

### **Bangalore, India Fall 2007**

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On October 11, 2007, three of us ventured to Bangalore, India, for four weeks. We originally learned about Bangalore from IMER and Dr. Kumar Belani, an anesthesiologist at the University of Minnesota that trained at St. John's Medical College. His wife is a Pediatric Infectious Disease physician at Children's, and both of them are originally from India. They are very kind and great resources if you need an inside source.

St. John's is a great place to go if you want to experience another culture and see how third world medicine works. However, it is not a great place if you want a lot of hands-on experience. Bangalore's population has increased from 3 million to 8 million in the last ten years. Because of this, it lacks the infrastructure to support its population, and you will see a significant amount of poverty, pollution, and traffic. However, you will also find very kind people and a very interesting culture. Many sightseeing opportunities exist in India, and we wished we would have had more time to take advantage of them.

We have organized this paper as a sort of guidebook to give you an overview of St. John's and Bangalore, and we hope it will be useful for anyone who is visiting (or hopes to visit) St. John's Medical College.

#### **Applying**

Applying to visit St. John's is a bit of a process, but no problem if you start early (at least 6 months ahead of time if possible). There are forms in IMER, but I will do my best to cover it all. You will need to send 6 copies of each of the following:

- 1) 2 letters of recommendation. Dr. Quie in IMER will write one if you meet with him, and Shannon Benson in IMER will help you set this up. You can also ask another physician or talk to Dr. Belani who is willing to write them too.
- 2) A general resume
- 3) Performa—or the St. John's application form (IMER has them); state that you plan to stay in the Annexe III for lodging
- 4) A certified check from any bank written to "St. John's Medical College Bangalore-560 034, India" (It was \$250 when we went, but we had to pay approx \$120 more when we got there due to a recent price increase.)
- 5) Copies of your passport

Send them to the College's Medical Secretary:

Jacintha, Executive Assistant to the Dean  
St. John's Medical College  
Sarajapur Road  
Bangalore 560 034  
Karnataka, India

As is very common in India, most people are not particularly prompt in replying to email/letters. So unfortunately, communication with St. John's is not the most efficient, and you may not hear from them for a long time, if ever. We finally got an email two weeks before we left saying they were expecting us.

### Getting Your Visa

We got a 6 month, multiple entry tourist visa. However, I was looking up information online and it sounds like the system changed as of October 1, 2007, so it may be different now.

Send the following items to the Indian consulate at:

India Visa Requirements

17 North State Street Suite #1630

Chicago, IL 60602

- 1) Valid passport
- 2) 2 page India Visa application (which you can easily download online)
- 3) 2 passport photos
- 4) Self addressed stamped envelope (via trackable method)
- 5) \$60.00

### Arrival & First Day

Arriving in Bangalore may be the most intimidating part of the trip, especially since most flights seem to arrive in the middle of the night. Ours was no exception. Fortunately, there are plenty of taxis at the airport for you. We were told to pre-pay for a taxi in the airport, which we did for 700 rupees (about \$18-19). Our fare may have been a bit steep, but it was for three of us. You should be able to get to St. John's for about 400 rupees. If you let people help you with your bags they will expect a tip, so be careful.

Take the cab to St. John's (the address above). You will have to go to the gate for the Annexe III if that is where you are staying. (Tell the driver that the gate for the Annexe III is directly across from the BDA complex.) The cab drivers can ask the gate guards and drop you off there. There is a 24 hour security guard and employee at the annexe who will give you your keys and show you to your room.

On the morning you plan to start rotations (or the Friday before if you happen to be in town) you will walk to the Dean's office and speak with Jacintha the secretary (this will be marked on the map). You will complete some paperwork, and then you will pay your outstanding bills (i.e. the remainder of the tuition sum). Then you will go to the director/Father's office to receive his signature and blessing. At this point you return to Jacintha and receive your "posting". You can choose to do your posting in any department. You could spend your whole time in one rotation or switch every week. Amy spent one week in each of Pediatrics, NICU, and Anesthesiology. Kelly spent three weeks in Anesthesiology, and Kristine spent three weeks in OB/GYN. We all spent our last week on the Community Health rotation where we traveled to the rural villages. We'll talk more about this in another section. After you receive your posting you will go and check in with the Department Chair and start your rotation. Every Friday you will visit Jacintha to renew your posting or begin a new one for the following week.

