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GARDEN TOURISM: THE GALLIC GATEWAY TO GAIETY

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ABSTRACT:

The present world's mass tourism has regenerated itself, paving way for niche tourism that focuses more on qualitative tour experience than the volume. One such segment that pulls the tourists with alacrity is Garden tourism. This novel tourism yet novice have immense potential in spearheading green tourism in the arena of entertainment. This research paper interestingly, studies the tourism potential of a garden in Puducherry - 'Le Jardin Botanique'. Frequent field visits, intricate interviews, rich theoretical inputs, accurate observations, etc. forms the base of this research.



KEYWORDS: *Tourism, Gardens, Nature, Tourists, Puducherry*

GARDENS - A GIMMICK

Garden tours have been a major tourism motivation factor in recent years; it is an area of tourism where a botanical garden is marketed and presented as a tourist attraction encouraging tourists who are gardening enthusiasts to enjoy Mother Nature's bounty by spending time visiting lush gardens sprinkled with colourful blooms.¹ It aims to put the spotlight on a variety of trees, shrubs, aromatic herbs, flowers, potted plants, cacti, bonsai and landscaping. Special horticultural attractions include topiary gardens, Zen gardens,

aromatic gardens, medicinal plants, ornamental plants, butterfly zone, terrariums, greenhouse, nursery stall selling saplings and a store selling gardening equipment, seeds, books and compost. Gardens around the world are gaining immense significance in relation to attracting tourists. Biblically, the ancestors of all human beings, the first man and woman (Adam and Eve) to be created by God began their life in the Garden of Eden entrusted with the task of caring for and nurturing the garden. Eden garden represented vitality, source of life and beginning of all

good things. The Quran refers to this garden as a veritable paradise and mentions about 51 species of plants in the garden. In Hinduism too, gardens are considered as places where beauty is worshipped, with trees, plants and flowers playing a central role of being refuge to birds, bees, insects and other wildlife. India has no dearth of beautiful gardens, the Mughal Tomb gardens and the commercial gardens of the British Raj post 1731 are noteworthy.²

RESPLENDENT CHRONICLE

Gardening as a structured

1. Kraushofer, Agnes. 'Visually Impaired Visitors in Garden Tourism Attractions', In *ISCONTOUR 2013: Proceedings of the International Student Conference in Tourism Research*, (BoD-Books on Demand, 2013), p. 56

2. Benfield, R. *Garden Tourism*, (Oxfordshire: CABI, 2013), p. 5

activity dates back to 2500 BC, when Sargon crossed the Taurus Mountain and reached Anatolian plateau to collect figs, vines and olives. Similarly, Queen Hatsheput of Egypt, engaged an expedition in 1495 BC to Punt (Somalia) searching for trees that yield frankincense (*Boswellia carteri*) from their resin. This expedition has been recorded as a beautiful wall carving at her palace in Thebes. It is interesting to see that Alexander the Great too was keenly interested in plants and gardens. He is noted for bringing the pomegranate from Armenia, and peach and apple from Central Asia back to Greece in the 4th Century BC. Arabs also went on an expedition to Ethiopia to take back coffee to Arabia in 900 AD.³ From time immemorial, people have considered the amazing diversity of plants and gardening as an essential part of the ecosystem and besides being a part of most basic human activities due to its wide range of multiple uses one of the less recognized benefits is the personal satisfaction derived from this hobby. Thus, we see that history has recorded for posterity many interesting details on gardens. The yesteryear gardens continue to be a big draw for tourists attracting hordes of visitors from around the globe confirming the strong bond between human beings and the natural world, best expressed by the term coined by Edward Wilson (1984) - 'biophilia' which refers to

“the connections that human beings subconsciously seek with the rest of life”⁴

POIGNANT PUDUCHERRY

Endorsing the fact that all over the world gardens are a tourist's delight, Puducherry stands foremost in presenting itself as an ideal 'garden tourism' destination to nature loving tourists. The Botanical Gardens in Puducherry, popularly called as 'Le Jardin Botanique' is spread over a sprawling 22 acres and is home to a variety of species of flora including endangered and exotic species of plants; it also has toy train rides and six fountains one of which is a musical and dancing fountain making the garden a popular attraction in Puducherry. The garden was started in 1826 by the French and is laid out in ornate French style, with pruned trees, well maintained flowerbeds and gravel-lined paths, offering a refreshing and relaxing time for tourists. There are over 1500 species of plants with neat placards indicating the species, common name and interesting details like the uses of the tree, amount of oxygen generated and its medicinal value; it is undoubtedly one of the best botanical gardens in South India.



Fig 1. Fossil tree – a special attraction in the botanical gardens⁵

After beaches and lakes, gardens too have a magnetic effect in attracting tourists. Puducherry is gifted with bountiful gardens, densely populated by several plant species, both native and transplanted from other parts of the world. The old maps of Pondicherry drawn in 1705 and later, reveal that there were several gardens in and around the town. It is said that these gardens came into existence from 1825 when the Ministère de la Marine authorised the administration to promote the cultivation of

3. Maxted, N, Ford-Lloyd, B. V and Hawkes, J. G. Complementary Conservation Strategies. *In* Plant Genetic Conservation. (Eds.,). Netherlands: Chapman & Hall. (1997): 15, 16.

