Famed heritage buildings to be opened for public from Feb. 18

Initiative taken as part of the month-long Pondicherry Heritage Festival 2017

S. PRASAD

PUDUCHERRY: In a bid to promote Puducherry’s rich architectural heritage, as many as seven heritage buildings in the famed Tamil and French quarters in the Boulevard will be opened to public from February 18.

For the first time, visitors will be allowed access to Ananda Ranga Pillai House, Lycee Francais de Pondicherry, Ecole Francaise d’Extreme - Orient, Ashram Library, Institut Francaise de Pondicherry, Cluny Embroidery Centre and the Bharatiar Museum.

The Open House is on the lines of the Journees du Patrimoine in France, an enormous celebration of the country’s rich architectural heritage. During the event in September, heritage buildings will open their doors to the public.

“The initiative was conceived by INTACH along with People for Puducherry’s Heritage as part of the month long Pondicherry Heritage Festival 2017. The Open House at each of the designated heritage buildings is from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. on different days starting from February 18.”

“The idea is to promote the city's tangible and intangible heritage such as music, festivals, dance, drama and temples. Each guided tour will be conducted by an expert who will guide the heritage lovers and explain about the building’s rich architectural history and heritage,” Ashok Panda, co-convener of INTACH told The Hindu.

INTACH along with Urban Design Collective, Story Trails and Soulful Pondy will also be organising four different types of Heritage walks from February 19 to enable tourists visiting Puducherry to get a complete synopsis of the former French enclave, traditional architecture and closely observe the nature of its architectural traditions.

The Heritage walk would cover the Bharathi Park, walking tour of the Tamil and French quarters in the boulevard. Urban Design Collective will launch the first heritage walk “Revisit Pondicherry” — A Jane Jacobs Inspired Photowalk in the French quarter on February 19. Heritage lovers can take photographs during the walk. The participants will also be provided with brochures carrying information of the heritage structures covered in the walk. “We want people of Pondicherry from different fields to participate in this month long Festival. It should be a people’s event where we all celebrate our heritage in its various forms and diversity.”

The Cluny Embroidery Centre (above) and the Lycee Francaise French school in Puducherry are among the seven heritage buildings that will be open for visitors as part of the month-long Pondicherry Heritage Festival 2017. — FILE PHOTO: T. SINGaravelou
Meet the crafters

The Made in Pondy segment of the Pondicherry Heritage Festival showcases the work of the people behind the town’s artisanal name.

PARSHATHY J NATH

The sun, sea and free-flowing drinks are always a draw, but for a sizeable section of us, Pondicherry is often also a journey of discovery. From experiencing Jyoti Naoki Erri’s Japanese tea ceremony and trying one’s hand at chocolate making with Jane Mason of Mason & Co, to learning surfing with the Spanish brothers Juan and Samal Rebold at the Kallialay Surf School and browsing Nico Erri’s customised surfboards, the town offers many surprises. But lest we forget where it all began, the Made in Pondy segment of the ongoing Pondicherry Heritage Festival takes us back to some of the original crafters of the town’s artisanal name.

Here are some of them:

Upasana

Featuring elegant, minimalist cuts and avant-garde patterns, Upasana is for the modern woman; one of the first brands to launch sustainable organic clothing. With their new collection, Conversations, they are trying to attract the young fashionista as well. Khadi tunics – with ethnic elements, but international aesthetics in design – are the latest addition. "Many prefer to buy an entire look. So some of our tunics come with a scarf and trousers," says Vidhi Jain, designer at Upasana. Inside their R and D department, where two design students are working on the latest lines, a part of the wall is filled with pictures of decorated bulls and mango sellers. These are being used to design three-dimensional art-detailed pouches, funky accessories that can go well with the minimalist tunics.

Price: Starting from ₹ 990
When: 9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Saturday
Where: Upasana, Auroshiplam
Made in Pondy Special: Upasana will only be displaying Smallsteps cloth bags to urge people to avoid plastic
Details: 0413 2622939

Naturellement

Jams, fruit syrups, nut butters, pickles, cookies and more – you will be spoilt for choice at Naturellement. This is thanks to founder Martina Ljungquist (also a Swedish teacher), who believes in going local and seasonal. They also have a Naturellement Garden Café. "We promote the slow food movement. We want people to come here and spend quality time," says Ljungquist, who came to Auroville 31 years ago. "Everything here is made from scratch. We avoid everything that is industrial."

