

# River and Empire: Chola Era On A Ponniyin Selvan Trail

**Duration:** 3 Days, 3 Nights

**Departure from:** *Bengaluru*

**Interests:** *History & Context, Religion & Beliefs*

**Type:** *Small Group, Expert led*

## Introduction

Tamil Nadu is famous for its temples famous for their master buildings, articulate detailing and the overall sense of grandeur that astonishes a visitor. These temples constructed years ago have been in worship till date. Since ages these temples have been a centre of spirituality, religious movements and the politics.

The Cholas were among India's greatest empire builders with their influence and reach hitting its zenith around the 10-12<sup>th</sup> century. This period also saw new schools of architecture emerge and flourish – some of these traditions are in existence even today.

The River and Empire is a specially tailored itinerary to give you an immersive cultural experience in art and architecture of the Chola empire right in the heart of the river that sustained it. The tour will take you to heritage sites along the river Kaveri and its delta distributaries. We will travel to sites of incredible historical importance guided by Madhusudhanan Kalaichelvan, one of the most well informed and scholarly subject matter experts. An architect, conservationist, painter, epigraphist, he has been conducting guided heritage tours through Road Access to Temples Heritage And Monuments (RATHAM). More details in this [Swarajya post](#).

Over three days you will get to see the architectural marvels, understand the nuances and motivations behind the stone splendours at Chidambaram, Thanjavur and Trichy. At the end of the tour you'd have a very good idea about who the Cholas were, why and how they built the great temples and be able to fully appreciate the great architectural traditions.

## Itinerary

### Day 1 – Departure

We begin the journey late in the evening from Bengaluru. We will meet at the departure point and travel by overnight bus to reach Chidambaram early in the morning the next day.

### Day 2 – Chidambaram to Kumbhakonam

We check-in to our hotel in Chidambaram and post a brief halt for freshening up we will leave for breakfast. We will then begin our temple trail. We will visit the famous Chidambaram Nataraja temple, and the Melakadambur Temple via the Veeranam Lake. The Veeranam lake was built by the Cholas in the tenth

century and it is on the banks of this lake that author Kalki sets the opening chapter of his magnum opus Ponniyin Selvan. Formerly known as Veerananarayanapuram lake, this as described by Kalki is where Chola Princess Kundavi spent her time in the spring, and its 64 openings are said to be the reason for Ramanujacharya's decision of 64 *peethas*.

In the second half of the day we shall head to Gangaikondacholapuram Brihadeshwara temple which was constructed by Shri Rajendra Chola, the son of Sri Raja Rajeshwara. This was a commemorative temple constructed after the victory of the Cholas over the Gangas. At the same site, the king also constructed a lake like a tank that spreads over 22 km, which was also known as the Jalmay Vijayastambh literally meaning the victory pillar made of water. The inscription tells us Sri Rajendra Chola after his victory of Bengal, brought the water of River Ganga and poured it in this lake. The place gets its name from this incident.

From here, we'll head to the Adi Kumbheshwara temple in Kumbakonam. Post this we will depart towards the hotel in Kumbakonam and retire for the day.

Stay: Kumbakonam

### Day 3 – Kumbhakonam to Thanjavur

We begin the day with the Airawateshwara Temple at Darasuram, another one on the UNESCO list of three living Chola temples. Built by Raja Rajeshwara Chola II, the temple is named after the white elephant of Indra, Airavata who was saved by Shiva. It is believed that Airawata was cursed by the sage Durwasa with a disease that will change his colour and was cured only after bathing in the waters of this temple. This was commemorated by placing an idol of Indra seated on Airawata in the sanctum sanctorum.

We will then head to Pazhayarai which was the ancient capital of the medieval Chola dynasty. From here we head to Thiruvaiyaru which houses the Panchanatheshwara (Aiyarappar) temple close to which is the one-roomed house where Thyagaraja composed some of his greatest works.

We end the day at Thanjavur. The Brihadeshwara temple of Thanjavur, also known as Sri Raja Rajeshwara temple, is possibly the best-known example of the grandeur of Chola temples.

