

Tamil Nadu



Buzzing with ancient traditions of classical dance forms, music, art, handicrafts, literature, philosophy and religion, the cultural cauldron of Tamil Nadu continues to reverberate, in its magnificent temples and unique rituals. This strong yet eclectic heritage peeps through the temple towns as well as the megapolises, that many cities are fast turning into, especially Chennai, its capital.

CHENNAI

In Chennai, the mores of ancient civilizations merge with those of colonial powers, to evolve an industrial hub that is IT-savvy. The name may have changed from Madras to Chennai, but the character of this southern metro remains unaffected. Shored along the Bay of Bengal, this 'gateway to the South' has evolved from a tiny fishing village to the

country's fourth-largest metro. Films are a booming industry here, and it can rightly be said to have set the trend for stars turning politicians, in the country!

City Lights

Old temples here are perfect examples of southern temple architecture. The towering **Kapaleeshwar Temple** is dedicated to Lord Shiva and has 36 bronze statues of the Shaivite saints, the Nayanars. The **Parthasarthy Temple** is dedicated to Lord Vishnu,



Kapaleeshwar Temple

with idols of other incarnations too installed here. Christ's Apostle is said to have preached and died at Chennai. The **St Thomas Mount** and **Santhome Cathedral** commemorate these events. **Fort St. George** is now the State Government headquarters.



Santhome Cathedral

City Culture

The city also has many beaches, though not meant for swimming. **Elliot's Beach**, at **Besantnagar** is more popular with the younger crowd, while **Marina**, running 12 km in length, is one of the longest in the world. On the way to **Mamallapuram** (better known as Mahabalipuram) famous for its Shore Temple, is **Covelong**, a picturesque fishing village with an idyllic golden beach. There is an interesting **Museum** and **Portrait Gallery**, besides the **St. Mary's Church**. Visit the **Pantheon Complex** where the National Museum, Art Gallery and Connemara Library are located.

Some other Art Galleries are: Vinyasa Art Gallery: 28115073, Easel Art Gallery: 28225193, Ravi Varma Art Gallery: 24956281, Raasi Art Foundation: 24410389.

Cultural Institutions: Indian Council of Cultural Relations: 24333293, **Kalakshetra** founded by Rukmini Devi Arundale, the window to South Indian culture trains students in classical art and dance forms in the 'gurukul' tradition (24911836), Vedanta Institute: 28262266.

Auditoriums: Kalaivanar Arangam: 25365669, Vineyard Centre Hall: 23740724, Raja Annamalai Hall: 25341425, Music Academy: 28112231, Rajalakshmi Hall. There are many memorials built on the sea shore: **Anna Square**, to the late chief minister CN Anna Durai; **MGR Memorial**, close to Anna Square, to matinee idol and late chief minister MG Ramachandran. The **Victory War Memorial** and **Rajaji Memorial** are also worth visiting.

Amusement Arcades: Chennai is hot

and happening. You can enjoy fun rides in many of its parks and arcades. VGP Universal Kingdom: 24491445, Krishkinta Theme Park: 28258988, Aha Water Park: 24491954, MGM Dizzi World: 28415212. Tarsha Water Sports: 28270154. Dash n' Splash, on Chennai -Bangalore Highway, Kart Attack is Chennai's first Go Karting track.

Bowling Alleys: Wild West: 28517527, Down Under: 28552244, Snow Bowling: 28264045.

Parks: Crocodile Bank: 29154833, Guindy Snake Park: 22350821, are two exclusive wildlife parks.

Gourmet's Delights

Chennai is the place for food connoisseurs. The South Indian fare on offer has immense variety in vegetarian and the spicy non-veg cuisine of the Chettians. Coffee pubs, of which there are quite a few, are also fun places.

South Indian: Dakshin: 24994101, Kumaran Foods: 24971407, Kaaraikudi: 8111893, Hotel Egmore Woodlands 8414999.

Chettinad: Hotel Virudhunagar Ayanar: 24310409, Anjappar: 28217200, Pandiya Nadu: cuisine from Madurai-24996760, Velu Military Hotel: 28220353, Pallavi: 28270521.

Confectioners: Mom's Confectionery: 5386647, Upper Crust: 8554332, Sam's Bakes: 6630907.

Chinese: Shanghai Club: 22344747, Noodle King: 28276383, Beijing Blues: 28110420, Shogun: 28111128, Chin Chin: 28253434.

Coastal: Coastline: 28111893, Coconut Lagoon: 28117010.

Multicuisine: Teppanyaki at Cilantro: Japanese, 22314343, Don Pepe:

Mexican, 28110413, Kyonbokgong: Korean, 24671949, Pacifica: 26612772, Hot Kitchen: 24493157, Brindavan: 24761137, Peshawari: 28110101.

Night Out

Pubs: The pub culture has overtaken Chennai, effectively initiated by Geoffrey's: 24757788.

Nightlife: Dublin: 2499 4101, Fort St George: 28272827, The Westminster: 24994101, Deep Purple: 954114-472435, Durrant's Bar: 28110101, The Leather Bar and Pasha: 52144000, Zara: 28114941. The **discos** are EC41: 24491101 and Hell Freezes Over: 2825900.

Shopper's Paradise

Chennai is a true buyer's hangout. The place to shop for jewellery and sarees is **T Nagar, Anna Salai, Mungambakkam High Road** and **Burma Bazaar** (Parry's Corner), **Mount Road** teems with shops of all hues, but it is shopping at arcades such as **Spencer's Plaza**, that make shopping a real pleasure.

Selections: Nalli Silks & Silk Sarees: (2434 4347), Sundari Silks (2814 3039), Radha Silk Emporium (24941906), Kumaran Silks (4343544), Ranjana's (6433333), T. Mangharam (5355722), Varsidhi (6454093), Rangachari (4994545), Sreeniwas (28284758), Kala Mandir (28521983), Textorium (24466223), Ram Shyam (26193084).

