

Experience Report Internship in Delhi, India

Identification Code: Ind-2019- D612S-f

Degree: Master in Environmental Sciences

Semester: 5th

Destination Country: India

Objective of stay: Internship

Duration: 17th May - 29 July 2019 (10 weeks)

Host institution: Edible Routes

1. Advice and suggestions concerning the living, working, studying and/or research conditions, which might be useful for future scholarship holders

- Personal and academic interest in the host country

While being the second populous country on Earth, with its 1,3 billion inhabitants, India is a fast developing country and its megacities are concerned with urgent environmental issues. In Delhi, the air quality is reported to be among the worst in the world. As a student of environmental sciences, I found interesting the chance of personally facing some of the current environmental problems to experience some among the major urban environmental challenges. My curiosity was to understand to which extent people perceive and are affected by the local changing climate, and which initiatives are taken to tackle such issues.

My academic focus was on sustainable food practices at the urban level. I thought that exploring this reality in Delhi (16,349,831 inhabitants) I would have learned about innovative sustainable food initiatives. As per the personal interest, which I hardly to disentangle from the academic, I had the interest of living in a “developing country” to extend my personal geopolitical understanding to a broader scale.

- Preparation and organization of your stay abroad

Participating in the “indo-german dialogue on urban sustainable practices” conference in Freiburg, I got to know the founder of Edible Routes. I was engaging in an informal conversation on urban farming in different cultures when he came up with the idea of an internship at their organization in Delhi. I checked what they were doing and I immediately found that exciting. I wrote to him and I promptly had an answer with practical information concerning the accommodation, tasks and so on. I was offered a place to stay (which eventually didn't work out and I had to search for something else) and a very rough schedule of potential activities to do there. I was not asked to prepare myself for the internship, however, I had accumulated some experience in this field because of my personal and academic focuses.

- Visa:

Bureaucracy in India is very complex, I would advise starting the visa application early enough to go through potential problems without stress.

For me, the visa application process hasn't been easy. I had to apply to the Indian embassy in my home

country from Germany and due to some misunderstanding, I ended up having a multiple entry - one-year valid **E-visa**. Such visa had the limitation that each period of stay in India could not exceed 90 days, which resulted to be very tight considering my plan of traveling through India after the end of the internship (almost 90 days). However, possible solutions to this are going to Nepal even on a day-trip (they do not require any visa) and then come back to have an extension of the stay (this is possible only with multiple entry visa and, again, e-Visa are more complex). In general, I would suggest to go for a normal visa procedure and avoid the electronic one. Going personally to the responsible office might ease the understanding of the differences between the various visa option.

The Indian government doesn't allow people with tourist visa to work for NGO, even if is not paid, however, this is hardly going to be an issue. Most important visa to check this with the internship supervisor.

Flight:

This was the easiest part, I flew directly from Frankfurt to Delhi for roughly 300 Euro (if you have a tourist visa you might be asked to show a return flight to demonstrate you are going out of India, clarify this when making the visa)

Insurance:

I had a contract with *Die Continentale* Insurance promoted by DAAD, with 32 Euro monthly

Accommodation search:

I was initially guaranteed accommodation at one of the farms. However, the weather conditions (incredibly hot and humid) combined with a poor sanitary supply (very basic kind of washroom in a very uncomfortable location, aka opposite side of the fields..), mosquito (Malaria and Dengue are still a serious problem there) and some other minor factors didn't allow me to stay there long. I have searched for alternative accommodation for which I had to pay not-planned money (~ 190/month). Finding a room in a shared flat has then been relatively easy and I ended up enjoying this very much.

- Practical advice and where to find useful information

Talking to people that have already had some experience in India is the most useful way to prepare yourself for such an experience. It's possible to find information from various fonts, but ultimately the most reliable ones are the stories and experiences from fellow students/friends who have been there.

- What did you like or dislike about your host country and your host institution or host university?

It is difficult to shortly summarize how it feels to live in a country like India.

