



# *Brihadeeswara Temple*



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## **Brihadeeswara Temple, Thanjavur**

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Brihadeeswara Temple is located in Thanjavur, a city in Tamil Nadu. The temple was constructed by Rajaraja Chola and was dedicated to Lord Shiva. The temple was built 1000 years ago on the basis of Dravidian architecture.

This tutorial will let you know about the history of the temple along with the structures present inside. You will also get the information about the best time to visit it along with how to reach the temple.

## **Audience**

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This tutorial is designed for the people who would like to know about the history of Brihadeeswara Temple along with the interiors and design of the temple. This temple is visited by many people from India and abroad.

## **Prerequisites**

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This is a brief tutorial designed only for informational purpose. There are no prerequisites as such. All that you should have is a keen interest to explore new places and experience their charm.

## **Copyright & Disclaimer**

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## Table of Contents

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Brihadeeswara Temple, Thanjavur .....	1
Audience.....	1
Prerequisites.....	1
Copyright & Disclaimer .....	1
Table of Contents.....	2
1. BRIHADEESWARA TEMPLE – OVERVIEW.....	3
2. BRIHADEESWARA TEMPLE – HISTORY .....	6
3. BRIHADEESWARA TEMPLE – ARCHITECTURE.....	8
4. BRIHADEESWARA TEMPLE – HOW TO REACH?.....	11
5. BRIHADEESWARA TEMPLE – NEARBY PLACES.....	14

# 1. Brihadeeswara Temple – Overview

Brihadeeswara Temple was built by **Rajaraja Chola** in 1010AD. The temple is located in **Thanjavur** which is one of the largest cities in India and is located in Tamil Nadu. The height of the tower of the temple is 60m. The statue of **Nandi**, the bull, is situated at the entrance whose length is about 4.9m and height is about 4m. Granite stone was used to construct the temple.



## Thanjavur

Thanjavur is one of the big cities in India which glorified during the reign of **Chola dynasty**. After that the city came under the rule of **Nayaks** and **Marathas**. There are many temples and other monuments besides Brihadeeswara temple which the tourists can visit.



There is a legend which says that the city was named so due to a demon named **Tanjan** who was killed by **Neelamegha Perumal**, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. There is no historical evidences which tell about the foundation of the city but it is said that the city existed during the **Sangam period** in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.

### Visiting Hours

The temple is opened for the public from 6:00am to 12:30pm and 4:00pm to 8:30pm. It takes around 2-3 hours to visit the whole temple as the temple is very big. The temple is also opened on all days of the week including government holidays.

### Tickets

There is no entry fees and tourists can come and visit the temple any time during the visiting hours.

### Best time to visit

Thanjavur can be visited during the period of **October** to **March** as the climate is pleasant. Tourists can also enjoy outdoor activities besides visiting the temple. In the rest of the months, the climate is very hot.

### Where to Stay?

There are around 35 hotels in Thanjavur that range from inexpensive hotels to star hotels. Tourists can stay and enjoy the services of these hotels as each hotel provides good hospitality. Some of the hotels of the city are as follows:

- **Five-Star Hotels**
  - Hotel Svatma located at Blake Higher Secondary Road
- **Four-Star Hotels**
  - Lakshmi Hotel located at VOC Nagar, Trichy Main Road

- **Three-Star Hotel**

- Hotel Balaji Inn located near Bus Stand
- Hotel Parisutham located at GA Canal Road
- Hotel Gnanam located at Anna Salai
- Hotel Sangam located at Trichy
- Hotel Victoriyah located near Rohini Hospital

- **Budget Hotels or Two-Star Hotels**

- Hotel Abis Inn located at Pudukottai Main Road
- Hotel Ramnath located near Bus Stand
- Hotel KRA located at Anna Salai
- Tanjore Hi Heritage Boutique Hotel located at East Main Street
- Hotel Annamalai located near Bus Stand

- **Cheap Hotels**

- PLA Residency located at Srinivasan Pillai Road
- ASK Residency located at Annasalai
- Hotel RAKS located at Trichy Road
- Sri Karruna Residency located at East Main Street
- Hotel Yagappa located at Trichy Road

## 2. Brihadeeswara Temple – History

Brihadeeswara Temple is located in Thanjavur that has a long history. Though the year of foundation of the city is not known but it is believed that the city existed during the Sangam period that was from 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC to 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.

