

A Wedding Trip to the Tip of Tamil Nadu

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My friend and I had got an invite to a wedding in a place called Madurai, a culturally rich and a growing business district in the state of Tamil Nadu. The place is about 450 km from Bangalore.

Not sure about how we would go but we were decided to make the trip to the wedding. While we first thought of making a bike trip, an afterthought was to drive than to ride. After borrowing a car from another friend of mine, I and my friend hit the highway towards Madurai in the cold early morning of March from Bangalore. We wanted to cover a large distance while it was still not too warm before we hit the sultry weather of Tamil Nadu. After driving for a couple of hours and stopping over for some tea and snacks in certain places along the highway it was decided and known that we would reach Madurai by about early afternoon.

After spending time driving and repeatedly listening to songs of a recently released Bollywood movie, 'Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety', we reached Madurai. The town was crowded enough to keep the driving speeds low. After navigating through the maps and talking to the friend who was actually getting married, we reached the hotel that was booked for us to stay. There were other people who were staying at that hotel from the wedding party. We were tired after the long drive that started early in the morning from Bangalore and decided to take a quick nap so that we could go around seeing things in the evening and later to attend the party that was planned before the wedding the day after.

Waking up to the warm climate of Madurai, we got ready to go and be a part of the wedding reception that was arranged at the rooftop of a hotel in Madurai. We were caught unaware of how a wedding party would be in Tamil Nadu. The ones that I had attended in the past were typically very traditional, this one was an amalgamation of the modern thoughts and the rich past of the semi-urban youth from the developing cities of Tamil Nadu.

I forgot to mention that we happened to go around to catch up on some lunch after we reached Madurai earlier in the day. We went to a very popular restaurant by the name Amma Mess known for traditional but very different non-vegetarian food; the seafood platter or the sea food omelette that the place served was very unique and had varied flavours of homemade *masalas*.

The wedding party had a lot of friends of the groom and the bride, all dancing to the tunes of songs in Tamil, Hindi and English. The food and the ambience was just right for the cool breeze that the rooftop party destination offered for the sultry weather of the city.

Once we were done with the party, we headed back to the hotel to take some rest. But the thought of just attending the wedding was unsettling. The next phase of the wedding was a reception scheduled the next evening. We almost had an entire day before the actual wedding took place.

After reaching the hotel, we were quite sure to step out of Madurai to head to someplace close by. When we started searching places closer to Madurai on Google maps, Rameswaram became an obvious choice. Situated about 140 kms on the south eastern tip of Tamil Nadu, the place has an aura of its own. I had been to Rameswaram earlier, and the thought of an impromptu travel to the place in the middle of the night from Madurai was quite enthralling. The food at Rameswaram, the cool blue water under the Pamban bridge and the deep sea was calling me to make that drive.

We were tired but very sure that we wanted to step out of Madurai and do something that was beyond just attending the wedding. We drove out of the hotel at around 2 in the morning and were back at listening to the songs of the Bollywood movie. We stopped at very few places that were open for some tea before reaching Rameswaram in the early hours. As we had no plans to stay in Rameswaram but to head back to Madurai for the wedding reception, we went straight to the famous Rameswaram Jyotirlinga temple. The place is crowded, independent of whichever time you go as it is one of the important destinations for spiritual travelers of the Hindu dharma. The temple is a pilgrimage for people who travel across the country to visit the Jyotirlingas. This is one of the 12 such temples in India.



The school that Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam spent his younger days

The temple features a unique architecture, the stone pillars inside the temple appear to be literally hanging in the air. The sight mesmerizes anybody who travels to this place for the first time. Rameswaram is also the place where the former president of India, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam spent his younger days. You can visit the school where Dr. Kalam studied. There are stories of how he would travel long distances from his house to reach the school, he did not just travel long distances to the school but he travelled very long distances to become one of the most respectable and loved human beings in the country and the world.

We later went to the beach in Rameswaram called Dhanushkodi, situated at the tip of the town. The place is believed to be the starting point of the Ram Setu that connects India to Sri Lanka.



The road to Dhanushkodi

The last time that I had been to Dhanushkodi, it had remains of what the village had become after the tsunami, a completely devastated place. However, this time the place had been renovated, there was a road laid till the tip of the land that ended in the middle of the sea.

We took a U-turn from this place and started back towards Madurai but before we could leave Rameswaram, we stopped by at the Pamban Bridge. There is an old railway bridge parallel to the road bridge. The bridge came to national limelight when it appeared in a Shahrukh Khan movie. The cool blue colour of the water under the bridge that connected the river to the sea is mesmerising.



The Pamban Bridge

After spending about an hour at the bridge we headed back to Madurai, where our friend was all set to tie the knot.

The reception was overwhelming with a lot of people and the next day the wedding had a similar scene. After finishing all the events of the wedding we headed back to our home

destination in Bangalore. On our way back we also stopped to visit the Madurai Meenakshi temple, famous for its architecture in stone.



The fishermen and the aqua colours of Rameswaram

I must confess that if I get another opportunity to visit Rameswaram, I would definitely do that to see and experience the blue, the warmth, and the colours of the sea and the sand there.