

SKILL BASED ELECTIVE II (V SEMESTER)

CULTURAL TOURISM IN INDIA

Unit I: Travel for knowledge and education – travel during Ancient period-Nalanda, Taxila, Kanchipuram, Madurai, Medieval Period – Travellers – Abdul Razaak, Ibn Batuta, Marcopolo, Domingos Paes, Nuniz Modern Period – William Hawkins, Thomas Roe, Bernier.

Unit II: Culinary Traditions, Crafts, Melas, Emporias, Folklores, Traditions. Music- Hindustani, Carnatic Dance – Kuchipudi, Odissi, Kathakalli, Bharathanattiyam.

Unit III: Tourist Centres in North – Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Ajanta, Ellora. South – Belur, Halebidu, Mysore, Mamallapuram, Kanchipuram, Madurai, Tanjore, Trichy.

Unit IV: Fairs – in Chennai, Chidambaram, Thiruvaiyaru and Kanyakumari. Festivals – Holi, Deepavali, Dasara, Ugadi, Onam, Pongal.

Unit V: Eco-Tourism – The concept – Eco Tourism in Coastal centres – Kanyakumari, Mahabalipuram, Poompuhar, Kovalam. Hill Stations – Ooty – Masinakudi, Kodaikanal, Kerala – Kumarakulam.

References:

1. Agarwal V.S. The Heritage of Indian Art, Publications divisions, Govt. of India, New Delhi 2003.
2. Basham A.L. The wonder That was India, 3rd Edition, London, 2002.
3. Basham A.L. (ed) A cultural History of India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2002.

Cultural tourism is the subset of tourism concerned with a traveller's engagement with a country or region's culture, specifically the lifestyle of the people in those geographical areas, the history of those people, their art, architecture, religion(s), and other elements that helped shape their way of life

Travelling means going from one's place to another or from one's country to another. This instinct of roaming about is rooted in man's nature. This instinct leads a man to see the unseen, to know the unknown and to unveil the mystery. Therefore, it is very beneficial part of education.

Cultural concept:

Culture is a way of life. The food you eat, the clothes you wear, the language you speak in and the God you worship all are aspects of culture. In very simple terms, we can say that culture is the embodiment of the way in which we think and do things. It is also the things that we have inherited as members of society. All the achievements of human beings as members of social groups can be called culture. Art, music, literature, architecture, sculpture, philosophy, religion and science can be seen as aspects of culture. However, culture also includes the customs, traditions, festivals, ways of living and one's outlook on various issues of life.

Culture thus refers to a human-made environment which includes all the material and nonmaterial products of group life that are transmitted from one generation to the next. There is a general agreement among social scientists that culture consists of explicit and implicit patterns of behaviour acquired by human beings. These may be transmitted through symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment as artefacts. The essential core of culture thus lies in those finer ideas which are transmitted within a group-both historically derived as well as selected with their attached value. More recently, culture denotes historically transmitted patterns of meanings embodied in symbols, by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and express their attitudes toward life.

Culture is the expression of our nature in our modes of living and thinking. It may be seen in our literature, in religious practices, in recreation and enjoyment. Culture has two distinctive components, namely, material and non-material. Material culture consists of objects that are related to the material aspect of our life such as our dress, food, and household goods. Non-material culture refers to ideas, ideals, thoughts and belief. Culture varies from place to place and country to country. Its development is based on the historical process operating in a local, regional or national context. For example, we differ in our ways of greeting others, our clothing, food habits, social and religious customs and practices from the West. In other words, the people of any country are characterised by their distinctive cultural traditions.

Culture and Civilization

The word 'culture' and 'civilization' are often used synonymously. However, they have clearly defined meanings differentiating them. 'Civilization' means having better ways of living and sometimes making nature bend to fulfil their needs. It also includes organizing societies into politically well-defined groups working collectively for improved conditions of life in matters of food, dress, communication, and so on. Thus some groups consider themselves as civilized and look down upon others. This disposition of certain groups has even led to wars and holocausts, resulting in mass destruction of human beings.

On the other hand, 'culture' refers to the inner being, a refinement of head and heart. This includes arts and sciences, music and dance and various higher pursuits of human life which are also classified as cultural activities. One who may be poor and wearing cheap clothes may be considered 'uncivilized', but still he or she may be the most cultured person. One possessing ostentatious wealth may be considered as 'civilized' but he may not be cultured'

Therefore, when we think of culture, we have to understand that it is different from civilization. As we have seen, culture is the 'higher levels of inner refinement' of a human being. Humans are not merely physical beings. They live and act at three levels: physical, mental and spiritual. While better ways of living socially and politically and better utilization of nature around us may be termed as civilization. This is not enough to be cultured. Only when the deeper levels of a person's intellect and consciousness are brought into expression can we call him/her 'cultured'.

Culture and Heritage

Cultural development is a historical process. Our ancestors learnt many things from their predecessors. With the passage of time they also added to it from their own experience and gave up those which they did not consider useful. We in turn have learnt many things from our ancestors. As time goes we continue to add new thoughts, new ideas to those already existent and sometimes we give up some which we don't consider useful any more. This is how culture is transmitted and carried forward from generation to next generation. The culture we inherit from our predecessors is called our cultural heritage. This heritage exists at various levels. Humanity as a whole has inherited a culture which may be called human heritage. A nation also inherits a culture which may be termed as national cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage includes all those aspects or values of culture transmitted to human beings by their ancestors from generation to generation. They are cherished, protected and maintained by them with unbroken continuity and they feel proud of it. A few examples would be helpful in clarifying the concept of heritage. The Taj Mahal, Swami Narayan Temple of Gandhinagar and Delhi, Red Fort of Agra, Delhi's Qutub Minar, Mysore Palace, Jain Temple of Dilwara (Rajasthan) Nizamuddin Aulia's Dargah, Golden Temple of Amritsar, Gurudwara Sisganj of Delhi, Sanchi Stupa, Christian Church in Goa, India Gate etc., are all important places of our heritage and are to be protected by all means.

Besides the architectural creations, monuments, material artifacts, the intellectual achievements, philosophy, treasures of knowledge, scientific inventions and discoveries are also the part of heritage. In Indian context the contributions of Baudhayana, Aryabhatta, Bhaskaracharya in the field of Mathematics, Astronomy and Astrology; Kanad and Varahmihir in the field of Physics; Nagarjuna in the field of Chemistry, Susruta and Charak in the field of Medicines and Patanjali in the field of Yoga are profound treasures of Indian Cultural heritage. Culture is liable to change, but our heritage does not. We individuals, belonging to a culture or a particular group, may acquire or borrow certain cultural traits of other communities/cultures, but our belongingness to Indian cultural heritage will remain unchanged. Our Indian cultural heritage will bind us together e.g. Indian literature and scriptures namely Vedas, Upanishads Gita and Yoga System etc. have contributed a lot by way of providing right knowledge, right action, behavior and practices as complementary to the development of civilization.

General characteristics of culture

- 1) Culture is learned and acquired: Culture is acquired in the sense that there are certain behaviours which are acquired through heredity. Individuals inherit certain qualities from their parents but socio-cultural patterns are not inherited. These are learnt from family members, from the group and the society in which they live. It is thus apparent that the culture of human beings is influenced by the physical and social environment through which they operate.
- 2) Culture is shared by a group of people: A thought or action may be called culture if it is shared and believed or practiced by a group of people.
- 3) Culture is cumulative: Different knowledge embodied in culture can be passed from one generation to another generation. More and more knowledge is added in the particular culture as the time passes by. Each may work out solution to problems in life that passes from one generation to another. This cycle remains as the particular culture goes with time.
- 4) Culture changes: There is knowledge, thoughts or traditions that are lost as new cultural traits are added. There are possibilities of cultural changes within the particular culture as time passes.
- 5) Culture is dynamic: No culture remains on the permanent state. Culture is changing constantly as new ideas and new techniques are added as time passes modifying or changing the old ways. This is the characteristics of culture that stems from the culture's cumulative quality.
- 6) Culture gives us a range of permissible behaviour patterns: It involves how an activity should be conducted, how an individual should act appropriately.

- 7) Culture is diverse: It is a system that has several mutually interdependent parts. Although these parts are separate, they are interdependent with one another forming culture as whole.
- 8) Culture is ideational: Often it lays down an ideal pattern of behaviour that are expected to be followed by individuals so as to gain social acceptance from the people with the same culture.

Importance of Culture in Human Life

Culture is closely linked with life. It is not an add-on, an ornament that we as human beings can use. It is not merely a touch of colour. It is what makes us human. Without culture, there would be no humans. Culture is made up of traditions, beliefs, way of life, from the most spiritual to the most material. It gives us meaning, a way of leading our lives. Human beings are creators of culture and, at the same time, culture is what makes us human. A fundamental element of culture is the issue of religious belief and its symbolic expression. We must value religious identity and be aware of current efforts to make progress in terms of interfaith dialogue, which is actually an intercultural dialogue. As the world is becoming more and more global and we coexist on a more global level we can't just think there's only one right way of living or that any one is valid. The need for coexistence makes the coexistence of cultures and beliefs necessary. In order to not make such mistakes, the best thing we can do is get to know other cultures, while also getting to know our own. How can we dialogue with other cultures, if we don't really know what our own culture is? The three eternal and universal values of Truth, Beauty and Goodness are closely linked with culture. It is culture that brings us closer to truth through philosophy and religion; it brings beauty in our lives through the Arts and makes us aesthetic beings; and it is culture that makes us ethical beings by bringing us closer to other human beings and teaching us the values of love, tolerance and peace.

Indian Culture

A brief discussion on the fundamental characteristics of Indian culture reveals two important aspects:

- 1) Its diversity or diverse cultural traits
- 2) Its unity or the fundamental underlying flame of unity.

The present name of the country "India" refers to ancient "Bharatavarsha" or the Land of Bharata of mythological fame. Various Muslim nations to the west of India prefer to call it as Hind or Hindustan. Thus we find diversity in the nomenclature of the land itself. For a better understanding on the diverse elements of Indian culture we shall first should focus on its various aspects. Then we shall examine how among these diverse elements there is the eternal flow of unity which is the fundamental characteristic of Indian culture.

1. *Physical Diversity:* Geography has given India different physical diversities in its very structure. It has vast varieties of soil, wide differences of the frontiers with four distinct geographical divisions.

They are as follows:

- 1) The Himalayan Mountains with its Eastern and Western ranges
- 2) The Northern plains enriched by Indus, Ganga, Brahmaputra and their tributaries
- 3) The Central Indian plateau and the Deccan plateau
- 4) Long strips of coastal lands between the sea and the Western Ghats and the Eastern Ghats Mountain ranges.

These different geographical units very well show that India represents extreme diversities of mountains, plains, rivers, deserts, plateaus and coastal areas in its physical features. Thus it is referred to as a sub-continent rather than a mere country. Physical diversity has its side effects. Differences in physical features automatically have brought differences in altitude, climate, temperature, rainfall, flora and fauna.

It is very interesting to note that India represents the three main climates of the earth:

- The Polar Climate
- The Temperate Climate
- The Tropical Climate

The Great Himalayan region is known for its snowy and cold climate having its impact on the North and North Eastern states. The Southern Indian states are typically prone to tropical climate whereas in other parts of India we find the prevalence of a temperate climate. This is a unique example of the diversity of the country with multi-climatic zones. The climatic conditions very well affect the soil of the region. If we have comparatively barren and rocky lands in the extreme north, we have a contrast in the very fertile and productive lands of the Gangetic plains and the Malabar territories. Physical diversity is again found in case of seasons. All the traditional six seasons are experienced in India.

They are:

- Summer Rains

- Autumn
- Dewy
- Winter
- Spring

Out of the six seasons the main four seasons such as Summer, Rains, Winter and Spring amply justify the existence of striking varieties in the climate of the country. Similarly, differences are also found in the percentage of rainfall in various parts of the country. The rainfall varies from 7.5 cms. to 1200 cms. per year. As a result, the temperature varies from the eternal snowy mountains to the scorching heat of the Thar desert.

The North-Eastern region and the marshy lands of Bengal have the highest degrees of rainfall whereas Western India has relatively scanty rainfall. Thus if we have the rich alluvial soil in the Gangetic plain we also have the high table lands of Deccan plateau and the sandy deserts of Rajasthan.

The differences in the rainfall, soil and temperature have their impact on the flora and fauna of the country. India possesses many of the striking varieties of botanical as well as zoological specimens found all over the world. If we have the rare variety of Olive Ridley at Gahirmatha in Orissa, the forests of Assam have the unique one-horned rhinoceros.

Further the geographical division of the country has stood on the way of a united history of the country. We find the growth of different regional kingdoms, different dynasties and different ideals of kingship through the ages. This is mainly due to the physical diversity of the land.

2. *Racial Diversity:* In the words of the prominent historian V.A. Smith: "India is an ethnological museum." Even the ancient Greek historian Herodotus remarked: "Of all the nations that we know of India has the largest population." In the 21st century also India is the second most populous country of the world. This population is composed of so many races and it represents primarily all the ethnographical dimensions of mankind.

They are:

- White type constituting Caucasian group
- Yellow type signifying the Mongolian group
- Black type of the Ethiopian group

These three basic types of human races are present in India.

The 1901 census of India gives the following eight ethnic groups present in the land:

- Pre-Dravidian
- Dravidian
- Indo-Aryan
- Turko-Iranian
- Scytho-Dravidian
- Arya-Dravidian.
- Mongoloid
- Mongoloid-Dravidian

These ethnic groups prove one thing. The Dravidians, Aryans, Greeks, Parthians, Sakas, Hunas, Arabs, Turks, Mughals, Afghans, Anglo-Indians, tribals like Bhils, Kurals, Nagas, Mizos etc. have all merged with the Indian population to form a greater human race. Because of this racial diversity, the physical features of her inhabitants are bound to differ. That is why the people of sub-Himalayan regions resemble the mongoloids while in the Gangetic plain they have similarities with the people of the Middle-East. Likewise, the Southern Indian region also has lots of dissimilarities.

3. *Linguistic Diversity:* Racial diversity of India has its direct reflection on the linguistic variety of India. As per the Linguistic Survey of India, India possesses 179 languages and 544 dialects. These languages and dialects are spoken by the people of different regions and different races. The Constitution of India has given recognition to 18 languages as modern Indian languages. Among the prominent Indian languages mention may be made of Hindi, Bengali, Assamese, Oriya, Gujarati, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Manipuri, Sindhi, Punjabi and Urdu. Even foreign languages like Arabic and Persian are still in vogue.
4. *Scriptural and Literary Diversity:* India being a multi-lingual country has a vast treasure of different scripts and literatures. When the languages are many, naturally scripts are of different types. No wonder then literatures have emerged in various languages and dialects, both major and minor, thus contributing to

the richness of a Pan- Indian literature including Sanskrit. So far as script is concerned India has got a good number of scripts.

The major ones among them are:

- Brahmi
- Kharosthi
- Devnagari
- Persian
- Roman
- Olchiki

Similar is the case with literature. We have a vast variety of Indian literature such as Hindi literature, Oriya literature, Bengali literature, Tamil literature, Dingal literature, so on and so forth. The literature of one language exhibits its own specific characteristics, easily distinguished from the literature of other languages.

5. *Socio-Cultural Diversity*: The variations in physical features, racial structure and languages have resulted in considerable differences in dress, food habits, social customs and beliefs of the people. The people of India differ considerably in their social practices and cultural differences vary from state to state.

For example, the dress habit of the people of a hot place like Rajasthan will definitely differ from that of Kashmir because of a very cold climate. The North-Eastern people have their traditional dress whereas the tribal dress is unique of its own. Even the style of wearing a dhoti or a saree differs from Uttar Pradesh to Bengal to Tamil Nadu to Maharashtra and Gujarat. In matters of diet and mode of living Indians also show extreme diversities. The North-Western people are mainly wheat-eaters but in Eastern India it is rice and fish which constitute the staple food of the people. In the South people prefer hot and spicy dishes. Though majority of the people of the country are vegetarians the number of non-vegetarian people is no less.

The Hindu society as such is divided into a four-fold caste system which include:

- The Brahmanas, The Kshatriyas, The Vaisyas and The Sudras.
- In fact, the social structure of the Indian society is composed of the social organisation of her original inhabitants, the Aryans and the invaders who settled here later.
- The traditions, customs, rituals in Indian society have their regional variations. Diverse elements are found in the performance of social rites, festivals and ceremonies.

In the words of R.K. Mukherjee: “India is a museum of cults and customs, creeds and cultures, faiths and tongues, racial types and social systems.” Thus various conflicting trends of social systems and modes of life style have together built up a rich and complex diversity in India.

6. *Religious Diversity*: India is a country of many religions. All the major religions of the world are found here. Mention may be made of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism etc. People of different religions live here in sizeable numbers. All these religions have grown here quite freely with their different sects and sub-sects.

India is in a sense unique that it is the motherland of four major religions of the world — Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. Hinduism which is the religion of the majority has various sects like Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism, Tantricism, Sun-cult, Ganapatya-cult etc. Buddhism with Mahayana, Hinayana, Vajrayana and Kalachakrayana sects, Jainism with Svetambar and Digambar sects, Islam with Shia, Suni, Shafi and Hannafi sects, Christians with Catholic and Protestant sects live in this country alongside each other quite peacefully. The primitive tribes of the country have their own peculiar cults too.

Fairs and festivals peculiar to each religion are celebrated here with much gaiety and pomp. Religious preachers of different religions have preached their sermons in different ages of history. We cannot claim any single religion as the religion of the entire land. Rather it is a land which encourages people of various religions to live in peace and harmony. Thus India is a land of religious variety— both old and new.

7. *Economic Diversity*: Since ancient times India has been regarded as the land of milk and honey. It is for this economic prosperity of the land India has been invaded and occupied by the foreigners many a time though at present the picture is not so rosy.

Rather from economic point of view India presents a picture of diversity. It is a country of princes and paupers, aristocrats and middle class people, highly rich and extremely poor people. If India is proud of possessing some richest people of the world, it is also a matter of shame that millions go without two square meals a day. Crores of Indians live below the poverty line for generations while the rich continue to grow richer and richer. Besides these two extreme classes we have a middle class who maintain a balanced standard of living. Interestingly this rising middle class has formed a strong backbone of the country's economy in various fields like infrastructure,

agriculture, science and technology. States like Punjab, Maharashtra and Union Territories like Delhi and Goa are economically far ahead of states like Bihar, Orissa and Nagaland. The per capita income of a Delhite is far more than that of a Bihari or an Oriya. Some states continue to function better economically than the average national level while many others lag behind pathetically. The reasons behind such economic disparity are many and varied and quite puzzling too. Thus richness and poverty go side by side.

8. *Political Diversity:* The vastness of the country, its geographical diversities, various races with various languages, religions, creeds and systems of belief have all contributed significantly to the political unification of India. Regionalism and local identity have played a great role in the path of maintaining this unity. Interestingly, history has time and again proved that Indians never presented a united front in the face of foreign invasion.

The regions in the extreme South never came under Northern rule. They remained independent under local dynasties. Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka, Samudragupta and a few other kings in the ancient period, Alauddin Khilji, Akbar and Aurangzeb in the medieval period tried hard to achieve the political unity of the country and fought a number of battles to materialize this dream. But they were not totally successful in this regard. After the death of any such powerful ruler, internal weakness, strong regionalism, separatist tendency and mutual dissension used to play their part. So the attempt of partial political unification attempted by the previous ruler used to end in failure leading to disintegration.

Even in the modern period when India was under the British rule, the Indians never gave a united resistance to the Britishers. Certain regions had waged heroic struggles for liberation against all odds. The Marathas, the Rajputs or the Sikhs, for example, took up arms against the foreigners but never as a united Indian front. A united resistance might have checked the establishment of British rule in India. In fact, a popular national feeling was absent among the Indians till the 19th century. There were regional resistance movements or glorification of local rulers. This absence of political unity was largely due to the prevailing diversities in race, language, religion, caste, creed and, last but not the least, the imposing geographical barriers. The physical features and natural barriers almost made some kingdoms, big or small, little worlds by themselves. They behaved like independent states. The principle of localism used to work more effectively which hampered the political progress of the country and checked the growth of a United Kingdom of India.

Ideal of Unity in Indian Culture:

In 1888 Sir John Strachey had remarked: "...that there is and never was an India or a country of India possessing, according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious, no Indian nation, no people of India, of which we hear so much." Another contemporary historian Vincent Arthur Smith replied:

"The political unity of whole India, although never attained perfectly, in-fact, always was the idea of the people through centuries..." Smith further stated:

"India beyond all doubt possesses a deep underlying fundamental unity far more profound than that produced either by geographical isolation or by political superiority. That unity transcends the innumerable diversities of blood, colour, language, dress, manners and sects." The above two views are contradictory.

While one view refers to the diverse elements of India, the other points to the underlying unifying tendencies of its culture. As a matter of fact, a curious observer feels puzzled with the existence of so many diverse trends of Indian culture at first glance. Its history, tradition, custom, language, race, religion etc. present a bewildering picture of diversity existing in a tightly knit fashion. But the other side of the trend is more amazing. Among these variations and diversions hang a strong thread of unity which binds the whole system. This unity is the spirit of Indian cultural heritage. It emboldens Indian spirit, Indian tradition and the process of Indianisation.

In the words of R. K. Mukherjee:

"...He (any superficial observer) fails to discover the one in the many, the individual in the aggregate, the simple in the composite."

This unity is further nurtured by a uniform system of administration all over the country.

Of course one should not think that the ideal of Indian unity is a recent concept. It has been upheld right from the dawn of history. The spirit of unity has manifested itself in our life style, in the blood of our body, in the spirit of our thought and has thus become an inherent part of Indian culture.

9. *Geographical Unity:* The unity of a culture to a great extent depends on its geography. It is geography that determines the spread of a civilization. Be it in Egypt, Greece, China or India, the topography of the land around a major river has played the most significant role in the growth of culture and history of a civilization.

The geographical unity of India is an age-old concept which was very much present in the mind of its inhabitants since ancient times. The first expression given to this sense of unity was naming the entire land from the Himalayas up to Cape Comorin by the single name of Bharatavarsha' or the Land of Bharata till modern times.

Vishnu Purana gives us a vivid description of geographical location of Bharatavarsha as a single unit in the following manner:

- "Uttaram Yat Samudrasya
- Himadrischaiva Dakshinam
- Varsham tad Bharatam nam
- Bharati Yatra Santatih
- Yojananam Sahasram tu
- Dropoyam Dakshinottarat,
- Purve Kiratas Paschime
- Yavanas sthitah"

(The country which lies to the North of the sea and, to the South of the Himalayas is known as Bharata which is inhabited by the descendants of (king) Bharat. The country stretches from Himalayas to the sea for thousands of miles. On the Eastern boundary the Kiratas live and on the Western boundary live the Yavanas.)

Thus nature has provided a very well defined geographical boundary. On the three sides the country is surrounded by the seas and oceans while the Himalayas stands as a sentinel from North-East to North-West. The location of Bay of Bengal in the East, Indian Ocean in the South and Arabian Sea in the West has detached the land from the rest of the world. These boundaries have helped to make India a compact geographical unit by acting as a kind of natural line of control. The epics and Puranas also vividly give a sense of unity to the people of the land. The very name of the land "Bharatavarsha" has a deep historical significance. From "Bharatavarsha" to "Bharata Mata" and "Vande Mataram" we find a flow of deep sentiment of geographical unity. Our national anthem "Jana Gana Mana" incorporates the unity of our motherland in so far as it highlights the integral wholeness of India by mentioning Punjab, Sindh, Gujarat, Maratha, Dravida, Utkala, Banga, Vindhya, Himachal, Yamuna, Ganga etc. Thus the vastness of the country with its natural forests, mountains, rivers etc. has created among its subjects a consciousness of fundamental unity from the earliest times.

10. *Political Unity:* The unity of Indian culture has also been amply promoted by the political atmosphere prevailing in the country through different ages. In the pages of Indian history, we come across several rulers who tried to bring India under one administrative unit.

Mention may be made of Ashoka and Samudragupta in the ancient period who had established their suzerainty all over India. In the epics, Puranas and ancient literature we find frequent use of titles such as Chakravartin, Ekraat, Samrat, Rajadhiraj, Sarbabhauma, Mahurajadhiraj etc. The kings aspired to gain such titles by bringing the whole of India under one control. Kautilya defines the extent of area of a Chakravarti king in the following manner: "The field of a Chakravarti king extends from Himalaya to the sea, in other words covers the whole of India."

The repeated performances of rites and sacrifices such as the Rajasuya, Asvamedha, Vajapeya and Mahabhisheka show the ideal of universal conquest and an all Indian over-lordship of the ancient Hindu rulers. The medieval rulers like Alauddin Khilji, Akbar and Aurangzeb partially fulfilled the concept of political unity of India by their wars and conquests. They tried to give a good centralised administrative system for the whole of India. The uniform official designations, laws, customs and system of coinage strengthened the bond of political unity. Even during the time of British rule in India a unitary setup was given to the Indian territories. This led to the growth of national consciousness. The achievement of independence was the result of the sense of unity in political sphere. The constitution of India also begins with "We, the people of India" and "India that is Bharat shall be a union of states." Thus since the epic age a somewhat coherent political unity has been maintained over the land extending from the Himalayas to the Indian Ocean.

11. *Religious Unity:* India is a country where several religions are freely adopted and practiced. While discussing the diversity of Indian religions we have found the existence of all major religions of the world. But the significant feature is that among all these religions we find a peaceful and harmonious co-existence. The term 'secular' used in the Indian Constitution, guarantees the citizens equality of all religions. People of all religions and beliefs enjoy this freedom. Hinduism being the religion of the majority has an overwhelming impact on Indian minds. It can be considered as the single most important unifying factor. Hinduism in India has provided an attitude or a way of thinking which is shared and cherished even by the people of other religions.

The gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon like Vishnu, Durga, Laxmi, Siva and Parvati are worshipped with same reverence all over India. The Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavat Gita, Ramayana and Mahabharat have their appeal all over the country. There are four dharmas of Hinduism, (Badrinathdham in the North, Dwarakadham in the West, Rameshvaram in the South and Jagannathdham in the East), twelve Jotirlingas and fifty-one Sakta pithas in the whole country. This network of holy places creates a sense of unity among all Hindus. Festivals like Rakhi, Diwali, Durga puja, Vaishakhi and Pongal have an all India fervour.

The daily prayer of a Hindu includes all the major rivers of the country:

- Gungescha Yamuneschaiva
- Godavari Sarasvati
- Narmade Sindhu Kaveri
- Jalesmin Sannidhi Kuru.

(O rivers Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmada, Sindhu, Kaveri ! Come ye! And enter into this water of my offering.)

The prayer reminds us not only of the vastness of the country but also the cultural and religious unity of this vast land. The list of sacred places of the Hindus in Sanskrit hymns shows the religious unity pervading over all parts of the country.

- 'Ayodhu Mathura Maya
- Kashi Kanchi Avantika
- Puri Dwaravatischiba
- Suptate Mokshadayikah'

(Ayodhya, Mathura, Maya or Haridwar, Kashi or Varanashi, Kanchi or Conjeeverum, Avantika or Ujjain and Dwaravati or Dwaraka are seen as important sacred places in India.)

Religious concepts of Karma, rebirth, heaven and hell, Moksha, Nirvana, immortality of the soul, Monotheism etc. are universally accepted throughout the country. The saints, sages and preachers have always glorified the oneness of all religions.

If Jainism and Buddhism spread to the South from the North, Sankaracharya brought the message from the South, Kabir, Nanak and Sri Chaitanya established a link between the North and South through their universal faith. Further Sufi saints like Nizam-ud-din-Aulia and Moin-ud-din-Chisti added the message of fraternity and liberalism among the different sects. Thus among the diverse religious beliefs, faiths and customs the stream of religious unity works as a strong binding factor of Indian cultural heritage.

12. *Cultural Unity:* The cultural unity of India is equally strong amidst its manifold diversities. The cultural roots of Indian life can be traced back to the Vedic period. This root gradually spread to Indian culture in course of time with its branches. Thus the basic unity of literary ideas, philosophy, outlook, conventions and practices has prevailed all over the country.

The social ceremonies, religious rites, festivals and modes of life are the same all over the country. The sanctity of family, the rules of the castes, the sanskaras like Upanayun, Namakaran, rites of cremating a dead body, the cleanliness of the kitchen etc. are common to all communities and sects. Besides regional festivals there are some typical festivals like Dussera, Holi, Diwali etc. that are celebrated throughout the country.

13. *Scriptural, Linguistic and Literary Unity:* Although India possesses several languages, dialects, scripts and literary products in different languages, a sense of uniformity and oneness prevails among them. Brahmi is the oldest form of Indian script. The script of Modern Indian language has been derived from it. The other type of script called Kharosthi was in less use relatively. At present the Indian Constitution recognises the Devnagari script as the script of national language.

The strong root of Hinduism lies in the use of Sanskrit language which was the official and court language of the rulers of India for more than two thousand years. Before the Christian era Prakrit was the language of the people. The message of Buddhism was written in this language. Gradually Pali and Sanskrit replaced Prakrit after the downfall of the Mauryan rulers. Then in spite of regional linguistic varieties, Hindi and English have been in use all over India. Now we find a three-language formula trying to bring about a linguistic unity of the country. The theoretical and the linguistic unity are provided by Sanskrit language because it is the original source of Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, Oriya, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam etc. Then during the British period English became the official language to bind all the Indians under one administration. In the post-independence era Hindi has been made Rashtrabhasa or national language to bring a linguistic assimilation among the Indian languages. With different languages trying to maintain a national unity, literature of different regions too reflect this unified structure of the country. Sanskrit literature is the main source from which the writers, poets and

dramatists of modern Indian languages have taken both inspiration and material. The Vedas, Upanishads, Gita or the works of Kalidas or Jaydev in Sanskrit are rich treasures of regional literature. Tulsidas, Iqbal and Tagore are respected in all parts of India because they have portrayed “Indian character” in their scholarly works.

14. *Socio—Economic Unity*: The social diversity of Indian life is superficial. Irrespective of differences in dress, food and other habits there is the mark of traditional unity. For example, whatever may be the regional variation in dresses, Dhoti and Saree still remain the traditional Indian costumes. In spite of the differences in food habits, the way of taking food while squatting on the ground, the treatment in vegetarian and non-vegetarian diet have a standard pattern throughout the country.