Price: Starting from ₹ 120
When: All days, 9 am to 5 pm at the café
Made in Pondy special: Brownies, new line of five different breakfast cereals and Italian bread sticks
Details: 0413 2622034

Living Art Lifestyles

Mother-daughter duo, Bitasa Samantaray and Bidisha Samantaray, travel across the country and work with carigars in West Bengal and Gujarat to create unique designs, which blend Indian motifs with Western cuts. Bidisha’s quirky sense of fashion comes through in the contemporary organic cotton tops, in pinks and bottle-greens. The LAL line also includes jackets and bomber jackets, featuring Kutch embroidery. “If you really want to make a fashion statement, pair them with a sarj,” says Bidisha. LAL also retails an elegant line of cushion covers, lamp shades and earrings.

Price: Starting from ₹ 500
When: 10 am to 9 pm
Where: No. 14, Rue Du Bazaar St Laurent
Made in Pondy: LAL will hold a printing workshop for bags and T-shirts
Details: 0413 4308773
Keeping alive the rich culture

Folk art performance and magic show mark third week of heritage festival

S. SETHALI
PUDUCHERRY

The third weekend of Pondicherry Heritage Festival 2017 was packed with events that brought alive the traditional folk art, introduced the history of magic and captured the changing landscape.

Protected by helmets, children between the age group 8 and 16 skated along Promenade Beach to promote Pondicherry Heritage Festival on Sunday evening. Led by two senior skaters holding a banner, the 50 children from Thomas Speed Skating Academy held a balloon in their hands with 'Pondicherry Heritage Festival' printed on it.

Beginning the procession from Chief Secretariat office, the skaters reached Gandhi Thidal and performed slalom skating. Soon, Zumba flash mob took over the platform surprising the evening walkers with their performance.

Shadow puppet show
Presenting one of the dying folk arts to the audience at Lyceum Francois de Pondicherry, Soulful Pondy organised a shadow puppet show on Saturday evening. R. Kuppuswamy, a ninth generation shadow puppeteer living in Pondicherry, manipulates the strings to tell a story of Hindu epic 'Ramayanan' through silhouettes.

Leather shaped into characters and painted with glaring colours took the stage to narrate 'Ramayanan.' This puppeteer is the son of L. Rajappa and R. Sundari. Mr. Rajappa was honoured with 'Kalamamani' award. He is one of the few artists who continue the legacy of this folk art originated from Thanjavur," said Vijay Shankar, Coordinator, Pondicherry Heritage Festival.

This show was hosted by Lyceum Francois, Proviseur Mr. Stephan Madrias organised by Soulful Pondy, IN-TACH, Pondy CAN and People for Pondicherry Heritage (PPH) for the Pondicherry heritage festival 2017.

At dusk, Urban Design took the architecture students and tourists from Delhi and France on a 'night walk' to explore and capture Pondicherry's streets.

Starting from Le Café on Saturday evening, the participants walked along the Promenade Beach. "Inspired by the writer Jane Jacob's most well-known concepts — Eyes on the street, 'allowing for the strange, 'private and public space' and others, we discussed the changing urban life. The participants were asked to capture the photographs that responded to these themes," said Devangi Ramakrishnan of Urban Design Collective.

Lively fete: (Top) Children skate along the Promenade Beach on Sunday evening to promote Pondicherry Heritage Festival 2017; (above) a zumba flash mob performing. S.S. KUMAR

Janes Jacob was a writer, journalist and activist best known for her 1961 book, 'The Death and Life of Great American Cities'. This book was one of the most influential American texts on the inner workings and failings of cities that inspired generations of urban planners and activists.

She added that they captured the bustling activity on the beach road where people came in large numbers during the weekends.

They also led a team on a ‘morning walk’ to freeze the early morning bustle at Pondicherry's Sunday market and Grand Bazaar in their cameras.

"Amateur photographers, tourists and local enthusiasts were present. We looked for the changing nature, old and new, contract them and fix the missing element through the photographs and discussed continued relevance and importance of these themes in contemporary urban life in India," she added.

She stated that the best pictures from the photowalk will be exhibited as part of the Heritage Festival photography exhibition at Maison Colomban from February 23. Alliance Francaise hosted a talk on the 'History of Magic in India and France' and a magic show by French magician Lawrens Godon.

On Sunday evening, Anita Ratnam performed 'A Million Sitas' at Gratitude Heritage Hotel.
‘Funding heritage protection is a benefit rather than a cost’

Experts advocate increased focus on human connectivity to conservation

STAFF REPORTER
PUDUCHERRY

Stressing the relevance of heritage conservation in an era of smart cities, experts from different domains on Saturday called for treating investments in protection of tangible and intangible heritage as a benefit than as cost.

