✦ A FREE AI SKILL, MADE EASY

Turn any place into a tiny hand-drawn city.

Pocket City is a free AI skill made by April Zhu. You give your coding agent (Claude Code or Codex) a place, and it builds a tiny, hand-drawn isometric city of a real square of that place, about 150 to 250 metres across. Every box marked **My prompt** is one you can copy. Change the bits in [brackets] to fit your place.

WHAT YOU GET

- **The real map:** buildings, streets, trees, parks, water and even shop names come from OpenStreetMap, so everything sits where it really is.
- **A living city:** cars, bikes and people move through the streets.
- **Seasons and festivals:** the agent researches the place's real climate and culture, so you can switch between seasons (or dry and monsoon weather) and 1 to 3 special occasions like a Christmas market or a bonfire night.
- **Famous buildings hand-built:** if a landmark sits inside your square, the agent builds it from published plans and photos instead of drawing a plain box.
- **One web page:** the whole city is a single HTML file. It works offline, opens straight from your computer, and you can put it on any website.

See it live: april-zhu.com/pocketcity · **Licence:** MIT (free, including commercial use). Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors (ODbL), which the page credits for you.

WHAT YOU NEED (ONE TIME)

- **Claude Code or Codex.** Claude.ai also works by uploading the skill, but the full pipeline runs best in Claude Code or Codex.
- **Python 3.9+** with one library: shapely.
- **Node 18+** (22+ preferred).
- **Google Chrome.** The agent uses it to check its own renders.
- **Internet access** for the agent. It downloads map data and researches the place.

STEP 1

Check your setup

Open your terminal and run these three lines:

IN YOUR TERMINAL

```
python3 --version
node --version
pip install shapely
```

Tip: if `pip install shapely` complains about your system Python, make a virtual environment first: `python3 -m venv .venv && source .venv/bin/activate && pip install shapely`

STEP 2

Install the skill in one line

CLAUDE CODE

```
curl -L https://april-zhu.com/pocketcity/skill/pocket-city.tar.gz | tar -xz -C ~/.claude/skills
```

CODEX

```
curl -L https://april-zhu.com/pocketcity/skill/pocket-city.tar.gz | tar -xz -C ~/.codex/skills
```

Claude.ai: Settings → Capabilities → Skills → upload **pocket-city.skill** (download it from April's page).

Before you move on: restart Claude Code / Codex after installing so it picks up the skill. In Codex, allow network access for the session (or approve it when asked).

STEP 3

Make your first city

Open Claude Code (or Codex) in an empty folder and ask in plain English. Use any of these examples from the skill itself:

MY PROMPT

- Make a pocket city of Portofino harbour, 230 m
- Gion in Kyoto, 200 m
- A pocket city around the Pantheon in Rome
- My street in Lisbon: Rua da Rosa at Travessa da Queimada, 180 m

What the agent does, step by step:

1. Downloads the map of that square from OpenStreetMap.
2. Places the square so no famous building gets cut by the edge.
3. Turns the map into a scene: buildings, roads, trees, water, named shops.
4. Researches the place: building styles, roof types, street life, climate and festivals, with a source for every fact it shows on screen.
5. Hand-builds the landmarks in your square.
6. Builds the page and checks its own renders, then fixes what looks wrong.

It's a long run (research + building + checking), so let it work. When it's done you get **pocket-city-<place>.html**. Double-click it to open.

Inside the page: drag to turn the city, scroll to zoom, switch seasons and special scenes on the left, click a camera view at the bottom, and open Field notes to see every source.

STEP 4 · THE MOST IMPORTANT TIP

Pick a place that comes out great

The city is only as detailed as the map. Every building comes from OpenStreetMap, so a place with few mapped buildings comes out as a near-empty square. Here's what I found when I tried Indian places (buildings mapped inside a ~220 m square, 20 Nov 2026):

PLACE	BUILDINGS ON THE MAP
Portofino, Italy (April's example)	**92**
Pondicherry White Town	**49**
Fort Kochi	**44**
Church Street, Bengaluru (mine)	**40**
Kala Ghoda, Mumbai	**29**
Varanasi, Dashashwamedh Ghat	**29**
Connaught Place, Delhi	**15**
Hawa Mahal, Jaipur	**11**
Gateway of India, Mumbai	**1**

So:

- European and East Asian old towns come out beautiful straight away (Kyoto, Amsterdam, Lisbon, Rome).
- In India, start with Pondicherry White Town, Fort Kochi or Church Street in Bengaluru.
- **Check before you start:** open openstreetmap.org and zoom into your street. If you can see building outlines everywhere, go for it. If it's mostly blank, pick a nearby street that has them.
- **Size:** 200 m is the sweet spot. Bigger is slower and emptier, smaller rarely shows a whole street.
- **Mix it up:** a square with some water, some green and some buildings looks best.

