

Wonders of South India

CHENNAI - MAHABALIPURAM - PONDICHERRY - THANJAVUR
TRICHY - MADURAI - PERIYAR - BACKWATERS - COCHIN

10 Nights / 11 Days



Day 01: Arrive at Delhi

On arrival meet and greet at the airport by our representative and transfer to your hotel.

CHENNAI - Formerly called Madras, it is the capital city of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. This metropolis is often called the cultural capital of India for its deep-rooted traditions and long heritage. Spread over 200 square kms with the Bay of Bengal on the east, the city is the gateway to the rest of South India. Modern Chennai grew out of a small village when in 1639 a fishing hamlet called “Madrassetnam” was selected by early English Merchants of the East India Company as a site for the settlement. The city is popular for its numerous tourist destinations including beaches, temples, forts, palaces along with many colourful festivals that attract tourists from all parts of the country. The city presents a culture that is totally different from North India and represents a lifestyle that is a perfect blend of traditional and modern India.

Overnight at the hotel.



Day 02: Chennai / Mahabalipuram (56 Kms / 02 hrs drive approx)

After breakfast at the hotel drive to Mahabalipuram. Enjoy visit of Chennai including following:

The Santhome Cathedral Church

Santhome Cathedral is a historical ancient pilgrim centre built during the period of the 14th to the 15th century AD by the Portuguese. The cathedral, near Chennai beach, got its name from St Thomas, the doubting discipline of Jesus Christ. A museum is located in the grounds nearby. Main attraction of the museum is a 16th century map of South Asia. Santhome Cathedral is one of the prominent attractions in Chennai. People with Christian faith visits this place and attend the Mass.



Kapaleeswara Temple

Kapaleeswarar, an ancient Shiva temple, is the biggest temple in Chennai. A masterpiece of dravidian style and displays the architectural elements - gopurams, mandapams and a tank. There are some fragmentary inscriptions dating back to 1250 AD, though the architecture and structure of the temple is more related with the culture that prevailed in 16th century, when Vijay Nagar kings refurbished it. As per the tradition, Goddess Karpagambal is offered a garland made of gold coins named kaasu maala on the ritual of Friday worship.

Fort St. George & Museum

St. George fort was built by the British East India Company in 1640 AD, under the direct supervision of Francis Day and Andrew Cogon. Today it is used as an office of Tamil Nadu Secretariat and the Legislative Assembly. The fort houses a St. Mary's Church and fort museum. The Fort Museum is the repository of rare exhibits of weapons, uniforms, coins, costumes, medals and some other artifacts dating back to the British period. The flag staff at Fort St. George is still the tallest in India. South of the Fort is the War Memorial, a graceful monument built in 1939 in memory of the warriors who sacrificed their lives during the First World War. (Museum remains closed on Fridays).



Enroute visit to Dakshinachitra.



Dakshinachitra

Dakshinachitra is an exciting cross cultural living museum of art, architecture, lifestyles, crafts and performing arts of South India. Dakshinachitra is located on the East Coast Road at Muttukadu - 21 kms South of Chennai. Dakshinachitra literally means - “a picture of the south”. You can explore 17 heritage houses, amble along recreated streetscapes, explore contextual exhibitions, interact with typical village artisans and witness folk performances set in an authentic ambience. (It remains closed on Tuesdays).

Later continue drive to Mahabalipuram.

MAHABALIPURAM - Also known as Mamallapuram, it is a 7th century coastal town located about 60 km from Chennai. Mahabalipuram’s name originated from Mamallapuram, where ‘mamall’ means excellent wrestler and was a name offered to King Narasimha Varman I. Mahabalipuram is a UNESCO world heritage site, which has various historical monuments dating back to period between 7th to 9th centuries. It is home to various rocks cut monuments that stand as an example of the Dravidian architecture. Mahabalipuram is a perfect treat for tourists with its long stretches of sea coast and some of the amazing carved granite structures with Dravidian architecture.

