
GEEO ITINERARY

Southern India w/ UW-Madison 12/22/2024

Day 1: Kochi Arrive in Kochi at any time. Meet your group for a welcome meeting around 6:00 or 7:00 p.m.

Arrive in Kochi at any time. Due to the potential for flight delays or cancellations, we recommend that you plan to arrive in India at least a day in advance. This will also give you time to adjust to the time difference and overcome any jetlag. We can book extra hotel nights for you in Kochi before and/or after the trip. Please note that check-in at the hotel is usually around 2:00-3:00 p.m. There are no planned activities until an intro meeting around 6:00 or 7:00 p.m., usually in the hotel lobby. Check for a sign or ask at the reception desk about the exact time and location of the group meeting. Please make every effort to arrive in time for this meeting. If you are delayed and will arrive late, please inform us. Your tour leader will then leave you a message at the front desk informing you of where and when to meet up tomorrow. After the welcome meeting, visit the harbor to enjoy the sunset over the Chinese fishing nets (*Cheena vala*) followed by an optional group dinner.

Day 2: Kochi/Kalpetta Take a morning train followed by a scenic drive to reach Kalpetta in the Wayanad district.

This morning, take a train followed by a scenic drive to Kalpetta, a friendly town with a backdrop of majestic hills. The Wayanad region of the Western Ghats in Kerala is renowned for its sprawling tea plantations that produce some of the finest teas. The group will arrive in the late afternoon or early evening, giving you some time to explore the quaint town before finding a place to try out delicious Southern Indian cuisine. Approximate travel time: 4 hrs by train, 2 hrs by private vehicle

Day 3: Kalpetta Walk nature trails through forested areas of Wayanad. Take a guided tour of a tea factory and plantation to learn about tea production.

Enjoy a beautiful nature walk in Wayanad, home to many endangered species. The region has an amazing diversity of flora and fauna as well as a long and significant history; the Edakkal caves have remarkable and rare Stone Age carvings. Later, enjoy a visit to a tea factory for fascinating insights into the world of tea production. With an expert guide, stroll through the rolling hills blanketed with vibrant green tea bushes, breathe in the aroma of freshly plucked tea leaves, and explore the factory to learn about the tea-making process, including the withering, rolling, drying, and grading of the tea leaves. Finish off the visit with a fresh cup of local tea.

Day 4: Kalpetta/Mysore Settle in for the drive to the ancient city of Mysore.

Travel to Mysore (formally Mysuru), one of the cleanest cities in India, located in the foothills of the Chamundi Hills. The city was the seat of the Wadiyar dynasty and was the capital of the Kingdom of Mysore for almost six centuries, from 1399 until 1947. Approximate travel time: 4.5 hrs by private vehicle

Day 5: Mysore Explore the vibrant city of Mysore, including visits to Chamundeshwari Temple and Mysore Palace. Then enjoy some free time when you can opt to visit the Devaraja Market or join a yoga class.

Imagine life as a Maharaja during a guided tour of the Mysore Palace, home of the former royal family, which ruled from 1399 to 1950. Learn about the rich history of Indian royalty and soak in the splendor of an era long gone. Later, join the throngs of Hindu pilgrims at Chamundeshwari Temple on the top of Chamundi Hills. See the monumental statue of Nandi the Bull (ridden by the Hindu god Shiva) while admiring the temple's intricate architecture. In your free time, visit the Devaraja fruit and vegetable market or join a yoga class at one of the many local institutes.

Day 6: Mysore/Māmallapuram Enjoy a full day of scenic train travel to Chennai before a short bus ride to Mamallapuram. Visit the Shore Temple.

Enjoy a scenic ride to the east coast today on India's extensive rail system. Play cards, chat with your fellow passengers, or soak in the landscapes before arriving in Chennai. From there, continue south for a short ride to the small village of Mamallapuram. The group will visit several temples and shrines at Mahabalipuram, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, that were created during the 7th and 8th centuries. The Shore Temple stands out among the complex for its marvelous view of the Bay of Bengal. Made of granite, the temple is actually comprised of three shrines, two dedicated to Shiva and one to Vishnu. Approximate travel time: 8 hrs by train, 1.5 hrs by private vehicle

Day 7: Māmallapuram Free time to explore Māmallapuram.

Use some free time to explore all Māmallapuram has to offer. Opt for a swim in the ocean or a jog along the beach, explore the monuments by bicycle or on foot, or go shopping for handicrafts and jewelry.

Day 8: Māmallapuram/Puducherry Continue to Pondicherry (now known as Puducherry) and learn about Sri Aurobindo Ghose at the ashram.

In the morning, drive to Pondicherry (now known as Puducherry), formerly the largest French Colony in India and an important trading town. The city's layout has a strong French influence, with wide boulevards and French-style houses. You'll have a brief walk with your tour leader, but for more in-depth information, we recommend an official guided tour by a local. The group will visit the Sri Aurobindo Ashram to learn about the teachings of Sri Aurobindo, the yogi who developed what he called Integral yoga or supramental yoga. Its aim is a spiritual realization that not only liberates a person's consciousness but also transforms their nature. Approximate travel time: 2.5 hrs by private vehicle

Day 9: Puducherry/Madurai Travel back inland to Madurai, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world.