Boutiques: Encore: 24357673, Sakhi: 28516175, Tarunee Loka: 8280043.

Department Stores: Globus: 28153512, Lifestyle: 28477788, Shopper's Stop: 28363352, Westside: 28490573, Naturally Auroville: 28330517.

Jewellery: Lalitha Jewellery: 28141155, Kairali: 28549964, Mehta Jewellers: 28283130, G R Thangamaligi: 4345062, Vummidi: 28493040, Bapalal & Co: 28113030.

Facts at a Glance

Access: By Air: Chennai is connected by Jet, IA, Sahara, A-I and other international airlines to the rest of the country and the world. **Airport:** The Meenambakkam Airport is located 17 km southwest of the city centre. Kamaraja terminal is for domestic travel and Aringar Anna International for international flights. Prepaid taxis are available at the airport.

By Rail: Headquarters of the Southern Railways, Chennai is well connected with the rest of the country through Chennai Central (broad gauge) and Egmore (meter gauge) Railway Stations. The Tamil Nadu Express from Delhi, Ganga Kaveri Express from Varanasi, Shatabdi Express from Bangalore and the Charminar Express from Hyderabad are some of the trains from the major cities to Chennai. You also have the Coromandel Express from Chennai to Kolkata. There are separate stations for local trains.

By Road: The city is well linked by roads to the major cities in South India – connected by the National Highway Nos 4, 5 and 45. **Bus Terminus:** The State Express Bus Stand is on the south of George Town (same as Park Town). Inter-city reservations can be made from here (25341835). **Getting Around:** Chennai has a good network of local trains. Services run every 15 minutes from 4.30 am till 11 pm. The main stops are Beach, St Thomas Mount, Deer Park, Egmore, Mambalam, Saidapet and

Tamil Nadu

Mungambakkam. Buses are prompt, clearly labelled and convenient. Autorickshaws have negotiable fares, and low familiarity with the language becomes a disadvantage many a times. **Temperatures:** Summer: Min 22°C, Max 41°C; Winter: Min 29°C, Max 29°C. **Best time to visit:** September to February.

City Code: 044
Indian Airlines: 22561483
Jet Airways: 22561818
Air Sahara: 22580909
India Tourism: 28460285
ITDC: 28278884
TTDC: 25367851
Tourism Information Centre, Govt. of Tamil Nadu: 25388785
Car Rentals: Travel House 28116090. For two-wheelers, U-Rent Services: 22567398.
Major Banks: Apart from Thomas Cook and the SBI counters at the airport, the city has American Express Bank (G-17, Spencer's Plaza). Thomas Cook has its branches at Ceebros Centre, 45 Montieith Road, Egmore and at the Eldorado building, 112, Mungambakkam High Road.
Hospitals/Medical Centres: Apollo Hospitals: 28294749. For ambulance service, dial 102
Devaki Hospital: 24993391,
Kilpauk Medical College & Hospital: 28255331, Stanly Hospital: 25261351

Home Away From Home

ITC Hotel Park Sheraton & Towers: 24994101, Taj Coromandel: 66002827, Le Royal Meridien: 22314343, The Park: 52144000, Chola Sheraton: 28110101, The Trident Hilton: 22344747: Radisson: 22310101, Ambassador Pallava: 28554068, Radha Park Inn: 24757788.

MAMALLAPURAM

Some 60 km from Chennai, on the shores of the Bay of Bengal, is Mamallapuram. Exquisite monuments, caves and temples are Mamallapuram's testimony to its glory during the Pallavas rule from the 5th to the 8th centuries. The seven monolithic granite *rathas* or the chariots of the Pandavas are a visual treat. A 27x9 metre stone relief, depicts Arjuna's penance, or as some believe, Ganga's descent from the heavens. Besides the nine rock-cut cave temples, it is worthwhile spending time at the majestic 7th century **Shore Temple**, which has withstood the onslaught of the sea for ages. The Cholamandal Artists' Village is a unique place and artists and sculptors live and work here in idyllic conditions. **Dakshina Chitra** (245303) is a heritage centre where traditional crafts-persons and folk artists perform in the recreated ambience of the 19th century.



Shore Temple

Facts at a Glance

Access: The Chennai International Airport is 60 km away, from where one can proceed by road. The nearest railhead is Chengalpattu, 32 km on the

Chennai-Tiruchi section of the Southern Railways. Besides, there are linkages with Kanchipuram and other towns by a regular bus service. Taxis are easily available.

City Code: 04114

Tourist Dept.: 242232

Home Away From Home

Fisherman's Cove: 67413333, Sterling Resorts: 224243914, GRT Temple Bay: 242251, Golden Sun: 242245, Silversands: 242228, VGP Golden Beach Resort: (044) 24926444, Hotel Tamil Nadu (TTDC): 242287, Tamil Nadu (TTDC): 242361, Quality Inn MGM Beach Resort: 272435-48.

KANCHIPURAM

One of the seven holy cities of India, Kanchi, on the banks of the Vegavati river, is not only a temple town but also the nerve centre of the handloom industry. Here nondescript lanes are fringed by traditional houses, and the only sound you hear is the staccato of a loom in action.

City Lights

There are many temples dedicated to Lord Shiva, Vishnu and Goddess Parvati. **Kamakshi Amman Temple**, is associated with Adi Shankaracharya. There is a square enclosure and an ornate, pillared **Kalyanamandapam** (marriage hall) in the outer sanctum. A must-see is the art gallery that has pictures of Adi Shankaracharya and the *Shankara math*. The **Kailashnath Temple**, carved in sandstone is the oldest here. There are approximately 58 small shrines of Shiva and Parvati within the



Kamakshi Amman Temple

compound. The *lingam* is supposed to be the third largest in Asia. **Ekambareshwara Temple** spreads over 12 hectares. The temple has a 59 m-high *gopuram* and a pillared



Ekambareshwara Temple

mandapam. **Vaikuntha Perumal** and **Devarajaswami** too recount heights the splendid art of temple architecture had scaled then. Lord Brahma is supposed to have performed a *yagna* to call on Vishnu at **Varadaraja Temple**.



