



THE CLASSIC SOUTH - TAMIL NADU & KERALA 14N/15D

TOUR SUMMARY

Embark on a richly layered **14N/15D** South India journey through the sacred temples of Tamil Nadu and the serene landscapes of Kerala. Begin in Chennai, then dive into Tamil Nadu's temple trail—from the rock-cut wonders of Mahabalipuram and the spiritual energy of Chidambaram to the Chola architectural grandeur of Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Darasuram, and the UNESCO-listed Brihadeeswarar Temple in Thanjavur.

Explore the living temple towns of Srirangam and Madurai, where towering gopurams, vibrant rituals, and bustling markets immerse you in centuries of devotion. Experience the cultural richness of Chettinad, known for its palatial mansions and artisan traditions like cotton weaving and tile making.

Cross into Kerala, where the landscape shifts to misty hills, spice-scented air, and calm backwaters. Visit Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary, and relax with an overnight houseboat cruise in the Kumarakom backwaters. End your journey in historic Cochin, with its blend of Portuguese, Dutch, and Jewish heritage.

From sacred chants to Kathakali dance, temple towers to tranquil lakes, this tour offers a complete experience of Dravidian culture, classical art, and South India's natural beauty.

Best time: Oct - February

Note: While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, this itinerary is intended as a guide and may include unintentional errors or be subject to adjustments due to unforeseen circumstances.



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Detailed Itinerary

DAY 1: Arrival in Chennai – Welcome and Orientation

Arrive at Chennai International Airport, where you will be greeted by our representative and transferred to your hotel. Take the rest of the day to unwind and recover from your journey. As you settle in, you'll be introduced to Chennai's unique blend of colonial heritage and modern vibrancy. Once the gateway of the British East India Company in South India, Chennai still carries echoes of its colonial past in its grand architecture. From the Indo-Saracenic domes of the Madras High Court to the iconic clock tower of Chennai Central Station, the city is dotted with monuments that reflect British colonial influence.

Your guide will offer a brief orientation, sharing insights into Chennai's evolution—from a fortified British outpost at Fort St. George to a bustling capital rich in culture, commerce, and history. With this introduction, you'll be well-prepared to explore the many *things to do in Chennai* in the days ahead.

Dinner and overnight stay at your hotel in Chennai.



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DAY 2: Explore the Cultural and Colonial Highlights of Chennai

After breakfast, begin your Chennai city tour with a visit to some of its most iconic landmarks that showcase the city's rich history and cultural diversity.

Start at the Government Museum Chennai (BRONZE GALLERY), one of the oldest museums in India, known for its impressive bronze gallery housed within a striking 19th-century red-brick building. Continue to Kapaleeshwarar Temple in Mylapore, a masterpiece of Dravidian architecture, where intricately carved gopurams tower over bustling courtyards and echo centuries of living tradition.

Just nearby, explore San Thome Cathedral Basilica, built over the tomb of St. Thomas the Apostle. With its soaring white spires and serene interiors, it stands as one of the few churches in the world built on an apostle's final resting place. Proceed to Fort St. George, the birthplace of colonial Madras and the foundation of British presence in South India. Walk through its historic corridors to understand the city's transformation from a fortified trading post to the dynamic capital of Tamil Nadu.

The tour continues with a scenic drive along Chennai's Marina Beach Road, offering views of the city's iconic colonial-era architecture, including the Ripon Building, Madras High Court, and the timeless Chennai Central Railway Station—all visible from the outside, and each narrating a chapter of Chennai's British legacy.

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DAY 3: Explore Mahabalipuram – A Journey into Ancient Dravidian Architecture

After breakfast, embark on a scenic drive along the coast to Mahabalipuram (Mamallapuram), a UNESCO World Heritage Site renowned for its rock-cut temples and ancient stone carvings. This historic port city is often called the cradle of Dravidian temple architecture, showcasing some of the earliest and most influential styles in South Indian art.

Your Mahabalipuram sightseeing tour includes a visit to the gravity-defying Krishna's Butter Ball, a giant granite boulder precariously balanced on a slope for centuries. Explore the beautifully sculpted Trimurti Cave Temple, the monolithic Ganesha Ratha, and the massive Descent of the Ganges or Arjuna's Penance Panel—one of the largest open-air bas-reliefs in the world. Continue to the iconic Five Rathas, a group of rock-cut temples shaped like chariots, each dedicated to characters from the Mahabharata. Conclude your tour with the majestic Shore Temple, an ancient granite shrine overlooking the Bay of Bengal, and one of the oldest structural temples in South India. This immersive visit to Mahabalipuram's UNESCO monuments offers a deeper understanding of Tamil Nadu's sacred art and architecture.

