

## **SPIRITUAL AND HERITAGE DESTINATIONS OF SOUTH**

**INDIA** Hello viewers,

welcome to the episode on spiritual and heritage destinations of south India. Southern India is famous for its temples which receives huge number of pilgrims from all over the country and abroad. Apart from temples, south Indian style of art and architecture mesmerizes everyone, and such temples, monuments and buildings acquire the fame as heritage destinations. For better understanding, this episode is divided into five parts:

- SPIRITUAL DESTINATIONS OF TIRUPATHI, SRISAILAM, KANCHIPURAM, MADURAI, SRIRANGAM
- SPIRITUAL DESTINATIONS OF KUMBAKONAM, RAMESHWARAM, VELANKANNI,
- SPIRITUAL DESTINATIONS OF SHRAVANABELAGOLA, UDUPI, GOKARNA, GURUVAYOOR, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
- HERITAGE DESTINATIONS OF HAMPI, BELUR, HALEBID, VIJAYAPURA, BADAMI, AIHOLE, PATTADAKAL AND MYSURU
- HERITAGE DESTINATIONS OF THANJAVUR, MAHABALIPURAM, HYDERABAD, CHIDAMBARAM, PUDUCHERRY

### **SPIRITUAL DESTINATIONS OF TIRUPATHI, SRISAILAM, KANCHIPURAM, MADURAI, SRIRANGAM**

#### **TIRUPATHI:**

Located on the foothills of Tirumalai in the Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. Tirupati is one of the most famous and sacred pilgrimage site in India. The deity Lord Venkateshwara (also known as Balaji) is believed to receive more number of worshippers throughout the year than any of the temples in India. The magnificent temple is also said to be one of the richest temple in India. Many kings and rulers were said to be the devotees of this holy temple. The temple is now under the administration of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam committee which organizes various utsavas and celebrations in Tirupati.

## **SRISAILAM:**

Srisailam is located in Karnool district of Andhra Pradesh is another ancient city of temples known for its religious, cultural and historical significance. Srisailam is dated back to 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, to the period of shatavahanas who were the builders of first empire in southern India and temple of Lord Mallikarjuna is believed to be existed even before shatavahanas. The Lord Mallikarjuna was also worshipped many rulers of Shatavahanas, Pallavas, Chalukyas, Kakatiyas, Reddy kings, the emperors of Vijayanagar and Chatrapathi Shivaji. The specialty about the temple is that each and every person can go into the sanctum sanctorum of Mallikarjuna, touch the idol and perform Abhishekam and Archana himself.

## **KANCHIPURAM,**

Kanchipuram is the home of goddess Kanchi Kamakshi Amman, one of the 51 Shakti peetas across India. Located near the Capitol Chennai in Tamil Nadu, Kanchipuram is also known as Satyavrita Kshetra. Lord Shiva also resides in the temple followed by another eight shakti goddesss surrounding the temple. Kanchi Kailasanatha Temple is said to be oldest temple in Tamil Nadu.

Apart from the Kamakshi amman temple and Kailasanatha temple, pilgrims and tourists can also visit Ekambareshwar temple, Kanchi kudil, Vedanthangal bird sanctuary. Kanchipuram is also famous for its silk sarees all over the country.

## **MADURAI,**

Madurai is famous for the “Meenakshi Amman Temple” which is one of the huge temples in Tamil Nadu. Built by Pandyas, the history of the temple dates back to 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. The invasion of Malik Kapur in 1310 resulted in destruction of the ancient temple. However, a new temple was built by Hindu Kings around 17<sup>th</sup> Century has wonderful architecture. Visitors to Madurai can also pay a visit to Murugan temple, Gandhi Museum, Samanar Hills, Koodal Azghar temple and Pazhamudhir Solai temple.

## **SRIRANGAM:**

Srirangam is an island situated in the district of Trichy of Tamil Nadu. Situated between the rivers of Cauvery and Kollidam in the form of an island, Srirangam is

another important pilgrimage place for Hindus. The temple of Sri Ranganatha, which is one of the 108 vaishnava temples in India has spiritual, historic and cultural significance. It is said that the temple dates back to the aboriginal Indians and the region was known as Coromandel Coast which had the trading with China and Europe. The rajagopuram (the tower) has 236 feet high and it is said that the coastline of Sri Lanka can be seen from the top of the Rajagopuram.