Vaikuntha Perumal

Shopper's Paradise

Shop for silk Kanjeevaram sarees. Hand-woven on wooden looms using mulberry silk and gold thread, can be found in a variety of flaming colours and in a range of prices. Some of the reliable shops are: **Nalli Weaving Centre, Kamatchi Co-optex, Sri Swami Silks**, among others. You could visit a weavers' house where men and women alike, work on looms from morning till night and take 3 months to complete a saree. Visit the Handloom Weavers' Service Centre on Railway Station Road, open on weekdays. Alternatively, you can ask your hotel to help you out.

Facts at a Glance

Access: **By Air:** Chennai (75 km) is the nearest airport. **By Rail:** Kanchipuram is well connected by most trains on the Southern Railways network. Most trains coming in from Chennai Central Station go up to Arakkonam (metre gauge) from where you can hire a car, it takes 25 minutes to reach Kanchipuram. **By Road:** On Chennai-Bangalore Highway, most people opt to drive from Chennai or Bangalore (278 km). Regular buses also ply from the major southern cities like Pondicherry (113 km) and Vellore (70 km). The main bus stand is at Esplanade. **Temperatures:** Summer: Min 20°C, Max 38°C; Winter: Min 20°C, Max 28°C. **Best time to visit:** October to February.

Home Away From Home

Only budget accommodation is available at Jaybala, International, Hotel Tamil Nadu (TTDC) and Hotel Baboo Surya.

PUDUCHERRY

A former trading haunt of Greeks, Romans and finally the French, the town of Pondicherry is a resplendent medley of history, architecture, culture and natural beauty. Originally called Vedapuri, it was believed to be the abode of the venerable Sage Agastya. Situated on the eastern coast of peninsular India, Pondicherry offers spiritual aura, exotic locales and peaceful environs, not to miss the French flavour that pervades all over. The grand boulevards, quiet promenades and colonial mansions draped with colourful bougainvillaea; the sea warm and gushing, and the sparkling sands.

Pondicherry is mainly renowned for having been the abode of Aurobindo Ghose, who set up an ashram in 1910. The Mother, originally Mirra Richard (a French painter-sculptor) followed him here. **Auroville**, the 'International Township for Harmony', celebrates a unique philosophy attracting people from all over the world.

City Lights

The most beautiful public spot, right in the heart of the town, is the **Government Park**, and reposing at its centre is the sacred white Greco-Roman structure **Aayi Mandapam**. It



Aayi Mandapam

relates the legend of Aayi, a 16th century courtesan. **Palais du Gouvernement**, now housing the Raj Nivas (not open to the public) and the Legislative Assembly, is a brilliant example of town planning. Ranga Pillai was the celebrated *dubash* (diwan) of Dupleix, the governor of Pondicherry, whose 18th century mansion is one of the oldest surviving buildings on the west side then known as "natives' quarters". A visit to Pondicherry is incomplete without a stroll down the peaceful promenade **Goubert Avenue** or **Beach Road**, flanked by landmarks, like **French War Memorial**, illuminated during Bastille Day celebrations on 14th of



French War Memorial

July. **Dupleix' Statue** is Pondicherry's tribute to Francois Dupleix. The 19th century **Lighthouse**, now abandoned, guided seafarers to Pondicherry. A 3 m high statue of Gandhi, set amidst eight exquisitely sculptured pillars on the seashore near the old lighthouse, adds to the magnificence of the avenue.

Romain Rolland Library has a huge collection of books and periodicals in Tamil, English, French and other languages. Located just behind, the **Museum** contains excavations of the Indo-Roman trading era and the Chola, Pallava and Vijayanagar dynasties. It

also houses French coins and sculptures from the archaeological site of Arikamedu.

Churches: The French missionary zeal in the 17th and 18th centuries saw several churches built here: **Eglise de Sacre Coeur de Jesus, Eglise de Notre Dame de la Conception Immaculee, Eglise de Notre Dame des Anges** (modelled on the Basilica at Lourdes, southern France). Joan of Arc is immortalised in marble in the garden outside the church.

Must Do

Auroville. An amazing experiment in community living, 'The City of Dawn or Auroville', is located 10 km north of Pondicherry. An entirely independent multi-racial community works and lives here in self-fashioned, wildly original homes comprising 50 settlements spread across 20 sq km. More than 50 languages are spoken, as many countries have offered to have a permanent pavilion here to reflect their country's culture and ethos. The Indian pavilion is called the Bharat Nivas.

A large modern architectural marvel the **Matri Mandir** houses a meditation room that holds the largest single glass crystal in the world. Visitors to Matri Mandir require an entry pass, which is available from the Information Kiosk at the entrance.



Matri Mandir

Fairs & Festivals

International Yoga Festival (January first week), **Maasi Magham** (March) when a procession of deities moves to the tunes on *nadeswaram*; Bastille Day, and Fete de Pondicherry (August).

Facts at a Glance

Access: **By Air:** Chennai (160 km) is the nearest airport. **By Rail:** A couple of rail routes from Chennai and Thiruvannamalai connect to Puducherry on meter gauge. The Puducherry Railway Station is a five minutes walk from the sea. **By Road:** This is the best way to reach Puducherry. Buses depart regularly from Chennai and take approximately three-and-a-half hours to reach Puducherry. **Distances:** Bangalore (303 km), Thiruchirapalli (203 km), Thanjavur (192 km). **Getting Around:** With the well-paved, smooth streets making for an easy ride, the best way of getting around Puducherry is on a bicycle. You can hire one at the PT&TDC office on Beach Road; they also organise regular trekking tours. **Best time to visit:** October to February. Preferably, the festival season.

