Guide for Visiting Researchers in Auroville

Auroville Research Platform

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This Auroville Research Platform guide offers some basic information for visitors interested in carrying out research in Auroville. Whether you would like to do your own study, or work on an Auroville research project, our team is happy to welcome you to our community and support you in this endeavour, in the spirit of experimentation and collaboration that Auroville is based on.

Please read this document carefully, as it clarifies some commonly-asked questions, provides resources for researchers, and outlines some guiding principles for undertaking a research project in Auroville.

In order to undertake research in Auroville, please note the following key requirements:

1) Before beginning, make contact with the Research Platform via email
2) Obtain an appropriate visa for legally undertaking research in India (not applicable for Indian citizens). If your research can be supported by the Research Platform, we will facilitate this process.
3) Agree to share any outcomes of your research with us for Auroville's archives.

Contents

Auroville

Auroville was founded in 1968 by the Mother, a spiritual leader who had a vision of creating a universal township where men and women of all nations together strive to live in human unity and embody a spiritualized society. Based on the spiritual vision of Sri Aurobindo, an Indian freedom fighter and yogi with whom she closely shared her spiritual journey, the ideal of Auroville drew seekers from all over the world. These pioneers started Auroville on a barren plot of land in the late 1960s, planting trees and building the soul of the city, the Matrimandir. The foundational principles for Auroville as noted down by the Mother are found in 3 documents: the Auroville Charter, A Dream, and To Be a True Aurovilian.

Today, Auroville is a densely forested community that houses around 3000 people from all over the world (over 50 different nationalities). It is a society that seeks to embody its spiritual vision through applied work, acting as a centre for innovation and experimentation. As our small township is surprisingly complex, we encourage researchers who come to Auroville to familiarize themselves with some basic texts on Auroville, as well as some excellent ethnographic works, listed below. These will help you to get an idea

> "Q. Is Auroville the only solution to the misery of mankind and the disorders of society?
>
> *A. Not the only solution. It is a centre of transformation, a small nucleus of men who are transforming themselves and setting an example to the world. This is what Auroville hopes to be.*"
>
> The Mother, December 28th, 1972.

of how Auroville functions on a daily basis, its achievements and contradictions, as juxtaposed with the vast evolutionary vision of the Mother.

Research in Auroville

What is research in Auroville? Given Auroville's intention of individual and collective socio-spiritual transformation, and ethos of applied experimentation, "research" in the Auroville context is multi-dimensional. The Mother was clear about the central place of research for this experimental township:

> *From the Auroville Charter:*
>
> "Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations."
>
> "Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity."

In practice, research in Auroville encompasses academic, fundamental, applied, and spiritual research, including a wide range of scientific analytical, social sciences and subjective practices and inquiries that individuals and collectives perform towards embodying Auroville's Dream. In particular, Auroville focuses its research in the following domains:

- ✓ Art and Culture
- ✓ Education
- ✓ Sustainability
- ✓ Urban planning and Architecture
- ✓ Rural Development
- ✓ Spirituality
- ✓ Health and Wellness
- ✓ Collective Organisation

The Auroville Research Platform

The Auroville Research Platform is a service affiliated with Savi, Auroville's portal for interns and volunteers. Our goal is to support fertile cooperation between visiting researchers and Auroville by providing a point of contact and resource centre for researchers interested in our community.

In a world that is increasingly aware of the ethical responsibility of research towards a 'host community,' we also aim to ensure that academic research in Auroville is done in the spirit of collaboration, reciprocity, sincerity and good will.

We offer ourselves as a resource for researchers on two levels:

1. Research Support

We offer various resources to ensure that your research is original and can be executed with a strong understanding of the Auroville context, depending on your need. For example, we can provide you with:

- Resource-persons or experts on your subject in the Auroville context
- Research mentors, where needed (especially for undergraduate students)
- Database of research done on Auroville
- Logistical support for presenting your research within the community.
- Assistance with identifying research participants
- Access to a network of researchers who are currently in Auroville, or who have done research on Auroville in the past.

In a first instance, we ask you to fill in a Researcher Form, to enable us to best support you.

2. Practical Support

We are a point of contact in Auroville to answer any questions you may have about the logistics of your stay, and we provide administrative support for the procurement of the correct visa needed to do research in Auroville – required by the Indian government.

Please note that strong checks are undertaken by the Indian government to ensure that foreign individuals do not exceed the limitations of their visa. We strongly discourage doing research on a tourist visa, as any activity that exceeds tourist visa limitations can lead to a ban from Indian territory for a minimum of 5 years.