The multidisciplinary panel was participating in a round table on ‘How the heritage of a city informs its future and forms the base of its development’ organised at the French Institute of Pondicherry (IFP) as part of the ongoing Pondicherry Heritage Festival 2017.

The speakers advocated an increased focus on the human connectivity aspect to heritage conservation and involving people’s participation in any effort in this regard.

Nicolas Fornage, India Director, French Development Agency (AfD) Heritage, said: “Many municipalities consider it (investing) a liability, which is not the right approach. Heritage should be considered an asset and a basis to generate cash flow.”

“The heritage of a place should be seen as an asset to be maintained, used and drawn upon.” As an example, he suggested that the Swadeshi mill in the city should allow visitors in to see the work that makes it lively.

Raj Poduval, economist, formerly with the UN and the EU, concurred that heritage was an asset for any country looking at economic development because the cultural and heritage tourism provides for revenue-making opportunities.

Speaking on implementing the Puducherry smart city project with emphasis on conserving the heritage, Raphael Gastebois, architect expert deputed to the Government of Pondicherry, said retrofitting, re-development, and green field were the guidelines to make Puducherry a smart city. “Focusing on the Boulevard area, the project proposes to make Puducherry a global tourism destination,” he said.

Satya Prakash Varanasi, an architect from Bengaluru, said that a master plan of a city had to be politically correct and not merely a professionally correct one.

“Heritage and culture is always defined without referring to the human connectivity. Heritage is not found in zones. There should be a sense of belonging for a resident of a heritage city. Even to achieve heritage activism, people in a heritage city should have a sense of belonging. Conservation of heritage is not possible without the participation of people,” he said.

Even heritage tourism could not be seen as a phenomenon in isolation. “We need travellers and visitors for a heritage city rather than tourists,” he said.

‘Consistency lacking’

Mukund Padmanabhan, Editor, The Hindu, wished that there was “a greater consistency in how we dealt with the monuments.”

“Sometimes there is a furore made about conservation of a building, while in other instances there is absolute silence.”

Apart from having a sound legislative framework in place, it was important to have a consistent approach to protecting monuments rather than pick and choose public causes, especially in certain cases where the entire weight of the Government comes down on the appropriation of a historic site of a city, Mr. Padmanabhan said.

He pointed out that a harder nut to crack was the protection of the environment, especially wetland ecosystems, given the expansion of population, the increasing pressures on housing and migration into urban sites.

While the speakers broadly agreed on the need for introducing legislation to conserve heritage cities, there was no consensus on whether new laws were warranted or amendment of existing ones would serve the end.

S.P. Shorey, Hyderabad-based architect, averred that the idea of heritage conservation as a constant fight or conflict between conservation and development was a figment of imagination.

“Heritage conservation is not against development. It is about identity, belongingness, memories and landscapes. There should be a strong regulation. To protect heritage, there should be no new investment that would degrade your asset,” Shorey said.

Devangi Ramakrishnan of Urban Design Collective, Puducherry, said conservation consciousness was shaped by “how we experience the city, allowing for variations and fantastic expression such an urban social fabric offered.”

Aurelie Varrel, researcher, IFP, moderated the round table discussion. Kakoli Banerjee of People for Pondicherry’s Heritage and Audrey Richard-Ferrouj of IFP participated.
Puducherry: Puducherry is known for its sun, sea, spirituality and serenity. But the city—a neat little melting pot of cultures and nationalities—is also a buzzing creative hub. And a recent ongoing festival is highlighting this creativity from Pondicherry's best-known brands. For the first time since its inception three years ago, the Pondicherry Heritage Festival is doing an exposition on brands from Pondy. Displayed at the city's Crafts Bazaar next to the famed Bharathi Park and a mere hop and skip away from beachfront, the exhibition—called Made in Pondy—includes both nationally and internationally known Pondy-brands, some big and well-known, others niche.

While recognisable Pondy brands like Hidesign leather products, Golden Bridge Pottery and MAROMA spa and fragrance products are very much a part of the exhibition, also present are lesser known brands and boutiques. Many of them are well-known among the city's resident and tourist population including the fragrance and incense outlet Auroshikha, part of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, antique furniture outfit Geethanjali, Sri Lakshmi jewellers, an 80-year-old retail presence in the city and much-visited Pondy boutiques LAL and Disdis. Others like J Seetharaman's Saran Exports is less visible, even though he supplies high-end bed linen to hotels in the Middle East.

