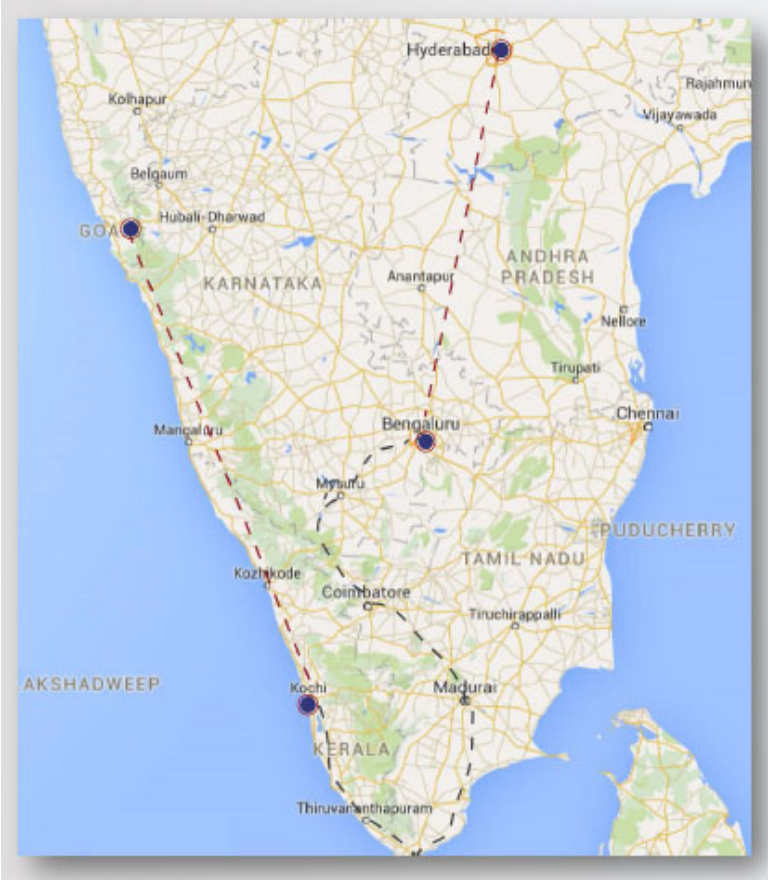
HIDDEN INDIA



For good reason, India is called “the sub-continent” a world unto itself over 5,000 years old, 1.3billion people enclosed within an area 1/3rd the size of the US. Most of it remains hidden and unknown to us.

This is an exploration into the Hidden India beyond the Taj Mahal. To find it, we venture to that area of India least known to the West, where we find the most ancient Hindu culture and the most ancient Christian culture, founded by one of Christ’s 12 Apostles. All of this is combined with the vibrant New India, epitomized here by India’s Silicon Valley.

An area steeped in history and culture; of beauty, peace, serenity; of romantic luxury, marvelous hotels, refined cuisine, and gorgeous beaches. And yes, there are jungles with tigers.

This is Southern India – the most fabulous part of India, yet unknown even to most of those who have been to India before. The best time to go is February, when the weather is most delightful. That’s when I’m going, and I invite you to join me.

Day 1: *Thursday, February 04*

We begin in Hyderabad, India, dual capital of both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states. There are direct flights to Hyderabad International Airport from London-Heathrow, Dubai, Singapore, and many other cities. Transfer upon arrival to the 5-star Taj Krishna Hotel.

Day at leisure. The Taj Krishna is in the city center with malls nearby, as well as the city's main Hindu temple, the solid white marble *Birla Mandir*:

This evening we have our Welcome Dinner, with our first taste of the famous Hyderabadi Cuisine, at the private home of a good friend of Jack Wheeler's.

Day 2: *Friday, February 05*

This is our one day here and we make it count. We have a morning exploration of the Golkanda Fortress, built in the 900s next to the famous diamond mines that produced the Koh-i-Noor and Hope diamonds.

After lunch, we visit the Chowmahalla Palace (left), residence of Hyderabad's Nizam rulers. Afterwards, we see the landmark of Hyderabad, the Charminar (right). Built by an Islamic ruler in the late 1500s, it nonetheless has a Hindu temple in one of its minarets!

Adjacent to the Charminar are the bazaars that made Hyderabad renowned as the City of Pearls. Every exotic and beautiful item in India is here – a shopper's ultimate delight.

At day's end, we retire to the Jade Room of the Falaknuma Palace for High Tea and watch the sunset from its balcony.

Dinner is at your leisure to give everyone a chance to retire early and be ready for tomorrow.

