

# 15 Top Experiences



## 1 Backwaters of Kerala

It is not every day you come across scenery as sublime as Kerala's backwaters: 900km of interconnected rivers, lakes and glassy lagoons lined with lush tropical flora. And if you do, there is no better way to experience it than a few serene days spent on a teak and palm-thatched houseboat. Float along the water – while nibbling on seafood so fresh it's still almost wriggling – and forget about life on land. The distinctive houseboats cluster around the main hubs of Alappuzha, Kumarakom and Kollam (p216).



## 2 Nilgiri Mountain Railway, Ooty

The historic Nilgiri Mountain Railway (p419) is a must-see for lovers of locomotives. The toy train, a Unesco World Heritage Site, is steeped in old-world charm. Sit by the window, and enjoy the ride from Ooty (p416) to

Mettupalayam as the train snakes over bridges, goes through small tunnels, and chugs past small and picturesque stations. The journey from Coonoor (p419) to Mettupalayam (41km) has delightful views; so try not to miss this glorious stretch.



## 3 Konkan Coast Drive

The coastal stretch of Karnataka is breathtaking, especially if you drive along its beaches. Still raw and untouched, the pristine coastline has several worthy stops. Start from the northern-most beach destination, Gokarna (p150) and wind your way down the coast, making pit stops at Murudeshwar, from where you can detour to Netrani Island, Baindur, Maravanthe, Malpe in Udupi (p137) and Tannir Bavi close to Mangalore (p136). From rocky outcrops to large stretches of clean brown sand, busy beaches to secluded spots, the topography is charmingly diverse.

# South India at a Glance

*With their ability to inspire, thrill and confound all at once, these four states present an extraordinary spectrum of travel experiences. From a gorgeous coastline running thousands of kilometres, lush landscapes, tea and coffee plantations to ancient temples with grand architecture they will leave you spellbound.*



## KARNATAKA P50

Karnataka offers culture, history and art, and doffs its hat to modernity with a chilled beer.



## KERALA P188

From backwaters, beaches and historic towns to spice and tea plantations, Kerala's exotic locations are a treasure to explore.

Thiruvananthapuram



## ANDHRA PRADESH P446

With unexplored beaches, hills, ancient temple towns, handicraft hubs and buzzing cities, Andhra Pradesh presents a huge variety.

Hyderabad

Bengaluru

Chennai



## TAMIL NADU P290

Temple towns, historic beaches, traditional arts and famous cuisine – sample the colours and taste of Tamil Nadu.





# Tamil Nadu

## Why Go?

Tamil Nadu remains proudly distinct from the rest of India, welcoming visitors with its wealth of history and culture. Towering temple architecture is the state's greatest drawcard. The temples at **Madurai**, **Rameswaram**, **Tiruchirappalli**, **Chidambaram**, **Kanchipuram** and **Rameswaram** are magnificent in size, grandeur and sculptural elegance as are the Chola temples of **Thanjavur**, **Kumbakonam** and **Mamallapuram** that are world heritage monuments. Escape the heat of the state's scorching plains to the Western Ghats and go to hill stations like **Ooty**, **Coonoor**, **Kotagiri**, **Kodaikanal** and **Valparai**.

This state is home to the bustling capital of **Chennai**, the blue shoreline of the Coromandal Coast and the former French colony **Puducherry**. Halt at the very end of India in **Kanyakumari** where mighty seas and an ocean mingle over spectacular sunsets.

Close-by is the the Union Territory of **Andaman and Nicobar Islands**. These islands are jewels in the middle of the Bay of Bengal, offering pristine beaches and underwater adventures.

## Getting There & Away

**Air:** Chennai, Coimbatore, Tiruchirappalli and Madurai are Tamil Nadu's four most important airports connected via daily flights to all metros and major cities. While Chennai has daily flights to overseas destinations, Tiruchirappalli, Madurai and Coimbatore have limited international services.

**Train:** Main cities in Tamil Nadu are well connected to the metros of India. The key railheads are at Chennai, Coimbatore, Erode, Tiruchirappalli, Madurai and Salem. Visit the official railway website [www.irctc.co.in](http://www.irctc.co.in) for more information.

■ Colourful fishing boats and the Vivekananda Memorial at the backdrop in Kanyakumari

# Top Highlights



## 1 Shore Temple, Mamallapuram

Against the timeless waves of Mamallapuram stands the splendour of the Shore Temple (p318). A symbol of Pallavan architecture and maritime influence across the seas, the Shore Temple is a stunning example of a coastal monument. Its towering presence transforms a usual beachside into one that is grand and majestic with a sense of history. Settle on the sands by dusk and watch the darkening silhouette of this monolith against the backdrop of the



## 2 Tranquebar

Located close to Puducherry, this is a quiet, orderly, pretty town set on a long sandy beach with a few fishing boats. Tranquebar (p327) was a former colony of the Dutch, who used it as a trading hub before selling it to the British, and remnants of Danish heritage are scattered all over. The most imposing of these is Fort Dansborg which dates back to 1624. Tranquebar is also home to some pretty churches. This is one of the towns which was struck by the devastating

