NAT HAB
CULTURAL JOURNEYS

Vibrant Traditions & Personal Connections



South India Sojourn

Ancient Empires, Royal Palaces, Kerala Backwaters & Highland Tea Estates

Table of Contents

Trip Overview 3

Itinerary 4

Accommodations 10

What Makes Cultural Journeys Different? 12

Dates, Pricing & Info 13

Extensions 16



Trip Details:

Days
13 Days / Jan–Mar

Price
From $13895

South India Sojourn

Ancient Empires, Royal Palaces, Kerala Backwaters & Highland Tea Estates

Few regions of the planet are as beguiling as the southern sector of the Indian subcontinent. Our journey begins in Hyderabad, famed for its Indo-Islamic architecture and unique fusion of cuisines earning its status as a Creative City of Gastronomy by UNESCO. In Hampi, explore the otherworldly remnants of the late-medieval Vijayanagara Empire— ornate temples, royal courts and elephant stables—sprawling over a boulder-strewn landscape. Mysuru holds opulent palaces and centuries-old silk weaving traditions. In the Western Ghats, an ancient mountain chain that is one of the world's most important biodiversity hotspots, explore dense rainforest, highland tea and coffee estates, and spice gardens. Wind up with a languid boat trip in Kerala's peaceful backwaters, cruising through narrow canals and fishing villages where daily life unfolds at water's edge.

Trip Highlights

Explore Temples, Monuments & Evocative Ruins

Trace the rise and fall of South Indian kingdoms among Hampi's royal remnants and Mysuru's palace halls, take part in a puja at Virupaksha Temple, and wander the ruins of splendid Chitradurga Fort

Experience Life Along Kerala's Canals by Boat

Cruise the backwaters in a traditional wooden shikara, meet a family that fishes by hand, listen to vanchipattu boat songs, and walk the earthen bunds that surround below-sea-level rice fields

Stay at a Rainforest Ecolodge in the Western Ghats

Spend two nights within the tropical wet evergreen forest as we hike among towering old trees and learn about local wildlife on walks led by resident naturalists, including after dark



South India Sojourn Itinerary

Ancient Empires, Royal Palaces, Kerala Backwaters & Highland Tea Estates

Itinerary at a Glance

Day 1	Begin our South India journey in historic Hyderabad
Day 2	Hyderabad
Day 3	Step into the ruins of the Vijayanagara Empire
Day 4	Follow Ramayana legends to the village of Anegundi
Day 5	Greet the sunrise and join Hampi's living traditions
Day 6	Trace Karnataka's history from fort walls to market stalls
Day 7	Uncover Mysuru's royal legacy and silk traditions
Day 8	Enter the forests of the Western Ghats
Day 9	Ride the rails to Kerala's backwaters
Day 10	Wayanad / Kozhikode / Alappuzha / Kumarakom—Across Kerala by Rail
Day 11	Cruise village waterways and row with a snake-boat crew
Day 12	Meet the families who farm and fish Kerala's backwaters
Day 13	Depart Delhi after your South India journey



Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-543-8917

Day 1

Begin our South India journey in historic Hyderabad

- Arrive in Hyderabad, a historic Deccan capital shaped by Persian, Arabian and South Indian influences
- Join your Expedition Leader and fellow travelers for a welcome dinner and an introduction to the journey ahead

Arrive in Hyderabad, founded in 1591 and shaped by centuries of Deccan, Persian and Arabian influences evident in its architecture and cuisine. You are met on arrival and transferred to The Leela Hyderabad in Banjara Hills. This evening, meet your Expedition Leader and fellow travelers over a welcome dinner. Our Expedition Leader introduces the route ahead and provides context for the distinct histories, cultures and landscapes we will encounter across South India.

Day 2

Hyderabad

Discover Hyderabad's royal heritage and home cooking

- Explore the Charminar, Laad Bazaar and Chowmahalla Palace in Hyderabad's old city
- Visit the traditional pearl market, then share a home-cooked lunch with a local family
- Walk among the Qutb Shahi Tombs, where Persian, Afghan and Indian architectural influences meet

Enter Hyderabad's old city on foot, beginning at the Charminar, built in 1591 under Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah. Continue through Laad Bazaar as merchants open for the day, then visit Chowmahalla Palace, once the seat of the Asaf Jahi dynasty.

Hyderabad and nearby Golconda were important centers of international trade, particularly in diamonds and pearls. Visit the traditional pearl bazaar, where pearls are still sold alongside attar, textiles, footwear and Hyderabad sweets.

