

## Auroville press info sheet 2015

Auroville is a planned city for up to 50,000 people from around the world, under development in south-east India. It is located mostly in the State of Tamil Nadu close to the Coromandel Coast, some 10 kms north of Pondicherry and 150 kms south of Chennai. Auroville is a place for research and experimentation, its purpose is to realise human unity.

### History

The concept of an international-universal city devoted to an experiment in human unity originally sprang from the writings of India's great philosopher-yogi Sri Aurobindo. It was his French-born spiritual collaborator and co-worker Mirra Alfassa, known as The Mother, who first gave it more concrete form by naming it 'Auroville' and stating:

*"Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities. The purpose of Auroville is to realise human unity."*

This was the first public statement on Auroville, given out in 1965. Next, in 1966, the concept of Auroville was put before the General Assembly of UNESCO by the GOI, and was unanimously endorsed. Two years later, on 28th February 1968, youth representing 124 nations and all the Indian States came together to inaugurate the township and receive its Charter, which reads as follows:

1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.
2. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.
3. 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.
4. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.

At the same time UNESCO repeated its unanimous endorsement of the project, and did so again in 1970 and 1983. In 1988 the project was given special status by the GOI, when the 'Auroville Foundation' was created by Act of Parliament. The site chosen for Auroville was a severely eroded plateau extending eastwards to the sea. An early priority for the project was the environmental regeneration and reforestation of the land. To date over 2 million trees have been planted, with the result that the area now has a green and widely forested landscape. Alongside this work, emphasis has always been placed on development of the city, preferably using non-polluting appropriate technology and sustainable energy generating systems.

### Auroville today

The Master Plan for the city is based on a spiral galaxy shape and incorporates four sectors (the International, Cultural, Industrial and Residential Zones) plus a surrounding Green Belt. The four Zones have as their focus a huge globe-shaped structure called the Matrimandir, the 'soul of the city', a place for silent concentration. The Matrimandir is surrounded by beautiful gardens and, eventually, a lake.

Auroville today numbers around 2,400 residents from some 50 countries including India. They live in 110+ settlements of varying size and character spread over a total area of 20 square kms. The residents are engaged in the fields of agriculture & green work, renewable energy, education, health care, village outreach, construction, electronics, commerce, the arts and administration. All are volunteers who either receive a monthly basic 'maintenance' in local rupees, or pay for themselves partly or entirely from their own private resources as a contribution to the project.

General financing for Auroville comes from five sources – the GOI and NGOs within India and abroad; 24 Auroville International Centres around the world; a percentage of the profits of Auroville's many commercial / business units; supporters of Auroville worldwide who understand the global value of what is trying to be done through this unique experiment and, substantially, from the Aurovillians themselves.

### Auroville's significance and outreach

Auroville's work is not confined only to meeting the needs of the emerging city, or to those of the wider bio-region. Auroville sees itself as a place of research and experimentation for humanity as a whole; research not only into sustainable practices, but more importantly into the establishment of a society based on a practical human unity, applicable to all people and all nations. Auroville has already gained national and international acclaim for its environmental work. Many hundreds of acres of forest cover have been created; indigenous flora and fauna have been re-introduced or have returned naturally; botanical gardens, tree seedling nurseries and seed banks have been established; and comprehensive soil and water conservation practices have been introduced. The development of ecologically-sound agriculture without the use of pesticides and detrimental chemicals, plus application of up-to-date agro-forestry techniques, is also being actively pursued.

Auroville is also involved in raising awareness of the dangers of salt intrusion in the immediate coastal zone caused by over-pumping of ground water; is working with farmers' associations to identify and introduce less water-dependent agricultural practices; and is promoting the use of effective micro-organism (EM) technology.

The Centre for Scientific Research (CSR), recognized by the GOI since 1984 for its development work in appropriate technology, is a focal point for future-oriented activities, together with the Auroville Earth Institute (AEI). AEI provides regular training programmes, offers consultancy, designs buildings, supervises construction incorporating its own compressed earth brick technology, and is headed by the representative for India & South Asia to the UNESCO Chair of Earthen Architecture. The Auroville Institute of Applied Technology (AIAT) is a non-profit training school serving students from the local villages. Other major outreach work undertaken by Aurovilians has included overseeing the transformation of Pondicherry's Bharati Park, restoration of historical buildings in Tranquebar, and the restoration of Adyar Creek in Chennai into a healthy and environmentally sustainable nature reserve.

## **Education**

Auroville's multi-cultural educational system endeavors via its six schools to help each child to discover the inner self and realize her/his highest potential. It is increasingly based on a free choice system, which allows the children / students to choose their own subjects for study. Sports and physical education are strongly encouraged for the balanced and healthy growth of the child, plus artistic training to develop aesthetic faculties.

Special care is given to volunteering students from India and abroad, who are given meaningful activities and study projects guided and monitored by the city.

In addition to this, some 700 children from the surrounding villages benefit from Auroville's educational programmes via another half dozen day or night schools and educational centres established and overseen by Auroville's Village Action teams .

## **Arts and culture**

There are regular film shows in Auroville, plus occasional theatre, music, dance and choir performances, poetry readings, exhibitions, PowerPoint presentations, lectures, etc., normally free to residents and guests alike. The creative energy field in the city is highly conducive for artistic expressions. Auroville Art festivals and exhibitions are regularly hosted in various places of India. Auroville also has a biannual Film Festival.

## **Health**

Together with allopathic and dentistry provided for both Aurovilian and village patients, many systems of alternative primary health care are in use, including homeopathy, Ayurveda, physiotherapy, naturopathy, acupuncture, massage and other therapies via various centres in the city.

The Auroville Health Centre located near Kulilapayam village and equipped with basic medical facilities, serves the Auroville community and around 200 local patients daily via its main building and 7 village-located sub-centres. More than 30 local women health workers, trained by Auroville, are active in 17 nearby villages, giving first-aid, advising on home cures, providing basic health education, and encouraging better nutrition by way of small family vegetable gardens in the villages. An Institute for Integral Health is nearing completion in the centre of the city.

## **Commercial activities**

Some 180 commercial / business units and 70 service units operate in Auroville. The activities of the former include handicrafts, graphic design and printing, food processing, electronics and engineering, metalworking, windmill production, clothing and fashion, computer services, building construction and architecture. They contribute a third or more of their profits toward the ongoing development of the city and maintenance of its basic services and infrastructure, while also providing employment and training for large numbers of local villagers. Some 5,000 local people are employed in Auroville.

## **Organization**

There are three separate but interacting bodies which make up the Auroville Foundation – a Governing Board with Secretary who is residing in Auroville, an International Advisory Council, and a Residents Assembly, the latter comprising all Aurovilians on the Master List of residents aged 18 or over. Bodies like the 'Auroville Council' and 'Auroville Working Committee' are elected by the residents every 4 years from volunteering Aurovilians willing to dedicate themselves to handling the basic administrative needs of the city. Most major decisions, especially those of a controversial nature, are taken at General Meetings or, in case of more official matters, at a Residents Assembly.

## **Visitors Centre**

Auroville has a number of guesthouses of different styles and standards. Day visitors can be thoroughly informed in the Visitors' Centre that, with its info desk, large exhibitions, video showing, boutiques and restaurants, leaves one with a fairly good impression of the city's aims and achievements.

***For further information on Auroville please access the website [www.auroville.org](http://www.auroville.org) or contact: OutreachMedia, Multimedia Centre, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, INDIA; e-mail: [outreachmedia@auroville.org.in](mailto:outreachmedia@auroville.org.in)*** (Jan 2015)