Friday · March 3rd - Friday · March 17th

SOUTHERN INDIA CULINARY IMMERSION TOUR WITH PETER KURUVITA

Itinerary for Southern India Culinary Immersion Tour with Peter Kuruvita

Friday · March 3rd  
Chennai

Saturday · March 4th  
Chennai

Sunday · March 5th  
Chennai - Puducherry

Monday · March 6th  
Puducherry – Chidambaram – Gangaikondacholapuram – Darasuram – Thanjavur
Notes

Join celebrity Australian chef Peter Kuruvita as he explores the food, history & vibrancy of Southern India.

Peter Kuruvita is an award-winning Australian chef, restaurateur, Avid Traveller & Culinary Tour Host, author and TV presenter. Well known for establishing Sydney's iconic Flying Fish Restaurant & Bar, Peter currently operates a number of restaurants in Australia and the Pacific. Flying Fish Fiji at Sheraton Fiji Resort and opening in August 2016 Aggie Grey’s by Peter Kuruvita at The Sheraton Samoa Aggie Grey's Hotel & Bungalow in Australia, his signature style of waterside locations and fresh quality seafood spiced with his cultural flavors can be found in his hometown, Noosa, on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, at Noosa Beach House, his restaurant partnership with Sofitel Noosa Pacific Resort.

Peter's childhood experiences cooking with his Grandmother in the traditional kitchen of his ancestral home in Colombo, Sri Lanka inspired his first cookbook “Serendip – My Sri Lankan Kitchen”.

His next cookbook “My Feast with Peter Kuruvita” takes a culinary and cultural journey through the island communities of Asia and the South Pacific. Peter has presented 3 TV series; My Sri Lanka with Peter Kuruvita, Island Feast with Peter Kuruvita and Mexican Fiesta with Peter Kuruvita which air on many networks worldwide. His shows combine beautiful scenery with sensational local cuisine and culture. Peter has worked with Dilmah Tea in an ambassadorial role for many years, developing the concept of tea gastronomy. This involves hosting the annual “Real High Tea Challenge” for chefs and consumers, now a worldwide event, and recipe development. For more details on Peter, see his website www.peterkuruvita.com

Peter and I have designed this wonderful 15 Day tour to be fully immersed in India's culinary rich South - Chennai, Puducherry, Thanjavur, Madurai, Thekkady, Kumarakom, Kochi and Hyderabad.

A small group tour of 14 people along with Peter and a local English speaking guide, the tour feature a mix of stunning upmarket hotels and boutique heritage properties.

We invite you to journey with us into the heart and soul of the deep south exploring the stunning states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Hyderabad – the city of pearls, learning about the diverse cultures, cuisines, and way of life of the people who make up the rich tapestry of South India!

There will be plenty of opportunities to experience Southern Indian cuisine and culture through cooking classes, market and street food tours.

03 March 2017 - 17 March 2017

$11,499 AUD

Price is per person, based on twin share in the lead in room, and includes:
Culinary Immersion tour escorted by Peter Kuruvita – award-winning Australian chef, restaurateur, Avid Traveller & Culinary Tour Host, author and TV presenter

- 2 Nights Accommodation at The Leela Palace, Chennai
- 2 Nights Accommodation at Palace de Mahe, Puducherry
- 1 Night Accommodation at Svatma, Thanjavur
- 2 Nights Accommodation at Taj – The Gateway Hotel, Pasumalai
- 2 Nights Accommodation at Spice Village, Thekkady
- 2 Nights Accommodation at Coconut Lagoon, Kumarakom
- 2 Nights Accommodation at Vivanta by Taj – Malabar, Kochi
- 2 Nights Accommodation at Taj Falaknuma Palace, Hyderabad

Breakfast daily at hotels, most lunches and dinners included at specially selected restaurants

All private transfers and private transportation between cities within Southern India, entrance fees, sightseeing and touring with Local English speaking guide

Cookbook

Small group tour of 14 people

The cuisine of India is one of the world's most diverse cuisines, characterised by its sophisticated and subtle use of the many spices, vegetables, grains and fruits grown across India. The cuisine of each geographical region includes a wide assortment of dishes and cooking techniques reflecting the varied demographics of the ethnically diverse Indian subcontinent. South Indian cuisine is distinguished by a greater emphasis on rice as the staple grain, the ubiquity of sambar (a vegetable stew based on a broth made with tamarind and toovar dal) and rasam (a soup prepared with tamarind juice or tomato, pepper and other spices), a variety of pickles, and the liberal use of coconut and particularly coconut oil and curry leaves. The dosa, poori, idli, vada, bonda and bajji are typical South Indian favourites and are generally consumed as breakfast. Hyderabadi biryani, a popular type of biryani (made with spices, rice and meat or vegetables), reflects the diversity of South Indian cuisine. Andhra, Chettinad, Tamil, Hyderabadi, Mangalorean, and Kerala cuisines each have distinct tastes and methods of cooking.

