

South India Spiritual Journey with Alex & Daren



South India Ashram Spiritual Journey

Table of Contents

Itinerary	3
28-Jan Art of Living Ashram Udayapura, Karnataka	4
Location and Setting:	4
Sri Sri Ravi Shankar’s Spiritual Teachings:	4
Meditation and Yoga Programs:	4
The Vedic Culture and Spiritual Activities:	4
The Gurukul and Other Institutions:	4
The Sri Sri Ayurveda Center:.....	5
Art of Living International Center:	5
The Samadhi and The Golden Temple:	5
Special Programs and Events:	5
30-Jan Sri Ramana Maharshi Ashram Tiruvannamalai	7
Historical Significance	7
Pilgrimage and Spiritual Retreat:	8
4-Feb Gingee Fort Location: Viluppuram District, Tamil Nadu	9
4-Feb Auroville near Pondicherry	10
Key Features of Auroville:	10
7-Feb Mahabalipuram (Mamallapuram)	12
Historical Significance.....	12
Key Attractions:	12
Cultural and Architectural Significance	13
Tourism and Modern-Day Significance.....	13

South India Ashram Spiritual Journey

Itinerary

28/Jan, Wed	1	Arrive in Bengaluru Bengaluru International Airport - BLR Airport Transfer 1.08 (1hr 8 min) - 60km Depart Bengaluru International Airport Arrive Udayapura Art of Living Int'l Center Sri Sri Ravi Shankar Ashram
29/Jan, Thu	2	Art of Living Int'l Center Ashram Visit Day 1
30/Jan, Fri	3	Depart Udayapura by Bus Coach 3.25 (3hr 25 min) - 205km Arrive Tiruvannamalai Sangam House
31/Jan, Sat	4	Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Ashram Visit Day 1
1/Feb, Sun	5	Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Ashram Visit Day 2
2/Feb, Mon	6	Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Ashram Visit Day 3
3/Feb, Tue	7	Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Ashram Visit Day 4
4/Feb, Wed	8	Depart Tiruvannamalai by Bus Coach 1.58 (1hr 58 min) - 114km Option: Gingee Fort, Rani Fort Arrive Auroville
5/Feb, Thu	9	Auroville Ashram Visit Day 1
6/Feb, Fri	10	Auroville Ashram Visit Day 2 Option: Pondicherry Day Tour
7/Feb, Sat	11	Depart Auroville by Bus Coach 2.36 (2hr 36 min) - 140km Option: Mahabalipuram World Heritage Site Arrive Chennai Chennai International Airport - MAA

Accommodations | 11 Days & 10 Nights

Art of Living Int'l Center Udayapura	2 Nights	AR 28/Jan - DP 30/Jan
Sri Ramanasramam Tiruvannamalai	5 Nights	AR 30/Jan - DP 04/Feb
Auroville near Pondicherry	3 Nights	AR 04/Feb - DP 07/Feb

**Schedule subject to change*

Retreat Schedule | Estimated TBD

**changes depending on schedule and ashram timings*

7:30-8:00am	Kriyas & Pranayama
8:00-9:30am	Asana
9:30-10:30am	Brunch
10:30am-6:30pm	Ashram Activities & Dinner
7:00-8:00pm	Satsang

**Schedule subject to change*

South India Ashram Spiritual Journey

28-Jan | Art of Living Ashram | Udayapura, Karnataka

The Art of Living Ashram is located in Bangalore, Karnataka, and is one of the most well-known spiritual centers in India. It was founded by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, a renowned spiritual leader and humanitarian, in 1995. The Ashram serves as the global headquarters for the Art of Living Foundation, which promotes meditation, yoga, and spiritual practices aimed at promoting peace, well-being, and personal transformation.

