



The Crafts and Textiles of Tamil Nadu and Kerala 25 Days/24 Nights

Note – You can easily spend a month or more exploring Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. Thirty handicrafts in these regions have Geographical Indications (see page two) and dozens more are practiced in village-based workshops.

	Activities	Overnight
Day 1	Fly U.S. to Chennai.	Chennai
Day 2	Morning visit to Fort St. George, which was built in 1640 and was the East India Company's principal settlement in India until the seat of government moved to Kolkata in 1774. The Secretariat and the Legislative Council Chambers, built between 1694 and 1732, are among the oldest surviving British constructions in India. Your next stop is St. Andrews Kirk, a Neo-Classical church consecrated in 1821 and inspired by St. Martin-in-the-Fields. Afternoon visit to the Pantheon Complex, which includes the Government Museum, the Connemara Public Library, the National Art Gallery and the Contemporary Art Gallery. The Government Museum contains fine bronzes from the Pallava and Chola periods and a superb collection of South Indian antiquities. While in this area, make sure to admire the Government College of Arts and Crafts and the Egmore Railway station, both designed by Robert Fellowes Chisholm.	Chennai
Day 3	Morning visit to the Kalakshetra Foundation, a school for Bharatanatyam dance, Carnatic music and fine arts. The Foundation's Craft Centre includes a handloom weaving center and a unit for Kalamkari. The latter art form dates to the 14 th century and involves the meticulous hand-painting of epic stories, sometimes combined with block-printing, on cotton textiles using vegetable dyes. Afternoon visit to the Basilica of San Thomé. This gothic-style church was built in 1898 over the tomb of St. Thomas who, according to legend, died here in 72 A.D. This will be followed by a visit to the Kapaleshvara Temple, the largest Hindu temple in Chennai. Note: Non-Hindus typically are not permitted inside the inner sanctum of temples in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.	Chennai

Day 4	<p>Morning visit to the Cholamandal Artists' Village, one of India's largest, self-supporting communities for artists. The complex contains several exhibition galleries, an outdoor sculpture garden, artist studios and a craft shop. After lunch, you will visit DakshinaChitra, which was created by the Madras Craft Foundation in 1996 to showcase the art, music, dance and architecture of South India, specifically the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Spread over ten acres, the center is laid out as a series of villages containing replicas of indigenous housing and workshops for textiles and handicrafts.</p>	Mahabalipuram
Day 5	<p>Full day exploration of Mahabalipuram. This UNESCO World Heritage site was built in the 7th century by the Pallava king Narashimha Varman I and includes rock-cut caves, shrines, temples and massive bas reliefs. In the center of town you will find two magnificent bas-reliefs, Bhagiratha's Penance (or the Descent of the Ganges) and the Krishna Mandapa. To the east of the city, perched on a promontory on the Bay of Bengal, lies the dramatic Shore Temple, which is dedicated to Vishnu and is surrounded by rows of seated Nandis. Finally, south of the city sits the Panch Rathas (Five Chariots) temple complex, which contains a number of unfinished, rock-cut shrines that brilliantly imitate wooden architecture in stone. Mahabalipuram is still home to a number of stone carving workshops, some of which you can visit today.</p>	Mahabalipuram
Day 6	<p>Morning drive to the temple town of Kanchipuram, one of the seven sacred cities of the Hindus. Some of the vibrant temples found here include Kailasanatha, Ekambareshvara and Vaikuntha Perumal. The grand Kailasanatha temple, dedicated to Shiva, was built in the 8th century and contains some of the earliest known frescoes in South India. The Ekambareshvara temple is one of the five <i>panchalinga</i> (essential element) shrines of India, and houses a linga made of <i>prithvi</i>, or earth. The Vaikuntha Perumal temple is unique in that it contains three inner sanctums stacked vertically, each enshrining a different image of Vishnu (standing, sitting and reclining). En route to Kanchipuram, you will visit the wood carvers of Chengalpattu, who create beautiful furniture and religious icons for Tamil temples and houses. Afternoon visit to a workshop for Kanchipuram silk weaving (GI¹). Kanchipuram saris are known for their luster, durability and interesting color combinations, and typically feature extensive use of <i>zari</i>, or metallic thread.</p>	Pondicherry

¹ *GI* means that the textile or craft has been given a Geographical Indication by the government of India. A GI identifies a good as originating in a specific locality where a given quality, reputation or characteristic of the good is essentially attributable to its geographic origin, e.g., Darjeeling tea.

