

## **In the Footsteps of Saint Thomas, A Christian Faith Tour**



### ***Our Lady of Dolours Basilica, Thrisur***

Christianity in India is as old as Christianity itself. It is believed to have been brought to India by a disciple of Christ himself, long before America was discovered, and even before Europe adopted the faith.

According to tradition, St. Thomas, one of the twelve chosen Disciples of Christ and the Apostle of India sowed the seeds of Christianity in India. Extensive trade relations existed between India and the Mediterranean countries even before the Christian era. Following an existing trade route he set foot at Cranganore (Kodungallur) in 52 AD, which was then an important port. He traveled about various parts of Kerala by water and land, preaching the Gospel and forming Christian communities which began to grow. Besides the Jews who had by then settled in the region, many Brahmin families of Kerala also received the faith. As the region, St. Thomas came from, was broadly referred to as 'Syria' due to pre-existing trade relations, the new followers were referred to as 'Syrian Christians'.

St. Thomas established Seven and Half Churches or Ezharappallikal in Southern India. He was killed in 72 AD, his body was brought to Mylapore (near Chennai) and buried there. His tomb is venerated until this day.

The advent of Europeans in India for trade and commerce from the 15th century onwards led to the mass influx of Christians and subsequent development of Christian pilgrimage sites. These churches are as much a part of the heritage of India as its ancient temples and medieval mosques. In this tour, you will be taken to visit the seven churches founded by St. Thomas and also explore the Christian heritage of India. Indeed, while travelling in the region you will also get to see some of the most stunning temples of the region.

## Itinerary Snapshot View

- Day 1 – Cochin (Kerala- India)**  
Arrive from your home country
- Day 2- Cochin**  
Visit Churches in the nearby area
- Day 3- Alleppey**  
Cochin City Tour  
Enroute visit Churches
- Day 4- Alleppey**  
Backwater Cruise and Village tour
- Day 5- Kollam**  
Church visit
- Day 6- Thekkady**  
Forest Reserve enroute visit Church
- Day 7- Thekkady**  
Forest visit and Elephant experience
- Day 8- Madurai**  
Hindu Temple, Rickshaw ride
- Day 9- Trichy**  
Town of empty mansions
- Day 10-Trichy**  
Rock Fort Temple
- Day 11- Velankani**  
Lady of Good Health Church
- Day 12- Pondicherry**  
Walking tour of Tamil and French town
- Day 13-Chennai**  
Shore Temple
- Day 14- Chennai**  
City tour and St. Thomas Basilica
- Day 15- Fly home or Goa**
- Day 16- Goa**  
Old Town tour ...Basilica of Bom Jesus
- Day 17- Goa**  
Explore the lovely beaches
- Day 18- Flight back home via Mumbai**



## Detailed Itinerary

### Day 1: Cochin

Arrive in Cochin (Kochi). You will be met at the airport by our representative and **driven to Cherai** (1 hour).

Almost midway on the Kerala coast, just north of Cochin, Cherai Beach is a picturesque place with the Arabian Sea on one side and Backwaters on the other. Long stretches of golden sands and relatively calm waters make it ideal for swimming and sunbathing. Dolphins can be occasionally seen here and Chinese fishing nets on the waterfront are added attractions.

Cherai boasts a rich cultural past with many prominent monuments of Christian heritage.

During the day we will drive to North Paravur to **visit St Thomas Jacobite Church**. This church where the mortal remains of the Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of Jerusalem, St. Gregorios Abdul Galeel, is entombed, was founded in AD 1566 by the parishioners of the old MorThoman church located nearby. When they approached the ruler of Paravur (Paravur Thampuran, a Hindu king), he donated a plot of land situated in the midst of the seven bazaars of Paravur town, tax free. The church built here was consecrated in the name of St. Thomas, the Apostle.



