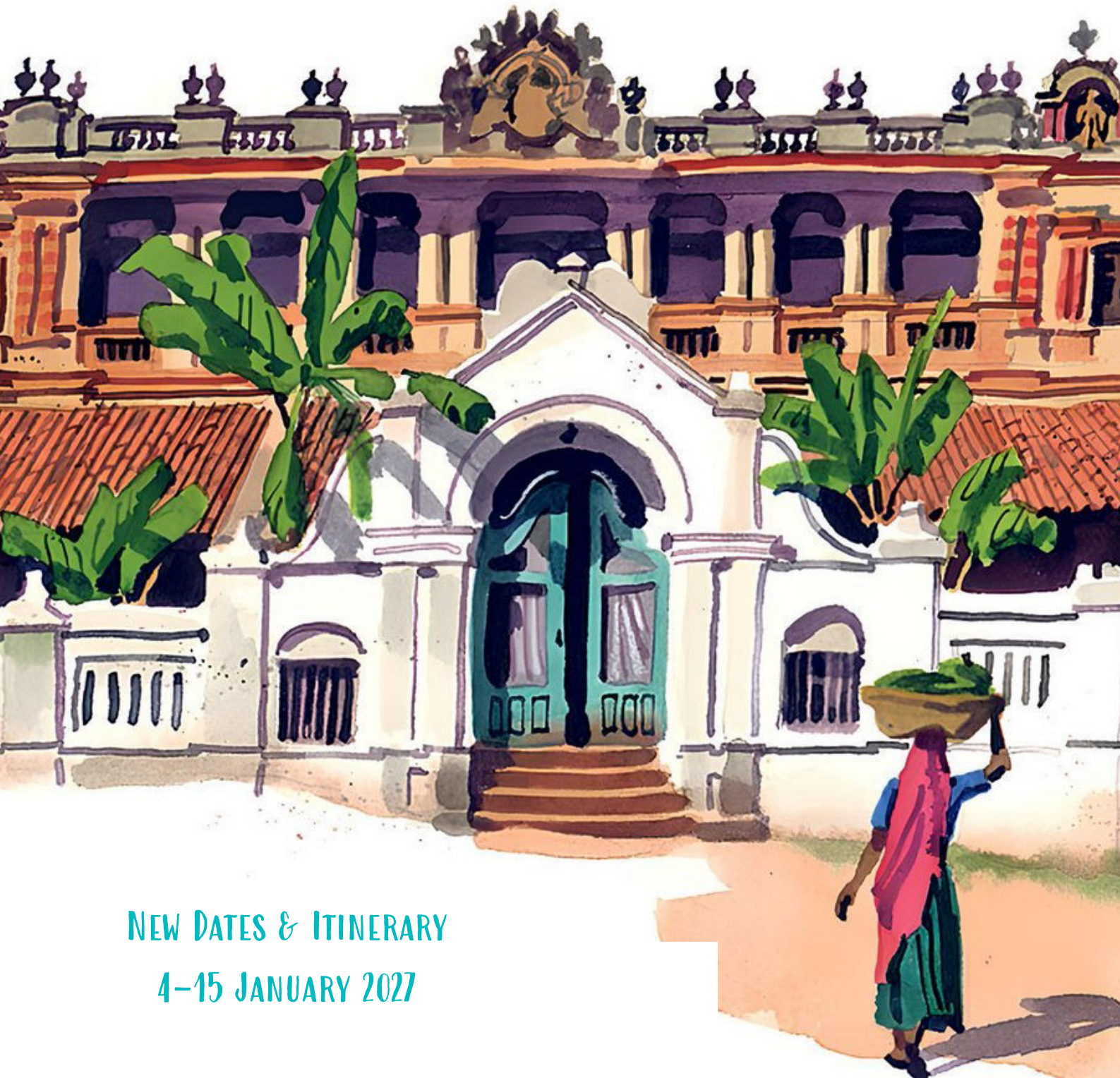


Art | Architecture | Craft | Textiles | Heritage

South India Design Tour

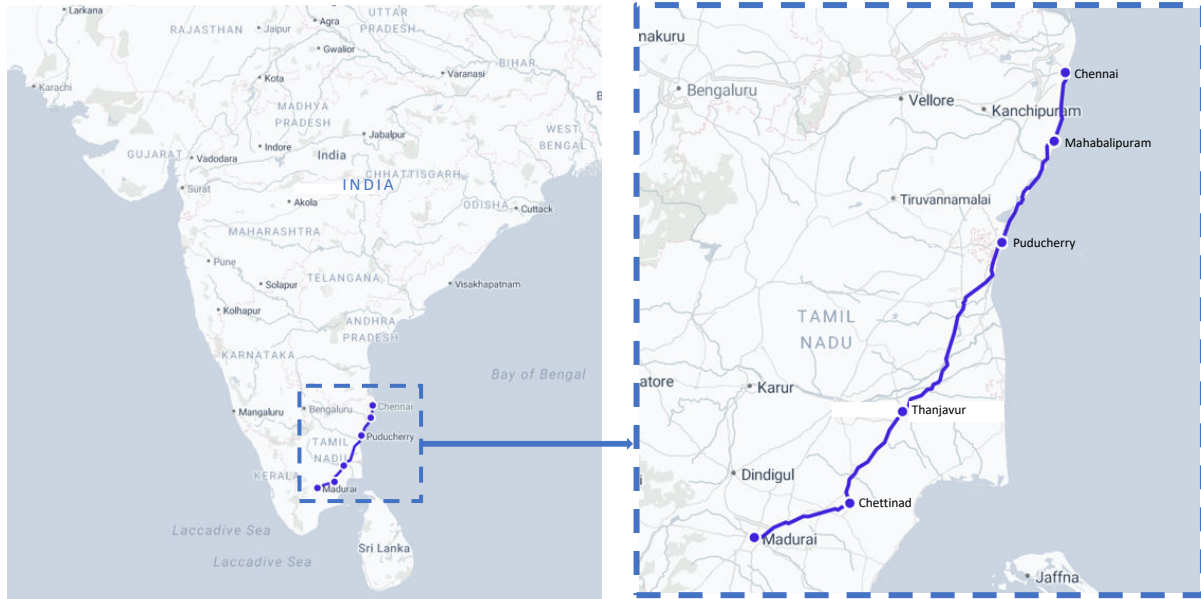
Where French colonial heritage, ancient temples, extraordinary Chettinad mansions and sacred landscapes come together in one of South India's most fascinating regions



