Introduction

For my exchange, I attended the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay in Mumbai India. I major in computing science, and it was my third year at SFU. My term started in the middle of July and ended at the beginning of December.

Preparation for exchange

Most information I needed was provided by SFU and IITB, and I was easily able to access other valuable information via the internet. I researched courses on the university’s website and decided to take 2 courses that are almost identical to SFU courses, and one course that was only offered as a grad course at SFU. For packing, make sure that you got all the important documents with you. Otherwise, it’s not a big deal if you forget something because you can acquire most things there. I booked my flight tickets on google flights, and it was straightforward. You can coordinate with IITB to get someone to pick you up at the Mumbai airport. Often local shops and restaurants will only accept cash. Also, there is a limit to how much cash you can withdraw from ATMs each day, so make sure to bring enough cash so that you can pay registration fees and such at the beginning. Upper-class shops/restaurants will often support credit card. Cost of living in India is very cheap compared to Canada. I believe I paid around $400 per month for my dorm, with all meals included. When you buy western products, you often pay western prices, but generally, you can get by spending very little money.

During Exchange

Arriving at the school and joining the orientation was very straightforward. You have to make sure that you have the right documents to get into university grounds since without it you cannot get in. As you arrive on campus, the staff at the university will guide you through the process of settling in. I was accommodated at the dormitory of the university. The dorms were separated by gender, and most exchange students were in the same building together. We each get a small, simple room with a bed, desk, closet, and a window with a view. It was comfortable for India standards, and there were cleaners who offer to clean your room twice a month. Showers and bathrooms are shared amongst the students on the floor. The showers did not provide warm water, but this was not a problem since it was very warm in Mumbai. There is no kitchen in the dorms, but there is a mess which provides four meals every day, with no limit on how much you take. There is a laundry room where you can pay for laundry service for a reasonable fee. A gym, a social area and a study space are also at the dorm. My dorm was far away from the entrance of the university(about 30min on foot), but there are tuk-tuks(small taxis) which can take you to the gate for a reasonable price. The style of classes was similar to that of SFU’s. Standard lectures, quizzes, assignments, and exams. It seemed like some of my classes was scaled when it was graded. The season I visited Mumbai(July to Dec) was quite warm, so I spent most of my days in t-shirts, shorts and sandals. July/August is the monsoon season, which has very strong but often short bursts of rain. The city’s pollution level was always high,
and it was noticeable in my lungs. I also saw many people coughing all over the city. The campus is probably one of the least polluted areas in the city since it's next to two large lakes and has a lot of greenery. Mumbai is a huge city, so there are endless places to visit. Religious/sacred places are generally open to tourists as long as you are respectful and follow their rules. In the city, there are many scammers who will try to take advantage of you, but there are others who are very kind and will help you when you need it. It is best to travel in groups to be safe. Often I will spend a whole day exploring a neighbourhood. There are many festivals in Mumbai, which I definitely recommend people to join. I often ate local food because it is much cheaper(and more interesting) than the “westernized” restaurants. Most of the exchange students had stomach problems for the first couple of weeks, but most of our stomachs adjusted as time passed. Indian Culture is completely different from Canadian culture. The differences cannot be summarized in this report, but make sure to be respectful since Indians are often religious and traditional people. On-campus, people will treat you more nicely than in the city. There are many animals(bulls, monkeys, goals) on campus and in the city, but they are generally safe if you don’t bother them. There are many extracurricular activities and events you can join on campus. I once joined a half-marathon which was very memorable. I visited Goa on a long weekend, and I highly recommend students to visit. It was a really nice break from the chaotic city.

Reflection After Exchange

When first arriving in the country, I was very overwhelmed. In the first week, I regretted my choice of coming to India. It was quite a shock in the beginning, but once I adjusted to the environment, it was not as bad as it first seemed. I learned that I have to go with the flow. There are so many things in India that will disturb you. How chaotic the city is, how much garbage there is in the rivers, and how many people are trying to scam you. If you start reacting to all of these things, there is no end. Of course, it is hurtful that people are trying to harm you by scamming you, but that’s just how it is, and there isn’t much a traveller can do to change things. For me, it was important to come at peace in the chaos and accept things as they are, even when things were wrong in my perspective.

I wish I knew how competitive IITB was. I found myself surrounded by Indian students who seemed a lot more capable than I, and I had to work very hard to keep up. I was not able to travel during the semester as much I thought, simply because I had to work extra hard to catch up with my classmates.

One of the exchange students from Germany accidentally got a tourist visa instead of a student visa. He was not able to attend the university and was forced to go back to his country. Be 100% sure that you get the student visa when you apply.
Festival in Mumbai