



## The Women's Travel Group Southern India: the Malabar Coast, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu

*The sights, sounds, and aromas of India await, as you wend your way through the lush landscapes and colorful markets of Kerala. The Portuguese, Syrian Christians, Jews, and Dutch all left their mark on the cuisine and culture. Ayurveda is the oldest healthcare system in the world and Kerala Ayurveda is justifiably famous. The Cochin Jewish community is the oldest in India dating back to King Solomon's time. Modern Syrian Christians of Kerala believe that the Apostle Thomas visited in A.D. 52 to baptize their ancestors. Southern India is a magical place filled with a rich cultural history. A land of spices that has a fascinating cuisine distinct from the North. Explore, relax, and unwind!*

### **Day 1 – Saturday November 27 - Cochin (D)**

Fly to Cochin in the state of Kerala. Upon arrival you will be met and transferred to your hotel. Early check-in is included. A tour briefing followed by a Welcome dinner is scheduled this evening in the hotel.

#### **Brunton Boatyard (Sea Facing)**

*This 22 room, CGH Earth property is moored on a historic stretch of Cochin's famed harbour. The Brunton Boatyard Hotel was resurrected from the remains of a Victorian shipyard. Today, it gives the modern traveler a unique opportunity to dwell amidst the shadow plays of 19th century history. A mercantile trading era when pepper from Kerala was as precious as gold. The Brunton Boatyard Hotel is your chance to dine from, literally, a melting pot. All the cultures that came to the Malabar Coast over three centuries can be sampled in a single evening. Locally sourced ingredients enhance historical recipes.*

### **Day 2- Sunday November 28 - Cochin (B)**

In Cochin, visit the Portuguese church built by St. Francis in 1562, the Jewish Synagogue, the famed Mattancherry Palace and learn about the Chinese fishing nets. Enjoy an evening presentation of the colorful Kathakali. Kathakali is a dramatic Hindu dance drama unique to Kerala utilizing vivid makeup and masks.

### **Day 3- Monday November 29 - Cochin/ Kumarakom (BD)**

Drive approximately 1 ¼ hours through rural India to Kumarakom. Check in at **Coconut Lagoon Resort (Heritage bungalow)**. Your afternoon is at leisure.

You may want to experience an Ayurvedic therapeutic massage, indigenous to this region, which is both relaxing and healing. We have arranged a sunset cruise before dinner.

#### **Coconut Lagoon Resort (Heritage Bungalow)**

*Take an enchanting boat ride through Vembanad Lake to reach Coconut Lagoon, a backwater destination that is nestled amidst canals, paddy fields and lush natural life. Reflecting Kuttanad's vibrant culture, this resort has old Kerala homes constructed in the centuries-old 'tharavadu' style, transplanted from the past, and preserved to perfection. The lake is home to an abundance of natural life, with rare species of plants, butterflies, birds, and sea creatures, which can all be discovered from Coconut Lagoon with the help of the resident naturalists. We will delight in Kerala's cuisine. Freshness is key! Dishes prepared by the chefs include traditional recipes and multi-cuisine fusions.*

### **Day 4 - Tuesday November 30 – Cruise the Backwaters (BLD)**

This morning, we enjoy a boat ride through the series of canals and lagoons winding their way through



several tiny villages and tropical vegetation. Not only do the backwaters of Kerala link the state together, they are an integral element in maintaining ecological balance and creating harmony with nature. Lunch at the Phillipkutty farm on a charming island in Vernbanad Lake. Return to the hotel in the late afternoon.

**Day 5 - Wednesday December 1 Kumarakom/Thekkady- 3 h. drive (B)**

Depart for Thekkady this morning. Afternoon at leisure.

**Spice Village (Garden Cottage)**

*Spice Village is set in a spice garden in the cool highlands of Periyar in Thekkady.*

*The resort was conceived as a village, modeled on the dwellings of the native Manan tribe of this region. Its building used local materials, native artisans and, mountain spirit. 52 rooms are arranged in bungalows through the Garden*

*"Local people taught us about self-sustaining systems and steward our organic gardens that put fresh vegetable, fruits, and spices on your table every day." Spice Village's master chefs share their skills in using and combining spices in traditional Kerala dishes in the nightly cooking classes. Try your hand at papermaking. The pulp that creates the notepads, menus and luggage tags is made from wastepaper collected in the resort.*

**Day 6- Thursday December 2 Thekkady/Madurai - 3 1/2 drive (BL)**

This morning we visit Periyar, a unique wildlife sanctuary, about 300 square miles, and centered around an artificial lake fed by the Periyar River. We will have a game-viewing boat ride on Periyar Lake. It is home to tigers and a significant elephant population, as well as rare lion-tailed macaques, sambar deer, leopards, and Indian bison. Later we drive to Madurai. We will stop on the way to visit a spice plantation.