On arrival in Mahabalipuram, transfer to hotel.

Overnight at the hotel.



Day 03: Mahabalipuram

After breakfast, enjoy the sightseeing of Mahabalipuram including:



Arjuna's Penance

The Arjuna's penance is one of the most famous stone carvings at Mahabalipuram. It is an enormous relief made of two massive boulders. One of the biggest open-air rock canvases in the world, the Arjuna's penance is 31m long and 9m high. There are many schools of thoughts over the theme of Arjuna's penance. One believes that the sculpture shows Arjuna undertaking a penance to obtain a rare weapon against his enemies; the other School believes that it portrays the legend of the River Ganges's descent to earth. Whatever the reasons, Arjuna penance remains one of the most beautifully carved structures. Arjuna's Penance has over 100 figures of gods and semi divine creatures, birds and beasts, man and saint.

Five Rathas

The Five Rathas, also known as Panch Rathas, is a set of rock temples. They are excellent examples of the evolution of Dravidian style architecture. These temples are built in the same shape as pagodas, and greatly resemble Buddhist shrines and monasteries. The Rathas are associated with the great epic Mahabharata. These are the architectural prototypes demonstrate the imposing gopurams and Vimanas; multi pillared halls and sculptured walls, which dominate the landscape of Tamil Nadu.



Mandapams

In Mahabalipuram, there are eight mandapams (shallow, rock-cut halls) scattered over the main hill, two of which have been left unfinished. They are mainly of interest for their internal figure sculptures. One of the earliest rock-cut temples is the Krishna Mandapam. It features carvings of a pastoral scene showing Krishna lifting up the Govardhana Mountain to protect his kinsfolk from the wrath of Indra. On the hill rests a dangerously balanced boulder named Krishna's Butterball after his legendary affinity for fresh butter.



Shore Temple

Shore Temple - This beautiful and romantic temple, ravaged by wind and sea, represents the final phase of Pallavas art and it was built in the late 7th century during the reign of Rajasimha. It is believed that at one point in time there were seven such temples, six of them were victims to the natural elements of erosion. This temple has three shrines; one dedicated to Lord Vishnu and the other two to Lord Shiva. The frothy waves form a striking backdrop to the temple, protected by rows of rock-carved bulls. The most unique feature of the temple is that it houses shrines to both Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu.

Overnight at the hotel.



Day 04: Mahabalipuram / Pondicherry (Approx 99 Kms / 02.5 hrs drive)

After breakfast, drive to Pondicherry.

PONDICHERRY - Pondicherry has been derived from the Tamil word Puducheri signifying ‘the new settlement’.

Located perfectly on the Coromandel shoreline, Union Territory of Pondicherry was ruled by the French for more than 3 centuries and today it symbolizes a living monument of the French culture in India. There is a strong influence of French culture on Pondicherry town, especially on its architecture,

Pondicherry is enriched with its architectural marvel and cultural wealth. The main tourist draw in Pondicherry is Sri Aurobindo Ashram, where Sri Aurobindo and the Mother spent their time for the upliftment of society.

On arrival in Pondicherry, transfer to the hotel.



Day 03: Delhi / Agra (225 Kms around 04 hrs drive)

Later enjoy visit of Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Sri Aurobindo Ashram

It was founded by Sri Aurobindo way back in November 1926. Initially the Ashram comprised of only 24 disciples. The Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry has come a long way from its initial days of inception. It now features among the major places of tourist interest in Pondicherry. Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry today is a large institution that has its extensions in almost all the major cities all over the world. It offers many charitable benefits to the area, including free medical amenities and a publishing house.



Later enjoy the Heritage walk in French quarters of Pondicherry. (Duration: Approx 02 hrs) - This walk is through the French quarters and will take approx 02 Hours. The former French colony retains the attributes and beauty of French architecture along the White Town (French Quarter). This area includes French houses, Government buildings, café etc. This walk will cover the various lesser known, interesting buildings & monuments. Walk will include Ganesha Temple (a very beautiful small temple, one of its own kind), Ayi Mandapam (probably the only monument in the world dedicated to a harlot), French War Memorial, Gandhi Statue, Ashram Dining Room, Old Light House and many more.