Key Features of the Art of Living Ashram:

Location and Setting:

Situated in the serene outskirts of Bangalore, the Ashram is nestled amidst the lush greenery of the rolling hills. Its tranquil environment provides an ideal setting for spiritual reflection, personal growth, and the practice of meditation and yoga. The vastness of the area, combined with the beauty of the natural surroundings, enhances the peaceful atmosphere of the Ashram.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's Spiritual Teachings:

The Ashram is centered around the teachings of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, who emphasizes the importance of meditation, mindfulness, and self-awareness as tools for personal development and spiritual growth. The Sudarshan Kriya, a breathing technique developed by Sri Sri, is one of the core practices taught at the Ashram. This technique is known for its positive effects on mental, emotional, and physical health.

Meditation and Yoga Programs:

The Ashram offers a wide range of programs for individuals at all stages of their spiritual journey. These include the Art of Living Part 1 course, which introduces participants to basic meditation techniques and the Sudarshan Kriya. Advanced programs such as Art of Silence (a silent retreat for deeper meditation), Yes+ (a course aimed at young people), and The Meditation and Yoga Retreat provide deeper immersion into spiritual practices and mental well-being.

The Vedic Culture and Spiritual Activities:

The Ashram is a hub for spiritual learning, where traditional Vedic knowledge is taught alongside modern self-development practices. The Ashram hosts various cultural activities, including chanting, kirtans (devotional music), satsangs (spiritual discourses), and yoga sessions, creating a harmonious environment for individuals seeking inner peace. Art of Living's humanitarian initiatives are also an important part of the Ashram's mission, which focuses on bringing about social change through education, healthcare, and rural development.

The Gurukul and Other Institutions:

The Ashram has a dedicated space known as the Gurukul, a school that offers traditional Vedic education and teaches ancient spiritual texts, including the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and other sacred scriptures. This initiative aims to preserve the ancient Indian spiritual knowledge and pass it on to younger generations. The Ashram also has a satsang hall for spiritual gatherings, where devotees can come together for chanting, prayers, and listening to spiritual discourses by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.

South India Ashram Spiritual Journey

The Sri Sri Ayurveda Center:

In addition to spiritual practices, the Ashram promotes holistic well-being through the Sri Sri Ayurveda center, which offers Ayurvedic treatments and wellness therapies. These therapies focus on rejuvenation, detoxification, and balancing the mind-body connection.

Art of Living International Center:

The Ashram is part of a global network of Art of Living Centers, and it also hosts international visitors who come to attend programs, workshops, and retreats. The Ashram attracts thousands of spiritual seekers and volunteers who come to connect, learn, and experience the teachings of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.

The Samadhi and The Golden Temple:

One of the most prominent features of the Art of Living Ashram is the Samadhi of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, a serene meditation space dedicated to the founder of the Art of Living Foundation. Visitors often come here for meditation and to offer their prayers. There is also the Golden Temple, a stunningly beautiful structure at the Ashram, which is a symbol of peace, serenity, and devotion.

Special Programs and Events:

The Art of Living Ashram hosts numerous programs throughout the year, from introductory workshops to advanced spiritual retreats, allowing individuals from around the world to experience the transformative benefits of yoga and meditation. The International Meditation and Yoga Festival is one of the major events at the Ashram, where participants come together to celebrate yoga, meditation, and the teachings of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.

The Art of Living Ashram near Bangalore offers a peaceful retreat where individuals can rejuvenate spiritually, emotionally, and physically. With its holistic approach to well-being, the Ashram provides a perfect environment for learning and practicing ancient spiritual traditions in the modern world. Whether one is seeking personal growth, spiritual awakening, or simply peace and relaxation, the Ashram offers something for everyone.

South India Ashram Spiritual Journey

South India Ashram Spiritual Journey

30-Jan | Sri Ramana Maharshi Ashram | Tiruvannamalai

Located in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, is one of the most revered spiritual centers in India. The Ashram is dedicated to Sri Ramana Maharshi, one of the most profound spiritual teachers of the 20th century. The Ashram is set at the foothills of Mount Arunachala, which holds great significance in Hindu spirituality as it is considered to be a manifestation of Lord Shiva.