4. Wilson, E. O. Biophilia, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 11-15

5. Field visit, *Botanical Garden*, Puducherry, 22 May 2016

sugarcane and indigo by utilising its surplus revenue. On June 26, 1827 a decision was taken by the administration where, the garden came under the care and control of Belanger, the Botanical Director and it was then called as Jardin Colonial or Colonial garden.⁶ The botanical garden Jardin Colonial covered an area of 18 Hectares.⁷

The temperature in a year is 28° C in average. In a month, the temperature varies from 31.8° C in summer to 24° C in winter. Puducherry receives rain upto 1254 mm on an average in a year. The French were enthusiastic in studying the nature of plants that could be cultivated. They expertly identified the plants that would flourish and grow well by adopting itself to the Puducherry's changing weather patterns.



Fig 2. Field Visit to the Memorable Memorial of G. S. Perrottet - Founder of the Garden

The famous traveller Victor Jacquemont also reported the cosmic collections of thousand varieties of plants nurtured in this botanical garden in an area of 7500 square meters, in the year 1829.⁸ This garden was entrusted to a famous Botanist Mr. S. G. Perrottet in 1838. He grew new varieties of plants, nourished them and cared for the botanical garden with utmost sincerity leading to the creation of a living herbarium. He meticulously arranged the plants in such a way that the garden appeared fascinatingly beautiful.⁹

Assortments of florae like tobacco, cotton, sugar-cane, mulberry etc., were carefully planted in a short period of 4 ½ years and the garden was beautified with an ellipsoidal water body and attractive walking paths. Apart from this, a circular pond was erected at the centre and a **greenhouse** was built in the south-west direction of the garden. Perrottet was so dedicated to his profession that he travelled to various places like Calcutta (now Kolkata), Madras (now Chennai), Sri Lanka, Shevroy Hills i.e.Yercaud Hills near Salem in Tamil Nadu and he brought in several new species of plants. In 1850, Perrottet pioneered the cultivation of Vanilla plants, a climbing vine of the orchid family from whose pods an expensive flavouring agent is obtained. Perrottet did not limit himself to plants, he tried his hands at sericulture too by developing a silk worm nursery as well. There were about 500 varieties of plants in the garden then and they continue even today. Apart from Perrottet, Countest Lacour in 1870, Pelletier

6. Archives Administratives, *Administrative Archives of the French Establishments of India: containing Laws, Ordinances, Regulations, and all other Publications made by order of the Government* (Archives administratives des Établissements français de l'Inde: contenant les lois, ordonnances, règlements, et toutes autres publications faites par ordre du gouvernement), 1827, Issues 7 to 14, p. 145

7. *Annuaire, Directories of French Establishments in India - Pondicherry* (Annuaire des Établissements français dans l'Inde - Pondichéry), (Puducherry: Government Printing House, 1870), p.152

8. Jacquemont, V, *Letters from India*, 2nd edn, (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1835)

9. Department of Agriculture 2015, 'Au Jardin Zoologique At Pondichèry', viewed 21 December 2015, <http://agri.puducherry.gov.in/bggarden.html>

in 1875 and Mr. Reynaud in 1885 were instrumental in introducing a variety of new species of shrubberies.

Mr. Achart effectively discharged his duties as the Head of Agriculture in Puducherry since 1890 and was eventually promoted as the Director of Le Jardin Botanique in 1900. Not to be forgotten are the contributions of a few other famed Botanists of those times namely Rev. Father Dessaint, Mr. Monseigneur Leveille, Mr. Giblon and Dr. Bigot. Since 1954, the Department of Agriculture is assigned with the additional assignment of preserving the botanical garden. Presently, the garden hosts unique collections of trees and plants that lure tourists.

In 1904, two artesian wells were put into operation for watering the plants. Different species of trees and shrubs numbering about 250, were identified and labelled. There were also more than 200 species of herbaceous plants.¹⁰ In the year 1965, Dr. Sen, Deputy Director, Botanical Survey of India, suggested a few methods to improve the status of the park. His scheme envisaged the setting up of a nursery with an attached glass-house, a laboratory, a conservatory, a student's garden, a herbarium, a library, the construction of boundary walls and roads, a rockery, a fountain, development of landscapes, hedges, shrubberies etc. His Report also emphasized arrangements for meeting water requirements and provision of facilities for aquatic cultivation.¹¹

Even after many years, the botanical garden continues to be well maintained by the present Government and every year several Garden Festivals are being conducted, like Flower Festival, Fruit and Vegetable festival here. This garden attracts at least 500 tourists during weekends.

