

Friday
Saturday
Sunday in
Chennai



Friday: Aqua at the park



Saturday: Marketplace in Chennai



Sunday: Kapaleshwara Temple

From temples to high-rises, markets to malls, *masala dosa* and filter coffee to tapas and sangria, there's something for just about everyone in Chennai. Isabel Putinja offers an itinerary showcasing the city's culinary, cultural and shopping highlights

FRIDAY

6PM The best place to be at sundown is **Aqua**, the poolside lounge bar on the 8th floor of The Park Hotel, from which you can watch night descend on busy Gemini Circle below. With cosy canopied sofas and the soft light of lanterns, the setting is romantic. Order your favourite cocktail, or if you prefer, a juice or smoothie. The menu features a tempting selection of tapas to accompany your pre-dinner apéritif.

7.30PM Just a stone's throw away, Khader Nawaz Khan Road has a number of fine-dining spots. **Kryptos** is India's only Greek and Cypriot restaurant. Chef RC Willi Willson has designed a winning menu with a huge variety of authentic Greek dishes. The salad and mezze bar is a veritable smorgasbord of Hellenic delights with kalamata olives, vegetables grilled to perfection, fresh feta cheese and delicious dips like skordala and horitiaki. The baklava, which is made fresh every day, is an absolute treat.

9PM Owing to laws in Tamil Nadu state restricting the sale of alcohol, bars are found only in high-end hotels. Also, any serious partying must be done by 11pm, when bars are required to close. Just off Anna Salai in the Taj Club House Hotel is

The Blend, a lounge bar with retro décor. A guest DJ spins tunes every Saturday night. Try one of its popular "detox" cocktails, like the Green Tea cocktail made with tequila, green melon, lime and, naturally, green tea. The sangria infused with rosemary and vanilla is a taste of heaven.

11PM Once the bars close, Chennai's night owls head to one of the many 24-hour restaurants located at the city's five-star hotels. Make up for the calories you lost on the dance floor at **Anise** in the Taj Coromandel Hotel, where you'll find a variety of appetising Indian and continental dishes. From *masala dosa* to Caesar salad to *nasi goreng*, there's something to satisfy just about any craving.

Aqua at the park



MY PERFECT FRIDAY



Friday night is a time to socialise and do some serious partying as well as networking. I often go to the **Dublin**, which is the

most happening club in the city and the place to be seen. I then move on to **The Leather Bar** where the crowd is young and where a lot of film stars hang out. I often pop into **Pasha**, which is in the same hotel and is one of the most popular clubs in town. Another favourite is **Chipstead**, which has an older, more corporate crowd where I regularly run into a lot of my clients. Once the clubs close, I've worked up an appetite and it's time for a meal. I head to **Six-O-One**, which is open 24/7. I love the pastries, and the chicken curry and rice is one of my favourite dishes. There's also a lovely buffet.

Kaushik Velendra, fashion designer

WHERE TO STAY

BUDGET * **Hotel New Woodlands**

This is a long-time favourite in the budget category because of its central location in Mylapore and clean and comfortable rooms, suites and cottages. There are two popular vegetarian restaurants on-site and a swimming pool. Rates range from S\$40/A\$30 to S\$75/A\$57, not including breakfast. 72-75 Dr Radhakrishnan Salai, Mylapore, tel: +91 (0)44 2811 3111, www.newwoodlands.in

MID-RANGE * **Somerset Greenways**

This newly opened property is within easy reach of top tourist sites. Its studios and apartments feature fully equipped kitchens, flat-screen TVs, DVD players and broadband. There's also a state-of-the-art fitness centre and dazzling rooftop infinity pool. Rates range from S\$200/A\$152 to S\$300/A\$229, including buffet breakfast. 94 Sathyadev Ave, MRC Nagar, tel: +91 (0)44 7100 0001, www.somerset.com

BLOW-OUT * **Taj Vivanta Fisherman's Cove**

This scenic resort set in lush gardens by the seaside is an hour outside the city. The beach setting, spa, fitness centre and huge pool are obvious draws, along with sea-view cottages and villas with private gardens. Rates range from S\$350/A\$267 to S\$500/A\$382, not including breakfast. Covelong Beach, Kancheepuram District, tel: +91 (0)44 6741 3333, www.vivantabytaj.com

