

travelogue



The Main Panduranga Swamy Temple

The First Port of Call: Coromandel

From beaches to shopping, churches to temples, Machilipatnam has much to offer to those looking to explore the lesser known towns on the Eastern Coast of South India

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Masulipatnam or Machilipatnam as it is now known was once the first port of call on the Coromandel coast for European traders vying for a hold on India and its trade. This coastal town in the Krishna District of Andhra Pradesh often overlooked by travellers makes for the perfect day trip destination from Vijayawada or even as an interesting detour for those heading to Vijayawada.

This ancient port town of the sixteenth century still boasts of flourishing trade, only today, it is in the hugely popular Kalamkari fabric and gold-plated costume jewellery (or imitation jewellery as it is more commonly known) used in movies and television soaps.

Some of the interesting places to visit in Machilipatnam are Manginapudi, Chilakapudi and Pedana. While Manginapudi in Machilipatnam has long been popular for its black sand beach which is like no other in the state. It is only in the last few decades that Manginapudi has grown in prominence, owing to be being adopted by Datta Peetham

led by Sri Ganapathi Sachidananda Swamy. He christened Manginapudi as Datta Rameshwaram, declaring it be a holy site equivalent to the major pilgrimage centre of Rameshwaram, after building a temple dedicated to Dattatreya Swamy. Since, then Manginapudi has also attracted tourists who wish to take a dip in the sea, visit the temple on the coast and the twelve wells that were also built by the Peetham to defend the town from destructive tidal waves.

Chilakalapudi though famous for being a hub for rolled gold jewellery, it is the Panduranga Swamy Temple here which holds pride of place. The Chilakalapudi Panduranga Swamy Temple built by Sree Narasimham in 1927 is a beautiful symphony of colours and symmetries. So striking and television soaps

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Chilakalapudi Panduranga Swamy Temple Complex

Fact File

Less than seventy kilometres from Vijayawada, one can drive to Machilipatnam from Vijayawada in an hour and a half. From Hyderabad, Machilipatnam is three hundred and forty kilometres and the drive takes about six hours



Screenprinting Kalamakari Designs

ingly is the main temple - dedicated to Panduranga Swamy and his wife Goddess Rukmini - painted in alternating hues of bright and vivid colours, that is bound to grab your attention from the moment you set foot on the sprawling temple grounds. What is even more fascinating about this temple though, is that there is no Hundi (a donation box that is a common feature of temples) here and anyone who comes to this place of worship need not pay anything for puja performed here. The temple is still maintained privately by the original builder's grandson, Sree Gangadharam. He is also the head priest of the main temple. Tiny temples in hidden alcoves dot the entire length of the complex and there is also the remarkable Sahasra Linga Mahamandapam with its many Shiva Lingams.

Finally, Pedana is where every-

body's favourite fabric, Kalamkari comes from. Machilipatnam and Sri Kalahasti are the two main centres in the country for production of this artisanal fabric. But, Machilipatnam today, has moved onto quickly producing Kalamkari designs on both cotton and silk fabric using screen printing. Very efficiently putting to use its long history of textile trading - that dates as far back as trading with the Greeks in Muslin - in commercialising this traditional form of art. Other points of interest in Machilipatnam are the Machilipatnam Harbour and the Dutch Fort and Cemetery.

And, don't forget to bring back a box of the sumptuous Bandar Laddu, which gets its name from the place it comes from - Bandar, which is but the Persian for Port, and one of the names given to the port town of Machilipatnam.