**Heritage Hotel Madurai (Deluxe Club)**

*Welcome to Heritage Madurai. A 72 room resort, one hundred years in the making, in the heart of a city that grew from drops of nectar that flowed from the locks of Shiva, as legend would have us believe. Enter the gates of the 17-acre resort, and experience the Madurai of distant past.*

**Day 7 - Friday December 3 Madurai Sightseeing (BD)**

Madurai is the cultural capital of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Here we will find some of the most impressive Hindu temples in Tamil Nadu. The largest, Meenakshi Temple occupies 35 acres in the epicenter of the city. It amazes with its 14 gateway towers (gopurams) with 33,000 sculptures. Continue to Thirumalai Nayak Palace, a blend of Islamic and Dravidian architecture designed as the king's residence. Our visit to the Gandhi Museum for a deeper insight into the life of the Mahatma. We see the beautifully constructed Mariamman Teppakkulam Tank, which covers 16 acres. Handicrafts like cotton, handwoven silk, lace, wood, and stone carvings are also found in this area. There's **full moon** tonight.

**Day 8 - Saturday December 4 Madurai/Chennai (Madras) 3 h (BD)**

We will be transferred to Madurai airport, for our flight to Chennai. Upon arrival we will be met and transferred to your hotel. Rest of the day is free to relax.

Tonight, enjoy the farewell dinner with a glass of wine.

**ITC Grand Chola Chennai (Executive Club)**

*Set in an opulent, palatial design which pays homage to Southern India's grand empires, the ITC Grand Chola, Chennai overlooks verdant parks and gardens. Experience understated Indian hospitality in an exquisite property with a distinct personality. This luxury hotel 10 award winning food and beverage outlets, signature wellness experiences and more. It embodies the highest standards in Indian hospitality balanced with elegant restraint in a prime property with distinct personality. ITC Grand Chola has 522 rooms and 78 luxuriously appointed service apartments- collectively it is the epitome of Indian grace and style, expertly delegated with thoughtful amenities. ITC Grand Chola meets the needs of both the business travelers on the move as well as the bespoke requirements of the destination connoisseur.*

**Day 9 Sunday December 5 - Chennai Sightseeing - Depart (B)**

A highlight today is remarkably historic San Thome Cathedral, built on the tomb of the Apostle. St.



Thomas visited Madurai in 52 AD and was martyred in 72AD. Marco Polo recorded his own visit in 1292. The morning tour of Chennai includes stops at the Victoria Art Gallery, the Fort St. George, and the Kapaleeswarar Temple complete your visit. Bid India farewell and board your International flight home. Or continue to charming Pondicherry.

Rooms will be available till 1200, Noon. Late check out is not included.

### Pondicherry Extension

#### **Day 9 - Sunday December 5 - Chennai /Pondicherry 6 h (B)**

We will drive to Pondicherry after breakfast, making interesting stops along the way.

#### **Palais de Mahe (Deluxe)**

*Palais de Mahe (a CGH Earth experience) is situated in the French quarter in Pondicherry, India. The architecture of this beautiful boutique hotel is in keeping with the French colonial style of the region. It has 18 luxurious suites, a lovely courtyard with a swimming pool, a restaurant and bar, and a poolside cafe. Palais De Mahe is at the intersection of two beckoning worlds. One gently murmurs the spirit of Colonial France with its clean streets, neatly plastered bungalows and flower-decked balconies, while the other envelops you in its salt and spice laden air coming off the Coromandel Coast of India in great animating gusts. The street signs in Pondicherry are unique and its several languages aid the global traveler. Historic buildings jostle against charming sidewalk cafes, trendy designer wear boutiques stand next to sari shops. It is these rich contrasts that were infused into the Palais de Mahe, which mirrors the twin faces of this charming seaside city in southern India. The style remains faithful to a historic past while the experience offers a captivating blend of the old and the new making you feel like a traveler in time.*

#### **Day 10 - Monday December 6 - Pondicherry (BD)**

Pondicherry is a city with many artisans. We will visit the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, a spiritual community practicing yoga, meditation and there are also libraries for study and facilities music, dance, theatre, and the arts. Integral yoga aims for a more evolutionary order in terrestrial Nature.

The French Quarter or the White Town is distinguished by the Goubert Avenue which runs along the Promenade Beach. The manicured layout of the avenue is lined with heritage villas and buildings and statues - the most significant part of Pondy's history. Across the canal lies the Tamil Quarter - the Black town. The Tamil Quarter has its own architectural heritage, best demonstrated by restored mansions (like Hotel Maison Perumal) which feature semi-public street verandahs, central courtyards, and large windows. The Tamil Quarter bustles with activity all day long and displays the Indian side of Pondicherry. There will also be time for shopping on Mission Street with fabric, jewelry & home wares by Indian designers. Dinner in the hotel tonight.

#### **Day 11 Tuesday December 7 - Pondicherry / Chennai / Home**

You will be transferred to Pondicherry airport in time for your flight to Chennai. Upon arrival connect your flight to onward destination.

***From Chennai you might continue to the Maldives or Sri Lanka!***

#### **Main tour**

#### **Land Arrangements:**

**Minimum 6 travelers on sharing basis                      \$3,130 Per Person**

**Single Supplement add    \$1,230**