Traveling and living in India can be very energy consuming and stressful depending on where and in which circumstances one is. Finding a quiet spot in a city like Delhi can be very beneficial to maintain some personal sense of space and relaxation when working in a full-time internship. The city is very large and getting from one place to another can take hours when the traffic is very intense. As a young white woman, walking around is not always a comfortable experience. People stares can become even scary in some circumstances. However, it depends upon individual sensitivity. Women safety is an issue in India and some initiatives are rising to ease women to be around without too much stress. For example, the modern and

efficient metro system in Delhi offers always a wagon only for women. Personally, I found it a relief to be "stared at" by women and not only men.

Some cultural traits made me struggle to find my role in my working environment. Unorganization and unreliability of services and people made me often feel very frustrated and unmotivated. This has made me hard to keep my motivation at the beginning, especially because initially I didn't perceive my work as beneficial for my co-workers. However, this improved significantly during my stay as I got the chance of adjusting my expectations and I worked hard to bring some effective contribution to the working group.

In general, this experience has definitely increased my patience and mental flexibility toward diverse working-contexts.

For a nature and peace lover as I am, Delhi has been incredibly challenging. It has been interesting to personally experience the meaning and relevance of the topics that I work on. Urban sustainable development, sustainable food practices, urban farming, environmental education, environmental advocacy are some keywords that give an idea of why I decided to go there. In this sense, I cannot say that I "enjoyed" being in such a city, but it is what I was looking for in order to increase my personal and professional awareness of what it is to deal with climate urgencies at the urban level.

In my host institution I found a very diverse group of people. Sustainable business makers (Edible Routes) as well as "idealists" that work hard without significant revenues (Edible Routes Foundation). Both contexts have been very interesting to explore. I initially struggled understanding the general organization and finding my own role and tasks there. My impression from the beginning was that they perceived me as a random volunteer, rather than a person they could rely on in terms of organizing and to work with. Due to the general poor organization and the lack of properly structured work it took me a bit to understand what (of any significance) I could have done there. I then found my spot at the Foundation (6 months old, therefore the poor organization) by assisting the preparation of a research project, workshops on environmental topics and the design of a school project, in collaboration with IGSSS. Furthermore, I took part in some of the projects in which the foundation is involved. Here, my contribution has been mostly limited to the assistance and I learned about project management and monitoring.

Project participation at the Edible Routes Foundation

Dharampal Satyapal (DS) – *City Forest Proposal for Restoration Ecology in Noida*

Here, I collaborated with the team by writing the proposal of a project aimed at restoring the Noida city belt. The work was commissioned and funded by the Dharampal Satyapal Group of Companies CSR.

Nai Disha - grey-water treatment

A community garden project in collaboration with the Nai Disha NGO, whose focus is promoting children education and empowerment. We designed and installed a grey-water treatment system based on permaculture principles. Parallel to this implementation a few months project targeted the local community children was undertaken in a set of sessions aimed at raising environmental health awareness.



Aastha - kitchen gardens in slum communities with differently able kids

In collaboration with Aastha community, we developed and implemented a set of kitchen gardens for disadvantaged joint families living in slums. Aastha is a local NGO that is specifically targeting differently-abled kids. After installing such kitchen gardens (veg-boxes on their roof-tops) we went back every second week to monitor and give advice for maintenance and harvesting.



UNHCR – excursion with the UN- high commission for refugees

We went on a mission to the Mewat Rohingya refugee camp to explore the chances of establishing a business partnership in bamboo construction for the Edible Routes pots. Then we discussed the possibility of the establishment of a community garden.



IGSSS – School project – sessions on environment, health, and organic farming

Here, I have collaborated in the design of a few school sessions with kids. I prepared class material for children to understand and play around the concept of organic farming and healthy eating. This was the longest project I was engaged in and it was commissioned and sponsored by IGSSS (Indo-Global Social Service Society).

The course of a typical weekday

During my internship, there have been no days similar to others. However, the most common structure included waking up around 7 and getting out at 8. One hour and a half circa are spent on public transportation to reach one of the farm or any other location of work. There, we would have either some practical work on the field or workshop to conduct for some clients. Lunch is eaten together around 1 pm sharing our respective food and we would stay at least one hour chatting and resting before going back to work. Around 4 pm the working day is almost considered done as it takes another one hour and a half minimum to reach home. In the time of high temperature in May and June, the day could be over already at 3 as it was unbearable to work in the heat. At home, I would shower (necessary after working in the hot Indian summer of 46 °C) and rest before reading and checking emails from the foundation and prepare some documents. In alternative to the farm, which would be the working place for two/three days in the week., the other days were set at various location at the headquarters of one of the other NGOs or private clients or some desk work from home or the University researching on current topic and preparing material for activities.

