

Chennai City Guide

What to see in Chennai, how to get around the city, and what to know before you go — built to pair with Indroam's South India itinerary templates.

THE GATEWAY TO TAMIL CULTURE

Chennai (formerly Madras) is the capital of Tamil Nadu and a common entry point for South India, with a long coastline, Dravidian temple architecture, and a deep classical music and dance tradition that's distinct from North India's. The city is laid out along the Bay of Bengal and is generally more spread out and traffic-heavy than its older core suggests. This guide covers how to navigate it and what to prioritize.

GETTING AROUND

- Chennai Metro covers a useful but still-growing share of the city
- App-based cabs and autorickshaws are the most practical option for most sightseeing
- Marina Beach and the area around it are best explored on foot in the early morning or evening, avoiding midday heat
- Distances between sights can be significant; group sightseeing by neighborhood rather than crossing the city repeatedly
- Humidity is high year-round given the coastal location — plan accordingly

TOP SIGHTS & EXPERIENCES

- Marina Beach, one of the longest urban beaches in the world, best visited at sunrise or sunset
- Kapaleeshwarar Temple in Mylapore, a classic example of Dravidian temple architecture
- San Thome Basilica, built over the site associated with the burial of St. Thomas the Apostle
- Fort St. George, the first British fortress in India, now housing a museum
- Government Museum (Egmore), one of the oldest museums in India with a strong South Indian bronze collection
- Mahabalipuram, a UNESCO World Heritage site of rock-cut temples a short trip south of the city

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Dress modestly for temple visits; some Tamil Nadu temples restrict non-Hindus from the innermost sanctum
- Carry cash for smaller eateries and autos; cards and UPI are widely accepted elsewhere
- The classical music and dance season (Margazhi, around Dec–Jan) fills the city with concerts if your dates align
- Coastal humidity and heat are highest Apr–Jun; Nov–Feb is the more comfortable window to visit
- Chennai is a common gateway for trips further into Tamil Nadu — Mahabalipuram, Pondicherry, and the temple towns further south