

BayIND Report Summer School

The three-week Summer School of the Bavarian-Indian Centre in Hof began with our individual journeys to the Indian IT and start-up hub of Bangalore on the 24th and 25th of August. This city would be our longest stopover of the Summer School, with one week spent at the small Urban Nest Hotel, our retreat for these exciting days. Our first day of the programme began with one of the highlights of the entire trip: a visit to a Sikh place of worship, the Gurdwara. There, we not only observed a service with singing and prayer but also visited the kitchen where lunch was prepared in huge pots by volunteers. We were deeply impressed by the concept that everyone, regardless of their origin or religion, receives a hot meal free of charge at this place of faith.

As the week started with a public holiday (Krishna Janmashtami), and the university was therefore closed, we continued our programme with a visit to the German Consulate General in Bangalore. Here, we gained valuable insights into the tasks of a consulate, the working conditions of the Foreign Office, and personal impressions of Bangalore. This eventful day was perfectly rounded off with a cooking class, where we prepared a three-course meal featuring both vegetarian and non-vegetarian versions of the main course. We learned a lot about different spices and their healing properties.

The next morning, our project work began at Ramaiah University of Applied Sciences, where we were formally welcomed by the Vice Dean of the Faculty of Management and Commerce. After an extensive campus tour, we were divided into four different project groups, each assigned to work on a different aspect of sustainability and present a product pitch at the end of the week. The groups, a mix of German and Indian students, allowed us to quickly interact with Indian students and understand their perspectives on various topics. Additional input came from daily expert lectures by faculty members. For many of us, the week was particularly enlightening as the cultural differences in our approaches to time, planning, work methods, and stress management became apparent. We were able to reflect on how our own cultural backgrounds might occasionally pose challenges to others. However, hospitality of the Indian students made us forget any minor issues. Their curiosity and interest in us and our lives in Germany sparked great conversations, as well as fun evenings spent at bars and playing sports in Bangalore.

Three times a week, we started the day at 7 a.m. with yoga sessions, which were highly rewarding despite the early start. So, there were plenty of opportunities to relax alongside our project work. On the final evening of our project, our pitches—successful to varying degrees—were celebrated with a farewell party, complete with a Bollywood dance performance (some of us even joined in), and we received university merchandise as a memento.

After this action-packed week, our next stop was Mysore, a city about three hours from Bangalore. The journey there began with a stark contrast: although Mysore, with its 800,000 inhabitants, is far from small, yet it felt peaceful and quite compared to Bangalore. The streets and markets of Mysore were lively and colorful, exactly how we had imagined India. We experienced our first taste of an Indian market, which overwhelmed us with stalls selling

incense, natural dyes, exotic spices, coconuts, and bananas. A special highlight was the visit to the magnificent Mysore Palace in the afternoon. We were in awe of its architecture, from the intricate tiles to the lavishly decorated ceilings. As the evening became darker, the palace was illuminated, accompanied by a procession of elephants—an absolutely breathtaking scene! The next day, we visited the Infosys Campus, which felt like a completely different world. With wide, empty streets and buildings resembling the Pantheon in Athens, we felt far removed from the hustle and bustle of Indian city life. On the way back, we stopped at a centuries-old temple, and Akshay shared fascinating stories about the various gods, bringing Indian mythology to life for us.

Back in Bangalore, we had company visits to Kronos from Regensburg, the renowned Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB), and Siemens Healthineers. During these visits, we were introduced to the concept of 'Jugaad'—the typical Indian knack for finding creative solutions to everyday problems. This exchange summarized our experiences in India so far.

The next day, a train journey to Chennai was scheduled, but due to a train delay, we spontaneously had to fly with a group of 27 people—something we didn't know was possible! Upon arrival in Chennai, we were greeted by hot, humid weather, with temperatures exceeding 30°C and high humidity levels, leaving us drenched in sweat. That evening, we had the chance to speak with an expat about her day-to-day working life in Chennai and the changes India has undergone over the past 20 years. Her insights as a German woman living in India were particularly fascinating.

In Chennai, we visited the IIT-Madras campus, the top engineering university in the country. With great pride, we were told that German engineers were involved in its construction.. The start of the Ganesha Chaturthi festivities was particularly impressive, with large statues of the elephant-headed god Ganesha lining the streets. On this day, we also explored the city with an Indian architect, admiring old art deco houses and visiting authentic, less affluent neighborhoods. The following day, we toured the stunning UNESCO World Heritage temples in Mahabalipuram and then enjoyed some time relaxing on the nearby beach.

Early the next morning, we set off for Kochi, where a winding bus ride took us into the lush, forested mountains. On the way, we stopped at a waterfall and later switched to minibuses, as the road to our hotel was steep and adventurous. The hotel itself was gorgeous, featuring an infinity pool and a lounge with table tennis and other games—perfect for relaxation. In Munnar, famous for its tea, we hiked through tea plantations and visited a tea factory (we are now all mini tea experts!) and a spice garden, where the healing powers of Ayurvedic plants were explained to us. Munnar truly was a wonderful place to stay, offering an escape not only from the hustle and bustle of Indian cities but also from the heat.

Our final stop was Kochi, where we stayed in a lovely hotel with a courtyard pool. We spent much of our time together by the pool, playing water polo and werewolf, enjoying our last few days as a group. A highlight was the backwater tour in the south of the city, where we sailed on a traditional houseboat through picturesque water channels, both natural and man-made, and enjoyed lunch on board. We concluded with a visit to a traditional theatre, where the

elaborate costumes left a lasting impression. In the evening, we had a small farewell party at the hotel, where we thanked Olga, Akshay, and Dimple for their wonderful company with a rewritten song, before saying our goodbyes.

The next day, most of the group departed, though some extended their trips with a few extra stops to explore more of the country or region.

This was undoubtedly a trip we will remember for the rest of our lives! The three weeks were incredibly enriching and intense. We made many friends and saw so many new things. The Summer School is the perfect way to immerse oneself in the country and its culture, especially if you want to explore more of India afterward. It's truly an opportunity to get to know one of the most fascinating, contrasting, and welcoming countries in the world.