

TAMIL CULTURAL PROFILE

-PLEASE NOTE: This profile provides an overview of some of the cultural information relating to the diverse older Tamil speaking people who live in Sydney, NSW, and Australia. This description may not apply to all people as individual experiences may vary. However this profile can be used as a guide to some of the issues that may concern your clients. Information about relevant services & activities is also included. This profile was developed through consultation with community leaders, clergymen and we wish to acknowledge the great support provided by the community towards creating this resource.

Migration of the Tamil-speaking Community

The 60 million Tamils, most of whom are living in Tamilnadu in India, are also residing in other parts of India such as Pondicherry, Andaman and Nicobar, Bangalore, Mysore, Mumbai, Thiruvanantha puram, Kolkata, Delhi and Chandigarh.

Many Tamils are also found living in the Northern and Eastern Regions of Sri Lanka. Tamils have also made Singapore, Malaysia, Mauritius, South Africa, Fiji, Maldives and some parts of the Caribbean their homelands.

Migration of Tamil Speaking people to countries like Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, USA and other European nations, in large numbers has also taken place.

From the information gathered from the elderly Tamil migrants & community leaders it has come to light that the Indian Tamils were the first Tamil migrants to Australia.

They have come long before the Sri Lankan Tamils who began migrating only just before 1970.

The census of Population and Housing, Australian Bureau of Statistics states that prior to 1971 there were only 202 Tamil speaking persons in Australia. However, this number has increased dramatically year by year, as shown in the table below:

(ABS CENSUS)

YEAR	FIGURES
1991	11,376
1996	18,690
2001	24,067
2006	32,701

There was a steady increase of persons speaking Tamil at home in the State of NSW from 1970. Approximately half the Tamil speaking population lives in the State of NSW, total of 15,743.

The table below, 2001 & 2006 Census of Population and Housing, shows the number of Tamil speaking persons and the increase of persons in NSW.

State	2001	2006	Increase	Increase (%)
NSW	12,087	15,743	3,656	30%

The Tamil speaking people have migrated from more than 13 countries, but the largest migration is from Sri Lanka and India.

According to the 2006 Census of Population and Housing the following table gives more than 13 countries as the birthplace of persons speaking Tamil at home in NSW:

Country	Male	Female	Total
Sri Lanka	3807	3894	7701
India	2296	1997	4293
Australia	1001	969	1970
Malaysia	275	370	645
Singapore	117	150	267
New Zealand	42	44	86
UK	55	54	109
Other Europe	41	34	75
USA	5	06	11
Canada	6	16	22
South Africa	14	17	31
Fiji	0	8	8
Other	262	262	524
TOTAL	7921	7821	15,742

In Australia, the migration of Sri Lankan Tamils increased tremendously, mainly caused by the war between the Sri Lankan armed forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil 'Eelam' reaching its peak around the year 2009.

Tamils in Local Government Areas

The table below shows how the Tamils are spread out in the Local Government areas in the State of NSW, Western Region, and also shows where more than 100 Tamils are living according to the 2006 Census of Population and Housing:

Local Gov't Area	2001	2006	Increase
Auburn	1211	1370	159
Blacktown	1145	1956	811
Parramatta	1196	1582	385
Holroyd	1099	2171	1070
Baulkham Hills	751	1120	368

Strathfield	1775	1867	192
Burwood	293	349	55
Canterbury	221	286	65
Ashfield	197	198	1
Marrickville	94	50	44
Leichhardt		17	
Drummoyne		19	
Concord		28	

Tamil Senior Citizens of NSW

- The Tamil 70+ population in the Western Sydney are about 385 & 199 in Inner West.
- 2006 Census states that **2,545** Tamil speaking persons aged 55 years & over are living in NSW.
- Sri Lanka : 1,706, India : 494, Malaysia : 217, Singapore : 30, UK : 3, other European countries : 3, Canada : 3, South Africa : 12, Fiji : 3 and other countries : 74. Total : **2,545** seniors

Tamil Language

- Tamils believe strongly that knowledge of their mother tongue is a vital ingredient in the preservation of their identity and culture.
- Tamils have strong feelings towards the Tamil language, often venerated in literature as "TamilAnnai" - "the Tamil mother".



