

wildlife

The coastline, waters, plains and jungles of the south provide a varied habitat for a vast range of species. It's one of the most appealing regions for birdwatchers, with wetlands and sanctuaries such as Chilka Lake and Calimere home to storks, herons, cranes and flamingoes, particularly between November and January. Birds of prey are also often spotted over open countryside.

Elephants, revered through the Hindu god Ganesha, are found throughout southern India – in the wild, at reserves that look after former logging elephants, or as sculptures outside temples. The mighty gaur, the large Indian ox, can be seen in national parks in Kerala, Karnataka and Goa, along with peacocks, monkeys, sambar deer and, for the lucky, tigers. The sight of a tiger's fresh paw print reminds visitors how privileged they are to share the forest with its natural residents. For a walk on the slightly less wild side, Coorg is a hilly, lush, coffee-growing region where dawn spice walks are popular. And when the guides imitate bird calls, they usually get a reply from deep within the forest.



cuisine

Southern India has the widest choice of vegetarian dishes, typified by the regional cuisine of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Rice, often flavoured with coconut or lime, along with tasty stuffed masala dosa pancakes and idli rice cakes are among the staples served with pulse and vegetable sauces. Southern India is known as the 'fish basket' of the nation and Portuguese-influenced Goa is famous for fish curries and seafood, often steamed in banana leaves, as well as eye-watering vindalhos.

A typical Indian meal will comprise different varieties of bread and rice combined with lentil, vegetable, meat, fish or poultry dishes, rounded off with a dessert to satisfy the sweetest tooth. Sometimes food is served on large plantain leaves, without cutlery but with bowls of sauce. Indians believe the appearance, aroma, taste, texture and feel of the food are all part of the culinary experience, so don't be afraid to dig in and use bread and rice to roll up the food into manageable mouthfuls. Coconut water is a refreshing and popular drink in the south, or Kingfisher beer comes in 650ml bottles.

▶ **Sample: On The Go Tours** has a seven-night cookery course in Goa from £579 per person, based on two sharing and excluding flights. Price includes accommodation, four cookery classes and a market visit with a chef. T: 020 7371 1113. www.onthegotours.com

