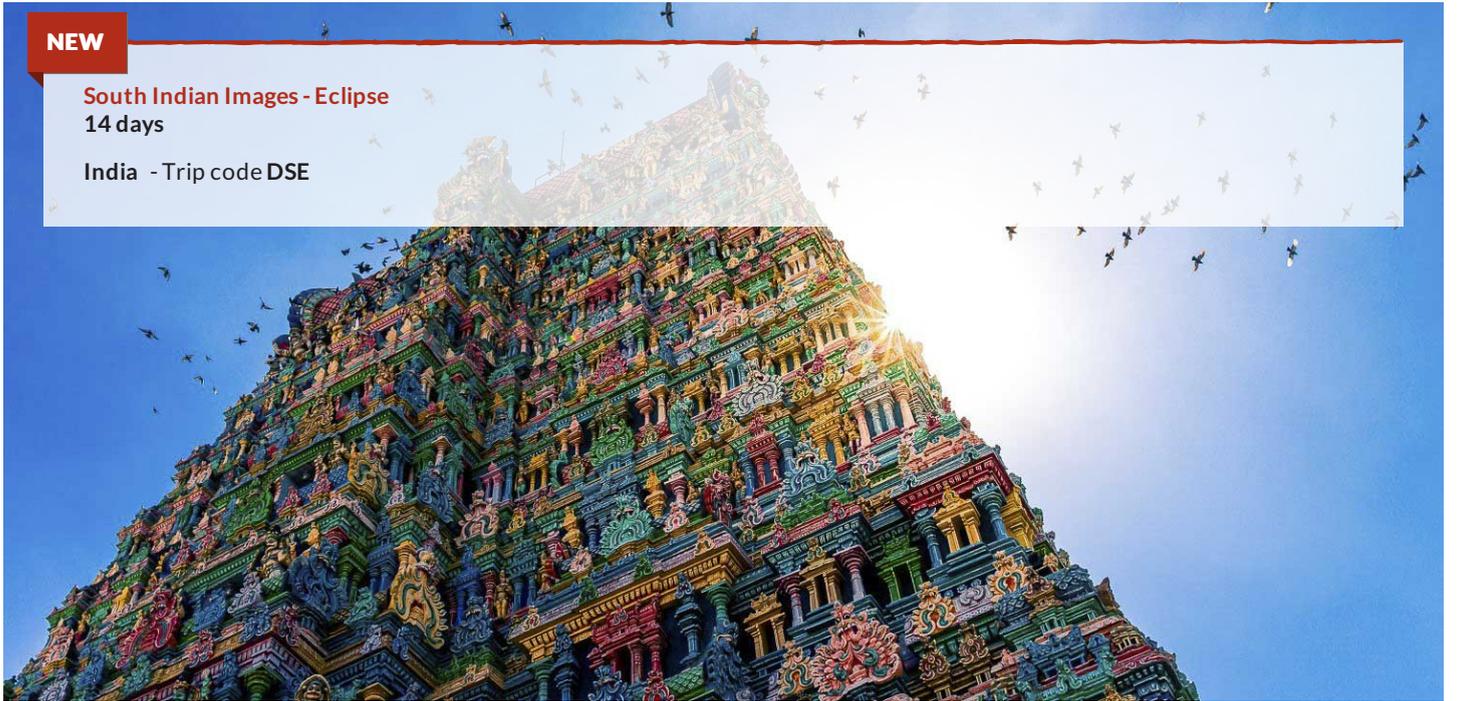


# EXPLORE!

NEW

**South Indian Images - Eclipse**  
14 days

India - Trip code DSE



## South Indian Images - Eclipse

A journey across colourful landscapes taking in the annular solar eclipse at the colonial hill station of Ooty. From intricately carved temple complexes to lush jungle backwaters and historic harbour ports, travel by train, bus and riverboat climbing to the heights of the Western Ghats and dropping down to the Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean. This fast-paced adventure includes a little bit of everything southern India has to offer.

### Trip highlights

- ★ **Annular eclipse** - Watch the solar eclipse from the colonial hill station of Ooty
- ★ **Mysore** - Visit the Maharajah's Palace, one of the largest and most elaborate palaces in India
- ★ **Madurai** - Wind your way through 1000 ornately carved pillars in the Meenakshi Temple
- ★ **Kochi** - Explore the Portuguese influenced city by boat
- ★ **Mamallapuram** - Relax on the tropical beaches of the Bay of Bengal

#### ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

##### Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

#### TRIP PACE:

##### Moderate

Moderate pace tours are ideal if you want a holiday which combines exciting activities and experiences with plenty of time to relax and unwind. Typically you'll be active and busy for part of the day but then also have time to rest and recharge your batteries.

