

India Design Tour

A journey that begins in the bougainvillea-lined streets of French colonial Puducherry, travels through the ancient Hindu heartland of Tamil Nadu, winds through Kerala's lush tea and spice plantations and concludes with the cutting-edge contemporary art of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale

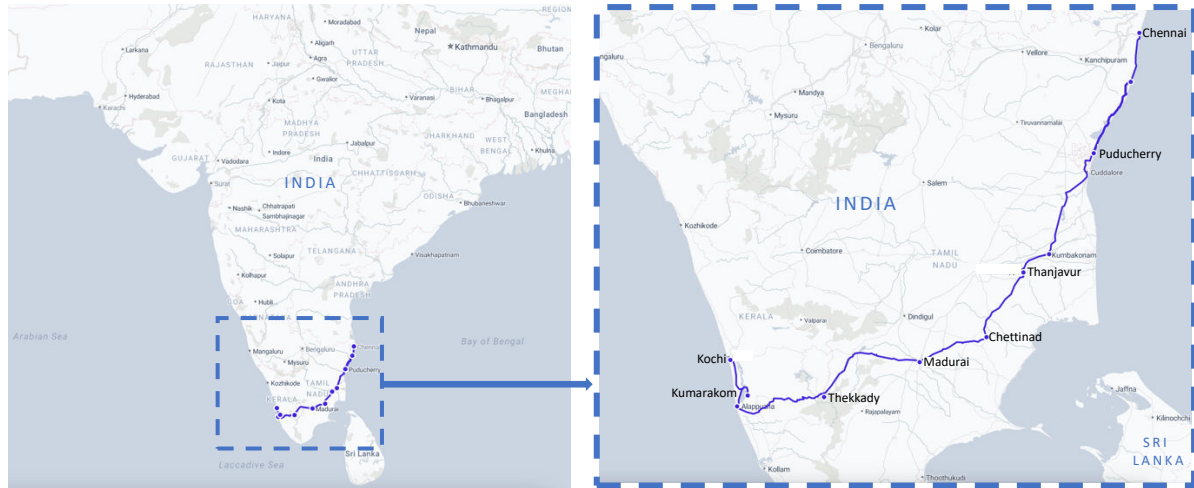


FLASH SALE!

\$4,000 discount –
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CONSCIOUS LUXURY JOURNEY ACROSS SOUTH INDIA (4-20 JANUARY 2026)



AT A GLANCE

Dates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4th to 20th January 2026 (17 days, 16 nights)
Hotels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taj Fisherman's Cove Resort, Chennai • Palais de Mahe, Puducherry • Svatma, Thanjavur • Visalam, Chettinad • Heritage Madurai, Madurai • Spice Village, Thekkady • Coconut Grove, Kumarakom • Eighth Bastion, Kochi
Meals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakfasts daily (16), lunches (3) and dinners (2), as per the itinerary
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private transfers to and from the airport • Private air-conditioned vehicles for ground transport
Your Hosts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tour leader: designer, Nicole Court (Sydney based) • Tour manager (India based) • Specialist guides at each destination
Group size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8-15 guests
Pricing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AUD\$14,950 (was AUD\$18,950) per person, twin share • AUD\$3,500 single supplement
Bookings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A deposit of AUD\$2,500 is required to reserve a spot on this trip (please see Tour Details on page 27 for the full payment schedule) • Bookings close 8 August 2025
Itinerary Highlights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curated art, architecture, landscape, textile, craft and history-focused excursions for an insider's perspective into South India • Walking the bougainvillea-lined streets of French colonial Puducherry • Visiting UNESCO World Heritage-listed temples and monuments • Staying in some of South India's most beautiful hotels, including a beautifully restored Art Deco mansion in Chettinad • Exploring spice plantations in the lush hills of the Western Ghats • Cruising the serene backwaters of Kerala • Immersing ourselves in the contemporary art scene at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale
Best time of year to visit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • December and January is the coolest time of year – sunny 28-32°C days and balmy 20°C evenings make for lovely travelling weather



MAMALLAPURAM – UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE-LISTED MONUMENTS

MEET YOUR HOST: NICOLE COURT

An Artistic Journey Through South India with a Designer Who Knows How to Look Closer

Join Sydney-based designer Nicole Court on an immersive, 16-night journey through the south of India – a country she has long admired for its intricate beauty, layered history, and living traditions.

This one-of-a-kind tour, handcrafted by Nicole in collaboration with local experts, invites you to explore southern India through a designer's lens – from historic homes and lush gardens to workshops, temples, and quiet corners of architectural wonder. With her thoughtful eye, deep respect for craftsmanship, and warm, personal approach, Nicole creates space for real connections – not just to places, but to the people who shape them.

This is not a typical tour. It is an invitation to see more, feel more, and slow down – in the company of like-minded travellers and a host who has spent a lifetime chasing beauty and meaning around the world.

ABOUT NICOLE COURT

Nicole is a multi-disciplinary designer with more than 30 years of experience across textiles, interiors, homewares, publishing, and landscape design. Today, she works as a landscape designer in Sydney, but her creative journey has taken her through India and across the world – always with an eye for the handcrafted, the historic, and the beautifully unexpected.

Nicole's textile and homeware collections were sold in Australia and New Zealand's top boutique stores and regularly featured in publications including *Belle*, *Vogue Living*, *Inside Out*, *Gourmet Traveller*, *House & Garden* and *Marie Claire*.

She has contributed to *Landscape Outlook* magazine as a garden writer and has spoken at the Landscape Design Institute, Mosman Garden Club, and Ku-ring-gai Horticultural Society. Whether she's designing a garden or curating a cultural journey, Nicole brings the same sensibility: thoughtful, tactile, and quietly elegant.

A FAMILY TRADITION OF TRAVEL AND DESIGN

Nicole's love for Asia is woven into her family story. Her mother, Dee Court, an art teacher and textile expert, led small-group tours to India and Central Asia – passing on to Nicole a fascination with traditional crafts and cross-cultural connections. Nicole's aunt, Robin Duffecy, a writer and interior designer, once lived in Delhi and formed close friendships with many of the country's leading thinkers and creatives.

These relationships didn't end with the previous generation. Over time, Nicole built her own network of artists, collectors, writers, and designers in India and these connections form the heart of this special journey.

WHY TRAVEL INDIA WITH NICOLE?

- **Design-led Discovery:** Explore India's architectural treasures, lush gardens, and rich artistic traditions with someone who notices the details.
- **Meaningful Encounters:** Meet local artists, curators, and creatives in private settings – from home studios to heritage houses.
- **Beautifully Balanced:** Enjoy a curated pace with time for conversation, contemplation, and well-chosen comforts.
- **A Personal Touch:** This tour reflects Nicole's passion, insight, and care – and is designed to feel more like travelling with a generous friend than a tour leader.

Join Nicole Court on a unique and intimate exploration of India – where art, design, and culture come together in ways that are deeply inspiring and quietly unforgettable.

Instagram: @nicolecourtdesign



PUDUCHERRY

INTRODUCTION

‘INDIA IS VIVID, EXCITING, AND OVERWHELMING, with kaleidoscopic beauty in all directions. The very air is electric, multidimensional. Women in pink, red, indigo, or orange saris float past. Temple bells ring, pilgrims chant, car horns honk, and jasmine and roses and street food scent the air. Everything is on the move.’

You are invited to join us on the India Design Tour in January 2026 for a “conscious luxury” journey through South India.

South India is renowned for its lush landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and tropical climate. Sacred rituals and ceremonies, deeply rooted in tradition, continue to play a vital role in daily life. Women, clad in colourful saris, adorn their hair with fragrant flowers, embodying the region's beauty and grace. Indian textiles, once one of the world's most valuable trading commodities, were central to the cultural exchange between East and West, and the bustling ports of South India, which flourished when trade winds and maritime routes connected distant lands, boast fascinating histories of foreign interactions – from the Roman Empire to the East India Company.

This tour is an opportunity to experience a unique perspective of India, through the eyes of a designer. Through Nicole Court's network of friends, family, and interesting contacts, she has curated architecture and history-focused tours and organised special visits to meet Indian craftspeople. You will see artisans practising the centuries-old arts of kalamkari and tile making, observe handloom weavers at work, and learn the secrets of how to cook authentic South Indian dishes.

