

# **Itinerary for Sacred India Tour**

## **January 9–23 2010**

We'll start each day with meditation at 6:00am followed (on most days) by a hatha yoga class at 6:30am.

(In this itinerary Sri Swami Satchidananda is referred to as *Sri Gurudev*.)

### **January 9, 2010 , Saturday**

Chennai, the "Gateway to South India," is the capital of Tamil Nadu and the fourth largest city of India. It is only 350 years old (very young for India!) and has a population of six million. It was here that Robert Clive lived and planned his military expeditions in the 18th century.

The changing chapters of Chennai are evident in the different styles of architecture: the Dravidian architecture in the temples, the Indo-Sarcenic architecture in the High Court and University Senate Hall, the Moghul architecture of the Arcot Nawab's palace at Chepauk, the Victorian era architecture of the museum buildings and lastly the sky scrappers.

- Arrival and rest
- Overnight in Chennai

### **January 10, 2010, Sunday**

- Tour and darshan at a Chennai Temple
- Welcome Luncheon
- Tour of Egmore Museum
- Cultural Event
- Overnight in Chennai

### **January 11, 2010, Monday**

Thiruvannamalai is built around the sacred hill "Arunachala", and is the home of many devotees and ashrams: Ramanashram, Seshadri Ashram, Skanda Ashram, the Yogi Ram Surat Kumar Ashram among others. Sri Ramana Maharshi, the "Sage of Arunachala" lived in Tiruvannamalai from 1896 to 1950. As a young man, Sri Gurudev studied with this great saint.

The Arunachala temple is situated at the foot of a hill and dedicated to Tejo Lingam (God incarnate as fire). It is one of the largest temples in the South and is dominated by an 11-storeyed gopuram.

- Meditation at Ramakrishna Mutt
- Visit to Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandarin
- Depart for Thiruvannamalai (4 hours)
- Tour and Meditation at Ramanashram
- Overnight in Thiruvannamalai

## **January 12, 2010, Tuesday**

- Early walk, "Girivellam", around the holy mountain
- Tour Ashram of Yogi Ram Surat Kumar
- Darshan at Ishwaran Temple
- Overnight in Thiruvannamalai

## **January 13, 2010, Wednesday**

The Union territory of Pondicherry was ruled by the French for 300 years.

Aurobindo Ashram was founded by Sri Aurobindo in the year 1926. After Sri Aurobindo's death, the ashram came under the spiritual leadership of a French lady known as "The Mother", who ran the ashram until 1973. Visitors throng to pay homage to the samadhis (final resting place) of these two spiritual companions at the Ashram premises.

Ten kilometers away from the Aurobindo Ashram is Auroville, also known as the "City of Dawn". It is an experiment on international living aspiring to harmony among people of different caste, creed and nationality.

- Meditations at Skanda Ashram and Virupaksha Guha
- Travel to Pondicherry
- Visit Rajagiri Fort on the way
- Evening in Pondicherry, walking tour of the French Quarter
- Overnight in Pondicherry

## **January 14, 2010, Thursday - *Pongal Festival***

- Pongal celebrations at dawn, in Auroville
- Tour of Auroville
- Tour of Aurobindo Ashram premises
- Meditation at the Samadhi Shrine
- Overnight in Pondicherry

## **January 15, 2010, Friday**

Mahabalipuram is world-famous for its miles of unspoiled beach and rock-cut art. The sculpture, here, is particularly interesting because it shows scenes of day-to-day life, in contrast with the rest of the state of Tamil Nadu, where the carvings generally depict gods and goddesses.

- Day trip to Mahabalipuram and sculpture shopping
- Overnight at Beach Resort

## **January 16, 2010, Saturday**

- Beach Resort and rest day (meals on your own)
- Overnight at Beach Resort

## **January 17, 2010, Sunday**

Thanjavur (or Tanjore) is located on a fertile plain which is referred to as the "rice bowl" of Tamil Nadu. This ancient city enjoys the distinction of being the centre of Tamil learning and culture between the 10th and 14th centuries

Tanjore is dotted with no fewer than 74 temples - the most famous of which is the Brahadeeswarar (Siva) temple. This temple was built by Raja Raja Chola I (985-1012 AD) The Encyclopaedia Britannica describes this temple as the "grandest temple in India, built by Tamils, the greatest temple builders in the world." The tower is capped by an 81.3 ton monolithic slab which is presumed to have been hauled into position along an inclined plane 6 kms long. Thanjavur City is also famous for its exquisite handicrafts and artwork.