#### GROUP SIZE:

##### 12 - 18

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

## Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

### DAY 1 - Join trip in Bangalore

Our trip begins today in Bangalore.



**Accommodation: Hotel Hindusthan International Bangalore** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

### DAY 2 - Drive to Mysore and discover its magnificent palace

We have a journey of around four hours by road to reach Mysore which offers the interested traveller a great deal including the huge Maharajah's Palace. Originally built in the 14th century, the palace has undergone two subsequent re-buildings and is today an opulent mixture of Hindu and British architecture. After exploring the palace we visit the enormous monolithic sculpture of the sacred bull Nandi, standing halfway up the Chamundi Hill. There will be some free time in the afternoon to explore at your own pace and you may wish to visit the Srirangapatnam Palace just outside the city, or see the historic art gallery in Jaganmohan Palace.



**Accommodation: Southern Star Mysore** (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 3 - Take a game drive in Bandipur National Park

Leaving Mysore, we drive to nearby Bandipur National Park. The park is home to a variety of animals such as the chital (spotted deer), monkeys, mongoose, panther and the Indian bison. The park's elephant population is one of the largest in the country and we may see some of them working in the forest. We take a game drive this afternoon before spending the night at a lodge on the outskirts of the park.



**Accommodation: Tusker Trails** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 4 - Morning nature walk before driving to Ooty

Waking up early on Christmas Day, we take a nature walk in the park before driving to Udhagamandalam, better known as Ooty. The most famous of all South India's hill stations, Ooty (2270m) was first adopted by the British then by wealthy Maharajas, earning the moniker 'snooty Ooty'. On arrival we enjoy Christmas Lunch at the colonial era Taj Savoy hotel.



**Accommodation: Fortune Sullivan Court Ooty** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Lunch

## DAY 5 - View the annular eclipse and take a walking tour in the famous hill station

India is a place steeped in ancient myth and legend, and as you might expect from a culture also obsessed with the stars and planets, Hindu mythology offers us an interesting story to explain this natural phenomenon of an eclipse: The deity Rahu was beheaded by the gods for drinking Amrita, the gods' nectar. Rahu's head flies off into the sky and swallows the Sun which is what causes it to disappear for a short time. The eclipse takes place at 09.30 and we'll be in the right spot in plenty of time to see the whole event. Our astronomer will be with us to provide an insight in to the science underpinning the eclipse, and help us make the most out of our opportunity to see it. Weather conditions cannot be guaranteed, but the chance of clear, mostly clear or partly cloudy skies is around 50%, with a 50% chance of it being cloudy. After a morning enjoying this wonderful event we'll take a walking tour of Ooty taking in the Botanical Gardens, St Stephen's Church and Ooty Lake.



**Accommodation: Fortune Sullivan Court Ooty** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 6 - Travel on the Toy Train. Drive to Kochi

After breakfast we take a ride of just over an hour on the famous Toy Train through the lush Nilgiri mountains to Coonoor . Traditionally the Toy Train was pulled by steam engines, but these days diesel engines are often used. It is not unknown for the train to be out of service due to maintenance or poor track conditions, if this is the case we will transfer to Coonoor by bus. We then drive to the port city of Kochi, a journey of around seven hours. There'll be plenty of stops along the way to enjoy the hill country, rural scenery and small villages and town that we pass through, before reaching sea level and the port city of Kochi.



**Accommodation: Trident Cochin** (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 7 - Explore Fort Kochi on foot and by boat

Kochi has been a gathering place of merchants since antiquity and is full of bustling traders. Fort Kochi is the oldest European settlement in India (1500), and has a mixture of English, Dutch and Portuguese influences. The Mattancherry Palace was built by the Portuguese in the 16th century, but extensive renovations by the Dutch some hundred years later earned it the name the Dutch Palace. It has some of the best murals in India, depicting scenes from the Ramayana and other great legends. We will take a tour by boat to Fort Kochi, passing Bolgatty Island and seeing the cantilevered Chinese Fishing nets. We also visit St Francis Church before a free afternoon for personal exploration.



**Accommodation: Trident Cochin** (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 8 - Spend the night on a houseboat in the backwaters

Today we visit the Jewish synagogue in Kochi before driving to the most beautiful stretch of inland waterways in Kerala - over 80km of Malabar backwaters winding under the lush leaves of coconut palms. We board our houseboat for an exotic journey, chugging in unhurried style on waterways used by villagers commuting from village to village. The traditional houseboats are simple vessels, with en suite twin rooms, and the pace is relaxed, enabling us to see riverside village life in its entirety. The people that live along the backwaters are a colourful mix of high born Nayas, traditionally inheriting property through the mother; Brahmins, once priests but now mainly professional workers; Dravidians, speaking their own language and Christians, Jews, Muslims and Chinese - an attractive, friendly melée of different types, often looking somewhat incongruous with their black umbrellas to ward off the tropical sun. Keep an eye open for the rich variety of birdlife along the water's edge. We dock in the middle of the waterways and relax as we watch the sun go down.



