Exploring India: Navigating the Pitfalls of Short Term Study Abroad
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An Amazing Trip of Discovery to India

• March 11 – 21, 2016: Kolkata, Delhi and Agra

• 8 weeks of study prior to departure, including great lectures by professors from Syracuse University, Brandies, Univ. of Calcutta and SUNY Oswego at OCC.

• 20 students with 2 faculty.

• Two course options:
  • The History of India Since 1857. – Prof. Richard McLain
  • Art History II – Prof. Chris Kukenberger

• Excellent support from Calcutta Research Group and Director Prof. Paula Banerjee hosted.
Not taking precautions regarding restaurant selections and food hygiene.

Food poisoning, a summer threat

AMOCA LAXMI BUKKAR HYDERABAD

Safe food practices are vital all year round. Particularly care should be taken in summer when risks of food poisoning are high. Taking extreme precautions while eating outside food would lessen instances of food poisoning, observed doctors.

On Tuesday, 30 people fell ill following suspected case of food poisoning after consuming burgers and pizzas at a city bakery in Huzur Saba Nagar. Food inspectors in the city confirmed that it was a food poisoning case based on the report obtained from state laboratory. In this back drop, city-based doctors have given some useful tips to avoid instances of food poisoning in this scorching summer.

General physician Praveen Koppula said, “Food poisoning is an illness caused by eating contaminated food. Infectious organisms including various bacteria, viruses and parasites or their toxins are the most common causes of food poisoning.”

Common bacteria like E Coli, Salmonella and Bacillus Cereus are responsible for food contamination. These bacteria are caused due to improperly baked or cooked food, also food that has been stored and over heated, he said.

“The common symptoms of food poisoning include severe diarrhea for more than three days, vomiting, nausea, severe abdominal cramping, oral temperatures higher than 100.5 F, difficulty in speaking, tummy swelling food and double vision that start after hours of eating contaminated food.”

Eating stored food (presenting food for long time in cooker) and not cleaning hands or using unclean water in cooking can result in food poisoning. “Avoiding outside food in eateries, outlets, bakeries, pani puri thali etc and eating hygienic food, drinking only filtered water will be healthy in the summer season”, said Praveen.

General physician at Care hospitals, Ather Pasha said that cross contamination of foods can be a cause of food poisoning. “While shopping, preparing food or storing food, keep raw meat, poultry, fish and shellfish away from other foods. This prevents cross-contamination.”

He emphasised the importance of cooking food at a safe temperature. “The best way to tell if foods are cooked to a safe temperature is to use a food thermometer. You can kill harmful organisms in most foods by cooking them to the right temperature.”

Ground beef should be cooked to 160 F (71.1 C), while steaks and roasts should be cooked to at least 145 F (62.8 C). Pork needs to be cooked to at least 160 F (71.1 C), and chicken and turkey need to be cooked to 165 F (73.9 C). Fish is generally well cooked at 145 F (62.8 C).

Following labels on food packaging can help in understanding the way food should be consumed. “These labels provide information about when to use the food and how to store it that helps in managing food locally,” said Ather Pasha.

One has to be careful and make smart restaurant choices if he/she is eating outside. Note the general cleanliness of the facility and staff. If you aren’t confident that conditions are sanitary, leave.
Not warning participants about sanitary conditions and toilet (often no paper/or soap)
Not preparing students in advance for the sociological and historical context of what they will be seeing

Victoria Memorial, Kolkata
Not picking up on cues when interacting with the opposite gender

• Working out appropriate ways of interacting across genders is tricky! Due to the diversity of the population, there’s no easy “one size fits all” guide of how to act appropriately.

• Ask people you trust (i.e. program staff, host families, classmates, friends) of the same gender what is appropriate.
Taking photos without permission

- Crucial to be respectful of the culture you are in while taking photos.

- Inappropriate to take a photograph of people in India without their permission, even if it’s done “secretly” or without the subject knowing the picture is being taken.

- Though people in India practice religion differently and the concept of modesty is a part of Hindu and Islam.

- Stranger capturing and keeping an image of them can be perceived as a violation of the subject’s modesty and privacy.

- Distant crowd scenes that do not focus on an individual or specific group, landscapes, or pictures of objects are appropriate.

Left, view from Taj Mahal
Not finding the balance between being respectful and remaining true to yourself when it comes to clothing choices

• Daunting task to figure out what to wear while in India, especially for women. However, the most important element of dressing appropriately is finding the balance between being respectful and remaining true to yourself, and understanding the impact of the choices that you make.

• Appropriate in most situations (and recommended) for women to cover their legs up to at least mid-calf, keep their shoulders covered, and avoid plunging necklines. Men have more flexibility. No hard and fast rules though; club attire or bathing suits can be controversial in India.

• Be true to yourself; understand the image you are reflecting through your attire, and respect how what you wear may affect your image, and your program.

• Lastly, if you do not typically wear a headscarf at home, it is best not to wear one in India.
Church Street Cemetery, Kolkata
Making assumptions and missing out on the most beautiful part of India: the nation’s rich diversity.

- Incredibly diverse nation linguistically, culturally. Often very difficult to understand the layers of the Indian identity.

- Void sweeping generalizations about Indians based on the people you meet.

- If you spend most of your time studying in Delhi, your understanding of what it means to be India may be completely different than if you spent that time Kolkata or rural Punjab.

- By meeting and interacting with people from different backgrounds, generations, education level, linguistic identities, socio-economic level, and regions, a picture of a complicated and layered society with a real richness and multiple cultures will begin to emerge.

- These are part of what makes India such a beautiful transformative place to study abroad.

*St. John’s Church, Kolkata (Original Anglican Cathedral)*
Dakshineswar Kali Temple, Kolkata
Alternative Pedagogical Approaches

Red Fort, Delhi
Who Teaches—Us or Them?

- Student Art Projects
- Student Presentations at sites and on bus journeys
- Student interactions (shopping, exploring night life, interaction with locals and CRG’s amazing staff and Professor Paula Banerjee)

Humayun's Tomb, Delhi
Qutb Minar
Pitfall we did **not** avoid

- Travel of 28+ hours and exhaustion upon arrival.
  - Lack of ability to fully appreciate the Indian experience.
- Stomach bugs for everyone in Delhi.
- Issues of females being targeted or harassed by males (no major incidents).
Overall, great planning equaled an amazing trip of exploration and discovery for our community college population!

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