

Great Living Chola Temples

The **Great Living Chola Temples** is a UNESCO World Heritage Site designation for a group of Chola dynasty era Hindu temples in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.^{[1][2]} Completed between early 11th and the 12th century CE, the monuments include the Brihadisvara Temple at Thanjavur, the Temple of Gangaikonda Cholapuram and the Airavatesvara Temple at Darasuram. The Brihadisvara Temple was recognised in 1987; the Temple of Gangaikondacholapuram and the Airavatesvara Temple were added as extensions to the site in 2004.

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Location



Location of Chola temples in the UNESCO world heritage site.

Great Living Chola Temples



Scenes from the three temples

UNESCO World Heritage Site	
Location	India
Coordinates	10°46′59″N 79°07′57″E
Includes	Airavatesvara Temple Brihadeshwara temple Gangaikonda Cholapuram
Criteria	Cultural: (ii), (iii)
Reference	250
Inscription	1987 (11th Session)
Extensions	2004
 Location of Great Living Chola Temples	
[edit on Wikidata]	

The Brihadeeswarar Temple is located in the city of Thanjavur, about 350 kilometres (220 mi) southwest of Chennai. The Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple and Airavatesvara temple are about 70 kilometres (43 mi) and 40 kilometres (25 mi) to its northeast respectively. The city of Thanjavur is connected daily to other major cities by the network of Indian Railways, Tamil

Nadu bus services and the National Highways 67, 45C, 226 and 226 Extn.^{[3][4]} The site has a nearby airport (IATA: TJV) which does not have a regular air service. The nearest airport with regular services is Tiruchirappalli International Airport (IATA: TRZ), about 55 kilometres (34 mi) away.^[5]

Airavatesvara Temple

The Airavatesvara Temple is in the town of Darasuram, near Kumbakonam completed in 1166 CE.^[6] It is one among a cluster of eighteen medieval era large Hindu temples in the Kumbakonam area.^[7] The temple is dedicated to Shiva. It also reverentially displays Vaishnavism and Shaktism traditions of Hinduism, along with the legends associated with sixty three Nayanars – the Bhakti movement saints of Shaivism.^{[8][9][10]}

The stone temple incorporates a chariot structure, and includes major Vedic and Puranic deities such as Indra, Agni, Varuna, Vayu, Brahma, Surya, Vishnu, Saptamatrikas, Durga, Saraswati, Sri devi (Lakshmi), Ganga, Yamuna, Subrahmanya, Ganesha, Kama, Rati and others.^[11] The temple was much larger and once had seven courtyards according to inscriptions. Only one courtyard survives, parts of the temple such as the gopuram is in ruins, and the main temple and associated shrines stand alone.^[12] The temple continues to attract large gatherings of Hindu pilgrims every year.^{[13][11][14]}



A Dravidian architecture Pillar in Airavatesvara Temple, Darasuram @ Thanjavur district

Brihadisvara Temple



Brihadeeswarar Temple 011

The Brihadisvara Temple at Thanjavur is a Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva.^{[15][16]} It is one of the largest South Indian temple and an exemplary example of a fully realized Tamil architecture.^[17] Built by Raja Raja Chola I between 1003 and 1010 AD, the temple was originally built around a moat. It included gopura, the main temple, its massive tower, inscriptions, frescoes and sculptures predominantly related to Shaivism, but also of Vaishnavism and Shaktism traditions of Hinduism. The temple was damaged in its history and some artwork is now missing. Additional mandapam and monuments were added in centuries that followed. The temple now stands amidst fortified walls that were added after the 16th century.^{[18][19]}

Built out of granite, the vimanam tower above the sanctum is one of the tallest in South India.^[16] The temple has a massive colonnaded prakara (corridor) and one of the largest Shiva linga in India.^{[16][20]} It is also famed for the quality of its sculpture, as well as being the location that commissioned the brass Nataraja – Shiva as the lord of dance, in 11th century. The complex includes shrines for Nandi, Amman, Subrahmanya, Ganesha, Sabhapati, Dakshinamurti, Chandesvara, Varahi and others.^[21] The temple is one of the most visited tourist attractions in Tamil Nadu.^[22]

Gangaikondacholapuram Temple

The Gangaikondacholapuram Brihadisvara Temple is a Hindu temple located at Gangaikondacholapuram about 70 kilometres (43 mi) from Thanjavur Brihadisvara Temple. Completed in 1035 AD by Rajendra Chola I as a part of his new capital, this Chola dynasty era temple is similar in design and has a similar name as the 11th century, and sometimes just called the Gangaikondacholapuram temple.^{[23][24][25]}

It is dedicated to Shiva and based on a square plan, but the temple reverentially displays Vaishnavism, Shaktism and syncretic equivalence themes of Hinduism with statues of Vishnu, Durga, Surya, Harihara, Ardhanishvara, and others.^{[24][26][27]} In addition to the main shrine with linga, the temple complex has a number of smaller shrines, gopura, and other monuments, with some partially

ruined or restored in later centuries. The temple is famed for its bronze sculptures, artwork on its walls, the Nandi and the scale of its curvilinear tower^{[24][28][29]}

Criteria for being "Great Living Chola Temples"

Criterion (i): The three Chola temples of Southern India represent an outstanding creative achievement in the architectural conception of the pure form of the Dravidian type of temple.

Criterion (ii): The Brihadisvara Temple at Thanjavur became the first great example of the Chola temples, followed by a development of which the other two properties also bear witness.

Criterion (iii): The three Great Chola Temples are an exceptional and the most outstanding testimony to the development of the architecture of the Chola Empire and the Tamil civilization in Southern India.

Criterion (iv): The Great Chola temples at Thanjavur, at Gangaikondacholapuram and Darasuram are outstanding examples of the architecture and the representation of the Chola ideology.



Ardhanarishvara – half Shiva, half Parvati – sculpture at Gangaikondacholapuram.

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External links

-  Media related to Great living Chola temples at Wikimedia Commons
- UNESCO's World Heritage Site listing the Chola temples
- Chola Temple Architecture at come2india.org

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