

TRAVEL WITH FRIENDS IN 2014



Sri Meenakshi Temple in Madurai, Tamil Nadu

# The Living Arts of Southern India

TAMIL NADU

with Julian Droogan  
1–18 January 2014 (18 days)



Renaissance  
Tours



## Tour leader



**Dr Julian Droogan**

Julian is a specialist in South Asian archaeology and comparative religions who graduated with a PhD from the University of Sydney. He has been researching the archaeology, art history and religions of India for the past fifteen years.

Julian's tours combine a focus on the spectacular archaeology and history of India with an understanding of the rich religious, artistic and architectural traditions of the subcontinent.

## The Living Arts of Southern India

Follow the sacred temple cities of Southern India in Tamil Nadu, enjoying the subtle arts of traditional dance and music en route.

Tropical, spicy, chaotic – Southern India is a world apart from the dryer, more expansive north. Custodian of India's most vibrant Hindu arts, temples and cultures, the south is a visual and culinary delight. On this tour visit some of the great holy cities such as Tanjor, Madurai and former French colonial Pondicherry.

As well as sublime visual arts such as the Chola bronzes, attend some of the local religious festivals and experience traditional south Indian theatre, dance and classical music.

### At a glance

- Visit spectacular palaces and temples
- Attend local religious and cultural festivals
- See French colonial architecture in Pondicherry
- Visit local artists' colonies
- Explore the Chettinad history and legacy



# Itinerary

## Wed 1 January 2014 Australia – Chennai (Madras)

Depart Australia on Singapore Airlines flights to Singapore where you connect with flight SQ528 to Chennai arriving late in the evening. Transfer to the hotel.

Chennai is known as the 'Gateway to the South.' Tamil Nadu is a historic land where arts and culture flourished and gifted this city with a rich cultural heritage and monumental buildings.

## Thu 2 Jan Chennai

Morning at leisure. After a welcome briefing and lunch with Julian Droogan and fellow travellers, depart the hotel to visit the rich archaeology and art collection of the Madras Museum which also houses the Victoria Art Gallery.

Continue to the Valluvar Kottam memorial honouring the Tamil poet and his classic work, the Thirukural. A weaver by trade, Thiruvalluvar lived around the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC in what is present-day Chennai and wrote this famed poem, providing a moral code for millions of followers.

Time permitting, enjoy the views from St. Thomas Mount, the site where St. Thomas was believed to have been martyred. St Thomas Cathedral was originally built by the Portuguese in 1504, then rebuilt in neo-Gothic style in 1893. In the basement is a chapel housing the tomb of St Thomas the Apostle (Doubting Thomas), who it is said brought Christianity to the subcontinent in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. **B L D**

## Fri 3 Jan Chennai – Mahabalipuram

Depart Chennai after breakfast and travel to Mahabalipuram. Just outside Chennai visit the Cholamandal Artists' Village. This four-hectare artists' cooperative gives visitors the chance to both see and purchase contemporary Indian art direct from the source.

The next stop will be at the Dakshina Chitra, an exciting cross-cultural living museum of art, architecture, lifestyles, crafts and performing arts of South India. There is also an Art Gallery which was established by the Madras Craft Foundation with the purpose to bridge the past with the future and to promote and encourage contemporary art and design.

Arrive at the hotel late in the afternoon. The highly regarded Mahabalipuram Dance Festival\* is held every year in January. Subject to the final festival program attend a performance tonight.

Dinner at the hotel. **B L D**

## Sat 4 Jan Mahabalipuram

Start your exploration of Mahabalipuram with a visit to the Shore Temple, which symbolises the heights of Pallava architecture and the maritime ambitions of the Pallava kings. Its small size belies its excellent proportion and the supreme quality of the carvings, many of which have been eroded into vaguely Impressionist embellishments. Originally constructed in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, it was later rebuilt by Narasimhavarman II and houses two central shrines to Shiva.

Arunja's Penance is a relief carving on the face of a huge rock depicts animals, deities and other semi-divine creatures as well as fables from the Hindu Panchatantra books. The panel (30m x 12m) is divided by a huge perpendicular fissure that's skilfully encompassed into the sculpture.

