Acknowledgement
To the Bestseller Fund for inspiration and opportunity
The socially and environmentally sustainable transformation of Tranquebar into a model heritage town with strong local participation.

**Vision**

The serene seascape

**தெற்கு விளக்கம்**

The socially and environmentally sustainable transformation of Tranquebar into a model heritage town with strong local participation.
Bay of Bengal
Tranquebar
Chennai
Pondicherry
India
Indian Ocean
Arabian Sea
Lakshwadeep
Maldives
Sri Lanka
Indian Ocean

Map for illustrative purpose. Not official.
Map of Tranquebar

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Boats lined up in front of the Fort

Introduction

Resting on the Coromandel Coast, in the Nagapattinam district of Tamil Nadu, the small town of Tranquebar is a living museum, containing more than two centuries of Danish heritage in India. Tharangambadi, “the land of the singing waves,” as the town is known in Tamil, harmoniously integrates local Muslim and Tamil culture alongside European influences. Here, one can experience a rich past, as well as a relaxing and rejuvenating nostalgic atmosphere.
Tranquebar in colonial times

History

History
In the 14th century, under the rule of the Thanjavur king, Raghunatha Nayak, Tranquebar was an active international trading port attracting Muslim traders, German theologians and Moravian entrepreneurs. At the time of the arrival of the Danes, this quaint town had already seen an influx of foreigners. Arab, and later, Portuguese traders had plied the coasts, and in 1620 when the Danish East India Company was established with the construction of the Dansborg Fort, trade languages on the coast were Tamil, Portuguese, Arabic and Malay. The construction of Fort Dansborg, a solid example of Scandinavian military architecture, built by the Danish captain, Ove Gjedde, was part of a treaty signed on 19 November 1620 between the King of Thanjavur and the King of Denmark, mainly for exporting pepper from India. By 1777, the Danes took complete control of Tranquebar. Tranquebar was taken by the British in 1801, but restored to the Danish in 1814. The British finally purchased Tranquebar, along with the other Danish settlements in India, in 1845.
Tranquebar was at the epicenter of a succession of intersecting forces, and, as a result, it has been witness to a unique legacy. The first Protestant missionaries to set foot in India were sent by King Frederick IV to begin work at Tranquebar. As a result, Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Pluetschau opened a printing press in Tranquebar which is accredited with the pioneering concept of making books a social product in India, a practice in contrast with the “guarded imprints” of the Portuguese presses. The first Tamil version of the New Testament rolled out of this press. It was indeed the first edition in any Indian language.
Children playing on the beach in front of the Fort and the Collector's Bungalow
The Masilamani Nathar Temple, the Dansborg Fort, the New Jerusalem Church, the Zion Church and the old mosque express the uniqueness of Tranquebar through the impressive architectural structures that stand out in contrast to the dusty, quiet lanes and the wide expanse of the sea. The town remains a glorious tribute to architectural tastes from opposite corners of the world. Two centuries of Danish heritage have left important cultural imprints that can still be seen today in colonial houses, churches, cemeteries, and most particularly, the Dansborg Fort.
Colorful catamarans used by local fishermen
Today, Tranquebar has a population of about 10,000 people and fishing remains its main economic activity. Traditional crafts are another major source of income. Tranquebar is an educational hub with four schools in the immediate town and 18 more in the vicinity. Although the majority of the population is Hindu, there is a strong Christian and Muslim presence with churches, temples and mosques within walking distance of each other.
Life in the small fishing village holds a rare simplicity and beauty, quite different from the noisy humdrum of city life. Tranquebar’s marketplace is a lively, everyday affair of scattered shops selling fresh fish, vegetables and fruits, stalls selling quick bites and locals haggling over bric-a-brac. The fishermen go out to sea, and one can find them launching their boats into the surf at dawn. Children in uniforms make their way to school, men leave their homes for their jobs outside, and women settle into their household chores... the hot mornings seem to drift lazily by. In the afternoons, the women are free, and you can imagine they are napping, or crammed into each other’s houses, gossiping, chatting or even bickering. Others keep themselves engaged within the walls of their homes in some creative activities like sewing, weaving, embroidering or recycling wastepaper into baskets and bowls.
A Tranquebar trader and his wares

