

HISTORY & CULTURE

Celebrating Puducherry, the legacy town



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History, culture, art... these different elements come together at the Pondicherry Heritage Festival

Residents, artists, craftsmen, scholars and experts come together for the one-month long Pondicherry Heritage Festival (PHF). Organised by People for Pondicherry's Heritage, Indian

National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) and PONDYCAN, it celebrates the diversity of Puducherry's heritage and showcases it to the world.

“The festival creates and strengthens the unique identity and sense of belonging of being a Pondicherian. PHF provides the opportunity to discuss ways to preserve the town's natural, spiritual, cultural and architectural heritage, for generations to come,” says Sunaina Mandeem, co-founder of PONDYCAN.

Into its fourth edition, the PHF this year has come up with new initiatives. As involving children in

creating awareness about the heritage, is high on the organisers agenda, a colouring book has also been planned. “The heritage colouring book has sketches of buildings, monuments, natural heritage and streetscapes of Puducherry by architect Anandhi and artist Ehjournale. “The idea is to familiarise children with both built and intangible heritage in their surroundings, and raise their curiosity about these monuments,” says Vijay Shankar, coordinator of INTACH, who conceptualised the book.

The book will be distributed to school children who visit the monuments during the festival. On February 1, a science fiction written by fifth grader Vipanchi Nayak, titled, *The Mysterious*

Virus, will be released (6 pm, Palais de Mahe, 4 Rue Bussy). The book deals with two issues close to her heart – child rights and animal rights.

While last year's edition showcased Bahour, this year the PHF has added another new region, Tirubuvanai, which has three of the four Chola temples located in Puducherry. On January 20 (3 pm to 5.30 pm), a guided tour of the Panchanadisvara Temple, tanks and farmlands of Tirubuvanai has been organised and participants need to pre-register (email:2018phf@gmail.com). "At the end of the tour, a shadow puppetry show, depicting scenes from the *Ramayana* has been organised. Ninth generation shadow puppeteer Kuppuswamy will perform at the show," says Mandeem.

“A major highlight of PHF this year is IndoChine (as the French referred to present-day Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) connect,” says Shubham Biswas of INTACH Pondicherry. He says that during the colonial period, the French had established the Bank of Indochine for administrative purposes, and the urban legend goes that one of the managers who served that bank used to live in a house which is now a private property called Kusum’s Home.

Later this bank was taken over by UCO Bank. An exhibition titled Traces in Time, where art objects, photographs, documents and other cultural traces that reveal Puducherry’s historic

ties to Indochine will be displayed at Kusum's Home. (7 Rue de la Caserne, February 12 to 18, 10 am to 9 pm).

Two prominent families from the city who have had strong connections with Indochine, will open a section of their homes to display precious objects and artefacts and also explain the history behind it. Foodies can look forward to the Vietnamese food festival planned around the same time at Le Duplex.

They also focus on the preservation of the existing monuments. "We are trying to throw light on Pondy's oldest existing French heritage, the bell tower at the premises of Our lady of Angels

church, and also the lighthouse being in danger,” says Mandeem says Father Sandou Cyril, the parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of Angels, says, “the 300-year-old bell tower built in the year 1739 was left untouched by the British when they captured Puducherry from the French in 1761, though they completely destroyed the church adjoining the tower. The church was rebuilt in 1770. The bell tower needs to be restored as early as possible. The Government had allotted ₹75 lakh for renovation work last year, but so far work has not been initiated.” INTACH inspected the bell tower and has cautioned that public should not be permitted to go near to it as it is on the verge of collapsing.

“PHF this year has invited four residents of Pondicherry to share their ideas on ‘West of the Grand Canal: How to save our buildings and streetscapes? The west of the canal has many Franco Tamil and Tamil houses. As streetscapes define our culture, we have invited architect students to exhibit their streetscapes of Pondicherry on January 20.

All of the regional craft, products and creative entrepreneurship will be highlighted at the Made in Pondy, a craft bazaar (January 25-28, 11 am to 9 pm). VK Munuswamy, a UNESCO and national award-winning terracota artiste will be displaying his work at the bazaar. PHF has a host of events comprising panel discussions, excursions, book launch, literary events, concerts and dance performances, exhibitions and folk performances. A photo contest titled ‘Streetscapes of Pondicherry’, will be conducted by the Pondicherry Rivage Ladies Circle 47.

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The festival schedule is at [www.http://pondicherryheritagefestival.org](http://pondicherryheritagefestival.org)

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