

SOUTH INDIA

EXQUISITE TEMPLES & TROPICAL LANDSCAPES

November 8 – 19, 2024



Meenakshi Temple,
Madurai



This tour is presented by the alumni associations of the University of Alberta, the University of Saskatchewan, Western University, McGill University, York University, McMaster University, and University of Guelph. All are welcome!

Experience the rich culture of scenic South India through its fascinating art, architecture, and rituals in a slew of World Heritage Sites.

Feast your eyes on lush, tropical landscapes, rice paddies, sugar cane, coconut groves, and colourful villages as you travel along the shores of the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea.

Discover grand temples, testaments to the great cultural opulence left behind by vanished dynasties. Delight in the French colonial vibe of Pondicherry and marvel at the restored courtyard mansions of Chettinad. Immerse yourself in the lush plantations of Periyar and learn to prepare a meal with the freshest of spices.

Savour the culinary traditions of the south; aromatic cuisines with an abundance of fresh vegetables and lightly spiced with influences of the merchants from around the world who came here to trade and left their mark on the regional cuisines.

Delight in luxurious accommodation: a picture-perfect French colonial inn on the Coromandel Coast; a restored heritage mansion deep in the interior; and a resort set in emerald-green rolling hills covered with spice plantations.



Tour Leader

Meera Kachroo is an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Religion and Culture at St. Thomas More College in Saskatoon (Treaty 6). In both research and teaching, she highlights the perennial texts and teachings of Asian religions and how they flourish in modern lives. Meera's original ethnographic fieldwork is based among south Indian communities known for their intensive meditation and ritual practices. She has travelled widely across Asia, and is excited to share her love of south Indian culture, sacred sites, and... spices!



Auroville,
Pondicherry



Signature Moments

- ☞ Luxuriate in exceptional accommodation in heritage hotels and deluxe resorts
- ☞ Delight in the lush green landscapes
- ☞ Feast your eyes on World Heritage Site temples and monuments
- ☞ Connect with chefs at a cooking class featuring Kerala spices

Our Route



Detailed Itinerary

Friday, Nov. 8: Arrive Chennai, Transfer to Mahabalipuram

You will be met upon arrival at Chennai Airport and transferred directly to our hotel by the sea in nearby Mahabalipuram (about an hour's drive from the airport.) Most flights arrive in Chennai late at night, so settle in and let the sound of the ocean lull you to sleep.

Overnight: Radisson Blue Resort Temple Bay, Mahabalipuram

Saturday, Nov. 9: Mahabalipuram

Relax this morning in the lush gardens of the resort, take a dip in the meandering outdoor pool, or luxuriate in the spa. This afternoon, after our briefing, we head out to view the collection of archeological wonders nearby: the magnificent 7th century Shore Temple; the massive carved monument of Arjuna's Penance; and the Krishna Madapam, with elaborate carvings of the myth of the god safeguarding villagers and cattle. Enjoy our Welcome dinner together this evening.

Overnight: Radisson Blue Resort Temple Bay, Mahabalipuram

Meals: Breakfast, Welcome Dinner

Sunday, Nov. 10: Along the Coromandel Coast to Pondicherry

Visit Auroville, the utopian "The City of Dawn" built by the flower-power generations of the 1960s. Continue to the former French colony of Pondicherry, which reflects a bohemian-chic feel with quiet cobbled streets lined with mustard-yellow colonial houses. Our resident storyteller accompanies us for a walk along the seaside promenade.

Overnight: Palais de Mahé, Pondicherry

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Shore Temple, Mahabalipuram



Monday, Nov. 11: Explore the capital of French India

Start the day with a walk in the Ville Noir to get a feel for the Franco-Tamil ambience and the restored heritage buildings. Visit the Hindu temple of Manakula Vinayagar, with 40 different forms of Lord Ganesha. Explore on your own, too; 'Pondy' is easy to navigate and there is a huge selection of galleries, museums, and shops to enjoy.

Overnight: Palais de Mahé, Pondicherry

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Tuesday, Nov. 12: Kumbakonam

Head inland today to the birthplace of the great Chola Empire, the remarkable civilization that expanded Hinduism to the banks of the Mekong River. Visit the vast Chidambaram Temple dedicated to Shiva as the lord of dance. The 'new' temples of this incredible space are around 1000 years old; the older part is said to be over 3,500 years old. Continue to the temple town of Kumbakonam. Visit and converse with young monks training as scholars and priests at a Vedic school.

