

E.Y.H.O. Tours

South India

Temples and Tea
With Living Heritage of Chettinad

January 22 – February 2, 2024

"All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware." -Martin Buber



www.eyhotours.com



Gift yourself

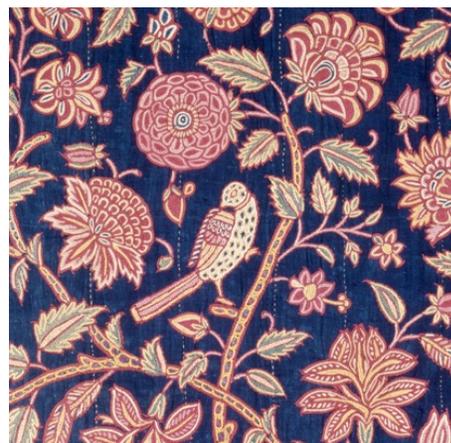
An eye-opening journey to the riches of South India

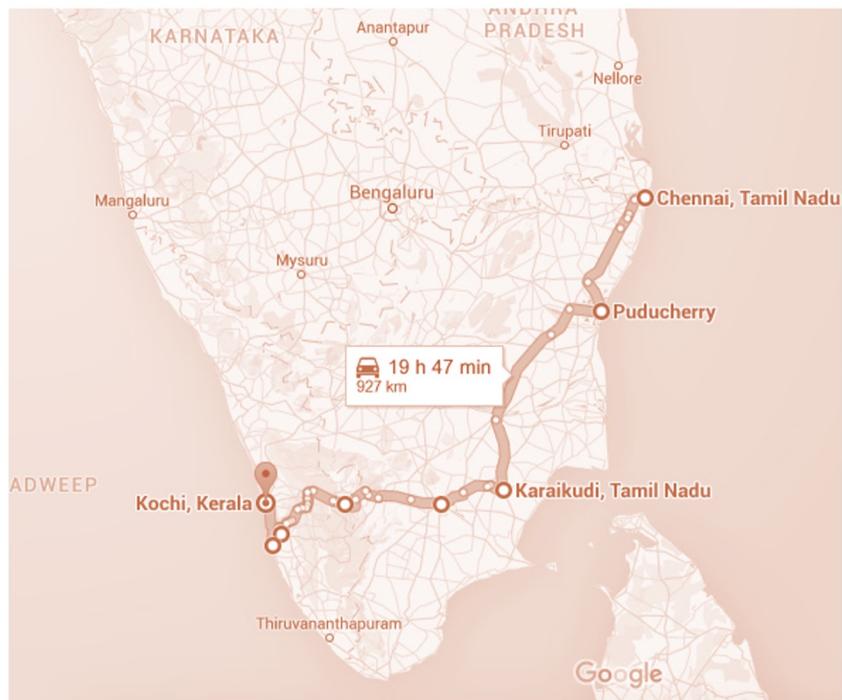
Visit fabled lands of ancient Malabar and Coromandel coasts
Trail the tea-draped Deccan plateau
Tap into temples with a millennium of uninterrupted worship
Explore Chettinad's unique lifestyle, cuisine, and architecture
Cruise the verdant backwaters in God's own Country
French and Dutch vibes in Pondy and Fort Kochi
Return feeling rejuvenated and inspired

For your trip to South India, there is only ONE person to contact. Her name is Shila Desai. You're in excellent hands – Shelley Kirsch, Toronto

Highlights

- Insider visits with architectural insight to 6th - 12th C temples and monuments of Mahabalipuram, Chidambaran, and Meenakshi
- Cuisine, lifestyle and architecture of fascinating Chettinad
- Tea plantations of serene Munnar
- Backwaters cruising in Kerala
- French and Dutch heritage of Pondicherry and Cochin
- Idyllic beach Ayurveda retreat in Kerala
- Delightful accommodation in colonial tea plantation outposts and boutique hotels throughout
- Packed with inclusions: culinary lessons, artisanal demos, and meals with local families





Your Destination Awaits

Over the mountainous Western and Eastern Ghats and down into the Malabar and Coromandel coasts of South India lie the hidden gems of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Far less visited than the North, South India has a wealth of cultures, unique architecture and history, varied topography, ancient living temples, and some of the subcontinent's tastiest cuisine.

