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15 places to visit in Pondicherry to rejuvenate your body, mind, and soul

By Catherine Gilon

15 Nov 2016



Posted 25 Jan 2014
Vol 5 Issue 4

A former French colony, Pondicherry, the town that is a mere three-hour drive from Chennai is a popular weekend getaway in South India with many tourist attractions and must-see-places.

The Weekend Leader has compiled a list of 15 places to visit in Pondicherry, now known as Puducherry. (Places have been listed in alphabetical order and not in terms of their importance.)

1. Arikamedu

The Arikamedu archeological excavation site, which is around 7 km from Pondicherry, gives you a glimpse of ancient Roman trading in this part of the world.

The place literally means 'eroding mount' and has been a treasure trove of Roman artifacts like lamps, glassware and so on, dating back to 1 BC. Though not much remains of the site, it is worth a visit to discover history, your way.



Aurobindo ashram is a popular landmark in Pondicherry (Photos: Joshua)

Knowing God's Will

God sent me to Israel even though I had no money! I'll show you how. Go to stevemoxham.com



2. Aurobindo Ashram

The Aurobindo ashram, established by Sri Aurobindo, is a popular landmark in Pondicherry. The Ashram consists of a row of interconnected houses, including the buildings where Sri Aurobindo and The Mother lived and meditated. A white marble shrine, their final resting place is a place of reverence for many who follow their humble teachings.

3. Bharathi Park

Situated close to the famous Promenade Beach is another place of interest, the Bharathi Park. Surrounded by the picturesque governor building, Roman Rolland library, and the government hospital, the government park has abundant space for a leisurely stroll.

It also houses Aayi Mandap, a monument constructed by a French emperor in memory of a lady courtesan, Aayi, who had built a pond to supply water for the citizens of Pondicherry.





Aayi Mandapam at Bharathi Park

4. Bharathidasan memorial

Two great Tamil poets Bharathiyar and Bharathidasan had close connections with Pondicherry. Bharathidasan, a native poet of Pondicherry involved in socio-political genre, is said to have inspired the Dravidian movement further in Tamil Nadu.

In fact, the city is said to have inspired Bharathiyar's famed works – Kuyil paatu and kannan paatu. Both the Bharathiyar and Bharathidasan memorials (on Perumal Koil Street) are worth a visit for their literary value.

The Bharathiyar memorial is under renovation but the poet's works are currently preserved in a museum nearby.

5. Botanical Garden

Include Botanical Garden in your list of 'places to visit in Pondicherry.' Established in the early 19th century, Botanical Garden attracted a lot of attention after it became known that the acclaimed film 'Life of Pi' was shot here. (Don't expect anything magical though!)

There are a wide variety of trees, birds, and even some monkeys. The aquarium is average, a toy train entertains kids, but the trees are its lifeline. The garden is very close to the Pondicherry bus terminal.



Chunnambar - Gateway to Paradise

6. Chunnambar Boat House (Paradise Beach)

You may not want to miss a visit to Chunnambar Boat House. With the sun out most of the year, boating in calm waters can be a soothing experience. The backwaters at Chunnambar along the Cuddalore Main road will guarantee you a pleasure ride - be it on one of those larger ferries or a jet ski.

But the reason why most people visit this place is to hitch a ride to Paradise Beach, a beautiful coastline which is accessible only through a boat ride.

Add this place to your sightseeing list in Pondicherry. But do drop in before 4 pm as the access to Paradise Beach is closed after that.

7. Kalki

With residents of Auroville - an international township near Pondicherry founded by The Mother - promoting sustainable living, you will find heaps of organic and natural products across the town.

Kalki is a shop in Mission Street, which is a treasure trove for products ranging from candles, potpourri to hand painted silks, scarves, jewellery, and more. Don't forget to splurge on their bags too.

8. Matrimandir (Auroville)

This beautiful dome is synonymous with Auroville, and represents its very essence with a quiet hall for meditation. The dome is covered on the outside by



Matrimandir: The dome is covered by golden discs

golden discs that reflect the sun, giving it a surreal radiance.

The Matrimandir Viewing Point, a raised garden area presents a striking view of the building. While you are at Auroville, don't forget to shop around for some awesome earthenware and paper products.

9. Mohanam Culture Centre

If you want a taster session of local Tamil culture, try visiting Mohanam Culture Centre near Auroville. The centre aims to revive local arts including folk dances (Kummi, Karagam and Kolaatam), martial arts

(Silambam) and theatre (therukoothu).