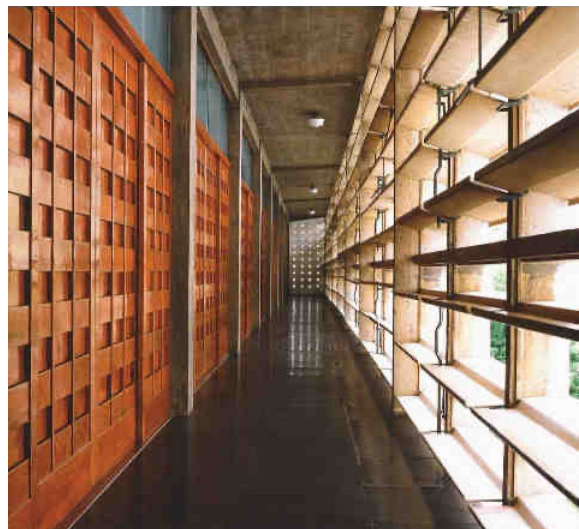
There will also be visits to bustling flower markets, learning about perfume making and essential oils, hunting for vintage treasures that once graced the grand mansions of Chettinad, shopping for beautiful textiles, and tasting South Indian coffee (delicious!) – all whilst allowing plenty of time at each destination so that you experience the rhythm of each place.

Our tours are intimate, with 8-16 guests – small enough to offer personalised boutique experiences, yet large enough to connect with a group of like-minded travellers who have shared interests in art, architecture, design and textiles.

CONSCIOUS LUXURY

Each hotel has been chosen for its special magic, each one revealing its unique sense of place in a way that only exists in India. The hotels have been chosen from a community of independent hoteliers and hospitality groups who define luxury by the following constants:

- Deliverable community impact including training and employing staff from the local community
- Conservation of nature and wildlife
- Preservation of built heritage
- Promotion of intangible heritage through local experiences
- Sensitive land use and efficient resource utilisation
- Sustainable solutions and best practice
- Excellence in service, style and design



INDIA'S FIRST MODERNIST BUILDING - GOLCONDE (1935-1945) , PUDUCHERRY

ITINERARY

DAY 1 • Sunday 4th January

Chennai: Upon arrival at Chennai International Airport, our friendly representative will greet you with a warm smile and a placard displaying your name. You will then be comfortably transferred in an air-conditioned car to the hotel (1hr 10 mins drive). Check-in is from 2 pm onwards.

Accommodation: *Taj Fisherman's Cove Resort & Spa, Chennai (Deluxe Room Sea View)*

Taj Fisherman's Cove Resort

Nestled within the historic walls of a centuries-old Dutch fort, Taj Fisherman's Cove Resort & Spa is a tropical 5-star retreat with a private beach and lovely views of the Bay of Bengal.

TAMIL NADU

Tamil Nadu is the homeland of one of humanity's living classical civilisations, stretching back uninterrupted for two millennia. This vibrant culture is very much alive in the Tamils' language, dance, poetry and forms of Hinduism. The region is home to some of India's most remarkable temples, from the intricate stone carvings at Thanjavur to the grand halls at Madurai.

The landscape is dotted with towering, pastel-hued temples. Its long coastline, the Coromandel Coast, bears the remnants of forgotten European trading posts and has a fascinating history of foreign interactions, from the Roman Empire to the British East India Company.

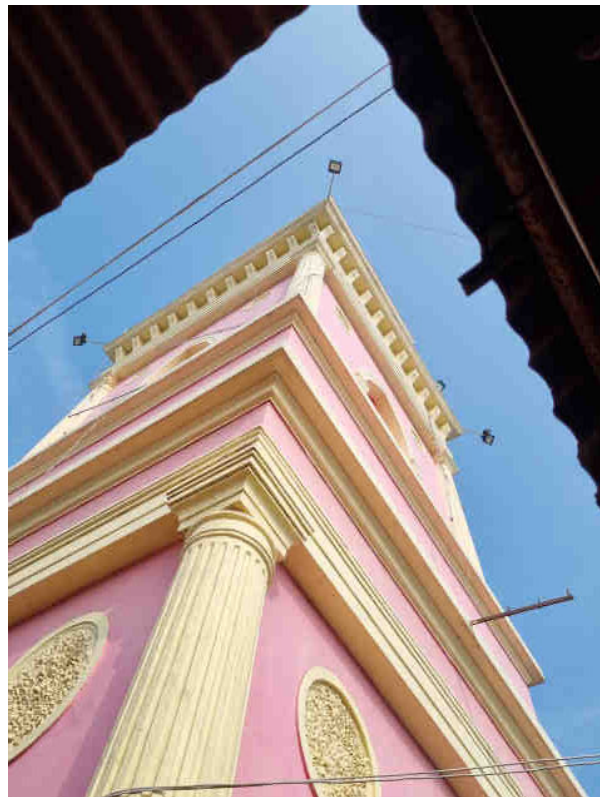
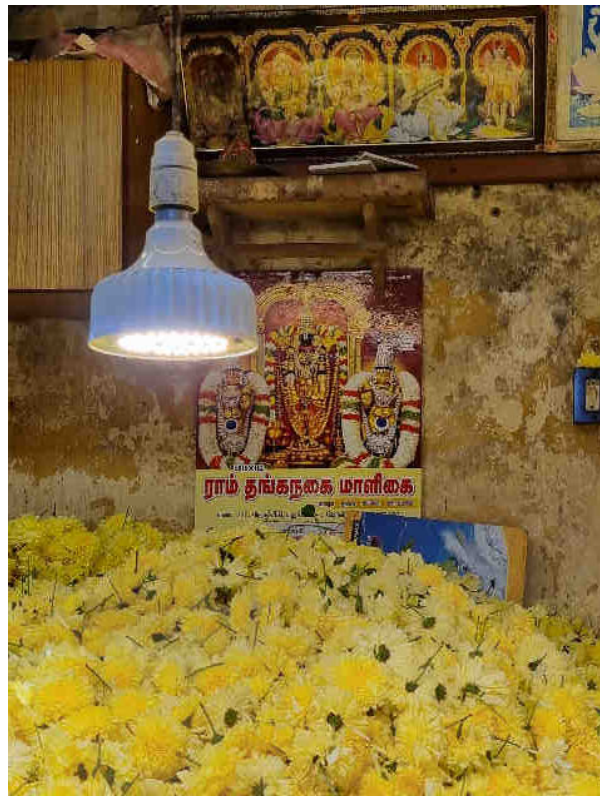
The long history of Dravidian civilisation in Tamil Nadu is one that predates the dominant Aryans of the North, and because of this, Tamils feel they are more deeply rooted in the Indian subcontinent. There is a distinct "otherness" to Tamil Nadu – its language and culture are unlike anywhere else in India. Tamil Nadu has a reputation for being conservative and devoutly religious. While this may still largely hold true, a gradual transformation is taking place as the state increasingly deals with the outside world. Amidst ancient temple gates, glass-and-steel offices of modern IT companies thrive, and the Tamil-language film industry rivals Bollywood.

DAY 2 • Monday 5th January

Mamallapuram: This morning you will have the opportunity to meet your host, Nicky Court, and fellow guests, as we begin our South India adventure.

Our first stop is Mamallapuram (also known as Mahabalipuram) (20 mins drive). A major seaport in the 7th and 8th centuries, Mamallapuram is now a tranquil spot on the Coromandel Coast. This UNESCO World Heritage site offers a fascinating glimpse into the artistic and technical brilliance of the Pallava artisans, who carved intricate temples directly from the natural landscape. The world's largest bas-relief, the Descent of the Ganges, is one of the extraordinary works of Indian art that you will see here.

Another highlight is the Shore Temple, which is said to be one of seven temples that once stood here. It is carved from a single, massive rock. Local legend says that the god Indra submerged the others during a mighty storm, leaving only the Shore Temple above the waves. This myth persisted until the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, when the sea receded by 500 metres. To the amazement of local fishermen and tourists, a long row of large rocks emerged from the water, possibly remnants of the submerged temples.