Home to Ayurveda, the best yoga shalas, coconut-tree-lined coasts that give way to fine sandy beaches, vast plains carpeted with tea and paddy, small villages and ornate temples, misty mountains, enclaves of Dutch and French colonial outposts, as well as bustling metropolises complete with skyscrapers next to surviving relics of ancient history.

South India is a destination you'll savour long after your return home.

“What I love about this itinerary . . .

The South is the unadulterated essence of India. Tamil Nadu and Kerala are infused with living history and devotion. Waves of invaders transformed the North but their influence waned this far south. As a result, temples have been in continuous use for a thousand years or more, and unbroken traditions continue from ancient times.

For this tour, I've curated gems of temples, Ayurveda, and Chettiar heritage. On the east coast, I've added Pondicherry for a unique spiritual experience with a Tamil-French flair, and on the west a cruise through emerald-fringed backwaters. Because South India is best experienced slowly, the trick is to do less than more.

Shila

At a glance

12 Days (11 nights)

Cost

Double occupancy sharing: USD 4520/Add for own room: USD 1260

- 2 nights Chennai (Madras)
- 2 nights Pondicherry
- 2 nights Karaikudi
- 1 night Madurai
- 2 nights Idukki
- 1 night backwaters cruise
- 1 night Cochin

Note: International flights into Chennai and out of Kochi. Please contact us for internal travel and transfers not covered in this itinerary.



Day 1: Mon Jan 22

Madras (Chennai)

Arrive Madras, transfer to centrally based hotel. *Note: Arrivals before 2pm require an extra night (\$)*

Welcome and relax. Afternoon visit to [Dakshinachitra](#), a centre for art, architecture, lifestyles, crafts and performing arts of South India.

Take in evening rituals at Kapeeshwar Temple. Built in 7th C A.D, this Shiva temple honours his consort Parvati. Welcome dinner: a delicious introduction to the ubiquitous *dhosa*.

Meals: D



Day 2: Tues Jan 23

Madras (Chennai)

Day at Kalakshetra Arts Village, “holy place for the arts” situated on a hundred-acre seaside property. Explore the craft center and the performing arts heritage of South India. Enjoy open spaces and spreading trees. Take in a hand-loom textile demo and the libraries, followed by South-Indian-style lunch with the students of Kalakshetra. In the afternoon, participate in a drama workshop or Indian classical dance (*Bharatnatyam*). Evening, relax.

Meals: B, L



Day 3: Wed Jan 24

Pondicherry (Puducherry)

After breakfast, transfer to Puducherry, approx. 4 hours. Enroute: shore temple of [Mahabalipuram](#), carved out of caramel-coloured rock in 7thC.

Arrive “Pondy” - former capital of French India, an enclave of French-style colonial architecture, Indian-style verandahs, and bohemian-chic artist culture. Check in at our historic hotel in the old quarter. Enjoy the sea breeze over lunch and continue to explore on foot, Or take a short boat ride to Paradise Beach. Evening, convene with a local family to learn secrets of traditional South Indian cuisine with a French twist.

Meals: B, D



Day 4: Thu Jan 25

Puducherry

Walking tour of Puducherry, exploring the Arulmigu Manakula Vinayagar temple, the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and l'Eglise de Notre Dame des Anges, among others. Afternoon tour of the renowned Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Evening at leisure to explore on your own or book a meditation session at the Ashram or walk along the seaside promenade. If you're feeling more urbane, imbibe cocktails in the open-air lounge at L'E-Space.