Historical Significance

The Ashram was established by Sri Ramana Maharshi himself in the early 20th century. The Maharshi, who was born in 1879, attained self-realization at a young age and made Arunachala his home, living there in deep meditation and contemplation. His teachings centered around the exploration of the Self through the practice of self-inquiry (Atma Vichara), particularly the question, "Who am I?" which remains central to his philosophy.

Key Features of the Ramana Maharshi Ashram:

Location – Mount Arunachala: The Ashram is situated at the base of Arunachala Hill, a sacred mountain in Hinduism that is believed to be the physical manifestation of Lord Shiva's divine light. Devotees come to Tiruvannamalai to meditate, perform spiritual practices, and seek guidance from the sacred energy of Arunachala, which is known as the "Hill of Light."

Sri Ramana Maharshi's Presence: The Ashram is imbued with the powerful presence of Sri Ramana Maharshi who spent most of his life at this location. Although he passed away in 1950, his teachings continue to inspire seekers from around the world. Visitors often feel a deep sense of peace and tranquility upon entering the Ashram, which is attributed to the Maharshi's spiritual energy.

The Samadhi Shrine: The central feature of the Ashram is the Samadhi Shrine of Sri Ramana Maharshi, where his body was laid to rest after his passing. The shrine is a focal point for meditation, prayer, and reflection. Pilgrims often spend time here in silence, contemplating the Maharshi's teachings and meditating on the nature of the Self.

Meditation and Silence: The Ashram provides a peaceful environment for visitors seeking to practice silent meditation. Many visitors come to engage in self-inquiry, a practice that was taught by Sri Ramana to help individuals directly experience their true nature. The Ashram encourages introspection and self-exploration in a serene atmosphere, with the focus on stillness, silence, and contemplation.

The Old Hall (Maharshi's Meditation Room): The Old Hall is the room where Sri Ramana Maharshi spent many years meditating and teaching his disciples. It is a deeply sacred place for followers of the Maharshi. The hall is open to visitors, who can sit in quiet contemplation and feel the stillness of the space that was once graced by the presence of the great sage.

The Goshala (Cow Shed): Sri Ramana Maharshi had a deep affection for cows and believed in their spiritual significance. The Goshala (Cow Shed) at the Ashram houses cows that are cared for with love and reverence. It is a place of calm and peace where visitors can spend time in the company of the cows, whom the Maharshi regarded as sacred beings.

The Ashram Temples: Within the Ashram complex, there are small temples dedicated to various Hindu deities, including Lord Shiva, who is associated with Mount Arunachala. Devotees can participate in daily pujas (ritual worship) and bhajans (devotional singing) that are part of the spiritual life at the Ashram.

South India Ashram Spiritual Journey

The Bookstore and Library: The Ashram Bookstore is home to many of the Maharshi's writings, including his teachings on self-inquiry, meditation, and the nature of the Self. The library offers a wide range of spiritual texts, including the collected works of Ramana Maharshi and books about his life and teachings. It is a valuable resource for those seeking to deepen their understanding of his philosophy.

The Ashram's Daily Routine: The daily life at the Ashram is simple and centered around spiritual practices, including meditation, chanting, and silent reflection. The Ashram follows a structured schedule that allows visitors to immerse themselves in the Maharshi's teachings and experience a life of discipline and devotion. There are also morning and evening satsangs (spiritual discourses), where seekers come together to listen to readings of the Maharshi's teachings.

The Tranquil Environment: The overall environment of the Ashram promotes peace and tranquility. The surroundings are lush with trees, gardens, and peaceful courtyards, contributing to the serene atmosphere where one can disconnect from the distractions of the world and focus on the inner journey.

Pilgrimage and Spiritual Retreat:

The Ramana Maharshi Ashram attracts pilgrims and spiritual seekers from around the world. Visitors come not only to honor the Maharshi's legacy but also to experience the spiritual energy that pervades the Ashram and the sacred Mount Arunachala. Many people stay at the Ashram for extended periods to deepen their practice of meditation and self-inquiry.

