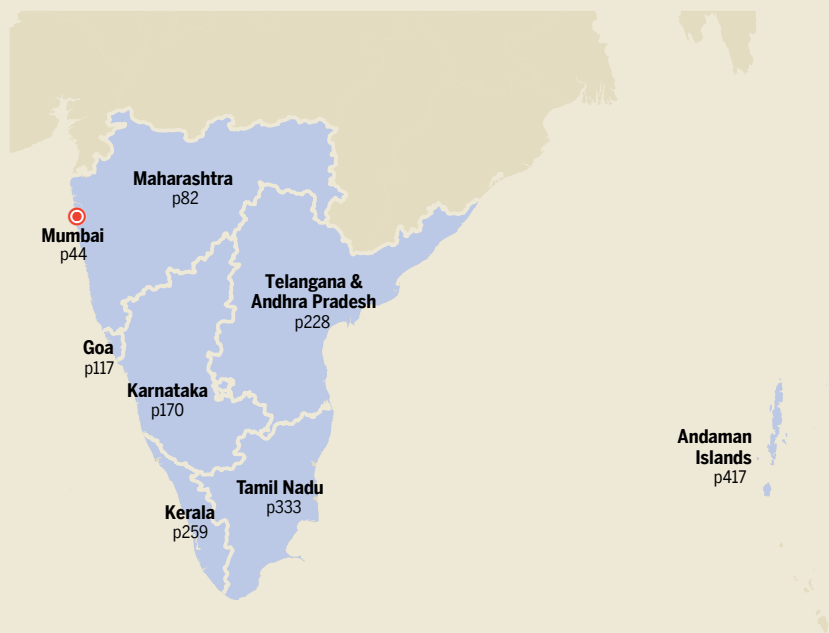




# South India & Kerala



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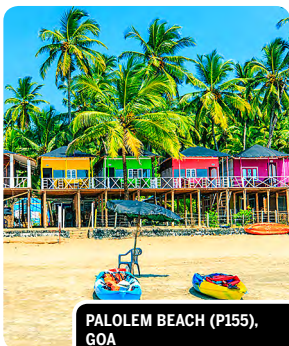
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## South India &amp; Kerala: Off the Beaten Track

**LOUAR METEORITE CRATER**

Created 50,000 years ago this huge crater in Maharashtra has a shallow green lake at its base and wilderness all around. (p99)

**TADABA-ANDHARI TIGER RESERVE**

This Maharashtra reserve is one of the best places in India for wildlife-watching while relaxing in accommodation ranging from homestays to luxury jungle lodges. (p100)

**DUDHSAGAR FALLS**

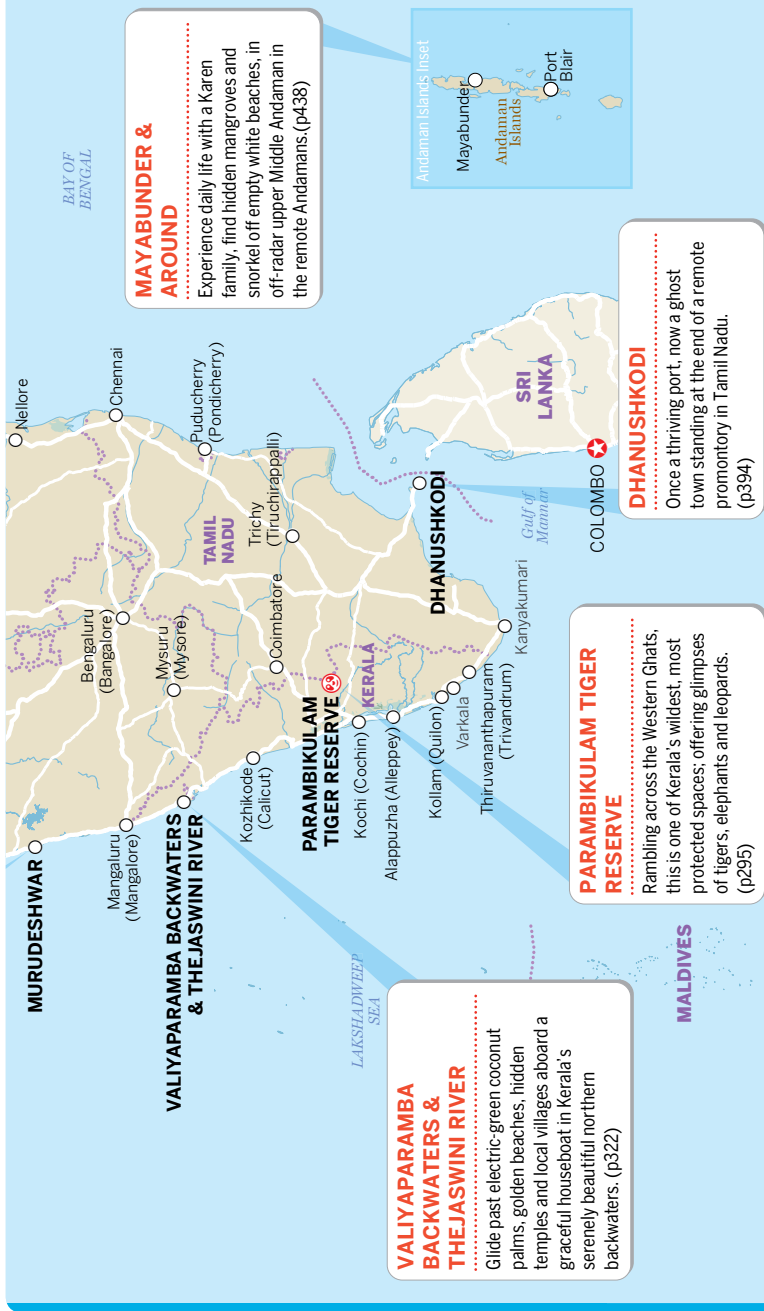
Meaning 'Sea of Milk' Dudsagar is Goa's 300m-high, tiered waterfall, reached by a bumpy, 45-minute 4WD ride through stunning jungle scenery. (p144)

