



retreat | recreate

South India Textiles & Handcrafts: 9-23 February 2026

Trip Notes as at 4 JAN 2026

Welcome to our brand new South India Textiles and Handcrafts tour. This tour has been designed to feature the textile arts and handcrafts of the cities, villages and regions we are privileged to visit within the deeper context of India's history, art, architecture, spirituality, aesthetics and rich cultural heritage. Please refer to the itinerary for a day to day run down of activities and tour details. These Trip Notes function as a kind of FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) and should be read in conjunction with the tour itinerary.

This tour will be accompanied by retreat|recreate host, Susan Keeble. Our English-speaking tour leader in India will be confirmed closer to departure.

Itinerary disclaimer

Some changes to the itinerary may occur due to inclement weather, timetable changes or circumstances beyond our control. While we do our best to prevent this from happening, it may be unavoidable. It can also happen with little notice, so please bear with us if we have to make modifications to the itinerary.

Please note: this itinerary was developed many months prior to departure. Accordingly, we may make slight amendments depending on the planned activities and venues as they are confirmed closer to departure or if any of our activities need to changes days or dates. We'll always let you know of any proposed changes to this itinerary.

Is this trip suitable for you?

This trip is for fit, active (see fitness requirement below), adventurous, textile and handcraft enthusiasts. You don't need to be an artist or an accomplished, experienced textile or handcraft practitioner. If you're curious about the world, have an interest in the art of hand-made, are keen to explore traditional Indian culture, you understand the importance of being a generous and tolerant group member, you are a courteous and aware traveller who is respectful of local etiquette, traditions, beliefs and customs, and you value socially responsible travel, this is the trip for you!

Health, fitness and mobility

Please carefully and realistically consider your mobility and health when determining if this trip is right for you.

The itinerary is full to ensure value for money, however there are some brief free periods. All travellers need to be in good

physical health and have good fitness and mobility to participate fully on this trip. This trip is not for you if your health, fitness and mobility are compromised or you use mobility aids.

Due to recent experiences on some tours, we have made the decision to require all travellers to submit a **Fitness to Travel declaration** together with their Booking Application form, to ensure all travellers are physically suited to our tours. We reserve the right to decline an application if we deem your fitness or mobility levels to be a detriment to your own and others' satisfactory participation in the tour. The specific physical requirements for this tour are outlined on the Fitness to Travel declaration and below:

All participants must be able to:

- Navigate arrival and departure airports without personal assistance
- Carry their luggage for short distances
- Embark and disembark coaches, jeeps, rickshaws and trains without assistance
- Manage flights of stairs at a moderate pace without assistance. Not all of our hotels have elevators and ground floor rooms are sometimes not available or cannot be guaranteed. Some sightseeing locations (eg. forts and stepwells) also have flights of stairs
- Undertake walking tours including walking on uneven, hilly and possibly muddy terrain
- Walk at a moderate pace and keep up with the rest of the group
- Cope with warm to hot and sometimes humid weather
- Stand for extended periods of time in galleries and museums
- Use squat toilets as western toilets are not always available at the villages we visit and at some road-side stops
- Cope with some long travel days and some consecutive travel days. Most of our road travel is in a private air-conditioned coach. Regular stops will be made for bathrooms, meals, sightseeing and photographic opportunities
- Be prepared to travel on some rural roads which can sometimes be a bit bumpy and dusty. Some of the roads we encounter may not be maintained in as good condition as those you're used to at home and others don't have concrete/bitumen

- Be patient as distances are not necessarily indicative of travel times, road conditions can slow us down and travel can sometimes take longer than expected.
- Use bath over shower facilities, as walk-in showers cannot be guaranteed
- Sit on a low stool or the floor for some workshops
- be courteous, aware, respectful and observant of local etiquette, traditions, beliefs and customs
- Be able to satisfactorily participate in the full tour program as described

This tour offers a range of immersive experiences. Some experiences are not readily available to the average tourist and we will occasionally venture off the standard tourist trail. While this is not an adventure tour, a 'sense of adventure' is required.

