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MEET THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH INDIA & KERALA

Chryselle D'Silva Dias introduces her people.

THE SOUTHERN AND western part of India could be a continent by itself. The seven states and two Union Territories (Goa, Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and the Andaman Islands) encompass around 365 million people.

As across India, every state in this region is different, with its own culture, folk traditions, heritage and dozens of languages, and, of course, cuisine. Four hundred years of Portuguese rule resulted in bold Goan-Portuguese flavours while indigenous spirits such as *feni* – once deliberately subverted by colonial powers to quash their production – are today trendily packaged. Unlike in the north, coffee reigns supreme.

Beyond our obsession with food, the people of this region are different from our counterparts in the east and north. South India is generally seen as more liberal and literate. Kerala, in particular, is known for its high literacy rate (averaging 96%) and

of other faiths too. Kerala has one of the world's oldest Jewish communities, while in Karnataka you can still find a large number of well-preserved Jain monuments. Historically, religious harmony was a given but with the increasing saffronisation of the south, this may be changing.

The four major languages are Tamil (Tamil Nadu), Kannada (Karnataka), Telugu (Andhra Pradesh and Telangana) and Malayalam (Kerala). You'll find Marathi spoken in Maharashtra and Goa, while Tulu (Karnataka) and Konkani (Goa, Maharashtra and Karnataka) are also spoken by thousands of people. Although Hindi is the official language of the country (along with English), it is not the national language – a distinction that is crucial given

that India has 122 major languages and 1599 other languages, out of which 22 languages are recognised in the Constitution.

The implementation of Hindi in the southern states has been controversial since pre-

UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Thirteen of India's 42 UNESCO World Heritage Sites are located in South India. These include the Impressive Ajanta and Ellora Caves in Maharashtra, the Chola temples in Tamil Nadu, Hampi in Karnataka and the Churches of Old Goa.