It is also believed that in the **Battle of Venni**, Chola king **Karikala** fought with Cheras and Pandyas and also faced invasion by Mutharayars. Later on the city was ruled by Cholas.

### Thanjavur under Chola Dynasty

Chola king **Vijayalaya** defeated **Elango Mutharayar** and conquered Thanjavur in 850AD. He worshipped **Goddess Nisumbhasudani** and so built a temple. **Aditya** succeeded Vijayalaya and ruled the city. King **Rajaraja Chola** constructed Brihadeeswara Temple in 985AD which was one of the great construction of the Cholas.



Rajaraja Chola

### Thanjavur under Pandyas

Pandyas captured Thanjavur two times, first in the period of 1218-1219 and second in 1230. In 1230, Pandyas defeated Rajaraja III who was sent to exile. Rajaraja III sought help from **Vira Narsimha II** who belonged to **Hoysala dynasty**. After sometime Pandyas annexed whole of the Chola kingdom and ruled Thanjavur from 1279 to 1311.



### Thanjavur under Delhi Sultanate

**Malik Kafur** annexed Thanjavur from Pandyas and ruled from 1296 till 1306. The sultanate also conquered the kingdom of Pandyas and ruled from 1311 to 1335. After this, Delhi Sultanate annexed **Ma'bar Sultanate** and ruled from 1335 to 1378. After this, Thanjavur was annexed by Vijayanagara empire that ruled from 1365 to 1674.

### Thanjavur under Marathas

**Ekoji** of **Bhonsle dynasty** was the half-brother of **Shivaji** and conquered Thanjavur in 1674AD. This dynasty ruled Thanjavur till 1855. Maratha rulers were fond of Carnatic music. In 1787, **Amar Singh** usurped the kingdom from **Serfoji**, his nephew. But later Serfoji regained his throne with the help of the British. In 1855, British annexed Thanjavur after the death of Shivaji who didn't have a male heir.

### Brihadeeswara Temple

Rajaraja Chola I constructed the temple whose foundation was laid in 1002CE. The temple was based on the Chola style architecture which included multifaceted columns and square capital signals. Many religious events were conducted here which included daily rituals done by the king.



# 3. Brihadeeswara Temple – Architecture

Brihadeeswara temple was constructed by Rajaraja Chola I and was designed by **Kunjara Mallan Raja Rama Perunthachan**. The base of the temple has the pictures of dancing Shiva and stone deities. A 2m high, 6m long, and 2.5m wide statue of Nandi Bull weighing 20 tonnes can be found at the entrance.

The bull is made up of a single stone and is the second largest statue of Nandi. The Shiva Linga inside the temple has the height of 3.7m. The dynasties that ruled after Cholas also added the pictures of many deities.

## Entrance

The platform on which the temple was built has the height of 5m. The outer walls of the temple are built like fort having a deep moat surrounding it. There are two entrances to the temple.



The first is the five storey gopuram and the second is the free standing gopuram to which people reach through a quadrangle. **Vimanam** or the **Shikhara** of the temple is 60.96m high.

## Mandapas

The centre of the temple has the statue of Nandi Bull. There are two halls in the temple also called mandapas. One of the hall is pillared while other is the assembly hall. Apart from these, there are many more shrines.



The primary deity worshipped here is Lord Shiva whose image is established on the inner sanctum. There is also a Shiva Linga inside. There is one more chamber called **Karuvarai** or **womb chamber** in which only priests can enter.

### **Pradakshina and Garbhagriha**

The inner and the outer wall make Pradakshina for circumambulation. This Pradakshina is built around the Garbhagriha which is built on a platform and is square in shape. The image of a deity is placed in the center of the garbhagriha. Rajaraja Chola 1 used to give gift from the hall.

### **Deities of the Temple**

Lord Shiva is the main deity of the temple and a Shiva linga is established here to worship him. The height of the Shiva linga is 8.7m. Other deities are placed in the outer wall also known as **Koshtha Moorthigal**.



