

Chennai Travel Guide

Chennai: The Gateway to South India
India · Generated July 12, 2026 · mycitytravelguide.com/india/chennai/

Things to do in Chennai

Religious Sites

Explore Chennai's magnificent temples and sacred places that showcase Dravidian architecture and spiritual traditions spanning centuries.



Kapaleeshwarar Temple Must See
1-2 hours No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

A stunning 16th-century temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, featuring intricate gopuram (temple tower) with traditional Tamil architecture. The temple is a vibrant pilgrimage site with elaborate carvings and daily rituals. Located in the residential area of Mylapore, it's one of Chennai's most iconic temples and a must-visit for understanding Hindu spiritual traditions.

San Thome Cathedral Must See
45 minutes No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

A magnificent Neo-Gothic cathedral built over the tomb of St. Thomas, believed to be an Apostle of Jesus. This architectural marvel blends European design with local elements, featuring stunning stained glass windows and a serene interior. The cathedral stands as a symbol of religious harmony in Chennai with fascinating spiritual and historical significance.



Parthasarathy Temple Top Pick
1 hour No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

One of the oldest functioning temples in India, dedicated to Lord Krishna. This 8th-century Pallava temple showcases classic Dravidian architecture with beautifully carved pillars and intricate stone work. The temple complex includes fascinating murals and sculptures that depict episodes from Hindu mythology in exquisite detail.

Thiruvallikkeni Divya Desam Top Pick
1 hour No Booking Needed



Map

A sacred shrine of Lord Vishnu and one of the 108 Divya Desams (holy temples) revered in Hindu tradition. The temple features exquisite carvings and a peaceful atmosphere, with annual festivals that attract devotees from across India. The sanctum sanctorum showcases intricate architectural details and spiritual significance unique to South Indian temple design.

Tips for Religious Sites

- Most temples have dress codes—wear modest clothing covering shoulders and knees
- Remove footwear before entering inner sanctums
- Visit early morning for a more serene experience and smaller crowds



- Photography may be restricted in certain areas; ask permission first



Landmarks & Monuments

Visit Chennai's iconic landmarks that tell stories of colonial heritage, cultural pride, and architectural excellence from different eras.



Fort St. George

Must See

2-3 hours No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

India's oldest British fort, built in 1644, this historical compound houses government buildings and museums. The fort's architecture blends colonial and South Indian styles, featuring the stunning St. Mary's Church and the Fort Museum. It's a fascinating peek into colonial history with well-preserved structures, documents, and artifacts that chronicle India's relationship with British rule.



Government Museum

Must See

3-4 hours No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

One of India's oldest and largest museums, established in 1851, housing exceptional collections of bronze sculptures, artifacts, manuscripts, and contemporary art. The museum's bronze gallery is world-renowned, displaying masterpieces from various dynasties. The sprawling campus includes multiple sections dedicated to different themes, making it a comprehensive cultural institution.



Chepauk Palace

Top Pick

1 hour No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

An 18th-century Indo-Saracenic palace, once the residence of the Nawab of the Carnatic. The palace features distinctive Islamic-influenced architecture with ornate domes and arches. Though partially in ruins, its grand structure and elaborate design provide insight into the lifestyle and architectural preferences of Indian nobility during the Mughal era.

Tips for Landmarks & Monuments

- Fort St. George is best visited on weekdays to avoid crowds
- Allow ample time for the Government Museum—don't rush through the galleries
- Consider hiring a guide for deeper historical context and stories
- Photography policies vary; check with individual sites before taking pictures



Museums & Galleries

Immerse yourself in Chennai's art and cultural institutions showcasing everything from ancient bronzes to contemporary masterpieces.

DakshinaChitra Top Pick

3-4 hours No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

A living museum of South Indian art, crafts, and culture set across 6 acres. Featuring replicas of traditional homes from different regions, craft demonstrations, and cultural performances. Visitors can interact with artisans, watch craftspeople at work, and learn about traditional techniques. The museum offers authentic cultural immersion with attached restaurants serving traditional cuisine.