An idol in Madurai representing the Tamil language as a goddess;
The caption on the pedestal reads *Tamil Annai* ("Mother Tamil")

- The classical language of Tamil, one of the oldest languages in India, has the oldest extant literatures amongst other Dravidian languages.
- Tamils are mostly Hindus with sizable Christian, Muslim populations.
- The art & architecture of the Tamil people encompass some of the greatest contributions of India to the Art World.
- The music, the temple architecture and the stylized sculptures favoured by the Tamil people remain live art forms, still learned and practiced.
- Most traditional Tamil Art take a religious form usually centring on Hinduism, although the religious element often only serves as a means of representing universal and occasionally, Humanist themes.
- The persons speaking Tamil at home in Australia mainly speak two Tamil dialects, the Sri Lankan Tamil dialect and the Indian Tamil dialect.
- It's the same language and they follow common Tamil culture and traditions.
- The Tamil written form is the same for both communities except in the usage of certain words and phrases.

Religious Affiliation



- Religion is an important source of value, ideals and aspiration.
- It provides a location for community life.
- According to the 2006 Census, among the 32,101 Tamil speaking persons living in Australia, there are 7 religious groups:- Hindus, Catholics, Other Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, other religions and some with no religion.
- The majority being Hindus.
- The Hindus have about 9 Hindu Temples in NSW.
- The Catholics & Christians conduct Church services in the Tamil language.



Customs & Values



- A culture of love, respect, honouring others and humbling one's own ego so that the inner nature, which is naturally pure and modest, will shine forth.
- Indian culture places a great emphasis on an individual's independence and privacy.
- Personal prestige is of great importance to an individual.
- To be punctual is considered as a mark of respect shown by the individual.
- Favours done are appreciated by a show of gratitude.
- To be modest in attire, mannerism and character is greatly valued.
- Shoes are never worn in the house and any places of worship.
- Elders in the family must be given their due respect and courtesy. It is considered a sacred duty of children to care for their elderly parents or grandparents.
- The sum total of all good and bad actions is called Karma which is the load that we carry on the journey to our next life.

BASIC TRADITIONS & PRACTICES



- ❖ - **Vanakkam:** A term of respect used when greeting someone or a form of respect in which one joins his or her palms together in front of his or her chest. This gesture is also used by Hindus in their worship.

❖ Greetings:-

English Greeting	Tamil Greeting	Closest English Pronunciation
Hello	Vanakkam	KA-LAI VA-NA-KAM (Good Morning) MA-LAI VA-NA-KAM (Good Evening)
Good Morning	Kalai Vanakkam	Kaalay Vanakkam
Good Evening	Malai Vanakkam	Maalay Vanakkam
Goodbye	Poitu Varan	Pooitu Vaaren
Yes	Aam	Aam
No	Illai	Illay
Thank You	Nandri	Nandri

- ❖ A Tamil person is called by his or her given name and not by the family name or surname.
- ❖ Duty of Care – Children are expected to take care of their parents in their respective homes & look after them until their death. This custom is changing in Australia.
- ❖ **Respect for elders:** Respect for elders is a keystone in the Tamil culture.
 - *sitting to the left of elders
 - *bringing gifts on special occasions
 - *not sitting while they are standing
 - *not speaking excessively

- *not yawning or stretching
- *not putting one's opinions forward strongly
- *not contradicting or arguing,
- *seeking their advice and blessings
- *giving them first choice in all matters
- *serving their food first

- ❖ The Hindus go to the temple on Fridays & Tuesdays, as they are sacred days for them.
- ❖ **Footwear is not worn in the home and temple** – Footwear is considered unclean. It is also important to apologize when one touches someone with his or her shoe or sandal.
- ❖ **Giving and receiving with both hands** – Hindus are required to give and receive gifts with both hands. The reason for this is that with the gift, prana (life force/vital energy) is passed through the hands to the gift. The recipient receives it with both hands along with the prana from the gracious giver.
- ❖ **Care in sitting** – It is considered improper to sit with one's leg outstretched in front of a temple, shrine or altar or even toward another person. This is considered disrespectful.
- ❖ Women wear a round mark called, pottu on their forehead as a sign of auspiciousness or beautification. Babies wear a round black mark on their foreheads to protect them from the evil eye.
- ❖ Relatives & Friends are visited only on an auspicious day after the Tamil New Year – The beginning of the Tamil New Year falls on the first day of the Tamil month Citirai (April-May).
- ❖ It is customary to visit relatives and friends without making an appointment.
- ❖ It is the duty of households to invite visitors to eat with them even if the visitors come to their home without prior arrangement or appointment.
- ❖ **Doorways** – Conversations are not held inside or through doorways. This is considered inauspicious. Likewise to exchange, give or lend an object, one steps inside the room first, or the recipient steps out of the room so that both persons are in the same room.
- ❖ **Offerings** – Offerings of food should not be tasted before placing in front of a deity. Only vegetarian foods, sweets, flowers, and prayer items are offered.
- ❖ **Cows are revered** – Prohibited slaughtering of cows for consumption, as it provides milk for all, it ploughs fields for cultivating food : its urine has medicinal properties and the dung is used as manure for our crop as well as to light village fires.