Present Day
With the mosques’ call to prayer echoing in the comforting warmth of the evening, everyone is returning homewards. One can feel the strong sea breeze as the night lazily settles in and soak up the magic while watching the stars overhead and the sea below.
Every Saturday and Sunday evening hundreds of people: local families, residents and visitors from neighboring villages gather at the Fort. Local snack stalls, ice-cream vendors and balloon and toy sellers give an insight into the humble expression of how people like to celebrate life by the ocean in Tranquebar.
The mosque’s minarets adorn the skyline

During festivities such as Eid, Pongal, Ramadan, Republic day, Christmas and Diwali, people from all faiths enthusiastically participate. Tranquebar embodies a harmonious religious landscape where the locals take pride in respecting all traditions equally.

Muslims celebrate the yearly festival of “Sandhana Koodu” or “Sandal Car” from the third day of the new moon in September. Every night for ten days, the sandal car is carried towards the seashore and on to the streets. All pray to Allah to help them through their endeavors. Sweets are distributed to convey the joy in their hearts.
In the first week of September, the native Christians celebrate “Jebamaalai Mary Festival,” in the name of Holy Mother Mary. The seven days of festivities start with flag hoisting followed by various events during the week, one of which is carrying the beautiful deity on a decorated car around the town, while praying for the well-being of all. On the final day, Sunday, the flag is brought down and a grand mass ensues.
The fisher community holds a ten day celebration called “Renugadevi Amman Festival.” The deity is very special to them, and all send out prayers and offerings to the god. Feasts, festivities and various modes of entertainment are celebrated as an expression of gratitude to their deity.

On the anniversary of Lord Zeigenbalg, celebrated on 14 January, everyone comes together to remember how Tranquebar came to be and enjoy a shared public holiday.
Challenges

Fishermen returning with their catch at dawn
Tranquebar still faces a number of challenges as a rural town, including poor access to drinking water, an irregular supply of electricity and a lack of public sanitation facilities. An ongoing concern is how to keep the essence of a simple, rural town alive, while bringing in modern development.
Lost and forgotten since the British left India, today this demure town is in the spotlight again. On 26 December 2004, Tranquebar was hit by the tsunami. The devastation and suffering that followed threatened to smother this rare blend of culture and religion. Hundreds of deaths, destruction of homes and huge losses were suffered, with the fishing community being particularly badly hit due to its close proximity to the sea. In the wake of the tsunami, governmental, non-governmental and philanthropic organizations promptly moved into the area to support victims. Now, Tranquebar slowly recovers through concerted relief and development projects that have focused on emergency needs as well as livelihood restoration.
When the quaint, little town of Tranquebar was devastated by the tsunami in 2004, several organizations focused on reconstruction and rehabilitation of the directly affected population. The first initiators were the Bestseller Fund in their role of funding and project facilitation in partnership with INTACH Pondicherry, a national organization concerned with protection of cultural and natural heritage. An intensive collaboration began between the Bestseller Fund and INTACH Pondicherry that continues today, resulting in the restoration of the diverse and unique heritage of this coastal town. They shared a common interest in preserving the heritage of this coastal town. This collaboration inspired them to involve other organizations to bring about holistic development. SJDT (St. Joseph’s Development Trust), a Madurai based NGO came on board in 2005, with Upasana Design Studio from Auroville, Pondicherry joining in 2008.
The work is being done through three different Indian partners

1. INTACH Pondicherry - Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage
   Their focus is on town planning and restoration of heritage buildings, urban landscaping and solid waste management.

2. SJDT - Saint Joseph’s Development Trust
   They are working with women empowerment, education and microcredit.

3. UPASANA
   Upasana is focusing on craft development, protection of culture and communication.

INTACH Pondicherry is working with INTACH Pondicherry

SJDT is working with SJDT

UPASANA is working with UPASANA
INTACH Pondicherry: Restoration and Mentorship
(www.intachpondicherry.org)

INTACH Pondicherry (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) is an all India organization with its headquarters in New Delhi, dedicated to heritage conservation and awareness. It has more than 140 chapters all over the country. INTACH Pondicherry is a non-government organization that conserves and promotes India’s natural, built and living heritage. INTACH Pondicherry chapter is actively engaged in heritage preservation in Tranquebar with assistance from the Bestseller Fund and the government of Tamil Nadu.

