

Student report

TUMexchange – Indian Institute of Technology Madras

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Preparation



Figure 1: Entry Gate IIT Madras

I completed my semester abroad at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IITM) in Chennai, India. Before commencing my exchange, I did my research on India and this is what I initially found out. The city of Chennai, also known by its former name Madras, had awoken my interest in different ways. Being the fourth largest city in India with more than 7 million inhabitants, and with one-third of India's automobile industry located in North Madras, Chennai had deeply impressed me. As an undergraduate student in Mechanical Engineering, this manufacturing center provided an interesting look into the engineering world in different countries. It also has impactful nature, with Marina Beach, one of the longest natural urban beaches in the world.

However, the major factor for choosing this destination was without doubt the mixture of both, modern and traditional values. Ever since I watched the movie *The Life of Pi* I had sensed a profound admiration for Hinduism and their way of life. The film depicts a tolerant approach to every person with their own beliefs, showing that we can all coexist together and learn from each other. It was a magnificent occasion for me to discover and learn more about the most common religion in India, whilst visiting the beautiful temples such as the Kapaleeswarar Temple built by Pallavas in the 7th Century or the Ekambareswarar Temple dedicated to several Hindu Gods such as Ganesha, Vishnu, Shakthi or Surya.

The IITM aroused my interest on an academic level, because it is ranked as the best engineering institute in India. The Department of Aerospace Engineering has especially gained world-wide attention due to its perfect balance between teaching, research and industry interaction. The most astonishing trait of this university to me, were the research areas such as the MAV's and Helicopter simulations and the Combustion Driven Shock Tube/Shock Tunnel from the Aerodynamics Group - Ranjith M. PhD, Florida Atlantic University - or the research on Supersonic Combustion and Fuel Injection Strategies of the Propulsion Group - Dr. Amit Kumar PhD, Western Reserve University. Being part of this Department, was a great opportunity for me to study in an environment where the thirst for knowledge and the willingness to learn and discover new horizons in terms of technology is unmatched.

All in all, I considered that studying in this new atmosphere would provide me with new, challenging and extensive knowledge to prepare me in an ideal and matchless manner in succeeding to graduate in Mechanical Engineering and continue my studies as an Aerospace Engineer.

Studies at host university

The TUM Exchange program, which gave me the opportunity to go to study abroad, has the following application procedure: Firstly, an internal application via TUM Global & Alumni Office and furthermore, an external application at the partner university. All these important information's can be read under the TUM Exchange official website (<https://www.international.tum.de/en/go-international/study/study-stays-worldwide-with-tumexchange/>). There you will find all the eligibility criteria and opportunities, including language requirements.

Normally, each university has its own semester begin and semester end dates. So that there may be difficulties due to possible differences in the semester begin and end. In my case, the winter semester at TUM starts in October and ends in March. At IIT Madras that corresponding semester begins in July and ends in December.

Therefore, I had to organize myself accordingly: In the semester before leaving for India I could not do any exams due to the date differences, so instead I decided to do my bachelor's Thesis and finish in July right before heading to India. This turned out to be a great idea and might help you to organize yourself. You might want to do the same or do an internship to take advantage of the date differences.

Regarding the Learning Agreement, I strongly recommend doing it. Firstly, a Learning Agreement, is an official document that states what subjects you are going to complete in your partner university, which will later on be recognized (Academic Recognition) by your home university. In some cases, it is difficult to find information on the subjects that are being offered in the partner university. But I strongly recommend to do your research well (maybe ask some other students that have done the exchange semester in the same partner university as your target university) and find out as much information on the subjects being offered there. Then, you will have to contact the professor of a similar subject in your home university and show him the syllabus of the subject being taught in the partner university. Furthermore, the professor has to agree to recognize this subject.

Studying at TUM, I have been told that professors here usually do not recognize any subjects. However, it really depends on the professor, the subject and the partner university. There is a list of subjects and their corresponding partner universities (PDF document) that have already been recognized. You will be able to receive the academic recognition of this limited number of subjects usually without a problem.

Personally, I have opted for a different alternative. I have done the so-called *Ergänzungsfächer* abroad. Studying Mechanical Engineering you will get the academic recognition for an *Ergänzungsfach* for any subject completed abroad in the domain of Mechanical Engineering that has at least a scope of 3 ECTS.

