



Heritage Tourism and Rameswaram Island

By

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What is heritage tourism?

Heritage is the full range of inherited traditions, monuments, objects, and culture of a particular place or region. It is the range of contemporary activities, meanings, and behaviours that we draw from them. Heritage includes preserving, excavating, displaying, or restoring a



collection of old things. It is both tangible and intangible, in the sense that ideas and memories--of songs, recipes, language, dances, and many other elements of who we are and how we identify ourselves--are as important as historical buildings and archaeological sites. It can be considered to be made up of the practices and traditions that are passed on from parents to children, but it also has to do with what has been passed on from the family, community and place where people have been raised.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States defines heritage tourism as "traveling to experience the places, artefacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past", and "heritage tourism can include cultural, historic and natural resources".

Types of heritage

Heritage can be broadly classified into the following

- **Natural heritage**, an inheritance of fauna and flora, geology, landscape and landforms, and other natural resources in a specific geographical area
- **Built heritage**, an inheritance of physical artifacts of the community and it includes religious structures like churches, mosques, temples etc. townscape, royal structures like palaces, isolated structures like fort wall, bridges, pillars etc. private structures like residential buildings etc., monuments from industrial culture, parks etc.
- **Art and Cultural heritage**, the legacy of intangible attributes of the society including local festivals, art and crafts in the region like handloom, pottery, sculpture, textiles, wood carving, foods, language and its dialects, livelihoods practices, market places, literature etc.

Rameswaram- an unknown paradise of heritage tourism

Rameswaram Island, known as a centre for spiritual tourism, attracts thousands of pilgrims every day. It attracts tourists and pilgrims in equal numbers. In one square kilometre of the main temple area, as many as hundred thousand tourists can be found on festive days. Rameswaram receives approximately 1.5 crores of pilgrims and tourists annually



through road and rail transport. People mostly visit the Islands for religious and spiritual reasons. Rameswaram is traditionally associated in Hindu culture with ‘Kashi Rameswaram Yatra’, which every Hindu is enjoined to perform once in her/his lifetime. Agni teerthams, natural fountains used for taking holy dip is one of the most crowded tourist areas in Rameswaram Island. Rameswaram, by Hindus, is considered to be one of the important places for performing rituals in the memory of ancestors.

Besides having religious and spiritual significance, there are other facets of tourism existing in the Islands which are mostly unknown to the people outside of the region. In fact, Rameswaram is a rich hub of natural, built and art & cultural heritage. In addition to Ramanathaswamy temple there is plenty of places and practices which are potential of attracting tourist from national and international levels. Following is the list of heritage sites and culture prevailing at Rameswaram

List of heritage sites and culture prevailing at Rameswaram

Built Heritage

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ramanathaswamy Temple• Teerthams• Kothandaswamy temple• Pamban Bridge• Pamban Railway Line• Abdul Kalam’s House• Kalam Memorial• Rama Dasa Hanuman temple built by Ramadasa• Vivekananda Bhaskaram, where Swamy Vivekakanda stayed during his visit to the Islands• Local deity temples: Ujjaini Amman, Nambu Nayaki Amman, Bhathrakali Amman, Durgai Amman, Eswari Amman, Soundari Amman, Karaiyur Mariamman and Kanthari Amman-Peikarumpu• Mohabeer Dharmasala | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shakshi Hanuman temple, having association with Ramayana mythology• Gurudwara, where Guru Nanak visited• Vallabhacharya Peedam• Pathanjali – Rudraksha Beeds• Ekanta Ramar Temple• Santhyagappar Church, Thangatchi madam• Vivekananda Memorial, Kunthukkal• Ramar Padam from where Rama viewed Sri Lanka and is the highest altitude in the Islands• Pisasumunai church• Danushkodi-Church• Danushkodi-Post office• Danushkodi-Railway station/ Hospital• Dhanushkodi – Temple |
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Art and Cultural Heritage

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Temple Sculptures• Mural Paintings prevailing in Ramanathaswamy temple• Herbal painting prevailing in KumuthaTeertham• Ancient poets' literature on Ramanathasamy• Prominent personalities – Visiting Rameswaram (Rajaji, Lal Bahadur Shashtri, Rajiv Gandhi, Mother Saradha, Swami Vivekananda)• PithruTharpanam practice• Annadhana practice | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aadi, Thai and Mahalaya Amavasya rituals• Mahamaham event• Palm based foods• Palm Leaf products• Oyillattam dance• Water Sports• Fishing• Fish Market/Beach Auction• Horse Riding vehicles• Mulaipari festival• Navarathiri festival |
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Natural Heritage

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ramar Bridge• Dhanushkodi• Ariyaman Beach• Sand Dunes• Green Turtle• Kutla Fish | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dolphins• Blue Crabs• Coral Reefs• Rama's Squirrel• Migratory Birds |
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What should we do?

Except a few, the significance of the heritage values above listed of Rameswaram Islands has not been documented for communicating to the people outside the region. Most of the visitors of the Islands complete their trip after having seen the Rameswaram temple and taken dip in the Teerthas since they are not aware of other potential heritage places,



events and activities. These unknown heritage aspects have huge potential to attract tourists on a larger scale and enhancing economic value of the tourism industry of the region.

Rameswaram's predominant image in national media remains as one of the pilgrims centres and many people from other parts of the country continue to see the Islands as a religious case. There is an immense need to popularize the 'untold' aspects of heritage in the Islands among the national and international community. Therefore, to change the present images in the media, the Government, people's organisations and civil society organisations need to take action use the Island's enormous heritage potential by designing well promotion and communication strategies.