Overnight: Mantra Koodam, Kumbakonam

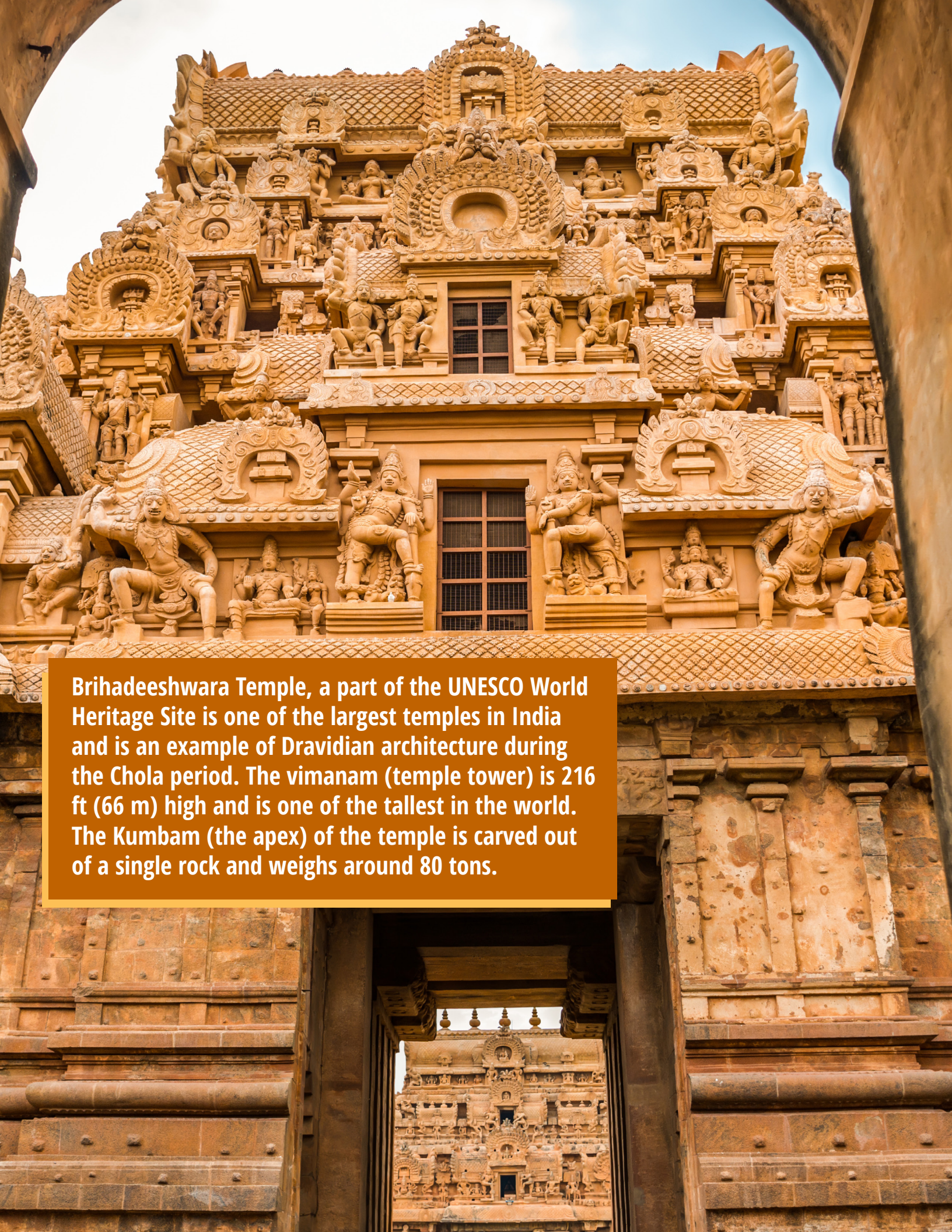
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Wednesday, Nov. 13: Tanjore, Chettinad

Set off to Chettinad via Tanjore (Thanjavur), where we visit the World Heritage-listed Brihadishwara Temple, one of India's most fascinating temples. Built of 130,000 tons of granite with no binding material and intricately carved with magnificent depictions of temple life of over 1000 years ago, the site is also home to a giant bull carved of stone. Continue to Chettinad, the cultural home of the Chettiar banking and business community, many of whom migrated in the 19th and 20th centuries to Southeast Asia whence they sent back lavish furnishings to outfit their magnificent mansions. We're staying in one of these splendidly restored mansions for two nights.