"The whole idea is to showcase all those who are making beautiful things in Pondicherry and Auroville and helping the local economy not only in terms of revenue generation but also jobs created," said Sunaina Mandeen, a spokesperson of the Pondicherry Heritage Festival organising committee.

There's a message here that entrepreneurship can also be creative, eco-friendly and sustainable and not necessarily just scale-driven and without social consciousness. Indeed many of the brands partnering for this event are all about sustainable, eco-friendly artisanal products.

That includes the likes of UPASANA which is into organic fabrics, the Sri Aurobindo Hand Made Paper and Auroville Papers and Naturelement organic jams, jellies and preserves which works exclusively with local village women. There are also products that normally don't see an retail display at all including the exquisite made-to-order embroidery that the good sisters of the local Cluny convent are famous for.
Dancing to the story of the sun, bird

Troupe performs ‘The birds-of-paradise and the dancing girl’ as part of the Pondicherry heritage fest

Frozen frames: Two moments from the drama performed by Chandrakalabhoomi Dance troupe that came down from the Anegundi Heritage Village in Hampi, Karnataka, as part of the Pondicherry Heritage Festival 2017.

STAFF REPORTER
PUDUCHERRY

From Anegundi Heritage Village in Hampi, Karnataka, came young artistes to entertain Puducherrians with their dance drama: ‘The birds-of-paradise and the dancing girl’.

Inspired from a short story by Shama Pawar, the Chandrakalabhoomi dance troupe performed the story of a young village girl who offers prayers to the sun and the birds-of-paradise by dancing, which impresses the almighty sun and transforms her life through dance.

Pondicherry Heritage Festival 2017 and INTACH Anegundi Hampi Chapter presented the show at Ashram Library on February 12. The dance drama was composed and choreographed by Poojarini Chowdhury and curated by Raam Marasani and Anjanadevi, while the visuals and sound were by Jeremy Carroll.

Artistes Anitha, Renuka, Bindu, Pallavi, Shilpa and Raam Marasani from Anegundi, who dedicated their time to this art form for over 10 years, performed the piece.

Chandrakalabhoomi dance troupe was formed in 2009 in Anegundi.

The dance troupe was initiated by Ajanadevi and Ram Marasani in collaboration with Poojarini Chowdhury.
Dancing to the story of the sun, bird

Troupe performs ‘The birds-of-paradise and the dancing girl’ as part of the Pondicherry heritage fest

Frozen frames: Two moments from the drama performed by Chandrakalabhoomi Dance troupe that came down from the Anegundi Heritage Village in Hampi, Karnataka, as part of the Pondicherry Heritage Festival 2017. T. SINGARAVELOU

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Expo to showcase products of UT residents

Four-day ‘Made in PONDY’ exhibition will be held at Gandhi Thidal from tomorrow

S. PRASAD
PUDUCHERRY

Perfumes, garments, papers, you name it and you get it here. Puducherry is not just a tourist destination, but a place where you can get the most exotic products.

A wide range of products made in Puducherry will be on display at the ‘Made in PONDY’ expo being held as part of Pondicherry Heritage Festival.

For the first time, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) and People for Puducherry’s Heritage are organising a the expo at the Craft Bazaar at Gandhi Thidal from February 23 to 26.

The expo will be inaugurated by Tourism Minister Malladi Krishna Rao.


“The idea is to make the ‘Made in PONDY’ a nationally and internationally recognised brand. It is inspired from the products sold reliably-verified and certified under the ‘Made in PARIS’ brand logo in Paris. This is printed on the packaging of their products and increases their brand value as well as their sales because customers know they are getting a good product,” Ashok Panda, co-convener of INTACH, told The Hindu.

This effort to showcase Puducherry products through the heritage festival will increase the brand value of the products and quality. This will also increase their sales nationally.

Puducherry will also be known as a destination for quality products and the Brand Puducherry now known only through heritage and tourism will become a place for manufacturing and sales of quality products, Mr. Panda said.
A walk to soak in the heritage of former French enclave

Chennai-based Storytrails walks a group of people to the historical sites

S. SENTHALIR
PUDUCHERRY

After assembling in front of the Chief Secretariat office in Goubert Avenue on a Sunday evening, Storytrails took off their two and half hours journey with a group of people. It was a journey by walk that made several stops at important historical sites in the French quarters, passing through the history with a little gossip about the kings and telling the lesser-known stories of the former French colony.

Chennai-based Storytrails, in their story-based walking tour took people on the ‘French Connections Trail’.

