

BEACHES IN TAMIL NADU : A CENTRE OF TOURIST ATTRACTION

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Tamil Nadu which lies on the southern peninsular India has a long stretch of beach running over 900 km.¹ The coromandel coast, abutting the Bay of Bengal, boasts of many ideal locations for sun and surf, where golden sands are dotted with palm and casuarina groves.² Ruffling sea washes ashore pebbles and surf. Gentle breeze sways the yachts on the sea and forms small dunes on the beach. Crabs play hide and seek, coming out of one burrow, taking refuge in another. Sea gulls hover on the sky and then rest on the sails. There are many more breathtaking sights to please the tourists in Tamil Nadu.³

PULICAT

A saline shallow water spread formed by the confluence of Backwaters, **Pulicat Lake**⁴ and **Buckingham Canal** situated on the northern end of Tamil Nadu is an ideal picnic spot. A catamaran ride on the shallow water spread and a visit to the small bird sanctuary are two most leisure activities to be undertaken here. A Dutch cemetery of the 17th century is located on the shore.⁵

MARINA BEACH

Marina Beach, the "**pride of Chennai**" is the second largest beach in the world⁶ and has a wide sandy foreshore. Apart from enjoying the afternoon breeze, a walk down the Marina will take every tourist through some of the well-preserved colonial buildings of Chennai. One can start with the Senate hall, University library, Chepauk palace (erected by the Nawab of Carnatic), Presidency college, Ice House, and Queen Mary's college.¹¹⁵ The Ice House derives its name from the fact that it was actually used to store ice imported from America during the second half of the 1840s.⁷ Situated on the beach, the **Anna** and **MGR Samadhis** (squares) are memorials for popular former chief ministers of the state. They attract thousands of visitors everyday. An aquarium is also located on the Marina Beach.

ELLIOT'S BEACH

Following the road along the coast down south from Marina, one comes to **Elliot's Beach**⁸ where one can spend a few hours relaxing. At one end, is the **Velankanni church** which attracts a large number of

pilgrims and the **Ashtalakshmi temple**⁹ which houses different forms of Goddess Lakshmi. It is built in a unique style of architecture.

MUTTUKKADU

A backwater and estuary, **Muttukkadu** situated 36 km. from Chennai is an ideal picnic spot for rides on motorised boat or for wind surfing.¹⁰ Pedal boats or row boats are available on hire for cruising leisurely. Muttukkadu is ideally suited for angling and fishing. **TTDC** is operating boat services and a cafeteria.¹¹

COVELONG (KOVALAM)

Situated 40 km. away from the hustle and bustle of Chennai, **Covelong** is a salubrious village.¹² But it is brisk with fishing activities. The sea and the surf here are gentle.

THEME PARKS IN CHENNAI

Along the east coast road between Chennai and Mahabalipuram, several amusement parks, enthrall children and adults alike. Some of them are **V.G.P.**¹³, **M.G.M.**¹⁴, **Queen's Land**¹⁵, and **Littlefolks**.¹⁶

MAHABALIPURAM

Situated 58 km. away from Chennai, once a port and the second capital of the Pallava dynasty, **Mahabalipuram** flourished during the 7-8th centuries.¹⁷ The monuments of the Pallavas, the proto type of the Dravidian temple architecture, lure every visitor to this town. The monuments, scooped out of natural rocks are of monolithic type. Mahabalipuram has been declared by **United Nations Organisations** (UNO) as one of the World Heritage centres.¹⁸ One of the monuments '**Arjuna's Penance**'¹⁹ - stands as a back drop for the stage. For over 1500 years, this small shore-town has awakened to the tune of hardened steel on stone as its craftsmen begin a new day. The pristine glory of the 8th century temple adds splendour to the beach here. The **Dance festival**²⁰, held from December to February is highly acclaimed.