Regarding the buddy program, my partner university paired every exchange student with a buddy for himself. This was extremely helpful – especially in the beginning – to help you settle in and complete all the bureaucratic paperwork. I strongly recommend, to take advantage of the buddy program if available.

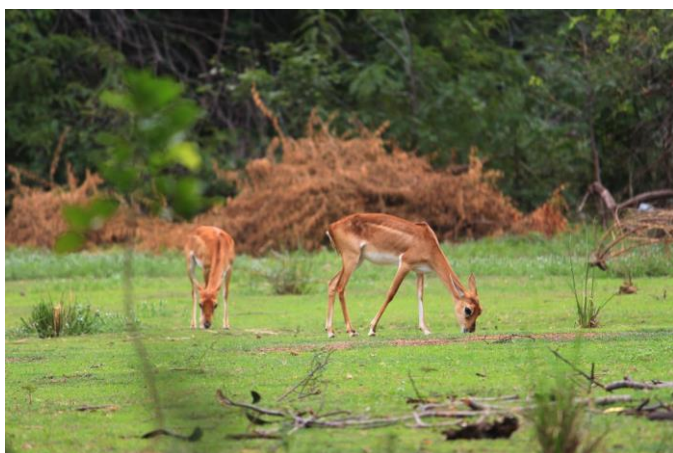


Figure 2: Wild life on Campus.



Figure 3: Wild life on Campus.

Accommodations abroad

At IIT Madras all students, staff and workers live on campus. As an exchange student, you will be provided accommodation in any one of the hostels on payment basis (approx. Rs. 19,000/- per semester). You have to bear the normal living expenses, food expenses (approx. Rs. 100 per day in the hostel mess) and travel expenses. No tuition fee will be levied.



Figure 4: Bhadra Hostel

I was allocated in the Bhadra Hostel. Obviously, everything was a bit different than what I was used to in Munich. But I considered everything as part of the experience of living abroad and embraced it. The rooms are usually very small, but since I spend most of my time outdoors that did not end up being a problem. I also decorated my room with a lot of pictures and some little souvenirs I kept on collecting from my trips. That made my room feel like home after a couple of weeks on campus. If I would go on trip during a long weekend, arriving back to campus, to your own room, was a nice feeling, almost as arriving back home.



Figure 5: Typical Room at IIT Madras

Everyday life and leisure

Apart from doing assignments, group projects and studying, I also had a lot of free time. I would mostly hang around with my friends from campus. We were more or less 70 international students from all over the world and it was great to make some new friendships. We would mostly hang around together, play music together, explore the city and its surroundings, discover new places to have food, do a lot of sports, learn new languages and all of that was great fun. The people I have met there are truly special, and I am sure that I will keep in touch with many of them.

I had also the chance and luck to make new friendships with local people studying at IIT Madras. It was very peculiar because many local students are not from Chennai or even Tamil Nadu, but they come from all over parts of India. For most of them living in Chennai was also a completely new experience and it would be very fun to discover new places of interest with them. Most of them were very friendly and willing to help absolutely all the time.

That has been one of the aspects I have liked most about my experience in India. How well I have been treated by its people. A few of us international students had the chance to visit the homes of the local students, eat with their families their home-made food, listen to their music and embrace their culture and traditions. For me, that was one of the most exciting moments of my stay in India, where I came to understand many things about the Indian culture and fell in love with many of its flavor's and traditions.

Intercultural experiences

Regarding my intercultural contact with India and its culture, I must say that these cross-cultural experiences have been my most valuable gain in sense of personal growth. As I have already mentioned, I fell in love with Indian culture. India is a huge country – many refer to it as a subcontinent – with an impressive diversity. The local people often joke and tell you that every 20km Indian culture varies: the food changes, the typical clothes change, the languages and dialects change, etc. Even though 20km may seem as an exaggeration, the diversity of India is undeniable. Despite this plurality all the local people I have met and talked to, are very proud of belonging to the same nation and feel very bonded. They respect and embrace each other's traditions, even though they might not share the same beliefs. For me, this was a lesson of tolerance and mutual respect, the foundation of co-existence. Furthermore, another aspect that surprised me a lot, was the friendliness and willingness to help of Indian people. Throughout my stay in India, I have been treated very well. Whenever I arrived at a new place, I would know that I could always ask for advice or directions to the local people. Sometimes the language was a difficulty, but eventually you would always understand each other. Sometimes local people would be so eager to help, that if you would ask them for directions, they would give you a heading, without having a clue where the place really was.