Before and after - the restoration of a traditional Tamil house on the beach
Restoration Work

For the last 5 years, INTACH Pondicherry has been running an architectural office in restored buildings on Goldsmith Street, funded by the Bestseller Fund. From these offices, a large amount of planning and implementation has taken place.

1. Restoration of six houses on Goldsmith Street
2. Restoration of the old parts of Tranquebar
3. Town Park and the park to the south of Fort Dansborg
4. The Sivan Temple
5. The Sea Promenade
6. Matching Grant Scheme
7. Von Theiligen House
8. Governor’s Building
9. Solid Waste Management
Restoration of six houses on Goldsmith Street

A number of Tamil houses damaged by the tsunami were acquired and restored by the Bestseller Fund. They are now used as project buildings and a guesthouse. The houses are all situated in Goldsmith Street close to the sea, and the idea is to create a whole restored streetscape to display the value of Tamil architecture. Previously, the focus has been on colonial style houses, but the Tamil style is equally important for Tranquebar as a heritage town. All the houses are open to the public.
Restoration of the Historic Town of Tranquebar

For the last five years, the Bestseller Fund, in cooperation with INTACH Pondicherry, has been running an architectural office in Tranquebar, which besides restoration work on a number of heritage buildings, has prepared a list of heritage buildings, and feasibility studies for the water supply and decentralized sewage system for the old town. These plans include a new access road to Fort Dansborg, landscaping of Goldsmith Street and the Parade Ground in front of the Fort. The first phase of this comprehensive work is now being implemented and is expected to be completed by 2011. The work is financed by the Ministry of Tourism in Delhi through the Tamil Nadu Department of Tourism, and executed by the Public Works Department with INTACH Pondicherry overseeing the project to ensure that it is implemented in accordance with the approved plans. As part of urban renewal work, the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB) has agreed to improve the electricity supply to Tranquebar and install underground cabling. These improvements will considerably enhance the image of this heritage town.

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Town Park

In order to restore a large open space close to the sea where several old houses had disappeared, the Bestseller Fund has created a public park. The park will be a distinctive feature along the future Sea Promenade. Together with Auroville Botanical Services, INTACH Pondicherry worked on the park and the initial work was completed by the end of 2009. The park will be opened to the public by the end of 2011 when most of the plants have established themselves.
South of Fort Dansborg there is a deserted fishing village that is completely overgrown with thorn bushes. Plans for a shaded park have been made, and the work of clearing the area and planting new trees and palms started towards the end of 2010. Further south, the Bestseller Fund has already established a coastal plantation to protect the sensitive area between the sea and the river. This has been implemented as an example of eco-restoration through planting more than 20 different species of trees that were part of the original flora here. It has been a difficult task, as the survival conditions consisting of sand and a lot of salt from the sea are challenging. However, after many replantings the area will soon become a small forest.

The Park to the south of Fort Dansborg
The Sivankoil Temple

In cooperation with the local Temple Trust, the Bestseller Fund has rebuilt the wall around the temple and cleared the site of sand and vegetation. The earlier streetscape around the temple has been re-established and will be part of the future Sea Promenade.
Sea Promenade
The work to establish a Sea Promenade linking the Fishermen’s Village to the north of Tranquebar with Fort Dansborg along the coast has been started. A plaza is planned in front of the old Sivankoil Temple beside the Town Park, along with a large granite model of Tranquebar as it looked 200 years ago. This has been designed and is currently being built by a stone carver. The Sea Promenade is expected to be finished in the beginning of 2011.
Matching Grant Scheme

There are still many listed heritage houses in Tranquebar, and virtually all of them are in urgent need of restoration. In order to assist the private owners with this task, the Bestseller Fund has decided to make a pilot project giving a matching grant of 50% of the restoration cost for heritage houses. As a first step, we have accepted three houses and the work started towards the end of 2010. If the test is a success, the Bestseller Fund will consider expanding this program.

