

Welcome to India and Pondicherry, Spring 2012



After your arrival in Pondicherry (aka Puducherry), you will be meeting the Kulturstudier team almost every day. They are well prepared and eagerly awaiting your arrival. For the time being, we have made this document to give you the most important information you need when settling into this great town. Please read it thoroughly before departure, and bring it with you to Pondicherry.

We are arranging an introduction and welcome meeting with all the students and team on **Sunday 5th of February at 16:00** on the roof of Maison Raja, Canteen Street 112. The location depends on the number of students, so be aware that changes may occur.

The management team in Pondicherry consists of Laurie Schmitt (manager), Kavitha Ramkumar and Senthil Raju. Your contact person is Kavitha on phone number (0091) 9655933142 or by email: *kavitha@kulturstudier.org* (English only).

Monday 6th of February is the first day at the study centre. In the following days we organize a regular academic schedule, with classes starting at 09:15, 11:15, etc. Breakfast is served at the study centre from 08:30, and lunch is served at 13:00.

Help yourself

Kulturstudier is an organization run by social scientists. We regard ourselves as a university, and the academic courses are our main task. We regard our students as responsible adults, and do not want to make their stay overly organized by us. It is mainly your own responsibility to get the most out of your stay in Pondicherry.

Kulturstudier does not have a guide who watches you at all times. We regard it as part of the learning process that our students enable themselves to be independent. This way, it is also easier for you to get to know your way around in Pondicherry. This means that if, for instance, your baggage gets lost on the flight it is you who will have to follow up on the travel agency/ airline. If you have any problems with your ticket, you will have to contact the travel agency yourself. Likewise; if you are having minor health issues, you go to the doctor yourself (or bring some other student along), and if you are going on weekend trips, you do the organizing of transport and hotel booking; if you have trouble with your visa you contact the embassy or immigration office yourself; if the shower in your apartment stops working, you contact the manager where you live. In short: we expect you to behave as if you were on your own.

When this is said, our team represents a security net for you. You will see us every day, and we are available for you when you need advice on different issues. In case of emergency or a difficult situation, we are always there for you. It is advisable that in case of certain incidents such as things getting stolen, harassment etc. you should inform the team immediately so the necessary steps can be taken. In this document you will find most of the basic information you need to get all set in Pondicherry.

During the semester, you will also get necessary information about schedules, trips, festivals, long weekends etc. on a regular basis. Usually information is given at the weekly meetings. This is scheduled every Wednesday at the study centre after lunch. *These meetings are mandatory for students.* If you miss out on these meetings, it is your own responsibility to get briefed on the given information from one of your fellow students.

“What you get out of it depends on what you put into it”

Studying with Kulturstudier is at its core much the same as studying in any university campus; what you get out of it depends on what you put into it. This goes for the academic work as well as recreation. You can fail your studies and learn nothing – or you can be academically inspired and find what you want to do for the rest of your life. Our students are diverse in their backgrounds and priorities and, wonderfully, tend to find friendship and respect amongst each other. That said, while in Pondicherry you can stay in a backpacker bubble with fellow students or - with a little effort and creativity - you can find local friends and explore local culture on its own terms, taking care to respect local norms and regulations.

Accommodation

On arrival in Pondicherry, you will be accommodated in a room together with one to three other students. This semester the students will be living in the following houses:

Maison Raja:

At Maison Raja in the Indian part of the city, we have several apartments. This is a large, centrally located apartment house where most of our students will be staying, and the big roof terrace is a popular place for various events and gatherings. There is a security guard /doorman at the entrance at all times, and a serviceman/woman available during daytime. You will be in charge of cleaning the apartments yourself. Necessary equipment can be found in the apartments. Once every week you will get clean bed sheets. If something in your apartment (like toilet, light, etc.) does not work, you give a notice to the watchman, who will inform the owner, Mr. Prem Raja.

Address: 112 Canteen Street.