NEW DATES & ITINERARY

4-15 JANUARY 2027

BOOKINGS CLOSE 24 OCTOBER 2026



AT A GLANCE

Dates	• 4th to 15th January 2027 (12 days, 11 nights)
Hotels	• Taj Fisherman's Cove Resort, Chennai • Palais de Mahe, Puducherry • The Lotus Palace, Chettinad • Visalam, Chettinad • Heritage Madurai, Madurai
Meals	• Breakfasts daily (11), lunches (1), afternoon teas (4) and dinners (1)
Transport	• Private individual airport transfers on arrival and departure • Private air-conditioned vehicles throughout
Your Host	• Tour leader: designer, Nicole Court (Sydney based) • Tour manager (India based) • Specialist local guides
Group size	• Small group, typically around 12 guests, with a maximum of 14
Pricing	• AUD\$12,950 per person, twin share • AUD\$4,500 single supplement
Bookings	• A deposit of AUD\$1,000 is required to reserve a spot on this trip (please see Tour Details on page 22 for the full payment schedule)
Itinerary Highlights	• Exploring the bougainvillea-lined streets and French-colonial heritage of Puducherry • Experiencing the devotion of pilgrims at some of Tamil Nadu's most sacred temples, while travelling during the much-loved festival of Pongal • Curated experiences in art, architecture, landscape, textiles, craft and history, offering an insider's perspective on South India • Staying in some of South India's most beautiful hotels, including a retreat designed by Geoffrey Bawa and an Art Deco mansion
Best time of year to visit?	• December to January is the coolest and most comfortable time to travel in South India, with sunny days averaging 28-32°C and pleasant evenings around 20°C



TAMIL QUARTER, PUDUCHERRY

AN ARTISTIC JOURNEY THROUGH SOUTH INDIA

SOME JOURNEYS TAKE YOU TO BEAUTIFUL PLACES. OTHERS OPEN YOUR EYES TO A DIFFERENT WAY OF SEEING THE WORLD. This carefully curated journey through Tamil Nadu explores a region where outstanding architecture, ancient civilisations, craftsmanship, spirituality and everyday life remain deeply intertwined.

South India has a remarkable continuity between past and present. Sacred rituals remain woven into everyday life, while temples, palaces, homes and gardens reveal a living tradition of craftsmanship and design. Here, architecture is not simply about beautiful buildings; it is a reflection of belief, history, community and the way people understand their place in the world.

South India's long history of trade has also shaped its cultural landscape. Indian textiles were once among the world's most valuable trading commodities, while the ports of South India connected the region with distant cultures – from the Roman Empire to European merchants and the East India Company. These centuries of exchange left their mark on architecture, decorative arts, textiles, cuisine and everyday life, creating a culture that is distinctly South Indian yet remarkably cosmopolitan.

We begin in Mahabalipuram, where magnificent Pallava monuments carved from stone reveal the sophistication of one of South India's great architectural traditions. In Thanjavur, we encounter the extraordinary legacy of the Chola dynasty through monumental temple architecture, sculpture and painting. In Puducherry, French-colonial streets, Tamil homes, gardens, galleries and cafés reveal a very different chapter in the region's history – one shaped by centuries of cultural exchange.

We then travel to Chettinad, where the extraordinary mansions of a once-prosperous merchant community reveal the cosmopolitan world created through trade across South and Southeast Asia. Their interiors bring together local craftsmanship with materials and influences from far beyond India, creating a fascinating expression of wealth, taste and cultural exchange.

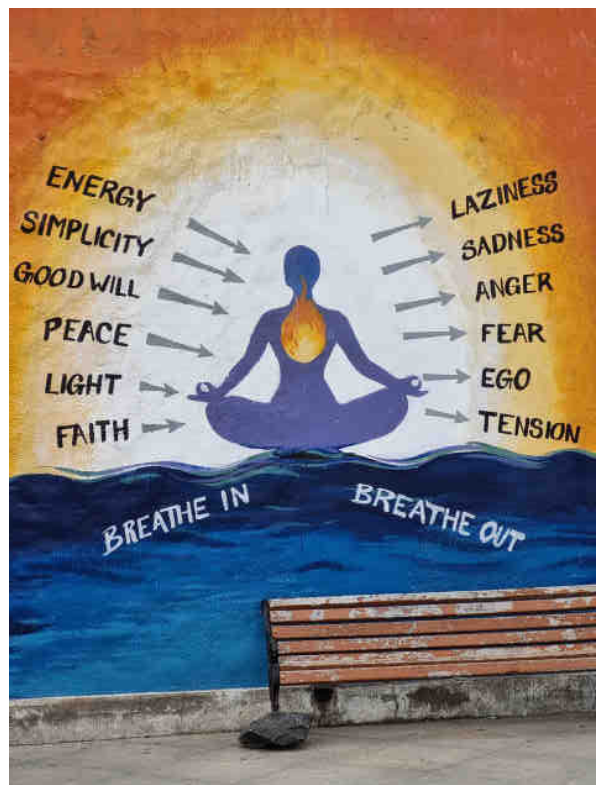
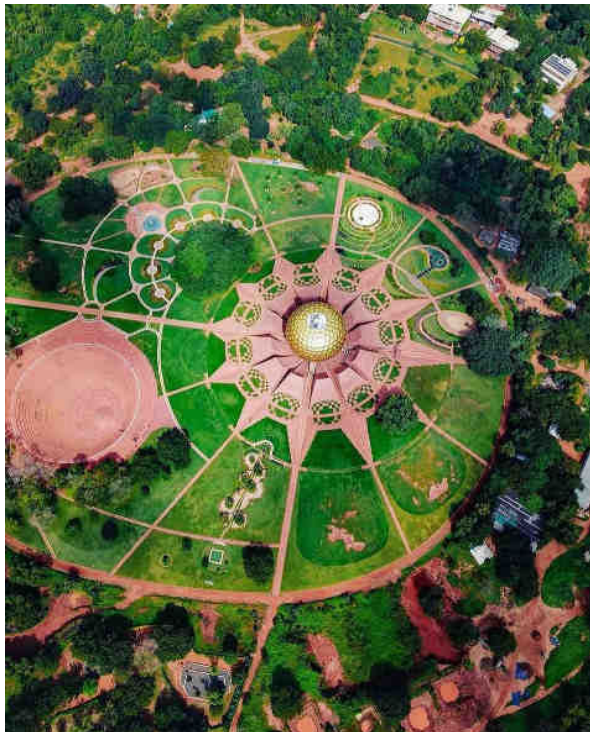
Throughout the journey, we will meet artists, artisans, weavers, designers and local experts who can help us understand the stories and traditions behind what we see. We will explore the relationship between craftsmanship and culture and discover how skills and knowledge passed from one generation to the next continue to shape the region today.

