



## TAMIL NADU TOUR – 11 Nights & 12 Days

CHENNAI | KANCHIPURAM | MAHABALIPURAM | PONDICHERRY | THANJAVUR |  
KARAIKUDI | MADURAI | RAMESWARAM | KANYAKUMARI

### DAY 1 ARRIVE IN CHENNAI

On arrival at the airport, meet and assist and transfer to the hotel.

**Chennai** known as the Gateway of South India is known for its deep rooted traditions and cultural heritage. The capital of Tamil Nadu and the fourth largest city in India, Chennai is a sprawling metropolis and also an important port. Once a fishing village, Chennai was the capital of the Madras presidency during the British era and was converted into the capital of Tamil Nadu in 1969. Chennai displays a blend of Dravidian and Gothic architecture in its buildings.



Chennai hosts a large cultural event, the annual Madras Music Season, which includes performances by hundreds of artists. The city has a vibrant theatre scene and is an important centre for the **Bharata Natyam**, a classical dance form. The Tamil film industry, the second largest film industry in India, is based in the city.

### DAY 2 CHENNAI SIGHTSEEING

Sightseeing of Chennai features a visit to

**Santhome Cathedral:** Built by Portuguese in the 14th and 15th century, this Cathedral is named after St. Thomas. Historically important, it is one of the Fort pilgrimages for the Christian community.

**St. George Fort:** St. George, one the first few bastions built by the East India Company, marks the beginning of Chennai as a modern city. Now the Fort is converted to Museum.

**Kapaleeswarar temple** Dedicated to Lord Shiva, Kapaleeswarar temple has inscriptions from the 13th century A.D. The temple 'Gopuram' (tower) is in the characteristic Dravidian style of architecture. The walls and pillars of temple has very delicate and intricate carvings which depict the scenes from Hindu mythology.

**Kalakshethra:** The cultural Institution found by Rukmani Devi Arundale in 1936 and is devoted to the revival of classical arts. Students from many countries learn the arts in the ancient traditional way of Indian teachings - Gurukulam. Classical dance, music and traditional textile design and weaving are taught in natural surroundings.

**Marina Beach** is the second longest beach in the world and has a wide sandy foreshore. Situated on the beach, the Anna and MGR samadhis are memorials of the most popular former Chief Ministers of the state.



Overnight at the hotel in Chennai

<b>DAY 3</b>	<b>CHENNAI – KANCHIPURAM – MAHABALIPURAM</b>
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After breakfast, drive to **Kanchipuram** which is a spectacular temple city which reflects the glorious traditions of South India with its noted temples and thriving Handloom industries. The city is famous for silk weaving.

The towering **Ekambareswar Temple** holds prime importance in Kanchipuram. Spread over an area of 20 acres, the *gopuram* (rising tower at the entrance of the temple) stands tall at 57 metres. Dedicated to Lord Shiva, the temple has beautifully sculptured granite walls and a thousand-pillared hall. Varadaraja Perumal Temple with a 100-pillar *Mandapam* is another architectural delight. Other temples include Kailasnatha Temple and Kamakshi Amman Temple.



Proceed to Mahabalipuram. Check into the beach resort for overnight stay

#### **DAY 4 MAHABALIPURAM SIGHTSEEING**

Ancient temples that reflect the glory of erstwhile kingdoms, pristine beaches that emanate matchless natural beauty, rich cultural heritage that welcomes you with warmth – Mahabalipuram is in many ways the splendidly vibrant destination you will love to visit many times. The important monuments to be visited are Five Rathas (Chariots), Arjuna’s Penance, Shore Temple and Krishna’s Butter ball.

Built in the 7th century, this ancient Pallava port is the site of several antique sculptural marvels. The only remaining Shore temple is a spectacular two-spired shrine which is unique in that it buses shrines for Vishnu and Shiva. The Pallavas had perfected the art of sculpting rocks to build temples without using brick, mortar or timber and the five monolith Rathas (chariots) stand as the surviving masterpieces of Pallava sculpture.



**Arjuna's penance** is the world's largest bass relief measuring 27m by 9m. This sculptural panel shows animals, Gods and Angels contemplating the descent of the Ganges from its source in the Himalayas and also depicts popular fables from the Panchatantra. Besides these, the Mahishamardhini Cave, the Krishna Mandapam and Varsha Mandapam also have beautiful reliefs depicting Vishnu reclining on the coils of seven headed serpent, Krishna as incarnation of Vishnu lifting mount Govardhana to protect his kinsmen from the wrath of Indra respectively.



Overnight at the beach resort in Mahabalipuram.

#### DAY 5 MAHABALIPURAM – PONDICHERRY

After breakfast, travel to Pondicherry. Pondicherry is synonymous with **French Heritage** in India and understandably so as it served as the capital of the French Colonies in India. The Beach road which is part of the Pondicherry heritage is a classic example of French construction.

Promenade Street is the most favorite street for the locals as well as tourists. It's a 1.5 km stretch alongside the main Pondicherry Beach (rock beach) and it has several landmarks along the way like the Statue of Mahatma Gandhi, Light house and a Statue of Joan of Arc.