Overnight at hotel.



Day 04: Pondicherry / Chidambaram / Tanjore (184 Kms / 04 ½ hrs drive approx)

After an early breakfast, drive to Thanjavur.

THANJAVUR - The name Thanjavur is derived from “Tanjan”, a legendary demon in Hindu mythology.

Tanjore as the British called it is extremely fertile, prosperous and scenic; it was the natural choice for capital city of one of the greatest empires of the south. Now a small city in the state of Tamil Nadu, it rose to glory during the Chola period from the 10th century to the 14th, when it came to be the centre of art and education. The Cholas built extensively during this period and 74 of their temples are still standing. As the centre of cultural development, Thanjavur attracted master craftsmen, and it still continues to produce attractive handcrafted ware. Thanjavur is still famous for its bejewelled, gold leaf Tanjore paintings, fine silk carpets, bell metal work, musical instruments, pith work and bronze sculptures.

On the way, enjoy visit of **Nataraj Temple (02 hrs drive)** - The Chidambaram Nataraja Temple is an excellent example of a unique amalgamation of a number of architectural styles. The innermost sanctum inside the Chidambaram Nataraja Temple has idols of Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati.

The Chitsabha inside the temple is an interesting piece of architecture. The other fascinating and important shrine located inside the Chidambaram Nataraja Temple is the Govindaraja Perumaal. There are five halls in the temples including Nritha Sabha, Hall of Immortal Dance. Sivakamiamman temple, the Sivaganga Tank and the thousand pillar hall are also important features of the temple. *(It remains closed from 1200 hrs till 1600 hrs).*

On arrival in Thanjavur, transfer to the hotel.

Overnight at the hotel.



Day 06: Tanjore / Trichy / Madurai (5-6 hrs drive approx)

After breakfast, enjoy visit of Thanjavur including following:

Brihadeshwara Temple

Built by great Chola king in the 10th century it is an outstanding example of Chola architecture and is listed in world heritage. On the top of the apex of 63 metres high, a dome is said to be constructed from a single piece of granite, weighing an estimated 81 tones. The dome was hauled into place along a 6 km earthwork ramp in a manner similar to the one used by the Egyptian Pyramids. The temple has been the sense of continuous worship for over thousand years. Only Hindus are allowed in the sanctum sanctorum. (It remains closed from 1200 to 1600 hrs).



After breakfast, drive to Madurai, on the way enjoy visit of Trichy.



Sri Rangnathaswamy Temple

This superb temple complex at Srirangam, about three km from the Rock Fort, is surrounded by seven concentric walls with 21 gopurams and is probably the largest in India. Most of it dates from the 14th to 17th centuries, and many people have had a hand in its construction, including the Cheras, Pandyas, Cholas, Hoysalas and Vijayanagars. The temple complex is very well preserved, with excellent carvings throughout and numerous shrines to various gods, though the main temple is dedicated to Vishnu. (It remains closed from 1200 hrs till 1500 hrs).

Rock Fort Temple

Rockfort temple stands tall on a magnificent hill which is believed to be 3500 million years old. This temple dates back to 7th century. This hillock forms the landmark of bustling Trichy town. There are two temples here one for Siva and the other for Vinayagar known here as Ucchi Pillayair, Ucchi means zenith. The deity here sits and watches the whole Trichy town from the summit. The uchipillayar temple is very small; one has to climb about 400 steps to reach the summit. One can have a panoramic view of the whole town from the top of the hill.



After sightseeing, continue drive to Madurai.
On arrival in Madurai, transfer to hotel.
Overnight at the hotel.