City Code: 0413

Tourist Info: 22339497, 22334574

PT&TDC: 22337008

Railway Station: 22336684

Bus Stand: 22336693

Car Rentals: Vijay Tourist: 22341363

Two-wheeler Rentals: Auroma Enterprises: 22336179

Hospitals: Government Hospital: 22336050, JIPMER: 22372380-89, TB Sanatorium: 22336641, Clinic Nallam: 22335463

Gourmet's Delights

You will find many cuisines here, beginning with South Indian, French, Chinese, North Indian, Chettinad, and even Vietnamese. Try **Ajantha**, **Le Café**, **Seagulls**, **Rendezvous**.

Home Away From Home

Hotel De L'Orient: 2343067, Anandha Inn: 2330711, Pondicherry Ashok: 2655160.

CHIDAMBARAM

An archetypal temple town, Chidambaram is renowned particularly for the spectacular **Nataraja Temple**. It also happens to be one of the few temples where Shiva and Vishnu are enshrined under one



Nataraja Temple

roof. Sprawling over 40 acres, the roof of the sanctorum is covered with gold plate. The presiding deity of the temple is represented by air, one of the five elements of the universe and is known as *Akasa Lingam*. The **Sivakamiamman Temple**, the Sivanga tank, the thousand-pillar hall are other important features of the temple. The **Thillaikaliamman** (Kali temple) was built by Kopperunjingan, who ruled between 1229 and 1278 AD. The town is also home to the **Annamalai University**, a residential university founded by Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar. It is on the eastern

outskirts of the town and is a great centre of Tamil learning and carnatic music; it also offers courses in Medicine, Engineering, etc. One can stay at Saradharam Hotel, Chidambaram.

THANJAVUR

The **Brihadeeswara Temple** is an architectural wonder that reflects the artistic skills of the erstwhile Chola rulers. Built by Chola king Rajaraja I in the 11th century, it is one of the tallest temples in the world. The temple stands within a fort, whose walls were



Brihadeeswara Temple

later built in the 16th century. The towering Vimanam is about 200 feet in height and is referred to as **Dakshina Meru**. The shivalinga here is probably the grandest in existence. The **Periya Nayaki Temple** within the temple is a later addition from the Pandya period, and so is the 600 AD **Subramanya Temple**. The shrine consist of a tower 55 feet high, rased on a base 45-sq-feet, covered with delicately carved figured, pillars and pilasters. They are built along a corridor 50 feet long, communicating with another Mandapam 50 sq. feet to the east. There are various sub-shrines within the temple too.

Temple Timings: From 5.30 am to 12.00 noon; from 4.00 pm till the last puja is performed by 8.00 pm.

Festivals

Krittika day (in the month of Kartik); Visaka is the annual festival for 9 days, celebrated in the month of 'Visaka' (May-June). The drama of Raja Rajeswara is enacted, the deity is daily bathed with fragrant water.

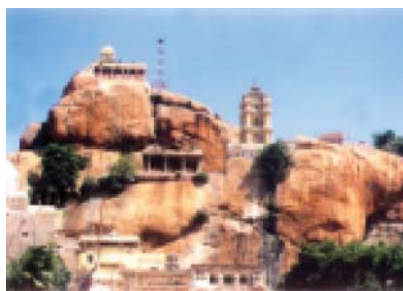
Facts at a Glance

Access: By Air: The nearest airport is at Trichy (65 km). **By Rail:** There is a railway junction in Thanjavur. It is well connected with Trichy, Chennai, Madurai and Nagore. **By Road:** Thanjavur is well connected by road with all the major towns and cities in Tamil Nadu and also with Kochi, Ernakulam, and Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala and Bangalore in Karnataka. There are regular bus services for visiting all places of interest in and around Thanjavur. Tourist taxis are also available. One can stay at Hotel Sangam, Hotel Parisutham.

TIRUCHIRAPALLI

The grandeur of a colossal rockface, an ancient temple perched on that, a holy city at its feet - for 300 years, this has been the most enduring memory of Tiruchirappalli.

Remains of the erstwhile Chalukya and Pallava's glory at the **Rock Fort**



Rock Fort Temple

Tamil Nadu

Temples are the **Thayumanaswamy** temple, to Lord Shiva, and **Vinayaka** temple, to Ganesh at the top. Non-Hindus are not allowed inside. Timings: 6 am to 8 pm. Entry fee: Re 1. **St John's Church**, near the Teppakulam Tank is famous for its shuttered side doors. The **Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes**, a Neo-Gothic building completed in 1896, stands right across the road from the tank. Every year, on February 11, the church celebrates the **Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes**. Another popular pilgrimage spot nearby, the **Natarwala Darga** houses the tomb of the popular Muslim saint Natar Shah who lived in the city in the 17th century. **Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple** is 3 km further north of the Rock Fort Temple, on a 30-km long island. The expansive complex is laid out across 7 concentric



Ranganathaswamy Temple

walls with 21 gopurams in them with the monuments increasing in height outwards. There is a small **Museum** inside which houses a collection of stone and bronze sculptures.

Festivals

A car festival is held here each January when a decorated wooden chariot is taken out through the streets between the various walls. During **Vaikuntha Ekadasi** (mid-December) the north portal of the sanctum sanctorum is

thrown open to devotees. Tel: 0431-2432246. Timings: 6 am to 10 pm. About 2 km east and nearly as old, this shrine is dedicated to Shiva and Parvati. A half-immersed *lingam* is the main attraction inside the shrine. The rules governing the entry of non-Hindus into the sanctum sanctorum are flexible. Timings: 6 am to 12.30 pm and 4 pm to 8.30 pm.

Shopper's Paradise

NSB Road is the most popular stretch lined with shops selling everything from brassware and handloom textiles to locally manufactured cigars! Trichy is also the largest artificial diamond manufacturing centre in the country and to have a look at the brilliant synthetic diamond jewellery, walk down the **Jaffer Shah Street** (near Rock Fort). **Srirangam Island** is the other shopping hub in the city. Some of the other popular places to explore are: **Khadi Kraft** (for traditional weaves and handicrafts), **Poompuhar Sales Emporium** (local handicrafts), **Ramjee & Co.**, (musical instruments, especially *veenas* and violins).