- The minimum age is 18 years at the time of travel
- If you are prone to motion sickness, you should consider how you might manage this. Sitting by a window and/or using motion sickness bracelets, ginger tablets, Kwell tablets and Travacalm tablets are measures that have assisted our previous tour participants greatly.
- You must carry your own personal first aid kit at all times - paracetamol, bandaids, anti-nausea pills, hydration salts, Imodium tablets, RAT tests etc in addition to any personal medications or other requirements (eg spare prescription spectacles). For legal reasons the retreat|recreate host and tour leader are prohibited from dispensing any type of drugs including antibiotics and headache tablets. Please purchase and carry adequate quantities of all personal and travel medications as suitable substitutes are not always available outside your home country. Please ensure that you are personally and adequately prepared as flights, bus trips, lots of walking, warm weather and unfamiliar food can take their toll.
- retreat|recreate is able to provide general advice on mandatory health requirement, however we are not medical experts. It is your responsibility to consult your doctor or travel health expert at least two months prior to departure for up-to-date medical information and for the latest health, vaccination and anti-malarial requirements and recommendations for your destination.
- While vaccinations such as hepatitis A and typhoid will apply to most travellers, other vaccines such as hepatitis B, rabies, meningitis and cholera may also apply. Some vaccines require more than one dose so arrange your medical appointment at least 4-6 weeks before travel. TMVC clinics are recommended for travellers from Australia and New Zealand. www.traveldoctor.com.au
- We strongly recommend that all travellers are up to date with their routine vaccinations such as tetanus, diphtheria, measles/mumps/rubella, polio and influenza.
- You should be issued with an International Certificate or Vaccination booklet that records each vaccination. Always carry this with you on your travels.
- As of 2025, there is no longer a requirement for our travellers in India to be vaccinated against Covid-19, however we strongly recommend all our travellers are up to date with the recommended Covid-19 vaccination schedule.
- If you are unwell prior to travelling, please stay at home and contact us to make alternative arrangements.

- We ask all travellers to monitor their health throughout the trip and report any symptoms of any illness to the host and/or guide immediately.
- If you feel unwell or exhibit flu, cold or covid-like symptoms while on tour, you will be required to take precautionary measures to reduce the risk of transmission, including wearing a mask.
- Mosquito-borne illnesses: Malaria, dengue fever, Japanese encephalitis, chikungunya fever, Zika and filariasis occur in India. Take preventative measures such as wearing long clothing, using repellent, and being indoors particularly around dusk and dawn. Consult a medical professional regarding prophylaxis against malaria according to the itinerary and season of travel.
- Air pollution levels in some parts of India can spike to hazardous levels. If you suffer from asthma or other respiratory conditions, please carry your medication with you at all times. Those with pre-existing medical conditions, particularly heart and lung conditions, may be especially affected. All travellers are encouraged to pack face masks as a precaution. You can check the pollution index levels for many Indian cities at the following website: <http://safar.tropmet.res.in/>

Included activities

Included activities are those specifically listed in the itinerary; any marked as optional are at an additional cost. Activities not outlined in the itinerary are at your own expense and are undertaken at your own risk. None of the activities on the itinerary are compulsory however if you wish to take time off from the scheduled itinerary the cost of those activities will not be refunded. Of course, we hope you'll enjoy and participate in our itinerary.

Accommodation

We aim to provide an authentic, memorable and insightful experience of the incredible places we visit as well as a glimpse into India's diverse culture, colourful history, and impressive architecture. Accordingly, we have carefully selected boutique and heritage venues. The hotels on this trip are in 3, 4 and 5 star categories according to Trip Advisor. All are more than comfortable, but please don't expect luxury. We'll spend 7 nights in 5 star hotels, 4 nights in 4 star hotels, 2 nights in 3 star hotels (the best available in smaller towns) plus 1 night on a deluxe houseboat.

All of our lodgings including the houseboats (day 12) have ensuite bathrooms. Several of our hotels have swimming pools. The names of our hotels will be provided to participants closer to departure. On rare occasions, alternative arrangements may need to be made due to circumstances beyond our control. A similar standard of accommodation will be arranged in these instances.

