



The Extra Mile

Travel with the master

Presents

Dynasties, Merchants & Gods

*Discovering Tamil Nadu
one story at a time.*

7-17 February 2026



Dynasties, Merchants & Gods: An immersive journey through the cultural heart of Tamil Nadu

I first discovered Tamil Nadu as a student of Fine Arts—its temple architecture and sculpture were not just chapters in our syllabus, but living heritage we explored onsite. We walked through the majestic temples of the Pandyas, Cholas, and Cheras, each dynasty leaving behind a legacy of artistry, devotion, and ambition. Though often at war, these ancient rulers shaped the cultural and spiritual fabric of South India—fostering advances in architecture, literature, and the performing arts.

It was the stories that stayed with me—the myths of gods and goddesses, the legends of kings, and the echoes of dynasties long past. My Chettiar friend shared tales of her community's rich traditions, but it was only when I visited Karaikudi that I truly understood the grandeur and glory of this land.

On this specially curated tour, *Dynasties, Merchants & Gods*, we trace a vibrant trail—from the rock-cut temples of coastal Mahabalipuram to the living towns and villages that pulse with creativity and memory. Along the way, you'll meet artisans, home chefs, storytellers, classical musicians, and historians who breathe life into Tamil Nadu's layered past.

We are fortunate to have Madhuvanathi, a gifted classical musician and story teller, accompany us—she will weave together the stories and songs of this journey, adding rhythm and resonance to every moment.

Join me on a one-of-a-kind journey through the soul of Tamil Nadu—one story at a time.

Warmly
Shoba



ABOUT THE FACILITATOR

Vidushi Madhuvanathi Badri

Madhuvanathi, is a classical vocalist, teacher, performer and culture host who started training in Carnatic Music when she was 6 years old. After being initially tutored by her mother Smt. Meenakshi, a vainika and vocalist, she started rigorous training under Kalaimamani Vidushi Smt. Bhushany Kalyanaraman, thus imbibing the authentic paatanthara (style) from the GNB and Thanjavur S. Kalyanaraman lineage. She learns advanced music from Kalaimamani Vidushi Smt S.Rajeswari as well. Madhuvanathi is also specially trained in Tamizh music having learnt the Tevaram, Tiruvasagam, Tirumandiram, Periya Puranam, Divya Prabandham and Tiruarutpa from her musicologist aunt Dr. Rama. Kausalya, scholar and former principal of the Tiruvaiyaru Music College, with whom she travels to perform Lecture Demonstrations and conduct workshops. The two of them presented a daily programme on Tamizhisai on Makkal Television for 2 years, which was widely received by the Tamizh audience and scholars alike. Madhuvanathi is currently hosting a Carnatic music reality show called "Podhigai singing idol" on Doordarshan's tamizh regional channel – Podhigai. She is also one of the trustees of "Marabu Foundation", at Thillaisthanam in Thanjavur, an organisation that strives to preserve traditional art and culture for it to be safely handed down to the generations to come. She loves introducing little minds to the world of music and influencing them musically.