Facts at a Glance

Access: **By Air:** IA connects Tiruchirapalli with Chennai and also destinations in the Middle East. SriLankan Airline connects to Colombo. The airport is about 7 km from downtown. **By Rail:** On the Chennai-Madurai main route, Trichy is an important railhead on the Southern Railway. Regular trains connect with Thanjavur, Tuticorin, Kovalam and Rameshwaram on the metre gauge, and Bangalore, Coimbatore, Ooty, Kochi,

Kanyakumari and Mangalore on the broad gauge. Trichy Junction, off the Madurai Road-Junction Road intersection, lies in the southern part of the town, within convenient distances of the major hotels and the Central Bus Stand. **By Road:** Good roads link Trichy with the rest of Southern India, with frequent state-run services to nearby Madurai. **Getting Around:** Reliable bus service; main SETC Bus Stand off Royal Road-Rockins Road intersection. Tourist taxis, autorickshaws and cycle-rickshaws are your other options. **Distances:** Madurai (150 km) and Chennai (320 km). **Temperatures:** Summer: Min 26°C, Max 37°C; Winter: Min 20°C, Max 31°C.

City Code: 0431

Indian Airlines: 2341063

SriLankan Airlines: 2460844/852

Banks: HDFC: 2330975, Federal: 2703830, SBI: 2401480

Hospitals: Seahorse Hospital, Cantonment; Kaveri Medical Centre, Tennur High Road; KAP Vishwanathan Hospital

Chemists: Guru Medicals, Madurai Road; Lakshmi Medical Stores: 2465601

Home Away From Home

Hotel Sangam, Jenney's Residency, Royal Southern, Femina Hotel.

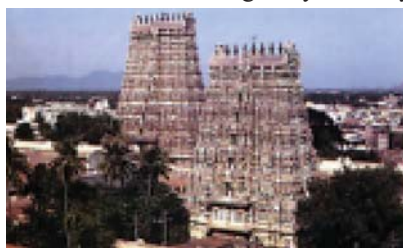
MADURAI

Madurai, being the oldest city in Tamil Nadu, was home to the ancient Tamil Sangam, the literary conclave that produced the first epic, *Silappathikaram*. If there is any place where the Tamil mind has blossomed into its fullest expression, it was in the

shadow of the thousand pillared Meenakshi Temple, in ancient Madurai. Legend has it that Madurai was once a forest till King Kulasekhara Pandya built a temple around the *Lingam* that was accidentally discovered there. Overnight, a lotus-shaped city came up around the temple and soon it was time to name the holy city. It was then that Lord Shiva appeared and drops of nectar *mathuram* (sweetness in Tamil) fell from his matted locks at the place. And that's how the place got its name.

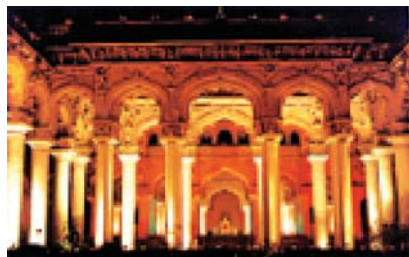
City Culture

With its huge *gopurams* towering over the city, the life of Madurai revolves around the **Meenakshi Sundaeswar Temple**, dedicated to Meenakshi, the consort of Shiva. Originally built by



Meenakshi Sundaeswar Temple

the Pandya king Kulasekhara in the 13th century, it attained its present splendour only in the hands of the Nayaks, 400 years later. The magnificent temple with 12 towers, the 1,000-pillared *mandapam* and the *Potramaraikulam* (the golden lotus tank) is a perfect example of Dravidian architecture. The mandapam, houses the temple **Museum**. The **Thirumalai Nayak Palace**, 1 km southeast of the temple, testifies to the glorious reign of the Nayaks. An attraction is the light and sound show, which depicts events



Thirumalai Nayak Palace

from Thirumalai Nayak's life and also snatches from the ancient Tamil epic *Silappathikaram*. (English: 6:45 pm - 7:30 pm, Tamil: 8 pm - 8:45 pm.) Other shrines and places worth visiting include **Mariamman Teppakulam**, **Alagar Koil**, **Tirupparankundram** and **Gandhi Museum**.



Gandhi Museum

Shopper's Paradise

Madurai streets teem with shops of readymade garments as well as fabrics manufactured in-house. **Chithirai**, **Avanimoola**, **Puthumandapam** and **Thevangu Chetty Choultry** are the popular shopping areas and you get to buy the famous Batik and Sungundi sarees here. Excellent turkish towels are also a famous export of Madurai. Hajeemoosa, All India Handicrafts Emporium, Co-optex, Madurai District Sarvodaya Sangh and Gandhigram Showroom are reliable shops for towels.

Facts at a Glance

Access: By Air: IA and Jet Air fly daily from Chennai and Mumbai. Madurai is also linked with Tiruchirapalli, Bangalore and Kochi by air. Madurai Airport is 11 km from the city. **By Rail:** One of the major railway junctions of South India, Madurai is connected with all the main tourist places in Tamil Nadu and through Chennai to the rest of the country. The railway station is near the downtown, hardly 1 km from the Meenakshi Temple. **By Road:** Situated at the crossroads of NH 45 and 78, it is well connected to all corners of the state. **Bus Stands:** The city is served by four bus stands, each covering a different region or service. **Getting Around:** You can take cycle-rickshaws, auto-rickshaws and taxis, at negotiable rates. **Distances:** Chennai (444 km), Kodaikanal (120 km) and Coimbatore (227 km). **Temperatures:** Summer: Max 37°C, Winter: Max 29°C. **Rainfall:** 85 cm.