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The cuisine of India is one of the world's most diverse cuisines, characterised by its sophisticated and subtle use of the many spices, vegetables, grains and fruits grown across India. The cuisine of each geographical region includes a wide assortment of dishes and cooking techniques reflecting the varied demographics of the ethnically diverse Indian subcontinent. India's religious beliefs and culture have played an influential role in the evolution of its cuisine. Vegetarianism is widely practiced in many Hindu, Buddhist and Jain communities.

India's unique blend of cuisines evolved through large-scale cultural interactions with neighbouring Persia, ancient Greece, Mongols and West Asia. New World foods such as chili peppers, tomatoes, potatoes and squash, introduced by Arab and Portuguese traders during the sixteenth century, and European cooking styles introduced during the colonial period added to the diversity of Indian cuisine.

Indian cuisine has also influenced cuisines across the world, especially those of South East Asia. It is now one of the most popular cuisines across the globe, enjoyed not only among the large Indian diaspora but also by the general population in North America, Europe, Australia and parts of Africa.

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Andhra, Chettinad, Tamil, Hyderabadi, Mangalorean, and Kerala cuisines each have distinct tastes and methods of cooking. Some popular dishes include the biryani (ghee, rice with meat curry), seafood (prawns, mussels, mackerel) and paper-thin pathiris from Malabar area. Tamil cuisine generally classifies food into six tastes: sweet (milk, butter, sweet cream, wheat, ghee (clarified butter), rice, honey); sour (limes and lemons, citrus fruits, yogurt, mango, tamarind); salty (salt or pickles); bitter (bitter gourd, greens of many kinds, turmeric, fenugreek); pungent (chili peppers, ginger, black pepper, clove, mustard) and astringent (beans, lentils, turmeric, vegetables like cauliflower and cabbage, cilantro). Traditional Tamil cuisine recommends that all of these six tastes be included in each main meal to provide complete nutrition, minimise cravings and balance the appetite and digestion. A typical meal, served on a banana leaf, includes steamed rice along with a variety of vegetable dishes like sambar, dry curry, rasam and koot (vegetable added with lentil). Meals are often accompanied by crisp appalams (papadums). After a final round of rice and curds or buttermilk, or both, a meal is concluded with a small banana and a few betel leaves and nuts.

We invite you to journey with us into the heart and soul of the deep south exploring the stunning states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala and Hyderabad – the city of pearls, learning about the diverse cultures, cuisines, and way of life of the people who make up the rich tapestry of South India!
Friday · March 3rd

Chennai

Description

Arrive - Chennai
Welcome to India!
Your international flight will land at Chennai airport sometime during the late evening hours.

After you clear the Immigration and Customs formalities, you will be met by our representative at the Arrival Hall and escorted to your hotel.

Chennai is the largest city in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, and located on the south-eastern Coromandel Coast off the Bay of Bengal. This vibrant metropolis serves as a gateway to the culture of South India.

Hotel: The Leela Palace
Room: Deluxe Sea View Room
Meals: Nil

Saturday · March 4th

Chennai

Description

Chennai

In the morning, you will visit the Madras Museum housed in the Pantheon Complex, a complex of cultural institutions which derives its name from The Pantheon.

The Museum comprises several galleries under various sections like archaeology, anthropology, geology, botany, numismatics, contemporary art, zoology and children. The big highlight is building 3, the Bronze Gallery, with a superb collection of South Indian bronzes from the 7th-century Pallava era through to modern times. It was from the 9th to 11th centuries, in the Chola period, that bronze sculpture peaked. Among the Bronze Gallery’s impressive pieces are many of Shiva as Nataraja, the cosmic dancer, and a superb Chola bronze of Ardhanarishvara, the androgynous incarnation of Shiva and Parvati.

Thereafter, proceed to Fort St. George, Britain’s first bastion in India and the nucleus from which the British Empire grew. Built in the neoclassical style, today it is the seat of the local government. Interestingly, Yale University in the USA is named after Elihu Yale the second British Governor of Fort St. George.

Later, we will lead you to Dakshin restaurant at Crowne Plaza for lunch. After 25 years of glorifying the culinary traditions of the six South Indian states – Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu – this legendary restaurant presents a new menu showcasing the best of the best. Enjoy this selection of iconic recipes as they take your imagination to a bygone era...

In the late afternoon hours, proceed to Mylapore, which is one of the most ancient parts of the city. Here, you will visit the Santhome Church built during the 16th century by Portuguese explorers. This is one of the only three Basilicas in the world to be built over the tomb of an apostle of Christ, San Thome and is dedicated to St. Thomas, who travelled to India in 52 AD. Ptolemy, the ancient Egyptian traveller is said to have visited Mylapore, and Marco Polo described it as a bustling port city. The area is abuzz with local restaurants, small shops selling flowers, coloured powders, and other items for the puja (worship).

