

Temples and Traditions SOUTH INDIA

WITH DR PAULA RICHMAN and DR MICHAEL FISHER



FAR
HORIZONS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL TRIPS

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SOUTH INDIA: TEMPLES AND TRADITIONS

with Dr. Paula Richman and Dr. Michael Fisher

Explore the Heritage and Natural Beauty of South India: A Cultural Tour Through Ancient Temples and Tranquil Backwaters

Join Far Horizons and a select group of just 13 others on an enchanting 16-day South India cultural tour!

This journey invites you to explore a region with a history that spans over two thousand years, an area that has been the cradle for numerous formidable dynasties and empires. South India offers diverse history, culture, and natural beauty – there are few more rewarding destinations to be found anywhere in the world.

From the archaeological wonders of Hampi and Mahabalipuram to the awe-inspiring Great Living Chola Temples, this South India tour is curated to offer an unparalleled investigation of India's rich past. But the journey doesn't stop at historical sites. The South India trip you're about to embark on is truly a feast for all the senses. The local cuisine promises to be an adventure as we enjoy delicious local specialties throughout our itinerary.

The accommodations are nothing short of remarkable on this tour... From our stay in Visalam, a century-old mansion with original woodwork and art deco grilles, to the Coconut Lagoon, a retreat nestled in the heart of Kerala's Backwaters; this accommodation has been described by Condé Nast Traveler as one of the '25 Best Destinations in the World' and has been featured in National Geographic Traveler's '50 Places of a Lifetime'.

As we journey along this South India tour, from the aromatic tea plantations to the vibrant spice markets and brilliantly adorned temple façades, you'll find yourself in constant wonder and fascination. This South India trip allows travelers to get to know a seemingly enchanted land!





Daily Itinerary

Day 1

Arrive in Bangalore, Museum of Art and Photography (MAP)

Arrive in Bangalore, the capital city of the southern Indian state of Karnataka, in the early morning. Bangalore was founded in the 16th century and is known as the Garden City. Today it is regarded as India's "Silicon Valley".

Transfer to the Taj MG Road Hotel, our home for one night. After some time to rest, in the afternoon we visit the recently opened Museum of Art and Photography, home to a growing collection of Indian art including paintings, sculptures, textiles, photographs, popular culture, and more, from the 10th century to the present day. Enjoy our elegant Welcome Dinner at the hotel. (D)

Day 2

Fly to Vidyanagar, Sunset at the Temples

After the morning and lunch on our own, transfer to the airport for a non-stop flight to Vidyanagar, followed by a short drive to Hampi, or Vijayanagara—the City of Victory (NOTE – occasionally, the flight from Bangalore to Hampi is not offered or available, in which case our group will drive in the morning from Bangalore to Hampi over 8 hours).

Enjoy a sunset visit to the temples of this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Overnight for two nights in the elegant Evolve Back County Resort. (B/ /D)

Day 3

Hampi

All day will be spent in Hampi, the seat of the famed Vijayanagara Empire and the capital of the largest kingdom in post-Mughal India. This city once boasted riches known far beyond the shores of India. The Virupaksha Temple contains the shrines of Shiva, Pampa, and Bhuvaneswari. It has a conspicuous, 164-foot-high gopura, or entrance tower, and parts of this temple are older than the rest of the Vijayanagara monuments. The monolith—21 feet high—of Ugra Narasimha is nearby. It was carved from a single boulder in 1528 and presents an image of Vishnu. We will also visit the Hazara Ramachandra Temple, which may have been the private place of worship for the royal family.

