

MAMALLAPURAM

Mahabalipuram or Mamallapuram is a historic city and UNESCO World Heritage site in Tamil Nadu, India. During the reign of the Pallava dynasty, between the 3rd century CE and 7th century CE, it became an important center of art, architecture, and culture. Mahabalipuram was already a thriving seaport on the Bay of Bengal before this time.

Early History

Mahabalipuram's early history is completely shrouded in mystery. Ancient mariners considered this place the land of the Seven Pagodas. There are others who think that Mahabalipuram suffered from a great flood between 10,000 and 13,000 BCE. Controversial historian Graham Hancock was one of the core members of a team of divers from Indian National Institute of Oceanography and the Scientific Exploration Society based in Dorset, UK who surveyed the ocean bed near Mahabalipuram in 2002 CE. He is more inclined to believe the flood theory. His exploration also afforded him a fair glimpse of the vast extent of submerged ruins of the city.

DURING THE RULE OF MAHENDRAVARMAN I (600 CE – 630 CE), MAHABALIPURAM STARTED TO FLOURISH AS A CENTRE OF ART AND CULTURE

He himself was a well-known poet, playwright, and orator. His patronage helped the creation of several of the city's most iconic landmarks. This period of artistic excellence was duly continued by his son Narasimha Varman I (630 CE – 680 CE) and subsequent Pallava kings.

PLACES TO SEE

1. Shore Temple
2. Sunrise in Beach
3. Five Rathas
4. Arjuna's Penance
5. Descent of the Ganges
6. Krishna's butterball
7. Trimurti Cave
8. Krishna Cave Temple
9. Varaha Cave Temple
10. Mahishasuramardini Cave
11. Ganesh Ratha Temple
12. Olakkannesvara Temple
13. Sri Sthala Sayana Perumal Temple
14. Lighthouse
15. India Seashell Museum
16. Nithyakalyana Perumal Temple

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SHORE TEMPLE

As per legends, the Shore Temple was a part of the Seven Pagodas in Mahabalipuram. Seven Pagodas is an old Hindu legend. As history has it, Prince Hiranyakasipu did not believe in Lord Vishnu. However, his son Prahlada was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu which forced Prince Hiranyakasipu to banish Prahlada from the kingdom. Prahlada was the welcomed after a while after which he went on and became the king.

He had a grandson named Bali who also founded Mahabalipuram. Shore Temple was given the name 'Seven Pagodas' after they saw such a tall structure standing alongside the seashore. This temple was like a landmark for the navigating ships. Also, the structure resembled that of a Pagoda and hence the familiarity.



<https://goo.gl/maps/JRAKTXJ8Umj16Sa16>

MAHABALIPURAM BEACH

The beach lies on the shore of the Bay of Bengal and comprises some rock-cut sculptures. The scintillating beach has golden sand all along the stretch and is also famous for caves, massive rathas, chariots and temples

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FIVE RATHAS

The Five Rathas, also known as Panch Rathas, is a exemplary set of rock temples. They are excellent examples of the evolution of Dravidian style architecture. These temples are built in the same shape as pagodas, and greatly resemble Buddhist shrines and monasteries. The rathas are associated with the great epic Mahabharata. The first ratha that is located right by the entrance gate is Draupadi's Ratha. It is shaped like a hut and is dedicated to the goddess Durga. Next comes Arjuna's Rath. This one has a small portico and carved pillar stones and is dedicated to Lord Shiva. There are no carvings inside this temple, but many are on the outside. Directly in front of Arjuna's Rath is the Nakula Sahadev Rath. This ratha has some huge elephant sculptures included that are a huge draw for the Five Rathas. It is dedicated to the God of Rain, Lord Indra. The Bhima Rath is huge. It measures 42 ft in length, 24ft in width, and 25ft in height. The pillars there do contain lion carvings even though the ratha is incomplete. The largest of the Five Rathas is the Dharamraja Yudhistar's Rath.