GOUBERT MARKET IN PUDUCHERRY

Mamallapuram – Puducherry: After exploring Mamallapuram, we will drive to Puducherry (2 hrs). Once a French colony, Puducherry is now one of India's most picturesque towns, with its French colonial architecture and relaxed, coastal vibe.

Accommodation: *Palais de Mahe, Puducherry (Palais Chambre Deluxe)* | *Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch*

Palais de Mahe

Palais de Mahé is located in Puducherry's charming French Quarter. Just steps away from the seafront promenade, this elegant hotel features spacious rooms that blend colonial architecture with modern comforts.

The hotel has a polished, old-world vibe. The centrepiece is a sleek pool with sun lounges accessorised with nautical-striped towels. On the rooftop terrace, the hotel's restaurant offers lovely views over the rooftops of the French Quarter to the sea.

PUDUCHERRY

Until 1954, Puducherry (formerly known as Pondicherry) was a French colony, and it has preserved much of its colonial charm, including its French street names. The streets are lined with villas painted in vibrant colours with bougainvillea-clad doorways. The town is home to cafes, restaurants, boutiques, and galleries, many showcasing local artisanal products, while the police force still sports the distinctive red French *képis*.

Pondy (as it is fondly called by its residents) is regularly featured in the top ten cleanest cities in India, with its streets kept spick and span by its ever-present teams of lady sweepers (providing employment for underprivileged women).

Pondicherry also draws spiritually minded visitors to the internationally renowned Sri Aurobindo Ashram and the nearby experimental community of Auroville. These places offer immersive experiences in expanding collective consciousness through yoga and meditation.

DAY 3 • Tuesday 6th January

Puducherry: We will visit busy Goubert Market this morning to get a glimpse of the daily life of Puducherry. There is a lively fish section, run by women. There are also merchants sitting behind mountains of dried chillies and aromatic spices; rows and rows of fresh local produce, banana leaves, and coconuts; butchers portioning chunks of beef and pork; and flower sellers threading garlands and selling flower petals by the kilo.

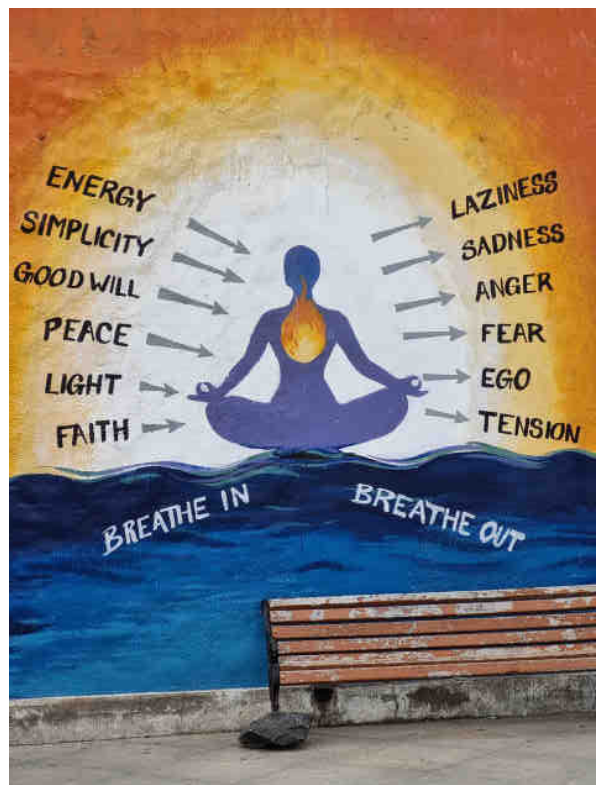
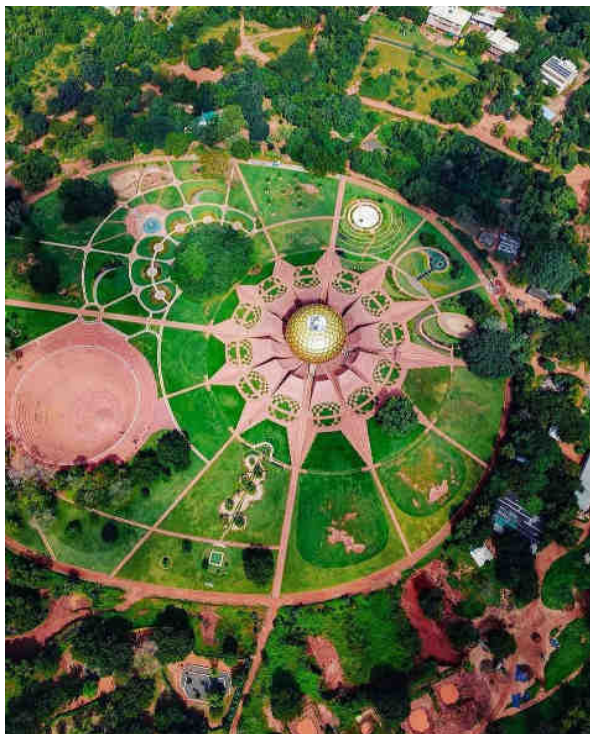
This afternoon we will walk the tree-lined streets of the French Quarter (called the White Town) with a local expert to learn more about Puducherry's architecture. There will also be time to shop in the upmarket boutiques or visit one of the lovely cafes. We will also take you see a beautiful church that has interiors that are a meditation on colour, with stained glass windows that open onto flower-filled gardens.

Accommodation: *Palais de Mahe, Puducherry (Palais Chambre Deluxe)* | *Meals included: Breakfast*

DAY 4 • Wednesday 7th January

Puducherry – Auroville – Puducherry: We will visit Auroville this morning (30 mins drive). Auroville is an experimental, non-denominational township dedicated to human unity and peace. Since its inception in 1968, Auroville has attracted people from all over India, and the world.

We will visit the Matrimandir, a golden globe at the heart of Auroville. The concept of "The Mother" represents the great evolutionary, conscious, and intelligent principle of Life – the



AUROVILLE

Universal Mother – which seeks to help humanity transcend its current limitations and enter the next phase of evolution, known as the supramental consciousness.

There are twelve gardens surrounding the Matrimandir. They serve as the spiritual foundation for the city. Each is designed to symbolise a different idea, such as Existence, Consciousness, Bliss, Light, Life, Power, Wealth, Utility, Progress, Youth, Harmony and Perfection.

The houses and buildings spiral around the centre, with green spaces interspersed throughout, and the industrial areas are located at the periphery. The vision for Auroville is for it to be an ideal place to raise children, where they can grow up in a natural environment while still benefiting from modern technology.

Afterwards, we will return to Puducherry (30 mins drive). This afternoon is free for you to relax and explore at your own pace.

Accommodation: *Palais de Mabe, Puducherry (Palais Chambre Deluxe) | Meals included: Breakfast*

DAY 5 • Thursday 8th January

Puducherry – Kumbakonam – Thanjavur: This morning we will drive to the River Cauvery (2hr 15min), where we will visit one of the last remaining artists practicing Karuppur Kalamkari. This centuries-old art form involves drawing intricate designs on fabric, using plant-based dyes derived from flowers, bark, roots and seeds. The dyes are applied to cotton using brushes and pens made from coconut stems and bamboo. Once completed, the artwork is washed and dried along the riverbank, with the river water playing a key role in giving the fabric its distinct texture.

Kalamkari traces its origins to the Maratha period in Thanjavur, where it was often commissioned by the royal family. In Tamil Nadu, Karuppur Kalamkari holds deep cultural significance and is widely used in temple decorations, such as hangings, canopies, and door frames, particularly during the Panguni Uthiram festival. The art is revered as sacred and is an integral part of the local community's traditions and beliefs.

After our visit, we will go to a lovely restaurant nearby for a thali lunch, a tasting plate featuring some delicious traditional recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation. You will also have the chance to try the famed “degree coffee” – Kumbakonam's signature filter coffee, made from the finest local beans and fresh milk. South Indian coffee is delicious!

Afterwards, we will continue to Tanjore (50 mins drive).

