

TOURISM SITES IN DHARMAPURI DISTRICT

Introduction

Dharmapuri is a district in Kongu Nadu region in Western part of Tamilnadu in South India. It is the first district to be split from Salem district in Tamil Nadu after the independence of India on Oct 10, 1965. The Other major towns in the district are Karimangalam, Palacode, Pennagaram, Harur and Pappireddipatti. Dharmapuri town is historically called "Tagadur".

Tourism is the largest service industry in India, with a contribution of 6.23 per cent to the national GDP and 8.78 per cent of the total employment in India. India witnesses more than 5 million annual foreign tourist arrivals and 562 million domestic tourist visits. The tourism industry in India generates about \$ 100 billion in 2008 and that is expected to increase to \$ 275.5 billion by 2018 at a 9.4 per cent annual growth rate. In the year 2009, 5.11 million foreign tourists visited India. Majority of the foreign tourists come from USA and UK. Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh were the top four States to receive inbound tourists. Domestic tourism in the same year was massive at 650 million. Andhra Pradesh (24.2%), Uttar Pradesh (20.7%) and Tamil Nadu (17.8%) received the big share of these visitors. Ministry of Tourism is the nodal agency for the development and promotion of tourism in India and maintains the "Incredible India" campaign.

In the process, the Ministry consults and collaborates with other stakeholders in the sector including various Central Ministries/Agencies, the State Governments/ Union Territories and the representatives of the private sector. Concerted efforts are being made to promote new forms of tourism such as rural, cruise, medical and eco-tourism. With 34,000 temples of centuries old, Tamil Nadu holds the credit of being the Top State in attracting the maximum number of foreign tourists in India. The history of architecture and sculpture in Tamil Nadu begins with the Pallava Temple of the Dravidian Style. UNESCO has declared monuments like living Chola temples at Thanjavur, Darasuram and Gangaikondacholapuram, monuments at Mahabalipuram and Nilgiris Heritage Train, as World Heritage sites. A recent study made by Anu Chandran assumes importance in the context of tourism promotional activities concerned world heritage sites in Tamil Nadu.

The temples of Tamil Nadu reverberate with spirituality and music. Madurai, Rameswaram, Kumbakonam, Chidambaram, Thanjavur and Tiruchirappalli have innumerable temples with different deities. Tourism in today's world is no longer a luxury or mere sightseeing. Even the most common man can attain the status of a tourist. Tourism today has become more of a knowledge based industry. Many people are involved in tourism directly or indirectly. The commercial operations in travel and tourism influence a wide spectrum of areas of development. Now-a-days a lot of factors draw people towards tourism. The important motivations for travel and tourism may be cultural, social, interpersonal,

Theerthamalai, Dharmapuri

Shri Theerthagirishwarar Temple is one of the ancient temples constructed by Chola and Vijayanagara kings at Theerthamalai. The site lies in the Harur taluk of Dharmapuri and is situated at the top of a hillock. The temple is frequented by pilgrims and tourists during celebrations of Mahasivarathri, when the temple is beautifully decorated for the festival. Several processions are also hosted on this day in the temple.

Theerthamalai is an important sacred place in Harur taluk of Dharmapuri district located in Tamil Nadu, India. The name Theerthamalai in Tamil it means Hill with Holy Water. Theerthamalai is a village situated about 16 km north-east of Harur. Theerthagirishwarar temple is located at the top of a hillock. The temple situated about one km up the steep slope of a hillock derives its name from the five springs in the temple. Lord Theerthagireeswar (Lord Shiva) is the worshipping deity.

This pilgrim and picnic centre becoming very popular with the public. Lord Theerthagireeswar (Lord Shiva) is the worshipping deity. According to the legend it was here that Lord Rama worshipped Lord Shiva to absolve himself of the sin of having killed several demons in the war against Ravana. Hence there is belief that a holy dip in the waters of this spring will wipe out the sins committed by the people.

Location

It is located 60Kms from Dharmapuri on the way to Tiruvannamalai via Haroor.

Deity: Theerthagireeswarar and Arulmozhi Vadivambigai

History

Theerthagirishwarar was built in 7th century and many contributions were made by the Chola and Pandya Kings. Several Inscriptions can be found in the Theerthagirishwarar Temple. In the inscriptions on this temple says Chola emperors had regularly visited this temple including Rajendra Cholan. Poet Saint Arunagirinathar referred to the Temple of Theerthagireeswarar in his compositions.

Several Inscriptions can be found in the Theerthagirishwarar Temple. They relate to the Vijayanagar and Chola rulers. There is one inscription in ancient Telugu and Kannada. Poet Saint Arunagirinathar referred to the Temple of Theerthagireeswarar in his compositions. The Mandapam near the sanctum sanctorum is supposed to be built by Sila Naicken. He is said to have maintained a well-fortified garrison at the top of the hill from where a commanding view of the surroundings can be on all sides is available.

