

# Tourism Destination Development Plan – A Study of Cheyyur Region as Transit Hub in Tamilnadu

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**Abstract:** *Tourism industry is the largest and fastest growing industry in the world. Its contribution towards economic growth is tremendous. Realising its growing importance in generating employment and its increasing contributions towards GDP, Indian government has introduced schemes like PRASHAD, Swadesh Darshan, SAATHI, Dekho Apna Desh and NIDHI. The Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation is introducing new programmes for destination development in Tamil Nadu, especially rural tourism destinations which will strengthen the economy of the rural areas in Tamil Nadu, Cheyyur, an enchanting village in Chengalpattu district, is about 100 kilometers from Chennai. Cheyyur is noted for its rich heritage and culture, with potential for high-level community-based tourism in the area. Given its proximity close to both Mamallapuram to the east and Pondicherry to the west, this area may be developed as a transit tourist attraction bridging the two cities. The objective of the study is to find the tourism potentials of Cheyyur region and to understand opportunities and challenges in developing Cheyyur region as a sustainable and responsible transit tourist destination. The concluding section offers suggestions on how to leverage the opportunities to overcome the challenges in developing Cheyyur region as a transit tourist destination.*

**Keywords:** Cheyyur region, Transit tourism, Sustainability. Responsible tourism, Community based local tourism, Swadesh Darshan 2.0. Jan Bhagidari.

## INTRODUCTION

Following the devastating epidemic in 2020, the tourism sector is now slowly recovering its strength. The tourist industry is today regarded as the global economic powerhouse. According to the Economic Impact Research wing of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the tourism sector contributed 9.1% of global GDP in fiscal year 2023, and this figure is expected to rise in the years to come. Furthermore, in 2023, there were around 27 million new jobs created directly or indirectly, a 9.1% increase over 2022<sup>1</sup>. In a sense, India's tourism industry has grown as a result of the government's numerous tourism-related initiatives. The Indian government is implementing new tactics to draw tourists from both inside and outside the country. The "Visit India Year 2023" campaign was one such effort to boost travel to India. State governments were urged by the Indian government to transform lesser-known locations into iconic ones. The Destination Development Division of the Ministry of Tourism prepared a comprehensive project report for 'Special Assistance to States/Union Territories for Capital Investment (SASCI)', to help transform lesser-known sites into iconic destinations on par with global standards<sup>2</sup>. The government provides 100% of the funding for the project's estimated cost. Transit tourism is steadily developing. It is a connecting link between tourist-generating zones and the destination. Governments are considering the development of transit tourism, despite the fact that it is an unrecognized form of tourism. Transit tourism, also known as layover or stopover tourism, is both financially effective and time-saving. Instead of ideally spending time, tourists are encouraged to explore the locations en route. My paper focuses on building a transit tourism destination between Mamallapuram and Pondicherry. The Cheyyur in Chengalpattu district lies between Mamallapuram and Pondicherry. Vayalur, The Rain Drop Boat House in Mutaliyarkuppam, Cheyyur, Onampakkam, and Alamparai Fort are among the other areas in Cheyyur taluk that have potential as historical, cultural, religious, natural, or recreational sites. These locations were included in the Cheyyur region even though the Dutch Fort at Sadras, Vasavasamudram, falls under Tirukazhukunram taluk since it was situated on the belt. It is possible to create a new circuit using these destinations. The following is the descriptive plan made on the basis of the information collected from various sources to make Cheyyur a hub for Transit Tourism in Tamilnadu.

### Aim of the study

#### There are two main aims.

The first aim of this research is to find and develop a new tourism destination by making use of already available resources in the Cheyyur region. Apart from the traditional

occupations of agriculture and salt production, turning this area into a tourist destination will provide the locals in the Cheyyur region with an alternate or supplementary source of income. A new source of revenue in the form of tourism will help the local community in avoiding relocating to other areas in search of employment, as agriculture and salt production are unprofitable and in decline.

Cultural, heritage, and environmental preservation form the second important aim of this study.

With this aim, I set the following objectives in this paper as a first step toward achieving the purpose of my research.

#### Objectives of the study:

1. To determine the Cheyyur region's potential for tourism
2. To comprehend the challenges and opportunities involved in making this area a new tourist destination.

#### METHODOLOGY

My research paper will be descriptive in nature, as determined by the study's objectives. This research paper will be produced by holding personal interviews with specialists in the subject matter and referring to books, journal papers, government reports, and so on.

