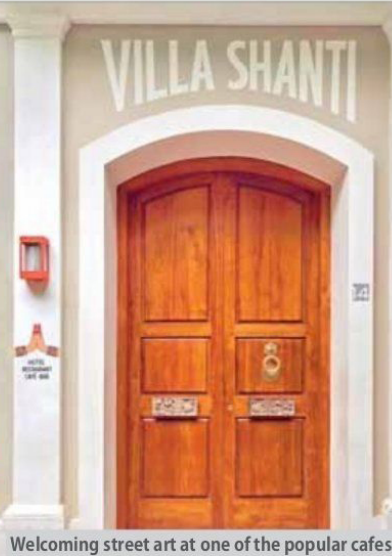


travelogue



A restored heritage building, now a homestay



Welcoming street art at one of the popular cafes

feature. The beach which has been turned into a rocky one is probably one of the cleanest and the most peaceful of beaches in India. Early mornings and late evenings are especially pleasant as you hear only a quiet murmur chatter, as you take in the sea breeze blowing in from so close, cooling you off after a hot and humid day.

There is much to explore here for when you tire of the lazy strolls by the beach and all the cafes serving hot croissants and coffee. Short distances from here are Auroville and the Aurobindo Ashram, Arikamedu which is a site of Roman excavations, a fossil forest and even Island beaches.

Heritage walks and cycle tours of 'Pondy' is the way to explore when you are here. My first day in Pondicherry, I walked 9.6 kilometres to be exact, discovering urban street art and restored heritage bungalows. In this town with its neat little blocks, self reliance comes easy to a girl who just wants to explore, camera in hand.

FACT FILE

Less than 160 kilometres from Chennai, Pondicherry makes for an ideal weekend gateway. Take the scenic route and drive along the East Coast Road where the coast line hugs the road for almost half the journey here. For those wanting a more direct route, Pondicherry now has an operational airport and a few airlines connecting to it on alternate days.

Europe can wait

NEEHARIKA SATYAVADA

Pondicherry, or Puducherry as it is now known, has South India's most distinctive sub culture. Originally, Puducheri or New Settlement, it was interpreted into Pondicherry by and for the French. From the Romans who came here to trade in the 1st century AD to the Portuguese who returned in 1521 to trade in textiles, Pondicherry has had a colourful legacy.

Legend has it that the sage Agastya established an ashram here on his journey south and that this little town's history dates back to the Vedic Era when it was called Vedapuram. But, not the Pallavas, Cholas, Pandyas, Sangamas or the Mughals; not even the Dutch or British who came later could lay claim to this town. It has and will always be French. With a little bit of Tamil in it.

Starting from the 1st century AD when the

They say if you can't afford a ticket to Europe, travel to Pondicherry instead. Stroll through the white part of town and be transported in time and place to a laid back French town or just wander the streets to absorb the distinctive Franco-Tamil culture of the place. This small seaside town has a lot to offer for one who is looking for a leisurely laid-back holiday

Romans came to trade here, Pondicherry has had a rich maritime history. Once an important port of call it was a very prominent fortified town in the 17th century and as the town changed hands, it was razed to ground and its ramparts were flattened to what are today the tree lined boulevards of Pondicherry.

The historical richness of this town comes to life in its art & architecture. Laid out in a grid, the town is divided into the French and Tamil quarters by a storm water canal. Both these quarters are so distinctive that you can tell which part of town you are in just from colours of the houses and the building styles, which go from classical European to vernacular Tamil in a step. A lingering shadow of its European past following you along its every street or rue as it known here.

The promenade with its Gandhi statue is probably, Pondicherry's most recognisable



Rocky beach along Pondicherry's iconic promenade