**Accommodation: Kerala Houseboat** (or similar)



Simple Boat



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

## DAY 9 - Travel to Thekkady

After spending the morning drifting through the backwaters, we disembark and drive to Thekkady. The route takes us through rolling hills where tea and spices are grown, and through small villages with colourful markets. We'll make a couple of stops in the villages and to admire the scenery, and the journey will take us around 5 hours.



**Accommodation: Abad Green Forest** (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 10 - Visit a spice garden en route to Madurai

After breakfast we take a visit to a nearby spice garden. After learning a little about how spices such as cardamom, vanilla, Pepper and cinnamon are grown and processed we drive to Madurai. The drive will take us nearly six hours with plenty of stops along the way. This evening we'll celebrate New Year's Eve with a gala dinner in our hotel.



**Accommodation: Hotel Fortune Pandiyan** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

## DAY 11 - Discover the ornate Meenakshi Temple

Today we have a morning tour of Madurai including a visit to the 16th century Meenakshi Temple with its nine imposing gopurams (monumental gates). Within the temple complex we explore the Thousand Pillared Hall, the Golden Lotus Tank and the Nandi Pavilion. Rising above the temple, above the festive pandemonium of swirling crowds of pilgrims that never seem to cease, are 12 stupendous towers. A short distance away is the Tirumalai Nayaka Palace, a blend of Hindu and Saracen architectural styles. Recent restorations include repainting the carvings and stone-work in their original colours - a startling effect. This afternoon you are free to explore this bustling temple town at leisure, taking in a trip to the Gandhi Museum, soaking up the vibrant colours and floral aromas, browsing through silver, craft and carpet shops or even ordering tailor-made outfits from one of the many bazaars.



**Accommodation: Hotel Fortune Pandiyan** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 12 - Take a train to Chennai then drive to Mamallapuram

We take the Vaigai Express train to Chennai today, arriving in the early afternoon and we drive to Mamallapuram on the shores of the Bay of Bengal, around and a half hour away. This was the chief harbour for the Pallavas Kingdom some 1200 years ago and

many examples of masterful carvings from those days still exist. Mamallapuram offers us the ideal opportunity to relax after our journey. The area is well known for its many beautiful temples and miles of beaches, perfect for an evening stroll.



**Accommodation: MGM Beach Resort** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 13 - Explore Mamallapuram's shore temples

Today we will take a tour of Mamallapuram visiting the UNESCO World Heritage listed Shore Temple, built in 7th century, and Ajuna's Penance, and the world's largest bas relief (some 27m long by 9m high) and one of the most impressive friezes in India. Although both are quite weather-beaten, a remarkable amount of detailed carving still remains. We will also explore the Mandapa Cave temples with interesting reliefs and the Five Rathas - monolithic temples sculptured out of the rock in the mid-7th century.



**Accommodation: MGM Beach Resort** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 14 - Tour ends at Mamallapuram

Our tour ends this morning after breakfast.



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## Why book this trip

Southern India is a delightful part of the country, and generally more laidback than the north. There are rolling tea plantations, magnificent palaces, ancient railways and the famous backwaters with their distinctive house boats. This particular trip is timed to be at the colonial hill station of Ooty for the annular eclipse of 26th December 2019, with an amateur astronomer on hand to explain the phenomenon and help you to make the most out of it. An annular eclipse happens when the moon lines up perfectly with the sun, but is at just the right distance from the earth that it doesn't quite cover it completely, leaving a ring of sunlight known as the 'ring of fire'.

# What's included?



## Included meals

Breakfast: 13  
Lunch: 2  
Dinner: 2



## Transport

Bus  
Boat  
Rickshaw  
Taxi  
Train



## Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader  
Boat Crew  
Driver(s)  
Local Guide(s)



## Accommodation

1 nights simple boat  
8 nights standard hotel  
4 nights premium hotel

# Trip information

## Country information

### India Holidays & Tours

#### Climate

There is considerable variation between the different regions of India but, in general, the climate is tropical. Summer temperatures on the plains are very hot, but cooled by the South-West Monsoon, which lasts from June- September. During these months it can be very wet and therefore very humid. At altitude, temperatures can become quite cool at night even in the summer and may drop below freezing between December and February so warm clothing is necessary. In the winter, northern and mid India can be very cool, with cold evenings, so warm clothing, including plenty of layers, are essential. The south of India remains warm and sunny during the winter months.

#### Time difference to GMT

+5

#### Plugs

3 Pin Round

#### Religion

Catholicism, Hindu, Islam and Sikhism

#### Language

Hindi and English.

