

# THANJAVUR

## Temple Layout

Rajarajeswaram, as the temple was named by its founder, fills a large portion of the small fort (Sivaganga Fort), encircled by moat on the east and west, the Grand Anaicut Channel (Putharu) on the south and by the Sivaganga Garden on the north. The temple entrance has an imposing gateway on the east, on either sides of which stand two small shrines dedicated to Ganapathi and Murugan and further through there is another Gopuram 90 feet high. This way leads into an outer court. A second and magnificent Gopuram further leads into the main court in which the temple is built. The inner court is about 500 feet long and 250 feet broad, is well paved with brick and stone. The court is surrounded on all sides by a cloister. The western and northern wings have Sivalingams consecrated therein and there are paintings over these walls depicting sixty-four Nayanmars, sacred sport of Siva. The outer measurement of the temple is 793 feet by 397 feet.

## Main Shrine

The main shrine of Sri Brihadisvara, the Great God - a Sanskrit rendering of the original tamil name Peruvudaiyar- stands at the western end of the main court. It comprises of five divisions -

1. Garbhagriha or the Sanctum Sactorum and the corridor around it
2. Ardhana-Mandapam
3. Maha-Mandapam with the open aisles
4. Stapana-Mandapam with the shrine of Sri Thyagarajar
5. Narthana-Mandapam for the temple paraphernalia and where the servant wait; and
6. Vadya-Mandapam and portico for the musicians.

Main shrine has three portals named Keralantakan, Rasarasan and Thiru-Anukkan. These portals are guarded by Dwarapalikas or the guardians of the gate. They are of huge proportions and of exquisite workmanship. There are several sets like these in the temple, of which seven of them are 18 feet by 8 feet. They are all monolith, and some are of very high artistic merit, especially at the entrance of Sri Subramanya temple.

The Sivalinga of Sri Brihadisvara is probably the grandest in existence. This image was originally called Adavallan (the one who is good in Dance). Another name was Dakshina-Meru Vitanken. Both the names occur in Thiruvisaipa as the names of the deity are as same as in Chidambaram Temple. This possibly indicates that the Saiva creed derived its support at the time mainly from Chidambaram. Rajaraja Cholan calls the image Rajarajeswaramudaiyar - The Lord of Rajarajeswaram. The tower over the shrine is named Dakshina-Meru after the abode of Lord Shiva at Kailasam, the Uttara-Meru.

Sri Thyagaraja, also called Vitankar, worshiped within a portion of Stapana-Manadapam, is the patron deity of Cholas. The legend goes that their mythical progenitor Chola Muchukuntan helped Indra against the asuras, for which help, he was presented with seven images of Thyagaraja, which he installed in the seven holy places of Thiruvarur, Thiru-nagai-karonam, Thiru-kkareyil, Thirukolili, Thirumaraikadu, Thirunallaru and Thiruvamur which are known as Sapta-Vitanka-Kshetras. Rajaraja Cholan was a devout worshiper of Sri Thyagaraja at Thiruvarur where he built this great temple; and, consecrated Sri Thyagaraja at Thanjavur also, as a mark of his own piety and in commemoration of the exploits of his celebrated ancestor.

The great Vimana is of the Dravidian style of architecture. It rises to a height of about 216 feet, a tower of fourteen storeys, finely decorated with pilasters, niches and images of gods of the Hindu pantheon. The basement of the structure which supports the tower is 96 feet square. The sikhara or cupolic dome is octagonal in shape and crowns the Vimana. The gilded Kalasa or finial, over dome is 12.5 feet high. It is believed that the sikhara and the stupi does not throw on the ground. The dome rests on a single block of granite, of 25.5 feet square. Two Nandis, each measuring 6.5 feet by 5.5 feet beautify each corner of the

stone which is estimated to weigh about 80 tons, and is believed to have been conveyed to the top of the tower by means of an inclined plane commencing from Sarapallam (scaffold-hollow), four miles north-east of the city.

#### **Sub Shrines:**

Shrine of Sri Subramanya in the northwest corner, Shrine of Goddess Sri Brihannayagi, Sri Chandeewara Shrine, Shrine of Ganapathy, Shrine of Nataraja in the north eastern corner, the colossal monolith figure on Nandhi, the sacred bull, in the central courtyard and the Shrine of Karuvurar.

