

The best MARCO POLO Insider Tips

Our top 15 Insider Tips



INSIDER TIP Saturday night in Goa

While others sleep, in Goa you can go shopping instead. Enjoy a very special atmosphere, partying, bartering and marvelling at the Arpora Saturday Night Bazaar → p. 36

INSIDER TIP City of the future

Spiritual freedom through yoga and meditation at the Sri Aurobindo ashram in Auroville. Around 2000 people from 40 countries live in this 'universal city' → p. 104, 123

INSIDER TIP Romance under the stars

The Full Moon Restaurant on Bogmalo Bay sets up tables right at the water's edge → p. 41

INSIDER TIP From villains to conservationists

Go walk-about with former ivory smugglers and poachers in Thekkady: no one is more familiar with the tracks of the elephants, or can better spot the signs of a tiger → p. 117

INSIDER TIP Thousands of coconuts for Ganesh

Every morning, offerings are taken to the elephant-headed god at the Pazhavangadi Ganapathy Temple → p. 66

INSIDER TIP Cruising into the sunset

Happy hour: the right place and the right time for an evening excursion on the Mandovi River, live music, Goan dancing and dinner included → p. 42

INSIDER TIP The perfect fit in one hour

Skirts, blouses, trousers or shirts: at the Pudumandapam Market in Madurai there are 250 tailors who'll make up your garments in no time at all → p. 106

INSIDER TIP Hot & spicy

Nutmeg, cardamom, vanilla, cinnamon and sandalwood – exotic fragrances at the spice market in Kochi → p. 51

INSIDER TIP Steaming through the hills

It looks like a toy – and doesn't go much faster. Thank goodness, because now you can lean back and enjoy the nostalgia trip to Ooty aboard the Nilgiri Mountain Railway. Look out for the monkeys along the route, and share your lunch with fellow passengers (photo left) → p. 114

INSIDER TIP Avoiding the crowds

In the Nilgiri Mountains, you've (still) got the mountain caves and dense jungle of the pristine Wayanad National Park almost all to yourself (photo below) → p. 64

INSIDER TIP Relaxing among the bananas

In Hampi, travellers congregate at the Mango Tree to eat delicious and cheap *thalis*. Then they sit and relax while overlooking the river – sometimes for the whole afternoon → p. 82

INSIDER TIP Feeding time for an elephant

Twice a day at the Aarathy restaurant in Madurai, guests can feed the temple elephant with South Indian specialities → p. 106

INSIDER TIP Holiday on the farm

Certainly not something you would immediately associate with a trip to this part of the world: life on the farm Indian style. Learn about organic farming, drive an ox-cart and also immerse yourself in the holistic spa at the village near Bengaluru → p. 79

INSIDER TIP Frolicking around

In the evening, dolphins come out to play in the sea off the secluded Agonda beach → p. 38

INSIDER TIP Sleeping under elephant grass

With the inclusion of natural materials, the cottages of the Spice Village in Thekkady make for a healthy environment, perfect for a good night's sleep → p. 58



BEST OF ...

GREAT PLACES FOR FREE

Discover new places and save money

FOR FREE

- **An early start to the day with yoga**

From 6–8am, at 26 different public spaces in Chennai, e.g. Panagal Park and Marina Beach, you can take part in *free yoga classes*. The idea came from the former mayor, who had the good health of the citizenry at heart → p. 123

- **Massage included**

In the spice gardens of Goa, tours also include free, relaxing *massages*. Of course, there is the ulterior motive that you'll later purchase the requisite oils, but you don't have to → p. 43

- **Silent Parties**

Dancing at night, barefoot on the sand, with headphones on – that's both romantic and considerate. And it's easy on the wallet: the *open air discos in Palolem* in Goa offer free entry (photo) → p. 39

- **First the rice harvest, then the entertainment**

Once the rice has been gathered in, the farmers around Hampi organise *ox-cart races* and *bullfights*. The animals don't suffer, the Torero's prize being the money and sweets that he manages to pluck from the head of the bull. And you can also take part and enjoy South Indian traditions up close → p. 83

