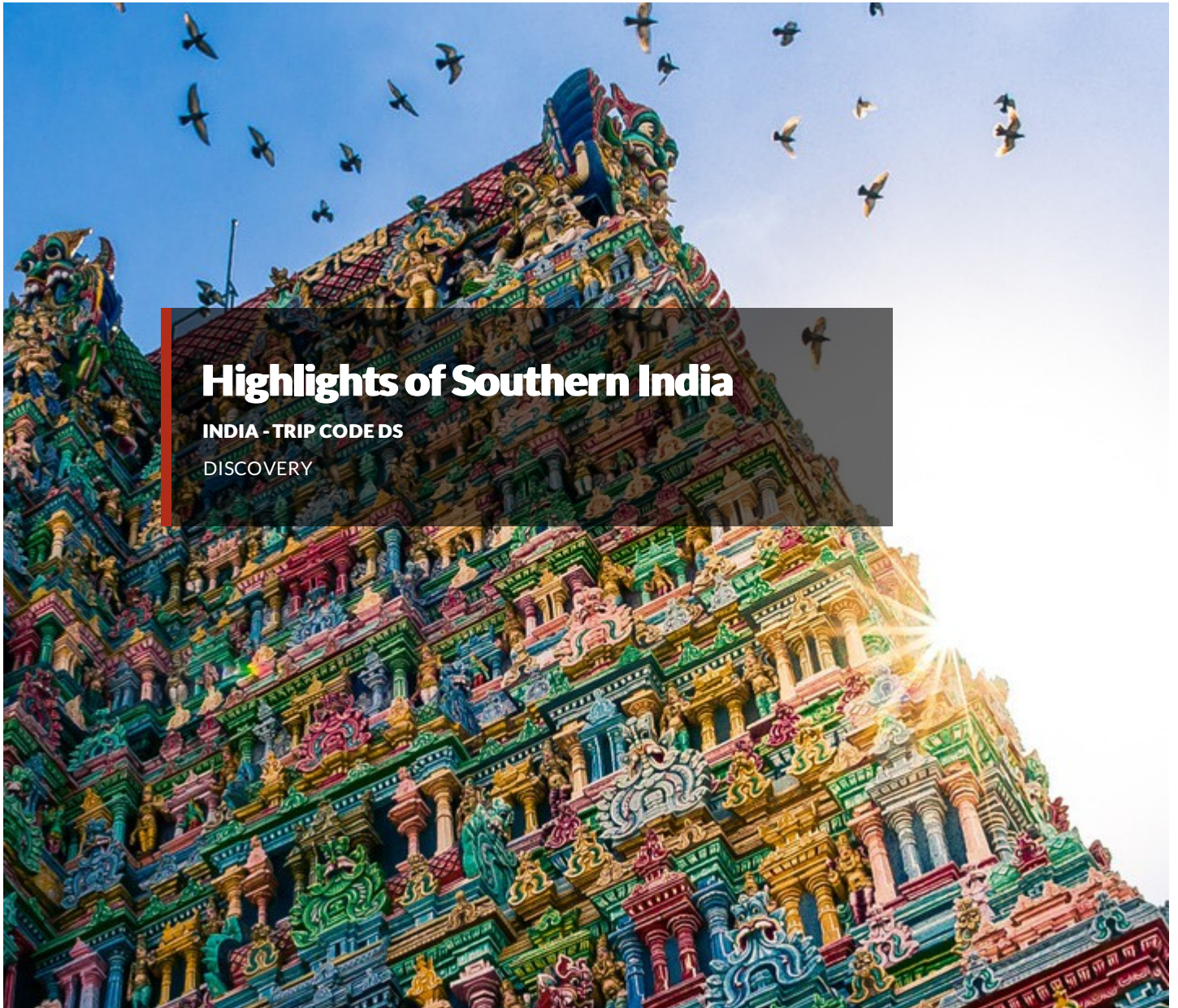


EXPLORE!



Highlights of Southern India

INDIA - TRIP CODE DS

DISCOVERY

Why book this trip?

This two-week journey is the perfect introduction to India's varied south. As we wind our way around the region we discover intricately carved temple complexes, ornate palaces and lush scenery in the tropical south-west.

- **From January 2020 we have changed the itinerary** - as well as reversing the route, we are now including Pondicherry and two nights in Bandipur National Park. Please click on the date you want, to choose the correct itinerary.
- **Palaces and temples** - Visit the ornate Maharajah's Palace in Mysore and discover the colourful Meenakshi Temple in Madurai
- **Bandipur National Park** - Search for endemic wildlife including elephant, chital and bison
- **Kochi and surrounds** - Explore the Portuguese influenced city including the Chinese fishing nets and cruise the nearby backwaters

**INCLUDED MEALS**

Breakfast: 13
Lunch: 1
Dinner: 1

**TRIP STAFF**

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

**TRANSPORT**

Bus
Boat
Train

**ACCOMMODATION**

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

**TRIP PACE:**

Moderate

**GROUP SIZE:**

12 - 18

Itinerary

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

DAY 1 - Join tour at Bangalore Airport, drive to Mysore

Our tour begins today at Bangalore Airport. After meeting in the arrivals hall we leave the airport and drive to Mysore.