Kalakshetra Top Pick Book Ahead

2 hours Book Ahead



Map



Wiki

A renowned institution for learning and promoting classical Indian arts, particularly Bharatanatyam dance and textile arts. Set in peaceful gardens, the campus includes performance spaces, galleries, and studios. Visitors can attend performances, view textile exhibitions, and experience authentic classical Indian art traditions in an inspiring educational environment.



National Art Gallery Notable

1.5-2 hours No Booking Needed



Map

Housed in a beautiful Victorian building, this gallery showcases Indian contemporary and classical art. Features rotating exhibitions of paintings, sculptures, and installations by renowned artists. The gallery's architecture and curated collections make it an inspiring space for art lovers and a platform for understanding modern Indian artistic expression.

Tips for Museums & Galleries

- Check opening hours and days before visiting—some museums close on Mondays
- DakshinaChitra offers cultural programs; check their schedule for performances
- Photography policies differ by venue; ask before taking pictures inside galleries
- Consider guided tours for deeper understanding of collections and artworks



Parks & Gardens

Escape the city bustle in Chennai's lush green spaces offering recreation, relaxation, and beautiful natural landscapes.



Marina Beach Must See
2-3 hours No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

Asia's second-longest urban beach stretching 13 kilometers along the Bay of Bengal. Marina Beach is a beloved recreational space with sandy shores, casuarina trees, and open spaces. Perfect for evening walks, swimming, and people-watching. The beach features local vendors, food stalls, and stunning sunset views. It's an essential Chennai experience showcasing the city's vibrant street culture.



Guindy National Park Top Pick
2-3 hours No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

India's smallest national park, a pristine urban wildlife sanctuary within the city. Home to various species of animals and birds including spotted deer, wild boar, and numerous avian species. The park offers nature trails, a small zoo, and guided walks. It's an excellent spot for birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts seeking to experience urban wildlife conservation.



Arignar Anna Zoological Park Top Pick
3-4 hours No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

One of India's largest zoos featuring over 1,400 animals representing more than 100 species. The park emphasizes animal welfare with spacious habitats and conservation programs. Visitors can see tigers, lions, elephants, and numerous reptile and bird species. The zoo includes a reptile park and engaging animal demonstrations, making it educational and entertaining for families.

Tips for Parks & Gardens

- Visit Marina Beach early morning or late evening to avoid peak sun and crowds
- Guindy National Park: best time is early morning for wildlife viewing
- Zoo: wear comfortable shoes and bring water; arrive early to avoid afternoon crowds
- Beach safety: avoid swimming during monsoon season (October-December)



Ancient & Historical Sites

Explore ancient ruins and heritage structures that showcase the architectural brilliance and cultural legacy of South India's kingdoms.

Arulmigu Arunachaleswara Temple Top Pick

Full day trip No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

Though located in Tiruvannamalai (near Chennai), this 9th-century temple is one of South India's most important pilgrimage sites dedicated to Lord Shiva. The temple features massive gopurams, sacred pond, and inner sanctums carved within a hillside. The surrounding sacred mountain and temple complex create a spiritually significant landscape attracting millions of pilgrims annually.



Madras High Court Notable

45 minutes No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

A magnificent Indo-Gothic structure built in 1892, one of Asia's largest court buildings. The architecture showcases colonial craftsmanship with intricate details, grand courtyards, and ornate decorative elements. Though primarily an functioning court, the building's exterior is impressive and represents an important period of architectural heritage in Chennai.

Tips for Ancient & Historical Sites

- Tiruvannamalai temples require early morning visits for spiritual atmosphere
- Wear comfortable walking shoes for exploring temple complexes
- Respectful dress and behavior required at all religious sites
- Hire local guides for historical context and spiritual significance



Neighborhoods & Districts

Wander through Chennai's distinct neighborhoods, each with unique character, local life, and authentic experiences.



