

SOUTH INDIA TEXTILES AND HANDCRAFTS

22 February – 9 March 2027

retreat|recreate is delighted to offer this 16 day/15 night small group, women's tour exploring **South India** through the lens of its **traditional textiles and handcrafts**.

Visit specialist textile museums, artisan villages and ateliers, colourful bazaars and fabulous cultural and tourist sites; **engage** with local artisans; **be inspired** by incredible design, craftsmanship and architecture; **be in awe** of spectacular views of the Bay of Bengal as we travel along the Coromandel Coast (Chennai, Mahabalipuram and Puducherry), the Arabian Sea at Kochi, the verdant, mountain vistas of Munnar and the serene backwater landscapes of Kerala; and **experience** wonderful South Indian culture, cuisine and hospitality.

Participate in **NINE hands-on handcraft workshops: kalamkari, eco-printing, embroidery, kottan (palm leaf) basket weaving, Sungudi saree dyeing, batik (wax resist), paper making and tapestry weaving**. Enjoy demonstrations of **silk weaving, kolam (floor art), and tile making** plus several **walking and rickshaw tours, visits to handcraft villages, cooperatives and non-government organisations, a performance of traditional Kathakali dance** and much, much more!

Join us for this exciting trip of a lifetime and allow **spectacular South India** to captivate and inspire you!

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ITINERARY

as at May 2026



Day 1

Monday 22 February

Day 2

Tuesday 23 February

CHENNAI

Vanakkam! Welcome to Tamil Nadu!

Upon arrival at Chennai airport (MAA), you'll be met and transferred to our fabulous starting point hotel.

We encourage you to arrive in India a day or two before the tour to recover from flights between time zones and explore independently. Additional nights at our starting point hotel may be booked through us (at extra cost and subject to availability).

Suggestions for pre and post tour sightseeing and textile shopping will be provided to participants closer to departure. There's also the option (at additional cost) to participate in pre-trip culinary tour of Chennai and/or a cooking class and meal with a local family.

For our first evening together, we'll gather at 6pm (TBC) at our starting point hotel, for a **'welcome' meeting** where you'll be introduced to your fellow travellers, retreat|recreate host and local tour leader. Afterwards, we'll head out to one of Chennai's fantastic restaurants for our first **group dinner**.

Meals: Dinner

CHENNAI

To kickstart our exciting South Indian adventure, we'll embark on a fascinating orientation tour of Chennai (previously known as Madras until 1996).

We'll explore **Mylapore** neighbourhood, including the stunning, 7th century **Kapaleeshwar Hindu temple**, famous for its impressive architecture and colourful statues and **Santhome Cathedral** which was built by the Portuguese in 1532 to commemorate St Thomas who arrived in India in 52AD and martyred in 72AD.

In the afternoon, we'll visit an **arts and cultural academy** dedicated to the preservation of traditional Indian art and crafts. We'll enjoy a hands-on **kalamkari fabric painting workshop**. This time consuming process can include up to fifteen steps. Black outlines are created on fabric using either a bamboo kalam (pen) or hand carved blocks. The outlines are then 'coloured in' with natural inks. Additional steps may include washing, dyeing, bleaching, starching, waxing, indigo dyeing, wax removal.

We'll return to our hotel for the evening.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 3 Wednesday 24 February

MAHABALIPURAM

After breakfast, we'll leave Chennai and head south along the Coromandel Coast. We'll stop at **Dakshinachitra**, a cross-cultural, **living museum of art, crafts, architecture, lifestyles and performing arts**. Dakshinachitra literally means 'a picture of the south'. The textiles, handcrafts and arts of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are showcased here.

We'll explore heritage houses (relocated to this site), amble along recreated streetscapes, experience contextual exhibitions, interact with village artisans and hopefully witness one of the regular folk performances (performance times TBC).

In the afternoon, we'll travel to **Mahabalipuram**, famous for its 7th and 8th century, **UNESCO listed Shore temple, Arjuna's Penance and cave temples**. The exquisite stone carvings at each of these ancient sites is quite remarkable!

Afterwards, we'll check in to our hotel for one night.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 4 Thursday 25 February

PUDUCHERRY

Today we'll travel towards Puducherry - known as Pondicherry until 2006. Puducherry translates as 'new village' in Tamil.

We'll take a side trip to a family-run organic farm for a hands-on natural **eco-printing workshop**. Using leaves and flowers gathered from the lush garden, we'll craft our own **botanical prints** and explore the range of results from different interactions between flowers and foliage with fabrics, treatments, and dyes.

While our bundled fabrics are brewing in the dye pot, we'll enjoy a **home-cooked, Tamil lunch**, made with home-grown ingredients from the family's garden.

Upon arrival in Pondicherry, we'll check into our beach-side resort and spend the rest of the day relaxing. There's a pool in which to take a dip, a beach on which to walk, beautiful grounds to explore and a day spa offering massages, facials, a steam room and sauna (by appointment and at extra cost).