Heritage hotels are a wonderful way to experience Indian hospitality harking back to the days of the Maharajah. Please be aware that each room is unique, bathrooms have often been retrofitted, some rooms are bigger than others or have different views or outlooks and we may occasionally be allocated some rooms without windows. These properties are different from a standard hotel and thus may not have some mod cons such as televisions and elevators.

Accommodation is on a twin share basis. The single supplement is applicable if you prefer your own room.

Twin rooms (with two beds) may sometimes be in limited supply at some of our accommodation venues. Twin rooms are sometimes smaller than single occupancy (1 bed) rooms. Should the demand for twin rooms exceed availability at any of our tour hotels, some twin share guests (starting with those who booked last) may need to stay in single rooms at those hotels. In this case, a pro rata single supplement will apply to those nights. Please be assured that we will do our best to accommodate all room requests where possible.

Solo travellers can elect to share a twin room for the duration of the tour and we will do our best to pair you up with another solo traveller. Note however that if an uneven number of solo guests book this tour, the last to book will need to pay the single supplement.

If you are considering sharing a twin room with another guest, please consider whether you will be able to cope with another person's potential snoring or different understanding of personal space and quiet. Please be brutally honest with yourself about your capacity to share a room with a stranger as well as your suitability as a roommate. Be sure to read our tips for room sharing at <https://retreatrecreate.com/room-sharing-tips-and-suggestions/> Unless twin share travellers book together, we'll rotate our twin share solo guests each time we move hotels so they each have a chance to share with others.

Pre and post-tour accommodation

We strongly recommend that you extend your stay both before and after the tour to allow time for recovery from flights, different time zones and to explore independently and pursue your own interests. Our itinerary is focussed on textiles and handcrafts. While some general tourist activities are included, we can't include everything. To this end we offer our India travellers a small selection of optional pre-tour programs. You are of course welcome to plan and arrange your own pre/post tour activities such as cooking classes, gallery and museum visits, forts, temples etc. A list of suggested activities will be provided to participants closer to departure.

Additional pre tour accommodation at our Chennai hotel and post tour accommodation at our Kochi hotel may be booked through us prior to departure at additional cost (subject to availability). You're welcome to arrange your own pre/post-tour accommodation. Options include using your preferred travel agent, Airbnb or online sites like www.booking.com. Further information on our meeting point and finishing point hotels and additional pre/post tour prices will be provided upon confirmation of your tour booking.

Note: If you book pre-tour accommodation at a hotel other than our starting point hotel, your arrival transfer may not be included. Please check with us before making your booking if an arrival transfer is important to you. If you book pre-tour accommodation elsewhere, you will need to make your own way (at your own cost) from your chosen accommodation to our tour hotel in time for our 6pm welcome meeting on day 1 of our tour.

Check in time at our Chennai hotel is 14:00 hours. If you arrive before 14:00 hrs and your room isn't ready, hotel reception staff can assist with storing your luggage. Check-out time at our Kochi hotel is generally 11:00 hours. If your flight from Kochi departs later in the day, our hotel can assist with storing your luggage until your departure. Should you require early check-in at our Chennai hotel on your day of arrival or late check-out at our Kochi hotel on your day of departure, additional charges will apply.

Flights

Flights to and from India are not included in the trip price. Please don't book flights until you've received confirmation that you have a place on the tour, have paid your deposit and received confirmation that the trip is confirmed as proceeding. Information on booking flights and a Travel Details Form will be forwarded for completion once we have our minimum group size.

Arrival flights should **arrive at Chennai International Airport (MAA) no later than midday on 9 February 2026.** We

strongly recommend that you arrive at least a day or two in advance to allow for possible flight delays and recovery from travelling from a different time zone or on an overnight flight. **Please be sure your plans for 9 February allow you to be on time for our 6pm welcome meeting.**

Departure flights should **depart from Kochi international Airport (COK).** Our tour finishes on the morning of **23 February 2026.** There are no activities planned for that day and you are welcome to depart at any time.