Day 3: *Saturday, February 06*

We're off on an early morning flight to Bangalore, capital of Karnataka state. We stay at the 5-star Oberoi hotel. We start with flowers.

This is the *Lalbagh Flower Garden*, the most famous botanical garden in India. A gardener's paradise, it has a replica of London's Crystal Palace and a rock outcropping that's 3 billion years old – the Lalbagh Rock.

Once we manage to tear ourselves away from such peaceful, serene beauty, we visit the Krishna Rajendra Flower Market – the largest flower market in all Asia. No one photo can possibly do it justice, so the link is to an abundance of total eye-candy pictures.

We end the morning visiting the *Dodda Ganesha Temple*, devoted to the most popular Hindu deity Ganesha, provider of wisdom and good fortune. He's also the most recognizable with his elephant head. Ganesha's statue in the temple is 18ft high, 16ft wide, carved from a single boulder, painted white, and decorated with gold and jewels.

Yet while Bangalore is renowned for its gardens and temples, it exemplifies New India as a global hub of information technology and biotechnology research, to the extent it's sobriquet is "The Silicon Valley of India." The center of this is the Bagmane Tech Park, home to many of the most prominent info-tech companies in the world.

We'll have lunch here with some of Bagmane's rising entrepreneurs, who are on the cutting edge of info-tech product development. After a tour of the stunning buildings and architecture of Bagmane's various campuses, we'll return to the Oberoi to enjoy its many amenities. This evening we'll dine at one of the city's best restaurants.

Day 4: *Sunday, February 07*

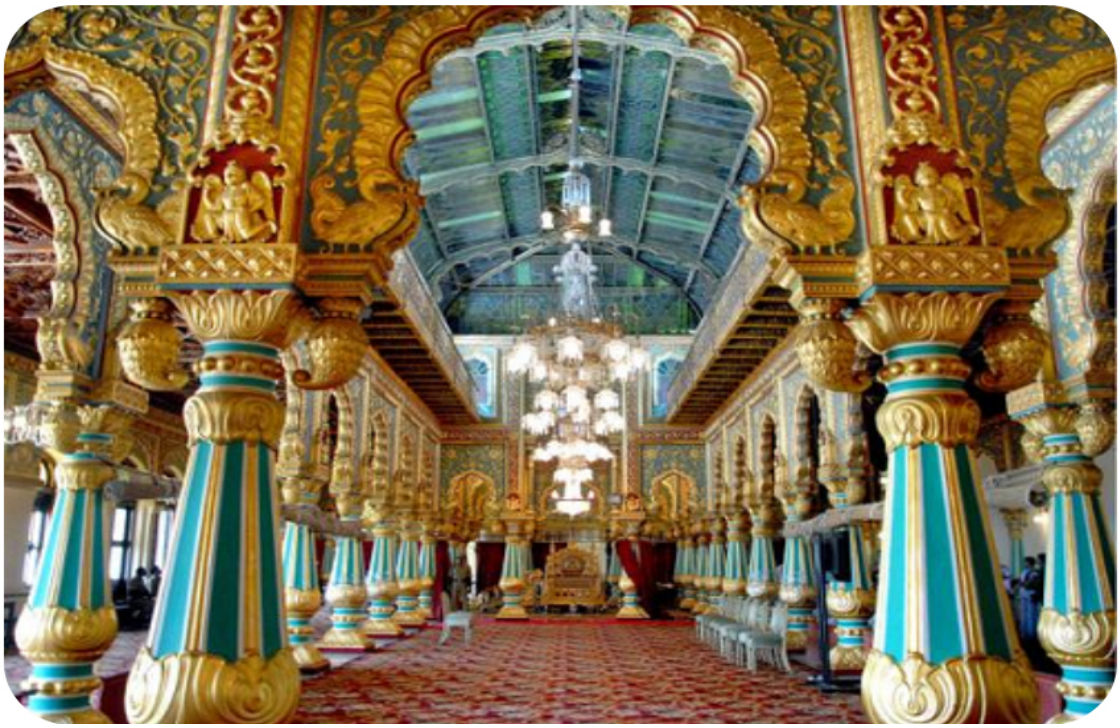
This morning we drive 90 miles to the historic city of Mysore. Enroute we make a stop at a small village a few miles off the main road to see the Painted Storks of Kokkare Bellur. It's a nesting and breeding site for painted storks and spot-billed pelicans from all over Asia, living in total harmony with the villagers.

At this time of year, the chicks have hatched and are fledging. It's an extraordinary sight.