Von Theiligen House

The Bestseller Fund has acquired one of the last intact Danish colonial style buildings in Kings Street, the nine columned building called 'Von Theiligens House', named after the Danish doctor who built it and lived in Tranquebar in the 19th century. The building will be restored and the main office utilized as a Microcredit Bank, established by the Bestseller Fund. The work will be finished by the end of 2011.
Governor’s Building
The National Museum of Denmark, in cooperation with the Bestseller Fund, is transforming the Old Danish Governor’s Bungalow into a local Cultural Center. The National Museum is financing the restoration of the building, and INTACH Pondicherry is the consultant and implementing agency. It is expected to be completed in 2011. This building along with the surrounding buildings, as well as the old garden, will be a central public area for Tranquebar and its inhabitants. A library, an exhibition, a shop, a Tamil restaurant and a tourist office will be part of this project. A trust will soon be formed to manage this center, and the Bestseller Fund has promised to support these activities until they can sustain themselves.
Solid Waste Management

For three years, the Bestseller Fund has financed a pilot project to keep Tranquebar town and an area of Porayar clean. The project, in cooperation with Tranquebar Panchayat, is managed by INTACH Pondicherry. Garbage is collected from all households, once they have separated their waste into compostable and non-compostable parts. All waste is taken to a central garbage area in Porayar, where waste is either composted or sorted for recycling. The streets are kept clean, and the cleanliness of the town has impressed many. The project has expanded into the fishermen’s village and it is planned that the finances and management will soon be taken over by Tranquebar Panchayat.
Community Development

St. Joseph’s Development Trust (SJDT)
(www.sjdt.in)

The Bestseller Fund started its social development work in Tranquebar as a tsunami relief project, but it has expanded and is working towards poverty elimination in the entire Tranquebar area. The work is focused on women empowerment, microcredit, childcare, assisting disabled persons and coastal plantation.

A Madurai based grass-roots organization, SJDT, was asked to join Tranquebar’s development project, and since 2005 they have been involved in social restoration, non-formal education, microfinance and women’s empowerment.
They have made a significant impact on a wide range of social needs in Tranquebar including:

- Setting up day care centers in 18 villages and supporting them for four years.
- Tuition centers were opened.
- Women’s group development through self-help group formation, economic development activities and access to microcredit.
- The implementation of a program for persons with disabilities, where microcredits are distributed and those who can work are recommended to the local body to provide jobs under the ‘100 days of work for the rural poor act’ (NREGA).
- A coastal plantation program to reduce soil erosion, protect Tranquebar from further tsunami threats and promote environmental regeneration.

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Childcare
Day Care Centers
SJDT have established day care centers in almost all of the 18 villages where they work, but most of them have been taken over by government run programs. Only two day care centers in Kattuchery and Anandhamangalam are left and the Bestseller Fund supports them.

Complimentary School
A large number of tuition centers were established in the 18 villages. Programs in tuition centers help the children to improve their studies. The tuition centers help the children to achieve holistic growth through many extra-curricular activities that are carried out. It has been a great success and the tuition centers have helped many children to acquire a good education. The need is now diminishing due to the success of the program and improved conditions in the 18 villages. At present, 320 children are attending our eight remaining tuition centers in Tranquebar block villages.
Child Rights Committee and Children’s Parliament

In each village, SJDT has established a Child Rights Committee and a Children’s Parliament. Child rights committee members identified key issues in their villages and solved them with the help of the Panchayat. They inspire a collective mind among the children and try to help all the children in their village. Each village has a Children’s Parliament where the elements of democracy are demonstrated to the children and through this, they learn to use their democratic rights.
Women Empowerment

SJDT is presently working in 18 different villages in and around Tranquebar. SJDT has established and worked with 133 self-help groups (SHGs) with more than 2000 women in the Tranquebar region.