You will take a heritage walk through the area including the four narrow Mada streets which circle the 16th-century Kapaleeswarar temple. Built by the Pallava kings in the 8th century, it is a striking example of Dravidian architecture and the oldest temple in Chennai. Dedicated to Lord Shiva, the temple boasts stunning sculptures and inscriptions dating back to 1250 A.D. Non-Hindus and foreigners are restricted to enter the main sanctum of the temple.

In the evening, experience an interactive cooking demo at the Indian restaurant – Jamavar in your hotel, followed by North Indian dinner at the same venue.

Hotel: The Leela Palace
Room: Deluxe Sea View Room
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Sunday · March 5th

Chennai - Puducherry

Description

Chennai – Puducherry
After breakfast, you will drive to Pondicherry (approximately 3.5 hours, excluding stops). On arrival, you will check-in to your hotel.

Puducherry was part of the Pallava, Chola and Pandya empires from the 4th to 14th centuries, followed by Islamic rule. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch, were the first Europeans to return to trade in textiles. The flourishing trade attracted even the French, who established a settlement here in 1674 AD. Today, Puducherry is referred by names such as ‘Quintessence of French Culture’, ‘India's Little France’ and ‘The French Riviera of the East’. This territory was under the French rule for nearly 281 years. Still, it has the French flavour in it as one can see by the grand colonial mansions, beautiful boulevards, and placid promenades, spellings on sign boards and buildings, names of roads and public places.

Later, we will take you to Mohanam – Centre for Culture and Heritage, where you will be involved in a hands-on cooking class that will give you a taste of India, followed by Tamil lunch.

During the afternoon, you will visit Aurobindo Ashram the spiritual centre of the city, which was founded by Sri Aurobindo Ghose, a great seer, poet and prophet of the twentieth century, to help man reach the zenith of his evolution through spiritual exercises and yoga, combined with physical activity and productive work.

Later, explore Pondicherry's wonderful French Quarter, with its clean and uncrowded streets, neatly painted houses, grand government buildings, sombre memorials and thriving cultural institutions. You will also visit the Notre Dame church, eventually making your way through the bustling Grand Bazaar, for a look at the daily life in the Tamil Quarter.

This evening, we will take you to one of the finest luxury boutique hotels in Pondicherry – Le Dupleix, where a wonderful mix of French and Indian menu will be set up for you under the stars and an old mango tree at the The Courtyard restaurant.

Hotel:- Palais de Mahe
Room:- Standard Room
Meals:- Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Monday · March 6th

Puducherry – Chidambaram – Gangaikondacholapuram – Darasuram – Thanjavur

Description

Puducherry – Chidambaram – Gangaikondacholapuram – Darasuram – Thanjavur
This day, your destination will be Thanjavur (approximately 4.5 hours, excluding stops). Since it is going to be a long day, we would suggest that you depart from the hotel by 07:00 hours.

On your way, you will visit the famous temple sites of Chidambaram, Gangaikondacholapuram and Darasuram.

Chidambaram is one of the most ancient and most celebrated of shrines in India. It is associated with Nataraja, or Shiva in his Ananda Tandava pose (the Cosmic Dance of bliss) in the cosmic golden hall and the hall of consciousness (Chit Sabha). Shiva is also worshipped in the “formless form” of the Chidambara Rahasyam, while the temple is known for its Akasa Lingam, an embodiment of Shiva as the formless Space. (Pondicherry – Chidambaram drive: 1.5 hours, without stops.)

The Gangaikondacholapuram temple (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) was built by King Rajendra to rival the Brihadisvara temple built by his father in Thanjavur. The highlights here are the gopurams (soaring pyramidal gateway towers of Dravidian temples) and the carvings of Shiva. Of particular note is the panel showing Shiva blessing Chandikesvara, a steward in his household. This is considered to be a masterpiece of Chola art. (Chidambaram – Gangaikondacholapuram drive: 1 hour, without stops.)

Thereafter, continue to Darasuram (50 minutes, without stops).
Upon reaching Darasuram, enjoy lunch with a cooking demo at Chettinad restaurant of Paradise Resort. The meal will be served on the banana leaves in traditional Tamil style.

After lunch, proceed to the 12th-century Airavatesvara Temple at Darasuram (a UNESCO World Heritage Site). Built mainly of granite, the temple has pillars with beautifully carved apsaras (celestial nymphs) and friezes of lively dancing figures and musicians. Each of the pillars illustrate mythological stories showing the penance of Parvati, Shiva's consort.

Later, drive another hour (without stops) to reach Thanjavur, and check-in to your hotel.

