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Bangalore, India
April, 2008

I just returned from a 5-week rotation at St. John's Medical College in Bangalore, India during March and April of 2008. Located in the Indian state of Karnataka, the city is often called the "Silicon Valley of India." Wealth is in a stark contrast to poverty throughout the city. Outside pristine malls with air-conditioning a girl with one leg hobbles along begging for one rupee. Next to a Mercedes is a barefoot old man pushing a cart of oranges down the street. Bangalore is the fastest growing metropolis next to New Delhi and the city lacks the infrastructure to handle the growth. Trash collects in empty lots and throughout the streets, and power outages happen multiple times a day. The contrast between the rich and the poor carries over to medical care, as I will explain later in the essay.

Months before I was walking along the broken sidewalk avoiding the holes that exposed sewage, I was planning for my trip with the help of previous essay writers. They carefully outlined the steps necessary to apply to St. John's, obtain a visa, and pack for India so I won't repeat them. A few things have changed, however, and I have some tips of my own about the hospital and as a woman traveling in India:

I arrived in Bangalore in the middle of the night and was worried about taking a taxi alone to St. John's at that hour. I got a pre-paid taxi from the airport for 270 rupees. Luckily, my taxi driver made sure that I got to Annexe 3, the new dorm for visiting medical students and physicians that is located in the back corner of the campus. The best way to get to Annexe 3 is to tell the driver "St. John's College across from the BDA Complex in Koramangala." The BDA complex is a small shopping area that all of the taxi drivers seem to recognize. Across the street from BDA complex is the gate you need to enter. Turn right after entering the gate, pass the auditorium, and go straight until the Annexe 3 is in front of you. If you arrive in the middle of the night as I did, you will fill out some papers with a guard who will give you your room key. Do not worry if they don't seem to have any record of you reserving a room – they always seem to have plenty of space.

The Annexe 3 is very comfortable – for 10,000 rupees a month (\$250), you will have a double bed, desk, and bathroom with a hot shower. They supply towels and sheets. The hallways are open to the outside and have lots of mosquitoes at night, but your room will be fairly mosquito-free if you keep your door closed and you do not need a mosquito net. I also recommend buying a plug-in mosquito repellent for your room – they are available in larger grocery stores. Several women wearing matching navy saris clean the whole place daily. They will clean your room anytime – just give the front desk your key. The people at the front desk are helpful and sell juice and cold water for 15 Rs. If you occasionally have something that needs to be refrigerated, they will be happy to put it in theirs.

You will need cash in rupees for the Annexe and for extra tuition at St. John's. Changing US dollars to rupees can easily be done at the Forum mall (see below). ATMs are everywhere but use them wisely – Wells Fargo charged me \$5 for each withdrawal. I recommend opening a Citibank account in the US prior to your trip. There are Citibank ATMs all over Bangalore – there is one across the street from Forum mall - and there is no charge to withdraw rupees from your American account. Credit cards are accepted at most of the larger stores and restaurants. You will need cash and bargaining skills for shopping on Commercial Street, MG road and Brigade road where you will find authentic Indian silks, figurines, art, clothing, etc.

You can get to the Forum mall from the main gate (near the canteen), turn right and walk until you see a gas station. Turn right at the gas station and the Forum mall will be a few blocks down on your left. The Forum mall is air-conditioned, has a fast internet café, modern shops, and restaurants such as KFC, Pizza Hut, and McDonalds (no hamburgers). There is a movie theatre on the top floor with Bollywood and foreign films. Reliance World internet café has a fast connection and the staff will help you to upload pictures and download music while you hear popular Indian music. Waiters will approach you every few minutes to see if you want to purchase juice, lassis or coffee. For 100Rs, you will have 4 hours of internet time. They have a special rate of 1000 Rs worth of time for only 650 Rs. The internet “café” on campus is only 10Rs an hour, but the keyboards are sticky and the connection is painfully slow.

I had been warned about “eve teasing” but found that dressing conservatively, avoiding eye-contact and traveling in groups kept this to a minimum. I wore loose-fitting tops that covered my shoulders and jeans or capris. Kurtas (traditional Indian tops) were breezy and comfortable as well. A great place to find men's and women's kurtas and salwar suits (dress-length tops with baggy trousers) as well as other textile items is the store Fabindia. Leaving the gate across from BDA complex, turn right and head straight for about a mile. It will be on your left. I bought a sari with an Indian friend who helped me to properly pleat and pin it so that I could wear it to a special dinner. If you want to buy a sari, there are some fantastic silk shops off of MG road.

I found that having a cell phone was a must. It made it easier to meet up with friends and call home. There are “STD” (standard) phone booths across campus but they can end up being costly. You may bring your own from home if you call your provider in advance and have them unlock it for you. I called Sprint before I left and the best they could offer me was \$2.50/minute to call the US. I ended up buying a cell phone for 1200 Rs and it was well worth it. There is a mobile phone store/counter in the BDA complex where I bought my phone after showing them my St. John's badge and my passport. I recommend the prepaid plan with Vodafone along with international calling cards where the rate is as low as 4 Rs a minute. Vodafone will call you with recordings in Hindi multiple times a day. But don't worry – incoming calls are free.