After lunch, visit the Five Rathas. Carved from single pieces of rock, the Five Rathas are low-lying monoliths that huddle in more ancient subtlety than grandeur. Each temple is dedicated to a Hindu god and named for one of the Pandavas, the five hero-brothers of the epic Mahabharata, plus their common wife, Draupadi.

There will be time to visit the local sculpture's workshops, where traditional Hindu sculptures are still prepared according to ancient Vedic styles. Tonight return to the Mahabalipuram Dance Festival\*.

**B L**

## Sun 5 Jan Mahabalipuram – Tiruvannamalai

Today travel from Mahabalipuram to Tiruvannamalai. A stop will be made at the Rajagiri Fort and Krishnagiri Fort in Gingee. Though the construction of the hill fort at Gingee is traditionally ascribed to one Anada Kon, a local chief, it came into prominence with the rise of Nayakas of Gingee in early 17<sup>th</sup> century.



Three of the Five Rathas at Mahabalipuram



Shore temple, Mahabalipuram

The Muslim sultans of Bijapur, the Moguls, the Marathas and other have always recognised the strategic importance of the fort and fought hard to retain it. Gingee was the seat of Maratha power for few months during the wars with the Moguls.

Arrive in Tiruvannamalai late in the afternoon. The small, unassuming town, Tiruvannamalai is something of a hidden gem in a region overwhelmed by significant temples. Flanked by Mt Arunachala, it is an important Shaivite town where the god Shiva is revered as Arunachaleswar, an aspect of creative cosmic fire. **B L D**

### Mon 6 Jan Tiruvannamalai

The Arunachaleswar temple is often awash in golden flames and the roasting scent of burning ghee, as befits the fire incarnation of Shiva, the Destroyer of the Universe. Covering some 10 hectares, this vast temple is one of the largest in India.

After lunch, circumambulate Mt Arunachala by bus and visit some of the surrounding lingam shrines. **B L D**

### Tue 7 Jan Tiruvannamalai – Pondicherry

Today journey from Tiruvannamalai to Pondicherry. With its seafront promenade, wide boulevards, enduring pockets of French culture and architecture, and a popular ashram, charming Pondicherry is unlike anywhere else in South India.

In the afternoon enjoy a walk along the seafront promenade and enjoy dinner in one of the many French restaurants. **B L D**

### Wed 8 Jan Pondicherry

During a relaxing day in Pondicherry enjoy a heritage walk through the French quarter, visit the Botanical Gardens and French Cathedrals such as Notre Dame de Anges and the Sacred Heart Church. **B**

### Thu 9 Jan Pondicherry – Chidambaram

Morning drive from Pondicherry to Chidambaram. Nestled among ancient temples and architectural splendours, Chidambaram is a small temple town where traditional Indian ritual life is preserved in all its aesthetic beauty.

In the afternoon visit the Chidambaram temple which is one of the five holiest Shiva temples, each representing one of the five natural elements; Chidambaram represents akasha (aether).

It is an ancient and historic temple dedicated to Lord Shiva Nataraja and Lord Govindaraja Perumal and is one of the few temples where both the Shaivite and Vaishnavite deities are enshrined in one place.



Tonight attend the Pradosham Festival\* which is celebrated in honour of the god Shiva. A whole year for men is said to be a single day for the Gods. Six poojas (rituals of worship) are performed in a day at the sanctum sanctorum, while six anointing ceremonies are performed over the whole year for the other principal deity - lord Nataraja (Vishu). **B L**

### Fri 10 Jan Chidambaram – Thahnjavur (Tanjore)

Today travel from Chidambaram to Thahnjavur (Tanjore). A first stop will be made at Gangaikondacholampuram temple. The Chola emperor Rajendra I (1012–1044) built the temple dedicated to Lord Shiva with an imposing gopuram that can be seen miles around. It is a replica of the Brihadeeswara temple at Thanjavur built by his father. There are many beautiful sculptures on the walls of the temple and its enclosures. It was built in commemoration of his victory over the kingdom abutting the Ganges.

A further stop is made at Airavatesvara located in the town of Darasuram. This temple, built by Rajaraja Chola II in the 12<sup>th</sup> century is considered as one of the Great Living Chola Temples. It is dedicated to Lord Shiva. Shiva is here known as Airavateshvara, because he was worshipped at this temple by Airavata, the white elephant of the king of the gods, Indra.