SATURDAY

7.30AM Chennai is a city of early risers and many eateries open for breakfast well before dawn. One of many excellent chains serving South Indian food is **Saravana**

Bhavan, which is crowded at all hours of the day. This is the place to try local specialities like *masala dosa*, *idli* and *vada*, served with unlimited helpings of coconut, mint and tomato chutney. South India is also famous for its delicious filter coffee, served in a metal cup and deep saucer. Pour the steaming hot liquid from one to the other to cool it, then enjoy.

8.30AM The vast gardens of **The Theosophical Society** are the city's lungs. Spanning 110,000m² in the south of the city, it's a pleasant place for a morning stroll and a haven from the noise of the city centre. The gardens' main attraction is the "Big Banyan Tree", said to be more than 450 years old and covering an area of more than 4,500m². Home to many species of birds, this is also a great place for bird watching.



MY PERFECT SATURDAY

My Saturday starts with a morning walk in **Nageswara Rao Park** in Mylapore, which is close to my home. This is an opportunity to socialise because I meet many people of all ages in the neighbourhood. Then I enjoy breakfast with my husband while we read all the mainstream newspapers and discuss the highlights.

Over lunch I often plan the rest of the day. I enjoy going to **Connemara Public Library** in Egmore to browse through the books. Early evening invariably starts with a visit to Mylapore's **Venkateswara Perumal Temple**, which is dedicated to Vishnu, our family deity. I like it because it has shrines to other Hindu deities, too, and is spacious and not crowded. If there's an interesting cultural programme in the evening at the **Madras Music Academy**, it takes precedence over all other activities. The day ends with my husband and I dining at a vegetarian restaurant before heading home. My favourite is **Mathura** on Anna Salai. N Meera Raghavendra Rao, freelance journalist and author, www.justlies.wordpress.com

10AM Chennai is the centre of South Indian classical music and dance. **Kalakshetra** (the "temple of arts") is a renowned school with an idyllic, seaside campus. In the mornings you can watch classes in thatched cottages throughout the campus. Dance teachers sing and mark the rhythm with wooden sticks and boards while dancers in colourful cotton saris execute the steps.

NOON **Burgundy's** opened in MRC Nagar only a few months ago but it's already the place to lunch thanks to the winning duo of restaurateur Vipin Sachdev and Chef Willi of the ever-popular Kryptos and Tuscana ☕



restaurants. The popular buffet features a variety of fabulous dishes, with different daily offerings from a wide range of cuisines: Lebanese, Italian, and North and South Indian. Start your gourmet tour at the *chaat* counter, move to the antipasti bar and then head to the vegetarian or non-veg counters featuring delicious mains. The Indian and continental desserts are simply superb.

2PM T Nagar is Chennai's main shopping district, known for its huge silk and jewellery showrooms where brides-to-be from across India come to buy everything they need for the big day. **Nalli's** and **Pothy's** are two of the largest and most popular sari shops and are worth a visit just to see the exquisite Kanchipuram silk saris on display and to experience the shopping frenzy.

5.30PM Chennai residents were shocked to learn a year ago that the beautiful heritage mansion housing the much-loved café and shops at **Amethyst** was to be torn down. But owner Kiran Rao has managed to recreate the tranquil ambience and exquisite gardens in a new location on Whites Road. This is the ideal place to spend

a long afternoon with a cup of tea and a good book or chatting with friends. The shop upstairs features an eclectic collection of Indo-Western wear and jewellery, and a very select range of *haute couture* by prominent Indian designers.

8PM Just 2km away on TTK Road is **Benjarong**, one of the city's handful of Thai restaurants. The dishes here are not "Indianised" to suit local tastes. The delicate seasonings and balanced flavours of Thai cuisine are most apparent in dishes like the *tom yum* prawn soup and the ever-popular Thai green curry. Add to the excellent food an elegant setting and you have the ingredients for the perfect evening out.