Mylapore

Must See

3-4 hours No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

One of Chennai's oldest and most culturally vibrant neighborhoods, home to the famous Kapaleeshwarar Temple. Mylapore is known for its narrow lanes, traditional architecture, and thriving arts scene. The area features numerous small temples, traditional restaurants, silk shops, and flower markets. The neighborhood exudes authentic South Indian culture with regular cultural programs and traditional festivities.



George Town

Top Pick

2-3 hours No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

Chennai's historic commercial district, established during the colonial period. George Town is characterized by colonial architecture, bustling bazaars, and traditional businesses operating for centuries. The area offers a glimpse into old Chennai with narrow streets, colonial buildings, temples, and mosques coexisting. It's ideal for exploring authentic local commerce and historical architecture.



T. Nagar

Top Pick

3-4 hours No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

Chennai's premier shopping and entertainment hub featuring shopping malls, traditional markets, and restaurants. The neighborhood showcases both modern retail spaces and traditional Tamil culture. Ranganathan Street (Ranga Street) is the main commercial area with shops selling everything from clothes to traditional goods. The area offers a blend of modern and traditional Chennai shopping experiences.

Tips for Neighborhoods & Districts

- Mylapore: visit during temple festivals for vibrant cultural experiences
- George Town: best explored during morning hours when markets are active
- T. Nagar: weekdays are less crowded than weekends for shopping
- Wear comfortable clothing and footwear for neighborhood exploration



Tours & Activities

Engage in guided experiences and activities that provide deeper insights into Chennai's culture, history, and natural beauty.

Guided City Tours

Top Pick

Book Ahead

4-8 hours Book Ahead

Comprehensive guided tours covering Chennai's major attractions including temples, museums, beaches, and historical sites. Professional guides provide cultural context, historical narratives, and insider perspectives. Tours vary in duration and focus, from full-day comprehensive tours to specialized heritage or temple tours. Available options include private drivers or group tours through established operators.

Backwater Tours

Top Pick

Book Ahead

2-3 hours Book Ahead

Explore Chennai's serene coastal backwaters and lagoons by boat. These tours offer peaceful nature experiences, opportunities to spot birdlife, and views of traditional fishing villages. Early morning tours provide the best wildlife viewing. The backwaters showcase a different side of Chennai, away from urban bustle, offering photography opportunities and encounters with local communities.

Bharatanatyam Dance Classes

Notable

1-2 hours per session Book Ahead

Learn India's classical dance form at Kalakshetra or other cultural institutions. Classes range from introductory sessions to intensive courses. Instructors teach hand gestures (mudras), movements, and philosophy behind the dance form. Ideal for visitors seeking to engage with classical Indian arts and understand the spiritual and cultural dimensions of Bharatanatyam.

Tips for Tours & Activities

- Book guided tours through established operators or hotels for reliability
- Backwater tours: early morning (6-8am) offers best bird and wildlife sightings
- Dance classes require advance booking and comfortable loose clothing
- Ask guides about monsoon-specific recommendations during rainy season



Day Trips & Excursions

Discover fascinating destinations within short drives from Chennai, perfect for full-day excursions and extended exploration.



Mahabalipuram Must See
Full day No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

Ancient port city 58km south with stunning shore temples and rock-cut monuments. UNESCO World Heritage Site featuring the iconic Shore Temple, Arjuna's Penance rock carving, and numerous cave temples. The town offers pristine beaches, scenic backwaters, and cultural richness. Perfect for a day trip combining historical exploration with beach relaxation and fresh seafood dining.



Tiruvannamalai Must See
Full day No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

Sacred pilgrimage town 140km west known for the massive Arunachaleswara Temple. The temple's impressive architecture and spiritual significance make it one of South India's major pilgrimage centers. Visitors also enjoy the surrounding holy mountain, sunrise views, and local ashrams. The town offers authentic spiritual experiences and traditional Tamil culture immersion.

Pondi cherry (Puducherry) Top Pick
Full day to 2 days No Booking Needed



Map



Wiki

Charming coastal union territory 165km south with French colonial heritage and French Quarter architecture. Puducherry combines spiritual seekers' haven (Auroville), colonial charm, and beautiful beaches. The town features European-style buildings, serene ashrams, peaceful backwaters, and excellent seafood restaurants. Perfect for a weekend getaway combining history, spirituality, and coastal relaxation.

