EXPLORE! Tour Notes

PRICE GUARANTEE 100% NO SURCHARGES

South India Explorer (QDS 2016)

CULTURAL DISCOVERY

TOURDURAT
17
DAYS

Tour Style: Simply
Tour Pace: Moderate
Tour Type: Small Groups
Tour Comfort: Simple
tour Code: QDS

Tour Highlights - South India Explorer

- ✓ Mamallapuram - Discover World Heritage ruins and the colonial grandeur of Pondicherry
- ✓ Madurai - Join the worshippers at the vibrant Meenakshi Temple
- ✓ Kerala Backwaters - Cruise through the beautiful backwaters
- ✓ Kochi - Watch fishermen bring in the days catch as the sun sets
- ✓ Ooty - Ride the Toy Train and explore the hill station of the British Raj
- ✓ Hampi - Explore the temples and ruins of the ancient Vijayanagar capital
- ✓ Goa - Relax in the Portuguese influence coastal town

Tour Essentials

Accommodation:	8 nights Simple Hotel 2 nights Simple Overnight Train 5 nights Standard Hotel 1 night Simple Homestay
Included Meals:	14 breakfasts, 0 lunches, 1 dinner
Start Point:	Join tour: Chennai Airport
End Point:	Tour ends: Goa
Transport:	Bus, Train, Public Bus, Taxi
Countries:	India

South India Explorer

This overland journey from South India's Coromandel Coast to the Arabian Sea at Goa is an ideal way to meet the welcoming local people as we travel mainly by local bus, train and boat. We explore intricately carved temple complexes, cruise along the tranquil backwaters of Kerala, climb to the cool heights of the Western Ghats and spend time on tropical sandy beaches.

Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Tour Comfort: Simple

These are often small, family run establishments or campsites which provide a no-frills experience with adequate amenities and service standards. Sleeping arrangements are simple, typically with en suite facilities.

Tour Style: Simply

If your idea of adventure travel is to experience everyday local life in a country then try one of our Simply Explore tours. These grassroots adventures are flexible, affordable and fun

Tour Pace: Moderate

These moderately paced tours provide some busy days with plenty of experiences to enjoy, as well as time to relax along the way.

Your tour itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

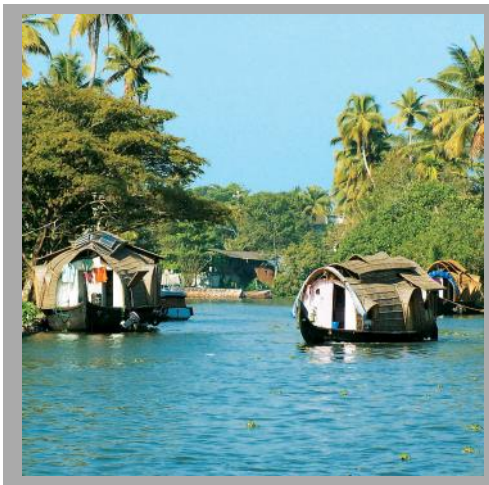
Your Tour Leader

A Tour Leader is an integral part of any Explore tour and your tour will be led by one of our experienced tour leaders who have been handpicked and expertly trained. We believe that our Tour Leaders are the key to the success of our tours; they are passionate travellers who are bursting with first-hand local knowledge which they love to share. Your tour Leader will also take care of all the planning and organisation throughout your journey. Their passionate approach will make this tour fun and inspiring, bringing the destination to life whether you're travelling alone or with others.

DAY 1 Join tour at Chennai Airport

Our tour begins at Chennai Airport. After collecting our bags we exit the airport and make our way to Mamallapuram, set 2 hours along the coast from Chennai on the shores of the Bay of Bengal.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available **Swimming Pool Available**



Included Meals: None

DAY 2 Take a walking tour to the Shore Temple of Mamallapuram

Mamallapuram was the chief harbour of the Pallavas Kingdom some 1200 years ago and a number of superb examples of its masterful carvings still exist in the so-called pagodas (actually 'rathas'). This morning there's the option to take a tour with your tour leader to view some of the areas most celebrated structures, including the 7th century Shore Temple - a UNESCO World Heritage site - and Ajuna's Penance, the world's largest bas-relief and one of the most impressive friezes in India. Although both have suffered at the hands of centuries of natural erosion, a remarkable amount of detail still remains amongst the carvings. We will also explore the fascinating reliefs of the Mandapa Cave temples and the Five Rathas, 7th century monolithic temples that were sculptured out of the very rock that surrounds them. The rest of the day is then free to enjoy some of the many attractions of the area, perhaps relaxing on the beach, or exploring by foot or bicycle.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3 Free time to explore before overnight train to Madurai