Singh House:

Singh House is located in the Muslim part of Pondicherry, a rather quiet area with particularly beautiful architecture. In this building we have a few large and comfortable apartments. The building has a roof terrace. There is a security guard /doorman at the entrance at all times, and a serviceman/woman available during daytime. Mr. Pierre Ellouard, who owns the place, is an old friend who also runs “Satsanga”, one of our favourite restaurants in Pondicherry. You will be in charge of cleaning the apartments yourself. Once every week you will get clean bed sheets.

Address: 32 Raja Sing Street (South end of Gandhi Street, next to the Church).

Raj Maison:

In the quiet French colonial part of Pondicherry, and close to the promenade along the Bay of Bengal, Raj Maison is a large and gracious house with ample rooms. It has a roof terrace and a big patio, and there are many restaurants within close walking distance.

Other:

After the welcome meeting on Sunday, we will brief you together with the house management on everything you need to know about the place you are living. The various houses and rooms are simple and practical. For the past 13 years students have made their homes here, and have

appreciated the variations in appearance and organization of the different houses. It is impossible and unnecessary to make every house and room exactly the same. But because of the variations we sometimes experience that some may envy others based on first impressions. However, after a couple of weeks, after settling in and appreciating the particular advantages of their place, almost everyone prefers the room and house that chance placed them in. The same goes for roommates. People are placed in rooms together, mostly by chance. And it is impressive how well roommates get along.

Toilet paper is expensive in India, and you will have to buy your own. We equip the apartments with toilet paper before you arrive, and from then you will have to get it yourself in the near-by shops. We expect you to respect your roommates as well as the apartments.

Because all locations are for the students and team only, you are not to bring people besides fellow students to the apartments without first informing Kulturstudier management. Please note that no visitors are allowed to stay overnight at the student houses. Visitors need to identify themselves and register at the entrance, and Kulturstudier reserves the right to deny access. This rule may seem strict, but is based on long experience.

Laundry

Many students choose to do their own laundry in buckets in the bathrooms. You may also use laundry places on the streets. There is for example one close to Maison Raja, and one in the intersection of Lal Bahadur Shastri Street. When you deliver laundry you can usually pick it up the day after. At the laundry stall they give the clothes a rather rough treatment. We therefore recommend that you wash the most sensitive materials yourself.

Meals

As you know, breakfast and lunch is offered at the study centre on weekdays. On the weekends you organize your own meals. Dinner is on your own accord, all week. There are lots of nice places to eat and good, cheap food in the city. Please help each other to find the best places. In this document you will find a map of Pondicherry where we have marked off many places to eat. Kulturstudier always arranges welcome- and goodbye-events for the students. A welcome dinner is held on Friday the first weekend.

Staff

Many people work for Kulturstudier in Pondicherry. This semester Noah Taylor and Margrete Slettebo are seminar leaders in Peace and Conflict Studies.

Laurie Schmitt is Kulturstudier's manager in Pondicherry. Senthil Raju and Kavitha Ramkumar are her assistants. You will see them almost every day at the study centre. At the study centre there are many others preparing and serving your meals and keeping the place in order.

Day trips and weekend trips

With many years of experience, we have learnt that students get the most interesting and unforgettable feeling of India "under their skin" when they organize trips and explore the area by themselves. Therefore, we encourage you to use your time off to explore some of Pondicherry and the nearby areas on your own. We always make room for one long weekend off, so you can explore some more of southern India. Remember to give notice to the team when you leave Pondicherry for overnight trips.

Kulturstudier does arrange one or two trips every semester, which are relevant to the curriculum. These trips will be announced during the semester. We do not charge anything from you for organizing these trips, but students pay for transport and accommodation (and for meals on weekend trips) themselves.

Other activities

In addition to the academic schedule, we always offer additional courses that you may join in your spare time. Usually, these are: Yoga, Tamil course, martial arts, cooking class, Bollywood dance, and more. Kulturstudier also arranges evening get-togethers with different themes (such as Indian culture, movie-nights etc.) during the semester. You will get more information about these courses and evenings in the second or third week of your stay. If you have any suggestions for theme nights etc., let someone in the team know!