Something more about Delhi

Delhi is among the most polluted cities in the worlds and this can be perceived anytime in daily life. It is a stressful place to be around and the traffic can be very annoying. The streets are very dirty and loud, for this, it is very unpleasant to walk through. However, in the chaos of such a big metropolis is not too hard to find some kind of peace oasis. The people I met in Delhi have been incredibly welcoming. They invited me to their homes and offered me very delicious food. In general, I found in the people I worked with a rare example of hospitality and kindness. This has counterbalanced the stress of working in deeply unorganized condition. The organization I have interned at has been almost a family during my stay. Not only did people take care I was comfortable and happy but wanted also to make sure I had a great experience. My co-workers from the foundation quickly became friends and shared with me a variety of activities. They insisted on bringing me around so that I could explore the local culture and cuisine.

There are endless anecdotes about crazy things I have witnessed during my stay and I find difficult to recall one in particular. However, every time I went to the Aali farm, I had to take a shared tuk-tuk cab to reach the farm. I have experienced that even if these vehicles are supposed to transport a maximum of 4 people, 9 individuals can actually be carried and despite the heavy load the driver would still be able to drive fast in the traffic avoiding sudden frontal accidents.

- Internship or study conditions

The working conditions at the internship place were initially quite scarce and working from home was not a thing as I needed a table, electricity to charge the laptop and wifi. These factors were not available at my first location and for that reason, I had to go to the local university to also access the Eduroam to be able to download scientific papers. However, entering the university hasn't been always easy as generally visitors are not allowed.

The leader of the organization, the person that I was in contact with before coming, has shown always interest in my work and my sense of security. When I had to switch location because sleeping at the farm was

not possible, he offered me to stay at his house for 10 days and a colleague hosted me for another week until I found a shared apartment where I could stay the rest of my stay.

2. Feedbacks

I found in my colleagues (roughly my age) immediately friends with whom I felt very welcome and very comfortable. This allowed us to share way beyond professional life-enriching each other with personal insights.

During my stay, I could profit from the working environment also by the surrounding activities that are promoted by the organization. I assisted the preparation and execution of many workshops offered to private clients, for example on the topics of Organic Composting, Native Trees of Delhi, Invasive Species etc. Furthermore, I had the chance to visit a lot of gardens and previous projects.

At the beginning of the internship I felt often that I wasn't contributing to the general work and what I was doing was either not relevant or not indispensable. This brought me a general sense of frustration that made me feel quite unchallenged. The organization is generally poor and the foundation was a recent development of the Edible Routes business and a lot of things were still in the process of settling down. I think that it general it isn't uncommon to develop some sense of frustration during internships. My personal recommendation is to have a rather long stay that allows students to develop their own task with time. Three months are, in my opinion, the minimum time to spend in such circumstances.

However, I managed to bring my own knowledge and to fit it in the work even when this did not result in some use. It took me some time to understand exactly how I could have contributed significantly to their work. I found this in writing and designing the session for a school project in collaboration with IGSSS. There I felt challenged in the right way and I had the satisfaction of feeling that my work has been very useful to the people.

- Preparation

I was explicitly told that there was no need to prepare myself for this internship, so before arriving in India I simply tried to read as much as possible about the country and its culture along with some general knowledge about permaculture.

This experience has been pretty much coherent with my expectations in the sense that my task was not 100% defined and left me the freedom to choose at any time what I could do. My goals are totally met in the sense that this experience gave me the cultural insight I was looking for. However, as I suspected to be, this experience hasn't been incredibly useful in terms of my professional development. In other words, it has been essential for my soft skills, but I didn't have many responsibilities and tasks that led me to a significant professional growth. For this reason, I might well try to do another internship in Europe.