

Welcome to India and Pondicherry, Spring 2016

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, January 31st, 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. You will find a map of Pondicherry on your bed at your arrival, where important locations are marked off.

The management team in Pondicherry consists of Armin Untersteiner (manager) and Senthil Raju (assistant manager). Your contact person is Senthil at phone number (0091) 962656159 or by email: senthil@kulturstudier.org (English only). Our office is located in 19 Savarirayalu Street. If you need help in organizing a Taxi to pick you up at the airport in Chennai and to bring you to Pondicherry than you have to write the complete flight details (including departure airport and flight number).

Monday, February 1st, is the first day at the study centre. In the following days, we organize a regular academic schedule, with classes starting at 08:45, 10:45, etc. Breakfast is served at the study centre from 08:15, and lunch is served at 12:30.

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 (bring another 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.

This being 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. We will facilitate your stay in Pondicherry. 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.

Already before your arrival in Pondicherry we will send you important information via e-mail. We expect you to check your e-mail account regularly and to send us a response when requested. We will do equivalently. 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 Tuesday 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, cultural learning, social life and 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, find friendship and respect amongst each other.

Accommodation

Living in a third world country has its challenges. You can expect that some of the comforts you are used to are hard to recreate in Pondicherry at a price you can afford. This pertains for example to noise, heat, privacy, internet access, poverty, cleanliness and more.

The accommodation Kulturstudier offers varies from semester to semester according to availability of housing. It is not possible to give full predictability in what you can expect. Rooms vary in size, furnishing and appeal. You may find that someone else had more luck than you when the rooms were assigned. You may also find that construction is going on nearby or that the window in your room looks into a ventilation shaft, or directly into your neighbour's kitchen. Please be prepared for these possibilities, as they are all a part of life in India.

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

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.

Other

After the welcome meeting on Sunday, you will meet with the management of your housing facility and together we will brief you on everything you need to know about the place you are living. The various houses and rooms are simple and practical. For the past 15 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, in 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. We expect you to respect your roommates as well as the apartments.

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 nearby shops.

Because all locations are for the students and team only, you are not allowed to bring people besides fellow students to the apartments without first informing Kulturstudier management well in advance. 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 leave at times designated by Kulturstudier management. Kulturstudier reserves the right to deny access to any guest to our housing facilities. 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. The student houses also arrange for laundry services for you, or you may use laundry places on the streets. The house owners will inform you about the different options in the first house meeting. 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. Kulturstudier always arranges welcome and goodbye events for the students. A welcome dinner is held during the first week.

Staff

Ms. Katya Waldboth is the seminar leader in Peace and Conflict Studies. Mr. Armin Untersteiner is Kulturstudiers manager with Mr. Senthil Raju as his assistant. 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 accommodation (and for meals on weekend trips) themselves.

Other activities

In addition to the academic schedule, we always suggest additional courses that you may join in your spare time. Usually, these are: Yoga, martial arts, Bollywood dance, and more: the offerings vary from semester to semester. Kulturstudier also arranges evening get-togethers with different themes (such as Indian culture, movie-nights etc.) during the semester. These evenings are usually planned together with some students who like to engage themselves in the organization of cultural evenings. You will get more information about these courses and evenings in the early weeks of your stay.

Transport

Lots of places in Pondicherry have bikes for rent. The price varies from approximately 40 to 50 rupees a day. You may also buy a bike. A new one will cost you about 5000 rupees. To take an auto rickshaw (motorized three-wheeler taxi) around the city is around 70 Rs. A rickshaw (three-wheeler bike) costs a bit less. At night time it will cost a bit more. Always bargain and fix the rate before taking the rickshaw, and be aware that some auto- and bicycle rickshaw drivers might be drunk at late evening / night time. The best way to recognise a drunk driver, is that they usually suggest outrageous prices for taking you anywhere (like 250 rupees). Due to the chaotic traffic conditions in India, we request that you not rent mopeds / motorbikes.

Banks

There are many cash machines (ATMs) 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.

Telephone/ Internet

Most students get an Indian SIM-card and cell phone numbers, which is cheap and practical. Remember to give the management team 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.

Internet: Slow and disrupted internet connection can cause a lot of frustration for some students. If you cannot study or live without internet – you should not study in a third world country. Kulturstudier does not promise internet access in the houses or at the study centre. We recommend that you buy a mobile internet dongle for your lap-top in Pondicherry.

