dinner at a local restaurant for dinner.

Meals: Breakfast **Hotel:** The Taj Connemara (Heritage Room)



Specialized – Customized – Personalized Journeys to India & Beyond

Day 2 Chennai – via Kanchipuram (2 hours) to Mamalapuram (2 hours) – Sunday 29th January 2012

After breakfast, we head out to Kanchipuram, the temple town of South India which houses three of the most famous South Indian temples: Kailasanathar Temple, Vardaraja Permul Temple and Ekambareshwar Temple. Kailasanathar Temple, the oldest and the most beautiful temple of Kancheepuram was built by the Pallava king in the 7th century giving great importance to the Dravidian architect.

After lunch we will visit the markets of Kanchipuram famous for its high quality silks. Sought by international designers of haute couture, we will watch skilled workers weave the finest of silks with its intricate patterns in bright colors and gold and silver threads. For those interested, we will stop by a few stores to buy quality silks.

After lunch we drive to Mahabalipuram (aka Mamallapuram) where we will check into our deluxe resort located on the best stretch of white sandy beach. Mamallapuram is a wonderful combination of heritage monuments, empty stretches of sandy beaches and excellent sea food.

The evening is at leisure to enjoy a relaxed dinner at any of the several dining options of the resort.

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: GRT Radisson Temple Bay

Day 3 Mamalapuram – Monday 30th January 2012

We begin the day with an early morning visit to the stone temples of the 7th century, which makes this seaside village an open-air museum. We'll explore the rock sculptures beginning with the world's largest bas-relief in stone, the Descent of the Ganga. The sculpture depicts a scene from Hindu mythology, with hundreds of beings—celestial, human, and animal—that seem to be miraculously moving towards a natural cleft in the center of the stone. We'll also see Arjuna's Penance, depicting a scene from the *Mahabharata*; the Five Rathas, "chariots of the gods" hewn from solid rock; and the twin-spired Shore Temple that overlooks the Bay of Bengal. We'll walk around on our own to see local artisans creating rock sculptures, just as they have done for centuries. We will have plenty of time to browse through the markets for traditional stone carvings and other handicrafts for which Mamallapuram is the center in South India.

The rest of the day is at leisure to enjoy the bustling village markets, the beaches of Bay of Bengal, or the resort's 27,000-square-foot meandering pool with its pool-side café or the variety of spa services.

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: GRT Radisson Temple Bay



Specialized – Customized – Personalized Journeys to India & Beyond

Day 4 Mamalapuram – via Auroville (2 hours) to Pondicherry (20 min) – Tuesday 31st January 2012

After breakfast we drive to Auroville. Founded as a project of Sri Aurobindo Society, today Auroville is recognized as the first and only internationally endorsed ongoing experiment in human unity and transformation of consciousness, also concerned with sustainable living and the future cultural, environmental, social and spiritual needs of mankind. Today, we will visit the Visitors Center to learn about this unique project and see the peaceful Matirmandir from afar.

The Matrimandir completed in 2008, took 37 years to build. A huge sphere surrounded by twelve pedestals, the central dome is covered by golden discs that reflect sunlight and so gives the structure its characteristic radiance. Inside this central dome is a meditation hall known as the *inner chamber* – which contains the largest optically-perfect glass globe in the world. The Matrimandir, and its surrounding gardens in the central Peace Area, is fully open to the public by appointment. If you wish to return to Auroville the next day to explore the grounds and visit Matrimandir more closely, please advise Tara so a permit for the next morning can be arranged.

After lunch we drive to Pondicherry, a former French sea-side colony with French street names, croissants and Indian policemen in French-like uniforms. This is a perfect walking town and a great way to soak in the local culture and the city's leisurely approach to life with its Parisian style sidewalk cafes and the exuberant Beach Road.

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Maison Perumal

Day 5 Pondicherry – Wednesday, 1st February 2012

After breakfast we explore this quaint city on a 2-hour walking tour through the French and Tamil quarters; the former constituting structures in the European classical style, while the buildings in the latter are in vernacular style of Tamil Nadu. We will visit Sri Aurobindo Ashram, located on Rue de la Marine. It was founded by Sri Aurobindo, the poet philosopher to help man reach the zenith of his evolution through spiritual exercises and yoga, combined with physical activity and productive work. The Ashram has a nice garden and contains the tombs of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The Varadaraja Temple, is the most important temple of Lord Vishnu and the Manakula Vinayagar Temple on rue de Orleans is known for its architecture and sculptural wealth. The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on South Boulevard has some beautiful stained glass windows depicting the life of Jesus while the Eglise De Notre Dame De Lourdes built in 1876 contains the statue of Our Lady gifted by France.