Respect to the superiors, family bond, salutation by joining of both hands, marriage rites etc. bear the same amount of unitary strength irrespective of differences. Similar is the case with Indian economy. Economic disparity among the Indians is quite visible. But one thing we must agree is that the root of Indian economy lies in agriculture. It is predominantly agrarian in nature. From the tiller of the soil to the owner of the soil, indirectly there is the bond of production from the soil which determines their way of living. Moreover, there are large numbers of agro-based industries in India because of our dependence on agriculture.

15. *Physical Uniformity*: From the very beginning many foreigners like Aryans, Sakas, Hunas, Scythians etc. have entered the Indian soil. They came here, settled here and mingled themselves with the original Indian inhabitants and adopted the local culture.

The Muslims came during the medieval period, settled here and completely absorbed themselves into the fold of Indianness. In different periods of history different tribes and races have come to India and have acquired a sort of physical uniformity. An all-Indian character and a general Indian personality have been evolved out of this process of physical assimilation. From physical uniformity a feeling of nationalism has flavoured the Indian soul. Mother and motherland have mingled into the very existence of India. Thus in spite of all diversities Indian culture has maintained a unique bond of unity. Indian religion, language, society etc. have preserved this sense of unity amidst its variety. The outsiders and invaders have lost themselves in the veritable ocean of Indian culture and have been Indianised thoroughly. This is the most wonderful part of Indian culture. In Balmiki Ramayana we find its reference in an indirect way. When Rama killed the demon Ravana, the ruler of Lanka (Modern Sri Lanka), he advised his younger brother Lakshman not to stay in the prosperous land of Lanka. Rather Rama advised Lakshman to go back to his “Motherland Ayodhya.” He said so because for Lord Rama, “the mother and the motherland are more glorious than the heavens.”

Travel for knowledge and education

The educational tourism sector is booming and presents great business opportunities within the hotel sector and e-commerce. Regarding the educational field, tourism is a great motivation for students of any age when it comes to acquiring knowledge and new experiences for an integral development of the person. The tourism sector is one of the most powerful industries today, generating millions in revenue and with an upward trend, according to the World Tourism Organization. Currently, different types of tourism have been developed: ecological tourism, gourmet tourism, solidarity tourism, rural tourism etc, which also integrate a specific experience to choose from by the person who hires the trip. Traveling opens the mind and gets people to develop in human values, personal experiences and emotions. Among all these modalities of the tourism sector, educational tourism begins to stand out thanks to new technologies that allow these two branches to be easily and simply integrated.

Important in travel and tourism industry

- a) **Exposure** – The primary reason behind the importance of practical learning in the tourism industry is the kind of exposure students receive by going out in the industry and opting for training sessions. You really get to meet hundreds of new people which help you to get a new perspective on things in your life as well as in your workplace.
- b) **Skill Development** – There are numerous travel and tourism courses which offer theoretical education on the subject. But it is very important at the same time to help students gain the necessary skills required for work in the tourism industry. Thus, it is very important to impart the travel and tourism skills for work in students in order to help them grow in the industry and work efficiently.
- c) **Industry Work** – It is very important for you to understand well about the working conditions and everything before actually getting into the industry. Thus, having the practical education in tourism greatly helps students in getting acquainted with the working of the industry. This helps them to work effectively in the industry after the completion of the course.
- d) **Learn from Mistakes** – There are certain skills for tourism students that are necessary to work effectively in the industry. Practical education can help the students to get an opportunity to learn from their mistakes in the early stages. It is very important to understand the framework of the work and learn from the amateur mistakes before getting into the industry. Thus, practical education is a great opportunity for them to make mistakes and learn from them, which eventually helps them to work hassle free in the industry.

- e) Interest Finder – Practical education is greatly important for students to test their knowledge in various sectors in the tourism industry. This can help them to identify their interest in the particular niche and work more hard in that particular sector of the tourism industry. Thus, practical education is as important as the theoretical education. Many times, students know everything about the industry theoretically but when it comes down to practicality, they might get confused. Thus, practical education can help greatly for students to identify their interest and work towards developing their skills required in the particular field.

Travel during Ancient period

Do you think that the culture of Indian people has been the same since the beginning? The answer is no. No culture remains the same. And this is true of India as well. It has gone through many phases of change. Do you know why these changes occur? This is because every dynasty, every invader who comes and settles down in the country leaves their marks on the culture of that country. In order to understand the present culture of Indian people, it is necessary to understand the process it has gone through in the past. Thus, in this lesson we will attempt to take a look at the life of the people of Ancient India. You will read about the various stages of ancient Indian history from the Harappan times through Vedic, Mauryan and Gupta periods. The emphasis is on the changing nature of Indian society with corresponding changes in society and culture. When we read history we can understand how the modern world has emerged over long centuries of development. It is important to appreciate what we have achieved in the past to make our future worthwhile.

India has a continuous history covering a very long period. Evidence of neolithic habitation dating as far back as 7000 BC has been found in Mehrgarh in Baluchistan. However, the first notable civilization flourished in India around 2700 BC in the north western part of the Indian subcontinent, covering a large area. The civilization is referred to as the Harappan civilization. Most of the sites of this civilization developed on the banks of Indus, Ghaggar and its tributaries.

The culture associated with the Harappan civilization is the first known urban culture in India. The Harappans built the earliest cities complete with town planning, sanitation, drainage system and broad well-laid roads. They built double storied houses of burntbricks each one of which had a bathroom, a kitchen and a well. The walled cities had other important buildings such as the Great Bath, Granaries and Assembly Halls. Agriculture was the main occupation of the Harappans who were living in rural areas. Those living in the cities carried on internal and external trade and developed contacts with other civilizations such as Mesopotamia. They were excellent potters. Various types of utensils, toys, seals, figurines have been excavated from different sites. Harappans also had the technical knowledge of metals and the process of alloying. The bronze sculpture of a dancing girl found in Mohenjodaro testifies the sculptural skills and aesthetic sense of the Harappans. Shell, ivory, bone and faience were used as material for different crafts and objects. Lothal was a dockyard situated in Dholaka Taluk of Ahmedabad in Gujarat. It was also a well-planned wall city. It was an important centre of sea trade with the western world. Another important town in Gujarat was Dholavira while Kalibangan was in Rajasthan.

Numerous seals carrying the images of the one-horned rhinoceros known as unicorn, the Agni peepal leaves and a male god throw light on the religious beliefs of the Harappans. It appears that they worshipped plants and animals and the forces of nature. They worshipped a male god resembling Lord Shiva of later times and a mother goddess among others. They probably believed in life after death and also in charms and spells. Seals engraved with animal figures like the humped bull, elephant and rhinoceros suggest that these animals were considered sacred. 'Peepal' has been found depicted on many seals. Harappans knew how to write and most of their seals contain some form of script. But unfortunately no one has yet been able to decipher that script. As a result, our knowledge of the Harappan civilization is based on the archaeological evidence alone. The figures of men and women on various seals found in the excavations reveal that the people knew the art of spinning and weaving. They were perhaps the first people to cultivate cotton. A large number of Indus seals found in Mesopotamia which indicated of a possible trade between the Indus valley and Mesopotamian civilization. By 1800 BC the Harappan civilization began declining. However, we do not know the exact reasons why this happened.

Vedic Culture

A few centuries after the decline of the Harappan civilization, a new culture flourished in the same region and gradually spread across the Ganga-Yamuna plains. This culture came to be known as the Aryan culture. There were significant differences between this culture and the culture which preceded it. Aryans settled on the banks of rivers Indus (Sindhu) and Saraswati (which is now non-existent). They composed many hymns in honour of the gods and goddesses they worshipped. These were compiled in four Vedas - the Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda. The word veda means knowledge of the sacred spiritual knowledge. These vedas were considered infallible as they imparted the highest spiritual knowledge. Initially the Vedas were transmitted orally. Since our knowledge of the early Aryans is based on these Vedas, the culture of this period is referred to as the Vedic Culture. Scholars divide the vedic period into the earlier and later Vedic period. The earlier is represented

by the Rig Veda while the latter by all other Vedic literature including the Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. Two epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and the Puranas, though compiled much later, also throw light on the life and society of an earlier period. For this period archaeological evidence has also been found in some areas of Uttar Pradesh.

- Society and religion

Though Aryan society was patriarchal, women were treated with dignity and honour. The family was the smallest social unit; several families (kula) made a village (grama) and several villages formed a vis. A number of villages formed a tribe or jana which was ruled by a chief called rajan. His chief function was to protect the tribe from external attack and maintain law and order. He was assisted by the members of two councils called sabha and samiti. The Purohita performed religious functions while the senani looked after military activities. There was no concept of the state or kingdom at this stage. Although the post of Rajan had become hereditary, he could be removed from power if found weak and inefficient or cruel.

Towards the later Vedic period, society was divided into four varnas - Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. This was also called the Varna-Vyavastha. To begin with it denoted categories of people doing different kinds of functions but with the passage of time this division became hereditary and rigid. The teachers were called Brahmins, the ruling class was called Kshatriyas, farmers, merchants and bankers were called Vaishyas while the artisans, craftsmen, labourers were called Shudras. Moving from one occupation to another became difficult. Simultaneously, the Brahmins also occupied a dominant position in the society.

Another important social institution of the time was the system of chaturashrama or the division of life span into four distinct stages i.e. brahmacharya (period of celibacy, education and disciplined life in guru's ashram), grihastha (a period of family life), vanaprastha (a stage of gradual detachment and sanyasa (a life dedicated to spiritual pursuit away from worldly life). However, it should be noted that these stages were not applicable to women or to the people of lower varnas. Women were respected by the society, enjoyed freedom, had access to education and were often free to choose their partners through swayamvara. Purdah and sati was not prevalent. The ultimate aim of life was to attain moksha or salvation through the pursuit of dharma, artha and kama. Karma or performance of duty without any expectation or return was preached in the Bhagavad Gita. The early Vedic people worshipped forces of nature and personified them as gods and goddesses. Indra, Agni, Varuna, Marut were some of their gods while Usha, Aditi, Prithvi were some of their goddesses. Some of the solar Gods and goddesses referred to in the Rig Veda are Surya, Savitri and Pushan. Yajna (sacrifice) was performed along with chanting of Vedic hymns. People poured ghee (clarified butter) and other ingredients into the fire to invoke the blessings of gods. Agni or fire was looked upon as an intermediary between Gods and humans. The Vedic people prayed individually as well as collectively for the welfare of the jana.

There was a change in religious practices during the later Vedic period. The prominent Gods of the early Vedic period like Indra, Agni and Varuna lost their prominence and popularity. Their place was taken by a new trinity of Gods where Brahma enjoyed the supreme position, while Vishnu became the preserver and Shiva completed the trinity. The religion became extremely ritualistic. Sanskrit mantras, which were the monopoly of Brahmins, became an essential part of all religious functions. This made the Brahmins very powerful and the Yajnas expensive. Participation in them was restricted to the upper three classes. The kings performed Ashvamedha, Rajasuya and Vajapeya sacrifices to establish their position. It is very interesting to know that some elements of the culture of the Vedic Age have survived over a period 3,000 yrs. and continues to be a part of Indian culture even today. By the end of the latter Vedic age changes started occurring in the society. For the first time people started discussing certain beliefs such as creation of the universe, life after death and essence of life. These were questions which were dealt with in great detail in the Upanishads.

- Material life and economy

The Aryans were primarily pastoral and agricultural people. They domesticated animals like cows, horses, sheep, goats and dogs. They ate simple food consisting of cereals, pulses, fruits, vegetables, milk and various milk products. They drank a beverage called Soma. Games of chess, chariot racing etc. were their modes of entertainment. In the early period there was no money transaction or taxes. Bali or voluntary donation was prevalent. Cows were the measure of wealth. As the time passed, extensive use of iron brought great changes in their material life. Iron axes enabled them to clear forests leading to the expansion of agriculture throughout the Gangetic plains. Iron tools resulted in varied crafts and technology. Use of iron weapons and horses enabled them to fight wars and defend themselves better against enemies. Increasing number of crafts, availability of surplus food and growth of population led to specialisation of skills and urbanisation. Towns and cities grew and territorial states emerged. High quality earthenware called 'Painted Grey Ware' and 'Northern Black Polished Ware' have been found in many areas. Coins came into circulation. Trade was carried on, both overland and through waterways, enhancing material prosperity. By sixth century BC, there were some sixteen large territorial states in North India and

upper Deccan known as Mahajanapadas. Important among them were Anga, Magadha, Kosala, Kashi, Kuru, and Panchala.

Popular Religious Reforms

This period (B.C. 600 to B.C. 200) is important not only for political unity of the country but also for cultural unity. Ancient India saw the rise of two very important religions, Jainism and Buddhism which left a lasting influence on Indian life and culture. Vedic religion was earlier also known as Brahmanism because the Brahmins played a major role in it. Later it came to be called Hinduism. The Brahmins had developed a vested interest demanding large charities at the end of the sacrifices. As a result, the sacrifices became very costly. Moreover, the Brahmins considered themselves superior to the other varnas and became arrogant. This led to the unpopularity of Brahminism and a need for reforms was felt. Besides, there were other factors like the reaction of the Kshatriyas to the Brahmin claim for supremacy and the Vaisya's demand for an improved social position. The Vedic religion had become very complex and ritualistic. The reforms led by the Kshatriyas and aided by the poorer masses who could not afford the high cost of sacrifices, resulted in the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism around sixth century BC. These new religions that is Jainism and Buddhism also influenced the religious beliefs and several practices of Hinduism. The founder of Jainism is believed to be Rishabhadeva, the first of the twenty-four tirthankaras and as the last tirthankara Mahavira developed and gave final shape to the Jain doctrines.

The Jains lay great emphasis on severe penance and asceticism. Lord Mahavira asked them to take five vows - not to tell lies; not to injure life; not to own property; not to steal; and to maintain chastity (celibacy). He also asked the Jains to follow the three-fold path of Right belief, Right Conduct and Right Knowledge. Later, the Jains were split into two sects the Shvetambaras (white clothed ones) and the Digambaras (the naked ones). Most of followers of Jainism belong to the trading community.

The other movement was led by Gautama Buddha (563 - 483 BC), a younger contemporary of Mahavira. He taught the Four Noble Truths. His path was the middle path. He believed that there is sorrow in this world and that desire is the cause of that sorrow and it can be conquered by following the Eight Fold Path (ashtangika marga). The eightfold path comprises:

- Right understanding,
- Right thought,
- Right speech,
- Right action,
- Right livelihood,
- Right effort,
- Right mindfulness
- Right concentration.

Basically both these movements were against the orthodox and ritualistic Brahmanical religion. Both the reformers emphasised a good moral life and the importance of ethics.

Both of them founded an order of monks, established monasteries called sthanakas in the Ages Jainism and viharas in Buddhism. Later, Buddhism was also split into two divisions- the Hinayana and the Mahayana to which a third called Vajrayana was added subsequently. Buddhism spread to a very large part of the world- Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, Japan, Thailand, Korea, Mongolia and Afghanistan. Even today a substantial population of these countries is Buddhist.

Hinduism underwent many changes in history. It gave rise to several religious sects within itself with varying beliefs and practices. Like Buddhism, some sects of Hinduism also spread outside India, particularly in the countries of South East Asia. Later Hindu tradition even accepted the Buddha as one of the incarnations (avatara) of Vishnu.

The Persian Invasion and Its Impact On Indian Culture

In the first half of sixth century BC, there were a number of small tribal states in north west India. There was no sovereign power to unite these warring tribes. The Achaemenid rulers of Persia or Iran took advantage of the political disunity of this region. Cyrus, the founder of the Achaemenid dynasty, and his successor Darius I annexed parts of Punjab and Sindh. It was believed to be the most fertile and populous part of the Achaemenid empire. Indian subjects were also enrolled in the Achaemenid army. The Persian rule in north western India lasted for nearly two centuries. During this period there must have been regular contact between the two regions. The naval expedition of Skylax probably encouraged trade and commerce between Persia and India. Some ancient Persian gold and silver coins have been found in Punjab. Though the mountainous passes in the north western border were being used from very early times, it seems that Darius entered India through these passes for the

first time. Later on, a section of Alexander's army traversed the same route, when he invaded Punjab. The administrative structure of the Mauryan empire was influenced in some measure by the Ages that of the Achaemenid rulers of Persia. It may be mentioned here that the Persian title of satrapa (governor) continued to be used by the Indian provincial governors as kshtrapa for quite a long time.

The cultural effects of the contacts with the Persians were also significant. The Persian scribes brought into India a new style of writing. It is called kharoshthi. It was derived from the Aramaic script, which was written from right to left. Many of Asoka's inscriptions found in north western India are written in kharoshthi. This script continued to be used in north western India till about third century AD. The Persian influence may also be traced in the preamble of Asokan edicts. The Mauryan art and architecture were also greatly influenced by the Persian art. The monolithic pillar edicts of Asoka with their bell-shaped capitals are somewhat like the victory pillars of the Achaemenid emperors which have been found in Persepolis.

The Persian influence found in Chandragupta Maurya's court was in the form of the ceremonial hair bath taken by the emperor on his birthday. It was in typical Persian style. It is mentioned in the Arthashastra that whenever the king consults the physician or the ascetic, he should sit in a room where the sacred fire was kept. This indicates the influence of Zoroastrianism, the religion of ancient Iranians.

The Greek (Macedonian) Invasion and Its Impact On Indian Culture

During the fourth century BC, the Greeks and the Persians fought for supremacy over West Asia. The Achaemenid empire was finally destroyed by the Greeks under the leadership of Alexander of Macedon. He conquered Asia Minor, Iraq and Iran and then marched towards India. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, Alexander was greatly attracted towards India because of her fabulous wealth.

On the eve of Alexander's invasion, north western India was divided into a number of small principalities. Lack of unity among them helped the Greeks to conquer these principalities one after another. However, Alexander's army refused to march ahead when they heard about the vast army and the strength of the Nandas of Magadha. Alexander had to return. He died at Babylon at the young age of 32 on his way back to Macedon. Alexander hardly had any time to reorganise his conquests. Most of the conquered states were restored to their rulers, who had submitted to his authority. He divided his territorial possessions covering parts of eastern Europe and a large area in western Asia into three parts and placed them under three Greek governors. The eastern part of his empire was given to Seleucus Nikator, who declared himself a king after the death of his master, Alexander.

Though the contact between the Macedonians and ancient Indians was for a brief period, its impact was fairly wide in range. Alexander's invasion brought Europe, for the first time, in close contact with India, as routes, by sea and by land, were opened between India and the West. A close commercial relation was also established. The traders and craftsmen used to follow these routes. Alexander asked his friend Nearchus to explore the sea coast from the mouth of the Indus to the Euphrates in search of harbours. The Greek writers have left many valuable geographical accounts of this region for us. Alexander's invasion paved the way for political unification of north western India by conquering the warring tribes of this region. It seems that by his campaigns Alexander made Chandragupta Maurya's work of annexing this area easier. Soon after Alexander's departure, Chandragupta defeated one of his generals, Seleucus Nikator and brought the whole of north western India upto Afghanistan under his control.

The influence of Greek art is found in the development of Indian sculpture as well. The combination of the Greek and the Indian style formed the Gandhara School of art. Indians also learnt the art of making well-shaped and beautifully designed gold and silver coins from the Greeks. The Greeks had some influence on Indian astrology as well. Many valuable information about the social and economic condition of northern and north western India of that time are known from the Greek accounts left by Arrian, admiral Nearchus, and Megasthenes. They tell us about the developed condition of many crafts, existence of a brisk trade with the outside world, and about the general prosperous condition of the country. Much has also been said in these accounts of carpentry as a flourishing trade in India. It seems the fleet which Alexander sent along the western coast of India under Nearchus was built in India.

Alexander's adventure also helped the West to know something about the Indian life and thinking. It has been said that the ideas and notions of Indian philosophy and religion which filtered into the Roman empire flowed through the channel opened by Alexander. As the Greek writers left dated records of Alexander's campaign, it helped us a great deal to frame the chronology of ancient Indian history. The date of Alexander's invasion – 326 BC provides a definite 'marker' for arranging the sequence of historical events in India.

Ashoka The Great: Representing The Acme of Indian Culture

Ashoka occupies a unique place in the history of India. His policies of universal peace, non-violence and religious harmony find no parallel in the monarchs of the world. Ashoka stands out as a monarch who combined successful kingship with idealism and philosophy. Like other rulers, Ashoka too began his reign with war - the conquest of

Kalinga. However, the mindless destruction of life and property in this war shattered him so greatly that he vowed never to wage any war again. Instead he adopted the policy of Dhamma Vijaya that is conquest through dhamma. In his thirteenth major Rock Edict, Asoka states that true conquest is by piety and virtue. Such a decision taken by a king, who lived in an era where military might be the measure of power, earned him a unique place in history. Ashoka was a true humanist. His policies were oriented towards the welfare of his people. His dhamma was based on social responsibility. Besides giving importance to respecting brahmins, and servants, obedience to elders, abstention from killing living beings, dhamma also asked people to live in religious harmony. It combined in itself the good points of all sects. Ashoka proved to be a tolerant monarch who, although himself a Buddhist, never sought to impose his personal religion on his subjects. In his twelfth major Rock Edict, he states that in honouring of other sects lies the honour of one's own sect. As a king, Ashoka set a very high ideal for himself. He saw himself as a father and the subjects as his children. He communicated his thoughts and philosophy to his people by inscribing them on stone pillars and rock surfaces. These edicts are remarkable examples of Mauryan architecture and also of engineering skills. They are the living monuments of his times.

Ashoka attempted to educate his subjects by pointing out the wastefulness of expensive rituals. He asked people to practice ahimsa. He himself gave up the practices of the royal hunt and pleasure tours and instead began Dhamma Yattas tours for the furtherance of Dhamma. By giving his empire a common Dhamma, a common language, and practically one script (Brahmi) he brought further political unification. India has been a secular country since the Buddhist age. Though he himself became a Buddhist he did not impose it on the others but followed a tolerant religious policy. He made gifts and grants to non Buddhist as well as anti-Buddhist. Ashoka's fame also rests on the measures that he took to spread the message of peace amongst the different regions of the world. He sent ambassadors to the Greek kingdoms and the West. Indian culture spread to far-away lands. According to a Buddhist tradition, Asoka sent Buddhist missions to regions such as Sri Lanka and Central Asia. Buddhism spread to different parts of the world and although it is no longer a major force in India today, yet it continues to be popular in Sri Lanka and the Far Eastern countries. The Varna system popularly known as the caste system which had arisen in the Vedic Age now became well established and gradually became the dominant form of social organization throughout India. Along with the new religions and philosophy the growth of cities, crafts and trade furthered the process of cultural unity in our country. Asoka unified the entire country under one empire and renounced the use of war as state policy. On the other hand, he says that he strives to discharge the debt he owes to all living creatures.

Art and Architecture: Mauryan Beginnings

The Mauryan contribution to art and architecture was significant. Ashoka is known to have built 84,000 stupas to commemorate various events of Buddha's life. According to Megasthenes, Pataliputra's grandeur matched that of the cities of Persia. Ashokan edicts were inscribed on stone pillars that were made of single columns of polished sandstone and had capitals on their top. The best preserved of all Ashokan edicts stands at Lauriya Nandangarh (Bihar). This thirty-two feet tall column has an almost fifty ton seated lion capital placed on its top, an engineering feat worth admiring. The bull capital from Rampura is also another fine example of Mauryan sculpture. The most famous capital is the one at Sarnath, which shows four lions and the Dharmachakra. You must be familiar with this as this has been adopted as the national emblem of the Republic of India. Besides pillars, few Mauryan figures have also come to light. The most well-known of these is the Yakshi from Didarganj. The beauty of these figures lies in the exactness of their workmanship and in the fact that they appear to be made from one single stone. Like the pillars, these figures are polished with a unique surface gloss (now called Mauryan polish). You will be amazed to know that despite all these centuries this gloss has not lost its shine. Besides the language that has been used in nearly all the inscriptions and Prakrit which appears to have become the lingua franca of the country and in the Brahmi script the earliest known Indian script.

Another noteworthy aspect of Mauryan architecture is the rock cut caves. The Lomash Rishi (with its impressive entrance) and the Sudama caves are examples of such architecture. These caves cut from solid rock were provided by Ashoka for non-Buddhist monks. These caves marked the beginning of the rock cut architecture which was patronised by later rulers too. His rock edicts were inscribed in the local language and the local script.

Post - Mauryan Cultural Developments

Although the Greeks, Shakas, Parthians, and Kushanas were foreigners, they were slowly absorbed into the local population. Since they were warriors, the law gives assigned them the status of Kshatriyas. It should be noted that such a large scale assimilation of foreigners into the Indian society took place only in the post-Mauryan times. We can say roughly from about 200 BC to about 3rd century A.D. profound changes took place in the economic and political life and vital developments in different aspects of cultural life of our country i.e. religion, art and science as well as technology. There was a significant advancement in foreign trade both by land and by sea, besides emergence of various crafts.

Many foreign rulers adopted Vaishnavism. In the Besnagar Pillar inscription, Heliodorus (the Greek ambassador of the Indo-Greek king Antialkidas) describes himself as a Bhagavata i.e. worshipper of Vishnu. Similarly, some coins of Kanishka also show the figure of Siva on them. You will recall that one of the Kushan rulers was called Vasudeva, clearly indicating his vaishnava faith. Do you know the importance attached to the year of Kanishka's accession i.e. 78 A.D. Well, it marks the beginning of the Saka era. The interaction among different foreign ethnic groups and the Indians played an important role in their choice of one or the other Indian religions. Some foreign rulers also turned to Buddhism, as this did not create the problems of fitting into the caste system. Menander converted to Buddhism. Kanishka too is remembered for his services to this religion. However, this increasing popularity of Buddhism brought about a major change in the religion. Buddhism in its original form was too abstract for the foreigners. They therefore advocated a simpler form through which they could satisfy their religious cravings. Around the same time Buddhism split into two schools: The Mahayana or the Great Wheel and the Hinayana or the Small Wheel. The former believed in image worship, rituals and Bodhisattvas, (incarnations of Buddha) while the latter continued the practices of the earlier Buddhism.

The Mahayana received royal patronage from Kanishka, who convened the fourth Buddhist Council to finalise its teachings. He also set up many stupas in memory of the Buddha.

- **Art and Sculpture Central:**

Asian invasions led to further development of Indian art and sculpture. Close contacts with the western world introduced many new forms in Indian art. The most significant development was the growth of the Gandhara school of art. This school borrowed features from both the Greek and Roman art forms. Many images of the Buddha from the Kushan period have Apollonian faces, their hair is in the Graeco-Roman style and their draperies arranged in the style of a Roman toga. This assimilation of artistic features was probably because many artisans from different countries trained in different schools came together under the Kushan rule.

Mathura, which was the centre of the indigenous school of art, was also influenced by the invasions. A number of images from here of terracotta and red sandstone, which have definite Saka-Kushan influence, have survived. The most famous is the headless statue of Kanishka from Mathura. While the earlier Buddhists had used only symbols to depict the Buddha, the Mathura school became the first to make faces and figures of the Buddha. Folklores such as the Jatakas were drawn out in long panels on rock faces. Besides the images of Buddha, which were made in large numbers, statues of Mahavira were also produced.

- **Deccan and South India**

The Satavahanas in the Deccan held an important position under the Mauryas. After the death of Ashoka, they assumed total independence. They became very powerful and made their capital at Paithan or Pratisthan on the river Godavari. The Satavahanas soon entered into conflict with the foreign satraps, especially the Shakas. It was under Gautamiputra and his son Vasisthiputra Satkarni that the Satavahanas became very powerful. They extended their kingdom, cleared forests, made roads and administered their State well. New towns came up and trade was carried on with far off countries like Persia, Iraq and Combodia.

- **Kharavela of Kalinga**

Another kingdom which rose to a position of importance after the Mauryas was Kalinga. Kalinga included modern Orissa and parts of Northern Andhra. Its most important ruler was Kharavela. The Hathigumpha Inscription in a Jain cave at Udaigiri hills would give us a detailed account of his reign, but unfortunately it is not easily decipherable. It is definitely known that he was a graet administrator as well as a brave warrior. He carried out works of piety and public utility, like building roads and gardens.

- **South India**

The area which lies to the south of the river Krishna and Tungabhadra is called South India. It was the region of the Cholas, Cheras and the Pandyas who were constantly at war with each other.

- **Sources**

The main source of information about these kingdoms and the life of the people is the Sangam literature. That is why this period from the beginning of the 1st century B.C. to the end of 2nd century A.D. is called the Sangam period of the history of South India.

- **Cholas**

Karikala was the most important ruler of this kingdom. He defeated the combined forces of the Cheras and the Pandays. He succeeded in pushing back an invasion from Ceylon. Karikala has been credited with many welfare activities. He got may canals dug so that water from the river Cauvery could be used for irrigation purposes. Karikala patronised works of literature and art. He was a follower of the Vedic religion.

- **Pandays**

The Pandyan empire was founded by a woman king. She maintained a huge army. She also encouraged trade and patronised art as well as literature.

- **Life and Culture**

The people during this period lived a simple life. They were fond of music, dancing and poetry. Many musical instruments like drums, flutes, pipes, etc. were popular. Most of the people lived in valleys and a majority of them were farmers. Others were herdsman. There were artisans and craftsmen also who mainly lived in towns. There were merchants specially in the coastal areas and trade was carried on by sea.

- Society

The Greeks, Kushanas, Shakas and Parthians were called Yavanas. They soon merged with the Indian society and adopted Indian names and inter-married. Even their coins started carrying the images of Indian gods like Vishnu, Ganesha and Mahesha. The fact that they had adapted to the Indian society easily may explain why foreign rulers patronised Buddhism.

- The Age of Harshvardhana

King Harshvardhana decided that he must subdue the petty warring rulers and bring them under his domain. He devoted six important years of his life to do so. Hiuen Tsang, a Chinese traveller and Bana Bhat, his court poet, have given detailed accounts of Harsha's reign. According to Hiuen Tang, King Harshvardhana had an efficient government. He further tells us that families were not registered and there was no forced labour.

- Harsha's religious activities

Do you know that Harsha built many hospitals and rest houses? He also gave grants to many religions especially Buddhism and Hindu Religion. Later in his life Harsha became more inclined towards Buddhism. Harsha's literary activities had some important plays e.g. Nagananda Ratnavali and Priyadarsita. He collected learned men around him as is evident from the report of Hiuen Tsang and Bana Bhat. Bana wrote Harsha's famous biography, Harshcharita as well as the literary piece Kadambari.

