

welcome to South India



Soul Stirring

Two words: stunningly unforgettable. This is the India for those seeking the happy-go-lucky beach life of Goa; the ancient Hindu temples of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka; the upbeat urban jungles of Mumbai (Bombay) and Bengaluru (Bangalore); the breezy palm-fringed backwaters of tropical Kerala; the trekking and wildlife-watching opportunities of forested sanctuaries; and the remarkably unfettered tribal culture of Andhra Pradesh. With its ability to inspire, frustrate, thrill and confound all at once, this part of the world certainly presents an extraordinary spectrum of travel experiences. Some of these can be challenging, particularly for the first-time visitor: the

poverty is confronting, Indian bureaucracy can be exasperating and the crush of humanity sometimes turns the simplest task into an epic battle. Even veteran travellers find their sanity frayed at some point, yet this is all part of the India ride. Love it or loathe it – and most visitors' see-saw between the two – South India will jostle your entire being, and no matter where you go or what you do, the memories you gather will blaze brightly long after your trip comes to a close.

Luscious Landscapes

South India comprises thousands of kilometres of coastline that frame fertile plains and curvaceous hills, all kept glis-



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Like a giant wedge plunging into the Indian Ocean, peninsular South India is the steamy heartland of the subcontinent, and a lush contrast to the snow-capped mountains and sun-crisped plains of the north.

(below) Souvenirs of Hindu gods for sale, Sri Meenakshi Temple (p364), Tamil Nadu
(left) Turmeric workers, Mattancherry, Kerala



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teningly lush by the double-barrelled monsoon. The region's tropical splendour is one of its greatest tourist drawcards with thick coconut groves, luminescent rice paddies, fragrant spice gardens and verdant tea plantations proffering plenty of green respite. And then there are the waterways. Azure seas gently lap crescents of sun-warmed sand and boats cruise along the slender rivers and glassy lagoons of Kerala's renowned backwaters. Aficionados of the great outdoors can look forward to paddling in the shimmering waters of one of many beautiful beaches, scouting for big jungle cats on heart-racing wildlife safaris, or simply inhaling fresh country air on meditative forest walks.

Deliciously Festive

With a tremendous variety of diverse dishes, South India is deliciously rewarding. From traditional southern favourites such as *idlis* (fermented rice cakes) and papery dosas (savoury crepes) to a melange of regional and global offerings, there's certainly no dearth of culinary adventures. Food also plays a prominent part in many of the region's festivals, with wildly colourful sweets usually taking centre stage. Given its rich collection of religious denominations, South India's festival scene is a wonderfully mixed platter – from larger-than-life celebrations with elephants and body-twisting acrobats, to pint-sized harvest fairs honouring a locally worshipped deity.