

ICFMCF 2026*International Conference on Financial Markets and Corporate Finance**IIT Madras | 4-5 July 2026***VISITOR'S GUIDE***Exploring Chennai & Beyond*

Beaches · Temples · Heritage · Art · Day Trips

Welcome to Chennai

Chennai — the cultural capital of South India — offers conference delegates a rare confluence of ancient Dravidian heritage, colonial history, vibrant arts, and breezy coastline. The city sits on the Coromandel Coast of the Bay of Bengal and is home to IIT Madras, one of India's premier research institutions and the proud host of ICFMCF 2026.

This guide covers the best of Chennai's beaches, religious landmarks, historical monuments, and art spaces, followed by curated day-trip itineraries to nearby towns — Mahabalipuram, Kanchipuram, Pulicat, Pondicherry, and Tirupati — each within comfortable reach during your stay.

At a Glance — Chennai Highlights

Category	Place	Area / Locality	Highlight	Location
Beach	Marina Beach	Triplicane	One of the world's longest urban beaches	https://maps.google.com/?q=Marina+Beach+Chennai
Beach	Elliot's Beach	Besant Nagar	Quieter, cleaner; perfect for evenings	https://maps.google.com/?q=Elliot's+Beach+Basant+Nagar
Temple	Kapaleeshwarar Temple	Mylapore	Iconic Dravidian gopuram & street markets	https://maps.google.com/?q=Kapaleeshwarar+Temple+Mylapore
Temple	Ashtalakshmi Temple	Besant Nagar	Unique 8-Lakshmi shrine by the sea	https://maps.google.com/?q=Ashtalakshmi+Temple+Basant+Nagar

Category	Place	Area / Locality	Highlight	Location
Temple	ISKCON Temple Chennai	East Coast Road	Grand Krishna temple; serene atmosphere	https://maps.google.com/?q=ISKCON+Temple+Chennai+ECR
Heritage	Fort St. George	George Town	First British fortress in India (1644)	https://maps.google.com/?q=Fort+St+George+Chennai
Museum	Government Museum Chennai	Egmore	Chola bronzes & Roman coin collection	https://maps.google.com/?q=Government+Museum+Egmore+Chennai
Science	Birla Planetarium Chennai	Kotturpuram	Space shows & science galleries	https://maps.google.com/?q=Birla+Planetarium+Chennai
Cultural	Kalakshetra Foundation	Thiruvanmiyur	Classical Bharatanatyam & Carnatic music	https://maps.google.com/?q=Kalakshetra+Foundation+Chennai

1. Beaches

1.1 Marina Beach

Marina Beach is one of the longest urban beaches in the world, stretching nearly 13 km along the Bay of Bengal. The broad sandy promenade is lined with statues of Tamil leaders, street food stalls selling sundal and bajji, and horse-ride vendors. Sunrise here is spectacular and draws thousands of early walkers every morning.

Best Time	5:30 AM – 8:00 AM (sunrise) or after 5:00 PM
Location	Triplicane, Central Chennai
Key Sights	Lighthouse, Anna Memorial, MGR Samadhi, aquarium
Tips	Avoid midday heat (April–June). Watch your valuables in crowds.

1.2 Elliot's Beach (Bessie Beach)

A calmer, cleaner alternative to Marina, Elliot's Beach in Besant Nagar is popular with families, joggers, and the college crowd. The nearby Ashtalakshmi Temple and a row of trendy cafés make the neighbourhood one of Chennai's most pleasant evening hangouts.

Best Time	4:30 PM – 7:00 PM (sunset hours)
Location	Besant Nagar, South Chennai
Atmosphere	Relaxed; less crowded than Marina
Tips	New Year's Eve is especially lively here.

2. Religious Landmarks

2.1 Kapaleeshwarar Temple

This 7th-century Shiva temple in Mylapore is Chennai's most celebrated religious site and a masterpiece of Dravidian architecture. The towering multicoloured gopuram (gateway tower), sacred tank, and bustling streets lined with flower sellers and traditional shops create an atmosphere that feels unchanged by centuries.

