

PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA WITH SHIVANANDA SWAMIJI

Itinerary



The journey overview

The journey will start in Rishikesh, a sacred city located on the banks of the Ganges River, where you will witness the Ganga Aarti, an offering ceremony to the sacred river. The next day, you will have the opportunity to visit Vashishta Cave and Maa Arundhati Cave, places of meditation and spiritual retreat.

The trip will then continue to Hyderabad and from there to Srisailem where you will visit Mallikarjuna Jyotirlingam temple and Amman temple dedicated to Goddess Bhramaramba Devi. You will have the chance to participate in the Kaalsarp dosh puja ritual and admire the river Krishna.

From Srisailem, the journey will continue to Tirupati which is famous for Tirupati Balaji temple, dedicated to Vishnu. You will also visit Tirumala, Pushkarni and Anjaneya Swami temple dedicated to Hanuman.

The next stop on your journey will be Shri Kalahasthi where you will visit the temple where Goddess Parvati is worshiped as Shiva-Gnana Prasunamba. After that, you will head to Anand Siddha Ashram in Vellore and Brihadeshwara temple in Thanjavur, a powerful experience.

From Thanjavur, the journey will take you to Rameshwaram where you will find Ramanathaswamy Jyotirlingam, Agnitheertham and Dhanushkodi temple. You will also have the opportunity to cross the Pamban bridge and visit the Five-faced Hanuman temple.

The last stop of your journey will be in Madurai where you will visit the famous Meenakshi Amman temple.

Day 1: Arrive in Rishikesh

Fly from Delhi to Dehradun and transfer to the hotel in Rishikesh. Rishikesh is known as the "Yoga Capital of the World" and is a sacred place for spiritual seekers.

Rishikesh, nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas in northern India, is a city of profound significance with a rich blend of spiritual, religious, historical, and cultural elements. Revered as the 'Yoga Capital of the World', it draws innumerable spiritual seekers globally for yoga, meditation, and spiritual healing. Its role in Hindu mythology, being the penance site of Lord Rama and the composition place of the Mahabharata, underpins its historical significance. It also serves as the starting point for the sacred Char Dham Yatra pilgrimage. The holy Ganges River, flowing through the city, and the daily evening Ganga Aarti at Triveni Ghat enhance its religious aura. The city's landmarks, the Ram Jhula and Lakshman Jhula, and its association with the Beatles further amplify its cultural value. Recently, the city has also emerged as an adventure sports hotspot. Hence, Rishikesh holds a multifaceted importance, appealing to a broad spectrum of visitors from around the globe.

Day 2: Rishikesh

Start the day with a visit to the Shivananda Ashram, a renowned spiritual center. Explore the ghats along the Ganges River. Witness the evening Ganga Aarti on the riverbanks.

Day 3: Rishikesh

Embark on a full-day visit to the Vashishta Cave and Maa Arundhati's Cave as they are both located on the banks of holy river Ganga, they are both known for their spiritual significance. We will spend time meditating in the caves and possibly take a dip in the river.

Day 4: Rishikesh - Hyderabad

Transfer from Rishikesh to Dehradun and take a flight to Hyderabad. Today the day will be spent traveling from north to the southern part of India and Hyderabad is a big historic city and next morning we will start our journey to a jyotirlinga site. Upon arrival in Hyderabad we will spend the night at a hotel in the city and if time permits we will walk the surroundings.

Day 5: Hyderabad to Srisailem

After breakfast, travel from Hyderabad to Srisailem (approximately 212 km / 132 miles). Srisailem is a sacred town known for its Mallikarjuna Jyotirlingam, one of the 12 main Jyotirlingams representing Lord Shiva. Attend the evening rituals and aarti at the Jyotirlingam. Overnight stay in Srisailem.

Day 6: Srisailem

Start the day with a special pooja at the Mallikarjuna Jyotirlingam (with prior booking). Visit the Amman Temple, dedicated to Goddess Bhramaramba Devi. Enjoy a boat ride on the Krishna River (if available) or opt for a Kaalsarp dosh puja (with prior booking). Overnight stay in Srisailem.

