

[Tamil Temple Towns Tidy Up For Tourists](#)

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Tamil Temple Towns Tidy Up For Tourists In Tamil Nadu the pains of pilgrimage may soon be a thing of the past. The government of this South Indian state plans to develop, renovate and clean-up at least 12 of its most popular historical and cultural towns, including Chidambaram, Mahabalipuram, Tranquebar and Thiruvaiyaru, the birthplace of Carnatic composer Saint Tyagaraja. The strategy is to expand and enrich the experience of these historic towns, thus attracting more pilgrims and tourists. Much work has already been accomplished. Travel writers Colleen and Hugh Gantzer have recently praised Tamil Nadu's temple towns as being among the cleanest in all of India. In Mahabalipuram, landscaping around the temples and barricades near the monuments has reportedly alleviated the congestion that previously pestered pilgrims. In Tranquebar work has already begun, funded by a Copenhagen group, to restore the 17th-century Dansborg castle. Tranquebar is also home to a 16th century Siva temple. The majority of visitors to Tamil Nadu have been pilgrims, mostly interested in worship. However, the government is banking on the tremendous potential of Tamil Nadu to attract tourists. They are hoping, too, that pilgrims will become devoted to spending time, and money, outside the temple. Their efforts seem to be effective. Since 1990 the number of domestic tourists to Tamil Nadu has increased by 35%. Hotel chains such as the Taj Group have taken notice of the improvements and are quickly adding the sand-and-surf properties in Tranquebar to their real estate holdings. The government is not shy about its motives. They want a booming tourist industry. In fact, tourism can now receive the same benefits due any other industry. But, they say, pilgrims will also benefit from the improvements. Access will be easier through improved roadways, and pilgrims will have cleaner, more beautiful places to stay.