

Jaffna & the North

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Best Places to Stav

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Why Go?

With towering, rainbow Hindu temples, sari-clad women on bicycles and a spectacular coastline fringed with palmyra and coconut palms, the North is a different world. Here the climate is arid for most of the year and the fields sun-baked. The light is stronger: surreal and white-hot on salt flats in the Vanni, bright and lucid on coral islands and northern beaches, and soft and speckled in Jaffna's leafy suburbs and its battle-scarred centre.

And, of course, there are the cultural differences. From the language to the cuisine to religion, Tamil culture has its own rhythms, and people here are proud of their heritage. Inevitably, given that this region was a war zone until very recently, there's still a noticeable military presence. But the ambience is far more relaxed than you'd expect, as locals focus on healing, rebuilding and reviving the rich traditions of northern life.

When to Go

Feb The best month to view greater flamingos, present in their hundreds in Mannar Island. Jun-Jul High season sees sunshine, moderate heat and delicious mangoes. Jul-Aug Jaffna's extraordinary 25day Nallur festival has parades, ice cream and ritual self-mutilation.





Jaffna & the North Highlights

- 1 Marvelling at the spectacular seascapes and surreal light exploring **Jaffna's Islands** (p274)
- 2 Slipping into a trance during puja (prayers) at **Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil** (p263) and investigating the charming **market** (p269) and its textiles, tropical fruit and cigars
- 3 Observing the war's destruction of homes, temples and communities and appreciating the strength of its survivors
- 4 Discovering ancient baobab trees, a historic fort and remote bays at **Mannar Island** (p260)
- 5 Riding along coastal
- roads in the **Jaffna Peninsula** (p271), fringed by fishing boats, calm seas and quiet beaches
- 6 Learning about Hindu traditions at Maviddapuram Kanthaswamy Kovil (p271), Thirukketeeswaram Kovil (p261) or Thurkkai Amman Kovil (p271)