**ACCOMMODATION:**

Southern Star Mysore (or similar)

Grade: Premium Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: NONE

DAY 2 - Discover Mysore Palace

Mysore 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 mélange of Hindu and British architecture. This morning we visit the Maharajah's Palace and also see the enormous monolithic sculpture of the sacred bull Nandi standing halfway up the Chamundi Hill. The rest of the day is left free to explore at your own pace. You may wish to visit the Srirangapatnam Palace outside the city or see the historic art gallery in Jaganmohan Palace. In spring, the scent of jasmine fills the air, making Mysore a city of true oriental splendour.



ACCOMMODATION:
Southern Star Mysore (or similar)



Grade: Premium Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 3 - Take a game drive in Bandipur National Park

Leaving the city today 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 gaur - 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:
Windflower Tusker Trails (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel





SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 4 - Morning game drive before driving to Ooty

An early start today as we take a second game drive in to Bandipur. After returning to our lodge for breakfast and a freshen up we drive 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 itself a reputation as Snooty Ooty.



ACCOMMODATION:
Fortune Sullivan Court Ooty (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 5 - Take a walking tour in the famous hill station

We take a walking tour of the town this morning and the afternoon is left free to visit the Botanical Gardens, St Stephen's Church or Ooty Lake. You may like to play golf at the Ooty Golf Club or take a walk up to Dodabetta Peak for some stunning views, or perhaps visit a local tea factory. There may also be the option to take a guided walk with a visit to a tribal village with a local guide.



ACCOMMODATION:
Fortune Sullivan Court Ooty (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

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

After breakfast we take a ride on the famous Toy Train to Coonoor. Whilst traditionally the Toy Train was pulled by steam engines these days they are mostly pulled by diesel engines. It is not unknown for the Toy Train to be out of service due to maintenance or due to poor track conditions, if this is the case we will transfer to Coonoor by bus. We then transfer to the coastal city of Kochi.



ACCOMMODATION:
Trident Cochin (or similar)



Grade: Premium Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 7 - Explore Fort Kochi and the Jewish Quarter

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 harbour cruise 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)

Grade: 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 people 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 waters edge. We dock in the middle of the waterways and relax as we watch the sun go down.



ACCOMMODATION:
Kerala Houseboat (or similar)

Grade: Simple Boat



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST, LUNCH & DINNER

DAY 9 - Travel to Thekkady

After spending the morning drifting through the backwaters we disembark and drive to Thekkady. En route if we have time we may stop at one of the nearby colourful markets.



ACCOMMODATION:

Abad Green Forest (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



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 the spices are grown and processed we drive to Madurai. The drive will take us nearly six hours but we will make plenty of stops along the way.



ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel Fortune Pandiyan (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

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'll 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)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 12 - Take a train to Chennai then drive to the coast on the Bay of Bengal

We take the early Vaigai Express train to Chennai this morning, arriving mid-afternoon, before driving to the tropical shores of the Bay of Bengal. Our hotel is located right on the beachfront in an area known for its miles of tropical sandy beaches. It is perfect for relaxing, and only around 40 minutes from the famous shore temples of Mamallapuram.



ACCOMMODATION:
MGM Beach Resort (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 13 - Explore Mamallapuram's shore temples

Today we will explore Mamallapuram, the chief harbour for the Pallavas Kingdom some 1200 years ago and many examples of masterful carvings from those days still exist in the so-called pagodas (actually 'rathas'). We will see the World Heritage listed Shore Temple, built in 7th century and Ajuna's Penance, 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 see 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)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 14 - Trip ends in Mamallapuram

Our trip ends this morning after breakfast in Mamallapuram.



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

Trip information

Country information

India

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

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Kochi - Traditional Kathakali Dancing £5.00.

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

A torch is useful in case of powercuts/ emergencies.

Tipping

Explore leader

Tipping isn't compulsory, and we work hard to ensure that our leaders all receive a fair wage. However, you might want to recognise a leader that's done a great job or really added to your trip by giving them a tip. We're often asked about the recommended amount. It's a tricky one, and down to personal preference, but we'd recommend between £15 to £20 per person per week as a guideline

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, your leader may organise a group's tips kitty for included activities and meals and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Accordingly, you should allow GBP45, approx. 3'800 Indian Rupees for group tipping.

For all non-included services and meals on your trip please tip independently at your discretion.

India

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	Dinner price	Beer price	Water price
£8	£10	£3	£0.5

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Indian Rupee Recently new 500 and 2000 rupee notes have been bought 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, 4WD, Boat, Train

Accommodation notes

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.

Price Guarantee

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 and Passport 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/evisa/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 28 selected entry points which can be found via the official Indian Government website link above. However, you can exit from any of the authorised immigration check posts in India.

Passports must have at least 6 months validity from the date of arrival in India and at least two blank pages for stamping. Visa applications will take approximately 4 days to process.