The Botanical garden is enriched with a variety of indigenous and striking deciduous evergreen species. Each contributes to the overall floral prosperity, splendour and gorgeousness of the garden. The garden houses a few endangered species and specimens of the tropical too. The tourists are greeted by the tall and monster like *Khaya senegalensis* which is a rare species brought from Central Africa. An interesting aspect is the blooming of sweet aromatic flowers from the trunks of the huge Cannon ball trees *Couroupita guianensis* that enhances the charm of this garden. The mighty presence of old and gigantic silk cotton trees *Bombax malabaricum* and *Oreo doxaregia*, the majestic royal palms that stands erect are vistas of visual attractions to the tourists.

Some of the rare species of trees that adds to a collection of incredible colour, bouquet, magnificence and serenity to this Botanical garden are "*Adenantha pavonina*, *Anthocephala luscadamba*, *Samania saman*, *Albizzia*, *Lagerstroemia lanceo lata*, *Michelia champaka*, *Crescentia cujeta*, *Sweita neamahagoni*, *Kigeli apinnata*, *Ficus (Fig tree)*, *Delonixregia (Flame of the forest)*, *Peltophorum ferrugineum*, *Saracaindica*, *Butea frondosa*, *Plumeria species*, *Spathodia caampanulata*, *Milligtonia hortensis*, *Tabebui arosea*".

The tourists always get attracted towards the colourful flowers, height of the trees, diverse period of blossoming, fruit creation, and foliage flaking.¹² The visit and screeches of periodic creepy-crawlies adds beauty to this lush green garden.

Jardin Colonial, being an important site for tourists, the then Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry A. K. Singh (July 2014 – May 2016) vigilantly monitored the renovation work that was carried out in the garden. He observed that high standards were not being maintained in the garden. He also directed the garden officials to ensure that all the trees are labelled, indicating the name, age, use and other essential details. He suggested that the labels be self-explanatory as guides will not be able to handle a huge crowd. He posed a few pertinent questions to the garden care takers which clearly reveal his keen interests in upgrading the garden. Though the garden is maintained by the Department of Agriculture, the beautification and renovation work was initiated in the year 2014 by the Department of Tourism at a cost of Rs.6 crore. The renovated garden will have flowering plants to add a dash of colour,

10. Administrative Report 1960-61, Government of Puducherry, Puducherry, p.19

11. Sundararaju, V 2017, 'Heritage Trees of Pondicherry', viewed 9 March 2017,

<https://www.scribd.com/document/338392302/Heritage-Trees-of-Pondicherry>

12. Reid, M 2013, *Interview with the Tourist from United States of America*, 20 May 2013

a jogging track for fitness enthusiasts, enhanced parking facilities, a viewing deck and an amphitheatre.¹³



Fig 3. Field Visit to the Route Map - Path provider of the Botanical Garden



Fig 4. Field Visit to Visitor's Time Board- The Vulnerable Vita of the Garden

Table 1. Glimpse of Plant Collections¹⁴

Total number of trees collection	More than 2200 numbers
Genus	132 Nos
Species	198 Nos
Family	52 Nos
New Accession	More than 150 Nos
Collection of cactus and succulents	30 Nos
Collection of foliage and ornate plants	50 Nos
Saleable blossoming plants	6 Nos
Bushes	60 Nos
Therapeutic plants	More than 100 Nos
Decorative flower trees	More than 25 Nos
Usufructs	More than 200 Nos
Oldest trees by age	Bombax, Khaya - more than 175 years old
Loftiest Tree (maximum)	Bombaxx, Khaya, Enterolobium (about 50 feet)
Trunk girth (maximum)	Bombaxx, Khaya, Enterolobium (about 16-18 feet)

The tourists who visit this garden are lured by an attraction that is unique to this garden – the fossil park. Fossils are remains, sediments and impressions of plants and trees which date back to thousands of years and that are preserved in different forms. Fossils are formed due to high temperature and pressure that transforms the accumulation of sediments in sea, lakes and swamps. These accumulations are in the form of sandstone and it is called as sedimentary rocks. During such sedimentation process, plants and animals also undergo changes in composition, where sand particles replace the cellular components of plants and animals and are converted into rocks. These rocks are referred to as fossils. Interestingly, Puducherry botanical garden has an excellent exhibition of fossils for tourists.

13. Philip, A, 'Governor marches into Botanical Garden, sets deadline for Renovation', *The Hindu*, 9 September 2014, p. 2

14. Government Brochure, '*Botanical Garden*', Government Press, 2015

A leisurely stroll through the entire stretch of the botanical garden offers a serene, peaceful and a rejuvenating experience under the natural green umbrella of the dense trees and plants. This 187 year old Botanical garden is a distinctive heritage milestone for Puducherry serving as a significant sightseeing spot¹⁵ and glee for the tourists,¹⁶ living herbarium for the scholars pursuing botany and as a biological -gallery for forestry and naturalists. It also offers rest for the weary, tranquillity to meditators, picnic spot to children, tourists and an ideal place for jogging. It continues to remain as the only lung space of tree and green precinct in the heart of the city.



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15. Stra, 2015, *Interview with the Tourist from France*, 10 May 2015

16. Evon, 2015, *Interview with the Tourist from Italy*, 11 May 2015