Mallikarjuna Jyotirlinga in Srisailem is one of the most significant shrines in India, carrying profound spiritual and religious significance. As one of the twelve Jyotirlingas, it is believed to embody Lord Shiva in his most powerful form. Devotees believe that a darshan (visit) of the Jyotirlinga can cleanse one's soul and lead to moksha (liberation from the cycle of birth and death).

Alongside the Jyotirlinga, the Bhramaramba Devi Temple, a Shakti Peetha, is also situated in Srisailem, making it a sacred site for Shakti worshippers as well. According to Hindu mythology, parts of the Goddess Sati fell at these Shakti Peethas, making them potent with spiritual energy.

The temple is also known for its role in mitigating Kaal Sarp Dosha*. According to Vedic astrology, Kaal Sarp Dosha occurs when all the seven planets are positioned between Rahu and Ketu, and it is believed to bring numerous challenges and problems in a person's life. Performing a Kaal Sarp Dosha Puja at the Mallikarjuna Temple is considered highly beneficial as it is one of the few temples in India where this ritual can be performed. This puja is conducted to appease the serpent gods, Rahu and Ketu, thereby neutralizing the ill effects of the Kaal Sarp Dosha.

The belief that visiting and offering prayers at the Mallikarjuna Jyotirlinga and performing the Kaal Sarp Dosha Puja can bring peace, prosperity, and relief from troubles underpins the temple's spiritual and religious importance. The multitude of believers visiting this temple annually is a testament to its profound significance in Hindu religious and spiritual practices.

Day 7: Srisailem - Hyderabad - Tirupati

Drive back to Hyderabad and take a flight to Tirupati. Overnight stay in Tirupati.

Most of the day will be spent traveling to get to Tirupati. Tirupati is amongst the most popular and most visited God Vishnu temple in the world. It is believed that if anyone in their lifetime visits the main temple of Tirupati Balaji (Vishnu) then all their previous sins get washed away.

Day 8: Tirupati - Tirumala (Shri Tirupati Balaji Temple)

Visit Tirumala, the hilltop abode of Lord Venkateshwara (Tirupati Balaji). Take a dip at the sacred Pushkarni before entering the main temple. Explore the temple complex and its surroundings. Visit the Anjaneya Swami (Hanuman Temple). Return to Tirupati for an overnight stay.

The darshan, or act of seeing, of Tirupati Balaji, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu located in Tirumala, Andhra Pradesh, India, carries profound religious and spiritual significance. Lord Venkateswara has the power to grant wishes, and his darshan can confer religious merit and provide a path to moksha, or liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Additionally, the serene environment of the temple offers spiritual healing, while unique rituals, including the offering of 'Tirupati Laddu' as prasadam** and the tonsuring ritual symbolizing the surrender of ego, enhances the religious experience. Furthermore, the temple's rich history, evident in its Dravidian architectural style and cultural practices, adds to the significance of the darshan. Hence, a visit to Tirupati Balaji is considered a deeply enriching and transformative experience for devotees.

Day 9: Tirupati - Shri Kalahasthi

Visit Shri Kalahasthi, famous for its Shiva lingam representing the element of air. Explore the temple dedicated to Goddess Parvati as Shiva-Gnanam Gnana Prasunamba. Witness special pujas for Rahu/Ketu (related to horoscope problems). Overnight stay in Tirupati.

Srikalahasti's religious significance is primarily rooted in its status as a prominent place of worship for Lord Shiva. Here's more on its religious importance:

- **Panchabhoota Sthalam*****: Srikalahasti Temple is considered one of the five Panchabhoota Sthalams or elemental temples dedicated to Lord Shiva, each representing a different element. The Srikalahasti Temple represents the element of Vayu or wind. The inner sanctum, or the Garbhagriha, of the temple enshrines a vayu linga, which is a form of Shiva manifested as wind. The lamp inside the sanctum is said to flicker constantly, irrespective of the lack of air movement inside, indicating the presence of Vayu.