Training for SHGs

SJDT is organizing a large number of different training programs on various levels. Programs for managing the groups, book keeping and running savings and microcredit loans have been arranged for all the groups in the project. All the women groups are united in a federation, and special training programs for leaders and elected members are carried out continuously. A large number of different training modules for income generating activities have been made and held for the SHG members. Examples of these training programs are: production of pickle, incense sticks, wire bags, soap and candles. Training in tailoring has been very popular, and further training modules are planned.
Access to Microcredit

Part of the program for empowering the women involves access to microcredit. After initial training in group management and savings, the SHG members have been given access to microcredit through a revolving fund donated by the Bestseller Fund. SHG members have started income generating activities such as petty shops, tea stalls, vegetable selling, cow rearing and other agricultural projects, brick production and coconut leaf weaving. The program has been extremely popular and it has given many women a significant raise in their income.

The Bestseller Fund has a number of projects in India, and they have decided to use microcredit in all of them. The Fund has therefore, in cooperation with SJDT, established a Microcredit Bank, with its main office in Tranquebar, and branch offices in all the places where it will be active. The bank has already started its activities but is expected to expand in 2011.

Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons

A special effort has been made to aid disabled persons in the 18 villages SJDT is working with. In total, 107 disabled persons have been assisted. SJDT staff are training the members in each group and helping individuals to access government support and acquire National ID cards. All the groups are given access to microcredit, and more than 60 members are now involved in income generating projects.
Coastal Plantation

The coastline of Tamil Nadu has lost most of its tree and bush cover; this is one of the reasons why the tsunami had such a devastating effect. In order to change this, a program for coastal plantation for the Tranquebar coastline was started. Instead of the traditional monoculture of eucalyptus or casuarina, we decided to restore the area by re-establishing the plants which grew here before. More than 20 species were selected and local seeds were collected. In our nursery, plants were raised and later planted in a large belt to the south and north of Tranquebar. The area is very difficult to cultivate because it is very sandy and close to the sea. Many replantings have been necessary and women have worked hard, watering the plants for long periods in the dry season. The plantations are now well established and will soon change the coastline into a green forest belt. More plantations are planned: one in the fragile former fishermen’s village, which is in a low-lying area, exposing Tranquebar to the sea, and another in the water-logged area in the river, which is also a fragile area, as a storm can easily change the coastline here. In the latter, a mangrove plantation is planned, as this would be a good way to secure this area and, at the same time, give Tranquebar a unique natural asset.
Upasana Design Studio is based in Auroville, Tamil Nadu, South India. Upasana is currently involved in many social projects, as well as running a clothing company which mainly uses India’s traditional textiles. The studio provides space for designers from different countries to explore their creativity and learn about the ideals of “socially responsible design”.

Work done by Upasana

- Craft mapping
- Creating Tranquebar Craft Resource Center (TCRC)
- Creative workshops with artisans, designers and craft enthusiasts
- Design workshops
- Training for entrepreneurship skills amongst artisans and women producers
- Art and cultural activities engaging local youth, schools and women
- Linkage building with institutions, retail outlets and exhibitions
- Creating a brand identity for Tranquebar town
Craft mapping revealed an array of more than 29 local crafts still practiced in the area, extending back for many generations. Having selected six crafts, namely bamboo, coconut, shell, palm leaf, wood and terracotta, Upasana has undertaken new product development, skill upgrading and local leadership building programs. Providing livelihood opportunities has become an integral part of the restoration of Tranquebar.
Local ladies participating in a TCRC workshop.
The Tranquebar Crafts Resource Center (TCRC) was created as a platform to perfect craft, explore creative possibilities and exhibit products; a space for artisans to showcase their designs and for visitors to see Tranquebar through a cultural, interactive experience in a visually engaging manner. Established in a beautifully restored Tamil building on Goldsmith Street, TCRC is a community-based venture to improve livelihood sustainability. It is also an inviting place to relax, with a coffee shop featuring a simple, delicious menu and a tranquil ambience.
Upasana continues to work towards the revival of craft-based livelihoods in the Tranquebar region, while simultaneously encouraging community relation building and initiating communications outreach and marketing for Tranquebar as a heritage town.
Palm leaf products designed by students interning at Upasana and handcrafted by Tranquebar artisans
Many workshops were conducted to help the different craft communities to expand their market and increase their sales. They were given many new designs and taught about good finishing, so that their products can reach a more sophisticated market. Designers were invited to work with the communities and mutually come up with better finished products to suit contemporary markets.
Public Event

1. To bring the diverse communities of Tranquebar together to participate in a common activity, thereby helping them to bond and explore their roots

2. To provide a platform for the artisans of Tranquebar where they could sell their products

Gaalum Naveedu Niramalar
1. Gaalum Naveedu Niramalar, a kural dravidian forum, organized a public event to bring the diverse communities of Tranquebar together to participate in a common activity, thereby helping them to bond and explore their roots. The event featured various activities such as art and craft exhibitions, cultural performances, and workshops. The aim was to promote unity and cultural exchange among the residents of Tranquebar.