- Kingdoms of the Deccan and the South:

You have read about the Satavahanas who controlled the Deccan for a long time. After their decline, many small kingdoms came up in the Deccan. The first one among them was that of the Vakatakas, who tried to build a strong state, but they did not last long. After the Vakatakas came the Chalukyas of Vatapi and Kalyani. Pulakesin was a powerful ruler of the Chalukya dynasty. The Chalukyas kept fighting with the Rashtrakutas (towards the north) and the Pallavas (towards the south). The Chalukya rule came to an end in 753 A.D. when the Rashtrakutas defeated them. The capital city of Vatapi was a prosperous one. There were trade relations with Arabia, Iran and the Red Sea port to the west, as well as with South-East Asia. Pulakesin II sent an ambassador to king Khusrav II of Persia. The Chalukyas patronised art as well as religion. They build temples and cave shrines in the deccan hills. Many of the sculptures of the Ellora caves were created at this time under the patronage of the Chalukyas and the Rashtrakutas.

Cultural Development During the Gupta Period

The last phase of ancient Indian history starts in early fourth century A.D. and ends in about the 8th A.D. The Guptas built a strong and powerful kingdom and under the political unity and state patronage that was provided by them, cultural activities increased manifold. You will recall that following the Greek invasion, various art forms in India had been markedly influenced by Graeco-Roman styles. This art mainly depicted the Buddha or Buddhist thought. But during the Gupta period art became more creative and Hindu gods and goddesses also came to be portrayed. The artistic achievement of the age is exhibited in the delicate workmanship and the variety of designs shown in different kinds of Gupta coins. The general scheme that was followed was to exhibit the portrait of the king on one side of the coin or an appropriate goddess with her associated symbols on the other side. The king is shown in many positions - the Ages shooting a tiger or a lion, playing a musical instrument seated on a high backed couch etc.

On the reverse in most cases was Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and in some cases Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and arts. Besides coins, Gupta art found adequate expression in monuments and sculptures. The skilled artists of this age used their tools and skills to express the ideals and philosophical traditions of India through various art forms. They decorated even the niches and corners of religious places with statues of gods and goddesses. The images of gods were treated as symbols representing attributes associated with the gods. Hence the god was shown having four or eight arms in each carrying a symbol or an ayudha (weapon) although they were depicted in human forms. Stone, terracotta, and other materials were used to construct the abodes of gods and goddesses.

Examples of the Gupta art can be seen at the dashavatara temple at Deogarh and the cave temples in Udaigiri hills. However, the most famous examples of Gupta art that still remain are the numerous seated and standing images of Buddha from Sarnath. The school of art that thrived at Sarnath provides us with some of the most pleasing and graceful images of the Buddha. Besides stone, Gupta artists were also skilled in bronze. A two-metre-high bronze image of Buddha has been discovered at Sultanganj (near Bhagalpur in Bihar). Examples of sculptures in caves created during this period are traced to the famous Ellora Caves.

- Architecture

The Gupta architecture has survived in a few shrines, rock cut caves (Ajanta) and temples, such as the Dashavatara temple at Deogarh. These structures were mainly made of stone and bricks. Some references in the works of Kalidasa give us a glimpse of Gupta architecture. The poet has given a vivid picture of a well-planned town with a network of roads, market places, big sky-touching palaces and mansions with terraces. The palaces had many inner apartments. They had court-yards, prisons, court-room and sabhagriha. Their verandahs opened on roofs lit with moon-beam at night. The pleasure garden which was attached to palace contained all sorts of seasonal flowers and trees. Archaeological evidence about Gupta architecture is however poor. However, examples of Gupta shrines have been discovered in the jungles of Central India, especially in the Bundelkhand region. These include the one at Bhitargaon in Kanpur district.

- Painting

Painting as an art form reached a high degree of perfection during the Gupta times. The wall frescoes at the Ajanta caves (Aurangabad) and the one at Bagh caves (near Gwalior) bear evidence of this. Although Ajanta paintings belong to the period between the first to the seventh century AD yet most of these were produced during the Gupta time. These paintings depict various scenes from the life of the Buddha. The skill with which the human, animal and plant figures have been drawn shows the refined and sensitive nature of Gupta art. The conception of beauty was a characteristic of Gupta art. Expression through art was given importance as it was regarded as a means for the attainment of spiritual joy.

The Pallavas And The Cholas

Any account of ancient India is incomplete without referring to the two dynasties of South India i.e. the Pallavas and the Cholas and their contribution to art, architecture, administration and conquests. Quite a few dynasties rose in the South from the early centuries of the Christian era. Among them the Pallavas were great patrons of art and architecture. The 'ratha' at Mahabalipuram style of temples built by them were fine examples of rock-cut temples. The Pallavas also built structural temples like the Kailashanath and Vaikunthperumal temples at Kanchipuram. The Kailashanath temple is a huge structure with thousands of images and is said to be the "largest single work of art ever undertaken in India". There is also a set of bas reliefs found at Mahabalipuram (Mamallapuram) which is attributed to the pallava period. The Pagodas built at Mahabalipuram go back to the first century AD.

Temple building activity flourished in India from the 5th century AD onwards. While the North Indian temples were built in the Nagara style consisted of the shikaras (spiral roofs), the garbhagriha (sanctum) and the mandap (pillared hall), the temples in the South were built in the Dravida style completed with vimana or shikhara, high walls and the gateway topped by gopuram. After the Pallavas the Ages (6th to 8th century AD) the tradition of building temples was further developed by the Cholas (10th - 12th century AD) in the south. Do you know that the temple was the central place in the village? It was the gathering place for the villagers who would come here every day and exchange ideas and discuss all matters of common interests. It served as a school too. During festival days' dances and dramas were also performed in the temple courtyard. The achievements of the Cholas also lie in their conquests across the seas and developing democratic institutions for governance at the village level. The village panchayat called sahha or ur had extensive powers. It had control over finances too. This body included several committees which looked after various aspects of village administration. A very detailed account of the functioning of the sabhas is available from one of the Chola inscriptions. The Chola rulers were also great builders. The Dravida style of temple architecture reached its zenith under the Chola rulers. One of the finest example of this style is the Rajarajeshwar or Brihadeshwara temple. During this period one also notices great achievements in the field of sculpture.

Great progress was made in literature both religious and secular. Sanskrit also became the language of the courts in many parts of the country. Tamil literatures also made great progress. The Alvars and the Nayanars, the Vaishnavite and Shaivite saints made lasting contributions to it. In spite of the dominant position of Sanskrit in most parts of the country, this period marks the beginning of many Indian languages as well as distinct scripts in different parts of the country. In short, we can say that by the time, the ancient period of Indian history came to an end, India had developed a culture which was marked by features that have characterized it ever since.

Transformation of vedic brahmanism into puranic hinduism

The transformation of the ancient brahmanical faith into modern Hinduism can be regarded as the most distinguishing feature from the Gupta period onwards. Buddhism no longer received as much royal patronage as it did earlier. Brahmanism had come to the forefront. The Gupta rulers especially provided filling to the Bhagavata Sect of Hinduism. They called them self Bhagavatas, worshipped Lord Vishnu performed Asvamedha yajnas, gave large donations to brahmanas, and built many temples. The Puranas were finally compiled in this age. Vishnu emerged as the god of devotion and came to be represented as the preserver of dharma. Numerous legends gathered around him and a whole Purana called Vishnu Purana was compiled in his honour. Similarly, a law book called the Vishnumriti was also named after him. Above all, by the fourth century AD there came into being a famous Vaishnava work called 'Shrimadbhagavad-purana' which taught devotion to Lord Krishna. A few Gupta

kings also were worshippers of Shiva, the god of destruction. Bhagavatism which was a contemporary to Buddhism and Jainism in origin and owed its birth to the stream of thought which began with Upanishads reached its zenith and became the most popular sect during this age. The theory of Ten Avatars or incarnations of the supreme god Vishnu came to be accepted and among them, Krishna was considered the most important.

Besides Vishnu, Brahma, Surya, Kartikeya, Ganesha, Durga, Lashmi, Saraswati and others were also worshipped as were lesser gods like Indra, Varuna, Yama etc. The snakes, the yakshas, and the Gandharvas also continued to be revered. Even animals, plants, rivers and mountains were looked upon with reverence and cities like Banaras and Prayag became places of pilgrimage. Idol worship became popular. Thus the prominent features of modern Hinduism took shape during the Gupta period. Although Buddhism was on its decline, yet it continued to have its following. Besides the artistic creations of Ajanta and Ellora, the images of Sarnath Buddha belonging to this time show that Buddhism was also quite popular. Even Jainism commanded some following during the Gupta period.

Nalanda's Emergence As A Great Centre Of Learning

Nalanda became a great centre of learning during Harsha's reign. Students from different parts of the world came here to imbibe learning. Although all the remains mounds of Nalanda have not yet been excavated, yet the evidence of a huge complex of buildings has been uncovered. Some of these were as many as four storey high. According to Hiuen Tsang, Nalanda housed as many as 10,000 students. It was supported by the revenues of 200 villages. Although this huge monastic-educational establishment was primarily a centre for learning of Mahayana Buddhism, yet the curriculum included secular subjects as well. Grammar, logic, epistemology and sciences were taught here. Students were encouraged to develop a spirit of enquiry and reasoning. Active discussions and debates were taking place. Harsha is said to have invited a thousand learned monks of Nalanda to take part in the philosophical assembly at Kanauj. In his account, Hieun-Tsang has given a detailed account of Nalanda. Thus university continued to be the centre of intellectual activity till the twelfth century.

Christianity In India

According to tradition, christianity was brought to India by Saint Thomas in the first century A.D. According to legends, the Parthian king Gondophernes (C. 19- 45 A.C.) sent a messenger to Syria to look for a skilful architect who would build for him a new city. The messenger returned with St. Thomas, who converted him and many members of his court to Christianity. The truth of the legend is doubtful. It was most probably the frequent trade and movement between India and the west which was responsible for bringing this disciple of Lord Christ to India. The merchants, traders and even craftsmen frequently travelled along popular land and sea routes. St. Thomas preached christianity in many parts of India.

He was killed at Mylapore (near Madras). The tomb of St. Thomas is still to be found at the same place. A large community of christians known as Syrian Christians continue to reside in Kerala even today. The Christian Church has two major divisions-the Roman Catholic church and the Protestant church. The holy book of the Christians is the Bible. The Bible contains two parts: the old Testament and the New Testament. The Bible today is available in all major languages spoken in our country. Today, we have over one and a half crore Christians in India. Several charitable institutions under their patronage are flourishing in all parts of our country. Perhaps the most famous Christian social worker, he has contributed a great deal for the welfare of the poor and homeless in our country.

Culinary Traditions

Indian cuisine consists of a wide variety of regional and traditional cuisines native to the Indian subcontinent. Given the range of diversity in soil type, climate, culture, ethnic groups, and occupations, these cuisines vary substantially from each other and use locally available spices, herbs, vegetables, and fruits. Indian food is also heavily influenced by religion, in particular Hindu, and cultural choices and traditions. Also, Middle Eastern and Central Asian influences have occurred on North Indian cuisine from the years of Mughal rule. Indian cuisine is still evolving, as a result of the nation's cultural interactions with other societies.

Indian cuisine is ever more present in our dishes: Curry, cilantro, star anise... This festival of flavors and colors is a delight for both our eyes and our palate. But do we truly understand what authentic Indian cuisine is?

Due to the diversity and richness of its dishes, Indian cuisine remains relatively unknown. Indian cuisine is not limited to just one type of cuisine but many which vary from region to region depending on the different natural resources available, economic and cultural history, as well as the religion of that part of India. Indian cuisine is a whole world to be explored... Lets set off on this voyage of discovery. The numerous invasions that took place throughout history have made Indian cuisine all the richer: European colonization with, in particular, the British and Portuguese, as well as interactions with Persians. It was during this period, in the 16th century, that chili was introduced to Indian cuisine by the Portuguese and that certain Persian dishes, such as chicken tandoori and biryani became part of Indian gastronomy. There are also regional differences in Indian cuisine. Whether in the

North, South, East or West, the delicate blending of spices produces dishes which are full of flavor and color. There are, however, huge regional contrasts in Indian cuisine:

- In northern India, whole-wheat flat bread (chapati) forms the basis of a meal, whereas in the south, it is rice.
- Oil is used for cooking in the south whereas ghee is used in the North.
- Tea, or Chai, is the most popular drink in the north whereas coffee with condensed milk is preferred in the south.
- These examples demonstrate how regionally diverse Indian cuisine is. We have discovered that each region has its own culinary specialties and traditions, now let's take a closer look...

In the north a special oven, known as a tandoor, is frequently used for cooking. New Delhi, for example, is well known for its tandoori dishes. Likewise, one of the traditional dishes in the Northern city of Punjab is chicken tandoori. The North is also well known for the quality of its meat, especially in the Kashmir region. Cuisine in the south mainly revolves around fish, seafood, chicken and mutton. Sauce based dishes are often very spicy, especially in Kerala. Yogurt is frequently used to make dishes such as raita and dhal. Vegetarian cuisine is also very good thanks to the numerous fruits available such as the jackfruit, mango, banana, papaya, guava, lemon and pineapple. The influence of Portuguese colonization is still very much evident in Goan cuisine. Numerous Catholics inhabit this region (in a country where Hinduism is the major religion) and this explains why meat, including pork can be eaten here.

India is tough to package. Especially when it comes to food. Break it down State-wise for a broad introduction. Delve into regions within the State, different communities that inhabit these regions and interpretations of local dishes that change every 100 kilometres; and you have a complex, dynamic menu that makes the thrill of discovery, for even the most non-experimental diner, intense. It's an ideal setting for food tourism, a genre that is burgeoning as people travel the world inspired by culinary shows, world's top-restaurant lists, influencers and Instagram. It helps that India's culinary ambassadors, like Gaggan Anand, Manish Mehrotra and Vikas Khanna, are packaging regional flavours innovatively, resulting in Indian food breaking free from the greasy butter chicken and fiery roghan josh stereotype. Kolkata-born and Bangkok-based chef Gaggan's restaurant ranked number five on the recently announced 'World's 50 Best Restaurants' list in Bilbao, Spain.

And while India has always been a fixture on the route of writers and travel show hosts, over the past few years, celebrities like Gordon Ramsay, Gary Mehigan, David Rocco, Andrew Zimmern and, of course, the late Anthony Bourdain, began to explore, and celebrate, different facets of the rapidly-changing country, instead of simply hunting for colourful histories and trademark exotica.

On foot: Kaveri Sinhji, Cultural Anthropologist and Historian, Founder, Culture Rings, based in Bengaluru, has been conducting food walks for international tourists for almost a decade now. She says, "About 90% of the people writing in for a booking say that they do not want spicy — spicy meaning chilli hot here. They love our cooking with spices though. They love cinnamon and cardamom and appreciate the various benefits that come from these spices, but chilli hot is not something they want." She adds that international visitors are extremely worried about things like the Delhi Belly, and some even ask for guarantees on not falling sick. "So I tell them that I can't give them a guarantee — just like they cannot give me one for their country. If you go to Bangkok, you eat on the street, you are not used to the water — and it is the water that can make you sick."

"Most Indian diplomats will tell you that there are some brilliant Indian restaurants abroad," says Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, India's former High Commissioner to the UK, "However, there are also several Pakistani and Bangladeshi-owned Indian restaurants, and it is these that define Indian food for thousands of international diners. The onus then should ideally be to promote the right concept of Indian food."

Image makeover: These perceptions are changing, thanks to restaurants like Gymkhana in London (modelled after Indian gymkhana clubs), which got a Michelin in 2014. Or The Cinnamon Club, set in the former Westminster Library, and serving modern Indian food. Of course, given the build-up, once tourists land in India, they first want to hit the streets for those promised samosas. Street food tends to raise questions on quality, hygiene and provenance of ingredients. Aiming to change that is Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), which has undertaken numerous projects towards ensuring food safety across sectors. Project Clean Street Food, launched in 2016, aims to train 20,000 roadside vendors in Delhi on health and hygiene, in phase one. Pawan Agarwal, CEO, FSSAI, says, "In consideration is also a campaign on recognising responsible places to eat at. This will be for restaurants as well as packaged food. Metrics to evaluate quality of produce used, hygiene, reduced food wastage etc, are being developed, and those displaying sincere efforts will be recognised, making it easier for visitors to make smart choices."

Traditional Indian Music

The Indian music known best in the West is the sitar playing of Beatles-collaborator Ravi Shankar and hip-yrating dance music of Bollywood musicals. But Indian music is much more than that. It has a long history and is closely linked to Indian spirituality. The instruments, melodies and rhythms are mostly unfamiliar to Western ears, and for Westerners requires a whole different approach and understanding of music to appreciate.

Classical Indian music concerts have traditionally been built around a single vocalist or instrumentalist. Classical Indian music itself is based on single melody lines, often with great attention given to single notes. By contrast Western music is harmonically based. Indian music performances often last for hours and build slowly, with stages of exploration and improvisation, and ascending and descending, before reaching a climax and then winding down. Westerners, as Ravi Shankar pointed out George Harrison's Bangladesh concert, often have trouble determining when the tuning ends and the performance begins. Often time one instrumentalist will come and play and the other performers will come in at a different time and join when they are ready. Holding it all together is a steady droning noise.

Music-making is regarded primarily as a male activity. Women are traditionally allowed to sing only on three occasions: while working in the fields, while attending all-female wedding parties and while attending shrines during annual women's festivals. A performance is a relaxing and meditative experience, often with very personal, one-on-one interactions between musicians and listeners. Audiences have traditionally shown their appreciation by raising their hands and murmuring "wawa." Clapping is regarded as a modern form of appreciation. Indians make a distinction between a "love audience" and a "ticket audience." Some concerts in India are more like family get-togethers and have an audience of only 20 to 30 people. The small stage where Indian musicians perform is called a takht. Indian musicians like to perform on a takht covered by a rare Kerman rug which helps create a relaxed, Eastern atmosphere for performances and recordings. These days you often see rock groups practicing on an oriental rug.

Early History of Indian Music

Classical Indian music evolved from the Vedas, the sacred Hindu chants of ancient India. The ancient Indians believed in the divine origin of music. The purest form of sound was considered equal to cosmic energy. As a result, music and religion were always closely intertwined. Classical Indian music probably evolved from the religious poems and chants of the Vedic period. One of the four main Vedic texts, called the Samaveda, written possibly before 1000 B.C., is the source of many musical forms. Music was later codified by Bharata Muni.

The Karntak style of southern India is closest to music of the vedas. Speculating on the first Indian music, musicologist S.D. Pillai told AP, "People used clay pots that stored water as musical instruments. Drums were used to send messages during war. String instruments came later with devotional music played in temples."

As Indian music developed over time, it absorbed musical style forms around south and central Asia, particularly from various locations around India, Persia, and the Mughal homeland in present-day Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. The Hindustani music of northern India is the result the fusion of the Hindu music of the Veda and Muslim influences from the west. Amir Khusrau (1253-1325) is regarded the father of Hindustani music. He melded Persian, Hindu, Sanskrit and Islamic influences and is regarded as the founder of qawwali and khayal and the inventor of the sitar.

Later History in the Middle Ages

During the Mughal era and the feudal era, Indian classical music thrived in the courts of kings, maharajahs, princes and wealthy noblemen, who often tried to outdo each other in the patronage of the arts. Many people regarded music as an entertainment form reserved for the wealthy. In Mughal times a performance sometime lasted all day and all night. It was designed to be performed for a relatively small group of people in a relatively small luxurious chamber room not among a large audience in a concert hall. The most famous singer was Tansen, a Rajput princess married to the Mughal Emperor Akbar. It was said that her voice was so beautiful and powerful it could ignite oil lamps. The Mughals never conquered the south and Hindu Veda music remained alive there in temples and villages and has endured as Karnatak music. While Hindustani music was a court music for elites, Karnatak flourished as a music close to the people. Much of it was never written down until recently. Instead it was passed on using a system the defined rhythmic units using mathematics. Europeans were enchanted by some of the music they heard from India. According to legend one Indian musician ripped open his instruments at Queen Victoria's coronation to prove that the "seemingly superhuman sounds he produced didn't come from a concealed mechanical device." The greatest impact of European music on India was the introduction of brass bands by the British. Brass band music is very much alive today. Most towns have several competing bands, Brass bands are fixtures of wedding processions.

With the decline of Indian nobility patronage of classical Indian music has been taken over by wealthy members of the Indian community in India and abroad and by the paying public.

Indian Music Schools: Hindustani and Karnatak

There are two main schools of Indian classical music: the Hindustani style of the North and the Karnatak (also spelled Carnatic and Karanatic) of the South. The Hindustani style features a number of Turko-Persian musical elements not found in the more varied and, in some ways, complex Karnatak style. Well-known Hindustani styles include Dhrupad, Dhamar, Khayal, Tappa and Thumri. A gharana (literally meaning "extended family") is a school of music. Certain ones have good reputations. Gharanas are more like philosophical schools than formal institutions. There are ones for singing and various instruments and they often distinguished by style and mode of thought. They have usually been founded by famous musicians. Traditionally musical traditions have been passed on orally and musical skills have often been taught from father to son or teacher to pupil. Students pay respect to their instructors by kissing their feet. The relationship between teachers (known as pandits and gurus among Hindus and ustaad among Muslims) and their pupils is very important in Indian music. Teachers and pupils are often related, and the spiritual element of the instrument is often as important as technical virtuosity. In northern India, the spiritual relationship is symbolized by a ceremony in which a teachers ties a string around the wrist of a pupil.

Marfil: A mahfil (derived from the Persian word for "gathering" or "assembly") is modern version of a traditional private instrumental and vocal performance. Musicians at a marphil have traditionally been forbidden from performing pieces they have played in public. Marfils are the dominion of the elite. It is considered a great honor for someone to play at, host or even attend one. It is almost impossible for ordinary people to attend one unless they know the right people. Those who attend seem be divided between the socially ambitious and true music lovers who prefer the atmosphere of a small intimate performance to a concert in a large hall. "The evening's cost are sometimes shared among the guests, who contribute to the collection, which is taken up at the beginning of the evening; if the mahfil features qawwali then the listener gives the money directly to the singers. It is not unusual for musicians to earn over 2,000 in a mahfil of about fifty listeners...Where qawwali is concerned the amount itself, ideally, is insignificant—the gesture of getting up often and placing a small coin or note into the hands of the singer is a devotional act in itself. "Nautch girl" mahfil feature a dancing girl performing before an all-male audience, who throw money at the dancer and fight among themselves for her attention. "A large number of helpers, usually female, crowds into the kitchen to prepare halftime-snacks" and "dinner, to be served after the performance at around two in the morning." Most of the dishes for this meal have been prepared and bought by the guests themselves.

Description of a Marfil: Describing a marfil, Jameela Siddiqi wrote in the *Rough Guide to World Music*, "The build-up for a marfil is in itself a major performance...guest-listeners...rush back and forth with final preparations—washing the hot-sweet betel leaves and wrapping them around sweet spices to make paan to be chewed, sucked at spat out." "The large drawing room still retains its grandeur—the furniture has either been moved back against the wall or removed from the room altogether...The fragrance of joss sticks fills the air...The "stage" is clearly marked with rich weavings and bolster cushions. Both musicians and audience sit on the floor...There is no amplification." At true mahfil gatherings, "the audience don't merely recognize the forthcoming raaga as the instrument is being tuned, but actually call out the taal they would like the musicians to use...The intensity of the music is sharpened by the interaction between audience and performer. Those listeners who are most apt to respond are soon noted by the musicians, who are close enough to see the expressions on their faces and play to their emotions. There is no applause at any time, for clapping is considered undignified and only fit for large concert halls where there is no other practical way of showing appreciation."

Classical Indian Music

Classical Indian music blends rhythm, harmony and melody in a subtle and intricate way that is unfathomable to many Westerners. It is largely improvised but is done so within very strictly defined boundaries. According the *Rough Guide of World Music*, "Where Western music starts at a particular point and then progresses from it. Indian classical music revolves around the point, probing it from every angle, yet maintaining a dignified restraint. It is this restraint that distinguishes Indian classical music from the carefree abandon of Indian pop and film music." Classical Indian music unfold over a long period of time. A typical Indian raga begins slowly, sometimes sounding as if the musicians are warming up and practicing, then builds and gains momentum and complexity, and finally climaxes with a "dizzying display of dexterity." Improvisation is an important aspect of classical Indian music but is has to be in such as way that it does not violate the mood or the structure of the piece. A lot of the improvisation is in the form of embellishments and ornamentation. Indian music is based on two pillars: 1) the raga, the melodic form; and 2) the taal (or tal or tala), the rhythmic form A lot of Indian music features a constant drone, produced by an instrument called a tambura. It creates a reference point for musicians and listeners and is usually produced by advanced students in a school. The taal is a time measure that can be clapped out by hand. The rhythmic equivalent of a raag, it is derived from the word tali, meaning "hand clap." Taals are made of matras (numbers of beats) and bols (unique sets of patterns). There are hundreds of taals. Most drummers have a few favorites.

Ragas

Ragas (or ragan or raag) are traditional Indian melodies that attempt to evoke the interaction of man's emotions and his environment. They refer to a complex scale pattern and notes arranged in numerical ratios associated with things like moods, colors, seasons and even hours of the day "as well as a certain philosophical and moral ideas used to generate a performance in that particular raag." Raga is the classical term; raag is colloquial. The word "raga" is derived from a Sanskrit word that means "that which colors the mind." Raga is the mainstay of both the Hindustani classical music of northern India and Karnatak music of southern Indian music, where it is known as the raga. It is defined by ascending and descending scaled of 7, 6 and 5 notes that work like jazz, creating a structure off of which the musicians improvise. The rhythm structure is called the taal, which is guided by a main beat called the "sum," that provides a focal point for the numerous counter rhythms to meet. Ragas can feature a singer or solo instrument like a sitar. There are some 200 main ragas, defined by unique combinations of scale patterns, dominant notes, ascending and descending patterns, and specific melodic phrases. Some are linked with different seasons or times of the day. Others are regarded as masculine or feminine. By one count 95 percent of the music is improvised but the improvisations are done within fairly strict parameters. Raga arrangements generally have a characteristic mood that is repeated in many compositions. Musicians, however, have considerable freedom to improvise within the framework, and performances are often judged by the brilliance of the improvisation. Improvisation, though, is done within certain boundaries. If the performer strays too much from the raga it is not regarded as classical music.

Phases of a Raga

The first form of the raga, the alaap, is a slow invocation in a meditative style with free rhythms accompanied by solo instrument improvisations and the constant drone of the tamboura. There is generally no drumming and the notes of the raga are introduced one by one. In the old days an alaap could last a couple of hours. Now it lasts only a few minutes. Indians often find this phase the most stimulating while Westerners are often bewildered by it. It is regarded as opportunity for the musicians involved to best show off their skills.

Later, a more rhythmic style, called the jor, develops with many variations. This is followed by the jhala, in which the rhythm increases and repeated notes from the plectrum are introduced. Only in the last phase of the raga, the gat, are percussion instruments such as the tablas or pakhavajas introduced. A gat is a fixed musical figure. It features melodic phrases that are repeated again and again and provide a basis for the musician to improvise off of. With the gat providing a slow, medium or fast tempo structure the sitar or singer generates melody and weaves intricate counter rhythms. The gat often ends with a jihala, a crescendo of rapid repeated notes filled out by rhythm.

Classical Indian Singing

According to the Rough Guide of World Music, "Singing is considered the highest form of classical music...Instruments are regarded according to their similarity to the human voice...The degree of musical purity is assigned according to a scale which has music at one extreme and words at the other. As word become more audible and thus the meaning of the lyrics more important, so the form is considered to be less musically pure."

Serious listeners of Indian music often refer to two kinds of sound: one physical and audible to human ear; the other is spiritual and inaudible. The latter is said to be formed from ether and liberates the soul. It reportedly takes great devotion and concentration to perceive it. In the Agra area, singers chew on tamarind seeds near the grave of the famous singer Tan Sen to improve the quality of their voices. Tan Sen was a Rajput princess married to the Mughal Emperor Akbar. It was said that her voice was so beautiful and powerful it could ignite oil lamps.

Dance

India is a land of varied cultures and traditions. Diversities in all spheres make the Indian culture quite unique. Indian folk and tribal dances are product of different socio-economic set up and traditions evolved over ages. In India, we have festivals and celebrations virtually every day, and dances are performed to express joy and festivity. This has added to the richness of Indian culture. Since every festival is accompanied by celebration, folk dances have become an integral part of our social milieu. There are numerous folk and tribal dances, and almost all of them have continuously evolved and improvised.

Folk dances are performed for every possible occasion - to celebrate the arrival of seasons, birth of a child, a wedding and festivals, which are a plenty. The folk dances are extremely simple with minimum of steps or movement. Indian folk dances are full of energy and vitality. Some dances are performed separately by men and women while in some performances men and women dance together. On most occasions, the dancers sing themselves, accompanied by artists with instruments. Each form of folk dance has a specific costume and rhythm. Most of the costumes, worn for folk dances, are colorful with extensive jewels and designs. Let's have a look at folk dances of India

North India

- **Dumhal** - This age-old dance is still kept alive by the Rauf tribe of Jammu & Kashmir and is performed by men who wear long and colorful robes, accompanied by tall conical caps. The performers place a banner into the ground at a fixed location, and the dance is performed around this banner.
- **Hikat** - Performed in groups, the dancers hold each other's hand and go around dancing in circles. The pace of their movement is adjusted according to the tempo of the music being played. Usually, it all begins slowly and the pace gradually picks up until the women gain full momentum.
- **HurkaBaul** - This dance form is associated with the state of Uttarakhand. Performed during maize and paddy cultivation in the state, this dance form is more of a storytelling. While a singer incorporates heroic stories of battles in his song, the dancers enact the stories with the help of their moves.
- **Chholiya** - 'Chholiya' dance form is practiced in the Kumaon region in the state of Uttarakhand. It is traditionally performed in wedding processions. Sword wielding men dancers are seen dancing spiritedly and hence 'Chholiya' is often referred as 'sword dance'.
- **Bhangra** - 'Bhangra' is one of the most popular and energetic dances of Punjab. The origins of this impressive dance form remains speculative. While it is widely believed that 'Bhangra' is a martial dance form, it is also said that it was started by farmers to celebrate the harvest season. No celebration in the Punjab and surround areas is complete without a Bhangra performance.
- **Dhamyal** - 'Dhamyal' or 'Dhuph' is one of the most popular folk dances of Haryana. 'Dhuph' is a circular drum and is played by male dancers. The dance is performed as a part of celebration after a long day's work in the fields.
- **Mayur Nritya** - This dance form is prevalent in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Also known as peacock dance, 'Mayur Nritya' is performed by dancers who wear specially designed clothes so as to resemble a peacock. It is performed while worshipping Lord Krishna.
- **Charkula** - It is a dance performed in the Braj region of Uttar Pradesh. 'Charkula' is basically a multi-tiered circular pyramid and it's believed that Goddess Radha's grandmother announced the birth of her granddaughter while balancing a 'Charkula' on her head. Hence women dancers carry huge 'Charkulas' which in turn holds many lighted oil lamps.
- **Rasa Lila** - It is a divine form of dance performed in several parts of India. This particular dance form is considered very important by the devotees of Krishna as it has a mythological significance. It is believed that the dance was performed by Krishna along with Radha and her friends.
- **Giddha** - This dance form is performed in the state of Punjab. Giddha is the female version of 'Bhangra'. The dance aims at expressing the feminine grace. The women wear colorful clothes while performing. Giddha is usually accompanied by 'Bolliyan', a collection of couplets.

