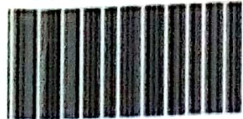


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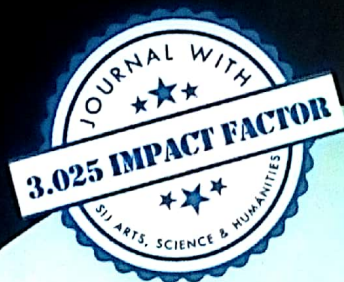
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CULTURAL AND HERITAGE TOURISM IN TAMIL NADU

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Abstract

Tamil Nadu has rich cultural heritage including folklore rooted to traditional values and beliefs. The exemplary cultural products of Tamil Nadu depicted in the work speak volumes about the prospects of cultural tourism in the state. Tamil Nadu is the top state in attracting the maximum number of foreign tourists in India. Tamil Nadu has some great temples like Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple, Tanjore Brahadeswara Temple, Srirangam Ranganathaswamy Temple, Velankanni Church and Nagoor Dharga are visited by people of all religions. Festivals such as pongal, karthigai deepam, Christmas, Bakrid and lot more describe the mystique belief of people of Tamil Nadu. The most important aspect of Tamil culture is the architectural heritage of the state. Tamil Nadu is also called the cradle of South Indian temple architecture and is a living museum of architectural styles that originated in the 7th century and culminated in the huge temple complexes studded with towering gateways called "Gopurams". Tamil Nadu Tourism Department highlights certain potential cultural tourism destination in its packages.

Keywords: Heritage, Temple, Festival, Cultural, Destination, package.

Introduction

Tamil Nadu has rich cultural heritage including folklore rooted to traditional values and beliefs. Tamil Nadu is one of the most urbanized states of India but most of the people still live in villages. The exemplary cultural products of Tamil Nadu depicted in the work speak volumes about the prospects of cultural tourism in the state. Tamil Nadu is the top state in attracting the maximum number of foreign tourists in India. Archaeological sites with civilization dating back to 3800 years are found in Tamil Nadu. With more than 3400 temples, this state also holds the credit of having the maximum number of UNESCO heritage sites in India which includes the Great Living Chola Temples and Mahabalipuram. The history and culture of Tamilnadu goes back to thousands years back. For centuries, people of various religions have been residing in the state. The main religions in Tamilnadu are Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Jainism. Hinduism, along with its various sects, is the oldest religion in the state. Hindus are the followers of number of sectarian monastic institutions. In Tamil Nadu, there is an established caste system with traditional differentiations and has more pronounced than in many other parts of India. A large part of population is confined to Chennai and those around Madurai, Tiruchirappalli and Coimbatore.

The Great Temples

Tamil Nadu has some great temples like Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple, Tanjore Brihadeswara Temple, Srirangam Ranganathaswamy Temple, and all the above mentioned temples have world class architecture that mesmerize utterly. Velankanni Church and Nagoor Dharga are visited by people of all religions. It is indeed to the credit of the state that a calendar year is dotted with really colourful and culturally important festivals aplenty. The traditions of olden times are still very much prevalent in Tamil Nadu and the incredible festivals stand testimony to that. The amount of culture that is displayed in these festivals make them very special. Most of the festivals in Tamil Nadu are Temple festivals. Almost every temple has its own festivals and fairs. Dance festivals like Mamallapuram Dance Festival, Natyanjali Dance Festival, etc are considered to be new pull factors as regards cultural tourists. Tamil Nadu is home to perhaps the largest number of temples in the country and almost every temple has their own festival or fair. Most of the temple festivals fall between September and November, and between March and June. Every corner of Tamil Nadu is sprinkled with pre-historic cultural legacy.

Festivals

Festivals such as pongal, karthigai deepam and more describe the mystique belief of people of Tamil Nadu. Cities like Chennai, Madurai, Trichy and Coimbatore attract cultural tourists all the year round because of its holding famous art and music festivals and other cultural events. Besides, the popular dance form 'Bharat Natyam' talks about the vibrant Tamil Nadu culture. This state in South India is a land of rich history and tradition. It is the land where traditions and culture combine to live in harmony. Tamil Nadu abounds in ancient monuments and temples, which reflect the religious, artistic and cultural accomplishment of the state.