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 5 Friday 26 February

PUDUCHERRY

This morning's excursion takes us to an organisation where high quality, sustainable, ethical, naturally dyed & hand crafted clothing and products are made. Only natural, enviro-friendly materials are used for dyeing and all embroidered details are hand stitched by local women. We'll enjoy a **hands-on shibori workshop** by folding, pleating and/or stitching fabric to create a dye resist, before the fabric is dipped into the **indigo vats**.

Afterwards we'll enjoy a delicious lunch at an **organic farm** where natural farming and permaculture techniques are practiced, traditional knowledge is preserved and local culture, community and cuisine are celebrated.

This evening we'll take a rickshaw tour to explore some of the landmarks of Puducherry's **Heritage French Quarter** including the **Cluny Embroidery centre**. Housed in an 18th Century building, this inspiring initiative provides training in **embroidery**, work opportunities and support for underprivileged and marginalised women.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 6 Saturday 27 February

PUDUCHERRY

This morning's excursion will take us to a picturesque village. We'll get a taste of rural life, watch **potters** at work, view lush rice paddies and see the banyan tree featured in 'Life of Pi'. We'll also **watch a demonstration of the traditional art of kolam - ephemeral floor art**. Each morning at dawn, women draw rangoli patterns at the cleansed threshold of their residence using white rice flour and chalk. Believed to invite positive energy into homes, the rice flour patterns also provide food for insects and birds.

Our time in the village will culminate with a **visit to a local family and lunch in their home**.

We'll spend the afternoon at a rehabilitation centre which provides training in **weaving, sewing and embroidery** and the means to earn a dignified livelihood for physically and socially handicapped women and men. We're privileged to participate in a **hands-on embroidery workshop** with this organisation.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 7 Sunday 28 February

KARAIKUDI

As we travel this morning, we'll stop at a **silk weaving cooperative**. As you watch the weavers in action, you're sure to gain an appreciation for the time and skill required to produce the beautiful, **handwoven silk sarees and dupatta**.

In the afternoon, we'll stop at **Athangudi village** to learn about the exquisite **handmade tiles** of the same name. The hand poured, air dried tiles are created from a blend of sand, cement and pigment. Their smooth, polished surface makes the richly coloured pigments appear to glow – a quality for which these tiles are famous.

This evening we'll enjoy a sumptuous dinner at **The Bangala**, known for serving superb Chettinad cuisine. The Bangala was ranked India's seventh best restaurant in 2019 by Conde Nast Traveller.

Tonight's heritage accommodation exudes Chettinad charm with quaint gardens, old-style furniture, extensive verandahs, plus a swimming pool and a library.

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner



Day 8 Monday 1 March

MADURAI

We'll experience a **hands-on basket weaving workshop** at a Foundation located in charming **Keelaya Patti** village. **Kottan** is the **art of weaving palmyra (palm leaf) baskets** - a craft once practiced by affluent women in this region. The **baskets** were traditionally used for day-to-day household packaging and also in rituals and ceremonies.

The Foundation originally set out to document the original patterns and techniques of Kottan craft, but in doing so has also helped to revive and sustain this traditional craft. The women artisans connected to the Foundation come from a variety of social and economic backgrounds. United by their common craft, they have grown into a strong, supportive community.

In the afternoon, we'll continue our journey to Madurai, where we'll check into our hotel upon arrival

Meals: Breakfast



Day 9 Tuesday 2 March

MADURAI

Optional: As India is the birthplace of yoga, there's the **option to take an early morning yoga class** (at extra cost).

This morning we'll experience the grandeur of 16th century **Thirumalai Nayakkar Mahal** (palace) and iconic **Meenakshi temple**, a historic, prominent Hindu temple located on the southern bank of the sacred Vaigai River.

After lunch, we'll take a **rickshaw tour** to gain an insight into local life in this vibrant city. We'll explore the wholesale banana market where no less than 16 varieties of banana are sold, a market selling bamboo and bamboo products, stalls selling onions and vegetables and shops selling all kinds of woven baskets.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 10 Wednesday 3 March

MADURAI

This morning we'll enjoy a hands-on **Sungudi Saree knotting and dyeing workshop** with a veteran artisan who is known for their skill in this art. This form of knotting and dyeing has been practiced in Madurai since the 16th century. We'll explore several techniques and create our own piece of tie and dyed fabric. We'll also visit a nearby weaver's colony.

Later this afternoon, there'll be time to relax and if you wish, enjoy a massage or facial at our hotel's day spa (by appointment and at extra cost).

Meals: Breakfast



Day 11 Thursday 4 March

MUNNAR

Our journey today, takes us into the state of Kerala and to the picturesque hill station of Munnar, a former resort for the British Raj elite.

Upon arrival in Munnar, we'll check in to our hotel set amidst misty mountains, tranquil forests and with spectacular views of verdant valleys.

