

Welcome to South India & Kerala

Like a giant wedge plunging into the Indian Ocean, South India is the subcontinent's steamy heartland – a lush contrast to the peaks and plains of the North.

A Fabulous Heritage

Wherever you go in the south you'll be bumping into the magnificent relics of the splendid civilisations that have inhabited this land over two millennia – the amazing rock-cut shrines carved out by Buddhists, Hindus and Jains at Ajanta and Ellora; the palaces, tombs, forts and mosques of Muslim dynasties on the Deccan; Tamil Nadu's inspired Pallava sculptures and towering Chola temples; the magical ruins of the Vijayanagar capital at Hampi... and a whole lot more. It's a diverse cultural treasure trove with few parallels.

Luscious Landscapes

South India's thousands of kilometres of coastline frame fertile plains and rolling hills – a landscape that changes constantly as you travel and is kept glisteningly green by the double-barrelled monsoon. The palm-strung strands and inland waterways of the west give way to spice gardens, tea plantations, tropical forests and cool hill-station retreats in the Western Ghats. The drier Deccan 'plateau' is far from flat, being crossed by numerous hilly ranges and spattered with dramatic outcrops often topped by picturesque old forts. And across the region, wild forests are preserved as parks and sanctuaries, where you can seek out wildlife from elephants and tigers to monkeys and sloth bears.

City Spice

South India's vibrant cities are the pulse of a country that is fast-forwarding through the 21st century while also at times seemingly stuck in the Middle Ages. From in-yer-face Mumbai (Bombay) or increasingly sophisticated Chennai (Madras) to historic Hyderabad, IT capital Bengaluru (Bangalore) and the colonial-era quaintness of Kochi (Cochin) and Puducherry (Pondicherry), southern cities are great for browsing teeming markets and colourful boutiques. And, of course, for indulging in a smorgasbord of their cuisines, whether you fancy simple southern favourites such as *idlis* (spongy rice cakes) and *dosas* (savoury crêpes), spicy west-coast seafood curries, Mughal-influenced biryanis or inventive fusion creations in chic city dining haunts.

Soul Stirring

Spirituality weaves its way throughout the vast and complex tapestry that is contemporary India. The multitude of sacred sites, spectacular festivals and time-honoured rituals are testament to a long, colourful, sometimes tumultuous religious history. Soak it all up at massed Hindu pilgrimage temples or tranquil hilltop shrines, and feel the centuries of tradition at ancient Buddhist caves or big city mosques. And if you like, become part of it all with some meditation or yoga in the land of yoga's birth.



Why I Love South India

By John Noble, Writer

When I wake of a morning in South India, there's only one certainty about the day ahead: it will never, ever be dull. Extremes of poverty and wealth may confront, and the crush of humanity and traffic exasperate, but in between times I'll be experiencing people, scenery, colour, buildings, *life* – the like of which I won't encounter in any other country in the world. The biggest risk of travelling here, whether in Tamil Nadu's heaving temple towns, Kerala's lazy backwaters or Mumbai's frenzied bazaars, is that the rest of the world can seem so sadly routine afterwards.

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