Day 07: Madurai

After breakfast, enjoy visit of Madurai including following:

Meenakshi Temple

This temple is nearly 2000 years old placed in the heart of the old town-a splendid example of Dravidian architecture. The present temple was designed in 1560 by Vishwanatha Nayak and subsequently built during the reign of Tirumalai Nayak. There are four entrances to the temple with an area of six hectares. Each of its 12 towers has the height of 45 to 50 meters. The Potrama Raikulam or the Golden Lotus Tank is the place where the Tamil literacy society, called Sangam used to meet to decide the merits of the work presented to them. The temple museum has 985 richly carved pillars and each one surpasses the other in beauty. (It remains closed from 1200 hrs till 1530 hrs).



Tirumalai Nayak Mahal

The palace (or Mahal) was built by Thirumalai Naicker, the greatest of Nayakkar kings of Madurai. The Nayaks ruled Madurai from 1545 till 1740, after the Pandya kings. The palace is the place where Thirumalai Naicker lived and held his court. The palace complex area was originally four times bigger than it is now, consisting of two portions – Swarga vilasa and Ranga vilasa. There were also other portions like the palace shrine, harem, theatre, royal band stand, armoury and other structures which were used to accommodate palanquins, royal chariots, relatives, servants, guests and other regal paraphernalia.

‘Bedtime of the God’ at Meenakshi Temple

In the Evening enjoy the ceremony ‘Bedtime of the God’ at Meenakshi Temple - Evening visit the Meenakshi Temple to attend the evening ceremony known as ‘Bedtime of the God’. A colourful procession, in which the image of Shiva is carried accompanied by musicians, temple singers and priests from his shrine. Enroute Shiva visits the other deities before entering Parvati’s (Meenakshi) temple to sleep with her for the night. This ceremony is worth witnessing.



Overnight at the hotel.

Day 08: Madurai / Periyar (148 kms / 4.5 hrs drive approx)

After sightseeing, drive to Periyar.

PERIYAR - Periyar National Park is situated in the hills of the Western Ghats. The center piece of Periyar National park is the 5,500-hectare Periyar Lake formed by the construction of a dam on the Periyar River in 1895. The dam submerged low-lying forest whose dead tree trunks still jut out of the waters. Along the fringes of the lake are marshy areas with tall grasslands. This is one of the richest habitats of large mammals, as it provides both excellent cover and nourishment in the form of succulent shoots and grasses. Periyar is a veritable paradise of elephants. Herds of playful wild elephants can be seen near the Periyar Lake, their favourite haunt for frolicking in the water.

On arrival in Periyar, transfer to the hotel.