Upon reaching Mysore, we check in to the city's most historic lodging, the Green Hotel, converted from the Chittaranjan Palace of Mysore's rajas. After lunch, we'll learn why Mysore is known as "The City of Silk." Mysore is the main producer of silk in India, and we'll see how it's made straight from mulberry silkworm cocoons.

Then we explore one of the great sights in all India – Mysore Palace, the residence of the Wodeyar Dynasty, the Maharajas of Mysore from 1350 to 1950.

The interior is even more breathtaking than the exterior. This is famous Durbar Hall leading to the Maharaja’s Golden Throne:



We stay until closing time at 5:30, slip off for a quick dinner, then we’re back before 7 when the palace is lit up (only) on Sunday evenings. A sight we’ll never ever forget:

Day 5: *Monday, February 08*

We'll be anxious to get on the road early this morning, for we're driving to the Nagarhole Tiger Reserve.

Nagarhole contains more big wild animals than most any other sanctuary in India – more Asian elephants than anywhere else in the world, over 100 tigers, scores of leopards, their prey in

profusion, plus crocodiles and over 300 bird species, birdwatcher heaven.

We stay at the Orange County Kabini Resort, named by *National Geographic Traveler* as one of the 25 World's Best Eco-Lodges. It is simply out of this world. There's an ayurvedic spa, an infinity pool, the food is fabulous, and you're treated like royalty.

We'll go for a boat ride on the river to see crocs and elephants up close – and a jeep safari in the forest to watch for tigers and leopards. It's always a matter of luck, for these are animals in the wild – nonetheless Nagarhole is the best place in India to see them. This is what we're looking for:

Day 6: *Tuesday, February 09*

We spend this morning doubling our chances of seeing tigers and leopards – especially since we'll be on *elephant back* to see them. No noise, just the elephant quietly walking…the tiger doesn't even notice you.

The afternoon is yours to enjoy – a float safari to see crocs, elephants, and other wildlife by the river banks, a jeep safari through the forest, a birdwatching walk, or simply relaxing at the spa or by the pool. We end the day with a candlelight dinner by the river.

Day 7: *Wednesday, February 10*

We bid a reluctant goodbye to Nagarhole for a morning drive through a southern portion of the Western Ghats World Heritage Site to reach the utterly charming town of Ooty, built as a hill station by the British in the 1800s.

In addition to the town surrounded by flower gardens and tea plantations, in the area of Ooty live one of the most ancient and unique tribes in all India, the Todas. They still continue to practice their old ways and religion, with many still living in their dramatic thatch homes:

After checking in to Ooty's best, the Highland Hotel, we'll spend the afternoon exploring the town, its gardens, and visiting the Toda people.

Day 8: *Thursday, February 11*

Ooty is in the Nilgiri Hills of the state of Tamil Nadu, and is the terminus of the Nilgiri Mountain Railway, completed by the British in 1908. Using steam locomotives and a rack-and-pinion track, it traverses 16 tunnels, 250 bridges, and 108 curves in 26 miles. So historic that it is a World Heritage Site, this is one of the great train rides on earth. So of course, we're going to take it today.

We'll spend a relaxing morning in Ooty, then board the train after lunch. The train takes four hours to reach Mettupalayam, the railway's other terminus, whereupon we drive to the commercial and industrial hub of Tamil Nadu, *Coimbatore*. We'll arrive at our hotel, The Residency, by early evening.

Day 9: *Friday, February 12*

We're off by mid-morning to a place you won't believe. It's a four hour drive to the cultural heart of Tamil Nadu, Madura. Known to the ancient Greeks and Romans, Madura is one of the oldest

cities in India. We stay at the 5-star Taj Pasumalai hotel. As soon as we can after check-in, we make a beeline for the most extraordinary, the most spectacular Hindu temple in all India.

You will not believe your eyes when you gaze upon the Meenakshi Temple Complex. There are 14 enormous temple towers with the highest 170 feet, all completely covered with thousands upon thousands of brilliantly painted Hindu gods, goddesses, heroes and demons. It's like nothing you've ever seen in your life. This is the view from the top of the highest temple:

The fantastic figures adorning the temple towers are in the tens of thousands:

What's more, the interiors of the temples are also stunningly spectacular – and the entire complex is lit up at night…

You can't experience or begin to assimilate this in an afternoon and evening. We'll be back tomorrow.

Day 10: *Saturday, February 13*

We have the whole day to spend as much time at the Meenakshi Temples as you want. We'll also visit the 17th century Thirumalai Palace of Madura's Nayak kings nearby, and the majestic St. Mary's Cathedral.

