



# Tamil Nadu & Chennai

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## Best Places to Sleep

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- ➔ Les Hibiscus (p363)
- ➔ Bungalow on the Beach (p369)
- ➔ Visalam (p380)
- ➔ 180° McIver (p399)

## Best Temples

- ➔ Meenakshi Amman Temple (p381)
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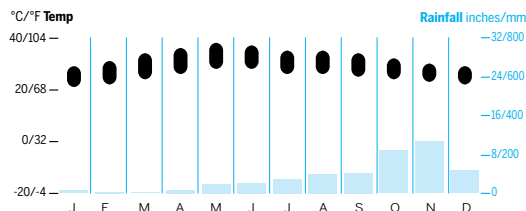
## Why Go?

Tamil Nadu is the homeland of one of humanity's living classical civilisations, stretching back uninterrupted for two millennia and very much alive today in the Tamils' language, dance, poetry and Hindu religion.

But this deep-South state, with its age-old trading vocation, is as dynamic as it is immersed in tradition. Fire-worshipping devotees who smear tikka on their brows in Tamil Nadu's famously spectacular temples might rush off to IT offices – and then unwind at a glitzy night-time haunt in rapidly modernising Chennai (Madras) or with sun salutations in bohemian Puducherry (Pondicherry).

When the hot chaos of Tamil temple towns overwhelms, escape to the southernmost tip of India where three seas mingle; to the splendid mansions sprinkled across arid Chettinadu; or up to the cool, forest-clad, wildlife-prowled Western Ghats. It's all packed into a state that remains proudly distinct from the rest of India, while also being among the most welcoming.

## When to Go Chennai



**Jan–Mar** The weather is at its (relative) coolest and the monsoon is over.

**Jul–Sep** Hit the hill stations after the crowded 'season' but while the weather is still good.

**Nov–Dec** The full-moon festival of lights.



## Tamil Nadu & Chennai Highlights

### 1 Puducherry (p359)

Soaking up the unique Franco-Indian flair, boho boutiques and lively yoga scene.

### 2 Hill Stations (p390)

Escaping to the cool, mist-cloaked mountains and heritage hotels at Kodaikanal or Ooty.

### 3 Thanjavur (p372)

Admiring the Chola temple

architecture of Brihadishwara Temple.

### 4 Chettinadu (p379)

Spending the night in an opulent mansion and feasting on fiery cuisine.

### 5 Madurai (p381)

Getting lost in the colourful chaos of Tamil temple life at Madurai's Meenakshi Amman Temple.

### 6 Tranquebar (p369)

Losing track of time at a quirky old Danish seaside colony.

### 7 Mudumalai Tiger Reserve

(p406) Tracking down rare exotic wildlife between mountain panoramas.

8 Chennai (p327) Exploring the countless faces of Tamil Nadu's capital.