

MADURAI

Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple - Introduction

The most amazing feature of this temple is the fact that it is a living legend, absorbing traditions for over two millennia. In its finished form, it represents the marvelous resilience of the Indian cultural ethos - (the fact that it was reconstructed during the Nayak period, after the destruction of the temple by Malik Kafur, one of the generals of Allaudin Khilji). Legends such as Meenakshi Kalyanam, the coronation of Meenakshi and Sundareswarar as the Queen and King of Madurai, still form part of the grand festival traditions.

In fact, Meenakshi and Sundareswarar are regarded as the Royal Pandya rulers of Madurai; Meenakshi's father, is said to be Malayadwaja Pandyan, who was preceded by Kulasekhara Pandyan - the legendary builder of the city of Madurai.

The living legend the temple is - is complimented with architectural and sculptural splendour thanks to the vision and patronage of the Madurai Nayak rulers - successors to the Vijayanagar empire. Towering Rajagopurams dominate the skyline of Madurai; each of these gopurams is filled with myriad stucco images reflecting legends from the puranas; the temple complex in itself is a lavish art gallery, what with the grandeur of sculptures in the 1000 pillared hall, the millions of stucco images adorning the towering gopurams of the temple the murals, the depiction of the Tiruvilayadal puranam - only to name a few.

The festival traditions here represent a congruence of the Saiva, Shakta, Skanda and Vaishnava streams of the Hindu religion - thanks to the adept repositioning of the Maasi Tiruvizha in the month of Chittirai, to coincide with the annual festival at the Kallazhagar temple, when all of Madurai is transformed into one huge space of celebration faith.

[Temple Regular Opening Hours:](#) 06:00 to 12:30 and 16:00 to 21:00

[Temple Art Museum-1000 Pillar Hall Opening Hours:](#) 07:00 to 12:30 and 16:00 to 20:00

[Temple Office Phone No:](#) 0452 - 2344360

Mariamman Teppakulam

This is a huge temple tank about 5 kms east of the Meenakshi temple. The mandapam in the centre has an idol of Vigneshwara (Vinayaka). This tank was said to have been dug by Tirumala Nayaka. It is the biggest tank of its kind in Tamil Nadu and one of the most imposing sights of Madurai when it is full of water. The vinayaka idol was found when the earth was being dug out from here to build the Thirumalai Nayakkar Mahal. So, the place attained sanctity and was converted into a teppakulam (tank).



This enormous temple tank is fed by water brought from the Vagai through an ingenious system of underground Channels. King Thirumalai Nayak born in 'Poosa' Star. so in commemorating the birth of the king, Float festival is conducted in Tamil Month 'Thai' (Jan/Feb) in the tank in a colourful way, which attracts thousands of tourists.

Madurai, in Tamilnadu, is known popularly as the 'City of Festivals' and among the many festivals big and small which take place there throughout the year, one of the most picturesque is the float Festival or 'Teppothsavam'. On that day, the idols of Goddess Meenakshi and her consort Lord Sundareshwarar are taken in grand procession to the big lake called Teppakulam, and drawn round and round a shrine built in the middle of the small island in the centre of the lake, seated on a decorated float called 'Teppa'. The float festival was originated in the 17th century by king Thirumala Nayaka who reigned in The local story is that the king had a new palace built and to make bricks for it, a great excavation was made. Later, he converted the excavated depression "into a sixteen acre lake, fed the same by the Vaigai river through underground channels and built the temple of Ganesh on the artificial island in the middle. Then he started the custom of taking the divine idols for a boat ride on the waters of the lake on his birthday. Generally, this festival is celebrated during January of the year beginning with Sankranthi (pongal) festival.

At dawn, the processional idols of Meenakshi and Sudareshwarar start out from the main temple in great pomp. The deities are carried in golden palanquins escorted by elephants, horses, musicians and thousands of devotees. After reaching the Teppakulam, about three kilometres away, the deities are placed in a prepared 'mandapam' on the banks of the lake, where the devotees are allowed to worship them. The idols are then taken in palanquins and placed on a great raft-like structure, colourfully decorated with varieties of flower garlands, silken buntings, paper lanterns and masses of flowers.

Hundreds of devotees catch hold of the two big ropes by which the float is drawn and they await the signal to start. One rope is pulled by men standing on the central island and second by those on the bank of the lake. After the final ritual of worship the priests give the signal and the men strain at the ropes.

Slowly, the great float moves away from the shore and begins its circuit. As the men on the rope run along the bank of Teppakulam the thousands of spectators crowding there enjoy by shouting the names of the deities in great joy. The float itself moves around the lake at slow, steady pace. After a couple of rounds, which take more than three hours, the ornamental raft is moved to the central island and remains there till the evening. All through the day, a number of boats ply to the island bringing thousands of devotees to worship.