**St Thomas Jacobite Church**

Continue to **Kodungallor Church**. According to the history and traditions of the Indian Church, Apostle St. Thomas reached 'Maliankara' (Malankara) in AD 52 and established a Church at a place in North Paravur then known as Kottailkavu. This is said to be the

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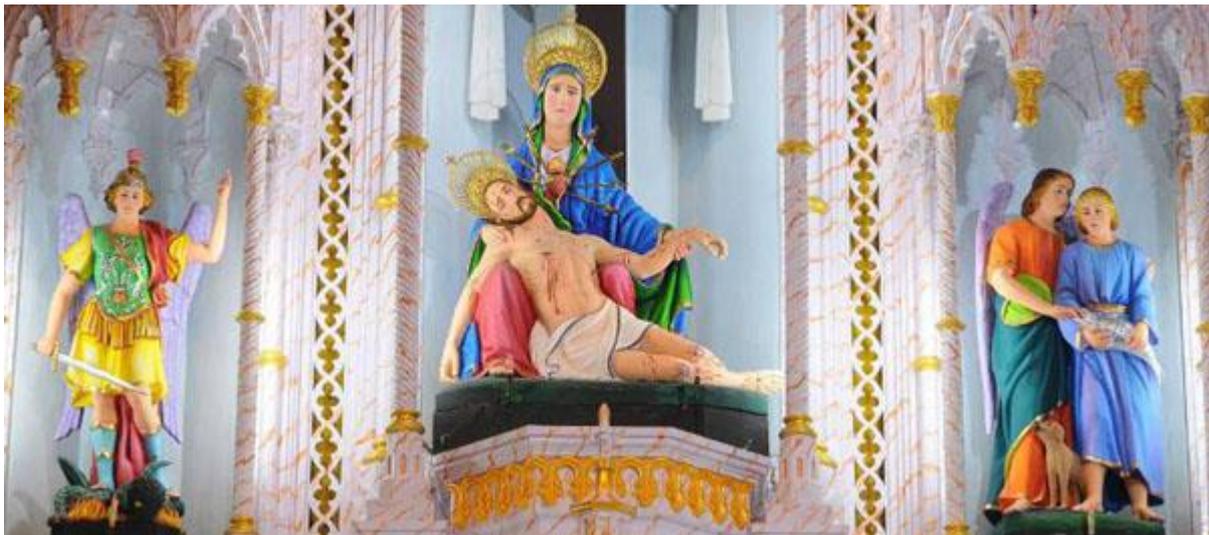
first Christian congregation in India. This historic site is located just a few miles south of the ancient port of Kodungallor. The early Christian converts are believed to be the Jewish settlers who migrated to the India and also some Hindus. North Paravur in the early centuries was the most prominent Christian centre in India and it still holds a unique position in the Malankara Church. A large Christian population, mostly Syrian Orthodox and Roman Catholics, lives here.

**Accommodation: A hotel in Cochin**

Meals:Dinner

**Day 2: Cochin**

After breakfast we will drive to Thrissur to **visit Our Lady of Dolours Basilica**, a minor basilica of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church. The third tallest church in Asia and the largest church in India, it is famous for its Gothic style architecture and exuberant interior decorations including fine specimens of murals, images of saints and scenes from the scriptures.



***Our Lady of Dolours Basilica***

Later we will continue to Palayoor to **visit the St. Thomas Church**. The church is unique in that it has a continuous history of two millennia and stands on the same spot where the apostle first established it. The first church founded by St. Thomas continued to exist for many centuries and in 1607 a more convenient church around the existing old structure for built.

After day long visits, drive back to your hotel.

**Accommodation: A hotel in Cochin**

Meals:Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 3: Cochin – Alleppey/Backwaters

Today we will have sight seeing in Fort Cochin area. **We have the option of arriving in Public ferry directly onto the Fort Cochin island and transfer in Indian tuk tuk to the monument as a joy ride.**

If Kerala is India's most beautiful state, which many believe, then the lovely port of Cochin is its jewel. It has been variously hailed as Queen of the Arabian Sea, Venice of Orient, etc. Some choose to call it simply a museum city for its rich past and colourful present. We will be taken to **visit Mattancherry Palace or Dutch Palace, Jewish Synagogue and St. Francis Church.**

Mattancherry Palace (closed on Fridays) was built by the Portuguese in 1555 for the maharaja of Cochin. Later renovated by the Dutch, it came to be known as the Dutch Palace. The little museum here has a collection of costumes, palanquins and other articles from the royalty.

Jewish Synagogue (closed on Fridays and Saturdays) was built in 1568. This simple building has marvellously rich interiors. There are clusters of coloured glass lamps hanging from the ceiling and the floor has blue willow patterned tiles, none of which are identical.

