

was considered better making it feasible to develop initially a 6,000 feet runway with scope for extending it later upto 10,000 feet. The fact that only dry crops were being cultivated in the area also weighed in its favour.

At present, Madras on the north, Bangalore on the west and Tiruchchirappalli on the south are the nearest airports which serve the needs of Pondicherry and Karaikal. Kozhikode airport is the nearest from Mahe and Vijayawada from Yanam.

VI. Travel and tourist facilities

Modelled after the medieval towns of France with promenades, boulevards and vistas, Pondicherry has a distinct character which distinguishes it from other towns in India. Its little mansions, high ceiling dwellings adorned with carved masonry pillars, terraced balconys, tall framed doors and windows, chandeliers, candelabra and consoles are all testimonies of a three hundred-year-long association with France. These features, combined with the numerous temples, churches and mosques in their varied hues and styles have endowed it with an aura of serenity that is both sublime and rare.

Sri Aurobindo sought the shores of Pondicherry in 1910. After some sixteen years of rigorous *tapasya*, the Ashram was organised on a practical basis and has grown since then steadily under the Mother's guidance.⁶⁶ Pondicherry is today a pilgrimage centre with the Samadhis of Aurobindo and the Mother attracting devotees from all over the world. Apart from its own importance as a tourist destination, Pondicherry is at the centre of a region noted for its historic monuments. It is very close to such renowned places as Chidambaram, Gingee, Tiruvakkarai and Vedanthangal. The temples at Bahur Tirubhuvanai, Madagadippattu and Tiruvandarkovil—some of the oldest in South India—are all situated around Pondicherry. Endowed with such unique features, it was but natural for the town to grow into a centre of tourist attraction. It was only in December 1961, that a Tourist Wing came to be formed in the General Administration (Information) Department to deal with all problems connected with tourism in the Territory.⁶⁷ Early attempts were confined mainly to the provision of decent hotel accommodation at reasonable rates. A nine-bed tourist home was first opened at Karaikal in January 1964. The 20-bed tourist home in Pondicherry was declared open on 10 August 1967. This was followed by the opening of a six-bed tourist home at Mahe in October 1969.

With the opening of the Tourist Information Bureau in 1961 efforts were made to popularise the tourist attractions of Pondicherry and to furnish travel and tourist information to incoming as well as outgoing tourists. In March 1966, the Sri Dharbaranyeswarer Devasthanam of Tirunallar built from its own funds a tourist lodge, to serve the needs of pilgrims visiting the temple.⁶⁸

Realising the growing importance of tourism and the need to devote special attention to the implementation of plan schemes the 'Tourism Wing' which was until then under the administrative control of the Public Relations Officer was bifurcated with effect from 1 July 1970 and conferred an independent status. The Tourism Wing was thus placed under the control of the Tourist Officer, subsequently redesignated as Director of Tourism.⁶⁹ This arrangement was dispensed with on 8 June 1973 and the Directorate was once again merged with the Directorate of Information and Publicity.

In due course the Municipalities also started evincing some interest in the tourist trade. On 22 May 1968 the Karaikal Municipality opened an 18-bed tourist home in Karaikal town. The Pondicherry Municipality soon followed (29 July 1971) with a 14-bed tourist home in Pondicherry. Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Sri Aurobindo Society run a number of guest houses mainly to cater to those visiting the Ashram.

In 1969 two air-conditioned suites were added to the Government Tourist Home at Uppalam by way of further expansion.⁷⁰ To cope up with the increased demand for decent hotel accommodation in the town, the administration sanctioned a sum of Rs. 3.19 lakhs for the construction of a 28-bed annexe to the Tourist Home at Uppalam. Another 34-bed home was declared open on 11 November 1973 at Indira Nagar (close to Dhanwantari Nagar) to cater to the needs of people visiting Dhanwantari Nagar.⁷¹ The three-bed Government Guest House in Yanam was declared open on 12 April 1974. Thus by the end of the IV Plan the total bed strength of Government Tourist Homes exceeded hundred as against none at the beginning of the II Plan. A Tourist Information Bureau started functioning at Karaikal from 17 August 1975.

Private entrepreneurs have not lagged behind in providing hotels attached with air-conditioned bars, roof gardens for moon-light dinners etc. The Grand Hotel d'Europe established in 1891 is so well known for its French cuisine.

Several other hotels which serve good western dishes have come up recently. There are a couple of eating places serving French and Vietnamese dishes in the town.

In order to provide accommodation and other facilities to excursion parties, it was proposed to establish two Excursion Centres, one at Pondicherry and the other at Tirunallar in Karaikal under the IV Plan. The Excursion Centre at Pondicherry, providing dormitory type accommodation for 100 persons was declared open on 24 February 1976. In order to provide some recreational avenues for visiting tourists, it was decided to introduce rowing boats in Chunnambu Ar (river) and Usteri (lake). Boats were brought from Kodaikanal. Boating in Usteri was introduced on 19 December 1970. Water being available in Usteri only for six months a year i.e. from October to February, boating facilities are available only during this period. During the remaining period, the boats operate in Chunnambu Ar. The lake site, being an ideal picnic spot, was proposed to be beautified with way-side parks alongside the lake and sheds for picnic parties with recreational facilities. Facilities for sun and sea bath near the new pier in Pondicherry was provided with effect from 23 February 1976.

The Inspection Bungalows at Suttukanni, Bahur, Gudappakkam, Karaiyamputtur and Sornavur, all situated amidst salubrious surroundings close to the bank of a lake or river were under the management of the Public Works Department.⁷² Officials as well as the public used to frequent these spots during week-ends especially during summer. While some of these Inspection Bungalows were in a state of neglect for want of proper renovation and maintenance, some others were put to other use.

With the steadily growing importance of Pondicherry as a tourist centre interest among entrepreneurs grew in travel trade. A few travel agencies started operation, but due to lack of steady business had to close down. Recently some outside travel agencies have opened their branches in Pondicherry. There are no recognised travel agencies in the Territory. C.J. Revals, Auro Travels and Amsham Travels undertake domestic as well as international air bookings.

A number of private individuals and firms arrange casual tours to place of tourist interest and also to pilgrim centres, especially during festival seasons. The functioning of these firms are not subjected to any regulation. Since 1972 sight seeing tours are arranged by the Tourist Information Bureau,