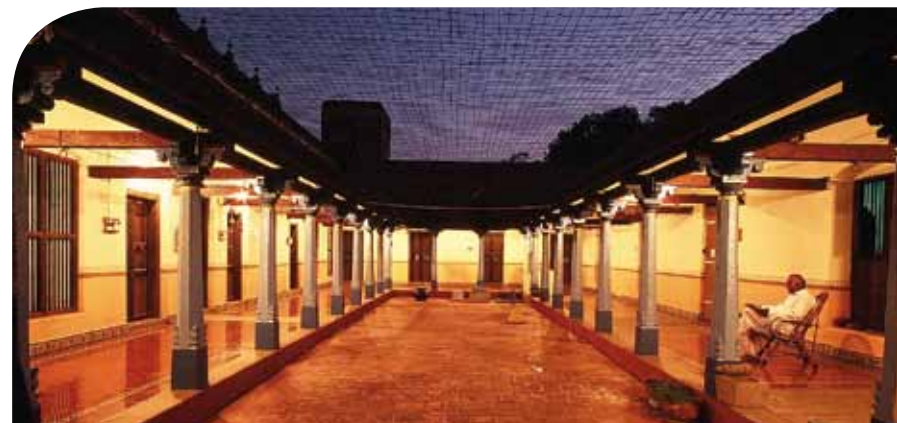
## 3 Tea Tasting, Coonoor

When a sea of green mossy bushes is all you can see for miles, you know that a hot cup of tea is close by. To taste different varieties of tea in the Nilgiris, head to Highfield Tea Estate (p421) in Coonoor. Free samples are given at the end of a tour to all visitors. Though more formal tea tasting rooms have not permeated the region yet, Tranquillitea (p425) homestay in Coonoor organises a session for their guests with veteran tea planters taking you through the subtle nuances of different varieties.



## 4 Chettinadu Mansions

The entire Chettinadu region is dotted with huge, lavish mansions (p363) built by one of the wealthiest communities, the Chettiars. Think Burmese teak wood pillars, Japanese tiles and Belgian glass. A typical mansion has a series of courtyards of varying sizes flanked by rooms on all sides. At the entrance usually stands a beautifully carved teak wood door. Go beyond it and you can see till the end of the house as all the doors are concentric. One of the most lavish mansions is the Raja's Palace in Kanadukathan village. Many of them have been converted into hotels.





# Thanjavur & Kumbakonam

A visit to Thanjavur and the Kaveri delta area is a must if you wish to understand Tamil culture. This is where it all started: the music, dance, temple architecture, paintings, sculptures, literature and a lifestyle that was based on agricultural prosperity. Neighbouring Kumbakonam has around 188 temples that will demand a two-day stay for a temple tour.

## Trip Planner

### GETTING THERE

**Thanjavur:** The closest airport is Tiruchirappalli (50km) which has daily flights from Chennai. From Thanjavur Junction daily trains run to Chennai, Tiruchirappalli, Rameswaram, Bengaluru, and other cities. Private buses ply from Chennai, Tiruchirappalli, Chidambaram and Madurai.

**Kumbakonam:** This town is 40km from Thanjavur and 100km from Tiruchirappalli airport. Kumbakonam railway station is connected via daily trains to major cities and towns.

### SUGGESTED ITINERARY (4 DAYS)

Spend the first day visiting the temples and monuments in the town. The next day you can visit the surrounding areas. After this make your way to Kumbakonam. Even though it is a small town you can spend two days on a temple trail.

### BEST TIME TO GO

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### GREAT FOR



## Top 5 highlights

- **Brihadeeswarar Temple, Thanjavur** (p338)
- **Shivaganga Fort, Thanjavur** (p339)
- **Royal Palace & Museums, Thanjavur** (p340)
- **Swamimalai** (p341)
- **Temple Tour, Kumbakonam** (p340)



# Cultural Capital



**Thanjavur** is one of the major towns in the Delta area and the capital of the district of the same name. At first glance it is like any other bustling, dusty town, but look again and you find signs of its past greatness everywhere. The ruins of forts, palaces and ramparts, the cultural medley of the many communities that live here and the presence of dance and music even in the street displays are testimony to this.

Legend goes that it was named after a demon called Thanjan, who was slayed by Lord Vishnu on the banks of the Kaveri. Prosperity gave the people here the luxury of exploring the finer aspects of life. Once known as the 'rice bowl' of Tamil Nadu, the Kaveri delta is now drying up.

Apart from its fabulous temples **Kumbakonam** has an aura that derives from its antiquity and reputation as a seat of secular and spiritual studies. The acerbic wit of its inhabitants lends an invigorating presence to the town.

Bharatanatyam performances take place regularly at Brihadeeswarar Temple