The Sri Ramana Maharshi Ashram in Tiruvannamalai is a sanctuary for those seeking spiritual awakening and self-realization. The Ashram offers a peaceful environment for meditation, self-inquiry, and introspection, with the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi guiding all those who come. For many, visiting the Ashram is a transformative experience that brings them closer to understanding their true nature and the deeper truths of existence.

South India Ashram Spiritual Journey

4-Feb | Gingee Fort | Location: Viluppuram District, Tamil Nadu

Historical Significance: Gingee Fort, one of the most historically significant forts in Tamil Nadu, is a complex of three hilltop citadels—Krishnagiri Fort, Rajagiri Fort, and Chandrayandurg Fort—which are connected by fortified walls and ramparts. The fort was originally constructed by the Chola Dynasty in the 9th century and later expanded by the Vijayanagar Empire in the 16th century. It was further fortified by the Marathas under Chhatrapati Shivaji's descendants and the Mughal Empire. The fort's location on the Gingee hills offers a strategic advantage, making it a nearly impregnable stronghold. It is surrounded by rugged terrain, deep moats, and steep hills, making it difficult for invaders to approach. The fort played an important role in regional conflicts, particularly during the Mughal and Maratha wars, and was used as a base of operations during the French-British conflicts in the 18th century.

Key Features:

Krishnagiri Fort: The highest of the three, known for its strong defenses and spectacular views of the surrounding area. **Rajagiri Fort:** Famous for its architectural structures, temples, and the large water reservoir.

Chandrayandurg Fort: Noted for its defensive systems and the remnants of its military barracks.

Today, Gingee Fort is a popular tourist destination due to its architectural grandeur, historical importance, and panoramic views. It also houses a number of temples, including a Shiva Temple, Kali Temple, and Vishnu Temple, making it a culturally rich site.

Rani Fort (Rani Mangammal Fort) | Location: Madurai, Tamil Nadu

Historical Significance: Rani Fort, also known as Rani Mangammal Fort, is situated in the ancient city of Madurai and holds a special place in Tamil Nadu's history. The fort was built by Rani Mangammal, the queen regent of the Nayak dynasty, during the 17th century. She was known for her administrative acumen and played a crucial role in consolidating the Nayak dynasty's control over Madurai after the death of her husband. Rani Mangammal was an extraordinary ruler who undertook several reforms in administration, infrastructure, and military defense. The fort was constructed as a means of defense against external threats and was used to protect the royal family and regional governance. It is an example of the military architecture of the Nayak period.

Key Features:

Defensive Walls and Moats: The fort is fortified with thick walls and moats, which made it a stronghold against invaders. **Rani Mangammal's Palace:** The fort also housed the royal palace, which was a blend of traditional Tamil and architectural styles. **Temple Architecture:** The fort houses a Shiva temple dedicated to Lord Nataraja, showcasing the integration of religion with royal defense structures.

Rani Fort is relatively smaller compared to the larger forts of Tamil Nadu but remains significant due to its association with one of the most powerful women rulers of South India. It's often overlooked by tourists but is a gem for those interested in the region's rich history and the powerful role of women in Tamil royalty.

South India Ashram Spiritual Journey

Both forts represent the resilience, strategic genius, and cultural richness of Tamil Nadu's history. Gingee Fort stands as a testament to military might, while Rani Fort speaks to the strategic and administrative brilliance of a powerful queen.

4-Feb | Auroville | near Pondicherry

Auroville is an international township located near **Pondicherry**, Tamil Nadu, India. It was founded in **1968** by **Mirra Alfassa**, also known as **The Mother**, a spiritual collaborator of the Indian philosopher and yogi **Sri Aurobindo**. Auroville is dedicated to realizing human unity and is designed as an experiment in community living, with a focus on personal and collective transformation through spiritual and sustainable practices.

