

# NYC subway or Metro, pick one



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**A**lthough built only two years ago, the Chennai Metro has not only connected residents with their destinations, but also linked various local cultures. Recently, a tour across Chennai was conducted using the Metro with a focus on sights in close proximity to each stop, and both residents and foreigners got a taste of what the city has to offer. *CE* took the opportunity to tag along for the tour's debut.

Organised by KeyTerns group, the 'Madras thru Metro tour' was created as a preview to the Madras Day celebrations this month. The two guides, Srinivas and Yogi, began the Metro tour with traditional South Indian breakfast, followed up with award winning Hot Chips Coffee.

Coming from New York City, there were two things that stood out in the Metro here. First, it was very clean inside, and I even saw workers actively cleaning the interior. Second, there weren't many

people using the train when we left. The main differences are because of how expansive and overcrowded New York's metro is. Our first stop of the day was at the Koyambedu station, where we visited the Krungaleeshwaran Temple and Vaikundavasa Perumal Temple.

Although not the first temples of the day, the group was told of their history going back to the 10th century, as well as their links to the Ramayana period. According to Yogi, Lord Rama's sons installed an idol of Lord Shiva in this location after a confrontation with their uncle, Lakshmana. Nearby this temple stands a smaller Vishnu temple, where three conjoined trees are the side, wrapped with string and rope, and cradles hanging from its trunk.

Next on the agenda, the group was led to a nearby dance studio hidden above three flights of narrow stairs. The connection here was that since dance was so integrated with Chennai's film industry, it only made sense to introduce members of the group to some new dance routines and zumba lessons. Buvanmathu, an actor and choreographer, and Revathy and Habib, dance directors at the studio, led these lessons. While learning the routines was easy enough for the group, once Buvanmathu started busting out his Zumba les-

sons, the class turned into flailing limbs and gyrating hips. This continued till the three instructors offered to show us a more sporadic, local style of dance.

Lunch was Gujarati food at Mithai Mandir, which was much sweeter than local foods. From there we hopped on the train at Vadapalani to Nehru Park, and visited St. Andrew's Church, a Scottish Catholic church. Here the group was regaled the history of Scotland and Chennai's relationship. Built in 1821, this church was inspired by the St. Andrew's Church in Scotland and influenced the setting up of the Madras Christian College in 1835.

From temple to church and onward, we proceeded once more on the Metro towards Pallavaram Hills to visit the Pallavaram Rock Cut shrine place, known to locals as the Panchpandava Cave Temple. From the Airport Metro, we rode in cabs through small, winding streets, and for anyone not from the city, the contrasting living conditions were startling. At the shrine, the group learned of how the temple was once cut from a rock and later expanded on by the residents. Despite the Metro's limited coverage, this tour managed to show us sights ranging from a Catholic church to a rural shrine. And yet, these are all part and parcel of Chennai.