

TRAIN : The Deccan Odyssey
JOURNEY : Madras Mail – Mumbai (Bombay) –Hyderabad
Journey Duration : Upto 15 Days

DAY 1 MUMBAI

Your voyage of discovery begins at Mumbai airport, where you will be met and transferred to the iconic five-star Taj Mahal Palace & Tower Hotel for a luxurious two-night stay.

This flagship Taj hotel offers you splendid views of the Arabian Sea and Gateway of India, alongside refined century-old hospitality. This legendary luxury hotel has played host to kings, dignitaries and eminent personalities from across the globe.

Deluxe Class guests will stay in the Tower Wing, Presidential Suite guests reside in the Palace Wing. An additional night may need to be purchased depending upon the arrival time of your flight on Day 1.

(All meals today are at your own arrangements)

DAY 2 MUMBAI

This morning in Mumbai we take a short cruise, weather permitting, to Elephanta Island, a lush island densely wooded with palm, mango and tamarind trees. The atmospheric and fascinating cave complex, which dates to the 3rd – 5th century, was designed to honour the life of Lord Shiva, one of the most auspicious Hindu gods and is now a World Heritage Site.

We return to the city for lunch at the famous seafood Trishna restaurant and in the afternoon, you are free to explore Mumbai independently or visit one of the colourful local markets.

In the evening a welcome drinks reception is followed by dinner at your hotel where you can get to know your fellow travellers who will share this remarkable Indian odyssey.

DAY 3 MUMBAI

This morning in Mumbai we visit the 'Dhobi Ghats', an intriguing outdoor laundry. The dhobi is a traditional laundryman who collects your dirty linen, washes it and returns it neatly pressed. The Ghats are the laundries where they practice this historic tradition. Our tour then takes in Fort Bombay and Gandhi's House, now turned into a fascinating museum depicting his inspirational life.

Mid-afternoon sees us boarding our private train, the Deccan Odyssey, a perfect way to experience the colour, character and amazing diversity of India. Settle into your beautifully appointed cabin and enjoy the hospitable atmosphere of the Bar Car before experiencing fine Indian or western cuisine in one of the restaurant cars.

DAY 4 OLD GOA

The state of Goa, renowned for its beaches, temples and world heritage architecture, was the capital of the Portuguese Empire in the east and displays much of this heritage in its architecture today.

We take a morning tour to view Basilica De Bom Jesus and Sé Cathedral of Santa Catarina, a towering white structure with a grand baroque interior and the most imposing church in the historic Old Goa.

DAY 5 NILGIRI MOUNTAIN RAILWAY TO OOTY

The Nilgiri Mountain Railway, a World Heritage Site, starts from the town of Mettupalayam and takes us on a journey full of twists and turns as this narrow gauge steam train ascends 30kms on India's only Rack and Pinion Railway with gradients as steep as 1:12 to the town of Coonor, from where for the final 16kms the train picks up speed on its way to the hill resort at Ooty at 7,228 feet (2,225 metres) famous for its pretty cottages and beautiful Botanical Gardens. The 'Toy Train' heads through tea and coffee plantations and forest clad hills and with no less than 16 tunnels and tall bridges along with the breathtaking views make a journey to Ooty an extraordinary experience!

DAY 6 KOCHI (COCHIN)

Kochi (formerly Cochin) with its beautiful natural harbour and scenic backwaters has meant its history has been rich and varied. The British, Arabs, Portuguese, Dutch and Chinese have all left indelible marks on the architectural development of this city. We will visit the Dutch Palace and the Jewish Synagogue and then see the Giant Chinese fishing nets that billow from massive teak and bamboo poles which dot the entrance to the harbour and are still in use today. The day ends in a visit to the 500-year old Fort Kochi where we will walk through the historical Dutch and Portuguese buildings.

In the evening there is the opportunity to witness a Kathakali Dance performance where the dancers are elaborately made up with paint and masks accompanied by drummers and musicians as they act out a dance drama.

DAY 7 TRIVANDRUM & KANYAKUMARI

The Deccan Odyssey arrives in Trivandrum in the early morning. After breakfast we visit the Napier Museum and the dominating Padmanabhaswamy Hindu Temple.

Following lunch, we head to Kanyakumari which is mainland India's southernmost point, where the three seas – Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea & Bay of Bengal – meet and where the shore temple to the Virgin Goddess Kanyakumari stands.

DAY 8 MADURAI

One of the oldest cities in India situated on the River Vaigai, the Temple City of Madurai was the capital of the Pandya Kingdom but it was during the reign of the Nayaks that the magnificent Meenakshi-Sundareswarar Temple was constructed, which is one of India's greatest cultural and architectural landmarks.