Tips for Day Trips & Excursions

- Mahabalipuram: visit early morning for smaller crowds and best light for photography
- Tiruvannamalai: dress modestly and wear sturdy shoes for temple exploration
- Puducherry: rent bicycles to explore French Quarter at leisurely pace
- All trips: arrange transportation through hotels or hire private taxis for comfort

Practical Information

Best Seasons to Visit

Winter (November to February) is the ideal time to visit Chennai with pleasant weather, clear skies, and temperatures ranging from 20-28°C. This season offers perfect conditions for sightseeing, beach visits, and outdoor activities.

Summer (March to May) brings hot and humid weather with temperatures exceeding 35°C. While crowded with fewer tourists, accommodation rates are lower. Not recommended for extensive outdoor exploration.

Monsoon (June to September) brings moderate rainfall and rejuvenates the landscape. Weather is cooler but humid. Travel is possible but less ideal for outdoor activities. October sees occasional showers transitioning to post-monsoon



season.

Post-Monsoon (October) marks the beginning of better travel season with cooling temperatures and clear weather conditions emerging as monsoon recedes.

Getting Around Chennai

Public Transportation: The Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC) operates extensive bus networks covering the entire city at affordable rates. Buses are frequent but often crowded during peak hours.

Metro Rail: Chennai Metro operates two lines (Blue and Green) covering major areas. It's clean, efficient, and the fastest way to navigate between key attractions. Modern facilities and air-conditioned coaches make it comfortable.

Taxis & Auto-rickshaws: Auto-rickshaws (autos) are abundant and economical for short distances. Negotiate fares beforehand or use app-based services like Uber and Ola for transparent pricing and convenience.

Cabs & Private Transport: Online taxi services and rental cars with drivers offer flexibility for full-day exploration and day trips. Hotels can arrange reliable transportation options.

Bicycles & Two-wheelers: In some neighborhoods like Puducherry, bicycles provide a leisurely way to explore cultural areas and backstreets.

Airport Transfer: International and domestic flights arrive at Chennai International Airport. Pre-arranged taxis, airport shuttle services, and metro connections provide convenient city access.

➔ Airport Transfer

Chennai International Airport (MAA) to city center:

- **Metro (Blue Line):** Direct service from the airport to Chennai Central in about 45 minutes, tickets cost roughly ₹50-70
- **Airport Shuttle Bus:** Government-run bus service to T Nagar and Egmore in 45-60 minutes, tickets around ₹50
- **Prepaid Taxi:** Prepaid counter inside the terminal offers fixed-rate rides to city center in 30-45 minutes for about ₹450-600 depending on traffic
- **App-based Cab (Ola/Uber):** Pickup from the designated zone to most city hotels takes 30-50 minutes and costs approximately ₹350-550

Shopping in Chennai

Silk & Sarees: Chennai is famous for Kanchipuram silk sarees. Shop at Government Silk Weaving Factory or established boutiques in Mylapore and T. Nagar for authentic, high-quality silk products at fair prices.

Traditional Crafts: Look for bronze sculptures, temple ornaments, wooden carvings, and traditional artwork. DakshinaChitra and local markets offer authentic artisanal products directly from craftspeople.

Shopping Districts: T. Nagar and Ranganathan Street offer traditional shopping with both mainstream and specialty stores. Mylapore provides intimate boutiques and traditional shops. South India Shopping Mall and Express Avenue offer modern retail experiences.

Markets: Flower markets, particularly flowers on Ranganathan Street and Temple Street markets, offer fresh flowers, strings, and decorative items. Morning shopping provides the best selection and prices.

Bargaining Tips: In traditional markets and street vendors, bargaining is acceptable and expected. Start at 50% of asking price and negotiate upward. Government shops and modern malls have fixed prices.

Timings: Most shops open 10am-7pm. Markets operate early morning (5am-10am) for fresh products. Some shops close on Sundays or specific days; check locally.