Meals: B



Day 5: Fri Jan 26

Karaikudi

After breakfast, 2 hour transfer from Puducherry to [Chidambaram Temple](#), abode of the dancing Shiva and embodiment of element of space.

Continue 4 hours to the heart of Chettinad – Karaikudi. Check-in at heritage hotel that recalls the glory of the wealthy elite of this region. The Chettiars are a community of hereditary bankers who plied their services all over South East Asia and returned with the finest teak, ceramics, and stained glass to build mansions of remarkable architectural pedigree.

Meals: B, L



Day 6: Sat Jan 27

Karaikudi

Explore the fascinating micro-culture of Chettinad with a member of the community. Visit heritage mansions – in effect home-banks – where valuables and grains were stored, families lived generationally around courtyards, conjugal relations took place when men returned from banking overseas. Try your hand at making gorgeous Chettinad floor tiles which even though not fired, manage to last hundreds of years. Learn to make rice patterns on floor and visit a Chettiar antique market. Afternoon Chettinad cuisine cooking lesson

Meals: B, L



Day 7: Sun Jan 28

Madurai

Drop in at a traditional sari shop and learn about saris for different occasions. Learn how to drape a sari, followed by a visit with a home weaver.

After lunch, transfer 1.5 hrs to Madurai to the fabled 6thC Meenakshi Temple, dedicated to female energy and Goddess Parvati, consort of Lord Shiva. Its *gopuram* is covered with thousands of stone figures of animals, gods, goddesses and demons painted in all colours of the rainbow.

Overnight at heritage hotel in Madurai.

Meals: B, D



Day 8: Mon Jan 29

Munnar

After breakfast transfer 5 hrs on winding hillside roads to verdant Munnar. Girded by three rivers, Munnar is populated by indigenous peoples and forests, and wildlife. The oldest tea plantations are situated here too.

Upon arrival, visit a spice plantation to learn how cinnamon, pepper, and cashews grow. Evening at leisure or walk nearby tea plots and join the women tea-pickers in the evening tea picking.

Meals: B, L



Day 9: Tue Jan 30

Munnar

Transfer by jeeps to Talayar Valley to experience tea production & tea tasting followed by lunch.

Upon arrival at Talayar tea Estate, after refreshments, walk through the evergreen tea gardens. Watch tea leaf plucking activities. Witness tea production processes like withering, cutting, tearing, curling, fermenting and drying. Finally taste the tea produced in your presence.

Break for a Tamil lunch at the bungalow. Return to Munnar for the evening

Meals: B, L, D



Day 10: Wed Jan 31

Kumarakom

Transfer 3 hours downhill to Kumarakom, the entry to Kerala's rice country. A cluster of islands around Vembanad Lake are known for their unparalleled beauty.

Board your deluxe converted rice barge, enjoy lunch on board, and relax while the traditional boat cruises through narrow serene backwater canals, while glimpsing life on shore. Lunch, evening tea/coffee with snacks, dinner and overnight stay on luxury air-conditioned houseboat.

Meals: B, L, D



Day 11: Thu Feb 1

Kochi

Transfer 2 hrs to Kochi (Cochin), a 16th century Portuguese and Dutch fort-city that is steeped in history. Guided visit to St Francis Church, the oldest Church in India, 500-year-old Portuguese Houses, cantilevered Chinese fishing nets, 16th century Synagogue, Jew Town and Portuguese-built Mattancherry Palace with beautiful murals. Evening performance of classical dance-drama *kathakali*.