Later in the afternoon we'll explore the vibrant, sprawling **spice and tea plantations** for which this region is famous. We'll enjoy a guided walk through a picturesque tea plantation, visit a tea factory to learn about tea processing and enjoy tasting some specialty tea blends.

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner



Day 12 Friday 5 March

MUNNAR

Today we visit a **charitable trust** dedicated to the rehabilitation and generation of sustainable livelihoods for the differently-abled children & young adults of Munnar's rural plantation community. Here, we're fortunate to explore the art of **wax resist block printing** when we participate in a **batik workshop**. Patterns are printed on fabric using blocks dipped in hot wax. The wax which functions as a **dye resist** is usually made from a mixture of paraffin or beeswax and is sometimes mixed with plant resins.

After enjoying a delicious lunch at the trust, we'll participate in a **paper-making workshop**. Working with pulp made from cotton, we'll each **create our own handmade paper**.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 13 Saturday 6 March

ALLEPPEY

After checking out of our hotel we'll drive to either Alleppey or Kumarakom (32 kms apart) depending on where our houseboats are docked on the previous evening.

In the afternoon, we'll board our **deluxe houseboats** which will be our accommodation for the night.

This iconic experience is a 'must-do' in this region and an opportunity to sit back, relax and catch a glimpse into water-side village life.

We'll spend an enchanting afternoon and evening cruising along tranquil backwater canals, gazing at the lush tropical greenery and paddy fields, enjoying stunning views and savouring an authentic Kerala dinner.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 14 Sunday 7 March

KOCHI

This morning's scenic drive takes us to the charming port city of Kochi (also known as Cochin).

We'll visit the **Kerala Folklore Museum**, and dive into the region's rich culture. This 'Aladdin's cave' is home to a vast collection of more than 4000 ethnographic artefacts of the common person in Kerala, from the last 1000 years.

In the afternoon we'll take a private tour and explore Fort Kochi. We'll visit significant sites such as the iconic cantilevered **Chinese fishing nets** (thought to have been introduced by traders from the courts of Kublai Khan, the Mongol ruler of China), **Kochi beach** (a great place to watch the sun set) and **Mattancherry Palace** (built by the Portuguese around 1545, renovated by the Dutch and known for its Kerala-style architecture, royal artefacts, and intricate Ramayana murals).

Our charming **heritage hotel** is located within **Kochi Fort** and was built in 1668 by the Dutch East India company in classical Dutch architectural style.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 15 Monday 8 March

KOCHI

This morning we'll enjoy a **hands-on tapestry weaving workshop** with a textile designer who works with artisans and organizations to preserve and reform the handloom industry. We'll explore fundamental weaving techniques using small traditional frame looms plus an array of colours, patterns and textures.

There'll be free time in the afternoon for you to relax, shop or explore independently before we attend a **performance of Kathakali dance**. This South Indian style of classical dance originated in Kerala between the 16th and 17th centuries and is renowned for its artistry and storytelling. Themes are often based on early Hindu texts and the eternal battle between good and evil. The hand and feet gestures, complex stylised movements and intricate eye and facial expressions all take years to master.

On our final evening together, we'll enjoy a delightful **farewell dinner**, reflect on the experiences of the last two weeks and say our fond farewells to each other and incredible India.

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner



Day 16 Tuesday 9 March

KOCHI

Our tour concludes after breakfast.

There are no activities planned for today so you are welcome to depart at any time. Our hotel's check out time is 11:00am.

Additional nights at our finishing point hotel may be booked through us at additional cost (subject to availability).

Airport transfers may also be booked through us at additional cost. Alternatively, you're welcome to make your own transport arrangements - the reception team at our tour hotel can assist.

Note: This itinerary should be read in conjunction with the Booking Conditions and Trip Notes. Please pay particular attention to the notes on Health, Fitness and Mobility to ensure this trip is right for you.

PRICE:
Twin share: AU\$ 8750 per person
Single supplement AU\$1950

- A deposit of AU\$ 1500 is required to secure your booking
- The balance is due no later than 7 November 2026

INCLUSIONS:

- Arrival transfer from Chennai airport to our tour hotel
- 15 nights accommodation as per the itinerary
- Meals as per the itinerary (15 breakfasts, 5 lunches, 6 dinners)
- Transport, entrance fees to all museums, galleries, sights and excursion venues as per the itinerary
- Hands-on workshops (marked in red) and activities as per the itinerary
- Fully escorted by a local English-speaking tour guide and a retreat|recreate host

EXCLUSIONS:

- International and domestic airfares
- Travel insurance (essential)
- Passports and visas
- Early check in or late check out
- Departure transfers
- Personal spending (souvenirs, laundry, phone, camera fees, porter charges, etc)
- Optional activities (noted in blue)
- Meals and drinks not included in the itinerary
- Tips. We'll establish a tips kitty on Day 1 so our local guide can tip as needed, on behalf of the group. Approx. INR9000 per person (TBC). Refer to the Money section of the Trip Notes for more information.