

INDIA

Sacred Tamil Nadu: The Yogi's Guide

Pondicherry, Auroville, Tiruvannamalai, Chennai and Coimbatore: the masters, the temples, the seasons, the e-Visa and itineraries, checked and dated



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YOGIDE

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Contents

Before you begin	4
How to read Sanskrit and Tamil words	5
How to use this book	5
Chapter 1. Tamil Nadu, the Siddhas and the Tirumantiram	6
A classical language, a living religion	6
The Nayanars	6
The Siddhas	6
Tirumular and the Tirumantiram	7
Patañjali at Chidambaram	7

teacher or medical advice. Questions; administration@lacangel.fr

Before you begin

Tamil Nadu is the south-eastern corner of India, a long coastal plain on the Bay of Bengal backed by the hills of the Western Ghats. For a yoga practitioner, it holds an unusual concentration of places where modern yoga and much older contemplative traditions meet within a few hours of each other. In Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother built an ashram around a yoga that has nothing to do with posture classes. At the foot of Arunachala, Ramana Maharshi taught self-enquiry in silence for more than half a century. In Chennai, T. Krishnamacharya spent his last decades, and his son T.K.V. Desikachar founded the institution that carries his teaching. Near Coimbatore, a large spiritual campus has raised a 112-foot face of Śiva as the first yogi. And all around stand some of the largest temples in India, among them the hall of the dancing Śiva at Chidambaram and the Chola temple of Thanjavur.

This guide is written for the person who comes for practice, study or silence, and who wants to arrive with respect, clear expectations and no avoidable mistakes. It is not a list of "the top ashrams". You will find no ranking, review or recommendation of a school, teacher or retreat in these pages, and that is deliberate. What it gives you is the context, the practical facts the institutions publish themselves, and the questions that let you choose for yourself.

It is built on three promises.

First, practical facts are checked and dated. Every practical fact in this guide, from visiting hours to booking rules, entry fees, festival dates and visa rules, was checked online on **16 October 2026** against the most official source we could find, listed at the end. When information was unofficial or contradictory, we say so; what we could not verify, we left out.

Second, no invented experiences. No testimonials, no "when I sat at the Samadhi" anecdotes, no reviews of ashrams or teachers. Legends are called legends; historical dates come with their sources.

Third, the sacred is treated as sacred. The samadhis of Pondicherry and Tiruvannamalai are places of prayer, Arunachala is worshipped as Śiva himself, and the great temples are living places of worship, not museums. Sanskrit words are written in Devanagari with a scholarly transliteration (IAST). Tamil has its own script, which this book does not print: Tamil words are given in the Latin spellings you will see on signs, such as vanakkam or Karthigai.

This guide informs; it does not replace official advice.

Before you travel, read your government's travel advice for India, check the official Indian e-Visa website yourself, read the current rules of any ashram or centre on its own website, and see a travel health professional. In an emergency in India, dial **112**, the national emergency number (UK FCDO travel advice).

How to read Sanskrit and Tamil words

Sanskrit words appear in everyday spelling (Arunachala), in Devanagari (अरुणाचल) and in IAST (Aruṇācala). A few keys are enough:

IAST	Sounds roughly like	Example
ā, ī, ū	long a, ee, oo	Aruṇācala
ś, ṣ	"sh" (two slightly different sounds)	Śiva, aṣṭāṅga
c	"ch" as in church	cit, "consciousness"
ṭ, ḍ, ṇ	t, d, n with the tongue curled back	Naṭarāja
ṅ, ṁ	"ng"; nasal hum	liṅga, oṃ

Tamil spellings in Latin letters vary (Tiruvannamalai or Thiruvannamalai, Tirumular or Thirumoolar); this book follows the official source it quotes. In Tamil spellings, "th" usually stands for a soft dental "t", and "zh" for a sound between "r" and "l", as in Margazhi, the month of December–January.

How to use this book

Deciding when to go: Chapters 2 and 9. Choosing where to practise: Chapters 3 to 7, then Chapter 15 before paying anyone. Ticket booked: Chapters 11 to 13. On the road: Chapters 8, 10, 14 and the Tamil of Chapter 18.

Chapter 1. Tamil Nadu, the Siddhas and the Tirumantiram

A classical language, a living religion

Tamil Nadu means "the land of the Tamils". Tamil Nadu Tourism, the state's official tourism department, calls Tamil "one of the oldest surviving classical languages of the world" (Tamil Nadu Tourism, "Useful Vocabulary"). Its page on Madurai links the city to the Silapathigaram, a work of Sangam literature, and to the assemblies of Tamil poets that tradition places there.