### Accommodations & Lodging

When we arrived in Bangalore we thought that we were staying at the original Annexe. This was where previous students had stayed, and we had heard about the bucket showers and cold water! However, we were pleasantly surprised when we were dropped off at a very new-appearing building. Three months before our arrival the “Annexe III” was built on the opposite side of campus. This building is used for housing visiting students and physicians. Everyone has their own room with a double bed, a (western) toilet, a sink, and a shower. There is even hot water! The only downfall to this building is the cost: 10,000 rupees or about \$250/month. It is well worth it, I promise you! They also provide sheets and towels, but you still may want to bring your own.

One other important note regarding the Annexe is that the rooms can get pretty damp. Two of us had a slight problem with mold, which ruined some shoes and a backpack. Do your best to bring stuff that you wouldn't mind throwing away at the end of your time in India.

### What to wear

You will see a mix of traditional Indian dress and western clothing in Bangalore. However, while it may be hot, you will not see anyone wearing shorts. Outside of the hospital, and while traveling, we usually wore jeans or capris with short-sleeve shirts. We didn't see many skirts, but longer skirts would be fine. Tennis shoes or casual athletic shoes are best due to the mosquitos and dirt, but sandals are fine if you are good about applying bug cream. Our hospital attire consisted of nice pants or khakis and a short or long sleeve sweater or shirt. You will also wear your white coat. Another option for girls is to buy kurtas, which are tunic-like shirts of various colors. You can buy these at the Big Bazaar (behind the Forum Mall) for about \$3-5. There are also plenty of clothing shops in the Forum Mall, but some may be much more expensive. For hospital footwear, anything will work; most doctors there wear Teva/Nike-type sandals. We wore loafers, Dansko clogs, or sometimes flip-flops.

The OT (or operating theater) attire is interesting. As you enter the OT area, you will leave your shoes put on their OT shoes (which are actually flip-flops) You are then given scrubs to put on. A previous essay writer said that he brought his own brand new tennis shoes and was able to use these. We only watch the surgeries, so usually the flip flops were ok other than feeling very odd in tennis shoes.

You may also choose to go out to a bar or restaurant with other international students, and jeans and a nice shirt are fine for this.

### Laundry

We had our clothes laundered at Sancy's Laundrette for 25 rupees per kilogram. It takes a few days, so you should plan ahead if you plan to travel. Also, the laundry was hit or miss. The first time we had our clothes done, they turned out great. However, the next time our clothes smelled musty and a shirt was stained. Also of note, they do not launder undergarments or socks. I would suggest bringing as many of these items as possible because they are hard to launder. Because the rooms are fairly damp, clothing takes a very long time to dry. We ended up buying more socks at the Forum Mall before the end of our trip.

## Communication

- a. Email - There is a computer lab located on campus (see map). It is open from around 8-9am until 11pm and costs 15 rupees per hour for students. The computers are fairly slow, but you are able to easily check your email.
- b. Cell phone - I would suggest buying a cell phone while in India. It was a nice way to keep in touch with family and friends and to meet up with other international medical students that you will meet in India. If your phone has a sim card, you can call your phone company and get an unlock code (which will take about two weeks to get). Once you have the unlock code you can switch out the sim card in your phone for a pay-for service sim card that you can purchase in India. I bought a sim card at the BDA complex across the street from the Annexe for 295 rupees. To buy a sim card you will need to bring a passport photo and proof of address (I used my St. John's name badge). After you put the sim card in your phone, you will need to enter your unlock code. You can then add rupees to the phone in increments of 201, 501, or 702. Local calls cost 0.5 rupees per minute and international calls cost 6 rupees per minute.
- c. Phone booths - located by the canteen, cost is 10 rupees per minute. Unfortunately, these phones are on the other side of campus. Since the time difference in India is either 10 ½ or 11 ½ hours, they may be a little less convenient.

## Eating and Restaurants

We are just going to list some of the places near campus we frequented often (see our map), plus a few we tried a little further away. You can find many other options in the Lonely Planet South India, which was a great resource for restaurants.

- The Canteen: this is on campus for hospital staff and the place we usually ate lunch. Traditional Indian food, entrees 10-25 Rs.

- Sukh Sagar: another great place for lunch next to campus, traditional Indian food (their Thali's are great), 15-35 Rs.

-Nandhini's: this is on the ground floor of the Nandhini's Palace hotel across the street from campus. They don't open for dinner until 6:30 or 7 pm (as with many other restaurants in India), but it's a decent, quiet place to eat dinner. Also traditional Indian cuisine, but a little more expensive, entrees 30-60 Rs.

-“The Chinese Restaurant”: you will find a lot of Chinese food in India, but this was our favorite. We actually don't remember the name ☺ but you can find it by using our map. This is a nice place to have dinner, and the service is great. Entrees ???

