

# SOUTH INDIA

January 30 to February 14, 2009

## IONS CIRCLE MEMBER TRIP



Join IONS Circle members on a journey to the ancient land of India at this time of global shift and transformation. This is a special opportunity to travel with other like minded IONS members. As we travel we will share in conversation, pondering the larger questions of life and the universe, and open ourselves to the archetypes of Hinduism and Buddhism. Our Indian leader is Shantum Seth, charismatic teacher and well known guide, who will bridge the cultures and through his contacts has arranged for us to meet with living masters and teachers along the way. We will be guests at traditional ashrams, holy sites and extraordinary ancient temples, including the 7<sup>th</sup> century Mahabalipuram temples along the sea shore near Chennai which are carved from monolith rocks.

We will visit several contemporary spiritual sites including the Sri Sri Ravi Shankar ashram, the head quarters of the Theosophical society, the Pondicherry ashram of Sri Aurobindo and the planned transnational utopian community of Auroville. At Sri Ramana Maharshi's ashram we take a full moon meditation walk around holy Mount Arunachala with local pilgrims.

On our way, we visit service initiatives and explore the question, "What is our work in the world?". In Madurai visit the famous temple to the beautiful 'fish eyed' Goddess, Meenakshi. Every night a procession takes an idol of Shiva to her chamber for the night and is carried back early the next morning.

Rest at the historic places of gentle natural beauty and experience ayurveda healing practices that originated in India thousands of years ago, and is considered "the mother of all medicines". The area we are visiting is known for its ayurveda spas. We will explore Indian astrology, and take a relaxed, overnight boat ride along the backwaters of Kerala, viewing the village life of rural India along the waters edge.

**Note:** This will be an exceptional chance to see India that few travelers have the opportunity to see experience. One on one meetings with Gurus are being arranged through unique personal contacts. Most of the people who we hope to meet are accessible to the masses at large but a private "darshan" is difficult to arrange...we have managed to obtain assurances of private one on one meetings with some rather marvelous people. We will take time for meaningful conversations. This is a very personal itinerary which will be paced so that you can feel, as well as see, south India. (Limited to 15 persons)

### ITINERARY:

#### **Day 1, 2, January 30, 31, Friday, Saturday: Bangalore**

Arrival Bangalore airport and transfer to the guest rooms at the ashram of Sri Sri Ravi Shanker. Time to rest after your long international flight. You may want to visit one of the city's

numerous spas for an unforgettably relaxing experience based on the



# SOUTH INDIA

January 30 to February 14, 2009

ancient Indian medical processes of Ayurveda. The town of Bangalore is home to the ashram of His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, a universally revered spiritual and humanitarian leader. We will have a personal audience with His Holiness, who is a multi-faceted social activist and whose initiatives include peace negotiations and counseling in conflict zones around the world and numerous humanitarian initiatives. The city of Bangalore, which is now a hub for high technology development and outsourcing, allegedly got its name when an old woman living nearby served a humble dish of boiled beans to a lost Hoysala king and it became known as the 'town of boiled beans' in the early 16th century! **Ashram Guest House (B,L,D)**

## **Day 3, February 1, Sunday: Bangalore/Madurai**

The town of Madurai, packed with pilgrims and tourists alike, is famous for the awe inspiring Meenakshi temple which forms the heart of the 2500 year old city. We will visit the temple, a final contender as one of the seven wonders of the world, seething with activity from dawn to dusk. Our trip would not be complete without a visit to the Gandhi Memorial Museum, to pay homage to one of India's greatest leaders for peace. **Hotel (B,L,D)**



## **Day 4, February 2, Monday: Madurai**

Today we visit the eye hospital founded by the famous Doctor "V", whose selfless work in the field of optical surgery has brought hope to many visually challenged poor people. Aravind Eye Hospital, the world's largest and most effective centre conducting more than 90,000 sight restoring surgeries each year, was started by one man's vision of bringing eyesight to the poor. In the afternoon we drive a short distance to visit Gandhigram, a rural education hub following Gandhian principles. Gandhigram, located in the shadow of the Sirumalai mountains is famous for its medicinal plants. We will learn about the uses of the many medicinal plants in the area. **Hotel (B,L,D)**