Vivek Ramakrishnan of Storytrails walked the group after distributing tour guide systems to the parking space of Chief Secretariat office. After ensuring that everyone could hear him speak, he began: “We will talk about the battles, colonial architecture, and the charm life that French led in Puducherry.”

**Roman presence**

He continued: “Behind every charming façade, you will find incredible stories. Did you know that the Romans were in Puducherry as early as the 2nd century AD?”

“Romans established a trading station here for pearls, stones, spices. Later, the Dutch, Danes and the British arrived. They also came for cotton when the industrial revolution created a huge demand for raw materials. Along with them, the missionaries arrived for converts. Puducherry was passed on like a bouncing ball,” explained the raconteur.

The French first set foot in 1670. They were the last ones to arrive. “Puducherry was perfect for French except for the British,” he said, explaining the war between the French and the British to retain the territory of Puducherry.

**British-French war**

Wrapping up the brief history on the arrival of conquerors, the group walked to the Puducherry museum where they were told about the war between British and French more in detail and the reason why the border between Puducherry and Tamil Nadu is interspersed. The next stop was at the Raj Nivas, where the storyteller narrated the life of Duplex sprinkled with some gossip.

From Bharathi Park, they walked to the Old Light House, Gandhi Statue, Customs House, La Bourdonnais Street, Police Head Quarters, visiting the Eglise de Notre Dame des Anges, Hotel Qualithé, Chamber of Commerce building and listening to stories of the built heritage, poets and unforgettable characters all of whom wove their way into the fabric of Puducherry.

They stopped by the French Social Club, Manakula Vinayagar Temple, Sri Aurobindo Ashram and ended their trail at the Consulate.
What the hand creates

The Made in Pondy initiative threw the spotlight on brands that bank on human potential

SUBHA J RAO AND PARSHATHY J NATH

A potter was the centre of attraction at the Made in Pondy initiative, part of the Pondicherry Heritage Festival. As Ayyappan moulded the clay and turned the wheel, adults and children alike watched open-mouthed. He patiently shaped the wet clay, sprinkled water and patted it gently till he got the desired shape.

In less than 10 minutes, the blob of brown clay turned into a vessel one could pour water from, once it was fired. He had been at work since morning - in front of him was lined an array of things he'd created, including lids and vessels to cook from.

In another stall (LAL Boutique) where you could block-print your own tee or jhola for a fee, people queued up every time someone tried their hand at blockprinting, guided by the resident printer Nazir, who hails from West Bengal. He dabbed the paint on trays stained red, black, green and orange, rubbed it in, and then dipped the block before handing it over to the chosen person. However old you are, the joy of seeing a print come alive on fabric is unparalleled.

At Upasana Design Studio's stall, people looked lovingly at the Tsunami dolls created to provide a livelihood for fisherwomen. This is also a thriving example of a 'gift economy' - where valuables are given, not sold, and where the context is building a relationship, not making a transaction.

One thing was clear at Made in Pondy. Hand-made will always continue to draw eye-balls. Hopefully, that will also translate into a commercially-viable option. In the coming weeks, we'll try and explore the many hand-made charms of Puducherry.

Laboratoires Senteurs

The aroma of jasmine, lavender and lotus hits you as you enter the store. On a warm weekday afternoon, it teems with tourists. Known for its colognes, which come in 20 varieties - Musk for Men, Landor, Natural, Ocean Spray... Senteurs also makes around 30 non-alcoholic fragrances. The enterprise began when The Mother decided to get her favourite Friction de Foucaud skin freshener made in Puducherry, instead of importing it.

In the last few years, Senteurs has also added other products, such as aloe vera nourishing cream and gels, lip balms and foot creams. The health-conscious can also sample essential oil blends, such as Junisowh (said to aid stiff joints) and Soffrowh (for those with sinus-related issues and insomnia).

Laboratoires Senteurs
5-7 St Gilles Street, White Town
Monday to Saturday, 9 am to noon, 2 pm to 5 pm
USP: Friction de Foucaud skin freshener
From ₹58
04132334870
Chola site plays backdrop for Pondicherry Heritage Festival

Music, dance, drama and talks to be part of the month-long event in Bahour

S. SENTHAILIR

PUDUCHERRY: The Pondicherry Heritage Festival 2017 opened with celebrations, fittingly, in one of the ancient places in Puducherry.