Transport

Lots of places in Pondicherry have bikes for rent. The price varies from approximately 30 to 35 rupees a day. You may also buy a bike. A new one will cost you about 2500-3000 rupees. To take an Auto (motorized three-wheeler taxi) around the city is 40-50 Rs. Rickshaw (three-wheeler bike) costs a bit less. Some drivers will charge more at night time. Always bargain, and be aware that some auto- and bicycle rickshaw drivers might be drunk at late evening / night time. The best way to recognize a drunk driver, is that they usually suggest outrageous prices for taking you anywhere (like 60 - 100 rupees). Due to the chaotic traffic conditions in India we ask you not to rent mopeds / motorbikes.

Banks

There are many cash machines (ATM's) all over Pondicherry; and most of them accept Visa and Mastercard. There are also regular banks where you can withdraw cash or cash traveller's checks. Some of the banks are marked off on the map.

Telephone/ Internet

A lot of the parents call Kulturstudier's home office during the first week of your stay to check that everything is ok with their young ones. Please remember to call your folks at home and let them know you are ok!

There are lots of phone booths close to the accommodations. To call Norway, you have to find a place with an ISD sign. Calls to Norway cost about 5 -10 rupees a minute. To call a phone line from Norway to Pondicherry, you need to prefix 0091413 before the number you are using. Most students get Indian SIM-card and cell phone numbers, which is cheap and practical. Remember to give the field management your Indian number if you do get one. The more numbers they have, the easier it is to pass information around on short notice if necessary. You may use European SIM cards in India, but it is very expensive. It is not possible to make collect calls from Pondicherry to Norway.

There are many Internet cafés in Pondicherry. The prices vary from 25 – 80 rupees an hour. Quite a few places have wireless connection, so that you may bring your laptop (Hidesign, Promenade at the beach road and coffee.com at Mission Street both have good wireless connection. They are marked off on the map).

Copying

Many places have copying machines. They usually have a sign with “Xerox” outside the shop. It is in general very cheap to make copies. If you are going to copy books, we recommend that you use Sri Ambal Xerox at Mahatma Gandhi Street.

The study centre

Lectures and seminars are held Monday through Friday. The study centre is located at Kailash Resort in the village of Pudukkupam, 12 km south of Pondicherry. Every Sunday we post schedules for the following week at the residences and on the board at the study centre. This is where we spend most of our time during the week. We have buses transporting students and team to and from the study centre. The bus ride takes about 30 minutes.

Kailash Resort is a wonderful place with many flowers, coconut palm trees, a swimming pool and beach. The place is peaceful and picturesque. It only takes a couple of minutes to walk from the centre down to the beach. There is a Veranda café where breakfast and lunch is served every week day. You can also buy snacks and soft drinks. The study centre is closed on weekends.

Kailash is also a tourism resort and cultural centre, so there will also be holiday makers and other guests there. The space we use is partially away from the rest. The beach is public. Access to the pool is restricted, but we have an arrangement with the management at Kailash to allow limited access for our students.

Bus Schedule

<i>From town</i>	<i>From the study centre</i>
08:00	-
-	11:15
12:30	14:00
-	16:30

Weekly meetings

Every Wednesday right after lunch we have our weekly meeting with students and team. This meeting is mandatory. The idea is to share information and to discuss issues that need to be addressed. In the classroom you will find a box where you may put your comments or suggestions regarding trips, food and other things. We do recommend that you use this box; we always strive to make the students happy, and to do that, we need your feedback! When necessary, we will give other general information at any weekday after lunch.

Student representatives

During the second week, the students select one student representative from each living quarter. These representatives have a certain responsibility regarding issues such as problems related to studying conditions, accommodation etc. The student representatives have meetings with the field management and seminar leaders on a regular basis.