If you are not confident booking your own flights or buying travel insurance online, you may wish to seek the advice and assistance of your preferred local travel agent.

Airport Transfers

Your arrival airport transfer in Chennai **is included** in the tour cost. Details of your arrival transfer will be provided closer to departure. Chennai airport (MAA) is 14km and approximately a 30-40 minute drive from our starting point hotel, although travel time is somewhat dependent on traffic conditions and the trip can take longer in peak traffic.

Departure airport transfers in Kochi are NOT included in your trip cost. We can assist you with pre-booking a departure transfer at an additional cost. Alternatively, you are welcome to arrange your own departure transfer – our hotel reception team can assist you with this if required.

Please note: any unused pre-paid arrival and departure transfers will not be refunded.

Transport

Most of the travel on this tour will be by private air-conditioned coach, but will also include short trips via manual rickshaw and auto-rickshaw and an evening on a houseboat.

Main roads in India are usually very busy with an assortment of vehicles from the biggest trucks (which always have right of way) down to bikes (and cows, goats, chickens and dogs). The use of the horn is a form of communication between drivers.

The drivers engaged by our tour operator are experienced and well trained. Our leaders have complete authority to remove groups from local transport if the driver is not driving safely. If you are uncomfortable with your driver, please always let your tour leader know in the first instance. Please always wear a seatbelt where available.

Please be prepared for some long travel days, sometimes over consecutive days. On longer travel days, regular stops will be made for meals, bathrooms, sightseeing and photos. Distances in India do not reflect the driving time. Patience and a sense of humour are required. Meal breaks may sometimes be delayed, depending on our location and the availability of suitable restaurants. Some snacks and drinks will be provided on our private coach however we recommend that you bring your own additional preferred snacks. You may also wish to be prepared with your own music, podcasts, small handcraft project or reading material.

Auto Rickshaws, e-rickshaws and manual rickshaws: For short journeys we may use a local style of transport called an auto rickshaw. E-rickshaws (with rechargeable batteries) are becoming more common and we will endeavour to engage these over the petrol-fuelled type where possible. These small, motorised and person-powered three wheeled vehicles are a common form of transport in India and do not have seatbelts.

Meals

In India, food is a way of life. You can snack for a bargain or dine in the finest restaurants. Generally, you can eat fairly cheaply in India. There's a choice of restaurants and street stalls serving traditional and local Indian food. In South India, rice is the staple with dishes such as dosa, idli, sambar and a variety of coconut-based curries available. Spices and tamarind are used in most dishes. There's likely to be less variety available outside the main cities. Please note, service in restaurants (especially with a large group) can be quite slow, so patience is a must.

Several lunches and dinners are not included in the tour price, giving guests the flexibility to set their own budget. However, we will frequently eat together as a group, particularly lunches, as we move from a morning activity to an afternoon activity. Please refer to the itinerary document for details of included meals.

Our local tour leader will be able to direct you toward restaurants that have appropriate hygiene standards and suit your dietary requirements. Our local tour leader will endeavour to cater for specific dietary requirements however we recommend that you carry extra snacks in case suitable options are limited. If you suffer from particular food allergies, our local tour leader will endeavour to disclose to their fullest knowledge the main ingredients in dishes being consumed, however it is your personal responsibility to ensure that you do not ingest any foods to which you are allergic.

Vegetarians and vegans are well catered for in India, with most restaurants offering a vegetarian and vegan section of the menu. Some restaurants only offer vegetarian food.

Some tips that will help you stay well when eating in India include:

- Stick to restaurants and street stalls that are busy with locals
- Wash your hands before eating (most restaurants will have a hand-basin or bathroom) or use a sanitising hand gel.
- Give yourself a few days to get used to local food, especially spicy food
- If in doubt, stick to vegetarian food
- Avoid salads and peel fruit to avoid eating anything that may be washed in local water
- Fresh lime and soda is an excellent and affordable drink. It comes in salty, sweet and plain versions (and tastes better than most hydration powders).
- Drink more masala chai!

Water

It's not safe to drink tap water in India. It's also advisable to use filtered water when brushing your teeth and avoid ice in drinks unless you're dining at a reputable venue.