There are different validity visas and the costs are as follows:

30-day validity (travelling between April and June) - \$10

30-day validity (travelling between July and March) - \$25

1-year validity - \$40

5-year validity- \$80

Those applying for a 30 day electronic visa can only apply within 30 days of arrival for your visa to be valid. Furthermore double entry is permitted and you can only obtain two 30-day visas in a calendar year.

Please note these costs are subject to frequent change so you should check on the official Indian government visa website mentioned above. Biometric data will be collected on arrival in India.

If you are not eligible for the e-Tourist Visa, please refer to VFS Global to apply for your Indian visa - https://www.vfsglobal.com/india/uk/how_to_apply.html

Whilst the online form offers a relatively quick way to apply for a visa, some applicants have reported difficulty in completing the form. If you do require assistance, then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. They can complete the online visa on your behalf for a fee of £30 + the visa cost. See 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.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may be able to apply through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See 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.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

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 complimentary transfers will be arranged from the Explore designated airport or train station to your trips joining point, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. Generally the airport or station that Explore have selected will be the one that is closest to the town or city where the trip starts, or the one nearest to the joining point. It will be either an airport or train station but not both.

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, Polar, 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. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. 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

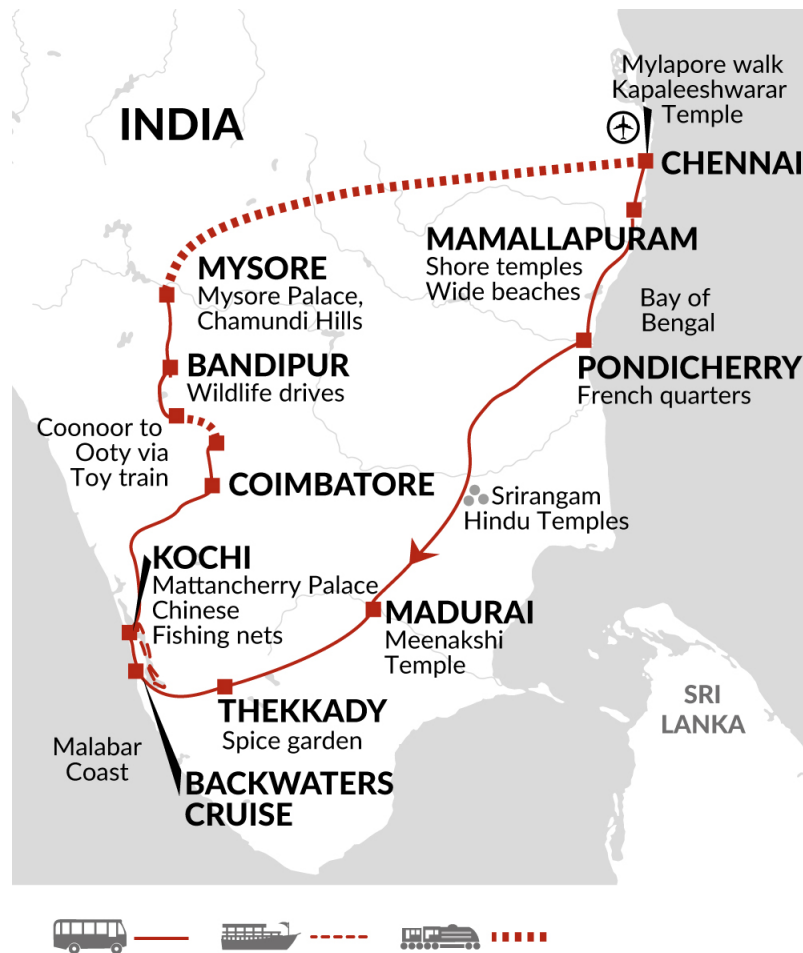
We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.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

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. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. 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 [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

Transport Information



Highlights of Southern India 2020 itinerary

Travelling on an Indian train is a fantastic experience, with millions using the rail network every day it is the perfect opportunity to meet local families.

For all the train journeys on our trips, we will reserve your seats/berths in advance in 2nd class with air conditioning. Whilst we'll try to ensure the group is all together, due to overwhelming demand and the system for booking train tickets in India, it may not always be possible to have everyone in the same carriage and some reservations may be in 3rd class. In such cases our Tour Leaders will help everyone to find their seats and ensure you get the most out of your journey. For overnight trains, each berth is separated by curtains and has 4/6 bunk beds. Bedding (sheet, blanket and pillow) is provided but you may wish to bring your own sleeping liner for added comfort. Train travel in India is safe and civilised but for added security whilst you sleep it may be a good idea to bring a bike lock for your bags. If you do not wish to carry one with you, your tour leader can help you to purchase one locally before your train journey.

Please note that in January train journeys can sometimes be affected by fog. This may result in some last minute changes to the itinerary. In this eventuality we will endeavour to stick to the itinerary as closely as possible and will cover any extra costs incurred.

In order to make reservations on Indian trains and guarantee the smooth operation of

your trip, we require your full passport details. It is important that we receive these details as soon as possible so we are ready to make the arrangements as soon as train tickets are available to buy.

Reviews



**AWARD WINNING
EXPLORE LEADERS**



**PRICE GUARANTEE
PROMISE**



**AIRPORT
TRANSFERS**