- **Rahu-Ketu Kshetra:** The temple is considered one of the few places where devotees can appease Rahu and Ketu, significant astrological entities according to Hindu belief. It is believed that worshipping at this temple can mitigate the ill-effects caused by the unfavourable position of these planets in a person's horoscope.
- **Dakshina Kailasam:** Srikalahasti Temple is often referred to as Dakshina Kailasam, meaning Kailash of the South (Mt.Kailash where shiva resides). Kailasa is the abode of Lord Shiva, so this epithet elevates the temple's status.
- **Kaal Sarp Dosha and Sarpa Dosha Nivarana:** This temple is also a renowned place for performing rituals to counteract the Kaal Sarp Dosha and Sarpa Dosha, specific conditions in a person's horoscope that are believed to cause various hardships. Pujas or rituals performed here are said to alleviate these troubles.

Day 10: Tirupati - Vellore

Drive to Vellore and visit Anand Siddha Ashram. Proceed to the hotel for an overnight stay.

Maha Ananda Siddha, born on December 6, 1930, in Dharmapuri district, is an esteemed spiritual figure known for his extraordinary practices. He has reportedly abstained from food or water since 2003 and has been blessed by Lord Shiva to live for 500 years. He has undertaken temple renovation work and initiated feeding programs for the poor. The Siddha is believed to understand the intent behind everyone's actions and words, and purity of intention is said to be required for engagement with him.

Lord Shiva, appearing to him in 2002, instructed Siddha to live in a cave on Mahadeva Mount, where he's currently building a unique temple without traditional architectural plans or machinery. This temple, one of the most powerful places in the universe according to him, serves to protect Mother Earth and humanity.

Renowned for his healing powers, Siddha has reportedly cured many deaf people and blessed childless couples. He also states he possesses eight bodies and sometimes meditates in fire. Annually, he performs a ritual bath on April 14th, the Day of the Siddhas, in accordance with Lord Shiva's instruction.

His life reflects the meaning of his name, "Ananda" – great bliss, as he aims to restore balance to the universe.

Day 11: Vellore - Thanjavur

Drive to Thanjavur and explore the famous Brihadeshwara Temple which houses one of the largest Shivalingam in the world. Overnight stay in Thanjavur. This temple visit depends upon what time we depart from Vellore and what time we get to Thanjavur, as it is an almost 300 KM drive. However, we may visit the temple the next morning as well.

The Brihadeeswarar Temple, or the Big Temple, in Thanjavur, dedicated to Lord Shiva, holds immense religious significance. It houses one of the world's largest Shiva Lingams, embodying the deity in his aniconic form, and a massive Nandi statue, Shiva's mount, believed to convey prayers directly to Shiva. The temple complex also includes shrines dedicated to various other deities, making it a comprehensive spiritual site. The temple hosts numerous religious festivals such as the Chithirai festival, enhancing its religious relevance. The temple's spiritually charged ambiance offers devotees a conducive environment for meditation and spiritual practices. Furthermore, its intricate carvings and frescoes, which depict stories and teachings from Hindu mythology, serve not only as an architectural marvel but also as a form of religious instruction. Brihadeeswarar Temple stands as a vital pilgrimage site for the devotees, embodying profound religious and spiritual significance.

Day 12: Thanjavur - Rameshwaram

After breakfast, visit the Brihadeeswarar Temple in Thanjavur. Proceed to Rameshwaram. Overnight stay in Rameshwaram.