For environmental reasons, try to avoid buying bottled water. Bring a reusable water bottle and re-fill with filtered water. The hotels at which we stay provide bottled filtered drinking water in each guest room. Our private coach will also carry 20 litre containers of filtered water from which you may refill your own drink bottle. You may also wish to invest in a water bottle with its own filter eg: <https://grayl.com/> <https://www.fill2purefilters.com.au/>

Toilets

All our accommodation venues have western toilets, but it is likely that you may encounter squat toilets during your travels, particularly in public places and in rural areas. Public toilets are most easily found in major cities and tourist sites and the cleanest toilets (usually, but not always, with sit-down and squat choices) are most reliably found at modern restaurants, shopping complexes and cinemas. Beyond urban centres, toilets are generally of the squat variety. It's always advisable to carry your own toilet paper/wipes and hand sanitiser. At some public toilets, the attendant may expect a small fee (Rs20-50).

The issue of toilets and what to do with used toilet paper is not always clear. Some sewage systems can't handle toilet paper, so if there's a waste-paper basket next to the toilet, that is where the toilet paper goes. If there's no basket, then flush toilet paper down the toilet.

Workshops and hands-on activities

The hands-on handcraft activities included in this itinerary are not necessarily formal classes with trained teachers. They're more about genuine person to person interactions, cultural exchange and learning directly from authentic, traditional artisans (sometimes masters) at their workplace, village or home, in their own style.

Safety

- Many national governments provide a regularly updated advice service on safety issues, news, travel restrictions, entry requirements etc involved with international travel. We recommend that you check your government's advice for their latest travel information prior to your departure.

- Our tour leader has the authority to amend or cancel any part of the itinerary if it is deemed necessary due to safety concerns.
- We strongly recommend the use of a neck wallet or money belt for the safe keeping of your money, passport, air tickets and other valuable items. Please leave valuable jewellery at home.
- Not all of the hotels at which we stay have a safety deposit box for your valuables. A lock is recommended for securing your luggage.
- To reduce the risk of pick-pocketing and petty theft, we recommend that you exercise caution when walking alone and encourage you to walk together and only on main, well-lit thoroughfares at night. Be particularly vigilant on public transport and avoid catching public transport at night. Simple measures like carrying your day pack on your front, not hanging your bag over the back of your chair and wearing a money belt or neck wallet will reduce the chance that your valuables should go missing.
- Traffic and driving conditions: Depending on where you come from, note that drivers in India may drive on the opposite side of the road to what you're used to and traffic can be a little more chaotic. Look both ways before crossing any road. Stay alert!
- Seat belts: Please be aware that local laws governing transportation safety may differ from those in your home country and not all the transport which we use provides seat belts. Where seatbelts are available, please use them.
- Fire Precautions: Please be aware that local laws governing tourism facilities differ from those in your home country and not all of the accommodations we use have fire exits, fire extinguishers or smoke alarms.
- Swimming pools: You may stay at hotels with unfenced pools and no lifeguard on duty.
- Heritage hotels: During this trip, we will be staying in some charming heritage properties - one of the many highlights of this trip. Occasionally the staircases, balconies, passages, door heights etc in these restored buildings don't necessarily comply with western safety standards. As many of these properties are preserved in their original state, elevators are not always available
- Our tour leader and host will accompany the group on all included activities however you'll also have some free time to pursue your own interests, relax or explore at your leisure. While your leader and host may assist you with the available options in a given location, any optional activities you undertake are not part of your itinerary and Vedic Walks and retreat|recreate make no representations about the safety of the activity or the standard of the operators running them. Please use your own good judgement when selecting an activity in your free time. The decision to partake in any activity which is not part of the itinerary is at your own discretion and risk.

Travel insurance

Travel insurance IS NOT included in the trip price and is mandatory for all travellers on our tours. We require that, at a minimum, you are covered for medical expenses including emergency repatriation. We strongly recommend that the policy also covers cancellation, personal liability, Covid-19 related scenarios as far as possible, curtailment and loss of luggage and personal effects. You will not be able to join the tour until evidence of travel insurance and the insurance

company's 24-hour emergency contact number have been provided.

