

# Welcome to South India & Kerala

*Like a giant wedge plunging into the ocean, South India is the subcontinent's steamy heartland – a lush contrast to the peaks and plains up 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

Thousands of kilometres of coastline frame fertile plains and rolling hills in South India – a constantly changing landscape 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 craggy ranges and often spattered with dramatic, fort-topped outcrops. And across the region, preserved wild forests shelter wildlife from elephants and tigers to monkeys and sloth bears.

## Delicious Dining

South India's glorious culinary variety and melange of dining options beckon hungry travellers. Some of India's most famous and traditional staples hail from here: large *idlis* (fermented rice cakes) and papery *dosas* (savoury crêpes) are the backbone of South Indian fare. Mouth-watering Mumbai (Bombay) is India's top destination for gastronomic indulgence, be it vibrant street food or diverse haute cuisine; Goa's spicy, Portuguese-influenced fare is inventive fiery fusion at its finest; and Kerala's coconut-laced seafood is the stuff of legend – resulting in a deliciously rewarding culinary journey for visitors.

## Sophisticated Cities

The south'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 and increasingly sophisticated Chennai (Madras) to historic Hyderabad, IT capital Bengaluru (Bangalore) and quaint, colonial-era Kochi (Cochin) and Pudukcherry (Pondicherry), southern cities are great for browsing teeming markets and colourful boutiques, soaking up culture and indulging in India's trendier side. Think fashionable cafes and coffee houses, imaginative gourmet restaurants and a blitzkrieg of hipsterised microbreweries and cocktail bars.



## Why I Love South India & Kerala

By Kevin Raub, Writer

Forgetting the first time I landed in Mumbai on the tail end of a late '90s monsoon is a hopeless endeavour. Never had I encountered such thunderstorms, an absolute onslaught of Armageddon proportions. But once the clouds cleared over the gateway to South India, one of the world's most cinematic cities sprung to life, a kaleidoscopic potpourri of colour and chaos, a high-spirited melange of mayhem and masala. Be it Mumbai's gastronomic feats, Goa's sun-drenched sands, Tamil Nadu's heaving temple towns or Kerala's lazy backwaters, the South Indian see-saw of shock and awe never lets you forget.

**For more about our writers, see p544.**