At midday, a local family welcomes us into their home for lunch, introducing us to a cuisine influenced by Mughal, Turkish and Arabic traditions. Later, visit the Qutb Shahi Tombs, a royal necropolis combining Persian, Afghan and Indian architectural influences.

Day 3

Step into the ruins of the Vijayanagara Empire

- Fly to Hubli and continue to Hampi through the granite boulder landscapes of the Deccan Plateau
- Discover the Vittala Temple complex and its famed stone chariot
- Watch evening light illuminate the temples, ruins and boulder fields of the former imperial capital

Fly to Hubli this morning, then continue overland toward Hampi as the Deccan Plateau gives way to the immense granite boulders that characterize the region.

By the early 16th century, Hampi was the capital of the powerful Vijayanagara Empire, a city of roughly half a million people whose temples, royal compounds, canals and reservoirs spread across the landscape surrounding the Tungabhadra River.

After settling into Evolve Back Kamalapura Palace, make a first visit to the Vittala Temple complex, where the famous stone chariot stands before the temple. End the afternoon at a viewpoint overlooking the remains of the former capital as golden light illuminates the ruins and surrounding boulder fields.

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Day 4

Follow Ramayana legends to the village of Anegundi

- Cross the Tungabhadra River by traditional coracle into the landscape identified as Kishkinda in the Ramayana
- Travel through rice fields and banana groves as your Expedition Leader shares stories of Rama and Hanuman
- Meet Kishkinda Trust founder Shama Pawar to learn about her community conservation work, then share lunch in her walled garden

Board a traditional coracle to cross the Tungabhadra River, then travel through rice and banana fields toward a landscape identified in the Ramayana as Kishkinda, the monkey kingdom where Rama meets Hanuman.

Caves, prehistoric rock art and distinctive rock formations appear throughout the area as our Expedition Leader shares the stories associated with these hills and waterways.

In Anegundi, meet Shama Pawar, founder of the Kishkinda Trust, which works with local residents on architectural conservation, environmental protection and the preservation of craft traditions. Learn about this community-based work firsthand before joining Shama for lunch in her walled garden amid the boulders and banana groves of this historic village.

Day 5

Greet the sunrise and join Hampi's living traditions

- Climb Matanga Hill before dawn to watch sunrise over Hampi's temples and boulder-strewn hills
- Follow the ancient bazaar to Virupaksha Temple and take part in a Hindu puja
- Ride a coracle along the Tungabhadra River before gathering for evening drinks on the riverbank

Leave before sunrise for a moderate 20- to 30-minute ascent of Matanga Hill. From the summit, the Tungabhadra River, temple towers, abandoned city and boulder-strewn hills spread below us in the first light of morning.

After descending, continue past a monolithic Nandi statue and along the ancient bazaar to Virupaksha Temple. Believed to have functioned continuously since the 7th century, it remains an active place of Hindu worship, and we witness and take part in a puja rather than experiencing the temple solely as a historic monument.

After breakfast and time to rest, those who wish may visit Hampi's Royal Enclosure. Late this afternoon, return to the Tungabhadra River for another perspective on the landscape, traveling by round bamboo coracle before gathering for drinks on the riverbank as evening settles over Hampi.

Day 6

Trace Karnataka's history from fort walls to market stalls

- Explore Chitradurga Fort's massive lower defenses with a local guide
- Hear the story of Onake Obavva, one of Karnataka's best-known folk heroines
- Browse Mysuru's Devaraja Market among stalls filled with flowers, produce, perfumes and puja offerings

Today's longer drive to Mysuru is broken by a visit to Chitradurga Fort. Explore its massive lower fortifications with a guide who shares the story of Onake Obavva, one of Karnataka's best-known folk heroines.

After lunch, continue to Mysuru and head directly to Devaraja Market. Banana and coconut varieties, vegetables, flowers and puja offerings fill the stalls, while perfume sellers and small shops line the surrounding lanes. Our Expedition Leader and local guide lead us through sections of the market visitors could easily overlook before we continue to our heritage hotel.

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Day 7

Uncover Mysuru's royal legacy and silk traditions

- Tour Mysuru Palace's lavish halls and ceremonial spaces while learning about the Wadiyar dynasty
- Join a local hostess in her home to prepare and share a meal using seasonal ingredients and Mysuru cooking techniques
- Follow silk production from silkworm cocoons to the loom with a textile specialist

Begin at Amba Vilas Palace, better known as Mysuru Palace, where our guide introduces the Wadiyar dynasty through its audience halls, ceremonial spaces and lavish interiors.

