The Cultural & Musical Soul of Southern India
DURING THE PONGAL HARVEST FESTIVAL
JANUARY 8–21, 2019
Kapaleeshwarar Temple
“Deity” / Sarath Kuchi
South India harbors the true soul of this vast, vibrant country, where tranquil backwaters and spice plantations coincide with meticulously carved and colorfully painted Hindu temples, and women in technicolor silk saris walk alongside majestic elephants. Through in-depth lectures and special meetings, enjoy the unique opportunity to interact with local scholars, community development organizers, and talented craftspeople and performers, unlocking centuries of history and peeling away complex layers of culture. Learn about traditional cooking and enjoy a meal hosted by a local family. Wind your way through the lush landscape of Thekkady Periyar Wildlife Reserve, with a chance to see elephants, sambar, and langurs by boat. Experience the tranquil tempo of life in Kerala from the deck of a private boat and learn about traditional dance forms from local performers. Throughout the program, savor the flavors of coconut and curry during extraordinary meals, relax each evening at fine hotels, and let India’s cultural tapestry envelop you during this exceptional journey through India’s soulful south!

Travel with Oberlin Professor Jennifer Fraser

Jennifer Fraser is Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology and Anthropology In the Conservatory of Music. She has taught classes ranging from Music of India to Music and Gender, Music and Ecology, Analysis of World Music, and Javanese Gamelan. Challenging students to become active participants in their learning, she asks them to think critically about music in the world as both a sonic and social act. Inspired by activist ethnomusicology, her newest course involves community-based learning and partners with a Lorain afterschool program. Jennifer’s research, including a monograph, focuses on the music of the Minangkabau (West Sumatra, Indonesia) in relation to issues of ethnicity, gender, Islam, and natural disasters. She has led two winter term trips to Indonesia, serves on the Oberlin Shansi Board of Trustees, and has published recipes in The Ethnomusicologists’ Cookbook. In her spare time, she enjoys cycling, cooking, and dog sitting. She once rode a camel in the Rajasthan desert.
Departures (January 8): Depart on an overnight flight to Chennai.

Arrivals in Chennai (January 9): In the evening arrive in Chennai, the capital city of Tamil Nadu state and India’s fourth largest city. Drive to the five-star Taj Coromandel Hotel, and retire for a night’s rest. Taj Coromandel Hotel

Music & Dance of Tamil Nadu (January 10): Begin with a visit to Kalakshetra, a renowned arts and culture academy that specializes in traditional Bharatanatyam dance and Gandharvaveda music. Continue to Fort St. George and George Town, where the British built a fortified warehouse for the English East India Company in the 1640s. Proceed to Mylapore, inhabited in the 16th century by the Portuguese, and visit the St. Thomas Cathedral Basilica, one of only three known churches in the world built over the tomb of an apostle of Jesus. Following a break for relaxation, visit the colorful Kapaleeswarar Temple to watch the priest perform aarti—a prayer invoking blessings of the Supreme Being. This evening gather for a welcome dinner. Taj Coromandel Hotel (B, D)

Kanchipuram Temples & Weavers (January 11): Depart for Kanchipuram, the ‘Golden City of a Thousand Temples’ and one of India’s oldest towns, to explore several 7th- and 8th-century temples. Savor local specialties at lunch. Stop in a traditional weaving village famous for its fine silk saris and visit the homes of traditional Kanchipuram weavers. Continue to Covelong Beach and check into the beautiful Taj Fisherman’s Cove Resort. This sumptuous resort is spread out across acres of lushly landscaped beachfront property. Relax over dinner in the hotel’s seaside restaurant overlooking the waves of the Bay of Bengal. Taj Fisherman’s Cove (B, L, D)