The scene in the evening is even more wonderful and over a lakh of people gather to watch the procession. As dusk falls, all the five towers of the island temple glow with coloured light illumination. And thousands of little oil-lamps are lighted in the niches of the walls overhanging the lake. All are brightly reflected in the water and it looks as if the lake is aglow with its own light. After the gun signal booms, the float is also illuminated with strings of coloured electric bulbs, banks of fluorescent tubes and a blaze of flood lights turning the ornamental raft into a dazzling sight.

Soon afterwards, a display of fireworks starts on the shore and an answering bouquet of red and green flares soars up from the central island. Another gun signal booms and the float begins to move. The water ripples and the reflections of coloured lights form ever changing patterns. As the raft makes its slow round of the lake, the fireworks continue and the people cheer and fold their hands in prayer to the deities. After completing a full round, the float is brought to the shore and the divine idols are taken out with great ceremony. Then follows the enactment of scenes from the legend relating to the deities. Finally, the idols are mounted on a beautifully decorated golden horse and return to the main temple in a great procession.

This float festival attracts large number of tourists and visitors and the entire city wears a festive appearance.

Azhagar Kovil

Here ' Vishnu ' presides as Meenakshi's brother ' Azhgar '. During the Chitrai festival in April/May, when the celestial marriage of Meenakshi to Sundareswarar is celebrated, Azhagar travels to Madurai. A gold processional icon called the Sundararajar is carried by devotees in procession from Azhagar Kovil to Madurai for wedding ritual.

Palamudhirsolai , one of the six abodes of Lord Subramanya is on the same hill, about 4 kms. above. A natural spring called Nuburagangai where pilgrims bath, is located here. Azhagar Kovil is Located 21 kms. northwest of Madurai is a Vishnu Temple on a picturesque wooded hill.

Thirupparamkundram

Thirupparamkundram is the first and foremost temple of Lord Muruga (Subramania) in India. Lord Muruga is well known as Karthick in North India.



It is located 8 Kms South of Madurai Railway Junction. The temple here is one of the six abodes of Lord Subramanya. Its innermost shrine is cut out of a solid rock.

Tamil Saint poet 'Nakkeerar', who composed the great literary work Thirumurugaattupadai, the songs in praise of Lord Muruga, 2000 years back, in this divine place.

History says that Lord Muruga has battled to win over evils in six places and this is the FIRST place he won the evil 'Surapadhman'. So this place becomes the first Aru Padai Veedu (in Tamil 'Aru' means 'Six' and 'Padai Veedu' means 'a place where warriors camp during a battle') Muruga married Deivayanai, daughter of Indra, after the victory over Surapadman, in this holy place.

To use Photograph or Video Camera inside the temple, but not the shrines, Rs.25/- each should be paid.

The Tonsuring Place located very near to Saravana Poigai is just 500mts away from the temple entrance. Ticket, Rs.10/-, is sold inside. Service is available between 05:30 and 18:00 in all days. After tonsure you can bath either in Saravana Poigai or in bathroom inside this place.

All kind of facilities like marriage halls, lodges, hotels, snack stalls, taxies, autorikshaws and more are available.

There is also a Travellers Bungalow to stay, run by the Temple's Trust, at the cost of Rs.100/- for single and Rs.150/- for double per day. Telephone Number of this Bungalow : 2482648
There is an Orphanage and Home for Aged are run by the Temple's Trust. You can donate for them at the Administrative Office of this Temple.

Temple Contact Information

Arulmigu Subramania Swamy Thirukovil Administrative Office
Thirupparamkundam, MADURAI - 625 005.
Tel.: +92-452-2482248

Temple Opening Hours : 05:30 to 13:00 and 16:00 to 21:30
8km away from Madurai Railway Junction and Central Bus Stand

Gandhi Museum

The Gandhi Memorial Museum is one of the distinct places to be visited in Madurai. This Museum is one of the rare living Memorial of "The Father of India".

Thirumalai Nayakar Mahal

When Krishna Devaraya was the King of Vijayanagar, he sent one general Nagama Naick to Madurai to control the internal confusion in the Madurai regional politics. Nagama Naick controlled the warring groups and restored peace, but declared himself as an independent ruler.



This act provoked the King Krishna Devaraya and he sent Viswanatha Naick, the son of the revolutionary Nagama, to arrest and produce his father in the royal court. Viswanatha fulfilled the order of the King, but justified his father's act and explained the real condition of the region. King, being convinced by the explanation of Viswanatha, released his father and crowned Viswanatha as the ruler of Madurai as a reward to his loyalty. Thus the Madurai Naick Principality was established about 1530 A.D.