Stay: Thanjavur

### Day 4 – Srirangam and Return

On the last day of our journey, we head to Trichy where we visit the Rockfort, the famous Srirangam temple and the equally beautiful Tiruvanaika shrine. In the Alwar traditions, the Sri Ranganathaswamy temple is considered to be one of the eight swayambhu kshetras. This temple is also one the largest temple in India with seven *prakaar* enclosures.

Following which we leave for Bengaluru. We will make a stop midway for lunch. We will conclude the journey in the evening in Bengaluru at the drop location.

### Tour Highlights

- Day 2
  - Nataraja Temple, Chidambaram - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nataraja\\_Temple,\\_Chidambaram](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nataraja_Temple,_Chidambaram)
  - Melakadambur Amirthakadeswarar Temple - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mela\\_Kadambur\\_Amirthakadeswarar\\_Temple](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mela_Kadambur_Amirthakadeswarar_Temple)

- Gangaikonda Cholapuram Brihadisvara Temple - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brihadisvara\\_Temple,\\_Gangaikonda\\_Cholapuram](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brihadisvara_Temple,_Gangaikonda_Cholapuram)
- Kumbakonam Kumbeswaara temple - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adi\\_Kumbeswarar\\_Temple,\\_Kumbakonam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adi_Kumbeswarar_Temple,_Kumbakonam)
- Day 3
  - Darasuram Airawateshwara Temple - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airavatesvara\\_Temple](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airavatesvara_Temple)
  - Pazhayarai Vadathali - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pazhayarai\\_Vadathali](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pazhayarai_Vadathali)
  - Tiruvaiyaru Aiyarappar temple - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aiyarappar\\_temple](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aiyarappar_temple)
  - Brihadeeshwara Temple, Thanjavur - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brihadisvara\\_Temple,\\_Thanjavur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brihadisvara_Temple,_Thanjavur)
- Day 4
  - Trichy Rockfort Temple - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiruchirapalli\\_Rock\\_Fort](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiruchirapalli_Rock_Fort)
  - Srirangam Sri Ranganatha Swamy Temple - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ranganathaswamy\\_Temple,\\_Srirangam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ranganathaswamy_Temple,_Srirangam)
  - Jambukeswarar Temple, Thiruvanaikaval - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jambukeswarar\\_Temple,\\_Thiruvanaikaval](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jambukeswarar_Temple,_Thiruvanaikaval)

## Detailed Tour Logistics

**Duration:** 3 Days, 3 Nights

**Departure from:** Bengaluru

**Exact Departure location:** Cubbon Park Metro Station

**Departure time:** 2100 hrs on date of departure

**Drop location on return:** Cubbon Park Metro Station

**Drop time:** Evening. Expected to be between 2000 and 2200 hrs on the last day of the itinerary.

## Terms

### Inclusion

1. Transport from and to the departure point.
2. Stay at a three-star hotel or resort on twin-sharing basis
3. Vegetarian meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner)
4. Temple and monument entry fees (for Indian nationals only; foreign nationals will need to pay separately at some monuments)

### Exclusions

1. Photography and videography charges (need to be paid separately)
2. Additional refreshments like small eats, drinks
3. Any other aspect not mentioned in inclusions

### Payment and cancellation policy

1. Full payment to be made upfront

2. Full refund will be made if the tour is cancelled by the organizers.
3. 50% refund will be made if the customer cancels the booking within 20 days of departure.

### Things to note

1. The tour will involve enough walking outdoors in the day. Please ensure you carry your caps and sunglasses. Keep a bottle of water ready with you always to beat the heat.
2. Given the walking we will be doing, ensure you get a good pair of walking shoes that you're comfortable with, for the tour.
3. If you need things like medication, keep it handy and ensure you bring it along with yourselves. Do not depend on being able to buy such locally.
4. If you have any allergies, be sure to check explicitly on the food that will be served to you.
5. Please ensure you have enough cash for miscellaneous expenses you may incur. Do not depend on ATMs etc. locally to provide for this.
6. If you're not from the city where the tour departs from, it is best if you plan your arrival and departure one day on either side of the tour departure date at the least.