

[Singapore Pilgrims Drawn by India's "Spiritual Pull"](#)

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Singapore Pilgrims Drawn by India's "Spiritual Pull"

Rajathurai, R. A group of 24 devotees, mostly young people, assembled at the Sri Senpaga Vinayagar Temple in Ceylon Road, Singapore, on the morning of December 14 to seek the blessings of Lord Vinayagar before leaving that evening for Madras on a spiritual tour of South Indian temples that lasted 14 days and covered over 3,500 km. Twelve places and 41 temples were visited on an almost circular route that symbolized a pradakshana (circumambulation) of all the temples in Tamil Nadu. It was a hectic tour, but with the Lord's grace everything went according to schedule, and in each one of the temples we had beautiful, unrushed darshan (view) of the Deity, and archanas were performed.

In Kanchipuram, we received the blessings of all the three Achariyas. The Sage of Kanchi favored us with a long discussion. In Palani, we walked up the hill carrying pots of milk and performed abhishekam (bathing of the Deity). In Rameswaram, we went religiously through the ritual of bathing in the Sea and the temple's 22 wells, culminating in the abhishekam to Siva in the form of Ramanathaswamy. In Thiruchendur, special archanas were performed, and we had the good fortune of pulling the Lord in His golden chariot followed by darshan of the panchabhutas (5 Lingams). We bathed at Courtallam and worshipped Kutrallanathar (Siva), walked up to the Murugan temple at Maduramalai, and around the 8-km. holy hill, Arunachala, in Tiruvannamalai. We walked in pouring rain and worshipped Lord Venkateswara in Tirupati and rounded up the tour with the darshan of Kalahasthiswarar and Saint Kannappan in Thirukalahasthi in Andhra Pradesh.

Since 1961, I have been visiting the temples in India with my family almost every two years. There were times when I felt that the filth, pollution, endless harassment by beggars and priests would erode the little faith I had. These taxed my patience, and I always felt relieved when I returned home. I decided not to go again, but this resolve was only short lived. I have returned to India again and again, unable to resist the spiritual pull. This day has always resulted in new experiences and fulfillment.

Yet, when I organized this tour I had my doubts - doubts on whether the tour would be a success; how the young would react to the environment; what the political situation would be after the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi and election fever in Tamil Nadu. But, above all, these was this complete faith in the Lord, the belief that nothing can go wrong when one leaves everything to Him and seeks His protection. The group had dedication and one-mindedness, and these attitudes worked wonders. Many incidents encountered on the tour symbolic of His grace. Those who had doubts at the beginning of the tour returned to Singapore spiritually enriched and with the hope of returning soon to the holy places they had visited.

Helpful Hints: Overseas Indians tend to take a lot of things for granted in their countries of adoption, and when they visit India, they find it difficult to accept many things. Therefore, when going on a spiritual tour one must first forget the standards, the sense of time and values they are used to and adapt to the standards they encounter. In short, be prepared for the worst, place your trust in God and see how smoothly things move. Times schedules are only a guide; you could reach your destination very late at night.

The temples and their environments are much cleaner than what they were a few years ago. The Archeological Department is carrying out preservation and reconstruction work on many of the ancient temples that are showing signs of disintegration. Beggars, except in a few places, have ceased to be nuisance. In Rameswaram, they are still a formidable force, and one has to distinguish between the really poor ones and those who are highly professional. In Samayapuram, you will encounter a determined assault from vendors from the time you alight from the coach until reach the temple door.

Once inside the temple, meet the executive officer of the temple and inform him of your needs. He will provide a reliable priest who will perform the rituals to your satisfaction and with less cost. Don't hesitate to tip priests. You will not only have very good darshan of the Deity, but the practice will open up new vantages for you. In fact, tipping is a widely accepted practice in India. It can work miracles.

On the other hand, I am aware of many who visit temples but do not get involved with priests or in rituals. They, too, have darshan, say their prayers and return completely satisfied. In the final analysis, what counts is one's mental attitude, the devotion to follow the chosen path and, above all, His grace.