Built in 1503 at Fort Cochin, St. Francis Church is one of the oldest churches in the subcontinent. It was built by the Portuguese, but became a Protestant church with the arrival of the Dutch and an Anglican church after the British occupation. Vasco da Gama was buried in its churchyard.



#### **St. Francis Church**

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After a tour of Cochin, drive to **Kokkomangalam**.

St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Church at Kokkomangalam is one of the seven and a half churches founded by St. Thomas. He preached the gospel for about a year here and 1600 people are believed to have converted to Christianity through him. A portrait of St. Thomas is venerated here. The church has been renovated very recently giving it a total new look.

**Continue on to Alleppey** for an overnight stay. Referred to as the Venice of the East, Alleppey has always enjoyed an important place in the maritime history of Kerala. Today, it is famous for its boat races, backwater holidays, beaches, marine products and coir industry.

**Accommodation: A hotel in Alleppey (Backwaters area)**

Meals: Breakfast and Dinner



***Kerala Backwaters***

#### **Day 4: Alleppey/Backwaters**

Today enjoy a **houseboat cruise** on the famous Backwaters of Kerala with lunch. The entire state of Kerala is criss-crossed with waterways that provide for irrigation and also serve as convenient modes of transportation and commerce. Next to the coastline, these endless stretches of lakes and lagoons are together called the backwaters. Life along these canals and byways is quite different from that seen along the highways. Many of the villages are isolated and entirely dependent on the canals for means of livelihood, transportation and communication...and the best way to explore these surroundings is by a 'kettuvallam' or houseboat.

**We will enjoy the high tea with a prominent Christian family.**

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**Accommodation: A hotel in Alleppey (Backwaters area)**

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

**Day 5: Alleppey – Kollam**

This morning you will be drive to Niranam. **St. Mary's Orthodox Syrian Church** here was founded by St. Thomas in AD 54. The present building, supposedly the fourth, was constructed in 1912 and was renovated during the year 2000. Among the attractions here are a huge Cross made of granite, relics of St. Thomas, remnants of the old church, the golden cross etc.

Continue to Kollam and **visit Kollam Port Church**, popularly known as the Church of Our Lady Purification. It is believed to be one among the seven and a half churches founded by St. Thomas. Because of sea erosion, the church was reconstructed thrice. The present church was built in 1993.

Spend the night in Kollam. Kollam was formerly called Quilon and Tarsish. During the rule of the Travancore monarchy in southern Kerala, Kollam was the focal point of trade. Today, it is a major business and commercial centre in Kerala.

**Accommodation: A hotel in Kollam**

Meals: Breakfast and Dinner

**Day 6: Kollam – Thekkady**

Drive to **Nilakkal** and visit St. Thomas Church. The Apostle worked here for one year and during this period 1100 people were converted to Christianity. All the churches founded by St. Thomas are on the coast or very near it except the church at Nilakkal. It is located in the interiors on the Sabarimala Hills amidst jungles and is in a dilapidated state. Depending on our time we also have option to visit Niranam Church nearby.



**Nilakkal Church**

Continue to **Thekaddy**. Thekkady is widely known for its spice plantations. A walk through them makes an interesting insight into the world of spices with vista of pristine greenery shrouded by low hanging clouds, gurgling brooks and the Western Ghats in the backdrop. Thekaddy is also a base for visiting Periyar National Park.

**Accommodation: A hotel in Thekkady**

Meals:Breakfast, Dinner

**Day 7: Thekkady**

This morning enjoy a **spice plantation walk**. Accompanied by a naturalist, you will be taken on a tour of the cardamom, nutmeg, vanilla, pepper, coffee and other spices. Stroll amid lush, terraced farms, sprawling plantation estates while listening to bird songs and the murmuring of mountain streams. Make stops along the way to take pictures of the verdant surroundings, and breathe in the fresh mountain air, before continuing to some of the most picturesque vantage points in Kerala.

In the afternoon head to Periyar Tiger Reserve. Sprawled over an area of 925 Sq. km., Periyar is one of the 27 tiger reserves in India. It is a repository of rare, endemic and endangered flora and fauna and forms the major watershed of two important rivers of Kerala, the Periyar and Pamba. One can see herds of elephants and sambars and also tiger, gaurs, lion tailed macaques and Nilgiri langurs.