Thanjavur or Tanjore as it was earlier called, rose to glory during the later Chola period between the 10th and 14th centuries and became the centre of learning and culture. Overrun by green fertile plains, Thanjavur is known as the rice bowl of Tamil Nadu. The destination has a large share of the ancient temple wonders of South India. The Chola kings, who were great patrons of the arts, built most of the 93 temples, of which the Brihadisvara temple is the masterpiece. While they lavished their wealth on the temples, they also encouraged the belief in the divine right of kings, and the practice of donating a part of one's wealth to the temple for spiritual gain.

Dinner will be served at the Aharam in SVATMA. On the agenda today is a special Maratha cuisine that took pride of place in the Royal kitchens of the Thanjavur Marathas. The recipes in the Thanjavur region have a distinct flavour of native spices and ingredients that were introduced in this region for the first time when the Maratha warriors started to settle here.

Hotel:- Svatma – The Heritage Residence
Room:- Deluxe Room
Meals:- Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

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Tuesday · March 7th

Thanjavur - Madurai

Description

Thanjavur – Madurai
In the morning, you will visit the Brihadisvara temple (a UNESCO World Heritage Site).

Also known as the “Big Temple,” it was built between 985 and 1012 AD by Rajaraja I. It is a magnificent structure with a 14-storey-high vimana (a towered sanctuary housing the main deity). A dome carved from an 80-ton single block of granite tops the vimana. An enormous Nandi bull, the traditional vehicle for Shiva, guards the entrance to the main sanctuary. Built mainly of granite, the temple has exquisite inscriptions and sculptures of Shiva, his consort Durga, and Vishnu.

This afternoon you will take part in a cooking demo with your in-house chef at SVATMA who specialises in Chettinad cuisine; this will be followed by lunch. Chettiar food is a feast for the gourmet. With a generous dose of pepper and not chili, making it spicy but not hot. The spicing is subtle and its secret is the “instinctive hand” of the “achi” (elder sister), dumping a handful of this and a pinch of that in the masala leading the taste buds on a journey of intrigue and delight.

After lunch, you will drive to the pilgrim town of Madurai (approximately 4 hours, excluding stops), one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in India.

On arrival by the evening, you will check-in to your hotel.

Most cities in India have a legend surrounding their origins. Madurai is no exception, and the story tells how Shiva looked down and drops of nectar fell from his locks, resulting in the city being named Madurai or “The City of Nectar”. It was the seat of the Pandya Empire between the 7th and 13th centuries and briefly served as the capital for an Islamic sultanate in the 14th century. In 1364, Madurai became a part of the Vijayanagara Empire and by the middle of the 16th century the local Hindu governors, the Nayakas, proclaimed Madurai an independent kingdom until it passed into the hands of the British in 1840.

Dinner will be served at the GAD multi-cuisine restaurant of your hotel. One of the best known All Day diners in Madurai, here you will find cuisines ranging from local to healthy to international, with something to delight everybody’s taste-buds.

Hotel:- The Gateway Hotel Pasumalai
Room:- Executive Room
Meals:- Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Wednesday · March 8th

Madurai

Description

Madurai

Early in the morning, you will be taken for a private, interactive walking tour of Madurai, named "Vanakkam Madurai" (welcome Madurai) developed exclusively by us. We chose Madurai as the location for this walking tour as it is one of the oldest cities in India and is a place of great historical and cultural importance.

This walking tour starts at dawn (06:00 hours) and extends up to 2 hours (until 08:00 hours) to offer a unique and genuine experience to immerse you in the culture and everyday life of an Indian city. This is an experience in which you will get synchronised with the place and the people. As you walk through the markets you get to understand nuances of local society, different roles of people, age-old traditions that are still alive, habits of people, street vendors, local homes, and markets are explained and introduced in a very interesting and involving way. The walk is a remarkable experience, once you share with local residents and visiting pilgrims.

After breakfast at your hotel, you will visit the Meenakshi Temple.

The Nayaka kings laid out the old town in the pattern of a lotus with narrow streets surrounding the Meenakshi temple at the center. This is an outstanding structure dedicated to Meenakshi the “fish eyed goddess” who is also the consort of Shiva. Shiva has a temple dedicated to him in the complex. Since Meenakshi is the presiding goddess, the daily ceremonies are first performed at her shrine and then at the shrine of Shiva. This is a living temple and each shrine has priests performing rituals in front of them and you will also see the decorated temple elephant. An active temple, you will mingle with the people who come throughout the day to worship. Perhaps you will also queue up to be ‘blessed’ by the much loved, temple elephant! Non-Hindus and foreigners are restricted to enter the main sanctum of the temple.

Lunch will be organised at The Banyan, the multi-cuisine restaurant at the Heritage Madurai hotel.

In the afternoon, you will visit the Thirumalai Nayaka Palace and its massive courtyard and grand hall. Note the Islamic influences and striking dome above the main chamber.

