

# AUROVILLE

## *AN IMPOSSIBLE UTOPIA?*

Imagine an international community free of government, money, religion and strife; a town where all nationalities, ethnicities and races live together in peace and harmony, where everyone is driven by a common philosophy and a desire for human unity and where spiritual evolution is placed above economic growth. It hasn't worked out quite as perfectly as planned, but nevertheless a township of that kind – and the world's largest existing spiritual utopia – has been growing dynamically in south-east India over the past 48 years. Words by **Dini Martinez**.

**F**oundation and philosophy  
Auroville is not just another hippie haven. It was designed to be a poster child for India itself. According to a 1982 Indian Supreme Court ruling, Auroville is "in conformity with India's highest ideals and aspirations". In 1968, Mirra Alfassa, spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo and known by her followers simply as 'The Mother', founded the project aspiring to a better world. Its four-point Charter sets out her vision of integral living:

1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular: it 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 a place of 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 research for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.

#### Structure

A cylindrical green belt forms the invisible barrier that marks the official parameters of Auroville. Past various ecological farms and communities, one ends up at a peculiar golden-egg shaped piece of modern architecture: the Matramandir. A two-storey, solar-

powered, rather sterile white meditation hall, covered with real gold plates and surrounded by the silent Peace Area – a green array of manicured gardens – forms the centre of the 'City of Dawn'.

Although originally intended to accommodate 50,000, today Auroville's actual permanent population is no more than 3,000, comprised of 50 different nationalities. The main languages spoken are English, Sanskrit, French, German and Tamil. The process of becoming an Aurovillian is long and not in-expensive. In fact, to become an official resident, the 60 per cent foreigners require initial funds higher than most Indians will ever have. Furthermore, a monthly contribution is expected by Aurovillians, who are asked to help the community whenever possibly by work or money. Most residents spent the rainy season back in their home countries to stock up on the reserves necessary to keep living the dream. Visitors are asked for a daily guest contribution which also contributes to Auroville's budget. »



SOME VISITORS  
COME TO  
VOLUNTEER WITH  
ONE OF THE FARMS,  
RENEWABLE  
ENERGY PROJECTS  
OR HANDICRAFT  
PRODUCTIONS TO  
GET A GLIMPSE INTO  
THE EVERYDAY LIFE  
OF A DIFFERENTLY  
STRUCTURED  
SOCIETY

Travel to Auroville: where to stay, how to get around  
and what to do

There are over 450 guest beds in Auroville, covering a variety of different budgets and standards of guest houses and home-stays. As the whole area is very large and spread out, the best way to get around is by motorbike or bicycle. Cars are strongly discouraged from entering Auroville, so the mostly dirt roads are dominated by plenty of dogs, some ox carts loaded with hay and the occasional small tour bus. Traffic can get heavy at dusk, when herds of cows head home and everyone else seems to want to get somewhere too.

There are plenty of restaurants, as well as some communal kitchens, in the compound. In theory, conventional money is not used as currency. In reality, the Aurocard, which visitors are requested to buy, is not widely accepted and it is advisable to always carry some cash with you. The same applies to the activities on



offer, which include yoga, tai-chi, movement improvisation, different kinds of alternative healing sessions and courses, on-going discussion groups on the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo and more. Especially during the visitors' season – between December and March – there are also classical Indian dance performances, movies at the Cinema Paradiso and Sadhana Forest evenings.

Some visitors come to volunteer with one of the farms, renewable energy projects or handicraft productions to get a glimpse into the everyday life of a differently structured society. All these projects, as well as private



Previous page: Matrimandir, Auroville **Top:** Sri Aurobindo **Left:** Mirra Alfassa  
**Bottom left:** Yoga school **Below:** Visitors volutieer with farming energy projects



re mundane issue is the question of who controls the money in a 'money-less' society. Auroville's official website merely depicts a vague pie chart which gives percentages but no actual numbers. Most official residents do not know where their mandatory donation for a house goes. Some living in the more fanciful and experimental dwellings have found their home advertised in random architectural magazines several months after moving in.

However, the majority of Aurovillians seem little bothered about money. They are artists, dreamers, spiritual seekers, eco-farmers and creative adventurers – most of them friendly and open-hearted, as well as lost and lonely in that particular way of those searching for something quite intangible – not even they themselves necessarily knowing exactly what it is.

A better or worse society?

Overall, Auroville has as many successes and failures to point at as most of the rest of the world, albeit possibly slightly different ones: an opaque monetary system, tangles of bureaucracy and the natural fiascos occurring when humans interact. On the other hand there are plenty of innovative projects, a great proportion of energy gained through solar panels, organic farming, spontaneous art and theatre shows, a spiritual education and – more than anything – the courage to try and turn a dream into reality. ❶