Tourist Destinations - Puducherry

Geography and History

Today, *Festive India* team is visiting the quaint French-inspired town, Puducherry. This union territory is a perfect blend of French and Tamil cultures, and is best known for its majestic age-old monuments, marvelous churches, and exotic beaches.

The union territory of Puducherry was originally called 'Putucceri,' where *putu* means 'new' and *ceri* means 'village.' Puducherry was ruled by the Pallavas from 325 A.D. to 900 A.D., followed by the Chola Dynasty that ruled the town from 900 A.D. to 1279 A.D. During the fourteenth century, the Vijayanagar kings took over. It was further conquered by the Sultan of Bijapur, after which the Portuguese and the Danish took over Puducherry and used it as a trading center.

The town of Puducherry became a French settlement in 1674 when French East India Company's director, François Martin, made it the capital of French posts. It was in this year that Putucceri began to be called Pondichéry. The village's name was officially changed to Puducherry in 2006. The French controlled most districts of Puducherry until 1954 when the rest of the country was ruled by the British.

The union territory comprises of four disassociated and disjoint districts— Mahe district on the Arabian Sea, Karaikal and Puducherry districts on the Bay of Bengal coast, and Yanam, an enclave of Andra Pradesh. Mahe is a territory in Kerala while Karaikal and Pondicherry are parts of Tamil Nadu. Around 162 kilometers from Chennai, the city of Puducherry is split into two halves by a canal and its French-styled streets, designed parallelly and leading to a roadstead offshore.

Puducherry has around three hundred villages, leafy boulevards, lush-green beaches, and extravagant hamlets. The lands of Puducherry are highly fertile, owing to its Karaikal district that is nestled in the fertile Kaveri River delta. Some of the main crops grown here include sugarcane, rice, peanuts, and cotton. Artesian wells around the town supply ample water for irrigation in the city.

Since this town is located next to the sea coast, the weather here is mostly hot and humid. During the summer season, temperatures rise up to forty degrees celsius. Monsoons bring relief to the Pondy people as the weather remains neither too cold nor too warm. Winter time gets chilly; during the evenings, the temperature goes below twenty degrees celsius.

Places to See in the French Riviera of the East!

1. **Auroville**:

Known as the 'City of Dawn,' Auroville is a universal town where everyone lives in harmony beyond their nationalities, caste, creed, or class. Auroville fulfills the task of providing justice to Sri Aurobindo's vision of creating a space on earth which no nation or community could claim to be its own, and where everyone lives peacefully.

2. **Sri Aurobindo Ashram:**

Founded by Sri Aurobindo in 1926, Sri Aurobindo Ashram is a center of yoga, meditation, and spirituality. There is a mausoleum or Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo under a frangipani tree. Find your inner peace by immersing yourself in spirituality at his ashram!

3. **Arikamedu:**

Take a dip into the history of Puducherry by visiting Arikamedu, an archaeological site adorned with Roman lamps, intriguing stone beads, and glassware. It is now used for displaying archaeological excavations, and red and black ceramic statues.

4. **Chunnambar Boathouse:**

Better known as 'Plage Paradiso,' Chunnambar Boathouse is a picturesque picnic spot situated on the backwaters of Puducherry. Bask in the fresh sunlight and play beach sports with your folks, or enjoy a boat ride in paddled boats, rowed boats, and more amidst a lane of mangrove trees.

5. **Serenity Beach:**

As its name goes, this beach is meant to provide you with serenity and tranquility. It is a calm beach that boasts of natural beauty and a panoramic view. Laze around the beach all afternoon, reading a book or sipping on fresh juices at Serenity Beach!

6. **Jawahar Toy Museum:**

A paradise for children, Jawahar Toy Museum has as many as 120 vibrant dolls wearing costumes from different regions of India. The museum is a perfect place to learn about diverse cultures of Indian states like Punjab, Rajasthan, West Bengal, or Haryana. It's located right next to the Old Lighthouse, which was built by the French rulers of Puducherry in the nineteenth century. It was once the only source of light that guided the ships that moved towards the Red Hills in the sea.