**Enjoy a nature walk** on trails traversing diverse habitats. This will be an interpretive programme offering excellent opportunity to watch birds, butterflies and other wildlife. The trails often pass through evergreen and moist deciduous forests interspersed with marshy grasslands.

**Accommodation: A hotel in Thekkady**

Meals:Breakfast and Dinner

**Day 8: Thekkady –Madurai**

Today we cross over to the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu and **drive to Madurai**. Madurai town is perhaps the most vibrant town of southern India and throbs with vim and vitality. All activities at Madurai are centred around Sri Meenakshi Temple, which is in the heart of the old town and is one of the most stunning living temples in the country.

Later **enjoy a cycle rickshaw ride** and visit city's banana and vegetable markets, bamboo bazaar, dhobi ghat (washermen's enclave), as well as some textile and brass industries to watch locals make metal pots on furnace and spinning yarns.



**Meenakshi Temple**

Later in the evening **visit the beautiful Meenakshi Temple**. This temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva's consort Parvati who is known here as Meenakshi. The temple complex is within a high-walled enclosure, at the core of which are the two sanctums surrounded by a number of smaller shrines and grand pillared halls.

**Accommodation: A hotel in Madurai**

Meals: Breakfast and Dinner

**Day 9: Madurai – Chettinadu – Trichy**

Drive to **Chettinadu** to **see traders' lovely mansions** embellished with marble and Burma teak, wide courtyards, spacious rooms. **Enjoy lunch in the town** and sample the unique Chettinad cuisine that has transcended the boundaries of the state to carve a worldwide following.

After lunch at a lovely mansion, drive to Trichy. Trichy has a history going back to the centuries before the Christian era, when it was a Tamil citadel. The town and its fort, as it stands today, was built by the Nayaks of Madurai. It was one of the main centres around which the wars of the British-French struggle for supremacy were fought in the 18th century.

In the evening we will come **for service in Our Lady of Lourdes Church**- a beautiful building in the old City.

**Accommodation: A hotel in Trichy**

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

**Day 10: Trichy**

**Explore Trichy today.**

The most famous landmark of this bustling city is the **Rock Fort Temple**, a spectacular monument, perched on a massive rocky outcrop. It is a stiff climb up the 437 steps cut into the stone to the top, but well worth it for you get a fantastic view of the town and its other main landmark, Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple.



### **Rock Fort Temple**

Shrouded in a haze of coconut palms, **Sri Ranganathaswamy** is one of the largest and most interesting temple complexes in India. It is built on an island, in the middle of Cauvery river and covers a staggering 2.5 sq km. The temple complex is very well preserved, with excellent carvings throughout the numerous shrines to various gods, though the main temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu.

There is another huge temple complex nearby – the **Sri Jambukeshwara Temple**. This temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva. In the evening we will go **for service in CSI St. John church**.

### **Accommodation: A hotel in Trichy**

Meals: Breakfast and Dinner

### **Day 11: Trichy – Tanjore – Velankanni**

Drive to Tanjore and **visit the Brihadishwara Temple**, which is the crowing glory of Chola architecture. This superb and fascinating monument is one of only a handful in India with World Heritage listing. It has been worshipped continuously for more than 1000 years. The temple is fortified and inside the inner courtyard is a well-arranged Archaeological Museum, with some interesting exhibits and photographs.

**Continue to Velankanni** and check into your hotel.

In the afternoon to visit the famous church, **Our Lady of Good Health**. There are three major events associated with this church. The Virgin Mary is said by tradition to have appeared to a shepherd boy named Tamil Krishnannesti Sankaranaranayam who offered her child milk. She is subsequently said to have appeared to and healed a crippled boy selling buttermilk. A group of Portuguese sailors attribute being saved from

a violent storm to her intercession. They constructed a larger chapel at their landing spot in Vailankanni.



***Our Lady of Good Health Church***

**Accommodation: A hotel in Velankanni**

Meals: Breakfast and Dinner

### **Day 12: Velankanni – Pondicherry**

Drive to Pondicherry . On arrival in Pondicherry, check into your hotel.