We'll have time to relax by the pool and have a nice dinner at the Taj Pasumalai, then we'll return to the temple by 9pm to witness the incense shrouded *Night Procession,* where priests bring a silver encrusted icon of the god Shiva to spend the night with his goddess consort Meenakshi.

Day 11: *Sunday, February 14*

We leave by mid-morning to drive to the very southern tip of India, *Kanyakumari*, arriving at the appropriately-named Seashore Hotel. This will be our view:

These two islets are just off the coast. On the left is the Vivekenanda Rock Memorial – on the right, the giant statue honoring Thiruvalluvar, the most revered Tamil poet and philosopher who lived some 2,200 years ago. We'll visit both.

One of the more fascinating aspects of Kanyakumari is its being the center of Christianity in Tamil Nadu. Almost half of the area's population are Christian. One of India's most famous churches, the Church of our Lady of Ransom, overlooks the city, where we can attend Sunday services and meet Tamil Christians.

Kanyakumari is a real fishing village, and we'll walk on the beach to make friends with the fishermen as they bring home their catch for the day. We'll end the day enjoying the ocean sunset on the Seashore's rooftop bar.

Day 12: *Monday, February 15*

Here at the bottom of India, we'll be awakened by an ocean sunrise as well – which jump starts our day for an early breakfast, then a train ride up the Malabar Coast to Alleppey in the state of Kerala. We transfer to the Marari Beach Resort, a place of utter serenity on a beach as idyllic as can be.

We arrive to a sumptuous lunch and spend the afternoon in this peaceful haven. We have a sunset dinner on the beach.

Day 13: *Tuesday, February 16*

Today is very special. Behind our beach on the Malabar Coast are the famed Kerala Backwaters,

"one of the most beautiful locations on earth," to quote *National Geographic* magazine. To explore them by luxury houseboat is one of National Geographic's *"50 Top Experiences of a Lifetime."*

After a relaxing morning at Marari, we transfer to and board the luxurious Cinnamon houseboat, where our private chef has prepared lunch for us. We'll visit tiny fishing villages tucked into hidden palm-fringed lagoons. We'll catch our dinner of fresh fish. We'll spend the night moored in a secluded cove. We'll have a day of such beauty and tranquility it must be experienced to be understood.

Day 13: *Wednesday, February 17*

After a wonderful breakfast, we disembark from our Kerala houseboat and within an hour we arrive at the historic port city of Cochin (Kochi) and our hotel, the Old Harbor. The first thing we'll notice are these enormous nets suspended over the water. These are Cochin's famous *Chinese fishing*

nets used since the early 1300s.

We'll wait until sunset when the best pictures are taken like this. For now, we embark on an exploration of extraordinary history.

It is the story of one of Jesus' Twelve Disciples, St. Thomas the Apostle, who spread the Gospel widely after the Crucifixion and landed on the Malabar Coast of India in 52 AD. There he founded what may be the oldest Christian communities in the world, that of St. Thomas Christians, or as they are locally known, *Nasrani* (people of Nazareth).

St. Thomas founded seven and a half churches in Kerala, the last uncompleted when he passed away. They still stand to this day – and we are going to visit the two most important. The first and thus the oldest church in all India is the St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Church in Payalur.
It is here we will find a pilgrimage site dedicated to St. Thomas:

We'll also visit the other principal Apostolic Church established by St. Thomas, the Syro-Malabar Pilgrim Church at Kottakkavu. The 2,000 year-old community of St. Thomas Christians thrives today, comprising some 20% of the population of all Kerala. It is a tribute to religious freedom in India, and certainly one of the most fascinating historically.

We return in time to explore Old Cochin, the millennia-old center of Indian spice-trading for the Chinese, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Portuguese, Dutch and British – and take those sunset photos

of the Chinese fishing nets right next to our Old Harbor hotel.

Day 14: *Thursday, February 18*

We have a mid-morning flight to perhaps the most enchanting state of India – Goa. Established by the Portuguese in 1510, Goa remained a colony of Portugal's until Indian leader Jawaharlal Nehru ordered the Indian Army to invade and seize Goa militarily in 1961. Today, Goa is India's smallest state, yet has 2½ times the per capita GDP as the rest of India. It is ranked by the Indian Finance Commission as having the highest quality of life of all 36 Indian states and territories.

We stay at the luxury boutique Pousada Tauma, right on the "Queen of Goan Beaches," Calangute. Goa is Platonically paradisical, and we're in the most beautiful part.

Not far away is the World Heritage Site of Historical Old Goa. The primary reason for its status is the Basilica do Bom Jesus ("Basilica of Good Jesus" in Portuguese), a pilgrimage site for millions of Christians around the world:

The Basilica contains in a silver casket the body of St. Francis Xavier (1506-1552), a founder of the Jesuits. Interestingly, many Hindus in Goa pray to St. Francis as well.