Rameshwaram is home to the Ramanathaswamy Temple, one of the twelve Jyotirlinga shrines where Lord Shiva is worshiped, it is a major pilgrimage site. Rameshwaram is deeply associated with the epic Ramayana, as it is the place where Lord Rama built a bridge across the sea to Lanka to rescue his wife Sita from the demon king Ravana. It is also here that Rama worshiped Shiva to cleanse himself of the sin of killing Ravana, a Brahmin, giving rise to the primary deity of the temple, Ramanathaswamy. The temple's holy corridors, architectural grandeur, and the ritual of taking a bath in its 22 holy wells draw

devotees worldwide, enhancing its religious importance. Moreover, Rameshwaram is considered the Varanasi of the South, suggesting that dying in this place would bring salvation.

Day 13: Rameshwaram

Visit the Ramanathaswamy Jyotirlingam and the sacred wells. Take a dip in the ocean at Agnitheertham. Drive to Dhanushkodi where the three oceans meet. Return to the hotel for an overnight stay.

Day 14: Rameshwaram - Madurai

Morning visit to the Pamban Bridge and the Five-faced Hanuman Temple. Drive to Madurai. Overnight stay in Madurai.

Day 15: Madurai

Visit the Meenakshi Amman Temple, explore the temple premises, and witness the evening temple ceremony. Transfer to the Madurai airport for your onward journey.

The Meenakshi Amman Temple in Madurai, holds immense significance in various aspects. Dedicated to Goddess Meenakshi, an incarnation of Goddess Parvati, and Lord Sundareswarar, a form of Lord Shiva, it is a pivotal pilgrimage site, particularly for Shaktism followers who venerate Meenakshi as the principal deity. The temple's architecture, characterized by intricately carved gopurams and pillared halls, is a testament to the grandeur of Dravidian craftsmanship. The temple hosts the renowned Chithirai Festival, which celebrates the celestial wedding of Meenakshi and Sundareswarar, drawing devotees from across the globe. While the current structure dates back to the 17th century, the temple's roots purportedly extend 2500 years, underscoring its historical importance. As a Shakti Peetha, it is considered one of the holiest shrines of the Mother Goddess, enhancing its spiritual significance. Furthermore, the temple complex once served as a hub for education, demonstrated by the presence of multiple mandapams. Hence, the Meenakshi Amman Temple is a beacon of religious devotion, architectural

splendor, cultural vibrancy, and historical richness, embodying the cultural ethos of India.

Foreign nationals can enter the temple and see and visit most of the parts but they are not allowed to enter the main shrines inside.

DESCRIPTIONS OF SOME OF THE LOCAL NAMES / TERMS USED ABOVE

* In Vedic astrology, Kaal Sarp Dosha is a condition in the horoscope of a person where all seven of the main celestial bodies or planets — Sun, Moon, Mars, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, and Mercury — are positioned or hemmed between the shadow planets Rahu and Ketu.

"Kaal Sarp" translates to "Serpent of Time," with "Kaal" meaning time and "Sarp" meaning serpent. Rahu and Ketu, in Hindu mythology, are considered serpent deities, with Rahu being the serpent's head and Ketu the tail.

This dosha is believed to have a significant impact on an individual's life, often leading to various hardships and struggles. It is said that the person may face hurdles in every aspect of life, such as career, health, finance, and personal life. The severity and nature of the problems vary depending on the positioning of Rahu and Ketu in different houses of the astrological chart.

However, it's important to note that not all astrologers or branches of astrology consider Kaal Sarp Dosha. Some argue that it's not mentioned in classical texts and its effects may be overemphasized.

If it is believed that someone has Kaal Sarp Dosha in their horoscope, certain rituals or pujas, like the Kaal Sarp Dosha Puja, are performed to mitigate the supposed negative effects. Temples like the Mallikarjuna Temple in Srisailem are popular places for conducting such rituals.