Legend

According to the legend, in order to worship to Lord Shiva, Rama sent Hanuman to fetch water from the River Ganga, but when Hanuman did not return at the appointed time for pooja, Rama unleashed an arrow onto the rocky slope of the hillock and water sprang forth, which today is called Rama Theertham. The tiny waterfall drops from a height of about 30 feet is perennial and during the summer as well as the rainy season the water falls on the bathing Ghat behind the sanctum sanctorum of the temple.

The other Theertham, all of which have their origin in different parts of the rocky surface, are the Agasthya Theertham, Agni Theertham. Kumara Theertham and the Gouri Theertham, besides these four Theerthams the Hanuman Theertham is situated about 16 km from the main temple on the banks of river South Pennar. This too is also closely associated with the temple. It is stated that when Hanuman returned with the water from the Ganga, he found that Rama had brought the Ganga water with his arrow. He then threw away in anger the vessel containing the Ganga water. This water fell onto the riverbank. Hanuman Theertham also is a very holy place. During summer even when the river is dry there will be sweet water in the spring that flows from rock in the riverbed. The waters of the Theerthamalai are supposed to have medicinal values too. It may be mentioned that Theerthamalai has huge reserves of magnetite iron ore that can be utilized for the Salem Steel Plant.

There is another spring known as Vashista Theertham higher up in the hill. Close by are the wonderful granite pieces of Saptha kanyakas. The beauty of these sculptures is that they can be viewed only through a very narrow crevice in the rock. The nine-day annual festival at the Temple is in the month of March.

Lord Siddhi Vinayaka adores the temple. Vayu Theertham and Varuna Theertham are on the western side of the hill.

Indira Theertham is on the east. Hanuman and Yama Theerthams are on the north and south respectively. Vasishtha Theertham is at the top of the hill. This is a divine hill surrounded by holy theerthas

According to Puranas, Kumara Theertham was created for abishek to Lord Muruga when He was crowned as the Supreme Commander of the forces of the Devas. Bathing here or at least spilling the drops blesses the devotee with knowledge and wisdom.

Gowri Theertham was created for Mother Ambica. She worshipped Lord with this Theertha and got His hand in wedding and became part of his body. Devotees worship Lord and Mother with this Theertha for happy wedding boons.

Agasthya Theertham is a blessing of Lord Shiva to cure the sage of ulcer troubles. It is said that the Theertha contains copper and herbal properties. Devotees consume the water and also use for cooking for relief from gastric problems. It also cures stomach pain.

Agni Theertham relieved Agni himself of the sins he earned due to passionate love of women. This balances the heat in the body and is a wonderful medicine for cold attacks, tuberculosis etc.

The antiquity of the temple dates far back to over 1000 years. Renovations were done in the year 1014 during the reign of Raja Raja Kulothunga Chola. Saint Arunagirinathar had sung the glory of the temple in his Thirupugazh hymns.

List of Theertham

Theertham means Holy water in Tamil language. All of which have their origin in different parts of the rocky surface, they are Agasthya Theertham in the Hill, Ramar Theertham, Agni Theertham, Gowri Theertham, Kumara Theertham, Vasishtha Theertham in the top of the Hill Cave, Vayu Theertham, Harur, Varuna Theertham, Harur, Indira Theertham, Andiyur (Mondukuli), Yama Theertham, Veppampatty, and Anuman Theertham, Hanumantheertham.

Temple Opening Time

The temple is open from 6.00 a.m. to 11.00 a.m. and from 4.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.

Prayers

People pray here for mental peace, relief from diseases, child boon and family prosperity and release from debt burdens. They believe that Lord and Mother hold the solution for all their problems. Those seeking child boon use to tie a cradle and also tie threads around the anthill. They also tie thread around the Pavalamalli tree for wedding boon. People also tie the thread around the anthill for relief from the adverse aspects of serpent planets. The wind carrying the smell of the herbal plants around the hill improves the health of the devotee while going up and coming down.

Thanks Giving

Tonsuring, ear boring are the main prayer commitments followed by devotees. They perform abishek to Lord with honey, oil, cosmetic powders, milk, curd, fruit juices, green coconut, panchamirtham, sandal, rose water and sacred ashes and rice flour. The affluent perform Swarnabishek – abishek with gold coins and also vastras to Lord and Mother. Annadhanam is undertaken by some.

Festival

The famous festivals of the temple are the 10 day Masi Brahmotsavam in February – March with procession of the presiding Lord, car festival on the 7th day, wedding festival on the 5th day and Sathaparana festival – Lord in reclining posture on the 10th day; Abishek pujas with 365 litres of milk on the Chithirai new year day falling mostly on April 14 or a day earlier or later occasionally, Navarathri in September–October and Aadi 18 July–August with special abishek at night followed by Girivalam – circumambulation of the hill. The devotee crowd in the temple is usually big on Saturdays and Sundays. Pradosha is devotionally observed. Also Tamil and English New Year Day are observed in the temple.