- **End the day with fresh shrimps**

Buy some freshly caught shrimps straight from the Chinese fishing nets in Kochi and have them prepared at the stall. They'll cost you a pound at most and you'll sit on the sand with the bag in your hand and watch as the giant nets are silhouetted against the sunset – just stunning → p. 50

- **More than 300 concerts for free**

At the *Chennai Music and Dance Festival*, classical music and traditional dances are performed at more than 100 venues, with over 2000 participants contributing to at least 300 concerts. And it doesn't cost a thing, though small donations are, of course, always welcome → p. 127



● ● ● Dots in guidebook refer to 'Best of ...' tips

ONLY IN SOUTH INDIA

Unique experiences

- **When Indian men go dancing**

Kathakali, the best-known dance drama in South India, is noted for the colourful make-up and elaborate costumes of the male-only performers. You are welcome to watch the painstaking make-up process, and of course the dances themselves, which recreate scenes from ancient Hindu epics → p. 53

- **Temporary tattoo**

In the model village of *Dakshinachitra* near Chennai, you can see demonstrations of typical Indian handicrafts. While you're there, you can also have elaborate henna mehndi patterns painted on your hands → p. 102

- **Spiritual shopping**

Pondicherry is a real shopper's paradise when it comes to basic spiritual requirements. This is mainly due to the *Sri Aurobindo shops*, which sell clothes, bags, jewellery, incense sticks, oils and high quality handmade paper, all made in the nearby ashram at Auroville → p. 104

- **India's treasures lie in the south**

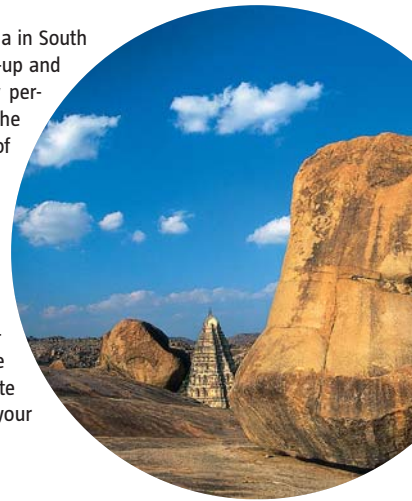
The vast majority of the subcontinent's most impressive monuments and cultural treasures are located in South India. Look out for the stunning *temple complex of Hampi* (photo) and the magical *sea temple in Mamallapuram* → p. 80, 103

- **Riding pillion through Goa**

When in Goa you can hire a motorbike rider who will take you everywhere on the back of his bike or Vespa. It's inexpensive, fun and an unusual way to get around. You can find *two-wheeler taxi stands* everywhere → p. 41

- **Farewell on the beach**

These *ceremonies* may make you feel uneasy, but will show you a real piece of India. You have to get up early though to watch the priests at work on *Varkala beach* in Kerala. Families arrive with the ashes of their recently departed, so they can be blessed and then scattered in the sea → p. 68



ONLY IN

THE PERFECT ROUTE

Experience the many sides of South India, from Tamil Nadu to the beaches of Goa via tiger reserves, the Backwaters and city pubs

TEMPLE, TEMPLE, TEMPLE

1 **Chennai** → p. 96 is the perfect starting point. Here you can hire a car with driver for the entire journey, or arrange to cover some sections by train. Before setting off from Chennai, climb the 106 steps to the white *San Thome Basilica*, where tradition states that St Thomas the Apostle met his martyrdom. The East Coast Road follows the sea south to 2 **Mamallapuram** → p. 103 (photo left). At this unique Unesco World Heritage Site allow yourself plenty of time to admire the *sea temples* and the nine *cave temples* with reliefs full of elephants and celestial beings. The journey continues southwards to 3 **Thanjavur** → p. 108, which has all of 90 temples. You can enjoy a superb view over 4 **Tiruchirappalli** → p. 109 from the 83-m (272-ft) high *Rock Fort* crowned by the *Uchi Pillar Temple*. Just 6km (4mi) away, the legendary temple city of 5 **Srirangam** → p. 110 lies on an island between two rivers, its bazaars thronging with pilgrims. South India's greatest marvel, however, is in 6 **Madurai** → p. 105 – the *Sri Meenakshi Sundareshwarar Temple*, festooned with some 33 million figures of gods and demons. Before the visit you can order a garment from one of the 250 tailors in the adjacent bazaar, and pick it up afterwards.