Day 7	<p>Full day exploration of Pondicherry, the former capital of French territories in India, established in 1674 by the French East India Company. Sights of interest include Government Square, the French Quarter, the Church of Our Lady of Angels, and Pondicherry's European-style promenade. The Sri Aurobindo Ashram, founded in 1926 by Bengali poet, philosopher and freedom-fighter Sri Aurobindo Ghose, sells high-quality incense and essential oils, and operates its own paper making workshop. The Cluny Embroidery Center sells wonderful embroidered linens and decorative items. There are also numerous craft workshops in Auroville, a utopian community conceived in 1968 by The Mother, a spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo. Two prominent ceramic studios in Auroville include Mandala Pottery and Forest Pottery Studio; the first ceramic studio to open in the region, Golden Bridge Pottery, is located back in Pondicherry. Upasana and Auroville Papers showcase organic textiles and papermaking, respectively.</p>	Pondicherry
Day 8	<p>Morning departure for Kumbakonam, stopping en route to visit the bronze sculpture artisans of Swamimalai (GI). These talented sculptors create superb replicas of traditional South Indian bronzes through the lost-wax method. The design and construction of these artworks follows the strict aesthetic guidelines outlined in the <i>Shilpa Shastra</i>, an ancient treatise on Indian art. Many of the originals upon which they are based can be seen in the Rajaraja Museum in Thanjavur. You will then visit the silk weavers of Kumbakonam, who create brightly colored saris and <i>pattu pavadai</i> (children's dresses) featuring floral and animal motifs and heavy use of zari. If time permits, you will see a demonstration of traditional Thanjavur painting (GI). This distinctive school of art developed during the Maratha era (17th to 19th centuries) and is characterized by brilliant colors and profuse decoration with gold leaf and precious/semi-precious stones. Note - there are no centralized workshops for this, so it will entail driving from village to village to see who is working.</p> <p>En route to Kumbakonam, you have the option of visiting Chidambaram, the place where Shiva is believed to have performed his cosmic dance, the <i>tandava nritya</i>. This town is home to a zealous Hindu community and features a number of beautiful temples, the highlight being the Nataraja Temple. This temple was built by the Cholas in the 9th century and has a gold-plated roof covering the entire inner sanctum. It is also one of the five <i>panchalinga</i> shrines of India; it houses the <i>akasha</i> or ether linga, the most sacred of the five elements.</p>	Kumbakonam
Day 9	<p>Leisurely departure for Thanjavur, which served as the capital of three powerful dynasties between the 9th and 19th centuries - the Chola, the Nayaka and the Maratha. Morning visit to the 11th century Brihadishvara Temple. This temple complex is one of the</p>	Thanjavur

finest examples of Chola architecture in India, and features an 80 ton octagonal cupola carved out of a single block of golden granite. Afternoon visit to the Nayaka-era (1535 to 1676) Royal Palace and the Rajaraja Museum and Art Gallery. The Royal Palace features a magnificent Durbar Hall with elaborately painted pillars, walls and ceiling. The museum contains an impressive collection of bronze and stone idols dating from the 7th to 20th centuries, including many important and often-copied images of Shiva.

- | | | |
|---------------|--|-----------|
| Day 10 | Morning departure for Chettinad, stopping in Pudukkottai to visit with local potters who create enormous clay figures for Ayyanar shrines. Ayyanar is a guardian deity primarily worshipped in rural villages in Tamil Nadu and Tamil villages in Sri Lanka. Ayyanar shrines are often found in open groves surrounded by trees, and priests are often non-Brahmins belonging to the Velar, or potter cast. The shrines and temples of Ayyanar are flanked by huge, colorful statues of the deity and his companions riding horses or elephants. As the “watchman” god, Ayyanar and his mounted generals protect gardens, fields, and villages by riding each night around their perimeters to prevent the entry of evil spirits. Today you will also visit the Jain cave temples at Sittanavasal, which feature faded but still beautiful fresco-secco paintings dating from the 7 th century. | Chettinad |
| Day 11 | Morning visit to several eclectic mansions in Chettinad. In the early 20 th century, the bankers and merchants of Chettinad utilized their substantial wealth to build elaborate mansions that blend local architectural styles with European and Art Deco influences. For example, the spectacular Chettinad Palace features Italian marble, Burmese teak, Indonesian crockery, European crystal and wall-to-wall mirrors from Belgium. Afternoon visit to the mosaic tile makers of Athangudi, who create beautiful geometric and floral designs in rich tones of ochre, red, blue, brown and white. You can also hunt for treasure in the bazaars and antique markets of Karaikudi. | Madurai |
| Day 12 | Morning visit to the 17 th century Thirumalai Nayaka Palace and the immense Theppakulam water tank. The Palace, which incorporates Islamic influences, was partially restored in the 19 th century by Lord Napier, then governor of Madras. The square-shaped tank features animal- and bird-shaped balustrades leading down to the water. Afternoon walk through Madurai’s vibrant bazaars, where you can admire crafts made specifically for the region’s Hindu temples and religious festivals. In Pudhu Mandapam, you can often find <i>Muthangi</i> , which are garments made for temple deities. While they were decorated in the past with zari, pearls and precious stones, glass beads are typically used today. You can also find appliquéd textiles used to decorate temple chariots and doorways. This will be followed by a visit to the Minakshi Sundareshvara Temple, one of the most vibrant living temples in South India. This complex | Madurai |

features 12 gigantic gopuras, or towers, covered with brightly-colored deities, animals and monsters. The Thousand-Pillared Hall, now a small museum, contains 985 highly-decorated pillars; a set of pillars just outside of the hall produce the seven notes of Carnatic music when struck. The evening puja at the Minakshi temple is not to be missed.