**MURDESHWAR**

This beachside pilgrimage town in Karnataka is known for its colossal seashore statue of Lord Shiva overlooking the Arabian Sea. (p211)

**GUNTUPALLI**

A former hilltop Buddhist cave monastery in Andhra Pradesh especially noteworthy for its caves, carvings and *chaitya-grha* (prayer hall); (p252)



# Itineraries



2  
WEEKS

## Classic Kerala

With its coconut-palm-fringed beaches and languid backwaters, Kerala can justly claim to be India's most laid-back state. But there's plenty of colour and fun to spice up your tropical idyll – lively festivals and snake-boat races, Kathakali dance-dramas, charming colonial-era quarters and a famously flavoursome cuisine.

Spend a day visiting the museums and dining well in capital **Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum)**, before making the half-hour hop southeast to beach resort **Kovalam**. Shift down another gear at nearby **Varkala**, a holy town with a dizzying cliff-top guesthouse-and-restaurant enclave, where you'll keep active with yoga, SUP or surfing. Continue north to **Kollam (Quilon)** and take the tourist cruise along the canals to Alappuzha (Alleppey) with an overnight stop at the **Matha Amrithanandamayi Mission**, the ashram of Kerala's celebrated 'Hugging Mother'. Reaching **Alappuzha (Alleppey)**, you're in backwaters central; aboard a houseboat, kayak or canoe, discover what the sublime backwaters are all about. Next, detour east into the tea-coated, very trekkable hills of **Munnar**. Travel back down to **Kochi (Cochin)** and take the ferry to the old colonial outpost of Fort Cochin, where seafood barbecues, warm homestays, arty cafes, colonial-era mansions, Kathakali shows and the intriguing Jewish quarter at Mattancherry fill a fascinating few days.

4  
WEEKS

## Goa, Caves & Cities

City lights, historic sites, beachy bliss, jungle adventure and a touch of colonial-era quaintness – this trip will give you a flavour of all that’s fantastic about the south.

Begin in cosmopolitan **Mumbai**, Bollywood’s beating heart and home to some of the nation’s finest spots to shop, eat and drink. Take a sunset stroll along Marine Drive, a curvaceous oceanside promenade dubbed the ‘Queen’s Necklace’ because of its sparkling night lights, finishing with *bhelpuri* (fried rounds of dough with rice, lentils and chutney) on Chowpatty Beach. Catch a ferry to Elephanta Island from Mumbai’s historic Gateway of India to explore its stunning rock-cut temples and the triple-faced sculpture of Lord Shiva.

