

Chennai & Tamil Nadu

Updated 01 July 2005

NOTE ON THIS UPDATE

This document provides updated information for pages 956–1019 of Lonely Planet's 10th-edition India guidebook. Information is presented in the same order as that found in the book. Information on specific places is limited to those covered in the book; many more establishments are open. In general, when we say that a place is open we mean that most or all of the facilities are intact; places not mentioned are unaffected.

For updated information on India, see www.lonelyplanet.com/tsunami/india.

GENERAL CONDITIONS

More than six months after the devastating Boxing Day tsunami, the clean-up is over and rehabilitation is continuing on the coastal areas. The tsunami damage in Tamil Nadu was naturally limited to the coastal area, and travellers won't find much evidence of the devastation unless they go looking for it. Along Marina Beach in Chennai, the East Coast Rd between Chennai and Mamallapuram, and the coastal area of the Nagapattinam district – the areas hardest hit by the tidal wave – you'll still see some debris, marooned fishing boats and temporary housing. All hotels, restaurants and tourist facilities in the affected areas are operating normally again. Southern India is currently in the middle of the monsoon season, so this is low season for travellers and the fishing industry is in hibernation.

TRANSPORT

Notwithstanding monsoon conditions, all transport is operating normally. There are no train lines along the coastal area of Tamil Nadu, but bus services are operating normally, as are taxis and autorickshaws for shorter distances. The only roads affected by the tsunami were in the Nagapattinam area, but bridges have now been rebuilt. All flights in Tamil Nadu are operating normally. A new South Indian budget airline, Air Deccan (www.airdeccan.net) is worth checking out for cheap flights between some centres.

CHENNAI

Fishing villages and shanties along Marina Beach and the foreshore area were badly hit by the tsunami. For a Westerner, a short walk along Marina Beach can still be a draining experience, with so many desperate people asking for help. In terms of tourism facilities, there are no changes in Chennai. Boats to Port Blair in the Andaman Islands are not currently operating for tourists but should resume in September.

Places to Stay & Eat

All hotels and restaurants are unaffected by the tsunami.

CHENNAI TO MAMALLAPURAM

The East Coast Rd between Chennai and Mamallapuram was affected by the tsunami, but everything is now back to normal. Cholamandel Artists' Village is open, as is Dakshinachitra craft village in Muttukudu. Taj Fisherman's Cove Resort in Kovalam village suffered some water damage but is now operating normally. The Crocodile Bank was swamped with water from the tsunami, but miraculously none of the 500-plus crocs escaped. It's now open and operating normally.

Mamallapuram

Tamil Nadu's only real beachside travellers' enclave, Mamallapuram is still a fishing village, so it was certainly affected by the tsunami. All of the half a dozen restaurants fronting the beach were badly damaged, but all survived. They are currently closed due to the monsoon. Lodging options are all open. The famous Shore Temple is intact and, although some new monuments were uncovered when sand was washed away by the tide, they have since been reburied.

Places to Stay

Everything is open.

PONDICHERRY

Protected by the sea wall along its famous promenade, Pondicherry town was virtually unaffected by the tsunami. The pier is intact and the beachfront Park Guest House (part of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram) is unaffected. Beaches to the north and south of Pondy were inundated by waves but have returned to normal.

CAUVERY DELTA

The Nagapattinam district, which includes Tranquebar, Karaikal and Velanganni (Vailankanni), was by far the worst-affected part of the Tamil Nadu coast. Hundreds of fishing villages and homes were washed away, and as many as 7000 lives were lost here. The Danish fort at Tranquebar survived the tsunami, though a nearby Hindu temple is crumbling into the sea.

Velanganni (Vailankanni)

The tragedy at this Christian pilgrimage centre was the timing. Tamil Nadu's largest basilica, the Roman Catholic Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health, drew tens of thousands of Christian pilgrims to Velanganni over the Christmas period. When the tsunami struck on the morning after Christmas Day (a Sunday), thousands were on or close enough to the beach to be caught in the surging waters. Shops and stalls set up along the road leading to the beach were swept away, though the water didn't reach the church itself. Most hotels were far enough back from the beach to be unaffected.

RAMESWARAM

Protected to some extent by Sri Lanka, the fishing community and Hindu pilgrimage centre of Rameswaram was spared some of the carnage occurring further north. The beachfront Hotel Tamil Nadu suffered some water damage to its cottages, but it is now repaired and operating normally. All other accommodation is open.

KANYAKUMARI

India's 'Land's End', at the tip of Tamil Nadu, suffered tsunami damage, mostly to the fishing harbour and nearby village. Tourists were left stranded on the Vivekananda Memorial, about 200m out from shore, but the memorial was undamaged by the tsunami and ferries to the island have resumed as normal. All hotels and restaurants and the famous Kumari Amman Temple are open.