
ONTARIO-INDIA EXCHANGE REPORT

Home Institution: UOIT

Host Institution: IISER Pune

Time of stay: Summer 2018 (June – August)

Program nature: Short Term Study Program (SSP)

- 1. Campus:** IISER Pune has a beautiful campus. The laboratories are well equipped and there are dedicated microscopy and tissue culture facilities (among others). Doing research at IISER Pune was definitely one of the most engaging things that I have done in my undergraduate degree so far, it gives you a taste of what doing real research is like. The main building has an open concept with most of the roof open to the sky, so you'll be able to enjoy the sight of rainfall during the monsoon just steps from the lab! I cannot praise the campus enough!
- 2. The placement:** This was my first time working in a research-based setting. I was able to gain exposure to what goes on inside a lab, as well as what meetings and journal clubs are like. The working hours may be different than what you may be used to (i.e. 10 – 6pm instead of a 9 – 5pm), and you may need to come in on weekends (depending on the type of work you are doing). Although the project and work was intensive, I got a lot of experience out of it. [Of note, if you plan on travelling inside India and going sight-seeing, plan your experiments accordingly and discuss it with your supervisor so you can make the most of your stay in India]. On campus, there are also talks and presentations throughout the week given by faculty, students, or visiting speakers which are highly informative. You'll get to interact with PhD students and get a feel of what doing a PhD is like.
- 3. Food:** There are many places on campus to get food and refreshments. Within the main building, there is a Café Coffee Day (similar to Tim Hortons) which sells coffee/drinks and snacks. There is also an MDP Coffee House which serves chai. Just outside the main building, there is a small canteen which has a few more options (south Indian snacks, ice cream, etc). The cafeteria building is just a 5-minute walk from the main building, it has two floors offering amazing food from 730am to about 11pm. The prices are very

affordable, a full lunch or dinner will cost you 50 – 60 rupees, which equates to about a dollar.

4. **Hostel:** I was placed into the PhD hostel, which had single occupancy rooms. There are washrooms (western style) and showers on each floor, as well as a clothes washing machine and filtered water dispensers. There is housekeeping staff that come in every day (and who are very helpful, kind and friendly) for upkeep of the facilities. There are no common fridges or cooking spaces. The rooms come with a bed, mattress, pillow, closet, and a desk. The fees charged to me were 500 rs/day – which was absolutely worth it, to be within walking distance of the lab and on campus with access to all the facilities! Also located on campus is a general store which sells almost anything you may need (laundry detergent, soaps, snacks, stationery, USB sticks, etc.). If they do not have something you need, you can always go to RelianceMart or DMart (about a 5 min drive from campus).

5. **Getting a SIM card:** Having a local phone number will facilitate a lot of things (ordering food, ordering things online, requesting rides, signing up for apps, staying in contact). So if you're there for more than 3 weeks, I would definitely suggest getting one. The nearest provider to campus that offers foreigners SIM cards is the Airtel store in Varsha Park Society. Their website has all the details of what documents to bring, and you may have to ask the International Office at IISER to provide you with something called a "bonafide certificate" to accompany the other documentation as proof of your address during your stay.

6. **Delivery:** Swiggy, Zomato, and UberEats are food delivery apps. Definitely check them out, as you can try a lot of tasty food without having to go off-campus if you're pressed for time or want to try something new. Almost all the drivers will deliver your food on motorbikes so that is a pretty cool thing to see! Amazon and BigBasket are also online stores where you can buy groceries – shipping costs are low in India, so if you want to do any online grocery shopping just to get a feel of what it's like, I would recommend trying it!

7. **Transportation:** The two safest ways to get around is through the Uber and Ola apps. You can request different types of vehicles, see the pricing before you request a ride, and see all the driver information as well as the route he's taking while you're on your way.

8. **Other:** This was my first time in India, and it was amazing; I was completely immersed in the daily life within a week or so of my arrival. It takes you by surprise, and you when you return to your room at night after a full day of interacting with people, working, and having fun, you're almost too excited to fall asleep in the anticipation of waking up the next day to do it all over again. I almost never felt exhausted despite being active all day. It was definitely a change of pace from what I was used to in Canada, and I absolutely loved it. The people are extremely helpful, whether it be people in the labs, the friends you'll make on campus, the Uber drivers, or the security guards.

Everyone's experience will be a bit different but I can guarantee that you'll be pleasantly surprised. The weeks go by so fast without you even realizing it! I can say with full confidence that this was definitely a life-changing summer, I went for a laboratory placement, but I got so much more out of it. It ultimately will be what you make it, so go with an open mind, be willing to accept new ways of doing things, don't stress out a lot, and just go with the flow! I am extremely lucky and grateful to have had this experience and hope to return to India again in the future.