

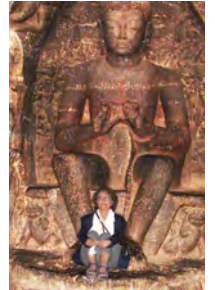
North India

- ❖ **Varanasi** (Benares), the oldest city in the world with a continuous culture, is known as the main pilgrimage site of India. We visit temples and float down the Ganges at dawn to see an astounding variety of pilgrims and spiritual practitioners.



- ❖ **Khajuraho** is an extensive Hindu sandstone temple complex covered with exquisite carvings that represent all of life, from the most sublime to the most ordinary.
- ❖ **The Taj Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri,** and the **Agra Fort**, with its pearl mosque, are shining examples of Islamic architecture at the city of **Agra**.

- ❖ **Ajanta** and **Ellora**, two of the greatest sites of India, are vast Buddhist and Hindu cave and temple complexes carved out of single rocks. Dating from 200 B.C. to 800 A.D., they contain some of the most famous paintings and sculptures of ancient India. Our hotel is in nearby **Aurangabad**, an important Moslem city.



South India



- ❖ **Tiruvannamalai** (Tiru), is an old and great temple town where we touch ancient, Vedic India with a stay at an ashram (**Sri Ramanasramam**) founded by the sage Ramana Maharshi. He was the teacher of W. Somerset Maugham and the inspiration of Maugham's novel, **The Razor's Edge**. With its Vedic chanting, traditional devotional songs by local women, and steady flow of visitors from all over India, we get a close-up experience of Indian daily life and illumined spirituality.

- ❖ **Pondicherry** (Pondy), a French-controlled city until 1954, still proudly maintains its French flavor. It is beautifully situated next to the ocean and is home to the **Sri Aurobindo Ashram**, one of the most well-known spiritual communities in India. Our home base will be in rural **Auroville**, a multi-national spiritual community that has reversed desertification in the area by planting over a million trees and which also works with local villages to improve living standards, education, and women's empowerment. Fine French restaurants are one of the joys of Pondy.

- ❖ **Mamallapuram** (Mahabalipuram), where temples have been carved out of single rocks, is one of the most important archaeological sites of India.

- ❖ **Madurai**, "the capital city of ancient Southern civilization," is home to the magnificent and vast Meenakshi-Sundareshwar Temple, which covers 45 acres.

- ❖ **Kerala**, one of the most beautiful states, has a literacy rate of 99%. A historical and cultural crossroads, it includes a 2,500 year old Jewish community, a Christian community tracing its origins to the Apostle Thomas that still chants in Aramaic, and a mosque built while Mohammed was alive. We walk in verdant forests and in tea and cardamom plantations in the **Western Ghats** (mountain range), explore **Kochi** (Cochin), and float through **inland waterways** before heading home.

