

SPIRITUAL TOURISM IN TAMILNADU

INTRODUCTION

Spiritual tourism is that form that is exclusively or strongly motivated for religious reasons. One of the oldest types of tourism and a worldwide phenomenon of religious history, it can be differentiated into various forms. The short-term religious tourism is distinguished by excursions to nearby pilgrimage centres or religious conferences. The long-term describes visits of several days or weeks to national and international pilgrimage sites or conferences.

Visiting spiritual site has been a travel motivation from the ancient time when the human beings had developed increasing faiths in Gods and Goddesses. As such, human beings are the creations of the cosmic power to grow harmoniously and peacefully. Anything and everything that occur in the universe is attributed to the actions of God as everything exists with the prior knowledge of God. Hence, this belief and faith on God is an integral part of the growth and development of human race and civilizations. As a result, it has become so intensive and extensive in the present world owing to the consciousness and broad understanding of people towards realizing a meaningful and productive life.

DEFINITION OF SPIRITUAL TOURISM

A spiritual is a ritual journey for peace, attaining mukthi, visiting heritage sites. very step along the way has meaning. A pilgrimage or spiritual is a journey during which transformation takes place. Pilgrims will get new insights and deeper understanding. Life is seen with different eyes on completion of the pilgrimage.

EVOLUTION OF SPIRITUAL TOURISM

Tourism in India dates back to ancient times. Travel for the purpose of learning, Pilgrimage and trade have always been an integral part of the social fabric of this huge subcontinent. Carrying on this long tradition, Pilgrimage Tourism in the country today, has attained unprecedented levels. In fact, Tourism is being used as a means to earn maximum foreign exchange by almost all countries. The same cannot be quietly justified for India. The purpose of foreign exchange is also an important part for the country, but not in all. Being vast in size, India needs a force to bind all diversities what she has. India is often named as subcontinent, means a small world in character.

It is religion which has been a common thread to pivot different languages, religion, customs and diversities. If one looks over the location of Pilgrim centers of India, one will find the role of religion in national integration. From extreme North to Southernmost part of the country and from Eastern most to Western most part everywhere, it is Religious centre which makes people to travel and indirectly to understand the custom and tradition of different part of the country strengthening national integration.

Today, spiritual tourism forms an important segment of domestic tourism and though accurate figures are difficult to arrive at, it is estimated that this segment alone generates a

movement of around 150 million people all over India. With rising affluence, the middle-class Pilgrims in the country have increasingly started linking visits to Religious places with pleasure outings. This large number of Pilgrim Tourists contributes to the economy of the local area in many ways. However, since this segment's paying capacity is not very high, their conversion in large numbers often tends to strain the basic infrastructure of these Pilgrimage sites.

India is not only a vast country in size, but in many other fields too as it is considered to be unique in the world. It is the only country in the world where god wishes to be born. It is a land of about thirty-three Crore Gods and Goddesses. Consequently, the number of Pilgrim centres are scattered throughout the country. India is a land of lord Rama, lord Krishna and Lord Buddha.

SPIRITUAL TOURISM IN TAMILNADU

Tamil Nadu has been astonishingly impressive in spiritual tourism. The enchanting State is blessed with plenty of well-known religious destinations. Pilgrimages to these destinations bring enormous economic gains to local residents. The number of people visiting pilgrimage centers is almost equal to the population of Tamil Nadu.

1. Chidambaram Kapaleeswarar, Chidambaram

Nurturing history of over thousand years, Chidambaram Kapaleeswarar temple also known as Kapaleeswarar temple without much effort makes its name as one of the must-visit temples in Chennai. Settled in the city of Mylapore, it is a fine example of the Dravidian style of architecture which features gopurams, vahanas(vehicles), a golden chariot and more. Furthermore, this famous temple in Tamilnadu derives its name from the words 'Kapalam' which means head and 'eeshwarar' which refers to the divine Lord Shiva, who is worshipped as the prime deity here. Along with the Supreme Being, Lord Shiva's consort Parvati is worshipped here in the form of Karpagambal(Goddess of the Wish-Yielding Tree). As per the Puranas, Parvati worshipped Lord Shiva in the form of a peacock which in turn gave the area the name Mylai (Peacock in Tamil). Moreover, it is believed that it was around 7th century CE that the Pallavas sculpted this astounding temple and gave travelers another reason to visit Tamil Nadu.

