

# Picturesque *Puducherry*

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his seaside French colony is a delightful amalgamation of nature, history, culture, and food. With its vibrant Gallic connection, Puducherry stands out as a city which will hold a special place in every visitor's heart.



A one-time French settlement, Puducherry is among my favourite holiday hotspots, and the White Town or French Quarter here is my favoured place. The best way to explore this stunning promenade overlooking the beach is to take a leisurely walk. There are several boutique properties around this area as well as heritage ones that have been converted to hotels that make for great accommodation options. A walk through the many lanes around the promenade – with interesting names, including the French ‘Rue,’ meaning street - will give you a great insight into the colonial history here. The buildings are painted in stunning hues – ochre, pink, blue, green, and more - so keep your camera charged, for there are several Instagram-worthy images that can make their way to your phone. I suggest you stop at the stunning Manakula Vinayagar Temple, which dates back to the 17th century. Its colourful façade and surrounds, with vendors selling water lilies, make for a great start to the day. Check out the famed Aurobindo Ashram located close by, where you can pay your obeisance to the mortal remains of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Admire the stunning

architecture and stained-glass images at Our Lady of Angels Church, and if all that walking has worked up your appetite, head to one of the French cafes that dot the place for an Indo-French breakfast.

## AUROVILLE VIBES

One of the other places I always visit is Auroville, the experimental township outside city limits that is home to the Matrimandir. Set apart from the hustle and bustle of city life, Auroville lets you pause and spend a few quiet moments with your inner self. People from around the world come here for some peace and reflection. Walking around Auroville, you will come across several interesting shops – leather is one of the industries here so bags and shoes are aplenty. I recommend you check out the many ceramic stores, some of which have the production units attached, allowing you to see how the beautiful ceramic pottery is made. There are also soap-making factories, offering the visitor a wide array of hand-made soaps to choose from. And Auroville has some nice restaurants where you can stop by for a scrumptious lunch.

### **Clockwise from Top:**

*Perfectly laid-out colonial buildings at the White Town.*

*People enjoying the peace at Auroville.*

*The seaside sunset - a sight to behold.*







Another interesting place to visit is the Tamil Quarter, where you can see heritage homes and markets, that will make you feel as if time has stopped

**Clockwise from Left:**

*The Arikamedu ruins, an once upon a time Indo-Roman trading city.*

*The many restaurants in Puducherry offer the most delectable cuisine.*

*Shopping for local souvenirs and leather goods is a must here.*

## OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

In my trips to Puducherry, I have always tried to look for offbeat experiences and on my latest trip, I discovered Arikamedu, where you can gaze upon Roman ruins. The site is protected by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), and the crumbling brick buildings here stand testimony to the fact that this was once a famed Indo-Roman trading port. There have been ongoing excavations in the area which have unearthed terracotta remains and pottery, all of which I am told will make their way to a museum here. Spend some time around the ruins and you are sure to be transported to a bygone era. Another interesting place to visit is the Tamil Quarter, where you can see heritage homes and markets, spaces that will make you feel as if time has stopped. Located in and around Sivan Koil Street and Kamatchi Amman Street these old homes are a fine example of vernacular architecture.

## SHOP TILL YOU DROP

When in Puducherry, do not miss shopping for local souvenirs at the many Ashram stores in and around the White Town. Handmade paper especially is a speciality here and a visit to Sri Aurobindo Handmade Paper, established in 1959 is a must for me. I always end up buying stationery here - the paper products and boxes also make for interesting gifting ideas. One of the nicer places to shop for local products is the Crafts Bazaar in White Town, where prices are also reasonable. The many boutique stores that dot Mission Street are full of interesting

clothes, accessories and more, ensuring your bags are heavier than when you arrived in Puducherry.

## FOOD AND FUN

With its interesting Indo-Franco cuisine, the gastronomic scene in Puducherry is one to fall in love with. New-age cafes, old-time bakeries, and French and Indian restaurants ensure there is never a dull moment for food connoisseurs here. A city boasting multifarious options, Puducherry has a magic and charm like none other. The unmatched joy of catching an incredible sunset in Puducherry, as you savour the myriad experiences the city has to offer, is something that will make you come back to Puducherry again and again, just like I do ●