Hogenakkal Falls

Hogenakkal Falls is located at the border of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, around 46 km from Dharmapuri. In Hogenakal, the Kaveri River enters Tamil Nadu as a big river with gushing water. The name 'Hogenakal' is derived from Kannada means Smoky Rocks. When the river falls on the rock below, the gushing force of water causes a smoke-like mist, leading to the origin of the name. At Hogenakal, the water spreads for miles around and cruising on country - made dinghies (Parisal) is possible. Hogenakal is considered the Grand Canyon of India in terms of the unique landscape and the wild Kaveri River flowing there for ages. It is also sometimes referred to as the Niagara Falls of India.

The river plays major role in making the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu prosper as it passes through. Kudagu in Karnataka is where the Cauvery originates as a small stream and gathers momentum and gets bigger on her way down. It is in Hogenakkal that the Cauvery enters Tamil Nadu as a big river with gushing waters presents a waterfall. At many places the falls descends as far as 20 mtrs. The water also makes a continuous thundering sound. This gives the area a different atmosphere. At Hogenakkal the water spreads for miles around. The locally made boats are called Parisal. A parisal ride will give you a rare experience.

Surrounded by hills at various heights, Hogenakkal offers the visitors a different ambience and is a refreshing place to relax. Fresh fish caught in the river is cooked and served. One can also take bath in the falls. Local people give oil massages. As the river flows throughout the year, Hogenakkal can be visited through the year. To add attraction the forest department maintains a mini zoo and a crocodile park here. The New Moon days in the months in January or Thai and in July or Adi are special for the pilgrims who arrive to take a dip in the river. However on Adi 18th, which is in August, a festival to the river goddess is celebrated.

Sir Thomas Munro Pillar, Dharmapuri

This pillar was erected by the British India's Government of Madras to mark the association of Dharmapuri with SIR THOMAS MUNRO who lived here from April 1792 to March 1799 as Assistant to the Superintendent of Revenue in the BARAMAHAL. His house and his favorite garden were few yards away from this place near at vel milk depot.

Hanumanthathirtham

This place is situated on the bank of Pennaiyar at a distance of 10 km from Uthangarai and traditionally associated with Tirtmalai. It is believed that Hanuman was instructed by Lord Rama to bring water, but after waiting for a long time, Rama created a waterfall, Hanuman was said to have thrown down the vessel in which he brought the holy water and this spilled water is believed to be the "Hanumantatirtham".

Adhiyamankottam

The capital of Adhiyamans, ancient rulers of Thahadoor, was Adhiyamankottam which is situated on the Salem-Dharmapuri road, 7 km from Dharmapuri. The ruins of the roughly oval shaped fort are still there. The Chenraya Perumal temple there is a protected monument and is thought to have been constructed both by the King Krishna Devaraya and the Hoysala kings. There is a mandapam which leads to the sanctum sanctorum. There are paintings in the ceiling depicting scenes from the Mahabharata, Viswarupa darshan of Lord Krishna and some scenes from the Ramayana. All the paintings belong to the 13th century.

Kottai Kovil

This is one of the temples built for Lord Shiva. It is located on the northern side of Dharmapuri. It has been renovated and is maintained by the government and people of Dharmapuri. There are rare sculptures and paintings contained in it. The main speciality of this temple is the 'Hanging pillar'. There is also a legend that there was a secret passage that connects this temple to Adhiyamankottai.

Subramanya Siva Memorial

Subramanya Siva was born on 19 September 1884 in Vathalagundu, Madurai. He was a revolutionary independence fighter who worked closely with other freedom fighters, such as V.O Chidambaram Pillai and Subramanya Bharathi, and inspired many young men to join the freedom movement. He was the first political prisoner of the Madras presidency and described his jail experiences in a book, Jail Life. He also published Gnana Bhanu, a collection of poems. He was an admirer of the philosopher, Swami Vivekanandha and his religious master Ramakrishna Paramhansa. Siva disagreed on many things with Gandhian Philosophy. He believed in using violent methods where constructional methods had failed. Siva died on 23 July 1925.

Conclusion

The study mainly analyses the tourism development in Dharmapuri district, the factors responsible for promoting the tourism industry and the problems faced by the tourists and also the service providers in the study area. The government has taken all the efforts to development tourism area. The government also provides supportive schemes for setting up and developing the tourism related activity such as training hotel management and conducting training courses in order to improve the efficiency and performance of the guides. The various factors such as travel agencies, trade fairs, religious festival, advertisement, journals and magazines very much influence the tourists in the study area. The major problems faced by the tourists are poor courtesy, poor road facilities and disturbances such as agitation, communal riots and the activities of the terrorists, cheating and mugging. Regarding the service providers, majority of service providers show an upward trend in their business but majority of the service providers did not get any assistance from the government.

The study also highlighted that the tourist inflow in Dharmapuri district has increased over the years and there is ample scope for improving the performance of this industry in Dharmapuri district. Hence the policy makers and the department concerned should take necessary steps to develop more attractive tourist destinations. There is greater need for increasing the facilities like infrastructure, transport, accommodation, restaurant, shopping facilities, communication etc. The role of the central government, state government and local administration are vital in planning, promoting and sustaining tourism schemes. Such schemes should also take care to involve the local people and private institutions. Thus, a pragmatic tourism promotion effort with the participation of people will certainly make Dharmapuri a prime centre in the tourism map in India.

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