A heritage trip to Chola temples enthrals visitors

The guided tour was aimed at showcasing the glory of Thirubhuvanai

On a late Saturday afternoon, individuals from different walks of life gathered at the Fire Station on Subbaiah Salai for a mission. They boarded a bus towards Thirubhuvanai, nearly 22km from Puducherry, to explore the past glory of the coastal town.

As part of Pondicherry Heritage Festival, People for Pondicherry Heritage organised a guided tour to Chola temples of Thirubhuvanai. “There are three Chola temples located in Thirubhuvanai. These structures were built even before the Cholas ventured on to build large temples in Tamil Nadu. The temples built using Cuddapah stones served as a model to the huge temple structures that were built later,” informed Vijay Shankar of INTACH, as the team reached Tirukundankudi Mahadeva Temple in Madagadipattu.
The first stop was at Tirukundankudi Mahadeva Temple in Madagadipattu, which was built by Raja Raja Chola before the construction of Thanjavur Brihadeeswarar Temple.

G. Venkatasubramanian from the French Institute of Pondicherry (IFP) added that the inscriptions in the temple mention two important lamps — Nandha lamp and Chandi lamp.

The inscriptions also mention the livestock income that was used to maintain the lamps, division of the country, tax collectors, Vedic scholars and village medical practitioners.

Both Venkatasubramanian and Vijay explained the structure of the temple that has a square sanctum, domical sikhara and niches of the sanctum that are now empty. N.Kamashi, an employee of JIPMER, was seen closely inspecting the small carvings on the stone.

“I did not know till recently that Chola temples were in Puducherry. Reading about this excursion in a newspaper, I decided I should make this trip to Thirubhuvanai and signed in their website. I came along with my husband determined to see these beautiful temples unknown to us till now,” said Kamashi.

Informative inscriptions

From Madagadipattu, the team went to Panchanadisvara temple in Thiruvandarkoil. The temple built in 987 AD during the Uttama Chola period, has inscriptions containing information on land plots, land measuring scales, land ownership, weavers, charities, new resettlement, taxes, lake protection, canals, administrative boards and ceremonies besides the beautiful Chola sculptures.

The final drop was at the Varadaraja Perumal Temple in Thirubhuvanai which was built in 995 AD. There are 187 inscriptions in the temple, mentioning the existence of a Sanskrit University and a hostel for students. After visiting all the temples, Kalyani Singh, a volunteer at Volontariat, a non-governmental organisation, said that she was excited to have been part of this excursion.

“This tour has shown us historical places which we would not have visited if not for this festival. It is a very good initiative,” she said.

Nicoloe, a tourist from France, added that she has been visiting Puducherry every year for the past 10 years, but it was only through the Pondicherry Heritage Festival that she became aware of the small temples. “We only go to the big temples in Madurai or Thanjavur. We miss out on these small historical structures,” she said.