Late afternoon arrival at the hotel. Thanjavur was the ancient capital of the Chola kings, whose origins go back to the beginning of the Christian era. The Cholas' era of empire building was between AD 850 and 1270; at the height of their power, they controlled most of the Indian peninsula. The stylised bronze work for which they were famous is still produced in the town. **B L D**

### Sat 11 Jan Thanjavur

After breakfast visit the Brihadishwara temple which is the crowning glory of Chola temple architecture. The temple was commissioned in 1010 by Rajaraja (whose name literally means 'king of kings'), a well-regarded monarch so organised he had the names and addresses of all his dancers, musicians, barbers and poets inscribed into the temple wall. These temples were the prototypes for buildings as far away as Angkor Wat in Cambodia.

Later in the day explore the Royal Palace and Museum. Enter the main hall of the palace, and continue to the elegantly faded Durbar Hall (Royal Court). An incredible profusion of murals erupts here, unrestored and elegantly faded, bursting with geometric designs, scenes of Hindu legend and a flock of vaguely-European-yet-almost-Indian cherubs. **B L**



Sun 12 Jan

Thahnjavur – Kanadukathan

Today journey from Thahnjavur to Kanadukathan. Stop in Sittannaval, a small Jain cave temple that conceals magnificent vegetable-oil frescoes. Note the Eden-like garden paradise painted on the main ceiling, which conceals fish, mythical sea monsters and beautiful water maidens. There are also interesting megalithic stone remains in the surrounding landscape.

Time permitting a stop will be made at the Pudukkottai Royal Palace and Museum before arriving in Kanadukathan located in the Chettinad region of southern Tamil Nadu. **B L D**

Mon 13 Jan

Kanadukathan

Spend the day exploring the Chettinad history and legacy. Chettinad is the homeland of the Nattukottai Chettiars, a prosperous banking and business community. Chettinad is rich in cultural heritage, art and architecture. It is well known for its houses, embellished with marble and Burma teak, wide courtyards, spacious rooms, and for its 18<sup>th</sup> century mansions.

Originally built by early Tamil dynasties like the Cholas, the temples of Chettinad stand testimony to the spiritual beliefs of its denizens. Each temple has its own tank called oorani where water lilies are grown and used for holy rituals. Even today much of Chettinad's daily tidings are centred around the festivities of the temple.

Chettinad is also known for its culinary delicacies. Chettinad food is essentially spicy, with a standard full meal consisting of cooked lentils, eggplant curry, okra sambar, ghee for flavouring rice, and sweet meats like payasam and paal paniyaram. **B L**

Tue 14 Jan

Kanadukathan – Madurai

Morning at leisure. Today is the first day of the Tamil month of Thai. The months of the Tamil Calendar have great significance and are deeply rooted in the faith of the Tamil Hindus. We may be able to join or observe the local festival.

Afternoon drive to Madurai. Famous for the awe-inspiring Sri Meenakshi Temple complex, Madurai is an animated city packed with pilgrims, beggars, business-people, bullock carts and underemployed rickshaw drivers. It's one of South India's oldest cities and has been a centre of learning and pilgrimage since the time of Classical Athens. A textile centre from way back, the city was also the setting for Mahatma Gandhi's decision, in 1921, to wear nothing but khadi (homespun cloth), and tailors' shops are everywhere in town. **B D**



Wed 15 Jan

Madurai

Morning exploration of the Sri Meenakshi Temple which is the abode of the triple-breasted, fish-eyed Goddess Meenakshi Amman ('fish-eyed' is an adjective for perfect eyes in classical Tamil poetry) and considered by many to be the height of South Indian temple architecture.

It's not so much a temple as a 6-hectare complex enclosed by 12 gopurams, the highest of which towers 52m over Madurai, and all of which are carved with a staggering array of gods, goddesses, demons and heroes.

Next visit the impressive remains of the Thirumalai Palace. The main event is the entrance gate, main hall and Natakasala (Dance Hall), with their faded yellow plasterwork, lion and makara (crocodile-elephant creature) sculptures and a series of fabulous murals that hints at the opulence the Nayak rulers once enjoyed.

Finish with a visit to the excellent Gandhi Memorial Museum. It contains an impressively moving and detailed account of India's struggle for independence from 1757 to 1947, and the English-language signs pull no punches about British rule. Included in the exhibition is the blood-stained dhoti (long loincloth) that Gandhi was wearing at the time he was assassinated in Delhi in 1948.