Central India

- **Gaur Dance** - This dance is associated with the tribal people in the state of Chhattisgarh. In this dance, men don colorful head-dresses and hats adorned with peacock plumes. Women, beautified by tattoos and ornamented with fillets made out of brass and necklaces made out of beads, also join the gathering.
- **Muria Dance** - This dance is associated with the tribal people of the Bastar district of Chhattisgarh. It usually begins with an invocation to the phallic deity of the tribe. The Muria people also perform 'Hulki' dance and 'Karsana' dance. While 'Hulki' dance is considered the most attractive of all dance forms, 'Karsana' is seen as a recreational activity.
- **Saila Dance** - This dance form is associated with Bastar district in the state of Chhattisgarh. Saila is a unique dance in which the dancers use sticks for rhythmic purpose. The dancers are seldom seen forming a circle, each standing on one leg and supporting themselves by holding on to the dancer in front. Then they all hop together round and round.
- **Karma Dance** - Karma dance is performed by the tribes of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar and other regions of India. The dance is associated with the fertility cult and is related to the Karma festival that falls in the month of August. The dancers form a circle by placing their arms on the waist of the adjacent dancer and dance in a rhythmic manner.
- **Kaksar Dance** - Kaksar dance is popular among the Abhujmarias of Bastar. It is performed in hope of reaping a rich harvest. To invoke the blessings of the deity, young boys and girls perform Kaksar. An interesting trivia about the Kaksar dance is that it allows its dancers to choose their life partners from the same dance troupe.
- **Jhumar** - This dance form originated in the Multan and Balochistan region of Pakistan. Jhumar is slower and more rhythmic. Often performed by men, 'Jhumar' marks the beginning of the harvest season and portrays the happiness of people.

- **Jawara Dance** - It is associated with the state of Madhya Pradesh. The dance not only involves rapid feet movement but also difficult acts of balancing. The women perform a balancing act by carrying a basket full of the harvested crop on their head.
- **Bhagoria Dance** - This is performed by the tribal people of Madhya Pradesh. Though the dance is part of a unique festival, which allows young men and women to elope, it has its own agricultural significance – completion of the harvest season.
- **Suwa Dance** - It is performed by tribes in the state of Chhattisgarh. Also known as ‘parrot dance’, this unique dance gets women to act like parrots! It is usually performed only by women and girls while men get to play musical instruments of their choice.
- **Tertali Dance** - It is performed by the Kamar tribe of Chhattisgarh. The dance is performed only by women who start by squatting. A musical instrument called ‘Manjira’ is tied all over their body – most commonly to their legs and the same is played by the performers throughout the ritual.
- **Grida Dance** - Grida dance is performed in the state of Madhya Pradesh during winter when the rabi crop is ready to be harvested. The dance marks the success of farmers which is celebrated among the villagers in a grand manner.

East India

- **Chhau** - This dance form traces its roots to Odisha, Jharkhand and West Bengal but it is popular in other parts as well. As masks form an important feature of this dance it is called ‘Chhau’, which literally translates to ‘mask’. The performers wield weapons such as swords and shields while dancing.
- **Brita Dance** - ‘Brita’ or ‘Vrita’ dance is one of the most prominent dances of West Bengal. The dance is usually performed to thank the local deity after recovering from a contagious disease – usually small pox.
- **Dalkhai** - This dance is popular in parts of Odisha. The dance is performed by young women who are later joined by men, playing drums and other instruments. Interestingly, the men address the women as their girlfriends throughout the play.
- **Gotipua** - It is performed in the parts of Odisha. ‘Gotipua’ is a unique dance form since the performers are dressed as women. The dance form is taken seriously by the boys so much so that they don’t cut their hair just to look like women.
- **Bardo Chham** - It is performed by Sherdukpens, a small community living in the West Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh. The Sherdukpen tribe believe that every month an evil force appear to mar the good qualities of humans. Thus to ward off those evil forces, they wear masks representing different animals and dance together.

North East India

- **Bihu** - This dance form forms the most attractive part of the Bihu festival celebrated by the people of Assam. Bihu is celebrated at the beginning of the harvest season and goes on for nearly 30 days.
- **Hojagiri** - This dance is performed in the state of Tripura. Women and young girls balance bottle and earthen lamps on their head and move their lower body so as to make sure the bottles or lamps don’t fall. Men are involved in the act by singing and playing musical instruments.
- **Nongkram Dance** - Performed by the Jaintia Hill inhabitants of Meghalaya, the ‘Nongkram’ dance is a colorful event. The dance form is a way of paying respect to the local deity.
- **Bagurumba** - It is performed mainly by the Bodo tribe in Assam. Usually performed by the women, the dance is accompanied by instruments like drums and flutes. Bagurumba dance has a rich history and is believed to be inspired by nature.
- **Bhortal Dance** - It is a folk dance of Assam. Performers wield cymbals and dance in groups, with each group consisting of six or seven dancers. Dancers come up with a unique beat known as ‘Thiya Nom’ and engage in rapid feet movements.
- **Jhumur** - This dance is performed in the states of Assam, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Odisha. The dance is performed by young girls while men take care of the musical part. The dancers place their arms around the waist of the adjacent dancer and sway to and fro in a synchronized manner.
- **Cheraw Dance** - It is performed in the Indian state of Mizoram. While the men move horizontally and vertically held bamboo staves, women dance in between them so as to avoid their legs getting caught in between the staves. The beats are formulated when the bamboo staves are moved at rapid pace.
- **Chang Lo** - This dance is performed by Chang tribe of Nagaland. Since the dance is traditionally performed to celebrate the victory over their enemies on a battle field, dancers don costumes worn by warriors and display war tactics in the form of dance.

South India

- Padayani - It is performed in the central part of Kerala. Padayani is not only popular but is also pleasing to the eyes as colors form an important aspect of the dance. The dancers wear massive masks which often represent deities.
- Kummi - 'Kummi' is a popular folk dance in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Since this dance form originated when there were no musical instruments, it just involves women singing and clapping.
- Kolannalu - It is performed in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Popularly known as the 'stick dance', 'Kolannalu' involves group of dancers forming two circles. While the inner circle receives a strike on their sticks, the dancers forming the outer circle deliver the strike.
- Parai Attam - It is a special type of dance in Tamil Nadu. Men folk play a percussion instrument called 'Parai' and dance to the rhythm they come up with. Traditionally, the dance was performed for various reasons and is one of the oldest dance forms of India.
- Karagattam - It is an ancient folk dance of Tamil Nadu. Karagattam is performed while worshipping the goddess of rain. Dancers balance huge pots on their head and dance to the tunes of musicians.
- Mayil Attam - It is performed in the temples of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. This dance is similar to the 'Mayur Nritya' of Uttar Pradesh. Young girls are dressed to look like peacocks and perform to the beats of the musicians. The dancers often imitate the moves of peacock.
- Paampu Attam - It is performed in Tamil Nadu. This dance is performed while worshipping snakes as snakes are considered divine in this part of the country. Young girls wear clothes that resemble the skin of snakes and go about moving like snakes!
- Poikal Kudirai Attam - 'PoikalKudirai' literally means 'horse with fake legs'. The dancers are made to look like they are riding a horse with just two legs! This is one of the most popular folk dances in Tamil Nadu.
- Theyyam - It is performed in the Malabar region of Kerala. Theyyam is an age-old dance, performed to praise Goddess Kali and hence it is also known as 'Kaliyattam.' The dancers paint their faces with vibrant colors which add to the overall effect.

South West India

- Dollu Kunitha - It is performed in the state of Karnataka. Dollu Kunitha is a popular drum dance. Large drums are hung around the necks of men. The songs used in this dance usually have religious and battle fervor.
- Ghodemodni - It is performed in the state of Goa and the adjoining areas. Ghodemodni is also called as 'warrior dance' as the performers are dressed as warriors and wield swords. The dance portrays a war since the village in which the dance form originated was once captured by a king.
- Lava Dance - This art form is performed in one of the islands of Lakshadweep. It's performed by the men inhabiting the island. The dance is based on folk songs and rhythmic movements.
- Fugdi - It is a Goan dance performed in the Konkan region. Performed by women, this dance form is given life during Hindu festivals. The dancers make different formations like circles or rows and go about singing and dancing. The dance begins slowly and gains pace gradually.
- Veeragase - Veeragase is one of the prominent dances of Karnataka as it's performed during Dasara celebrations in Mysore. Performed only by men, this dance form is intense and involves energy-sapping movements.

West India

- Dandiya - This is very popular dance form in the states of Gujarat and Rajasthan. Dandiya is a dance form which requires its dancers to wield sticks and wear colorful costumes. Much like the 'Saila' dance, sticks here are used for rhythmic purpose.
- Garba - This dance form originated in the state of Gujarat. Garba is traditionally performed during the nine-day Hindu festival 'Navaratri'. The dance is performed around a lamp. Often the lamp is replaced with a picture or statue of Goddess 'Shakti'.
- Koli - Koli is performed in Maharashtra. Since the dance is performed by fishermen, it involves elements of fishing and sea. Both men and women are involved in this interesting dance form which is a treat to watch.
- Tippani Dance - Performed during weddings and festivals in Saurashtra region of Maharashtra, this dance is performed only by women. Shehnai and percussions like Manjira, Tabla and Dhol are used to create music.
- Padhar Dance - It is a folk dance performed in Gujarat. Performed by fishermen, who spend their lives along the banks of Nal Sarovar, Padhar dance involves enactment of fishing and rowing of boats.

Kuchipudi

Kuchipudi, a pre-eminent Indian classical dance form counted among ten leading classical dance forms of India, is a dance-drama performance art that originated in a village of Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh, India. Similar

to all leading Indian classical dance forms, Kuchipudi too evolved as a religious art rooting back to the age-old Hindu Sanskrit text 'Natyashastra' and connects traditionally with temples, spiritual faiths and travelling bards. This ancient dance form finds place in the 10th century copper inscriptions and in 15th century texts like 'Machupalli Kaifat'. Traditionally it is regarded that the sanyassin of Advaita Vedanta sect, Tirtha Narayana Yati, and his disciple Siddhendra Yogi initiated, methodized and arranged the present day version of the dance form in 17th century. Usually performance repertoire of Kuchipudi that is broadly oriented on Lord Krishna and the tradition of Vaishnavism include an invocation, dharavu – short dance, nritya – pure dance and nritya – expressive dance respectively.

Odissi

Odissi or Orissi is one of the pre-eminent classical dance forms of India which originated in the Hindu temples of the eastern coastal state of Odisha in India. Its theoretical base trace back to 'Natyashastra', the ancient Sanskrit Hindu text on the performing arts. Age-old tradition of Odissi is manifested from Odisha Hindu temples and various sites of archaeological significance that are associated with Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, the sculptures of which adorn dance postures of this art form. A form of illustrative anecdote of mythical and religious stories, devotional poems and spiritual ideas emoted by dancer with excellent body movements, expressions, impressive gestures and sign languages, its performance repertoire includes invocation, nritya, nritya, natya, and moksha. This dance form includes themes from Vaishnavism and others associated with Hindu gods and goddesses like Shiva, Surya and Shakti.

Kathakali

'Kathakali', an important genre in the Indian classical dance form, is associated with storytelling form of this art. It is the dance drama from the south Indian state of Kerala. Similar to other Indian classical dance arts, the story in 'Kathakali' is also communicated to audience through excellent footwork and impressive gestures of face and hands complimented with music and vocal performance. However, it can be distinguished from the others through the intricate and vivid make-up, unique face masks and costumes worn by dancers as also from their style and movements that reflect the age-old martial arts and athletic conventions prevalent in Kerala and surrounding regions. Traditionally performed by male dancers, it developed in courts and theatres of Hindu regions contrary to other Indian classical dances which predominantly developed in Hindu temples and monastic schools. Although not clearly traceable, this classical dance form is considered to have originated from temple and folk arts that trace back to 1st millennium CE or before.

Bharathanattiyam

Bharatanatyam, a pre-eminent Indian classical dance form presumably the oldest classical dance heritage of India is regarded as mother of many other Indian classical dance forms. Conventionally a solo dance performed only by women, it initiated in the Hindu temples of Tamil Nadu and eventually flourished in South India. Theoretical base of this form traces back to 'Natyashastra', the ancient Sanskrit Hindu text on the performing arts. A form of illustrative anecdote of Hindu religious themes and spiritual ideas emoted by dancer with excellent footwork and impressive gestures its performance repertoire includes nritya, nritya and natya. Accompanists include a singer, music and particularly the guru who directs and conducts the performance. It also continues to inspire several art forms including paintings and sculptures starting from the spectacular 6th to 9th century CE temple sculptures.

New Delhi

The capital city of India, New Delhi, with the fusion of age old history and varied cultural diorama, is one of the bustling tourist destinations in North India during the winter season. The city with its quaint charm that is said to be dating back to the Pandava era is one of the significant historical cities in India. The city is home to several ancient monuments, forts and churches that delineate the chapters of Indian history. Amongst them the Purana Quilla, Qutub Minar, Jantar Mantar, Red Fort, Jama Masjid and Humayun's Tomb holds special tourists' interest. The ruins of Tughlaquabad Fort, Lotus Temple and Lodhi Garden and its monuments are some other heritage attractions in New Delhi. The India Gate, which is close to the Parliament and Rashtrapati Bhavan, is yet another popular tourist attraction that stands as a memorial to all the Indian soldiers who lost their lives during the Indian Freedom Movement, Indo-Pak Wars and Sino-Indo Wars. Rajghat, which is yet another memorial, holds a national significance and attracts tourists from all over the world. Being in the city you can't escape from the quaint charm of Chandni Chowk and the colonial ambiance of Connaught Place. Chandni Chowk is one of the oldest and congested areas of the city that is noted for its multiple arrays of shops dealing in jewellery, antiques, garments and street food, 'Parathe Wali Gali' is a must visit place when you are in Chandni Chowk. On the other hand, Connaught Place, which acts as a bridge between Old Delhi and New Delhi, is a popular hangout in the city with numerous multi-cuisine restaurants, pubs, shopping arcades and hotels. The Akshardham Temple, which is the largest Hindu Temple in the world, exhibits a detailed picture of Indian culture and religion... thus making it another prominent tourist attraction in New Delhi. Don't miss out the light and sound show. If you

are travelling to New Delhi at the time of Republic Day, then you must catch a glimpse of the parade in front of the Red Fort. Shopaholics have a whole lot of options. S.N. Market, Lajpat Nagar, Janpath, Sadar Bazar and Palika Bazar are some of the notable shopping areas in the city where arrays of shops from garments to handicrafts and antiques to electronic goods can be found.

Agra

Home to one of the seven wonders of the world, the Taj Mahal, which is a marble monument built by Shah Jahan and often dubbed as a 'symbol of love', the medieval city of Agra is yet another good pick from the bucket of destinations to visit in North India during the winter. Agra dilates an eminent chapter of the Golden Era of the Mughal Empire. The city hosts several other historical ramparts including the Agra Fort and other monuments and palaces. It is also noted for its traditional culture, architecture, marble crafts, leather products and cuisine. During the winter Agra is packed with tourists from all over the world but the marvelous sight of the Taj Mahal once you get hold of leaves you in a state of solitude... no matter who so ever knocks you from behind. Approximately an hour's drive from Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, which is famed for its Buland Darwaza, is one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in India, and is a must visit place for travellers having an interest in Indian medieval history. Further, the Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary makes for a refreshing getaway from Agra.

Jaipur

The only planned city of its time, Jaipur the capital city of royal Rajasthan still beats in its fairy tale palaces and rugged fortresses perched on hills. Today it is a blend of tradition and modernity but the colour pink is still associated with hospitality in Jaipur. Being of historical importance, the city is one of the most popular tourist destinations in North India during the winter. It is a city where a traveller can participate in a lot of activities like heritage tour, shopping traditional items and jewellerys. The City Palace, Hawa Mahal, Jantar Mantar, Lake Palace and Amber Fort are the major heritage sites in Jaipur. In the outskirts... the Nahargarh Fort and Jaigarh Fort are the two notable heritage sites. On the other hand, the city hosts several Hindu and Jain temples; of them the Birla Mandir, Narayan Temple, Galtaji, Choolgiri Temple, and Govind Devji Temple are the notable ones. Ram Niwas Bagh, Dolls Museum, B.M. Birla Planetarium and Ghat Ki Guni are some other tourist spots in Jaipur. Well, don't miss out the light and sound show at Kesar Kyari in Amber Fort. It is held every evening. The remote fort city of Jaisalmer, which is located in the midst of the Thar Desert in the incredible state of Rajasthan, is yet another popular winter getaway in India. It attracts all travellers including honeymoon couples, and other leisure travellers. The city is noted for several architectural buildings belonging to former rulers. The Jaisalmer Fort, which is also known as 'Sonar Quilla', housing several havelis and Jain temples, is one of the beautiful examples of craftsmanship exhibiting the rich Rajasthani style of architecture with intrinsically designed walls, carved windows and facades. The Nathmalji-Ki-Haveli, Patwon-Ki-Haveli and Salim Singh-Ki Haveli are the major tourist sites that elaborate the intricate architecture and sheer craftsmanship. The Gadisar Lake with numerous beautiful shrines, and Bada Bagh housing several cenotaphs are some other tourist sites in Jaisalmer. In the outskirts of Jaisalmer City, the ruins of Kuldhara village, Barna village, Khuri Desert, Moolsagar Palace and Ram Mandir are must visit places that leave travellers spell bound. On the other hand, how can you escape from Jaisalmer without a camel safari in the SAM Dunes? That's the only way to explore the vast stretch of the Thar Desert. The best time to visit the SAM Dunes is during the Jaisalmer Desert Festival, which is held in the month of February. It is the best way to get acquainted with Rajasthani folk culture.

Udaipur

One of the historic cities in India that is famous internationally as the most romantic destination in the world, partly because of the influence of the Lake Palace Hotel located in the middle of the placid water of Lake Pichola... Udaipur during the winter season pulls in travellers from all over the world. Like any other cities in Rajasthan, Udaipur also comes with its own legends and much of its history is clearly visible from the picture perfect gallery hosting palaces, gates, temples and quaint alleys. Each and every turn and bricks are preserved with heroism, valour and chivalry. Yet the city turns out to be one of the honeymoon destinations in India during the winter. The major attractions are the Lake Palace, Lake Pichola, City Palace, Fateh Sagar and Monsoon Palace. Some other attractions in Udaipur are Gulab Bagh, Ahar, Pratap Memorial, Saheliyon Ki Bari, Jagdish Temple and Bhartiya Lok Kala Mandir. Close to Udaipur, Mount Abu is the only hill station in Rajasthan and is worth a visit during the winter. Other excursions on your Udaipur tour can be Kumbhalgarh, which is approximately 84 kilometers away, and Ranakpur, which is approximately 90 kilometers away.

Manali

Manali That's my favourite pick any time of the year and during the winter when you catch the glimpse of snow-fall early in the morning... holding a cup of hot coffee in your hand, your partner being cozy with you at the same time and the stunning views of far-fetched snow-capped mountains blazing the intimacy... Ah! Nature here herself showers romanticism. I feel like rolling over the bed once again and pouring some more lovely moments into my winter trip to Manali. "WINK" but now it's time to grab nature at her best. Manali is one of the popular hill

stations in India where tranquility dwells even in the midst of tourist crowd throughout the year. Nature here hosts an amazing alpine forest of Pine and Deodar trees dotted with several fruit orchards and cattle farms. An hour's drive from Manali to Solang Valley, which during the winter season turns out to be one of the popular ski resorts in India, one can here exploit the nature with several adventure activities like skiing, zorbing and paragliding. Well... the temperature over here throughout the winter remains freezing and hence it is recommended to carry proper woolen garments if you are planning to go for paragliding in Solang. Manali is also a gateway to several trekking destinations in Himachal Pradesh. During the winter season you can go for some short treks in Manali like the Bhrigu Lake trek and Beas Kund trek. Other popular treks around Manali are the Malana Valley and Chandra Tal trek, but during winter these treks are difficult to access. Rohtang Pass, which is at an altitude of approximately 4,000 meters, is a popular tourist destination in Manali being the highest point on the Manali-Keylong road. Although access to Rohtang Pass during the months of December, January and February becomes impossible due to heavy snowfall, yet some crazy trekkers do make it to the point. Are you one of them? Besides its breathtaking natural beauty, Manali is also notable for housing a rich and indigenous Indo-Tibetan culture. The Gadhan Thehchoking Gumpa and Nyingamapa Gumpa are the two popular Buddhist pilgrimage sites that pull in several tourists from all over the world. The quaint ambience of Vashisht village, which is approximately 3 kilometers away from Manali, is also worth a visit on your winter trip to Manali. The village is far-famed for hosting several hot springs and stone houses with beautiful carvings. Apart from all... the cultural clamour can be witnessed thoroughly when you visit Old Manali. The Hadimba Temple and Manu Maharishi Temple are the notable attractions here. Some other beautiful places to visit around Manali are Katrain which is popular for its apple orchards and trout hatcheries; the temple town of Naggar; and Manikaran, which is an important Hindu and Sikh pilgrimage site.

Dalhousie

Dalhousie The name itself throws a distinct colonial charm. Named after the 19th century British Governor General Lord Dalhousie, the scenic hill station in Himachal Pradesh, Dalhousie houses some of the most beautiful churches of North India. The St. Patrick's Church, St. Francis Church, and St. Andrew's Church are the most notable ones having rich architectural work of their own with stone carvings, glass and wooden structures. Besides the colonial diorama, the town's varying altitude spreading out over the Kathlog, Potreys, Tehra, Bakrota and Balun hills is dramatically set with a dense grove of pines, deodars, oaks and rhododendrons... which almost remains covered in snow during the winter. Yes! Snowfall in Dalhousie during the winter season is the major attraction. It is the best time to frame the panorama of the breathtaking countryside from Panchpula, Bakrota Hills and Dainkund. Approximately 10 kilometers from Dalhousie, Kalatope is yet another scenic spot that also houses a wildlife sanctuary. Close to Kalatope, Ahla village is one of the notable pilgrimage sites in and around Dalhousie. Built in the 10th century, Laxmi Narayan Temple is one of the finest specimens of ancient architecture in Dalhousie. Talking about antiques... you must pay a visit to Satdhara, which is a stupa dating back to the Murya and Sunga period. Dakshina Murti, Shivkul and Norwood Paramdham are some other cultural hubs in and around Dalhousie.

Kasol

Kasol One of the least tapped hill stations in Himachal Pradesh that is nestled in the luxuriant greens of the thick pines in Himachal's Parvati Valley, Kasol during the winter season truly offers a quiet weekend getaway. The small town on the bank of River Parvati with patches of small villages in the midst of dense pinewood is a hideout ideal for an impromptu nature holiday in the Parvati Valley. Further, the trek to Malana Village, which is one of the strenuous treks in Himachal Pradesh, is a good option for an adventure trip during the winter. A visit to the nearby Tosh village allows you to get acquainted with the Himachali folk culture where people are extremely hospitable. Moreover, lazing around in Kasol is just not one option for leisure travellers. Kasol is well known for trout fishing and hence travellers dreaming of fishing and angling holiday in the Indian Himalayan region may whizz to Kasol in the winter months.

Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh

kasauli Amid the quaint colonial ambience, Kasauli unwraps rejuvenating elements of nature with the panorama of sprawling plains of Punjab and Haryana. The moment might drop your jaws when you catch sight of the blazing carpet of light as darkness falls. Kasauli during the winter season makes a cool escape from the city dust to the refreshing atmosphere that is cuddled with thick forest of pine, oak, and chestnut trees. Its colonial ambience is reinforced by stretches of cobbled roads, shops, houses with charming facades and scores of neat little gardens and orchards. The 'Monkey Point' is one of the must visit places in Kasauli, which is an important pilgrimage site. Nonetheless, the Baba Balak nath Temple and Sai Baba Mandir are also two other religious sites in Kasauli. Other attractions in Kasauli include the St. Patrick's Catholic Church that was built in 1847 AND Sunny Side, which is the oldest cottage in Kasauli, built in 1848.

Shimla

Shimla Even though it remains one of the bustling hill stations in India throughout the year, Shimla during the winter season turns out to be a fantasy world. The nature herself boasts off a scenic spectacle with layers of snow bedded over the thick alpine forest AND the panorama from the Ridge of snow-capped mountain ranges engulfed in the beauty of the nature is worth a capture. It is the best time, especially in the months of December and January, to go for a forest trail that runs towards the villages of Kamina and Pabo. If you are lucky some bird species can also be sighted. A short trek to Tattapani is also recommended as one of the adventure activities in Shimla during the winter season. Further, if you are looking for some more adventure then just whizz your wheels an hour snaking through the mountains to Kufri, which lies at an altitude of 2,622 meters and is one of the notable skiing destinations in the Indian Himalayan region with varying slopes. Just when you find the temperature dipping and you run out of warm garments, check out some quality woollens, jackets and shawls arraying down the Mall, which is one of the longest stretches of pedestrian shopping in the world. It also has arrays of hops dealing in traditional handicrafts, miniature paintings, jewellery, metalwares, rugs and carpets. Close to the Mall is the Himachal State Museum, which is one of the finest examples of craftsmanship from the colonial era. It exhibits a huge collection of coins, photographs and handicrafts. The Gaiety Heritage Cultural Complex, which is another colonial architecture built in a Gothic Victorian Style; Shimla State Museum that was built in 1974; and George Castle are some of the prominent tourist attractions in Shimla. The temperature might get very freezing during the winter, BUT one must step into the Christ Church that was built by the British in 1857 in the Neo-Gothic style of architecture and is one of the long lasting legacies of the British Raj. On the other hand, the Jakhoo Temple, which is an ancient temple dedicated to Lord Hanuman, is one of the important Hindu pilgrimage sites in Shimla AND one can even get hold of beautiful views of the Shivalik mountains and the nearby town of Sanjuli. Other popular religious sites are Tara Devi Temple and Sankat Mochan. A visit to Naldera which hosts India's oldest nine-hole golf course and Chail which holds the unique distinction of being the highest cricket pitch in the world... completes your tour to Shimla during the winter season.

Mussoorie

Mussoorie with green rifts of the Doon Valley at an altitude of 1,880 m, Mussoorie takes one back to the colonial past through its tralatitious appetizing cuisine and magnificent architectures. With abounding trekker-friendly area, stunning chatoyant natural panorama and glistening lakes, Mussoorie is also dotted with slushing waterfalls and shrubby forest. Kemtpy falls on the way to New Tehri is the most popular tourist destination. Among the several other tourist spots, Sir George Everest House is often visited by tourists.

Nainital

Nainital Located in the Kumaon region, Nainital, popularly known as the Lake District in India, is the weekend gateway for nigh domestic tourists and a beguiling sashay for foreign tourists round the year. At a height of 1,938 m, Naini Lake, holding a perpetual Hindu myth, is a summer retreat in the heart of Nainital. A pony ride or a very short trek up to the Naina peak, en route through shrubby forests, at an elevation of 2,615 m, which is the highest point in Nainital, offers a panoramic view of distant snow-clad peaks like Nanda Devi, Trishul and Nanda Kot. These peaks can also be clear-sighted from Snow View Point. Orienting towards a quest for more natural virtue Nainital is bonded with hermit destinations like Mukteshwar, offering an unhindered view of majestic Himalayan range; Bhimtal Lake, which is larger than Naini Lake; Sat Tal, a cluster of seven small interconnected lakes in the mystic oak forest; Khurpa Tal, a trowel lake; Naukuchia Tal, a nine-cornered lake; Kilbury, a weekend picnic spots popular for its flora and fauna and Pangot, a thick forest of oak, bamboo and deodar.

Ranikhet

Ranikhet The "Queen's Meadow" with lush green conifer forests, hearty ambience, placid surroundings, emerald green valleys and ancient temples is footsure making it an year-round destination for tourists. Ranikhet, the tiny hill paradise, is just a couple of hours drive from Nainital.

Kausani

Yet another spectacular hideout in the hills of Garhwal, Kausani during the winter elaborates a striking environment with the Someshwar Valley on one side and Katyuri Valley on the other. The landscape that is dotted with dense pine trees and shadowed by the scenic spectacle of Himalayan peaks like Trishul, Nanda Devi and Panchchuli... can't be compared with any other hill stations in the Garhwal region. The quaint hill station with its picture perfect ambience has been a favourite place for several notable personalities like Mahatma Gandhi and Sumitranandan Pant. The Anashakti Ashram, where Gandhi spent some days and wrote his commentary of Anashakti yog, is one of the major attractions in Kausani. The ancient Baijnath Temple, which dates back to the 12th century, and the Someshwar Temple, which was crafted by the Chand Dynasty, are the major pilgrimage sites around Kausani and are considered historically significant. The Rudrahari Mahadev Temple on the way to the Adi-Kailash trek is yet another spiritual site near Kausani. During the winter, the Kausani Tea Estate turns

into a must visit place. It is spread over an area of 208 hectares and stretches from an elevation of 1,200 meters to 1,800 meters.

