

travelogue

A fountainhead of art & culture

An hour's drive from South India's most popular pilgrimage centre, Tirupati, is Srikalahasti. A temple town in Chittoor district that is renowned for producing art on textile that is just as iconic as the ancient Shiva temple that gives this town its fame

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Legends surround Srikalahasti, the temple town near Tirupati. Home to the ancient Shiva Temple, the Srikalahasteswara Temple, this town has been the centre of many legends, stories and folklore. Here is where Lord Shiva's famous devotee Bhakta Kannappa offered his own eyes to staunch the bleeding from the Shiva Lingam's eyes. Here is where the oil lamp that flickers as if by the touch of wind, glows steadily in the airless sanctum sanctorum of the Vayu Linga. Here is also where, Lord Shiva's devotees Sri, Kala and Hasti - the spider, the serpent and the elephant - attained salvation, merging into the Vayu Lingam in the temple. Today the idol of Sri kalahasteswara stands with a spider at the bottom, a five hooded snake crowning the top and elephant tusks adorn it on either side. So, it isn't just the presiding deity who draws his name from a legend, but the town itself.

The Kalahasteswara Temple stands on the banks of the river Swarnamukhi under the

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shadow of a hill. And is one of the temples dedicated to the Panchabhoota (the five elements) Lingams of Shiva. While it is the Vayu Lingam representing wind that is here, the other lingams representing fire, water, sky and earth



The fabric being boiled and washed before colours are filled in



A finished Kalamkari Dupatta drying

are manifest at Arunachalam, Thiruvanaikaval, Chidambaram and Kanchi.

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Kalamkari, literally meaning craftsmanship of the pen, refers to the hand painted or block printed cotton fabric produced in the towns of Sri Kalahasti and Machilipatnam in Andhra Pradesh. Before the actual process of art begins, the cotton fabric has to be prepped for drawing by washing it in water and soaking it in milk

and culture. Vilasini Natyam, which is the traditional temple dance form originated here and what started out back then in the 13th and 14th centuries is what has today evolved to become one of the most appreciated fabric for its artistic value. That there is the story of Kalamkari.

Kalamkari, literally meaning craftsmanship of the pen, refers to the hand painted or block

Sri Kalahasti is 36 kilometres from Tirupati. The nearest airport is at Tirupati while the nearest railway station is in Sri Kalahasti itself.



A master artist draws the outline in charcoal

printed cotton fabric produced in the towns of Sri Kalahasti and Machilipatnam in Andhra Pradesh. Before the actual process of art begins, the cotton fabric has to be prepped for drawing by washing it in water and soaking it in milk. A master artist then draws the design freehand in bold black strokes using a charcoal pencil. The cloth is then soaked once again, this time in boiling water before colours are filled in by the artisans using a bamboo kalam (pen). The colours are always natural and made from ingredients like indigo and myrobalan fruit. From sarees and dupattas to bed linen, this hand-painted cotton textile is considered hip not just in the art circles and there is a huge demand for it today.