The most splendid monument of Hampi is undoubtedly the Vitthala Temple Complex with its 56 musical pillars that resonate when tapped. The Lotus Mahal, shaped like a lotus flower, was the air-cooled summer palace of the queen. The Krishna Temple is a monumental complex east of the Virupaksha Temple and dedicated to Lord Krishna, one of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. The King's Balance, near the Vitthala Temple, is where kings were weighed against grain, gold, or money which was then distributed to the poor. We then see the Queen's Bath with lotus-shaped fountains that once spouted perfumed water. Our walk includes the Elephant Stables which housed these huge royal pachyderms. (B/L/D)

Daily Itinerary *(cont'd)*

Day 4

Drive to Chikmagalur, Chitradurga Fort

Drive from Hospet to Chikmagalur (6 hours) with a stop to visit Chitradurga Fort. Enclosed by seven concentric stone walls, it is a modern reminder of the Nayak dynasty that once held sway across this part of central Karnataka. This fort was effectively the heart of the Nayak kingdom until it was conquered by the Mysore Kingdom in 1779. Although traces of older fortifications can still be found here, most of the standing walls and gateways were constructed by the Chitradurga Nayakas and Tipu Sultan, a ruler of the Kingdom of Mysore.

Overnight for two nights in the [Gateway Hotel in Chikmagalur](#), a lovely 29-room resort set at an altitude of 4,000 feet within a coffee-producing countryside. (B/L/D)

Day 5

Belur, Halebid

The morning is free to relax by the pool or explore the area with lunch on our own. In the afternoon, visit Belur and Halebid for a style of architecture unique to the region. The buildings here were built in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries by Hoysala rulers. Each small, compact temple is lavishly decorated with sculpture, and the decorations cover every inch of wall space. This tightly packed sculptural scheme is exclusive to Hoysala art and was never replicated. Prime sites in the area include Hoysaleswara Temple in Halebid, with the Archaeological Museum, and Chennakeshava Temple in Belur. (B/ /D)

Day 6

Sravanabelgola, Fly to Cochin

This morning, we depart Chikmagalur for Sravanabelgola, where we climb a flight of 614 steps (you can take a palanquin!), finely chiseled into the granite of the mountain, to the summit. Here, the sixty-foot-tall statue of Sri Gomatheswar carved more than one thousand years ago, dominates the open plaza. It is purported to be the tallest free-standing statue in the world.

Continue to Bangalore (total driving time of 6 hours) for our flight to picturesque Cochin, an important spice trading center and seaport. Pepper and cardamom, cinnamon and ginger, nutmeg, mace, and anise from the Periyar Hills – all were transported to Cochin to be shipped to a spice-hungry world.

Overnight for one night at the [Eighth Bastian Hotel](#). This boutique hotel is located in the renovated old section of the city where streets are filled with tiny, upscale shops housed within the Dutch Colonial mansions. Enjoy a late dinner at our hotel. (B/L/D)



Chandragiri hill, Sravanabelgola

Daily Itinerary *(cont'd)*

Day 7

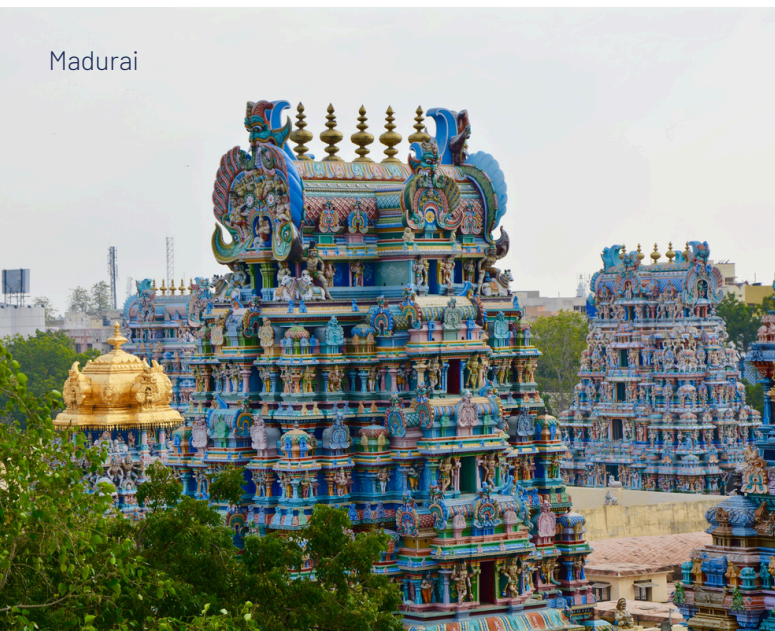
Cochin, Mattancherry Palace, Transfer to a Lakeside Resort

Cochin is full of echoes of Kerala's past colonizers, including Hindu and Mughal dynasties, Portuguese and Dutch conquerors, and the British Empire – which came seeking control of the lucrative pepper trade. The city hosts the oldest church in India, 500-year-old Portuguese houses, tiled homes built in the Chinese pagoda style, and a Jewish community whose roots go back to the Diaspora.