Your visa options

There is a Research Visa that is given out by the Indian government to foreigners, after review by a special Committee. This process is recommended for those who want to do long-term, extensive research in India (for example in the pursuit of a PhD), but can be overly complicated for shorter-term research projects.

We can support foreign (i.e. non-Indian) nationals in obtaining a 6 to 12 months Entry visa (as a registered Auroville Volunteer) under which you can undertake research activities in our community. These visas are issued by the Indian government specifically for a stay in Auroville, and need a special recommendation from the Auroville Foundation. Please note that this visa recommendation should be requested via the Research Platform 3 months in advance of intended travel, and that they are not valid for touristic activities within India at large.

Your research in Auroville

We define two distinct types of research projects:

1) A research project that meets an explicit research need of Auroville.
2) A personal research project.

Of course, we see these categories as fluid, but for the clarity of our process, the two types of projects have slightly different trajectories.

A project based on an Auroville need

Our community – individuals, groups, social and commercial enterprises and community services – are conducting a large range of applied research but have limited time and resources to assess, analyse, and formally disseminate their findings.
The various contributions to be brought to an Auroville research project could be:

● Formulating relevant research projects
● Research design and methods

- Data collection and analysis
- Supporting publication of research outputs
- Sourcing funds for research in Auroville

Take a look at the research section of the Savi website where some research opportunities are available. Questions range from broad inquiries into governance, economy, and culture, to applied projects in microbiology, agro-ecology, engineering, and architecture.

If you are interested to take one of these opportunities, contact us to see how We can match your qualifications with a research project in Auroville.

An independent research project

The Auroville Research Platform will also support an independent research project in Auroville, offering some orientation, logistical support, and as a point of contact. We only ask everyone to consider the 8 recommendations for doing research in Auroville, listed below, and to consult us and our database of research previously undertaken on Auroville to avoid duplicating projects: research.auroville.org.

In case of undergraduate applicants, we strongly encourage creating a relationship with an Auroville research mentor, who can orient you in undertaking research in Auroville. To be most fruitful, a Skype meeting prior to coming to Auroville can already help you shape the research in a more contextualized way. We are happy to provide you with a list of possible mentors once you get in touch with us to share your ideas and project.

The Auroville Research Platform team: Dominique, Ravi, Henrike and Suryamayi.

8 Recommendations for Research in Auroville

Based on our experience with many researchers coming to Auroville in the past, we have identified some best practices, which we would like to share with you in the form of recommendations.

1. Make sure your project connects to Auroville

While it may be hard to adequately assess what Auroville is like from a distance, please ensure that you have read and understood some basic source material (see recommended reading list) to avoid repetition of efforts or, especially in the case of social sciences and humanities, an under-contextualized research approach. To translate back to Auroville and Aurovilians, make sure your project is sufficiently streamlined and clear to be understood by laypeople; as a community interested in research, it is greatly appreciated if your work can be understood by interested individuals.

2. Take your time

We often see that short-term research projects, with fieldwork of less than 3 months, fall short of being really comprehensive and are unable to contextualize findings adequately. Arriving here, finding your way and connecting to the right people and projects for your research can take much more time than anticipated as Aurovilians are generally quite busy. Please keep this in mind when you plan your research project.

3. Ensure informed consent

Although a basic requirement of most academic studies, we would like to reiterate that it is important for research that involves participants to work from informed consent – ensure that your participants know what your research project is about and how the data may or may not be used.

4. Share your interviews with the Auroville Archives

Your interviews with Aurovilians are a precious resource for Auroville's archives. Please ask your interviewees for permission to share recordings and/or transcripts of your interviews with the Auroville Archives. If they agree to this, do ask if they consent to their real name being used, or if they would prefer a pseudonym, and give them the opportunity to review and remove or edit portions of their transcript/recording before it is submitted for archiving.

5. Please be generous with your research findings

As we are striving to learn from you as you are learning from us, please make sure that you have a system for dissemination of research findings. If you have any ideas for this and need support to execute it – for example, giving a presentation or holding a focus group on your findings – we will support you with the logistics to the best of our abilities. As a minimum, we ask that you send us your finalized paper so that we can add it to our database of research done on Auroville.

6. Consider open access publication

Auroville is an experiment for humanity, and as such we value open access publication systems. While we realize that this is not feasible for everyone due to the financial burden of open access publishing, please consider trying to find funding for this.

7. Consider naming an Aurovilian mentor/expert/unit as a co-author

Depending on the level of interaction and engagement between you and a specific person or unit in Auroville, please consider giving back by naming them as co-author. Clearly, this can only work on a case-by-case basis, but we would like to note here that it is one avenue of showing appreciation for experts and mentors.