Itinerary at a glance

DATE	LOCATION	DETAILS	ACCOMODATION
Feb 7	Mahabalipuram	Arrive Chennai airport and transfer to Mahabalipuram. Checkin at your hotel. Introduction to the tour and welcome dinner.	ITC Mahabalipuram
Feb 8	Pondicherry	Guided tour of Mahabalipuram. Drive to Pondicherry for a heritage lunch with a French–Tamil family, evening at leisure.	Villa Shanthi
Feb 9	Pondicherry	Explore Auroville on a guided tour followed by lunch with its residents. In the evening, enjoy a guided heritage walk through Pondicherry.	Villa Shanthi
Feb 10	Kumbakonam	Drive to Kumbakonam with a stop at the majestic Gangaikondacholapuram Temple, followed by lunch en route. In the evening, visit the Airavateeswara Temple before enjoying a traditional Thinnai dinner and storytelling session at a local home.	Mantrakoodam
Feb 11	Kumbakonam	Explore Kumbakonam’s rich artisan heritage with visits to Swamimalai Bronze Idol makers and a Kalamkari family. Enjoy a traditional banana leaf lunch, followed by an afternoon with Nagaswaram instrument makers and a brief performance; end the day with a Thinnai Evening, dinner.	Mantrakoodam
Feb 12	Thanjavur	Drive to Thanjavur, explore the Maratha legacy through visits to the palace complex, Sarasvati Mahal Library, and Bronze Idol Gallery. Enjoy high tea with the royal family, followed by an evening experience at Brihadeeswara Temple for the Palliyarai Ceremony.	Svatma
Feb 13	Thanjavur	Engage with Tanjore painting and Veena artisans as they share their craft, followed by a traditional Thanjavur–style lunch. In the evening, enjoy a Thinnai Evening with Dr. Rama Kausalya in Tiruvaiyaru, featuring music, dance, and stories on the Devadasi tradition, ending with a home–cooked dinner.	Svatma
Feb 14	Karaikudi	Drive to Karaikudi. Explore the grand Chettiar mansions, and in the evening, enjoy a Thinnai Evening with a local family—sharing stories, snacks, and cultural insights.	Visalam
Feb 15	Karaikudi	Visit an Athangudi tile workshop and a women’s sweet–making cooperative, followed by lunch at Bangala. In the evening, explore a village shrine dedicated to Ayyannar with its striking terracotta horses.	Visalam
Feb 16	Madurai	Travel to Madurai, In the afternoon, take a guided walk through the city's historic streets, and in the evening, experience a Thinnai Evening with a local woman sharing stories of Madurai Sungudi sarees.	Madurai Heritage
Feb 17	Departure	Start the day early in the morning with a musical tour of the Meenakshi Amman Koil reflecting on the significance of the Goddess and of the historic temple. After breakfast at the hotel, head to the airport for the return flight.	



DAY 1 – Saturday, February 7 Arrival in Mahabalipuram

You will arrive at Chennai International Airport and be transferred to Mahabalipuram which takes around 1.5 hrs approximately. Upon arrival, check-in at Welcomhotel By ITC Hotels, Kences Palm Beach. In the evening, you will be introduced to your facilitator, Madhu, and will be given an overview of the journey that lies ahead followed by a dinner that sets the tone for the days to come.

Accommodation – Welcomhotel By ITC Hotels
Room Type – Garden Cottage
Meals included – Dinner





DAY 2 – Sunday, February 8 Mahabalipuram – Pondicherry

Begin your day early in the morning with a guided exploration of Mahabalipuram’s iconic monuments —Shore Temple, Mahishasuramardini Cave Temple, and the magnificent Arjuna’s Penance. These ancient sites tell stories of Pallava rule and temple architecture. After breakfast, check-out of ITC Mahabalipuram.

Drive down to Pondicherry (approximately 2 hrs 15 min) and have lunch with a 4th and 5th generation family with French roots. They will serve a sit down meal influenced by Tamil, French, Vietnamese and Portuguese culinary styles. Pondicherry’s French history, heritage and culture will be par for the Course. Check in at Villa Shanthi. Rest of the evening at leisure. Dinner followed by overnight at hotel

Accommodation – Villa Shanthi
Room Type – Deluxe Room
Meals included – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner



DAY 3 – Monday, February 9 Pondicherry & Auroville

After breakfast, you will take a guided tour of Auroville showcasing the philosophy behind its conception and its evolution as a universal township for the world. The tour will end with lunch served at a local Aurovillian restaurant which offers an opportunity to interact with its residents.

In the evening, a guided tour by a local highlighting the history and heritage of the French and Tamil heritage of Pondicherry. Proceed for dinner and overnight at hotel

Accommodation – Villa Shanthi

Room Type – Deluxe Room

Meals included – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner





Day 4 – Tuesday, February 10 Pondicherry to Kumbakonam

After breakfast, you will journey to Kumbakonam, stopping en route at the Grand Gangaikondacholapuram temple, built by Rajendra Chola in the 11th century CE. Learn about the Chola dynasty, its architectural brilliance, and devotional hymns dedicated to Lord Shiva.