Spend the morning seeing the sites of this lovely city, including Mattancherry Palace (Dutch Palace), built by the Portuguese in 1557 and containing stunning murals depicting scenes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranic legends.

In the afternoon, we transfer to the lovely Coconut Lagoon Resort, located on the edge of the great Vembanad Lake. Fittingly, the resort can be reached only by water. The tile-roofed bungalows, set amidst lush foliage, will be our home for two nights. (B/L/D)

Madurai



Houseboat on Kerala Backwaters

Day 8

Houseboat Cruise through Backwaters of Kerala

After a free morning at leisure, board a traditional houseboat called a kettuvallam, made of bamboo, rattan, and wood, and spend several hours drifting through the picturesque backwaters of Kerala, a network of canals, lakes, lagoons, and estuaries stretching over almost 1000 square miles.

As we float along the palm-fringed narrow waterways and through a vast expanse of paddy fields, coconut groves, and flocks of migratory birds, delight in lunch prepared onboard as we enjoy the traditional village life that lines the banks. (B/L/D)

Day 9

Travel to Madurai through a Plethora of Plantations

Today's journey takes us through a panorama of cardamom, coffee, and pepper plantations to Madurai, one of South India's great temple towns (total driving time of 7 hours).

Overnight for two nights at the 5-star Taj Gateway Madurai Hotel. (B/L/D)

Daily Itinerary *(cont'd)*

Tirumalai Nayak Palace



Day 10

Madurai City Tour

The area around Madurai has a rich cultural heritage passed on from the great Tamil realm more than 2500 years ago. It was an important cultural and commercial center even as early as 550 AD and was the capital city for the great Pandya kings.

Our first stop is Tirumalai Nayak Palace, built in 1636 AD by one of the Madurai Nayak rulers. During the 19th century, the Governor of Madras renovated the complex, preserving the spacious rectangular courtyard called the Swarga Vilasam and a few adjoining buildings. Their imposing scale evokes the grandeur of a vanished era.

Then it's on to the enormous Meenakshi Temple complex encircled by high walls and containing twelve soaring gopura towers. The turrets are completely covered with exquisite stucco figures of vividly painted deities and mythical animals. Return to Meenakshi Temple for the evening ritual where enveloped in a cacophony of music, intoxicating incense, and reverent singing, witness the memorable 'Going to Bed Ceremony'. Each night the image of Shiva is carried in a silver palanquin from his shrine to another part of the temple to join his consort Parvati at hers. Dinner is on our own. (B/L)

Day 11

Karaikudi

Depart Madurai for our drive to Karaikudi, the capital of the Chettinad region in the state of Tamil Nadu, and the original homeland of the Nattukottai Chettiars, a prosperous merchant community dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The wealth of the traders is displayed in the area's palatial houses notable for their ornate doorways, chandeliers, and carved wooden ceilings.

Spend today in Karaikudi's historical environs including a stop at a neighboring village, home to one of the most imposing mansions in the region. We visit local artisan workshops to observe the traditional hand-loomed weaving of the bold and vibrant patterned cotton used for the famous Chettinad saris as well as the enduring art of Athangudi tile making. There is time for an exploration of Karaikudi's famous Antique Market.

Overnight for one night in one of the grand mansions, now a resort in Visalam near Karaikudi. (B/L/D)



Daily Itinerary *(cont'd)*

Day 12

Pongal Festival (in Tanjore), Brihadishvara Temple, Airavateshvara Temple

Today, we have the privilege of witnessing the Pongal Festival, a vibrant and spirited celebration observed in the Tamil Nadu region of India and other parts of the world where Tamil communities reside. This festival holds immense significance in Tamil culture as a time to celebrate the harvest, culture, and traditions of the region.