#### **The Great Nandhi**

The Nandi within is elaborately worked and the Nayak Mandapam is massive and striking. The Nandhi is 12 feet high, 19.5 feet long and 18.25 feet wide. The Nandhi is a monolith weighing about 25 tons and the stone is said to have come from a bed of Gneiss at the foot of Pachaimalai near Perambalur. Another version is that the stone was brought over from the bed of the River Narmada in the north. There is a tradition that the Nandhi is growing in size with the progress of time. It was feared it might become too large for the Mandapam erected over it and a nail was driven into the back of it, and since, its size has remained stationary. Two portrait statues on the front pillars of the Nandhi Mandapam are pointed out as those of Sevappanayakan (the first Nayak ruler) and of his son Achyutappa Nayak.

#### **The Frescos**

The Chola frescos painting discovered in 1931 by Mr.S.K.Govindasamy of Annamalai University within the circumambulatory corridor Aradhana Mandapam are of great interest. These are the first Chola specimen's discovered. The passage of the corridor is dark and the enthusiast finds the walls on either side covered with two layers of paintings from floor to ceiling. Those of the upper layer are of the Nayak period, as certain labels in Telugu characters mentioned the names of Sevappa, Achyutappa and others. The Chola frescos lie underneath. An ardent spirit of saivism is expressed in the Chola frescos. They probably synchronised with the completion of the temple by Rajaraja Cholan. Saivism was at its height at that time and the Cholas were predominantly of that faith.



#### **About Tanjore Painting**

Welcome to the unique and colourful world of Thanjavur paintings. This school of paintings originated in Thanjavur during the reign of the Marathas in the 16th century. It existed from 17th to 19th Century, and had a limited output. Today, this tradition is kept alive by a few hundred dedicated artists mostly based in Tamil Nadu, India.

## ROYAL PALACE



The Palace, on the east main street is a series of large and rambling buildings of fine masonry, built partly by the Nayaks around 1550 AD, and partly by the Marathas. The entrance is by way of a large quadrangular courtyard. The encircling walls are pierced by big gateways to the north and east. The courtyard leads to a many-pillared hall. A small inner courtyard gives access to a large one.

On the southern side of the third quadrangle is a vimana like building, 190 feet high with eight storeys and it is the Goodagopuram. This was the palace watch tower and also the armoury of the Thanjavur Kings till 1855 A.D.

The two Durbar Halls of the Nayaks and the Mahrattas and the Raja Sarafoji Saraswathi Mahal Library are the chief sights of the Palace. The Saraswathi Mahal Library has remarkable collection of about 30,433 sanskrit and other vernacular palm leaf manuscripts and 6,426 printed volumes, besides a large number of journals. The library is the effort of the three hundred years of collections by the Nayak and Mahratta kings.

Madamaligai is the tower which rises from the palace roof beyond the Goodagopuram. It has six storeys. It is believed that this was built by Nayak ruler to enable him worship Sri Ranganatha of Srirangam every mid-day. This many storeyed tower was destroyed by lightning and was subsequently repaired and preserved.

The Sangita Mahal or the Music Hall is a miniature of the surviving court of Thirumalai Nayak's.



Hours: 9 am -1 pm; 3 pm - 6 pm. All days except government holidays, especially those of important in South India.

A remarkable collection of South Indian sculptures and paintings is housed in the old palace buildings at Thanjavur (Tanjore). Thanjavur has been an art centre of great importance throughout almost the entire history of Tamil Nadu. During the Chola period, two magnificent temples were built in this region, the Brihadeswara Temple and the Gangaikondacholapuram Temple ( 10th to 11th centuries). Today, the town is a flourishing centre for bronze sculpture, stonework and paintings. The palace was originally built

by the Nayak rulers of Tamil Nadu. It was this dynasty that added to and enlarged many of the temples, with ornate and often huge sculptures. The palace building, set within a large compound, also contains the Saraswati Library and the Sangeetha Sabha, or Music Hall.

Within the museum there is a gallery with a representative collection of stone sculpture from the Pallava, Chola, Pandya and Nayaka periods. Another gallery contains samples of the characteristic glass paintings of Tanjore. There are two principal traditions in this style of painting in South India, especially in Thanjavur. Every Hindu home is supposed to have a prayer room, where the family deity is installed after the house is built. These household images of gods and goddesses are in bronze, silver or clay are painted pictures. The paintings are done on wood, using a variety of colours, and to enhance the pictures, details of jewellery and clothing are added by attaching gold leaf, paper, semi-precious and precious gems.

This museum is however best known for its bronze sculpture collection, of rare artistic quality. It is, of course, impossible here to describe all the 400 or more pieces. But few outstanding works which, if you are lucky, will be in this museum and not found in exhibitions around the world. The Kalyanasundaramurti ( Tiruvengadu district, early Chola), the images of Shiva and Parvati at the time of their marriage, is truly a masterpiece, one of India's finest bronzes of all time.

