Pondicherry celebrates unique culture, tradition & history

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A Student participates in the ‘painting for Puducherry’s heritage’ competition. (Photo: DC)

Puducherry: The Pondicherry Heritage Festival is back in town to celebrate the unique culture, tradition, history, arts and architecture of Puducherry, which make the city one of the most interesting places in the country.

The one-month-long festival was kick-started on Thursday with the event ‘painting for Puducherry’s heritage’ where a number of students painted the architectural heritage and streetscape, folk art forms and games of the town.

The festival, rich with a number of events, aims to create and strengthen the unique identity and sense of belonging of the people of Puducherry, to showcase and celebrate the rich and diverse tapestry of Pondicherry’s heritage to visitors and the world, and to discuss how to preserve the cultural heritage for generations to come, say the organisers.
The festival is being jointly organised by People for Pondicherry’s Heritage, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) and PondyCAN, with the support of the government of Puducherry.

Last year’s festival expanded the celebrations to explore the rich history of Bahour area of the Union Territory. This year, in the fourth edition of the festival, the organisers plan to explore the Tirubhuvanai region, which has three Chola temples located in Puducherry, besides Pondicherry and Bahour.

“This time we have also planned a heritage colouring book to distribute among children. The heritage colouring book has sketches of buildings, monuments, natural heritage and streetscapes of Puducherry by architect Anandhi and artist Ehjoumale. The idea is to make the children aware of the rich heritage of the place and to draw their attention to the importance of preserving it”, said Natesa Iyyer of People for Pondicherry’s heritage. A number of events have been organised exclusively for the students, which include heritage quiz, heritage tours and the launch of a heritage colouring book. Apart from the cultural events including dance and music programmes, heritage walks, open-houses of historic buildings, and other events taking place, this year’s festival will feature a number of excursions also.

This includes an up-close look at Pondicherry’s history of beach erosion and the current efforts in beach restoration, a pedestrian tour of Bahour, a bird watching outing at Ossudu Lake, and exploration of three Chola temples in Tirubhuvanai. According to the organisers, the festival also includes the first-ever exhibition that explores the fascinating cultural relationship between Pondicherry and Indochina, as Asian possessions of the French colonial empire.

Originally conceived as a way of drawing attention to the need to conserve Pondicherry’s outstanding architectural legacy, the festival has now expanded its scope to embrace all manner of intangible traditions. “We boast a diverse built environment, an idyllic seaside natural setting, a rich spiritual and intellectual history, and fascinating combination of indigenous and imported cultural practices. It is the interplay of these factors that gives Pondicherry its distinctive flavour”, say the organisers.