7. **The Pondicherry Museum:**

Housing a collection of eighty-one intricately-carved sculptures from the Chola Empire, this art and history museum showcases many archaeological excavations that transports the onlookers to many centuries ago.

8. **Eglise de Notre Dame des Anges:**

A stunning example of Greco-Roman architecture, the Church is best known for its spectacular statue of Mother Mary holding baby Jesus and the White Chapel. It also exhibits many relics of Joan of Arc, the patron saint of France.

9. **Kanniga Parameswari Temple:**

Exemplifying the traditional Deccan architecture with a hint of French design, this temple is devoted to Goddess Shakti. Photography lovers must visit this temple!

10. **The Pondicherry Botanical Garden:**

A must-visit destination, the Pondicherry Botanical Garden is spread across twenty-two acres of land. Boasting of over 1500 species of plants, the garden gives its visitors a pleasant environment along with ample information about the exotic plant species that it displays.

11. **French War Memorial:**

Situated at Goubert Avenue, the French War Memorial is an important historical destination that was built to pay homage to the soldiers who lost their lives to World War I. It is an architectural marvel that tells the stories of these soldiers and their sacrifices for the war.

Food

The French capital of India serves its guests with the finest platter of culinary delights. One can find a quaint little café or a high-toned French restaurant in every nook and corner of this town.

Begin your day with a hearty breakfast at Baker Street and enjoy the crispiest croissants, sandwiches, pita pockets, and burgers with buttery pastries, mousses, cakes, chocolate escargots, and the list is endless! Next, have a filling platter of eggs, bacon, ham, fresh cream, tomatoes, pesto, and butter crepes at Crêpe in Touch. Finish strong with their classic caramelized banana dessert. If you want to try French cuisine, visit Les Saveurs to try Chermoula-spiced chicken tenders, ratatouilles, salmon wellingtons, shrimp cakes, or eggplant galettes with a glass of wine.

After exploring the French lanes and their cuisine, walk towards the Tamil lane and try out some of the lip-smacking South Indian snacks like medu vadas, which are called bondas in

Puducherry, at Mission Street. Don't miss out on their mushroom bondas! Find the best street food of Puducherry at MG Road, especially idlis and idiyappam. Go for soybean dosa at Surguru Veg Restaurant at Sardar Valabhai Patel Marg in Heritage Town!

If you want to taste the conglomeration of French and Tamil cuisines, then make sure to visit Maison Perumal and try some of the traditional Tamil-French offerings, such as Sutta era and Milagu Kozhi, Muttai Kuzhambhu, and Vada Curry. It's a dreamy combination that cannot be found anywhere else but in Puducherry. Finally, satisfy your sweet tooth at Zuka Chocolates to try the best pralines, ganache, chocolate pakoras, and truffles in Puducherry.

Culture

Puducherry transports you to the French colonial era with its colonial streets and French-style houses. The town has a cosmopolitan culture, having undergone several cultural shifts over the years. Walking through the streets of Puducherry, you will observe a cultural medley of French and Tamil influences.

A large number of tourists from around the world flock to Puducherry to attend various festivals and fairs, such as Fire Walking Festival, International Yoga Festival, and Mask Festival. Other than this, people in Puducherry also celebrate Keralite festivals such as Onam, Sri Krishna Jayanti, and Vishu. Majority of people residing in the town are Hindus, who worship Lord Sulramaniar, Angalamman, and Muthumariammam.

The tradition of practicing art and craft evolved in Puducherry during the colonial period, which is why locals are still engaged in designing artworks and crafts. They design incense sticks, candles, screen paintings, batik paintings, and wooden serving mats. Most of the people here speak either French or English along with Telugu, Tamil, and Malayalam. Half of the population of Puducherry holds both Indian and French citizenship.

If you are visiting Puducherry for the first time, be prepared to experience a mishmash of Anglo-Indian, Portuguese, French, Dutch, and Tamil cultures.