Dinner and overnight stay at Mahabalipuram



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DAY 4: Kanchipuram: Temples, Traditions, and Timeless Silk

Post breakfast day excursion to Kanchipuram and back. Tucked just a couple of hours from Mahabalipuram, **Kanchipuram** is where history, devotion, and silk threads come together in a beautiful tapestry. Known as the *City of Thousand Temples*, this ancient town in Tamil Nadu is a magnet for travellers seeking a rich cultural and spiritual experience.

Let's start with the **Ekambareswarar Temple**, one of the most sacred shrines dedicated to Lord Shiva. Its towering gopuram stands at nearly 60 meters high, and inside, you'll find intricately carved halls, ancient legends etched into stone, and a 3,500-year-old mango tree under which Shiva & Parvathi were wedded. It's part of the *Pancha Bhoota Sthalam (Five elements)*, representing the element of earth, making it a must-visit for anyone on a **temple tour in Tamil Nadu**. Next, step back in time at the **Kailasanatha Temple**, the oldest temple in Kanchipuram. The 8th century temple is sandstone beauty feels like a museum carved from rock. The carvings here are some of the finest examples of early Dravidian architecture—truly a highlight of **heritage tourism in South India**. The silk. Kanchipuram is famous worldwide for its lustrous **hand-woven silk sarees**. A visit to one of the traditional silk weaving looms reveals the artistry behind every thread—no mass production here, just generations of weavers crafting heirlooms by hand. Whether you're looking to buy a **Kanchipuram silk saree** or simply watch the magic happen, the looms are a living museum of textile heritage.

Dinner and overnight stay at Mahabalipuram



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DAY 5: Explore Pondicherry Sightseeing – Auroville, French Quarter & Local Experiences

After breakfast, embark on a scenic drive to Pondicherry. *En route*, make a brief stop at the **salt pans** (subject to worker activity) for a glimpse into local livelihoods. Your first stop in Pondicherry is the serene township of **Auroville**, where you can explore the iconic **Matrimandir** and other attractions that showcase its unique philosophy and architecture. Enjoy a wholesome **lunch at Auroville**, known for its organic and sustainable cafes.

In the afternoon, dive into **Pondicherry sightseeing** with a walk through the charming **French Quarter**, known for its vibrant colonial buildings, mustard-colored facades, and quiet tree-lined streets. Visit the **Sri Aurobindo Ashram**, the spiritual heart of the city, and the nearby **Manakula Vinayagar Temple**, a colourful and historic temple dedicated to Lord Ganesha. Take a relaxed walk along the **Promenade Beach**, soaking in views of the Bay of Bengal and landmarks like the **Gandhi statue**.

Later, enjoy a leisurely **cycle rickshaw ride through the French Quarter**, perfect for photography and discovering hidden alleys. End your day with a stroll through **Goubert Market**, a lively local bazaar, followed by a refreshing cup of **authentic South Indian filter coffee** at a nearby café.

Dinner and overnight stay in Pondicherry.



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DAY 6: Chidambaram Temple, Coir & Bronze Craft, Gangaikonda Cholapuram – Heritage Drive to Tanjore

After breakfast, depart for **Thanjavur (Tanjore)** with your first stop at the iconic **Chidambaram Nataraja Temple**, one of the most sacred **Shiva temples in Tamil Nadu**. Celebrated for its **Chola architecture** and cosmic symbolism, the temple is a must-visit for heritage lovers and spiritual seekers alike.

Along the way, stop to witness two traditional **Tamil Nadu crafts** (subject to artisan availability):

- **Coir rope spinning** – an age-old cottage industry using coconut fibre to create strong, eco-friendly ropes.
- **Bronze casting** – observe the intricate **lost-wax process** that gives life to exquisite bronze idols, a craft that has flourished since Chola times.

Continue your journey to the majestic **Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** known for its soaring tower and masterful stone carvings. It's a quieter counterpart to the Brihadeeswara Temple and perfect for photography and cultural immersion.

Break for a traditional **South Indian lunch in Kumbakonam**, a temple town famous for its coffee, silk, and religious energy.

Reach Tanjore by evening, check in at your hotel, and unwind. Enjoy a hearty dinner and overnight stay in Thanjavur, the heart of Tamil Nadu's classical arts and Chola legacy.