## **Day 5, February 3, Tuesday: Madurai to Thekkady**

For those who know the southern part of India the very sound of the word Thekkady conjures up images of elephants, unending chains of hills and spice-scented plantations. In the Periyar forest of Thekkady is one of the finest wildlife reserves in India and spread across the entire district are picturesque plantations and hill towns that hold great opportunities for treks and mountain walks. We will leisurely explore cardamom, pepper, coffee and tea plantations, tea factories, tribal settlements and the surrounding hill regions. Our traditional, luxurious hotel tonight is charming with its individual thatched cottages. Ayurveda spa treatments are exceptional here. **Spice Village Hotel (B,L,D)**



## **Day 6, February 4, Wednesday: Thekkady to Kumarakom**

Today we board houseboats, called "Ketuvallams", two to four persons per boat, and comfortably ride and view the rural life of quaint little towns that are like the Venice of India! Nowhere else will you find such a unique crisscrossing network of canals on which thatch covered country boats punt along leisurely. Along the way, through the backwaters, we pass the most entrancing bits of scenery with palm-lined banks, quiet water-bound villages and little boats taking the local people to and fro-everything framed in green. Dinner aboard our boats. **Overnight on air conditioned houseboats (B,L,D)**

# SOUTH INDIA

January 30 to February 14, 2009



## **Day 7, February 5, Thursday: Allepey to Kollam**

We leave our houseboats in Kollam in the southern gateway to Kerala's backwaters. Surrounded by coconut palms and cashew plantations on the edge of Ashtamudi Lake. We will see the Mannarshala snake temple with 30,000 images of snake gods. Childless women come here for blessings and return for thanksgiving when they have borne a child. A leisurely dinner. **Hotel (B,L,D)**

## **Day 8, February 6, Friday: Amritapuri**

This bustling Keralan market town houses a great treasure. The Hugging Mother ashram... better known as Amritapuri. We will have an audience with Ammaji

herself...one of the greatest living gurus of our time. Ammaji, her devotees say is the embodiment of Devi, the divine mother of the universe. At her ashram in this small fishing village by the Arabian sea people come to experience her unique darshan in which she holds each devotees in her arms like a mother embracing a child. Dinner at an excellent local restaurant. **Hotel (B,L,D)**



## **Day 9, February 7, Saturday: Flight to Chennai**

In busy, sprawling Chennai we visit the headquarters of the Theosophical Society. The Society is a worldwide body whose primary object is Universal Brotherhood based on the realization that life, and all its diverse forms, human and non-human, is indivisibly One. It imposes no belief on its members, who are united by a common search for Truth and desire to learn the meaning and purpose of existence by engaging themselves in study, reflection, purity of life and loving service. We will be met here for discussion and a leisurely walk the beautiful grounds. In the evening, after dinner, we will have the privilege to visit the Kalakshetra...a private dance academy and a vital centre of training and performance for classical Indian dance. **Hotel (B,L,D)**

## **Day 10, February 8, Sunday: Chennai / Sri Bhagwan Oneness University**

Another important Guru who we will be meeting near Chennai is Bhagavan. Sri Bhagavan (who used to be called Kalki or Kalki Bhagavan by devotees however he prefers to be called just Bhagavan). He is the founder of the Golden Age Foundation and Oneness University, and is considered by his devotees to be the living Avatar capable of giving enlightenment to the whole of mankind.

We also plan to meet the well known Yoga guru AG Mohan. Their teachings are rooted firmly in practices tailored for the individual, using sound and chanting, and integration of breath and movement as spiritual and therapeutic tools. Later in the day we will visit the Kapleshwara Temple in Chennai, one of the very oldest living temples in India dedicated to the Lord Shiva. **Hotel (B,L,D)**

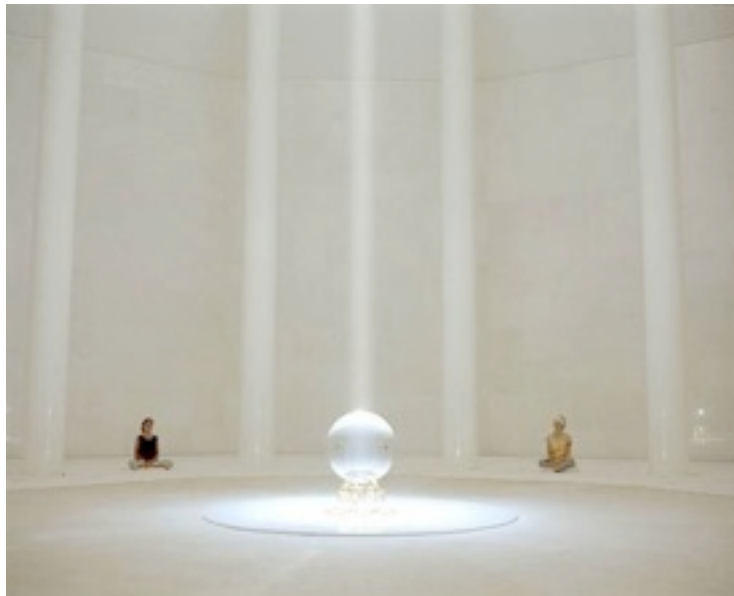
## **Day 11, February 9, Monday: Chennai to Tiruvanmalai**