2. Meenakshi Temple, Madurai

Spreading its spiritual aura over the souls of worshippers is the oldest temple of Madurai, Meenakshi temple. This shrine that dates back to over 2500 years is considered as old as the city it adds shine to, etched on the southern bank of River Vaigai, Meenakshi is an avatar of Goddess Parvati the consort of Lord Shiva. Also known as Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple, it is believed that it is the same place where Lord Shiva (Sundareswarar) and Goddess Parvati (Meenakshi) tied the knot. Donning the Dravidian style of architecture, this temple was once considered to be counted among the 'Seven Wonders of the World'. One of the things that you should not miss out while on a spiritual tour in Madurai, is the procession that is carried out by the priest of the temple. In the ceremony, a photo of Sundareswarar is carried in a chariot to the shrine of

Meenakshi. Followed by a pooja that take place once the golden feet of the Lord are brought out of his consort's temple. And throughout this process the chariot of the Lord is fanned.

Tamil Nadu	No. Domestic Tourists / Visitor			No of Foreign Tourists / Visitor		
	Overnight Tourists	Same Day Visitors	Total	Overnight Tourists	Same Day Visitors	Total
Month (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
January'2019	3243254	5469335	8712589	286887	0	286887
February'2019	2808229	4936034	7744263	255325	0	255325
Marhc'2019	2809817	4781387	7591205	237237	0	237237
April'2019	2621678	4530733	7152410	226746	0	226746
May'2019	2742421	4553063	7295484	222404	0	222404
June'2019	2962404	4716552	7678957	156643	0	156643
July'2019	3101337	4697670	7799006	172737	0	172737
August'2019	2964857	4559066	7523923	162772	0	162772
September'2019	2895248	4543636	7438884	164958	0	164958
October'2019	3213959	4886090	8100049	188568	0	188568
November'2019	3392327	5004717	8397044	206823	0	206823
December'2019	3677220	5292969	8970189	247171	0	247171
Total	36432751	57971252	94404003	2528272	0	2528272

The maximum no. of domestic leisure visitors to Tamil Nadu are spread across the months of October - January. For foreign leisure visitors to Tamil Nadu February and January have been the preferred months for visit.

Source: *Tourism Survey for Tamil Nadu (Jan - Dec 2019)*

3. Rameshwaram Temple

Rameshwaram along with Badrinath, Puri and Dwarka are the famous temples of India that are visited by pilgrims to attain salvation. Talking about this spiritual pilgrimage site of Tamil Nadu, it finds its place in the town of Rameshwaram and is one of the 274 Paadal Petra Sthalams which finds its special mention in the songs of the three famous Nayanars, Sundarar, Appar and Tirugnana Sambandar. With the coming of 12th century, Rameshwaram temple saw its days of evolution by the hands of Pandya Dynasty and is revered as a sacred site for Vaishnavites, Shaivites and Smarthas. The Indian epic Ramayana is associated with this temple where the Lord Rama worshipped the lingam of Lord Shiva to get rid of the sins he committed when he fought with Ravana, the king of Lanka.

4. Brihadeeswarar temple, Thanjavur

Thanjavur, also known as Tanjore, is a city and district headquarters in the state of Tamil Nadu. Thanjavur is famous for the Brihadeeswarar Temple built by Rajaraja Chola in the year

1010 AD. Also known as the Big Temple, it is one of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in India and also one of the popular places to experience Tamilnadu Tourism. Situated on the banks of River Cauvery, Thanjavur has a rich historical heritage and is a must visit place in Thanjavur as part of Tamilnadu tour. The city was once the stronghold of the historic Cholas and at one time was also the capital of the Cholas, Mutharayars and Marathas when they were at the peak of their power. Since then, Thanjavur has been one of the chief political, cultural and religious centers of South India. The temple is considered to be one of the best specimens of South Indian temple architecture.

5. Kumbakonam

The name Kumbakonam in English means the Pot's Corner. In olden days it was called Thirukudamookku and it is also popularly called as Kudanthai now. According to history, Kumbakonam dates back to the Sangam period and was ruled by the Early Cholas, Pallavas, Medieval Cholas, Later Cholas, Pandyas, the Vijayanagar Kings, Madurai Nayaks, Thanjavur Nayaks and the Thanjavur Marathas. It rose to be a prominent city between the 7th and 9th centuries AD, when it served as a capital of the Medieval Cholas. The town reached the zenith of its prosperity during the British Raj when it was a prominent center of European education and Hindu culture; and it acquired the cultural name, the Cambridge of South India.