In the evening, we will return to the temple to witness a Hindu ritual, an Aarti Ceremony before we continue our journey towards Madras.

DAY 9 PONDICHERY (PUDUCHERRY)

Pondicherry, located on the Bay of Bengal, is the former capital of the French territories in India.

To this day there still remains a rich French cultural heritage including the French language being widely spoken. Landmarks include Raj Nivas, the residence of the Lt Governor of Pondicherry – a handsome 200-year-old building which faces Government Park with its paths and lawns, fountains and sculptures as well as the wide and vibrant beaches and beautiful promenades.

Tonight, we have our final dinner aboard the Deccan Odyssey.

DAY 10 CHENNAI

Chennai (formerly known as Madras), the capital of Tamil Nadu, is located on the legendary Coromandel Coast with a marvellous tradition of music and dance. This city of 4 million people has a pronounced colonial heritage dating back to the 17th century when the British East India Company built a small fort on the banks of the Cooum River and called it Fort St. George.

We arrive in Chennai in the morning where we tour the highlights of the city including Fort St. George and the National Art Gallery. We also make a visit to the 16th century San Thome Basilica, built over the tomb of Thomas Didymus, one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus. He is informally referred to as 'Doubting Thomas' because he doubted Jesus' resurrection when first told.

This evening transfer to our luxurious beachfront property of the Taj Fisherman's Cove Resort & Spa for a three night stay. The Fisherman's Cove, once an impressive Dutch Fort, is now one of the finest beach resorts in Southern India. It is located on a beautiful white sandy beach, lapped by the waters from the Bay of Bengal and offers a perfect setting for relaxation at the end of your journey through Southern India.

DAY 11 MAHABALIPURAM

Today there is the option to visit Mahabalipuram, a beautiful coastal resort classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The rock cut temples and caves situated here are amongst the finest in the world and originated between 7th and 9th century. The highlight is a visit to the Shore Temple, which is renowned for its intricate carvings and skilled craftsmanship and is one of the oldest temples in southern India.

DAY 12 AT LEISURE

Today we enjoy our final day in Chennai at the Taj Fisherman's Cove Resort & Spa. Enjoy time relaxing in the lush landscaped gardens of the hotel or take one of the many scenic walkways that lead to the beach. Perhaps make time also to rejuvenate yourself with a signature spa treatment from the hotel's excellent Jiva Spa.

DAY 13 CHENNAI TO HYDERABAD (BY AIR)

Today we travel by air from Chennai to our final destination, Hyderabad and stay for two nights at the luxury Taj Falaknuma Palace. Elevated 2,000 feet above Hyderabad, this luxurious 5-star property features a blend of colonial and Indian designs. It houses a heritage walk with beautifully crafted objects from the world over and a first-rate spa.

Built in 1894, it is the former palace of the Nizam, rumoured to be the richest man in the world at one time. Overlooking the twinkling City of Pearls, this enchanting palace exudes romance and grandeur that take one back to when the Nizam ruled Hyderabad.

DAY 14 HYDERABAD

Today we visit Golconda Fort (Shepherd's Hill) which was the capital of ancient Kingdom of Golkonda and is situated 11 km west of Hyderabad. The city was founded in the 12th century by Kakatiya kings and the massive fort was later built under the reign of the Qutub Shahi Dynasty (c.1518–1687). The fort is a superb example of outstanding engineering and amazing architecture. Its system of acoustics is a big attraction – the sound of clapping at the entrance can be heard at 'Bala Hissar' – the highest point and almost a kilometre away.

From here we travel to the Qutub Shahi Tombs. Located north of the Golconda Fort, the tombs represent the most authentic and majestic display of the Qutub Shahi dynasty's architectural tradition.

We return to the city and visit Charminar. Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, the fifth ruler of the Qutb Shahi dynasty built Charminar in 1591 AD, shortly after he had shifted his capital from Golkonda to what is now known as Hyderabad. He built this famous structure to commemorate the elimination of a plague epidemic from this city. He is said to have prayed for the end of a plague that was ravaging his city and vowed to build a masjid (mosque) at the very place where he was praying.

In the evening, we say our goodbyes to our fellow passengers at a Gala Farewell Dinner in the most magnificent of venues, the 101 Dining Hall of the Taj Falaknuma Palace.

DAY 15 HYDERABAD

After breakfast you will be transferred to the airport in Hyderabad to begin your journey home. Airport transfers are included for all guests.