Behaviour and etiquette in Pondicherry / at the Study centre

In India, you will find quite different concepts about what is considered good and decent behavior and dress codes than what you are used to. Patience is a virtue in India; the idea of efficiency is very different from home. For instance “five minutes” is never five minutes, but

more like twenty minutes. Communication difficulties often result in misunderstandings. To lose your patience or get openly agitated is considered loss of face. Please be patient.

When you interact with the local population, you have to be sensitive to what they might consider impolite, rude or disrespectful. You cannot take for granted that it is enough to just “be yourself”. For example, the more decently you dress, the more respect you will get. In Pondicherry as well as in the villages there are certain dress codes, and respecting these will enable your communication with the peoples living there, and you will get less unwanted attention. In other words: the respect you get reflects the respect you show.

In the city:

It is important that you realize, although you will see tourists in Pondicherry practicing a very relaxed dress code that the locals are taking notice of what you wear. What you wear out in the public communicates a lot to the surroundings. We suggest you consider and reflect on this, and follow these codes to both show and get respect:

Women: A general rule is to always cover your shoulders and knees. Avoid tight blouses/ shirts, short tops and miniskirts. You should pack light, as you can get cheap, suitable Indian/ European clothes in Pondicherry. The clothes in Pondicherry are beautiful and comfortable in the heat, and you can get more suitable clothes for the environment there. According to many of our female (Norwegian) team, the best (and easiest) way to get respect for young girls is to wear a Punjabi. (See further down for packing tips).

For men, it is a bit less complicated. Light pants (not shorts) and short-sleeved shirts/ t-shirts are what we recommend. You can get tailored shirts really cheap, so don't drag along too many clothes! Singlets and shorts are not suitable in public. It is totally unacceptable not to wear a shirt. It is ok for western men to wear traditional Indian clothes also, (like dhoti, lungi) and it is very comfortable compared to jeans etc.

At the study centre:

When you pass through the nearby villages; the general rule is to always be dressed in a decent way. That means women should cover their shoulders and knees, and men should not wear singlets! The same rule applies when we walk to and from the beach. Out of respect to the locals working at the study centre, and for optimal working conditions for both the students and the team, no one is allowed to wear bikini or only shorts at the centre.

At the beach.

Being at the beach in India is a completely different thing than going to the beach at home. There is no beach in India where you can be alone. At the beach by the centre, there is hardly ever any other bathers there, but sometimes the young boys from the village pay a visit to the beach just to watch the girls. We have a guard at the beach, who sees to it that no one bothers our students. It is completely unacceptable to lie topless on the beach, or to go swimming topless. Sometimes the undertows are strong in the area; make sure you don't swim too far before you know the conditions well.

Drugs

All kinds of narcotics are strictly forbidden in India, and the penalty is harsh if you get caught with any kind of drugs. To give an example: if you happen to get caught with 10 grams of hash, you risk 10 years in prison. Anyone who ever set foot in an Indian prison knows that just to spend a week there would be unbearable. The Indian government is particularly harsh

on tourists if they are caught with drugs, and quite a few westerners serve long sentences in Indian prisons after being charged with possession of illegal substances.

In spite of it being illegal and in spite of risking long time in jail if getting caught, smoking marijuana and hash is common among certain groups of people in Pondicherry. Someone will probably offer you marijuana, and they will also tell you that the police don't care, or that you can bribe your way out of a situation if you get caught. This is simply not true; the local police do care, and they have a lot of knowledge about dealers and the general drug-situation both in Pondicherry and in Mamallapuram.

Kulturstudier does not accept that our students use any kind of drugs. Both our students and we have been present in Pondicherry over a long period of time, and people and the authorities do pay particular attention to what we do. The police are very helpful towards our students and us when we need their assistance, and we are dependent on keeping our good reputation in order to maintain our good relationship with the local authorities. Breaking the law in any way would be very damaging to Kulturstudier's business/work in Pondicherry, and could threaten our very existence in India. We will not hesitate: students who use drugs will be expelled, and told to leave our premises.