Enroute have lunch at a local restaurant. Upon arrival in Kumbakonam, check in at Mantra Koodam. In the evening, explore the intricately carved Airavateeswara Temple, the second of the three Great Living Chola Temples before heading to a local home for a Thinnai Evening—a relaxed traditional home-cooked dinner (tiffin meal) and storytelling session. Return to the hotel for overnight stay.

Accommodation – Mantra Koodam

Room Type – Mantra Cottage

Meals included – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner





Day 5 – Wednesday, February 11 Kumbakonam

After breakfast, Spend the day immersed in Kumbakonam’s artisan traditions. In the morning, you’ll visit the Swamimalai Bronze Idol Makers and a 12th-generation Kalamkari family, witnessing centuries-old techniques.

Enjoy a local vegetarian lunch served on banana leaf at a quick-service mess. In the afternoon, interact with makers of the Nagaswaram instrument, followed by a short performance. The day concludes with another reflective Thinnai Evening at your hotel followed by dinner and overnight.

Accommodation – Mantra Koodam

Room Type – Mantra Cottage

Meals included – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner



Day 6 – Thursday, February 12 Kumbakonam to Thanjavur

After breakfast, check-out and drive to Thanjavur and check in at Svatma. An introduction to the history of Tanjore and of the Marathas will be given where you can explore the rich Maratha history with a visit to the palace complex, the Sarasvati Mahal Library, and the Bronze Idol Gallery. Later, you'll enjoy high-tea and conversation with members of the Maratha royal family.

The evening is set aside for a Thinnai Evening at the Brihadeeswara Koil to witness the evocative Palliyarai Ceremony, where Lord Shiva is escorted to Parvati's chamber amidst music and chanting. Return to the hotel for dinner and overnight stay.

Accommodation – Svatma
Room Type – Millennium Suite
Meals included – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner



**Day 7 – Friday, February 13
Thanjavur & Tiruvaiyaru**

After breakfast, you'll meet master artisans of Tanjore painting and the Saraswati Veena, who will walk you through their creative process. Proceed for a Thanjavur style lunch.

In the evening, head to the village of Tiruvaiyaru for a special Thinnai Evening hosted by Dr. Rama Kausalya. Through music, dance, and storytelling, she'll share the transformation of the Devadasi tradition into present-day Bharatanatyam. A simple but traditional dinner at Dr. Kausalya's home wraps up the night. Return to Svatma for overnight stay.

Accommodation – Svatma
Room Type – Millennium Suite
Meals included – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner



**Day 8 – Saturday, February 14
Thanjavur to Karaikudi**

After breakfast, depart for the Chettinad region and check in at Visalam in Karaikudi. In the afternoon, have lunch and then you'll tour grand Chettiar mansions that reflect the opulence and lifestyle of a once-flourishing merchant community.

The evening brings another Thinnai Evening, this time with a Chettiar family, where stories, snacks, and local legacy come together in a warm home setting. Return to hotel for overnight

Accommodation – Visalam

Room Type – Chettinad Room

Meals included – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner



Day 9 – Sunday, February 15 Karaikudi

Your morning includes a visit to an Athangudi tile-making workshop to witness the handcrafting of bright, colorful Chettinad tiles, followed by a visit to a women's cooperative making sweets for social events. Proceed for lunch. In the evening, visit a local shrine dedicated to the village deity Ayyannar, famous for its terracotta horse offerings. End the day with dinner and quiet reflection at your hotel.

Accommodation – Visalam

Room Type – Chettinad Room

Meals included – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner



Day 10 – Monday, February 16
Karaikudi to Madurai

Travel to Madurai and upon arrival, proceed for lunch. Check in at Madurai Heritage. Later in the afternoon, enjoy a walking tour through the vibrant streets of Madurai, discovering its Pandian-era past.

In the evening, join a **Thinnai Evening** at the home of a local woman who will share her love for Madurai Sungudi sarees and her experience of life in this temple town followed by Dinner. Return to hotel for overnight stay.

Accommodation – Madurai Heritage

Room Type – Luxury Room

Meals included – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner



Day 11 – Tuesday, February 17 Departure

Start the day early in the morning with a musical tour of the Meenakshi Amman Koil reflecting on the significance of the Goddess and of the historic temple. After breakfast at the hotel, head to the airport for the return flight.

