

Pilgrimage Tourism in Tiruchirappalli District with special reference to Rock Fort Temple

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Tiruchirappalli district is renowned for its cultural heritage and Vibrant Pilgrimage sites. Among those, the Rockfort stands as an iconic symbol of spiritual significance and historical intrigue. This article delves into the Pilgrimage tourism landscape of Tiruchirappalli with specific focus on the Rock fort. Beyond its religious appeal Rockfort contributes significantly to the local economy through tourism, supporting business and infrastructure development. Through a blend of historical Narrative and contemporary analysis this study aims to illuminate the enduring allure of Pilgrimage Tourism in Tiruchirappalli epitomized by the majestic Presence of the Rockfort.

Keywords: Uchchi Vinayaga-Self-manifest Lingam-Kundhalaraga-Lalithangura Pallaveshwara Girugam.

1. Introduction

Tiruchirappalli, known for its lively customs and rich cultural legacy, has grown to become a popular pilgrimage site in South India in addition to a thriving metropolis. This historic city, which is tucked away on the banks of the magnificent River Cauvery, is rich in spirituality, history, and centuries-old architectural wonders. Tiruchirappalli is a popular destination for pilgrims and tourists alike because of its quiet ashrams, revered temples, and the ambiance of devotion that permeates the whole place. This introduction lays the groundwork for discussing Tiruchirappalli's deep religious significance and distinctive cultural offerings for travellers looking to travel there for pilgrimage tourism and spiritual enrichment.

Rockfort

Tiruchirappalli's most iconic feature is a towering rock fort, rising 83 metres above the otherwise flat landscape of the city. This rock, estimated to be around 3,800 million years old, is among the oldest geological formations in the world, predating even the Himalayas. Its

abrupt ascent makes it visually striking, but the true highlight lies at its summit—a temple accessible via 427 steps carved directly into the stone. Inscriptions found at the site date back to the 3rd century CE. While much of the fort's structure has eroded, the Guard Gate remains intact. Historically, the fort was pivotal during the Carnatic Wars and is believed, as per an inscription, to have significantly contributed to the establishment of British rule in India.

Thayumanavaswamy

The temple is renowned for its exquisite architectural design, crafted entirely from rock. It is located on Mount Trisira, often referred to as the "Southern Kailash." Scientific studies suggest that the rock formation is approximately 3,500 million years old, making it older than Mount Kailash. The self-manifested lingam at the site is believed to represent the tip of one of Mount Trisira's three peaks, giving Lord Thayumanavar the title "Tender Sprout of the Mount." The mount features sacred shrines at its top, middle, and base. Additionally, the musician Thiyagabrahmam composed the raga "Kunthala" in honour of the goddess associated with this temple.

Architectural Beauty of the temple

At the summit of the rock stands the Uchipillaiyar Temple, dedicated to Lord Vinayaka, offering a breathtaking panoramic view of Tiruchirappalli. A flight of steps leads to the Thayumanavaswamy Temple, devoted to Lord Shiva, where the lingam is naturally formed as part of the rock itself. Below this temple are two ancient cave temples attributed to the Pallava period, along with a pavilion used during the temple's float festival. Nearby, a historic tank adds to the site's significance, alongside the house where Robert Clive resided during his time in Tiruchirappalli.

The Cave temple

There is a rock-cut cave temple in the middle of the mountain. It was built by the Pallava king. Mahendravarma in 6th century A.D. There are more than 18 inscriptions in the pillars, walls and ramparts of the rock cut cave. The temple has a beautiful chitra mandapam. All walls and ceiling are painted with drawings depicting puranic history. It also has beautiful sculptures, stone chains and stone yazhi with rotating stone balls in the moth. The Pilgrims can enjoy the minute art of eight bodied mokey with one face, bull-elephant with one face, dancing nataraja and so on.

Vasantha Mandapam

There is a sixteen pillared Vasanthamanadapam on the way to Ucchi Vinayagar temple. It was built by Tirunelveli Dalavaymudaliyar in 1630 C.E French and English troops were using this mandapam to watch enemies. Now a telescope has been placed here. We can see the city view as if it is very near.

Manimandapam

There is a Manimandapam built in 1918 near the Vasanthamandapam. There is a big copper bronze bell weighing 2 ½ tons, with 4.8 feet length and 4.6 feet branch. It was manufactured by the Railway Industries, Nagappattinam. Every day, it rings at 4.00a.m. 6.00a.m Statue of Grington, Railway superintendent of that day holding this bell is in Nagapattanam Railway Industry.