Another sculpture - the Bhikshatanamurti - is of Shiva in a different mood. Bhikshu means 'mendicant', and in this sculpture Shiva is shown standing wearing little else but wooden sandals, jewellery and a snake wrapped around his waist. Beside him is the pretty form of a dancing deer, which stands on its hind legs to reach up to Shiva's outstretched arm. In the other hand Shiva carries a shallow bowl-like object which is the cause of his predicament. Brahma, the old god of creation, is said to have lusted after his own daughter. In anger, Shiva struck him, cutting off one of his five heads, and this skull of Brahma's head gets attached to Shiva's palm, like a begging bowl. Shiva becomes a mendicant, going from place to place, like Lady Macbeth trying to get rid of the stain of murder, it is only when he bathes in the Ganga River at Banaras that he is absolved of the 'sin' of murdering a Brahmin and a God. This is why that spot on the river at Banaras is sacred to the Hindus, who flock there in their thousands to take a dip absolving them of sin, and even to die and be cremated there, to end the cycle of rebirth into lives of sin and misery. In this sculpture, Shiva's face is austere and serious, and his hair is wild and filled with symbols of his power - the crescent moon, the skull, the datura flower and the snake, for he is conqueror of Time and Death.

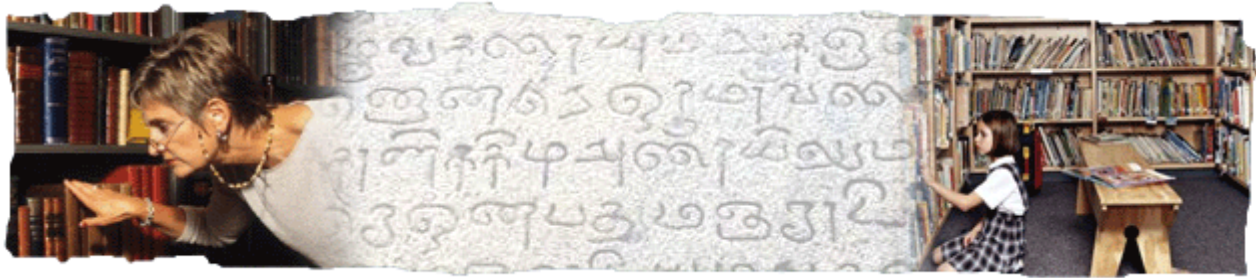
Another brilliant sculptural piece is the Vrishabhantika with the Devi. Shiva here has one arm raised and bent, as if he were leaning on his bull, Nandi. The Devi, also part of this piece, is an individual sculpture of great beauty and elegance



The quadrangular Shivaganga Fort, Southwest of the old City, was built by the nayakaruler, Sevappa Nayaka, in the mid-16th century. Its battle mented stone walls, which enclose an area of 14 ha (35 acres) are surrounded by a partly rock cut moat. The Square **Shivaganga Tank** in the fort was excavated to



provide drinking water for the City. The fort also contains The great Brihadishvara Temple, Schwartz Church, and public amusement park.



This library has one of the most important oriental manuscript collections, in India. Established around 1700 AD, the library contains a collection of over 44,000 palm leaf, and paper manuscripts in Indian and European languages. Over eighty percent of its manuscripts are in sanskrit, many on palm leaves and are very unique. The Tamil work includes treatises on medicine, and commentaries on works from the Sangam period.



### **Sivagangai Garden**

A very beautiful park, located north of the big temple. It has a good collection of beautiful flower plants, birds and animals.

### **Punnai Nallur Mariamman Kovil**

It's around 4 Kms from Tanjore.

### **Tamil University**

Established in 1981, the university is engaged in research and advanced study in Tamil. Tamil University Museum has a collection of coins and musical instruments.

### **Rajarajan Manimandapam**

Constructed on the eve of the World Tamil conference held at Thanjavur and is a beautiful park



The 18th-century Christ Church or Schwartz Church a legacy of Tanjore colonial past, stands to the east of the Shivanganga Tank. This church was founded by the Danish missionary, Reverend Frederik Christian Schwartz, in 1779. When he died in 1798, the enlightened Maratha ruler, Serfoji II, donated a striking marble tablet, made by John Flaxman and this has been placed at the western end of the church. It depicts the dying missionary blessing his royal patron, surrounded by ministers and pupils from the school that he established.



#### **Darasuram**

34 Kms from Tanjore has a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva which was built by Rajendra Chola. It also boasts as a silk weaving centre.