Festivals & Events in Chennai

Pongal (January): The most important harvest festival celebrated across Tamil Nadu with colorful rangoli designs, special foods, and public festivities. Temples and streets come alive with celebrations and traditional performances.

Tamil New Year (April): Celebrated with special prayers, new clothes, and traditional sweets. The period marks cultural renewal and is observed with family gatherings and community celebrations.

Navratri/Dussehra (September-October): Nine-day festival featuring Bharatanatyam dance performances, classical music concerts, and religious ceremonies. Golu traditions (goddess worship displays) are prominent in homes and temples.

Deepavali/Diwali (October-November): Festival of Lights celebrated with fireworks, lights, sweets, and new clothing. Major temples host special prayers and celebrations. The atmosphere transforms the city into a vibrant festival zone.

Chithirai Festival (April-May): Annual festival at Kapaleeshwarar Temple with processions, chariot events, and cultural performances celebrating Lord Shiva's wedding legend.

Margazhi Music Season (December-January): Classical music festival season featuring daily concerts throughout the city. Thousands gather for performances by renowned musicians in temples and concert halls.

Sample 5-Day Itineraries

Day 1: Heritage & Spirituality

Morning: Visit Kapaleeshwarar Temple in Mylapore with its stunning gopuram and spiritual energy. Experience the early morning rituals and grand architecture. Afternoon: Explore Mylapore's narrow lanes, flower markets, and traditional shops. Evening: Sunset walk along Marina Beach, enjoying local street food and city views from the shoreline.

Day 2: Colonial History

Morning: Explore Fort St. George, learning about colonial heritage and viewing the historical museum. Visit St. Mary's Church within the fort complex. Afternoon: Tour Government Museum's extensive bronze collection and artistic masterpieces. Evening: Relax at nearby parks or explore George Town's old bazaars for authentic Chennai atmosphere.

Day 3: Culture & Arts

Morning: Visit Kalakshetra to understand classical Indian arts traditions and view Bharatanatyam performances. Afternoon: Explore DakshinaChitra's living museum with craft demonstrations and traditional home replicas from South Indian regions. Evening: Attend classical music or dance performance at a local venue or concert hall.

Day 4: Spiritual Pilgrimage

Full day: Excursion to Tiruvannamalai (140km, 3 hours drive). Explore the massive Arunachaleswara Temple and circumambulate the sacred Arunachala Mountain for spiritual immersion. Experience authentic pilgrimage atmosphere and local ashrams. Return to Chennai by evening.

Day 5: Coastal Exploration

Full day: Day trip to Mahabalipuram (60km south). Visit UNESCO-listed Shore Temple, Arjuna's Penance rock carvings, and various rock-cut monuments. Relax on pristine beaches and enjoy fresh seafood. Optional: Visit nearby Covelong Beach or explore artist villages. Return with sunset views.

Best Photography Locations

Marina Beach Sunrise & Sunset (Golden Hour: 5:30-6:30am & 5:30-6:30pm): Capture the bay's shimmering waters and silhouettes of morning joggers during sunrise. Evening light creates dramatic coastal landscapes with the fishing boats and casuarina trees beautifully backlit.

Kapaleeshwarar Temple Gopuram (Morning Light - 6am-8am): The intricate stone carvings of the gopuram are best photographed in soft morning light, which highlights architectural details and creates stunning color contrasts.

Mylapore Streets & Flower Markets (Early Morning - 5am-8am): Colorful flower garlands, narrow lane architecture, and local community life provide authentic cultural photography. Morning markets offer vibrant compositions with traditional vendors.



Fort St. George Architecture (Late Afternoon - 2pm-4pm): Colonial-era buildings and structures photograph beautifully in afternoon light. The heritage architecture contrasts beautifully with modern city backdrop.

San Thome Cathedral Interior (Mid-morning - 9am-11am): Soft light through stained glass windows creates spectacular interior photography. The Neo-Gothic architecture photographs dramatically in well-lit conditions.