Specialized – Customized – Personalized Journeys to India & Beyond

Note: *For those with a prior permit/appointment, you will return to Auroville to visit The Matrimandir, and its surrounding gardens in the central Peace Area.*

Evening is at leisure to enjoy the town on your own or browse the local village market.

Meals: Breakfast **Hotel:** Maison Perumal

Day 6 Pondicherry to Kumbakonam (4 hours) – Thursday 1st February 2012

This morning en route to Kumbakonam, we visit the Chidambaram Temple with a bejeweled image of Nataraja, depicting the Lord Shiva as the Lord of the Bharatanatyam dance. This is one of the few temples where Shiva is represented by an anthropomorphic murthi (an embodiment or a representation of divinity,) rather than the classic, anionic Lingam. The Cosmic Dance of Lord Nataraja symbolizes the motion of the universe as sustained by Lord Shiva.

In Kumbakonam we visit the famous Shiva temple Gangaikonda Cholapuram, with its beautifully sculptured high towers depicting stories of the ancient epics. Time permitting we will stop at the Darasuram temple, built in memory of the White elephant – Airvath.

Enjoy a relaxed evening or perhaps watch a cultural program with dinner at your resort.

Meals: Breakfast **Hotel:** Paradise Resort

Day 7 Kumbakonam – Friday 3rd February 2012

This morning we visit Tanjore, the ancient capital of the Chola Kings (10th – 14C) which became a center of learning and culture. Tanjore is also well known for its exquisite handicrafts, bronzes and south Indian musical Instruments. We visit Sri Brihadeshwara Temple and the Raja Raja Palace, now converted to Museum & Art Gallery displaying a number of bronze and granite statues of the Chola Period.

This evening, back at our hotel, we join a local chef as he demonstrates the art of cooking a few of his signature yet simple South Indian dishes. Learn about the health benefits of various spices and take home traditional recipes to try on your own. Enjoy the delicious dinner that you helped prepare.

Meals: Breakfast & Dinner **Hotel:** Paradise Resort



Specialized – Customized – Personalized Journeys to India & Beyond

Day 8 Kumbakonam via Chettinad to Madurai (5 hours) – Saturday 4th February 2012

After breakfast we drive to Madurai via Chettinad, a region rich in cultural heritage, cuisine, art and architecture. We stop to enjoy a delicious lunch at The Bangala Hotel, a charming heritage hotel known for its delicious cuisine. After lunch we continue on to Madurai.

This evening we will witness the night ceremony at the world famous Meenakshi Temple when the bronze statue of Lord Shiva is carried to the bed chamber of Parvati in a procession accompanied by religious prayer and temple music.

Meals: Breakfast and lunch **Hotel:** Heritage Madurai

Day 9 Madurai - Sunday 5th February 2012

This morning we visit the Meenakshi Temple one of the biggest temple complexes in India built in the 17th Century. Madurai's greatest landmark a virtual city within a city, the complex includes a bazaar that bustles from dawn to nightfall. It has a rectangular twin shrine: the southern temple dedicated to Meenakshi (the consort of Shiva) and the other to Shiva. The high point of the Meenakshi temple is Hall of a "Thousand Pillars", a great a work of structural engineering and art. Later we visit the Palace of Tirumala Nayak, a fine example of the blend of Hindu and Saracen architecture.

The evening is at leisure to enjoy your deluxe resort with all its modern amenities. An architectural masterpiece it is built with artifacts and heritage pieces from nearby villages.

Meals: Breakfast **Hotel:** Heritage Madurai

Day 10 Madurai to Periyar (4 hours) - Monday 6th February 2011

After breakfast we enjoy a scenic drive to Periyar, enjoying the view of the mountain ranges where a tropical rain forest still holds its own in the Periyar National Park. This evening we visit The Spice Village Resort for a cooking demonstration of a few typical Kerala dishes followed by a delicious dinner that we helped create.