Ficarano's: this was our favorite “expensive” restaurant near campus, where we treated ourselves to a nice Italian dinner once a week. The food and service are excellent, and the chocolate lava cake is better than any we have had in the US (or maybe we just really missed real chocolate cake!). Entrees 140-180 Rs.

-Café Coffee Day: this is like the Indian version of our popular coffee shops. This is a chain that you will see them just as often as you see Starbucks and Caribou at home, and will seem very similar (except for the Indian version of MTV playing at all times). Great snacks, desserts, and frappes. Drinks for 20-40 Rs.

-Forum Mall: at the mall (which will also seem a little more like home than you expect) you will find Pizza Hut (personal pizzas for 80-120 Rs.), KFC (without the potatoes, corn, and biscuits...rice instead), and McDonald's (no beef, but they still have the same great fries, and ice cream cones are only 10 Rs.). Inside the mall you will also find a small grocery store called Fab Mall (on the ground floor across from KFC), where you can buy cereal, bread, granola bars, chips, toiletries, etc.

-Sunny's: a nice restaurant with great pizza and pasta on Vittal Mallya Road. The patio is a fun place to eat, entrees 200-400 Rs.

-Ebony: this restaurant has a patio on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor of an office building that overlooks MG Road, entrees 90-275 Rs.

-Leila Galleria Hotel: This is a very upscale hotel where we attended a reception for Governor Pawlenty and decided to treat ourselves to a nice meal afterward. If you absolutely can't stand another minute without beef, the best cheeseburgers are served at this hotel's restaurant. (Just beware that it will cost you about \$15!)

It's also a great idea to bring some food from home. We usually ate granola bars for breakfast, and it's always nice to have some of your comfort snacks that you can't imagine living without for a month!

### Transportation

As you will undoubtedly notice the minute you arrive in Bangalore, traffic in India is very different than in Minnesota. There are no lane markers, everyone drives any which way they please, and they honk their horns incessantly. Needless to say, be very careful crossing the street! We were able to walk to many of the restaurants and shops that we went to most often. If you are going anywhere further than the Forum mall, autorickshaw (or "auto") is the way to go. These silly-looking, black and yellow, mini car/scooters are cheap and they're everywhere. Drivers will pull over to see if you want a ride even when you are simply waiting to cross the street. By autorickshaw, you should be able to go anywhere within a mile or so for about 30-40 rupees (to the Forum mall, for example). The key is always telling the driver to use the meter. However, there are a few exceptions. When it is raining or after 8-9pm, you will have to negotiate a fare, and it usually costs up to double the regular rate. For example, to get to Brigade Road or MG Road (great places to walk around and shop or eat, approx. a 25-min ride), you will likely pay about 50-60 Rs. with the meter during the day, but you may pay 100-120 Rs. at night or in the rain. We would not advise taking a regular taxi, unless you carry a lot of cash with you. We considered taking a taxi only once, on our way home from the Leila Galleria (expensive shopping area, and connected to the hotel the governor stayed at), but it was an easy decision when we discovered it would cost 1500 Rs. for the same ride that would be 100 Rs. in an auto. So in general, you will be able to walk to many places near campus, and autos are everywhere waiting to take you anywhere else you would like to go.

### Rotations

OB/GYN was a great rotation for those interested in the field. I spent most of the time shadowing, but did some NST's, exams, etc. I was allowed to watch a variety of things,

such as exams, deliveries, rounds and surgeries. There are two teams consisting of residents (or PG's as they call them) and attendings. Two days per week are spent in clinic, two in surgery, and one on L&D. The wards consist of rooms labeled "Septic", "PIH", "Eclampsia", "Labor", and "Post-Partum", and each room is filled with 6-12 women. The medical issues and treatments are similar to the US, but their equipment is fairly outdated. The team expects you to be there most days; a typical work day is from 8 am until 2-3 pm. They understand if you are traveling or sick like I was. I did see some interesting things while I was there, such as an induced 18-week fetus with anencephaly and a 30-year-old woman with testicular feminization.

The operating theater (or "OT") is an experience in itself. Most of the procedures are familiar; however their concept of sterility is a little different. You are also more likely to see larger tumors or cysts than you might in the US because most operations are paid for out-of-pocket, so the patient may wait until their symptoms are unbearable. (See the anesthesiology section for more details.)

Anesthesiology was a good experience for me because I am going into anesthesiology and had done an anesthesiology rotation prior to this experience. I do not think this would be a good experience for anyone unfamiliar with anesthesiology. The chair is an extremely nice person, but he basically tells you to go check things out on your own. You do not get paired up with anyone, and you do not get introduced to anyone. You mainly walk around the OT's and observe. If you are interested in learning or talking with people you will need to initiate the conversation or ask the physician about their anesthetic plan. Occasionally you will meet an attending that enjoys pimping you until you get a question wrong. I did meet a couple of nice residents and staff that were interested on how anesthesiology was different in the United States. Also, it is not uncommon for 4-5 anesthesiologists to be present during induction and emergence. In other words, it is unlikely that you will have the opportunity to do any procedures such as intubations or lines.