This Palace was built in 1636 by King Thirumalai Nayak with the help of an Italian Architect. The building we see today was the main Palace where the King lived. The original Palace Complex was four times bigger than the present structure. This palace consisted mainly of two parts, namely Swargavilasa and Rangavilasa.

In these two parts, there are royal residence, theatre, shrine, apartments, armoury, palanquin place, royal bandstand, quarters, pond and garden. King Thirumalai Nayak celebrated festivals like Sceptre festival, Navarathri, Chithirai festival, Masi festival and the Float festival.

He conducted daily dance and music performances in the palace. This palace was destroyed by his grandson Chokkanatha Nayak and the valuables were transferred to other places.

During 19th century, Lord Napier, governor of Madras between 1866 and 1872 made several renovation works. Today, only the spacious rectangular courtyard called the swarga Vilasam and a few adjoining buildings survive, their awesome scale evoking the grandeur of a vanished era. The courtyard measures 3,900 sq.m and is surrounded by massive circular pillars. To its west lies the Throne Chamber, a vast room with a raised, octagonal dome. This room leads to the Dance Hall. Then the palace was utilized to house some officials of the judiciary and district administration. After independence, this palace was declared as a national monument and is now under the care of the Tamilnadu Archaeological Department. It can be visited from 9a.m to 5 p.m on payment of the entrance fee.

The thousand pillar mandapam is supposed to have been built by Arya Natha Mudaliyar, the Prime Minister of the first Nayaka of Madurai (1559-1600 A.D.) and the founder of 'Poligar System'. An equestrian statue of the Mudaliyar flanks one side of the steps leading to the 'mandapam'. Except the inner shrines, probably no part of the temple is older than the 16th

century. The general plan of the sanctuary is typical of the gigantic South Indian temples with vast quadrangular enclosures and lofty 'gopurams' overlooking the central shrine. Round about the temple, outside the higher wall is, a neat garden fenced with iron railings. Even a casual visitor is fascinated by the many paintings and sculptures in this shrine. The ceilings are decorated with large paintings showing Shaivite and Vaishnavite themes. There is a beautiful painting of the marriage of Sundareswarar with Devi Meenakshi. Another beautiful painting is that of Harihara.

In the outer corridor are the most popular musical pillars, five in number, each composed of twenty two slender rods carved out of a single rock of granite, which produce the 'Saptha Swaras' when gently tapped with a wooden rod. There is a spacious 'pushkarini' in front of the Meenakshi shrine called the Golden Lotus Tank or 'Ponthamaraikulam'. Beautifully paved stone steps on all the four sides are set to reach the placid water. The great tower of the south reflected in the Golden Lilly Tank is perhaps the best known view of the Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple.

According to mythology, Indra from Devaloka entered this tank and it was filled with golden Lillies. It is said that the tank was also used to judge the literary merit of the manuscripts of poets and authors. When placed on the water, the manuscripts would float supported by a plank if its value was considered worthy otherwise it would sink to the bottom. This testing miraculous plank was called 'Sanga Palkki' (sanga plank) and can still be seen in the temple museum. This tradition amply substantiates the view that Madurai was once a centre of learning and erudition. The Pandyan kings were great patrons of arts and letters. One of the first monarchs of the dynasty, Ugra Paruvaludi (128-140 A.D.) is gratefully remembered for the patronage he extended to poet Tiruvalluvar.

In the 14th century, Madurai aroused the cupidity of Malikkafur who invaded it and set up a Mohammadan dynasty that remained in power for nearly fifty years, at the end of which it was conquered by a General of the Vijayanagar Empire and became a feudatory. The Vijayanagar Emperor, while guarding the kingdom against the invaders, subsequently restored it to the descendants of the Pandyan kings.

From the middle of the 16th century, right up to the eighth decade of the 18th century. the city retained its glory as the principal seat of the Nayakas. Although Vishwanatha Nayaka, the first and greatest of a long line of distinguished rulers, is credited with having laid the foundations of a well planned and well fortified city. Tirumala Nayaka, who ascended to throne in 1623 A.D., and ruled over Madurai for 36 years can be said to have made the largest single contribution towards the enhancement of the beauty and splendour of the town by magnificent edifices and monuments.

A little away from the temple precincts in the town is the ruins of Palace of Tirumala Nayaka constructed during his reign (1623-1645 A.D.). It contains beautiful domes and arches. One of the domes stands without the support of girder -an architectural feat of everlasting wonder. They must have been an extravagance of stucco in its heyday.

Tirumala Nayaka was undoubtedly the greatest of the Nayaka rulers. The Nayakas of Madurai like those of Thanjavur and ginee ruled South India as the Governors of Vijayanagar emperors and gradually became independent rulers as the empire began to decline and breakup, though they did not like to call themselves as kings due probably to their reverence to the dynasty.