Meals: Breakfast and Dinner **Hotel:** Cardamom County



Specialized – Customized – Personalized Journeys to India & Beyond

Day 11 Periyar - Tuesday 7th February 2012

Your day is at leisure to select from the numerous activities offered at your resort. Alternatively, you can accompany Tara on a Jungle walk, or visit the Spice plantations and browse the spice markets in the town of Kumily.

- Boatrides on lake Periyar for viewing wildlife
- Jungle walking tours
- Bamboo Rafting
- Border Hiking
- Plantation Tours (spices, tea and coffee)
- Elephant Rides
- Bullock Cart drives
- Kalaripayattu & Kathakali Performances

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Cardamom County

Day 12 Periyar to Cochin (5 ½ hours) - Wednesday 8th February 2012

After breakfast, we drive to Cochin, popularly known as the Queen of the Arabian Sea. Enroute we stop for lunch at a local home for a typical Keralite home-cooked meal. Time permitting, after lunch we can see a rubber plantation at work as we watch rubber being tapped.

Cochin is the oldest European settlement in India. Filled with backwaters and rich with old world charm, this city has lured many a great voyager to its shores. From time immemorial, Arabs, Chinese, Dutch, British & Portuguese seafarers followed the sea route to Kochi & left their impression on the town. Modern Kochi is thus a splendid mosaic of these myriad influences.

This evening, we attend a Kathakali Dance performance at a local Theater followed by dinner. Kathakali typically tells of epic battles of gods and demons and is as dynamic and dramatic as Bharatnatyam is austere and expressive. The colorful costumes, extremely beautiful makeup and facial expressions from the great epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata will keep you spellbound.

Meals: Breakfast and Dinner

Hotel: Old Lighthouse Bristow



Specialized – Customized – Personalized Journeys to India & Beyond

Day 13 Cochin – Thursday 9th February 2012

This morning we explore the bustling port city of Cochin. Starting with **Fort Kochi**, the oldest European settlement in India, we will visit **St. Francis Church**, the oldest church constructed by the Europeans in India. Built by the Portuguese in 1510, Vasco da Gama, the first European to reach India was buried here in 1524 before his remains were transferred to Lisbon 14 years later. His tombstone can be seen inside the church. **Mattancherry Palace**, built by the Portuguese in 1555 was presented to the Raja of Cochin as a gesture of goodwill. Also known as the **Dutch Palace**, due to the substantial renovation by the Dutch after 1663, the central hall was the Coronation Hall of the Rajas where their dresses, turbans, palanquins and murals from Hindu mythology can be seen. The **Jewish Synagogue** built in 1568, houses the scrolls of the Old Testament and a number of copper plates inscribed in Hebrew script are preserved. We end our tour in Jew town where we can browse through the numerous antique shops by the waterfront before returning to our hotel.

In the afternoon we go beyond the typical tourist to witness, Cherai Pooram, the annual Temple Festival at the Cherai Gowreeshwara Temple. Here we will enjoy a typical Kerala festival complete with elephant pageantry, traditional temple orchestra and cultural performances. Twenty-eight caparisoned elephants take part in the pooram.

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Old Lighthouse Bristow

Day 14 Cochin – Alleppey (1 ½ hours) – Friday 10th February 2012

After breakfast we drive to Alleppey to board our houseboat for an overnight stay.

As we cruise along the backwaters we cross shallow lakes and call in at settlements along the route. Our journey offers us a glimpse of people whose lives center on the water. Aboard the houseboat our personal crew anchors in a serene location for lunch prepared on the boat to our taste. After lunch we sail past the numerous canals passing extensive paddy fields and villages. After dusk the motors of the boat are turned off and we anchor overnight for a restful sleep amidst the silence of nature in its purest form.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Hotel: House Boat



Specialized – Customized – Personalized Journeys to India & Beyond

Day 15 Alleppey – Kovalam (4 hours) – Saturday 11th February 2012

After a leisurely breakfast, we disembark and drive to Kovalam where we check-into our luxurious Private Retreat for a day of rest and relaxation by the beach. Rest of the day is at leisure to enjoy the amenities of the resort, with its white sand beach, fine dining options and its numerous Ayurvedic and International Spa treatments.

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Surya Samudra

Day 16 Kovalam/Trivandrum (40 min) – Tour Ends – Sunday 12th February 2012

For those departing today, your transfer to Trivandrum airport is included.

Plenty of options abound for those who want to extend their stay to relax or explore this beautiful coastal town well known for its pristine beaches, its glorious sunsets and its Ayurvedic Spa treatments.