A day in anesthesiology starts around 7:30 with the first cases. You will arrive to the OT and enter where it says OT staff. At the front you will see a place to put your shoes and a place to sign in. To the right of the sign in desk, there are shelves of blue OT sandals. You can put on a pair of these sandals, and then go into to the women's or men's physician changing room where you will find white scrubs to wear. When you enter the OT area, you will find a print out of that days cases on the wall. You can then observe whatever cases you want to see.

Anesthesiology is practiced very differently than it is here. First of all, there is no pre-op area, and all patients are wheeled back to the OT without an IV. It is not uncommon to find patients laying by themselves in the OT prior to their operation. Some rooms have newer anesthetic machines, but some of the rooms have ancient anesthetic machines where you need to bag ventilate the patient. None of the machines had a CO2 monitor. The most common IV induction agents used were thiopental and propofol. Isoflurane is also used. They did not have desflurane or etomidate.

There is an opportunity to take call where you may have a greater chance of having the opportunity intubate or place lines.

## Pediatrics and Neonatology

I spent a week in each of these; both were interesting but very different. A day in Pediatrics usually begins at 8-8:30am and consists of rounding with the team until 1-2pm. After this I wasn't expected to do anything, so I was basically told I could go home. One day I stayed to see what everyone does all afternoon, but I felt like I was more of a burden trying to tag along while the interns and residents were trying to get their work done. The team is made up of an intern, one or two PG's (postgraduates - like residents) and an attending. Everyone is very nice, especially if you are outgoing and try to make conversation. Unfortunately, I didn't do any hands-on patient care in Pediatrics. This is very different than what we are used to, as we carry several of our own patients at any given time during our Peds rotation in med school. However, medical students in India are mainly classroom-taught, so I was expected to simply observe.

Although I was only observing, I saw several things I will likely never see again. For example, the first day I was there, I saw a child with diphtheria. In addition to interesting cases, the way the medicine was practiced was very different at St. John's. The Pediatrics ward is made up of several large rooms, each containing 8-15 metal beds. The mother is always present and sleeps in the bed as well, and grandmothers and fathers are also often present. While I believe the physicians are very smart and well-trained, one scary thing for me was the lack of hand washing that we are so strict about in the U.S. On rounds the attending would see all thirty patients without washing her hands between any of them. Overall, the experience was great, and it has made me much more appreciative of the resources we have available, and how we need to be more cognizant of how we use those resources.

I also spent a week in the NICU, where there was absolutely no shortage of hand washing! After spending a week in the Peds ward, the NICU at St. John's was surprisingly more like ours than I had expected. They are great at practicing proper hand washing techniques, and they have several of the more modern technologies that we also use in our NICU's (just older models and fewer of each machine). The schedule in the NICU is similar to the Pediatrics ward, with a typical day lasting from about 8am to 1-2pm. I also did a fair amount of observing, but I did a few exams and gestational age assessments in the NICU. The people were very nice here too, and they were happy to answer questions or tell me about the patients.

For me, one difficult thing about visiting the NICU at St. John's was hearing the stories of how so many families were forced to make decisions based on their ability to pay their hospital bill. When the average family's monthly income is 3000 rupees (approx \$75), even a one month stay in the NICU will put a family in debt for years. Because of this, some families may demand to take their baby home long before it is safe. Some may even make the decision not have a c-section when it is truly necessary to keep their baby alive because they know they can't afford the NICU care. Again, the experience in the NICU really made me think about how lucky we are to live where we do and to get the great care that we do.

## Travel

### In & around Bangalore

Unfortunately, Bangalore is not the best place for sight seeing, but there are a few places worth venturing to. The *Lonely Planet South India* is a great resource. Brigade

Road just south of MG Road (Mahatma Gandhi Road) and north of Residency Road is a main drag with lots of shops crawling with people. Church Street (just before MG Rd) also has stores and some restaurants.

Bangalore has a number of parks, such as Lalbagh Botanical Gardens and Cubbon Park, which can be nice places to visit for fresh air and quiet surroundings.

The Bangaluru Palace is interesting because it was the Maharaja's palace second to the larger one in Mysore, but it is very small, poorly preserved, and costs money to go inside. (So if you plan to go to Mysore, which you should, then you can skip the Bangalore palace.)