You will then explore the markets surrounding the Meenakshi temple. The area is a like a huge open-air department store, each street dedicated to one particular item – stationery, flowers and fruits, vessels, items used in worship etc. There is even one lane dedicated to bananas – South India boasts over 50 varieties! Housed in the remains of a 16th-century ruin nestled amongst the decorated pillars and carvings are a remarkable collection of stalls selling everything from silk scarves to pink plastic hairclips.

After the tour, you will embark on a Foodie's tour created especially for you. You will visit hand-selected places ranging from street-food selling vendors, roadside eateries and sit-in restaurants. Relying on the appetite and preferences as guiding criteria for the pace and the duration of the tour and to choose between the kinds of places to visit your guide will be a food enthusiast and local of the city. Rest assured that the quality and safety of each place has been carefully vetted.

Hotel:- The Gateway Hotel Pasumalai
Room:- Executive Room
Meals:-Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Thursday · March 9th

Madurai - Thekkady

Description

Madurai - Thekkady

In the morning, drive into the cool lush hills to lakeside Thekkady, bordering the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary and Tiger Reserve (approximately 4 hours, excluding stops).

On arrival, you will check-in to your hotel.
Periyar is the best-known wildlife sanctuary in South India. Though billed as a Tiger Reserve, it is really famous for its wild elephants, 100-year-old artificial lake and its setting in the beautiful thickly forested Western Ghats (a UNESCO World Heritage Site). The Periyar Lake lies at the heart of the sanctuary.

A buffet lunch will be served at the Tamarind Tree restaurant of your hotel. The buffet will offer a wide choice of cuisine styles, local and international.

In the afternoon hours, you will undertake a walking tour in a spice plantation farm.

Spices farmed here are exported all over India and other countries too. Spices like cloves, cardamom, fenugreek, black pepper, white pepper and others can be bought fresh from here. Their plantations and method of extraction and packaging too can be seen on this tour. You will also spend a while with the tea pickers and learn the skill needed to pick the leaf – two leaves and a bud. The speed and the dexterity of the women who pick the leaves are quite extraordinary to watch. You will also have a tea-tasting session, hearing how the tea is graded and prepared for auctions.

Later this evening, witness a famous martial art form of Kerala – Kalaripayattu in a centre. Kalarippayattu is a Dravidian martial art from Kerala. Possibly one of the oldest fighting systems in existence, it is practiced in Kerala and contiguous parts of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka as well as north-eastern Sri Lanka and among the Malayalee community of Malaysia. It includes strikes, kicks, grappling, preset forms, weaponry and healing methods.

Dinner will be served at the multi-cuisine Tamarind Tree restaurant of your hotel.

Hotel:- Spice Village  
Room:- Standard Villa  
Meals:-Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

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**Friday · March 10th**

**Thekkady**

**Description**

**Thekkady**
You will start the day early to go on a trek through the rainforest accompanied by a naturalist who will introduce you to the flora and the fauna of the forest. The park is home to Elephants, the occasional tiger, wild boar and deer as well as a large bird population including several species which are indigenous to the area. You will end the morning tour (3 hours) with a short ride on bamboo rafts on the Periyar River. Along the way you may see elephants wandering down to the water for a drink or to bathe.

After the trek, we will take you to taste the ethnic fusion food at the All Spice restaurant of the Cardamom County Resort.

Late afternoon, you will have a special cooking demo with your in-house chef at 'A Century-old Setting' in your hotel.

This evening, dinner will be arranged at the unique 50 Mile Diet restaurant of your hotel where the menu features items made from local ingredients only as the name suggests. Everything comes from within a 50 mile radius of the resort. Locally sourced food not only benefits the local communities, it also helps reduce the carbon footprint in transportation. Of course, a good bit of the food comes from more like 50 yards away. The vegetables are grown in-house at organic farms. And fish comes in fresh from the river. But the real magic in Spice Village cuisine comes from – you guessed it – fresh spices.

Hotel:- Spice Village  
Room:- Standard Villa  
Meals:-Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

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**Saturday · March 11th**

**Thekkady - Kumarakom**
Thekkady – Kumarakom
You will start the day with an early morning “yoga session”.

A disciplined science encompassing all aspects of life in different ways and levels, yoga assists in balancing the mind, body and spirit – restoring perfect health in the most natural and effective manner.

After breakfast, you will drive to Kumarakom (approximately 3 hours, excluding stops).

En route visit Plantation Bungalow at Kanjirappally for lunch with a local Kerala family. After being served a traditional welcome drink, you will be taken for a short walk in the surrounding rubber plantation processing unit and thereafter participate in a cooking demo which will include delicious local fare like rice pancake (palappam) and fish moilee.

You will arrive in Kumarakom in the late afternoon hours, and check-in to your hotel.

