

Temples, thalies & treehouses

Susie Brand takes a journey through the south of India.



I have recently returned from a most amazing tour of south India. My itinerary took me from coast to coast including Madras, Pondicherry, Tanjore, Madurai, Thekkady, the backwaters, Cochin, Calicut and Wayanad.

Madras, once home to the East India company, is a fascinating city situated on the sparkling Bay of Bengal. The British legacy includes the traditional St Mary's Church completed by a beautiful garden with papaya and mango trees. Later, I

statue gets too high. Nita, my guide, promised me she would help me choose one during the trip.

The following day, we headed south to Kanchipuram, one of the seven Hindu Holy cities. The statues and carving which decorate the

very laid back, perhaps due to having visited an ashram where I spent a couple of hours soaking up the calming atmosphere.

Next morning I was off to Tanjore to see the Brihadisvara Temple. I was amazed by both its height and the intricate carvings. A four hour journey then took us south to Madurai, one of the main cities of the south and home to the famous Meenakshi Temple. Again, the details carved on the temples left me amazed.

My rice boat was waiting on the backwaters.

By this stage in my journey, I was more than ready to put my weary feet up with a cold beer and let the crew do the work.

Just as I was on the point of becoming "templed out" it was time to head inland to Kerala. The route took me up through the Western Ghats to Thekkady. Here I visited the exotic spice plantations where pepper, cardamom and many other spices are grown. Having seen the raw ingredients I was truly able to appreciate the wonderful cooking.



abandoned my shoes and entered the Kapaleeswarar Temple. I was most surprised to find an auction taking place along with the prayers and meditation. Saris, originally given as offerings to the goddess Parvati are sold off when the pile next to her

temples were wonderful, the figures really looked like they were dancing! As promised, I got my sari and saw the weavers at work on hand looms. My driver, Selvam collected me on the third morning and we set off down the coast to Pondicherry. It felt



THE MEENAKSHI TEMPLE

My rice boat was waiting on the backwaters. By this stage in my journey, I was more than ready to put my weary feet up with a cold beer and let the crew do the work. They also prepared a deliciously tasty Thali. A further night of rest and relaxation at the wonderfully luxurious Taj Garden Retreat and I was ready for Cochin. A major port, this is a city with many attractions including a palace, synagogue and the Chinese fishing nets, a photographer's dream.

Driving up the coast, we reached Calicut. I was long due some ayurvedic massage, a Kerala speciality, and the splendid Taj Residency is famed for this. My masseuse hit all the right spots and the oils left me lightly perfumed if a bit greasy.

The final part of my trip, which I had been really looking forward

to, was a night in a treehouse. This is about as far from the traditional image of India as possible. Set in the heart of a beautiful forest, the treehouses are 90 feet in the air. I was a little nervous riding up to my bedroom in a basket but the chattering birds soon distracted me. Lodges on the ground are also available.

After a morning exploring the forest floor with an expert guide, it was time for me to head back to Calicut for my flight to Bombay. I had experienced so many different things, eaten a lifetime's worth of curry and would do it all again at the drop of a Kerelan coconut!

Susie joined Audley Travel in March of this year as our Programme Manager for the Indian Subcontinent, after previously working for Cox & Kings. Susie is passionate about the region and has a treasure trove of ideas and tips for those planning a visit.

Travel File

If you are inspired to take a journey through Southern India, we've put together an itinerary which includes many of the sights seen by Susie. The guideline price is £2,445 per person based on twin share and is dependent on season.



A TEMPLE ELEPHANT AT MADURAI

17-day itinerary

- Day 1: Fly from London to Madras via Dubai.
- Day 2: Arrive Madras and transfer to the Taj Connemara. Afternoon city tour including Fort George, the Chola Brass Museum, St Thomas' Church and the Hindu temple.
- Day 3: Morning drive to Kanchipuram for sightseeing of the temples. You may choose to visit the local handloom sari shops. Lunch at Fisherman's Cove. Taj Connemara.
- Day 4: Drive to Pondicherry with the option of visiting Mahaballipuram en route. Afternoon city tour. D'Orient.
- Day 5: Drive to Tanjore. Afternoon city tour. Parisutham Hotel.
- Day 6: At leisure in Tanjore. Optional sightseeing tour of Trichy. Parisutham Hotel.
- Day 7: Drive to Madurai. Afternoon at leisure. Evening temple visit. Taj Garden Retreat.
- Day 8: Morning city tour. Afternoon at leisure. Taj Garden Retreat.
- Day 9: Drive to Thekkady. Afternoon spice village tour. Taj Garden Retreat.
- Day 10: Overnight on traditional rice boat.
- Day 11: Travel on the rice boat to Kumarakom. Taj Garden Retreat.
- Day 12: Drive to Cochin. Afternoon city tour including the palace, synagogue and Chinese fishing nets. Taj Malabar.
- Day 13: Day at leisure in Cochin to relax or explore. Taj Malabar.
- Day 14: Drive to Calicut. Afternoon at leisure. Taj Residency.
- Day 15: Drive to Vythiri. Afternoon in the forest. Overnight in the treehouse.
- Day 16: Return to Calicut for the afternoon flight to Bombay. Orchid hotel.
- Day 17: Early morning departure for London via Dubai.

To discuss this itinerary and other options please call our Indian Subcontinent specialists on 01869 276 218.