Accommodation: *Svatma (Millenium Premium Room), Thanjavur | Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch*

Svatma

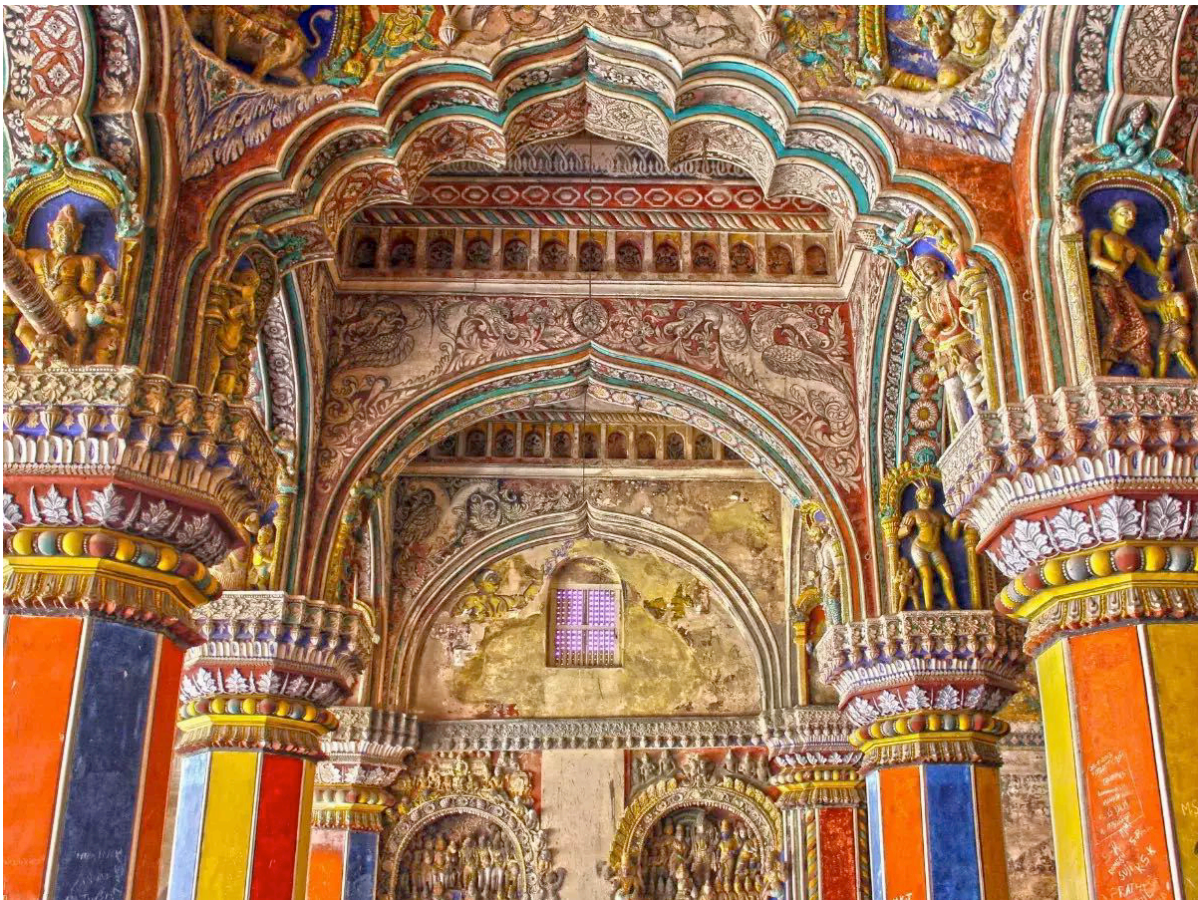
This lovely heritage boutique hotel blends luxury with tradition. It features expansive verandas, elegant hallways, inviting lounges, and open spaces perfect for socialising, as well as quiet nooks for those seeking peace and solitude. Set amidst beautifully landscaped gardens, complete with a serene pool, Svratma has been thoughtfully designed and restored to celebrate the rich art and culture of Tamil Nadu.

THANJAVUR

Thanjavur (formerly known as Tanjore) boasts a rich and fascinating history that is expressed through its architecture, art, and cultural heritage. Founded over a thousand years ago, the city has been a cornerstone not only of Tamil Nadu, but of South Indian civilisation. As the heart of the mighty Chola Empire, Thanjavur's influence stretched well beyond the Tamil region, shaping the cultural landscape of much of the Indian subcontinent, as well as Southeast Asia. The Cholas left behind an enduring legacy of grand temples, intricate sculptures and a distinctive artistic style that continues to be celebrated today.



UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE-LISTED BRIHADISHWARA TEMPLE IN THANJUVAR (c. 1010AD)



THANJAVUR'S ROYAL PALACE

DAY 6 • Friday 9th January

Thanjavur: The Brihadeeswarar Temple stands as the pinnacle of Tamil temple architecture. It is one of the largest and most awe-inspiring temples in India. A UNESCO World Heritage site, it was built in the 11th century, and it showcases the Chola dynasty's artistic legacy. The temple features an enormous central dome (which was the largest of its kind in the world when it was built) as well as intricate sculptures, frescoes and towering gateways. We will visit the temple twice to see it in different lights – at dawn, for its serene, spiritual atmosphere. And in the late afternoon, the intricately carved granite façade comes alive with the warm glow of sunset. During these times, the temple often hosts special pujas (acts of worship), offering a deeper connection to the spiritual and cultural pulse of Thanjavur.

We will visit a local atelier to learn about the school of Tanjore painting and see the artists at work. These highly collectible artworks are usually adorned with gold and depict Hindu deities, goddesses, and mythological scenes (Nicole's favourites are the glass-painted ones).

We will finish with a glimpse into Thanjavur's literary heritage at the Saraswathi Mahal Library. It is one of the oldest libraries in India and is renowned for its rare collection of ancient manuscripts and books.

Accommodation: *Svatma (Millenium Premium Room), Thanjavur* | *Meals included: Breakfast*

DAY 7 • Saturday 10th January

Thanjavur: We will visit the Thanjavur Maratha Palace, Art Gallery and the Chola Museum this morning and see a remarkable collection of bronze sculptures, murals and paintings.

Thanjavur – Chettinad: This afternoon we will drive to Chettinad (1hr 30min). The rest of the afternoon is free for lounging by the pool or exploring the beautiful heritage property that will be our home for the next three nights.

Accommodation: *Visalam (Chettinad Suite)* | *Meals included: Breakfast*

Visalam

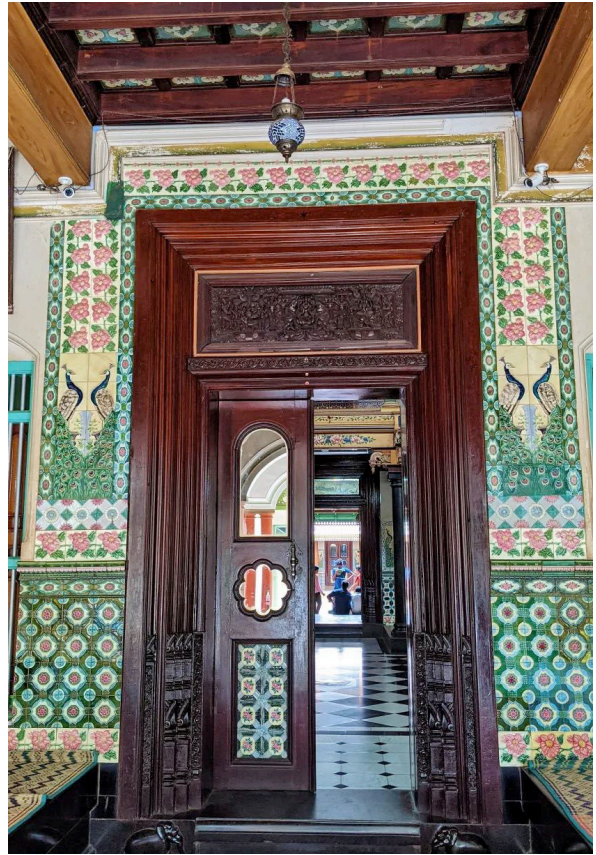
This 1930s Art Deco mansion is decorated with the original owners' furniture and paintings. Each of the guest rooms is decorated with antiques, vintage photographs and local textiles, and has large windows overlooking the gardens. There is also a lovely pool.

