



# Chitra Festival Madurai

## Experience the most impressive festival of South-India

In the month of April the colourful Chitra festival takes place in Madurai, the cultural capital of Tamil Nadu to celebrate the holy marriage between Lord Meenakshi and Lord Siva.

### The story

The story tells that once there was a Pandiya king Malayadhvaja, who did not have any children. He prayed to god to beget a child and his prayer was heard by the god. A miraculous three year old child came out of the sacrificial fire, her name was Meenakshi. There was only one unnatural problem, Meenakshi had three breasts. When the King was worried about the unnatural part, the god announced that when she would meet her future husband, her third breast would disappear. When her father died, princess Meenakshi ruled the Kingdom as a ferocious warrior. Meenakshi led armies on successful expeditions and in one of them, she reached the Himalayas and encountered Lord Siva. Immediately, her third breast fell off, and she became docile, ready to be the wife of Siva. Siva asked her to return to Madurai where he would come to marry her.



Once a year, Madurai celebrates Goddess Meenakshi's sacred marriage, as Chithirai Festival with huge 12 day festival. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the Festival, the Celestial wedding of Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Sundareswarar is performed. Though the wedding ceremony proposed to take place between 8.17am – 8.41am, people will started to make beeline for the Chitirai Streets from around 4.30 am. The crowd would be so huge that entry had to be barred hours before the event resulting in even those with valid passes may not able to enter the temple.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the Festival the Car festival will take place in the midst of thousands of people. The temple car with Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Sundareswarar will go around the Masi street of Madurai. This gigantic car is driven manually by thick ropes by thousands of people and is more than 350 years old. The pulling of temple car promotes harmony among the people and demonstrates the power of collaboration and team work to undertake huge task. Foreign tourists were asked to describe their feelings about this festival and the only thing they were able to say was: "Woaw.."



While there is flowing water through the rivers of Madurai, big crowds of people are gathering in the river on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the Festival. Azhagar will bless devotees on a Golden Horse Vahanam (Thanga Guthirai), with special Maalai (Garland) sent by Srivilliputhur Sri Andal Nachiyar. It is an age old belief that the attire of the Lord on this Golden Horse Vahanam gives the villagers residing around Madurai an indication of the prospects for the next harvest season. One of the traditions of the entire procession was the non-stop sprinkling of water on the Lord – said to be a happy gesture to thank the Lord for fulfilling their prayers and for giving them a good harvest as well as an effort to keep him cool in the hot summer month of Chitirai. This tradition is still conducted in the streets of Madurai during the festival.