Key Features of Auroville:

- 1. Philosophy and Vision:** Auroville is based on the idea of **human unity** and the belief that humanity's progress can be achieved when individuals transcend their personal and cultural limitations to embrace a higher consciousness. Sri Aurobindo's vision, combined with The Mother's guidance, aimed to create a space where people from all nationalities, religions, and backgrounds could live in harmony and work together for the common good.
- 2. The Matrimandir:** The **Matrimandir**, located in the center of Auroville, is the spiritual heart of the township. It is an awe-inspiring structure that symbolizes the Mother's vision of unity and serves as a meditation center for the residents and visitors. The golden spherical building, surrounded by gardens and pathways, is a place for quiet reflection and personal meditation, where individuals can connect with their inner selves. The Matrimandir houses a large crystal in its inner chamber that is meant to serve as a focal point for meditation.
- 3. International and Diverse Community:** Auroville is home to people from over **50 countries**, making it a vibrant and diverse community. Residents, known as **Aurovillians**, come from various cultural, social, and spiritual backgrounds. The community practices non-ownership and collective living, with the aim of eliminating social divisions and fostering equality. Auroville provides an inclusive environment where people work together toward a common goal of personal growth and collective well-being.
- 4. Sustainability and Eco-Friendly Living:** Auroville is committed to sustainable living and environmental stewardship. The township has integrated **eco-friendly technologies** and practices into its daily life, such as solar power, organic farming, water conservation, and waste recycling. Several organic farms and projects focused on environmental conservation thrive within Auroville. The community promotes a **simple and self-sustaining lifestyle**, with residents engaged in organic farming, tree planting, and green architecture.
- 5. Educational and Cultural Programs:** Auroville places a strong emphasis on education and personal development. There are several **schools**, including the **Auroville School** and the **International School of Auroville**, which cater to children from the local and international community. The educational approach in Auroville is holistic, integrating intellectual, emotional, and spiritual learning. Various **cultural programs** such as music, dance, theater, and art are regularly organized, encouraging creativity and expression.

South India Ashram Spiritual Journey

6. **Spiritual and Integral Yoga:** Auroville is influenced by the teachings of **Sri Aurobindo** and **The Mother**, particularly their concept of **Integral Yoga**. This yoga is an approach to personal and collective evolution, which goes beyond the physical aspects of yoga to include mental, emotional, and spiritual growth. Many Aurovillians follow practices of meditation, spiritual inquiry, and self-awareness to develop their consciousness and connect with the divine presence within themselves.
7. **Auroville's Economic Model:** The township operates on a unique **economical model** based on voluntary contribution. There is no money-based economy, and residents contribute to the community in various ways through work, knowledge sharing, and service. The currency used within Auroville is called "**Aurocard**," which is used for transactions within the township. Additionally, there are various cooperatives and enterprises within Auroville that contribute to the economy, many of which focus on sustainable products, organic farming, handcrafts, and renewable energy.
8. **Auroville Visitors:** Visitors to Auroville are welcomed to experience its harmonious and peaceful atmosphere. **Guesthouses, workshops, and meditation centers** are available for those who wish to stay, learn, and participate in the community life. Auroville encourages visitors to engage in its educational and spiritual programs, where they can learn about its philosophy, sustainable practices, and integral approach to life.
9. **Human Unity and Global Outreach:** Auroville is not just a local community but also a global symbol of the possibility of a world united by shared human values, transcending national borders and divisions. The township's focus on **unity in diversity** and the belief that humanity can rise to a higher level of consciousness is what continues to inspire many people globally.
10. **Art and Architecture:** Auroville's architecture is unique and innovative, blending modern designs with traditional elements. Many of its buildings incorporate **sustainable architecture**, using natural materials and renewable energy sources. Various artists and architects from around the world have contributed to the design of Auroville, creating spaces that blend art, nature, and functionality.

Auroville is a remarkable experiment in community living, spiritual growth, and sustainable practices. It embodies the vision of **Sri Aurobindo** and **The Mother**, offering a sanctuary for those seeking a deeper connection to themselves, the environment, and humanity as a whole. Whether for spiritual seekers, environmental enthusiasts, or those curious about communal living, Auroville offers a place to explore the potential of human unity and transformation.