CHETTINAD

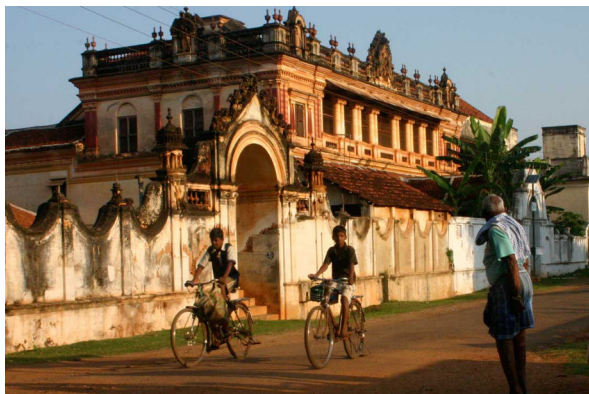
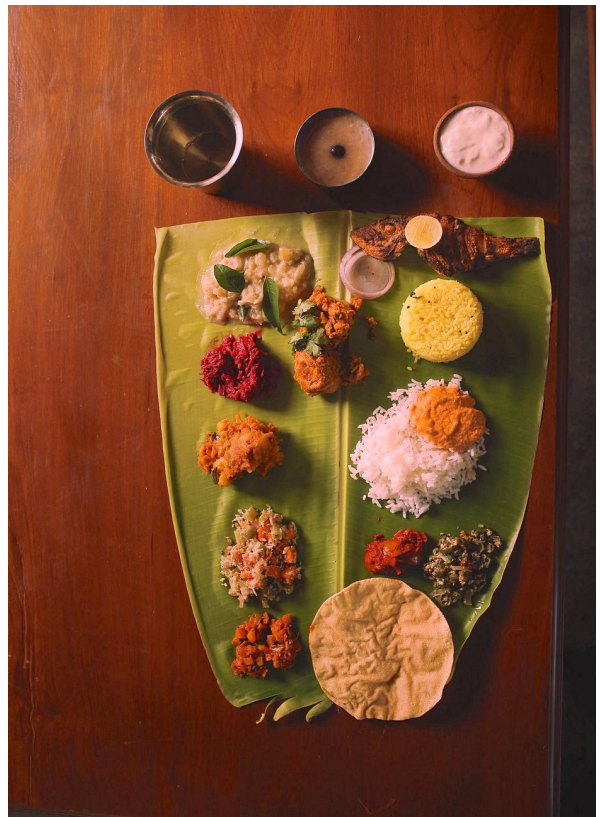
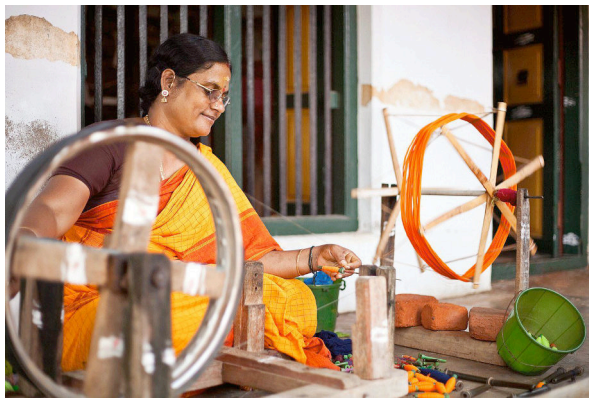
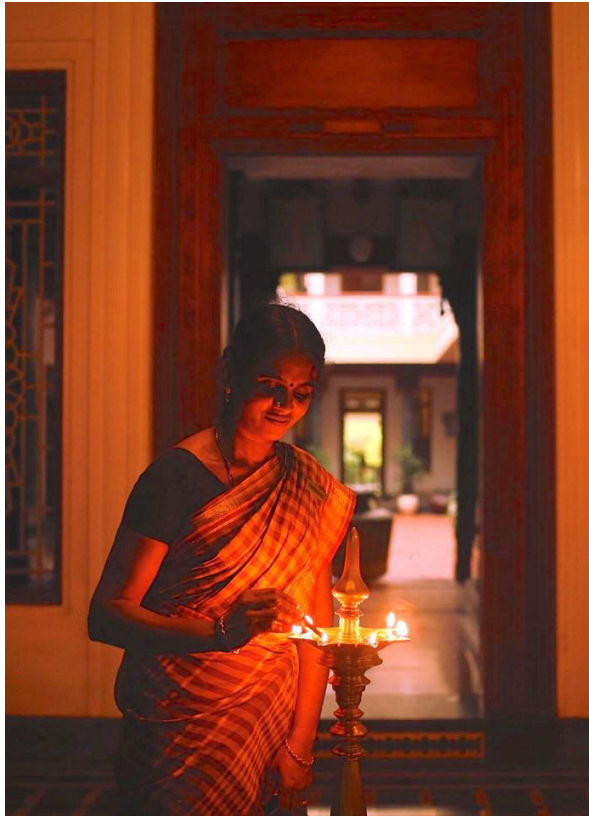
Chettinad is the homeland of the Chettiars. It is dotted with grand yet faded mansions, remnants of a bygone era when the community amassed enormous wealth across Asia during the days of the British Empire. These sprawling homes, often occupying entire city blocks, boast interiors with egg-plaster walls, crystal chandeliers, Burmese teak columns, Italian marble, patterned tiled floors, and intricate wood carvings. They are a living museum of Chettinad's glorious past and many of them are on the tentative list for UNESCO World Heritage recognition.

The name "Chettiar" is derived from the Sanskrit word *Shreshti*, meaning "wealth" – a fitting title for this prosperous merchant community. While the Chettiars have existed since at least the Chola period, it was during the 19th century, at the height of the British Empire, that they rose from traders to powerful moneylenders in nearly every British colony in Asia, from Burma to Singapore. They became the single most important financiers in the whole of Southeast Asia, with a client list that included royalty and the British East India Company.

By 1920, Chettiar loans underwrote 80% of Burma's agrarian and trading economy. But in the 1920s, crisis struck. The Great Depression meant that millions of people defaulted on their debts at the same time. Between 1931-8, the Tamil Chettiar community suddenly found themselves in



THE MANSIONS OF CHETTINAD



CHETTINAD (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT):– DAILY RITUALS, VINTAGE AND ANTIQUE SHOPPING, ATHANGUDI TILE MAKING, COOKING, STREET SCENES, AND HANDLOOM WEAVING

possession of a quarter of all Burmese land. This incited a devastating backlash against the Tamil community. There were anti-Indian riots and in 1937 Burma was administratively separated from British India. As a result, many Chettiars started repatriating their assets back to Madras (now known as Chennai) in the late 1930s. But it was the Japanese invasion of Burma in 1942 that prompted the tragic re-migration of a more substantial majority of Indian communities by sea, air or through the jungles of north-western Burma. Nearly half a million fled between January and June 1942.

After the war, the Burmese *Land Nationalisation Act 1948*, effectively stopped Indian communities (often born in Burma) from repatriating back to independent Burma (and recovering their properties). As a result, much of the community would migrate to India between the 1940s and 1960s, effectively becoming displaced persons in their Indian homeland. By the 1980s, increasingly anti-Indian measures enacted by an openly xenophobic Burmese military rule resulted in most of the remaining Burmese Indian community migrating to Thailand, Singapore, Bangladesh and Pakistan, and beyond, to the West.

Seeing glimpses of the former glory of these once-stunning mansions, built in Art Deco, Victorian, Tudor and Neoclassical styles, with a distinctly Indian sensibility, will be a highlight of our India Design Tour.

DAY 8 • Sunday 11th January

Chettinad: We will immerse ourselves in the history, architecture, and culture of this fascinating region by visiting the Chettinad Palace as well as some of the other grand mansions.

Antique and vintage shopping is a must here. There are shops filled with an incredible array of items, from enamel ware, trays, porcelain, cutlery, spice boxes, kitchen utensils and teapots, to radios, beautiful mirrors and lamps – the list goes on – treasures from the community's former glory days. We will also visit the artisans who still make beautiful handmade tiles in the traditional way.

Accommodation: *Visalam (Chettinad Suite)* | *Meals included: Breakfast*

DAY 9 • Monday 12th January

Chettinad: The 73 villages of Chettinad are dotted with traditional Chola-style temples, many of which are centuries old. Each temple features its own sacred tank which serves as the focal point for village life. We will visit one of the temples that is 1,800 years old.