SADURANGAPATTINAM

This is another fishing village, situated 16 km. south of Mahabalipuram. A ruined fort of Dutch origin near the beach houses tomb stones dating back to 16-17th century.²¹

POOMPUHAR

Another celebrated beach resort created in memory of erstwhile "**Kaveripoompattinam**" a legendary port city, is Poompuhar.²² The present complex was designed on the basis of the information available in the Tamil epic "**Silapathikaram**".²³ The historical happenings depicted in "**Silapathikaram**"

and the land marks mentioned therein are brought back to life here in stone. The Department of Tourism offers conch and shell type accommodation here.

THARANGAMBADI

Tharangambadi is another sea-side village, where the Danish merchants settled for trade.²⁴ A beautiful Governor's palace right on the beach tells about the hoary past.²⁵ This is another ideal shore for the tourists.

KODIAKKARAI

Also called as **Point Calimere, Kodiakkarai** is one of the celebrated beach resorts located in the shores of the Bay of Bengal.²⁶ The well known wild life sanctuary here spreads 333.3 sq.km. with 25 km. of tropical dry evergreen forests. It is bounded by **Bay of Bengal**, in the East and **Palk Straits** in the south. There are many species of marine animals and flora.²⁷ This beach resort offers different kinds of land mass from marsh to wetlands, backwaters to lake.

RAMESWARAM

Rameswaram island one of the best beach resorts, is situated off the mainland surrounded by **Palk Straits** and the **Gulf of Mannar** connected by the longest ever constructed bridge on sea.²⁸ It is also a celebrated pilgrim centre.²⁹ The serene beach and shallow water here are ideal for swimming and sunbathing.

MANDAPAM

Mandapam is the main land linking the Island of Rameswaram with Ramanathapuram. It is a gateway to many small Islands.³⁰ It is bestowed with a quite beach for sun and surf.

TUTICORIN

A port city and an industrial town, Tuticorin is one of the major ports of Tamil Nadu. **Pearl harvesting**³¹ is an important activity here.

TIRUCHENDUR

One of the six abodes of Lord Muruga,³² Tiruchendur is a very popular pilgrim centre and a beach resort.³³ The temple is situated right on the beach adding glory to the beach.

KANYAKUMARI

The Land's end of India, **Kanyakumari** or **Cape Comorin** is unique in being surrounded by the three seas **Bay of Bengal**, **Indian Ocean** and **Arabian Sea**. Hence the confluence is called "**Thrivani Sangamam**".³⁴ Here one can get a breath-taking view of the **Sun Rise** and **Sun Set** at their best.³⁵ The multi-coloured sand is yet another unique feature of the beach here. **Gandhi Mandapam** here on the beach has been so designed that on the birth day of Gandhiji, on October 2nd, every year the Sun's rays directly fall on the spot, where the mortal remains of the 'Father of the Nation' has been kept before being immersed in the sea.³⁶ Kanyakumari Amman Temple on the sea-shore is another attraction. According to Hindu mythology, **Goddess Sakthi** remains a virgin to save mankind.³⁷ Amidst the sea of Kanyakumari, a small hillock houses the memorial for the spiritual leader **Swami Vivekananda**.³⁸ In the nearby hillock, 133 feet statue of **Thiruvalluvar**, the author of '**Thirukkural**' is worth seeing.³⁹

A fine time to visit Kanyakumari is during **Chithra Pournami**⁴⁰ full moon day in the Tamil month of Chithirai (April). **Bathing Ghat**, a beach spot of Kanyakumari is a holy place where three seas confluence. Taking a holy dip here is believed as a sacred one.⁴¹ Young and old, rich and poor, infant and children enjoy sea bath over here. A good transport network both by bus and trains facilitate tourists to visit this spot again and again. All tourism infrastructure facilities are available at Kanyakumari.

VATTAKOTTAI (CIRCULAR FORT) BEACH

It is located in the Agasteeswaram taluk of Kanyakumari District. **Vattakottai** (circular fort) a granite fort, 6 km. north-east of Kanyakumari lying on NH-7, forms the terminal of a line of ramparts known as the south Travancore lines build by king **Marthanda Varma** to serve as defence.⁴² It is rectangular in shape and covers an area of about 3½ acres. The portion running into the sea was strongly built under the orders of **Captain De-Lennoy**⁴³ during the reign of king **Marthanda Varma** (1729-1758 A.D.). The green vegetation, dense coconut grove on the shore side and shallow sea waves in fine sand beach make the site an ideal picnic spot. Accommodation, dress changing, toilet facilities etc. are provided. Mini bus service, city bus service, cars etc., are available to visit this spot.

