

The World Through My Eyes

Travel Shot: Madurai Malli| The Jasmine Flowers Of Madurai

The minute we entered our hotel in Madurai, we were assailed by the heady scent of jasmine. This was no ordinary scent, mind you, but a haunting, beautiful perfume that I haven't come across with jasmine flowers anywhere. I looked around and, soon enough, found the source of the scent – a strand of jasmine flowers laid before the idol of Ganesha in the reception area. The famous Madurai *malli*! That moment, more than anything else, drove home the fact that we had, well and truly, arrived in Madurai.

For the uninitiated, the temple town of Madurai is well known for the special variety of jasmine flowers that it produces – popularly called Madurai *malli* or Madurai *mallige*. These flowers, grown abundantly in Madurai and surrounding areas, have thicker petals and longer stems, making it easier for flower vendors to string them. Also, these flowers retain their fragrance and freshness for up to two days, making them a huge hit with tourists and locals alike.

Apparently, it is the topography and climate of Madurai that lends the *malli* its special qualities and fragrance.



Madurai *malli* for sale outside the Meenakshi Amman temple

So feted are these flowers, in fact, that they have received their own Geographical Indication (GI) tag (<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/Geographical-indication-tag-for-%E2%80%98Madurai-Malli%E2%80%99/article12308395.ece>)! They have found mention in ancient Tamil scriptures as well.

In Madurai, you will come across these flowers for sale everywhere – on pavements, outside big showrooms, in marketplaces and, of course, outside the famous Meenakshi Amman temple. They are commonly sold by quantity here, though – a string of 100 flowers will cost you a certain amount (I forget exactly how much) – as opposed to sale by length (*mozham*) that I have seen in case of jasmine everywhere else.

How could we resist buying the *mallige* while in Madurai? I wore strings of them in my hair every day, and basked in the glorious fragrance of them.