At midday, a local hostess welcomes us into her home for an interactive cooking session and lunch. She introduces seasonal ingredients and techniques used in Mysuru cooking as we prepare and share a meal together.

This afternoon, turn to another long-standing regional tradition: silk. Mysuru's association with sericulture dates to the 18th century, when Tipu Sultan promoted the industry. With a textile specialist, visit a village where silkworm cocoons are raised and harvested, then follow the process through dyeing and spinning before the thread reaches the loom.

Day 8

Enter the forests of the Western Ghats

- Look for elephants, spotted deer and langurs as we drive through Bandipur Tiger Reserve
- Ascend into the Western Ghats as dry forest gives way to Wayanad's tropical evergreen vegetation
- Join a naturalist-led night walk to search for frogs, insects and reptiles in the rainforest

Our road to Kerala passes through Bandipur Tiger Reserve, part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve and one of India's important wildlife corridors. We cannot stop within the reserve, but we watch from the vehicle for elephants, spotted deer and langurs, with other wildlife possible though never assured.

Beyond Bandipur, dry forest gradually gives way to increasingly moist vegetation as we climb into the Western Ghats and eventually reach Wayanad's tropical evergreen forest.

Our base for the next two nights is CGH Wayanad Wild, a rainforest lodge at approximately 2,300 feet. After lunch and time to relax, head into the forest after dinner with a naturalist and flashlights, focusing on frogs, insects, reptiles and other species most active after dark.

Day 9

Ride the rails to Kerala's backwaters

- Hike through tropical evergreen forest, listening for bird calls and watching for signs of wildlife
- Taste locally grown tea and tour a coffee plantation where pepper and cardamom grow beneath the shade canopy
- Discover the surrounding forest's wildlife through remote-camera images and insights from the lodge's resident naturalist

Set out early for a moderate hike through tropical wet evergreen forest, walking beneath massive old trees while bird calls and other signs of forest life surround us.

After breakfast, visit Harrison Malayalam Tea Estate, following tea production from plucking through withering, rolling, fermentation and drying, then taste the finished tea.

At Moovatty Coffee Plantation, robusta coffee grows beneath a shade canopy while pepper vines climb tree trunks and cardamom grows below. After lunch at the estate, walk through the plantation and visit its drying, pulping and storage areas.

Back at Wayanad Wild, join the resident naturalist for an evening session using remote-camera images and field observations to better understand the wildlife that shares the surrounding forest.

Day 10

Wayanad / Kozhikode / Alappuzha / Kumarakom—Across Kerala by Rail

- Descend from the Western Ghats through winding mountain roads to Kerala's coastal plain
- Board the Vande Bharat Express and watch paddy fields, towns and coconut palms pass outside our windows
- Arrive in Kumarakom and settle in to your lakeside retreat

Leave Wayanad early, descending from the Western Ghats through hairpin bends as rainforest gives way to Kerala's lower country and coconut groves.

Time permitting, stop briefly in Kozhikode for a taste of Malabar breakfast specialties before boarding the Vande Bharat Express. Traveling south in air-conditioned Executive Chair Car, watch paddy fields, towns, coconut palms and glimpses of water pass outside the windows.

Disembark at Alappuzha and continue after lunch to Kumarakom Lake Resort on Vembanad Lake. Later this afternoon, there may be time to walk toward the nearby Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary or simply enjoy the hotel.

Day 11

Cruise village waterways and row with a snake-boat crew

- Travel Kerala's lakes and canals aboard a traditional kettuvallam houseboat, passing waterfront villages and enjoying lunch on board
- Paddle alongside a local snake-boat crew, then share coconut water or chai while learning about their village boat club

Board a traditional kettuvallam houseboat from the hotel jetty and enter Kerala's network of lakes and canals. Travel through backwater villages, stopping where possible to step ashore and see communities linked by water rather than roads. Lunch is served aboard.

Later, meet a local chundan vallam crew and learn about Kerala's village snake-boat tradition. These racing boats can stretch approximately 100 feet, with large crews paddling in rhythm to vanchipattu, traditional songs that set the stroke.

After learning the basic technique, take a place alongside the local rowers for short bursts of paddling. Then share coconut water or chai with the crew while learning about the village boat clubs, the people who race for them and life outside competition season.

Day 12

Meet the families who farm and fish Kerala's backwaters

- Navigate narrow canals by shikkara and meet a family preserving the rare tradition of barehand fishing
- Walk earthen embankments with a farmer to learn how Kuttanad's rice fields are cultivated below the surrounding water level
- Share a farming family's lunch overlooking the fields before gathering for farewell drinks and our final dinner together

Leave the wider waterways behind and enter Kerala's narrower canals by shikkara. These channels once carried rice, coir, copra and spices toward the coast and still pass homes, farms, coir yards and small settlements.