The first day of the festival on Sunday, organised in Bahour, a place dating back to the Chola period, paid tribute to two legendary sisters ‘Bangari and Singari’. Sunaina Mandeen, one of the organisers of the festival, said the third edition of the festival, organised by INTACH, PondyCAN and People for Pondicherry’s Heritage and supported by Departments of Art and Culture and Tourism, began with a dance drama on the siblings ‘Bangari and Singari’ that revisited the history of Bahour.

The legendary sisters were instrumental in diverting water from the Thenpennai River to the Bahour Lake, when Bahour region was reeling in water shortage, the organiser said.

The siblings devoted to the Bahour Moolamaadha Swamy Temple funded the construction of ‘Bangari canal’ that brought water from Thenpennai to irrigate the lands in and around Bahour.

The Mulanathaswami Temple was built even before Thanjavur temples were built by the Cholas. Students of Salangaig Cultural Academy, Puducherry, performed a dance drama.

The month-long festival has a wide range of programmes, including music, dance drama, talks, interaction on the heritage of Puducherry.

Guided walk

People can participate in the guided walk in Bahour to celebrate Puducherry’s ancient and natural heritage.

Next weekend, the festival begins with a talk by Dr. Nallam at the opening of ‘50 years in Puducherry’ — local life and architecture in photos by Dr. Veeren Koneru on February 10, followed by another dance drama ‘The birds of paradise and the dancing girl’ by Chandrakalabhoomi dance troupe, Aneegudi heritage village on February 12.

The third edition of the festival with a dance drama that revisited the history of Bahour.

Ashok Panda of INTACH said a dance drama performed in an ancient temple local and rural setting drew a huge crowd, never seen in Puducherry.

“It is a wonderful experience,” he exclaimed.

Bahour MLA N. Dhanavel and Raj Bhavan MLA K. Lakshminarayan were present at the inaugural function.
Fest to celebrate diverse heritage of Puducherry

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Puducherry: The Indian national trust for art and cultural heritage (Intach), People for Puducherry’s heritage and Pondy Citizen’s Action Network (Pondy Can) among others will hold the Pondicherry heritage festival 2017 for the third consecutive year from February 5 to 26 in the Union territory.

Supported by the departments of art and culture and tourism, the festival aims to showcase the rich and diverse cultural and architectural heritage of the tiny but beautiful town. The festival will include a series of events like Bharatanatyam performances, magic shows, craft bazaars, photo exhibitions and talks on heritage conservation among others. The organizers this year have roped in celebrities including Tamil actors Nassar and Khushboo and Bharatanatyam dancer Anita Ratnam for talks on heritage and cultural shows.

The festival will kick-start at 5.30am on February 5 at Ba-

CULTURAL TREAT: The organisers of Pondicherry heritage festival releasing the calendar of events during a press meet on Tuesday

noon, one of the most ancient areas dating to the Chola period, with a dance drama, ‘The legend of Bangari and Singari’ at Mulanathaswami temple. It will portray the lives of the sisters who constructed the Bahour canal and created the lake. It will be followed by a series of events including heritage walks covering the historic Bharathi Park and Bahour regions in the outskirts of the town.

The crafts bazaar proposed from February 23 to 26 at Gandhi Thidal will feature well-known products made by master craftsmen and craftsmen from Auroville and Puducherry. The craftsmen will also present live demonstrations of traditional arts and crafts. The debates, discussions and open house sessions in the festival will aim to address the ways and means of conserving heritage.

A group of children will undertake a rally on roller skates on February 19 on Beach Road to popularize the festival.
Olivier Litvine, Director of Alliance Francaise, Puducherry and others release the Poster of ‘Pondicherry Heritage festival 2017’ on Tuesday

G Pattabiraman
Pondicherry Heritage Festival to be held for a longer duration this year

S. Senthil

PUDUCHERRY: The festival celebrating the culture, tradition, history, arts and architecture of Pondicherry is back. This year, the Pondicherry Heritage Festival will be held for a longer period — from February 5 to 26.

The third edition of the heritage festival will be a star-studded event with film actors Nasser and Kushboo participating.

The main focus of this festival will be on Bahour, one of the most ancient locations in Pondicherry, dating back to the Chola period.

Organisers of the festival at a press meet on Thursday.

PHOTO: T. SINGARAVELOU

was a tremendously important aspect of any dynamic society. "If you do not know where you come from, you will not know where you are going to. India has a tremendously rich heritage that encompasses works of arts and also traces left by various colonisers. It is very important to preserve this heritage irrespective of whether it is tangible or intangible," he said.

Sunita Mandeep of PondyCAN, one of the organisers, noted that this was the third edition of the festival. Organised by Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) Pondicherry, People for Pondicherry's Heritage, PondyCAN, the Pondicherry Heritage Festival is supported by the Departments of Art and Culture and Tourism.