Lansdowne

One of the quaint hill stations in the Garhwal Himalayan region, Lansdowne despite being a popular weekend getaway from nearby cities is remote in its own way. The colonial atmosphere surrounded by the pristine environment that is thickly bedded with oak and pine forest represents a fusion of history and nature. During the winter season the salubrious weather leaves an indelible impact on the tourists. It is the perfect place where you can indulge in several recreational activities like birding, boating and hiking. The grand view of the Himalayan ranges from Tip-In-Top simply makes your trip to Lansdowne a memorable one. It is worth capturing the panorama of India's highest peak, Nanda Devi, and its surrounding peaks from this point. Close to Tip-In-Top, the St. Mary's Church is one of the finest examples of the rich architecture from the colonial era that attracts several tourists. The Garhwal Rifles Regimental War Memorial, Garhwali Mess and St. John's Church are some other major attractions in Lansdowne. Bhulla Tal is another popular tourist spot having historical significance. A short trek to Hawaghar that passes through Khyber Pass is recommended for those looking for some adventure activities during the winter season in Lansdowne.

Rishikesh

"The yoga capital of the world", Rishikesh, solitude of meditation and yoga, solenoid for esthetics, is in the foothills of Himalaya. The religious town, in other words is also far-famed for white-water rafting and gateway to hazardous trekking destinations. Laxman Jhula (hanging bridge) above the River Ganga is one of the major attractions other than temples and ashrams.

Auli

It is the perfect haven during the winter season for adventure lovers. Over the years Auli has gained prominence as one of the best ski resorts in India and is a gateway to numerous trekking destinations in the Garhwal Himalayan region. The majestic view from the cable car of the lofty Himalayan peaks like Trishul, Mana, Kamet and Nanda Devi undoubtedly leave you in a 'Peace of Mind'. Treks like Auli-Gorson, Kuari Pass and Tapovan further allows you to get acquainted with the snow-laden wilderness of the Garhwal Himalaya during the winter.

Srinagar

Come hell or high water Srinagar with its sparkling Dal Lake, colourful gardens and picturesque nature has always attracted travellers since time immemorial. But if you are travelling to Srinagar during the winter season... then you will find much of its natural beauty dressed in snow. The Dal Lake remains frozen almost from December to February and hence there is least possibility that you can go for a shikara ride. Don't worry... you have much to explore in the city even during the winter. Many travellers travel to Srinagar during the winter just to experience the snowfall. Perched at an elevation of 1,585 meters in the landlocked territory of Kashmir, the city is largely influenced by the predominantly Muslim culture that reflects from the several monuments including tombs and mosques. The Hazratbal Shrine, Jama Masjid, Aali Masjid, Stone Mosque, tomb of the mother of Zain-ul-abidin and tomb of Pir Haji Muhammad are the major tourists' attractions in Srinagar. On the other hand, the traditional Kashmiri handicrafts – pashmina shawl, silverware, brassware, wooden furniture, carpet and rug – simply capture the imagination of travellers seeking the cultural essence of the Kashmiri people. The Arts Emporium and SPS Museum are the best places to visit in Srinagar where arrays of traditional Kashmiri handicrafts are in display. The Pari Mahal overlooking the Mughal garden, Nigeen Lake and Royal Springs Golf Course are some other major tourist attractions in Srinagar. The Old City of Srinagar having a quaint charm holds travellers mind. The Hari Parbat is one of the major attractions in old city of Srinagar. Ah! Don't forget to spend a couple of nights in a houseboat... that's one of the few luxurious activities in Srinagar WORTH experiencing.

Patnitop

It is another amazing snowy hub you have picked; Patnitop during the winter becomes favourable for any traveller. It offers stunning views of the Pir Panjal range and hosts several adventure activities like paragliding, trekking, hiking, camping and rock climbing. Paragliding in Patnitop becomes a bit tough during the winter season because of the freezing temperature, BUT if you are prepared then that's gonna make your holiday in Kashmir more exciting. Further, camping and scenic nature walks in the vicinity of Sansar Lake, which is approximately 20 kilometers from Patnitop, are two major activities worth a try for leisure travellers. Small villages like Kud and Batote near Patnitop, surrounded by thickly wooded Cedar and Pine forests, allow you to soak in the charming Kashmiri culture.

Ajanta and Ellora

Ajanta Caves: - Lying in the core of the Sahyadri hills, on the mountain side above the Waghora River, are the overwhelming Ajanta group of caves, fascinating tourists from all over. The caves at Ajanta tell the story of Buddhism, spanning the period from 200 BC to 650 AD. The 29 caves were built as private abode of the Buddhist monks, who taught and performed rituals. Using simple tools like hammer and chisel, the monks carved out the imposing figures gracing the walls of these structures.

Ajanta Paintings: The world famous paintings at Ajanta also fall into two broad phases. The earliest is noticed in the form of fragmentary specimens in cave nos. 9 & 10, which are datable to second century B.C. The headgear and other ornaments of the images in these paintings resemble the bas-relief sculpture of Sanchi and Bharhut. The second phase of paintings started around 5th – 6th centuries A.D. and continued for the next two centuries. The specimen of these exemplary paintings of Vakataka period could be noticed in cave nos. 1, 2, 16 and 17.

Theme of the paintings-

- The main theme of the paintings is the depiction of various Jataka stories, different incidents associated with the life of Buddha, and the contemporary events and social life also.
- The ceiling decoration invariably consists of decorative patterns, geometrical as well as floral.
- The paintings were executed after elaborate preparation of the rock surface initially. The rock surface was left with chisel marks and grooves so that the layer applied over it can be held in an effective manner.
- The ground layer consists of a rough layer of ferruginous earth mixed with rock-grit or sand, vegetable fibres, paddy husk, grass and other fibrous material of organic origin on the rough surface of walls and ceilings.
- A second coat of mud and ferruginous earth mixed with fine rock-powder or sand and fine fibrous vegetable material was applied over the ground surface.
- Then the surface was finally finished with a thin coat of lime wash. Over this surface, outlines are drawn boldly, then the spaces are filled with requisite colours in different shades and tones to achieve the effect of rounded and plastic volumes.
- The colours and shades utilised also vary from red and yellow ochre, terra verte, to lime, kaolin, gypsum, lamp black and lapis lazuli. The chief binding material used here was glue.
- The paintings at Ajanta are not frescoes as they are painted with the aid of a binding agent, whereas in fresco the paintings are executed while the lime wash is still wet which, thereby acts as an intrinsic binding agent.

Ellora Caves: - The Ellora caves are 34 in number carved into the sides of a basaltic hill, 30 kms from Aurangabad. These impressive caves reflect the finest specimens of cave - temple architecture. The caves flaunt intricate facades and elegantly adorned interiors. Carved during the 350 AD to 700 AD period these structures represent the three faiths of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. All of Ellora's cave-temples are remarkable in size and detail; the most spectacular of them is the Kailasa Temple, the world's largest monolithic structure.

There are 34 caves in all: 12 Buddhist caves (500-750 AD), 17 Hindu caves (600-870 AD) and 5 Jain caves (800-1000 AD). The caves are numbered roughly chronologically, starting with the oldest Buddhist caves at the south end.

The Buddhist caves (also called Vishvakarma caves) are the earliest of the Ellora Caves, dating from 500 to 750 AD. All except Cave 10 are viharas (monasteries), which were used for study, meditation, communal rituals, eating and sleeping. The caves become steadily larger and more elaborately decorated as they progress to the north, which scholars have explained by the growing need to compete with Hinduism for patronage. The earliest Hindu caves at Ellora date from 600 AD, right in the middle of the Buddhist period.

Cave 1 is a plain vihara with eight small monastic cells and very little sculpture. It may have served as a granary for the larger halls.

Cave 2 is much more impressive. A large central chamber supported by 12 great square pillars is lined with sculptures of seated Buddhas. The doorway into the sanctuary is flanked by a muscular Padmapani, holding a lotus, and a bejewelled Maitreya, the Future Buddha. Both are accompanied by their consorts. Inside the shrine is a stately seated Buddha on a lion throne.

Caves 3 and 4 have a similar design as Cave 2, but are in poor condition.

Cave 5 is named the Maharwada Cave because it was used by local Mahar tribespeople as a shelter during the monsoon. It centers on a grand assembly hall stretching 36 meters long, which was probably used as a refectory. The two rows of carved benches support this theory. The shrine Buddha is seated on a stool with his right hand touching the ground in the Earth Witness gesture.

Cave 6 was carved in the 600s and is home to two of the finest sculptures at Ellora. On the left is the goddess Tara, with an intense but kind expression. Opposite her on the right is Mahamayuri, the Buddhist goddess of learning, shown with her attribute, the peacock. A diligent student sits at his desk below. Significantly, Mahamayuri has a very similar Hindu counterpart, Saraswati.

The magnificent Cave 10 dates from the early 700s and is known as the Carpenter's Cave (Sutar Jhopadi) because of its imitation in stone of wooden beams on the ceiling. At the far end, a seated Buddha is enthroned in front of a large stone stupa.

Cave 11 is known as the Dho Tal or "Two Floors" cave, although a basement level discovered in 1876 brings the total floors to three. The top floor is a long assembly hall lined with columns. It has both a Buddha shrine and images of Durga and Ganesh, indicating the cave was converted into a Hindu temple after it was abandoned by the Buddhists.

Cave 12, known as Tin Tal ("Three Floors"), also has an impressive upper hall. The walls of the shrine room are lined with five large bodhisattvas and is flanked by seven Buddhas, representing each of his previous incarnations.

Created during a time of prosperity and revival of Hinduism, the Hindu caves represent an entirely different style of creative vision and skill than the Buddhist caves. The Hindu temples were carved from top to bottom and required several generations of planning and coordination to take shape.

There are 17 Hindu caves in all (numbered 13 to 29), which were carved between 600 and 870 AD. They occupy the center of the cave complex, grouped around either side of the famous Kailasa Temple.

In contrast to the serene and solemn Buddhas of the earlier caves, the walls of the Hindu caves are covered in lively bas-reliefs depicting events from the Hindu scriptures. All of the caves are dedicated to the god Shiva, but there are also some images of Vishnu and his various incarnations.

Cave 14 dates from the early 600s and was converted from a Buddhist vihara. Its long walls are adorned with magnificently carved friezes and the entrance to the sanctuary is guarded by the river goddess Ganga and Yamuna. Inside, an alcove shelters seven large-breasted fertility goddesses (the Sapta Matrikas) holding chubby babies on their laps. Appearing to their right is the female aspect of Ganesh and the cadaverous goddesses of death, Kala and Kali.

Cave 15 is also a former Buddhist cave adopted by the Hindus. The ground floor is mostly uninteresting, but the top floor has some of the best sculpture at Ellora. Along the right wall are a sequence of panels showing five of Vishnu's ten incarnations or avatars, which give the cave its name, Das Avatara.

A panel to the right of the antechamber depicts the superiority of Shaivism in the region at the time - Shiva emerges from a linga while his rivals Brahma and Vishnu stand in humility and supplication. The cave's most elegant sculpture is in the left wall of the chamber: it shows Shiva as Nataraja, the Cosmic Dancer.

The most notable Hindu cave (Cave 16) is not a cave at all, but a magnificent temple carved from the solid rock, patterned closely on the freestanding temples of the time. It represents Mount Kailash, the abode of Lord Shiva, and is called the Kailashnath, Kailash, or Kailasa Temple. It originally had a thick coat of white plaster to make it look like a snowy mountain.

The Kailash Temple is a stupendous piece of architecture, with interesting spatial effects and varied sculpture. It is believed to have been started by the Rashtrakuta king Krishna I (756-773). The construction was a feat of human genius - it entailed removal of 250,000 tons of rock, took 100 years to complete and covers an area double the size of Parthenon in Athens.

Many more Hindu caves stretch down the hillside north of Kailash, but only three are must-sees: 21, 25 and 29.

Cave 21, the Ramesvara, dates from the late 500s and is thought to be the oldest Hindu cave at Ellora. It houses some fine sculpture, including a pair of river goddesses, two door guardians and some loving couples (mithunas) around the walls of the balcony.

Cave 25 features a sculpture of the sun god Surya driving his chariot towards the dawn.

North of this, the trail soon drops steeply down to a gorge, under a seasonal waterfall, and back up to Cave 29, the Dhumar Lena. Dating from the late 500s, it has an unusual cross-shaped plan. Pairs of lions guard its three staircases. Inside, the walls are covered in large friezes. To the left of the entrance, Shiva slays the Andhaka demon, then defeats the many-armed Ravana's attempt to shake him and Parvati off the top of Mount Kailash. Don't miss the dwarf baring his bottom to taunt the demon! On the south side, Shiva teases Parvati by holding her arm back as she prepares to throw dice in a game.

The Jain caves, dating from the late 800s and 900s, are 2 km north down an asphalt road (rickshaws are available). They reflect the distinctiveness of Jain philosophy and tradition, including a strict sense of asceticism combined

with elaborate decoration. They are not large compared to others, but contain exceptionally detailed artworks. Many of the Jain caves had rich paintings in the ceilings, fragments of which are still visible.

The most notable of the group is Cave 32, the Indra Sabha (Indra's Assembly Hall), a miniature of the Kailash Temple. The bottom level is plain but the upper floor has elaborate carvings, including a fine lotus flower on the ceiling. Two tirthankaras guard the entrance to the central shrine. On the right is the naked Gomatesvara, who is meditating deeply in the forest - so much so that vines have grown up his legs and animals, snakes and scorpions crawl around his feet.

South

South India (comprised of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu) really has a distinct culture that sets it apart from the rest of the country. Not only that, each state has managed to retain its own distinct identity. Intricate temple architecture, historical ruins, palm fringed canals, spirituality and beach will provide you with a varied and interesting trip.

Belur

Belur-Halebid go together like twin cities. Separated only by a short drive, both were home to the Hoysala dynasty for three centuries (mid-11th to mid-14th century). Coming upon one after visiting the other is like recognising a family resemblance. Both look similar being star-shaped. They were founded by a Jain, Nripa Kama, whose kingdom was sandwiched between the Cholas of Thanjavur in the south, and the Chalukyas of Badami in the north. Nripa Kama's son and successor was Vinayaditya. He is remembered by later generations that often, incorrectly, consider him to be the founder of the dynasty. But Halebid and Belur tend to defy history. It is rare to find a place that appears so untouched by time. The Belur and Halebid temples are cut from the soft stone called chloritic schist. It allowed for very fine detailing, evident in the intricately carved temple walls. The tradition of ivory and sandalwood handwork is reflected in the sculptures of these temples. As representations of South Indian styles they are comparable, perhaps, only to the temples at Khajuraho. Of special interest are the engineering techniques used in 'assembling' the temple, particularly the locking systems that used grid locks, interlocks and the pin and socket system! They were used for attaching separately carved panels onto the walls and ceilings, achieving a continuous and inseparable appearance for what are essentially disparate stone structures.

Things To See And Do: After a dusty drive through open land, with fields on either side culminating in a congested township, we enter the Belur Temple Complex. We come here for the sculptures, unlike any you will ever see. Stones don't just speak at Halebid and Belur. They sing.

Chenna Kesava Temple: The temple complex has two entrances but only one gopura. This present brick tower was built in 1397, in place of the Mahadwara that was burned down during the reign of the mercurial Mohammad bin Tughlak. Entering the complex, one is stunned by the vision directly ahead. The temple stands on a raised platform and looks like a carved casket made of wood polished to perfection, rather than something made of stone. The temple has a flat roof because its vimana was dismantled in 1879 to protect the sanctum sanctorum. There is a tank (on the right as you enter) and perforated stone screens between the exterior pillars of the main shrine. Chenna Kesava or Beautiful Kesava must be a happy deity. His abode in Belur is one of the most gorgeous temples in India. Hundreds of devoted artisans worked for nearly a century to build him a home worthy of the gods. Miniature shrines flank the steps to the temple. It is an ekatachala temple, meaning it has one shrine on a single platform. The temple's inside is dark, cool and quiet. Although pujas are performed through the day, most of the visitors are tourists. Inside the sanctum, the large image of Chenna Kesava is profusely ornamented and has a benevolent smile. His consorts, Bhudevi and Sridevi, stand on either side of him. Shlokas resound in this cavernous space, the deity is awe-inspiring, and intricate carvings hold your attention. Lord Keshava is certainly not lonely in this temple. A tourist guide enters with a group of people. The wonder in their eyes is clearly visible despite the gloom. He points out the navaranga platform on which devadasis performed their dances. It is the largest platform in any Hoysala temple. The shining, curved pillars have square bases. The guide shepherds his flock outside and silence reigns supreme again. There is a Narasimha Pillar to the south-east of the navaranga, which used to rotate on its own axis. A intricately carved Mohini Pillar stands to the south-west. Dim passages radiate from the centre and open out into the sunlight. One can wander around and watch as each carving comes to life. Look up and you'll see the Madanikas, female figures in graceful poses. They seem to be entranced by their own dance. The ceiling forms a kind of octagonal hollow dome, with all the tiers or concentric rings having superbly carved figures. Look down again, and straight ahead is the light at the end of the passage. Coming out into the sunshine is like being blasted onto the sun itself. Hoysala temples have no interior passages surrounding the sanctum sanctorum. The pradarshan (circumambulation) required of all devotees is effected on the raised platform. The path is lined with splendid sculptures, representing stories from Hindu mythology.

To the left, is the smaller, less elaborate shrine dedicated to Kappe Chennigaraya. It was built by Vishnuvardhana's senior queen Shantala Devi, herself a follower of Jainism. At the back of the temple are three important buildings – a large mandapa, the Andal shrine, and the Soumyanayaki Temple – that were built later, using material from ruined Hoysala buildings elsewhere. The more you look at the temple, the more you feel a deep sympathy for the Beautiful One – enclosed in one of the most attractive spaces created by man, He too must escape periodically to wander in the freedom of the hills.

Halebid

Only a short drive from Belur (16 km) is Halebid. The Hoysaleswara Temple, the main attraction here, was built in 1152. It is a dikutachala temple, meaning it has two shrines on the same platform. They are both dedicated to Shiva. The second temple in Halebid is the Shantaleswara Temple. The two temples took some 100-odd years to build. The walk to the temple is slightly longer than at Belur, all the better for appreciating its proportions and its fine lawns. People are sprawled on the grass and resting, even scattered among the Nandi mandapas on the left. A few steps lead you to the starshaped platform. As if that were humanly possible, the sculptures here are even more exquisite than the ones at Belur! In addition to providing more surface area for carving, the star-shaped temple walls also provide intermittent recesses for standing in the shade. No matter what functions are met by this design, the romantic reason for the star shape, as our guide said, is because “the moon and sun have eclipses but the stars shine continuously”. Just as in Belur, many sculptures here are three-dimensional, with the backs of the figurines carved with as much detail as the front. The figures are very expressive, with emotions such as anger clearly visible. The amount of detailing is incredible. For instance, when Shiva dances, not only is his shoulder slightly lifted but even the ornaments he wears are shown flying in the air! When a character is being crushed to death, its very eyes bulge! Thus, even though the eyes should be blank since eyeballs are rarely carved, the sculptures have used body nuances to convey something more significant. The makara torana on the southern entrance is particularly well crafted. The large Nandi mandapams are open halls, standing next to each other, and were probably added later. One Nandi is slightly larger than the other, and is said to be the third largest in India. They are beautiful, smooth, and above all, asymmetrical – difficult to achieve when you're sculpting on this scale.

Mysore

When my friends and I did the South India tour in February, one of the most recommended places by the locals was Mysore. We had a tight schedule in South India and fearing that we would get exhausted by adding one more destination in our itinerary, we foolishly dropped the idea of visiting Mysore. And I regret it now, if we would have been a little more courageous and would have pushed each other a bit, we would have not missed to visit this amazing place. Well, it is not for nothing that this city is so famous, dubbed ‘Cleanest City of India’ and a cultural centre of Karnataka, Mysore fulfills the criteria that makes it amongst the best places to visit in India. One gets to trace the history of Wodeyars; witness the magnificent Mysore art and architecture; enjoy day outings at beautiful places of nature and modern entertainment hubs. The city and the places around it offer everything that an avid traveller or someone seeking a rejuvenating break from work is looking for. Here is a blog that brings to you the best places in and around Mysore that one must visit.

Mysore Palace: Also known as the Mysore Maharaja Palace, it is the biggest thing that you will ever notice in Mysore! The palace is situated in the city's center, so you know, it cannot be missed anyway. The architecture is up for appreciation as it is a fine mix of Hindu, Islam, Gothic and Rajput styles. The stunning interior displays intricate craftsmanship. One would transcend to the era of Wodeyar dynasty while feasting eyes on the palace's exclusive design and properties. The palace is decorated in a grand manner every year during the Dasara festival, which probably is the best time to visit here.

Chamundi Hills: Chamundi Hills is the identifier of Mysore. It is famous for a temple that was built in the 11th century and has been renovated and turned into a tourist spot. The temple has a 5-meter tall statue that is said to have been sculptured out of a single rock. A flight of stairs with 1000 leads to Chamundi Hills that also offers spectacular vistas of the surroundings. Middle of the way, you shall also encounter the statue of Nandi the Bull.

Karanji Lake: At the foot of the famous Chamundi Hills is a huge lake called Karanji Lake. Constructed by the King of Mysore, Karanji is a 90-acre water body and is amongst the biggest lakes in Karnataka. The lake has become the shelter for migratory birds and as many as 90 species of birds can be found here. There is also a scenic park around the lake that has a huge enclosure for birds and it is considered the largest of its kind in the country.

Mysore Zoo: Behind the Karanji Lake is the Shri Chamarajendra Zoological Gardens at Mysore also known as Mysore zoo. The Zoo is spread in a 157-acre of land and houses a huge range of wildlife species not only from our country but animals from around the world.

Brindavan Gardens: The Brindavan Gardens are located a level below the Krishna Raja Sagara dam. It is a major tourist attraction near Mysore and is also regarded as one of the most beautiful gardens in the state of

Karnataka. The most exciting experience at this garden is the musical fountain show that is scheduled in the evenings.

Mamallapuram

Mahabalipuram is a temple town situated along the shores of the Bay of Bengal in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. The sheer sculptural extravaganza of the rock-cut temples is not only reflective of the artistic tastes of the erstwhile Pallava rulers: the temples are also regarded as the birthplace of an entirely new style of architecture, which came to be known as the South Indian temple architecture. Mahabalipuram art can be divided into four categories: open air bas-relief, structured temples, man-made caves and rathas ('chariots' carved from single boulders, to resemble temples or chariots used in temple processions). The famous Arjuna's Penance and the Krishna Mandapa, adorn massive rocks near the centre of the village. The beautiful Shore Temple towers over the waves, behind a protective breakwater. Sixteen man-made caves in different stages of completion are also seen, scattered through the area. Mahabalipuram is about 60 Kms. south of the city of Madras, in Tamil Nadu. Mahabalipuram, or Mamallapuram, was the chief seaport of the Pallavas who ruled over much of South India from as early as the first century B.C to the eighth century A.D., and it is now recognized as the site of some of the greatest architectural and sculptural achievements in India.

Temples of Mahabalipuram: Cave Temples were excavated by scooping out the scarp of the hill. The scooping work starts from front to back. The cave temple is usually divided into inner & outer mandapas, distinguished by the difference in levels. The front mandapa will have pillars & plasters numbering 4,6,8,10. The inner mandapa contains single, triple or five cells. The cave temple with little modification is categorized as Mamalla style. The pillars under this style are slender & taller with squatting lion at their base. The pillar is divided into distinct parts known as kalasa, tadi, kumba, padma etc. Monolithic Temples are locally known as Rathas. They were executed by chiseling out the exterior face of the boulder. Work started from top to bottom. The pyramidal vimana with sikhara at the top is an important feature of this style. It can be rightly said that these monolithic temples must have paved the way for the structural temples with elaborate architectural & sculptural details in the subsequent stage. There a total number of 8 monolithic temples found in Mamallapuram. The five rathas in one place, Ganesha Ratha, Valayankuttai Ratha & Pidari Rathas.

Five Rathas – a small hill sloping from south to north has been segmented into five divisions & converted into monolithic temples. The heights of the segments have been cleverly used for temples with single tier to three-tiered vimana. Each monolithic temples shows different kind of sikhara. The five rathas are Dharmaraja Ratha, Bhima Ratha, Arjuna Ratha, Draupadi Ratha and Nakul Sahadev Ratha.

Shore Temple: The Shore Temple on the Bay of Bengal was constructed in the 7th century during the rule of King Narsimha-Varman II Rajasimha (c. 690-728). The Shore temple is a temple complex consisting of two Siva temples and a carving of Anantasayana Vishnu. The temple facing east is entered by a small gopura. On plan, it consists of a small sanctum & a front mandapa & is a two-tiered vimana. The sanctum is housing a linga. The Somaskanda panel consisting of Siva & Parvati with baby Skanda is on the back wall of the sanctum. The dhara linga & Somaskanda panel on the back wall of the sanctum are the features of the Pallava temples only. The temple facing west is also dedicated to Lord Shiva. The temple is large in plan comprising sanctum, mahamandapa, front mandapa, balipitha and dvajastamba. The temple's vimana is four tiered with octagonal sikhara. It is important to note that stupis of both these temples are not covered by kalasa (copper finials). The carving on Lord Vishnu on a boulder in Anantasayana form is lying in between these two temples. It belongs to the period of Narasimhavarman I and thus earlier than the Siva temples.

Kanchipuram

Kanchipuram is known as one of India's Seven Sacred cities. Kanchipuram was, one of India's seven sacred cities. Kanchipuram was the historical capital of the Pallavas. It was under the Pallavas from 6th to 8th century A.D and later became the citadel of Cholas, Vijayanagar Kings, the Muslim and the British. It has been a centre of Tamil learning, cultural and religious background for centuries.

Kailashanathar Temple, Kanchipuram: Kanchipuram sarees made of finest silk are famous throughout the country. Kanchi has magnificent temples of unique architectural beauty bearing eloquent testimony to its glorious Dravidian heritage. Adi Sankara established his episcopal seat (Kamakotipeetam). Kanchipuram is the birth place of C.N. Annadurai, former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu affectionately called as "Anna" by the people of Tamil Nadu. Kanchipuram India, the Golden City of a thousand temples, is the capital of the Pallavas, the Cholas and the Rayas of Vijayanagar. During the 6th and 7th centuries, some of the best temples in the city were built by the Pallavas. The city was also a great seat of learning. Sri Sankaracharya, Appar, Siruthonder and the great Buddhist Bhikku lived, and worked here. Today, it is known not only for its temples, but also for its handwoven silks fabrics.

Kanchipuram Temple or the Golden City of Temples is one of the most important centers of Hindu religion and also one of the most picturesque. The place is one of India's seven sacred cities and the second holiest after Varanasi. The city was once the capital of the Pallavas, Cholas, and the Vijayanagar rulers. It was under the Pallavas from 6th to 8th century AD but, during that period, was also briefly occupied by the Chalukyas, and the Rashtrakutas. Many of the temples situated here are the work of the Pallavas and later Cholas.

Pilgrimage Attractions of Kanchipuram

Kamakshi Amman Temple: India has three main cities where the Goddess Shakti is worshipped. Kanchipuram holds the most important rank among the three. In the same order, the three places are Kanchipuram, where the Goddess Kamakshi is worshipped, Madurai, where the Goddess Meenakshi is worshipped, and Kashi, where the deity is 'Visalakshi'. The Kamakshi Amman temple is the hub of all religious activities in Kanchipuram. The temple is also in closer control of the Shankara Mutt, unlike the other temples, which are governed either by the Department of Archeology, Government of India, or the Hindu Temples Department of the Tamil Nadu Government. The main tower over the sanctum (Vimanam) of the temple is gold plated. Also of significance is the Golden Chariot in this temple. The Golden Chariot is taken in a procession around the temple on Friday evenings around 7.00 p.m. This temple also features an Art Gallery with pictures depicting the history of Sri Adishankaracharya and the Shankara Mutt.

Kailashanathar Temple: Dedicated to Lord Shiva, Kailashanathar (also spelt as Kailashnatha) is one of the earliest temples built by the Pallava ruler Rajasimha Pallava and was completed by his son, Mahendra Varma Pallava in the 8th century AD. It is the oldest structure in Kanchipuram and the finest example of Pallava architecture in South India. The temple is situated among several low-roofed houses just over 1-km west of the town center. Of all the temples in India, no other edifice has been so elaborately filled with all the 64 aspects of Lord Shiva. The temple is unique in its architecture and is viewed more as an architectural wonder than as a holy place. Hence, it is never crowded with locals. But, once in a year during Shivaratri festival large crowds visit the temple and there could be hours of waiting in long queues.

Ekambareshwar Temple: Ekambareshwar temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, is one of the largest temples in Kanchipuram, spreading over an area of 12.14 hectares. This ancient temple is surrounded by a huge stonewall built in the early 16th century during the days of the Vijayanagar Empire. Kumara Kottam Ekambareshwar temple is of hoary antiquity, beginning as a small fane, it has grown over the centuries into a large one with innumerable shrines, Mandapams, Gopurams and Tanks. It is considered to be one of the most ancient temples in India and has been in existence even prior to 600 AD. It enshrines many traditions.

Kumara Kottam: Kumara Kottam is located in between the Kamakshi and Ekambareshwar temples in the So-maskanda formation in the town of Kanchipuram. It is a well-visited temple with two Prakarams and a complete pantheon of Parivara Devatas enshrined in their respective shrines. In the sanctum, Muruga is in a seated pose. Valli, Deivayani are absent here, but their festival idols are kept here. In accordance with the function of Creation he has assumed, his right arm is in Abaya pose, the upper hand holds the rosary, and the lower left arm is on the thigh in Katyavailambita pose with the left arm holding the Kamandalam. The posture is also called "Brahma Chattam".

Varadaraja Temple: The Varadaraja temple is one of the important shrines of Sri Vaishnavites, also known as "Hastigiri" and is one of the celebrated Vaishnava Divya Desams, located in Vishnu Kanchi or "the Little Kanchi". Originally it was known as "Attiyuran". The main deity here is Varadaraja Perumal in a standing posture facing west and the Lord here is also known as "Devaraja", "Pranatharthihara", "Deva Perumal", "Athyooran" and "Perarulalan". Varadaraja temple with superb art has a magnificent history, which is associated with Sri Ramana, who used to serve here. Many miracles are said to have occurred. It was with his ministry that the temple, then already several centuries old, began to gain fame.

Ulahalanda Perumal Temple: Ulahalanda Perumal temple, situated about half a kilometre from the centre of the town near Kamakshi Amman temple is one of the oldest temples in Kanchipuram. The deity Ulahalanda Perumal in this temple represents the "Vamana Roopam", an incarnation of Lord Vishnu taken to save the Devas from the Demon king Mahabali. The deity Ulahalanda Perumal is depicted by a huge image of about 35 feet high.