#### Tourism potentials in Cheyyur Region

My research includes the Dutch Fort in Sadras, Vasavasamudram, Vayalur, The Rain Drop Boat House in Mutaliyâr kuppam, Cheyyur, and Digambar Jain Beds in Onampakkam, as well as the Alamparai Fort in Edaikkazhinadu, as prospective tourism destinations between Mamallapuram and Pondicherry.

#### Dutch Fort in Sadras

Sadras, a region of Kalpâkkam or Putuppattinam, is also referred to as Saturankappattinam. Another name for Sadras is "Kathirvasakan Pattinam".<sup>3</sup> This location was known as "Rajanarayananpattinam", named after a Sambuvayarar chief, according to an inscription dated 1359 that was discovered here. Later, in honor of the principal deity of the Vishnu temple here, the name was changed to "Sathiravasakanpattinam". The name was changed to "Sadras", once the Dutch took over.

The fort was constructed by the Dutch between 1654 and 1749. They manufactured high-quality muslin clothing every year and exported it. In addition to muslin cloth, bricks were produced and shipped overseas to construct their structures in Batavia Fort in Jakarta and Fort Hammanhiel in Jaffna. In addition, edible oil and pearls were exported from this region.

Envious of its wealthy trade, the English East Company invaded the fort by sea. The French rescued the Dutch. On February 17, 1782, a battle broke out between French and English naval forces. The struggle lasted three hours and ended with no consequence. In 1818, the English once again stormed and seized the fort. However, during the encounter, several of the fortifications were demolished. The fort's remains serve as a reminder of the rich trade that the Dutch established in other regions of the world. The fort is now under the control of ASI. It attracts tourists, particularly during weekends. It is a lesser-known tourism destination among visitors.

Location: Thirukazhukundram Taluk, Chengalpattu District  
Connectivity:

By Air: Meenambakkam- 90 kms:

By Road: Mamallapuram: 12.5 kms, Pondicherry:114 kms.

By Train: Madurantagam: 52 kms, Melmaruvattur: 51 kms

Circuit: Heritage tour/ Beach tourism

#### Vasavasamudram

A small, beautiful village located on the Palar River belt. A modest, lovely town located on the Palar River belt. This settlement is located between Sadras and Vayalur. Vasavasamudram, like Mamallapuram, was a harbour town under the Pallavas<sup>4</sup>. The vasavasamudram village was a part of Vâyâlûr in the ancient period<sup>5</sup>. In 1970, the state archaeology department of Tamil Nadu carried out an excavation in this area. The excavation's results demonstrate that trade relations existed between this area and Rome. The discovery of Mediterranean-origin amphora and conical jars helps to illustrate the significance of the location. These discoveries demonstrate that during the third or fourth century CE, this location had commercial contacts with the Romans and was inhabited for a brief duration of roughly 75 years. Another significant aspect of Vasavasamudram is that they used locally produced amphora in addition to importing them<sup>6</sup>. In his excavation report on Vasavasamudram, Dr. R. Nagasamy concluded in his excavation report on Vasavasamudram that this place was engaged in the cleaning of animal skins. This demonstrates that the Romans also traded animal skins<sup>7</sup>. Further research in Vasavasamudram will reveal the historical significance of the site in depth.

Location: Thirukazhukundram Taluk, Chengalpattu District  
Connectivity:

By Air: Meenambakkam- 90 kms.

By Road: Mamallapuram: 19 kms, Pondicherry: 107 kms

By Train: Madurantagam: 45 kms, Melmaruvattur: 44 kms

Circuit: Sangam Village circuit tour

#### Vâyâlûr

A Sangam age village, also known as 'Pilavâyil'<sup>8</sup>, is located near the place where the Palar River drains into the Bay of Bengal. It was a part of Mondur Nadu in Amur Kottam in Tondaimandalam in the tenth century CE<sup>9</sup>. It was given the name 'Jananathanallur,' a title of Rajaraja I<sup>10</sup>. Vâyâlûr, formerly known as Jananathanallur, was a part of Pattinanadu in SemburKottam in 'Jeyamkondacholamandalam' during the reign of Virupanna, the son of Vira Bukka, a Vijayanagar monarch. The weavers' society paid a tax of three panams each loom, according to another inscription from the Viyâkrapurîsvarar temple<sup>11</sup>. This indicates that weaving was another prominent occupation in this community. This weaver's village later attracted the Dutch, who built a fort in nearby Sadras.