Today, enjoy the drive to Madurai, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Located on the banks of River Vaigai, Madurai has been a major settlement for two millennia and has a documented history of more than 2,500 years. It is often referred to as "Thoonga Nagaram," which means "the city that never sleeps." Its skyline is dominated by the fourteen colorful gopurams (gateway towers) of Meenakshi Amman Temple. Approximate travel time: 6-7 hrs by private vehicle

Day 10: Madurai Hop on a cycle rickshaw for a tour of Madurai before visiting the famous Meenakshi Temple.

Enjoy a tour of Madurai aboard a cycle rickshaw, allowing you to see the sights at a slower pace from street level. Check out the fruit and vegetable market, watch the traditional pressing of oil by a pair of bulls, and visit the famous Gandhi Memorial Museum in the historic Tamukkam Palace. Later, visit the gorgeous Meenakshi Temple, considered the finest example of religious architecture in South India. The enormous temple complex is dedicated to Shiva and his consort Parvati, also known as Meenakshi. Even before you pass through the massive stone walls of the temple, the fourteen striking gopurams (monumental gateways covered with stucco figures of deities, mythical animals, and monsters all painted in vivid colors) loom high above. After visiting the temple complex, opt to visit the handicraft shops or duck into the cool shade of the covered stone tailor's market where, for a few rupees, rows of expert tailors will whip you up a custom shirt in minutes, all done on antique foot-pump sewing machines. In the late evening, opt to visit the Meenakshi Temple again for a glimpse of the nighttime rituals. Starting around 9:00 p.m., the temple is completely different than it is in the daytime. The nighttime rituals feature incense and lively spectacles.

Day 11: Madurai/Thekkady (D) Drive to Thekkady for a guided tour of spice plantations in the Cardamom Hills.

Drive to Thekkady, the spice capital of India, adjacent to Periyar National Park. Upon arrival, enjoy a guided tour of the plantation and tea factory to learn more about spice and tea production from this region. You might even get to enjoy a sample or two! You'll have the option of taking a boat ride on Periyar Lake, a great way to get to know the region and spot some animals. Periyar National Park is also home to over 200 species of birds, and the view from the boat offers a unique perspective for birdwatching. Approximate travel time: 4 hrs by private vehicle

Day 12: Thekkady/Kerala Backwaters (L, D) Travel to Alleppey for a local homestay to experience local life. Take a guided walk along the lagoon.

Travel down to the backwaters from Thekkady to catch a private boat for the short journey to the village homestay. Enjoy strolling under the palm trees, weaving in between the rice fields that cover the island while learning more about the lifestyles of the locals. Watch the sunset on the winding backwaters with locals in a small country boat. There may even be time to kick back and enjoy a local toddy (an alcoholic drink made from a coconut). In the afternoon, explore the island with a local to observe the different facets of local life and meet the people who live in this unique location. Just before sunset, hop on a small country boat with locals to enjoy sunset on the winding backwaters. Approximate travel time: 4-5.5 hrs by private vehicle, 15 minutes by boat.

Day 13: Kerala Backwaters/Kochi (B, L) Spend the morning in the village and eat lunch at a women's empowerment NGO. Take an orientation walk in Kochi and enjoy an evening performance of kathakali.

Spend the morning with your host family learning to cook local food, watching the toddy tappers at work, or wandering around the village. Leave the village and travel by boat and private vehicle back to Kochi. Along the way, enjoy a traditional Kerala lunch prepared by women of the Theruvaram Empowerment Project, which provides women from rural areas an alternative source of income by honing their hospitality and culinary skills. Learn about the local cuisine and socio-economic fabric of the region as you get to know the women, all while taking in live entertainment. After arriving back in Kochi, get to know this delightful city through a guided walk. Visit the Dutch Palace and Jewish Quarter with its 400-year-old synagogue. Explore St Francis Church, the oldest church in India. Spend your final evening in India enjoying a Kathakali performance, a form of traditional Kerala dance. Considered one of the oldest dance forms in India, Kathakali is a combination of drama, dance, music, and ritual. Characters with vividly painted faces and elaborate costumes re-enact stories from the Hindu epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana. The dance drama, performed exclusively by men, is famous for its amazing costumes, extensive makeup, and explosive body movements. Approximate travel time: 15 minutes by boat, 2 hrs by private vehicle.

Day 14: Kochi Depart Kochi at any time.

There are no planned activities today, so you may depart Kochi at any time. If you wish to extend your stay in Kochi, consider booking post-tour accommodation with us. Please note that check-out time from the hotel is usually mid-morning, but luggage storage services are available at the reception desk. Want more adventure? Book two or more GEE0 programs in the same school year and receive a discount! GEE0 will give you 10% off of the lesser value program(s) (up to 3 programs per year). If you would like to extend your time abroad but don't see another GEE0 program that interests you, let us know. We can work with you to find a trip from our tour operator's much larger catalog. Their tours are open to the general public and not designed specifically for educators, but we can still offer you and your travel companions a discounted educator price on any additional tours that you book.