- ❖ The funeral ceremony is performed according to local traditions. A special priest is called upon to perform the funeral rites.
- ❖ In Australia – the body is placed in a coffin and carried in a hearse for cremation.
- ❖ A widow cannot participate in auspicious ceremonies.

COMMUNICATION STYLE

- Courtesy and respect should be experienced in all communications.
- The elders should be addressed with respect using appropriate titles such as (Dr, Mr, Mrs, etc)
- The aged parents or grandparents should be well cared for.
- Handshakes between males and females are usually not appreciated.
- Agreement can be a nod of the head.
- Most families prefer to settle all their problems or within themselves. The head of the family will play a decisive role.

ATTITUDES TO PALLIATIVE CARE

- Western Medical Practices are generally accepted by the Tamil speaking community. As these health professionals are seen to minimise discomfort and pain, they are readily welcomed.
- Home care or hospitals are accepted by them.
- However, most Tamils become stressful when residential care is mentioned; reasons being that only the very poor are sent to residential homes in India.
- Physical examination of patients by the same sex is recommended, or else it may cause distress or discomfiture.
- Close family involvement in the care of the aged is demanded by their culture.

ATTITUDES TO PAIN MANAGEMENT

- Tamils of Sri Lankan origin practice and take advantage of both Western medicine and traditional remedies.
- Ayurveda, a traditional system of medicinal practices, using mainly herbs is also widely used.
- Aromatherapy, nutrition, massage and meditation are included in the Ayurvedic treatment to create a balance between mind and body.
- Many Sri Lankans, who are vegetarians, prefer medications that are not derived from animals.

APPROPRIATE FOOD

- The staple food of Sri Lankan is rice, with mild to spicy curries.
- Small amounts of meat and pulses are added to the diet.
- Tea is served with meals.
- Home food is preferred by most people.
- Religions practiced play a key role in deciding the diet.
- Buddhists do not eat flesh of any kind, although some may eat fish or eggs.
- Buddhism encourages vegetarianism, days of fasting, cultivating crops, cooking, storing their own food, and the practice of seeking alms (food donations).
- Food is considered as God.
- Those who practice the Hindu religion don't eat meat. Animals are considered to have spiritual awareness.
- A Hindu, who consumes meat, accumulates the Karma of that act. This Karma has to be washed off by doing good deeds in this life or the next.
- Beef is totally forbidden to Hindus.
- Protein in the diet is mainly obtained from dairy products, pulses and cereals.
- Dairy products such as milk, butter and yoghurt are considered to enhance spiritual purity.
- The Muslim will not eat pork.



SUITABLE

- Music and religion are closely inter-related.
- Suitable music may be dependent on the religion that the individual is affiliated with.
- Generally music should be soft and soothing.
- Traditional classical music is usually preferred to western styles of music.
- Always best to ask the individual or the family about appropriate music to be played to avoid offence.
- Recordings of various chants/prayers may be appropriate

ACTIVITIES FOR SENIORS

- Indoor games – cards, chess, scrabble, carom, table tennis, etc
- Useful crafts – knitting, fabric painting, board painting, etc.
- Yoga, Light exercises, meditation, computer classes, singing (karaoke), etc
- Tours & excursions to locations of interest in Australia
- Lectures/Talks/workshops on various subjects:-health, religion, culture, Tamil literature, social welfare, history, etc.