Pondicherry was a French colony at one time. It first came under the French rule in the mid-18th century, but over the years it repeatedly became a battlefield and, on many occasions, changed hands. In 1954, Pondicherry was restored to India. The influence of the French has been tremendous here. This oval-shaped township with the streets aligned at right angles is unlike any other Indian town. Its skyline from off-shore is typical of coastal French settlements as is its town planning.

Pondicherry has come into international focus because of the Aurobindo Ashram or Auroville which is situated here. It was established by Sri Aurobindo, an important Indian religious philosopher, who had once played an active role in the Indian independence movement. The ashram, its orchards, workshops and activity centres, attract a number of people, including foreigners, who share the beliefs of Sri Aurobindo.

In the afternoon **explore this charming city** – visiting Auroville and the old French and Tamil towns – in **a walking tour**.

**Accommodation: A hotel in Pondicherry**

Meals: Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 13: Pondicherry – Mahabalipuram – Chennai

This morning you will be **driven to Mahabalipuram** (100 km), a group of monumental rock-cut temples, set amidst palms trees on a long beach, washed by the Bay of Bengal. In fact, it is said that the story of south Indian stone architecture begins on the sandy beaches of Mahabalipuram and from here goes on to reach incredible heights in Kanchipuram, Thanjavur and Madurai.

The most renowned landmark of Mahabalipuram is the **Shore Temple**. Standing alone on the shore, this temple is protected by a wall constructed to minimize erosion. It is believed that at one point in time there were seven such temple, six of them were victims to the natural elements of erosion. Built in the 7th century AD, it has three shrines; one dedicated to Lord Vishnu and the other two to Lord Shiva.



**Shore Temple**

After visiting Mahabalipuram, **continue to the state capital of Chennai** where you will spend the next two nights.

#### **Accommodation: A hotel in Chennai**

Meals: Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 14: Chennai

Situated on the eastern coast of India, Chennai (earlier called Madras) is the fourth largest of the Indian cities, after Mumbai, Calcutta and Delhi. It used to be one of the bastions of the British Empire and a trading post for the East India Company. Today, this metropolis is a microcosm of ancient traditions and cultures co-existing with modern day industry and commerce.

This morning you will be taken to explore Chennai city.

First, you will **visit the St. Thomas Basilica**. It was built in the 16th century by Portuguese explorers, over the supposed tomb of St Thomas. In 1893, it was rebuilt as a church with the status of a cathedral by the British. The British version still stands today. It was designed in Neo-Gothic style, favoured by British architects in the late 19th century.

San Thome Basilica is the principal church of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Madras and Mylapore. In 1956, Pope Pius XII raised the church to the status of a Basilica Minor, and on 11 February 2006, it was declared a national shrine by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. The San Thome Basilica is one of the major pilgrimage centres for Christians in India. The church also has an attached museum.



***St. Thomas Basilica***

In the afternoon **visit the Fort St. George**, a 350-year-old fort with wide battlements is a reminder of the British Empire. Today, the old buildings in the fort house the Tamil Nadu State Government Secretariat and the Legislative Assembly. Within the fort complex, a number of other early buildings still stand, of which St. Mary's Church is the most interesting. The church has many paintings, records and registers, each with a story to tell.

**The Fort St. George Museum** contains some of the most fascinating items belonging to the East India Company and the colonial period. It houses rare weapons, uniforms, coins, costumes, medals and some other artifacts dating back to the British period. The museum also has a valuable collection of documents, letters and declarations which have been greatly used by the historians.

**Accommodation: A hotel in Chennai**

Meals: Breakfast and Dinner

**Day 15: Chennai - Fly Out**

Transfer to airport for your international flight.

**Accommodation: Check-out 12 Noon**

Meals: Breakfast

**\*\*\* End of the main tour\*\*\***

## Goa Extension Tour

### Day 15: Chennai – Goa

Transfer to airport for flight to Goa. On arrival in Goa, you will be received at the airport and taken to your hotel.

The small Portuguese enclave of Goa has retained its colonial flavor, despite having been a part of the Indian Union for a long time now. It has a character quite distinct from the rest of India. Here skirts far outnumber saris, there are gleaming white-washed churches, dense coconut palm groves, siesta is widely observed during the hot afternoon hours, and carnival festivities explode onto the streets prior to Lent.