Dinner & overnight in Tanjore



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DAY 7: Srirangam Temple Excursion & Brihadeeswarar Temple – Sacred Sites of Tamil Nadu

After breakfast, set out on a **day excursion to Srirangam**, home to the legendary **Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple**, the largest functioning Hindu temple complex in the world. Located near **Tiruchirapalli (Trichy)**, this architectural wonder is dedicated to Lord Vishnu and renowned for its sprawling gopurams, intricate sculptures, and sacred atmosphere.

After exploring the **Srirangam temple complex**, head into **Trichy for lunch**, where you can enjoy authentic **Tamil Nadu cuisine** at a local restaurant. Optional stops in Trichy include a quick photo op at **Rock fort Temple** or a short visit to the **Jambukeswarar Temple** if time permits.

Return to **Thanjavur (Tanjore)** in the late afternoon. In the evening, visit the awe-inspiring **Brihadeeswarar Temple**, also known as the **Big Temple**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** and one of the finest examples of **Chola architecture**. Explore the towering Vimana, monolithic Nandi, and beautifully carved corridors as the golden light of dusk brings the stone to life.

Enjoy dinner and overnight stay in Tanjore.



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DAY 8: Chettinad Heritage & Madurai Arrival – Mansions, Weaving & Fragrant Markets

After breakfast, begin your journey to **Madurai** with a cultural stop in the **Chettinad region**, renowned for its palatial mansions, traditional crafts, and legendary cuisine. *En route*, explore the charming town of **Kanadukathan**, home to Athangudi floor tiles & to grand **Chettinad mansions** built by the Chettiar community in the 19th and early 20th centuries. These heritage homes, with their Burma teak pillars, Athangudi tiles, and European influences, offer a glimpse into a bygone era of opulence.

Next, witness **Chettinad cotton weaving**, a local handloom tradition known for its bold colours and distinctive patterns. It's a chance to appreciate Tamil Nadu's **textile heritage** and see skilled artisans at work.

Indulge in a **traditional Chettinad lunch**, famous for its rich spices, aromatic curries, and its unique dishes. Post lunch, drive onward to **Madurai**, one of South India's oldest continuously inhabited cities. Before checking in, stop by the **Madurai wholesale flower market**, a vibrant, sensory-filled experience with heaps of fresh jasmine, marigolds, and roses—a must-see for photographers and culture lovers.

Dinner and overnight stay in Madurai.



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DAY 9: Madurai Sightseeing – Meenakshi Temple, Thirumalai Nayak Palace & Local Shopping

After breakfast, embark on a guided Madurai sightseeing tour covering key attractions such as the historic **Thirumalai Nayak Palace** and the iconic **Meenakshi Amman Temple**. Enjoy some free time near the Madurai Temple complex to explore local markets and street shopping for souvenirs and traditional crafts. Return to the hotel for lunch. In the late afternoon, you can either visit the **Gandhi Memorial Museum in Madurai** or enjoy the rest of the day at leisure.

Dinner and overnight stay at your hotel in Madurai.



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DAY 10: Brick Kilns, Spice Plantations & Kalaripayattu – Culture & Nature in Periyar

After breakfast, begin your scenic drive to **Periyar (Thekkady)**, nestled in the **Western Ghats** and known for its lush greenery, wildlife, and spice plantations. *En route*, stop at a **traditional brick-making unit** (subject to artisan activity) to witness the age-old process of handcrafting bricks using clay and natural sun-drying methods—a rare insight into rural livelihoods in Tamil Nadu.

Arrive in Periyar by lunchtime and enjoy a local meal. In the afternoon, visit a **spice plantation** for a guided tour where you'll learn about the cultivation, harvesting, and processing of **cardamom, pepper, cinnamon, cloves**, and other spices that make Kerala cuisine so distinctive. This **Periyar spice plantation tour** also includes opportunities to shop for fresh, organic spices directly from the source.

Later in the evening, experience the energy and skill of a live **Kalaripayattu martial arts performance**, Kerala's ancient and dynamic martial art that blends agility, strength, and tradition.

Enjoy dinner and overnight stay in Periyar (aka Thekkady), surrounded by the serenity of the forested hills.



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DAY 11: Periyar Nature Trails, Tea Plantations & Leisure

Start your day with an **optional early morning forest trek** in **Periyar National Park**, a guided experience through the rich biodiversity of the Western Ghats. Spot native flora and, with luck, glimpses of wildlife like deer, giant squirrels, and birds in their natural habitat. After the trek, return to the hotel for a well-earned breakfast.