City Code: 0452

Indian Airlines: 2741234

Airport Enquiry: 2671333, 2670433

Railway Enquiry: 2743131/132/135

Car Rentals: Services International: 2740942, 2742384, Tour Planners: 2632034, 282. Taj Services: 2602300

Banks: SBI, West Veli Street; Indian Overseas Bank, 96-A, Palace Road; Central Bank of India, 15, Meenakshi Koli Street.

Home Away From Home

Fortune Pandiyan Hotel, Taj Garden Retreat, Madurai Ashok, Germanus Days Inn, Hotel Park Plaza, Hotel Blue Lines, Hotel Supreme.

RAMESHWARAM

Lord Rama is said to have worshipped Shiva here on his way back from Sri Lanka. The temple is located on the island of Rameshwaram – the Benares of the South, connected to the mainland by a bridge. The deity here constitutes one of the 12 *Jyotirlingas* of India. The temple of Sri Ramanatha, is shaped like a conch. Since it was Sri



Shiva Temple of Rameshwaram

Rama himself who built the temple, it is held in particular reverence.

The Sacred Pilgrimage to Rameshwaram is among the important injunctions laid on the Hindus. A pilgrimage to Kashi is not considered complete without a pilgrimage to Rameshwaram, prayers in the Sri Ramanatha temple and a bath in Dhanuskodi, a tip of the island where the Bay of Bengal, called the "Mahodadhi" in ancient times, joins the Indian Ocean.

Shrines within the Temple: In the principal sanctum, there is the Linga of Sri Ranganatha. The Vimana, of three storeys, contains images of Hanuman, the Gandhamadhana Linga, and the Agastya Linga. The Linga of Visvanatha (also spelt as Vishvanatha), which Hanuman brought, is enshrined in another sanctum to the north. In yet another shrine there is an image of Visalakshi, the Consort of Visvanatha;

Ramanatha's Consort, Parvathavardhani, is enshrined in an adjacent sanctum to his right. The building style conforms to the majestic temple architecture so prominent in these parts of India. There are innumerable other shrines and twenty-two "Tirthas" (also spelt as Teerthas), or sacred bathing places.

Sacred sites outside the Temple:
Sethu: 5-km south of the temple is Sethu, where there is a celebrated temple of **Sri Anjaneya**, and where, tradition holds, Sri Rama built a bridge to Sri Lanka. In Devipatnam, or Navapashanam, also by the sea, there are nine stones visible at low tide. It is believed that they were set up by Sri Rama to represent the nine planets, the Navagrahas. **Gandamadhana Parvata**, where footprints of Sri Rama are enshrined; the temple of Sri Kodandarama where, Vibishana was crowned when he joined Sri Rama; **Uttarakosamangai**, 16-km southwest of Ramanathapuram stands the Shiva temple. **Tiruppullani Temple** commemorates the tradition where the Lord obtained a bow and arrows to use in the impending war from its presiding deity and also the place where Lord of the Ocean who had refused to help Him finally submitted.

Facts at a Glance

Access: By Air: The nearest airport is at Madurai (154 km). **By Rail:** Rameshwaram is well connected by trains from all the major cities of India.

By Road: State transport buses are available from railway. **Getting**

Around: Taxis, auto-rickshaws, cycle-rickshaws and *tongas* are available.

Tamil Nadu

Home Away From Home

Accommodation is available at moderate and economy class hotels, Devasthanam cottages and choultries in Rameshwaram.

KANYAKUMARI

Kanyakumari is India's 'Land's end', the southernmost tip of the peninsular mainland. It is also the confluence of the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal. A ferry will take you to the huge rock memorial, 400 m offshore, the **Vivekananda Memorial**, where Swami Vivekananda meditated in 1892. The mandapam was built here in 1970. Open daily from 7 am to 11 am and 2 pm to 5 pm, except on Tuesdays.



Vivekananda Memorial

City Lights

You will also find **Sri Pada Parai** (footprints of Kanya Devi) here, installed in a small shrine. **Kumari Amman Temple**, dedicated to Goddess Kanya Devi, the temple is open from 4.30 am to 11.45 am and from 5.30 pm to 8.45 pm. In May-June there is a procession of the idol of the deity, and in September-October during Navratri, people celebrate the goddess' victory over the demons. About 300 m northwest and inspired by an Orissa temple, is the **Gandhi Mandapam**. The sun's rays strike the



Gandhi Mandapam

sacred spot where the ashes of Mahatma Gandhi were laid prior to their immersion in the sea. **Vattakottai** is the **Circular Fort**, overlooking the sea, 6 km from Kanyakumari. **Nagaraja Temple**, 20 km away, the temple has shrines dedicated to Lord Shiva and Vishnu.

Must Do

The Sunrise & the Sunset! Tourists, pilgrims and locals flock to the sunrise point at 6 am. The majestic sight is also visible from most terraces of hotels in the vicinity. The night sky gradually transforms into gradations of pastel colours in the background and silhouettes of fishermen's boats in the foreground add to the grandeur of the place. On a full moon night, also termed as **Chaita Purnima** (the April full moon day), the setting sun and the rising moon glow simultaneously on the horizon.

Gourmet's Delights

Check out **Sanga Restaurant**, at Hotel Samudra, for simple vegetarian fare; **Archana Restaurant** (seaside) at Hotel Maadhini, for vegetarian and non-vegetarian; **Hotel Saravana** (vegetarian) for Chinese, Tandoori and South Indian fare.

Shopper's Paradise

Bargaining is the operative word in this 'seashell' town: seashell lamps, icecream cones, peacocks and even decorative mirrors, you can even have your name engraved on shells! At **Park View Bazar**, the **Kanya Handloom Wholesale**, **Rajalan Handloom Society**, **Co-optex Tamil Nadu** offer a wide range of ethnic south Indian, and other sarees. *Lungis* are an inherent part of the place. You can get them in many colours, prints and wild borders. **Sannathi Street** houses a number of handloom centres such as the **Tamil Nadu Handloom House** and **Kumari Fancy Centre**.