Rock Temples & Traditional Architecture (January 12): Drive to nearby Mahabalipuram, a UNESCO World Heritage Site where the 7th-century commercial trading port of the Pallava dynasty was established for trade with China and the Spice Islands. Examine the sublime rock-cut temples and the impressive two-spired shore temple, unique in that it houses both Vishnu and Shiva in its sanctum. Continue to Dakshina Chitra, a heritage center fostering craftsmanship and folk art. After lunch, visit the center’s traditional houses from communities of southern India, which are reconstructed by the finest carpenters. Return to the hotel, and the remainder of the day is at leisure for enjoying the resort. Taj Fisherman’s Cove (B, L)

Artists’ Village (January 13): Return to Chennai stopping along the way to meet artists at Cholamandal, India’s largest self-
supporting artists’ village. Fly to the great temple city of Madurai, one of the oldest cities in South India and considered “the Athens of the East.” Check into the five-star Taj Gateway Hotel Pasumalai and enjoy dinner together. *Taj Gateway Hotel Pasumalai (B, L, D)*

**Sri Meenakshi Temple & the Pongal Harvest Festival (January 14):** Visit the remarkable Sri Meenakshi Temple, perhaps the ultimate artistic masterpiece of South India, with twelve towers adorned with vividly painted stucco figures of mythical animals, deities, and monsters. In the Thousand-Pillared Hall, examine some of the 985 beautifully decorated columns. Drive south of Madurai for a chance to see true Indian cottage industry. Enter humble private homes and workshops, and meet the men and women who create colorful saris, tablecloths, and other handmade and handprinted textiles. Experience the pomp and splendor of Pongal festivities during which the sun, cattle, and birds are celebrated for providing a rich harvest. The evening is at leisure. *Taj Gateway Hotel Pasumalai (B, L)*

**Flower Markets, Palaces, & Recital (January 15):** Set out early on auto rickshaws for Madurai’s flower and vegetable markets, which attract nearly 10,000 visitors a day. Over piles of flowers, farmers and merchants negotiate their purchases while garlands are strung and weighing scales are heaped with white, purple, orange, and yellow blooms. See the city’s impressive 17th-century royal Thirumalai Nayak Palace, a fusion of Dravidian and Rajput architectural styles. Join a middle-class family in their private home and learn about Indian cooking followed by lunch with the family. Enjoy a Nadaswaram performance featuring the double reed wind instrument considered very auspicious throughout Tamil Nadu. After dinner, join an optional excursion back to the Sri Meenakshi Temple to observe the colorful music-filled ceremony in which Lord Sundarshewar is carried in a palanquin to the temple. *Taj Gateway Hotel Pasumalai (B, L, D)*

**Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary & Elephants (January 16):** Enjoy a spectacular drive to Thekkady, a green corridor of South India. Pass verdant tea and spice plantations during the ascent into the Cardamom hills. Check into the Spice Village Thekkady Resort and enjoy lunch together. Continue to the nearby Periyar Wildlife Reserve, South India’s most popular wildlife sanctuary, known especially for its elephants, though bison, sambar, wild boar, and langurs are common. Take a shared boat ride on Lake Periyar for a rare opportunity to observe South India’s wildlife at close proximity. Enjoy dinner together. *Spice Village Thekkady (B, L, D)*

To a non-refundable administrative fee of $500 per person. Written cancellation received by ISDI on or before September 10, 2018: full refund minus $500 per person administrative fee. Written cancellation received by ISDI on or between September 11, 2018 and November 20, 2018: full refund of any recoverable land costs, less $2,850 per person cancellation charge (includes administrative fee). Written cancellation received by ISDI on or after November 21, 2018: no refund. After the tour has commenced, it is not possible to issue any refunds. No refunds can be issued for occasional missed meals or sightseeing tours, or for any unused portion of the tour. If due to weather, flight schedules, or other uncontrollable factors you are required to spend an additional night, you will be responsible for your own hotel, transfers, and meal costs. TRAVEL INSURANCE | ISDI and the Oberlin Office of Alumni Relations strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance. ISDI will send you travel insurance information upon tour registration. In the event that you must cancel your participation in a travel program, trip cancellation insurance may be the only source of reimbursement.

