

- Host Institution:
 - o Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts

 - Home Institution:
 - o York University

 - Type of Exchange:
 - o Regular exchange.

 - Term and year in which you were on exchange in India:
 - o 2017/2018 academic year
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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).

Everything you're about to read comes from my completely biased opinion, so take it with a grain of salt (or not, it's your choice). Since I've been at SSLA for an entire academic year, I've had a variety of experiences, good and bad. I'll start with my courses/internship. My courses were great, but keep in mind that I chose relatively easy or "fun" courses because I was completing my free electives here. Other exchange students (from Germany and the U.S.) have constantly complained about the level of difficulty and the workload in some of their courses. And they weren't wrong; the workload is heavier and harder than the one we're used to, but as long as you aren't taking more than 5 courses at a time, you should be able to manage. The only real problem I personally faced in my courses was when professors would make us do group work (which was VERY often) and every single student I've worked with would procrastinate until the night before/the morning of, so I would end up doing most of the work. On the other hand, I had the opportunity to take an internship instead of 2

courses during my second semester at a waste management organization. This was probably one of my favorite educational experiences at SSLA.

When it comes to accommodation, there are both pros and cons about living at the hostel (residence). First of all, you have the option to stay off campus, but you have to make that choice before you arrive. Some girls tried to move out of the hostel because they were not having a positive experience here, but they had already signed up for the hostel so they weren't allowed to move out. The hostel was very strict at first, we had to sign attendance every night, we weren't allowed to leave past 9 p.m., and we had to send an e-mail stating where we were going if we weren't staying at the hostel for any reason (this was all for safety reasons). This got a lot better over time, we eventually didn't have to do any of these things. Another upside is that the hostel is new, and our rooms are nice. It's also a 1 minute walk to your class, so it's really convenient. However, if you are a light sleeper like me, you will lose a lot of sleep because the students and staff are very noisy during the day and night. And unfortunately, the hostel is facing a military air base, so their planes will start flying literally every minute anywhere from 4 a.m. until 1 a.m. sometimes (these are so loud that they physically shake your room). My final point to make is that they put the exchange students in "luxurious" rooms, physically separated from all the Indian students, who unfortunately had worse rooms than we did. They didn't even allow Indian students to enter our hallway, let alone our rooms, and we weren't allowed to enter theirs. This obviously caused a lot of tension because it isn't fair for them. Another important note about the hostel is the mess and the filtered water machines. Please be careful if you chose to eat at the mess. I've gotten sick countless times eating there, and so have the other exchange students and Indian students. There is only a microwave and a single burner if you want to cook for yourself. Also, when you drink water from the filtered water machine, make sure that the filter is on. The entire hostel got sick one week because someone kept turning the filter off.

Finally, I should mention some things about SSLA itself. The professors and teachers were all absolutely amazing. The building and the facilities are good, considering it's a very small college. The heads of administration however, I found were very unprofessional (and I'm not the only one to say so). They were constantly late in delivering important information or documentations, they don't like to admit to things that they did wrong (then they try and pin the blame on you or someone else), and they aren't very helpful at all, in fact, I found them very abrasive when I did ask for their help (which wasn't that often). They also talked bad about me to the other exchange students, which I thought was extremely unprofessional. But I didn't let this negative experience rule my whole experience at SSLA because most of my other experiences here were positive.

- 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)

Pune is a nice place to live. It's not as crazy as Delhi or Mumbai, so if you're looking to live in a quieter city, it's perfect. To get around the city, download Uber and Ola on your phone, this way you can take cabs and rickshaws without them trying to rip you off because you're foreign. These apps work all around India (for the most part), but you need an Indian SIM card to use them. Getting a SIM card here is very cheap, and it will honestly help you a lot. I went with JIO prepaid and it was less than \$10 for 3 months of unlimited data, calling (local), and messaging (local). The other companies are a bit more expensive, but sometimes their coverage is better.

I'd recommend Koreagon Park for going out to eat because they have a variety of restaurants (cheap, expensive, Indian, non-Indian), and it's a beautiful place to walk around. Osho garden (in Koreagon park) is absolutely beautiful and it's a nice place to get away from the chaos of the city.

- C. Please write about your experiences in the host country, if you did some travelling (including mode of transportation, finding accommodation, places you visited, people you met, cost of transportation and accommodation, and so on).

India is an incredible country. Every place you go to is so unique, and I would urge everyone to go travelling as much as they can while they are here. I've been here for a year, so I've seen a lot of what India has to offer. In northern India, I've visited the "golden triangle" (Delhi, Agra, and Jaipur) a couple of times. In Jaipur, I completed a 10 day Vipassana meditation retreat, which was life changing. I also made a quick stop in the beautiful city of Varanasi. In all of these cities (except Varanasi), Uber and Ola are available, and you can find cheap accommodation for these places using hostelworld or airbnb.

In southern India, I went to Kerala and some parts of Tamil Nadu with two friends and backpacked to 9 places (Kochi, Wayanad, Munnar, Ooty, Thekaddy, Alleppey, Kollam, Kovalam, Varkala). Uber and Ola are unfortunately not available in Kerala yet, so we rented a car to get to Wayanad, Munnar, Ooty, and Thekaddy, because it was more convenient for us to do. But there are local buses that you can take to go there too. In fact, to get to every other city, we took local buses and trains, which are extremely cheap. We used hostelworld, airbnb, and oyo rooms to find accommodation.

If you're in Pune and you want to get away for the weekend, Mumbai is a beautiful city (one of my favourites) and it's only a 3-4 hour drive away. The buses are around \$10, or you can rent a one way Uber or Ola (this option is more expensive, but it ends up being cheaper than the bus if you split the cost between 4 people). If you want to go to visit a nearby place for a day, you can rent Ola or Uber for a day (12 hours). This allows the driver to bring you to wherever you need to go, and also bring you back. Fun day trips close to Pune include Mahabaleshwar and Lonavala.

I've visited Goa (Palolem and Anjuna), but it was honestly very overrated. If you're into partying, it's fun because it's very crowded and everyone is in constant party mode. We took a night bus to reach there, and it took around 10 hours. If you want to go to a quieter beach and just relax, I would recommend going to Kashid. It's a small city below Mumbai and it's a lot closer to Pune than Goa is.

If you have time, visit Aurangabad (where the "mini Taj Mahal" is), and the Ajanta and Ellora caves (Buddhist and Hindu caves). These were one of the most incredible things I have ever seen, and they are not too far from Pune (7 hours by bus to get to Aurangabad and another 2-3 hours to get to the caves).

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

Be careful, especially if you're a woman or if you're LGBTQIA+. I know it sucks to have to hear that, I didn't want to believe it myself, but it really isn't safe to roam around at night. Me and my friend have personally had some scary experiences when we were in Kerala on New Year's Eve. And the bars or "clubs" here in Pune have a bad reputation of sexual assault too. Unfortunately, society has a long way to go.

Also, if you have mental health issues, or any form of disability, make sure you have all the resources and/or medication you need before you come here because it can be harder to find them here.