Another day in Mamallapuram offers the opportunity for some more personal exploration, with the chance to visit the either the nearby sights of Pondicherry or perhaps the Hope Foundation School at Pudipattinam. Pondicherry offers a charming mix of French colonial and Tamil heritage, whilst the school at Pudipattinam has been supported by Explore since the 2004 tsunami and is an inspiration to all who visit. Following dinner this evening we transfer to the railway station to catch the overnight train to Madurai and the cultural heartland of the Tamil and Dravidian cultures.

Overnight: **Simple Overnight Train**

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4 Time to explore Madurai's Meenakshi Temple

Arriving very early this morning, the rest of the day is free for sightseeing. Some of the options available include the stunning Tirumalai Nayaka Palace and the 16th century Meenakshi Temple, whose imposing gopurams (monumental gates) and dominating towers rise above the chaotic exuberance of the seemingly endless throngs of pilgrims. Another possibility is a visit to the exquisite Hindu Temple of Brahadeswara, a World Heritage site that encompasses some 400 years of the Chola Empire and includes within its main shrine the largest Lingham (the sacred Shiva fertility symbol) in India today. You may of course just wish to wander Madurai's vibrant streets, soaking up the colour and noise of its many bazaars and perhaps searching for a bargain or two amongst its myriad of craft and carpet shops.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: None

DAY 5 Drive across the Cardamom Hills to Quilon

Quilon lies in India's beautiful southwest, amongst the lush landscapes and hidden chan-nels of Kerala and this morning a private bus takes us across the Cardamom Hills, towards the glittering waters of the Arabian Sea. The journey will take us a good part of the day, covering some 260 kms and crossing the cool foothills of the Western Ghats, through an ever-changing landscape of plantations and verdant greenery. Quilon itself lies along the shores of Ashtamudi Lake and has long been a major trading centre in this region. Indeed, this was one of the earliest centres of Christian activity in the region and provides us with our gateway into the remarkable natural beauty of India's Arabian coast.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6 Take a motorboat through backwaters to our homestay

This morning we will cruise through the Backwaters by public motor boat from Quilon to Allepey, a journey time of some 8 hours and the perfect way to observe the colourful comings and goings on the waterways. Boats are the villagers' lifeline, acting as taxis, mail delivery, school buses and even cargo vessels. You may see great pyramids of coconuts or even the odd buffalo being carried along in this time honoured fashion! Along the narrow channels the industrious villagers survive on narrow spits of land, keeping cows, pigs, chickens and cultivating vegetable gardens. Even the shells from the fresh water mussels are burnt to make building lime, and coir is used for just about everything. This evening we stay in a traditional homestay, a fantastic opportunity to learn more about life in the Backwaters. In the late afternoon our hosts can organize a trip by traditional canoe.

Overnight: **Simple Homestay**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7 Drive to Kochi and explore the fort area

Continuing north today, we head for the bustling port of Kochi (Cochin) by private bus. With a beautiful natural harbour that earned it the title of 'Queen of the Arabian Sea', Kochi, as you might expect, was founded on trade, originally with the arrival of Jewish and Arab spice traders in the first century AD. Its prosperity and importance increased even more with the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century, to be closely followed by the Dutch and the English, an eclectic heritage that helped produce a fascinating mix of styles and influences. This afternoon we will enjoy a short orientation tour around Fort Kochi on foot. You can find the oldest church and the oldest synagogue in India amongst its winding streets. We will take in the architectural charm of the Church of St Francis, where Vasco do Gama was buried for a while, as well as the port's famous cantilevered Chinese fishing nets.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 8 Visit the Jewish Quarter or see Kathakali dancing

Today is left free to explore at your leisure. Fort Kochi is the oldest European settlement in India (1500), with a mix of English, Dutch and Portuguese architecture, making it a fascinating city to wander and discover either on foot or by auto-rickshaw . The Mattancherry Palace was built by the Portuguese in the 16th century, but extensive renovations by the Dutch some hundred years later earned it the name 'The Dutch Palace' and today it houses some of the best murals in India, depicting scenes from the Ramayana and other great legends. There is the option of taking a ferry across to nearby Ernakulam, or perhaps visiting the sumptuous grandeur of the Tripunithura Hill Palace, the impres-sive former residence of the Maharajas of Kochi. Kochi is also home to the famous Kathakali dance, thought by some to be the very essence of the culture of Kerala, por-traying as it does events from the great Indian epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Its origins may have come from traditional temple rituals and from an art form known as Koodiyattam. It is the face make up which makes this dancing so unique and dancers can take up to three hours painting their faces - the features are heavily emphasised as it is the facial expressions and co-ordinated eye movements which are important in the dance. This evening there may be an opportunity to view one of these remarkable performances for ourselves (optional).