## Budgeting and packing

### Optional activities

Thekkady - Spice plantation £5 (Including transport) Kochi - Traditional Kathakali Dancing £3.00. Udthagamandalam - Tea Factory £2.00; guided walk to tribal village £7.00.

### Clothing

Bear in mind that the area is tropical with high humidity. Light weight clothing is needed all year round with some warmer clothes for cooler evenings, particularly in winter (November-March) in the Nilgiri Hills. Due to the high chance of rain between October and December, it is advisable to take a rain jacket or umbrella during this time. Casual clothes are the most practical: tight fitting garments, brief shorts and skirts should be avoided, since they attract unwelcome attention. Shoes must be taken off for temple visits and you must always cover up arms and legs when going inside. You may want to take an old pair of socks to the temples as the floor can get very hot and difficult to walk on.

## Footwear

Comfortable shoes and sandals.

## Luggage

20kg

## Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and a daysac. Remember hotel porters are not always available, so don't overload yourself. Soft bags are preferable.

## Equipment

Eclipse glasses will be provided for you.

## Tipping

### Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

### Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour. Accordingly, you should allow £40 for tipping.

## Country Information

### India Holidays & Tours

#### Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

##### Lunch price

£6

##### Dinner price

£8

##### Beer price

£1.4

##### Water price

£0.5

#### Foreign Exchange

##### Local currency

Indian Rupee Recently new 500, 1000 and 2000 rupee notes have been brought in to circulation and as the old notes are no longer accepted there have been some cash flow issues. You don't need to worry about being given old notes as it's very easy to tell the difference, the new notes are pristine in comparison with most Indian money which is fairly tatty.

##### Recommended Currency For Exchange

GBP/US\$ are the best currency to change into local currency.

##### Where To Exchange

The Indian rupee is a restricted currency and it is best not to obtain in the UK as rates are very poor. You can either change money at the airport on arrival or in major towns during the tour. Your Tour Leader will advise you on the best

places in each town. Both GBP and USD cash are easy to exchange at the airport and at hotels however you will be restricted to changing £60 cash at a time and it's not possible to change money at these locations using a credit or debit card.

#### **ATM Availability**

ATMs are available in most large cities in India but they are very limited elsewhere so please do not rely on this.

#### **Credit Card Acceptance**

Very rarely, only in the larger outlets.

#### **Travellers Cheques**

Opportunities to exchange are limited.

## Transport, Accommodation & Meals

### Transport Information

Bus, Boat, Rickshaw, Taxi, Train

### Accommodation notes

#### Booking a Single Room

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

Accommodation in India is as varied as the country itself. On our tours we stay in a mix of hotels, heritage properties, camp sites and homestays. Standards do not equate to standards in the UK and it's best to approach each type of accommodation with an open mind. Service can be slow in places especially when travelling with a group. For the most part hotels do not have heating so in the winter months it can be chilly and if you feel the cold you may wish to ask for extra blankets. Hot water is not always available 24 hours a day in some of the smaller properties, and with a group staying you might find if you are showering last you may miss out on the hottest water.

## Essential information

### FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice click here.

For more information from Explore about travel advice, click here

#### **Under 18 immigration guidance**

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

### Essential Information

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

### Visa Information

India: Holders of passports endorsed 'British citizen' may be eligible for the e-Tourist Visa to enter India. The visa can be applied for through the official Indian government visa website only - <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html>. Please check all eligibility criteria that can be found on the website but important points are listed below - You must be arriving into one of 16 selected entry points, however, you can exit from any of the authorised immigration check posts in India. Entry points are - Bengaluru, Chennai,

Delhi, Goa, Kochi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Thiruvananthapuram, Jaipur, Amritsar, Gaya, Lucknow, Trichy, Varanasi and Ahmedabad. Passports must have at least 6 months validity from the date of arrival in India and at least two blank pages for stamping. The visa application will take approximately 4 days to process. It is only valid for 30 days and is only allowed for a maximum of two visits in a calendar year. The visa costs \$60. Biometric data will be collected on arrival in India. Whilst the online form offers a relatively quick way to apply for a visa, a number of applicants have reported difficulty in completing the form. Travcour will complete the on-line visa on your behalf for a fee of £25 + the visa cost. Please contact them directly if you wish to take up this service. If you are not eligible for the e-Tourist Visa, please refer to VFS Global to apply for your Indian visa - [http://in.vfsglobal.co.uk/how\\_to\\_apply.html](http://in.vfsglobal.co.uk/how_to_apply.html).

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See [www.travcour.com](http://www.travcour.com) to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

## Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

## Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

### Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

### Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

## Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

## Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

### Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

### Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

## India Holidays & Tours

### Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against Tetanus, Infectious Hepatitis, Typhoid and Polio. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information

regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth> and from your local healthcare provider.

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