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The Bestseller Fund, Denmark (www.bestsellerfund.com).

A unique non-profit organization that has supported the transformations of communities in Asia and Africa, the Bestseller Fund of Denmark, has taken up several development initiatives for the restoration and creation of sustainable communities in India. The Bestseller Fund is committed to restoring Tranquebar’s cultural heritage and bringing its rich legacy back to life. Together with local partners, the Bestseller Fund is supporting the idea of heritage protection as a means of bringing change and prosperity to the community and positioning the town as a premium cultural destination. The Indian Ministry of Tourism has now given their seal of approval and financial support to the project.

Organizational Support

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The Bestseller Fund has taken up a coastline protection project in collaboration with the Danish Tranquebar Association to build stone revetments along the seafront at Tranquebar. This project also includes beautification of the town center with the plantation of 20,000 plants consisting of 20 different indigenous species. Local women self-help groups carry out the plantation work, which involves fencing, planting and watering, as well as running the plant nursery.
The Government of India recognizes the need to recreate the historical town’s charming ambience with a modern appeal, and supports the joint project’s vision of making Tranquebar a vibrant destination for cultural tourism. A local citizen’s group, the district administration and the Tamil Nadu Tourism Department, as well as the Central Government of India are supporting the idea of protecting heritage as a means to bring change and prosperity to the town.
On-going joint ventures supported and funded by the Central Government are:

1. A Destination Development Scheme funded by the Central Ministry of Tourism to landscape the Parade Ground in front of Fort Dansborg and Goldsmith Street, and the provision of separate parking for buses behind the Fort

2. Underground cabling for electricity supply from Goldsmith Street, through Queen Street and King Street and along the market to the bus stand

3. Full restoration of the Governor’s bungalow, funded by the National Museum of Denmark

4. Implementation of a matching grant scheme, funded by the Bestseller Fund to support locals to restore their heritage houses on Queen Street
Future Plans

The repair and restoration of three more historic properties on Queen Street will soon be taken up, following the release of funds by the Bestseller Fund. The streets will be landscaped with granite paving; underground cabling, lighting and landscaping will transform this into a model street in the Tamil Precinct. This work will be part of the Destination Development Scheme financed by the Indian Government.
The partners are currently drawing up a development plan for the future of Tranquebar, focusing on improving basic infrastructure like roads, water, electricity and sewage systems over the next few years. The plan also includes the establishment of drinking water facilities, rest spaces, refreshment stands, public toilets, etc.

Regular meetings are held with the steering committee for the four partners UPASANA, INTACH Pondicherry, SJDT and BSF in Tranquebar. The focus for the different projects is to come across as a more unified project and therefore put less emphasis on the individual partners.
Future Plans for Tranquebar by the Bestseller Fund

1. MFI – Micro Finance of India
   The Bestseller Fund and SJDT are setting up a microcredit organization in India to be used in all their development programs. It will give women easier access to microcredit, and it will enhance existing microcredit activities. Its main office will be in Tranquebar, but branch offices will be established where the activities take place.

2. Craft exhibitions

3. Cafeteria of local cuisine run by SHGs

4. Cultural program

5. Continued work to restore old Tranquebar

6. Forming a local trust to manage the Governor’s Building as a cultural center

7. Sea walk for the entire coastline of Tranquebar town
Thus, a multi-pronged development agenda continues to be implemented. The project has elicited a great degree of participation from the town’s residents and authorities alike and the diverse developmental efforts are coming together. All the partners, in their own way and in their joint efforts, aim to create a singular impact – “the socially and environmentally sustainable transformation of Tranquebar into a model heritage town with strong local participation.”