Mythology of the Temple

According to the Puranas, this region was once ruled by Tirisira, a demon and the brother of Ravana, who had three heads. The mount is named Tirisiragiri, meaning "Three-Headed Mount" or "Mount with Three Peaks," in his honour. Tirisira worshipped Lord Shiva and performed a rigorous penance, offering two of his heads into the holy fire. Despite his sacrifices, Lord Shiva did not appear. As Tirisira prepared to sacrifice his third and final head, Lord Shiva appeared before him on his Rishaba Vahana (bull vehicle) and granted him numerous boons in recognition of his devotion.

Four-face profile of the Mountain

Trisiramalai presents a unique visual appearance depending on the direction from which it is viewed. From the east, it resembles Lord Vinayaka; from the north, it takes the shape of a peacock. Seen from the west, it appears like an anchored ship, while from the south, it looks like a seated bull or an elephant.

Chetty Girl Medical Care

Lord Siva, the father of all souls in this world became a mother too here for a devotee 'Ratnavathi'. Long ago, Rathnavathi was married to 'Dhana Guptan' in Tirisirapuram, Rathnavathy prayed Chevvanthinadhar and She became pregnant, she prayed Lord Chevvanthinathar daily for normal delivery. Due to flood in Cauvery, her mother who came with medicines, oils, etc necessary for delivery was not able to reach her. To relieve Ratnavathi from grievance, Lord Chevvanthinathar came as her mother. He gave her required medical care. From that day Chevvanthinathar is known as 'Thayumanavar'.

The History of Thayumanavar turning west

Saramamunivar, a devoted ascetic and descendant of Thirumoolar, cultivated a flower garden dedicated to Lord Thayumanavar. He grew special flowers, said to have been gifted by the serpent king, and offered them daily to the deity, known as Chevvanthinathar. During the reign of Parantaka Chola over Uraiyur, a flower merchant unlawfully plucked the sacred blooms and presented them to the king. Despite Saramamunivar's complaint, the king refused to punish the merchant. Deeply grieved, the ascetic prayed to Lord Thayumanavar. In anger, the deity, previously facing east, turned westward and brought about the destruction of Uraiyur with a sandstorm. The king perished, but his pregnant queen gave birth to Karikala Chola, the legendary ruler who later constructed Kallanai, a stone dam across the Cauvery River. Karikala also created the sacred tank of this shrine, known as Somarogini or Brahma Theertha, situated on NSB Road. An idol of Saramamunivar, depicted with corn, stands before the kodimaram, symbolising the destruction of Uraiyur.

Ucchi Vinayagar

After the carnation of Sri Rama, Vibhisana took leave from him. Sri Rama presented him the idol of Sri Renganatha worshipped by his ancestors, with the instruction that it would settle if placed on earth. Vibishana desired to install it in srilanka. On his way to Srilanka he wanted to take bath in Cauvery. Vinayaka appeared before him as a small boy. Vibhisana asked him to told it for some time. The boy called Vibhishana thrice and put it down. Vibhisana found it impossible to lift the idol of Renganatha and gave a strong stroke on the head of the boy who

turned as vinayaka. Till now, there is a deep curve on the head of Vinayaka as a mark of the stroke he received. We can see the foot mark of Vibhisana on rock.

Festivals

Aadi (Aadi Pooram) 11 Days

During the Tamil month of Aadi (July-August), there is a noteworthy celebration called Aadi Pooram. It honours the goddess Amman over eleven days, highlighting her divine qualities and deeds. Numerous rites and processions in the deity's honour are part of the celebration. Devotees have historically taken part in unique prayers, sacrifices, and cultural gatherings that showcase the goddess's attributes. The colourful celebrations of Aadi Pooram, which frequently include traditional music, dancing, and processions, are well-known.

Avani (Vinayagar Chaturthi) – 14 Days

During the Tamil month of Avani (August–September), people celebrate Vinayagar Chaturthi (also called Vinayaka Chaturthi) for a period of 14 days. Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed god regarded as the remover of obstacles, is honoured at this festival. Making and worshipping clay statues of Ganesha, saying prayers, and taking part in elaborate processions are all part of the festivities. On the last day, devotees immerse the statues in bodies of water to represent the god's return to his heavenly home. The holiday is characterised by colourful décor, hymns, and group dining.

Purattasi (Navarathri) – 10 Days

Navarathri is a 10-day celebration devoted to the worship of the goddess Durga in her different manifestations, taking place during the Tamil month of Purattasi (September–October). Navarathri is a holiday celebrated with fasting, prayer, and complex ceremonies. Each day of the festival is linked to a different facet of the goddess. The last day, sometimes called Dussehra or Vijayadashami, represents the victory of good over evil. The temple hosts devotional chanting, special processions, and cultural events at this time.