SOTHAVILAI BEACH

This beach is situated 12 km. from Nagercoil and 12 km. from Kanyakumari through west coast road. It lies in Puthalam town panchayat and is one of the best natural beaches of the district.¹⁵³ Soft waves of shallow water with lovely sand dunes attract domestic tourists. It is one of the best beaches for holiday lovers. The District administration has provided basic infrastructure facilities like drinking water, shadow shelters, view tower, children's play equipments and rest rooms etc.³⁴ It is a fine picnic spot.

Frequent bus services are available from Nagercoil. The tourists can reach the beach through the newly laid West Coast Road (WCR) which is a very beautiful drive along the sea-coast.

SANGUTHURAI BEACH

It is a beautiful beach which is very convenient for the local population of Nagercoil. It is 13 km. from Nagercoil and 15 km. from Kanyakumari through West Coast Road (WCR).⁴⁵ Frequent buses are available from Nagercoil. The District administration has provided basic infrastructure facilities over here. It is a developing beach resort.

THENGAPATTINAM BEACH

Thengapattinam, situated on the west coast near Painkulam village in Vilavancode taluk of Kanyakumari District is having a fine beach adorned with coconut groves.⁴⁶ As coconuts are abundant in this place, this might have derived the name **Thengapattinam** (coconut is called "**Thengai**" in Tamil). This village had in ancient times, trade relations with foreign countries like **Arabia**.⁴⁷ There was direct cargo boat service between Thengapattinam and other foreign maritime towns. **Copra, dry fish, coir and shark fin** were the main products that were exported.

Thengapattinam is having the estuary of the lovely river **Tamirabarani** with its non-salty water entering the sea.⁴⁸ The river back waters are surrounded by charming dense coconut groves. Boat riding on the river-backwaters is really an enjoyable one. It is situated 35 km. from Nagercoil, and 54 km. from Kanyakumari.

THEKKURICHI BEACH

Thekkurichi⁴⁹ a tiny village with lovely calm seashore lies near the Wet Coast Road (WCR). It is a lesser known sea-beach of the Kanyakumari District. Calm sea shore with shady casorina trees gives a

serene atmosphere. It is an excursion seashore tourist centre. Coir making is a major small-scale business of the coastal village. It is at a distance of 10 km. from Nagercoil and 29 km. from Kanyakumari.

MUTTOM BEACH

Muttom is a delightful place on the coast of Kalkulam taluk, attracting people desirous of having a seaside holiday. The seashore looks majestic because of huge beautiful rocks, jetting out into the sea.⁵⁰ The waves touch the rocks and create a mystic atmosphere. Muttom beach is a famous shooting spot for both Tamil and Malayalam movies. This seashore is having a rich heritage value for its ancient light house, which was originally established by the British in A.D. 1875 and subsequently improved in A.D. 1909.⁵¹

The sunset view point here is one of the most panoramic view points in the district. The district administration has developed basic infrastructure facilities like shady shelters, benches, car parking, solar lighting, risk free fencing on the rock etc.⁵² It is 16 km. from Nagercoil and 32 km. from Kanyakumari.

COLACHEL BEACH

Situated 30 km. from Nagercoil, once a port and a celebrated coastal city of south Travancore, **Colachel** flourished since 10th century onwards.⁵³ The success of **Maharaja Marthanda Varma** over the Dutch navy at Colachel is a celebrated incident in the history of Travancore.⁵⁴ In memory of Travancore victory over the Dutch navy, a **Victory Pillar** has been installed as a historical monument.⁵⁵ It is bestowed with a quite beach for sun and surf. A good transport network by bus facilitate tourists to visit this spot again and again⁵⁶.

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