Children and youngsters from the neighbouring villages of Auroville are trained in these activities. During Pongal, the harvest festival of Tamils, the centre conducts cultural and traditional events for the villagers with a liberal dose of traditional games like Kabaddi, Ilavatta Kal Thookuthal and Nondi. The women folk get a chance to showcase their artistic side with 'Kolam' (line drawings made in front of the house) competitions. It is one of the 'must see places in Pondicherry.'



Mohanam promotes traditional Tamil arts

10. Ousteri

Located 10 km from Pondicherry, Ousteri Lake (Osudu) is one of the biggest freshwater lakes in the city and used to be a major supplier of drinking water in the past.

Come December and the place swarms with migratory birds. If you happen to be in Pondicherry around this time, it would be a good idea to visit the spot for a leisurely boat ride and to catch some interesting avian life in action.

11. Promenade Beach

There are a bunch of beaches across this town with the Promenade Beach located right at the heart of the city. You'll see a relatively cleaner beach though the portion allocated to food vendors is an eyesore.

There is a small children's park at one end of the stretch, Mahatma Gandhi statue somewhere in the middle that doubles up as slide rides for the kids, a war memorial, and a beautiful French church dotting the beach line.

For a more peaceful stroll, we suggest that you take the parallel road and soak your sights in the beautiful, very Pondyish grey or orange buildings with large French windows.

You can stop at one of the quieter restaurants for a truly global culinary experience or go local by binging on yummy paani puris near the court complex.



Tourists relaxing at Paradise Beach

12. Quiet Healing Centre

If you are looking at rejuvenating yourself, this is the place to be. From Watsu (water-based therapy), shiatsu, sound healing to the more well-known acupuncture, hot stone massages, you can try them all at this health spa in Auroville.

All their treatments are non-invasive and natural, so you don't have to worry about side effects.

13. Svaram

Svaram – a musical museum and research centre in Auroville is a must-visit place for musicians and anybody

with genuine interest in music.

It was while browsing through one of the Auroville shops in Pondicherry we discovered an indigenous looking wind chime created by Svaram.

When we dug deeper, we discovered a whole new dimension of musical magic. Do check out the Svaram new waves series – a unique range of musical instruments based on Pythagorean studies, created to be used in sound healing. From raw tribal instruments to contemporary resonators, you have them all here!



Zuka: The latest hotspot in town

14. Siruvanthadu

Not many know of Siruvanthadu village near Villupuram as a silk destination, but surprisingly, this place located about 28 km from Pondicherry, hosts over 2500 silk weavers.

With over 300 silk sari stores, this village plays second fiddle only to the famed Kanchipuram (known for its silk saris). As the place is yet to be discovered by tourists, customer service is quite exceptional with most vendors willing to customize saris as per your requirements. A visit to this place is sure to keep the womenfolk happy.

15. Zuka café

Zuka chocolate café in Mission Street has become a recent icon in the city what with chocolate lovers thronging it through the day.

Its owner Srinath Balachander takes pride in infusing the original cocoa taste in its international line of chocolates, desserts and cakes.

A one-of-a-kind chocolate café, it is also known for creative experiments on special occasions. Their mocha cake is to die for and chocolate pakoras, another universal favourite.

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'Istanbul offers travellers everything they would ask for on a holiday'

By Aparajita Gupta
Istanbul

Posted 11 Oct 2016
Vol 7 Issue 41

The scintillating blue waters of the Bosphorus strait and the high boundary walls of the erstwhile Byzantine civilisation strewn with royal structures in every nook and corner of Istanbul offer travellers everything they would ask for on a holiday.

Thanks to Bollywood, Indians have of late become acquainted with various parts of Istanbul and Turkey at large.



A cruise down the Bosphorus strait, looking at the landscape and buildings in Asia on one side and Europe on the other, gives you the feeling that you are straddling two worlds (Photos: IANS)

The film "Guru" (2007), apart from picturising the sizzling bellydance in the song 'Mayya Mayya', had also shown Istanbul's Nuruosmaniye Mosque. Also, several scenes of "Baby" (2015), a film based on international terrorism, were shot in the Turkish capital.

Belly dancing is very popular in entire Turkey. One can visit a night club to get a glimpse of this spectacular show. Belly dancers are even hired for private parties and weddings.

The scenic beauty of the place and various historical sites spanning several civilisations have always attracted tourists from across the globe.

Istanbul, earlier known as Constantinople and Byzantium, is the most populous (around 15 million) city in Turkey with the majority of the population believing in Islam.