Key Hindu Festivals/Significant Dates

- Thaipongal (festival of harvest; honouring Sun) - 14th Jan
- Thaiposam (honouring Lord Shiva & his son Lord Murugan) - Jan/Feb
- Sivarathri (In honour of Lord Shiva) - Feb/March
- Hindu New Year - 14th April
- Ganesha Sathurthi (honour Lord Ganesh Son of Lord Shiva) - Aug/Sep
- Navarathri (honour Goddess of Knowledge Saraswathi, Wealth Lakshmi, & Courage Durga) - Sep/Oct
- Deepavali (festival of lights – victory of good over evil & return of Rama after his period of exile) - November
- Skandasashti (6days of fasting honouring Lord Murugan) - Oct/Nov

Tamil Radio Stations

- There are now 2 radio stations broadcasting Tamil programs 24 hours daily.
- 'Inpathamil Oli' – (Mr Bala Prabakaran Ph: 97982993) & Australian Tamil Broadcasting Corporation(ATBC)– Special Metre (atbcnews@hotmail.com/www.atbs.net.au)
- The SBS conducts a Tamil Broadcasting service for all the States & Territories on Sundays @ 11am. (FM 97-7 Sydney)
- FM 99.9 – Friday 10.00 – 12.00 (midnight)
- FM 99.9 Sunday 12 – 2.00pm
- FM 98.5 Saturday 8.00-10.00pm
- FM 90.5 Sunday 6.30 – 8.00pm

Tamil Libraries

- Tamil books in the State Library of NSW.
- Sydney Tamil Resource Centre Library. – (54 The Crescent, Homebush, NSW)
- Civic Centre Library – (No 57 Boorea Street, Lidcombe, NSW)
- Auburn Public Library
- Strathfield Public Library
- Sydney Murugan Temple, Mays Hill, Westmead, Library – (Ph:96871695)

Services & Activities useful for Older Tamil People in the Inner West & Western Sydney Region

CONTACT	ACTIVITIES
<p align="center">AUBURN TAMIL SOCIETY Mr S Velupillai : 0412 440 759 Mr Bala S Balendra: 9737 0215 email: auburntamilsociety@gmail.com</p>	<p>Seniors Club conducted weekly (Tuesdays') Lidcombe Community Centre Activities include light exercises, medical advice, short lectures, day trips etc.</p>
<p align="center">AUSTRALIAN TAMIL SENIORS' ASSOCIATION (NSW) Inc Mr V.M.Thevarajan Ph : 98636226 02-0401821434 tamilseniors@gmail.com</p>	<p>Reg Byrne Community Centre, Cnr Fyall Avenue & Darcy Road, Wentworthville – Weekly Meetings Wednesdays (9.00am – 1.00pm) Mt Druitt, Community Health Ctr (First Monday of every month)</p>
<p align="center">BLACKTOWN INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT SENIORS' SOCIAL SUPPORT GROUP Marilou : 02-88253777 Marilou.Adams@sydwestmsi.org.au</p>	<p>Meetings are conducted once every Month (Every 3rd Thursday of the Month (10:00am – 12:00pm)</p> <p>SydWest Multicultural Services Inc, G Floor, Suite 4, 125 Main Street Blacktown NSW 2148.</p>
<p align="center">The Tamil Senior Citizens' Association (NSW) Inc., (STRATHFIELD SENIORS GROUP) Mr. Gananadha – gananadha@yahoo.com www.tamilseniors.org.au</p>	<p>Strathfield Community Centre is located at 1B Bates Street, Homebush</p> <p>Weekly Meetings - Thursdays</p>

Bibliography

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Cat. No 2068.0 – 2006 Census of Population and Housing, States/Territories and Australia. Persons speaking Tamil at home by sex.
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Cat. No 2068.0 – 2006 Census of Population and Housing, Cities, Persons speaking Tamil at home by sex.
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Cat. No 2068.0 – 2006 Census of Population and Housing, Persons speaking Tamil at home by country of Birth, Capital City Statistical Divisions, and Australia.
4. People speaking Tamil at Home in Australia – Dr A. Kandiah, Sydney, 2008
5. Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne), www.miceastmelb.com.au Multicultural Equity & Access Program Sri Lankan Cultural Profile 2010.
6. This Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) CPP project, received funding assistance from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing under the Community Partners Program (CPP). Palliative Care for CALD Communities www.miceastmelb.com.au , June 2009.

The totals in a few tables provided by the ABS slightly differ from the totals of Tamil speaking persons shown on tables on the ABS website.

Representative Cultural Inspirational Saying

“Elderly health is in a sense a sort of a jigsaw puzzle where the pieces fit in different places at different times and the puzzle takes on a new shape every time. To learn to face the fact that the elderly are mercurial in temperament, and anything could boomerang at any time takes a lot of grit, courage and patience.

~ author Mini Swami.