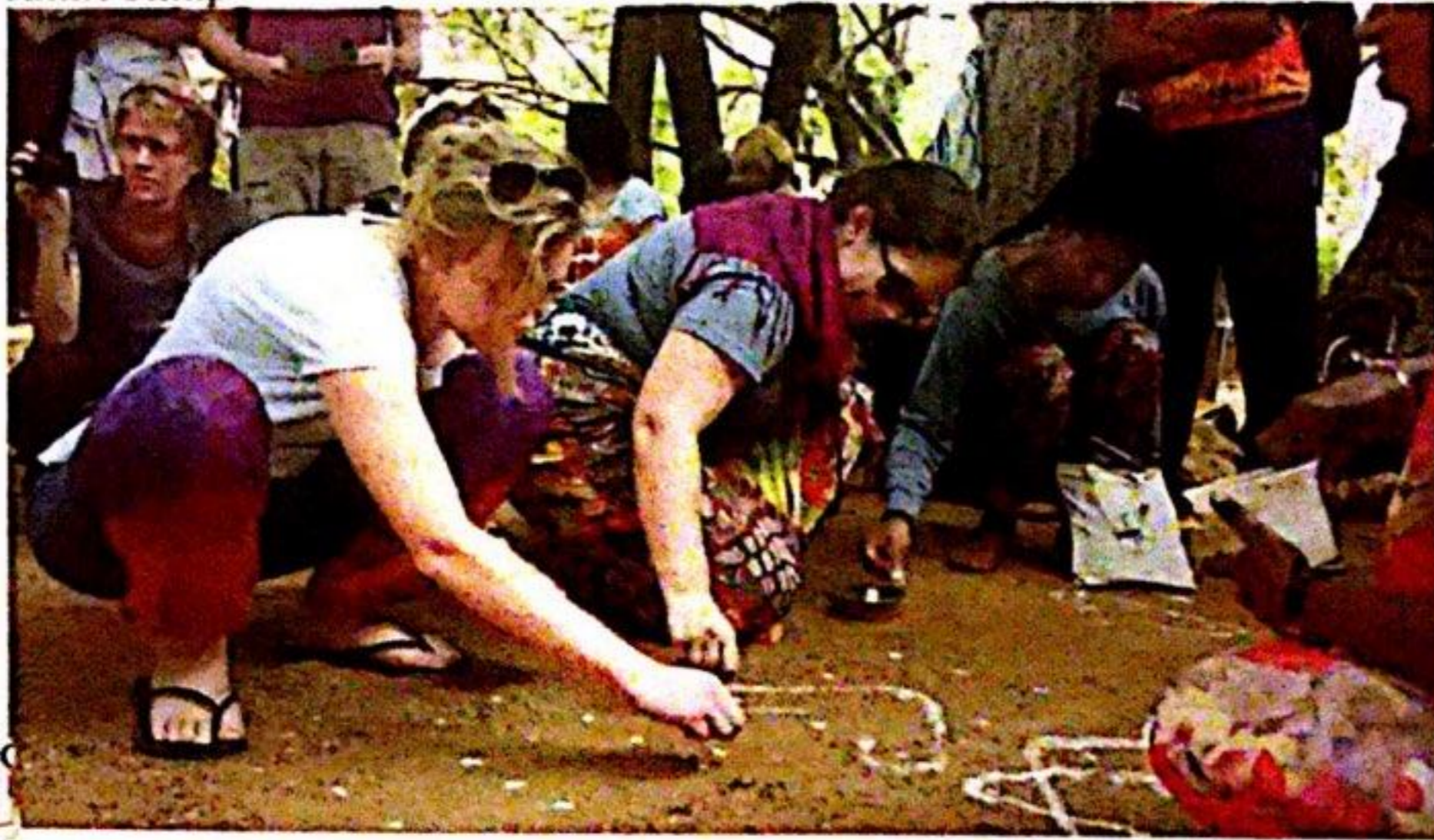


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Tourists to Puducherry have a feel of villages

Annie Philip



Tourists participate in local activities as part of the programmes organised by Mohanam Cultural Centre.— Photo: Special Arrangement
Alankuppam project is the government's first rural tourism project

For a few years now, the Union government has been looking at tapping rural tourism as a 'strategy for rural development,' considering its vast rural population and falling employment opportunities in the villages.

The Union Ministry of Tourism had launched the 'Explore Rural India' sub-brand in 2008 under its 'Incredible India' campaign aimed at extending the stay of tourists and providing livelihood opportunities to the local villagers. The idea is to help tourists experience village life by getting involved in routine rural activities and see firsthand the skills of the local people.

According to the description of the rural tourism scheme by the Union Ministry of Tourism, 'counter-urbanisation' and growing interest in heritage, culture and environmental consciousness have helped in the growth of rural tourism.

The Alankuppam village in Puducherry, close to Auroville, was among the places identified in 2011 by the Union Ministry of Tourism with potential for rural tourism, for its expertise in crafts. Now, with the tie-up of the Puducherry government and the Ille-et-Vilaine (Brittany region, France) administration to develop the Alankuppam rural circuit under the 2nd call for Joint Indo-French Projects in Support of Decentralised Cooperation for the year 2015-16, this project marks the government's first rural tourism project in Puducherry.

The Ille-et-Vilaine administration has expertise in coastal and eco-friendly tourism and wants to exchange knowledge on this front with Puducherry.

Tascon-Mennetrier, councillor, vice-president of Ille-et-Vilaine, who headed the delegation on a visit here, said, "It has been often observed that tourism does not benefit the local community as they are not involved. It has also been seen as detrimental to the environment. In the projects we have taken up in Puducherry, we want to make sure that it is a bottoms-up approach, and is eco-friendly. If the local community is involved, the project will be sustained and it will also remove chances of resentment."

The Chinna Veerampattinam Sustainable Eco-Tourism Project which has been funded by Ille-et-Vilaine uses this approach of 'integrated coastal zone management' according to Ms. Mennetrier.

The Alankuppam rural tourism circuit is aimed at extending the stay of tourists in Puducherry which has thus far been an average of around a day-and-a-half. Alankuppam and its neighbouring Sanjeevi Nagar villages are home to around a dozen units involved in making terracotta, ceramic, recycled paper, crochet and leather products.

The Mohanam Cultural Centre in Sanjeevi Nagar headed by P. Balasundaram has already been involved in linking