Drive to Thanjavur (Tanjore) with a stop at Brihadishvara Temple, completed in 1010 AD and an outstanding example of Chola architecture. The gigantic statue of Nandi the Bull guards the inner shrine, and the courtyard walls of the sanctum are covered with paintings from the Chola and Nayak periods, comparable to the famous Ajanta cave frescoes.

Recently declared UNESCO World Heritage as a part of the Greatest Living Chola Temples, Airavateshvara at Darasuram is one of the oldest of the Chola temples. Drive on to Kumbakonam, one of the oldest towns in south India and the capital of the Chola kings in the 7th century.

Overnight for one night at [Mantra Koodam](#), a heritage hotel designed like an 'agraharam' – the characteristically Brahmin street lined with 'illams' (homes). (B/L/D)

Day 13

Chidambaram, Transfer to Mamallapuram

Depart this morning for Chidambaram where we visit Natarajar Temple, one of the most ancient and celebrated shrines in India. The roof of this Shiva temple has 21,600 gold tiles and 72,000 nails that represent the breaths a person takes each day.

We continue to Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram), the chief seaport of the Pallava kings who ruled over much of south India from as early as the first century BC (total driving time today of 7 hours). Overnight for two nights in the luxurious [GRT Temple Bay Hotel](#), built along a beautiful beach overlooking the Bay of Bengal in Mamallapuram. (B/L/D)

Day 14

Mamallapuram

Mamallapuram, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is recognized for some of the greatest architectural and sculptural achievements in India. At the southern edge of the site, there is a group of five free-standing temples. Four of them were carved out of a single, long granite boulder and are detailed replicas of ancient wooden structures. Built of granite blocks, the Shore Temple is the earliest known example of a stone-built temple in south India. The sculptured rock relief known as Bhagiratha's Penance illustrates the descent of the Ganges, which begins in the heavens as the Milky Way. The celestial river descends from the sky to the summit of Mount Meru, the cosmic axis mountain, and then splashes and flows through the Hindu world. Enjoy a free afternoon to relax poolside with the Bay of Bengal as your backdrop, followed by our farewell dinner. (B/L/D)

Mamallapuram



Daily Itinerary *(cont'd)*

Day 15

Kancheepuram, Transfer to Chennai

This morning, we drive to Kancheepuram (Kanchi). This city has served as a royal capital to great empires for centuries, and this is reflected in its many exceptional temples. The temple of Kailasanathar, dedicated to Shiva, contains splendid carvings of divinities, including a depiction of a dance competition between Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. Ekambareshwarar Temple, in existence since the 6th century AD, is one of the largest temple complexes in India. Varadharaja Perumal Temple was built by the Cholas in 1053 A.D.

Continue to Chennai where we will have day-use rooms (with a late check-out until 9pm) at the GRT Grand Hotel. Dinner is on our own. A late evening departure to the airport begins our flight back home. (B/L)

Day 16

Depart India

Depart on our international flights back home.

PLEASE NOTE: This is a sample itinerary that is typical of our trip offerings. In general, you can expect a very similar program, though days may be swapped depending on availability, opening hours, and other affecting factors.



Kailasanathar Temple

Why Take This Tour?

**See Shiva's
'Going to Bed' ceremony
at Meenakshi Temple**

**Overnights in unique,
charming hotels and
resorts**

**Witness Pongal Festival
ceremonies at several
sanctuaries in
Tamil Nadu**

**Cruise the
Backwaters of Kerala**

**Explore three UNESCO
World Heritage Sites:
Hampi, Mahabalipuram,
and one of the Greatest
Living Chola Temples**

**Limited to 14
participants**

Pre and Post Trip Extensions

Far Horizons offers pre or post extensions for many of our trips. We can also arrange extra nights at the arrival and departure hotel should you wish to arrive early or depart later. Please contact us for details.



Tour Information

Pricing

For current pricing, please visit farhorizons.com and navigate to our trip page.