The small unassuming town of Tiruvanmalai is something of a hidden gem in a region overwhelmed by significant temples. We will visit Sri Ramana Maharishi's Ashram, the Arunachaleswar temple, and Arunachala hill, also known as Girivalam. At full moon we will join (optional) with the pilgrims who circumnavigate the base of the mountain in the moonlight for blessings, and to honor Shiva.

# SOUTH INDIA

January 30 to February 14, 2009

Ashram guest rooms (B,L,D)



**Day 12, February 10, Tuesday:**

**Tiruvanmalai to Pondicherry**

We travel today to the charming coastal town of Pondicherry with its French influence. Afternoon at leisure upon arrival to relax or explore on your own. Dinner. **Hotel (B,L,D)**

**Day 13, February 11, Wednesday:**

**Pondicherry / Oroville**

We visit Shri Aurobindo's ashram which propounds spiritual tenets that represent a synthesis of yoga and modern science. However, the key focus of our visit here is to see and experience Auroville...an experiment in international living where people of all nationalities and creeds are invited to live in harmony. We will visit Auroville, this wonderful community, as well as meet with creative and special

people who epitomize the spirit of the place. We will take time to meditate in the ethereal crystal dome. **Hotel (B,L,D)**

**Day 14, February 12, Thursday: Pondicherry to Mahabalipuram**

The coastal village of Mahabalipuram, now known as Mammalapuram, has been named a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Consisting of seven temples by the seashore, it is easily one of the most spectacular repositories of 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century stone carving in the South. A farewell dinner, and discussion of what we have seen and experienced during our time in India. **Hotel (B,L,D)**

**Day 15, February 13, Friday:  
Mahabalipuram to Chennai /  
flights to USA**

On the way from Mahabalipuram to Chennai we will see Dakshinachitra a cultural centre and arts complex, as well as a breeding farm for crocodiles, alligators, and turtles, a snake farm where anti venom is produced, and an interesting 7th century rock cut shrine called the Tiger Cave. Flights home. **(B)**



**Day 16, February 14,  
Saturday.** Arrive USA.

# SOUTH INDIA

January 30 to February 14, 2009

## LEADER:



**Shantum Seth** is one of the foremost teacher and guide in India. A Buddhist scholar and practitioner, he is an ordained Dharma teacher in the Zen tradition of the Vietnamese Master, Thich Nhat Hanh. He has been leading pilgrimages "In the Footsteps of the Buddha" since 1988 and in the past few years has expanded to lead pilgrimages which explore the rich history of India intricately intertwined with its many religions and deep spirituality. Shantum has coordinated programs on peace, cultural, and environmental issues with the United Nations Development Program for 15 years. He is also involved with inter faith dialogue. He has contributed to a number of books and documentaries/films (including for the BBC/Discovery) and presently teaches on a weekly TV program on national TV in India, and also worked on the Hollywood production entitled 'Buddha'. We are fortunate to have Shantum as he brings a vast knowledge of India, its culture and traditions and of Buddhism and Hinduism. Shantum Seth lives in Noida with his wife and two daughters.

**COST:** \$7,990 without international air. Single room supplement \$2,700.

**INCLUDED:** Hotels(double occupancy); all in country transportation per itinerary; all meals except one; monument entrance fees; bottled water; Shantum Seth's teachings; pre-departure preparation materials.

**NOT INCLUDED:** International air; items of a personal nature; alcoholic beverages; excursions not on this itinerary; ayurveda and spa treatments; gratuities to Indian leader, guides; drivers (optional, yet customary); travel insurance (strongly recommended, information will be sent upon registration).

Note: This itinerary is subject to change at their sole discretion of the organizers, to accommodate circumstances beyond their control, or to enhance the experience of the travelers.

**For more information or to reserve a space: Call 1-800-353-2276 or 415-332-0682**