Known for its bold, aromatic flavours, Chettinad cuisine is among the spiciest and most celebrated in India. To give you an authentic taste of the region, we have arranged a cooking class to learn how to prepare traditional Chettinad dishes.

Chettinad is also famous for its saris. We will visit a nearby handloom unit, where we will watch artisans weave these beautifully coloured textiles.

Accommodation: *Visalam (Chettinad Suite)* | *Meals included: Breakfast*

DAY 10 • Tuesday 13th January

Chettinad – Madurai: This morning we will drive to holy city of Madurai (2 hours). Meenakshi Amman Temple is the iconic heart of Madurai and one of the most important Hindu temples in India. This magnificent 17th-century temple, dedicated to Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Shiva, is a masterpiece of Dravidian architecture, with towering gateways and grand pillared halls. In the evening, we will stay for the *aarti*, a nightly ceremony in which Shiva's reunion with Meenakshi is enacted. The sacred rituals – flaming torches, chanting priests, and the sounds of the *nadaswaram* and *mellam* – bring the temple to life in a truly spiritual experience.



MADURAI

Madurai is also home to South India's most fragrant flower, a species of jasmine called *kundu malli*. Women sit in rows selling strings of flowers from wicker baskets to pilgrims who leave tens of thousands of blooms each day as offerings to the goddess at the temple. The scent of jasmine, tuberose, marjoram, myrrh, champak magnolia, and rose infuses the air like a fragrant blessing.

Accommodation: *Heritage Madurai (Luxury Plunge Pool Villa)* | *Meals included: Breakfast*

Heritage Madurai

This serene retreat was once home to the old Madurai Club, designed by renowned Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa, famous for his Tropical Modernism style. The space has since been beautifully transformed into a boutique hotel, featuring intricate Kerala-style woodwork, a charming sunken pool inspired by traditional temple-style ponds, and 17 acres of lush gardens.

MADURAI

While Chennai may be the capital of Tamil Nadu, Madurai is undeniably its soul. A city with a history dating back 2,500 years, Madurai is one of India's oldest continuously inhabited urban centres, steeped in tradition and antiquity. Once a bustling trading hub with ancient Rome, Madurai is dominated by the majestic Meenakshi Amman Temple and is renowned for its vibrant culture, classical dance and music, and rich weaving heritage.

DAY 11 • Wednesday 14th January

Madurai: Indian culture is suffused with perfume. From water scented with holy basil, known locally as *tulsi*, to sandalwood paste and garlands of jasmine and roses, Hindu rituals use an array of fragrances to bathe, decorate, and feed their gods. And here in the south, women wear strings of jasmine blooms called *gajra* in their hair. Perfumers from all over the world come to Madurai because the most beautifully fragranced jasmine is grown here (it's all about the terroir).

We will visit the flower market this morning to see 15-30 tons of jasmine being bought and sold. An entire field of jasmine will go into just one bottle of perfume – 350kg of flowers produces just 250g of concentrated extract.

We will also visit a beautiful Indo-Saracenic architectural gem this morning, the Thirumalai Nayakkar Palace, which was built in the 17th century.

This afternoon is at leisure – take a dip in your private pool, explore the lush gardens, or unwind with an Ayurvedic massage at the spa (at an additional cost). This evening, we have organised a dinner at The Banyan, one of Madurai's finest restaurants, conveniently located within our hotel.

Accommodation: *Heritage Madurai (Luxury Plunge Pool Villa)* | *Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner*

DAY 12 • Thursday 15th January

Madurai – Thekkady: This morning we will drive from Madurai, up into the hills of the Western Ghats (3hrs), to Thekkady, located in the neighbouring state of Kerala.

After settling into our lovely hotel, we will enjoy a botanical walk with a naturalist, who will guide us through the local flora and fauna, offering insights into the region's unique ecosystem.

Accommodation: *Spice Village (Spice Garden Cottage), Thekkady* | *Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch*

Spice Village

Spice Village is designed as a traditional village, set in a spice garden in the cool highlands of Periyar in Thekkady. It is focused on sustainability and local traditions and offers a unique blend of nature, culture, and comfort.



THE SPICE GARDENS AND WILDLIFE OF THE WESTERN GHATS IN KERALA

WESTERN GHATS

Older than the Himalaya mountains, the mountain chain of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Western Ghats represents geomorphic features of immense importance with unique biophysical and ecological processes. The site's high montane forest ecosystems influence the Indian monsoon weather pattern. Moderating the tropical climate of the region, the site presents one of the best examples of the monsoon system on the planet. It also has an exceptionally high level of biological diversity and endemism and is recognized as one of the world's eight 'hottest hotspots' of biological diversity. The forests of the site include some of the best representatives of non-equatorial tropical evergreen forests anywhere and are home to at least 325 globally threatened flora, fauna, bird, amphibian, reptile and fish species.

KERALA

Known as 'God's Own Country', this slender coastal strip is defined by its layered landscape: almost 600km of Arabian Sea coast; a languid network of glistening backwaters; and the spice and tea-covered hills of the Western Ghats, dotted with protected wildlife reserves and cool hill stations. Kerala is a world away from the hectic pace of the rest of India.

Traders have been drawn to Kerala's spices for more than 3,000 years. The coast was known to the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Arabs and the Chinese, and was a transit point for the spices from the Moluccas (eastern Indonesia).

Vasco da Gama's arrival in 1498 opened the floodgates to European colonialism as Portuguese, Dutch and English interests fought Arab traders, and then each other, for control of the lucrative spice trade. You can still see the history of the spice trade in Kochi (formerly Cochin), where the peppery whiff of the past is easy to find in the backstreets and busy wharves.

Kerala's long links with maritime trade have resulted in a multicultural society unlike anywhere else in India. As well as the majority Hindu population, almost 20% of the population are Christian, followers of a faith that has had a presence here far longer than in Western Europe – St Thomas the Apostle is said to have landed in Kerala in 52 AD, bringing Christianity to the subcontinent. The local Muslim community (25%) has its roots in trade across the Indian Ocean, and there is even a deep-rooted, though tiny, Keralan Jewish community. A tradition of valuing the arts and education resulted in a post-Independence state that is one of the most progressive in India, with the nation's highest literacy rate.

DAY 13 • Friday 16th January

Thekaddy: Bison, sambar, wild boar, langur, around 2,000 elephants and 35 to 40 tigers wander the lushly green hills of Periyar Tiger Reserve in the Western Ghats, where we have organised a lake cruise. Herds of elephants and sambar deer are common sights, and we may also spot gaur (large wild ox) and wild boars in the grasslands. A variety of avian fauna such as darters, egrets and kingfishers are usually spotted. Hopefully we will also see the Smooth Indian otter.

This afternoon we will visit a local spice plantation to learn about the cultivation, harvesting techniques, and health benefits, of the aromatic herbs and spices that are grown here, such as cardamom, pepper, vanilla and cinnamon.

Accommodation: *Spice Village (Spice Garden Cottage), Thekkady* | **Meals included:** *Breakfast*



THE BACKWATERS, KERALA

DAY 14 • Saturday 17th January

Thekkaddy – Alleppey – Kumarakom: This morning we will drive towards the coast to Alleppey (4 hours), arriving in time for lunch on the lush, greenery-fringed backwaters. This tranquil water world is dotted with villages, punted canoes, toddy shops, and houseboats. As we float along, we will take in the sight of vibrant green paddy fields, watch traditional rice barges glide by, and observe the peaceful rhythms of village life along the banks. Afterward, our boat will cross Vembanad Lake, bringing us to our hotel, Coconut Lagoon.

Accommodation: *Coconut Lagoon (Heritage Bungalow), Kumarakom* | **Meals included:** *Breakfast, Lunch*

Coconut Lagoon

Coconut Lagoon is located on a sheltered cove on Vembanad Lake. This backwater destination is nestled amidst canals, paddy fields and lush natural life. The villas of the resort are beautiful old Kerala homes called *tharavads*, that were rescued from demolition and carefully reconstructed in this beautiful setting. The lake is home to a plethora of natural life, with rare species of plants, butterflies, birds and sea creatures. A tranquil haven.