STEP 5 · MY BUILD

How I made Church Street, Bengaluru

> **MY PROMPT**
>
> Make a pocket city of Church Street × MG Road, Bengaluru, 230 m.

Good to know: India drives on the left, which the skill handles (`-drive left`).

- The map had **52 buildings and 58 named shops** in that square, which was enough.
- **Two map quirks needed fixing by hand:** a covered drain showed up as an open canal, and the Namma Metro (an elevated viaduct in the map data) was drawn flat on the ground. I removed both from the scene and built the metro viaduct and a moving Purple Line train myself as a hand-built landmark.
- **Seasons:** Bengaluru doesn't have four seasons, so the agent used weather regimes instead: dry, summer, monsoon and post-monsoon, each with a sourced note.
- **Special scene:** New Year's Eve on Church Street, at night with fairy lights and crowds.

What's on screen is real map data. Heights of unmapped buildings, colours and the moving traffic are illustrative, and the page's Field notes say so.

Takeaway: the skill does 90% of the work. For the last 10% (a weird map tag, a landmark you love), just tell your agent what looks wrong and it fixes it.

STEP 6

Keep talking to your agent

Once your city exists, use whichever of these fits:

WHEN YOU WANT	MY PROMPT
Add a landmark it missed	"Hand-build [building name] as a landmark. Find its plan and photos first, then build it from the kit's parts and check it from six angles."
Fix something that looks off	"In the render, [the river / the roofs / this street] looks wrong compared with photos of the real place. Check the map data and photos, fix it, and re-render."
Add a special occasion	"Add [Diwali / Ganesh Chaturthi / a Christmas market] as a special scene: research how this street actually celebrates it, add the decorations and crowd, and give it one sourced note."
Add a camera view	"Add a camera view called "[name]" that looks at [the corner / the landmark] from street level."

STEP 7

Put it on your website

The whole city is one HTML file, so you can host it anywhere. Fastest (free):

- **Netlify (easiest):** rename the file to index.html, put it in a folder, and drag the folder into app.netlify.com/drop

- **Vercel:** in that folder run `npx vercel` and follow the prompts.
- **GitHub Pages:** push the file as index.html to a repo, then Settings → Pages.

Inside an existing website, put the file in your public folder and embed it:

EMBED CODE

```
<iframe src="/pocket-city-bengaluru.html" style="width:100%;height:80vh;border:0;border-radius:24p
x" loading="lazy" title="Pocket City"></iframe>
```

Ideas: a hero section for a café, hotel or real-estate site showing the actual street; an "about my city" section on your portfolio; a travel blog header.

Why it matters: keep the OpenStreetMap credit that's already on the page. The map licence needs it.

IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG

Quick fixes

WHAT YOU SEE	DO THIS
"Overpass is busy" / map download fails	The free map servers get overloaded. The script retries other servers; if all fail, wait a minute and ask the agent to run it again.
No module named shapely	Run `pip install shapely` (in the same Python / virtual environment the agent uses).
Chrome not found	Install Google Chrome, or tell the agent the path (`CHROME=/path/to/chrome`).
The city looks empty	The place isn't mapped well. Pick a better-mapped street (see the table in Step 4) or a larger square.
Codex can't reach the internet	Allow network access for the session.

✦ @AMANJAIN.JPEG

All my prompts, in one place

Copy them in this order. Change the bits in [brackets] to fit your place.

1. python3 --version · node --version · pip install shapely
   Step 1, in your terminal, once
2. curl -L https://april-zhu.com/pocketcity/skill/pocket-city.tar.gz | tar -xz -C ~/.claude/skills
   Step 2, install for Claude Code (use ~/.codex/skills for Codex), then restart
3. Make a pocket city of [place], [200] m.
   Step 3, in an empty folder. Check the place on openstreetmap.org first (Step 4)
4. Hand-build [building name] as a landmark. Find its plan and photos first, then build it from the kit's parts and check it from six angles.
   Step 6, when a landmark is missing
5. In the render, [the river / the roofs / this street] looks wrong compared with photos of the real place. Check the map data and photos, fix it, and re-render.
   Step 6, when something looks off
6. Add [Diwali / Ganesh Chaturthi / a Christmas market] as a special scene: research how this street actually celebrates it, add the decorations and crowd, and give it one sourced note.
   Step 6, for a festival or occasion
7. Add a camera view called "[name]" that looks at [the corner / the landmark] from street level.
   Step 6, for a new angle

CREDITS

- **Pocket City skill:** April Zhu (april-zhu.com/pocketcity), MIT licence
- **Drawing kit:** builds on Colorfigures and iso-glow, which build on Tolga Cohce's iso-figure (MIT)
- **Map data:** © OpenStreetMap contributors (ODbL)
- **Church Street, Bengaluru build + Namma Metro landmark:** made by me with the skill

Now go build your first city tonight.

✦ If you make your own city, tag me, I'd love to see it · @amanjain.jpeg · Questions? visualsmediaco@gmail.com