



Iconic symbol of Tamil Nadu, the deity-clad gopurams of the Sri Meenakshi-Sundareshwar temple in Madurai, south of Chennai

Tamil Nadu has often been referred to as the land of temples. This is an understatement by any account. Because the temples of Tamil Nadu are built based on one fact - that God is everywhere.

ONLY HEAVEN HAS MORE GODS!

This is not only true of the many temple towns like Madurai, Tiruchirapalli or Rameswaram. It is also true of the whole state of Tamil Nadu, which teems with temples of every shape and size. Each beautiful in its own way and each a legend in its own right.

For instance, the famous Ekambareswarer temple at Kancheepuram has a beautiful 1000-pillared hall and a 2500-year-old mango tree, which bears on its four branches, fruits with four distinct tastes. If this hasn't given you a taste of the temples of Tamil Nadu, consider this. The Shore Temple at Mamallapuram is an architectural wonder and a world heritage site. Arjuna's penance nearby is the world's largest and finest bas-relief. You can also gaze in fascination at the gold-plated dome of the Nataraja Temple dedicated to the dancing form of Lord Shiva at Chidambaram, complete with the 108 gestures or mudras of his cosmic dance.

Even more amazing is the Brihadeshwarar temple built between 985 and 1014 AD. It has a dome made from a single block of granite weighing over 80 tonnes. This was achieved by hauling it into place along a 6-kilometer ramp in a manner similar to that used by the Egyptians to build the pyramids. And that's not all that's amazing about this structure.

The temple was designed in such a way that the shadow of its dome never touches the ground.

HERITAGE TO HELP YOU SING

Where else have you heard of an acoustic marvel like the centuries old Sangeetha Mahal in Thanjavur, which was built to bring out the best in the singer's voice and any musical instrument. Then there are ancient cities like Madurai, which legend says was named after drops of Maduram (nectar) that fell from Lord Shiva's locks of hair when he blessed the people of the town for constructing a temple in his honour.

Legend has it that Kubera, the Lord of Wealth, was born as a mortal in Chettinad, and this probably explains why houses in that place are called 'mansions for the gods'. A very fitting description considering that the houses are huge and wonderfully embellished with elaborate solid teak or granite walls. These walls are satin smooth and made of what is known as Madras plaster - a concoction of eggshells, egg white and myrobalan.

Then there is the town of Rameswaram, a major pilgrim center where legend says Lord Rama performed a pooja to Lord Shiva on his return from Lanka after killing the demon King Ravana.

WEALTH MEANS HEALTH!

And to build such vast monuments and temples, it was important to stay in the best of health. The unique and ancient system of medicine called Siddha accomplished that very well. An experience you too can share by rejuvenating your body and mind with one of the oldest systems of

ENCHANTING TAMIL NADU

Welcome to Tamil Nadu. A place that is more than just beautiful beaches, picturesque hill stations, exquisite silk sarees or strong filter coffee. A land steeped in rich tradition and culture, ancient myth and legend, sacred monuments and temples, and wonderful holiday memories that will never go away.

medicine in India. According to tradition, it was Lord Shiva who unfolded the knowledge of Siddha to his consort, Parvati, who handed it down to Nandideva and he, to Siddhars. Therefore it is called 'Saiva Sampradaya' or tradition of Shiva. And unlike some of the other traditional schools of medicine, it is equipped to treat medical emergencies.

This unique heritage has manifested itself in the form of modern and world-class super speciality hospitals, which offer the best treatment and high-tech surgery facilities at highly affordable prices. Not surprisingly, the state is now emerging as a medical tourism destination in this part of the world.

FILTER COFFEE FOR GOD-LIKE GUESTS

Their culinary skills too are as divine as their land. As a guest, you can expect a wide variety of delicious vegetarian and non-vegetarian food, with a dash of spices and served with the tradition of warmth and hospitality that is typically Tamilian. In fact, they have a saying in Sanskrit that goes 'Athithi Devo Bhava' (The guest is like a God). And knowing what gods mean to the Tamils, you can expect only the best from their kitchens.

A specialty in Tamil Nadu, especially for non-vegetarians, is the cuisine from a place called Chettinad.

It will be a delight especially for those who like hot and spicy non-vegetarian food. This cuisine has several variations of fish, mutton, and chicken dishes.

Another specialty of Tamil Nadu, especially in Chennai, is filter coffee. Its unique distillation process gives the coffee an extra strong aroma and flavour. The making of filter coffee is almost a ritual, with a bit of a show-off at the end where the coffee is poured from one container to another in rapid succession to make the coffee frothy.

ABSORB THE CULTURE BUZZ

A land filled with legend and myth needs a voice to speak out. That's what makes Tamil Nadu a vibrant centre of cultural energy and heritage. Dance troupes and artists roam the streets performing Karagaattam (performed by balancing a pot on the head), Mayil Attam (done by girls dressed as peacocks, complete with peacock feathers and a glittering head-dress with a beak), Poikkal Kudirai Aattam (where the dancer bears the dummy figure of a horse's body on his/her hips) and Puli Attam (performed by young men painted like tigers). These are but just a few of the very interesting folk dances that although ages old, are still performed to this day on the streets of Tamil Nadu, where music and dance is a way of life.

Then there is the festival of Jallikattu, where unlike the passive

bullfights of Spain, sometimes more than 300 bulls are let loose into crowded streets, where young men try to tame the bulls and vie for attention of fair maidens.

For a more elegant form of entertainment, there is Bharatha Natyam, a 3000-year-old dance form that was once performed in the courts of kings to please the gods. Other than dance and music, Tamil Nadu's commitment to art can also be seen at the Dakshina Chitra, an entire village dedicated to arts and crafts, continuing a culture that dates back to the ancient Indus Valley civilization.

COME FOR BUSINESS, STAY FOR PLEASURE

If you happen to be there on business, all is not lost. While savouring the culture and traditions of Tamil Nadu, you will have access to some of the most modern and sophisticated exhibition and convention centers anywhere in the world. The Chennai Trade Center at Nandambakkam in Chennai is spread over 10 hectares of land with four modules of 5000 square meters each, for exhibition halls and support services. It is architecturally and technically designed to be a state-of-the-art exhibition complex and conveniently located close to several prestigious hotels.



A mansion for the gods! Typical Chettinad house with glazed interiors



Silhouetted against history, the Shore Temple at Mamallapuram



Tourism is the hidden jewel in the Tamil Nadu crown. We have to polish it and make it luminous... (It) is a gourmet's delight. What has been missing is proper marketing, which we are now addressing