Beggars

For many of you, the sight and awareness of Pondicherry's many beggars will be grim and shocking. To us, who are not used to this extreme poverty being exposed in such a manner, this can be very difficult and uncomfortable. You may feel sad, very helpless and constantly worrying about what to do about this, how to react or how to help. We do know from prior experience that some students solve this by donating enormous sums (by Indian standards) of money to some of the beggars. This has led to certain expectations among the beggars and their "beggarmasters" in Pondicherry, regarding our students' generosity. You can be sure there will be a lot of beggars in the area around the accommodations the first weeks. To avoid that the streets around your home are crowded with beggars, you simply must not give anything in the area you live!

Begging is a socially accepted way of surviving in India, and it is common among the locals to give some rupees to beggars. The beggars might be very persistent. Naturally, Kulturstudier does not want to make any decisions regarding how our students spend their money, but we recommend that you give beggars amounts that are considered "normal" to give; 10 rupees and less. It is worth reflecting on the fact that many people that you interact with on a daily basis, such as auto drivers, waiters, etc. carry on their jobs earning very little. We know that students sometimes have huge disputes with rather poor rickshaw drivers over 5 or 10 rupees, and then the minute after they donate 50 rupees to a beggar, which is something to think about. Be aware of the fact that children begging on the streets are usually forced to do this by their family or beggarmasters. Children being "good at the job" seldom get the opportunity to go to school.

Night life

Restaurants and bars close at 23:00 at the latest. After eleven, the streets are empty, the exception being dogs and people sleeping on the sidewalks and in the streets. In India, most people have a different view on late evenings and drinking than we are used to. It is not acceptable for any Indian to be seen drunk in public, and especially not for women! It is also highly unusual to see women alone in the streets at night time.

In general, it is safe to walk around in Pondicherry on your own, but some of our students have experienced threatening episodes at night time. There is a local “sport” in Pondicherry among some boys and men to pinch girls’ breasts while biking past them. If this should happen, scream and shout aggressively, as this might scare them from doing it again. We strongly discourage that women walk or take a rickshaw alone at night. Make sure you walk with someone after 22:00.

Illness

Many of you will get ill in India. In general, most students get sick from bad food at least once or twice during their stay. This is very difficult, maybe impossible, to avoid. It is not dangerous, but could be painful. Symptoms are stomach cramps, nausea, diarrhoea, and vomiting; it usually lasts for a couple of days. It is of utmost importance that you drink enough water; at least 3 litres every day. This is more than your body will actually ask for; so do remember to drink even if you don’t feel thirsty. If you have a loose stomach, it is wise to mix “electral” (electrolytes) in the water. This enables your body to absorb liquid, salts and minerals although you are vomiting or having diarrhoea. Charcoal tablets have also proved to be very efficient when having stomach trouble. You can buy them at any pharmacy.

Due to the different bacterias than we are used to from home, it is very important that you wash your hands often to avoid getting sick.

NMC (New Medical Centre) and PIMS (Pondicherry institute of medical Science) are the medical centres that we advise you to use. We do not recommend that you use any other medical centres. NMC is located at Mahatma Gandhi Road and at Bussy Street, and marked off on the map. PIMS is a decent hospital with a standard similar to Scandinavian hospitals. It is located 20 minutes outside of Pondicherry, and this is where our students stay in case of hospitalization. You will find a document in your apartment with all the phone numbers you might need, including NMC and PIMS number.

If your roommate gets ill, we expect you to take a certain responsibility regarding the situation. Make sure that your roommate gets water and light food, and medications if required. If necessary, you will follow him or her to the doctor. (Remember; they will do the same for you if you need it!). If you get ill and cannot make it to a lecture or seminar, you or your roommate should inform the team before breakfast (e.g. send a sms). When students get ill, they usually call back home. Quite often we get calls from worrying relatives who already contacted the insurance company regarding illness, and that’s why Kulturstudier’s team needs to be informed on this issue. Kulturstudier can only answer their questions if you keep us informed on these issues. There is absolutely no reason to contact the insurance company unless you become seriously ill. In case of serious illness, Kulturstudier always contacts your family.