- Travel to Thanjavore (5 hours)
- Shopping excursion
- Evening Tour and darshan at Brahadeeswarar Temple
- Overnight in Thajavore

## **January 18, 2010, Monday**

Few cities in the world can claim a tradition as old as Madurai. Its history includes an era several centuries before Christ. Life in the entire city is oriented around the Meenakshi Amman Temple and its deities. This is a twin temple, with one shrine dedicated to Meenakshi (Parvathi) and the other to Lord Sundareswarar (Siva). This is perhaps the grandest temple in the entire south of India! Notable are the hall of a thousand pillars, a museum of icons, photographs and illustrations, and 4 lofty Gopurams (which gives the impression that the entire clan of Gods and Goddesses is cruising between heaven and the earth), and the sacred pond inside the temple called the Golden Lotus Tank.

Also in Madurai is the Gandhi Museum which is dedicated to Gandhiji's life and work and is housed in the 300 - year old Mangammal Palace.

- Early departure for Madurai (3 hours)
- Visit the Gandhi Museum
- Tour of Meenakshi Amman Temple
- Evening darshan at Murugan Temple
- Overnight in Madurai

## **January 19, 2010, Tuesday**

Coimbatore is the third largest city in Tamil Nadu. It has earned a coveted place in the industrial and agricultural map of modern India as a major textile and engineering centre. The Coimbatore district boasts one of South India's finest agrarian economies where millet, paddy, cotton, tea, oilseeds, betel nuts, turmeric, coffee and tobacco are cultivated.

In spite of its agricultural wealth and industrial boom, Coimbatore remains a city where age-old customs survive, where family bonds are strong and where tradition is a way of life. Two famous temples, the Marudha Malai temple dedicated to Lord Muruga and the Patteeswara temple at Perur, dedicated to Lord Shiva, are major pilgrimage centers.

- Travel to Palani (2 hours)
- Darshan at Palani
- Travel to Coimbatore (3 hours)
- Hatha class at IYI
- Overnight in Coimbatore

### **January 20, Wednesday**

- Elephant washing at Perur Temple
- Visit to Sri Gurudev's birthplace in Chettipalayam
- Families for Children orphanage
- Evening visit to Perur Madam and Perur Temple (where Sri Gurudev served briefly as temple manager)
- Overnight in Coimbatore

### **January 21, Thursday**

Ooty and Coonoor are "hill stations" – mountain top communities built by the British to escape the heat of Indian summers. Both towns are a scenic feast, with tea estates and coffee plantations on the steep slopes, and spectacular views of the valleys below.

- Early travel to Satchidananda Jyothi Niketan, tour school campus (this is the school founded by Sri Gurudev)
- Travel to Hill Station of Coonoor (one hour)
- Walking tour of Coonoor and Sims Garden, lunch at Taj Hotel
- Train ride back down the mountain, return to Coimbatore

### **January 22, Friday**

Cochin, the largest city in Kerala, is one of the most important ports in India. In the past, it has been under the rule of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English.

The main attractions for a traveler are the Portuguese palace, St. Francis' Church (Vasco da Gama's gravestone is located here) and the Jewish Synagogue. Also of interest is the ancient dance-form Kathakali, which is performed nightly in Cochin. It is reputed to embody the Kerala spirit of the Divine.

- Travel to Trichur (two/three hours)
- Satsang with Swami Boomanandaji
- Onward travel to Cochin (two hours)
- Kathakali Dance performance
- Overnight in Cochin

## **January 23, Saturday**

- Morning: sight-seeing in Cochin plus travel to Alleppy (one hour)
- Noon: board boat for Backwater Trip and Farewell Luncheon
- Tour concludes at 5 PM at Cochin Airport

Bon Voyage – Homeward Bound!

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