**Pondicherry Museum** features a good collection of sculptures from Pallava and Chola dynasties as well as fine bronzes, coins and an archaeological display. There are also lots of French colonial paraphernalia, which include a horse drawn carriage, colonial furniture, an antique grandfather clock and a bed slept in by Dupleix, Pondicherry's most famous governor.

Visit Aurobindo Ashram and **Auroville**, "that wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities "



Overnight stay in Pondicherry.

**DAY 6 PONDICHERRY – GANGAIKONDA CHOLAPURAM – DARASURAM – THANJAVUR**

After breakfast proceed to Thanjavur, an important center of South Indian religion, art, and architecture. Most of the magnificent Chola Temples which are UNESCO World Heritage Monuments are located in and around Thanjavur. The city is also home to Tanjore Painting, a painting style unique to the region.

**Gangaikonda Cholapuram** was built during medieval India and was erected as the capital of the Cholas by Rajendra Chola I, the son and successor of Rajaraja Chola, the great Chola who conquered a large area in South India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Sumatra, Kadaram (Kedah in Malaysia), Cambodia at the beginning of the 11th century A.D



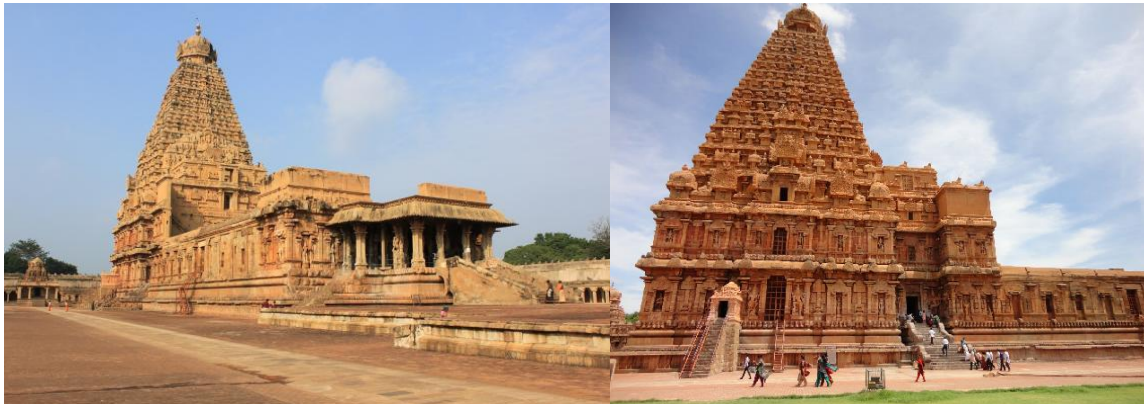
**Darasuram** is known for the Airavateswara temple constructed by the Rajaraja Chola II in the 12th century CE. This temple is a storehouse of art and architecture. The Vimanam (the structure over the Garbagriha or inner sanctum in the Hindu temples of South India) is 85 feet high. The front Mandapam itself is in the form of a huge chariot drawn by horses. The temple has some exquisite stone carvings. The main deity's consort Periya Nayaki Amman temple is situated adjacent to Airavateshwarar temple.

After sightseeing of these magnificent Chola Temples, travel to Thanjavur and check into your hotel. Overnight at the hotel in Thanjavur.

## DAY 7      THANJAVUR SIGHTSEEING

After breakfast proceed for the sightseeing of Thanjavur's most famous attraction and one of the biggest temples in India - **Sri Brihadeeswara Temple**: This massive temple was built by great Chola king Rajaraja I in the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. The tower over the inner sanctum sanctorum rises perpendicularly. The temple stands amidst fortified walls that were probably added in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. The Vimana is 66m high and is the tallest in the world. The Kumbham (the apex or the bulbous structure on the top) of the temple is carved out of a single rock and weighs about 80 tons!

There is a big statue of Nandi (sacred bull), carved out of a single rock measuring about 16 feet long and 13 feet high at the entrance of the temple. The entire temple structure is made out of granite, the nearest sources of which are about 60 km to the west of the temple. This Big Temple is one of the most visited tourist attractions in Tamil Nadu



**Tanjore Palace:** The palace near the temple is a vast building of masonry built partly by Nayaks around 1550 AD and partly by Marathas. It is grand pile of buildings with huge corridors and spacious halls. Two of the palace towers - the armory and the observation towers are visible from all parts of the city. The place also houses the Sangeeth Mahal- a perfect music hall. It is striking example of the engineering skills of the ancient builders.



Overnight at the hotel in Thanjavur

#### DAY 8 THANJAVUR – KARAIKUDI

Travel to the small village of Kanadukathan near Karaikudi to get a glimpse of life in rural Tamil Nadu. Activities include a visit the Chettinadu Mansion, bullock cart ride, tile factory visit and a saree weaving centre. Overnight at the hotel.