DAY 15 • Sunday 18th January

Kumarakom – Kochi: This morning is at leisure. You might choose to relax by the pool, indulge in an Ayurvedic treatment at the hotel's spa (at an additional cost), go birdwatching, or explore the butterfly garden – home to over 54 species of dragonflies and damselflies, a testament to the thriving local ecosystem. Keep an eye out for the floating tea shop, where you can meet the local tea lady from the nearby village.

This afternoon we will drive to Kochi (2 hrs). After settling into our hotel, you might enjoy a stroll to Fort Kochi beach to watch locals fly kites and young boys playing football. The iconic Chinese fishing nets are nearby, and the area also has charming cafes and shops to explore.

Later, we will experience Kathakali, a centuries-old Keralan form of classical dance that narrates mythological tales through expressive facial gestures, hand movements, and rhythmic dance. Known for its complexity, Kathakali is accompanied by live singers who narrate the story in melodic verses. The grand costumes and intricate makeup transform performers into larger-than-life characters. UNESCO has recognized Kathakali as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Tonight, we will attend a performance and have the opportunity to witness the artists applying their elaborate makeup before the show.

Accommodation: *Eighth Bastion (Bastion Room), Kochi* | **Meals included:** *Breakfast*

Eighth Bastion

The contemporary design of this boutique hotel was inspired by the elegance of colonial architecture. It is located in a tranquil spot at the heart of historic Fort Kochi, just a stone's throw from the iconic Chinese fishing nets.

KOCHI

One of the most atmospheric places in the south of India, Kochi (formerly known as Cochin) is a city of peninsulas and islands, on a large natural harbour. Old Kochi, where we are staying, is the peninsula comprising of Fort Kochi and Mattancherry. Some of the most interesting buildings in India are to be found here, including old Portuguese, Dutch and British architecture. Today it is a laid-back neighbourhood where murals adorn the streets, Chinese fishing nets dot the water, and heritage buildings have been reborn as cool cafes, chic boutiques and contemporary art galleries.



KOCHI (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): KOCHI-MUZIRIS BIENNALE, STREET MURALS, KATHAKALI PERFORMANCE, ANTIQUE SHOPPING, CHINESE FISHING NETS AND COLONIAL DUTCH ARCHITECTURE



KOCHI-MUZIRIS BIENNALE

DAY 16 • Monday 19th January

Kochi: We are excited that the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (Cochin Biennale) will be taking place during our stay, and we will immerse ourselves in the city's vibrant art scene. We will explore the exhibitions and site-specific installations scattered across various venues in Fort Kochi, including colonial buildings, decaying warehouses, and historical landmarks like the Mattancherry Palace, which is tentatively listed for UNESCO World Heritage status. This international contemporary art exhibition is renowned for its unique fusion of art, culture, and history. It is the largest art event in India and the biggest contemporary art festival in Asia.

We will also make sure we have time for some antiques shopping in Jew Town and Fort Kochi before we gather for a special farewell dinner to celebrate our journey and reflect on the experiences we have shared.

Accommodation: *Eighth Bastion (Bastion Room), Kochi* | **Meals included:** *Breakfast, Dinner*

DAY 17 • Tuesday 20th January

Kochi – home: Enjoy a relaxed morning before we check out of the hotel by 11am, marking the end of our tour. You will then be transferred in an air-conditioned car to the airport for your departure flight home.

If you would like to extend your stay for a day or two, you can immerse yourself further in the Biennale or enjoy a relaxing few nights on a rice barge cruise through the backwaters. Feel free to reach out if you need assistance with any additional travel arrangements – we would be happy to help!

Meals: *Breakfast*

TOUR DETAILS

How to Book

- Please email tour leader Nicky Court to request a booking form:

nicole@nicolecourt.com.au

Below are the key dates and important details to keep in mind:

- Your booking will be confirmed once your completed Booking Form and the AUD \$2,500 deposit has been received.

8 August 2025 – Group Confirmation Date

- Minimum number of guests – The tour and excursions require a minimum number of guests to be financially viable and to ensure a convivial group experience. If the minimum number of 8 guests for the tour is not achieved by this date, we reserve the right to cancel the tour and refund the monies paid.

Payment schedule

- Time of booking
 - \$2,500 deposit
- 8 July 2025
 - A further payment will be due, bringing your total paid to 25% of your tour cost
- 20 September 2025
 - The full and final balance (75%) of your tour cost will be due

Tour Dates

- India Design Tour: South India, 4th - 20th January 2026 (17 days, 16 nights)

Tour Inclusions

- 16 nights hotel accommodation, as indicated in the itinerary
- Meals specified in the itinerary
- Airport arrival and departure transfers
- Ground transport in air-conditioned coach and cars, with expert drivers
- Complimentary amenities in the vehicles such as bottled water
- Expert guides, including tour leader Nicole Court and specialist guides at each destination
- Entrance fees, taxes and all gratuities
- 24/7 on-ground support from our behind-the-scenes Indian travel team

Tour Exclusions

- International airfares
- Meals not specified on the itinerary
- Alcoholic beverages
- Visa fees
- Health and travel insurance
- Medical emergencies
- Expenses for re-routing due to voluntary or unforeseeable reasons
- Personal expenses for drinks, snacks, telephone calls, laundry, internet (most hotels have free Wi-Fi)
- Video camera fees at museums and monuments

Cancellation terms

- If you wish to cancel your booking, you must provide notice in writing (an email is sufficient)
- Cancellations made over 148 days prior to the tour start date will incur loss of deposit

- Cancellations made 148 to 106 days prior to the tour start date will incur a cancellation fee of 25% of the tour price
- Cancellations made 105 to 0 days prior to the tour start date will incur a cancellation fee of 100% of the tour price
- A minimum number of 8 bookings are required by 8th August 2025 for the tour to proceed. If the tour fails to satisfy minimum numbers, the tour may be cancelled or re-costed, we will give you notice on 9th August 2025. If the tour is re-costed, you will have the option to either accept the new cost or to cancel your booking. You must make this election within 1 day of receiving notice from us. If the tour is cancelled or if you cancel your booking in these circumstances, we will at your election refund all payments made (including your deposit) or credit payments towards alternative arrangements within 5 business days.

We will not be responsible for any other travel arrangements affected by, or any additional costs incurred, as a result of cancellation in these circumstances.

Booking Terms and Conditions

Please refer to “India Design Tour January 2026 Booking Form with Terms and Conditions” for our full terms and conditions.

Medical

On-call doctors are available at each hotel.

Dietary requirements

Please let us know if you any special dietary requirements when you book and we will confirm if we are able to accommodate them on the Design Tour – we will if we can!

Flexibility about minor changes

So much thought and care has gone into the itinerary of this Design Tour but India always requires some flexibility in regards to minor changes. Any minor changes to the itinerary (eg, an activity occurring on a different day to the dated itinerary) will only ever be made because it improves the flow of the experience. Hopefully this doesn't happen, but if anywhere is unexpectedly closed due to unforeseen events, we will make sure that we do something else equally interesting.

TESTIMONIALS

I HAVE NOW DONE TWO TOURS WITH NICKY. Two unforgettable, wow every single day, in fact, often multiple times a day, wow! moments. It was evident from the moment I landed in Delhi, warmly greeted, walked through the airport, onto a waiting bus and into the comfort of the first of many beautiful hotels. All the way through to the moment I flew out again, filled to the brim with awe and delight.

Every single detail of the tour was thoughtfully curated. Nicky is a natural curator. Her attention to detail. Her love of all things India. Her passion for authentic human experiences all shine through with grace and love. Yes, love. I feel spoilt by my two incredible tours through India with Nicky. I'm not sure there is any other way to do it now!

Sally, Sydney (January 2023 and January 2024)

NICOLE COURT'S DESIGN TOUR WAS A LUXURY TRAVEL EXPERIENCE THAT CANNOT BE MATCHED. Travelling with my sister, for my 50th birthday present, this tour was a complete success for me; the places we travelled to, the experiences that were curated and timed perfectly to build up our understanding of this complex and wonderful and diverse culture and place. I experienced utter beauty and fulfillment in many forms, be it the world class hotels, food or seamlessly planned activities.