9.30PM Time for a night cap before the bars shut down for the evening. Head up TTK Road to Cathedral Road, home to **Zara's Tapas Bar**. Mojitos and caipirinhas are the drinks of choice here, along with sangria. This is the only place in town where you can find Spanish tapas, like *patatas con salsa* and *croquetas de espinacas*. The resident DJ ensures that the party keeps going until closing time. ☚

STAPLES OF SOUTH INDIAN CUISINE

* Popular South Indian dishes like *idli*, *dosa* and *uttappam* are typically eaten as breakfast foods or as an afternoon snack or light evening meal. All of these dishes are made from the same type of batter: a mixture of rice and *urad dal* which is soaked and then mixed together and left to ferment. *Idlis* are light and fluffy steamed cakes while *dosas* are thin, crispy and pancake-like, and can be easily folded or rolled. When filled with a potato mixture, they become *masala dosas*. *Uttappams* are thicker *dosas* often topped with tomatoes or onions. Another popular snack food is *vada*, which is made with *urad dal* and deep fried, resembling a type of doughnut. Each of these dishes is typically accompanied by *sambhar*, a thick, soup-like sauce made with *dal*, vegetables and spices. The other necessary accompaniment is *chutney*, usually made with coconut. There are also tomato, mint and coriander chutneys.

* Rice is the staple of the lunchtime meal. This is eaten with a variety of vegetable dishes, like *poriyal* (vegetables mixed with coconut and curry leaves), and rice preparations, including tomato rice, coconut rice and lemon rice. Plain rice is then eaten with *sambhar*, followed by *rasam* (a thin soup made with tomato and tamarind) and then curd (yogurt) to complete the meal. These lunchtime meals are often served on traditional banana leaves in restaurants and at weddings. In South India, sweets are generally eaten at the beginning of the meal, not at the end!





SUNDAY

6AM Daybreak at **Marina Beach** is magic. The beach is crowded with walkers, joggers and swimmers, people meditating and doing yoga, as well as members of the local Laughter Club. Many historical buildings and monuments, such as Presidency College, the University of Madras, and farther north, the High Court and Fort St George, are located close to the seafront. The latter houses the Legislative Assembly, the State Secretariat and the Fort Museum.

7.30AM The **Ratna Café** on Triplicane High Road is a landmark where food quality takes precedence over décor. It has been serving traditional South Indian vegetarian dishes for more than 100 years and is considered to have the city's best *sambhar*.

8AM Close by is **Sri Parthasarathy Temple**, dedicated to Lord Krishna and dating back to the 8th century. A step inside is a step back in time, away from the bustle of the city just outside its gates.



9AM Farther south along the seafront is the imposing **San Thome Cathedral**, a key centre of worship for the city's many Christians. It was built in 1504 by the Portuguese on the burial site of St Thomas, who was believed to have brought Christianity to India in 52AD. It was rebuilt by the British in neo-Gothic style in 1893.

10AM A short distance west on Kutchery Road is Mylapore, one of the city's oldest neighbourhoods. The vibe here is more village-like, with lanes lined with jewellery

sellers, crumbling heritage homes and colourful market stalls. At its heart is the magnificent **Kapaleeshwärar Temple** and its huge reservoir. Mylapore is also the city's cultural hub, home to venues playing host to music and dance performances during the annual festival in December.

NOON It's worth the long drive down scenic East Coast Road to **Kipling Café**, where you can dine alfresco on the lawn under thatched roofs while enjoying the sea breezes. The pizzas and Thai curries are popular dishes, as are the fusion desserts. Try the tender coconut pannacotta with ginger biscuits – fusion at its best.

1.30PM A few kilometres farther south along East Coast Road is **DakshinaChitra**. This centre for living art traditions showcases many facets of South India's cultural heritage. You can watch artisans at work creating sculptures, pottery, ceramics and weavings. Performances are also held here. Spread across the grounds are stunning replicas of traditional houses from each of the South Indian states.

5.30PM Mall culture has come to India in a big way. The recently opened **Express Avenue Mall** on Whites Road in Royapettah is one of South India's newest and largest shopping centres. From Benetton to Body Shop, Levi's to Lush, all the major brands are here. The cinema and food court make it a complete shopping, entertainment and food destination.