Food in India was consistently delicious but you will need to avoid certain items if you are worried about diarrhea. I tried everything and as a result suffered the consequences later. Avoid the “filtered” water in the canteen, yogurt sauces that look like they were

diluted with tap water, fresh fruit and veggies you didn't peel yourself, and juices that may have been diluted with water. Ciprofloxacin is readily available at the pharmacy if you need it (I did). Definitely try Navarathan Korma – it is a mild creamy curry dish with pineapple, paneer (Indian cheese), vegetables, and cashews. I first had this dish in the city of Hampi but later found it around the corner at Sukh Sagar. Yum!

A word about infectious diseases at the hospital: **get fitted for an N95 respirator mask and bring some with you.** I saw a lot of patients with active TB – some of whom were suspected to have MDR TB. They are not in isolation and nobody wears masks of any sort. The only masks you can find at St. John's are surgical masks. The nurses and doctors at St. John's are very casual about TB. Luckily, I was able to track one down from a foreign friend who brought some with her. I also brought some gloves to keep in my pockets. You also may want to bring HIV prophylaxis in case you get a needle stick. I had relatively little patient contact and didn't feel I needed this but if you are going to do a rotation with more procedures you may want to be on the safe side. On the campus and throughout Bangalore are millions of stray dogs and monkeys so you may want to consider getting the rabies vaccine. The travel clinic at Boynton will be happy to go over your options with you.

I saw a wide variety of cases during my Medicine rotation: cortical vein thrombosis, histoplasmosis nodules, hepatitis b, TB lymphadenitis, multi-drug resistant TB, fever of unknown origin, enteric viruses. I also saw one case of “morbid obesity” which made the attending physician “very nervous.” This patient looked like the epitome of health compared to our patients at home. Lectures are held up to twice a day and I was impressed with the residents' vast knowledge. The attending physicians pimp the residents and students endlessly, sometimes about seemingly obscure biochemical pathways. Luckily, they spared me the embarrassment. Instead, the Indian doctors were often curious about how we would handle various situations in the USA. I enjoyed hearing the residents discuss the best Indian foods for a diabetic and was asked if all diabetic patients in the USA are compliant. Sometimes it is hard to follow the dialogue during rounds. Many patients speak the local languages Kannada or Tamil. One attending, Dr. Singh, would always fill me in on the case. When Dr. Singh wasn't there, the residents were happy to answer my questions. You are there to learn. Ask away!

As this attending put it, “If you have money, you live. If you do not, you die.” Medical care is typically given only after a patient or his family has paid the bill. St. John's tries to remedy this by charging the wealthy 30% of its patient population for private rooms while the poor 70% are grouped together in free rooms that contain about 15 patients, some of whom have active tuberculosis. For most patients, decisions about care are made depending on the cost. One man needed a chest CT to further explore a pleural effusion that was not resolving, but he could not afford it. He ended up going home.

In the ER, most shocking was a 27 year-old man who covered himself with gasoline, and lit himself on fire after a fight with his wife. He was covered in 3rd degree burns over 70% of his body. His friends brought him in via auto rickshaw wrapped in a blanket. He was writhing in pain, throwing punches at the staff, and nobody gave him

pain meds. They proceeded to rub betadine solution all over his body, wrap him in gauze like a mummy and only then did they consider some morphine. His family did not want to pay for his treatment so he sat in the hospital for 2 hours as care was halted. He was eventually transferred elsewhere.

I also rotated in dermatology and saw early leprosy, molluscum contagiosum, severe cystic acne causing keloids on a man's chest, a chemical peel for acne scars, pustular psoriasis, milia removal with a needle, removal of dermatosis papulosis niagra, and tinea versicolor. There are minor dermatology procedures and clinic visits in the outpatient department that are similar to what we see in the US. I highly recommend dermatology rounds on the wards. The dermatology patients are locked up with the psychiatry patients. A resident explained to me that "both dermatology patients and psychiatry patients have chronic conditions and the dermatology patients can get depressed." While we were on rounds seeing severe pustular psoriasis and pemphigus vulgaris, a psych patient uprooted a scale and threw it down the hallway.

My community health rotation was spent visiting local slums. We visited a clinic that provided basic care for 5 slums around the area. Posters depicting vasectomy, IUD, oral contraceptives, breast feeding were on the walls of this small facility with only 4 private rooms. Within one of the slums, we were gathered into a community room where a woman pulled out a jar of body wax and a hot plate to heat the wax. She started spreading wax on her friend's forearm and we learned that a program was being developed to give women in the slums a trade.

I traveled on weekends to Mysore and Hampi. Mysore can easily be a day trip and the palace is worth seeing. Hampi requires more planning. My friends and I found a travel agent (they are everywhere) who was helped us find an overnight bus and hotel accommodations in the neighboring city of Hospet. Opt for the air-conditioned Volvo buses wherever you can. I relied heavily on the Lonely Planet both within and outside Bangalore. Within Bangalore, I recommend the following restaurants (all in Lonely Planet unless otherwise stated):

Nandini's – Next to BDA complex. Nice for a quiet dinner.

Sukh Sagar – Left of gate. Try the Indian spring rolls or veg tikka masala

Grasshopper – In the backyard of a designer's studio. Set price, swanky 5-course dinner.

Tandoor - North Indian food

British Pub - in Forum Mall

13th Floor – Overlooks Bangalore

Beach – restaurant/pub with sand on the floor and DJ at night. Try the non-veg kebabs!

Paramount Hotel top floor – coffee shop/hookah bar that looks like a magical tree house.

I could never have been fully prepared for all that I experienced in India but I hope this essay is helpful to people who are thinking about a rotation at St. John's in Bangalore. I had a great time and I highly recommend it. Please feel free to contact me with questions: NOCKL001@umn.edu





