

**Encountering Religions: visit to India**  
**26<sup>th</sup> July – 9<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> August 2010**

**Trip, principally for teachers and open to anyone with an interest in the religions of India.**

**Led by: Pamela Draycott.** Pamela has been involved in leading trips to India with Indus/Soul of India for 10 years. She is highly experienced in the field of religious education having been a teacher and having worked for many years with RE Today and now as the Curriculum Adviser for RE and Citizenship with the Advisory Service in Kent.

**Who is it for:** The trip gives teachers and others working in education, as well as anyone with an interest in India, the opportunity to encounter the vibrancy and variety of the great religious traditions of the sub-continent.

**Outline:** Starting in **Delhi**, there is a focus on Islam, Sikhism, Jainism and Hinduism (with opportunity to spend time in the footsteps of the great Mahatma Gandhi) before moving on by sleeper train (an experience in itself) to **Varanasi** on the banks of the sacred river Ganga (Ganges). The aarti ceremony and the dawn boat ride on the Ganges is something that will stay with you for a very long time. Whilst in Varanasi there is an opportunity to visit nearby **Sarnath** and to encounter something of Buddhist history, belief and practice in India.

From Varanasi on to **Kolkata** (Calcutta) to visit a girls' school with an impressive outreach programme as well as sites connected with Mother Teresa. We will also encounter something more of Hinduism and Jainism in this sprawling city as well as shop for bargains in the 'new market'.

After Kolkata comes **Chennai** (Madras) to touch base with the long-standing Christian community as well as more aspects of Hindu belief and practice.

We will visit the silk city of **Kanchipuram** (Varanasi is also good for silk) on the way to **Tiruvannamalai** where we will spend a day in the Sri Ramana Maharishi ashram – an experience not to be missed. For those energetic enough we will take part in an early morning parikrama (walk) around the sacred hill of Arunachala (13km) in company with Saivite pilgrims.

After Tiruvannamalai we journey to **Mahabalipuram** to see the 10<sup>th</sup> century Shore Temple and rock carvings (a World Heritage Site). From there the choice is to return to Chennai for a homeward flight or to stay in Mahabalipuram for a couple of days rest and relaxation at the 'Ideal Beach Resort' before returning to **Chennai** for the flight back.

**Some further info:**

Pamela will provide outline information of each of the places visited and background information of the religions encountered.

The service of English speaking guides is available throughout.

Hotels (3\*-4\*) are good quality, clean and have air conditioning.

The cost of the trip includes return direct flights to and from Heathrow, an internal flight, two sleeper train experiences and coach travel as well as dinner, bed and breakfast. Prices stand at £2195 for the main tour, and £155 for the extension. The single room supplement is £561 and £69 respectively. (You will need to pay a deposit to the company and the rest within three months of travelling.)

You will need money for group tips (- in 2 halves – one at the beginning (after you have changed money into rupees) and one part way through – to cover baggage handling, guides, drivers etc – tipping is a way of life in India - £140 altogether. In addition you will need money for personal tips, for drinks (you will need to buy bottled water), for lunch and for the many souvenirs and artefacts you will buy. You can buy artefacts for a few rupees or spend hundreds of dollars/pounds on a silk carpet or bedspread. Prices are rising steeply in India and the pace of economic and social change is gathering momentum.

You will need to have travel insurance (either your own or it can be arranged through the company) and you have to get a visa which again you can arrange yourself or the company can do it at an extra cost.

The programme has still to be finalised but what is here gives you a good indication of what you will experience. We could make some minor alterations at the time of the visit to take advantage of local circumstances and the knowledge of the guide.

If you want to express interest in possibly coming on the trip with Pamela then please give her your contact details or contact her on:

07825 013356 or [pamela.draycott@kent.gov.uk](mailto:pamela.draycott@kent.gov.uk)

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**Sun 26 July 2010** 1720 departure from London Heathrow on direct British Airways flight to Delhi.

**Mon 27 July** 0615 arrival in **Delhi**, and transfer to Claridges hotel, one of the loveliest hotels in Lutyens-designed New Delhi [www.claridges-hotels.com/Delhi](http://www.claridges-hotels.com/Delhi). Afternoon visits to

- **Jama Masjid** (largest mosque in India, built by Emperor Shah Jahan and completed in 1656),
- **Chandi Chowk** (one of the oldest and liveliest street markets in Old Delhi),
- **Sri Digambara Lal Mandir** (Jain Temple – the oldest in Delhi, completed in the same year as the Jama Masjid) and
- **Gurdwara Sis Ganj** (Sikh temple – commemorating the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur).

**Tues 28 July** Visits to **Raj Ghat** and nearby **Gandhi Museum**.

The Raj Ghat is the place of Mahatma Gandhi's cremation, a simple black marble memorial surrounded by gardens. The nearby Gandhi Museum has a rich collection, and a wonderfully idiosyncratic bookshop.

2000 departure on New Delhi Islamupur Magadh Express overnight sleeper.

**Wed 29 July** 0740 arrival in Mughalserai. Onward (1 hour approx) drive to **Varanasi**. Stay at Clarks Hotel. [www.clarkshotels.com](http://www.clarkshotels.com). Afternoon visit to nearby **Sarnath**, where the Buddha began to turn the wheel of enlightenment. As well as a small and wonderfully rich museum, containing the original of India's most famous symbol, the Ashokan pillar topped by four lions, Sarnath has highly atmospheric Buddha vihara ruins and a huge stupa.

**Evening aarti ceremony by sacred river Ganga.** This nightly homage to Ganga Ma is a crowded cacophony of drums and bells, backdrop to a remarkably peaceful laying of lights on the river.