Mostly it was a wonderful human experience, feeling safe and totally cared for, allowed me to confidently explore this foreign country, supported and connected to both Nicky, Kinny and Deep our guides, and finding new connections with a fantastic tour group that have ensured I have some wonderful new friends for life. I cannot recommend Nicole Court's Design Tours highly enough.

Jacqui Williams, Perth (January 2024)

THE METICULOUS PLANNING OF THE DESIGN TOUR TO INDIA, the attention to detail, lovely surprises along the way, and our extremely knowledgeable guides all made this experience incredibly enlightening, where history, creativity and spirituality entwine, an unforgettable adventure for anyone passionate about design, textiles and architecture.

Spice scents, tiles, saris, hand-painted walls, incense, etched glass, hand-blocked prints, and temple bells have left an indelible mark on my soul. I feel completely spoilt and privileged to have been. It far exceeded all my expectations. I would go again in a heartbeat with Nicole, Kinny and the team. Highly recommended. A huge thank you. Heart open.

Suzanne Maher, Bellingen NSW (January 2024)

FROM THE EXTRAORDINARY STEPWELLS IN AHMEDABAD, to the spotted leopard spotting, the textile exhibitions and the fabulous palaces of Rajasthan, the India tour was full of surprises and "wow" moments. Along the way the accommodation was superb and the company great fun. Nicky and her team went to no end of trouble to ensure everything went smoothly and that we got the most out of all our visits. Grateful for the opportunity to learn so much about Indian architecture and culture from our expert guides. Highly recommended!

Anne W, Sydney NSW (January 2025)

I'VE BEEN TO NORTH INDIA TWICE BEFORE, but doing a tour with Nicky Court on her Design Tour is by FAR the best way to see India. You see the best of the best along with the chaos, but knowing you are safe and well taken care of. Just sit back and trust! There was something wonderful in every day along with pleasant surprises. We saw the most unique places, beautiful palaces, tombs, and ruins along with how the masses live on the streets, compatibly with cows, dogs, elephants, camels, donkeys, goats, sheep, bicycles, rickshaws, tuktuks, motor bikes, cars, buses, and trucks. The two most challenging components are the air and water quality but that faded as we basked in the glow of all that was so wonderful!!

MJ, Sydney (January 2024)

- What would you do again: All of it
- Funniest moment: Hooning around in tuk-tuks wherever we were
- Favourite hotels: RAAS Jodhpur, RAAS Chhatrasagar and Samode Haveli, Jaipur
- Best meal: The food everywhere was amazing, but it was also about the gin and tonic
- Most enjoyable experience: The colours and the textiles (especially the Calico Museum and the Anokhi Museum), architecture in Ahmedabad, the leopard adventure, the stepwell dinner, bird watching on the lake, palace visits, and the shopping in Jaipur!!

Sarah Ogilvie, Melbourne (January 2025)

IT WAS AN AMAZING TRIP and I would recommend it to other Kiwis and Aussies – I feel that it was the right balance for us and Nicky knows what we want. Going in the winter is highly recommended. The trip was well run and organised. All the hotels were good. Highly recommend this trip to anyone wanting an informative trip to India with no hassles.

Michelle, New Zealand (January 2025)

I'VE RECENTLY RETURNED FROM INDIA and was fortunate enough to be part of Nicky Court's Design Tour. As I was travelling alone, I did have some reservations about how I would manage, never having been to India before and being a little nervous in unfamiliar places. Fortunately, everything was taken care of with thoughtfulness and care. From the moment I alighted the plane until the moment I boarded to return home everything was looked after. The detail of what we did down to where the next clean bathroom would be, were all taken care of. I enjoyed hearing about the history of beautiful buildings. We experienced delicious meals in beautiful locations, from a Mughal-inspired garden to a step well, lit with hundreds of candles. The timing of our glamping in the beautiful wilderness park was impeccable. After a week of taking in so much history, culture and horns beeping it was lovely to enjoy the solitude and see the stars. Nicky and Kinny are both kind and gracious women whose care for others made the trip what it was. Their humbleness and willingness to help with any issue made everything seamless and stress free for the guests. Their knowledge and cultural insight was fantastic and we were well informed throughout the trip, much has stayed with me as I've settled back into life at home. Thank you for everything, I would highly recommend any trip to India that Nicky would organise.

Carla M, Sydney (January 2024)

MY TRIP TO INDIA with Nicole Court and her co-host Kinny Sandhu was just magical. Their knowledge and care and kindness for us all was outstanding. I have been to India many times but never like this. A small group of like-minded travellers, some were travelling to India for the first

time. Everything was organised so it was hassle free. At times India can overwhelm but there was a great mix of excursions and relaxation. We stayed in luxury small hotels and palaces which were divine. I cannot recommend this trip highly enough or India. India's people, culture, customs are intoxicating and with Nicole and Kinny you are immersed fully. Thank you so much.
Denise Wright, Melbourne (January 2023)

NICOLE'S INTRICATE DETAILED ITINERARY allowed us the privilege of experiencing unique insights into the personal lives of those connected to art and culture. Traversing through the backstreets, inhaling the flower market scenes, witnessing artisans at work... Nicole certainly gets the balance right: exploring and seeing the essence of each place, as well as having some peaceful times in nature. Nicole and Kinny, and her "on-ground" experienced network gave us a sense of inclusiveness and fine hospitality. Indeed, trust is the word to have as one's mantra, allowing the serendipitous adventure to unfold.
Jane Grossberg, Sydney (January 2023)

NICKY TOOK US ALL ON A MAGIC CARPET RIDE through Calcutta and India's North-East on her Design Tour. I have been to India many times, and I have been on a lot of group tours – this was one of the best I have experienced. Kinny and Nicky were great hosts and showed us things we would never have discovered ourselves, in a less travelled part of India.
Susan B, Sydney (January 2023 and January 2025)

TRAVELLING WITH 'DIETARY REQUIREMENTS' was not a problem with Nicky as our leader. She ensured that all our accommodation chefs were warned in advance and I never ever had an upset stomach. This is a small example of the attention to detail and care Nicky takes in planning her tours. Not to mention the wonderful places and people we saw, and accommodation we stayed in. I highly recommend Nicky's Design Tour.
Karen Robinson, Sydney (January 2023 and January 2025)

I HAVE COME BACK TO EARTH AFTER THE WONDERFUL TRIP YOU AND KINNY ORGANISED FOR US. I feel privileged to have travelled with you in such an understated and interesting way, just how I like it. We could never have envisaged an itinerary like that so thank you both. You did it all with calm efficiency. Aditya was very kind and helpful to us. And the driver, what a man, not a worrying moment as he weaved his way amongst all that life along the roads.
Sophie Wilson, Sydney (November 2024)

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR THE MOST MAGICAL AND AMAZING TRIP. We were so well looked after at every moment and felt so safe, secure and well supported. Mum is still buzzing from the trip and her face lights up when people ask her about it. I've made us a photo book and she's showing everyone. Such great memories for us both to treasure.

It was also really special to spend time with you and watch you work and weave your magic. You have a real gift for what you do and you always operate with such grace, authenticity and a real sense of ease and calm. And fun!! So many giggles and so much fun. I can really feel the love in what you do - even though I know it's not always as easy as you make it look.
Lara Esden, Sydney (November 2024)

THANK YOU FOR A MEMORABLE HOLIDAY. I was conscious (but not too) of the hard work that you put in to make it so. On reflection it is hard to pinpoint single events as all the days were so individually rewarding, rather like a colossal film set on a Cecile B. DeMille scale.

Just riding on the coach with kaleidoscopic images of village and road life was fascinating enough to say nothing of the set pieces which will live in both our memories. To cap it all my skepticism about seeing tigers in the wild (a private childhood fantasy bound up with Jim Corbett) was fully bowled at Panna.

We have done a lot of travel in our lives, at coffee today we both reflected that this trip was right up there and gave some insight into Robin and your fascination with the place.

It is no surprise after absorbing *The Golden Road* that India was a very major influence of cultures East and West well before the birth of Christ and will continue to be. We eschewed our hippy peers all those years ago who left to pay homage and I take all that back.

I acknowledge how much personal insight, attention to detail, romance and good taste that endowed this trip, thank you for allowing us to share it.

TW, Sydney (November 2024)