Best Time	6:00 AM – 8:00 AM or 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM (aarti timings)
Location	Mylapore, Central Chennai
Festival	Panguni Peruvizha (March/April) — grand chariot procession
Tips	Dress conservatively; remove footwear at the entrance.

2.2 Ashtalakshmi Temple

Perched on a small rocky promontory by the sea in Besant Nagar, this unique modern temple is dedicated to the eight forms of Goddess Lakshmi. Each form is enshrined in a separate floor, and the sound of waves combined with devotional music makes for a uniquely serene visit.

Best Time	Morning or early evening
Location	Besant Nagar (near Elliot's Beach)
Feature	Sea-facing location; eight shrines across multiple floors

2.3 ISKCON Temple Chennai

Located on the scenic East Coast Road, this large and beautifully maintained Krishna temple is known for its peaceful atmosphere, elaborate deity decorations, and devotional music. The temple complex also runs a restaurant and a gift shop.

Best Time	Evening aarti (6:30 PM onwards)
Location	East Coast Road (ECR), South Chennai
Festival	Janmashtami — celebrated with great grandeur

3. Historical & Heritage Sites

3.1 Fort St. George

Built in 1644, Fort St. George was the first English fortress in India and the nucleus around which the city of Madras (now Chennai) grew. Today it houses the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, a museum with colonial-era artifacts, and St. Mary's Church — the oldest Anglican church in Asia.

Best Time	9:00 AM – 1:00 PM
Location	George Town, North Chennai
Museum	Fort Museum — coins, stamps, portraits of colonial governors

Landmark St. Mary's Church (1680) — oldest Anglican church in Asia

3.2 Government Museum, Chennai

Established in 1851, the Government Museum in Egmore is one of India's oldest museums. Its highlights include the National Art Gallery's bronze collection (some of the finest Chola bronzes anywhere in the world), a gallery of Roman antiquities, and extensive archaeological and natural history sections.

Timings 9:30 AM – 5:00 PM (closed Fridays & national holidays)
Location Pantheon Road, Egmore
Must-See Chola bronze hall, Roman coin gallery, natural history section
Entry Nominal fee; free for children under 5

3.3 Birla Planetarium

One of the largest planetariums in Asia, Birla Planetarium in Kotturpuram offers immersive sky shows, science exhibits, and interactive galleries. It is a rewarding visit for delegates interested in science communication and public education.

Timings Show schedules: 11:00 AM, 2:00 PM & 4:00 PM (check current schedule)
Location Kotturpuram

4. Art, Culture & Nature

4.1 Kalakshetra Foundation

Founded in 1936, Kalakshetra is a UNESCO-recognized cultural institution and India's most prestigious centre for classical Bharatanatyam dance and Carnatic music. The sprawling campus of traditional tiled buildings, studios, and gardens in Thiruvanimiyur is a world apart from the city's bustle.

Best Time Late afternoon; check for performance schedules
Location Thiruvanimiyur, South Chennai
Must-Do Attend a live Bharatanatyam performance if timing permits

4.2 Cholamandal Artists' Village

India's largest artists' commune, Cholamandal was established in 1966 by artists who wanted to live and create together. The village contains open galleries, sculpture parks, and working studios of contemporary Indian painters and sculptors. Visits feel like stepping into a living art ecosystem.

Best Time 10:00 AM – 5:30 PM (closed Tuesdays)
Location Injambakkam, East Coast Road
Highlight Open-air sculpture garden; rotating gallery shows

4.3 Semmozhi Poonga (Botanical Garden)

A beautifully landscaped botanical garden in the heart of the city, Semmozhi Poonga houses over 500 plant species across themed sections — medicinal plants, ferns, cacti, and aquatic plants. The garden is a popular morning and evening retreat for locals and visitors alike.

Timings	9:00 AM – 8:00 PM
Location	Cathedral Road, Teynampet
Entry	Small fee; photography allowed

4.4 Guindy National Park & Pallikaranai Marshland

Guindy National Park is a rarity — a national park within city limits, home to spotted deer, blackbucks, jackals, and over 130 bird species. For birdwatching enthusiasts, the Pallikaranai Marshland is one of the last surviving natural wetlands in Chennai, hosting thousands of migratory birds from November to January.

