



A PILGRIMAGE TO SOUTH INDIA

Wednesday 1st - Wednesday 14th February 2012

Further information

What is the purpose of this visit?

In a multicultural and multifaith world, this visit will offer the opportunity to encounter two other major faith traditions, Hinduism and Zen Buddhism; to explore the practice of meditation within those traditions; and to reflect on how this practice meets and enriches our Christian understandings.

In addition, the visit will offer the opportunity to:

- Learn about the rich complexity of life in modern India - a society going through a rapid process of change as India emerges as a major economic power in the world;
- Visit local development projects, and reflect on issues of justice and equality in a world of huge divisions between rich and poor.

Who is it for?

Clergy or lay people who would like to visit India, and who are interested in contemplative spirituality and interfaith understanding. The group will consist of twelve people in all.

Who will lead it?

Canon Patrick and Mrs Sam Woodhouse will be leading the visit. Patrick is a Canon at Wells Cathedral. He has long had an interest in contemplative spirituality. He and Sam visited India in 1997 as part of a sabbatical in which he was exploring connections between different traditions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity). Subsequently he wrote a small book to encourage the practice of contemplative prayer entitled "Beyond Words".

They have since visited India many times, as their daughter Imogen now lives in India; she is married to Kiran and they live in the village of Silvepura, just north of Bangalore. Imogen and Kiran run "Sangam", a small education centre (see information overleaf).

Both Patrick and Sam have had an interest in development issues since they lived in Tanzania in 1980. During the sabbatical in 1997 they visited development projects in India run by Oxfam and Christian Aid.

Sam trained as a teacher, ran a global education centre for 10 years, and now works as the geography and citizenship adviser for Somerset LA. Much of her work has involved arranging opportunities for teachers to visit places very different to ours in the UK; she believes in the effectiveness of first-hand experience in bridging the gaps between human experiences. She currently helps Imogen arrange study visits for teachers to South India.

Where will we go?

We will stay in four very different places:

1. At **"Sangam"**, the small education centre run by Imogen and Kiran Sahi. This is based at "The Land", a 2-acre wooded garden, on the edge of the rural village of Silvepura, 20 km N of Bangalore. For more information see their new website www.sahiprojects.com/sangam Sangam can accommodate up to 12 people, on the assumption that guests are happy to share rooms. Accommodation is simple but comfortable, and the food is predominantly south Indian.



2. At **Tiruvannamalai**, a Hindu holy town in Tamil Nadu, where there is a large temple - "one of the largest and most captivating in India" (Lonely Planet Guide). Far from the tourist trail, we will see Hindu ritual, worship and life at first hand. We shall stay in a small hotel called the Arunai Anantha, which has adequate western facilities. Rooms will be mainly twin-bedded but with some single rooms available.

3. At **Shantivanam Ashram**, 38 km to the west of the city of Trichipalli. Shantivanam is a contemplative monastic community based on the Rule of St Benedict. It seeks to be a place of meeting for Hindus and Christians. Fr Bede Griffiths lived there until his death in 1993. We will share in their life and worship within the context of the surrounding Hindu village and culture. Accommodation and food are basic and very simple, in twin-bedded rooms.



4. At **Bodhi Zendo**, a Zen meditation centre in the Western Ghats. It was founded by Fr Ama Samy, a Jesuit priest and a Zen Master, who can be said to stand in between Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. The Centre is high in the hills with wonderful panoramic views of the surrounding mountains. There is a beautiful garden and an extensive library. We will take part in their life, including group meditation (zazen) and shared work. Accommodation is in single, clean, spacious rooms.

What will the weather be like?

February is about the best month for travel to India. It will be dry, as the monsoon rains finish in November. Temperatures will vary according to our geographical position - at The Land we will be about 1000m high and temperatures will be around 32° in the daytime but will fall at night. Further south and at the much lower altitude at Shantivanam, it will be hotter and more humid, day and night. And then up in the Western Ghats at Bodhi Zendo it will be cooler again, with fresher air.

What about the food?

Food in south India is mainly vegetarian. The hotness of the food seems to follow the temperatures - at The Land it will be gently spicy, but at Shantivanam it will be quite hot. We will ensure that drinking water is available at all places - either boiled and filtered, or bottled. All main meals are provided within the cost of the pilgrimage.

What is the process of the visit, and what preparation will there be?

First of all we will hold an information session on the morning of May 21st, for people to hear more about the pilgrimage. If they decide they would like to join the group, we will ask them to fill in an application form, and depending on numbers there may need to be a process of selection, based mainly on how people see themselves using the pilgrimage in their work back at home. Then there will be two preparation days: a whole day in late September 2011 when we will reflect briefly on India, Hinduism, Zen Buddhism, and the places we will visit. We will also talk about kit lists, tips for travelling to India, health considerations, and how to get a visa etc. The second day will be half a day, or an evening, in January 2012 - an opportunity nearer the visit to clarify practicalities and do any further preparation.

Will phone or e-mail contact be possible with people back at home?

Cell phones work almost everywhere, and we will have with us a contact number for people back at home; we will give a list of phone numbers during our visit. E-mail may sometimes be available via internet cafes but shouldn't be relied upon.

How much will it cost?

We anticipate that £675 will fully cover all expenses within India. This figure will cover all accommodation, food, drinking water, and travel. It will also cover costs of guides or support people where necessary, and some donations on behalf of the group to charitable organisations. It will not cover costs of any extra snacks, alcoholic drinks, and of course any gifts or things people may want to bring home.

The flight costs are additional to this, and these can of course fluctuate. At present (March 2011) they are £560. These will need to be purchased in June or July.

These figures do not cover preparation costs e.g. a visa for entry to India (£39), travel insurance, costs of vaccinations, and travel in the UK to Heathrow Airport.

We will discuss all these questions, and many others, at the preparation session in September.

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