<https://goo.gl/maps/TjQ82Fi1c1464fjZ6>



ARJUNA'S PENANCE

Not just historically, the structure is a fine specimen of this unique form of art of carving and sculpting on rock forms, that has roots way back in the 7th century South India. Most of these rock forms, including Arjuna's Penance, owe its existence to the Pallava dynasty that ruled over the region south of Vindhya's from 4th to 9th century. Till date these sites bear the legacy of the Pallava art, now being protected by ASI and UNESCO. People gather here throughout the year, not only to experience the unimaginable efficiency of the craftsman of that era that made such a creation possible only with basic tools like hammer and chisel; but also, to learn about the interesting stories that hide behind its interpretation.



<https://goo.gl/maps/PUm5sTx2XwdbzvWQA>

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DESCENT OF THE GANGES

Descent of the Ganges is a monument in Mahabalipuram dedicated to the legend of Goddess Ganga's descent to Earth. There is a giant open-air rock relief carved on two monolithic rock boulders that relate the famous legend of Bhagirath doing penance and leading the Goddess onto the earth. Some historians also believe that the carving are of Arjuna's penance instead to receive Pasupatha Astra to defeat the Kauravas.

<https://goo.gl/maps/VpedGtqPKhxz3zqi8>



KRISHNA'S BUTTER BALL

Krishna's butterball is a gigantic granite Boulder measuring 6 meters high and 5 meters wide and weighs over 250 tons. This strange object in the town of Mahabalipuram is said to be in the same position since over 1200 years. At one point in its history, seven elephants were employed to move it, but to no avail. It is believed that the rock is a piece of stolen butter dropped by God.

<https://goo.gl/maps/P6L22HDJ3392qTY29>



THIRUMOORTHI CAVE

Located near the northern hills of Mahabalipuram, Trimurti Cave is famous for its depiction of the Hindu Trinity - Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. Unlike the other cave temple built by Pallavas, this one does not have a pillared mandap but opens directly to the three shrines. Apart from that, a small shrine dedicated to Durga is also present, depicting the legend of her slaying demon Mahishasur.

<https://goo.gl/maps/ztAe9xV2JZtjuheq6>



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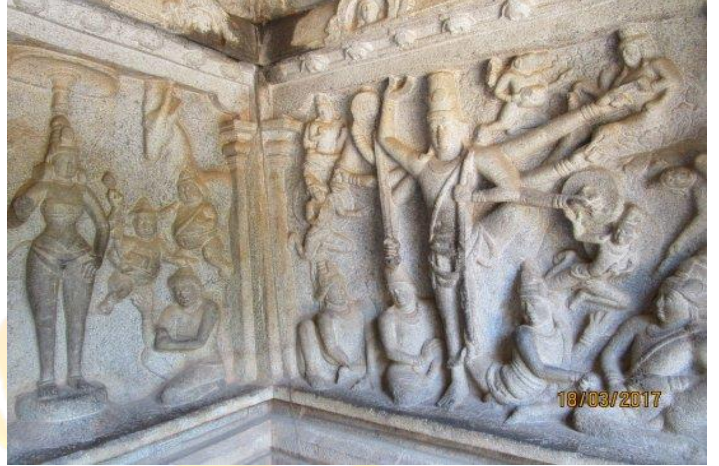
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VARAHA CAVE TEMPLE

Varaha Cave Temple is an exquisite rock cut Hindu temple located in Mahabalipuram. Created during the reign of Narasimhavarmam I Mahamalla, it is one of the greatest examples of Pallava art. The temple dates to the 7th century and bears a testimony to the ancient Vishwakarma Sthapathis. It houses an idol of Lord Vishnu in his Varaha form, a boar lifting Mother Earth

<https://goo.gl/maps/tReuo5PWXdKBeBkd7>



MAHISHASURAMARDINI CAVE

Mahishasura Mardini Cave temple, also known as Yampuri, is a rock-cut monument of Indian architecture, dating back to 7th century. There are two prominent carvings featured in the temple's sanctum. A carving of Vishnu on the seven hooded serpent and another of Lord Durga on her lion while slaying demon Mahishasura. The cave also depicts scenes of Puranas.