Inclusions

Price based on double occupancy and includes:

- Internal flights during the trip (if applicable/unless otherwise noted)
- The accompaniment of your scholar throughout the entire trip
- Local English-speaking guide
- Hotel accommodations (3 or 4 stars; or best available based in the area)
- Ground transportation
- Airport transfers for arrivals and departures
- Most meals as noted in the itinerary
- Entry fees to all included sites and museums
- Gratuities to guides, drivers, and restaurant and hotel staff
- Coordination for any private presentations or tours

Trip prices are based on a minimum number of participants. If this minimum number is not met, trip prices are subject to change. Should the prices need to change, Far Horizons will reach out to registered guests to discuss directly.

Single Supplement

Should a roommate be requested and one not be available, the single supplement will be charged.

Exclusions

- International round trip airfare
- A separate donation check of \$150.00 per person to a designated donation project
- Passport or visa fees
- Required vaccines or tests
- Airport or departure taxes
- Alcoholic drinks, beverages or food not included on set menus
- Excess baggage charges
- Personal tips and hotel incidental expenses
- Laundry or other items of a personal nature

Donation Checks

As a tour company that benefits from the cultural and natural riches of our destinations, we have a policy of donating to the scientific and cultural sites and projects which we visit. This has created a bond between Far Horizons and the academic and local communities that has helped us establish an extensive list of lecturers and contacts in each of our destinations. We ask that each participant donate to the noteworthy project we designate. The donation amount is \$150.00 per person. Note that the donation is required as part of your registration for the trip and that it is non-refundable.

Exchange Rate Fluctuations

Prices are based on currency exchange rates keeping below a projected level. While it is unlikely, if the exchange rates should change substantially, Far Horizons reserves the right to charge an additional amount to the trip cost.

Registration

A deposit of \$1000 per person is required along with your registration & health forms, which will be linked in the email confirmation you receive once you pay your deposit on our booking platform. Final payment is due 120 days before departure. Prior to departure, you will be sent a reading list and a tour bulletin containing travel information.



Kanchipuram Temple

Tour Information *(cont'd)*

Cancellation

Cancellations received in writing at least 120 days before departure will receive a refund less a \$500 per person administrative fee. Cancellations received less than 120 days before the departure date will not receive a refund. If for any reason you are unable to complete the trip, Far Horizons will not reimburse any fees. Upon registering for the tour, the purchase of travel protection with both trip cancellation and emergency evacuation is strongly advised. Links to recommended insurance policies will be included in the email you receive confirming receipt of your deposit.

Expectations During Travel

Our trips are designed for flexible, energetic people who like to be active, have a spirit of adventure and a positive attitude. We have designed this trip to be as comfortable as possible, while also aiming to visit some remote or unique sites that other companies do not attempt to include in their itineraries. There may be days where we have very long drives and the conditions of the roads may vary. Hotels and transportation in some remote areas may not be up to western standards. There may be times when no bellhops are available; please pack with the understanding that you need to be able to handle your own luggage at times. Sometimes we may be walking over uneven trails for a mile or more; hiking boots are strongly recommended. Not every meal will be haute cuisine and several lunches may be picnics or box lunches. By maintaining a flexible attitude we will soon be captivated by the beauty of the natural scenery, the hospitality of the local people, and the fascinating sites we will see. Your flexibility and patience will be appreciated.

Air Ticketing

International round trip flights are not included in the cost of the trip. If Far Horizons must change the trip dates or cancel the trip for any reason, Far Horizons is not responsible for any air ticket you may have purchased. Please send your complete air schedule as soon as you have it. NOTE: Please contact Far Horizons if you would like for us to handle your air ticketing.

Private Tours and Talks

The private tours of archaeological sites and talks by specialists are scheduled in advance and include a donation to each. Specialists working at these sites are excited about showing their work to interested enthusiasts. However, please be aware that there may be times when the director or a member of the staff may not be on site when our groups arrive due to other commitments.