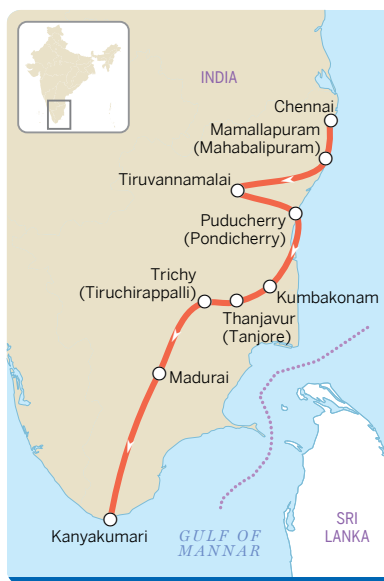
Next, make your way to the dazzling vineyards of Indian wine country around **Nashik**, sipping award-winning creations at Grover Zampa or Sula Vineyards, an outside-the-box Indian experience. Continue northeast to explore the ancient cave art at **Ajanta** and **Ellora**, situated within 150km of each other near Aurangabad. The incredible frescoed Buddhist caves of Ajanta are clustered along a horseshoe-shaped gorge, while the rock-cut caves of Ellora – containing a mix of Hindu, Jain and Buddhist shrines – are set on a 2km escarpment. Next up: the tropical beach haven of **Goa** for some soul-reviving seaside therapy. Wander through lush spice plantations, visit Portuguese-era cathedrals in Old Goa, shop at Anjuna’s colourful flea market and take your pick from dozens of fabulous beach spots, before travelling east to the traveller hot spot of **Hampi** in neighbouring Karnataka. Ramble around Hampi’s enigmatic boulder-strewn landscape and imagine what life here was like when it was a centre of the mighty Vijayanagar empire. Make the long trip down to **Mysuru (Mysore)** to explore Mysuru Palace, one of India’s grandest royal buildings, learn about ashtanga yoga and shop for silk and sandalwood in its colourful markets. From Mysuru it’s an exciting bus or taxi ride across the Western Ghats into Kerala and **Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary**, a pristine forest and jungle reserve and one of the best places in the south to spot wild elephants. Finally, take the hair-raising road down to the coast and make your way south to **Kochi**, Kerala’s intriguing colonial-era city, where a blend of Portuguese, Dutch and British history combines with wonderful homestays, creative cafes and a buzzing traveller scene.

3  
WEEKS

## Cities, Hill Stations & Sanctuaries

An offbeat trip through the contrasting cities, wildlife reserves and hill stations of the Deccan and Western Ghats.

Start with Maharashtra's little-visited but fantastic **Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve**, offering some of the best prospects for sighting wild tigers, before heading south to the wonderful princely capital **Hyderabad** with its centuries-old Islamic monuments and labyrinthine bazaars. Continue south to the culinary and shopping delights of India's 21st-century IT capital, **Bengaluru (Bangalore)**. On to the royal city of **Mysuru**. Gawp at ubergrand Mysuru Palace and try ash-tanga yoga. Head south to Tamil Nadu's **Mudumalai Tiger Reserve** or Kerala's **Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary**, where you can spot wild elephants and take jungle safaris, then on to the cool hill town of **Ooty (Udhagamandalam)**, one of India's most-loved holiday retreats. Take the toy train to Mettupalayam, near Coimbatore, then cross into Kerala and the tea-covered hills of **Munnar**, with fine hiking and secluded mountain accommodation. Finish with trekking and more chances of a tiger or elephant sighting at **Periyar Tiger Reserve**.

2  
WEEKS

## Sacred Tamil Nadu

A journey through Tamil Nadu is a trip into South India's spiritual soul.

Delve into the rich history of **Chennai** with a wander around the Government Museum before visiting the ancient Kapaleeshwarar and Parthasarathy temples. Travel south to beachside **Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram)** and its rock-cut shrines. Move inland to **Tiruvannamalai**, where the Arunachaleswar Temple is one of India's largest sacred complexes. Trade in temples for flamboyant cathedrals over a few days in the delightful old French seaside colony of **Puducherry (Pondicherry)** before heading back inland to the stunning Unesco World Heritage-listed medieval temples around **Kumbakonam** and **Thanjavur (Tanjore)**. Continue to **Trichy (Tiruchirappalli)**, home to the spectacular Rock Fort Temple and the Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple, probably India's biggest temple. Then head south to **Madurai** and the incredible Meenakshi Amman Temple, widely reckoned the pinnacle of South Indian temple architecture. If you like, wind down at **Kanyakumari**, the southern tip of India, with its temple to the virgin sea goddess Kumari, or continue west into Kerala.



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## OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Dublin, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

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