The festival partners include Alliance Francaise in Pondicherry, French Institute of Pondicherry (IFP), Centre for Ecology and Rural Development (GERD-Pondicherry) and many others.

Ms. Mandeep said: "Puducherryans are going to celebrate our beautiful heritage. This includes the nature, tradition, culture, buildings and the products made in Puducherry."

She added that famous dancers like Anita Ratnam would perform and the Hoteliers Association was organising a 'kids on skates' programme.

Arul of INTACH said that the festival was originally conceived as a way of drawing attention to the need to conserve Puducherry's outstanding architectural legacy. Its scope had now expanded to embrace all manner of intangible traditions and also focussed on the younger generation an exposure to the rich heritage. Hence, the festival on Sunday would be inaugurated at Bahour. "Drawing competitions for children on this subject and a discussion on built heritage will be held," he added.

Raghu Menon of CERD-Puducherry added that civilisation and Puducherry began in Bahour. The Mulanathaswami Temple in Bahour was built even before the Thanjavur temples were built by the Cholas.

"Many in Puducherry are not aware of this history," he added.

The focus of this festival will be on Bahour, an ancient location dating back to the Chola period. The festival will have interactive sessions and roundtable discussions with experts on heritage.

Andrey Richard-Ferroujil of IFP said that experts from different disciplines would discuss the need to conserve the natural heritage of Puducherry.

Alliance Francaise of Puducherry is organising a talk on the history of magic in India and France by French magician Lawrence Godon.

Vijay Shankar, festival co-ordinator, The Pondicherry Heritage Festival, Ashok of INTACH, S. Varalakshmi, one of the festival organisers. Ruth Sequeira of HDSign and Bitasta Samantary of People for Pondicherry's Heritage were present at the press meet.
Around Pondy in 22 days

Save the date for the ongoing Pondicherry Heritage Festival with talks, performances and music on offer

THREE editions on and still going strong, The Pondicherry Heritage Festival is back, not only with an expanded array of events but also a significantly longer duration, 22 days to be precise. Sunaina Mandeen, one of the founding organisers, credits it to the increase in the number of people coming forward to organise events on their own. Having begun last week on February 5 with a bharatanatyam dance performance called The Legend of Rangari and Singari, at the ancient Gualinathaswami Temple in Bahour, the festival will continue today with the launch of an exhibition by Dr Veeren Roneru, where he will be showcasing photos showcasing the local flavour and architecture of Pondicherry taken during his 10-year stay there. The remaining two weeks (it ends on February 26) promises enough to keep anybody spoilt for choice—from photowalks and guided tours in heritage spots-cultural trails, interactive talks, dance and many other events.

Past perfect

Considering that the festival was inspired by the depleting condition of Pondy’s heritage structures, especially triggered by the fall of the 144-year-old Mairie Building due to continuous rain, it comes as no surprise that the organisers have put the emphasis on heritage. Besides a special focus on Bahour (“It’s the most ancient inhabited place in Pondicherry dating back to 500 AD,” says Mandeen), events like Veeren Roneru’s photo exhibition, a showcase titled Archive of the Tamil Agrarian History 1650-1950 (organised by the Institut Francaise de Pondicherry and PondyArt), and a heritage walk by INTACH starting from Bharathi Park, promise to attract those interested to go down memory lane. Those who are familiar with the work of the late American Canadian journalist, Jane Jacobs, may want to attend the photowalks conducted by Urban Design Collective as well, titled Revisit Pondicherry.

Dance divine

Dance gets its fair due in this 22-day event. Among the inaugural performance by Salangai Cultural Academy apart, there is also a performance by the Chandrakala Bhoomi Dance Troupe from the Anengudi Heritage Village called Birds of Paradise and the Dancing Girl. Many are looking forward to A Million Stars, Anika Ratnam’s famous interpretation of female characters from the Ramayana. Also, do not miss the performance by the children of Molunam Cultural Centre, themed on Pondy’s heritage.

The perfect note

On the musical front, expect performances by Svaram who will play heritage-inspired music, vocalist Arimalan Padmanabhan and the release of the book, Aathamathil Thilaithavvan, of poems by Subramania Swamigal. There is also a performance by the Pondy-based band, H2O, besides a tribute to MS Subbulakshmi.

