

2nd Report – Auroville Bamboo Centre

My time as a volunteer in the Auroville Bamboo Centre started in participating in a “Bamboo Construction Workshop”. This gave me the basic knowledge for my following work in the Bamboo Centre and from then on I could improve and test my skills. I was doing different kinds of work, sometimes in the office, sometimes in the workshop and also on the bamboo farm, called “Bamboo Land”.

In the first quarter of my volunteer-year, I was building a shelf together with other volunteers, I supported the workers in the workshop with their tasks and helped out with the workshops that are conducted by the ABC. On the Bamboo Land, again together with other volunteers, I planted new bamboo and cared about the plants and seedlings. The idea is to not only grow this one species, but to combine bamboo with other trees and even vegetables or fruits. So we visited other places in Auroville and started to collect plants from there. Right before the monsoon, planting was very busy as this is the best time for it. We also had support from outside so I could improve my knowledge in planting as well.

The second quarter of my time as a long-term volunteer in the Auroville Bamboo Centre started with a special event. The Kerala Bamboo Fest 2015 took place in Kochi, Kerala and the Bamboo Centre was of course part of it. For me that meant that I went there together with my colleague Walter. First we had to prepare all the different products we wanted to take over there, pack them into four suitcases and by night bus, we went to Kochi. There we prepared our stall and for the following days we’ve been talking about bamboo, its uses and the Auroville bamboo centre. We also collected nice contacts so in future we may have a bigger impact on the world of bamboo. But with coming back (with only one suitcase) the work wasn’t finished. Now I prepared a presentation about our tour and also wrote a report for our newsletter. All this together was a very nice experience and I had a good time in Kerala with Walter although it was very busy most of the time.

The heavy monsoon in November 2015 affected not only Chennai or Cuddalore, but our bamboo farm as well. Most of the plants stood in water for over two months and did not survive this. We had a nice collection of different bamboo species from all over south India as well as a commercial plantation which should support the Bamboo Centre Workshop in some years. As we want to keep this project going on I started to restore and plan for rebuying of the needed plants. I did some work in the office, collecting notes and pictures about the damage, its cost and started to write letters for different organizations which could support us in bringing back the plants and keeping on our efforts. This work was again new for me and special as in the first months of being at Bamboo Centre I was also working for sometime on the bamboo land, planting and caring about the small seedlings. Now I tried to save whatever was possible from my (and others) previous work.

In the following time I was working on different things in the office, mostly helping the others as busy times came up. These things were letter writing, researching information and documentation. A lot of workshops happened in the tourist season as well and therefore I was often helping in preparing and

running these workshops, passing on the knowledge I got in the first months. An order for some bamboo shelves kept the workers busy for a long time and even I joined them to finish at the right time.

I enjoy my time in Auroville. Right now in the high season I can see what it means to be here for a longer time and profit much more from it than just tourists who are here for some days or weeks. In the first time, it was all about finding the best ways and all the places, getting a motorbike and/or bicycle and start living in a shared house. For me it was the first time of living on my own but I managed well and it was no problem getting along with all the new changes. Reasons for this are the support that I was getting from other volunteers from our weltwaerts-group and our mentors and coordinators.

Auroville is a great place for me with all the changes that are happening right now in my life. I'm trying out different things and take part in a lot of activities of all kinds. I enjoy presentations, I take part in community actions like creating one of the permaculture circle gardens in front of the Town Hall, listen to the music and other performances at the Open Mic Nights in Solitude, go on with learning Tamil in the Aikiyam School with Shankar and other volunteers, try out new sports like martial arts at TerraSoul, visit Farms and Forests on Sundays when the "Farm tours" take place or have a nice vegan chocolate ice-cream at La Terrace.

I also started exploring India a bit by visiting places outside of Auroville on weekends or as a holiday. Auroville is a good place to start from and a safe haven to come back for explorations. Day- or weekend-trips led me to Tiruvannamalai, Mahabalipuram, Gingee, the Mangrove Forest near Pichavaram and Alamparai. Once I have been outside for a longer time, visiting Ooty, Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, Mysore and Bangalore. But I never travelled alone; there were always volunteers from Auroville coming with me. That is also really nice that here are a lot of young people you can meet, join and make friends with.

Now already more than half of my time in Auroville is over and slowly I have to start thinking about how I will go on in Germany when coming back in August. With all the experiences I make here and the slowly but steadily happening changes, my view of life and my ideas for the future have changed. Already right now I'm taking a lot of "Auroville spirit" with me and this gap year after school and all the people I meet here give me new paths for my closer future.

Concluding at this moment, I don't regret coming here to Auroville for one year, volunteering in the ABC or taking off this time after school before whatever comes. Furthermore, it is also showing what my home, family and friends back in Germany really mean to me and opening my eyes about things I did not see before.