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 9 Travel to the hill station of Ooty

A morning train to Coimbatore takes us back across the Western Ghats, towards the old hill stations of the British Raj. After the short train ride we switch to a bus and drive the remaining distance to Ooty.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 10 Take a ride on the Toy Train

Today we take a short circular journey on the 'Toy Train' the only rack and pinion railway in Asia. Pulled by steam and crossing forested hills and girder bridges, the blue and cream carriages hark back to a golden age of engineering, when seemingly no hurdle could halt the ever-expanding British Empire. The railway itself can boast an interesting array of statistics, including a gradient of 1 in 12, no fewer than 208 curves and an impressive 13 tunnels. Given the terrain over which it has to negotiate it is also probably the slowest train in the country, averaging just 10.5km an hour. Whilst traditionally the Toy Train was pulled by steam engines these days they are mostly pulled by diesel engines. The rest of the afternoon is free to explore something of Ooty's natural and colonial charms at your leisure.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 11 Travel by public bus to Mysore

Departing Ooty today we take a public bus north, to the city of Mysore, famed for its silk and sandalwood as well as its Dasara festivities. The so called 'City of Palaces', it was, until the middle years of the last century, the heart of the regal state of Mysore. Today it is renowned as the cultural capital of Karnataka. Depending upon our departure time from Ooty, there may be time later this afternoon for some exploration of the city before dinner.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 12 Discover Mysore before the sleeper train to Hospet

Today there's a chance to visit some of the cities cultural highlights, including the sumptuous grandeur of the Maharajah's Palace. Originally built in the 14th century, the palace has undergone two subsequent re-buildings (the most recent being in 1912 when the palace was redesigned by the English architect Henry Irwin). Today it is an opulent mix of Hindu and British architecture, filled with stained glass, mirrored halls and a fascinating mix of the elegant and the gaudy. The Chamundi Hills that overlook the city are home to the towering Sri Chamundeswari Temple and the giant representation of Shiva's sacred bull, Nandi, which was carved from a single piece of rock in the 17th century and is one of the largest in the country. Later today we depart the city and board the overnight train to Hospet, our gateway onto the fabulous World Heritage sites of Hampi.

Overnight: **Simple Overnight Train**

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 13 Transfer to the ancient Vijayangar capital, Hampi

Arriving in Hospet early this morning we continue on to Hampi by taxi. The flourishing capital of the Vijayanagar Kings between the 14th to 16th centuries, Hampi was once the powerbase of one of the largest Hindu empires in Indian history. The sudden destruction of the city, following the Battle of Taikota in 1565, saw it abandoned by its people, leaving behind a ruined city that, even today, still conjures up something of the spirit of its long departed occupants. This afternoon you can choose to explore something of the ruins, or just enjoy a stroll through the wonderful countryside that surrounds these ethereal structures.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: None

DAY 14 A free day to explore the ruins and temples of Hampi

At its peak, Hampi was reputedly the size of Rome, with nearly half a million people occupying its city streets. Today has been left free to explore its numerous temples and monuments, one of the most remarkable examples of South Indian Dravidian architecture anywhere in India. There are the stunning carvings that adorn the temples of Virupaksha and Vittala, the sculptured pillars of the Ramachandra Swami Shrine and the wonderful two-storied Lotus Pavilion, all providing rich testament to one of the most powerful Hindu dynasties that ever existed.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 15 Take the day train to Goa

We catch another train this morning, crossing over the Western Ghats to Margaon in Goa, the one-time Portuguese colony on the Arabian Sea. Under Alfonso de Albuquerque, the Portuguese landed here in the 16th century, capturing the original Arab trade settlement and building a city festooned with gardens and fountains, monasteries and churches, most of them sadly now gone. Goa became a rich source of trade, bringing east and west together to trade pearls and rubies, exotic spices and Chinese porcelain. This eclectic mix of cultural influences has had a marked effect on the region, with Catholicism still firmly entrenched and the Portuguese custom of afternoon siestas still widely practised in the heat of the afternoon. Food too plays a big part in Goa's heritage, with pork vindaloo being a particularly popular dish and the locally brewed feni - a spine-tingling spirit made from coconut or cashews - providing a favoured tipple.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 16 Free time to explore Panjim or relax on the beach