TIGERS, TEA AND PARADISE BEACHES

Now it's up into the hills with their tea gardens and into the 7 **Periyar National Park** → p. 58 (photo right). Whether you're on a boat trip, trekking or bamboo rafting, elephants and monkeys will be likely to cross your path and, with a bit of luck, even a tiger. Afterwards you can go to the beach, namely the one at 8 **Varkala** → p. 68. Climb the steps to the top of the red cliffs, and enjoy the views from one of the many open-air cafés, bars or restaurants. Even if it's only for a few hours, in 9 **Alappuzha** → p. 55, the Venice of the East, you should board a houseboat made of bamboo and coconut and take a relaxing journey along the enchanted *Backwaters*. In 10 **Kochi** → p. 49 immerse yourself in the bustle of the Old Town's narrow alleyways; at sunset take a boat trip to photograph the *Chinese fishing nets*.



PARTIES, SHOPPING, ANCIENT SPLENDOUR

11 **Mysore** → p. 91 is the fairytale city of the Maharajas. During festivals the magnificent palace of *Amba Vilas* is illuminated by 96,000 light

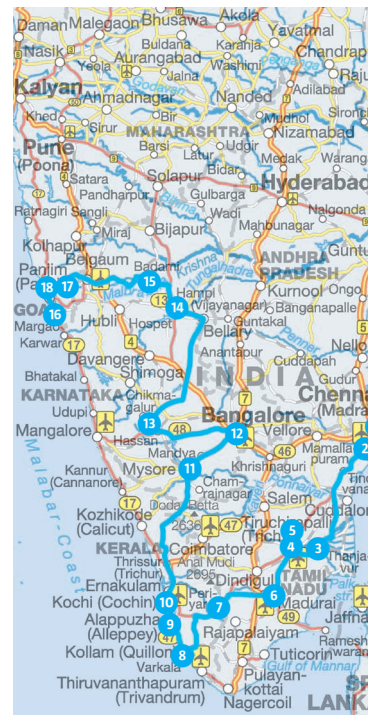
bulbs. On then to the shopper's paradise of 12 **Bangalore** → p. 76: silk, saris, jewellery and rugs – along the MG Road there is one fantastic shop after another. This western-influenced city with its plentiful nightlife is also often called the *Pub City*.

EROTICA IN STONE

Quite a sight. The erotic depictions at the *Hoysala Temple* in 13 **Belur** → p. 89 are extremely detailed. An almost mystical scene unfolds at 14 **Hampi** → p. 80. The location alone, between granite rocks and the river, is stunning. Hire a bicycle to explore the extensive complex – also a Unesco World Heritage Site – with its temples, palaces and the famous *Stone Chariot*. Four cave temples are hidden among the red sandstone hills of 15 **Badami** → p. 85. In the first one you can take lessons from the 18-armed statue of Nataraja (Shiva), who demonstrates 81 different dance moves.

SWIMMING, PARTYING, RIVER TRIP UNDER THE STARS

Now you can relax on the endless beaches of Goa. This, the smallest Indian state, is strongly influenced by its Portuguese heritage and exudes *joie de vivre*. The Queen of the sands is considered to be 16 **Calangute Beach** → p. 35. But you should also definitely visit 17 **Old Goa (Velha Goa)** → p. 43, with its snow-white church *Basilica Bom Jesus*. And finally, at sunset treat yourself to a romantic boat trip on the *Mandovi River* in the capital of Goa, 18 **Panaji** → p. 40. Return to Chennai from Dambolim airport.



2635 km/1637 mi. Driving time: 49 hrs.
Recommended duration: 16–20 days
Detailed map of the route in the road atlas, the pull-out map and on the back cover