South India Ashram Spiritual Journey

7-Feb | Mahabalipuram (Mamallapuram)

Located along the southeastern coast of Tamil Nadu, India, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site renowned for its rich historical, architectural, and cultural significance. The town is known for its magnificent rock-cut temples, intricate sculptures, and ancient monuments that date back to the **7th and 8th centuries**. It was once a bustling port city during the **Pallava dynasty**, which ruled the region from the 4th to the 9th centuries.

Historical Significance

Mahabalipuram was originally known as **Mamallapuram**, named after the Pallava King **Narasimhavarman I**, who was also known as **Mamalla** ("Great Wrestler"). The city was a major center for trade, culture, and religion and is believed to have been visited by ancient travelers, including the Chinese scholar **Hiuen Tsang**. The Pallava kings, particularly **Narasimhavarman I** and his successor **Rajasimhavarman**, were instrumental in the construction of the temples and monuments that have made Mahabalipuram a famous heritage site.

Key Attractions:

1. **Shore Temple:**

The Shore Temple is one of the most iconic landmarks of Mahabalipuram, standing majestically by the Bay of Bengal. This **rock-cut** temple, built during the reign of **Narasimhavarman II**, is a stunning example of early Dravidian architecture and is dedicated to **Shiva**. It is famous for its intricate carvings and the magnificent view of the sea, symbolizing the connection between the divine and the elements.

2. **Pancha Rathas (Five Rathas):**

The Pancha Rathas are a group of monolithic temples, each carved out of a single rock. The temples, which resemble chariots (or "rathas"), are dedicated to various Hindu gods, including **Arjuna**, **Durga**, and **Shiva**. Each ratha is named after one of the **Pandavas** from the epic **Mahabharata**. These temples showcase remarkable stone craftsmanship and intricate designs.

3. **Arjuna's Penance (Descent of the Ganges):**

Arjuna's Penance is a gigantic bas-relief sculpture carved into a massive rock. It depicts the story of **Arjuna** from the Mahabharata, where he performs penance to obtain the divine weapon **Pasupatastra** from Lord Shiva. The relief is detailed with scenes of animals, celestial beings, and mythological figures. It is considered one of the finest examples of Pallava art.

4. **Cave Temples:**

Mahabalipuram is home to several cave temples, carved into rock faces. These temples are dedicated to various Hindu gods and goddesses, featuring intricate carvings and sculptures that reflect the skill of the Pallava craftsmen. The **Varaha Cave Temple**, dedicated to the boar incarnation of Vishnu, is one of the most famous.

5. **Krishna's Butterball:**

Krishna's Butterball is a massive, naturally balanced boulder that sits on a slope, seemingly defying gravity. It is one of Mahabalipuram's most photographed landmarks, with numerous myths and legends surrounding its precarious position.

South India Ashram Spiritual Journey

6. **Mandapa (Pillared Halls):**

These open-air, pillared structures were used as assembly halls or prayer spaces in ancient times. The most famous is the **Mahishasuramardini Mandapa**, where the deity **Durga** is depicted slaying the demon **Mahishasura**.

Cultural and Architectural Significance

Mahabalipuram is an exquisite example of **Dravidian architecture**, particularly the **Pallava style**, which laid the foundation for future temple designs across South India. The stone carvings and sculptures at Mahabalipuram showcase the artistic excellence of the Pallava dynasty, with scenes from Hindu mythology, divine deities, and kings immortalized in stone. The style and craftsmanship here influenced many later dynasties, including the Cholas and the Chalukyas.

Tourism and Modern-Day Significance

Today, Mahabalipuram is a vibrant town that attracts both tourists and pilgrims. It has a beautiful coastal setting, with a laid-back atmosphere, making it a popular destination for travelers exploring ancient temples, architecture, and South Indian heritage. The town also hosts the **Mahabalipuram Dance Festival**, an annual cultural event where classical dance performances are held against the backdrop of the ancient monuments.

Mahabalipuram's blend of history, culture, and natural beauty continues to fascinate visitors from around the world, making it one of Tamil Nadu's most treasured historical destinations.

South India Ashram Spiritual Journey