We recommend that you take out travel insurance as soon as you pay your deposit. Insurers will generally allow you to adjust the dates for which you are covered, however if you extend the period for which you are covered, additional charges will apply. Some insurers may charge an amendment fee. Be sure to carefully note the circumstances under which your chosen insurer will cover you for cancellation.

Passports and Visas are the responsibility of the individual traveller. Please ensure the name on your passport matches the name on your booking and airline tickets. Your passport must be valid for at least 6 months beyond the duration of your trip and have at least two blank pages. Please note that visa requirements, eligibility and fees can change at any time. It's important that you check the latest information, specific to your nationality, with the Indian consulate in your home country.

An **e-Tourist Visa (eVT)** is available for holders of passports for a number of countries. The eVT facility allows travellers to pre-register and pay for their visa prior to travel to India. Please refer to the official eVT website below, noting the strict conditions regarding eligibility, visa fees, required documents and travel restrictions:

<https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/tvoa.html>.

Note: Other non-official websites are also in operation. If you choose to use a party other than the official website above to process your e-visa, you do so at your own risk.

30 day eVisas are valid for entry within 30 days of your application, for a stay of up to 30 days. We recommend you only apply for your eVisa 28 days or less prior to your arrival (at the earliest) and no later than 7 days prior to arrival. You must enter India before your Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) expires. If you intend to stay in India for more than 30 days, visas for longer durations are available. Check the website above for relevant conditions and fees. Closer to departure, participants will be provided with detailed instructions to assist with their eVisa application.

All foreign travellers are required to complete a **digital arrival card** within 72 hours prior to their arrival in India at <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/earrival/>

Money

- The official currency of India is the Indian Rupee (INR).
- As at March 2025 INR 1000 = USD11.70 = AUD18.60 = EUR10.74 = NZD20.46 = CAD16.76
- For up to the minute currency exchange rates, download the XE app to your smart phone (before you leave home).
- Cash: The most convenient and cheapest way to obtain local currency in India is via Automated Teller Machines (ATM) which are readily available in most towns. Our tour operator has advised that Bank of India or ICICI ATMs are the most reliable ATMs for withdrawals. Foreign currency notes that are old, torn or faded can be difficult to exchange, so please bring clean bills. Small denominations are most useful.
- The Indian rupee is a closed currency and foreigners are only permitted to bring a small quantity of rupees in to India. Check for updates at <https://www.nrguides.com/indian-customs-rules-for->

carrying-cash/. It's unlikely that you'll be able to exchange rupees in your home currency. Once you arrive in India, use your debit/credit card at an airport ATM to withdraw INR or exchange your own currency for INR at the foreign exchange desk.