**TOUR PRICE INCLUSIONS**
Accommodations, as outlined in the itinerary; breakfast daily, 9 lunches, 8 dinners (2 glasses of wine or beer with welcome and farewell dinners, beer with dinners); one group airport transfer on arrival and departure as outlined; land transportation by private motor coach as outlined; one economy-class ticket: Chennai to Madurai; entrance fees to sites per itinerary; services of ISDI Tour Manager; expert, local English-speaking guides; gratuities to local guides and drivers; bottled water daily; taxes, services, and porterage fees.

**TOUR PRICE EXCLUSIONS**
Airfare, airline taxes, and fuel surcharges; airport porterage; excursions, activities, or meals during traveler’s free time; personal items; personal services; travel extensions; personal insurance for health, baggage, and tour cancellation; passport fees; visa fees; gratuities for hotel housekeeping staff.
Kerala’s Tea & Spice (January 17): Begin a delightful first day in Kerala with a one-hour scenic drive to a tea factory to learn about tea production. Continue to a rubber and pineapple farm and, following lunch, explore the plantation with one of the owners. In the afternoon arrive in Kumarakom, Kerala’s heartland of lagoons and paddy fields where boats transport everything through the canal. After checking into the Coconut Lagoon Resort, enjoy a sunset cruise on Lake Vembanad and dinner together. **Coconut Lagoon Resort (B, L, D)**

Kerala’s Backwaters & Kathakali Dance (January 18): During a leisurely morning, sleep in or enjoy one of the many activities offered by the resort, including yoga or birdwatching. Then cruise through Kerala’s tranquil, unspoiled backwaters on a traditional houseboat, and admire migratory birds and picturesque fishing villages that line the banks. Hear of the modern threats to this delicate ecological treasure and preservation efforts. At a beautiful farm island on Lake Vembanad, meet the property owner who will discuss the traditional local agriculture and organic methods used to grow fruits and spice, and then be treated to a veritable feast of home-cooked specialties. Return to the hotel and relax or get an optional treatment at the resort’s Ayurveda Centre. After dinner, meet a Kathakali performance troupe, who will explain the significance of the costumes, facial expressions, and music followed by a performance of this elaborate dance form. **Coconut Lagoon Resort (B, L, D)**

Cochin’s Chinese Fishing Nets (January 19): After check-out, drive to Cochin, a city that rose to prominence in the 14th century as a major port for the spice trade. Following lunch, enjoy a walking tour of the historic “Kochi Fort” district, the waterfront territory given to the Portuguese in 1503. See the soaring Chinese fishing nets cantilevered over the sea with large stones suspended from ropes as counterweights. The nets are said to have been brought by traders from the court of Kublai Khan. Visit St. Francis Church, India’s first European church and the original burial place of Vasco da Gama, and see many beautiful colonial buildings. Enjoy an evening at leisure. **Taj Gateway (B, L)**

Synagogues & Mattancherry Palace (January 20): Today, learn about how Cochin became an important Jewish settlement after the Spanish Inquisition forced Jews living in Spain to relocate. Visit an active 16th-century synagogue that houses giant scrolls of the Old Testament, the copper plates in which the king of Cochin granted privileges to the Jewish community. Continue to the Mattancherry Palace, which houses exhibitions on royal costumes and palanquins in beautiful interiors that are richly decorated with exquisite murals of the Ramayana legend. Enjoy an afternoon at leisure for shopping and relaxing. In the evening, gather to bid farewell to South India over a memorable dinner. **Taj Gateway (B, D)**

Return to the U.S. (January 21): Transfer to the Cochin airport for independent flights to the United States.
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Learn about Bharatanatyam dance, Gandharvaveda music, and the Kathakali percussion and dance art form.

Discover India’s lush flora and fauna during scenic visits to tea plantations and the Periyar Wildlife Reserve.

Visit the private homes and workshops of textile artisans and dine with a local family.

Experience the vibrant festivities at the Pongal Harvest Festival in Madurai.

Observe colorful worship ceremonies in India’s sacred and evocative temples.