## **SPIRITUAL DESTINATIONS OF KUMBAKONAM, RAMESHWARAM, VELANKANNI**

### **KUMBAKONAM**

Kumbakonam, or 'the town of the celestial pot', is a famous pilgrim centre in Tamil Nadu. This temple town is perhaps the most special destination in the Cauvery Delta. Kumbakonam is a beautiful temple town, situated between the tranquil waters of river Cauvery and Arasalar. It has got enormous religious significance for Hindus and is a place of reverence. The temple structures are filled with wonderful art and architectural excellence. It is said that there are 188 temples within the town of Kumbakonam. Some of the important temples are the Kumbeshwar temple, Sarangpani temple and Ramaswamy temple. Mahamaham festival celebrated every year in which people from across the country attend.

### **RAMESHWARAM**

Rameshwaram is a revered pilgrim center in the Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu. Rameshwaram is one among the Charidham (four pilgrimages) and houses one of the twelve Jyothirlingas and is located on the Rameshwaram or Punban island which is on the tip of Indian Peninsula. It is believed that the temple of Ramanathaswamy is built by the lord Rama, the temple was developed during 12<sup>th</sup> century AD to be as a colossal and magnificent temple complex. The temple corridors are 1220 meters in length making them one of the longest temple corridors in the country ever built.

Tourists can also visit nearby attractions like Ramanathapuram, Tirupullani, Uthirakosamangai, Rama Sethu (Adam's Bridge), etc., and shop beautiful items made from seashells, beads, palm leaves, near the temple.

## **VELANKANNI**

Velankanni is a religious hub for the catholics in India. Situated in the state of Tamil Nadu, Velankanni served as a major port for the local to trade with Greeks and Romans. Velankanni cathedral was constructed during 16<sup>th</sup> century in gothic design and houses the “Our lady of Good Health” which is devoted to the mother of Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary.

## **SPIRITUAL DESTINATIONS OF SHRAVANABELAGOLA, UDUPI, GOKARNA, GURUVAYOOR, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**

### **SHRAVANABELAGOLA**

Shravanabelagola is a famous Jain Pilgrimage place about 51Kms from the District of Hassan and 100 Kms from Mysuru, Karnataka. Shravanabelagola is popular for religious as well as natural attractions. Situated on the hill is the monolith of Lord Bahubali which is 17.38 meters high is biggest monolithic sculpture in Asia. the hills have a number of Jain Basadis which are the biggest numbers in the world. Shravanabelagola is also known for “Mahamasthakabhisheka” which takes place once every 12 years. During the Mahamasthakabhisheka, the statue of Bahubali is showered with various milk, coloured waters which is a eye catching event in the town.

### **UDUPI**

Udupi is a notable pilgrimage place situated in Udupi district of Karnataka. Udupi means the land of the lord of stars is famous for Sri Krishna temple and Mutt. The Krishna Mutt was founded by Sri Madhvacharya in 13<sup>th</sup> Century. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Kanakadasa, a dedicated believer of Lord Krishna came to Udupi but, he was not allowed to enter the temple. With his devotional praise, the lord turned to face the window and this window came to be known as ‘Kanakana kindi’. Though all temples in India have the idols facing the entrance, the idol of Udupi temple faces towards a window in the back.

Udupi is also famous for Paryaya festival held once every 2 years, Krishna janmashtami, Rathotsava (Chariot festival). Tourists can also visit Malpe Beach, St. Mary's island.

## **GOKARNA**

Gokarna is situated on the western coast of state of Karnataka. It is a small town and a pilgrimage site with about 1500 year old Sri Mahabaleshwara Temple. It is believed that lord Shiva has emerged from the ear of a cow giving the meaning Gokarna (in Sanskrit, 'Go' means Cow and 'Karna' means Ear. Lord Mahabaleshwara (Shiva)'s idol is in standing position.

Apart from the beautiful temple, Gokarna is also famous for its secluded beaches. The Om beach is the important beach which attracts the tourists with the promise of peace and calmness.

## **GURUVAYOOR**

Guruvayoor is a famous pilgrimage destination in the state of Kerala. Derived from the names of three deities, Guru, Vayu and Oor, Guruvayur is famous for the Sri Krishna Temple which is believed to be one of the 108 most sacred temples in India dedicated to lord Vishnu. The temple is also famous for the oil lamps which are lit around the temple and also "Krishnattam" in which the tales of life of Krishna were enacted with dance performances which is unique for this temple.