- **Credit Cards:** The use of credit cards is restricted mainly to major hotels, shops and establishments.
- **Spending Money:** Every traveller is different and therefore spending money requirements will vary. Please consider your own spending habits when allowing for extra meals, drinks, shopping, additional sightseeing, optional activities, laundry, gifts, souvenirs, porter charges (airports and railway stations), camera fees, tipping and for emergency funds in case of delays. It's always better to allow for a little more than you think you'll need.
- **Contingency/Emergency funds:** We try to plan for every eventuality, however there are still some things beyond our control. Please make sure you have access to an extra US\$700/AU\$1000 for emergencies (eg. severe weather, natural disasters, civil unrest) or other events that result in unavoidable changes to the itinerary (e.g. transport strikes or cancellations, airport closures). Sometimes these things necessitate last minute changes to enable our trips to continue, and as a result there may be some extra costs involved.
- **Gratuities and tips:** If you are happy with the services provided, a tip is appropriate. At our group welcome meeting, our local tour leader will discuss the idea of running a group tipping kitty whereby everybody contributes an equal amount and our tour leader pays the tips on behalf of the group (for all group activities), while keeping a running record of all monies spent (except restaurant tips). The amount to budget for the tipping kitty is approximately INR9000 per person (TBC). The tipping kitty INCLUDES on-tour hotel porters, reception, cleaners and wait staff, restaurant wait staff for included meals, specialist guides, workshop leaders and drivers.
- The tipping kitty DOES NOT include a tip for our local tour leader so you may wish to set aside some funds for this. It is customary to tip your tour leader at the end of the tour, for outstanding service provided throughout your trip. We suggest around INR700-850/USD8-10/AUD12-15/EUR7-9/GBP6-8/NZ13-16 per person, per day. You are free to tip our guide more or less as you see fit, depending on your perception of service quality.
- The tipping kitty DOES NOT include tipping for your pre/post tour activities, accommodation, meals and transport and any activities or meals not taken with the group. Small notes of local currency make tipping easier. The following is a rough tipping guide for your pre/post-tour and independent activities not covered by the tipping kitty:
 - A private driver or tour guide for a full day: the equivalent of USD3-5 per person (INR 200-250).
 - Some restaurant bills will include a service fee, but otherwise tip 10-15% of the bill
 - For luggage porters at hotels, a small tip of INR 50 is reasonable.
 - For hotel housekeeping staff (pre/post-tour), leave INR20-30 under the pillow each morning.
 - For arrival and departure airport transfers, a reasonable tip is INR 200 – 500 per transfer.

Commissions

As in many countries, the receipt of commissions or kickbacks in exchange for recommending particular shops, services or activities is ingrained in the culture of the Indian tourism industry. In an effort to best control and monitor shopping and activities with an aim for the best possible experience, our guide has curated a small number of carefully selected shopping experiences and activities based on positive feedback from previous travellers. On occasion these will be as part of included walking tours or occasionally outside of included activities in free time. Please be assured that if you prefer not to join in on any shopping experiences there is no obligation to do so. If you do attend, be assured you are not under any obligation to buy.

Phone and internet

We require all our travellers to have data/internet access throughout the day (ie. not just at night at our hotels) to allow phone contact with the guide, host and fellow guests, for access to online maps, and in case anyone gets separated from the group and requires assistance. We use a WhatsApp group for this purpose during the tour and to share messages and reminders of meeting times/places etc. You will be requested to join the WhatsApp app about a week prior to departure. Please ensure you install WhatsApp at least one week prior to departure.

We recommend a couple of options for internet access:

1. Purchase an e-SIM, eg HolaFly or Airalo.
 - If you opt for an Airalo e-SIM, feel free to use the code SUSAN1062 to receive a small discount.
 - If you opt for a Holafly e-SIM, feel free to use this [link](#) to receive a small discount.
2. Purchase a global roaming package from your mobile/cell provider before you leave home.
3. Rent a 'pocket wifi' device – a quick google will show you several companies that offer this and you can arrange for the device to be delivered to your first hotel.

Note that if you need to download or update any smartphone apps for use in India, you should do so before you leave home as your local App Store doesn't always work in other countries.

Group leader and host

This tour will be accompanied by a local English-speaking tour leader and a retreat|recreate host. The aim of the guide and host is to take the hassle out of your travels and help you have the best trip possible. Your tour leader will provide information on the areas we visit and suggestions for things to do and see and recommend great local eating venues. The retreat|recreate host will provide suggestions of craft and textile-based activities, venues, shopping locations and experiences additional to those included in the itinerary. A list of these additional recommended shops, galleries/museums and activities will be provided closer to departure.

Weather and climate

February is the dry season in South India. Days are warm and sunny with temperatures ranging between 22-32C. Rain is unlikely.

What to bring

Closer to departure, participants will receive a suggested packing list. Generally speaking, you should pack as lightly as possible as you will be expected to manage your own luggage. It is recommended that you start with no more than 15kg checked in luggage. It is also essential that you check the weight and dimensions of luggage allowed by the airline(s) with whom you'll be flying.