**Thur 30 July** Early morning boat ride on the sacred river Ganga

– an experience not to be missed. Further visits to temples and ghats in the old city. Afternoon at leisure and 2040 departure from Mughalserai on Kalka Howrah mail overnight sleeper train.

**Fri 31 July** 0725 arrival at Howrah station, Calcutta (Kolkata). Stay at Park Hotel

[www.theparkhotels.com/park/calcutta/hotels/index.html](http://www.theparkhotels.com/park/calcutta/hotels/index.html)

Morning visit to Loretto convent school. [www.loreto.in/cal-loretoaldah/index.htm](http://www.loreto.in/cal-loretoaldah/index.htm). – a highly regarded girls' school with an impressive

outreach programme.

Afternoon visits in Kolkata, including to the **Ramakrishna temple** (Belur Math): The headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission in India, from where the philosophy of Ramakrishna as expounded to the West by his famous



disciple Vivekananda at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions is taught and practised. The Ramakrishna Mission is one of India's largest charitable organisations. [www.ramakrishna.org/rmk\\_ordr.htm](http://www.ramakrishna.org/rmk_ordr.htm).

**Sat 1 Aug** Visit the **Kali Temple** and **Mother Teresa's Home**. The Kali Temple is the heart of old Calcutta, and according to legend the founding point of the city. It is a difficult place for Westerners to visit, being crowded and noisy, and sometimes thick with the blood of goat sacrifices, and Kali's image is fierce, but Kali represents an essential aspect of the feminine in the divine. Mother Teresa's original Home for the Destitute and Dying was established in the grounds of the temple. <http://kalighat.jagaddhatri.com>.

**Sun 2 Aug** Further visits including the huge 19<sup>th</sup> century **Digambara Jain temple** [www.kolkata.org.uk/religious-places/pareshnath-jain-temple.html](http://www.kolkata.org.uk/religious-places/pareshnath-jain-temple.html), **St. John's church**, dating from 1787, and with an evocative "Black Hole of Calcutta" memorial, and a world-famous graveyard and the **Victoria Memorial**. A powerful reminder of empire! [www.culturalindia.net/monuments/victoria-memorial.html](http://www.culturalindia.net/monuments/victoria-memorial.html).

**Mon 3 Aug** 0830 Kingfisher flight to **Chennai**, arriving 1025. Stay at Radha Regent Hotel (one of our favourite hotels, with a truly outstanding restaurant). Visits in Chennai, including to the **San Tome cathedral**: big Catholic gothic cathedral with relics of St. Thomas, the **Portuguese Luz Church** – the oldest in Chennai, dating from 1516; a beautiful and intimate building commemorating the rescue of shipwrecked sailors by the Virgin Mary, and **Kapaleeshwara temple** – a great Saivite temple dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, with magnificent gopurams

**Tues 4 Aug** Visit to **St. Thomas Mount** and Little Mount. There is a very strong tradition that "Doubting Thomas" visited India and lived here for many years before his martyrdom. St. Thomas Mount is crowned by another 16<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese church, while **Little Mount** is a place of pilgrimage for the cave where St. Thomas lived.



**Wed 5 Aug** All day drive to **Tiruvannamalai**, via the temple and silk city of **Kanchipuram**. Kanchipuram is worth a visit not just for the Saravana Bhavan restaurant, but also the wonderful silk showrooms, and many important temples. Bypassing the two largest temples, we visit instead the **Kailasnath temple**, which dates from the 7<sup>th</sup> century and is rich in exquisite carvings. Being more of an archaeological site, it is more accessible to non-Hindus than many South Indian temples. Stay at Sparsa Resort [www.sparsaresorts.com/tiruvannamalai.html](http://www.sparsaresorts.com/tiruvannamalai.html).

**Thur 6 Aug** All day visit to the **Sri Ramana Maharishi ashram**, Tiruvannamalai. Sri Ramana remains one of the most important saints of the modern era, and his realisation ("I am that") inspires many followers. The ashram welcomes devotees from all over the world, as well as sympathetic enquirers. There are many places for meditation throughout the ashram, and you will be welcome to eat, sitting on the floor,

with the many residents and visitors.  
[www.sriramanamaharshi.org/arunachala.html](http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/arunachala.html).



**Fri 7 Aug** For the energetic, an early morning parikrama of the sacred hill of Arunachala (13km) in company with other Saivite pilgrims. The hill represents the presence of Lord Siva. Visit the great **Arunachaleswar temple**, one of the largest and most sacred in India. <http://tiruvannamalai.tripod.com/temple.htm>.

**Sat 8 Aug** All day drive back to **Chennai** via the 10<sup>th</sup> century **Shore Temple and rock carvings**, now a World Heritage Site, at **Mahabalipuram**. [www.mahabalipuram.co.in](http://www.mahabalipuram.co.in). Return to Radha Regent Hotel.

**Sun 9 Aug** 0805 departure on direct British Airways flight to London, arriving Heathrow at 1420.

#### **Optional beach extension:**

**Sat 8 Aug** Drive to **Mahabalipuram** to see the 10<sup>th</sup> century **Shore Temple and rock carvings**, now a World Heritage Site. Stay at eg Ideal Beach Resort. [www.idealresort.com/bprofile.htm](http://www.idealresort.com/bprofile.htm).

**Sun 9 Aug** The **Ideal Beach Resort** fronts onto a beautiful sandy beach, and its outdoor restaurant is deservedly popular. A perfect place for a couple of days' relaxation. Alternatively, to explore further the World Heritage history of Mahabalipuram, simply take an auto-rickshaw back into town.

**Mon 10 Aug** Late afternoon drive back to Chennai (c. 2 hours). Return to the Radha Regent Hotel.

**Tues 11 Aug** 0805 departure on direct British Airways flight to London, arriving Heathrow at 1420.