Overnight: Visalam Hotel, Chettinad

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Brihadeeshwara Temple, a part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site is one of the largest temples in India and is an example of Dravidian architecture during the Chola period. The vimanam (temple tower) is 216 ft (66 m) high and is one of the tallest in the world. The Kumbam (the apex) of the temple is carved out of a single rock and weighs around 80 tons.

Thursday, Nov. 14: Chettinad

The Indian adage has it that “one is lucky to eat like Chettiar”. Food in Chettinad is one of the most distinctive in the country featuring a distinctive set of spices including star anise seed, peppercorns, cinnamon, bay leaves, and nutmeg. We'll have a cooking class this morning and learn to prepare a traditional meal. There's time this afternoon to relax and explore the lost grandeur of this striking village.

Overnight: Visalam Hotel, Chettinad

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Wednesday, Nov. 15: Madurai

Drive west through the Tamil countryside to Madurai (about four hours). The geographical and religious center of Madurai is a massive Hindu temple complex dedicated to Meenakshi, the “fish-eyed goddess.” Its fourteen elongated pyramidal towers swarm with thousands of garishly coloured figures of gods, demons, and animals, while inside priests perform rituals at multiple shrines, and worshipers seeking favors from the gods pay their respects in most unusual ways. It is an extravaganza that spills out into the surrounding streets, where markets sell offerings and other religious paraphernalia, as well as everything else under the sun. This is India – exotic, spiritual, and intriguing.

Overnight: The Gateway Hotel, Madurai

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Thursday, Nov. 16: Across the Western Ghats to Periyar

Today's scenic drive takes us into the hills of Periyar in neighbouring Kerala to our gorgeous resort in the heart of the spice jungle. Our resort's master chefs share their skills with us at an evening cookery class to learn the secrets of traditional Kerala cooking and enter the magical world of Indian spices; what they are, how to use them, combine them, and savour the special magic they bring to foods. Your friends at home will be cardamom green with envy once you return with your new-found secrets! Our resort features a fine ayurvedic facility – this is a wonderful opportunity to enjoy massages and treatments.

Overnight: Spice Village

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Spice Plantation in Periyar



Friday, Nov. 17: Periyar's spice gardens

Visit nearby spice plantations; pepper, cardamom, cloves, and cinnamon are all cultivated here. Tea is another of Periyar's famed exports. The undulating hills of Kumily, a short drive from Periyar, are home to a number of both tea and coffee plantations. We'll visit plantations here today and learn what it's all about from plucking to processing.

Overnight: Spice Village

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Monday, Nov. 18: Kochi

Drive down through the lush green of terraced tea plantations to the edge of the Arabian Sea and the charming town of Kochi. In the city, we'll explore the intriguing mix of ancient mosques, Portuguese houses, a 400-year-old synagogue, the remains of the Raj, and giant fishing nets from China by the waterfront. This evening, we'll marvel at a Kathakali performance, the traditional dance of Kerala, before our celebratory dinner together.

Overnight: Eighth Bastion, Kochi

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Farewell Dinner

Tuesday, Nov. 19: Depart Kochi

The morning is at leisure to do some last-minute shopping before we transfer to the airport for homeward-bound flights. With a little more time available, consider a relaxing stay in Kerala's backwaters on our optional extension. See below for details.

Meals: Breakfast

Note: The itinerary and accommodation described in this tour brochure are subject to change due to logistical arrangements and to take advantage of local events.





Chidambaram Temple, Kumbakonam

Tour Details

Tour Cost (per person):

US\$5995 per person

Includes all taxes and gratuities.

Single Supplement: US\$1200

If you are travelling alone and would like to share, we will attempt to match you up with an appropriate roommate.

If we cannot, a single supplement will apply. This will be collected 90 days prior to departure.