Meet a family that continues the increasingly rare practice of barehand fishing. Watch the fisherman work in shallow water without nets or hooks, then sit with the family to learn how the skill is passed between generations.

Continue into Kuttanad, where farming relies on an engineering system that holds water back from fields lying below the level of the surrounding lake and canals. Walk an earthen bund with a farmer, with rice fields below on one side and higher water on the other.

Lunch is hosted by a farming family overlooking the fields, featuring ingredients tied directly to the surrounding landscape. Return to the resort this afternoon before a farewell drink beside the lake and our final dinner together.

Day 13

Depart Delhi after your South India journey

- Fly from Kochi to Delhi, where a day room offers time to rest and freshen up
- Transfer to the international airport this evening for departing flights

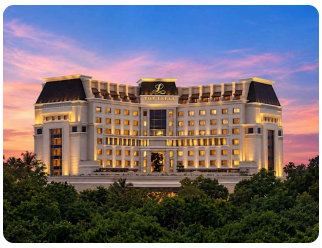
Transfer to Kochi Airport this morning for our flight to Delhi. On arrival, continue to Roseate House, where a day room is available until departure. There is time for lunch, rest and a chance to freshen up before our late-evening transfer to the international airport for flights home.

Ready to Book? Call an Adventure Specialist at 800-543-8917



South India Sojourn Accommodations

Ancient Empires, Royal Palaces, Kerala Backwaters & Highland Tea Estates



The Leela Hyderabad

A modern palatial hotel in upscale Banjara Hills offers colorful, opulent rooms, extensive dining options and a four-story wellness center crowned by a rooftop infinity pool and terrace.



Evolve Back Kamalapura Palace

This sprawling palatial retreat echoes the architecture of nearby ancient temple ruins, with arched corridors, regal interiors, ornate tiered rooflines, sprawling garden walkways and terraced reflecting pools.



Royal Orchid Metropole Hotel

Built for the Maharaja's British guests, this century-old colonial hotel opens onto a lively garden courtyard, where guests dine al fresco or relax beside a palm-shaded swimming pool.



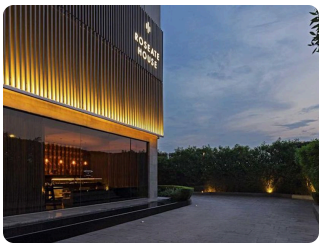
CGH Earth Wayanad Wild

Deep in the rainforest of the Western Ghats, this tranquil eco-resort borders a wildlife sanctuary, featuring an infinity pool tucked into the canopy and spacious rooms with private balconies.



Coconut Lagoon

Along Lake Vembanad's coconut-fringed canals and waterways, this secluded retreat is accessible only by boat, featuring traditional Kerala cottages, lakeside dining, a pool and floating tea shop.



Roseate House New Delhi

A modern sanctuary in New Delhi's vibrant Aerocity, Roseate House is a luxurious urban retreat, offering contemporary rooms, world-class dining, and personalized service—all just minutes from the airport and metro station.

For detailed descriptions, visit nathab.com/cultural-journeys/south-india-kerala-backwaters-tour/accommodations.

What Makes Cultural Journeys Different?

South India Sojourn

South India reveals itself most fully through the people who keep its traditions, landscapes and communities connected. On this Nat Hab Cultural Journey, we go beyond celebrated monuments and scenery to spend time in private homes, village workshops, farming communities and working waterways, meeting the people who give each region its character. With a small group, an expert Expedition Leader and experiences rooted in local life, we gain deeper insight into everything from silk weaving and plantation agriculture to cultural conservation, rainforest ecology and Kerala's backwaters. See what makes our journey so special:

1 **Personal Connections Open Doors**

Meet people in homes, gardens, workshops and farming communities rather than only at conventional visitor sites. Spend time with Shama Pawar and the Kishkinda Trust in Anegundi, cook with a Mysuru hostess in her home, and learn from Kerala families whose lives are closely tied to the backwaters.

2 **A Small Group Facilitates More Intimate Experiences**

With no more than 12 guests, we can enter spaces larger groups cannot—from private homes and village silk workshops to narrow backwater canals and local boat clubs. The intimate group size also creates more room for conversation with artisans, hosts and community members.

3 **Our Expedition Leader Connects One Region to the Next**

Travel with an Expedition Leader who provides context as the journey moves through very different histories and environments—from Deccan trade and the Vijayanagara Empire to Mysuru's silk industry, the ecology of the Western Ghats and the water engineering of Kuttanad.

