







# Coromandel calling

The coastal part of Tamil Nadu has several relatively unexplored places that speak volumes about its rich cultural heritage and history. These places exude an old world charm that is hard to beat.

An amalgamation of art, craft, tradition and modern elements, each of these destinations make for a holiday destination like no other.

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**E**very region of India has something unique to offer and attracts tourists from all over the world. However, the natural beauty of South India is undoubtedly awe-inspiring. Tamil Nadu has one of the most surreal places, which one must visit at least once. It has been home to the oldest of civilisations and has seen the rule of various ancient dynasties like the Chera, Chola and Pandya, which ruled the region between 300 BC–300 AD. The state of Tamil Nadu is thus rich in both cultural and natural aspects making it a tourist haven.

## Thanjavur

Tanjore or Thanjavur is home to the famed Tanjore paintings and

is often called the 'rice bowl of India'. The city has a rich cultural history influenced by the Cholas, the Nayakas and the Marathas. A potpourri of dance, culture, art and spirituality, Tanjore is well known for its bronze sculptures as well. At the heart of the town is its most well-known symbol - the Brihadeeswarar Temple rightfully called as the Big temple. Dedicated to Lord Shiva, this is among the largest temples in the country and a UNESCO Heritage site. Built in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, its main tower is 216 ft high and the basement is covered with inscriptions detailing the temple's administration and revenue. The rectangular structure has many sub shrines around it and the Archaeological Museum on site displays photographs of the

temple prior to its restoration. The other important place is the Thanjavur Maratha Palace Complex. It has two durbar halls of the Nayaks and the Marathas. The Saraswathi Mahal Library Museum and The Thanjavur Art Gallery are places within the palace complex that you must stop and see, as they have an interesting collection of historical memorabilia. You can pick up a Tanjore painting at the Government run showroom, Poompuhar.

## Chidambaram

A temple town in Cuddalore district, Chidambaram has a mixed history of Cholas, Pandyas, the Vijayanagar Empire, Marathas and the British! The place is revered as it is believed that Lord



Chidambaram temple

## QUICK FACTS



The Big temple was built using 1,30,000 tons of granite stone.

Tanjore paintings, in its original days, would be embellished with diamonds, sapphires and rubies!



Under sea excavations are planned at Poompuhar, a vital maritime port that is said to have trade links with Rome and China.

Shiva performed his cosmic dance called the Tandava Nritya here. The Thillai Nataraja Temple, spread across 40 acres in the heart of the town, pays obeisance to Nataraja or the dancing form of Shiva. This is said to be one among the five holiest Shiva temples, each representing one of the five natural elements. Chidambaram represents akasha (aether). The structure of the complex has five major halls, each of which has a specific purpose. It is hard not to soak into the religious fervour of the place and the intricately carved temple spires and temple tanks add to the majestic beauty of this place. The priests here are called Dikshitar, a community that wears their long hair in a lop-sided bun placed on the left side of their heads. It is believed that a visit to the Kali temple close by is mandatory after visiting the Nataraja temple. Chidambaram is home to the oldest universities of the state - the Annamalai University established in 1929.

### Poompuhar

A beach town in the Nagapattinam district of Tamil Nadu, Poompuhar was the capital of the early Chola kings and is also the name of the

Tamil Nadu Handicraft Emporium. Poompuhar was once a major port of the Chola Empire and is also called Kaveripoompatinam. This sleepy beach town has the Sillappathikara Art Gallery that displays a collection of sculptures carved by the sculptors of the Mamallapuram Art College. Marine archaeologists have confirmed that the city had been destroyed by Tsunamis and erosion. Ruins found here also depict a Buddhist connection.

Masilamani Nathar Koil is another temple, largely eroded by the sea, which dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century and still manages to reflect its architectural prowess. Excavations have unearthed a few ship wrecks, a wharf belonging to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, brick figures and copper coins.

### Gangaikonda Cholapuram

At one time, the capital of the Cholas, Gangaikonda Cholapuram, was founded by Rajendra Chola

***IT IS BELIEVED THAT A VISIT TO THE KALI TEMPLE IS MANDATORY AFTER VISITING THE NATARAJA TEMPLE***





Pic by Bindu Gopal Rao


Danish Fort at Tharangambadi

to commemorate his victory over the Pala Dynasty. He also gave the town its name. This place also has a huge lake called Chola Gangam that covers a whopping 22 km. Its water is used for drinking and irrigation. The Brihadeeswarar Temple occupies the center stage here and is in the midst of a beautifully landscaped complex. The temple is said to have the biggest lingam in South India with a height of 4 mt! Modelled on the lines of the Big temple of Thanjavur, the architecture of this temple is softer with delicate contours compared to the latter. There is a huge stone statue of Nandi at the entrance and the main temple can be accessed via a short flight of steps. All the walls of the main temple have detailed stone carvings, depicting images of gods and goddesses. An interesting element is the large number of bronze images here.

Naturally, this temple is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is counted as one among the three great living Chola Temples.

### Tharangambadi

This is a beach town on the coast of the Bay of Bengal that has a strong Danish history. The quaint town has an old world charm and its buildings are great examples of Danish architecture. The 17<sup>th</sup> century Danish castle located here was once a flourishing trade centre. The Town Gateway, built in 1792, in Danish architectural style, welcomes you to the town. The centre of attraction at Tharangambadi (former Tranquebar), however, is the peach coloured Danish fort built in 1620 by the Danish Royal Navy Commander, Ove Gedde, during the rule of the Nayaka King, Ragunatha Nayaka, of Tanjore. A thematic Danish museum was

established in 1979 inside the fort's precincts to showcase the connections between India and Denmark. The museum has several artifacts dating back to several years. The strikingly beautiful churches here are like no other. The Zion Church and the adjoining Ziegenbalg house, now called the Ziegenbalg Spiritual Centre, are important landmarks. Likewise, the New Jerusalem Church on King Street houses the grave of Ziegenbalg and is a beautiful white structure. An ideal way to soak into the history of this place is to walk around, admire the colonial culture and feel the past up close. Other important places are the ruins of the Masilamani Nathar temple, built in 1305. The beautiful sea and beach that stretches endlessly, however, is the focal point of attraction that stays with you much after you leave this place. 

Tharangambadi means the land of singing waves in Tamil.



This temple is located in the centre of the world's magnetic equator.

Chidambara Rahasyam or the secret of Chidambaram stems from the belief that there is a secret message in the embossed figure near the shrine of Shiva inside the temple.



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