#### **Kumbakonam**

Famous for the Mahamaham festival held every 12 years, Kumbakonam, 36 Kms from Tanjore, also boasts of five temples. The important ones among them are Sarangapani, Kumbeswarar, Nageswara and Ramaswamy temples. These temples are noted for their semi erotic sculpture

[Kumbakonam Home page](#)

#### **Mannargudi**

Lord Krishna is featured as Rajagopala in Rajagopala Temple, Mannargudi. This temple was constructed in the 12th century and received patronage from the Nayaka Kings.

#### **Mayiladuthurai**

Used to be called Mayuram, situated on the banks of river Cauvery. Mayuranatha Swami temple, Parimala Ranganatha Swamy temple, Kasi Vishwanatha Swamy temple, Punukeeswarar temple, Vadhanyeswarar temple and Ayyarappar temple are some of the famous temples in Mayiladuthurai .

#### **Thirubuvanam**

45 Kms from Tanjore, Thirubuvanam has a 13th century Chola temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. Also well known for its silk weaving industry.

#### **Poompuhar**

It was the capital and port city of Cholas, also called as Kaveeripumpattinam, as the river Cauvery drains into the Bay of Bengal here only. Kovalan and Kannagi of the great epic Silappathikaram, written by Ilangovadigal, lived in this town. "Silappathikara Kalaikkodam" is a panorama of sculptures depicting scenes from Silappathikaram.

#### **Poondi Matha Kovil**

A very famous Catholic church for Matha. People of all faiths visit the church.

### **Sikkal Singaravelavar Temple**

Around 80 Kms from Thanjavur situated on Nagapattinam Tiruvarur Main Road. The ancient history says that here Lord Murugan got the 'Sakthi Vel' from Parvathi (referred as Velledunkanni amman in this temple) and killed Suran. This temple is one of the few temples in Tamilnadu which has both Siva and Vishnu in the same campus. The 'Vel Vankuthal' festival in the Tamil month of Iyappasi is very famous here.

### **Vellankanni**

Shrine of Our Lady of Vellankanni 90 Kms away, noted for the church dedicated to 'Our Lady of Health', attracts devotees of all faiths.

### **Nagore**

88 Kms away, is a famous Muslim pilgrimage site. People of all religion visit the Nagore durgah.

### **Sirkazhi**

Goddess Parvathi gave Gnana milk to Thirugnana Sambandar here, when he was a child. After this, he sang the famous Devaram. Lord Shiva as Thoniappar resides in a thoni (boat). The boat symbolizes that Thoniappar helps people cross their sea of birth. Every year during Thiruvadirai Nakshatra of Chithirai month, the famous Thirumulaippal Utsav is held.

### **Swamimalai**

Located 32 Kms away, Swamimalai is one of the six abodes (Arupadaiveedu) dedicated to Lord Murugan. Lord Murugan preached Pranava mantra "OM" to Lord Shiva and that's why he is called Swaminathan. The 60 steps to the temple indicate the 60 years of the Tamil calendar. This temple is praised by Arunagirinadar. Every Thursday, Lord Swaminathan is decorated with a Diamond Vel.

### **Thirukandiyur**

The temples at Thirukandiyur are dedicated to Brahmasirekandeswarar and Harshavimochana Perumal, and are famous for their fine sculptural work.

### **Thiruvaiyaru**

13 Kms from Thanjavur, where the famous saint Thyagaraja lived and attained samadhi. The famous temple at Thiruvaiyaru is dedicated to Shiva, and is known as Panchanatheswara. An eight day music festival is held here, every January, in honour of the saint.

### **Thiruvarur**

55 Kms from Thanjavur, the Thyagarajaswami Temple is famous for the largest temple chariot in Tamil Nadu. This vast temple houses Thyagaraja, Kamalamba and Vanmikanathar and has been sung by the Saiva Saints. The pillars and the halls here are of great beauty. Rajaraja Cholan was an ardent devotee of Thyagarajaswami. This temple is also referred to us as Prithvi (Earth) Sthalam. Thiruvarur is also the birth place of Saint Thyagaraja.

### **Vaitheeswaran Kovil**

Vaitheeswaran, Thaiyal Nayaki, Muthukumaraswamy (Shiva, Parvathi, Subramanya Swamy) are the deities in this temple. An ancient temple dedicated to Shiva - as Vaitheeswaran literally meaning the divine provider of cures. Adorned with imposing towers, Mandapams and pillars, this well visited shrine has been sung by the Saivite Saint Poets. It is said that Angarakan - Mars, Kartikeya, Jatayu and the Rig Veda worshipped Shiva here. This shrine is also referred to as an Angarakasthalam.