A free day today, you may choose to tour a spice plantation or to explore Panaji, Goa's easy going capital; a friendly,sleepy town of narrow winding streets and whitewashed shuttered houses. The Malabar beaches here are very long and very white against the turquoise waters of the Arabian Sea and close to the capital you can find the superb beaches of Gaspar Dias and Dona Paula. Please be aware though of the strong undercurrents that can make some of these offshore waters dangerous. It is also possible to explore the beautiful Goan countryside by bicycle.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 17 Tour ends in Goa

Our tour ends this morning after breakfast.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Accommodation Rating

Accommodation in India is as varied as the country itself. On our tours we stay in a mix of hotels, heritage properties, camp sites and homestays. Standards do not equate to standards in the UK and it's best to approach each type of accommodation with an open mind. Service can be slow in places especially when travelling with a group. For the most part hotels do not have heating so in the winter months it can be chilly and if you feel the cold you may wish to ask for extra blankets. Hot water is not always available 24 hours a day in some of the smaller properties, and with a group staying you might find if you are showering last you may miss out on the hottest water.

Food & Drink

Included meals: 14 breakfasts, 0 lunches,1 dinner included in the price of this tour. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide.Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

India

Lunch £: 6.00

Dinner £: 8.00

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

India

Bottle of Beer £: 1.40

Water £: 0.50

Other Sightseeing & Activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Optional Excursions

Mamallapuram Temple tour Car and entrances 500 INR, Return taxi to Pondicherrry 2150 INR, Visit to Hope School 350 INR
Madurai Meenakshi Temple entrance 5 INR, transport by tuk tuk 250INR. Gandhi Museum entrance 50 INR
Mancombo Traditional wooden canoe ride 200 INR
Kochi Harbour Boat Cruise 300 INR, Kathakali Dance 250 INR, Mattancherry Palace entrance 90 INR, Synagogue entrance 5 INR, Tripunithura Hill Palace, taxi and entrance 500 INR,
Mysore: Taxi to visit Maharajas Palace 200 INR, Palace entrance 250 INR, Chamundi Hill entrance 100 INR
Hampi: Entrance to Elephant Stables and Vittala Temple 250 INR
Goa: Spice plantation tour 350 INR

Tipping - Tour Leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Tipping - Local Crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided.Accordingly, you should allow £20 for tipping.

In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Foreign Exchange

India

ATM Availability: ATMs are available in most large cities in India but they are very limited elsewhere so please do not rely on this.

Credit Card Acceptance: Very rarely, only in the larger outlets.

Travellers Cheques: Opportunities to exchange are limited.

Local Currency: Indian Rupee

Recommended Currency for Exchange: GBP/US$ are the best currency to change into local currency.

Where to Exchange: The Indian rupee is a restricted currency and it is best not to obtain in the UK as rates are very poor. You can either change money at the airport on arrival or in major towns during the tour. Your Tour Leader will advise you on the best places in each town.

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a ‘flight inclusive’ package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the ‘Land Only’ arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific ‘Joining Instructions’ prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found on our website at www.explore.co.uk, in the tour specific dates and prices section.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer. For more information please refer to https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the ‘Land Only’ arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer please refer to https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking

at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

EXPLORE!
The Adventure Travel Experts

CAMPBELL IRVINE
DIRECT TRAVEL INSURANCE

Travel Insurance is essential. If you have not already arranged cover, please contact our recommended Travel Insurance providers www.campbellirvinedirect.com/Explore who offer Travel Insurance specifically designed to cover travel with Explore or call **Campbell Irvine Direct** on Tel: 020 7938 1734

Explore Worldwide is an Introducer Appointed Representative of Campbell Irvine Ltd who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Visa Information

India:Holders of passports endorsed 'British citizen' may be eligible for the e-Tourist Visa to enter India. The visa can be applied for through the official Indian government visa website only - https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html. Please check all eligibility criteria that can be found on the website but important points are listed below –

You must be arriving into one of 16 selected entry points, however, you can exit from any of the authorised immigration check posts in India. Entry points are – Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Goa, Kochi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Thiruvananthapuram, Jaipur, Amritsar, Gaya, Lucknow, Trichy, Varanasi and Ahmedabad.
Passports must have at least 6 months validity from the date of arrival in India and at least two blank pages for stamping.
The visa application will take approximately 4 days to process.
It is only valid for 30 days and is only allowed for a maximum of two visits in a calendar year.
The visa costs $60.
Biometric data will be collected on arrival in India.