Facts at a Glance

Access: By Air: The nearest airport is at Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala), 90 km away. IA, Jet Airways and AI fly to Thiruvananthapuram. **By Rail:** Well connected to important cities with **t r a i n s r u n n i n g f r o m** Thiruvananthapuram, New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai and Jammu (the longest rail journey in India — 86 hours). The Nellore Express comes in from Chennai and the Kanyakumari Express connects Mumbai and Kanyakumari. Railway Station is 1 km away from downtown area. **By Road:** The Thiruvalluvar bus stand is a five-minute walk west of town. SETC Services to Chennai, Madurai, Thiruvananthapuram and Rameshwaram. **Distances:** Cochin 309 km, Kovalam 105 km, Thiruvananthapuram 80 km, Madurai 242 km. **Getting Around:** Taxis available from outside the railway station and from most hotels. Autorickshaws can be hired from

around the bus stand as well as the town centre. One can stay at numerous hotels like Singaar International. **Temperatures:** Summer: Min 22°C, Max 35°C; Winter: Min 22°C, Max 33°C. **Best time to visit:** November to February.

City Code: 04652

Hospitals/Medical Centres: There's a government hospital in Kanyakumari, along with private hospitals like Geeta Hospital and Sivanthi Hospital. The Vivekananda Kendra also runs a hospital (246250).

COIMBATORE

Home to shimmering fabrics, aromatic spices and fragrant tea; where temples and educational institutes share the skyline; where steel and aluminium foundries as well as paddy and cotton fields peacefully coexist at the foot of the Nilgiris, Coimbatore is a charming town.

City Lights

Perur Temple, where the temple deity is Lord Shiva, is an example of exquisite workmanship. Built by Karikala Cholan, it is 7 km to the west



Perur Temple



Forest College

of Coimbatore. **Maruthamalai Temple** (12 km), dedicated to Lord Murugan, is another example of temple architecture in the south. The temple complex is set in a park called **VOC Park**, named after the freedom fighter VO Chidambaram. It has a mini zoo and a toy train. **Forest College**, the second forest institution in India, is 3 km away. Worth visiting is the **Glass Museum** where interesting curios are on display.

Shopper's Paradise

Sarees are what you must buy when in Coimbatore, and some of the popular shopping areas are: **Devaraj Arcade**, Barathiyar Road; **SB Towers**, Pollachi Main Road; and **Sri Devar Shopping Complex**, Avanashi Road.

Facts at a Glance

Access: By Air: IA and Jet Airways fly in daily from Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kozhikode. IA also flies regularly from and to Kochi and Bangalore. The Peelamedu Airport is 10 km from the city. **By Rail:** There are daily trains from Ooty (Nilgiri Express) and Chennai (Shatabdi Express & Kovai Express). Additionally, the

Coimbatore-Rameshwaram Express travels via Madurai; the Kanyakumari Express and the Hyderabad-Kochi Express are the other daily trains connecting Kanyakumari and Kochi to Coimbatore. Railway station is 2 km south of the Central Bus Stand in the city centre. **By Road:** It is well connected by road to almost all major places in the south. Both private and government buses travel from and to the city. Bus stands at Gandhipuram and another at Ukkadam. **Distances:** Bangalore (330 km), Thiruvananthapuram (400 km), Chennai (532 km), Munnar (166 km), Madurai (227 km), Ooty (98 km), Kodaikanal (168 km) and Kochi (190 km). **Getting Around:** The city has a good network of roads. Local buses are relatively clean. Auto-rickshaws are metered and commonly available. **Cycles** are a good option as the city is clean and green. They can be hired from the markets at reasonable rates, for full or half day. Taxis and private cars can be hired at the hotels or at travel agent counters within the city. They operate on fixed rates. **Temperatures:** Summer: Max 38°C; Winter: Min 20°C. **Best time to visit:** October to March.

City Code: 0422
Indian Airlines: 2573396
Jet Air: 2212034
Bus Enquiry: 2460420/992
Hospitals: Kovai Medical Centre on Avanashi Road, Ellen Hospital on Sathy Road, Sheela Hospital on East Power House Road.
Chemists: Arasu Medicals at RS Puram and Ashoka Medicals on DB Road.

Home Away From Home

Heritage Inn, Hotel Surya International, The Residency, Nilgiri's Nest.

KODAIKANAL

Kodaikanal's central point is the star-shaped **Kodai Lake**. Sprawling over 24-hectares, this lake offers boating facilities. You can also bike or stroll around the lake. **Kurinji Andavar Temple:** Dedicated to Lord Murugan, the temple is 3.2 km away from Kodai

Lake, and is a beautiful vantage point providing a panoramic view of the lofty hills around Kodaikanal. The picturesque **Bear Shola Falls**, 3 km away and **Pillar Rock** 7 km away, make for popular outings nearby. **Bryant Park** is another popular attraction, especially in May, when the annual horticultural show is held here. It's a lovely place to walk in the evenings. Open daily from 8.30 am to 6.30 pm.



Pillar Rock

Gourmet's Delights

Try **Samudra Restaurant** (seafood) and **Hotel Punjab** (North Indian),



Kodai Lake

TAMIL NADU

Tamil Nadu

Royal Tibet (Tibetan and Chinese) – all situated on Hospital road. **Carlton Hotel** offers a buffet, it also has a well-stocked bar. **Eco-nut** is known for health food such as cheese, peanut butter and brown bread.

Shopper's Paradise

Shop at **Khadi Emporium**, **Handloom Co-operative Stores**, **Travancore Crafts Work**, **Government Sales Emporium**, **Kurinji Mini Super Market** and **Spencer & Company**. Homemade chocolate and cheese are a speciality.