Guindy Park	Guindy, near Raj Bhavan; open 9:00 AM – 5:30 PM
Pallikaranai	Pallikaranai, South Chennai; best at dawn
Tip	Binoculars strongly recommended for birdwatching

5. Day Trips from Chennai

Chennai is ideally positioned as a base for exploring some of South India's most historically and spiritually significant destinations. The following towns are all accessible as comfortable day trips by road.

5.1 Mahabalipuram (Mamallapuram) — ~60 km South

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Mahabalipuram was the port city of the Pallava dynasty (7th–8th century AD) and contains some of the finest rock-cut sculpture and shore temples in the world. The Shore Temple stands dramatically at the edge of the Bay of Bengal, while the Five Rathas (monolithic chariot temples) and Arjuna's Penance (the world's largest open-air bas-relief) are extraordinary artistic achievements.

Distance	~60 km via ECR (1–1.5 hours drive)
Must-See	Shore Temple, Five Rathas, Arjuna's Penance, Krishna's Butter Ball
Best Time	6:00 AM – 10:00 AM or 4:00 PM – 6:30 PM (avoid midday heat)
Tips	Wear comfortable shoes; bring sunscreen and a hat. Entry fee applies.
Also Visit	Tiger Cave, Lighthouse, local artisan stone-carving workshops

5.2 Kanchipuram — ~75 km South-West

One of India's seven sacred cities (Sapta Puri), Kanchipuram was the Pallava and Chola capital and is known as the 'City of a Thousand Temples'. It is also India's premier centre for hand-woven silk sarees — the renowned Kanjivaram silk, coveted across the country and world.

Distance	~75 km (about 2 hours drive)
Key Temples	Kailasanathar Temple (oldest), Ekambareswarar Temple, Kamakshi Amman Temple, Vaikunta Perumal Temple
Shopping	Kanjivaram silk sarees from weavers' cooperatives and established silk houses
Best Time	Early morning temple visits; saree shopping in late morning
Tips	Allow a full day; comfortable footwear essential (long walking between temples)

5.3 Pulicat — ~60 km North

Pulicat is home to the second largest brackish-water lagoon in India, the Pulicat Lake, which is a celebrated flamingo and pelican sanctuary. The town also carries significant historical weight as the site of the earliest Dutch and Danish settlement in India, with the ruins of a 17th-century Dutch fort still visible.

Distance	~60 km north via NH16 (1.5 hours drive)
Highlights	Pulicat Lake Bird Sanctuary, Dutch Cemetery, Fort ruins
Best Season	November to January for flamingo flocks; avoid monsoon months
Tips	Carry binoculars; local boat rides available for lake exploration

5.4 Pondicherry (Puducherry) — ~160 km South

A former French colony, Pondicherry has a unique dual character — a French Quarter (Ville Blanche) of mustard-yellow colonial buildings, bougainvillea-draped lanes, and café culture, set against a Tamil Quarter of traditional South Indian life. The Sri Aurobindo Ashram and the experimental township of Auroville draw thousands of spiritual seekers. The waterfront Promenade is one of India's most charming seaside boulevards.

Distance	~160 km via ECR (3 hours drive)
Must-See	French Quarter, Pondicherry Promenade, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville Matrimandir
Cuisine	French Creole cafés, seafood, local Tamil cuisine — all excellent
Shopping	Handmade paper, leather goods, Auroville products, local artisan crafts
Tips	An overnight stay is recommended to fully experience the town; check Auroville booking in advance

5.5 Tirupati (Tirumala) — ~140 km North-West

Tirupati is home to the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple, one of the most visited pilgrimage sites on earth. The hilltop deity, Lord Venkateswara (Balaji), is one of the wealthiest and most revered Hindu shrines, attracting tens of thousands of devotees every single day. The journey up the Tirumala Hills through forested ghats is itself memorable.