8. Find funding

Auroville units are generally underfunded, relying on volunteers and generous staff members. Funding is a major impediment to research in Auroville, so please make sure that you are able to fund your own research. If you are inspired by the research project as defined by the unit you are working with, consider whether you have access to sources of funding that may benefit the unit working with you.

Logistics of your Stay

Accommodation

Long-term stays can find various forms of accommodation, such as homestays, guesthouses, or even house-sittings. Please check out the dedicated website for lodging in Auroville: http://guesthouses.auroville.org/.
Please note that those registered as volunteers in Auroville need to be hosted inside Auroville, as per our agreement with the Indian government.
Finding accommodation can be especially challenging in the high season (late November–February), so please make sure to book accommodation well in advance. If you need support in finding accommodation, get in touch with the Auroville Guest Accommodation & Registration Service: avguests@auroville.org.in.

Financial Matters
- Admin Fees:

After getting in touch with the Auroville Research Platform, depending upon the duration of your stay, you will be redirected to Savi to process your visa application.

Savi levies a standard administrative fee of Rs. 1500 (approx. $20) for the visa assistance and registration (invoiced once upon visa request). For the expedition of your recommendation letter a visa courier fee of Rs. 2300 (approx. $33) is required.

- Community Contribution

All resident guests of Auroville contribute a monthly amount of Rs. 4500 (approx. $65) to our communal fund, which finances essential community services (such as roads, schools, health, security, etc). This community contribution applies to you as well, unless you are undertaking your research as a Savi-registered volunteer of an Auroville unit, for whom the monthly contribution is Rs. 900 (approx. $13).

- Living Costs

You will have to fund your living costs while residing in Auroville (see budget below – all of these figures as of April 2019).

Initial Auroville living costs
- ✓ Taxi from Airport: Rs. 2400.
- ✓ Auroville Guest Account Deposit: Rs. 500.
  (this amount is refunded at the end of the stay)

Monthly Auroville living costs
- ✓ Small motorcycle plus petrol: ~ Rs. 2700 to Rs. 3500 per month or;
- ✓ Bicycle: ~ Rs. 650 to Rs. 750 per month
- ✓ Food: ~ Rs. 4000 to Rs. 8000 per month according to your diet
- ✓ Accommodation in an Auroville Guest house: ~ Rs. 9000 to Rs. 25000 per month.

Legal Matters

- Registration with Indian Government Office

Foreign researchers, please note that registration, within 14 days of arrival in India, at the Indian Government's Foreign Regional Registration Office (FRRO) in Pondicherry is mandatory for a stay exceeding 180 days.

- Visa Restrictions

As per Indian visa policy, foreigners with an Entry Visa for Auroville cannot engage in any other activities in India, including travel outside Auroville for tourism in excess of 2 weeks. You must advise Savi of any major change in the course of your stay (interruptions, early departure, etc.). You also cannot legally receive financial remuneration for any activity in Auroville.

Insurance & Emergency Contact

- We strongly recommend that you obtain personal health, repatriation, and liability insurance. Please provide Savi with your insurance contract and contact information upon arrival.

- Please provide Savi with any additional personal emergency contact information upon arrival.

Resources

Database of Research Undertaken on Auroville

www.research.auroville.org.

Recommended Readings

Books

We recommend the following books, depending on your field of enquiry, to familiarize yourself with the context of Auroville.[1]

- Bowler, Dianna and Nitzan Merguei. The Journeying Years. Auroville: Prisma, 2009.
- Devin, Christine. Turning Points: An inner story of the beginnings of Auroville. Auroville: Auroville Press, 2008.
- Guigan, Gilles. The Mother on Auroville. SAIIER: Auroville, 2018.
- Kapur, Akash. Auroville, Dream and Reality: An Anthology of Aurovilian Writing. Delhi: Penguin, 2018.
- Minor, Robert. *The Religious, the Spiritual, and the Secular.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- Hadnagy, Paulette. The New Being and the New Society. Auroville: SAIIER, 2012
- Sullivan, W.M. The Dawning of Auroville. Auroville: Auroville Press, 1994.
- Thomas, Henk and Manuel Thomas. Economics for People and Earth: The Auroville Case. Auroville: Prisma and Auroville Social Research Center, 2013.
- Van Vrekhem, Georges. The Mother – The Story of Her Life. Delhi: Harper Collins India, 2000.

Theses & Academic papers

We recommend these academic theses, depending on your field of enquiry, to familiarize yourself with key research previously undertaken on Auroville.

