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The Spiritual Traditions of India Itinerary

Days 1, 2

Our caravan of insight and adventure begins as we depart for India.

Day 3

We arrive in Bangalore and transfer to hotel. **Bangalore** is Asia's Silicon Valley because of its thriving information technology industry. It is India's 5th largest and fastest growing city. Bangalore was founded in the 16th century by a local chieftain, Kempe Gowda. It is a vibrant cosmopolitan city with a pleasant temperate climate. Overnight Bangalore.

Day 4

After breakfast we depart on a full day excursion to the sacred **Jain** site of **Sravanabelgola** where we explore the colossal 60 foot tall monolithic statue of Gomateshara, the largest free standing sculpture in India. The Jain religion is one of India's three most important spiritual traditions that originated in India along with Hinduism and Buddhism. Founded in the 6th century BC by Mahavira, a contemporary of the Buddha, Jainism is dedicated and focused on Ahimsa – non-violence with a profound respect for nature and all living creatures. Here we will study Jainism with visits to the other local Jain temples that are key pilgrimage centers for the Jain. Overnight Bangalore.

Day 5

We depart Bangalore on a short flight to **Madras**, the gateway to **South India**. Madras is the capital of the state of Tamil Nadu and is the seat of one of the oldest civilizations in India with a rich heritage of fine arts, sculpture and architecture. Historically, Madras has a very long history that goes back more than 2,000 years. It was once a very important trading port with the Chinese, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs and later the French and Portuguese. After we check into our hotel we will visit the **Bronze Museum** where we will study the masterpieces of Hindu sacred art. Overnight Madras.

Day 6

After breakfast our classroom will be the ancient 13th century **Shiva Temple of Kapaleeshvara**. This famous temple is an excellent example of Dravidian temple architecture. Shiva is one of the three principal Gods of Hinduism and is one the most popular Gods worshipped in South India. Here we will study Hinduism, India's oldest religion. We will also visit another important Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Krishna, the **Parthasarathy Temple**. In the afternoon we will visit the **Kalakshetra**, a vital center of training and performance. This institution has produced generations of acclaimed artists since its establishment in the early 20th century. The Kalakshetra has trained many of India's most famous and successful musicians and dancers. It provides a holistic education in the arts in its serene and inspiring environment. Overnight Madras.

Day 7

Our day begins with a beautiful coastal drive to **Kancheepuram**, the holiest city in South India. Here we will explore the **Ekambaranathar Temple**, one of the oldest Hindu temples in the city. Kancheepuram was once a very important scholastic center and a meeting point for Jain, Buddhist and Hindu cultures. The architecture of the Ekambaranathar Temple defies words! Here we will continue our study of Hinduism with a lecture from a prominent local Hindu scholar. After Kancheepuram, we will then drive to Mahabalipuram. Overnight Mahabalipuram.





Day 8

Mahabalipuram, "The City of the Seven Pagodas" was once the main harbor for the great Pallava Empire. Here we will study the breath-taking display of the Pagodas, the small-sized shrines that have been chiseled out of boulders in the form of temple chariots dedicated to the Pandava princes. The true masterpiece at Mahabalipuram is the **"Penance of Bhagirata,"** the world's largest base-relief in stone 89 feet by 30. The Pallavas perfected the art of sculpting rocks to build temples without brick, mortar or timber. The only shore temple that remains is the spectacular two-storied shrine dedicated to the Gods Vishnu and Shiva. Overnight Mahabalipuram.

Day 9

After breakfast we depart for **Chidambaram**, one of the most important cities in the ancient **Chola Empire**. Chidambaram is steeped in Hindu mythology and is one of the holiest sites in South India. Here we will study at the *tandava*, the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva as **Nataraja**, the king of dance. We will receive a lecture from a prominent temple priest on Hindu philosophy on site. We then drive to Kumbakonam. Overnight Kumbakonam

Day 10

Kumbakonam is another very important Hindu city in the ancient Chola Empire that still boasts eighteen temples that demonstrate the magnificent architecture of the Chola dynasty. After breakfast we explore the 17th century **Kumbareshwara Temple** that is dedicated to Lord Shiva. Legend tells that Shiva himself designed this temple! After lunch we will study at **Nageshwara Swami Shiva Temple**. Here we will witness the devout coming to pray and make pilgrimage as they have done for centuries. Overnight Kumbakonam.

Day 11

Kumbakonam is one of the most revered and sacred Hindu temple towns in South India and we will come to see why as we explore the largest Hindu Temple in Kumbakonam dedicated to Lord Vishnu, at the 13th century **Saranangapati Temple**. This temple is a feast for the eyes with its hundred pillar hallway and 10 storied - gate. In the afternoon we receive a lecture from a prominent local Hindu scholar. Overnight Kumbakonam.

Day 12

Early morning drive to **Tanjore**. Nearly 1000 years ago in the 11th century, Tanjore was a powerful dynasty capital for the imperial Cholas whose empire extended to Sri Lanka and to South East Asia. The Cholas used their power and wealth to encourage the arts and build many temples. Tanjore has more than 93 temples including the splendid **Brahadeeswara Temple** dedicated to Shiva's bull Nandi that is carved out of black granite more than 20 feet long. Inside we will study the magnificent sculpted panels and frescos that decorate the walls. In the afternoon we will visit the **Saraswati Mahal Library** with over 30,000 manuscripts in palm leaf and paper. Overnight Kumbakonam.

Day 13

Early morning departure for **Tiruchirapalli**, also known as **Trichy**. Many Hindu pilgrims flock to Trichy to visit its famous **Ranganathaswamy Temple** with its beautiful cloisters and open courtyards. This temple is the most revered Hindu temple in South India dedicated to Vishnu. In its beautiful coconut palm tree setting, this is the largest and most interesting temple complex in all of India and is constructed in the middle of the Cauvery River. In the late afternoon we depart on a short flight to Trivandrum where we will then drive to Varkala. Overnight Varkala.



Day 14

For centuries, **Varkala** has been a place of pilgrimage for the people of Kerala. Varkala is located just north of Thiruvananthapuram on the beautiful coast of the Arabian Sea. It is a quiet unspoiled village with pristine white-sanded beaches and cliffs. The sunsets and sun rises are out of this world! The state of Kerala is famous for its **Ayurveda** holistic treatments and medicine. For centuries, this ancient Indian natural healing method has been used to stimulate the body's natural ability to heal using natural medicines, diet and yoga. Here we will spend the concluding portion of our program studying Ayurveda, Yoga and Buddhist Meditation. Overnight Varkala.

Day 15

In the morning we will visit the magnificent temple of **Kanyakumari** that attracts Hindus from all parts of South India. In the afternoon we will receive our first lecture on Ayurveda. Overnight Varkala.

Day 16

Yoga is one of India's many gifts to world civilization. In Hinduism, many methods are offered to attain the goal of Moksa – Liberation. Asceticism, devotion, ritual and yoga are a few vehicles that Hindus use for the path to self-realization. In fact, yoga is a very important discipline in other Indian religions such as Buddhism and Jainism. We will study the discipline of yoga with lectures and instruction from prominent Hindu, Jain and Buddhist yoga instructors and practitioners. In the morning we explore the tropical backwaters by boat. Overnight Varkala.

Day 17

Our wonderful learning experience in India comes to its conclusion as we fly back to Mumbai where we will connect to our international flight back to the States.

Day 18

We arrive back in New York at JFK.