Along the way, we will encounter the details that make travelling through South India so evocative – the scent of jasmine at a flower market, the carefully balanced spices of a Chettinad meal, the intricate work of a Tanjore painter, the rhythmic movement of a weaver's hands, the brilliant colours of women in saris, the fine carvings of a temple and the quiet beauty of a garden at dawn.

Our hotels are part of the experience too. We will stay in a restored French-colonial property in Puducherry, two beautiful Chettinad mansions, and Heritage Madurai, incorporating the former Madurai Club clubhouse designed by Geoffrey Bawa. Each has its own character, history and relationship to its surroundings, offering another perspective on the architecture and culture of the region.

This journey is an opportunity to look more closely – to understand the stories behind what we encounter and to experience a deeper, more personal side of South India. It is a journey into a living culture, where ancient traditions continue to find expression in the buildings, objects, rituals and everyday lives of the people we meet.

The group will be small – usually around 12 guests – allowing us to travel comfortably and to have genuine encounters with the people, places and traditions that make this region so fascinating.



AUROVILLE

SIGNATURE EXPERIENCES

Wander through French colonial Puducherry

Explore one of India's most distinctive coastal towns, where leafy streets, colourful colonial villas, bougainvillea, boutiques, cafés and galleries reveal the meeting of French and Tamil cultures.

Discover South India's great temple architecture

Visit some of the region's most extraordinary sacred sites, including the UNESCO World Heritage-listed monuments of Mahabalipuram, the magnificent Brihadeeswarar Temple at Thanjavur and Madurai's spectacular Meenakshi Amman Temple – each revealing a different chapter in the evolution of South Indian temple architecture.

Celebrate Pongal

Experience the colour, devotion and joyful traditions of Pongal, Tamil Nadu's great harvest festival. During our journey, we will encounter pilgrims visiting some of the region's most sacred temples and, as Pongal approaches, experience the rituals and preparations that surround this much-loved celebration. We will help create auspicious kolams and take part in the joyful preparation of the Pongal pot – a celebration of abundance, gratitude and the year ahead.

Experience the architectural splendour of Chettinad

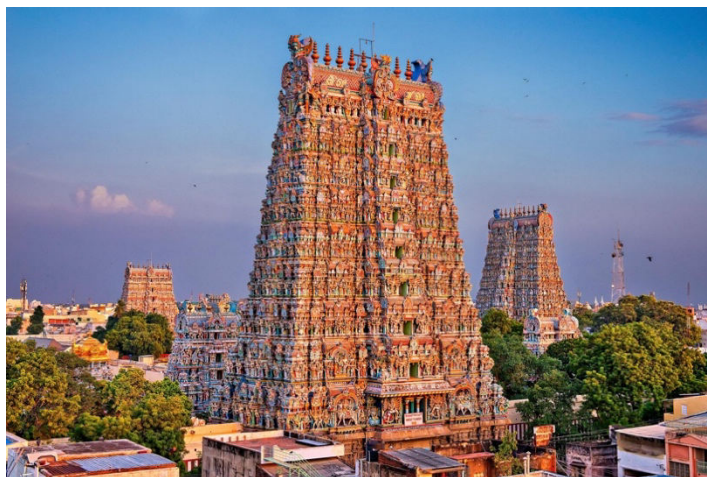
Spend five nights exploring one of South India's most fascinating architectural regions. Step inside remarkable merchant mansions, discover extraordinary decorative arts and craftsmanship, meet local artisans, browse antique shops and learn the secrets of Chettinad cuisine.

Meet South India's master artisans

Gain an insight into traditional craftsmanship through visits with handloom weavers, tile makers and other skilled artisans whose knowledge and techniques have been passed from generation to generation.

Stay in exceptional heritage hotels

Experience a collection of beautiful hotels chosen for their architecture, history, character and sense of place – from a restored French-colonial mansion in Puducherry and two exquisite Chettinad properties to Heritage Madurai, incorporating the former Madurai Clubhouse designed by Geoffrey Bawa.



THE HOLY CITY OF MADURAI



NICOLE COURT (TOP LEFT); PUDUCHERRY

MEET YOUR HOST: NICOLE COURT

FOR MORE THAN THREE DECADES, I HAVE EXPLORED THE INTERSECTION OF ART, CRAFT, CULTURE AND PLACE. As a designer and curator, my career has been shaped by a deep appreciation of craftsmanship, beauty and the stories embedded within the objects, buildings and landscapes we encounter.

My work as a multi-disciplinary designer has spanned textiles, interiors, homewares, publishing and landscape design. For more than a decade, I designed and produced textile and homeware collections handcrafted in India, which were sold through leading boutiques across Australia and New Zealand and featured regularly in *Belle*, *Vogue Living*, *House & Garden*, *Gourmet Traveller*, *Marie Claire* and *Inside Out*.

My connection with India is both professional and deeply personal. My aunt, Robin Duffecy, lived in Delhi for many years and developed close friendships with some of India's leading artists, designers, writers and creative families. Over the past three decades, those friendships became mine as well, giving me a window into India's creative world and a network of relationships across the region.

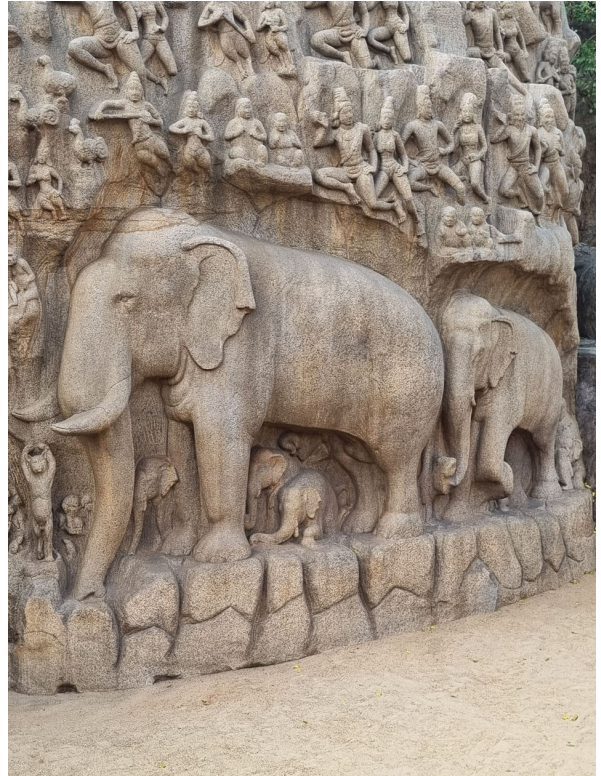
Travelling with me is about much more than visiting beautiful places. I am fascinated by the way culture, spirituality, craftsmanship and the natural environment shape the way people live and the places they create. I look at each destination through the lens of art, architecture, textiles, craftsmanship, spirituality and place to discover the stories, meaning and connections that make them come alive. I love sharing the details that might otherwise remain hidden – the meaning behind a pattern, the hands and traditions behind an object, the symbolism within a building, or the story of the person who created it.