Group Size:

15-20 participants

What's Included:

- Airport transfers for passengers arriving and departing as per the group itinerary
- Accommodation based on double occupancy in hotels listed or similar
- Meals as indicated in the itinerary
- All internal transportation by private coach
- Sightseeing with qualified English-speaking guides
- All activities and entrance fees
- One cooking class
- Two performances
- Taxes and gratuities (for guides, drivers, hotels, restaurants) as indicated above
- Fully escorted by your Worldwide Quest tour leader

Not Included:

- Airfare from your home to join the tour
- Visa fees (obtained prior to departure, US\$50))
- Meals other than those mentioned above
- Beverages with meals
- Fuel surcharges, if applicable
- Travel insurance
- Excess baggage charges
- Items of a personal nature
- Additional arrangements required due to any emergency or other situation
- Any item not mentioned in "What's Included"

Payment Details:

A non-refundable deposit of US\$750 per person is required to reserve a space on this tour. A second deposit of US\$2000 is due May 8, 2024. Final payment is due August 8, 2024.

What to Expect



Joining Instructions

November 8, 2024

This tour begins at Chennai International Airport (airport code: MAA). Travellers arriving on the tour start date will be met on arrival and transferred to our meeting point. This transfer is included in the cost of the tour. When you book the designated pre-trip accommodation with Worldwide Quest, your transfer from the airport to our group hotel on arrival is also included. If you are making your own pre-trip arrangements, this transfer can be provided at additional cost.

November 19, 2024

The tour concludes with a single included transfer to Cochin International Airport (airport code: COK). **Please contact us to verify timing of this transfer prior to making any flight arrangements.**



Transportation

We will be travelling in a comfortable air-conditioned coach driven by a professional driver. While roads are mostly paved except on rural back roads, there are few divided highways, therefore, we cannot expect to cover distances as quickly as we might in North America. There are a few long driving days, but roadside scenery provides a quintessential Indian experience.



Accommodation

We are staying in a mix of Western style hotels and restored heritage inns:

Radisson Blu Resort Temple Bay is set in 44 acres of lush, landscaped gardens with unparalleled views of the Bay of Bengal. Enjoy the spa, fitness centre, and outdoor pool. Rooms have private balconies to enjoy that view.

Palais de Mahé lies close to the seaside promenade in the centre of Pondicherry. The majestic courtyard, deep verandahs, and period furniture combine South Indian fire and flavour with French intensity and fervour. Rooms are spacious. The pool is delightful.

Mantra Koodam is set in a coconut grove in the countryside of Kumbakonam. Designed to resemble a characteristic Brahmin street, the living spaces are in cottages with large verandahs, ornate teak doors and open-to-air bathrooms. Includes a swimming pool.

Visalam is a favourite hotel set in a heritage house in the centre of the village. Public spaces and rooms are decorated in period style with high ceilings, gleaming floors, and antique furniture. Swimming pool.

Spice Village is set in a spice garden in the cool highlands of Periyar. Modelled on the dwellings of the Manan tribe of the region, the rooms are set in cottages in the splendid grounds. Modern interiors and bathrooms are based on natural materials and local woodcraft. Swimming pool.

Eighth Bastion is located by the sea in the heart of the historic Dutch area of Kochi. Rooms blend contemporary and colonial style mixing clean lines with nautical paintings and Dutch elements. The internal courtyard has a pleasant swimming pool.



Level of Activity: Moderate

A good level of fitness is required to enjoy this trip. You should be able to walk up to three hours at a time over uneven terrain both in rural areas and in crowded cities. In some places, access to temples and forts is only on foot with some steep ascents. Shoes must be removed to enter some temples. Should you have any questions about your ability to take part in this tour, please give us a call.



Weather

We expect sunny skies and lovely warm weather throughout our South India trip. Temperatures will likely range from highs of 30°C to overnight lows of 20°C .



COVID-19 Entry and Travel Requirements

All travellers on Worldwide Quest tours are required to be fully vaccinated and prepared to show proof of vaccination as per local regulations. Please refer to these websites for current requirements:

India: <https://www.cgitoronto.gov.in/>

Canada: <https://travel.gc.ca/>



Travel Documents

You will require a passport for this trip. Please ensure it is valid for at least 6 months beyond your scheduled return home. You will require a visa for India which must be obtained prior to arrival. The current cost of this visa is US\$50.