Uniquely located in two continents -- Europe and Asia -- the city is home to seven hills. Thus, while travelling across the city, one experiences a lot of undulating landscapes.

Emerging from Istanbul's Kemal Ataturk Airport and approaching the city, one can see a lot of construction work underway in this centuries-old city. But as one heads deeper into the city the high walls of Byzantine civilisation stand tall to welcome visitors.

In some parts of the city, the old houses may make Indians feel they are in Goa.

A cruise down the Bosphorus strait along the azure coloured Marmara Sea, looking at the landscape and buildings in Asia on one side and Europe on the other, makes people feel they are straddling two worlds.

And when one is tired of taking selfies and clicking pictures of the sea and the beautiful palaces alongside, a host of eateries are there along the strait waiting to welcome guests. On alighting from the cruise, one can adequately satisfy gastronomical desires.



The Blue Mosque in Istanbul

One must-visit is the Blue Mosque or the Sultan Ahmed Mosque with its five main domes, six minarets and

eight secondary domes. It was build between 1609 and 1616 during the Ottoman period.

Adjacent to Blue Mosque is the Topkapi Palace. This was one of the major residencies of the Ottoman sultans for around 400 years. The sprawling palace, which overlooks the Marmara Sea, has interesting museums of armoury and clocks. The royal structures and the greenery around cast a sort of spell on every visitor.

For food connoisseurs, Istanbul is a must-visit destination. A visit to a fine Ottoman cuisine restaurant, Asitane, will surprisingly reveal an extensive vegetarian menu.

It serves dishes like Ottoman humus, which is crushed chickpeas, lightly pureed with currants and cinnamon powder; Lor cheese blend, a mix of Lor cheese with scallions, parsley, green peppers and tomatoes, seasoned with rosemary and paprika among many other preparations.

If you want to loosen your purse strings, the places to go are the Spice Bazaar and the Grand Bazaar. The Spice Bazaar, as the name suggests, offers a variety of exotic spices and herbs along with other Turkish delights, while the Grand Bazaar has everything from hand-painted porcelain items and textiles to gold jewellery.



The old houses in some parts of Istanbul might remind Indians of Goa

The warmth of Turkish hospitality is visibly in the hawkers' attempt to lure Indians by singing film legend Raj Kapoor's famous "Awara hoon...". Even film star Aamir Khan is quite popular among the masses. Many recalled watching his hit movie "3 Idiots".

But tourism has taken a hit after the attempted military coup in mid-July that claimed at least 90 lives in Ankara and left around 1,150 injured.

"We get a lot of Indian tourists, but they are mostly from the US or Europe. In the last few years we have seen lots of tourists coming from China as well. But, of course, after the coup attempt, the flow of tourists has slowed," Ozlem, a tourist guide told said.

The Turkish government and Turkish Airlines are going all out to spread the word that the country is safe and tourists can visit without fear.

The best time to visit is April-May and September-October.

(Aparajita Gupta visited Istanbul at the invitation of Turkish Airlines.) - IANS

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Green guru

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A spiritual guru in saffron robes is the last man you would expect to get into a dirty river overflowing with sewage to clean it. But Balbir Singh Seechewal did just that to transform the Kali Bein beyond imagination, says **Narendra Kaushik**

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The protector

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To pursue his passion for wildlife, Imran Siddiqui reared chicken and sold it on the streets of Hyderabad. **T P Venu** tracks the silent work of the green warrior who recently stopped construction of a road through a wildlife sanctuary with a PIL

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By designing a terracotta incinerator, costing just one tenth of the incinerator that runs on electricity, Shyamsunder Bedekar of Gujarat has ushered in a revolution in women's hygiene in rural and semi-rural areas, says **Kavita Kanan Chandra**

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Entire India will soon come under the cover of Arogya Finance that lends money for the poor to go for medical treatment. Supported by social venture funds, Arogya is in nine States and has helped over 400 persons, says **Kavita Kanan Chandra**

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An ordinary simple middle class couple has been serving free lunch to 34 senior citizens in Mumbai since 2012. **Somma Banerjee** finds out why Yvonne and Mark D'Souza are so selfless in service

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Traffic tamer

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(<http://www.theweekendleader.com/Heroism/2468/traffic-tamer.html>)

To prevent an accident, similar to the one that killed her daughter, 59-year-old Dorris Francis has been regulating traffic since last six years at the spot where a car rammed their auto. **Partho Burman** profiles the braveheart from Ghaziabad

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