In this sense, travelling around India was very fun and very cheap. I would always travel with a group of friends from my campus and I sincerely have not had any negative experience worth telling. I have had a great time discovering many places in India – sometimes more touristic and sometimes less touristic and more authentic – and discovering new dishes and new flavors. India has a lot to offer: a huge variety of dishes, historic cities, paradise-like beaches, beautiful mountains and landscapes, etc. As you can see, the variety of adventures one can live in India is enormous.

Practical Tipps

Regarding the practical issues you may want to hear some experiences on visa, vaccinations, access to money, etc. Firstly, when applying for your Indian visa, you must take into account where you are officially registered. In case that you are registered in Munich, you can apply for your Indian Visa in the IVS Europe GmbH (all information under <http://ivs-germany.com/>). However, in my case, I am officially registered in Bonn (North Rhine-Westphalia), so that I had to apply for my visa in Frankfurt (Indo German Consultancy Services; all information under https://www.igcsvisa.de/igcs_english/index.php). I have also met people that got an e-Visa. However, I personally have not had any experience with this kind of visa.

Regarding the vaccinations, I strongly recommend taking care of this issue more or less six months before your stay abroad, since some vaccinations have to be injected twice with a certain period of time in between. I also recommend the *LMU Tropeninstitut* in Munich (*Reise- und Impfberatung* under http://www.klinikum.uni-muenchen.de/Abteilung-fuer-Infektions-und-Tropenmedizin/de/30_Reise_impfberatung/index.html). Personally, I found the institute very professional and their advice very helpful.

Furthermore, if you are wondering what credit card I used in India, I am glad to tell you, that I opened a bank account in the DKB and got a new credit card for free. With this new credit card, I was able to pay everywhere and withdraw money in many ATM's with no extra charges. I would also recommend this bank instiution, because it worked fine with me. However, I must say I ended up having some troubles to withdraw money from certain ATM's. All in all, I was very happy with my bank account.

Intercultural Seminars at TUM before mobility

I joined a short seminar on the IIT Bombay before my stay abroad. Since all the IIT's in India operate very similarly it was very helpful. You can read and do your research on the places you want to go but being able to talk to someone that comes from the place where you want to go is priceless. You could ask every question that crossed your mind and the people that held the seminar (a man and a woman from the Office of International Relations IIT Bombay) were very friendly and helpful. My advice is to take advantage of any seminar or workshop you can find related to your stay abroad, because it will be much easier to organize yourself and prepare yourself mentally for what is coming.

Conclusion

Answering the question: What would you take with you from Germany? My advice, or to put it another way, my challenge would be, to only take the essentials with you (mosquito repellent, medicines, etc.) and leave the rest. You will learn, how little you really need to live life to the fullest. It will also help you to dive deeper into the culture and embrace its traditions. Many activities throughout our day-to-day life are done differently in India and I would recommend you, to have a very open mind and try out as many new things as you can.

To conclude this report, I would like to shortly frame my best and worst experiences.

Personally, as I have already mentioned I did not have any bad experiences worth to mention. The only thing that comes to my mind, when people ask me about negative aspects of my exchange semester, is the long-distance relationship I had to have during my stay abroad. Of course, this is a very personal topic and will not go into further details.

However, I had plenty of great experiences. Starting with life on campus, I really enjoyed the campus style of life. All the students would live together and that created a very special bond between some of us. I really enjoyed my free time with them, practicing sports or playing music or simply hanging around. On the other hand, travelling around India has also been an amazing experience. Out of all the places I have had the chance to visit, my greatest experiences were discovering Hampi, sleeping in the desert in Jaisalmer and visiting the Taj Mahal in Agra.



Figure 6: The favorite mode of transport on campus among students is by bicycle.



Figure 7 : Wild life on Campus.