#SafeTravels

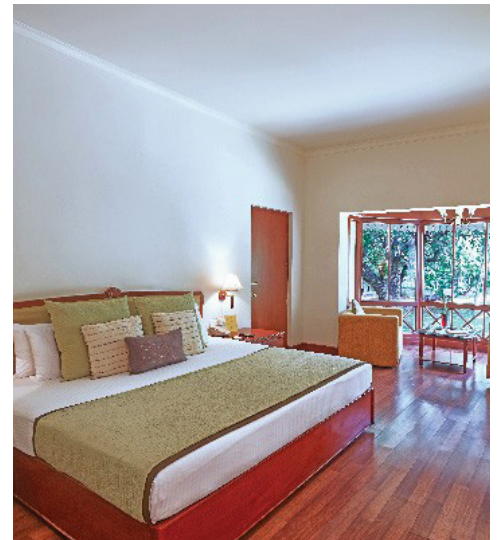
Worldwide Quest has been awarded the World Travel and Tourism Council's #SafeTravels Stamp for adopting health and hygiene global standardized protocols. [Learn more.](#)



Radisson Blue Resort Temple Bay,
Mahabalipuram



Palais de Mahé, Pondicherry



The Gateway Hotel, Madurai



TOUR EXTENSION

Optional Extension: A Relaxing Three Days in the Gorgeous Kerala Backwaters

November 19 – 22, 2024

Enjoy a three-night stay at an enchanting resort located in the sheltered cove of Vembanad Lake in the Kerala Backwaters, an interplay of coconut groves and canals on the edge of the sea.

Take a day cruise on the lake, a cooking class, and a backwater village tour. In addition, relax by the pool, luxuriate in the spa, rent e-bikes to explore the lanes, and savour top-notch cuisine.

Extension Itinerary

Tuesday, November 19: To Kumarakom

This morning we will have time at leisure in Kochi. In the afternoon after lunch in Kochi, we will take a 2.5-hour drive south to Vembanad Lake and check in to the wonderful Coconut Lagoon outside the village of Kumarakom. We can enjoy the remainder of the day simply soaking in the surroundings here. The resort is located close to the Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary, which we might choose to explore.

Overnight: Coconut Lagoon

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Wednesday, November 20: Cruise

This morning we will have time at leisure to enjoy the grounds and surroundings. In the early afternoon, we will begin exploring Vembanad Lake as we embark one of the quaint covered houseboats for which this lake is famous. Lunch will be served aboard. It is a time for absolute relaxation!

Overnight: Coconut Lagoon

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Thursday, November 21: Local Activities

This morning we will meet the people who call this place home on a village tour. Later, we will enjoy a cooking class. After lunch, it is time at leisure.

Overnight: Coconut Lagoon

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Friday, November 22: Departure

We will have a relaxed start to the day with time at leisure. Check out is at noon. We will be transferred to the Kochi Airport in the early afternoon for our onward travels.

Meals: Breakfast



Coconut Lagoon

Extension Cost

Tour Cost (per person):

US\$1395 based on two travellers

US\$1295 based on four travellers

US\$1195 based on six travellers

Per person, based on double occupancy

Single supplement: US\$435

What's Included:

- Roundtrip transfers by private vehicle
- Three nights accommodation
- Meals as indicated above
- Activities as indicated above

Not Included:

- Any airfare
- Fuel surcharge (if applicable)
- Travel insurance
- Alcoholic beverages
- Items of a personal nature
- Additional transportation required due to any emergency or other situation
- Any item not mentioned in "What's Included"

Additional Info

Terms and Conditions

For additional information about our terms and conditions, please refer to your booking form, the current brochure or our website. All participants booking with Worldwide Quest are covered by the terms of the Ontario Travel Industry Act (Worldwide Quest International, Ontario - License # 2667946). See full details [here](#).

Cancellation Policy

All payments are non-refundable, however you may transfer your initial deposit for any land tour to another tour 90 days or more prior to your scheduled departure date. Initial deposits for cruises are non-refundable and non-transferable. Your second payment and your final payment are non-refundable and non-transferable. If you cancel within 90 days prior to trip departure, all associated trip costs are non-refundable. In the event of a cancellation, you must notify Worldwide Quest immediately and in writing. See full details [here](#).

Travel Insurance

We urge you to ensure that you have adequate cancellation and medical insurance in place, should an unexpected event cause you to cancel or interrupt your trip or should the tour not be operable per our terms and conditions. We will offer you Manulife insurance coverage. Medical insurance including emergency medical evacuation coverage is mandatory on all our tours.



How to Book

Please contact the Worldwide Quest office for more information and to secure your booking.

1-800-387-1483 | 416-633-5666
travel@worldwidequest.com



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