

Top 10 things to do in Pondicherry

by Ami Bhat (Lonely Planet Author) Jul 2016



Beaches here have something unique to offer
Image courtesy: Flickr/Sarath Kuchi/CC BY-SA 2.0

Pondicherry, or Puducherry, is a perfect blend of beach, heritage, adventure and cultural experiences. The tranquil atmosphere of this lovely destination promises calm, and time almost stops. That said, you'll never get bored.

Among the many things that this town has to offer, here is our pick of 10 things to do in Pondicherry.

BEACH HOPPING

The Pondicherry beaches have a unique charm where its inherent serene atmosphere contrasts the wild, roaring sea rushing onto it. You can experience it yourself on any of its four beaches – Promenade, Paradise, Auroville and the Serenity beach. Each of these beaches have something unique to offer – from an iconic lighthouse and the French memorials of the Promenade beach to the shacks of Auroville beach, the weekend flea markets of Serenity beach and the unusual access to Paradise beach via boats.

SOAK UP THE CULTURE

Pondicherry is not just about passive absorption of culture. You can get involved too, with their unique cultural classes and activities – like pottery making and Indian cookery camps. There are offered by the cultural centers like the Join in for a day or take it on for a few days – truly a delightful experience when here.

TAKE A HERITAGE TOUR

Notre Dame Des Anges church
Image courtesy: Flickr/Jean-Pierre Dalbéra/CC BY 2.0

There are just tons of options for heritage lovers in Pondicherry, starting with an era much before the French arrived. Pondicherry is said to have been an ancient trading port that dealt with the Romans and you can see the proof of this at the ruins of Arikamedu. Alternately, you can just hop over to the 500-year-old Manakula Vinayagar Temple to see the rare three legged Lord Ganesha perched on a golden tower. When here, remember to get blessed by the live Temple elephant. Don't forget to visit the Notre Dame Des Anges – a church, reminiscent of the French era in Pondicherry.

Visiting these is just the tip of the iceberg. There is so much more of history to be discovered – with the Pondicherry museum and over 30 different churches and temples.

CALM YOUR SENSES AT THE AUROBINDO ASHRAM

A visit to this epic Aurobindo Ashram is recommended. No matter how restless you are, the atmosphere of this place, with its meditation and yoga practices, is bound to make you feel at ease. Don't forget to tour its small green campus to see the relics from the life of its founder – Shri Aurobindo.

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

French quarters
Image courtesy: Flickr/Melanie M/CC BY 2.0

One of the most recommended things to do in this unique city is to go on a walk through the two distinct parts of the city – the French Quarters and the Tamil Quarters. Discover how the quiet, colorful French avenues with its colonial buildings seamlessly merge with the busy, buzzing markets of the Tamil Quarters. Each section of the city is distinct with their colors and architecture and yet, blend in perfectly to give you a completely offbeat experience.

HAVE A GASTRONOMICAL EXPERIENCE

The diverse cultural influence of Pondicherry is evident in the gastronomical experience that it offers. From exquisite French cafes to authentic Tamil restaurants, you can just spend a day enjoying the ambience and the extreme taste of these two cuisines. And you really do not have to look too hard to find these restaurants. Just walk along the Promenade or the Tamil and French Quarters of the city to find the best of these two worlds.

SPEND A DAY AT AUROVILLE

Matri Mandir
Image courtesy: Flickr/Ashwin Kumar/CC BY-SA 2.0

The one-of-its-kind universal village, Auroville, beckons people for different walks of life, religion and cultures to stay together with peace and harmony. Exploring this small town of Auroville is bound to give you a different insight into life.

People in Auroville believe in self-sufficiency and everything – right from electricity to soap is produced by them. You can visit their boutique or their colorful street markets to buy some of these things. While here, don't miss the gorgeous meditation center – the Matri Mandir – for its beautiful design and more importantly, the unusual tranquility within in.

DIVE IN TO WATER SPORTS

Explore the colourful underwater world with some snorkelling and scuba diving or battle your way through the waves on a surf board. If these are too extreme for you, you can try some speed boating or banana boat rides. When the waves have exhausted you, head to the placid backwaters of Pondicherry for some kayaking and a peaceful boat ride.

EXPLORE NATURE

The second largest Mangrove forests of India, at Pichavaram
Image courtesy: Flickr/Aleksandr Zykov/CC BY-SA 2.0

Discover the diverse flora and fauna at the French-styled botanical gardens or head to the Ousteri Wetlands and national park for the unusual aquatic life. If you are lucky, you might just see some migratory winged beauties at the Ousteri Lake. Alternatively, you can take a boat ride through the second largest Mangrove forests of India at Pichavaram. A charming and unusual experience as you float along the small pathways and water roads created by the live plant stems and roots of this mangrove vegetation.

No matter what your travel tastes are, Pondicherry has something for everyone. With so many unique things awaiting you in Pondicherry, we would not be surprised if you are already packing your bags.

SHOP THE PONDICHERRY WAY

Pondicherry with the influence of the Auroville residents, offers you a unique array of things for you to take back with you. From handmade soaps to cotton kurtas, unique lamp shades, ethnic jewelry, candles, chocolates and more – shopping in Pondicherry is very different and fun! You can get all these at the flea markets on the beaches of Pondicherry.

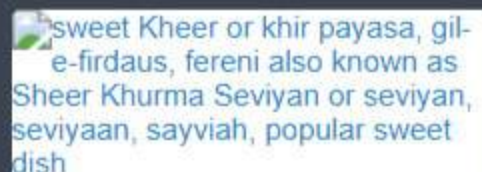
AUTHOR'S BIO: Ami Bhat is senior marketing professional, currently on a break to pursue full-time travel blogging. A travel enthusiast, who loves sports, photography and dancing with equal passion, Ami believes in planning a short escape for every long weekend that can come up through the year. And when she cannot travel physically, she travels virtually through words on her travel blog. More on: <http://www.thrillingtravel.in/>



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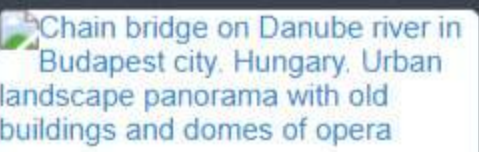
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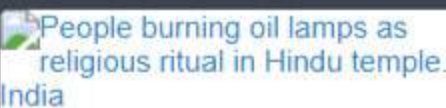
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