Later in the day, enjoy a **jeep ride through scenic tea plantations** and visit a **local tea factory** (subject to worker availability). Learn about the journey of tea from leaf to cup, and witness the plucking, drying, and processing that goes into making South India's famous brews.

In the evening, choose your own adventure:

- Embark on an **optional boat ride in Periyar Lake**, where you might spot elephants, bison, or otters along the banks of the forested hills.
- Or, spend your time indulging in **shopping for spices and handmade goods**, or unwind with a **traditional Ayurvedic massage**.

Dinner and overnight stay in Periyar (Thekkady).



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DAY 12: Backwaters & Bliss – Arrive in Kumarakom for Sunset Serenity

After breakfast, drive toward the tranquil village of **Kumarakom**, set along the serene **Vembanad Lake**, in the heart of **Kerala's backwaters**. Upon arrival, check in and enjoy a relaxing **lunch at your resort**, where traditional **Kerala hospitality** welcomes you with warm smiles and local flavours.

Spend the afternoon at leisure, taking in the peaceful surroundings. In the early evening, set out on a **sunset cruise through the Kumarakom backwaters**, gliding past coconut palms, fishing villages, and houseboats as the golden light reflects on the still waters—an unforgettable highlight of any visit to Kerala.

Return to your resort for **dinner and overnight stay in Kumarakom**, soaking in the calm and comfort of this idyllic lakeside retreat.



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DAY 13: Birdsong & Backwaters – Houseboat Experience in Kerala

Begin your day with an **optional early morning visit to the Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary**, a lush haven for birdwatchers and nature lovers. Walk through the peaceful trails along the Vembanad Lake and spot a variety of migratory and native birds, including herons, egrets, and the famous Siberian crane (seasonal).

Return to the hotel for a hearty breakfast before setting off on a short drive to board your **private Kerala houseboat**, a signature experience of the **backwaters of Kerala**.

Enjoy a freshly prepared **lunch on board** as you drift through the tranquil canals, past paddy fields, village homes, and coconut groves. The pace is slow, the views are endless, and the experience is pure relaxation.

Spend the afternoon and evening soaking in the scenery, reading, photographing, or simply watching rural Kerala float by. Dinner and overnight stay on the houseboat, lulled to sleep by the gentle rhythm of the water.



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DAY 14: Fort Kochi Heritage & Kathakali – Cultural Finale in Cochin

After breakfast on the houseboat, drive to **Cochin (Kochi)** and begin your exploration of the city's historic **Fort Kochi** area. Visit the iconic **St. Francis Church**, the final resting place of Vasco da Gama, and witness the centuries-old **Chinese fishing nets**, still operated using traditional methods along the waterfront. If available, make a short visit to the **local dhobi khana (open-air laundry)** to see washer men engaged in one of Fort Kochi's enduring community trades.

Break for **lunch at a local restaurant**, where you can enjoy a variety of Kerala coastal dishes.

After lunch, **check in to your hotel** and take some time to relax. In the evening, attend a live **Kathakali dance performance**, Kerala's classical dance-drama known for its dramatic makeup, colourful costumes, and expressive storytelling rooted in ancient epics.

Return to the hotel for dinner and overnight stay in Cochin, ending your day steeped in history, art, and culture



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DAY 15: Culture & Farewell – Cochin's Living History and Last Impressions

After breakfast, begin your final day with a visit to the **Kerala Folklore Museum**, a treasure trove of art, antiques, and architecture that offers deep insights into Kerala's vibrant cultural heritage. From masks and costumes to wood carvings and musical instruments, the museum beautifully preserves the legacy of Kerala's folk traditions.

Next, return to **Mattancherry** to explore the **Dutch Palace (Mattancherry Palace)**, known for its Kerala-style architecture and stunning murals depicting scenes from the Ramayana. Continue to the **Paradesi Synagogue**, the oldest functioning synagogue in the Commonwealth, with its beautiful Belgian glass chandeliers and hand-painted Chinese tiles.

Spend some **free time wandering the atmospheric Jewish Quarter** —perfect for picking up spices, antiques, or souvenirs, or simply soaking in the old-world charm.

Return to the hotel in the afternoon for packing and some final downtime before gathering for a **farewell dinner**, reflecting on the unforgettable journey through South India's temples, traditions, and timeless landscapes.

TOUR ENDS



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