

OIN STUDENT REPORT

- Host Institution:

Symbiosis International University, Pune.

- Home Institution:

University of Ottawa, Canada.

- Type of Exchange:

- SIP

- Term and year in which you were on exchange in India:

August 1st-31st 2017. (or the Summer after my 2nd year of my undergraduate degree)

- A. Please write between one and three paragraphs on your experience at your host institution (you may write about your courses/independent study there, hostel accommodation if you stayed on campus, campus experience, interactions with other students on campus and/or faculty, and so on).

My time at the host institution was splendid. From the variety of courses I attended to the many international friends I made, my time spent at Symbiosis International University was wonderful. In terms of our academic content, our first week was spent attending lectures at the Liberal Arts portion of the campus. They were all supremely informative and entertaining. As well, we got a chance to participate in workshops that ranged from Origami to the Business Climate in India. The teachers and professors were extremely personable and very professional, which I appreciated. I came to India with many questions about how the country worked and how life operated there. I was glad to be welcomed so warmly by everyone while being duly informed by the academic staff at Symbiosis.

In terms of accommodation, it was above and beyond my expectations. I packed for the trip assuming that our hostel arrangements would be rudimentary. Honestly, though, I was pleasantly surprised. Housekeeping came in everyday to clean our rooms, and it was great to interact with them also, in spite of the language barrier.

When it came to administrative work we had to do once we arrived at Symbiosis, there was some confusion as to the exact time of events and where we were supposed to be. Moreover, the communication barrier with drivers, locals, and whoever else we interacted with sometimes made it difficult to communicate effectively. That is not to say that Symbiosis was not fluent in English: in fact, it seemed to me that the administrative staff at Symbiosis had better English than I did.

I recommend that at least one student invest in an Indian SIM Card. Although it may be too expensive, it will be easier to communicate directly with a Program Co-ordinator when you are out and about in the city, instead of hoping that the driver is going to the right place. That being said, it is important to trust that your drivers and chaperones know where they are going, even if they don't speak English.

- B. Please write about your experience of the city in which your host institution is located (including transportation for getting around the city, places you would recommend for eating and sightseeing)

Great places to go in Pune are:

- Mahatma Gandhi Road (MG Road).
- The restaurants/nightlife around Koreagon Park.
- The markets around Laximi Road.
- Shaniwarvada Castle for sights and history.
- Aga Khan Palace for sights and history.
- An Ayurvedic Spa for massages and aromatherapy.
- Ganpati Temple for spirituality and Hinduism.
- The Osho Gardens (the opening hours are a little strange). It is very scenic and peaceful.
- Chitale Bandhu for sweets. (Kaju Katli, Barfi, Gulab Jamun, and Kulfi are some of my favourite Indian Sweets.)

Outside of Pune itself, we visited Mumbai (incl. the Prince of Wales Museum, the Gateway of India, the Causeway) and Aurangabad (The Ajanta and Ellora caves). It was all spectacular.

- C. Other (feel free to write about anything else that you think may help OIN students in subsequent years).

Tips for students going to Pune:

-When you carry currency, make sure you break your 500 Rupee Notes into smaller portions of 100's or 50's or even 10's. I found that most of the time, the rickshaw drivers or small shops would not accept a large note.

-Carry bug spray with you, as it will serve to be convenient when the mosquitoes come out at dusk and your bug spray from the morning wears off.

-To take full advantage of the city, be sure to visit a small bakery or a small store and buy some sweets, whatever they may be. Cookies and little treats are often very cheap, ranging from 10 rupees to 250 rupees, depending on quantity and quality. Nevertheless, all the sweets tasted great. Be sure to experiment and try new foods!

-You may or may not get sick during your trip. Before you leave and throughout the duration of the trip, be sure to take Antibiotics. I bought Allicin and a general Antibiotic Gut Flora and I was fine. Do not worry too much, though. If you trust your intuition when it comes to food hygiene, you will most likely not get sick. Simply be aware of the basic food safety rules: do not drink tap water, only eat fruits and vegetables with a skin (ie beware eating apples, lettuce, etc.). Others around you will be more than aware of the basic food safety rules, so if you forget, don't fret.

-Be sure to learn some Hindi as well as some phrases of the local language. In my case, we were in Maharashtra, where they speak Marathi. The locals love when you can speak a phrase or two in their local language. It is a great way to make friends or even make someone smile that can otherwise not communicate with you.

-People will ask you to take selfies with them, especially if you appear to be a foreigner (i.e. Caucasian). Again, trust your intuition. If you don't feel comfortable, say no. I took pictures with whoever asked and tried to make the best of it. It is fun memory to have.

-Sometimes, your senses can get overloaded, especially if there are tons of people and there is lots of noise and it is hot outside. Sometimes, things will seem chaotic and disorganized. Travelling around too can get exhausting. During these moments, you have to take a deep breath and accept the place for what it is. Realizing that you are a foreigner in their country can put things into perspective. Be sure to take one or two afternoons (when you have free time on the schedule) to rest in your room.

-You should consider bringing (or buying) an extra pillow or an extra sheet for your bed. The beds in the accommodations are perfectly suitable and clean, but just for comfort's sake, consider bringing a pillow and sheet.

-Download an offline version of Pune on the Google Maps app. It will be useful, especially when you find yourself trying to give instructions to a rickshaw driver.

-Ask a local friend how much something ought to cost before you pay for it. Shopkeepers or rickshaw drivers may try to rip you off, although the higher price may not seem like much money to you. If you are feeling generous, don't hesitate to pay the higher price, because you may be helping the shopkeeper/driver's family.

-The students at the college will most definitely speak English and be familiar with Western Culture. Expect to be approached by Indian College students who want to ask you about India and your home country. I was surprised and it made me happy when students would ask me about Canada and what snow is like! It will be easy to make friends if you frequent the College Cafeteria or Mess Hall.

-To make the most of your stay, get informed about what is going on at your College Campus. Feel free to attend student events. Furthermore, if you have free time, it is essential that you take the initiative and go outside. There were so many events and club activities going on while I was in Pune. I played music with the music club, I danced with the Bollywood dance club, and went to music and poetry events. Find what you're interested in and invest in the student culture.

-Ask lots of questions. You will learn a lot.

-There is a military base near the Symbiosis campus we stayed on. That being said, every day there were fighter jets that would take off and land as part of some routine. Just note that the jets are loud.

-Take photos. The time goes by fast.