- | | | |
|---------------|--|-----------|
| Day 13 | Morning drive to Periyar, crossing into the state of Kerala. Afternoon jungle trek through Periyar National Park, a wildlife sanctuary filled with deciduous forest, grasslands and tropical evergreens. Animals found within the park include elephants, tigers, Gaur, leopard, and Malabar squirrel, as well as a large number of birds and butterflies. | Periyar |
| Day 14 | This morning you will visit one of the many spice, tea and coffee plantations found in Periyar. After lunch at the plantation, drive to Kumarakom, arriving in time for dinner. | Kumarakom |
| Day 15 | Morning boat ride through the backwaters of Kerala. This network of waterways is home to a rural community in which water and land share equal space and importance. Besides viewing village life up close, you will float through endless rivers of water hyacinth and coconut palms, as well as the occasional roving duck farm. You will also pass a number of pastel-colored Christian churches. The Christian tradition in Kerala dates back to the 1 st century A.D. when, according to legend, the region was visited by St. Thomas shortly after the death of Jesus Christ. This afternoon you are free to relax at your hotel on Lake Vembanad, or take a leisurely walk through the Kumarakom bird sanctuary. | Kumarakom |
| Day 16 | Leisurely departure for Kochi. Afternoon walking tour of Fort Kochi. Highlights include St. Francis Church, where Vasco de Gama was buried in 1524, as well as the Dutch cemetery and Santa Cruz Cathedral. Private sunset cruise through Kochi's main harbor and waterways, where you can view Dutch, Portuguese and British-style buildings alongside traditional Chinese fishing nets and sea vessels from around the world. | Kochi |
| Day 17 | Morning visit to the Kerala Folklore Theatre and Museum, which houses an excellent collection of musical instruments, masks, costumes and woodcarvings. Your next stop is Paradesi Synagogue, one of India's oldest synagogues. The current building, which dates to 1664, features a floor made entirely out of hand-painted Chinese tiles, no two of which are alike. After lunch in a local restaurant, you are free to explore the shops and warehouses of Jew Town, which sell antiques, textiles, clothing and a wide range of souvenirs. This evening you will enjoy a dance performance featuring Kathakali, Mohiniattam, Theyyam and Kalaripayattu at Greenix Village, an arts center in Fort Kochi. | Kochi |

Day 18

Morning departure for Thrissur. Between the 13th and 19th centuries, Thrissur was ruled by a succession of powers, including the Kingdom of Kochi, the Zamorins of Kozhikode, the Portuguese, the Dutch, Tipu Sultan of Mysore, and finally the British. The city is also known as the Cultural Capital of Kerala, as it is home to the Sangeetha Nadaka Academy (music and theater), the Lalithakala Akademy (visual arts) and the Sahitya Academy (literature). Upon arrival in Thrissur, you will visit the Paramekkavu Temple, which houses a superb collection of *pooram* crafts, which are items used to decorate elephants and their mounts for temple festivals. Typical *pooram* items include *koda* (umbrellas), *nettipattam* (ceremonial forehead ornaments), *aalavattam* (peacock fans), *venchamaram* (yak wool flywhisks) and *tidambu* (ceremonial shields). The *nettipattam* are remarkably ornate, constructed of embossed copper pieces stitched to a blanket, the edges of which are decorated with multi-colored wool tassels. Afternoon visit to the 9th-century Vadakkunnathan Temple in Thrissur, a massive Kerala-style Shiva temple with superb wood carvings and decorative murals. You will also visit the Our Lady of Dolours Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, which sits on the edge of Thrissur's gold bazaar. Thrissur is the gold capital of Kerala, and is a great place to shop for silk and jewelry.