4 **Discover Artisanship & Traditions in Local Context**

Follow local traditions from their source: see silkworm cocoons before visiting the loom, walk among coffee, pepper and cardamom plants at a Wayanad plantation, and stand on Kuttanad's below sea-level agricultural bunds before sharing a meal featuring rice grown in the fields below.

5 **Meet the Protectors of Cultural & Natural Heritage**

Learn how conservation takes different forms across South India—from the Kishkinda Trust's work in a 500-year-old village to the wildlife landscapes of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve and the resident naturalists of the Western Ghats. In Kerala, meet farming and fishing families whose knowledge remains rooted in the working backwaters.



Dates & Pricing Summary:

Price
From $13895

Group Size
Limited to 12 Travelers

South India Sojourn Dates, Pricing & Info

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2028 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Jan 15 - Jan 27, 2028	**$13895** +internal air	
Jan 22 - Feb 3, 2028	**$13895** +internal air	
Jan 30 - Feb 11, 2028	**$13895** +internal air	
Feb 13 - Feb 25, 2028	**$13895** +internal air	
Feb 18 - Mar 1, 2028	**$13895** +internal air	
Mar 4 - Mar 16, 2028	**$13895** +internal air	
Mar 11 - Mar 23, 2028	**$13895** +internal air	

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Mar 19 - Mar 31, 2028	**$13895** +internal air	

See https://www.nathab.com/cultural-journeys/south-india-kerala-backwaters-tour/dates-fees for the latest pricing details.

Included

Trip price includes: Accommodations as specified in the itinerary, services of Nat Hab's professional Expedition Leader and local guides, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through lunch on the final day, select alcoholic beverages, bottled water and soft drinks with meals, most gratuities, airport transfers on Day 1 and the final day, all ground transportation, executive-class train travel from Kozhikode to Alappuzha, porterage at hotels, airports and railway stations, all scheduled activities and entrance fees, applicable still-camera fees, and all applicable government taxes.

Internal air cost includes: Economy-class flights from Hyderabad to Hubli and Kochi to Delhi.

Not Included

Not included: Travel to and from the start and end point of your trip, alcoholic beverages except those specifically included, gratuity for your Expedition Leader, passport and India visa fees, items of a personal nature (laundry, phone calls, internet, etc.), increases in domestic airfare or applicable taxes, required medical evacuation insurance, optional travel protection insurance, and any other items not specifically listed as included.

Important Information About This Trip

There are several aspects of this trip that guests should be prepared for, including long overland travel days, varied road conditions, early starts and active excursions. These are necessary to connect the historic sites of the Deccan with the Western Ghats and Kerala’s backwaters.

- Some travel days involve long drives, particularly between Hampi and Mysuru and as we travel from Mysuru through Bandipur to Wayanad. Visits and meals are incorporated along the way where possible.
- In Wayanad, guests should be prepared for forest walks on natural terrain, including a nighttime walk by flashlight and a moderate hike through tropical wet evergreen forest. Trails may be uneven, wet or slippery.
- Guests must be comfortable boarding and disembarking a variety of small boats, including traditional coracles, a shikkara and a snake boat. The Kerala program also includes walking along earthen bunds between waterways and rice fields.
- Our route through Bandipur Tiger Reserve is a transit rather than a wildlife safari. We keep watch for elephants, spotted deer, langurs and other animals from our vehicle, but stopping within the reserve is not permitted and wildlife sightings are never guaranteed.
- The journey from Wayanad to Kumarakom combines an overland transfer with travel aboard India’s Vande Bharat Express. Train schedules and local conditions may require adjustments to the day’s timing.

Mandatory Insurance

Since the areas we travel to are remote and wild (that's why we go there!), we require that all guests have, at minimum, medical evacuation insurance for this program. This is for the safety of all guests. We require that your chosen independent insurance plan includes at least $250,000 in medical evacuation coverage.

To protect your investment and to provide peace of mind while you travel, we also strongly recommend purchasing comprehensive travel insurance. Plans may cover everything from medical treatment to trip cancellations and delays and lost luggage. Please contact our office if you would like more information about the medical evacuation and comprehensive travel insurance policies we offer by calling 800-543-8917.



South India Sojourn Extensions

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Agra & the Taj Mahal Extension

No India adventure is complete without a visit to the fabled Taj Mahal and red sandstone Agra Fort, exquisite and magisterial monuments to the imperial splendors of the Mughal age.

$1995

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