During the Sangam age, this region was closely associated with the Thirayars. The name 'Pilavâyil' means the entrance may be to another world. This 'Pilavâyil' is associated with Ilanthirayan, who was born to a Naga princess, Pilivalai, and the Chola emperor Killivalavan, and later, he became ruler of Tondaimandalam, with Kanchi as his capital. Historically, Vâyâlûr is historically famous for Râjasimha's inscription, (also known as Narasimha II), which has 52 names of Pallava rulers who ruled before Râjasimha<sup>12</sup>.

This region began to lose its significance after the Dutch constructed a fort at Sadras. In addition to its historical

importance, Vāyalūr is a picturesque destination because of its close proximity to the Palar River.

Location: Cheyyur Taluk, Chengalpattu District

Connectivity:

By Air: Meenambakkam- 90 kms.

Road: Mamallapuram: 21.8 kms, Pondicherry: 105 kms

By Train: Madurantagam: 43 kms, Melmaruvattur: 42 kms

Circuit: Sangam Village circuit tour/ Water based tour

### **The Rain Drop Boat House, Mutaliyārkuppam, (TTDC)**

The Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation, in 2003, established the Rain Drop Boathouse in the backwaters of Odiyur Lake in Mutaliyārkuppam, near the Paramankeni Bridge<sup>13</sup>. The Raindrop Boat House is one of nine boat houses managed by the TTDC. Next to Muttukkadu boat house, this Mutaliyārkuppam boat house attracts more visitors every day.

In the fiscal year 2001-2002, it was decided to allot Rs 16 lakhs for the improvement of Mutaliyārkuppam boat house<sup>14</sup>. A wide range of boat types, 38 in numbers are utilized for riding, including rowboats, speedboats, motorboats, pedal boats, banana boats, and water scooters. Those who wish to visit will usually be taken to an island in the midst of the body of water, which offers an experience that is entirely unique. In Mutaliyārkuppam, TTDC intends to build boat houses. For the fiscal year 2023-2024, from Mutaliyārkuppam Rs. 131,72 lakhs were earned as revenue<sup>15</sup>. Inclusion of Mutaliyārkuppam, already familiar water-based tourist spot among the tourist will boost the scope of tourism in Cheyyur region.

Location: Cheyyur Taluk, Chengalpattu District

Connectivity:

By Air: Meenambakkam- 92 kms.

Road: Mamallapuram: 38.6 kms, Pondicherry: 90 kms

By Train: Madurantagam: 33 kms, Melmaruvattur: 32 kms

Circuit: Sangam Village circuit tour/ Back water tourism

### **Cheyyur**

Cheyyur, a village located on the backwaters of the Bay of Bengal. The inscriptions and other literary works refer to Cheyyur by various names, including Jayamkonda Chola Nallur<sup>16</sup>, Veera Rajendra Nallur<sup>17</sup>, Seyur, and Valavanagar. Cheyyur is distinguished by the fact that it combines elements of both Neithal and Marutha Thinai.

Cheyyur is famous for two things: temples and salt pans. According to Dr. Rasamanickanar's "Pattuppattu Araichi", the salt pans mentioned in the Perumpanarruppatai, may have solely referred to the Cheyyur salt pans. This was demonstrated by the fact that Vettaikkarakuppam, Cenkattur, Palur, Tontaimancinna Tontaiman, Nallur, Ayappakkam, and Nallarrur are all neighbours of Cheyyur. Perumpanarruppatai mentions those locations. The salt pans of Cheyyur were mentioned in Chola inscriptions discovered in the Kailasanathar and Vanmikinathar temples in Cheyyur<sup>18</sup>. This demonstrates that salt production in Cheyyur dates back to the Sangam period. The English East India Company was drawn to Cheyyur by the prospect of salt production. The temples of Cheyyur are also significant. The oldest temple is the Kailasanathar temple. However, it is now in such bad shape that it has lost nearly all of its structure. Another temple

is the Vanmikinathar Temple. The main deity is Lord Siva. Sri Kanthaswamy temple is another well-known temple in Cheyyur. Even the name 'Seyur,' which means 'the son of Siva,' was derived from Lord Kandaswamy's presence in this village. Cheyyur's main attractions are the temple festivals: Surasamharam, Sasti, and TeypiraiAstami pooja for Vetalkanams at the Kandaswamy temple, and Duriyothanan Padukalam at the Draupati Amman temple. On TeypiraiAstami, people from across Tamil Nadu come to the Sri Kandaswamy Temple to perform pooja for the temple's Vetalkanams.

Location: Cheyyur Taluk, Chengalpattu District

Connectivity:

By Air: Meenambakkam- 90 kms.