Basic requirements are:

- One lockable suitcase with wheels or a medium sized back-pack is ideal.
- A daypack/backpack to carry water, sunscreen, medical kit etc. for day trips.
- Please ensure your luggage is clearly labelled.
- Pack easy to wash and fast-drying clothes
- We recommend that you dress conservatively, in comfortable, loose-fitting clothing in light weight, natural fabrics which breathe in warm weather
- Clothing should cover your chest, upper arms, legs and back-side. As a minimum, aim to cover upper arms to mid-calf as a minimum for general modesty and particularly at religious sites. No shorts, mini-skirts or revealing necklines please
- Some temples have a strict dress code for women: full length trousers/skirts and full length sleeve top. Our local guide will provide advice as we travel.
- Keep a lightweight cotton shawl/scarf handy for use as an extra cover-up at religious sites
- Clothing that can be layered is the best way to tackle temperature variations.

Emergencies or other issues

While we always endeavour to provide you with the best possible holiday experience, due to the nature of travel and the areas we visit, sometimes things may not go quite according to plan. Should any issue occur during the trip, please discuss this with your retreat|recreate host or tour leader in the first instance so we can do our best to rectify the problem. In case of a genuine emergency, the local contact is our tour operator's office in India (details TBA).

Responsible Travel

Travelling responsibly is all about making good choices. It's about ensuring you have an incredible trip while also having a low impact, or rather a positive impact on the local environment, community and economy.

How you can be a responsible traveller:

- Choose to travel with a responsible travel company like retreat|recreate
- Consider offsetting the carbon and pollution produced by your flights and travel eg. www.ecologi.com
- For environmental reasons, avoid buying bottled water. Fill a reusable water bottle with filtered water instead or carry your own water bottle with its own filter.
- Say 'no' to plastic bags. A retreat|recreate cloth shopping tote will be provided in your welcome pack on day 1.
- Always dispose of litter thoughtfully, including cigarette butts.
- ALWAYS ask and receive permission before taking photos of people, including children.

- Please consider whether it is appropriate to post photos of don't post pictures of children on social media as they can end up on the 'wrong' sites.
- Eat at local restaurants, buy from regional artists and support social enterprises so you can cut out the middle-man and contribute directly to local communities and their economy. Supporting local artisans helps keep traditional crafts alive.
- ALWAYS be respectful of local customs, traditions, religion and culture.
- Dress modestly and respectfully. (Refer to the What to Bring section)
- When bargaining, stay calm, be reasonable and keep a smile on your face. It's meant to be fun!
- Learn a few words of the local language and engage with the people around you. A list of useful words and phrases will be provided closer to departure.
- Refrain from giving gifts, sweets or money to locals and children.
- Be an animal-friendly traveller. Only go to venues that respect animals by allowing them to live normally in their natural environment. Steer clear of venues that use animals for entertainment or abnormal activities and/or keep animals in poor and unnatural conditions.

A couple of rules

Our philosophy of travel is one of respect towards everyone we encounter and in particular, the local people who make our destinations such special places. You must at all times comply with the local laws, customs, foreign exchange and drug and alcohol regulations. Any illegal activity including the use of illegal drugs will not be tolerated. Possession or use of these substances is not only against the law but puts the rest of the group at risk. If you choose to consume alcohol while travelling, we encourage responsible drinking and expect that you will abide by the local laws regarding alcohol consumption. By travelling with us you are agreeing to adhere to these rules. Your group leader has the right to remove any member of the group for inappropriate behaviour or breaking any of these rules, with no right of refund. If you feel someone is behaving inappropriately while travelling with us, please inform your retreat|recreate host or tour leader immediately.

Travelling on a group trip

As you travel on a group trip you will be exposed to all the pleasures and maybe some of the frustrations of travelling in a group. We ask you to be understanding of the various needs and preferences of your group - patience with your fellow travellers is sometimes required for the benefit of everyone's travel experience. Remember too that you have responsibilities to the group. If you are requested to be at a place at a certain time, ensure that you don't keep the rest of the group waiting. We have found time and time again that the very best trips are those where the dynamics within the group work well - this takes just a little effort on your part.

Bring a sense of humour and a sense of adventure!
We're going to have a wonderful trip!

Any other questions?
Email Susan K at retreatrecreate@gmail.com