I believe the most memorable journeys are shaped by meaningful encounters – with interesting people, beautiful objects and places that reveal themselves slowly. This is why I seek out experiences that take us beyond the obvious, introducing you to artists, artisans, designers and local experts whose knowledge brings a deeper understanding to the places we visit.

I design every itinerary as though I were travelling with close friends. Small groups, thoughtful pacing, beautiful hotels and exceptional access allow us to experience each destination in a way that feels personal and immersive. I choose hotels and heritage properties that have a genuine connection to their surroundings – places with character, history and a strong sense of place, where the setting becomes part of the experience.

To me, the greatest luxury is travelling with the confidence that the details have been taken care of, while remaining open to the unexpected moments that make a journey memorable. It is often these quieter moments that stay with us longest: a conversation, a shared cup of tea, a glimpse into someone's world, or simply standing together in a remarkable landscape and taking it all in.

Instagram: @nicolecourtdesign



MAHABALIPURAM'S UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE-LISTED TEMPLES

ITINERARY

A 12-day Insider Journey with Nicole Court

Art | Architecture | Crafts | Textiles | Heritage

DAY 1 • January 4 • Arrival in Chennai + Welcome Afternoon Tea

Upon arrival at Chennai International Airport, my friendly local representative will meet you and escort you to your private, air-conditioned car for the journey to our seaside retreat, approximately 1 hour 10 minutes from the airport. Check-in is available from 2pm.

This afternoon, we will gather for a relaxed welcome afternoon tea on the veranda – an opportunity to meet your fellow travellers and your host, Nicole Court, and settle into the journey ahead.

Accommodation: *Taj Fisherman's Cove Resort & Spa, Chennai (Deluxe Room Sea View)* |
Meals included: Welcome Afternoon Tea

Taj Fisherman's Cove Resort

Located on the Bay of Bengal, Taj Fisherman's Cove is a relaxed tropical retreat surrounded by gardens and overlooking the sea. Its coastal setting provides a gentle introduction to South India.

TAMIL NADU

Tamil Nadu is home to one of the world's great living classical civilisations, with a cultural history stretching back more than two millennia. Its heritage remains vibrantly alive in the Tamil language, classical dance, poetry, music and, above all, its extraordinary Hindu temples.

Across the state, towering temple gateways rise above towns and villages, while the Coromandel Coast bears traces of centuries of international trade and cultural exchange. Roman traders, European merchants and the British East India Company all left their mark on this ancient landscape.

There is a distinct sense of otherness to Tamil Nadu. Its language, traditions and Dravidian architectural heritage are unlike anywhere else in India, and ancient culture exists alongside a rapidly changing modern world — from thriving technology and film industries to contemporary design, art and cuisine.

DAY 2 • January 5 • Mahabalipuram's UNESCO World Heritage Site

Our first exploration takes us to Mahabalipuram, approximately 20 minutes from the hotel. Once a major Pallava seaport during the 7th and 8th centuries, this tranquil coastal town is now home to one of India's most remarkable collections of rock-cut architecture.

The monuments of Mahabalipuram reveal the extraordinary skill and imagination of the Pallava artisans, who carved temples, sculptures and entire compositions directly from the granite landscape. Among the highlights is the Descent of the Ganges, an immense open-air bas-relief depicting the descent of the sacred river to earth.

We will also visit the famous Shore Temple, dramatically positioned beside the Bay of Bengal. According to local legend, the Shore Temple was one of seven temples that once stood here, with the others claimed by the sea. The legend acquired new resonance after the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, when the sea temporarily receded and revealed previously submerged stone structures offshore.



BRIHADEESWARAR TEMPLE, THANJAVUR (CIRCA 1010 AD)

Mahabalipuram to Puducherry

After exploring Mahabalipuram, we continue south along the Coromandel Coast to Puducherry, approximately two hours away.

Once a French colony, Puducherry is one of India's most atmospheric towns, with elegant colonial buildings, tree-lined streets and a distinctly relaxed coastal character.

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

Palais de Mahe

Located in the heart of Puducherry's charming French Quarter, Palais de Mahe combines colonial character with contemporary comforts. The hotel is just steps from the seafront promenade, with a serene central pool and a rooftop terrace overlooking the French Quarter towards the sea. It is my favourite hotel in Puducherry.

PUDUCHERRY

Until 1954, Puducherry was part of French India, and the legacy of its colonial past remains wonderfully visible. French street names, colourful villas, shuttered windows and bougainvillea-clad doorways give the French Quarter its distinctive character.

Today, the town has developed a lively creative culture, with cafés, restaurants, galleries and boutiques occupying many of its historic buildings. Local artisanal products, textiles and crafts sit comfortably alongside contemporary design, while traces of its French past remain woven into everyday life.

DAY 3 • January 6 • Puducherry – Exploring the Tamil and French Quarters

This morning we experience everyday life in Puducherry with a visit to Goubert Market. The market is a riot of colour, fragrance and activity, with women selling fresh fish, mountains of dried chillies and spices, displays of local produce, banana leaves and coconuts, and flower sellers threading garlands for temples and homes.

This afternoon, we explore the elegant, tree-lined streets of the French Quarter, discovering its distinctive architecture and some of the town's quieter corners. We will visit a beautiful church whose interior is a meditation in colour, with stained-glass windows opening onto flower-filled gardens.