Madurai: Madurai is one of the major cities in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. It is the administrative headquarters of Madurai District, the second largest city in Tamil Nadu and 25th most populated city in India. Located on the banks of River Vaigai, Madurai has been a major settlement for two millennia.

Tanjore

The cultural capital of Tamil Nadu, Thanjavur is located in the fertile Cauvery delta and is just as popular for its temples, arts and handicrafts as it is known for its paintings and rich history. Thanjavur is also a prominent center for rice cultivation and is therefore called the 'Rice bowl of Tamil Nadu'. Intriguingly, the city is believed to have been named after an asura (or a demon) Tanjan who was killed by Vishnu. Another school of thought believes

the city gets its name from Than-sei-oor, which means a place surrounded by rivers and green paddy fields. Eventually, the name was anglicized to Tanjore. The city shot into prominence as the capital of the mighty Cholas between 11th and 14th century. During this period, the Cholas built several temples and developed Thanjavur as an important center of art and culture. Brahadeeswarar Temple stands testimony to the wealth and might of the Cholas. Thanjavur remained the capital of the Cholas till the construction of Gangaikonda Cholepuram.

Though it ceased to be the capital after the end of Chola rule, Thanjavur remained an important city. The city became a capital again under the Marathas. Remnants of Thanjavur's historic past can be seen in its grand buildings. The main attraction of the city is the Brahadeeswarar temple, built in the early 11th century by Rajaraja Chola I. Thanjavur Royal Palace, Saraswathi Mahal library and the Vijaynagara fort speak eloquently of the city's past. Thanjavur's culture, music and art are renowned over the world. Thiruvaiyaru, about 54 km from the city, is the birthplace of Sri Thyagaraja, the legendary musician-composer of Carnatic music. The Thanjavur school of art originated around 1600. The city is a shopper's paradise and is the best place to buy handloom silk and cotton saris as well as paintings, bronze, brass idols and jewelry.

Thanjavur was under the Cholas till the 13th century, later it was conquered by the Pandyas. The Marathas took over the city in the late 17th century from the Nayaks. The death of Raja Serfoji II in 1833 led to Thanjavur's merger with the Madras Presidency in 1855. Over centuries, the reins of Thanjavur changed several hands but it was the Cholas who really took it to great heights of glory and the several monuments scattered around the city are a constant reminder of that.

Trichy

he historical city of Tiruchirappalli, popularly known as Trichi, is situated on the banks of the Kaveri River (also Cauvery) in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. Lying at a distance of 320 km from Chennai (Madras) and 150 km from Madurai, this Chola Dynasty citadel, known for its profound wisdom of the Sangam Age, still carries the age-old aura about it. The present-day city, with a blend of glorious past and acclaimed divinity through the famous Dravidian temples, stands as a commercial and tourist hub of Tamil Nadu.

Trichi has a long history, going back to several centuries before the birth of Christ. It was once the citadel of the mighty Cholas, the acclaimed dynasty of South India that has left its cultural identity in various fields such as culture, art, heritage, etc. The city later fell to the Pallavas. However, the Pallavas could not retain control of this strategic city and lost it to the Pandyas several times. The struggle for power between the Pallavas and Pandyas continued until the 10th century, when it again came under the rule of the Cholas. In the 12th century, the Vijayanagar kings of Hampi subverted the Cholas. In 1565, Trichi came under the rule of the Nayaks of Madurai, to be followed by the Marathas, the Nawabs of Carnatic, the French, and finally the British. However, it was under the Nayaks of Madurai that Trichi prospered in its own right and grew to be the city that it is today. The Nayaks constructed the Rock Fort, and firmly established Trichi as a trading city.

Modern City has a big Rail network, busy Airport, Big Industries like BHEL, Golden Rock Railway unit, Ordnance Factory belonging to the Naaratna classified PSUs/Govt. establishments; Multi Speciality Hospitals, both Government and private; Educational Institutions matching the International Standard. Plenty of tourist destinations always keeps this city and the district busy throughout the year.

Rockfort: It is also called as Uchchi Pillaiyar Kovil. It is in the heart of the city. This is a 275 ft tall Rock Structure. It is amazing to hear, this structure is one of the oldest and calculated close to million years old. There is a Cave temple cut out at the pinnacle is believed to have been built in 580 AD. The Temples of Lord Siva called Thayumanavasa Swami temple, Where the lingam is said to be projection of the rock itself and Lord Vinayagr [uchhi pillaiyar] is the attraction of this 350 steps rockfort. There are inscriptions in these temple that dates back to 3rd century B.C. At the foothills of the rock fort, a big & beautiful tank and a pavilion where the annual Float festival enthralls thousands of people. The Home of Robert Clive when he was in Tiruchi and the 18th Century Church, now housing the popular St. Josephs's College are the two important landmarks near this Tank.

he Rockfort Temple, (5 km at the North of Trichy junction. The temple can be reached from Central Bus stand or Trichy Junction with bus #1 for Rs 3). 6AM- 8PM. The temple complex has many temples. Thayumaanavar, Uchchi pillayar and Maanikka vinayagar are the most important temples. One can feel the icy chill of the wind when getting to the top of the rock. (The temple is housed on the top of a famous rock-88 Metres tall). One also gets a splendid view of the city and the Cauvery river from the top. Enjoy the bird's eye view of Trichy, SriRangam, Cauvery and its surroundings in the morning or in the evening. A must-visit place of anyone in South India. edit

Sri Ranganathaswamy temple: Sri Ranganathaswamy temple, (8 km from Trichy Junction. The temple can be reached from Central or City Bus stand by bus #1 for Rs 4). Temple for the sleeping form of Lord Vishnu. This temple is considred the foremost temple of lord vishnu (Bhooloka Vaikundam) for Vaishnavites. Very big temple having tallest Temple tower (Raja gopuram). Many interesting things are there try to Explore and understand. One must see this temple for its history, architectural beauty and for its religious value. Non-Hindus can only go

up to the sixth wall but not inside the gold topped sanctum sanctorum. The body of the Hindu saint Ramanuja has been preserved since 1000 years inside this temple.

Jambukeshwara Temple, (7 km from Trichy Junction and less than 1 km from Sri Ranganathaswamy temple). This is a famous Shiva temple and One of the five Pancha bootha kshetras (five elements namely water, earth, air, fire and ether). This one is appu sthala (representing water). free entrance. edit

Erumbeeswarar Temple is a Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva, located in the town of Thiruverumbur in 14 km from Trichy Junction. Since the temple is atop a hill, it is locally called "Malai Kovil" (meaning hill temple).

Perumal Malai, in Thuraiur. Another Temple for Lord Vishnu.

Samayapuram Amman Temple, 13 km from Trichy Junction. People walk in from the surrounding districts to offer their prayers. Popular with the masses. Can be crowded on Fridays.

Woriyur with Vekkali Amman Temple, 5 km from Trichy Junction. Popular with the masses. Can be crowded on Fridays.

Vayalur Murugan Temple, The Vayalur Murugan Temple is a Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Muruga. This temple is around 1200 years old built during the reign of the Cholas.

Thiruvellarai. Sendamarai kannan temple which was built before srirangam Renganadhaswami temple and thiruvanaikovil Jambukeshwara temple. It is 20 km from Trichy or 40 min of travel from Chatram bus stand in government/private bus. edit

Viralimalai Murugan Temple.

Gunaseelam - Vishnu Temple, dedicated to Lord Srinivasa.

St. Joseph's Church 5 km from Trichy Jn. and is 200 years old.

St. John's Church, at the cantonment is one of the oldest churches in India.

T.E.L.C Holy Trinity Cathedral, Melapudur.

All Saints Church, Salai Rd, Puthur.

St. Lourd's Church, Theppakulam.

Jaamiya Masjid in the centre of Trichy was built by the Nawab of Arcot more than two centuries ago.

Thablay Aalam Baadsha Dhargah is the mausoleum of a Muslim saint who came to Trichy centuries ago.

Mukkombu, A tourist spot at 15 km from Trichy Jn.

Kallanai, A 2,000 yr old dam built on the river Kallanai, (an offshoot of the Cauvery river) by Karikala Cholan.

Puliyancholai, A green hideout around a pretty waterfall. On the Foot hills of Kollimalai - Kolli hills near Thuraiur.

Fair

Fair, or sustainable, tourism can be defined as tourism that maximizes the positive impacts of tourism minimizes the negative ones. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines sustainable tourism as "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities". Sustainable tourism, then, is closely connected to a more general concept, sustainable development. Sustainable tourism often focuses on one of three main areas of interest: economic, socio-cultural, or environmental. Economic sustainability can refer to the destination community benefiting from tourism financially. This is not a given, as profits often leak away from the destination, especially if the tourism supply of a destination is too dependent on big, international corporations whose headquarters are located far away from the actual destination. While big hotels can provide employment to many locals, small, locally-owned businesses have more potential to distribute profits and reduce poverty in the community.

Tourism is socio-culturally sustainable when the relationship between tourists and the host community is built on mutual respect and tourism does not take advantage of the local population or harm its culture. Sustainable tourism aims to protect the local culture against cultural commercialization: a process where local heritage and culture are modified to meet the tourists' expectations. Socially sustainable tourism also emphasizes the role of the local population as business owners, decision makers, and tourism planners. Environmentally sustainable tourism recognizes the importance of the environment as a tourist attraction while ensuring the protection of local natural resources. Sometimes referred to as ecotourism, environmentally sustainable tourism also attempts to educate tourists about environmental issues while traveling to and within a destination. The most essential issues in ecotourism are minimizing waste production, improving waste management, and using energy as efficiently as possible in all travel-related activities, including accommodation.

Fairs in Chennai

The Chennai Dance and Music festival is a celebration of classical music and dance of South India. The festival is held at a number of venues throughout the city and mostly it is organized in the auditoriums, temples and heritage bungalows. Artistes from different parts of the country participate in this musical extravaganza and enthrall the audiences who are music lovers. This started quite early and was called the Margazhi festival which was back in 1927 and it was meant to commemorate the anniversary of the Madras Music Academy. Since it was held in the Tamil month of Margazhi it was named as Margazhi festival. Later the other music schools joined the festival. The South Indian classical music is treated as a form of worship and the musical notes truly fills the air of Chennai with a divine feeling. One of the cultural concerts of Chennai it involves 2000 famous participants and over 300 concerts are arranged. It is also called the December season to the international tourists. From Vocal and Instrumental music, dance the Chennai Dance and Music Festival is one of the important festivals for music lovers.

Mylapore, located in Chennai is a popular tourist destination. The name Mylapore is derived from the Tamil word, Myil which means a peacock. It is believed that to marry Lord Shiva, Goddess Parvati did penance in the form of a peacock. The Kapaleeshwarar Temple is an integral part of the town. The 400 years old temple is an example of eighth century Pallavan architecture. The Kapaleeshwarar Temple is one of the most important landmarks of Mylapore. The 400 years old temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva and showcases beautiful architecture. Some of the inscriptions of the temple dates back to 1250 AD. Legend proves that Lord Shiva to diminish Lord Brahma's pride cut off one of his head. Lord Brahma established a Shiv lingam in Mylapore as a form of penance.

The temple is popular for the idols of 63 Nayanmars or Shaivaite saints established in the courtyard. The idols are made of bronze and the famous Aurbathimoovar Festival is the celebrated in honor of the 63 Nayanmars.

During the Aurbathimoovar Festival the 63 saints of Lord Shiva are honored for leading ideal lives of penance and devotion. The Aurbathimoovar Festival includes a colorful procession through the streets of Mylapore. The 63 idols are carried around the town and thousands of devotees travel to Chennai to witness and be a part of the procession. Offerings of flowers and fruits are made to the deities. Streets and houses of devotees are decorated with kolams. Celebrations also include folk music and Kokkalikattai and Koothu dances. The famous traditional thoippavai puppet show is performed during the festival.

Fairs in Chidambaram

Two Bhrammotsavams (annual festivals) at Chidambaram are of great significance, as they involve colorful processions of festival deities in the car streets. The grandest of these occurs in the month of Margazhi (Dec 15 - Jan 15), concluding on the full moon day corresponding to the Arudra Darisanam festival (Arudra Darisanam is celebrated in Saivite temples all over Tamilnadu). This ten-day festival at Chidambaram involves a grand scheme of traditional observances commencing with the hoisting of the temple flag on the first day, followed by colorful processions of the five deities (Pancha Murthys) on the first eight days on various mounts. The fifth day features Mount Kailasam, while the sixth day features the elephant mount.

It is only on the ninth day that Nataraja leaves his sanctum, and is taken in a procession through the car streets, in the grand temple car. This is a special occasion and crowds throng to see it. Local fishermen communities traditionally offer gifts to Nataraja during this procession. Nataraja then returns to the Raja Sabha of the temple, where in the pre-dawn hours of the next day, while the moon is full, special abhishekams are performed to Nataraja, in the presence of tens of thousands of devotees, and this ritual is followed by the royal audience of Nataraja in the Raja Sabha. In the afternoon, Nataraja returns to the shrine ceremoniously from the Raja Sabha, amidst an enactment of the Ananda Tandavam or the Dance of Bliss. The second of the Bhrammotsavams happens in the month of Aani (June - July) and it concludes with Aani Tirumanjanam on the tenth day, in a manner similar to Arudra Darisanam in Margazhi. It is interesting that these annual Bhrammotsavams or festivals happen in the tamil months immediately preceding the summer and winter solstices (ie. Gemini and Sagittarius). Several other festivals centered around Nataraja and Sivakami are celebrated here throughout the year - Maasi Makam being one of the more significant ones. Live dance performances have been introduced to the temple recently, in the form of annual dance festivals.

Fairs in Thiruvaiyaru

Tamil Nadu, the southernmost tip of India is a popular tourist destination. It is well known for the beautiful golden palm fringed beaches, the refreshing hills resorts and many beautiful temples and magnificent architecture. Festivals, art and culture are significant tenets which describe the state. Cuisine is another major aspect of Tamil Nadu culture. The specialities of the region are idli, vada, pongal and uppama. A land of culture, music, art and architecture, Thiruvaiyaru in the Tanjavur district of Tamil Nadu is the birth place of the famous singer poet, Thyagaraja. The Thyagaraja Carnatic Music Festival, Thiruvaiyaru is a major music festival that is held here every year. This beautiful land is also popular for the beautiful handicrafts and the other forms of art.

Description: The history of Carnatic music dates back to around 15th century. Vocal music finds special emphasis in Carnatic music. The two main elements of Carnatic music are raga and tal. The Thyagaraja Carnatic Music Festival, Thiruvaiyaru attracts musicians and instrumentalists from all across the country. Legendary singers and musicians of Indian Classical music take part in this gathering and showcase brilliance and extraordinary talent. Music lovers and tourists visit Thiruvaiyaru during this time of the year to witness one of the most enchanting and enthralling experiences of a lifetime. Conducted on the Pushya Bahula Panchami to pay homage to Saint Thyagaraja, the music festival is also organized in other parts of the world. The songs sung as part of the homage are the Pancharatna Kritis or the Five Gems of Carnatic music.

Fairs Madurai

Meenakshi Kalyanam is truly one of the most popular festivals of Madurai that attracts visitors in large numbers, not only across India but from other countries as well. Meenakshi Kalyanam, Madurai is also one of the widely celebrated fairs and festivals in Tamil Nadu, India. The annual festival is celebrated every year at the world-famous Meenakshi Temple in Madurai in observance of the divine wedding of Goddess Meenakshi with Lord Sundareswarar (Shiva). Meenakshi Kalyanam Festival in Madurai is an annual festival that falls in the months of April – May (Hindu month of Chaitra). The festival commences from the second day of the lunar month that is exactly two days after the new moon. Meenakshi Kalyanam is celebrated in the grandest manner possible at the magnificent Meenakshi Temple located in the renowned temple city of Madurai. During the 12-day festival that is widely celebrated across the state of Tamil Nadu, spectacular images of Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Shiva are taken out for processions at the streets. A large number of locals as well as tourists flock to Madurai during this time to witness the majestic proceedings. The magnificent temple is adorned as a bride during the time of Meenakshi Kalyanam festival that adds to the beauty of the already splendid holy shrine. A large number of umbrellas and fans are beautifully decorated in authentic royal style during the celebrations of Meenakshi Kalyanam in Madurai. Traditional instrumental music provides a perfect backdrop to the enactment of mythological scenes by local artists. Car processions of large deities of Lord Shiva, Goddess Shakti and Goddess Meenakshi are a prominent feature of Meenakshi Kalyanam festival in Madurai.

Festivals

A festival is an event ordinarily celebrated by a community and centering on some characteristic aspect of that community and its religion or cultures

India is a land of festivals, where people from different religions coexist harmoniously. The wide variety of festivals celebrated in India is a true manifestation of its rich culture and traditions. There are many Indian festivals and celebrations, the most exciting of which are mentioned below. While the celebrations happen all over the year, October till January is the time when the country can be seen at its vibrant best.

- Diwali: The Grand Festival of Lights

Diwali, one of the most prominent Hindu festivals of India, is celebrated with a lot of pomp and show. During this festival of lights, houses are decorated with clay lamps, candles, and Ashok leaves. People wear new clothes, participate in family puja, burst crackers, and share sweets with friends, families, and neighbours.

Significance: The festival marks the return of Lord Rama, along with his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana, after a long exile of 14 years.

Key attractions: Homes decorated with fancy lights, candles and clay lamps, bustling shops and markets, and fireworks and crackers

When: The darkest new moon night of Kartik month of the Hindu lunisolar calendar, which corresponds to mid-October – mid-November as per the Gregorian Calendar

- Holi: The Vibrant Festival of Colours

Also known as the festival of colours, holi is one of the famous festivals of India, celebrated with a lot of fervour across the country. On the eve of Holi, people make huge Holika bonfires and sing and dance around it. On the day of Holi, people gather in open areas and apply dry and wet colours of multiple hues to each other, with some carrying water guns and coloured water filled balloons.

Significance: It signifies the victory of good (Prince Prahlad) over evil (Holika) and the arrival of spring.

Key attractions: Holika bonfire, playing with colours, and bhang thandai.

When: Full moon (Purnima) of the Phalgun month of the Hindu lunisolar calendar, which corresponds to the month of March of the Gregorian calendar.

Where: Almost all over the country; most vibrant celebrations can be seen in North Indian states.

- Dussehra: Witness The Triumph Of Good Over Evil

Dussehra, also referred to as Vijayadashami, is also among the most famous festivals of India. It is celebrated in different forms countrywide. Ramlila (enactment of scenes from Ramayana) is held everywhere for 10 days. It's culminated with "Ravan Dahan" – the burning of huge effigies of Ravana, Meghnath, and Kumbhkaran which is a real spectacle to see.

Significance: It celebrates the death of the demon king Ravana at the hands of Lord Rama.

Key attractions: Hustle bustle of the decorated markets, Ram-Leela acts, and the big event of the burning of effigies of Ravana, Meghnath, and Kumbhkaran

When: 10th day of the month of Ashwin according to the Hindu lunisolar calendar, which corresponds to September or October of the Gregorian calendar

Where: Pan India

- Navratri: The Nine Days of Fasting, Faith, And Devotion

Navratri festival is celebrated by all people throughout India in different ways. In Gujarat, it is a nine-day celebration of rejuvenating Garba nights and highly energetic Dandiya Raas dances. People are dressed in beautiful, colorful traditional clothes and the environment is very youthful and invigorating.

Significance: It represents the celebration of the Goddess Amba (Power) in nine different forms.

Key attractions: The 9 days of dance festivities in Gujarat, the exquisite Chaniya Choli's (traditional skirt & blouse), and the Gujarati cuisine – Sabudana Khichdi, Mandvi Paak, Singoda ki Kheer, and Potato Wafers

When: The first nine days of the month of Ashwin according to the Hindu lunisolar calendar, which corresponds to September or October of the Gregorian calendar

Where: Almost all over the country; most vibrant in Gujarat, Maharashtra and the metros

- Durga Puja: Of Prosperity, Goodness, And Devotion

One of the important Hindu festivals of India, Durga Puja is celebrated with grandeur by Bengalis, throughout the country. The 10 days of fast, feast, and worship of Goddess Durga are accompanied by cultural songs, dances, and dramas. Huge and beautiful Durga idols are made and placed in specially made artistic Pandals (canopies). People dress in traditional wear and go around the pandal – hopping, praying, and feasting.

Significance: It commemorates Lord Rama's invocation of Goddess Durga before going to war with the demon king Ravana.

Key attractions: Plush pandals, incredibly beautiful ten armed Durga idols, and the puja

When: 10th day of Ashwina Shukla paksha according to the Hindu lunisolar calendar, which corresponds to September or October of the Gregorian calendar

Where: Kolkata and the metros are the best places to be in India during Durga Puja celebrations

- Janmashtmi: The Birth Of The Mighty & Mischievous

Janmashtami is again a beautiful one among the most important religious festivals of India. Janmashtami celebrations in Mathura and Vrindavan are very popular. People fast throughout the day and break it with a special meal after dusk. Visiting temples, praying, dancing, and singing bhajans (hymns) at midnight is a part of the celebrations of the birth of Lord Krishna. Often, small children dress up like Lord Krishna on this day. Images and picturization of Krishna's life story are depicted in the "jhankis" in temples.

Significance: It is the annual celebration of the birthday of Lord Krishna.

Key attractions: The Janmashtami puja and festivities in the temples and the jhaankis of Lord Krishna

When: The 8th day (Ashtami) of the Krishna Paksha (dark fortnight) of the month of Bhadrapada according to the Hindu lunisolar calendar, which corresponds to August or September of the Gregorian calendar

Where: Celebrated by the Hindu community all over, but the festivities at Mathura and Vrindavan are very popular

- Ganesh Chaturthi: Eleven Days of Pampering Lord Ganesha

Ganesh Chaturthi, another one of important Hindu religious festivals of India, is a 10-day affair of colorful festivities. Huge handcrafted Ganesh idols are installed in homes or outdoors, in public pandals. Pujas are performed in the morning and the evening. The last day is the day of Visarjan – immersion of an idol in a water body. Cultural activities of singing, dancing, and theater, and free medical and blood donation camps are held.

Significance: It's the birthday of Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed God.

Key attractions: The beautifully crafted life size idols of Ganesha, and the immersion ceremony

When: The 4th day of the first fortnight (Shukla Chaturthi) in the month of Bhadrapada of the Hindu lunisolar calendar, which corresponds to August or September of the Gregorian calendar

Where: Celebrated in the states of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh with fervor and gaiety

- Gurupurab: Religious Processions & Peaceful Hymns

On the most important Sikh festival of India, special assemblies on the lives and teachings of the gurus, and langars (community meals) are organized in the gurudwaras. Karah Prasad is distributed among all, and hymn chanting processions are held in the city. People light up their homes with lamps and candles and burst crackers to celebrate Gurpurab.

Significance: It is the celebration of the anniversaries of the ten Sikh Gurus.

Key attractions: The soulful Bhajan-Kirtan (hymns), Gurbani in the Gurdwaras, the Langar and the Karah Prasad

When: The full moon day in the month of Kartik of the Hindu lunisolar calendar, which corresponds to November of the Gregorian calendar

Where: Celebrated by the Sikh community all over the world, especially in Punjab

- Rakshabandhan: Strengthening The Bond Of Kinship

One of the famous festivals of India, Rakhi is celebrated among Hindu. Signifying the brother-sister bonding, during Rakhi, the sister performs Aarti (prayer), applies tilak, and ties rakhi (a sacred thread) on the brother's wrist wishing his wellbeing. The brother, in return, vows to protect the sister. Another festival which has a strong similarity to Rakhi is Bhai Dooj which comes just after Diwali.

Significance: It symbolizes the strong bonding of a brother and sister.

Key attractions: The ritual of Rakhi and the brightly decked up markets showcasing a colourful variety of rakhis and sweets

When: The full moon day of Shravana month of the Hindu lunisolar calendar, which corresponds to August of the Gregorian calendar

Where: Particularly in North, Central and West India

- Eid Ul Fitr: Sumptuous Buffets & Sweet Festivities

Eid is one of the major festivals of India for the Muslim community. People dress up in fineries, attend a special community prayer in the morning, visit friends, and relatives and exchange sweets. Children are given idi (money or gift) by elders.

Significance: It celebrates the conclusion of the holy month of fasting called Ramadan.

Key attractions: The beautifully decked up markets and mosques, the morning Eid namaz at the mosques, and the sweet dishes.

When: On the 1st day of the month of Shawwal of the lunar Hijri calendar, which corresponds to July of the Gregorian calendar

Where: Celebrated by Muslims all over the country

- Bihu: Dance, Music, And Laughter

Popular among the festivals of India celebrated in the North East, Bihu is the harvest festival of Assam. During the month-long celebrations, young men and women wear their traditional clothes and perform the Bihu dance in the village fields and courtyards. During Bihu celebrations in India, a community feast is held with a lot of fanfare.

Significance: It's the traditional new year celebration of Assamese.

Key attractions: The Bihu dance and the local cuisine – coconut laddoo, til pitha, ghila pitha, and fish pitika

When: 14th or 15th April.

Where: Celebrated by the Assamese diaspora around the world, especially in Assam

- Hemis: Soothing Chants and Colourful Costumes

Hemis, the two-day religious festival from Ladakh, is one of the most important festivals of India. It attracts a lot of locals and foreign tourists each year. The festivities include the Cham dance done by the priests to the tune of

the traditional music of cymbals, drums, trumpets played by the monks. It's among the most unique types of festival where the dancing priests dress up in elaborate brocade outfits and masks.

Significance: It's the celebration of the birth anniversary of spiritual leader Padmasambhava, founder of Tibet Tantric Buddhism.

Key attractions: The scenic Hemis monastery and the Cham dance

When: 10th day (called Tse-Chu in the local language) of the Tibetan lunar month, which corresponds to June or July of the Gregorian calendar

Where: Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir

- Onam: Welcoming The Mighty Mahabali

Onam is among the important festivals of India, wherein people wear traditional wear, adorn houses with Pookalam (floral designs), and prepare Onasadya (elaborate meal of about 13 dishes). Events such as Vallamkali (snake boat race), Kaikottikali (clap dance), Kathakali dance, and Pulikali procession (artists dressed and painted like tigers and hunters) are held.

Significance: It celebrates the homecoming of the legendary king Mahabali.

Key attractions: The spectacular Snake Boat Race, the enigmatic Kaikottikali dance, and the Elephant procession

When: In the month of Chingam of the Malayalam calendar, which corresponds to August or September of the Gregorian calendar

Where: Celebrated by people of all communities in the state of Kerala.

- Pongal: Rich Rangolis and Sweet Savories

The four-day long harvest festival of South India is one of the most famous festivals of India. People prepare Pongal dish and wear their traditional attire. Celebrities include bonfires, dance, cattle races, sweets, and savories. The houses look resplendent with Kolam designs (traditional floral designs made with rice, colored powders, and flower petals)

Significance: It's a festival of thanksgiving to nature representing the first harvest of the year.

Key attractions: The variety of Kolam designs and cattle races

When: 14th or 15th January.

Where: Celebrated by Tamils all over India, primarily in Tamil Nadu

- Christmas: Celebrating The Birth of Jesus Christ

One of the most famous and awaited festival in the world, Christmas happens to be of sheer significance for elders and children alike. Everyone regardless of their religion wait for this day, children specifically for the surprise gifts from Santa. All the churches are lit up and decorated to celebrate the birth of Lord Jesus.

Significance: Birthday of Lord Jesus

Key attractions: Christmas tree decoration, prayers, birth of Lord Jesus and Santa Claus

When: 25th December

Where: The festival is celebrated across India. The best places to celebrate Christmas in India are Goa, Pondicherry, and Kerala.

- Easter: Celebrating The Resurrection Of Jesus Christ

Just like other festivals, Easter is also celebrated with much fervour and great religious solemnization in different parts of the country. Celebrated during Spring, Easter celebrations in India are distinguished by various colourful decorations, dance and plays, simmel and plum cakes, and bright lanterns adorning the streets.

Significance: Resurrection of Lord Jesus

Key attractions: Folk songs and dance, Easter eggs, cakes, chocolates, street decorations

Where: The festival is celebrated across India. The best places to celebrate Easter in India are Goa, Pondicherry, and Kerala.

- Baisakhi: The Rich Traditions and Cultural Prosperity

Baisakhi is primarily a festival celebrated by the Sikh community of Punjab and those around the world. It celebrates the welcoming of the harvest season for the rabi crops. The Sikhs celebrate this festival with a lot of excitement and enthusiasm by performing local folk dances such as Giddha and Bhangra. The festival is of great

religious significance in India as it marks the day when the tenth Guru of Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh, laid out the foundation stone for the Panth Khalsa-the Order back in 1699.

Significance: Welcoming the harvest season

Key attractions: Folk dance like Bhangra and Giddha, Punjabi feasts, decorations in houses and Gurudwaras

When: 13th or 14th April (Saturday)

Where: The festival is celebrated across Sikh communities in India. The best place to celebrate Baisakhi in India is Punjab.

- Ugadi

Ugadi (Ugādi, Samvatsarādi, Yugadi) is the New Year's Day for the people of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka states in India. It is festively observed in these regions on the first day of the Hindu lunisolar calendar month of Chaitra. This typically falls in March or April of the Gregorian calendar.

The word Ugadi is derived from two different words; 'Yuga' that means 'age' in Sanskrit and 'Adi' that means 'beginning' in both Sanskrit and Kannada. This festival celebrates the New Year in Karnataka. This day is also known as Chandramana Ugadi and refers to the beginning of the New Year according to the Hindu Lunar calendar that usually falls in the months of March and April (as per the Gregorian calendar). This auspicious day involves religious observances and customs. It is customary for people to shop heavily during the months preceding Chaitra (the first month in the Hindu calendar). This day is celebrated with fervour and is also regarded as the herald of the harvest season.

At the beginning of Chaitra, people clean and whitewash their homes and decorate temples as well as the deity rooms in their homes with jasmine flowers and mango leaves. To start the celebrations, the entire household wakes up before dawn and take a head bath after massaging the whole body with sesame oil and wear new, traditional clothes. The idols of gods and goddesses within the house are then bathed in oil too, after which prayers and offerings of neem flowers, mango and tamarind are given up. The elderly women in the family then apply oil and vermilion to the forehead of the younger members following which all members of the family watch their reflection in a vessel of molten ghee. The entire family worships the Panchanga or the new Hindu almanac which is read for the first time. It is believed that special blessings are bestowed on those who read and listen to the Panchanga. The temple priest or whosoever is reading the Panchanga needs to be given gifts of thanks in the form of new clothes.