Walking and Standing

Far Horizons expects all participants to be physically active and able to walk and climb independently throughout the full touring days. This includes walking over uneven terrain (uphill and downhill) for 2 miles or more at each site. You should expect to be on your feet for much of each day, averaging as much as 5 miles of walking per day. **As such, each participant should be able to walk unaided at a pace of 3 miles per hour for at least an hour at a time, and to stand unsupported for at least 60 minutes.** Bearing this in mind, we suggest that, if you have not already done so, you begin walking several miles every day, ideally including stairs and hills. If you have questions about your ability to keep up with the group or the strenuous nature of this trip, please contact the Far Horizons staff.



Travel Insurance

We strongly recommend that you consider purchasing travel insurance. Should illness or an unforeseen event force you to cancel your travel plans after your final payment or during your trip, it would be doubly unfortunate to incur a significant financial loss. Trip cancellation protection will enable you to be reimbursed for the loss of your payment if you are unable to travel for any of the covered reasons in the "Outline of Coverage" section, or should you have an accident or suffer from any medical conditions during the trip.

Far Horizons offers customized protection plans through Travel Insured International (a Crum & Forster Company) with the following benefits:

- Trip Cancellation and Trip Interruption for covered reasons
- Trip Delay
- Baggage Loss and Baggage Delay
- Emergency Medical Expenses and Emergency Medical Evacuation
- 24-Hour Accidental Death & Dismemberment
- 24-Hour Travel Assistance & Concierge Services
- Option to upgrade to 'Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR)

We recommend reviewing the language in detail so you are aware of specific parameters; Depending on the policy, to waive the Pre-Existing Medical Condition Exclusion or to upgrade to CFAR coverage, the plan must be purchased within 14 to 21 days of the initial trip deposit, full trip cost must be insured, and traveler is medically fit at time of plan purchase. Otherwise, coverage may be purchased at any time prior to departure.

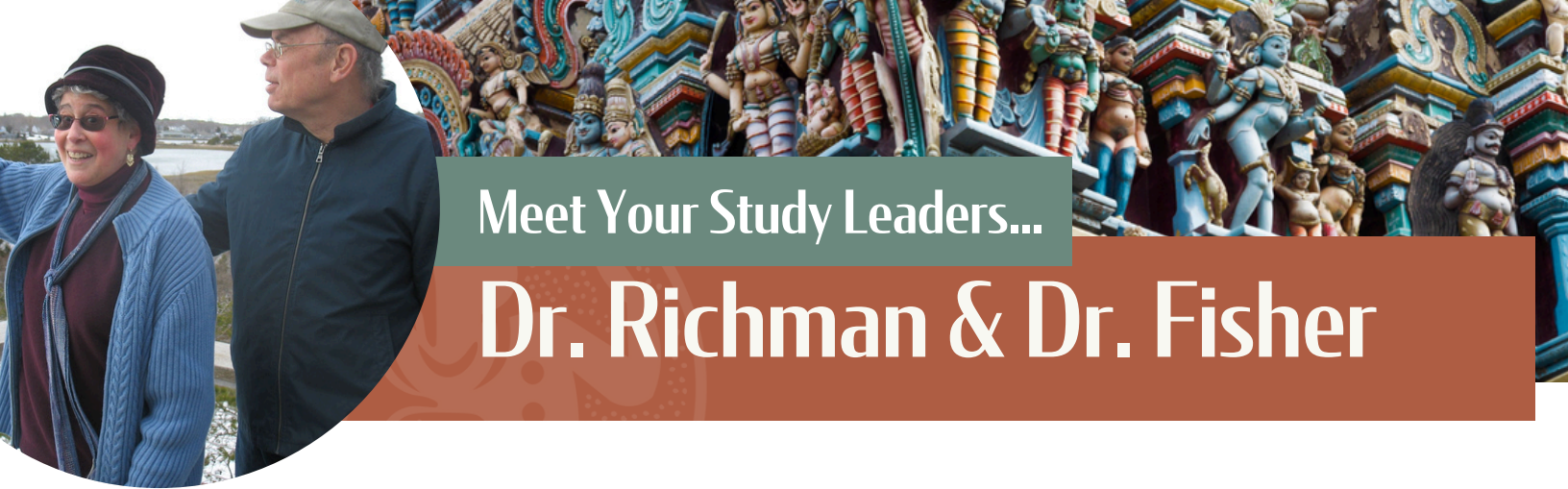
To obtain a personalized quote and/or purchase a plan through Far Horizons/Travel Insured International, simply click [HERE](#). For specific questions regarding the Worldwide Protector Plan, please contact Travel Insured International's Customer Care Center at 1-800-243-3174 or by email at customercare@travelinsured.com, and refer to Far Horizons' account number: 54070.

