

Sightseeing in Pondicherry

Museums, Temples, Churches in this South Indian City

Aug 25, 2009 [Anita Saran](#)



French Building in Pondicherry - *Anand Subhash*

Pondicherry's most famous museum is the Pondicherry Museum with its French colonial treasures. Also find out about festivals, shopping, and more.

Apart from its French ambience and the futuristic Auroville, Pondicherry offers many other delights for the traveller who wants to capture the essence of South India..

The Pondicherry Museum

Walking into the Pondicherry Museum is like going back in time to the days of French rule in the town. There are entire suites – a dining hall, bedroom, salon and office room completely furnished with antiques, gilt furniture, porcelain, and knick knacks of the French styles in vogue at the time.

Some exquisite marble pieces like 'Cupid and Psyche', 'Venus and Spring' are worth seeing. In the bedroom is the lovely four-poster bed that belonged to the Governor Dupleix. There is a comfortable library too with pink upholstered chairs and interesting portraits.

In a gallery with archaeological finds from Arikamedu is a notice that reads: Here you are welcome to muse, converse, study, stroll, enjoy, relax, look, learn, take notes with pencil." The gallery is stuffed with Roman and Brahmi pottery, jewellery, crucibles for melting glass, burial urns from the megalithic age, tools from the Neolithic period, and a French treasure chest.

In the handicrafts section, visitors can find lovely old Chola, Vijayanagar and Nayak bronzes as well as dolls made from cloth and papier mache. Incidentally, the pride of Pondicherry are the dolls made by its craftsmen.

In the Arms gallery, is an antique French horse carriage and an ancient hand-operated Gutenberg type printing machine.

Cultural Pilgrimages in Pondicherry

The Bharaathi and Bharathidasan Memorial Museums are the houses of the famous Tamil poets – Subramanya Bharathi and Kanakasubburatnam or Bharathidasan, disciple of the poet-patriot, Bharathi. These museums are cultural pilgrimages of the Tamil people.

The Maison Ananda Rangapillai is a beautiful blend of French and Indian architectural styles. This museum used to be the house of Ananda Rangapillai, a courtier of Dupleix. Rangapillai maintained a diary from 1736-1760, which is an invaluable historical record of French rule in India.

Architecture in Pondicherry

The RajNivas, a magnificent typically French palace beckons the visitor to Pondicherry with chandeliers in the hall, seen through the gate. Dupleix lived here once and now it is the residence of the Lieutenant -Governor. On the lawn stands a sculpture of Lord Vishnu as the Varaha (boar) 'avatar', holding the earth goddess, Lakshmi. Opposite is the Governemnt Park with its flowers and fountains, one of them as old as the era of Napoleon III (1852-1870).

Keeping French Tradition Alive in [Pondicherry](#)

The Alliance Francaise and the French Institute keep French traditions alive in Pondicherry. The French Institute conducts studies in Indian culture, ecology and biological sciences.

Pondicherry Temples and Churches

There are many temples in and around Pondicherry built by the Chola kings between 10th-12th centuries. At the Manakula Vinayagar Temple, on Rue d' Orleans, devotees seek blessings

For new undertakings. At Vilayanur, is the 17th century Sri Tirukameswarar Temple. The Thiruvandar Temple dedicated to Shiva has 7th century sculpture.

The Gothic-style Sacred Heart Church facing the sea has lovely stained glass windows through which the sun filters in orange and violet rays onto the ornate altar.

The Eglise de Notre Dame de Anges, built in the Roman style, has a portrait of Our Lady of Assumption, presented by Napoleon III.

In the style of the Basilica at Lourdes is the Eglise de Notre Dame de Lourdes. France gifted the statue of Our Lady to this church in 1877. There is a tank within the church an unusual feature.

The Sama Koil Church, once a temple of Shiva, has Our Lady with the crescent moon at her feet within an alcove above the tall entrance. The grotto is very beautiful, covered with vines and a lovely image of The Virgin being worshipped by a woman on her knees.

The Botanical Gardens with its towering trees begun in 1826, has a collection of rare plants from India and abroad. The aquarium contains some decorative fish.

French bread, wine and seafood are a must in Pondicherry. Vietnamese cafes serve pork and shell fish dishes. You can also find Italian and Chinese cuisine in town. But the best and probably the cheapest food here is French. You can eat some wonderful sandwiches and pastries made by French restaurateurs.

Festivals in Pondicherry

- Mascarade – a mask festival in March-April. Costumed and masked revellers dance down the streets to the music of trumpets and accordions.
- Masimagam – held on a full moon day in February-March, is a festival of deities. Idols from many temples are immersed in the sea in a spectacular procession.
- Bastille Day – On the evening of the French Bastille Day, retired soldiers parade the streets in their war finery, singing the French and Indian national anthems. The French flag flies beside the Indian flag from rooftops.