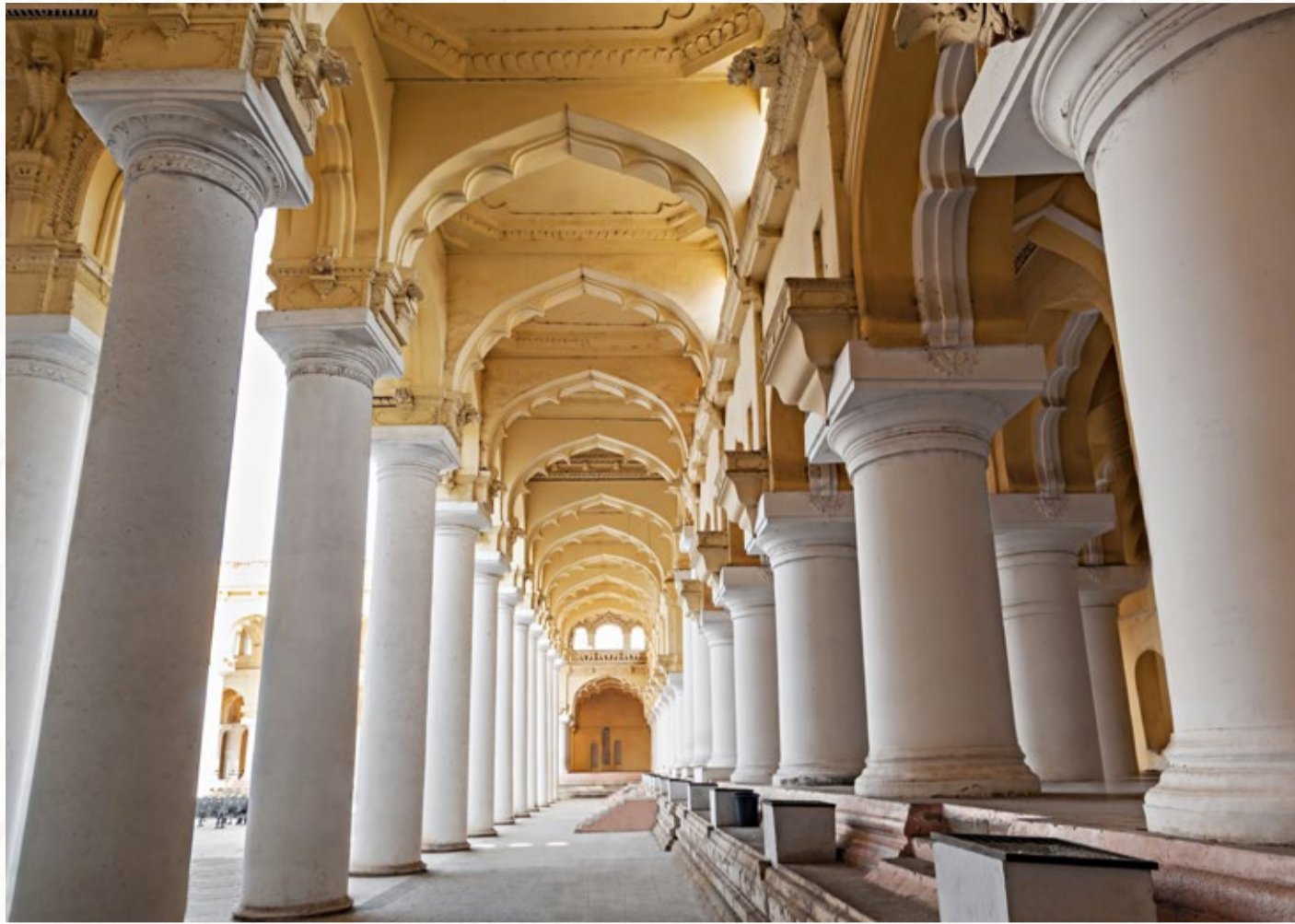
Later enjoy **Boat ride in Periyar** - Boat ride in Periyar Tiger Reserve, Thekkady.

It is an example of nature's bounty, with great scenic charm, rich bio diversity and providing veritable visitor satisfaction. Sprawled over an area of 777 Sq .km., Periyar is one of the 27 tiger reserves in India. Zealously guarded and efficiently managed reserve is a repository of rare, endemic and endangered flora and fauna and forms the major watershed of two important rivers of Kerala, the Periyar and Pamb. Boat cruises make the best option to check out the wilds of Periyar Sanctuary.

Today the Periyar Lake presents an excellent boating spot for tourists. Although it is unusual to see many animals from the boats, still you spot a family of Elephants, Wild Boar, and Sambar Deer by the water's edge. The upper deck is best for wildlife viewing when taking a boat cruise, but better turn up half an hour early to get the best seat.

Overnight at the hotel.





Spice plantation

After breakfast visit to Spice plantation - Enjoy a fascinating and informative visit to several neighbouring spice plantations as well as smaller-scale spice gardens whose owners are proud on their adaptation of organic farming methods, including the use of methane gas produced from cow dung to provide energy for their household needs. This visit enables you to get understanding of how the spice used in everyday cooking throughout the world are grown, harvested, and processed before they find their way to your local supermarket. The visit also provides you with a firsthand idea on the wonderful world of spices and its history, cultivation, medicinal values, economics, etc.