Road: Mamallapuram: 51kms, Pondicherry: 51 kms

By Train: Madurantagam: 20 kms, Melmaruvattur: 19 kms

Circuit: Sangam Village circuit tour/ Back water tourism

### **Digambara Jain Beds, Onampakkam**

The famous Jain monuments are located on the hills of Onampakkam. There are four hill locks in this vicinity by name Kurathi Malai, Koosa malai, Kurathi Malai, and Venmani malai. This is known as a best heritage site. The excessive quarrying activities resulted in the destruction of almost every monuments in the region. The only left out monuments are now located in the Kurathi malai. In the Kurathi malai, there are three jain thirthankaras statues namely Adinatha, Parsavanatha, and Mahavira. There are six stone beds and a Tamizhi inscription belonged to Pallava ruler Nandhivarmar II. This place is visited largely by heritage lovers. This place is now considered as a sacred place by the jains.

Location: Cheyyur Taluk, Chengalpattu District

Connectivity:

By Air: Meenambakkam- 90 kms.

Road: Mamallapuram: 53 kms, Pondicherry: 53 kms

By Train: Madurantagam: 18 kms, Melmaruvattur: 17 kms

Circuit: Heritage Circuit Tour

### **Ālamparai Fort**

The Ālamparai Fort was erected during the Mughal Empire on the Bay of Bengal's backwaters. Later, Musaffar Jung gifted it to French governor Dupleix in 1750 CE. In 1760 CE, Sir Eyre Coote, the military general of the English East India Company, captured the fort. The Ālamparai fort served as a port, exporting salt, zari cloth, and ghee to other places. There was a mint that was used to mint coins<sup>19</sup>. In the diary of Anantharanga Pillai, mention was there for encashing the promissory notes by the French from Pondicherry. TTDC listed this site as a lesser-known site. As a promotional act, TTDC had listed this site in the International Tourism Fair held in Berlin.

Location: Cheyyur Taluk, Chengalpattu District

Connectivity:

By Air: Meenambakkam- 95 kms.

Road: Mamallapuram: 77.5 kms, Pondicherry: 49 kms

By Train: Madurantagam: 25 kms, Melmaruvattur: 24 kms

Circuit: Heritage circuit tour/ Back Water Tourism

**Stake holders**

Developing a new tourism destination requires the collaboration of the region's stakeholders. Involving stakeholders is a huge task. In the Cheyyur region, the primary stakeholders are the local people, academicians (schools), Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC), Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), International, India Tourism, Tour Operators / Travel Agencies, Panchayat Presidents, DHAN (NGO), and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

**Opportunities****Employment generations**

The primary benefit of tourism promotion is the creation of new job opportunities for the local community. New jobs, either directly in the tourism industry or indirectly through linked businesses, provide locals with a better standard of living. Rural community development is mostly characterized by small-scale industries. Job security in the local area will prevent people from moving to cities.

**Conservation and preservation of the destinations**

A part of the revenue earned through tourism will be utilised for the development, preservation and conservation of heritage, cultural, religious and natural sites in the region.

**Diverse nature of destinations**

Another significant advantage of the Cheyyur region's destinations is their diversified nature. For instance, because of their seafront location, places like Dutch Fort, Vayalūr, and ĀlmparaiFort can be classified as either heritage sites or scenic sites. In Mutaliyārkuppam, the Rain Drop boathouse is a water-based tourist attraction. The biggest benefit of this tourist attraction is that it combines religion, heritage, and water-based adventure tourism in one area.

**Government initiatives**

The government of India, sensing the economic importance of tourism industry, is taking positive measures towards the development of tourism. The following are some initiative towards tourism destination development:

Swadesh Darshan 2.0 Scheme, introduced in 2015, is aimed at developing sustainable and responsible tourism practices. Guidelines are framed under the scheme for the state and the union territories. Government of India, under 'Swadesh Darshan', introduced 'Jan Bhagidari' plan, which is primarily aimed at including the local community as a stakeholder, with the goal of promoting sustainable and responsible tourism. 'Dekho Apna Desh' to develop the tier II and Tier III destinations in domestic tourism, was introduced on 7<sup>th</sup> march 2024.

National Integrated Database of Hospitality Industry (NIDHI) scheme (2020) is an initiative towards Aatmanirbhar Bharat aimed at the development of hospitality industry. NID, a NIDHI ID, will make the job easy for hoteliers in availing certain benefits from the government. System for Assessment, Awareness and Training for Hospitality Industry (SAATHI) scheme is to encourage self-assessment among hotels and restaurants. It was launched on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2020<sup>20</sup>.

Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD) Scheme, aimed at an

integrated development that include not only the development of the destination, but the overall development of the city. In a way, PRASHAD scheme, gives an inclusive integrated development of religious and heritage destinations aiming at the development of livelihood, skill, cleanliness, accessibility and security of the destinations.

**Challenges****Lack of proper Infrastructure Development**

The biggest challenge in destination development and management is improper infrastructure development. Proper development of well-laid roads to reach the destination is the biggest challenge. Proper access to the destination, electricity, good accommodation facilities, better telecommunication facilities, and a regular water supply are very much needed for the development. The primary deterrent for tourists is the inadequate infrastructure in the destinations. Drinking water and toilets should be well maintained.

**Safety and Security**

One major concern is the lack of safety and security for visitors to India. Cheating is the general issue against tourists. The most frequent crimes against visitors include theft, small-scale attacks, robberies, forgeries, and cheating. Tourists are also at risk from local conflicts and riots. Thefts and assaults on foreign women visitors are increasing. This will create a bad impression of the place.

**Lack of Skilled labour**

Any industry's survival depends heavily on well-trained, skilled personnel. India's tourism industry is suffering due to a lack of skilled workers. Another major issue is language barriers, which frequently result in misinterpretation between the tourist and the stakeholder.

**Indifferent attitude of the local community towards development**

It is critical that the local community be involved in the development. The growth strategy will fail if there are no locals to engage in its implementation.

**Publicity**

For the destination to develop, proper publicity is required. The attractiveness of a site is dependent on its publicity, even if it is being developed successfully. Despite their popularity, the Ālmparai Fort with its backwaters and the boathouse in Mutaliyārkuppam remain among the lesser-known locations. The reason is a dearth of well-structured publicity about them.

**Environmental issues**

The degree of development decreases with increased exploitation of natural resources. The primary issue with any development is pollution. The Cheyyur region is renowned for its cultural sites, antiquities, and backwaters. Every year, many species of birds migrate to the backwaters. The backwaters are the only problem. The development means that it will impact the arrival of these migratory birds in this location.

**Suggestions and Conclusion**

Any successful development requires a well-thought-out plan. For the development of any suitable destinations, long-term solutions ought to be implemented. The participation of the stakeholders, particularly the local population, is the most important prerequisite. The development programmes must be adequately explained to

the local population. To educate the locals, specially designed courses on the cultural, social, and economic benefits of the tourism sector must also be created. programmes to raise awareness, particularly on the economic advantages of the proposed initiatives.

Since there are no higher educational institutions in the Cheyyur region, the focus should be on the schools, educating the young minds and the academicians about the value of the tourism industry and their village's history through workshops, seminars, field trips, and competitions. As a result, the students who will serve as future ambassadors of their various tourist locations will have a greater understanding.

Fair practices, while dealing with tourists, should be encouraged to follow by the tour operators, the travel agents and hospitality personnel. These stakeholders are encouraged to make use of available government schemes introduced by the government of India.

At every destination, tourist security and safety should be improved. To prevent crimes against visitors, every site should have more tourist police stations with adequate security personnel.

Another significant issue with destination growth is infrastructure development. The most crucial is having appropriate access to the location with the aid of well-constructed roads. This might be carried out in coordination with the village administrators. The availability of sufficient electricity connections, street lighting, good quality drinking water, sanitation, and toilets should be upgraded with the support of the local government. The state government should offer frequent transportation connecting the destinations with other major locations;

Another significant issue for destination developers is sustainability in environmental preservation. This area is situated between the Backwaters and the Bay of Bengal. To avoid pollution of natural resources, separate policy notes have to be issued regarding dos and don'ts in the destinations to all the stakeholders in the region. Strict actions should be taken against violators of the policies.

In conclusion, based on my research, this plan would envision the main objective of the study, which is to create a new occupation through the tourism industry in addition to the traditional occupations of agricultural and salt manufacturing. A new tourist destination can be created by leveraging the available natural and cultural resources in the Cheyyur region. The local population in this area will have more opportunities to generate income thanks to tourism. This can be accomplished with careful planning and the cooperation of all stakeholders involved. The establishment of a tourism hub in the area will assist the local authorities in enhancing the social and economic well-being of the inhabitants of these villages. Development through sustainable and responsible tourism will ensure that the rich history, culture, and environment are sustained for the future forever.

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