These deities include **Dakshinamurthy**, **Surya** and **Chandra**. Other deities include **Ashta Dikpaalakas**, **Agni**, **Yam**, **Nirrti**, **Varuna**, **Vayu**, **Kuber**, and **Isana**. The statues of all these deities are six feet high.

## 4. Brihadeeswara Temple – How to Reach?

Brihadeeswara Temple is located in Thanjavur which is connected to many cities through road and rail network. Thanjavur does not have airport but tourists can reach Tiruchirapalli by air and then catch a taxi, bus or train to reach Thanjavur.



Distance of some of the nearby cities from Thanjavur is as follows:

- **Thanjavur to Tiruchirapalli**
  - By rail – 50km
  - By road – 59km
- **Thanjavur to Chennai**
  - By rail – 326km
  - By road – 341km
- **Thanjavur to Madurai**
  - By rail – 210km
  - By road – 195km
- **Thanjavur to Tuticorin**
  - By rail – 334km to 365km (depends on the route taken by train)

- By road – 333km
- **Thanjavur to Rameshwaram**
  - By rail – 314km
  - By road – 237km
- **Thanjavur to Tirupati**
  - By rail – 452km
  - By road – 414km

### By Air

Thanjavur does not have airport but the nearest airport is **Tiruchirapalli** from where flights to Indian and foreign cities can be caught. People who arrive at Tiruchirapalli can hire a taxi or take a bus to reach Thanjavur.

### By Train

Thanjavur is connected to nearby places through railways but there are very few long distance trains. Superfast and fast mail and express trains along with Jan Shatabdi have stoppages here. For long distance trains, tourists can go to Tiruchirapalli where many long distance trains arrive.



### By Road

Thanjavur is well-connected to many cities of Tamil Nadu by road. National highways that pass through the city are NH 67, NH 45C, and NH 226. These highways connect the city to Tiruchirapalli, Coimbatore, Pudukottai and many more.



The bus stations in the city are new bus stand, old bus stand, and Tiruvaiyaru bus stand.

## 5. Brihadeeswara Temple – Nearby Places

Besides visiting Brihadeeswara Temple, tourists can also visit many other places nearby. Some of these places are as follows:

### Gangaikonda Cholapuram

**Rajendra Chola I**, son and successor of Rajaraja Chola I, constructed Gangaikonda Cholapuram. Cholas controlled the whole southern India. Rajendra Chola founded the city in order to remember his victory over the rulers of **Pala dynasty**.



Now this place exists as a village in **Ariyalur** district. He also constructed a temple having three storeys and a huge wall is constructed around it.

### The Serfoji Saraswati Mahal Library

The Serfoji Saraswati Mahal Library is one of the oldest libraries of Asia. Tourists can find manuscripts written on palm leaves. The languages used in these manuscripts are Tamil, Hindi, Telugu, Marathi, English, and many others. This library was made by kings of Nayak dynasty who ruled from 1535 to 1675.



The library was developed by the Marathas after 1675 when they captured Thanjavur. Serfoji was one of the Marathas who learnt many languages and was also fond of art and literature. He played the main role in developing the library as Sanskrit literature from many parts of North India was gathered during his reign and for this he employed Pandits.

### Tirunallar Saniswaran Temple

Tirunallar Saniswaran temple is located in Karaikal district where lord Shiva is the main deity to be worshipped. The deity is made by using **Dharba** grass. Another deity is **Saniswar** who is worshipped before reaching the sanctum of Lord Shiva.





## Thanjavur Royal Palace

Thanjavur Royal Palace is situated inside the Vijayanagara fort and was the residence of Nayak rulers. Later on it came under the Marathas. Tourists can visit Nayak Hall Darbar hall, Serfoji's Saraswati Mahal Library.



## Vijayanagara Fort

Vijayanagara Fort was built by **Vijaya Raghav** who belonged to Nayak dynasty. Later on, Marathas completed the construction. Most part of the fort has now been ruined and tourists have permission to visit only a part of it.



The fort is around 2km away from the Brihadeeswara Temple. The fort is opened from 9:00am to 6:00pm on all days of the week.