Karaikudi

Overview

Karaikudi is the largest town among a collection of 75 villages that form the Chettinad region in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The name Karaikudi is derived from the 'Karai' plant found extensively in the region. Situated about 80 km from the city of Madurai, it was the home of the "Nattu Kottai Chettiars", who moved out to several parts of the state and the country to establish highly successful commercial ventures.

The town has several stately mansions, historic buildings, temples and archaeological sites. The city was also made famous by the Tamil and Telugu film industry who chose it for many movie shootings.

History

Quick Facts

State

Tamil Nadu, India.

Location

Karaikudi is located in Sivaganga district

- 400 km from the city of Chennai and
- 475 km from the city of Bangalore

Best Time To Visit

The best season to visit Karaikudi is between October to February.

Tourist Offices

STD Code

Sightseeing

Arulthiru Shanmuganathan Temple

Built in 1000 AD Arulthiru Shanmuganathan temple is 10 km from Karaikudi. The temple is situated on a 200 ft high hill. Several major festivals are celebrated at this temple.

Chettinad Houses

The stately old Chettinad Houses are a major attraction in Karaikudi. Spaced between two streets the front of the house faces one while the back faces the other. Built on a rectangular plot, the front and back entrances of most of the houses are directly opposite each other. Carved pillars fill the interior and the decorated walls are honeycombed with windows. Walls in these houses generally have wooden panels on them. Many of the houses display a large variety of priceless antiques.

The rooms in the house are generally in a straight line and each has an outlet to the back door. The front door of the house is generally made of carved teak wood and opens out to the beautifully carved pillared courtyard. Most homes have yet another corridor which is used by the women of the family.

Chettinad Museum

One of the Chettinad mansions has today been converted into the Chettinad Museum. The Museum displays traditional articles connected with every day domestic life, ornamental jewelry, expensive clothing, etc. The decorative floor tiles in the mansion differ from room to room.

Chettinad Palace

10 km from Karaikudi is the Chettinad Palace. Situated in the town of Kanadukathan the palace was constructed in the beginning of the 20th century by SA Ramaswamy Chettiar. The majestic structure is spread across 40,000 sq ft. and was constructed using Burmese teak, British steel and Italian marble. Its halls and rooms are lavishly furnished.

Mandabams

There are two 'mandabams' erected in honor of two great Tamil poets, Kamban Mani Mandabam in honor of Kavi Chakravarthy Kamban and Kaviarsar Kannadhasan Mani Mandabam in honor of the poet Kannadhasan.

Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple

The Meenakshi Sudareswarar temple was built in 1872 in the Dravidian style of architecture. The gopurams and mandapam at the temple are multilayered and covered from top to bottom with images of different Hindu gods and mythical figures. The temple also known as Sivan temple has 108 statues of Ganapathy Vinayaka.

Other Temples

The historically significant ***Kunnakudi cave temple***, 14 km from Karaikudi in the small village of Kunnakudi is known for its ancient hill temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. The 350 year old ***Kandadevi Temple*** situated 3km from Devakottai, the ***Vaishnava Thirukostiyur Temple***, the ***Pattamangalam temple*** near Pillayarpatti that has a banyan tree with a circumference of over 50 meters, and the 18th century ***Kalaiyar Koil*** located about 45 km from Karaikudi with a 150m high gopuram.

Pillaiyarpatti Temple

The rock cut Pillaiyarpatti temple is 12 km from Karaikudi perched on top of a small hill. Dedicated to Lord Ganesha, this temple is considered to be one of the oldest cave temples in Tamil Nadu. There are rock cut images of Shiva and Lingodbhavar at the temple. The image of Lord Ganesha is a huge bas relief in one of the caves at the temple and stands 6 feet tall. There is also a Shiva Lingum at the temple carved out of a stone by a renowned sculptor by the name of Ekkattur Koon Peruparanaum whose signature is found every where on the sanctum.

There are several inscriptions found at this temple. The inscriptions give an idea of the age of the temple. It is believes that the temple was built in 3 stages. The first stage dates back around 1600 years and during this time the innermost rock cut shrines of Karpaka, Vinayakar and Tiruveesar were made.

There are several inscriptions at the temple that date back to the period from 1091 to 1238 when Pillayarpatti Nagarattar was the custodian of the temple. The 2nd phase of the temple was conducted during this time in the 13th century. During this phase the Vimanams and Rajagopurams were built. The 3rd phase of the temple involved repairs and refurbishment of the entire temple complex.

Things To Do

Karaikudi is famous for its vividly hued handmade terracotta *Athangudi* tiles. Some of the factories allow visitors to see how the tiles are baked, glazed, designed and dried in the sun. They get their distinctive texture from the locally available sand and a special manufacturing process.

Thirumayam Fort Complex

The Thirumayam fort complex is part of a heritage area and includes a famous temple and two rock cut shrines within its

complex. It was erected by Sethupathi Vijaya Raghunatha Thevar, who ruled Ramanathapuram during the 17th century. The fort complex consists of the main fort and five smaller forts around it.

Planning a Trip

Getting There

Air

The nearest airports to Karaikudi are at Madurai (90 km) and Trichy (100 km).

Rail

Karaikudi railway station is connected to all major stations in South India.

Road

The town is located on NH 210 between Trichy and Rameshwaram. It is also easily accessible from NH 7, NH 45, and NH 49, making it easy to get to from all major towns and cities.

Getting Around

There are plenty of buses, taxis and auto rickshaws to get around the town and to important tourist sites in the vicinity.

Other Information

Shopping

Many tourists come to Karaikudi more for shopping than for sightseeing. The antique shops on Muniswaran Kovil Street offer a fascinating range of items. Most of the attractive and well maintained buildings that house the antique shops are as old as the antiques themselves. Hand crafted items made by local artisans are in great demand. Beautifully carved old pieces of wooden furniture attract a lot of interest. Karaikudi is also famous for its brightly colored ‘Gopura Karai’ saris, so named because of the tower shaped designs across the border of the sari. Several tourists go shopping for the famous Athangudi tiles.

Food

The food available in Karaikudi is essentially Chettinad cuisine. A standard vegetarian meal consists of rice with a large number of spicy curries. Seafood is very popular, especially crabs and prawns. Rice based ‘tiffins’ like ‘idli’, ‘dosa’, ‘appam’, ‘iddiappam’, etc. are in great demand. Rabbit dry fry is another popular item.

Directions

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