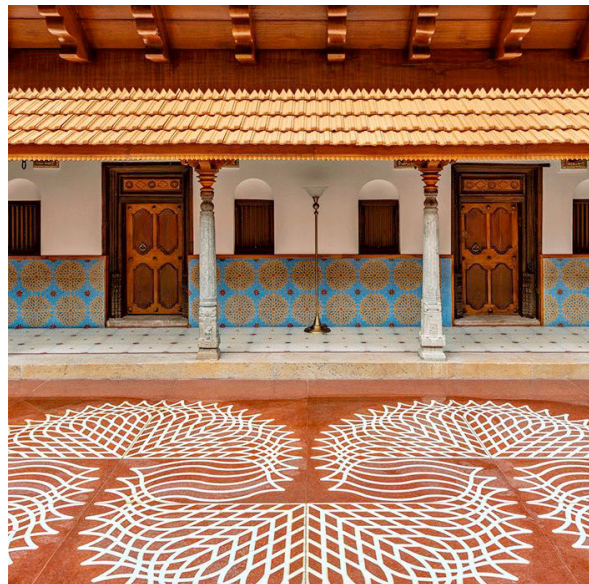
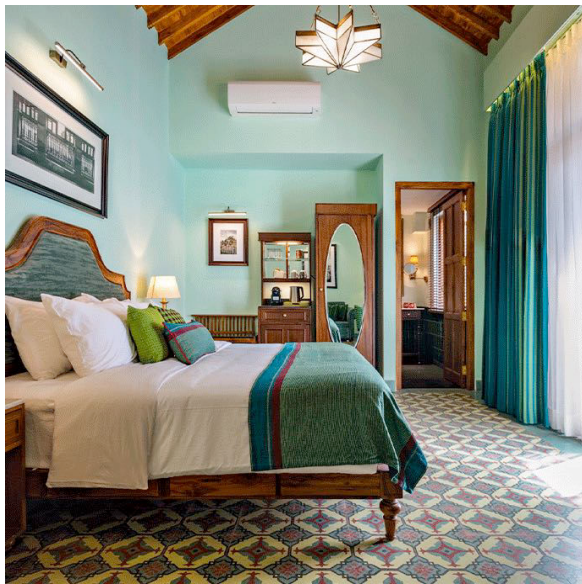
Afterwards, there will also be time to browse Puducherry's boutiques and galleries or linger over a coffee at one of its many atmospheric cafés.

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

DAY 4 • January 7 • Auroville – Architecture, Landscape and Idealism

This morning we travel approximately 30 minutes to Auroville, the experimental international township founded in 1968 with the ideal of creating a community dedicated to human unity, peace and conscious living.

At its centre is the Matrimandir, a golden sphere surrounded by gardens. Designed in the late 1960s, it was conceived as a place for silent contemplation and is the architectural and spiritual heart of the township.



THE LOTUS PALACE, CHETTINAD

The Matrimandir is surrounded by twelve gardens, each representing a different quality – including Existence, Consciousness, Bliss, Light, Life, Power, Wealth, Utility, Progress, Youth, Harmony and Perfection.

Auroville's architecture and landscape were conceived around a central idea of integration: buildings and communities radiate from the Matrimandir, with extensive green spaces woven between them and working areas located towards the periphery.

After our visit, we return to Puducherry. The afternoon is free to relax at the hotel or continue exploring the town at your own pace.

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

DAY 5 • January 8 • Thanjavur's Great Temple Architecture + India's Oldest Library

This morning we leave Puducherry and drive approximately three hours to Thanjavur, the former capital of the mighty Chola dynasty and one of the great cultural centres of South India.

Our principal visit is the extraordinary Brihadeeswarar Temple, a masterpiece of Chola architecture and a UNESCO World Heritage site. Built in the early 11th century, it represents the pinnacle of the Cholas' architectural and artistic ambition, with its monumental vimana, elaborately carved stonework, sculptural details and vast temple complex.

The temple is also a living place of worship and we will encounter pilgrims making their way here in the days leading up to Pongal, Tamil Nadu's great harvest festival. Pongal is a time of thanksgiving, celebration and renewal, when families give thanks for the harvest and honour the sun, cattle and the land that sustains them.

India's Ancient Library

We will also explore the literary and artistic heritage of Thanjavur at the Saraswathi Mahal Library, one of India's oldest libraries and home to an extraordinary collection of manuscripts and historic texts.

Our visit continues to the Art Gallery and Chola Museum, where we will see remarkable collections of Chola bronzes, sculptures, paintings and other works of South Indian art.

We then continue to Chettinad, approximately 1 hour 45 minutes away.

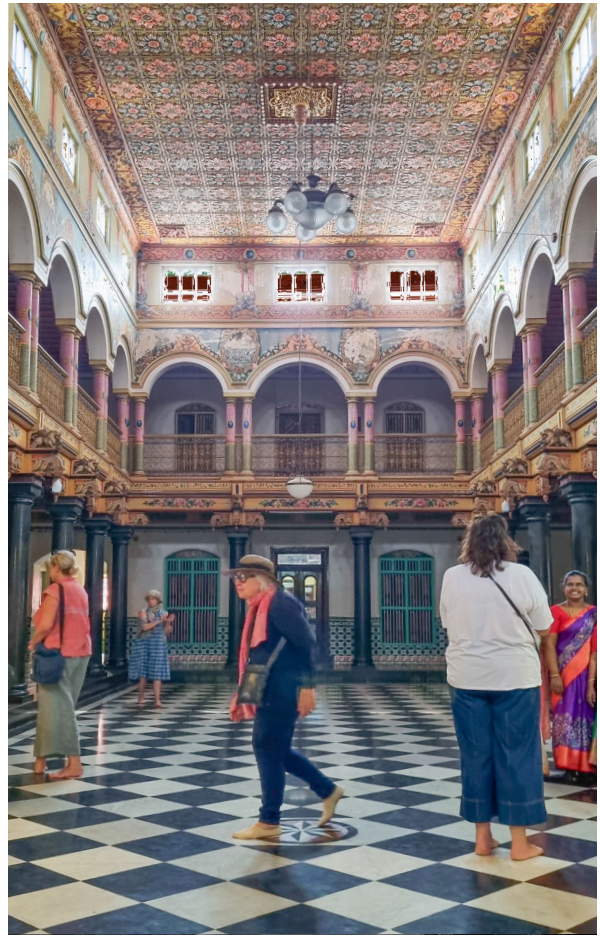
Accommodation: *The Lotus Palace, Chettinad | Meals included: Breakfast*

The Lotus Palace, Chettinad

This sensitively restored Chettinad mansion reveals the sophistication of the region's traditional architecture, with courtyards, richly patterned Athangudi tiles, carved teak columns and carefully selected antiques. Its contemporary interpretation of Chettinad style creates an intimate and characterful retreat.

