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12D BEST OF TWO CULTURES (TAMILNADU & KERALA)

Day 01 :Kuala Lumpur - Chennai

Arrive Chennai, after a traditional '**Swagat**' (Welcome) our representative would assist you at the airport & to our hotel for check in. **Chennai** is known for its cultural heritage & temple architecture. The region was served as an important administrative, military, & economic centre dating back to the 1st century. When the Portuguese arrived in 1522, they built a port, the region then passed into the hands of the Dutch, who established themselves near north of the city in 1612. On 22 August 1639, British East India Company was granted land, as a base for a permanent settlement. **Overnight Hotel – Chennai.**

Day 02 :Chennai - City Tour Chennai - Mahabalipuram (70 km - 02 hr)

(B)

Today we take a tour of Chennai, touching **Fort St. George**, built in the year 1640 AD by the British East India Company, under the direct supervision of Francis Day & Andrew Cogon. This bastion achieved its name from St. George. Within the fort we visit **St. Mary's Church**, built in the year 1680 & oldest Protestant Church in the East contains several antiquities, not the least being the oldest British tombstones in India. **Fort Museum**, with 10 rooms displaying the old uniforms, coins, padlocks, old prints & palanquins. **Santhome Cathedral** derives its name from St. Thomas, the apostle of Christ who is believed to have visited *Madras* sometime during 52 AD. He was killed on St. Thomas Mount just in 78 AD & was interned in Santhome beach, where church was built. Several years later, another church was built & his mortal remains were transferred to the new one. **Museums**, established in 1857, it is undoubtedly one of the country's finest museums. It has sections devoted to geology, archaeology, anthropology, botany, zoology, sculpture & numismatics. Its most prized possessions are the relics from 2nd century AD Buddhist site of Amaravathi & the prehistoric antiques of South India. Later we drive to **Mahabalipuram**, 7th century port city of the South Indian. It is believed to have been named after the Pallava king Mamalla. It has various historic monuments built largely between the 7th & the 9th century, & has been classified as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. The monuments are mostly rock-cut & monolithic, constitute the early stages of Dravidian architecture wherein Buddhist elements of design are prominently visible. **Overnight Hotel - Chennai**

Day 03 :Mahabalipuram - Excursion to Kanchipuram (65 km - 1½ hr)

(B)

Today, we take a guided tour of **Mahabalipuram**, visiting **Shore Temple**, one of the oldest temples in South India. It belongs to the 8th Century A.D. & is a good example of the first phase of the structure of temples constructed in the Dravidian style. Designed to catch the first rays of the rising sun & to illuminate the waters after dark, the temple ended up with an unusual lay-out. **Arjuna's Penance**, world's largest bas-relief. This huge whale-back shaped rock contains figures of gods, demigods, men, beasts, & birds & in fact, can be said to represent creation itself. Next we visit **Rathas**, monolithic temples fashioned as chariots. They remain an architectural mystery, for each is apparently a faithful reproduction of a structure built of wood. In fact, even the grain of the timber beams & rafters has been simulated in stone. Of the eight Rathas, five have been named for the Pandava brothers, the heroes of the epic Mahabharata. Later we take a day excursion to **Kanchipuram**, is one of the seven holy cities in the country. It was a city of learning for both Tamil & Sanskrit, & was believed to be visited by Hsuan Tsang. In ancient times it was called Kachi. Once had over a thousand temples & today there are more than a hundred extant. It is also known for its temples & silk sarees. We visit **Kailasanatha Temple**, built in 8th Century AD. It is built in the typical Pallava style, with a pyramidal tower, a pillared hall & vestibule, enclosed by a wall. The temple is famous for exquisite carvings & attracts devotees & tourists alike. There are 58 small shrines situated around the main shrine, as a compound wall. Fresco style paintings adorn the inner walls of the temple. Next we visit **Ekambaranatha**, ancient temple is dedicated to lord Shiva. The 57 metres high Raj Gopuram is one of the tallest towers in South India. The 3000 year old mango tree inside the temple has 4 branches each yielding different variety of mangoes. Before returning to Mahabalipuram we visit **Kamakshi**

Amman Temple, built in 12th century AD, as an important Shakthisthalam, known as Parabrahmaroopini. The main deity is seated on Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Eswara & Sadasiva. **Overnight Hotel - Mahabalipuram**