Important aspect of Tamil culture

The most important aspect of Tamil culture is the architectural heritage of the state. Tamil Nadu is also called the cradle of South Indian temple architecture and is a living museum of architectural styles that originated in the 7th century and culminated in the huge temple complexes studded with towering gateways called "Gopurams". The Brahadeswara temple at Tanjavur is the finest example of "sikhara" and "gopuram" architecture. Some of the world famous pilgrim centres of Tamil Nadu are Mamallapuram, Kanchipuram, Chidambaram, Kumbakonam, Rameswaram, Palani, Srirangam, Tiruttani and Kanyakumari. Tamil Nadu is a unique state from the tourism point of view. The immense tourist wealth of Tamil Nadu is one of the greatest assets of the State. Tamil Nadu has the countless number of tourist spots such as hill stations, beaches, wild life sanctuaries, bird sanctuaries, zoological parks, etc. The long and rich history of the Tamil language and society is marked by temples, pilgrim centres, historical and heritage monuments, etc. Tamil Nadu, the gateway of South India, has emerged as the hub of tourism for West Asia and South East Asia.

Cultural Activities for Tourism

Tamil Nadu has a long tradition of venerable culture. Tamil was the very first language to be recognized as a classical language of India. Tamil people regard their language as a very important part of their cultural identity. Throughout its history, Tamil literature has sought to inform and inspire, educate and entertain. Tamil poetry has universal appeal as evidenced by many examples. Tirukkural, which was written nearly two millennia ago portrays a universal outlook. The first Tamil printing press was established at Tarangambadi by the Danish missionaries. During the Indian freedom struggle, many Tamil poets and writers sought to provoke national spirit, social equity and secularist thoughts among the common man, notably Subramanya Bharathy and Bharathidasan. Even today Tamil Nadu is home to creative writers like Vairamuthu, Jayakanthan and Indira Parthasarathy.

Chennai city has many beautiful parks to its credit. The Corporation of Chennai has given a facelift to many of these parks in the city and has made them green by providing lovely lawns and attractive fountains. To patronize the folk arts and entertain the local population in the evening hours, it was decided to conduct a cultural show every Saturday in parks with the caption "Poongavil Poonkatru". This programme has promoted cultural tourism apart from providing a platform for promoting youth talents. Tamil Nadu Tourism is providing avenues for creative tourism in the annual Trade Fair, by facilitating the students of Government Fine Arts College to participate in painting portraits of visitors to the fair. "Chithira Santhai" was conducted in 2009 for the display and sale of paintings by eminent artists. A colourful "Coffee Table Book" named "Thoorigaiyil Thamizhagam" has been produced with public-private partnership, depicting art forms and cultural dimensions of Tamil Nadu and important tourist places. This coffee table book with beautiful paintings by eminent artists of Tamil Nadu has versions in Tamil, English, French and German with concise information on the paintings and their significance in

Tamil Nadu context. Chennai bustles with a number of cultural activities during December and January every year, especially Chennai Sangamam. This great event has contributed significantly for the regular revival of folk art forms. The entire atmosphere was surcharged with the festive mood. The "Semmozhi Sirpa Poonja" is a sculpture park at Mamallapuram where sculptures of architectural splendor have been installed. The tourists get a glimpse of the rich culture of Tamil Nadu from these scriptures. Temple festivals are not just religious occasions but also cultural and commercial landmarks. All Hindu festivals are occasions of great feasting, dance, music and love. One of the most well known fairs in Tamil Nadu is the Pollachi fair, which takes place on Thursdays. On these days, the fair is practically bursting at the seams. The Pollachi fair is the place for items from the Annamalai hills, Palaghat area and the Pollachi valley.

Heritage Towns

The Government of Tamil Nadu has declared 48 towns as Heritage Towns for conservation and preservation of their priceless heritage value. These Heritage Towns are developed by obtaining funds from the Town and Country Planning Development. The countryside of the state is dotted with various sites known for their own particular craft, such as the paintings of Tanjore, the mats of Pattamadai, and wood carvings of Chettinad. Tamil art has also found its way into Tamil celebrations. Dolls are often made in preparation of the Navaratri celebrations.

Tamil Nadu has a rich tradition of making metal objects which are used for both religious and secular purposes. A wide variety of objects includes standing lamps, aarathi, deepalakshmi hand lamps and chain lamps. Shallow dishes in circular, hexagonal, octagonal and oval shapes are widely used in Tamil Nadu and are made out of bronze or sheet brass. The popular Thanjavur plates are characterized by designs of deities, birds, flowers and geometric patterns beaten out from the back of copper and silver sheets and subsequently encrusted on a brass tray, Kudam or Panchpaatra. Metal toys are also popular and are sold at various gift outlets in various towns and cities of the state.