Facts at a Glance

Access: By Air: The nearest airport is at Madurai, 120 km away. IA and Alliance Air flights connect Madurai to Chennai and Mumbai. **By Rail:** Kodai Road is the nearest station to Kodaikanal, 80 km away. **By Road:** Kodaikanal is connected to all the major towns in Tamil Nadu. Most visitors usually drive up from Madurai or Coimbatore (180 km) away. The road up from Madurai is flat at first, with barely any sign of hill country, but the last hour of the journey is spectacular, as you climb still-higher into the mountains. **Distances:** Periyar (119 km), Ooty (236 km), Madurai (126 km). **Getting Around:** Mountain bike is a good idea. They can be hired from the stall outside Carlton Hotel. Taxis are another option but they are unmetered. Autorickshaws are not available. **Temperatures:** Summer: Min 11.3°C, Max 19.8°C; Winter: Min 8.3°C, Max 17.3°C. **Best time to visit:** April to June, August to October. Avoid the monsoons (November-December).

City Code: 04542

Hospitals/Medical Centres:

Government Hospital: 241292, Van Allan Hospital: 240273

COONOOR

Another popular hill station of Tamil Nadu, Coonoor has a much milder climate than Ooty. Summer temperatures are a maximum of 24°C and a minimum of 14°C. Winters are a maximum of 19°C and a minimum of 9°C.



Coonoor

Gourmet's Delights

Velan Ritz, Ritz road, Bedford, for continental meal. **Taj Garden Retreat**, Hampton road, has fantastic lunchtime buffets. **Sharon**, **Willington Riga**, Appleby road, is a good multicuisine restaurant. **New Anandabhavan**, TDK road, serves both veg and non-vegetarian meals.

Shopper's Paradise

Buy tea, and look for the label 'Tea Plant', a Government of India undertaking. For clothes and other handicrafts, go to the **Mission Arts and Crafts Centre** located in the central market area. Eucalyptus oil is another item on every shopper's list. Exercise caution because some oils may be fake.

Facts at a Glance

Access: **By Air:** Coimbatore is the closest airport. The drive from Coimbatore airport takes a little more than two-and-a-half hours. **By Rail:** Coonoor is on the toy train line between Mettupalayam and Ooty. This is the best way to arrive in this place, though getting a seat in the small train is not easy. Book in advance during season. **By Road:** If you're not accustomed to driving over mountain roads, try to get a local driver. Fourteen hairpin bends will eventually get you past busy Mettupalayam to the cool plains of Coonoor. The roads are not bad, but you might encounter some rough patches along the way. Be careful. **Best time to visit:** April to June and September-October.

City Code: 0423

OOTY

Cocooned in the Nilgiri Hills, and a very motorable hill station is Udhagamandalam, popularly referred to as Ooty. Earlier the abode of the Todas, now known as the honeymooners' favourite haunt – a picturesque lake, a sprawling garden, cool climate. It has all the essential ingredients to evoke the romantic mood in everybody. The **Botanical Gardens** are 145 years old and spread



Botanical Gardens

over 50 acres. The jewel of Udhagamandalam, one can find around 2,000 species of plants and trees from all over the world here. **The Lake:** Conceived in 1824 by John Sullivan, the lake spreads over four sq km and is a favourite haunt of picnickers. Over the years, the lake has shrunk in size giving place to the present racecourse, bus stand and the mini garden. You can take a boat ride here, or laze around in the boathouse (which also sports a restaurant). Boating is allowed here from 8 am to 6 pm on all days. Boat races are held here in May.



Ooty Lake

The small Gothic-style **St Stephen's Church**, built in 1829 and situated northwest of Charring Cross, is one of the oldest churches in the Nilgiri



St Stephen's Church

Tamil Nadu

mountains. The cemetery contains the grave of John Sullivan's wife. Sullivan is known as the founder of Ooty. **Kalhatti Falls**, 12 km away, a drop of some 131 feet, offers a breathtaking sight. At 8,031 ft, the **Mukurdhi Peak** is 36 km from Ooty. The name is derived from 'muku' (nose) and 'ardha' (half) suggesting a severed nose for the strange shape of the peak. Boating and fishing are permitted here.



Kalhatti Falls

Gourmet's Delights

Shinkows for Chinese cuisine on Mall road, Tandoori Mahal, Commercial Road, Ooty Bakers and Confectioners, Wren Building, Hot Breads, Hotel Sanjay are some of the most frequented restaurants in Ooty.

Shopper's Paradise

Local products include a range of aromatic and medicinal oils and essences extracted from herbs, woods, flowers, a range of fresh teas, home-made chocolates fresh fruit, vegetables, spices, Toda shawls and

silver jewellery. The best things to shop for in Udthagamandalam are tea and eucalyptus oil. For books, Higginbothams has two outlets, which offer a good selection.

Facts at a Glance

Access: By Air: The nearest airport is Coimbatore, 100 km away. **By Rail:** From Mettupalayam take the heritage Blue Mountain (Nilgiri Mountain Train) Train to Ooty via Coonoor. It is one of the world's few surviving mountain railways. The major broad-gauge railway junction is Coimbatore. Coimbatore is connected with all major cities like Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Rajkot, Kochi. **By Road:** Udthagamandalam is well connected by good roads. **Distances:** Chennai (535 km, via Salem), Coimbatore (89 km), Coonoor (18 km, via Gudalur), Mysore (160 km), Kozhikode (187 km), Bangalore (290 km), Kochi (281 km, via Coimbatore and Palakkad), Kodaikanal (256 km, via Coimbatore and Palani). **Getting Around:** Autorickshaws and taxis can be hired at negotiable rates from around the bus stand as well as around Charring Cross. **Temperatures:** Summer: Max 25°C; Winter: Min 5°C. **Best time to visit:** November to March, to avoid high-season crowds. (April to June and September-October).

City Code: 0423

Hospitals/Medical Centres: Vijaya Hospital, Government Hospital. Commercial Road has plenty of chemists.

Clean and comfortable



1. Normal



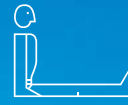
2. Inhale



3. Exhale



4. Inhale



5. Exhale and then normal



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