Arignar Anna Zoo Wildlife (Early Morning - 6am-8am): Animals are most active during early morning hours. Golden light and reduced crowds allow for authentic wildlife photography opportunities.

Shoreline at Mahabalipuram (Magic Hour - sunset time): Ancient temples silhouetted against sunset create iconic Tamil Nadu imagery. Reflection photography on wet sand during low tide produces dramatic compositions.

Electricity & Power

Voltage & Frequency: India uses 230V AC at 50Hz frequency, different from many Western countries operating on 110V or 60Hz. Ensure all electronics are compatible or use voltage converters.

Plug Types: India primarily uses Type D (three round pins in triangular pattern), Type A (two flat parallel pins), and increasingly Type G (three rectangular pins). Most hotels provide multiple plug types or adapters.

Adapters & Converters: Universal travel adapters are readily available in electronics stores, supermarkets, and hotel shops across Chennai. For sensitive electronics, consider bringing a step-down converter from your home country for safety.

Power Supply Reliability: Chennai's power supply is generally reliable in developed areas and hotels. Occasional power cuts (loadshedding) can occur, though rare in tourist areas. Most hotels have backup generators ensuring uninterrupted supply.

Where to Buy: Electronics shops on Mount Road, T. Nagar shopping areas, and modern malls sell various adapters and converters. Airport shops also stock travel adapters at premium prices.

USB Charging: Most hotels, cafes, and shopping malls provide USB charging points. Carrying a portable power bank is recommended for day-long excursions.

Must-Try Dishes & Dining in Chennai

South Indian Classics: Idli (steamed rice cakes), dosa (thin crispy crepe), sambar (lentil vegetable stew), and rasam (spiced soup) are quintessential South Indian breakfast items. Uttapam (thick savory pancakes) and pesarattu (lentil crepes) offer vegetarian delights. These are light, flavorful, and best enjoyed fresh from local "tiffin" restaurants.

Chettinad Cuisine: Hailing from Tamil Nadu's Chettinad region, dishes feature aromatic spices and bold flavors. Try Chettinad chicken curry, seafood specialties, and traditional breads. Restaurants in Mylapore and downtown serve authentic Chettinad preparations.

Seafood Specialties: Chennai's coastal location ensures fresh seafood. Must-try: Chepala Pulusu (fish curry), shrimp preparations, crab masala, and grilled fish. Beachside shacks and dedicated seafood restaurants offer authentic preparations at reasonable prices.

Street Food & Snacks: Bhajji (fried vegetables), chaat (savory snacks), pani puri (crispy hollow shells with flavored water), and vadai (fried dough rings) are popular street foods. Marina Beach's snack vendors offer authentic local tastes at minimal cost.

Sweets & Desserts: Mysore Pak (sweet brittle), Payasam (rice pudding), laddu (round sweets), and jaggery-based desserts are traditional Tamil sweets. Try filter coffee with these sweets for authentic experience. Coffee shops and sweet shops throughout the city serve excellent versions.

Dining Tips: South Indian restaurants often serve meals on banana leaves (traditional experience). Most restaurants are vegetarian-friendly. Street food is generally safe from established vendors. Peak dining times (12-1pm, 7-8pm) mean longer waits at popular places. Tap water is potable but bottled water is recommended for visitors.



Tourist Passes

Chennai Tourist Card

A comprehensive tourist pass offering discounted entry to major museums, monuments, and attractions across Chennai. Valid for 2 or 7 days with flexible validity periods. The card provides hassle-free access and potential savings on frequent sightseeing. Available at major hotels, tourist information centers, and selected attractions.



www.chennaipanchayat.gov.in

Chennai Metro Card

Rechargeable card for unlimited metro travel within validity period. Offers flexibility and savings compared to individual tickets. Cards can be recharged at metro stations and provide convenience for frequent travelers exploring the city via public transport.



www.chennai-metrorail.org

Museum Entry Passes

Government Museum and other institutions offer day passes, quarterly, and annual memberships with unlimited entry. Family packages available for group visits. Special discounts for students, seniors, and international tourists make multiple visits economical.



www.chennaigovmuseum.org

