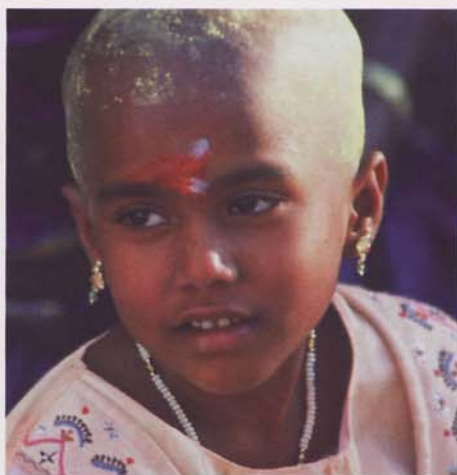




Traditional rice barge

# best of SOUTHERN INDIA

*Our India specialists choose some of the highlights to be seen in the southern states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.*



Pilgrim in Tamil Nadu

## AYURVEDA

*Ayurveda*  
Ayurveda is often referred to as the science of life, illness-prevention and longevity, and is said to be the oldest and most holistic medical system in the world today. The concept and philosophy was put in written form over 5,000 years ago in India. Today, ayurvedic medicine is practiced throughout the world and specifically in Kerala, which has experienced a renaissance of ayurveda in recent years. You can enjoy restorative massages and treatments in resorts such as Somatheeram in Kovalam, the Marari Beach Resort on the Malabar Coast and the Coconut Lagoon on the backwaters.

## TRAVEL BY RICEBOAT

*Travel by Riceboat*  
A popular way of exploring Kerala's lush backwaters is on your own private rice barge. Alleppey, south of Cochin, is a good place to start your trip. Backwater cruising gives you a genuine insight into the lives of the people of the region and your crew will provide delicious traditional Kerala cuisine. Life on the backwaters is perfectly serene: children play by the riverbanks, working boats drift slowly past as locals ply their trades, and birds flit idly along the water's edge. Overall, this is a thoroughly relaxing way to spend a day or more during your trip.

## LAKSHADWEEPS

*Lakshadweep*  
These remote islands lie to the west of Kerala in the Indian Ocean and are known for their natural beauty and clear seas. There is only one hotel for visitors, the Bangaram Island Resort which has individual rustic, fan cooled cottages scattered along the beach. The one restaurant serves freshly caught seafood including legendary prawn curries. The snorkelling from the island is excellent with plenty of colourful fish and delightfully warm waters. The entire experience is wholly laidback: wander along the beaches watching the local fishermen and sit back and savour the magnificent sunsets.



Fishermen at Cochin

## COCHIN

*Cochin*

The vibrant city of Cochin is situated near the Arabian Sea in the state of Kerala. Since the 15th century the local ruling families have forged strong trading links, firstly with the Portuguese and later with the Dutch and British. The exotic Mattancherry Palace bears testament to this close relationship. Today you will still find fishermen using Chinese fishing nets whilst surrounded by bustling market stalls, restaurants and cafes. The Jewish Quarter has one of the oldest synagogues in India, as well as spice traders and shops selling silks and handicrafts. In contrast is the beautiful Portuguese built St. Francis's, one of the oldest churches in India.

## PONDICHERRY

*Pondicherry*

With its seafront promenade, Hotel de Ville and botanical gardens, Pondicherry retains an atmosphere of 18th century colonial France. Catholic churches, whitewashed buildings with shuttered windows and policemen wearing kepis seem a world away from the adjacent bustling Indian commercial centre. To the north of town, the Sri Aurobindo ashram has a surreal air. Indian devotees are joined by westerners seeking inner peace at this centre for spiritual regeneration, meditating in the Matrimandir, a huge globe, the centrepiece of which is the largest crystal in the world.

## MADURAI

*Madurai*

A vital centre of Tamil culture, life in Madurai revolves around the spectacular Meenakshi temple whose origins go back 2,000 years. Enclosed by high walls, the labyrinth of corridors, pillared pavilions, chambers and shrines are filled with vendors of religious paraphernalia, priests and up to 50,000 pilgrims each day – it's almost a small town in itself. The four great gopurams, or towers, are encrusted with a kaleidoscope of carvings of gods, goddesses and animals jostling for your attention. Nearby, tailors can run up copies of your favourite outfits in a matter of hours. Elsewhere, the Gandhi Museum, housed in an old palace, is a sober reminder of the foundations on which modern independent India were founded.

## PLANTATION WALKS

In contrast to the coastal areas of Kerala are the hill stations and plantations of the hilly eastern and central regions. Pretty Periyar, southeast of Cochin, with its rolling green hills is a perfect place to see and learn about a multitude of different spices, including cardamom, cinnamon and black pepper. A morning spice walk can also easily be combined with an afternoon boat ride on Lake Periyar to view wildlife.



Hotel D'Orient, Pondicherry



## Travel file

A two week tailor-made trip to Kerala or Tamil Nadu typically costs from £1,500 per person with itineraries combining the two states costing from £2,000 per person, based on twin share. For further details please call our India specialists on 01869 276 218.