

My City
My Heritage

Pudu
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 Trail

Through the French and Tamil Quarters – A Tale of Two Towns

 2.6 kms

 Notre-Dame des-Anges Church

Photos by Joseph Rahul.
Illustration by Jisha Unnikrishnan.

Puducherry's charm lies in the seamless coexistence of contrasts — of French façades and Tamil courtyards, of bougainvillea-laced avenues and bustling bazaars, of colonial heritage and local spirit. This walk invites you to trace the city's layered history through its twin quarters: the stately French Town with its mustard-yellow villas, churches, quiet avenues in shades of grey, pink, and blue; and the Tamil Quarter, alive with sounds of temple bells, traditional verandahs, markets, and eateries.

Starting by the sea at the Notre Dame Des Anges Church, the trail moves through past colonial landmarks like the restored Town Hall building and consulate building, and cultural institutions such as the French Institute of Pondicherry — before crossing into the Tamil Quarter, where narrow lanes reveal courtyards, hidden shrines, and traditional homes. Together, these spaces tell the story of Puducherry as a crossroads of trade, culture, and identity — where the French vision of urban design met the Tamil way of life, creating a city unlike any other in India.

1 Notre-Dame des-Anges Church (Our Lady of Angels Church)

Built in 1855, this Greco-Roman style church with soft pink and cream tones stands as one of Puducherry's most iconic landmarks. Facing the Bay of Bengal, its interiors and stained-glass windows create a



tranquil start to the trail. The church reflects the deep French Catholic influence that shaped the early colonial fabric of the city.

It is the only church in Pondicherry that offers Mass in three languages — French, Tamil, and English. The church is also known as 'Dumas church,' being located on Dumas street, and 'Kaps Kovil,' named after the Capuchin friars who initiated its construction. Interestingly, 'Kovil' or 'Koil' is the Tamil term for a temple.

2 Town Hall (Mairie / Hôtel de Ville)



The Town Hall is an elegant colonial structure that once served as the administrative heart of French India. Though it required restoration after storm damage in 2014, it continues to represent the spirit of civic governance and Franco-Indian legacy. This stop introduces the civic and political dimension of Puducherry's colonial era, being the site of the first democratic exercise in India between 1871

and 1900, much before general elections were held in British India.

3 **Bharathi Park**



The lush green core of the French Quarter, once reserved for Europeans and used as a parade ground until the 1940s, is now a democratic public space.

Surrounded by historic buildings, the park's layout still echoes the geometric urban design introduced by the French. At its centre is the Aayi Mandapam, a white pavilion housing a bust of a *devadasi* (a temple dancer married to God) named Aayi. Built under the reign of Napoleon III, it commemorates Aayi's act of demolishing her own house for the construction of a water reservoir.

4 **Sri Aurobindo Ashram**

Established by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, the ashram represents Puducherry's spiritual renaissance. A quiet visit



here introduces the city's post-colonial transformation — from a French outpost to a spiritual center drawing seekers from around the world. The building also houses the samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and Mira Alfassa 'The Mother,' open to visitors. The ashram has several affiliated buildings across the heritage town, including workshops, guest houses, factories, and a printing press, recognisable by their typical grey hue.

5 **French Consulate (Rue Romain Rolland)**

Still functioning as the diplomatic representation of France, the Consulate building retains its historic charm. Its yellow façade and quiet courtyards adjacent to the shore embody the continued relationship between Puducherry and France, both cultural and emotional. Allocated to the French government in 1956,



the building itself is about three centuries old and has managed to retain some of its original features and character. Every year on July 14, which is the French National Day, the consulate hosts celebrations marked by fireworks at the beach promenade.

6 Golconde Dormitory



Golconde is India's first reinforced concrete building, designed in 1940 by Antonin Raymond under the guidance of The Mother. It is an architectural gem that blends modernist design with the spiritual philosophy of simplicity and harmony. Completed in 1945, it is a modernist building that predates the more well-known landmarks of modernist architecture in Ahmedabad and Chandigarh.

7 Calve College

Founded in the nineteenth-century by Calve Suppraya Chettiar, this educational institution became a crucial space for social reform and learning in colonial Puducherry. The building's Indo-French architecture highlights the blend of two cultures even in the field of education. The school was



damaged considerably in 2011 because of Cyclone Thane. After being marked unsafe in 2014, the building was shut for ten years for restoration under the guidance of the INTACH Puducherry, only welcoming students back in 2024. The tainted glass windows above its doorways are a distinctive feature.



8 Bharathiyar Memorial Museum



Once home to poet and freedom fighter Subramania Bharathi, this museum celebrates his literary legacy and revolutionary ideas. His ten year stay in Puducherry marked a turning point in modern Tamil thought, adding a powerful nationalistic layer to the city's story. Bestowed the title 'Bharathi' for his poetry, having been a pioneer of modern Tamil poetry, Bharathi was also active as a journalist across newspapers like *Swadesamitran* and *The Hindu* as well as a social reformer, speaking against issues like gender and caste discrimination. The museum displays some of Bharathi's original writings and photographs from his life.

9 Eswaran Koil (Varadaraja Perumal Temple)

This Tamil temple marks a transition from the serene charm of colonial buildings to the vibrant and lively everyday of Puducherry. The temple's colorful *gopuram* (a monumental entrance tower), rituals, and morning chants bring alive the deep rooted local traditions that coexist alongside French elegance. While the temple was first built under the Cholas in the eleventh-century, it saw significant damage in the tripartite wars between the French, the British, and local rulers. Significantly rebuilt in the eighteenth-century, some parts of the temple have pillars, arches and motifs borrowed from French architectural vocabulary and combined with Vaishnavite imagery and symbolism.



Please Note:

- Photography is allowed (in the interior and exterior buildings).
- Wear comfortable clothes, footwear, and carry a hat/ umbrella along with a bottle of water.
- It is recommended that you do the trail in the early morning, as the roads tend to get busy, and the weather becomes less enjoyable later in the day.
- Kindly respect the cultural and religious significance/ sentiments of the spaces as conveyed by the walk leader.

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02. Town Hall
03. Bharathi Park
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Sri Varadaja Perumal Temple

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WHITE TOWN

Notre-Dame des-Anges Church

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