#### DAY 9 KARAIKUDI – MADURAI

After breakfast proceed to **Madurai**. More than 2500 years old ancient city, situated on the banks of the river Vaigai, Madurai is believed to have been built by the Pandyan King Kulasekara. Madurai's history can be divided into four periods, beginning over 2000 years ago, when it was the capital of the Pandyan Kings. Apart from a brief period when it fell to the Cholas, Madurai remained with Pandyas till the decline of the empire. The 200 year old reign of the Natakas marked the golden era when art, architecture and learning scaled new heights.

**Meenakshi Temple** is the city's main attraction. It is nearly 2000 years old and located in the heart of the old town - a splendid example of Dravidian architecture. The present temple was designed in 1560 by Vishwanatha Nayak and subsequently built during the reign of Tirumalai Nayak. There are four entrances to the temple with an area of six

hectares. Each of its 12 towers has the height of 45 to 50 meters. The 1000 pillar Mandapam (hall) is an excellent example of the craftsmanship of the old days.



**Tirumalai Nayak Mahal:** This Indo-Saracenic building was constructed in 1523 and was originally four times larger than it is today.



**Vaniyur Mariamman Teppakulam** This enormous temple tank is fed by water from the Vaigai River. The tank has a Mandapam at the center enshrining Lord Vigneshwara. A colorful float festival is held in this tank every year.

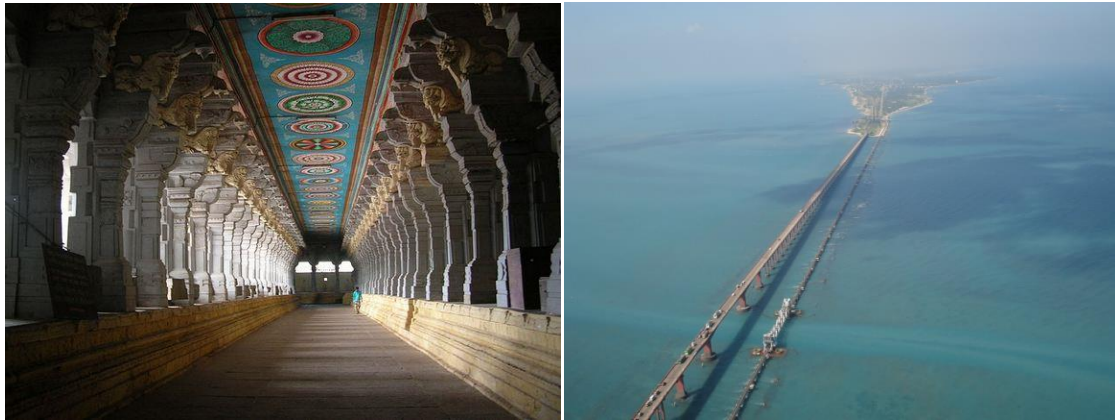
Overnight at the hotel in Madurai.

<b>DAY 10</b>	<b>MADURAI – RAMESWARAM</b>
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After breakfast, travel to **Rameswaram** which is a major pilgrim centre. It is connected to the mainland by road and railway bridges. It is located on Pamban Island separated from mainland India by the Pamban channel and is about 50 kilometres from Mannar Island, Sri Lanka. Rameswaram is a holy place because Sri Rama, on his return from Sri Lanka, offered his thanks to Lord Shiva and performed Pooja to wash away his sin in killing the Demon King, Ravana. Rameswaram is known for its 22 'theerthas' or wells in and around the main temple. This place is equally sacred to both Vaishnavites and



Shaivites. According to Hindu Mythology, if one visits Rameswaram and prays to Lord Shiva one will be relieved of one's sins.



The Ramanathaswamy temple is renowned for its magnificent corridors and massive sculptured pillars. The third corridor of Ramanathaswamy temple is the longest one in the world. Afterwards visit Kothandarama Temple on the way to Dhanushkodi, at the south-eastern tip of Pamban Island. It is about 24 kilometres (15 miles) west of Talaimannar in Sri Lanka.



In the afternoon visit the Memorial of India's former President APJ Abdul Kalam.

Born and brought up in Rameswaram, off the coast of Tamil Nadu, Kalam came from a very humble background. His father was a boat man and the imam of a local mosque. An excellent student, Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam went on to study aerospace engineering at the Madras Institute of Technology (MIT). Later, Kalam played an active part in designing missiles for the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). His work gave him the moniker of India's 'missile man' and he served as the 11<sup>th</sup> President of India from 2002 to 2007

**DAY 11****RAMESWARAM – KANYAKUMARI**

After breakfast, proceed to southernmost tip of mainland India - Kanyakumari.



Attractions in Kanyakumari include the famous Vivekananda Rock Memorial on the ocean, Thiruvalluvar Statue (near the Vivekananda Memorial), Mahatma Gandhi memorial and Devi Kanyakumari Temple. Overnight at Kanyakumari.

**DAY 12****KANYAKUMARI – TRIVANDRUM AIRPORT**

After breakfast travel to Trivandrum Airport to board your return flight

**Note:** The itinerary is flexible as it can be customized as per the time available



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