- Adams, Anne. "Education, from conception to graduation, a systemic integral approach." PhD diss. Philosophy in Humanities, CIIS California Institute of Integral Studies, 2006.
- Aldeguer, Julien. "Interactions multiculturelles et organisation sociale au sein de la communauté Aspiration à Auroville." Master 1 Lettres, Langues, Arts, Université de Nice Sophia Antipolis, 2007.
- Bhowmick, Pushan. "An Analysis of the Auroville Economic System (AVES): Towards a Sustainable and Ethical Economy." MA International Affairs, The American University of Paris, 2011.
- Brun, Justine. "L'expérience d'Auroville : une communauté internationale dans l'Etat du Tamil Nadu, Inde." Mémoire en Sciences Sociales, Université Libre de Bruxelles,

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[1] For a comprehensive list of books published in Auroville, see
https://auroville.org/system/file_attachments/files/000/002/436/original/BOOK_CATALOGUE_-_APRIL2015.pdf?1429785545

Belgique, 1995.

- Clarence-Smith, Suryamayi. "Towards a Spiritualised Society: Auroville, an Experiment in Prefigurative Utopianism." PhD diss. International Development, University of Sussex, 2019.
- Gonzales, Marco. "Beyond the Capitalist Paradigm? An exploration of the diverse economy of Auroville." MA Development Studies Thesis, International Institute of Social Studies (Erasmus), 2012.
- Horassius, Marie. "Ethnographie d'une Utopie, l'Exemple de la Communauté Internationale d'Auroville." MA Thesis, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2013.
- Jouhki, Jukka. "Imagining the Other: Orientalism and Occidentalism in Tamil–European Relations in South India." Ph.D. diss. History and Ethnology, University of Jyväskylä, 2006.
- Kapoor, Rakesh. "Auroville: A spiritual–social experiment in human unity and evolution." Futures 39 (2007): 632–643. doi:10.1016/j.futures.2006.10.009.
- Leard, Stuart. "The Routinization of Charisma in a Context of an Inner-Worldly Mystic Orientation." MA Sociology, University of Saskatchewan, 1993.
- Meier, Janne. "Being Aurovilian: Constructions of Self, Spirituality and India in an International Community." J@rgonia 4, no. 10 (2006). http://research.jyu.fi/jargonia/artikkelit/jargonia10.pdf.
- Minor, Robert. The Religious, the Spiritual, and the Secular: Auroville and Secular India. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- Mohanty, Bindu. "Integral Yoga: The spiritual ideals of Auroville." Ph.D. diss., California Institute of Integral Studies, 2004.
- Paris, Jean Claude. "Auroville: géographie d'une utopie Indienne." DEA Dynamiques des milieux et sociétés: espaces tropicaux, domaines européens, Université de Michel de Montaigne, Bordeaux III, 2003.
- Pillai, Shanti. "Auroville: Philosophy, Performance and Power in an Intentional Utopian Community in South India." Ph.D. diss. Performance Studies, New York University, 2005.
- Reinhalter, Jaya Priya. "Intentional Communities: place-based articulations of social critique." MA Geography, University of Hawai'i, 2014.
- Sasidharan, Sahil. "Self-organising for sustainability in an intentional community: Planning the international cultural township of Auroville in south India." MA Cities and Global Development, University of Sheffield, 2018.
- Verdiani, Antonella. "Education à la Joie, un exemple dans les écoles d'Auroville." Thèse de Doctorat, Université Paris 8 Sciences de l'Education, 2008.
- Vidal, Maël. "Manifesting the Invisible." MA Social Sciences and Humanities, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2018.
- Watts, Heidi. "Research: Large 'R' or small?" Ritam (2003), pp. 14 – 16.

In Auroville

Libraries
– Auroville Library: general collection
– Library of Evolution (Bharat Nivas, next to the Post Office): spiritual works
– Bhumika Library (Bharat Nivas, behind the Auditorium): Indian authors and scholarship
– Savitri Bhavan: works on Integral Yoga
– Auroville Earth Institute library: works on sustainable architecture
– Sri Aurobindo Ashram Library (Pondicherry): general collection
– Pondicherry University
– Institut Français de Pondichéry (Pondicherry)

Bookstores
– Auroville Visitors Centre: general collection, especially Auroville publications
– Freeland Bookstore (behind the Visitors Centre): general collection
– SAIIER (Town Hall): SAIIER publications, on education
– Sabda (Pondicherry): works related to Integral Yoga

Archives
– Auroville Archives (Town Hall)
– Bharat Nivas Archives (Bharat Nivas)
– Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives (Pondicherry)

Welcome to our collective experiment!

Water Ceremony for Auroville's 50th Anniversary, Matrimandir Amphitheatre, Feb 28th, 2018.