<https://goo.gl/maps/qR7cM72WEtXoztQ29>



GANESH RATHA TEMPLE

A fine example of the monolith Indian rock-cut architecture dating back to the late seventh century, the Ganesh Rath was built during the reign of Mahendravarman I. Initially, it was dedicated to Lord Shiva and housed a Shivalinga in the complex, but later on the Linga was removed, and now, Lord Ganesh is worshipped here.

<https://goo.gl/maps/rBpaZAtHNDs6sCUJ8>



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SRI STHALA SAYANA PERUMAL TEMPLE

Constructed in a Dravidian style, Sthalasayana Perumal Temple also called Thirukadalmallai, is one of the 108 Divyadesam dedicated to Lord Vishnu. He is worshiped here as Sthalasayana Perumal with his consort Lakshmi as Nilamangai Thayar. Yearly festival of Bhoothatazhwar Avatar festival is also celebrated here during the Tamil month of Aipasi (October to November).

<https://goo.gl/maps/LwMPVrNcrZCB9SpGA>



OLAKKANESVARA TEMPLE

Olakkannesvara Temple, also known as the Old Lighthouse, is a structural temple built in 8th century. The structure is made from grey-white granite and has a shikar on the top. Owing to its location on a hillock, it provides a pleasing view of the town. The temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva, but the worship has been ceased after the 19th century.

<https://goo.gl/maps/NsTQvCjnrxfCLa1N6>



MAMALLAPURAM LIGHTHOUSE

Mamallapuram Lighthouse in Mahabalipuram has been open for public view since 2011. The circular masonry tower of the Lighthouse is made of natural stones and is fully functional since 1904. Climbing on the stones and atop the Lighthouse (yes, you are allowed to climb) can be a real treat. From the top, the view is capable of captivating its audience.

<https://goo.gl/maps/ToFjNVdeF75T6Xuq7>



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INDIA SEASHELL MUSEUM

The newly built seashell museum of Mahabalipuram is one of its kind in the country and the largest one in Asia. It is basically a repository of various kinds of seashell kept with an aim to educate its visitors. There over 40,000 different specimens of rare and unique shell in the place.

<https://goo.gl/maps/gxzsU6GSJWc8xLf7>



TIGER CAVES

Built by the illustrious Pallava dynasty in the 7th century AD, the Tiger Cave is a monument to the prowess and virtuosity of the Tamil heritage. The temple complex, hewn from solid rock, is an architectural marvel that embodies the pinnacle of craftsmanship and artistry. The walls of the cave are adorned with intricate carvings and sculptures that depict scenes from Hindu mythology, including the magnificent tiger heads carved around the entrance, hence the name of the temple. The main attraction of the complex is the grandiose rock-cut sculpture of eleven tiger heads around a pavilion. This pavilion, flanked by sculptures of lions, was a seat from which the Pallava kings addressed their audience. The rock carving is a masterpiece that showcases the skill and precision of the ancient sculptors. It is a sight that will leave one breathless with wonder and admiration. The Tiger Cave was not only a place of worship but also a centre of learning and scholarship during the Pallava dynasty. The complex is considered an exemplar of Dravidian architecture and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The temple complex is a living testament to the rich cultural heritage of Tamil Nadu and is a destination that should be on every discerning traveller's itinerary



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NITHYAKALYANA PERUMAL TEMPLE

A sage called Kalava rishi came to this place along with his 360 daughters and begged the Lord to marry them. It is said the Lord himself came down before the sage in the form of a bachelor and in pursuance of the sage Kalava's earnest prayers, agreed to marry all his 360 beautiful daughters. So, in the next 360 days, He married all these maidens, one by one for one whole year. Hence, he earned the name 'Nithya (daily) Kalyana (marriage) Perumal (the Lord of Lords)', meaning 'the Lord who gets married every day' and on the last day he made each of the 360 brides as one and placed Her on His left thigh and took the avatar as Adi Varah Murthy here. Since He has His placed his bride on His left side this kshetram was called as Thiru eda enthai ('edam' means left) and colloquially became Thiruvideanthai now. Since he got married daily , he is also called as Nithya kalyana Perumal.



<https://goo.gl/maps/sXXAS7mN8KzA4EoQ8>

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