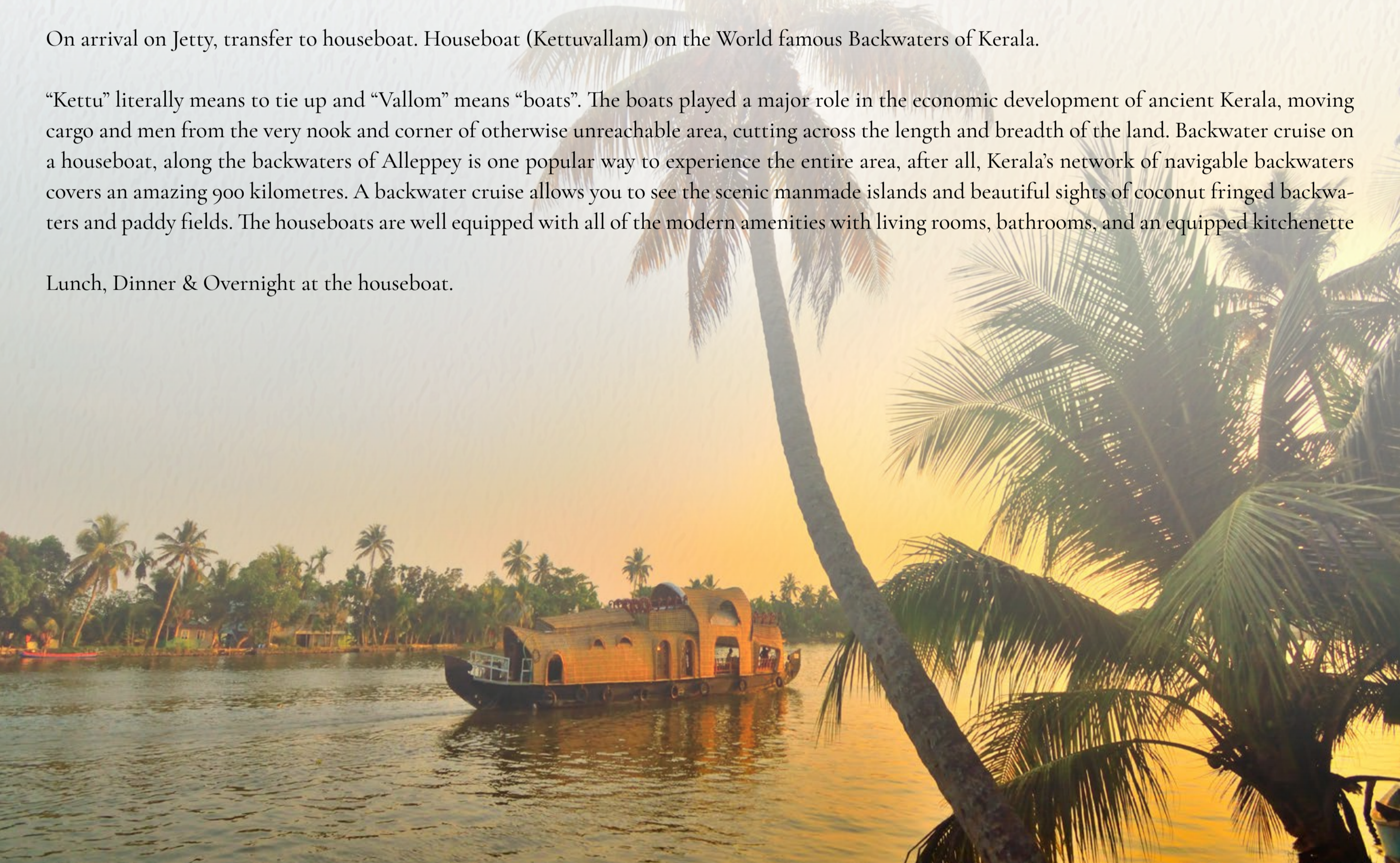
After the visit, drive to backwaters to embark the houseboat.