7.30PM Indians love Italian food and Chennai has many Italian restaurants from which to choose. But one that garners consistently good reviews is **Prego**, located at the Taj Coromandel Hotel. Chef Giovanna Marson from Milan has put together an award-winning menu featuring dishes like lamb osso buco and salmon stuffed gnocchi with asparagus sauce. The resident sommelier can help you choose the perfect wine to accompany your meal. Ask for one of the tables facing the pool.

9.30PM Unwind after an action-packed weekend on the outdoor terrace overlooking the city skyline at **365 A.S.** This lounge bar at the newly-opened Hyatt Regency on Anna Salai has a warm and welcoming ambience. Relax with a glass of wine or an after-dinner digestif. ☕

MY PERFECT SUNDAY



Sunday is the day I spend time with my family. After rehearsals, my Sunday morning ritual is to have egg appams at my mother's place. I then head out with my husband and daughter for some shopping and lunch. We love the wood-fired pizza at **Tuscania Pizzeria, one of our favourite restaurants. We then like to do some window-shopping on Khader Nawaz Khan Road. A visit to **Esprit**, my daughter's favourite shop, is unavoidable, as is a trip to **Landmark** bookshop, as my husband is an avid reader. We all love coffee so we stop for cappuccinos at **Barista**. We also often visit the **Hanuman Temple** in Pozhichalur on a Sunday afternoon. The perfect Sunday would not be complete without dinner with friends. One of my favourite restaurants is **Lotus**, which serves excellent Thai food. Urmila Sathyaranayanan, classical Bharata Natyam dancer, www.urmila.in**



CHENNAI DECEMBER SEASON – DECEMBER TO JANUARY

* Chennai is famous for its annual festival of music and dance. The festival was first held in 1927 when the prestigious Madras Music Academy was founded. Today, more than 75 cultural organisations stage their own extravaganzas featuring the biggest names in South Indian classical dance and Carnatic music. Known collectively as the Chennai December Season, events peak during the second half of December and continue well into January. During this time, there are more than 2,500 concerts and performances staged at more than 75 venues.

* Most concerts feature classical singers of the South Indian classical Carnatic style, but also violin, veena and flute, as well as non-traditional instruments like saxophone, mandolin and guitar. Most of the dance performances are of Bharata Natyam, the South Indian classical dance form, but other Indian classical dances are also showcased.

* Tourist numbers peak in December as music and dance aficionados from around the world flock to the city. The "season" becomes bigger each year and is now the largest festival of South Indian music and dance not just in India, but around the world.



Tiger Airways flies daily to Chennai from Singapore. Book your flights at www.tigerairways.com

CONTACT BOOK

FRIDAY

- **Aqua**, 601 Anna Salai, tel: +91 (0)44 4267 6000, www.theparkhotels.com
- **Kryptos**, 24 Khader Nawaz Khan Rd, Nungambakkam, tel: +91 (0)44 4503 8001, www.tuscanakryptos.in
- **The Blend**, Taj Club House Hotel, 2 Club House Rd, tel: +91 (0)44 6631 3131
- **Anise**, Taj Coromandel Hotel, 37 Mahatma Gandhi Rd, Nungambakkam, tel: +91 (0)44 6600 2827

SATURDAY

- **Saravana Bhavan**, 101 Dr Radhakrishnan Salai, Mylapore, tel: +91 (0)44 2811 5977, www.saravanabhavan.com
- **The Theosophical Society**, Adyar, tel: +91 (0)44 2491 2474, www.ts-adyar.org
- **Kalakshetra**, Thiruvanmiyur, tel: +91 (0)44 2452 4057, www.kalakshetra.net
- **Burgundy's**, Somerset Hwys, 94 Sathyadev Ave, MRC Nagar, tel: +91 (0)44 7100 0001
- **Nalli's**, 9 Nageswaran Rd, T Nagar, tel: +91 (0)44 2434 4115, www.nalli.com
- **Pothy's**, 15 Nageswara Rao Rd, Panagal Park, tel: +91 (0)44 4396 6333, www.pothys.com
- **Amethyst**, Whites Rd, Royapettah, tel: +91 (0)44 2854 1917, www.amethystchennai.com
- **Benjarong**, 146 TTK Rd, tel: +91 (0)44 2432 2640, www.benjarong.in
- **Zara's Tapas Bar**, 71 Cathedral Rd, tel: +91 (0)44 2811 1462, www.zaratapasbar.in