If you are not eligible for the e-Tourist Visa, please refer to VFS Global to apply for your Indian visa - http://in.vfsglobal.co.uk/how_to_apply.html.

All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

Vaccinations & Protection

India

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against Tetanus, Infectious Hepatitis, Typhoid and Polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria (eg. Paludrine, Chloroquine, Mefloquine etc.). The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth and from your local healthcare provider.

Preparing for your Tour

Climate

India

There is considerable variation between the different regions of India but, in general, the climate is tropical. Summer temperatures on the plains are very hot, but cooled by the South-West Monsoon, which lasts from June- September. During these months it can be very wet and therefore very humid. At altitude, temperatures can become quite cool at night even in the summer and may drop below freezing between December and February so warm clothing is necessary. In the winter, northern and mid India can be very cool, with cold evenings, so warm clothing, including plenty of layers, are essential. The south of India remains warm and sunny during the winter months.

Clothing

Bear in mind that the area is tropical with high humidity. Lightweights are needed all year round with some warmer clothes for cooler evenings, particularly in winter (November-March) in the Nilgiri Hills. Due to the high chance of rain between October and December,

it is advisable to take a rain jacket or umbrella during this time. Casual clothes are the most practical: tight fitting garments, brief shorts and skirts should be avoided, since they attract unwelcome attention. Shoes must be taken off for temple visit and you must always cover up arms and legs when going inside. You may want to take an old pair of socks to the temples as the floor can get very hot and difficult to walk on.

Equipment

A torch is useful in case of powercuts/ emergencies.

Footwear

Comfortable shoes and sandals.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so please don't overload yourself. It is possible at most stations to pay porters to carry your bags to and from the train however please be aware that the costs can seem high in comparison to other services. Most train stations have several sets of stairs to reach the platforms. It is worth packing light so you can carry everything yourself.

Luggage allowance on tour: 20kg

Transport

Travelling on an Indian train is a fantastic experience, with millions using the rail network every day it is the perfect opportunity to meet local families. Due to the system for booking train tickets in India, whilst we'll try to ensure groups are as close together as possible, it may not be possible to have customers sat together in the same carriages. In such cases our Tour Leaders will help everyone to find their seats and ensure you get the most out of your journey.

In order to make reservations on Indian trains we require your full passport details. It is important that we receive these details as soon as possible so we are ready to make the arrangements as soon as train tickets are available to buy.

General Information

Country details

India

Population: 1,210,193,422

Size of Country: 3,287,263 sq km

Major Language: Hindi and English.

Religion: Catholicism, Hindu, Muslim and Sikhism

Time Difference to GMT: +5

Electric Supply & Plugs

India

3 Pin Round

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years' experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures, self-guided, private journeys & tailormade holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, or any number of unusual forms of transport . Often you will stay in family run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Our commitment to the environment

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: Toilet Twinning (helping to flush away poverty), Lone Buffalo Foundation (a community project based in Laos providing creative skills for young people), Dekamer (a turtle rescue centre in Turkey) and Kids Saving the Rainforest (a wildlife rescue centre in Costa Rica supported through the LATA foundation). We also care passionately about the world's wildlife. We are patrons of the Born Free Organisation and Friends of Conservation.

Cool Earth

Explore are proud to support Cool Earth in their effort to reduce global carbon dioxide levels through the prevention of deforestation in the South America rainforest. Cool Earth focus on areas in immediate danger of deforestation, supporting local communities to be forest guardians. To date 350,000 acres of rainforest has been protected. Saving rainforest also protects rare animals and plants, allows local forest communities to maintain their way of life, and protects a major source of oxygen and fresh water. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year.

Earth Matters

- The Travel Foundation

  Explore are active members and supporters of the Travel Foundation which has established a variety of sustainable tourism projects in destinations and works with industry to improve practice. Visit their website www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk
- Tourism Concern

  Explore support the work of Tourism Concern who campaign for fairly and ethically traded tourism, and are part of its Ethical Tour Operator Group www.tourismconcern.org.uk
- For further information on responsible travel go to www.explore.co.uk/ResponsibleTourism/

Know before you go

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link at www.explore.co.uk/travel-safety

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's LicenceÂ granted by the Civil Aviation Authority.Â Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

For Self-Guided holidays and Private Journeys simply choose your date of travel and let us know so we can confirm all ground services.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2017.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2016 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2016. 2017/18 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2017.

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