Today is Thai Pongal\*, a fertility festival celebrated in South India at the end of the harvest season and one of the most important festivals celebrated by the Tamils in Tamil Nadu. Part of the Pongal celebrations is the Jallikattu taming of the bulls festival in the village of Alanganallur.

In the afternoon return to the Meenakshi Temple to watch the parade in which the goddess Meenakshi is married to her beloved, Shiva. **B L D**

Thu 16 Jan

Madurai

Today attend two of the most important local festivals which have gained world-wide renown.

The third day of the Pongal Festival\* is the Mattu Pongal Festival which is mainly dedicated to the worship of cows, bulls and other farm animals. Hindus believed that the cow is the manifestation of goddess Lakshmi and bull (as Nandi) is the sacred vehicle of lord Shiva. In the early morning, the cattle are bathed, decorated with garlands and bells and the horns are sharpened and painted in various colours. Special prayers offered to Lord Ganesh and Goddess Parvathi on this occasion.



Part of the Pongal celebrations is the Jallikattu taming of the bulls festival in the village of Alanganallur. In the afternoon join Julian and fellow travellers for a special farewell lunch.

The Teppam Float Festival\* celebrates the marriage of God Sundareshwar and Goddess Meenakshi. A float procession of their idols is taken from the Meenakshi Temple to a shrine built on an island in the Teppakolam Lake. The deities are placed on elaborately designed palanquins accompanied by elephants and horses. Devotees sing song all throughout the procession.

The deities are set afloat on a colourfully decorated raft and across the lake to the central island. Boats carry thousands of devotees to and from the worship site. At night, the river is illuminated by thousands of diyas that are set afloat by the devotees. This makes for a spectacular sight. **B L**

### Wed 17 Jan Madurai – Tiruchirapalli – Depart Chennai

Coach transfer from Madurai to Tiruchirapalli for the afternoon flight to Chennai connecting with the Singapore Airlines flight to Singapore. **B**

### Thu 18 Jan Arrive Australia

Early morning arrival in Singapore. Transfer to the daytime flight to Sydney, arriving in the evening.

**N.B.** Please note that final festival dates and programs are subject to confirmation. These are often based on complex lunar conjunctions and are typically announced approx. three months in advance.



Brihadishwara Temple Thanjavur

## Tour Prices

Per person twin-share	AUD 8,450
Single supplement*	AUD 1,200
Final payment due	1 November 2013
Reduction without international airfare	- AUD 1,500
Deposit per person	AUD 500
Supplement for business class on Singapore Airlines	On Request

\*Single travellers may request to share. Please advise at time of booking.

**Tour code** AGI401

**Fitness level** Above average

Please see booking conditions for fitness level definitions.

### Tour price includes

- Accommodation in centrally located superior 4 and 5-star hotels with private facilities and daily breakfast (**B**)
- Meals as per itinerary (**L**=Lunch, **D**=Dinner) including special welcome and farewell lunches.
- Singapore Airlines economy class airfare Australia – Singapore – Chennai – Singapore – Australia
- Taxes and fuel surcharges on airfare (as at 1 March 2013)
- Transfers on arrival and departure if travelling on group flights
- Domestic flight in India, Tiruchirapalli - Chennai (20KG luggage allowance)
- Comprehensive sightseeing, visits to attractions with Julian Droogan and local guides including entrance fees as per itinerary
- Lectures and talks with your tour leader throughout
- Gratuities for local guides and drivers
- Visa for India
- Hotel portorage (one piece per person)

### Tour price does not include

- Transfers on arrival / departure if not travelling on group flights
- Drinks with meals
- Items of a personal nature, including telephone, laundry, taxis etc.
- Airport portorage
- Camera and video fees
- Travel insurance

### Your hotels ★★★★★ & ★★★★★

Chennai – Taj Gateway Connemara  
 Mahabalipuram – Radisson Blu Temple Bay Resort  
 Tiruvannamalai – Hotel Sparash  
 Pondicherry – Promenade Hotel  
 Chidambaram – Paradise Resort  
 Tanjore – Ideal View Resort  
 Kanadukathan – Chattinadu Mension  
 Madurai – Taj Gateway Pasumalai  
 NB. Hotels of a similar standard may be substituted.