## **THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**

Thiruvananthapuram is another important pilgrimage place located in the state of Kerala. Known as Trivendrum, Thiruvananthapuram is the capital of Kerala is famous for Lord Ananthapadmanabha Temple. The deity, Padmanabha swamy (Lord Vishnu) is reclined under the hood of "Anantha" the great serpent god and the temple is now known as another one of the richest temple in south India apart from Tirupathi. Thiruvananthapuram was the capital of the rulers of Travancore also has historical significance.

Tourists also visit Kovalam beach and a number of museums and art galleries dedicated to Raja Ravi Verma in the city. The festival of Onam can be experienced

by the tourists spread through the months of August and September for ten days in total.

## **HERITAGE DESTINATIONS OF HAMPI, BELUR, HALEBID, VIJAYAPURA, BADAMI, AIHOLE, PATTADAKAL AND MYSORE**

### **HAMPI**

Hampi is located in the district of Ballary in state of Karnataka. Hampi, also known as Halu Hampi (Ruined Hampi) was once the historic capital of the Vijayanagar empire in the 14th century lies on the banks of the Tungabhadra River. It a very important historic place in Southern India and is a UNESCO world heritage site with over 500 Monuments spread across Acres. Hampi is surrounded by Rocky Mountains and mammoth boulders seemingly precariously balanced on each other.

Hampi houses many palaces, temples and forts and it is said that during the rule of the Vijayanagar empire, diamonds were sold on the streets in cup measures. Hampi is also famous for its 'Hampi Utsav' that takes place in the first week of November which is a cultural exhibition of music and dance and the monuments are lit which also adds to the attraction.

### **BELUR AND HALEBIDU**

Often called together, Belur and Halebidu are twin towns located in the District of Hassan in the state of Karnataka. Built around 12<sup>th</sup> Century by Hoysalas. Belur was the first capital of the Hoysala empire. During the ruler 'Vishnuvardhana' the capital was shifted to 'Halebidu' was was earlier called 'Dwarasamudra'. Both the towns house a number of temples and much of the temples are carved on Chloritic Schist (a soft stone). The Chennakeshava temple (lord Vishnu) is a place of worship for Hindus and the temple complex is full of beautiful art and architecture and also dancing dasis (Shilabalikas). Halebidu is situated at 35Kms from Belur also houses a temple of "Lord Shiva". The vehicle of Lord Shiva "Nandi" (Bull) is placed in front of the temple which is more artistic. Apart from Hindu temple, there are Jain Basadis near Halebidu which the tourists can also visit. Other places nearby are the Yagachi Dam, Shravanabelagola and Archaeological Museum.

## **VIJAYAPURA (BIJAPUR)**

Vijayapura, located in the state of Karnataka, is famous for its grand historical monuments which have interesting tales to tell about that period. Vijayapura was under the rule of Adil Shahi kings for about two centuries from 15<sup>th</sup> century and Yusuf Adil Shahi was the first ruler and during this period many historical monuments are built which attracts the tourists from all over. The city of Vijayapura is home to several world-famous attractions like Gol Gumbaz (a building with famous circular dome which can be seen from a distance, even before entering into the city), Ibrahim Rauza, Jumma Masjid and Malik-e-Maidan and barah kaman.

## **BADAMI AIHOLE AND PATTADAKAL**

Badami, Aihole and Pattadakal are some of the main heritage attractions in north Karnataka. Pattadakal is another UNESCO world heritage site apart from Hampi. The three sites were under the rule of “Chalukyas” and almost 3/4<sup>th</sup> of India was ruled by Pulakeshi – II of Chalukyas. Some experts believe that the temple architecture in India began from these places.

It is believed that the initial temples have been constructed in Aihole (125 in total) which still are in decent shape. Pattadakal is situated about 14Kms from Aihole which has amazing temples which have evolved with beautiful designs and architecture. The name Pattadakal means the Rock on which the prince was sworn in as a King or ruler. The site is located on the banks of the river Malaprabha which houses many temples dedicated to Lord Shiva.

Badami is another interesting historical site located about 23Kms from Pattadakal. Earlier known as “Vatapi”. Badami houses 4 important rock cut caves form the temples dedicated to Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva and last one dedicated to Jain Guru. These temples have magnificent art and design which tell the stories of the lords. But, these temples have lost their holiness since the temples doesn't have the idols for worship. There is a fort constructed above the mountain during the rule of Tipu Sultan.