Tamil Nadu has its own sacred literature, written in Tamil rather than Sanskrit, and its own lineages of saints and adepts.

The Nayanars

The Śaiva saints of Tamil Nadu, devotees of Śiva (शिव, Śiva), are known as the 63 Nayanars. Their hymns belong to a canon of twelve books called the Tirumurai, the key scriptures of the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition. The Thevaram hymns belong to this canon: Tamil Nadu Tourism notes the place of the Kapaleeshwarar temple in Chennai in the Thevaram of the poet-saints Sambandar and Appar, and its bronzes of the 63 Nayanars.

The Siddhas

The other great current is that of the Siddhas, Siddhars in Tamil, from Sanskrit सिद्ध (siddha), "accomplished, perfected". In Tamil tradition a Siddha is a perfected adept credited with spiritual powers (सिद्धि, siddhi), remembered at once as yogi, poet, physician and alchemist, writing in Tamil verse on palm leaves. Tradition attributes the Siddha system of medicine to them (Wikipedia, "Siddhar").

A traditional list in the Tamil encyclopaedia Abithana Chintamani counts eighteen Siddhas, among them Nandi, Tirumular, Agastya, Patañjali (पतञ्जलि), Korakkar and Bogar. Patañjali, author of the Yoga Sūtra, thus appears among the Tamil Siddhas. These are traditional attributions: scholars give no firm dates for individual Siddhas, and stories of their powers and lifespans are sacred lore (Wikipedia, "Siddhar").

Siddha medicine

is a living tradition in Tamil Nadu. This guide makes no health claim about it. If you consult a practitioner, tell your own doctor and never stop a prescribed treatment without medical advice.

Tirumular and the Tirumantiram

The Siddha text that matters most to a yogi is the Tirumantiram (also Thirumandiram), "the sacred mantra", attributed to Tirumular, who is counted both among the 63 Nayanars and among the eighteen Siddhas. It is the tenth of the twelve books of the Tirumurai. According to the encyclopedic summary of the scholarship, it has more than three thousand verses in nine chapters called tantras, and it is the earliest known exposition in Tamil of the Śaiva Āgamas (आगम, āgama), the scriptures of temple worship and inner practice. Its date is debated: proposals range from before the common era to several centuries after (Wikipedia, "Tirumantiram").

One of its nine chapters is devoted to yoga, presented along the eight-limbed path (अष्टाङ्ग, aṣṭāṅga) familiar from Patañjali and called "Śiva yoga". The text also teaches the four stages of the Śaiva path, caryā (conduct), kriyā (worship), yoga and jñāna (knowledge), and the Śaiva Siddhānta triad of pati (पति, the Lord), paśu (पशु, the soul) and pāśa (पाश, the bonds). It treats the body with unusual respect, as the means by which the soul does its work, a theme called kāyasiddhi (कायसिद्धि), "perfection of the body"; and Tirumular teaches non-violence, abstention from meat and alcohol, and the idea that love is God (Wikipedia, "Tirumantiram"; some of these summaries are flagged there as needing citations, so read them as orientation).

We quote no modern translation, because good translations are protected works. To read the Tirumantiram seriously, look for a scholarly edition with the Tamil text and a verse-by-verse commentary, such as the ten-volume edition directed by T.N. Ganapathy, or The Yoga of Tirumular by T.N. Ganapathy and K.R. Arumugam.

Patañjali at Chidambaram

One more legend ties Tamil Nadu to classical yoga. At Chidambaram, the temple town of Śiva as Naṭarāja (नटराज), "king of dancers", tradition tells of two sages living in the Thillai forest, Patañjali and Vyāghrapāda (व्याघ्रपाद), "tiger-foot". Pleased by their devotion, Śiva is said to have performed his cosmic dance for them there, and the temple was built to reflect this legend (Tamil Nadu Tourism, "The Town of the Cosmic Dance"). It is a sacred story, and one reason why readers of the Yoga Sūtra feel at home in Chidambaram (Chapter 8).

End of the sample

Thank you for reading this far. We hope these first pages already help your practice, and that they show how the rest of the book is built: clear steps, texts quoted with their source, nothing invented.

The full book has 42 pages.

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