The "Indra Dhwaaja", which is meant to bring in rain, is worshiped which is also a feature of Gudi Padwa, Maharashtra's New Year. Devotees decorate their front door with red earth and a string of mango and neem leaves. The entrance is also decorated with Rangoli in white chalk although coloured powder can also be used to fill the outlined figure. There is a special type of food item that is prepared for this occasion and is called the Bevu Bella. The preparation is a mix of Neem flowers or buds, jaggery, green chilies, salt, tamarind juice and un-ripened mango that symbolizes the mixture of happy, sad, infuriating, fearful, disgusting and surprising events in life.

Eco tourism

By the end of the 20th century, tourism has become the largest industry in the world, and this is now considered as the most rapidly growing industry of the world. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) predicts that international tourism will grow at approximately 4% per year through the year 2010. Until the start of the second last decade of the last century, tourism was seen as a profitable sector of business with no obvious constraints to growth, few barriers to entry to market, an almost universal welcome from governments, and few effective regulatory requirements to take the environment into consideration.

Commercial organizations, be large or small, were acting on the 'Dowkin's Principle of Self Interest.' With such wanton and rapid growth in tourism activity, it is no wonder that the impact of largely unplanned tourism development has been felt deeply as impending on environment, ecology, and on the people or the community. In the wake of these impacts, there is a need for the alternate tourism so that we can preserve tourism with its benefits for next generations also. And the outcome is the concept of eco-tourism. Thus, sustainable tourism development has become one of the essential elements of new tourism paradigm from "mass tourism" to "sustainable tourism."

Though ecotourism assumes so much significance in the present context, it accounts for a small proportion of the global tourism market – current estimates vary between 3 to 7% only. Ecotourism is usually considered to be more than just tourism to natural areas. However, since the formal introduction of the term by Ceballos-Lascurain almost three decades ago, controversy over appropriate uses for the term and inconsistency in its application have hindered the development of the concept and its practical realization at specific sites. Those at the forefront of ecotourism research and development now provide definitions, which address the fundamental goals of conservation of natural areas and local development. For example, The Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as "Purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and the natural history of the environment; taking

care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem; producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of the natural resources beneficial to the local people.”

The World Conservation Union’s (IUCN) Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas (CNPPA) defines ecotourism as “Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appropriate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local population.” One of the best definitions of ecotourism is that provided by the Australian National Ecotourism Strategy which states: “Ecotourism is nature based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable.” The above definitions indicate that ecotourism is a complex phenomenon, involving integration of many factors including tourists, resident peoples, suppliers, and managers and multiple functions. In ecotourism, natural areas and local population are united in a symbolic relationship through the introduction of tourism. A sound ecotourism is characterized by the four key hallmarks that distinguish it from simple nature, wildlife or adventure tourism.

The four hallmarks are that ecotourism projects have should:

- Be designed, built and operated so that they leave a “soft imprint”.
- Contribute money to the local economy and local community services.
- Contribute financially to environmental protection.
- Educate visitors and members of the local community.

The definitions of ecotourism focus on three significant aspects viz. nature, tourism and local communities. It differs in a meaningful way from mass tourism that aims at consuming nature leaving it depleted on more than one front. Conservation, sustainability and biological diversity are the three interrelated aspects of ecotourism. As a developmental tool, ecotourism can advance the three basic goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity:

- Conserve biological (and cultural) diversity, by strengthening protected area management systems (Public or Private) and increasing the value of sound ecosystem.
- Promote the sustainable use of biodiversity, by generating income, jobs and business opportunities in ecotourism and related business networks.
- Share the benefits of ecotourism developments equitably with local communities and indigenous people, by obtaining their informed consent and full participation in planning and management of ecotourism businesses.

The strong orientation of the ecotourism field towards principles, guidelines and certification based on sustainability standard gives it an unusual position in the tourism field. Ecotourism is viewed, as a means of protecting natural areas through the generation of revenues, environmental education and involvement of the local people in such ways; both conservation and development will be prompted in a sustainable manner.

While difficult to measure, ecotourism is believed to be the fastest growing tourism segment. Ecotourism has recently come to be regarded as the panacea that enables us to aggressively seek tourism dollars with no obvious damage to ecosystems, since wild resources are not being harvested and there is no apparent associated development.

As a concept, ecotourism has gained momentum recently in India, but as a way of life Indians have practiced ecotourism since times immemorial to nature and rich cultural heritage.

The main Objectives of Ecotourism are:

- a. Provision of socio – economic benefits.
- b. Provision of environmental services.
- c. Conservation of the natural areas.
- d. Provision of high quality experience.
- e. Promotion of environment advocacy.

Fundamental functions of Ecotourism include:

- Protection of natural area
- Generation of money
- Education
- Quality Tourism
- Local Participation

Success of Ecotourism: Unfortunately, ecotourism will not be successful without effective management and the framework, which has been presented, will be of little consequence in the absence of adequate institutional

arrangements and administrative commitments. The development of positive relationship between people, resources and tourism is very unlikely to occur without implementation of effective policies, management strategies, and involvement of a wide range of organizations, including NGO's and other development agencies. To get success in ecotourism we should follow a process.

The various steps of this process may include the following:

- a. To assess its impact.
- b. To plan for tourism development on the basis of sustainability.
- c. To involve the local community.
- d. To assist and encourage the participation of the NGO's.
- e. To facilitate the functioning of the ecotourism development.
- f. To examine the developmental process.

Options for Revenue Collection: We know that tourism is an important economic tool, and is contributing for the development of the countries. But in case of the ecotourism we have to generate revenue to make theory a practice. And the success of the ecotourism depends upon the quality of tourism. And this depends upon the resource exploitation and the revenue generated.

While developing the ecotourism, we can opt for several methods of revenue generation as follows:

- Entrance fee
- Facility use fee
- License/permit fee
- Sales, royalties
- On-site donations
- Collection from the Tour Operators
- Collection from the other sources related to tourism

We can say that ecotourism is neither a simple concept to define nor a straightforward phenomenon to implement and evaluate. Ecotourism should be regarded as being more than tourism to the natural areas and should be viewed as a means of combining the goals of resource conservation and local development through tourism in a synergistic fashion. This means that care should be taken to ensure that the goals of tourism development do not interfere with the goals of protecting natural areas and biodiversity. All the stakeholders in tourism development should safeguard the natural environment with a view to achieving sound, continuous, and sustainable economic growth geared to satisfying equitably the needs and aspirations of present and future generations.

Eco tourism in costal centres

Coastal areas are transitional areas between the land and sea characterized by a very high biodiversity and they include some of the richest and most fragile ecosystems on earth, like mangroves and coral reefs. At the same time, coasts are under very high population pressure due to rapid urbanization processes. More than half of today's world population live in coastal areas (within 60 km from the sea) and this number is on the rise. Additionally, among all different parts of the planet, coastal areas are those which are most visited by tourists and in many coastal areas tourism presents the most important economic activity.

Main sources of impact

- Residence in the coastal zone
- Fisheries and aquaculture
- Shipping
- Tourism
- Land-use practices (Agriculture, Industrial development)
- Climate change

Benefits of Sustainable coastal tourism

- **Economic benefit:** The main positive economic impacts of sustainable (coastal) tourism are: contributions to government revenues, foreign exchange earnings, generation of employment and business opportunities. Further information on economic contributions of tourism can be found on the website of the World Travel and Tourism Council.
- **Contribution to government revenues:** Government revenues from the tourism sector can be categorised as direct and indirect contributions. Direct contributions are generated by income taxes from tourism and employment due to tourism, tourism businesses and by direct charges on tourists such as Eco tax. Indirect contributions derive from taxes and duties on goods and services supplied to tourists, for example,

taxes on tickets (or entry passes to any protected areas), souvenirs, alcohol, restaurants, hotels, service of tour operators.

- **Foreign exchange earnings:** Tourism expenditures, the export and import of related goods and services generate income to the host economy. Tourism is a main source of foreign exchange earnings for at least 38 % of all countries (World Tourism Organisation).
- **Employment generation:** The rapid expansion of international tourism has led to significant employment creation. Tourism can generate jobs directly through hotels, restaurants, taxis, souvenir sales and indirectly through the supply of goods and services needed by tourism-related businesses; for e.g. conducted tour operators. Tourism represents around 7 % of the world's employees (World Tourism Organisation). Stimulation of infrastructure investment Tourism can influence the local government to improve the infrastructure by creating better water and sewage systems, roads, electricity, telephone and public transport networks. All this can improve the standard of living for residents as well as facilitate tourism.
- **Contribution to local economies:** Tourism can be a significant or even an essential part of the local economy. As environment is a basic component of the tourism industry's assets, tourism revenues are often used to measure the economic value of protected areas. Part of the tourism income comes from informal employment, such as street vendors and informal guides. The positive side of informal or unreported employment is that the money is returned to the local economy and has a great multiplier effect as it is spent over and over again. The World Travel and Tourism Council estimates that tourism generates an indirect contribution equal to 100 % of direct tourism expenditures.
- **Direct financial contributions to nature protection:** Tourism can contribute directly to the conservation of sensitive areas and habitats. Revenue from park-entrance fees and similar sources can be allocated specifically to pay for the protection and management of environmentally sensitive areas. Some governments collect money in more far-reaching and indirect ways that are not linked to specific parks or conservation areas. User fees, income taxes, taxes on sales or rental of recreation equipment and license fees for activities such as hunting and fishing can provide governments with the funds needed to manage natural resources.
- **Competitive advantage:** More and more tour operators take an active approach towards sustainability. Not only because consumers expect them to do so but also because they are aware that intact destinations are essential for the long term survival of the tourism industry. More and more tour operators prefer to work with suppliers who act in a sustainable manner, e.g. saving water and energy, respecting the local culture and supporting the wellbeing of local communities.

Kanyakumari

Kanyakumari district is the smallest district in Tamil Nadu. Even though it is the smallest in terms of area (1672 sq.km) its density of population is highest. The district occupies a unique place among the districts of Tamil Nadu. Kanyakumari district was once in the erstwhile Travancore state which was ruled by the kings Chera line consequent on the linguistic reorganization of states in India. The southern part of Travancore state was integrated with Tamilnadu in the year of 1956 and it became a district in the name of Devi Kumari Kanyakumari, the southernmost district of India and the smallest in Tamilnadu is having places of legendary, historical and artistic importance. The Western Ghats ending into green hills perennial rivers lotus filled tanks, dense forests with wild elephants, extensive paddy fields, rich palm grooves, wavy coconut gardens and a carved coastal line at nearly 70 km. length are the unique natural features of the Land's End- Promontory of India.

Climate: The study area has the unique advantage of rainfall during the south-west and north-east monsoons. The period of south-west monsoon is from June to September while that of north-east monsoon is from October to December. The average rainfall is 140 cm per year. The annual average maximum temperature is 31.04C and the minimum temperature is 25.03C.

Pilgrim Centres

Kanyakumari (or) Cape Comorin: The India's land's end, Kanyakumari or Cape Comorin is unique in being surrounded by three seas that is Bay of Bengal, Indian Ocean and Arabian sea. Hence the confluence is called "Thriveni Sangamam". Here one can get a breath-taking view of the sun rise and sunset at their best. The multi coloured sand is yet another unique feature of beach here. There is a lighthouse from where one can get a panoramic view. The government museum offers a good collection of sculptural art crafts of Tamil Nadu. It is one of the most popular tourist spots in the state in deeds, in the country. People love to see Cape Comorin during Chitra Pournami (full moon day in April.) when the sun and the moon are face to face at the same horizon but other full moon days are also special when one can see sun set and the moon rise almost simultaneously, as if by prior arrangement. Gunganthaswamy temple is 1000 years old temple is said to have been built by Raja Raja Chola. Kumari Amman temple is dedicated to Parvathi as Devi Kanya the Virgin goddess who did penance to obtain the hand of lord Siva.

Suchindrum: Suchindrum is a small village about 12 km from Kanyakumari. This holy place is located on the banks of the river Pazhayar, adjoining fertile fields and coconut groves and the temple is dedicated to Sri Thanumalya. The word denotes Siva, Vishnu and Brahma as, Sthan represents Siva, Mal represents Vishnu while Ayan represents Brahma i.e., Siva, Vishnu, and Brahma in "One Form" The Thanumalyan temple here is repository of art treasures. Musical pillars and a huge 18 feet Hanuman statue are proof of the artistic skill of the time. Inscriptions said to be of the 9th century AD are found in the temple. Suchindrum means the place where Indra attained purification. Sthalapurana has it that Indra suffered a curse from sage Gowthama, when he stealthily cast amorous glances at Ahalya the wife of Gowthama. Indra had to seek immediate redemption. He came to this place where he attained purification from Lord Siva. The present structure of the temple is the work of a number of persons spread over a number of centuries. It is a complex of many beautiful structures constructed at various times and is one of the best specimens and a store house of the Dravidian style of art and architecture. Gents tourists who enter the temple should remove their upper garments.

Nagercoil – Nagaraja Temple: Nagercoil is the headquarters of the Kanyakumari district. This is the largest Municipal town in Kanyakumari district. It lies at the head of the Aramboly pass about 12 km. from it, on the Trivandrum – Tirunelveli road. It is the largest town in Kanyakumari district. It has an area of 4.80 square miles comprising a number of villages eg. Vadasery, Olukanasseri, Vadiveeswaram and Kottar. Kottar and Vadasery are manufacturing and trading centers. Nagercoil owed much of its present position and importance to the efforts of Christian Missionaries. Park, Stadium, Polytechnic, AIR, TV station, Boarding and Lodging Facilities, Railway station etc., are available.

Swamithoppu: Swamithoppu, a lovely village is a birth place of Ayya Vaikundaswamy, who born in 1809. Ayya Vaikundaswamy, through meditation became a spiritual leader and crusader. The Swamy attained enlightenment in 1833. The Swamy predicted future happenings about bio-history, politics, religion, caste, puranic sastra, social life, nature, science etc. The Swamy's prediction were found true in later years. Swamy attained samathi in 1851. Swamy's preachings and predictions have been described in "Akilthirattu", which was written by Swamy's disciple Arigobalan in 1841. A memorial of Ayya Vaikundaswamy is built in Swamithoppu village. Large number of Swamy's followers and domestic tourists are visiting this memorial. Swamithoppu is 13 kms away from Kanyakumari. Frequent bus service are available both from Kanyakumari and Nagercoil.

Thiruvattar: The temple here is dedicated to "Adi Kesava Perumal" in Ananthasayanam posture and is considered one of the 13 sacred places for Vishnavas. The inscriptions found in the temple fix its age to the 12th century. Remains of old mura paintings belonging to a period not later than the 17th century are seen on the walls of the inner shrines. Wood carvings of exquisite workmanship adorn some of the structure in the temple. It is about 11 kms north of Thuckalay on Nagercoil- Kulasekharam road and 46 kms from Kanyakumari.

Kumara Koil: Kumarakoil is at the foot of the Velimalai hills in Kalkulam taluk, about 15 kms. north-west of Nagercoil and 3 kms east of Thuckalay. It lies in the jurisdiction of the Padmanabhapuram municipality. This place is known for its famous temple dedicated to Lord Muruga otherwise known as 'Kumaran'. The temple is built on the top of small hill about 200 feet height and faces east and can be reached by a flight of steps. Goddess Valli, the spouse of Subramanya, the presiding deity, is also enshrined in the temple by the side of the main deity. Here, Lord Muruga is in the form a child.

Chitharal: Chitharal is small village situated at a distance of 7 kms from Marthandam and 45 kms from Kanyakumari. It is famous for the rock-cut temple. Hillock at Chitharal has a cave containing rock-cut sculptures of Thirthankaras and attendant deities carved inside and outside dating back to 9th century A.D. It was converted into Bhavagathy temple in the 13th century A.D. Cars and vans can go up to the foot of the hill. One has to walk for about 10 minutes to reach the temple. The Jain images have been preserved by Central Archaeological Survey of India.

Mondaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple: Mondaikadu is situated on the sea coast, north-east of Colachel port. It is connected with Nagercoil and Trivandrum by a motorable road. This place is famous for its temple dedicated to BAGAVATHI Amman. It dates back to the 7th century B.C. The Amman is in the form of anthill which is about 12 feet in height and with five heads and believed to be growing gradually. The annual festival called Mondaikadu kodai is celebrated in March for 10 days and is the main attraction at this place. There are several interesting stories on the origin of this temple. It is believed that the sick is cured if they worship this Goddess. Salt, pepper, wooden toys, silk clothes, black bangles, the things obtained from the first harvest are some of the offering made to this deity. It is also Sabarimalai for Kerala women because they follow 41 days fasting and they carry 'Irrumudikattu' and come to this temple with spiritual feeling. All women make "pongal" during this festival and devotees used to have a dip in the nearby sea.

Kottar – St. Xavier's Church: It is situated on the main road from Trivandrum to Cape Comorin. It has been a trading centre from very early days. Rajendra Chola Deva changed the name of Kottar to 'Mummudi Chol-anallur'. It was also called 'Rajendracholapuram' after the great Rajendra Chola. Even now it is a busy centre of

trade. St. Xavier's church situated at Kottar was built during the 15th century A.D. Francis Xavier came to India to preach Christianity. He came from Spain some 450 years ago. He showed the way for spirituality. While he came to Kottar he erected a Church that was made by mud walls and wood in 1603. After many alterations and with other extensions the new modern Church was built there. The annual festival is celebrated during the month of November-December lasting for 10 days. Car festival in the ninth day is most important. During these festival days the shrine attracts larger crowd of visitors from all over south India.

Aralvoimozhi – A Pilgrim Centre: It is a pilgrim centre and a fine picnic spot. It is located on the Aralvoimozhi hill named 'Kathadi Malai', 15 kms from Nagercoil. A knight Devasahayam who followed Christianity and became a devotee of Jesus Christ was tortured by the King of Travancore to give up Christianity. He refused and finally Devasahayam was killed at this mountain. The king was surprised of his bravery. Even today many pilgrim visiting here believe that the diseases will be cured. There is a church on the mountain.

Thirupathisaram: Thirupathisaram is on the main road that leads to Aralvoimozhi and is about five kilometres from Nagercoil. It is famous for its ancient temple dedicated to Sri Thiruvazhimarban. The temple is one of the 108 shrines sacred to the Vaishnavites in India and one among the thirteen Devyasthalams of rest while Malainad. It is also the birth place of Saint Nammalwar.

Peer Mohamed Dargah at Thuckalay: There is a dargha named 'Peer Mohamed Oliyiah Dargha' at Thuckalay named after the great philosopher Mohammed Appa, who was born in Tenkasi of Tirunelveli District. After spending sometime in spiritual pursuits in Peermedu of Kerala state he came and stayed at Thuckalay. Being a Tamil poet of great eminence, he wrote many books on philosophy. It was said that he laid foundation stone for the Padmanabhapuram Granite Fort. The anniversary of the great philosopher poet is celebrated every year on a grand scale on the full moon day in the month of Rajap. Both the people of Kerala and Tamil Nadu attend the celebrations in large numbers irrespective of their caste, creed and religion.

Memorials

Mahathma Gandhi Memorials: The Gandhi mandpam has been constructed at the spot where the ashes of Mahathma Gandhi were kept for public view in an urn before a portion was immersed into the three seas. Every year on Gnadhi's birthday on 2nd October, the sun rays fall at the exact spot where the urn was displayed before immersion.

Swami Vivekananda Rock Memorial: Vivekananda Rock Memorial is another place in Kanyakumari which attracts large number of tourists. As its name implies, it is essentially a sacred monument, built by the Vivekananda Rock Memorial Committee to which Shri Mannath Padmanabhan was President and Mananeeya Eknath Ranade was Organisation Secretary and the Executive Committee Members drawn from different States to commemorate the visit of Swami Vivekananda to "Shripada Parai" during 24th, 25th and 26th December 1892 for deep meditation and enlightenment. A meditation hall is also attached with the memorial. Ferry service is available to reach the memorial. From ancient times, the rock has been regarded as a sacred place. In puranic tradition, it has been known as "Sripada Parai" meaning the rock, that has been blessed by the touch of Shripada feet of the Goddess.

Kamaraj Memorial: Regarded as the "King Maker of India" Kamarajar influenced many political events in the nation. From a humble background he rose to the position of the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu through sheer hard work and political acumen. As a tribute to the freedom fighter and "Perunthalaivar" this memorial was constructed where his ashes were kept for the public to pay homage before immersion into the sea.

Velu thambi Dalawah Memorial: Thallakulam is a hamlet in the Kalkulam taluk, about 5 kms from the Monday market –Thallakulam branch road. This place is historically important, since it is the birth place of the great revolutionary leader Dalawai Veluthambi, the then Dewan of Travancore who rose against the British. His ancient home once destroyed by the British has been rebuilt by his nephews, in which some of these personal belongings and the weapons used by him in the war against the British were kept.

Dams

Pechiparai Dam: Pechiparai Dam is about 43 km from Nagercoil. This dam in Kalkulam taluk, was built during the days of the Maharaja Sri Moolam Thirunal across the river Kodayar. The construction of the dam was designed on the pattern of the Periyar dam in the Madurai District. The length of the dam is 425.1 mts. It has catchment area of 204.8 sq.km. There is a camp shed provided at the dam side for the visitors. The weather is very pleasant and hence attracts large number of tourists. A pleasure boat service is available. The dam is surrounded by dense forests with valuable trees, wildlife etc. The total expense of the construction of this dam is Rs.26.10 lakhs.

Perunchani Dam: Perunchani is located 85 kms from Kanyakumari. It was built from 1948-53. It was opened on 1953 September 2nd. These dam sites are excellent picnic spots. Boating facilities and dormitory type of accommodation are available.

Mathoor Hanging Bridge: The Mathoor Hanging Trough is the tallest as well as the longest trough bridge in Asia, having a height of 115 feet and a length of one Kilometer. Constructed in 1966, this bridge has become a place of tourist importance. The bridge has been constructed at Mathoor across the river Parazhiyar at a cost of Rs. 12.90/- lakhs and the trough canal on the bridge carries water for irrigation from one side of a hill to the other side of a hill. The trough has a height of 7 feet with a width of 7 feet six inches. The canal is being shouldered by 29 huge pillars. The district administration has created tourism infrastructure facilities over here. It is 60 kms from Kanyakumari

Beaches

Sothavilai Beach: This beach is 12 kms from Nagercoil and 12 kms from Kanyakumari through West Coast road. It lies in Puthalam town Panchayat and is one of the best natural beaches of the district. Soft waves of shallow water with lovely sand dunes attract domestic tourists. It is one of the best beaches for holiday lovers. The district administration has provided basic infrastructure facilities like drinking water, shadow shelters, view tower, children's play equipment and rest rooms etc.

Sanguthurai Beach: It is a beautiful beach which is very convenient for the local population at Nagercoil. The beach lies in Rajakamangalam Panchayat Union. It is 13 kms from Nagercoil and 15 kms from Kanyakumari through West Coast road. The district administration has provided basic infrastructure facilities over here. It is a developing beach centre.

Thenkapattanam Beach: Thenkapattanam situated on the West Coast near Painkulam village in Vilavancode taluk is a place of historical importance. It is 35 km. from Nagercoil and 12 km. from Kuzhithurai. As coconuts are abundant in this place, this might have derived this name (coconut-thengai). It is also probable that this name was given to the place, as a result of its being the centre of Thengannad ruled over by members of Ay dynasty. The village had in ancient times, trade relations with foreign countries like Arabia⁴⁸. There was direct cargo boat service between Thenkapattanam and other foreign maritime towns. Copra, dry fish, coir and shark fin were the main products that were exported. Thenkapattanam is having the estuary of the lovely river Thamiraparani with its non-salty water entering the sea. The river backwaters are surrounded by charming dense coconut grove. Boat riding on the river backwater is really an enjoyable one.

Theckurichi Beach: Theckurichi, a tiny village with lovely calm seashore lies near the west coast road. It is a lesser known sea-beach of the Kanyakumari district which lies in Rajakamangalam Panchayat Union. Calm seashore with shady casorina trees gives a serene atmosphere. It is an excursion seashore tourist centre. Coir making is a major small scale business of the villagers. It is at a distance of 10 kms from Nagercoil (via) Rajakamangalam and 29 kms from Kanyakumari.

Muttom: Muttom is a delightful place on the coast of Kalkulam taluk, attracting people desirous of having a seaside holiday. It is 17 km. from Nagercoil via Rajakamangalam and also can be reached from Colachel or Mondaikadu. The place is well known to the mariners because of the crocodile rock jutting out into the sea. A light house has been built in Muttom village which has a range of visibility of 23 nautical miles in average weather conditions. This light house was originally established in 1875 and improved subsequently in 1909. The sunset view point here is one of the most panoramic view points in the district. The district administration developed basic infrastructure facilities like shady shelters, benches, car parking, solar lighting, risk free fencing on the rocks etc.

Fort

Padmanabhapuram Palace: Padmanabhapuram lies in the Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu, whereas major portion of the old Travancore State belong to Kerala. This is the ancient capital of Travancore which have been might constructed before 1601 A.D. The palace with an area of seven acres is situated in the very centre of the Padmanabhapuram fort. The art and architecture of the palace is of Kerala origin and atmosphere. The fort was built with mud originally was dismantled and reconstructed with granite by Maharaja Marthanda varma. The place is always cool and quit. A special combination of charcoal from burnt coconut shells, lime, white part of eggs and various vegetables extract were used for the shining block floors. The essential feature of an old Kerala house the Padipura, retain its importance appearance in the place which leads to the garden in front, with an oval lawn at the centre and pathway around. Thaikkottaram known as Mother Place said to be the oldest of all edifices in the palace contains 'Ekanta Mantapa' which was built of finely carved wooden pillars and decorated with specimens of indigenous wood carving. The most attractive building in the whole palaces is the 'Uppirika Malika' which consist of three storey. The Navarathri Mandapa which is a spacious hall of exquisitely beautiful granite pillars with dropping pendants reminiscent of the Nayaker style of architecture. Apart from them, there are so many temples inside the fort, among which Sr. Subramaniya temple, Saraswathy temple, etc.

Vattakottai: Vattakottai, a granite fort 6 km. north-east of Kanyakumari cape, forms the terminal of a line of ramparts known as the South Travancore lines built by Marthanda Varma to serve as defense for Nanjil Nadu. It is rectangular in shape and covers an area of about the three and a half acres. The fort is enclosed by walls 25 to

26 feet high, including the parapet, 29 feet thick at the front, 18 feet at the corners and 6 feet at the rear. The portion running into the area is the most strongly built under the orders of De Lannoy during the reign of Marthandavarma (1729-58 A.D). The green vegetarian, dense coconut groves on the shore side, shallow sea waves in fine sand beach have become an ideal picnic spot for the tourists. Accommodation, dress changing, toilet facilities etc., are provided. Mini bus service, city bus service, cars, etc. are available to see this spot.

Udayagiri Fort: Udayagiri fort is situated near the Padmanabhapuram fort on the Trivandrum- Nagercoil high-ways road at Puliyoorkurichy. It is about 14 km. from Nagercoil and 2 km. from Thuckalay and Padmanabhapuram. This fort was built during the regime of King Marthandavarma (1729-1758 A.D). This fort also had a foundry for casting guns. De Lannoy's Tomb is in this fort. He was one of the 24 European prisoners taken by king Marthandavarma in 1741 when he defeated the Dutch at Colachal. He joined King Marthandavarma and became a trusted General. He trained soldiers in the European method of fighting. Now, the district administration with the help of forest department has set up a Bio-diversity park over here.

Falls

Thirparappu Water Falls: Thirparappu is a good picnic spot. The Kodayar makes it descend at Thirparappu and the water falls at this place about 13 kms. The river bed is rocky and about three hundred feet in length. The water falls from a height of nearly 50 feet and the water flow for about 7 months in a year. Either side of the river on the left bank of the river in between the waterfalls and the weir, there is a temple dedicated to Siva enclosed by a strong fortification.

Olakkayaruvi: Olakkayaruvi water falls in the Western Ghats is about 8 km. north of Azhagiapandipuram and about 14 km. from Nagercoil. The beautiful waterfalls and the natural scenery all around the place attract many holiday seekers and thus this place has become an important picnic centre. An altar connected with the sage Agasthiar near the falls attracts a large number of religious minded people on full moon days of the month of Chithirai (April May) and they worship the altar, after a bath in the falls.

Harbor

Colachal Harbor: This sea coast town is situated about 22 km. west of Nagercoil and about 7 km. south west of Eraniel. It was a port of call of European merchants, during the 16-18th centuries. The Colachal port has afforded natural amenities for shipping by its physiographical structure, a group of outlying rocks forming a practical break water. Under cover of these rocks are done loading and unloading and other shipping operations. A variety of commodities is exported from here, prominent among them being palmyrah and its fiber, mineral sands fish and salt. Small steamers anchor in seven fathoms of water, off the shore Small vessels anchor in about five fathoms, less than a quarter of a mile off the coast. The flag staff in the flag staff compound transmits messages to the ships during day time by international code system. There is no light signaling at this port. A mast head-light is put up in the flag staff compound with red screen to denote the port and another at the port beacon emitting white light to denote the anchorage. The latter is visible for about 8 km. in clear weather. There is no jetty at this port. In the past, this port had its glory and its importance in the industrial and marine fields also. It was the centre for transportation of the fine cotton fibers of Kottar and Eraniel to foreign countries⁶⁷. Now there are two fiber factories at Colachal and finished goods are sent to Tuticorin for export. The fiber produced is graded and exported to England, U.S.A and other countries. Coir making is a major industry of the poor classes.

Chinna mutton Harbor: This harbor is located at 5kms north of Cape Comorin. This is naturally formed bay and hence an ideal location for constructing fishing harbor. The significance of this fishing harbor is that both Cape Comorin Bank and Wedge Bank are within 50 kms. from the harbor. This harbor is the sixth on the east coast in Tamil Nadu.