SUNDAY

- **Ratna Café**, 255 Triplicane High Rd, Triplicane, tel: +91 (0)44 2848 7181
- **Sri Parthasarathy Temple**, Near Venkatarangam St, Triplicane, tel: +91 (0)44 2844 2449, www.sriparthasarathyswamytemple.org
- **San Thome Cathedral**, 38 San Thome High Rd, Mylapore, tel: +91 (0)44 2498 5455, www.santhomechurch.com
- **Kapaleeshwarer Temple**, Close to Ramakrishna Mutt Rd, Mylapore
- **Kipling Café**, 14 L Jey Ave, Akkarakai, Sholinganallur, East Coast Rd, tel: +91 (0)44 2453 0040, www.kiplingchennai.com
- **DakshinaChitra**, East Coast Rd, Muttukadu, Chingleput District, tel: +91 (0)44 2747 2603, www.dakshinachitra.net

dakshinachitra.net

- **Express Avenue Mall**, Whites Rd, Royapettah, tel: +91 (0)44 2388 1923, www.expressavenue.in
- **Prego**, Taj Coromandel Hotel, 37 Mahatma Gandhi Rd, Nungambakkam, tel: +91 (0)44 6600 2827
- **365 A.S.**, Hyatt Regency Hotel, 365 Anna Salai, Teynampet, tel: +91 (0)44 6100 1234, www.chennai.regency.hyatt.com

KAUSHIK VELENDRA'S FRIDAY

- **Dublin**, ITC Hotel Park Sheraton, 132 TTK Rd, tel: +91 (0)44 2499 4101
- **The Leather Bar**, The Park Hotel, 601 Anna Salai, tel: +91 (0)44 4267 6000
- **Pasha**, The Park Hotel, 601 Anna Salai, tel: +91 (0)44 4267 6000
- **Chipstead**, Taj Coromandel Hotel, 37 Mahatma Gandhi Rd, Nungambakkam, tel: +91 (0)44 6600 2827
- **Six-O-One**, The Park Hotel, 601 Anna Salai, tel: +91 (0)44 4267 6000

N MEERA RAGHAVENDRA RAO'S SATURDAY

- **Nageswara Rao Park**, Luz Church Rd, Mylapore
- **Connemera Public Library**, Pantheon Rd, Egmore, tel: +91 (0)44 2819 3751, www.connemarapubliclibrarychennai.com
- **Venkateswara Perumal Temple**, Near Kesava Perumal St, Mylapore
- **Madras Music Academy**, 168 TTK Rd, tel: +91 (0)44 2811 2231, www.musicacademytmadras.in
- **Mathura**, 827 Tarapore Towers, 2/F, Anna Salai, tel: +91 (0)44 2852 1248

URMILA SATHYANARAYANAN'S SUNDAY

- **Tuscania Pizzeria**, 19 Third St, Wallace Gardens, Nungambakkam, tel: +91 (0)44 4503 8008, www.tuscania.in
- **Esprit**, 8 Khader Nawaz Khan Rd, BUVA House, 58/116, Blk 12, Nungambakkam, tel: +91 (0)44 4308 4827, www.esprit.com
- **Landmark**, Apex Plaza, 3 Nungambakkam High Rd, Nungambakkam, tel: +91 (0)44 6452 3150, www.landmarkonthenet.com
- **Barista**, 4 Khader Nawaz Khan Rd, Nungambakkam, tel: +91 (0)44 4213 8567, www.barista.co.in
- **Hanuman Temple** (Sri Rama Anjaneyar), Main Rd, Agathesswara Nagar, Pozhichalur, tel: +91 (0)44 2263 2629, www.sriramaanjaneyar.org
- **Lotus**, The Park Hotel, 601 Anna Salai, tel: +91 (0)44 4267 6000