Kumbakonam is known for its temples and mutts (monasteries). There are around 188 Hindu temples within the municipal limits of Kumbakonam. Adi Kumbeswarar temple, Nageswaraswamy temple and Kasi Viswanathar temple are the prominent Shiva temples in the town and it has one of the few temples dedicated to the god Brahma. Sarangapani temple is the largest Vaishnava shrine present in Kumbakonam. The Dhenupureeswarar Temple at Patteeswaram, the Oppiliappan Kovil, the Swamimalai Murugan temple and the Airavateeswarar temple at Darasuram are the other temples located in the vicinity of Kumbakonam.

6. Mariamman Temple, Samayapuram

Sri Mariyamman Temple is dedicated to Samayapurathal or Mariamman, an incarnation of Goddess Shakti. The main deity in the sanctum is made of sand and clay and hence there are no abhishekams conducted to the main deity, but instead the abhishekam is done to the small stone statue in front of it.

According to legend, the present deity was at the Ranganathaswamy temple at Srirangam, and one of chief priests of the temple believed that the idol caused him illness and hence asked it to be removed from the temple. It is a common belief that such local deities have immense powers and they must always be satisfied by proper offerings and sacrifices.

According to history, King Vijayaraya Chakaravarthi built the present-day temple in 17th century. The Goddess Mariamman has enormous powers over curing illnesses and hence, it is a ritual to buy small metallic replicas made with silver or steel of various body parts that need to be cured, and these are deposited in the donation box. Devotees also offer mavalakku, a sweet dish made of jaggery, rice flour and ghee. Persons affected by Chickenpox and Smallpox come to

this place, stay here and pray the Goddess for speedy recovery. Abisheka Theertham is sprinkled on them after Pooja.

7. Velankanni

The Roman Catholic Latin Rite Basilica is devoted to Our Lady of Good Health. Situated on the coast of Bay of Bengal, this is one of the most popular Christian pilgrimage sites in South India. The Shrine of Our Lady of Velankanni is one of the most frequented religious sites in India. It can be traced back to mid-16th century and is attributed to three miracles at different sites around where the Basilica currently stands. The appearance of Mary and Christ Child to a shepherd boy, the curing of a buttermilk vendor and the rescue of Portuguese sailors from a violent sea storm are the miracles associated with this shrine.

The shrine was started as a small structure in the mid-sixteenth century. The chapel was built by Portuguese sailors and became a parish church in 1771. Later in 1962 it was granted a Special status of a Minor Basilica and merged with the Major Basilica of Mary in Rome on 3 November 1962 by Pope John XXIII. Representing a Gothic style of architecture, the building of the church is painted white, while the roof is covered with red tiles. The Basilica contains three chapels, Our Lady's Tank, Church Museum, Priests' Residence, Offering Center, Stations of the Cross and Stations of the Rosary. The church organizes Holy masses in eight languages - English, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Telugu, Hindi, Konkani and Marathi.

8. Nagore Dargah

Nagore is famous for a Muslim dargah dedicated to the 16th century saint Meeran Sahib. The Nagore Dargah shrines are situated at three locations, Nagore, Vanjur and Silladi. The main campus is at Nagore, spread over an area of about five acres, which is enclosed by compound wall, with four impressive entrances, one each on the north, south, east and west. In front of the western gate, just outside the compound, is a large tower, 131 feet tall, called 'Periya Minara'. Nagore Dargah literature discloses that Tanjore King Pratap Singh built -Periya Minara- around 1760 AD, about 200 years after the death of Meeran Sahib. He is said to have built it in appreciation of having received the grace of Meeran Sahib.

9. Thiruchendur Murugan Kovil

This temple is considered to be one of the six Padai Veedu (Battle Camps) of Lord Murugan, the others being Thiruparamkundram, Palani, Swamimalai, Thiruthani and Pazhamudhircholai. This temple is known as the second Padai Veedu of Lord Muruga. Lord Muruga won the battle with the demon Surapadma and worshipped Lord Shiva at this sacred place. It is believed that the temple existed since the Vedic period, as it is mentioned in many ancient scripts.

The main entrance to the temple faces south although the sanctum faces east. The 133 feet Rajagopura, built close to the shores of Bay of Bengal, is an outstanding example of Dravidian architecture. The Gopura consists of 9 storeys there are nine Kalasas at the top of the gopuram. This is the only Murugan temple situated on the sea shore.

10. Srivilliputhur Andal Temple

The temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu, who is worshipped as Vatapatrasayi and his consort Lakshmi as Andal. It is believed to be the birthplace of two of the Alwars, namely Periazhwar and his foster daughter Andal. The Alwars lived in 8th century, so that the existence of the temple can be traced even before. Vatapatra Sayanar Temple was constructed by the King Villi who ruled the place. The tall temple tower was constructed by Peria Alwar with the help provided by the Pandian king Vallabadevan (765-815 AD). The Andal Shrine had been constructed by different kings of Pandya dynasty at different times. King Thirumalai Nayak had done many renovations.