THANJAVUR

Thanjavur, formerly known as Tanjore, has been a major cultural centre of South India for more than a thousand years. As the capital of the Chola Empire, it became a centre of architecture, sculpture, painting, music and literature, with Chola influence extending across South India and into Southeast Asia.



CHETTINAD MANSIONS, A WEAVERS' STUDIO VISIT AND SHOPPING AT THE ANTIQUES MARKETS

CHETTINAD

Chettinad is the homeland of the Chettiars, a prosperous Tamil merchant and banking community whose fortunes were built across the trading networks of British-era Asia.

Their wealth found spectacular expression in the great mansions of Chettinad. Built between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these enormous homes combine Indian traditions with influences gathered from around the world – Burmese teak, Italian marble, Belgian glass, elaborate wood carving, patterned tiles and imported decorative objects.

Thousands of these mansions were built across the region, many occupying entire town blocks. Today, some have been beautifully restored as hotels and museums, while others stand faded and partially abandoned, their extraordinary scale and craftsmanship offering a poignant glimpse into a remarkable chapter of South India's mercantile history.

Exploring these houses – with their courtyards, ornate interiors and eclectic international influences – is one of the great pleasures of travelling through Chettinad.

DAY 6 • January 9 • Pre-Pongal festivities + The Architectural Splendour of Chettinad

This morning we will have the opportunity to experience a rural pre-Pongal celebration, subject to local availability. This much-loved harvest festival is one of the most important celebrations in the Tamil calendar – a joyful expression of gratitude for the sun, the land, animals and the agricultural cycle.

Tradition comes alive through colour, music, ceremony and performance. Festivities may include classical dance and Silambam, the ancient Tamil martial art traditionally practised with bamboo staffs.

In the afternoon, we will walk from our hotel through the surrounding streets, discovering some of Chettinad's extraordinary mansions. Many now stand quietly abandoned, their elaborate façades and interiors offering a fascinating insight into the wealth and cosmopolitan outlook of the Chettiar community.

You may like to finish the afternoon with tea in the Lotus Palace's bijou Red Room (at an additional charge) – an intimate, jewel-like space with Art Deco lounge chairs, Burmese-red walls, patterned china and polished brass objects.

Accommodation: *The Lotus Palace, Chettinad* | **Meals included:** *Breakfast*

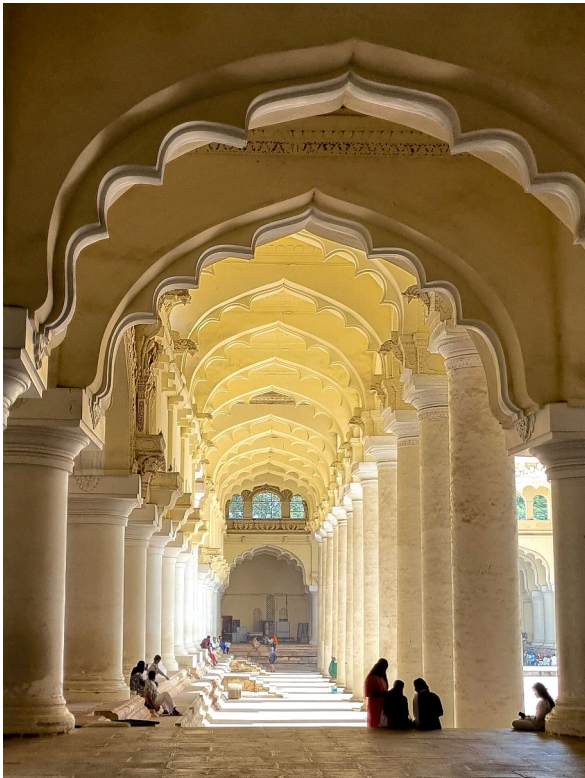
DAY 7 • January 10 • Antique & Vintage Shopping + Chettinad Cuisine

Enjoy a relaxed morning at leisure before we set out this afternoon to explore Chettinad's fascinating antique and vintage shops.

The region is renowned for its antique and vintage shopping – objects accumulated during the Chettiars' trading years such as enamelware, porcelain, trays, cutlery, spice boxes, kitchen utensils and teapots, alongside old mirrors, lamps, radios and other wonderfully eccentric treasures.

Chettinad is equally famous for its cuisine, known for its bold spices and aromatic flavours. This afternoon we will have the opportunity to learn about the region's culinary traditions during a hands-on cooking class, preparing some of its characteristic dishes.

Accommodation: *Visalam (Chettinad Room)* | **Meals included:** *Breakfast, Afternoon Tea*



MADURAI

Visalam

This beautifully restored 1930s Art Deco mansion retains the atmosphere of its original family home. Guest rooms feature antique furnishings, vintage photographs and local textiles, while large windows open onto the surrounding gardens. A lovely swimming pool provides a peaceful place to relax.

DAY 8 • January 11 • Ancient Temples, Chettinad Weavers + A Sacred Forest Grove

This morning we visit an ancient Pallava temple dating from the 9th century, a beautiful example of Dravidian temple architecture, with intricate stone carvings, frescoes and ornate pillared halls.

We then explore the world of the *Divya Desams*, the 108 sacred abodes of Vishnu that are central to the Vaishnavite tradition. Celebrated in the devotional poetry of the Alvars, the mystic poet-saints of South India, these temples remain important places of pilgrimage.

One of the *Divya Desams* that has left a particularly strong impression on me is Sathyamurthi Perumal Temple at Thirumayam. Here, Vishnu is represented in a remarkable reclining form, carved into the living rock. The temple is believed to date from the Pallava period and is celebrated in the devotional poetry of the Alvars.

What makes this shrine particularly extraordinary is the belief that the deity is self-manifested, rather than created by human hands. The atmosphere inside the dimly lit rock-cut sanctum is deeply atmospheric, and standing before this monumental reclining figure offers a powerful glimpse into the living devotional traditions of Tamil Nadu.

Beside the Vishnu shrine is an ancient Shiva temple, reflecting the intertwining of different traditions within South Indian sacred architecture.

Afterwards, we visit a nearby handloom weaving unit, where we will see artisans creating beautifully coloured textiles using traditional techniques.

We end the day with a visit to a sacred forest grove, where generations of devotees have left offerings of vividly painted terracotta horses. These evocative groves are often associated with Ayyanar, a guardian deity believed to protect the village and its inhabitants.