# Terms & Conditions

## How to Book

Complete, sign and return the Booking Form available from Renaissance Tours with your deposit and page one of your passport.

## Deposit / Final Payments

Your deposit is due at the time of booking and is used to pay hotel, airline, performance tickets and/or other deposits. It is non-refundable in the event of your cancellation.

Final payment is due 60 days before departure. Failure to make the final payment by the due date may result in cancellation of your booking and loss of deposit.

Payments are accepted in cash and by cheque, bank transfer, American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and Visa. A 3% service charge applies for payment by American Express and Diners Club.

## Cancellation & Refunds

**a) Cancellation by You** - Cancellation charges will be applied as shown below, calculated from the day written notification is received by Renaissance Tours. In addition to cancellation fees for tours operated by Renaissance Tours as shown below, airlines, hotels and other third parties may impose up to 100% cancellation charges.

60 days or more	Forfeit of deposit
59 – 45 days	25% of tour cost
44 – 31 days	50% of tour cost
30 – 15 days	75% of tour cost
Less than 15 days	100% of tour cost

The above cancellation charges include applicable GST.

In addition to the above, cancellation charges may apply for additional arrangements booked by Renaissance Tours, such as air tickets, hotels and travel insurance premium. If the reason for cancellation is covered by the insurance policy, you may be able to reclaim these charges.

**b) Cancellation by Us** - We reserve the right to cancel a tour for any reason (such as failure to reach

minimum tour participant numbers). Except for force majeure, we will not cancel a tour less than 60 days before departure. No further compensation will be paid in the event of cancellation by Renaissance Tours. A full refund of monies paid for tour costs will be the full extent of our liability.

Cancellation and/or amendment fees may apply for additional travel arrangements booked by Renaissance Tours.

## Passports, Visas and Vaccinations

All travellers must be in a possession of a valid passport – most countries require a 6-month validity from your date of entry or exit. For some countries (e.g. China, Vietnam, India, Russia), visas are included in the tour cost and will be arranged by Renaissance Tours prior to travel. For other countries, it is your responsibility to ensure you have the appropriate visa(s).

You are also responsible for obtaining all necessary inoculations and preventative medicines as may be required for the duration of the tour.

## Travel Insurance

It is a condition of travel that you are covered by comprehensive travel insurance for international tours. Your travel insurance can be arranged by Renaissance Tours.

## FITNESS AND PARTICIPATION

Most of our tours require a MODERATE level of fitness.

However, in certain destinations (e.g. Silk Road, Central Asia, Outback Australia, tropical destinations) or in certain seasons (eg. mid-winter; mid-summer) or because of the nature of travel (eg. remote rail), certain tours will require an ABOVE AVERAGE or CHALLENGING level of fitness.

If you (or we) have any doubts about your level of fitness, you may be required to have a doctor's appraisal. This would require your doctor to read the itinerary of your chosen tour, including the fitness level, and provide you (and us) with a written confirmation of your ability to participate.

## MODERATE

for the overall benefit of the group, all tour members must possess a moderate level of mobility, including the ability to:

- negotiate airports and railway stations without wheelchair assistance
- use combined shower/bath facilities (it is impossible to guarantee walk-in shower facilities)
- undertake walking tour of 1-2 hours duration, including using stairs, walking over cobblestones and other uneven surfaces
- stand for long periods in museums and other sites
- embark / disembark coaches, trains and other methods of transportation without assistance
- handle your own luggage

## ABOVE AVERAGE

In addition to the above, tour members must also be able to:

- Undertake walking tours of 2 – 3 hours
- climb staircases of 100 or more steps

## CHALLENGING

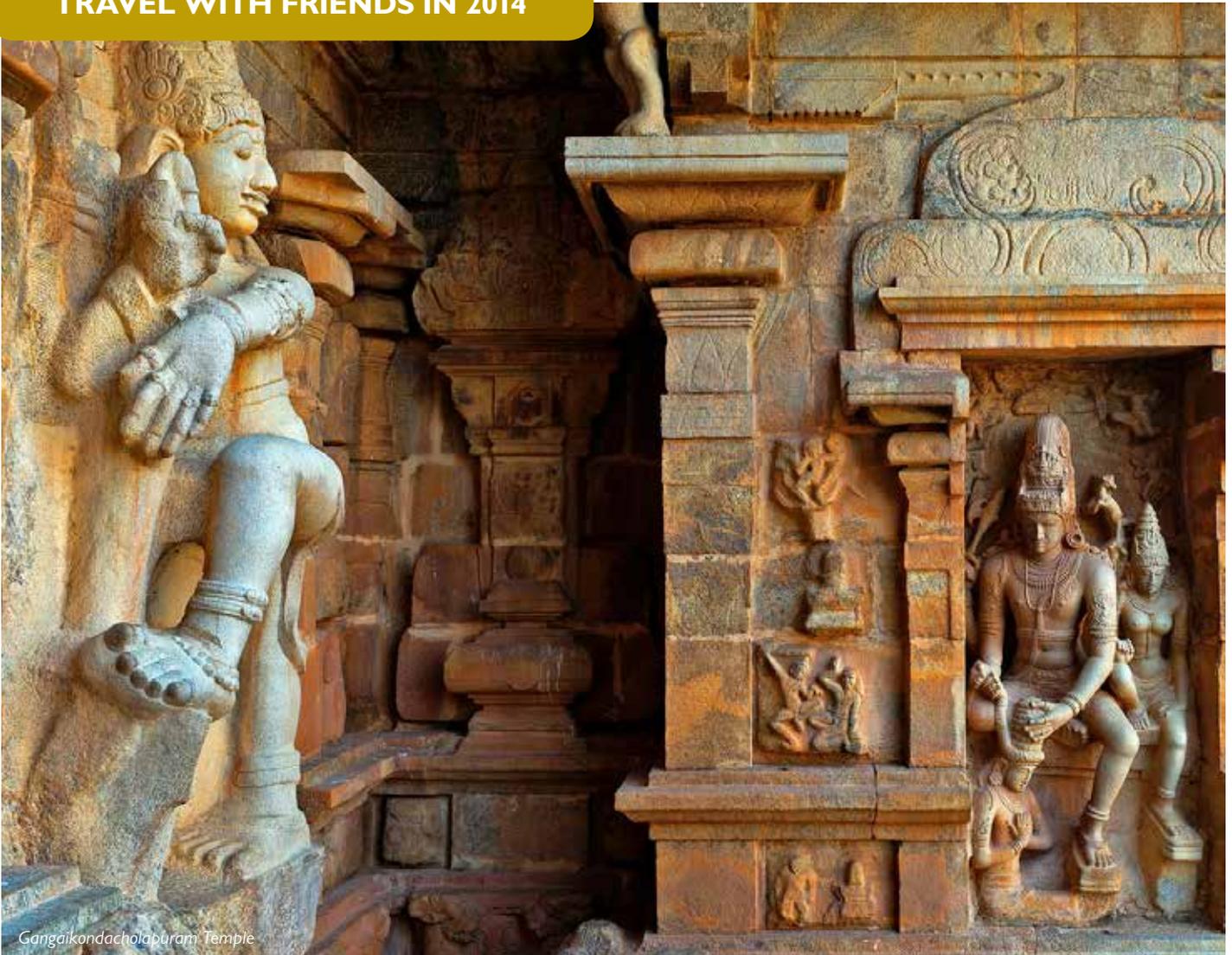
In addition to the above, tour members must also be able to:

- Handle extremes of temperature (e.g. below 0 or above 35 degrees)
- handle extremes of altitudes (e.g. 4000 metres and above).

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You can find the full terms & conditions on the Renaissance Tours booking form. They can also be found at [www.renaissancetours.com.au/booking-conditions/](http://www.renaissancetours.com.au/booking-conditions/) or we would be happy to post you a copy on request.





Gangaikondacholapuram Temple

Brochure effective March 2013



## Renaissance Tours

**toll free** 1300 727 095 (AU)

**toll free** 0800 403 621 (NZ)

**call** (02) 9299 5801

**fax** (02) 9299 5805

**email** [info@renaissancetours.com.au](mailto:info@renaissancetours.com.au)

**visit** [www.renaissancetours.com.au](http://www.renaissancetours.com.au)

Level 4, 47 York Street, Sydney NSW 2000

GPO Box 5068, Sydney NSW 2001

ABN 14 069 591 448 Lic. 2TA4526

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