

The World Heritage Sites of Tamilnadu

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ABSTRACT

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, shortly known as UNESCO is an organization that protects our rich cultural and historical lineage and spreads peace throughout the world. This specialized organization takes immense measures in protecting some of the most valuable man-made treasures across the world. And in India UNESCO has listed 29 World Heritage sites, in which four are from Tamilnadu. Besides these, the Northern Mountain Railway is also recognized as a Heritage site.

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Introduction

Tamil Nadu is a renowned state in India and has been held in high regard by many ancient poets. This is the place where Tamil language ripened many centuries ago and is a main commercial centre in the southern zone. The architectural style here is greatly admired by all. Monuments are the mouthpieces of our ancestors; every block of these impeccable arts has bundles of stories to tell, each pillar of these top-notch buildings has top secrets to share. Tamil Nadu monuments are marked by unique Dravidian architecture; they are emblazoned with intricate patterns that are one of their kinds. These marvellous monuments are still now an engineering wonder.

Tamil Nadu is a blend of both- the modern and the ancient, which makes it a beautiful destination to explore and experience our past cultural heritage with all the amenities of the present. The UNESCO monuments of Tamil Nadu and other UNESCO world heritage sites in Tamil Nadu are Brihadeeswarar Temple at Thanjavur (1987), Gangai Konda Choleeswaram (1987), Airavatesvara temple at Darasuram (1987), Group of Monuments at Mahabalipuram (1984) and Nilgiri Mountain Railway.

Brihadeeswarar Temple, Tanjore

Brihadeeswarar temple which is also known as the Tanjore Big Temple or Peruvudaiyar Kovil is world-renowned for its incredible architecture. This colossal shrine will make every beholder awestruck. Brihadeeswarar temple is a Hindu temple dedicated to

Lord Shiva located in the South bank of river Kaveri in the Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu, India. Being the ardent devotee of Lord Shiva, King Raja Raja Chola I built this temple with his utmost passion and brilliant architectural Style. Every nook and cranny of this colossal temple speaks of Raja Raja Chola's fame. The deity was first named as the "Rajarajeshwar". Later during the reign of Marathas, the deity was called as the Brahadeswar or the great Ishwara. According to the temple facts, the main sanctum was built purely with granite stones. It is believed that more than 130,000 tons of granite had been used in the construction of this specific building. This temple is located at the centre of a big open courtyard of about 500 feet length and 250 feet width. There is a 'Linga' about 17 feet high upon the 'Audaiyar' structure. It was called 'Rajarajeshwara Lingam'. But now it is called by the name 'Brihadeeswara Lingam' or 'Peruvudaiyar Lingam'.

The Vimana i.e the main sanctum is six stories high and measures about 66m height. It was built about a height of 216 feet. It is known as 'RajaRajan Dakshina Meru'. It means the Vimana looks like South Himalaya. Because the Vimana of Lingaraja temple (160 feet) of Bhubaneswar in Orissa is the highest Vimana in North India. A St. Mary Church in Orshisudar only has the height equal to the Tanjore temple. But the area of this temple is 2/3 that of the Tanjore temple. And the main vimana is a hollow tower above with a huge boulder. The 'Thumuli' of the Vimana has 12 feet height Golden 'Kalasa'. The beautiful sculptures are more attractive than the architecture. Brahadeeshwarar temple is the only temple that has this kind of structure among the temples of Tamil Nadu. Even the construction of the walls of the main sanctum is unique. It is built using interlocking bricks and to our wild guess, it is built without using any binding materials. Yet another totally outlandish fact is that the shadow of the main sanctum never falls on the ground, be it any time of the day. The lovely paintings in the walls of the big temple and the numerous inscriptions that were found around bear ample testimony to this fact.

Gangaikonda Cholapuram Brihadeeswara Temple at Jayankondam

Gangaikonda Cholapuram is a town located in Ariyalur, Tamil Nadu. It became the capital of the Chola dynasty in 1025 A.D. during the reign of Rajendra Chola I, and served as the Chola capital for around 250 years. As of 2014, the ancient city exists as a heritage town in Tamil Nadu, India. The name 'Gangaikonda Cholapuram or Choleeswaram' is named after the title of the king, signifying his conquests and successful expedition up to the Ganga. In other opinions, the name 'Gangaikonda Cholapuram' means 'the town of the Chola who took

over Ganga (water from Ganga) or who defeated the kings near Ganga. It is now a small village. Its past eminence is only remembered by the existence of the Great Siva Temple.

