

# It Takes a Village (<http://indulge.newindianexpress.com/it-takes-a-village-2/section/44488>)

East Coast (<http://indulge.newindianexpress.com/category/chennai/eastcoast>) Feb 5, 2016



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## Get a slice of rural life in the craft centres between Auroville and Pondicherry

What comes to your mind when planning a weekend jaunt to Pondy? Lazing on the beach, café hopping and rummaging for quirky souvenirs, perhaps. It's hardly ever riding on a bullock cart, playing kho kho or trying your hand at kolattam. This seldom-seen side of the region is what the Auroville and Puducherry Village Heritage festival promises to open up to visitors, next weekend.

On the count of three

The third edition of the festival, organised by the Mohanam Bioregion Culture and Heritage Centre, showcases the uniqueness of the villages lying between Auroville and Pondicherry, explains P Balasundaram, head of the centre. "The festival is our way of sharing the local lifestyle with people elsewhere. It is also an opportunity to revive the region's traditional arts and crafts," he adds. Travellers are often intrigued by the colonial thrall of Pondicherry and the mysticism of Auroville, but between these lie Alankuppam and Sanjeevi Nagar—villages with a distinctive cultural identity. They have developed into small craft hubs, with both the work and village life heavily influenced by the melting pot that is Pondicherry and Auroville. (<http://indulge.newindianexpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/moha13.jpg>)

Last year's edition of the festival, which was revived after the maiden venture in 2005, saw casual camaraderie between

locals and travellers as they played uriyadi, exchanged stories and shook a leg to Tamil folk songs. While there were 400 visitors in 2015, the festival is now gearing up for bigger numbers with the Auroville Marathon scheduled around the same time. Visitors can ride a bullock cart through the village, watch therukoothu, karagattam or join villagers in a game of kabaddi or thayam.



The festival, supported by the Department of Tourism, is more participatory this year with a number of one-hour experiential sessions, says Balasundaram. Instead of just watching a performance, you can pick up a drum and try the thapattam, learn how to wield the silambam, draw a kolam or join village women in dancing the kummi.

Visitors can also stock up on lamp shades, handmade soaps, incense and crafts made from terracotta, papier mâché and bamboo. Or catch a demonstration of pottery, stone-carving and basket weaving by the artisans.

#### On your plate

A typical Tamil thali meal with locally grown vegetables and snacks, prepared using traditional grains, like ragi adai and millet kozhukattai, will be on sale during the festival. “These are prepared and sold by village women. We have a contest for the best dishes as the festival is possible only by cultivating community spirit among the locals,” says Elumalai, who works with Mohanam. The centre also conducts cooking classes, village tours and craft workshops on a regular basis for travellers looking for a slice of rural tourism.

On February 13-14, from 10 am to 6 pm, at Bamboo Land, Alankuppam, Auroville. Details: [mohanamprogram@auroville.org.in](mailto:mohanamprogram@auroville.org.in) or 0413 2623806 and 2622944

– **Olympia Shilpa Gerald**

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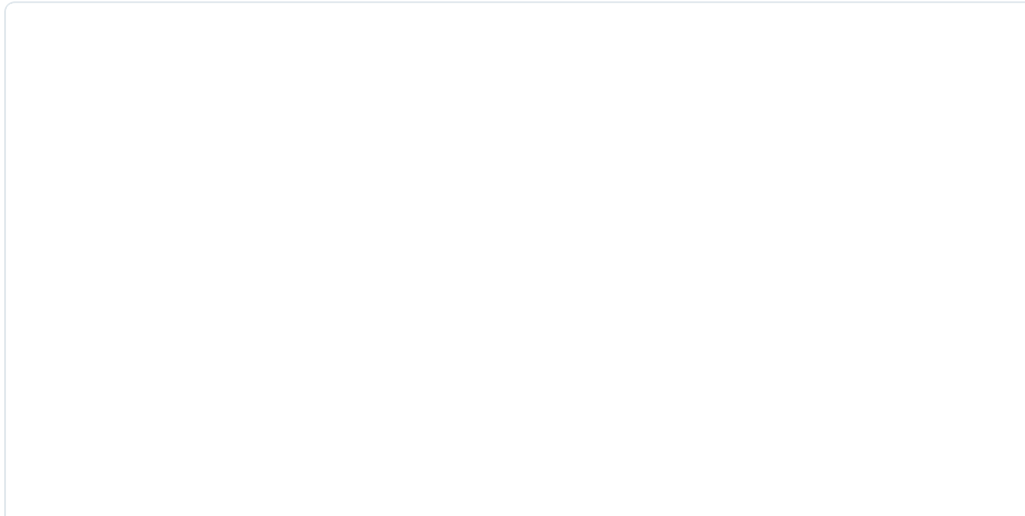
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