Tamil Nadu is famous for its artistically created baskets and fiber products which are of great demand both in India and abroad. While palm has become a major source of raw material for basketry and related products, bamboo, cane, grasses, reeds and fibres are also used in making baskets, ropes, mats, and many other items. The places famous for these arts are Salem, Dharmapuri, Coimbatore, South Arcot and Tiruchirappalli districts. Stone carving is yet another popular form of art that continued to exist over centuries. The craftsmen apply their creativity in making sculptures of various forms and structures. Granite and marble carving are confined to the areas around Mamallapuram and Chingleput. Pottery is also an important craft of Tamil Nadu. The state is famous for its manufacture of the famous Ayyannar horses. The horses are said to protect each village from evil. The large terracotta horses of Salem and Pudukottai are very much popular and are of great demand. The Kolam in Tamil Nadu is given a great recognition and is also given more importance during the Margazhi season which is one of the finest Tamil seasons. The Kolam has lots of aspects that are medically more helpful. Kolam also enhances the creativity of the people apart from reflecting the glory and splendour of Tamil culture and tradition.

Cultural Tourism Destination

Tamil Nadu Tourism Department highlights certain potential cultural tourism destination in its packages. The important ones are reviewed as follows. Sirkazhi is renowned in Tamil literature as the birth place of Thirugnana Sambandar, the Tamil saint. The saivite temple is dedicated to him. Tourists gather in large numbers to witness the Tirumalaippal festival celebrated in April. Vaitheeswaran koil, too, draws steady stream of cultural tourists from all parts of Tamil Nadu and other states. There is a

large and important Siva temple. Vaitheeswaran is the healer of all diseases and it is believed that a bath in the holy water of the Siddhamritham tank situated within the temple complex, cures all ailments. Gingee or Senji is a historical place, blending history and architecture. It has an interesting tale of historical value and veracity. The greatness of Poompuhar was brought out in some of the poems in Sangam literature and also by Silappathikaram and Manimekalai, the Tamil epics. The life and time of the Tamil classic 'Silappatikaram' has been recreated at Poompuhar to the immense pleasure of cultural tourists. In order to conjure up the decorative ornamental scenic beauty of Poompuhar, the whole Art gallery is made to present the environment and atmosphere of the 2nd century A.D., by the creation of Illanji mantram, Pavai mantram etc.

Very close to the five falls in Courtallam is an enchanting cultural tourism destination in Chithra Sabha (Hall of paintings) where Lord Siva's cosmic dance poses are depicted. According to Sthala Purana, this Chithra Sabha is one of the five sabhas consecrated hundreds of years ago. The paintings vividly portray various anecdotes from Siva Puranam. Rameswaram is a highly acclaimed tourist centre considered to be a national pilgrim centre. The 'Kasi of South' located in the Gulf of Mannar is a sought after destination by cultural tourists. Kanyakumari - the tri sea confluence is a cultural tourist's delight. The cultural tourism package comprises exquisite places namely Padmanabhapuram Palace, Chitharal, Suchindrum, Vattakottai, Thiruvattar and Vivekananda Rock Memorial. Madurai-the cultural capital of Tamil Nadu is famous as a centre of literary achievement and learning. Madurai was home to the Tamil Sangam which attracted literary personages who flourished under royal patronage. Many literary masterpieces were penned which survive to this day. There are ample tourist spots for cultural tourists such as Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple, Thirumalai Nayakkar Mahal, Gandhi Museum and Mariamman Tappakulam. Trichy, a renowned cultural tourism destination is a fine blend of tradition and modernity built around the Rock Fort.

The Srirangam temple which stands as the biggest temple complex in the country attracts large scale tourist influx. Thanjavur, is an engineering marvel and is renowned for Dravidean Temple Architecture. In ancient days this place had been a center for learning art and culture. The Brihadeeswar temple, a World Heritage site - also finds a place among the must see cultural spots. Kanchipuram is the temple town of India. It is one of the seven holy cities of the country. It is here that the Pallavas, Cholas and Vijayanagara rulers paid obeisance to their gods by constructing marvelous, wonderfully sculpted temples. All the temples are notable and visited by tourists to Kanchipuram. Culture and heritage are a natural part of the landscape in Kanchipuram` area - be it writing, fine arts, music or dance. The Kanchi Mutt established by Adi Sankara has a modern centre of learning. The Kattaikuttu Kalai Valarchi Munnetra Sangam - the Sangam to promote the interest of theatre closely linked with contemporary village life; Koothu - p- pattarai which recognize the traditions of native folk arts and communicate them to the audience in a contemporary idiom, and the Shakunthala Jagannathan Museum of Folk Art are spectacular cultural tourism spots of Kanchipuram.

Conclusion

"Culture and Heritage constitute a vital resource for tourism development, and tourism in turn makes an important contribution to cultural development". Cultural and Heritage tourism constitute important segments of global tourism demand.

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