KandhaSasti – 7 Days

The festival of KandhaSasti is devoted to Lord Murugan, the son of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati, and lasts for seven days. Usually, it occurs in Karthikai, the month of November or December in Tamil. Severe devotion, including fasting and penance, is observed during the holiday. Specimen prayers, processions, and recitals of the Kanda Puranam—a holy book devoted to Murugan—are all part of the devotions. The last day, Soorasamharam, honours Murugan's triumph over the demon Soorapadman.

Panguni (TheppaThiruvila) – 10 Days

Held in the Tamil month of Panguni (March–April), TheppaThiruvila or TheppaUtsavam is a 10-day float festival. The deity is carried through the temple tank on a float known as a theppa during the festival. This ceremony, which is visually stunning due to the deity's array of decorations, represents the deity's voyage across the oceans. Around the tank, devotees congregate to observe the float parade and take part in unique rites and prayers.

Chithirai (Thiru Ther) – 14 Days

During the Tamil month of Chithirai (April–May), there is a 14-day festival called Thiru Ther or Ther Thiruvila. The temple chariot (ther) is a prominent feature of the festival's elaborate processions. Devotees pull the ornately painted chariot through the streets of the town housing the temple. The celebration honours the presence of the deity and is characterised by extravagant offerings, community involvement, and devotional singing.

Vasantha Urchavam – 10 Days

The springtime celebration of Vasantha Urchavam lasts for ten days. It is devoted to greeting the god during the time of rebirth and blossoming flowers. The event includes a number of ceremonies and rituals that represent the coming of spring and the rebirth of spiritual force. During this period, there are special prayers, processions, and cultural events.

Thiru Karthigai Deepam

Held in the Tamil month of Karthikai (November–December), Thiru Karthigai Deepam is a noteworthy celebration. During the celebration, prayers are offered to Lord Murugan and lights are lit. Oil lamps are lit in homes and temples to commemorate the event, bringing a calm yet joyous ambience. For devotees, light represents the presence of God and the eradication of ignorance and darkness.

The Rock Fort Thayumanavaswamy Temple in Tiruchirappalli is highly revered by pilgrims, attracting devotees from far and wide. Situated atop a magnificent 273-foot high rock, the temple holds great reverence as a holy place devoted to Lord Shiva, referred to as Thayumanavaswamy, or "The God who became a Mother." The origin of this special title is based on a beloved tale in which Lord Shiva, touched by the faith of a pregnant woman, transformed into her mother to aid her during the delivery. The act of divine compassion is a profound symbol of the Lord's mercy and concern for his followers, which has made the temple a highly respected destination for those seeking blessings for maternal health and family welfare.

Significance of Pilgrimage Tourism in Rock Fort

The pilgrimage to Thayumanavaswamy Temple holds great importance, as it offers not only a spiritual journey but also a chance to witness breathtaking architecture. The temple, carved into the ancient rock, stands as a remarkable testament to the remarkable craftsmanship and unwavering dedication of the Pallava and Nayak dynasties. Visitors to the temple are often captivated by the exquisite rock-cut sanctum and the breathtaking views of Tiruchirappalli from the temple's elevated position, enhancing the overall sense of spirituality.

For numerous followers, making a journey during Shivaratri holds a unique and profound meaning. During this sacred night, the temple is filled with vibrant ceremonies and heartfelt prayers, as devoted individuals observe fasting, engage in deep meditation, and earnestly seek the divine blessings of Lord Shiva. The ascent to the temple, despite its challenging incline, is regarded as a means of atonement and dedication, with every stride drawing the pilgrim nearer to celestial blessings. In addition, the Rock Fort complex also includes the Uchchi Pillaiyar Temple, which is devoted to Lord Ganesha. Many people make a point to visit both shrines, as they believe that paying homage to Ganesha first helps to eliminate any obstacles, resulting

in a more rewarding and blessed visit to the Thayumanavaswamy Temple. In Tamil Nadu, a pilgrimage to the Rock Fort Thayumanavaswamy Temple is an experience that combines faith, history, and the breathtaking beauty of nature. It is highly recommended for those in search of spiritual fulfillment.

2. Conclusion

The cultural and economic character of Tiruchirappalli is based on pilgrimage tourism of Rockfort. With its breathtaking design and rich historical background, the Rockfort temple draws a large number of pilgrims and visitors, greatly boosting the local economy in the travel, retail, and hotel industries. Its importance as a major pilgrimage site must be preserved and enhanced, therefore meeting infrastructure needs, guaranteeing environmental sustainability, and enhancing safety and security protocols are imperative. More visitors and a greater understanding of Rockfort's history can be attained through efficient marketing and promotion. In addition to promoting economic expansion, pilgrimage tourism to Rockfort maintains and honours the area's unique religious and cultural heritage. Through sustained investment and maintenance, Tiruchirappalli can guarantee that Rockfort will continue to be a cherished and bustling destination for many years to come.

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