A labyrinth of backwaters with shimmering water, the brilliant green of mangrove forests, coconut palms lining the embankments, blue skies, flocks of migratory birds skimming the water – this is Kumarakom, a veritable dreamland! This famous backwater hub is a cluster of islands on the eastern banks of Lake Vembanad. With the huge lake on one side and with a network of calm canals running through it, Kumarakom, a masterpiece created by man and nature together, enjoys a unique position on the map of Kerala.

Evening here is the best time of the day. Consume yourself on a sunset cruise on the Vembanad lake, adrift to a flute accompaniment or just sit on the banks of the mighty lake and delve into a desultory contemplation.

Dinner will be served at the Ettukettu multi-cuisine restaurant of your hotel.

Hotel:- Coconut Lagoon
Room:- Heritage Bungalow
Meals:-Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Sunday · March 12th

Kumarakom

Description

Kumarakom
After a relaxed morning, you will be transferred by motorboat to Philipkutty’s Farm for a farm visit.

On arrival, you will be greeted by the host family and taken to the vegetable garden and livestock farm. Depending on the season you could pick some vegetables/fruits from the garden and help the host family to cook some delicious recipe for lunch. Sadya is the traditional vegetarian feast of Kerala. Usually served as lunch, it consists of par boiled pink rice, side dishes, savouries, pickles and desserts spread out on a plantain leaf.

Note: “Philipkutty’s Farm” honours only one booking at a time and that too on first-come-first-serve basis; therefore, the confirmation would be subject to availability.

Upon your return to the hotel, the rest of the day will be at leisure.

In the evening, you will be served the specialty cuisine of the area along with fresh seafood delicacies at the Ayemenem restaurant of your hotel.

Hotel:- Coconut Lagoon
Room:- Heritage Bungalow
Meals:-Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Monday · March 13th

Kumarakom – Alappuzha – Kochi
**Kumarakom – Alappuzha – Kochi**
The morning will be at leisure.

By noon, you will board an exclusive Houseboat at Vembanad Lake jetty to travel up to Alappuzha.

You will experience the journey along Kerala backwaters throbbing with its own unique culture. The cruise will take you through the Vembanad Lake and the village canals. You will skim past Chinese fishing nets, water lilies, lush paddy fields, coir villages, rustic homes, temples and coconut groves. There is a Kerala that lives along these waterways.

Lunch will be served on board. Each boat has a fully-equipped kitchen and an experienced cook to prepare authentic Kerala cuisine with seafood specialties and fresh vegetables.

You will arrive at Alappuzha jetty towards evening, where you will be met by our representative, and escorted to your hotel in Kochi (approximately 1.5 hours, excluding stops).

Spread over a series of islands and crisscrossed by the sea and backwaters, Kochi (long known as Cochin) speaks of old-world charm and leisure. Kochi's main sections – modern Ernakulum in the east, and the old districts of Mattancherry and Fort Kochi on a peninsula in the west – are linked by a complex system of ferries and bridges. Although most visitors end up staying in Ernakulum, Fort Kochi and Mattancherry are the focus of interest, where the city's extraordinary history of foreign influence and settlement is reflected in an assortment of architectural styles.

Dinner will be arranged at The Pavilion restaurant of your hotel, serving a wide variety of exotic Thai favourites and Chinese delicacies, complimented by a list of popular Oriental dishes as well.

**Hotel:** Vivanta by Taj – Malabar  
**Room:** Superior Charm Room  
**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

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**Kochi**

**Description**

Kochi  
This day, you will explore the various religious and cultural influences that shaped Kochi.

The most significant influence on Kochi by the foreign visitors is that of the Jews whose synagogue is one of the main attractions of the area. The Jews served as trading agents for the Dutch and the British, and they integrated into local society, learning the language and the culture. Even after the foreign traders departed, the Jewish community stayed on and made Kochi their home, though today only a handful remain. "Jew Town" as the area surrounding the synagogue is still called is a jumble of scores of small firms huddled together in old, dilapidated buildings and spice shops selling ginger, cardamom, cumin, turmeric and cloves.

From here, you will walk to the Dutch Palace or Mattancherry Palace, which was commissioned by the Portuguese for the Raja of Kochi in exchange for trading rights. The palace is two-storeyed and is built in the traditional Kerala style known as "nalukattu" (four buildings around a central courtyard). Made of wood and richly carved, the palace exhibits memorabilia from the Raja of Kochi's collection, but it is best known for its outstanding murals painted on the walls.

Next, you will visit two of the prominent Christian churches starting with St Francis' Church, first established by the Portuguese in the 1500s. This is one of the earliest European churches in the country. The simple façade served as the prototype for future churches here. Vasco Da Gama was buried here in 1524 before his body was taken to Portugal 14 years later. You will also visit the Santa Cruz Cathedral which was built in the late 19th century and has impressive murals on its ceiling.