Distance	~140 km via NH716 (3 hours drive; or Shatabdi Express from Chennai Central)
Key Visit	Tirumala Venkateswara Temple (darshan booking strongly recommended in advance online)

Also See	Padmavathi Temple (Tiruchanur), ISKCON Tirupati, Silathoranam natural rock arch
Tips	Book special darshan quota well in advance at tirupatibalaji.ap.gov.in; dress code strictly enforced
Note	Hair donation (mundan) is a common tradition; tonsuring facilities are available on the hill

6. Dining Recommendations

Chennai offers an exceptional range of dining — from soulful filter coffee and crispy dosas at traditional tiffin houses, to award-winning modern Indian cuisine. Below is a curated selection across styles and budgets.

Restaurants

Restaurant	Area	Cuisine	Style	Location
Avartana	Guindy	Modern South Indian tasting menu	Fine dining	https://maps.google.com/?q=Avartana+Chennai
Dakshin	Alwarpet	Traditional South Indian	Fine dining	https://maps.google.com/?q=Dakshin+Chennai
J Hind	T. Nagar	North Indian / Mughlai	Fine dining	https://maps.google.com/?q=J+Hind+Chennai
Pakwan Chennai	T. Nagar	North Indian / Punjabi	Family dining	https://maps.google.com/?q=Pakwan+Chennai
Annalakshmi Restaurant	Egmore	Vegetarian temple-style Indian	Cultural dining	https://maps.google.com/?q=Annalakshmi+Restaurant+Chennai
The Waterfall Restaurant	Vadapalani	Multi-cuisine — Indian & Chinese	Family dining	https://maps.google.com/?q=Waterfall+Restaurant+Vadapalani
Broken Bridge Cafe	Raja Annamalaipuram	Indian / Continental	Casual dining	https://maps.google.com/?q=Broken+Bridge+Cafe+Chennai

Cafés

Café	Area	Known For	Location
Chamiers Cafe	RA Puram	European brunch, pasta, gourmet sandwiches	https://maps.google.com/?q=Chamiers+Cafe+Chennai
Wild Garden Cafe	Royapettah	Mediterranean garden dining inside Amethyst	https://maps.google.com/?q=Wild+Garden+Cafe+Amethyst+Chennai
Writer's Café	Egmore	Literary atmosphere, continental café fare	https://maps.google.com/?q=Writers+Cafe+Egmore+Chennai

Café	Area	Known For	Location
Café Arabica	Anna Nagar	Specialty coffees, pizzas, pasta	https://maps.google.com/?q=Cafe+Arabica+Anna+Nagar+Chennai
Kipling Cafe	East Coast Road	Beachside seafood, burgers, cocktails	https://maps.google.com/?q=Kipling+Cafe+ECR+Chennai
Hard Rock Cafe Chennai	Nungambakkam	American burgers, steaks, live music	https://maps.google.com/?q=Hard+Rock+Cafe+Chennai

7. Practical Information

Getting Around Chennai

Chennai has well-developed metro rail connectivity (CMRL) covering key areas of the city. App-based taxis (Ola, Uber, Rapido) are widely available and recommended for conference delegates. Auto-rickshaws are useful for short distances — always negotiate or insist on the meter. For day trips, hiring a car with a driver for the day is the most convenient option (ask your hotel or the conference desk for trusted operators).

Best Time to Visit Chennai (July 2026)

July falls in the south-west monsoon period. Expect warm, humid weather with occasional showers (25–35°C). Light cotton clothing and a compact umbrella or rain jacket are advisable. The sea may be rough in July — swimming at beaches is not recommended. However, the rains make the city's parks and botanical gardens lush and very photogenic.

Currency & Payments

The Indian Rupee (INR) is the local currency. ATMs are widely available. Most restaurants, hotels, and larger shops accept debit/credit cards and UPI-based digital payments. It is advisable to carry some cash for street food, auto-rickshaws, and smaller local shops.

Language

Tamil is the primary language. English is widely understood in hotels, restaurants, and tourist areas. Signage at major sites is in both Tamil and English.

Emergency Contacts

Police	100
Ambulance	108
Fire	101
Tourist Helpline	1800 425 4747 (India Tourism)