## **MYSURU**

Mysuru earlier known as Mysore is located in the southern part of the state of Karnataka. The city itself has historical significance and tourists can find themselves in a city of grand palaces, tree-lined avenues, beautiful gardens and sacred temples. The city is also called as Heritage city with the splendid Ambavilasa (known as Mysore palace), Jaganmohan Palace and Museum and a host of other palaces welcome the tourists all over the world with their superb architecture which showcases the culture, tradition and a way of life of the Rajas.

Mysore is also world famous for Mysore Dasara, Mysore Silk sarees, Sandalwood and sandalwood crafts, sandalwood sticks Jasmine, handlooms and handicrafts, stone artifacts and beautiful souvenirs. Mysore is also known as Yoga hub and thousands of people come from all over the world to learn yoga in Mysore.

There are other places to visit in Mysore. The Brindavan Gardens, Chamundi Hills, St. Philomina Church, Mysore Zoo, Avadootha Datta peetam, Jayalakshmvilas museum, Karanji lake, LalithaMahal pal ace hotel and many museums.

## **HERITAGE DESTINATIONS OF THANJAVUR, MAHABALIPURAM, HYDERABAD, CHIDAMBARAM, PUDUCHERRY**

### **THANJAVUR**

Thanjavur (Tanjore) is located in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. Thanjavur is an ancient city located on the banks of the river Cauveri is rich in cultural and historical heritage, Thanjavur was ruled by the Chola empire who immensely admired the fine arts and music that formed the very base of the South India.

This Brahadeeswara Temple, is an UNESCO World Heritage Site, built in the 11th Century AD. There are a number of other ancient temples and forts in the city too. The city is recognized worldwide for its antiques and meticulous handicrafts. Tanjore is also the birth place of Carnatic music and Bharathanatyam.



## **MAHABALIPURAM**

Mahabalipuram is situated about 56Kms from the Capital city of Tamil Nadu, Chennai. Mahabalipuram is famous for some of the oldest carvings on granite is an archeologist delight. This city boasts a large collection of ornate stone-carvings, made on uncut rocks, which lay scattered in the complex and make it seem like an open museum. Destroyed to a large degree by soil and wind erosion, the magnificent Sea Shore Temple has been recognised by UNESCO for revival and restoration.

Mahabalipuram is also a great destination for a lazy beach holiday, and tourists can savor delicious seafood. There are many shops for buying artistic souvenirs and tourists can also see how the carving works are done on the granites are done in these shops.

## **CHIDAMBARAM**

Chidambaram is an important pilgrimage as well as a heritage destination. located in the state of Tamil Nadu, Chidambaram is famous for the large Nataraja Temple complex dedicated to Lord Shiva as the divine dancer. The temple complex is spread over 40 acres. The thousand pillared hall is another architectural marvel.

Tourists who visit Chidambaram can also see Pichavaram which has a huge mangrove forest and a range of sports activities like canoeing, rowing and parasailing can be done in Chidambaram.

## **HYDERABAD**

Hyderabad, also known as city of pearls is located in the state of Telangana. The city is an example of structural masterpieces and rich cultural heritage. The city has an history of over 400 years and witnessed rise and fall of many kingdoms. Charminar is the icon of the city built by Quli Qutubh Shah.

Other important tourist attractions are the Golconda Fort situated on the western outskirts of Hyderabad city. It is said that the famous Kohinoor diamond originally belonged to Golconda. Husain Sagar Lake, which houses a huge statue of Buddha in on an island in the lake, is accessible by boat, Birla Mandir, Lumbini Garden, Ramoji Film City and a host of museums.

## **PUDUCHERRY**

Puducherry is a (Earlier known as Pondicherry) was the oldest French Colony in the East Coast of India located near the state of Tamil Nadu. In 1674, a French governor by name Francois Marin transformed this small fishing village into a port town. It is a Union Territory of India and even to this day, many speak French and the roads are named in French language.

Puducherry is famous for internationally famous “Sri Aurobindo Ashram”, Nehru Junction, Lal Bahadur Shastri Street for shopping (Rue Bussy), Mahatma Gandhi (MG) Rd and Mission Street and Cathedral street worth tourist visit.

To sum up,

Southern India is home to the some of the important Hindu Pilgrimage places like Tirupathi, Kanchipuram, Rameshwaram, Udupi, Velankanni, Guruvayur, Thiruvananthapuram etc, and also there are various heritage sites like Hampi, badami, aihole, pattadakal, Mysore, Mahabalipuram, Chidambaram, Thanjavur and other important places which are known for their uniqueness in art and architecture.