** Prasadam, also spelled as Prasad, is a religious offering made to a deity during Hindu rituals and prayers. After the offering, it is distributed among the devotees, who consume it as a blessing from the deity. The term 'Prasadam' is derived from Sanskrit and means 'grace' or 'mercy'. In the context of Tirupati Balaji temple, 'Laddu Prasadam' is very significant. The laddus, made from

gram flour, sugar, ghee (clarified butter), cashew nuts, cardamom, and other ingredients, are offered to Lord Venkateswara during the ritual worship. These laddus are then given to the devotees as Prasadam. The Tirupati Laddu is particularly famous for its unique taste and is considered a special blessing from the deity. It has even been granted Geographical Indication status, further highlighting its cultural and religious significance. So, 'Laddu Prasadam' refers to the sacred laddus that are offered to the deity and then distributed among the devotees as a blessing from the god.

*** The term 'Panchabhoota Sthalam' refers to five specific temples in India dedicated to Lord Shiva, with each representing one of the five prime elements of nature - Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Space (or Ether). These elements, also known as 'Pancha Bhootas', are believed to be the fundamental components of life. These temples are important pilgrimage sites in South India, with each temple housing a Shiva Lingam that embodies one of these elements. Here's a brief description of each:

- **Prithvi (Earth) Lingam:** The Ekambareswarar Temple in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu, represents the earth element. The temple's main deity, Ekambareswarar, is worshiped in the form of Prithvi Lingam.
- **Appu (Water) Lingam:** The Thiruvanaikaval Jambukeswarar Temple in Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu, represents the water element. Inside the sanctum, an underground water stream is said to constantly bathe the lingam.
- **Agni (Fire) Lingam:** The Arunachaleswarar Temple in Thiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, represents the fire element. Here, Lord Shiva is worshiped as an infinite fire and the temple is known for the Karthikai Deepam, a festival where a huge beacon is lit atop the Arunachala hill, symbolizing the fire element.
- **Vayu (Air) Lingam:** The Srikalahasteeswara Temple in Srikalahasti, Andhra Pradesh, represents the air element. The lingam in this temple is known as the Vayu Lingam, and a lamp inside the inner sanctum flickers continuously, symbolizing the presence of Vayu, despite the absence of any air movement.
- **Akasha (Space) Lingam:** The Nataraja Temple in Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu, represents the element of space or ether. Here, Lord Shiva is worshiped in his form as Nataraja, performing the cosmic dance. The Akasha Lingam is symbolized by the empty space in the Garbhagriha or sanctum sanctorum. These five temples are significant in Saivism, and each temple's

architecture, lore, and rituals are centered around the element they represent. Visiting these five temples is considered a holy pilgrimage for followers of Lord Shiva.

**** In Indian architecture, especially in Hindu temple architecture, a "gopuram" is a monumental entrance tower. These towers are usually adorned with ornate carvings and statues depicting various deities and scenes from Hindu mythology. The word "gopuram" comes from two Tamil words: "go" or "gu," meaning "god," and "puram" meaning "exterior" or "outside." So, "gopuram" can be translated as "god's exterior" or "god's entrance." Gopurams are typically found in Dravidian-style Hindu temples, which are mainly located in Southern India. They are not only a grand entrance to the temple complex but also serve a functional purpose. The height of the gopuram allows it to serve as a landmark, making it easier for devotees to locate the temple from a distance.

Gopurams are usually multi-storied and taper in form, with the largest gopurams containing several stories, each adorned with a profusion of images of gods and goddesses, mythological creatures, and motifs of mythical and religious scenes. The design and artistry of gopurams vary from temple to temple, often reflecting the period they were built in, the dynasty that commissioned them, and the specific traditions of the region.

***** "Siddha" is a Sanskrit term that translates to "perfected one" or "one who has attained spiritual enlightenment." In the context of Indian spiritual traditions, Siddhas refer to accomplished yogis or spiritual practitioners who have achieved a high level of spiritual and yogic power, often believed to possess miraculous abilities. The term

"Siddha" signifies the state of having achieved ultimate knowledge and realization.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

To travel to India you need to apply for a VISA and this is your responsibility!

Please check this page: <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/tvoa.html>

Tour Organizer Contact Info:

For any questions, contact Shanti at +1-805-540-9507 via WhatsApp or email:
info@newlightcollective.com