Accommodation: *Visalam (Chettinad Room)* | **Meals included:** *Breakfast, Afternoon Tea*

DAY 9 • January 12 • Chettinad's Tiled Interiors + Traditional Tile Making

This morning we explore one of Chettinad's most magnificent mansions, celebrated for its extraordinary architecture and intricate tiled interiors.

We then visit local artisans who continue the region's tradition of handmade tile making, using techniques that have been passed down through generations. The distinctive patterned tiles are one of the defining decorative elements of Chettinad architecture and reflect the region's long history of combining Indian craftsmanship with international influences.

The remainder of the afternoon is free to relax and enjoy the hotel.

Accommodation: *Visalam (Chettinad Room)* | **Meals included:** *Breakfast, Afternoon Tea*

DAY 10 • January 13 • Dravidian temple architecture + Geoffrey Bawa's Madurai Club

This morning we drive approximately two hours to the holy city of Madurai.



HERITAGE MADURAI (DESIGNED BY GEOFFREY BAWA)

In the afternoon, we visit the extraordinary Meenakshi Amman Temple, one of the most important living temples in South India and a masterpiece of Dravidian architecture. Dedicated to Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Shiva, the vast complex is renowned for its towering gopurams, or gateways, covered in thousands of vividly painted sculptures.

The brilliant colours of these monumental towers are a defining feature of South Indian temple architecture, transforming the skyline into a kaleidoscope of gods, goddesses, mythical creatures and celestial beings.

Inside, vast pillared halls, shrines and corridors are filled with pilgrims, priests and worshippers. With thousands of devotees passing through the temple each day, this is not simply an architectural monument but a living centre of faith and ritual.

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

Heritage Madurai

Heritage Madurai incorporates the former Madurai Club, whose clubhouse was designed by renowned Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa in the 1970s. Bawa's distinctive style is characterised by a seamless relationship between architecture, landscape and climate. The hotel's serene gardens and traditional temple-inspired sunken pool create a beautiful setting in which to unwind after a day exploring Madurai.

MADURAI

With a history stretching back around 2,500 years, Madurai is one of India's oldest continuously inhabited cities and has long been a centre of Tamil culture, trade and religion. The city developed as an important trading hub, with connections extending as far as the ancient Mediterranean world. Today, its cultural life remains vibrant, particularly through its traditions of classical music, dance, literature and temple ritual, all centred around the Meenakshi Amman Temple.

DAY 11 • January 14 • Madurai's Flower Market + 17th Century Indo-Saracenic Palace

Indian culture is deeply entwined with fragrance. From sandalwood paste and sacred *tulsi* to garlands of jasmine and roses, flowers and perfumes play an important role in everyday life and Hindu ritual.

Madurai is particularly famous for its jasmine, celebrated for its intensely fragrant flowers. Women wear strings of jasmine, known as *gajra*, woven into their hair, while enormous quantities of flowers are sold each day for temples, ceremonies and celebrations.

This morning we visit Madurai's flower market, which will be especially lively as families select flowers and garlands for Pongal, celebrated tomorrow.

We then visit the magnificent Thirumalai Nayakkar Palace, a 17th-century Indo-Saracenic architectural gem built during the reign of King Thirumalai Nayak. Its monumental courtyards, soaring arches and richly ornamented interiors reveal the grandeur of the Nayak period.

The afternoon is free to relax and enjoy the hotel before we gather for a farewell dinner, raising a glass to the experiences, discoveries and friendships of our journey through Tamil Nadu.

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



PONGAL HARVEST FESTIVAL

DAY 12 • January 15 • Pongal • Departure

We will begin our final morning by celebrating Pongal, Tamil Nadu's great harvest festival and a joyful expression of gratitude for the Sun, the land and the abundance of the harvest.

I like to rise early to watch the sun come over the horizon and take a quiet moment to reflect on the year that has passed, give thanks for all that it has brought me, and look ahead to the year to come. It is a beautiful way to mark the beginning of a new year and bring our journey to a close.

The hotel will be beautifully decorated for Pongal with sugarcane, garlands of mango leaves and traditional palm-leaf decorations, creating a wonderfully festive atmosphere. Mango leaves are traditionally used in auspicious decorations, symbolising life, prosperity and well-being, while sugarcane is an important symbol of the harvest and abundance.

We will be invited to take part in creating kolams, the intricate and colourful designs traditionally drawn at the entrance to homes and buildings. Considered auspicious, kolams are a welcoming gesture and are traditionally associated with prosperity and good fortune.

We will also participate in the Pongal ceremony, as the priest performs the traditional rituals with chanting, the ringing of a bell, a sacred fire and offerings of fruit and sugarcane. The ceremony is intimate and deeply atmospheric, offering a glimpse into the spiritual dimension of the festival. Locals will be dressed in their most beautiful saris, adding to the sense of occasion.

At the heart of the celebration is the preparation of the Pongal pot. Rice and milk are cooked together until the pot boils over, at which moment everyone calls out "Pongalo Pongal!" The overflowing pot symbolises abundance and prosperity – the wish that the year ahead will bring plenty and happiness.

After breakfast, enjoy a relaxed morning before we check out of the hotel by 11am, marking the end of our journey.

Your private airport transfer to Madurai International Airport is included in the tour cost, giving you complete flexibility about when you depart. You may use this transfer today or, should you wish to extend your stay, on a later day.

Meals: *Breakfast*

Extending Your Stay

Should you wish to extend your stay, I would be delighted to provide a quote for additional nights at Heritage Madurai.

TOUR DETAILS

How to Reserve Your Place

To reserve your place on this journey, please request a Booking Form (including Terms & Conditions) by emailing:

nicole@nicolecourt.com.au

To confirm your booking:

- Complete and return the Booking Form.
- Pay the AUD \$1,000 deposit.

To enable this journey to proceed, a minimum of eight bookings must be received by 24 October 2026. Once confirmed, bookings will remain open, subject to availability.

Payment Schedule (all prices are in Australian Dollars)

At the time of booking

- AUD \$1,000 deposit

24 October 2026

- Final balance due

Later Bookings:

Bookings received after 24 October 2026

- Full payment is required at the time of booking.