#### Accommodation: A hotel in Goa

Meals: Breakfast

### Day 16: Goa

Today you will be taken to **explore the churches in Old Goa.**



When you set foot inside the **Basilica of Bom Jesus**, you will see a stunning display of architectural pieces in wood, stone, gold and granite. 'Bom Jesus' means 'Infant Jesus' or 'Good Jesus'. You see the altar of St. Anthony to your right and a wooden statue of St. Francis Xavier to your left. Inside **Chapel and Tomb of St. Francis Xavier** one will come across the silver casket that houses the immortal remains of St. Francis Xavier. You will also see sculptures of angels occupying the space between the panels.

**Church Of St. Francis Of Assisi** houses many 17th century pieces of religious art. **Chapel Of St. Catherine** stands as a living monument to the conquest of Goa by Albuquerque. **St. Cajetan Church** may remind you of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

#### Accommodation: A hotel in Goa

Meals: Breakfast

### Day 17: Goa

Day at leisure.

**Accommodation: A hotel in Goa**

Meals: Breakfast

### Day 18: Goa – Mumbai – Onward Flight

Transfer to airport for flight to Mumbai to connect to your international flight.

**Accommodation: Check-out 12 Noon**

Meals: Breakfast

#### TOUR PRICES, Quoted in SAR's on per person basis

Prices Valid from 01 <sup>st</sup> March to 30 <sup>th</sup> November 2017					
Circuit: <i>Main Tour- Cochin to Chennai</i>					
	Using 22 seater Mini Bus			Using 35 seater Large Bus	
Particulars	10-12 Pax	13-15 Pax	16-19 Pax	20-25 Pax	26-30 Pax
Land Arrangements	R30,690.00	R29,760.00	R26,970.00	R25,345.00	R24,025.00
Single Room Supplement	R10,930.00	R10,930.00	R10,930.00	R10,930.00	R10,930.00
Circuit: <i>Extension Tour- Chennai-Goa-Mumbai</i>					
Particulars	10-12 Pax	13-15 Pax	16-19 Pax	20-25 Pax	26-30 Pax
Land Arrangements	R8,760.00	R9,145.00	R8,060.00	R6,355.00	R5,815.00
Single Room Supplement	R4,575.00	R4,575.00	R4,575.00	R4,575.00	R4,575.00
Internal Airfare- Chennai-Goa-Mumbai sectors	R5,040.00	R5,040.00	R5,040.00	R5,040.00	R5,040.00

#### PRICE INCLUSIONS:

- Accommodation on twin-share basis in the mentioned hotels /similar (3 star deluxe or 4 star hotels)
- Meals: Buffet Breakfast and Dinner on all days. Additionally, 2 lunches and 1 high tea will be provided
- Transportation by an air-conditioned vehicle (appropriate as per the group strength)
- Sightseeing using local English speaking guide as per the itinerary.
- An English-Speaking tour manager accompanying throughout the trip
- Entrances for monuments (single entry) as per itinerary
- Special services at some Churches

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- Bottled water; portage at airports
- All currently applicable taxes

**PRICE EXCLUSIONS:**

- International Airfares ex Johannesburg, Durban & Cape Town
- Domestic air-fare quoted as supplement
- Visa fees, airport tax or any kind of insurance cover
- Any pre/post dinner drinks or drinks of any nature along with the meals unless specified
- Tips and Gratuities
- Items of personal nature like drinks, laundry, telephone calls, Video camera fee at monuments etc.

Should you require any additional information on the above tour, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Kind regards, Leona Meadows  
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*Please ensure that all names are spelt as per your ID or passport. Please check that dates, routings and times are as per your request. Select Incentive Group Travel cannot accept responsibility if booked incorrectly.*

*The new South African Immigration Regulation dictates that as from the 01<sup>st</sup> June 2015 children require **UNABRIDGED BIRTH CERTIFICATES**, along with their passports, when travelling. This requirement will apply to minors of all nationalities whether travelling unaccompanied, with both parents, single parent or with other adults. Should you be travelling with/making a reservation for children, please ensure that you apply for these certificates timeously*