Itinerary Changes

Changes in our itinerary, accommodations, and transportation schedules may occur while traveling. While we are committed to keeping as close to the published details as possible, sometimes it is simply not possible. Weather events, government affairs, or other factors out of our control sometimes come into play. A good book to read as well as patience, flexible attitude, and a sense of humor are essential.



Sacred cows



Meet Your Study Leaders...

Dr. Richman & Dr. Fisher

Paula Richman graduated with a PhD in South Asian Languages and Civilizations from the University of Chicago, and is Emerita William H. Danforth Professor in the Department of Religion, Oberlin College. She has won awards for her teaching skills, including Distinguished Teaching Award. Dr. Richman is the author and editor of many articles and books, including "Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia" and "Performing the Ramayana Tradition". She speaks and reads several languages, including Sanskrit, and has traveled throughout India for more than three decades. Paula travels and teaches with her husband, Dr. Michael Fisher. This husband-and-wife team brings a broad knowledge of the history and religions of India, plus exceptional teaching skills, that makes them ideal study leaders.

Michael H. Fisher received his PhD in History from the University of Chicago and is the Robert S. Danforth Professor of History, Emeritus, at Oberlin College. Dr. Fisher has been traveling to India since 1971 and has published many articles and books on the history of that country, including "A Short History of the Mughal Empire", "An Environmental History of India", and "Across the Three Seas: Travellers Tales from Mughal India". He is the featured lecturer in [The Great Course series: "A History of India"](#).



Lotus Majal

What People Are Saying About...

Dr. Richman & Dr. Fisher

“Paula and Michael are a first-class team, obviously deeply enamored of their respective areas of expertise and great teachers to boot. I’d love to travel with them again and hope you will let them design a future India trip.”

– BARBARA RACHKO

Journeys That Change Your Perspective

✦ **PHD-LEADERS: Your Scholar Is Your Travel Companion**

We place scholars at the heart of each journey, accompanying you throughout your trip. Our experts transform passive tourism into immersive intellectual adventures, offering insights into ancient civilizations through narratives shared over meals, during site explorations, and in evening discussions.



✦ **EXCLUSIVE ACCESS: Venture Beyond the Velvet Ropes**

We negotiate entry to restricted archaeological sites, private artifact collections, and untold cultural stories, creating experiences that transcend traditional tourism and reveal hidden historical wonders.



✦ **TRANSFORMATIVE TRAVEL: Artifacts to Epiphanies**

We believe the most meaningful souvenirs are invisible. Our expertly guided explorations of ancient sites catalyze deeper understandings of human ingenuity and cultural complexity, creating moments of clarity that forever change how you see past civilizations and contemporary society.



✦ **KINDRED COMMUNITY: Small Groups, Lasting Bonds**

We foster intimate interactions where archaeological passion creates unexpected connections. Through shared discoveries at remote ruins, animated discussions over local cuisine, and collective moments of wonder, our travelers forge friendships that extend far beyond the journey's end.



✦ **BESPOKE JOURNEYS: Crafted, Never Common**

We architect each trip as a masterwork of scholarly travel, balancing intellectual depth with comfort and discovery. Our itineraries reflect research, planning, and refinement to ensure every moment offers something meaningful for the curious mind that standard tours simply cannot deliver.

✦ **LEGACY OF EXCELLENCE: Countless Returning Travelers**

Our 40+ years of archaeological exploration and support for preservation have fostered a deeply personal relationship with our guests, resulting in an exceptionally high return rate that speaks to our individualized attention, and the lasting connections we create with each member of our travel family.

READY TO TRAVEL? SOUTH INDIA

WITH DR PAULA RICHMAN and DR MICHAEL FISHER

Email with Questions

journeys@farhorizons.com

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