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Pondicherry - Jacqueline Dufour

Jeff　　Bonjour, Jacqueline.

Jacqui　　Bonjour, Jeff.

Jeff　　Firstly, can I ask you why you enjoy travelling?

Jacqui　　I've been travelling for about fifteen years now, and I think it's important to learn about other countries and other customs in order not to have any prejudices. It's a secret to peace, in fact, to avoid saying the other person does things badly, because one doesn't know why they doing things that way. I often travel in a small group, because it's easier that way to come into contact with the people.

Jeff　　When in the year do you normally go travelling?

Jacqui　　I travel mostly in the off-peak period, so as not to come across so many tourists. It's also to see the people more in their everyday lives, rather than doing what they have to do for the tourists.

Jeff　　And can you tell me about some of the places that you've been to?

Jacqui　　I've been to Africa a little, in Namibia and South Africa, mostly to see the fauna, because I love animals.   For example, I went to the Kruger Park, which had been a childhood dream. When I was a child, I had lots of photos of animals on my bedroom walls: giraffes, elephants, and I made a dream come true going to that place. Apart from that, I've travelled in Asia, in Vietnam, Thailand, Northern India, and most recently, in Southern India.

Jeff　　I'm particularly interested to find out about your travels to Pondicherry in India.

Jacqui　　I went to Pondicherry for the first time a few months ago. I like the sound of the name. We learned about Pondicherry and Chandernagor in school, and it sounded dream-like, from a distant land. We knew there were cultural as well as trade links, but what we knew less about was the wars that were fought to have a trading post there. It was only when I travelled there that I learned that there had been many problems with other countries in establishing a post in Pondicherry.   Also, it's a landmark for the French, because, as the French are still living there, and French is still spoken, we get the impression that it's very accessible for us. It's part of our history.   There are snippets of dreams that are still alive.

Jeff　　What is there to see and do?

Jacqui　　The town itself, which is divided in two, there's what used to be called "la Ville Blanche," which was occupied by the French, and "la Ville Noire,"

where there are a lot of shops, noise, and so on. It's another world, very different to the town known by the French. Apart from the town, there are other things to see. There's a place that's known world-wide and that's the ashram of Aurobindo. It's a place where lots of people go to meditate. There's another institution, Auroville, a town to which people come from all over the world, a town where everything is based on sharing.

Jeff   So just how French is it?

Jacqui   There's a minority of the population who speak French, you could hear it in the streets, and people understand. English and Tamil are the official languages, but French is still spoken widely.

Jeff   Do they have French food?

Jacqui   No, no, I never eat French food when I travel abroad. I eat local-style.

Jeff   I understood they had baguettes and croissants.

Jacqui   No, no, never.

Jeff   Are the buildings in the French style?

Jacqui   The original building style is Portuguese. Then the French arrived and there was building in those limited parts of the town, often single-story houses. But the style wasn't particularly French, as people came from all over. There are, for example, houses with balconies, very beautiful ones. There is a lot of greenery. The construction of pavements for the pedestrians was a French idea, as is the drainage system. So, the look of the place is quite Frenchified

Jeff   And do many French people live there?

Jacqui   There are ten thousand French living and working in Pondicherry. That's quite a large number for a small town. They're concentrated in the town, which makes that quite an impressive population.

Jeff   Jacqueline, thank you very much for giving us so much information. Thank you very much indeed.