Thrissur

Day 19

This morning you will enjoy "A Day with the Masters" at the renowned Kerala Kalamandalam performing arts center. Founded in 1930 by the poet Vallathol Narayana Menon, the school offers intensive training in Kathakali, Mohiniattam and Koodiyattam, as well as South Indian instrumental and vocal traditions. You will visit the school's *Koothambalam*, a reproduction of a traditional temple theater. The theater was completed in 1976 and was designed in accordance with the *Natya Shastra*, an ancient Indian manuscript which codifies fundamental principles of dance, music and drama. You will also visit the school's art, costume and jewelry gallery, and sit in on several classes, such as Mohiniyattam, Kathakali-Vesham, make-up application or Carnatic classical music. Lunch will be in the school's canteen. Afternoon visit to the village of Killimangalam. Here you will find weavers making *kora* mats, which are finely-woven mats made from sedge grass (*Cyperus rotundus*), which grows profusely in Kerala's marshy environment.

Thrissur

Day 20

Morning visit to the metal lantern makers of Nadavaramba/Irinjalakuda. Lost-wax brass and bronze casting, particularly of oil lamps used in temples, churches and home shrines, is a specialty of Thrissur. A wide range of styles are produced, from small votives and prayer lamps used in an inner sanctum, to pillars and hanging lamps used for communal spaces. Both Hindu and Syrian Christian designs can be found, with many lamps incorporating peacocks, elephants, swans, snakes and floral designs. Afternoon visit to Kadavallur, where craftsmen create bronze

Thrissur

cooking vessels via the lost-wax method. This will be followed by a visit to the stone carvers of Kurukanpara, who make religious and household items for Hindu, Muslim and Christian families. Late afternoon visit to the Guruvayur Temple, which dates to the 16th century and is dedicated to Lord Krishna, an avatar of Vishnu. It is one of the most popular temples in Kerala, known for its large elephant sanctuary, which houses more than 50 elephants that have been “offered” to the deity by devotees.

Day 21

Full day drive to Kannur, stopping for lunch in Kozhikode. Afternoon visit to the Sargaalaya craft village in Iringal. Here you can find a number of items unique to Kerala, including palm fiber, coconut fiber and kora mat weavings and Kerala-style mural paintings. Continue driving to the coastal town of Kannur, which was an early trading post for both the Portuguese and the British. If you visit between November and April, you can experience the magic of *theyyam*. Theyyam is a drama-based form of worship found throughout the northern Malabar region of Kerala. Through tremendous mental preparation, theyyam performers literally “inhabit” certain gods and goddesses and depict them via codified actions and gestures for devotees. Theyyam originally focused on local village gods and ancestral spirits, but was later absorbed by Brahminical Hinduism. For example, the prime deity in theyyam, Muthappan, was originally a folk deity, but now is held to be a unified version of Shiva and Vishnu. The rituals borrow strongly from kalaripayattu and are accompanied by drums, pipes and cymbals. All performers are male, and they wear masks, body paint and costumes in vibrant shades of red and orange. Their *mudi*, or headgear, can be over six feet in height, thus requiring incredible skill to balance on the head.

Kannur

Day 22

Early morning walk through the vegetable and fish markets of Thalassery. Trading activity at the fish market will be booming, as fisherman show off their catches from the night before. It is not uncommon to find sharks, sting rays and other exotic species being weighed and sold to the highest bidder. After breakfast you can stroll through Thalassery’s spice market and visit a *bidi* rolling facility (hand-rolled cigarettes). At noon, you will attend the daily theyyam at the Vamal temple, during which local devotees come to ask Muthappan for his blessing. Afternoon visit to Lokenath Handloom, which makes a wide variety of shirt material, bedding and towels for sale in India and abroad. This will be followed by a visit to the 16th-century St. Angelo Fort, built out of laterite by the Portuguese.

Kannur

Day 23

Morning visit to the Parassinikadavu Temple, which is located on the bank of the Valapattanam river and is dedicated to Muthappan. This will be followed by a visit to artisans in Payyanur who make theyyam costumes, including headgear, breastplates and body

Kannur

ornaments. Due to their enormous size, lightweight materials must be used in their construction, such as bamboo and wood from the coconut and areca nut palms. Today you will also visit the Kerala Folklore Akademi in Chirakkal, which has a superb collection of theyyam costumes.

Day 24

Morning departure for Kozhikode, the site where Vasco de Gama first landed in India in 1498. Formerly known as Calicut, this city used to be a major center for the trading of spices and textiles. The term “calico,” referring to white, unbleached cotton, originated in Calicut, and the color *khaki* is purported to have been first developed here. Your first stop today will be the shipbuilding village of Beypore, where you can watch the construction of luxury teak yachts commissioned by affluent families in the Middle East. Kozhikode is also home to several beautiful mosques, as well as a robust spice market. The city is the storage and trading center for produce originating in the hill station of Wayanad to the east, such as cloves, cardamom, pepper, turmeric and coffee. These commodities are still sorted and packaged in old warehouses along the city’s waterfront.

Kozhikode

Day 25

Morning departure for the airport to catch your flight to the U.S.

Flight to U.S.