Rajendra Chola I, son of Rajaraja Chola wanted to build a temple in his capital Gangaikonda Cholapuram with the same main features of Tanjore Brihadeeswara temple. So he built a temple in 'Chittur' near 'Kudanthai' in 1035 AD. It is smaller in area and height than Tanjore temple. Its area has 340 feet length and 110 feet width. There are 150 pillars with beautiful ornaments. It was the role model for the latter thousand pillar mandapam. Every pillar was built upon a four feet height platform. The grand colossal Nandhi is carved out and positioned in the same way as in Brihadeeswarar temple. After the victory over the Ganga dynasty, Rajendra Cholan built this incredible piece of art at his headquarters Gangaikonda Cholapuram. Now the Gangaikonda Cholapuram town is located in Jayankondam in the district of Ariyalur, in Tamil Nadu. The five shrines of this temple and a lion well, which is said to be added during the 19th century. Apart from these, there are around 50 odd sculptures around the walls of the sanctum, in which the sculptures of Nataraja, Saraswathi and Lord Shiva, a devotee with a garland, are the most prominent.

Comparison

Gangaikonda Choleeswaram Temple has Vimana which resembles the Tanjore temple Vimana in structure. Both have square shape at the base; Pyramidal shape at the centre and hemispherical shape at the top. Tanjore temple has thirteen stages in vimana. But Choleeswaram temple has only eight stages. Tanjore temple has straight lines on its outer side, but Choleeswaram temple has curved lines. Percy Brown says that Tanjore temple is the best example for art skill, but Choleeswaram temple possesses a richness and beauty of its own. But both were constructed on the basis of spiritual life. When we compare these two temples on the basis of ornamentation, Choleeswaram temple is better than Tanjore temple.

Airavatesvara Temple at Darasuram

Airavatesvara Temple is a Dravidian architecture temple located in the town of Darasuram, near Kumbakonam in Thanjavur District in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Airavatesvara Temple is a Hindu temple dedicated mainly to Lord Shiva. This temple is referred to as the Great Living Chola Temple by UNESCO and was declared as the UNESCO heritage site in the year 2004.

Darasuram is a small hamlet in Kumbakonam known worldwide for the incredible Airavateswarar temple. This temple is not only a place of worship but also a part of the

UNESCO world heritage site. The Airavatesvara temple at Darasuram was built by the great Chola king Rajaraja II (1143-1173 CE), and it is placed third, after the two famous Chola temples of Thanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram. Despite being smaller than the other two, Airavatesvara temple holds sculptural masterpieces that make it stand separately, exemplifying the great heights achieved in the field of art, sculpture, and architecture, during the Chola reign. Built by Raja Raja Cholan II in the 12th century, this temple is yet another feather in the hat of Cholas. The Airavatesvara temple of Darasuram is also called Rajarajeswara after Rajaraja II; it is built on a pedestal conceived as a compromise between the Imperial Chola style and the Imperial Pandya Style. Kulothunga III built the Tribuvanaviresvara which is similar to the Darasuram temple. The different Bharatanatyam poses are represented in the temple. The vimana of this temple is a conical pyramid of six tiers. This incredible piece of art comprises exquisite carvings, Chariot shaped Mandapams, huge Vimana and extraordinary artworks. The presiding deity here is Lord Shiva.

Airavatesvara, as the name tells us, is believed to have been derived from Airavat, Indra's elephant, who had prayed in this temple. According to legends, Airavat, a white elephant who had emerged during the samudra manthan, had turned black after being cursed by rishi Durvasa. It is here, after praying and bathing in the temple tank that Airavat regained his lost colour. According to another story, Yama (the god of death) was cursed by a rishi that made him suffer from a constant burning sensation. He got rid of this curse by praying here and taking a bath in the temple tank, which is known as Yama Teertha.

While entering the temple, one sees a large gopura a little away from the nandi mandapa and bali-peetha, whose upper part is completely destroyed. However, its grandeur can be imagined from the smaller gopura that stands inside and remains completely preserved. From various records it is seen that the temple once held seven walled tiers that were subsequently destroyed during invasions by the Delhi Sultanate armies, led by Malik Kafur (1311 CE), Khusrau Khan (1314 CE), and Muhammad Bin Tughlaq (1327 CE), the remnants of which are still visible in bits and parts from the scattered ruins around.