We'll explore Old Goa this afternoon, and have our Farewell Dinner at one of its best restaurants.

Day 15: *Friday, February 19*

We include today to do what you wish. You can relax all day at the Pousada Tauma and cavort with elephants on Calangute Beach:

Or take off and explore Goa on your own. Our Farewell Dinner was last night as many flights heading back home out of India leave late at night, and you may want one this evening. If not, please join us for a sunset dinner on the beach.

Day 16: *Saturday, February 20*

This is Departure Day. There are flights to most major cities in India and several to the Gulf States and Far East to connect onwards. Or stay in Goa for a while – its enchantment will beckon you.

Trip Details to Join Us!

Led by Dr. Jack Wheeler

Dates:
Tuesday, February 04 to Saturday, February 20, 2015.

Cost per person: $7,850

Deposit, Payment, Cancellation and Refund
* 20% non-refundable deposit of $1,570 per person due upon application.
* Balance in full of $6,280 due by December 15, 2015, 60 days before departure.
* Refund of balance in full on condition of a fully-paid acceptable replacement for you. *Note*: you may want to consider trip cancellation insurance.

Important notes:

Cost includes:
* Domestic flights: Hyderabad – Banagalore, Kochin - Goa. All ground transportation, transfers, tours, and activities as specified in the itinerary with local English-speaking guides in private, air-conditioned vehicles. Bottled water on the vehicles.
* All meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner – including bottled water) with group from dinner on Thursday,

February 04 to breakfast on Friday, February 19.
* All accommodation from the night of Thursday, February 04 through the night of Friday, February 19.

Cost does not include:
* International flights to/from India; visa fees; single occupancy accommodation. Single supplement surcharge is $1,960 – what the Indian hotels charge us.
* Meals, services, and activities not with group or in itinerary; personal expenditures, such as laundry, camera fees, communications, gratuities, etc.; beer, wine, or alcoholic drinks.

Note:
* Online India E-Visa now available: https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html
* *Important caveat*: Every effort will be made to adhere to the itinerary above. Due to the vagaries of travel in this region and of adventure travel in general, the itingerary may be altered in any way necessary. Participants are expected to accept this and to maintain a cheerful attitude on an adventure such as this.
Only 8 adventurers can join Jack to Hidden India. To be one of them, please contact us immediately.

Life is short – the time for a Great Adventure is now.

Global Venture Holdings, Inc.
5810 Kingstowne Center Drive Suite 120-333
Alexandria, VA 22315

Phone**: 202- 656-3008**
email: jack@tothepointnews.com
Bank wiring instructions on request.

WheelerExpeditions

Dr. Jack Wheeler has had parallel careers: one in adventure and exploration with *Wheeler Expeditions*; the other in the field of geopolitics after receiving his Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Southern California, where he lectured on Aristotelian ethics.

His adventures began early. The youngest Eagle Scout in history at age 12, he climbed the Matterhorn at age 14, swam the Hellespont (LIFE Magazine 12/12/60) and lived with Amazon headhunters at 16, hunted a man-eating tiger in Vietnam at 17, and started an export business in Vietnam at 19. He wrote *The Adventurer's Guide* (New York: Mackay, 1975), described by Merv Griffin as "the definitive book for anyone wishing to lead a more adventurous and exciting life." He has three "first contacts" with tribes never before contacted by the outside world: a clan of Aushiri in the Amazon, the Wali-ali-fo in New Guinea, and a band of Bushmen in the Kalahari. He retraced Hannibal's route over the Alps with elephants; led numerous expeditions in Central Asia, China, Tibet, Africa, the Amazon and elsewhere, including 18 expeditions to the North Pole; and has been listed in *The Guinness Book of World Records* for the first free-fall skydive in history at the North Pole. His company has conducted exclusive expeditions to dozens of countries across the globe for over 35 years.

Dr. Wheeler has been called the "real Indiana Jones" by the Wall St. Journal. He has traveled to over 193 countries on all seven continents. He leads three to five expeditions a year. In addition to consulting and writing, he works with business leaders on projects worldwide. On a personal note, he married Ms. Rebel Holiday in St Tropez, France in 1986. They are the proud parents of two fine young men, Capt. Brandon Holiday Wheeler, USMC, (age 30) and Jackson Holiday Wheeler, (age 23) studying Philology (Classical Linguistics) at Sofia University in Bulgaria.

Jack Wheeler has traveled to every country in the world
– join him on Hidden India!