### Mysore

Mysore is a very worthwhile trip; it is only 2-3 hours south of Bangalore by bus or car. You can get there easily by bus, however we chose to hire a driver who took us to Bandipur National Park and Ooty, a mountain village. The driver cost approximately \$50, or 2,000 rupees, for three full days and two nights (hotel included), which we split three ways. We found this deal through a travel agency, and there are many in town.

The agency we used was:

Associated Travels Network

Email: [associatedtravelsnetwork@airtelbroadband.in](mailto:associatedtravelsnetwork@airtelbroadband.in)

Cell: 9845941737

Web address: [www.atnindia.in](http://www.atnindia.in)

Our contact person: K.S.R. Sringshwar, C.E.O.

In Mysore be sure to visit Maharaja's Palace. We also enjoyed Chamundi Hill; you take a bus, taxi or autorickshaw up the hill, where you will find tons of people, markets, and a temple. We chose to walk down the hill, which is made up of approximately 1,000 steps. The path is strung with light bulbs and will lead you past Nandhi, a large bull statue, and ends in an area with more market booths and prayer sites. We had our driver meet us at the bottom, but there are autorickshaws and taxis available too.

Since we had a driver, we also visited Brindavan Gardens, a large park and dam where many Indian tourists gather. Supposedly some Bollywood films have been made there. It was very neat to see, especially at night when they have a light show. However, it is at least 15 km away from Mysore on bumpy roads and likely not worth the price of a taxi ride.

For all of this, I would again recommend the Lonely Planet South India for food, hotels, and more details.

### Bandipur National Park

Bandipur is a national park between Mysore and Ooty, and the main road between these two cities takes you right through the park. This is a beautiful place to see if you have the time. We saw many elephants and monkeys along the road. When you stop at the main office of the park you will see dozens of monkeys that you can feed peanuts to. We also saw deer and wild boars. We chose to take the safari ride through the park, but it was a waste of time and money. First, we were charged more than 10X the price of the Indian tourist's fare because we were foreigners (you will find this is common at many tourist

attractions). The safari consisted of an hour-long bus ride through the park, where we saw one monkey and one peacock. You can imagine how well a big, loud bus attracts animals!

### Ooty

About 7 hours from Bangalore, Ooty was a neat place to visit because we were able to see a variety of Indian terrain. Ooty is a mountain village or “hill station” as the Indians call it. In order to get to Ooty you traverse a mountain, taking 36 narrow “hairpin” turns where large tourist buses and other vehicles are driving toward you honking (a little scary to say the least.) The views are beautiful with waterfalls on the various surrounding mountains and terraced farms all over. It is lush and green. Ooty is smaller than Mysore, and it had some cute shops and restaurants. We heard there is good hiking if the weather permits. Again the Lonely Planet came in handy for this.

### Goa

Goa is known as the place to go to party and stay in huts on the beach, however it was the most relaxing part of our vacation. We chose to stay at the Ramada in a part of Goa that is very quiet. However, getting to Goa was quite an adventure. We decided to take a sleeper bus that departed at 7 pm, and it was supposed to be a 12-14 hour trip. The bus was very old, and the seats are only wide enough for a thin person to lay flat on their back. There are also no bathrooms on the bus. The bus stopped once for dinner and once for breakfast. The roads are very poorly maintained and there were many pot holes. After 14 hours on the road, we were still several hours from our final destination. The bus was driving through a city that was close to the resort we were staying at, so we decided to bail out early. Needless to say, we booked a flight back to Bangalore. The one-way flight was approximately \$100, and the round-trip bus ride was about \$15 dollars. The Ramada had a great pool and was right on the ocean. The beach was almost empty, except for a few Indian women trying to sell things to tourists.

### What to Bring

- Umbrella and rain jacket
- Voltage Converter/Adapter
- Clorox wipes
- Granola/breakfast bars for morning and snacks
- Pillow case, sheet, extra towel or hand towels
- Toilet paper for your bathroom (you can buy it there too, but bring some to start)
- Tissue packets (keep with you at all times, most places don't have TP)
- Purell Hand Sanitizer minis to keep in your white coat and purse
- Permethrin Bug Spray for clothes, bed etc.
- Bug Lotion, 30% deet—we wore it everyday
- Ivory or Tide Dish Soap to wash undergarments in your sink
- Headlamp to read at night, if desired
- Shower scrubber or wash cloths
- Sunglasses
- Peanut butter and any other snacks or candy you may begin to crave
- Lonely Planet South India (or India if you plan to cover more of the country)

We had a wonderful experience in India, and each of us would be happy to answer any questions if you are considering St. John's for your international rotation!