

Niina Pylkki
439037
Tampere University
Faculty of Medicine and Health Technology

Travel report

Global Public Health Intensive course in Manipal, India

I was among the lucky ones to get along with eleven others to the ten days Global Public Health Intensive course in Manipal, India in February 2020. Four of us were from the MET faculty and eight from the SOC faculty. The experience is hard to describe as awesome as it was but I will try.



Before the trip:

The choice of whether to join the course was made in December, so there wasn't much time for arrangements. We undertook to do the assignments given in advance and to attend a very informative briefing where two Indian students told us about their home country. This provided a great kick-start for the trip.

We made a written report on the topic of the course, which we had to complete after field visits. However, it had to be naturally related within the course. For the report, we had received a lot of written material from the University of Manipal about health programs in India. Choosing my own topic was perhaps the most difficult thing, but I decided to choose a topic that I am really interested. My topic dealt with neonatal mortality in India. The topic had to be approved by the teacher.

For the trip to India, we needed vaccinations from which we got good information as soon as the information about getting into the course came. Recipes for vaccinations were nicely arranged through student health care. The vaccinations we paid for ourselves. Travel insurance had to be taken for the course. Visas as well as enrollment at the University of Manipal were the most demanding tasks as the completion of the electronic forms was slow and required several forms from the school including a language proficiency test.

A student coordinator had been selected from among us who could be contacted quickly with a whatsapp message. The teachers and the course coordinator were also easily contacted when there were any questions.

Financing of the course:

I had to apply for a short-term mobility grant from the university and faculty approval. In the case of grants, it was good to note that the grant is also counted as income and can therefore affect tax revenues. The grant was used to cover most of the costs, like flights. We flew three different flights in both directions. It was undeniably quite numb. On our return we were in Delhi for one night at the hotel, because we had an early flight back to Finland. The hotel was really cheap and also the quality was like that. Really, the hotel was really grumpy but yes, I was able to stay there for one night. There was not much personal charge left for the trip. About 150€, but I personally did not live on campus. I stayed with another student in the same room in a really nice hotel near in campus. This was a little more expensive, but on the other hand the hotel price also includes breakfast and dinner. All meals of the day were served also on campus so we ate lunch on campus and it was really tasty every day. As all meals were pre-paid, I didn't have to spend any extra money for food.

Study trip to Manipal

The course was worth (5 ECTS). We had a full program of six days related to our interesting report topic. We also had lectures which provided much needed pre-information for field visits. There were two field visits every day. It was really inspiring to get to see Indian health centers and other places to visit like pasteurization plant, malaria center, rural maternity and child welfare center. We also visited a water treatment plant and it was great to see how this "water machinery" works in a developing country.

For me, the Anganwadi center, which was like a kindergarden, and the joy of the children there was a great experience and it remained in my mind. On the other hand, a visit to an urban slum opened my eyes to real poverty. When people have nothing and yet they wanted to tell us about their lives. Especially raising children in those conditions left a big mark on me.

Local professors also arranged visits for a few of interested people, for example, I got to see how learning visits are organized for children in the Faculty of Science, where they have done some project that they present to others. University students organize these visits for children. I also got to get acquainted with the new technology in the university laboratory and a local professor offered an internship place there, so new opportunities for the future could have been found there as well.



Primary Health Centre, Hirabettu

Delivery room



Primary school students introduced the Korona virus with an extra visit at the Faculty of Life Science and on the second extra visit I got to see how orthopedic prostheses are made with 3D technology

Campus area

There was a magnificent museum of anatomy and pathology in the campus, whose exhibition was amazing. I will never in my life again see such a museum with a huge collection of real people and different tissues in formalin. The place was stunning.

The campus had also a library and canteen and there were many campus restaurants nearby where you could buy all kinds of food.

The campus area also had a sports hall, a swimming pool and a really big park area with a football field and wonderful nature trails for walking or hiking. The area was also a really great place for an "end point" with breathtaking views. In the park, monkeys jumped on trees that were already really exotic. The campus area felt safe but "safety things" there should be taken care of and it is not worth moving for women alone there. In the area you could move around there either on foot or on fast rickshaw moped rides that were both fun and cheap.

On more thing on campus.. for me it was exotic when the cows walked along campus and in the middle of the road, anytime, anywhere. Quite many pictures of cows were taken.

Other things worth mentioning:

The weather was really hot in Manipal, luckily we were in February so the heat was tolerable. I didn't need a cardigan or anything like that at all.

The dress code.. before the trip, Manipal university had sent some "university rules" for us. The clothes had to be conservative and the women had to wear over-the-knee clothes and the shoulders were not polite to show. I packed light clothes that were as requested and appropriate. However, I noticed that the rule was not strictly followed among the students there. As a tip for women, it's not worth taking a big pile of clothes from Finland, you can find really beautiful clothes there. I actually bought a few local long tunic "kurta"'s. Speaking of shopping.. Manipal was really cheap!

The food was really good and vegetarian food was available everywhere. Admittedly, I didn't eat a salad for ten days for fear of diarrhea and it worked because I didn't get sick of anything during the entire trip. And bottle of water was always present, I don't know how much I drank water during the trip but a lot.

Places worth visiting

In addition to “end point”, on the first day we visited St. Mary’s Islands, a wonderful place, also known as Coconut Island, where we traveled by boat. I also got to swim in the Arabian Sea. This was a great day that we crowned by eating together in a nice restaurant.

We also visited the Krishna Temple and it was definitely worth the experience and almost compulsory visit, once I had come this far.



Cow in the middle of the road, beautiful “end point” view and my Indian style with my new “kurta”

After the trip:

Writing the report was rewarding because the subject was self-selected and of particular interest. We had also received so much more information from the field visits that the report included more information than would have been needed. As the coronavirus had confused the entire state and the restrictions had come into force, we were unable to hold the seminar we had so much hoped for in Tampere. The closing-seminar presentation was carried out via zoom meeting.

The main points of learning

In addition to field visits, lectures, and interviews with local doctors and nurses, the presentation of the seminar to Indian students was exciting but at the same time the interaction in different cultures students provided a lot of information about their traditions and customs. Questions about Finnish health care opened my eyes to how well our social- and health care system works and serves everyone in here, regardless of socio-economic status. During the field visits, I got to experience and feel and listen to the information in a real environment and among the real experts working there. I got a broader picture of the subject than just reading. Field visits and study make the concepts even more memorable. I was able to build cultural understanding and tolerance, expose myself outside of my own world, and see it more broadly. The old saying “you have to go far to see nearby” is true.

The benefits of a study trip

First benefits is that this study trip increased my motivation to study. A study abroad period increases my competitiveness in the job market. It allows me to show future and current employers that I have an open mind, ingenuity and a willingness to adapt to a different environment

I will include the course as part of my degree and I think this kind of internship abroad looks good on my CV. Increasing language skills and getting to know the Indian health system as well as Indian culture and general customs will definitely help me to outline the challenges of global health in a developing country. In addition, the course brought the desired variation to science studies and I was able to experience the benefits of multidisciplinary studies.