

 *a culinary tour*

The spice plantations of **KERALA** have been providing cooks with their essential ingredients for centuries. The Keralan cuisine has many influences, especially Syrian Christian and Muslim dishes featuring meat and seafood, while traditional Hindu dishes will usually be vegetarian. Everywhere you'll find dosas, crispy pancakes made from rice and lentils, dipped into spicy sambar sauce or coconut chutney. Homestays with cookery lessons are a brilliant way to learn the art of Keralan cuisine. In Cochin, **NIMMY & PAUL** nimmypaul.com and **NALINI VERMA** [keralacuisinein](http://keralacuisinein.com) are renowned for their cooking classes.

A unique feature of Keralan cuisine is Ayurvedic cookery, developed over many centuries, which promotes wellness through eating foods that are compatible with their constitution. For a complete Ayurvedic detox, stay at **KALARI KOVILIKOM** cghearth.com where the chef creates a range of healthy vegetarian dishes from their organic garden.

While Kerala's beaches and backwaters are well known, the hills of the Western Ghats, with their temples, tea plantations, and lush tropical forests are refreshingly free from mass tourism. The dramatic coast of Bekal in northern Kerala is an unspoilt haven. Stay at the new **VIVANTA BY TAJ** tajhotels.com with its luxurious pool villas and Jiva Spa. If you can't get to Kerala the next best thing is a cooking master class by Prima Kurien (author of *Kerala Kitchen*) in Delhi, she can be contacted on primakurien02@gmail.com.

The state of **TAMIL NADU**, bordering Kerala, was once the capital of the ancient Chola Dynasty, famous for its art and culture. The temples of **TAMIL NADU** are among the finest in India, especially the Meenakshi Amman Temple complex in Madurai, a pilgrimage site for 2,500 years, and the Mamallapuram Shore Temple, along the Bay of Bengal, with its centuries-old stone carvings rising from the sand.

PREVIOUS PAGE: CUISINE AT THE TAJ PALACE HOTEL; THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: PEACEFUL SEATING AREA AT RAJAKKAD IN CHETTINAD; THE LAO BAR AT THE OBEROI MUMBAI; VIVANTA BY TAJ INTERIOR IN KERALA; CHURCH IN KERALA'S BACKWATERS; BAGS OF CINNAMON AT MARKET; MEENAKSHI TEMPLE IN MADURAI; VIVANTA BY TAJ IN BEKAL.



In **CHENNAI** (formerly Madras), The Government Museum has an exceptional collection of early Buddhist and Chola bronzes, while historic Fort St George is where the East India Company was launched in 1639. Further afield, explore the unique cuisine of the region of Chettinad with a homestay at **THE BANGALA** thebangalacore.com or the 18th century **RAJAKKAD ESTATE** rajakkadestate.com

GOA is known for its colonial Portuguese heritage, laid back vibe and exuberant parties on the endless stretches of white sandy beaches. The northern coast is where the action is, but the quieter south remains true to its traditions and you can still find empty beaches and genuine Goan charm at restaurants like **PALÁCIO DE DEUS** palaciodeadeus.com. Stay at the chic boutique resort **ALILA GOA** alilahotels.com where you can learn to make such Goan classics as pork sorpotel with chef Edia Cotta at the award-winning restaurant **SPICE STUDIO**. Dine like the locals at **MARTINS CORNER** martinscornergoa.com and the **UPPER HOUSE** in the heart of Goa's capital of Panjim theupperhousegoa.com.