This day's lunch will be at Nimmy and Paul's Kerala home At Home in Kochi. A prominent Syrian Christian couple, Nimmy is a renowned cookery instructor. Nimmy's guests visit her because they wish to experience the traditional flavours and preparations of Kerala in a comfortable and informal manner. Paul and Nimmy plan each event meticulously to make each visit a special treat.

In the afternoon, you will stroll through the charming Heritage Zone, where you will see various architectural styles reflecting the
many cultures that lived here. Dutch houses stand next to spacious porticoed British plantation style homes. Further down are two churches built by the Portuguese, while standing guard over the harbour are the Chinese Fishing nets.

We will time your arrival with the local fishing boats pulling in with their catch for the day.

This evening, enjoy a Kathakali dance performance organised at your hotel.

Kathakali is a classical dance form that has its origins in Theyyam – a ritual tribal dance of North Kerala. A distinguishing characteristic of this art form is that the actors never speak, and use hand gestures, expressions and rhythmic dancing in place of dialogue. Another standout feature is the wonderful makeup worn by all performers.

Thereafter, we will take you out for dinner to The Malabar Junction restaurant at The Malabar House (Relais & Chateaux). The Malabar Junction is the crossroads between East and West, innovative Keralan and Mediterranean influenced cuisine. They use only the best of local produce and prefer organic products whenever possible.

Hotel:-Vivanta by Taj – Malabar
Room:-Superior Charm Room
Meals:-Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Wednesday · March 15th

Kochi/Hyderabad

Description

Kochi / Hyderabad
In the morning, you will be escorted to the airport in time to board your IndiGo flight 6E 778 (12:45/14:10 hours – 1 hour/25 minutes) to Hyderabad.

Packed lunch will be arranged from the hotel.

On arrival, you will be met by our representative and escorted to your hotel.

Built on ancient granites, famous for its gem stones especially the magnificent Kohinoor diamond that decorates the crown worn by British royalty, Hyderabad was famous for its beautiful “monuments, mosques and mistresses”. Despite most of the population being Hindu, this area was ruled by the Muslims from 1724 when Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah (regulator of the land) seized power from the Mughal Governor. Thus began the dynasty which ruled the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad and included some of the richest men in the world.

In Hyderabad, you will stay in India's latest palace hotel – the Falaknuma Palace. Architecturally, the palace is a blend of Italian and Tudor architecture. It is home to priceless art and artifacts, ornate inlaid furniture from Kashmir, rich handcrafted tapestries and brocades from France, and intricate frescos with English and Indian influences. Each one of these has been meticulously restored to its original glory.

The rest of the day will be at leisure.

This evening you will take a palace tour with the in-house palace historian. Highlights of the palace interior include 18 types of marble, 16 types of wood and 10 types of chandeliers. The Gol bungalow was modelled after the White House on one side and Buckingham Palace on the other. There's a palace library with 5,970 books and guests can actually read 150 of them.

Later, enjoy a special set dinner at the Celeste restaurant of your magnificent hotel. This elegant all-day-dining restaurant offers classical Italian and Mediterranean fare that appeal to the palate of even the most discerning connoisseurs.

The fine pizzas and pastas, antipasti and cutlets are created with ingredients sourced from across the globe. A truly bespoke experience for a bon vivant.

Hotel:-Taj Falaknuma Palace
Room:-Palace Room
Meals:-Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Hyderabad

Description

Hyderabad
This day you will explore the city's rich and very colourful Nizami history.

Hyderabad is most famous for its charming minarets – Charminar, which stands at the center of the old city in its entire splendour amidst the colourful shops of Laad Bazaar with its glittering traditional bangles. Often called “The Arc de Triomphe of the East”, Charminar was built in 1591 by Mohammed Quli Qutb Shah and is a beautiful structure with four intricately carved minarets. Enormous in its size, this imposing monument exudes a charm that is more than 400 years old.

Laad Bazaar is located quite close to the Charminar. It is said that the market has been there since the Qutub Shahis and the Nizams era and thus presents a living heritage of the city.

The cuisine of Hyderabad borrowed heavily from the Persians and Mughals. To this they added local flavours and created a cuisine that is even today very distinctive. The key difference from the North Indian cuisine is the use of dry coconut and tamarind in its cuisine. One of the most important dishes in this cuisine is Biryani. Technically speaking, it is just a dish of rice and meat cooked with some spices, but it evokes the most passionate emotions among foodies. You get to try this dish along with some other local delicacies with one of the traditional families in Hyderabad. The lady of the house, Begum Mumtaz is acknowledged as one of the leading experts of Hyderabadi cuisine and is invited to give cooking lessons to the top chefs across the world.