Many students use Skype to call home, but we ask that you do not make video calls from your student houses as they require too much band width for the house internet, if it is available, to support. There are many Internet cafés in Pondicherry. The prices vary from 25 – 80 rupees an hour. Quite a few places have a wireless connection, so that you may bring your laptop (Banana Cafe, Coffee.com, Hidesign, and many others have good wireless connection).

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 Road.

The study centre

Lectures and seminars are held Monday through Friday. The study centre is located at RKN Beach Resort in the village of Pudukkupam, 14 km south of Pondicherry. 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. So you will know when you need to be at the study centre for your academic programme, we put the weekly schedules in the student houses and send it out via mail.

RKN Beach 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 study area 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, but you can pay for an auto taxi to transport you and use the resort’s facilities at the rates they charge the public.

RKN Beach Resort 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: This is the basic schedule but there will be changes as needs arise.

From town	From the study centre
07:45	-
10:00*	10:45*
	13:30
-	16:30

*not daily - only when needed/requested

Weekly meetings

Every Tuesday right after lunch we have our weekly meeting with students and team. This meeting is mandatory. The idea is to share information about upcoming events and to discuss issues that need to be addressed. Please do not hesitate to give us your comments or suggestions regarding trips, food and other things, at the meeting or at any other time. 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, or via email, Facebook, etc.

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.

The seminar leader also asks for you to choose one or two representatives from each course to be their student contacts for academic matters.

We recommend that students also select a Cultural Evening Committee to meet weekly to help arrange the programs for Wednesday's Cultural Evenings.

Behaviour and etiquette in Pondicherry / at the Study centre

In India, you will find quite different concepts about what is considered good behaviour and decent 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, timing is different there: "five minutes" is never five minutes, but perhaps 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 - this can be challenging in the beginning, but you may gain this ability while living in India.

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". Especially the dress code is an important issue in India. 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 people living there, and you will get less unwanted attention. The importance of the dress code in India is often underestimated. In other words: the respect you get reflects the respect you show.

In the city

It is important that you realize that although you will see tourists in Pondicherry practicing a very relaxed dress code, the locals are taking notice of what you wear. What you wear out in public communicates a lot to the people surrounding you. 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, transparent fabrics, 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 Kurta or Punjabi. (See further down for packing tips).

Men

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 okay 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 study centre, except at the pool.

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 are 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. We suggest a swimming dress rather than a bikini. With respect to water safety: the undertow is often very 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. Kulturstudier has been present in Pondicherry over a long period of time, and everyone, from the people on the street to the authorities, 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 (mainly from meat, fish, eggs or old oil from street 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 bacteria than we are used to from home, it is very important that you wash your hands often to avoid getting sick.

Aum Hospital, 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. Aum Hospital is located at Muthialpet, it has a very good standard and this is where our students stay in case of hospitalization. It takes a 10 minutes rickshaw drive from the studenthouses to the Aum Hospital. 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 30 minutes outside of Pondichery. You will find a document in your apartment with all the phone numbers you might need, including Aum Hospital, NMC and PIMS numbers.

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 an sms). When students get ill, they usually call back home. Quite often we get calls from worried 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.

Before You Leave Home

When our students arrive in Pondicherry, various authorities (Immigration, Foreign Registry Office, and local Police) want to be informed about who is with us. For this purpose, please provide Kulturstudier via mail (mail@kulturstudier.no) before you leave home with the scans of following documents and information details:

- Digital Passport photo (jpg or png)
- Passport scan
- Visa scan
- Place of issue of passport (city of issue)
- Place of issue of Visa
- Permanent address (in home country)
- Phone number in resident country
- Arrival information (departure country and town)
- Estimated date of arrival in India
- Father's and mother's name

It is a good idea to have the scans (passport, visa) on record for your own use as well.

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 three weeks to 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 thick wool sweaters (unless you are travelling in the north). Most Indian women in Pondicherry are dressed in Sari, Kurta or Punjabi; that is a long shirt either with leggings (Kurta) or wide trousers (Punjabi).

Kurtas and 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, colours and patterns. It is great fun to go to the tailor in India; they make a Kurta,

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 and style, but after a while you will be the best Ethnostyle-shopper there is.

Shoes

Most likely, you will end up using sandals every day everywhere. As you always take the shoes/sandals off when you enter in a house it is important that they are easy to put on and off. There are many shoemakers and shoe stalls at the corners where you can get cheap and nice 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; they 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 your doctor. Charcoal, disinfection liquid, band aids, 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 get different creams in Pondicherry to relieve itching. If you go for trips in the inland, we recommend you to 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!