The prakara or the wall that runs around the temple has beautifully sculpted couchant bulls visible from outside the gate too. The smaller gopuram that forms the entryway shows pillars in a row decorated with pretty ganas, surasundaris, and other motifs. In front of it are a large nandi mandapa, and a smaller bali-peetha showing beautiful carvings of lotus petals. The bali-peetha has musical stairs that are now locked and covered with an iron grill to stop people from walking on it. The staircase of the baali-peetha is in sync with the sculpted

panels seen all over the temple that are adorned with miniature dancing figures. Music and dance form the basic theme of this temple's ornamentation: a state of perpetual joy and entertainment.

Airavatesvara temple has a sanctum that holds a shiva-linga, without the circumambulatory path around it. The front hall or agra-mandapam is unique, as it had been designed to look like a chariot on wheels (the Tripurantaka ratha), complete with wheels, spokes, and hubs (in relief), pulled by leaping horses. The mandapa pillars show ornamentation depicting stories from the epics and Puranas, such as, burning of Manmatha, Parvati performing penance, Shiva's marriage, birth of Skanda/Kumara, Shiva's fights with the asuras, etc. Another interesting feature of this temple are the miniature panels with inscriptions that tell stories associated with the 63 Nayanmars (Shaiva saints), showing the Chola connection with Shaivism. Interestingly some of the panels also depict scenes from daily lives, such as women in yoga postures, a woman giving birth to a child with the help of female attendants, etc. There is also a separate sanctum for the Devi (Devanayaki Amman shrine), which is of a later period. The front mandapa has a beautiful dhwaja stambha in front, and the two ganas, padma nidhi and sankha nidhi, are seen on two side niches facing the entrance gate. The base of the outer pillars of the agra mandapa have gaja-yalis with curled trunks and tails. The second mandapa has four niches at the side of the doorway. In the first niche is seen a devi with a lotus and kalasha (an inscription says she's devi Ganga; however, there are various arguments that say she could be Annapurna or Bhuvaneshwari or Mohini). In the second niche stands Nandikesvara with hands in anjali mudra; the third one has bhakta Kannappa standing, wearing his signature leather sandals and carrying a bow; and the last one has a seated Saraswati. The prakara (wall) goes around the paved courtyard and around the temple holds pillared cloisters inside with cells in between the deities. At the four corners these cloisters are made large and turned into mandapas. Carved on a balustrade of one of the staircases that lead to the pillared cloister stands the famous 'Rishaba Kunjaram' sculpture, where we see the conjoined heads of a bull and an elephant but each having separate bodies. The buildings around the Darasuram temple were built at the time of construction of the main temple. The mandapa of this temple were built in the form of a chariot with artificial wheels and elephants as they drew the Chariot. The temple sanctum remains closed from 12 pm to 4 pm.

Group of Monuments at Mahabalipuram

The monuments at Mahabalipuram are situated on the Coromandel Coast of the Bay of Bengal, in Kancheepuram district of Tamil Nadu, India. It has nearly 40 sanctuaries, including the largest open-air rock relief in the world. These monuments include: the Pancha Rathas of Dharmaraja Ratha, Arjuna Ratha, Bhima Ratha, Draupadi Ratha, Nakula Sahadeva Ratha, and also Ganesha Ratha. It was tagged as a World Heritage site in 1984.

Facts about Group of Monuments at Mahabalipuram:

1. Mamallapuram was a sea-port during the time of Periplus (1st century AD) and Ptolemy (AD 140).
2. The towns of Mamallapuram were found 2000 years ago.
3. It was a very big port, bringing many traders to India.
4. This was the second capital of great Pallava ruler Narasimhavarman-I (AD 630-68).
5. The monuments at Mahabalipuram are situated on the Coromandel Coast of the Bay of Bengal, in Kancheepuram district of Tamil Nadu, India.
6. There are several temples at the Mahabalipuram i.e. Krishna Cave Temple, Mahishasuramardini Mandapa, Araha Cave Temple, Panchapandava Cave Temple and structural temples include the Shore Temple and the Olakkannesvara Temple.
7. The monuments at Mahabalipuram got the status of UNESCO'S World Heritage Site in 1984.
8. The Union Ministry of Tourism and Culture is taking care of the conservation work at this site.
9. The Ministry of tourism is running a project namely "Integrated Development of Mamallapuram" for its preservation.

Shore Temple

The Shore Temples at Mahabalipuram, a coastal village 50 km south of Madras, was constructed during the reign of Rajasimha in the 7th century. The temple with its beautiful polygonal dome saved the statues of Lord Vishnu and Shiva. These beautiful temples were damaged by wind. This temple has been declared as a world heritage site since 1984.