With a delectable coconut-and seafood-rich cuisine, don't miss fresh caught cooked right on the beach! Farewell dinner. Meals: B, D



Day 12: Fri Feb 2

Kochi

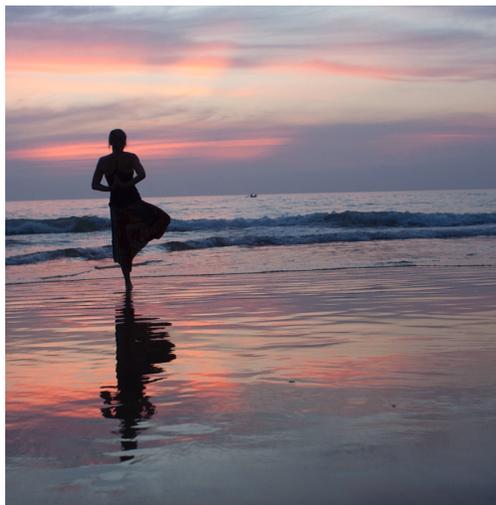
Transfer to airport (1 hr) according to your international flight departure.

We wish you a safe journey and thank you for traveling with EYHO!

Meals: B

Thank you for travelling with E.Y.H.O.! We look forward to welcoming you on another of our spectacular holidays.

Option: 4 days/3 nights Yoga and Ayurveda Retreat on idyllic Marari Beach, one of Kerala's finest.



Days 12-14: Fri-Mon Feb 2-5

Optional Add On

Yoga and Ayurveda Retreat

Transfer 1 hr to your Ayurveda shala at Marari Beach, nestled along the sea in acres of serene gardens. Take in private morning yoga classes on pristine Marari Beach, which is dense with palm groves and tucked-away colonial architecture. Explore local churches and temples during the day or relax and enjoy Ayurveda treatments(\$) Possibility of catching an infamous snake boat race (seasonal)

Offered at the resort: full Ayurveda.

All meals.

Please [enquire](#).



Marari Beach Hotel

Set on 13 acres with a choice of access to two beaches: Marari near fishing village and Alleppy, a more happening beach. Provides the ideal base for daily yoga classes and Ayurveda treatments.



Hotel Dune de L'Orient

A 1760's Old Quarter mansion renovated with high-raftered ceilings, savonnerie rugs, and easy chairs to lounge away afternoons. Fine Creole eating in the courtyard where Tamil spices mix with French understatement to titillate the palates of gourmets.



The Bangala

A 1910 heritage mansion of royal Chettiar family, with traditional interiors, beautiful gardens and uniquely designed suites. Enjoy rich authentic Chettinad cuisine, relax in the pool, or grab a book from the old library for a read on the verandah.



Heritage Madurai

Geoffrey Bawa designed hotel echoes with historic charm that resonates in open-to-the-air main areas and charming rooms. Unique Olympic-sized temple tank pool and dining under a 200yr old banyan serenaded by bird calls are highlights.



CGH Earth

Time on a Spice Boat flows at a languid pace. Recline on the foredeck and slowly get into the natural rhythm of life. Still your mind and let nature work its magic on your senses. CGH – ecologically conscious luxury. [Queen of the Backwaters](#)

Accommodations are representative only. Actual will be comparable but may vary according to group size and availability.



What's included

- Hosted by E.Y.H.O. owner Shila Desai
- Chettinad portion: hosted by Chettiar expert
- local English speaking destination guides
- All road transportation in private air-conditioned vehicle
- All guided tours and sightseeing
- All entrance fees at monuments and temples
- All breakfasts, 6 lunches and 6 dinners
- Athangudi tile making demo
- Culinary lesson with local family in Pondicherry
- Culinary lesson in Chettinad cuisine
- Kathakali dance-drama performance
- Dance or drama workshop at Kalakhshetra

What's not

- International airfare
- Internal flights tour start and end points
- Tipping and gratuities
- Travel insurance

Registration

USD800 to secure your space. Terms and conditions

Minimum 08/Maximum 14

COSTS

South India – based on minimum 12 pax. Will reduce by increments of USD150 pp for every 2 pax extra.

USD 4480 pp double occupancy

USD 1330 single supplement

Yoga/Ayurveda Add-on

Depends on #s. Please enquire. shila@eyhotours.com

Enquiries

To register or questions, please email:
shila@eyhotours.com

Terms and Conditions

For your complete peace of mind, we are TICO (Travel Industry of Ontario) accredited #50023991