BACKWATERS - Kerala is undoubtedly blessed with a unique feature called the backwaters. Backwaters are formed by the accumulation of sea water at the beach. As the waves moved to and fro, they made their way tearing the ground and forming backwaters. The backwaters are essentially inland lakes connected by a network of canals. The best way to enjoy the Kerala backwaters is to take a cruise on a Kettuvallam.

On arrival on Jetty, transfer to houseboat. Houseboat (Kettuvallam) on the World famous Backwaters of Kerala.

“Kettu” literally means to tie up and “Vallom” means “boats”. The boats played a major role in the economic development of ancient Kerala, moving cargo and men from the very nook and corner of otherwise unreachable area, cutting across the length and breadth of the land. Backwater cruise on a houseboat, along the backwaters of Alleppey is one popular way to experience the entire area, after all, Kerala’s network of navigable backwaters covers an amazing 900 kilometres. A backwater cruise allows you to see the scenic manmade islands and beautiful sights of coconut fringed backwaters and paddy fields. The houseboats are well equipped with all of the modern amenities with living rooms, bathrooms, and an equipped kitchenette.

Lunch, Dinner & Overnight at the houseboat.



Day 10: Backwaters / Cochin (58 kms / 02 hrs drive approx)

After breakfast, disembark the houseboat and drive to Cochin.

COCHIN - Cochin has long been eulogized in tourist literature as the 'Queen of the Arabian Sea'. Its location between the blue waters of the Arabian Sea and Kerala's emerald backwaters, its rich medley of Indian and foreign architecture, its truly unusual sights like the Chinese fishing nets and its quaint quiet localities like the Jewish Quarters demand the attention of all who travel to Kerala. Set on a cluster of islands and a peninsula, Cochin (now, Kochi) is a blend of medieval Portugal, Holland and an English country village.



On arrival, enjoy visit of Cochin as below:

Chinese Fishing Nets

The Chinese fishing nets (Cheenavala) are distinctly unique to Cochin. It is believed that traders from the court of the Chinese ruler Kublai Khan introduced these nets here. Oddly, these nets are found only in Kochi, outside China! Many fishermen earn their livelihood by fishing using these massive nets. A whole stretch of the coast along Fort Kochi and Vypeen are dotted with these nets.



Dutch Palace

The Dutch Palace was originally built by the Portuguese. Later, in 17th century, the Dutch modified it and presented it to the Raja of Kochi. Coronation of many Rajas of Kochi was held here. The palace has a fine collection of mural paintings depicting scenes from the Hindu epics Mahabharatha and Ramayana. The palace is located in Mattancherry. IMP: It remains closed on Fridays. Timings for the visit: 1000 hrs to 1700 hrs.

Jewish Synagogue

The synagogue, built in 1568, is magnificently decorated by Chinese tiles and Belgian chandeliers. Giant scrolls of the Old Testament can be found here. It is located near the Dutch Palace in Mattancherry. IMP: It remains closed on Fridays and Saturdays. Timings for the visit: 0900 hrs to 1200 hrs and from 1500 hrs to 1700 hrs.



St. Francis Church

It is the oldest church built by Europeans in India. On his 3rd visit to Kerala, Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese trader who reached India from Europe by sea, fell ill and died in Kochi. He was buried in the St. Francis Church. Later his remains were taken back to Portugal. In spite of that, his burial spot inside the church has been clearly marked out.



Kathakali Dance Performance

In evening, enjoy Kathakali dance performance - A special treat awaits us this evening as we proceed to witness the strength and vigour of Kathakali dance drama, as it enacts episodes from great Indian epics. The extremely stylized gestures, the elaborate make-up, the masks and the splendid costumes of these all-male dancers, recreates an incomparable sense of pageantry.

Overnight at the hotel.



Day 11: Cochin Departure

After breakfast, transfer to the Airport to board the flight for back home / onward destination.

(Rooms will be available till 12:00 hrs only)

End of Services