The greatest attraction of the temple is the Rajagopuram with eleven tiers and 192 feet height. It is one among the tallest towers of temples in Tamilnadu. It is also the Emblem of Tamil Nadu Government.

11. Palani

Palani is one of the popular pilgrimage sites in Tamilnadu. Puranas have a story that Lord Muruga disappointed for Gnanapazham came here to stay alone. Lord Shiva & Goddess Uma Devi convinced him by saying that he himself is the fruit of knowledge (Gnanapazham) and called him as Pazham Nee. Thus, the town got its name 'Pazhani'. The temple of Pazhaniandavar is situated in the Palani Hills at the height of about 1400 feet from the sea level.

12. Papanasam

Papanasam has a famous temple called the Papanasam Sivan Temple which lies on the banks of Thamirabarani River. Constructed in the Dravidian style of architecture, the holy shrine is dedicated to Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati who are worshipped as Papanasanathar and Ulagammai respectively. This is the place where Saint Agasthiyar got the Kalyana dharshan of Lord Shiva and Parvati along with his wife Lopamudra.

The Shiva lingam of the temple is completely made up of Rudraksha. Of the nine Kailash Kshetras - Nava Kailash, Papanasam is the first place and is attributed to Sun God. Hence, the place is known as Surya Kshetra and Surya Kailash. Devotees strongly believe that Lord Shiva in this temple is most powerful and cures all kind of diseases. The temple is famous for its Chittirai Peruvila where the festivities used to happen for 13 days.

13. Sri Sankaranarayana Swamy Temple, Sankarankovil

The temple is dedicated to Sankaranarayanar, who is the combined manifestation of Shiva and Vishnu. This temple was built by Ukkira Pandiya Thevar in the 11th century AD. This temple also called as Avudaiamman Kovil or Davasu Kovil. According to mythology, once the devotees of Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva quarreled with each other to determine whose god is powerful. Then Lord Shiva appeared as Sankaranarayanar to mark his devotees to understand that both Hari and Shiva are one and the same. So, it is held sacred by Saivites and Vaishnavites as well. Hence this temple depicts the concept of Hari and Haran being one God.

14. Arunachala Temple – Tiruvannamalai

Tiruvannamalai along with Gingee Fort is one of the ideal Chennai weekend getaways and a major pilgrimage site in Tamilnadu. Built within an area of 25 acres, this temple was constructed by Vijayanagara kings between 16th and the 17th centuries. This temple is famous for its huge & massive gopurams built on four sides of the temple. The Rajagopuram on East Gateway is 217 feet high with 11 storeys. The base measure 135 feet by 98 feet. This tower was built by King Krishna Devaraya of Vijayanagar. The Thousand Pillared Mantapam and the tank opposite to it were also constructed by Krishna Devaraya. The temple is fortified by a huge wall. Each of the prakarams has a huge Nandi.

15. Kumariamman Temple, Kanyakumari

Kanyakumari has been a great centre for art and religion for centuries. It was also an area of great trade and commerce. It was ruled by Cholas, Pandyas and Nayaks. Later on, Kanyakumari came under the rule of the Venad dynasty and its capital was located at Padmanabhapuram. In spite of the troubles encountered in the southern border of Venad, Marthanda Varma expanded the kingdom northwards to Aluva and established the kingdom of Travancore. In 1745, the capital was shifted from Padmanabhapuram to Thiruvananthapuram.

This is a popular tourist place and a place of great natural beauty. The city gets its name from the Hindu goddess Kanyakumari who was also known as Kumari Amman. Swami Vivekananda is said to have lived here for a while and meditated. It is situated at the confluence of Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. This place offers marvelous Sunset and Sunrise views. It is the only place in India where one can enjoy the unique spectacle of Sunset and Moonrise simultaneously on full moon days.

CONCLUSION

Pilgrims play an important role in the system of pilgrimage and the same is true for tourists in tourism. Pilgrims become crucial in the maintenance and continuity of pilgrimage. In case of pilgrimage, the maintenance and use of sacred places (the sacred capes) go hand in hand. The visiting pilgrims' goal is to experience the supreme spiritual bliss and the actions guided by the ethics they learn from traditions and mythologies. That is how conservation of environment is intrinsic to pilgrim behaviour and further to the system of pilgrimage. The deeply root Hindu Tradition of Pilgrimage have helped the divine spirit of pilgrimage places to survive and sustain since many centuries.

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