Meals included – Breakfast

7 February : ITC ,Mahabalipuram



Welcomhotel by ITC Hotels, Kences Palm Beach is a serene beachfront retreat in Mamallapuram, set along the ancient East Coast Road once used by seafarers and traders. Just minutes from the UNESCO-listed Shore Temple and Pallava-era monuments, the resort blends luxury with the timeless soul of South Indian heritage. With views of the Bay of Bengal and access to living history, it offers guests a deeply immersive coastal and cultural experience.

8-10 February : Villa Shanti,Pondicherry



Villa Shanti is a 15 room boutique hotel located in the French quarter of Pondicherry. Easy walking distance from the beach and the market. Colonial restored furniture or contemporary ones, antiques & artefacts, daily use objects are intricately blended which makes the Villa unique.

February 10,11 : Mantrakoodam, Kumbakonam



Mantra Koodam is a heritage boutique resort, is designed like an 'agraharam' – the characteristically Brahmin street lined with 'illams' (homes). It's a tribute to the region's heritage and its historic stature as a seat of power in South India. The cottages are designed like traditional Tamil homes – with large verandahs, Athangudi tiles on the floor, ornate Burmese teak doors and open-air bathrooms.

February 12,13 : Svatma, Thanjavur



Svatma is a 34 room luxury heritage hotel in Thanjavur, blending classical Tamil architecture with refined contemporary elegance. Located near the Brihadeeswara Temple, it offers curated cultural experiences, soulful vegetarian cuisine, and wellness rituals. Every corner reflects the artistic and spiritual legacy of Tamil Nadu.

February 14,15 : Visalam,Karaikudi



Visalam is a century-old Chettinad mansion lovingly restored by CGH Earth in Kanadukathan, embodying the rich heritage of the Chettiar merchant legacy, built as a father's tribute to his daughter. Set amidst quiet village lanes, Visalam preserves its original architectural grandeur—Italian marble, teak wood, Athangudi tiles—and now houses elegantly partitioned guest rooms, a pool, serene gardens, and a library

February 16: Madurai Heritage, Madurai



Heritage Madurai is a luxury resort built around a 17th-century British colonial club house, redesigned by legendary architect Geoffrey Bawa. It is located 2–3 km from key landmarks like Meenakshi Temple and Thirumalai Nayak Palace. Nestled amidst banyan trees and temple tanks, it offers a perfect blend of Madurai's cultural legacy and modern comfort.

TOUR cost based on a minimum group size of 12

Cost per person on twin / double sharing basis : INR 250000/- +5% GST

Cost per person on single occupancy basis : INR 327500/- +5% GST.

COST INCLUSIONS

- 1 night stay at ITC, Kenses Palm beach Mahabalipuram(Garden cottage)
- 2 nights stay at Villa Shanti in Pondicherry (Deluxe rooms)
- 2 nights stay at Mantrakoodam in Kumbakonam (Cottage)
- 2 nights stay at Svatma in Tanjore (Millenium Suite room)
- 2 nights stay at Visalam in Chettinad (Chettinad Room)
- 1 night stay at Madurai Heritage in Madurai (Luxury villa rooms)

All transfers using Toyota Crysta based 3 travellers to a car.

Tour lead by Classical musician and specialist guide Madhuvanathi

All meals starting with dinner on 7th February and ending with breakfast on 17th Feb.

All experiences as mentioned in the tour.

COST EXCLUSIONS

Any flight tickets

Tips

Usage of the car after 9pm

Alcoholic beverages

Early check-in / Late check-outs

Anything mentioned outside the itinerary



BOOKING TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- Token Deposit: ₹1,00,000 is required at the time of booking to confirm your spot.
- Balance Payment: Due by 15th October.

Cancellation Policy:

- On or before 15th September: Full refund.
- Between 16th September and 30th October: 50% refund.
- On or after 1st November: No refund.



BOOK THIS TOUR

The Extra Mile

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“Tamil Nadu is one of the few places in the world where classical culture is not in a museum, but alive in the streets, temples, and voices of its people.”

~ David Shulman