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A festival to experience village life

• Annie Philip



A village crafts exhibition held recently by Mohanam Cultural Centre.— File Photo

Fancied taking a bullock cart ride? How about playing the strategic game of 'Aadu Puli Aattam' or even taking part in a village party? Visitors and tourists will get to experience village life firsthand at the Puducherry Village Heritage Festival being organised by the Mohanam Cultural Centre on February 21 and 22.

The festival will take place at Alankuppam village near the Isai Ambalam School from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and include live performances, traditional foods, games and activities. The festival is supported by the Department of Tourism, village panchayat, women and youth groups and artisans of Alankuppam and Sanjeevi Nagar.

The neighbouring villages of Alankuppam and Sanjeevi Nagar are home to several units involved in making terracotta, ceramic, recycled paper, crochet and leather products. Visitors can buy these and a variety of other handicrafts made locally directly from the artisans from the art and craft market at the festival. The line-up of programmes include story-telling sessions, astrology using parrots and games such as 'Uriadithal,' 'Paanaiudaithal,' 'Pallankuzhi,' 'Sillattam' and 'Vazhuku maram eruthal.'

The Mohanam Cultural Centre in Sanjeevi Nagar headed by P. Balasundaram has been organising similar festivals in the past years where visitors can indulge in experiential tourism which is eco-friendly. Artisans from Alankuppam and Sanjeevi Nagar are also linked through the Lively One Village project which involves sharing expertise and providing a platform for the artisans to sell their products.

"I want visitors to experience life in the villages, and see the kind of work which is being done here, outside of Auroville. The festival will support the livelihood of the villagers. The Mohanam Cultural Centre is essentially a bridge between the surrounding villages and Auroville," said P. Balasundaram.

The festival assumes significance in the declaration earlier this month of the Alankuppam rural tourism circuit, a joint project by the Puducherry government and the Ille-et-Vilaine (Brittany region, France) administration.

Mr. Balasundaram and his team will also be assisting Ille-et-Vilaine in the Alankuppam project. It marked the government's first rural tourism project in Puducherry.