It is quite usual to get ill, but prior experience tells us that it is seldom serious when students get sick. Even so, being a long way from home, the students often feel that is more dramatic than it is when they become ill. Remember to take care of each other. Do not hesitate to contact the team if you feel unsure about how to handle your own or your roommate’s situation.

Evaluation

We encourage all our students to give feedback to Kulturstudier's team in Pondicherry on how you feel things are working out during your stay in India. You may also use one of the student representatives if you feel uncomfortable bringing things up directly with the team.

Other

During the first week, everyone has to hand in a copy of your passport and visa page in passport. Make an extra copy of these papers, along with your insurance papers for yourself also.

You are to sign the online form with general rules that you received from us before you go to India.

Three-weeks-crises

There is a phenomenon that we call "three-week-crises". The first three weeks, most people are happy and excited about India and their new, radically different every-day-life in Pondicherry. New impressions are met with enthusiasm and curiosity. After a month or so, many students get mood swings, and they tend to complain about different things. This is quite normal, India is an intense experience, and sometimes you wish you were back home. Make sure to plan your reading schedule well in order to have time for relaxation. We encourage our students to take weekend trips; it helps when you feel down! This soon passes, and in the end, everyone is always happy about spending the semester in India!

Packing advice & tips

Clothes:

It is very likely that most of your regular summer wardrobe will be a rather bad choice for India. Most of our female team live by the rule saying: "when in Rome, do as the Romans". By this, we mean to say that it is a good idea to leave your tight small tops and miniskirts at home. Also, the temperature is very high; there is no need to pack too many thick wool sweaters (unless you are travelling in the north). Most Indian women in Pondicherry are dressed in sari or Punjabi; that is wide trousers with a matching loose long shirt/ top.

Punjabis are comfortable to wear in the heat, and also they are considered decent. You can get them ready made, or get one at the tailor. They come in all different styles, material, colors and patterns. It is great fun to go to the tailor in India; they make a Punjabi or sari for you in a couple of days. You might have a couple of strange and funny misunderstandings along the way regarding material, style etc., but after a while you will be the best Punjabi-shopper there is.

Shoes:

Most likely, you will end up using sandals every day everywhere. Unless you are very picky when it comes to sandals, you will find plenty of nice ones in Pondicherry. Casablanca (marked off on the map) has a good selection of sandals and sneakers. There are many shoemakers and shoe stalls at the corners where you can get cheap and good sandals made to fit your foot.

For men it might be difficult to find the right sizes, but if you go to one of the shoemakers it really shouldn't be a problem. You should also bring a pair of sneakers / running shoes along. You will most likely need them at some point; might come in handy if you go for a trip in the mountains or plan to go trekking.

Pharmaceuticals:

You can get every kind of pharmaceutical in Pondicherry at the pharmacies – a lot cheaper than home. Bring Immodium and idoform and medications that require a prescription from you doctor. Charcoal, disinfection liquid, band aid, compressors, painkillers etc. you can get in Pondicherry. Remember to bring sunscreen lotion. It is expensive, and if you get it, always check the expiry date. There are many websites about travelling and medicine where you can find advice.

There are plenty of mosquitoes in Pondicherry. There are luckily also many good mosquito repellents such as creams (like “Good Knight” or Odomos) and sprays that keep them away. You will get bitten anyway, but a good way to reduce the amount of bites is to apply cream every evening and before you go to dinner and to bed, and wear long trousers and shirts in the evening. Many students bring Eurax, but you can also get different creams in Pondicherry to relief itching. If you go for trips in the inland, we recommend you get a mosquito net.

Unless you are very picky, you will find shampoo, balsam, deodorant, soap, body lotion etc in Pondicherry. You also get toilet paper, shaving equipment, tampons etc in many shops.

Other:

Paper and pens, stapler, tape etc you can get anywhere. You should however bring a portable computer and your academic literature, and then you’re all set for three months in India!

**We look forward to seeing you, and once again:
Welcome to India!**