Best of the rest

If you want to take a break from culture and heritage, then we suggest you check out the performance by magician Lawrens Godon. That said, everybody will love the open house tours at iconic architectural spots like Ashram Library, Dumas Guest House, Pondicherry Museum, Indian Coffee House and a walk called the French Connection Trail conducted by Storytrails. As for the kids, they will love the roller skating competition conducted by The Hotel Association of Pondicherry. And if you are disappointed by the lesser number of talks this time, spare a thought for the organiser. “Not many attend these talks,” admits Mandeen.

Till February 22. Details: pondicherryheritagefestival.org

— Karan Pillai
Remains of the day...

People for Pondicherry Heritage, a civilian initiative, breathes life into the city’s past. PARSHATHY J. NATH listens as members discuss its future.

It sounded like an explosion. The people of Puducherry wondered what hit their city on that beautiful rainy afternoon of November 29, 2014. Children covered their ears and grown-ups left their lunch midway to plop out of windows.

The 146-year-old The Mairie, built by the French, had collapsed. Walls buckled in and the roof came crashing down. It didn’t take the Government much time to raze the structure to the ground, thus wiping off the final vestiges of the history of that space. However this collapse triggered another response as well. A group of heritage lovers quickly formed a collective called People for Pondicherry Heritage (PPH) in a bid to ensure this never happened again.

At Gratitude Heritage, an iconic old building with vibrant yellow walls, the PPH core team recalls the day The Mairie fell. “There was a lot of sentimental value to that building. It was iconic,” says Yoo-mi Lee. The campaign, which demanded preservation of historical structures in the city, also mooted the idea of a Pondicherry Heritage Festival to bring people from all walks — culture, history, craft, music, dance and arts — on one platform. The festival, now preparing for its third edition, is an effort of PPH, Pondy Citizen’s Action Network (PondyCAN) and INTACH Pondicherry.

A Change.org petition and a Facebook post triggered the initial meet-up, says Sunaina Mandeen, co-founder of PondyCAN. “When I walked into Gratitude, where the first meet was held, there were about 35 people there. I didn’t even know many of them. The idea to start a collective sprung up, and we decided to call ourselves the People for Pondicherry Heritage, because that’s what we work for.”

On December 7, around 3,000 people gathered at the beach for a candle-lit tribute to The Mairie. “They came with flowers. People wrote their feelings and comments on a banner on a wall. The building meant much to all of us,” says Mandeen.

PPH ran a second event in the same month, where everyone with a heritage property was asked to light a lamp in front of their houses. Soon came the suggestion to start a heritage festival. The inaugural edition was held in February 2015. Gandhi Thidal, an open ground at the beach, became the fulcrum of the cultural movement.

Therukoothu dancers, musicians from Saram in Auroville, and local craftsmen gathered here; actress Revathi also turned up. Heritage centres such as Cluny Embroidery Centre and the Aurobindo Ashram Library became a centre for Odissi dance, and a discussion on the spiritual heritage of the city.

For some, the festival was personal. Natesa Iyer, another member, presented his father’s love-filled poem for Puducherry. “A few days before the inauguration of the festival, he passed away,” he recalls. The poems of Subramania Bharati and strains of Saram musicians filled the air.

PPH has not limited itself to just the urban spaces in Puducherry, but has also spread to bio-regions defined by their natural heritage value. The highlight of this year’s festival is a tour to the village of Bahour, a 30-minute drive from the city. Visitors will explore its historical connection to the Chola kingdom and architecture on the concluding day. They will also get a glimpse of village life and spend stime by the scenic Bahour lake.

PPH is a volunteer-driven movement, supported by like-minded heritage buffs from all fields. Each contributes their bit, sometimes as cash or as accommodation for artistes or a meal. “We do not raise any money or have sponsorship. If we run out of cash, we chip in ourselves,” says Mandeen. INTACH Delhi and the Government of Puducherry have been supporting them financially. The idea is to celebrate the city’s heritage, says Mandeen. “If you destroy that heritage, you kill it for the next generation. At the end of the day, we are stewards.”

Programmes spring up in the last moment through suggestions and discussions. And, the schedule changes till the end of the day, laughs Yoo-mi. “It is flexible. We do not have firm schedules.” Bitasta Samantaray, another member, compares PPH to a baby. “It is a movement that evolves according to the shapes we choose.”

PPH’s doors are open to anyone who shares the passion. This is the challenge of a volunteer-driven movement, says Mandeen. “I do not believe in structures. This is the modern way of doing things; deciding through consensus. And, we are great optimists. If one venue does not work out, there will be an alternative.”

(Pondicherry Heritage Festival is on till February 26. The schedule of the festival, is available at pondicherryheritagefestival.)