



Indian Impressions

By Roxana Nourouzi | July 9, 2009

My first exposure to Mumbai was exactly what you would imagine...crazy, random, chaotic and full of life!!!! On the way we drove through slums, saw cows on the side of the road, barefoot children, stores open at 11 pm and much more. The accommodations in Mumbai were comfortable. Nothing fancy but comfortable and I met three other interns, two from the US and one from Tokyo. My program coordinator let me know I would be spending the next day in Mumbai in which I would need to prepare for the rural location I would be going to on Tuesday.



Monday morning I woke up to a rain storm. It is monsoon season here so it rains hard everyday but it is still warm. The organization I went through has a internship program focused around film making and Bollywood. I had the opportunity to sit in and learn about this program and have to admit was a bit jealous of the stuff they get to do. Watch movies, meet with actors and directors, visit Bollywood sets etc. I was invited to a film premier in which I was really excited to attend but when I asked if I could push back my internship start date it was not a possibility. So sadly enough, I will miss the film premier but hopefully there will be other opportunities.

One of the highlights of the trip has been shopping in the market. Our housekeeper in Mumbai, who is from Southern India, took myself and the other girl from Tokyo shopping for Indian outfits called, salwar kameezes. I bought two outfits with matching bangles, scarves and waterproof sandals for pretty cheap. The best part was that the store keepers take your measurements right in the store and within minutes tailor the outfits to fit your body perfectly at no extra charge. It was also great to be with a local to help us navigate the shops and bargaining. I don't think we could have done it on our own. Even in Mumbai I found a lot of people don't speak English. I wish I had more time to explore Mumbai but I hope to return for a visit at some point soon to do the more touristy stuff.



Today I left Mumbai and took a three hour drive out to the village in which I will be working. The drive was absolutely beautiful as I got to see more of Mumbai as well as the countryside of the Maharashtra state including a charming little town called Lonavla which I want to go back and visit as well. Everything was so lush and green which I think is in part due to the monsoons. When I arrived in Rajgurunagar (the village I am in now) I went and met with the organization I will be working at called Chaitanya. The village is really small and quaint with NO foreigners (people

stare at me incessantly). I honestly cannot even describe in words the feeling of this town. Animals roam the streets. Men ride around on motorcycles with women with saris on the back. I am really excited about my work with the organization as well. I will start with site visits tomorrow.

The goal of Chaitanya is to build empowerment through women's self help groups. The government of India passed a law a few years ago indicating that if a group of 20 woman gather together then they are automatically eligible for a loan regardless of whether or not they have credit. This policy then gave way to Chaitanya to build a base for bringing rural poor women together to apply for these loans and then make their small businesses sustainable. The whole philosophy behind this is empowerment and community organizing and building which is really my passion. As far as work goes, I feel I am in the right place. I still have so much more to learn but am really excited about learning from both the rural woman and the amazing and intelligent woman who run the organization.