After lunch, proceed to the 18th-century Chowmahalla Palace which is said to resemble the Shah of Iran's palace, and continue to the magnificent forts and palaces, a legacy left by the wealthy dynasty.

The heart of the palace is called as Khilwat Mubarak. This grand durbar hall is undeniably the best part of the palace. Mughal domes, imposing arches and an intricate Persian work create a masterpiece. Inside the Durbar Hall, there is platform made up of marble. It is on this platform where the royal seat, Takht-e-Nishan was laid. It is said that Chowmahalla Palace used to have around 7000 attendants on any given day. For its grandeur and charm, it has been often compared to the Enchanted Gardens of the Arabian Nights.

You will also visit the extraordinarily beautiful Paigah Tombs, known for their architectural excellence.

Paigah Tombs have been decorated with exceptionally crafted geometrical patterns and carefully created designs. These tombs have been skilfully carved and their inlaid mosaic tile work is breathtaking. The famous 'Jali' work makes it even more attractive. Each tomb has been designed differently, ensuing a unique style and design.

Paigahs who married daughters of the Nizams were the highest ranking nobles in princely state of Hyderabad, after the family of Nizams. Paigahs were the only noble family who were permitted by the Sultan to have their private army.

Later, we will take you to the ITC Kakatiya's stylish fine dining restaurant that offers a delectable spread of Indian and inventive international cuisine – the Deccan Pavilion.

Hotel:-Taj Falaknuma Palace
Room:- Palace Room
Meals:-Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Hyderabad

Description

Hyderabad / Onward Destination
After breakfast, you will visit the fort at Golconda, which served as the capital of the Qutb Shahi Kings who ruled over the area. In 1724, Nizam-ul-Mulk repossessed it and restored it to its former glory for a short time.

The history of the fort dates back to the 12th century when it was originally built of mud by the Hindu Kakatiyas. Within the fort
are the royal palaces, the harem, halls for both public and private audiences, royal baths and a temple. The huge vaults once held the famous Kohinoor and Hope diamonds. Mostly abandoned by the 19th century when the English traveller Walter Hamilton visited in 1820, he described the fort as being almost completely deserted while “the dungeons (are) being used by the Nizam as a prison for his worst enemies, among whom were several of his sons and two of his wives.”

Also on the tour will be a visit to the Qutb Shahi Tombs which lie on a low plateau northwest of the fort. Each tomb built of either black granite or greenstone has its own base with a large onion dome and arches decorated with fine sculptures. Some of the larger tombs, perhaps those of the more famous of the Qutb Shahi kings, have their own mosques attached. Remnants of the coloured tiles used can still be seen in places. Most of the tombs of the rulers were built under their own supervision, but the area rapidly fell into a state of disrepair. Sir Salar Jung restored the site and replanted the garden which is maintained even today.

You may like to visit the workshop of Mrs. Suraiya Hassan, renowned for her silk and cotton weaves. Suraiya Appa, as she is fondly called, welcomes you into her weaving unit. The looms are focussed on the revival of Persian brocades, specifically: Mashru, Himroo, Jamavar and Paithani. The soft-spoken octogenarian has worked with the likes of Pierre Cardin, Hanae Mori and Fab India. This is mostly run by the widows of the area; she also runs a small school in the same premises.

For lunch this day we will lead you to one of the most popular multi-cuisine Indian restaurants in town – 4 Seasons that serves quality Hyderabadi cuisine.

The rest of the day will be at leisure, with the vehicle at your disposal for shopping.

Your rooms will be at your disposal until 18:00 hours.

In the evening, enjoy a very special traditional Thaali Dinner at one of the extraordinary venues within the hotel as you celebrate your last evening in India.

After dinner, you will be escorted to the international airport in time to board your flight to Onward Destination.

Hotel:- Taj Falaknuma Palace (until 18:00 hours)
Room:- Palace Room
Meals:- Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Notes

*Travel restrictions apply. Prices and taxes are correct as at 01 July 2016. Prices quoted are on sale until 15 February 2017 unless otherwise stated or sold out prior. Valid for selected travel dates. Price is subject to change, availability, alteration and international currency fluctuations without notice. Prices converted from the supplier's local currency are based on the current exchange rate on 01 July 2016. Single supplement is $3700 AUD. A deposit of $1500 AUD is payable at time of booking. Please note: while the deposit secures a place on the tour, it does not guarantee the final price. Final price is confirmed once paid in full. Tour price is based on a minimum of 8 passengers. If this number is not met, the tour may be repriced. Offer may be withdrawn at any time. All prices are per person, based on Twin Share occupancy for Land Based Itinerary including domestic flight from Cochin to Hyderabad. International airfares are additional, please contact Kirsty for international flight options & prices. Travel insurance is strongly recommended and can be arranged for you for an additional cost. For full terms and conditions, contact your MTA Travel Expert, Kirsty Thomas-Thoeun.