Thiruvalluvar Statue

A huge statue of Tamil Savant-poet, Thiruvalluvar is in Kanyakumari on the line of liberty statue of New York. The statue will be refurbished with the Dravidian sculptural details and will be a modern architectural delight raising over the rock situated adjacent to Vivekananda rock memorial. The statue will be of 133 feet height. The 'Cape festival' is celebrated during October every year to entertain the tourist. Accommodation is available in plenty as the Government of Tamil Nadu and Kerala run hotels of Indian and Western styles. A good transport network both by bus and trains facilitate tourists to visit this spot again and again. All tourism infrastructure facilities are available at Kanyakumari.

Mahabalipuram

The temple city of Mahabalipuram (also Mamallapuram) is situated just 60 km off Chennai on the Bay of Bengal coast in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The city is well connected through a network of roads from Chennai and other important cities of South India.

The history of Mahabalipuram is an intriguing one. Although its ancient history remains unclear, numismatics, temples and other sources of historical evidence suggest that it was a place of significance even before the temples were built. Some historical facts about Mahabalipuram are mentioned below:

- Mahabalipuram is a historic city and a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- It became a prominent center of art and literature between 3rd and 7th century CE.
- Ancient mariners referred to Mahabalipuram as the “land of the Seven Pagodas”.
- Several coins excavated from here reveal the existence of trade with Romans in ancient times.

Fairs & Festivals

The most important festival held in Mahabalipuram is the Mahabalipuram Dance Festival. This festival is held during December to January every year and attracts artists from all over the country. The festival is organized by the Department of Tourism, Govt. of Tamil Nadu. Various kinds of classical dances are performed at the festival like Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi and Kathakali against the backdrop of Pallava rock sculptures. The other festivals which are held in Mahabalipuram are Sthalasayana Perumal temple festivals, Brahmothsavam and Masimagam.

Tourist Attractions: Mahabalipuram is home to several tourist attractions that make for great exploration and sightseeing. There are several temples which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites besides other attractions which never stop amazing the visitors.

Here are the most famous tourist attractions in Mahabalipuram:

- Arjuna's Penance
- Thirukadalmallai or Sthalasayana Perumal Temple
- Shore Temple
- Crocodile Farm
- Krishna's Butterball
- Cave Temples
- Mahabalipuram (Mammallapuram) Dance Festival
- India Seashell Museum

Temples in Mahabalipuram

There are total 11 excavated temples in Mahabalipuram, called Mandapas, two open air bags reliefs, out of which one is incomplete. But the most famous Mahabalipuram temple, built from a rock is cut out temple, it is also known as 'Ratha'.

The Shore Temple: The name Shore temple is so named because of its unique location as it overlooks Bay of Bengal. This temple is an architectural masterpiece, made of granite blocks during 8th century AD. It is a five-storied temple with pyramidal structure of 60 feet height.

The Shrines in Shore Temple: Shore TempleThe temple has three shrines. The main shrine and the smaller second is dedicated to Hindu Lord Shiva and the third small shrine is dedicated to Hindu Lord Vishnu.

Sthalasayana Perumal Temple: Sthalasayana Perumal Temple is another important Mahabalipuram temple, which is counted amongst one of the 108 Divya Desam. It is a small temple, adorned with two major shrines of Lord Sthalasayana Perumal and Nilamangai Thayaar. The temple also has another separate shrine of Lord Nar-simha that reflects the Pallava style of architecture. Maasi Makham and Boothatalwar's Avathara utsavam are the important festivals of the temple.

The Depictions Of Arjuna's Penance: Arjuna's Penance is one of the largest bas reliefs in the world, carved during mid-7th century. It is also renowned as The Descent of Ganga. Standing at the height of 43 feet this massive structure is carved on the two adjoining monolithic rocks. The total length of Arjuna's Penance is around 96 feet. As per its name Arjuna's Penance this wonderful Mahabalipuram temple is also considered to be an illustration of Mahabharata, when Arjuna (one of the five Pandavas) rigorously worshiped to achieve Lord Shiva's weapon to destroy enemies. While according to another legend the temple also depicts the instance of Bhagiratha, who did penance to bring holy river Ganga down to earth from heaven.

Figures at Arjuna's Penance: Arjuna's Penance One of the notable figures of the temple is the figure of cat, that narrates the story of Panchtantra. Besides the figures of male and female snakes (Nagas), an artificial waterfall, four-armed deity of Lord Shiva, group of dwarfs (guards and followers of Lord Shiva) are pretty fascinating.

The Five Rathas (Pancha Rathas): The Pancha Rathas is one of the best examples of monolith Indian rock cut architecture, dates back to the late 7th century. These five rathas were constructed during the dynasty of King Mahendravarman I and his son Narsimhavarman I. These five rathas shrine is named after the five Pandavas -

Yudhishtir (Dharmaraja), Bheem, Arjun, Nakul and Sahadeva). The largest one of these is the ratha of Yudhishtir, then towards north are the rathas of Bheem, Arjun, Nakul and Sahadeva in order of descending heights. Each temple is carved beautifully with pink granite, outcropped of a rock. These shrines represent the glimpse of rich Dravidian architecture. The roofs of four of the shrines are in pyramidal shapes.

Mahishamardhani and the Adivaraha Mandapas: The exquisite carved rock temples in Mahabalipuram are called as 'Mandapas'. Out of these the two best Mandapas are of Mahishamardhani and the Adivaraha. These Mandapas are connected each other through a common scriptural source. On the walls of the Mandapa the excellent sculptures of Goddess Durga killing the devil and the Lord Vishnu in His cosmic sleep mesmerize everyone. Set amidst atop of a hill the Mahishamardhani temple is carved out of a rock. It has three shrines, out of which a small mandapa can be projected forward from a central shrine. The Adivaraha mandapa has two groups of royal sculptures facing each other. One is of a king seated with his two queens, while the other sculpture is of a standing king with his two wives standing beside him.

- Fair & Festival at Mahabalipuram Temple

Open Air Dance Festival: Open air dance festival is an annual celebration of Mahabalipuram temple, which is celebrated for a week. It is internationally famous as 'Mahabalipuram Dance Festival', organized by the Government of Tamilnadu. The festival starts from 25th December every year and conducted on all Saturdays and Government holidays upto the first week of February. It is celebrated with the great gusto right beside the Arjuna's Penance, before an open air stage, hence it's called Open Air Dance festival. In the festival you may enjoy the famous Indian dance forms such as Bharat Natyam, Kathakali, Odissi, Kuchipudi, Mohiniyattam and Kathak, performed by the skilled traditional dancers.

Poompuhar

Poompuhar is an ancient Indian port situated along the coast of Bay of Bengal, Tamil Nadu. No one knows when this town was created, but it has been mentioned in Tamil Sangam literature works like Manimekalai (4th Century BC), Silappathikaram, Pattinappaalai, etc. Also known by the name Kaveri Poompattinam, a significant portion of this port town was submerged into the sea due to repeated Tsunami, erosion, and floods. Government is now trying to establish this town as a tourist attraction in Tamil Nadu. To get to Poompuhar by bus, one needs to reach Karuvi, Mayiladuthurai or Sirkazhi. From there, direct buses are available. The above photo shows the Silappathikaram Art Gallery. It seems, this famous Tamil Sangam-period story of Kannagi, Madhavi and Kovalan was set in this very town.

Silappathikaram Story (in short): Kovalan is a rich shipping merchant at Poompuhar and Kannagi is his wife. But Kovalan is attracted towards a dancer called Madhavi, falls for her, and lives with her for some time. He loses a major portion of this wealth and comes back to Kannagi. Since they are short of money, he decides to sell Kannagi's golden silambu (a jewel worn on the legs) in Madurai. As he approaches a gold merchant there to sell it, he is captured and sent to the King who had been searching for a similar-looking silambu that was stolen from the Queen. Kovalan is mistaken to be the thief and is executed

Poompuhar Beach is a natural and ancient beach located in Poompuhar, Tamil Nadu, India, along the Bay of Bengal. The beach starts from the Kaveri river and extends around 3 km north side towards Neithavasal. The sand of this beach spreads out around 3 kilometers. Recently granite stone has been placed on the shore to stop erosion. This beach and Poompuhar city plays an important role in South Indian history. Chitra Pournami is an important festival for this beach which happens during the full moon in Tamil, month chittrai. There also occurs a Holy dip in the mouth of Kaveri river is celebrated during new moon in the Tamil month of Thai and Adi. Mayiladuthurai is the nearest town which is located on the bank of Kaveri around 24 km away from this beach.

Kovalam

Kovalam Beach lies in the Indian state of Kerala. It is a 16 km distance from the south of Thiruvananthapuram. It is the most famous beach in South India. The beaches of Kovalam can be mainly divided into the three parts – The southernmost beach called the Lighthouse beach is the most famous among the tourists. It offers the spectacular sight of the Vizhinjam Mosque. The other two are the Eve's beach or the Hawa beach and the Asoka beach. The best time to visit the Beach lies from the December to March.

It was Europeans who discovered the Kovalam beach as the tourist's destination. The Kovalam beach was the favourite hangout destination of Maharajah of Travancore, who was deeply impressed by its beauty. He used to spend leisure time at the beach. When his friends came to know about this magnificent beach, they also start visiting the place and by the third decade of the twentieth century, it became the popular tourists spot among the Europeans. It was once the casual fishing village of Kerala, which slowly converted into tourist's destination. Later in early seventies, there was boost in the popularity of the Kovalam beach with the arrival of Hippies. They used to come there in the groups and spend the quality time there.

Adventure activities at the Kovalam Beach: Holidaying at the Kovalam beach is the lifetime experience. If you are an avid water sports lover, you have plenty of options to enjoy your trip. Swimming at the Kovalam beach is the rejuvenating and a relaxing experience. Although the swimming is quite safe at the beach but, before going into the water it is advisable for the tourists to consult the lifeguards. Water skiing is just like the snow skiing where you have the vast space to enjoy and Kovalam beach is the good option to try water skiing. Skiing smoothly on the waves of the water is a lovely option for the thrilling speed lover. Kayaking and Canoeing can also be enjoyed here, which are slowly becoming the popular sports among the water sports enthusiasts. Canoes can accommodate only two people; kayaks have room for more than two people. If the tourists are interested in fishing, they can hire the boats from the local fisherman. It is advisable to carry the fisherman along with yourself for the purpose of safety. You can also enjoy angling, para-sailing and surfing at the beach.

Ayurvedic Massage at the Kovalam Beach: The most important thing the tourists can enjoy at the Kovalam beach is the Ayurvedic massage and treatment offered at many resorts here. The ayurvedic massage not only relaxes you but also rejuvenates your mind, body and soul. There are also Yoga centers available at the Kovalam beach. Other than Yoga and Ayurveda you can also enjoy the famous Kathakali dance at the beach.

Hill stations:

A hill station is a town located at a higher elevation than the nearby plain or valley. The term was used mostly in colonial Asia, but also in Africa (albeit rarely), for towns founded by European colonial rulers as refuges from the summer heat, up where temperatures are cooler. In the Indian context, most hill stations are at an altitude of approximately 1,000 to 2,500 metres (3,300 to 8,200 ft); very few are outside this range.

Ooty

Ooty (Ootacamund) the Queen of the Hill Stations, also known as Blue Mountains is one of the most beautiful hill stations in India. This hill station has splendid green downs and lofty hills of extraordinary scenic beauty and is endowed with a salubrious climate similar to the English summer.

Located in the Western Ghats at a height of 7,500ft, Ooty/ Udhamandalam is the headquarters of the Nilgiri district. Ooty was the former summer retreat of the British. John Sullivan, the collector of Coimbatore who founded the first European settlement here, stumbled across Ooty's idyllic scenery in 19th century during one of his nomadic searches for rare flowers. The name Ooty or Ootacamund derives its name from the local Toda word Udhamandalam meaning village of huts. The Tamil 'Whotai' a species of dwarf bamboo that grows in the forests, 'kai' meaning a fruit or green stuff in the middle and the Toda 'mund' meaning a village clapped at the end. Ooty, however, got its name during the British rule, by calling 'wotykamund' in the Madras gazette.

Ooty nestles in an amphitheater created by four majestic hills-Doddabetta, Snowdon, Elk Hill and Club Hill. These hills are part of the Nilgiri ranges that are really the meeting point for the Western and the Eastern Ghats.

Apart from coffee and tea plantations, trees like conifers, pine and wattle dot the hillside of Ooty and its environs. While visiting you will also come across many eucalyptus trenches. The fresh smell of eucalyptus trees in a trendy and pleasant breeze will make you feel relaxed for sure. The funnel-shaped blossoms covering the hills in floral profusion and the lavender-blue flowers spread over the mountains will pack you with memories for a lifetime. Ooty has many places to see. The idyllic valley views, tranquil forest ranges, beautiful flora and fauna with bustling music of the wildlife.

Botanical Garden: Built in 1847, by an English gardener Marquis of Tweeddale, this quite, beautiful, well maintained garden covers an area of 22 acres. It has 2000 different species of trees, fashioned beds laid out in an Italian style, beautiful flowers including orchids, a fossil tree trunk of 20 million years, a small artificial pond, alpine and medicinal plants among beautiful lawns and glass houses. The bushes are cut into the shapes of animals and birds. Annual flower show is held here in third week May every year. This show is one of the main attractions of Ooty. The rose garden 750m from Charing Cross contains over 1,500 varieties of roses.

Ooty Lake: An artificial lake constructed between 1823 and 1825 by Mr. John Sullivan, as an irrigation tank. The 2.5km long lake covers an area of more than 25 hectare with the famous narrow-gauge toy railway line running along one bank; rowing boats are available for hire. You can also go for horse-back riding around the lake. This is one of the most popular tourist spots. Pony rides for children is a major attraction. The mini-train for children is still another attraction.

Doddabetta Peak: About 10km East of the Railway Station, off the Kotagiri Rd 2623 meters the highest peak. This is a great place to enjoy the spectacular view of the mountainous valleys and peaks. The place is very serene. This place has a nice view tower wherein you can use high-power TTDC telescope to view surrounding places. On a bright day, one can have a bird's eye view of the plains of Coimbatore and Mysore, the plateau towns Ooty and Coonoor and the barracks at Wellington can also be seen at a distance.

Pykara: Situated at a distance of 19 kms. from Ooty, the river has a dam and a power plant. The great charm of the place is its perfect serenity, sparkling atmosphere and enchanting surroundings. The falls, about 6km from the bridge on the main road, are best in July. There is a forest Rest House and a boat House with Restaurant is at Pykara. Boats are available for hire in Pykara dam.

Stone House: This house was built by John Sullivan. It was occupied by the Principal of the Govt. Art College. The tribals called it as Kal Bangla (stone bungalow).

St. Stephens Church: It is the first church built in Ooty, 1820. It is said that the wood for this church was brought from Tipu Sultan's Lal Bagh Palace in Srirangapatnam after his final defeat. These wood had to be hauled up by the elephants from the plains. It has a clock tower, nine tubular bells and a gallery.

Black Thunder: Water Theme Park - Black Thunder, is set at the foothills of the gigantic Nilgris and 50 kms from Ooty. It is a thrilling and adventures water theme park at Mettupalayam. The water theme park is spread over 65 acres of land with green hills as backdrop and full of coconut and arecanut trees is a pleasant atmosphere. This park has adventurous water games and land games.

Summer festival below:

- Cultural program: This program included classical arts, dance, drama and music programs which is held at Brecks HADP open air stadium, Ooty.
- Flower show: Flower show is organized in the botanical gardens Ooty, where around 250 exhibitors showcase 150 varieties of flowers. The show is attended by around 150,000 people. The show is organized every year since 1896.
- Dog show: The dog show is organized by South of India Kennel Club (SIKC) every year. The show is organized at the Government Arts College ground in Ooty.
- Rose show: Held at the Government Rose Garden in Ooty, Rose show is popular for displaying beautiful rose towers made of thousands of roses and rose petal rangolis. In the garden, one can find around 3,000 varieties of roses.
- Spice show: Spice show is held for two days in Gudalur, Nilgiris at Saint Thomas Higher Secondary School. The spice show is organized by district administration and the departments of horticulture and tourism at Gudalur. The show was first held in the year 2010.
- Fruit show: The two-day fruit show is organized in Sim's Park, Coonoor. The event is organized by the Department of Horticulture and is organized every year from 53 years. The show attracts around 25,000 people every year.
- Vegetable show: The famous vegetable show is held at Nehru Park in Kotagiri. It is organized by the Department of Horticulture from the last 4 years. The event attracts around 16,000 attendees from all over. The star attraction of the show is the map of India prepared using red, yellow and green capsicums.
- Boat race and boat show: The boat race and show are organized for two days at the Ooty Lake.

Masinakudi,

Masinagudi, is a quaint little town on the Northern mountain edges of the Nilgiri hills. Bordering the fringes of the famous Mudumalai wildlife sanctuary and straddling the Moyar river, Masinagudi forms a center point between Ooty and Theppakadu. The approach to Masinagudi from Ooty is through the famous Kalhatti ghat section, which is possibly one of the steepest motorable slopes in the area. A short 18 Kms route comprising of 36 hairpin bends, this sector is still a nightmare for Drivers who are not experienced behind the wheel. The road begins at the Thalaikundha junction (on the Ooty side) and snakes its way towards Kalhatty. A check post along the way forces vehicles like Tempo travelers, Tata Sumo, Qualis etc to stop and check for their brake pads. If they are warm they are waved to the side for them to cool down, for the next few Km's are the steepest and the most treacherous ones along the way. It is advisable to do these stretches in low gears and use the brakes to a minimum lest they warm up and do not grip the wheel when you need them most. The steep roads descend into the foot hills and a further 10 Km ride takes you to the town of Masinagudi.

Kodaikanal

Kodaikanal located amidst the folds of the verdant Pali hills is one of the most popular serene hill stations in India, which mesmerises any visitor. With her wooded slopes, mighty rocks, enhancing waterfalls and a beautiful lake, a tour of Kodaikanal India is full of fun and leisur holidays. Kodai is situated at an altitude of about 2,133-m high and covers an area of 21.45-sq-km. The hill town is renowned for its educational institutions of international repute. Other than the fascinating places to visit in Kodaikanal, the pride of Kodaikanal is the 'Kurinji-flower', which blossoms once in 12 years. The hill-plantain fruits and plums are known for their freshness and taste.

Laces to Visit in Kodaikanal

Berijam Lake: Berijam Lake located at a distance of 21-km from Kodaikanal in Tamil Nadu is one among the beautiful lakes of South India. A sightseeing city tour will take you to the lake which is spread over an area of 24 hectares, the lake is star shaped and is known for its pure water.

Kodaikanal Trekking: Head for Kodaikanal in the Palani Hills for small-time trekking. You can take short treks and hikes to tourist spots close by as well to local viewpoints. Overnight treks are also possible here where one can spend a night at a local village.

Fairs & Festivals: There are several beautiful hill stations in Tamil Nadu. With the Summer Festivals, the hills are even hospitable to welcome the visitors on their holidays. The summer festival is held in the 'Queen of Hill Stations', the evergreen Ooty; the exquisite Kodaikanal or the salubrious heights of Yercaud. Cultural programs, adventure sports, boat races, flower and fruit shows add to the splendour of the festival.

Entertainment: The Golf Club is located 5-km from the Kodaikanal Lake. Boating and Angling facilities are available at the Kodaikanal Lake. Picturesque trek routes are available in and around Kodaikanal. For details, contact: The Trek Director, Department of Tourism, Government of Tamil Nadu, Chennai.

Kerala

Hill stations in Kerala are a traveler's paradise and are gifted with cooler and comfortable climate, verdant mountains, green valleys, dense and misty woods, frothing rivers, waterfalls, azure lakes and flower-filled meadows and are a part of Western Ghats. Misty, Mystical and serene hill stations of Kerala are a perfect holiday option for any traveler. A hill station is a town located at a higher elevation than the nearby plain or valley which was used by European colonial rules as an escape from the summer heat as temperatures are cooler in high altitudes. Kerala Honeymoon Packages in Places like Munnar, Thekkady, Ponmudi, Wayanad, Ramakalmedu, Nelliampathy, Vagamon, Thenmala etc are at an altitude of approximately 1,000 to 2,500 meters.

- *Munnar*

Height of munnar from sea level: 1,450 meters (4,760 ft) to 2,695 meters (8,842 ft) above the sea level

Green and surrounded by the serenity of spectacular hills, Munnar is a beautiful hill station redefines nature like never before. Holiday Packages in Munnar is one of the most popular in India, drawing a wide variety of people with the lure to view of her picturesque landscapes nestled on the verdant slopes of tea plantations. Munnar is located at a height of 1600m, and offers breathtaking views of the surrounding hills carpeted with tea plantations. Thus, whether you are a newlywed couple planning a honeymoon in Munnar or just planning a holiday in Munnar with your family, the beautiful tourist places in Munnar promises to charm Munnar is characterized by being the confluence of three rivers, the Mudrapuzha, Nallathanni and Kundala, which in turn gives the district its name as the word Munnar means "three rivers" in Tamil and Malayalam the local languages.

- *Wayanad*

Height of Wayanad from Sea Level: 700 meters (2,296 ft) to 2100 meters (6,890 ft) above the sea level

Wayanad is in Northern Kerala and is surrounded by lush green, sloping plains of spice plantations. A trip to Wayanad provides a panorama of undulating mist clad hills and dales and a stay in the summit of the Deccan Plateau on its southern side with the Western Ghats running through it. Blessed by nature with lush, tropical forests, undulating slopes through which a number of smooth flowing rivers run across and a climate that promises to charm, the serene hill station of Wayanad remains even today uncorrupted by modernity and thus, is generally regarded to be one of the most popular tourist destinations of Kerala. It is bound on the east by the Nilgiris and the Mysore districts of Tamilnadu and Karnataka respectively. It shares the borders with Coorg district of Karnataka on the north, on the south with Malappuram district and on the west with Calicut and Cannanore districts.

- *Vagamon*

Height of Vagamon from Sea Level: 700 meters (2,296 ft) to 1100 meters (3,610 ft) above the sea level

A virgin hill scape in Idukki Dist of Kerala, 1100 mts above sea level, Vagamon is one of the most scenic Greenfield hill stations in India with moderate winter, monsoon and salubrious climate round the year. The room temperature does not usually rise above 22-degree C even during the hottest season. Perched high among green tea plantations and gurgling streams, Vagamon or Wagamon ensures an exhilarating and soothing haven for trekkers and hikers. Strolling through the nature walks in Vagamon, you might come across elephants frolicking in pools just like that. With a rich and varied range of flora and fauna Vagamon is ideal for all those seeking a travel experience with a difference. Tourist attractions in Vagamon include Kurisumala (mountain of holy cross), Vagamon Meadows which is a favorite for movie shootings, Pine Forests and Thangal Hills

- *Vythiri*

Height of Vythiri from Sea Level: 1100 meters (3,610 ft) to 1300 meters (4,265 ft) above the sea level

Vythiri Hill Station is located in Northern Kerala near Wayanad in the Western Ghats. Since Vythiri is located at the high ranges, at an altitude of 4000 feet above sea level, the climate here is pleasantly cool throughout the year. Spread over an area of 150 sq. km. Vythiri is known for its pleasant climate and unparalleled beauty. Bestowed with natural wonders like hilly terrain, lush green forests, meandering streams and beautiful waterfalls.

- *Athirappilly*

Height of Athirappilly from sea level: 300 meters (984 ft) to 680 meters (2,230 ft) above the sea level

Athirappilly, located to the east of Chalakudy in Thrissur District, is situated on the fringes of Sholayar forests of the Western Ghats, which are the rain forests of Kerala. Athirappilly is famous mostly for its 42-meter-high waterfalls. Athirappilly, lying at an average elevation of 300 meters above sea level, consists of 14850 hectares of tropical wet, evergreen, semi-evergreen and moist deciduous riparian forest ranges. Athirappilly forests is one among the five territorial ranges of Vazhachal Forest Division, the others being Charpa, Vazhachal, Kollathirumedu and Sholayar. The forestland of Athirappilly is one among the world's biodiversity hotspots, as it is home to endangered as well as threatened species of flora and fauna. Athirappilly also draws the attention of biologists as its forest rangers are situated at a low altitude (300 meters), which is a unique phenomenon in the whole of Western Ghats. The picturesque waterfalls of Athirappilly are situated in River Chalakudy, which originates in the upper ranges of the Western Ghats called Anamudi Mountains. River Chalakudy flows down through the Vazhachal Forest Division till it reaches Athirappilly. The rocky river-bed at Athirappilly makes the river water turbulent and it gushes forward around big rocks to form segmented water cascades. The Athirappilly waterfalls consist of three waterfalls, the biggest of which is 42 meters high and 220 meters wide.

- *Ponmudi*

Height Of Ponmudi From Sea Level: 915 meters (3001 ft) to 1020 meters (3,347 ft) above the sea level

Ponmudi is one of the few hill stations in Northern Kerala and is located within a short driving distance of Thiruvananthapuram. Along with a beautiful array of mountain flowers, exotic butterflies and small rivulets, Ponmudi offers excellent opportunities for trekking. With its tea estates and mist covered valleys Ponmudi is a fast developing hill station. Popularly called Golden Peak, Ponmudi is surrounded by scenic hills, spice plantations, tea estates, natural springs and winding streams. Ponmudi was founded by Rishi Parashuram, a prominent Indian mythological figure. Some notable tourist attractions located in Ponmudi are Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary, Echo Point and various trekking spots. Mist-laden valleys, especially Golden Valley near Kallar River, also draw tourists. Travellers can find a deer park and wood and stone cottages coloured in bright hues while visiting here.

- *Ramakkalmedu*

Height of Ramakkalmedu from sea level: 1200 meters (3937 ft) to 2019 meters (6625 ft) above the sea level

Ramakkalmedu is a beautiful view spot in Tamil Nadu-Kerala border, giving breathtaking views of Kombai villages in Tamil Nadu on one side and the villages around Nedumkandam in Kerala on the other side and is located near Thekkady. Kuravan mount which has the Kuravan Kurathi statue is among the most scenic hill stations views in Kerala and the legend is that Rama and Sita came there during their exile and rested on the rock in Ramakkalmedu. Rolling green hills and the fresh mountain air make Ramakkalmedu an enchanting retreat. The hilltop also offers a panoramic view of Tamil Nadu towns of Kumbum, Theni, Kombe, Thevaram, Uthamapalayam, Bodinayakanur and Vaiga.

- *Thenmala*

Height of Thenmala from Sea Level: 500 meters (1640 ft) to 650 meters (2165 ft) above the sea level

Thenmala is also in Southern Kerala near Kollam district and is translated into the hill that yields honey in local language and is a small village at the foothills of Western Ghats and predominantly a forest area. The famous Shenduruney Wildlife Sanctuary is the most important ecotourism resource of Thenmala Ecotourism. This Wildlife Sanctuary is of about 100 sq. km. and harbors large varieties of flora and fauna. The honey collected from Thenmala forest region is of good quality and of high medicinal value because of the unique floristic composition of the forests in these areas. The hottest months are March to May and the coldest, December and January. The maximum temperature during daytime in the hottest month is about 39°C. The daily temperature varies from 17°C to 35°C.

- *Lakkidi*

Height of Lakkidi from sea level: 700 meters (2296 ft) to 1150 meters (3772 ft) above the sea level

Lakkidi is referred to as the Gateway of the Wayanad district. Lakkidi is the starting point in exploring the entire Wayanad region which is most notable for containing impressive mountain peaks, dense forests, and beautiful streams and other water features. Lakkidi is one of the highest locations in Wayanad, and registers the second highest degree of rainfall in the world.

- Thekkady

Height of Thekkady from Sea Level: 700 meters (2,296 ft) to 1900 meters (6,240 ft) above the sea level

The Country's sole Tiger reserve, Thekkady, with its bountiful treasures of tropical flora and fauna is the ultimate reservoir of many an endangered species and a rich tribal culture. Thekkady is a pleasant heaven on earth for those who love nature in its wild manifestations. Periyar Tiger sanctuary is spread over an area of 777 Sq.Kms, surrounded by an artificial lake over an area of 25 Sq.Kms. Bamboo Rafting, Border Hiking, Mangla Devi Temple, Periyar lake, Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary, The Sukri Dam, The tribal heritage museum etc are some of the most popular tourist attractions in Thekkady.

Kumaragam

Kumarakom is a popular tourism destination located near the city of Kottayam (16 kilometres (10 mi)), in Kerala, India, famous for its backwater tourism. It is set in the backdrop of the Vembanad Lake, the largest lake in the state of Kerala. Kumarakom is home to a wide variety of flora and fauna. Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary is a noted bird sanctuary where many species of migratory birds visit. The Vembanad Lake, the largest backwater in Kerala, is habitat for many marine and freshwater fish species and it teems with Karimeen (Pearl spot also known as *Etroplus suratensis*) shrimp (*Metapenaeus dobsonii*) common name Poovalan chemmeen. The bird sanctuary extends over 14 acres (57,000 m²), and came into existence following preservation efforts from the government. It is a major tourist attraction.

Tourism in Kumarakom largely revolves -around the backwaters of the Vembanad Lake. Several luxury and budget resorts lined up on the shores of the lake provide tourists with facilities for boating, yachting and fishing, with panoramic views of the lake. The other major attraction is the Bird Sanctuary, which is open from 6 am to 6 pm and can be visited by canoes arranged by local fishermen at the entrance to the sanctuary. A two-hour rowing canoe trip is quite cheap, and is best undertaken in the evening or early morning to avoid the afternoon sun. Furthermore, the Aruvikkuzhi Waterfall and its surrounding rubber plantation are a photographer's delight. There is also the Bay Island Drift Museum near the Kumarakom beach for history lovers, open from 10 am – 5 pm on Tuesdays – Saturdays and from 11.30 am – 5 pm on Sundays.

Kumarakom is the first destination in India to Implement Responsible Tourism practices. Kerala Tourism was awarded for its path-breaking 'Responsible Tourism' project in Kumarakom, which has successfully linked the local community with the hospitality industry and government departments, thereby creating a model for empowerment and development of the people in the area while sustaining eco-friendly tourism.

Bird Sanctuary

Located on the banks of the Vembanad Lake, the bird sanctuary is spread across 14 acres. The Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary, an ornithologist's paradise is a favourite haunt of migratory birds like the siberian stork, egret, darter, heron and teal. A visit to the bird sanctuary, set within the lush acres of wooded land nearby, acquaints you to the variety of migratory birds that flock in thousands, some from the Himalayas, some even from as far as Siberia. In addition, you can get thrilled of the native kingfishers ablaze in psychedelic colours, experience a walk under rookeries of egrets and night herons or lone golden-backed woodpeckers and even delight in the acrobatics of the paradise fly-catchers.