Day 04 :Mahabalipuram - Tanjore (300 km - 06 hr) (B)
Today we drive to Tanjore, flourished during the rule of the Nayaks & Mahrattas. It has been the treasure house of art for centuries. It is called the **Rice Bowl of Tamilnadu**. Thanjavur is well-known throughout the world for its exquisite handicrafts like the Art Plate, pithwork, bronze icons, Thanjavur paintings & the classical South Indian musical instruments. Later we visit **Brihadeshwara temple**, also known as Big Temple, built by Rajaraja Chola I was completed around 1010 CE. This 10th century CE temple, one of **UNESCO World Heritage Sites**, is a brilliant example of the Dravidian style of temple architecture. The beautiful Chola Fresco paintings on the inner walls of the temple are no way less than Ajanta paintings. **Overnight Hotel - Tanjore**

Day 05 :Tanjore - Madurai via Trichy (200 km - 04 hr) (B)
Today we leave for **Madurai**, rich cultural heritage passed for more than 2500 years old & has been an important commercial centre as early as 550 AD. It is the oldest city in Tamilnadu & was originally known as **Kadambavanam** or the **forest of Kadamba**. **En route Trichy** En route we stop at **Trichy**, which has very historic temples, monuments & churches. It was an important town in the days of the later Cholas, Nayaks as well as during the early days of the British East India Company. We start with **Srirangam Temple**, surrounded by the waters of the River Kaveri on one side & its tributary Kollidam on the other is a 600-acre island-town enclosed within the seven walls of the gigantic **Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple**. There are not less than 21 Gopuram here in this temple, one of which is the tallest in South India. Later we visit **Rockfort** most famed landmark is an 83 m high rock which is the only outcrop in the otherwise flat land of the city. The most amazing fact about the rock is that it is one of the oldest in the world approximately 3,800 million years, which makes it as old as the rocks of Greenland & older than the Himalayas. **Overnight Hotel - Madurai**

Day 06 :Madurai (B)
Today we visit to **Meenakshi Sundareshwar** was first built 2000 years ago & was substantially expanded between the years (1623-55 AD). Initially there was only the Shiva temple. A striking feature of the temple is the astonishing structure known as Ayiramkaal mandapam or the Hall of a thousand pillars in the outermost corridor. **Overnight Hotel – Madurai.**

Day 07 :Madurai - Periyar (136 km - 3 ½ hr) (B)
Today we drive to **Periyar**, Set on an attractive lakeside, it is South India's most popular Wildlife Sanctuary. Periyar is a place to cruise on the lake & gives an opportunity to see wildlife. It is home to tigers, leopards, elephants, bison, antelopes, sambhar, wild boar, monkey, a wide variety of birds. Evening game viewing at the sanctuary by boat on Lake Periyar **Overnight Hotel - Periyar**

Day 08 :Periyar - Kumarakom (135 km - 04 hr) (B)
At sun rise we take a boat ride to view wildlife in the sanctuary on Lake Periyar. After two hours of wildlife viewing we get back to the hotel for breakfast. Later we drive to **Kumarakom**, known for backwaters, huge Vembanad Lake & famous Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary. **Overnight Hotel - Kumarakom**

Day 09 :Kumarakom - Alleppey (Overnight Houseboat) (BLD)
Today we visit **Kumarakom Bird sanctuary**. There are two seasons for birds: between October & February there are cormorants, teals, & other ducks & from February to July there are darters (snake birds), night herons, egrets, & Siberian storks. It also has golden backed woodpecker, crow pheasant, white-breasted water hen, tree pie etc. Later we board the **houseboat**, locally called **Kettuvallam**, cruise around beautiful backwaters of Kumarakom to Alleppey to observe & experience the daily life of the villagers along the backwaters. **Overnight Houseboat.**

Day 10 :Alleppey - Cochin (65 km - 01 hr) (B)
Early morning before breakfast go for a wildlife viewing to the sanctuary on Lake Periyar by **boat cruise**. After two hours of wildlife viewing get back to the hotel for breakfast. Later drive to **Cochin**, a very popular & historical sea trade connection with Middle East, Mediterranean Europe, Dutch & British. It has one of the finest natural harbours on the Arabian coastline. Its cosmopolitan character is reflected in the buildings & structures representing different regions of the world. Rest of day at Leisure **Overnight Hotel - Cochin**

Day 11 :Cochin (Half Day Tour)**(B)**

Today we visit **Jew Town, synagogue**, built in the year 1568, is magnificently decorated by Chinese tiles & Belgian chandeliers. Giant scrolls of the Old Testament can be found here. Also visit the **spice market**, where the air is filled with the pungent smell of spices & history that brought the world to its doorstep. **Chinese fishing nets**, (*Cheenavala*) are distinctly unique to Cochin. It is believed that traders from the court of the Chinese ruler Kublai Khan introduced these nets here. In the evening see Kerala's most popular **classical dance, Kathakali**.

Overnight Hotel - Cochin (B)**Day 12 : Cochin – Kuala Lumpur**

Today we will transfer you to Cochin airport to board flight for onward Journey.