Tour Dates

Design Tour to Tamil Nadu

4-15 January 2026

What's Included

- 11 nights' accommodation in carefully selected hotels
- All meals as outlined in the itinerary
- Private airport arrival and departure transfers
- Ground transport in air-conditioned vehicles with experienced drivers
- Complimentary bottled or filtered water throughout the journey
- Tour leadership by Nicole Court, together with full support from our accompanying Indian tour manager
- Specialist local guides at key destinations
- Entrance fees, monument charges, taxes and gratuities
- 24-hour support from my expert Indian travel team

What's Not Included

- International airfares
- Meals not specified in the itinerary
- Alcoholic beverages

What's Not Included (continued)

- Visa costs
 - Comprehensive travel and health insurance (mandatory)
 - Medical expenses
 - Costs arising from voluntary or unavoidable itinerary changes
 - Personal expenses (including laundry, snacks, telephone calls and spa treatments)
 - Video camera fees at certain museums and heritage sites
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Cancellation Policy

Should you need to cancel your booking, please notify me by email.

- Before 24 October 2026 – the AUD \$1,000 deposit is non-refundable.
 - From 24 October 2026 – 100% cancellation applies.
-

Tour Confirmation

This journey requires a minimum of eight guests to proceed.

Please wait until you receive written confirmation before booking your international flights (or ensure your flights are fully refundable).

Should minimum numbers not be reached by 24 October 2026, you will be advised on 25 October 2026. At that time, the tour may either:

- proceed at a revised cost; or
- be cancelled.

Should the tour be re-costed, you may either accept the revised price or cancel your booking within one day of notification.

If the tour is cancelled – or you choose not to proceed with a revised price – you may elect to receive either:

- a full refund of all monies paid (including your deposit), or
- a credit towards a future journey.

Refunds will be processed within five business days.

Medical Assistance

All hotels have access to on-call medical assistance should it be required.

Dietary Requirements

Dietary requirements can usually be accommodated. Please advise me at the time of booking so arrangements can be made in advance.

Flexibility

Every effort has been made to deliver the itinerary exactly as described. However, travel in India occasionally requires minor adjustments. Should an activity need to move to another day, or a site unexpectedly close, an alternative experience of equal interest and quality will be arranged.

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

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 and 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

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 and the team. Highly recommended. A huge thank you. Heart open.

Suzanne Maher, Bellingen NSW

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

TESTIMONIALS (CONTINUED)

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, tuk-tuks, 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

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

- 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

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

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. Nicky was a great host and showed us things we would never have discovered ourselves, in a less travelled part of India.

Susan B, Sydney

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

TESTIMONIALS (CONTINUED)

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 is a kind and gracious woman whose care for others made the trip what it was. Her humbleness and willingness to help with any issue made everything seamless and stress free for the guests. Her 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

MY TRIP TO INDIA with Nicole Court was just magical. Her 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 you are immersed fully. Thank you so much.

Denise Wright, Melbourne

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 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

I HAVE COME BACK TO EARTH AFTER THE WONDERFUL TRIP YOU 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.

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

TESTIMONIALS (CONTINUED)

THANK YOU FOR AN AMAZING TRIP. You curated an incredible experience for us and while I'm still processing India, all of the details that made our trip comfortable were taken care of by you..

I have never stayed in such magnificent accommodations. And I know you put a lot of time and effort into your choices.

It was wonderful to be met at the airport in Delhi and whisked through customs. I loved meeting and learning from the local vendors you took us to, and your restaurant choices were spot on. You and your on-the-ground team were delightful and I enjoyed learning about Rajasthan from all of you. There did not seem to be any detail overlooked.

You are a great tour guide because you solicit input and listen to those who have toured with you. You also have an infectious love of India which transfers to those fortunate enough to be on a tour with you!

Your attention to detail and the thoughtful planning of all we did was not lost on me and, although India stretched me in many ways, I thoroughly enjoyed seeing it through your eyes. The history, the colour, the people, were all things I loved seeing. I know you put in countless hours planning and it showed.

I would highly recommend your trips to anyone interested in exploring India with you. Thank you for giving this hesitant traveller to India an incredible experience!

Julie Ogden, Colorado, USA

IT WAS SUCH A SPECIAL EXPERIENCE! You designed an incredible experience for us. What an honour it was to be able to join you!

Teri LeClair, Washington State, USA

I REMEMBER THE FEELINGS OF AMAZEMENT WE EXPERIENCED EVERY DAY as you put more of beautiful Rajasthan, Delhi and Agra before us.

Leanne Geneve, Perth

IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR A SOFT INTRODUCTION TO INDIA THIS MAY BE THE TRIP FOR YOU! Nicole Court's Design Tour to South India is perfectly curated to cover all aspects of the sub-continent with an itinerary that is flexible enough to include spontaneous experiences if they present themselves. Traversing the bottom of India from East to West provides enormous variety of cultures, landscapes and excursions all carefully chosen by Nicky. On our trip, her Operations Manager, Aditya, kept everything running smoothly along with Nicole, both keeping their cool and never ruffled by the occasional hiccup which would present itself...it is India after all!!

Thanks to Nicky and her team you will love everything and come away enlightened. Highly recommended.

Kathie Bridge, Adelaide

THE DESIGN TOUR TO CALCUTTA WAS FABULOUS, as was the group of friends I came away with.

May Clementson, Sydney

TESTIMONIALS (CONTINUED)

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 scepticism 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.

Tim Wilson, Sydney

ALL I CAN THINK ABOUT IS THE NEXT TOUR I WILL DO WITH NICOLE COURT. I don't think there is any better recommendation for a travel experience than that. I have just returned from her Design & Architectural Tour of Southern India and am still processing all the amazing places and experiences, and, of course, the several thousand photographs I took along the way.

As a first timer in India, it was incredibly reassuring to be guided by Nicole and her outstanding team of local experts. Every detail was thoughtfully handled, from the beautiful hotels, delicious meals, seamless transportation, unforgettable excursions and visits with remarkable artisans. She also shared tips on shopping, spa treatments, and much more. But as Nicole says, you do have to leave room for the unexpected in India, and those were the magical things that can't be pre-planned but give such joy.

Each day was a completely new experience and feast for the senses. I totally fell under India's spell and that is entirely due to Nicole's ability to lead us to the best southern India has to offer. People keep asking me for my top three highlights, but that's impossible – every single day was full of them.

Laura Reid, Sydney

OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS, I HAVE THOUGHT OF YOU OFTEN AND OUR WONDERFUL SRI LANKAN EXPERIENCE. It was a great trip. Brilliantly designed and executed (and obviously well researched). I especially loved your cheerful competence. So nice to be around. Very special trip indeed.

Vicki Craig, Sydney