Mahabalipuram also known as Mamallapuram is known for its charming seashore and incredible rock sculptures. The Group of Monuments at Mamallapuram is a collection of 7th and 8th century CE religious monuments in the coastal resort town of Mamallapuram in Tamil Nadu, India and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is on the Coromandel Coast of the Bay of Bengal, which is 60 kilometers south of Chennai. A visit to this lovely place will rejuvenate all your worn-out cells and fill you with fresh energy. Nook and cranny of this place are dotted with numerous remarkable artworks.

The sculptures of Mahabalipuram are a piece of cake for all the archaeologists and architecture lovers. This small strip of land is more charismatic than any other place in Tamilnadu, the lovely waves dashing against the rocks and the beautiful rock sculptures anchored sublimely on the shores is a spectacular sight to behold. Arjuna's penance is the magnum opus of Tamil Nadu artist; this mid-seventh-century art is the world's largest bas-relief. Its bulky size will make everyone wish for thousand eyes to capture this incredible art as a whole. This piece of art has lots of sculptures of Arjuna, Lord Siva, huge elephants, and whatnot. This place is surely worth a visit, these whole carvings are based on the folklore of Mahabharata. Other monuments are based on varied god and goddesses of the Hindu religion. Few Buddha sculptures are found here. The noteworthy monuments are Pancha Rathas, the shore temple, Varaha temple, and Descent of the Ganges. Most notable Cave Temples of Mahabalipuram are Varaha Cave Temple, Krishna Cave Temple and Panchapandava Cave Temple.

Nilgiri Mountain Railway (NMR)

Few of the mountain railways of India are listed under the UNESCO site namely Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, the Nilgiri Mountain Railway and the Kalka-Shimla Railway. In which the Nilgiri mountain railway is located in Tamilnadu. In the year 2005 Nilgiri Mountain was added to the UNESCO world heritage list. The Nilgiri Mountain Railway is a 1,000 mm meter gauge railway, built by the British in 1908, and is operated by the Southern Railway and is the only rock railway in India. The railway relies on its fleet of steam locomotives. NMR switched to diesel locomotives on the section between Coonoor and Udhagamandalam. NMR uses 'X' Class steam rack locomotives manufactured by the Swiss Locomotive and Machine works of Winterthur in Switzerland, on the rack and pinion section of its tracks. The X Class locomotives are six to eight decades old. These locomotives give NMR a distinct charm, taking scores of passengers to Coonoor and Udhagamandalam crossing 45.8 kilometres (28 mi), 108 curves, 16 tunnels and 250 bridges.

Local people and visitors led a campaign to return to steam locomotives in this section. This is one of the key attractions of the popular hill station Ooty in Tamilnadu that make the ride a most memorable one is its picturesque scenic surroundings. A ride in this lovely train will surely chill down the spine and will be one of the most unforgettable journeys in everyone's lifetime.

Conclusion

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Sites are important places of cultural or natural heritage as described in the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, established in 1972. There are 38 World Heritage sites located in India. Out of these, Brihadiiswara Temple at Tanjore, Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple at Jayankondam, Airavathesvara temple at Darasuram, Group Monuments at Mahabalipuram and Nilgiri Mountain Railway are situated in Tamilnadu also recognized as World Heritage sites. Rajarajeswaram temple or Brihadeeswara temple was constructed by Raja Raja Chola I at Tanjore. It is the highest and biggest temple of all Indian temples. This temple is the greatest temple which shows the toppest view of the South Indian Architecture. It is the best example for all South Indian Temples. Gangaikonda Cholapuram Brihadeeswarar Temple is just a replica of the masterpiece Tanjore Big temple also. The temple was constructed by Rajendra Chola I (1014-44 CE), the son of the famous Chola king Raja Raja Chola I, who built the Brihadeeswarar Temple at Thanjavur. In the later Chola temples, Airavatesvara temple has the beautiful architecture which can be compared with Tanjore temple and Choleeswaram temple. Nilgiri Mountain railway is a meter gauge railway built by the British in 1908 A.D. is operated by the Southern Railway. It is the only rack and rock railway in India. These remarkable sites are added in the World Heritage Sites and Monuments by UNESCO to protect them forever for the upcoming generations. People should be aware of these monuments and take care of these sites from natural and artificial dangers and exploitations.

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