

Lily Marra
University of Washington
Rainforest Retreat, India
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Question Set #1

1. What are your initial impressions of the organization and an overview and thoughts about the kind of work you've started doing; how does the work match your expectations, how does it match your goals?

Rainforest Retreat is a truly magical place. What I have been impressed by is the level of passion each person here has for both their environment and work—those who live on site working on the farm, the other interns' enthusiasm, Sujata and Anurag's extensive knowledge about each variety of each plant and animal. So far, I have been learning the scientific aspects of farming, understanding the importance of eco-agriculture in our saturated society. My current work is actually pretty in-line with what I assumed I would be doing, though I am glad the site hosts are giving me real responsibilities so early on. Hopefully as I get to know the plantation, I will be able to identify native plants/animals and their contribution to the farm's ecosystem.

2. What stood out to you the most regarding your arrival?

Everyone has been so incredibly kind! I was surprised by how simple and easy it was to get from Bangalore to Madikeri, and how both those I met while on the road and my site hosts are committed to my comfortable transition to life in India.

3. What was your greatest anxiety prior to departing and how do you feel about that now that you have arrived?

I was worried about how I would be treated as both a woman and a foreigner in India, which is painted as a treacherous place to hold such identities. Though since arriving, I have noticed almost no difference in my usual treatment. People in Coorg have been nothing but kind and helpful. Perhaps when I travel to Dehli etc. I will notice my gender/country of origin more severely, though for now I am comfortable!

Question Set #2

1. How are things going at work now that you have settled in for a bit? How does this align with your professional goals that you set for yourself? What would you like to achieve in the remainder of your internship?

No day is the same here at Rainforest Retreat: the only thing I can count on being consistent is the time of meals (and the near hourly delicious chai breaks). I have really enjoyed leading treks to nearby ridges, rivers and sacred groves for guests. Being a tourist in my own way, I think I can give a unique perspective on the history and biodiversity in the area. Occasionally, when there are no guests, I will complete tasks in the farm or guesthouses. These tasks offer a bit more of a challenge.

Of course, parts of my professional goals included becoming comfortable in new settings. But after a day of coffee picking on the plantation and getting covered in a thousand ants (and a few leeches), or after scrubbing the moss and mud off of roof tiles for 2 days, there were some "dear god, why?" thoughts running through my hyperconscious mind. I am definitely adjusting to the often monotonous, labor-intensive work that women at Rainforest Retreat complete every day. That said, I am learning a lot about what it means to work on an organic

farm—the importance of a balanced scientific, spiritual and labor-focused mind, the commitment to ecology and biodiversity that inspires a few extra hours' work. I hope to strike this mindful balance in my work as I continue.

2. How are things going relative to your personal goals? In which areas have you made progress and where do you still have some room to expand? What do you want to make sure you address before you leave?

One big personal goal I had was to limit my tech/phone use while in India. My fellow interns have the same taste in TV shows as I do, so while I might not be limiting my intake of *The Office*, I am definitely less dependent throughout the day. I've been so busy and so excited by the extremely beautiful nature around me that my normal media habits are dissipating. I certainly feel a bit lost when the thunder and lightning causes power outages and the option to reach friends and family goes away, but for the most part I am happy with my progress! On another note, I do hope to learn some Kannada before I leave, so that I can communicate more clearly with many people I interact with every day.

3. How are things going relative to your cross-cultural goals? What kinds of experiences have stood out to you so far? What do you want to ensure to experience before you leave?

Coorg is a relatively isolated region in India—it's more likely to be a destination than a place you pass through. I do feel like I am gaining an understanding of Coorg customs and culture, but my exposure has been limited, considering I really only leave the Retreat once a week to head to Madikeri, the nearest town. I hope to speak to others in Coorg, visit other homestays or wildlife reserves and learn about other social and ecological constructs, because though I am becoming an expert in my tiny corner of the Western Ghats, I know I could expand my cultural knowledge.

Question Set #3

1. Describe a day in your life:

The great thing about my internship is that every day is different depending on the number of guests we have, the weather, the crops needing attention, the projects throughout the plantation. I usually lead guests on a trek after breakfast, then spend the time between lunch and tea, and between tea and dinner, either working on my own research or on various projects (painting, watering, etc). I love taking the treks, explaining about the forest ecosystem and local environment never feels like work. If I am spending time doing my own research/reading I like to walk to a nearby field or green space and explore. My work-life balance is steady—considering I live where I work I have been surprised that I haven't felt trapped. The other interns and I make a point to relax after 5pm—go on a walk, watch an episode of *Star Trek* (some things are universal), do some quick shopping in Madikeri or the likes.

2. Housing:

I have my own room at the office of Rainforest Retreat, with two other female interns in the room next door. Living onsite doesn't feel too suffocating, since the plantation is large enough that there is always a place to escape to. For my site, there isn't an option to live elsewhere, so I would just suggest bringing a few things from home to make the simple space more familiar.

3. Finances:

I only leave my site about once a week, so I have spent close to nothing since arriving in India! My sister just visited and we took a trip south, where I decided to spend some extra money on taxis instead of buses (which I would suggest, considering it takes ten times longer than one would expect to get anywhere...). When you stay at a

guesthouse or homestay, the costs usually include meals, so it is a really excellent way to travel on a budget (and the food is delicious!). India is affordable for students from the US, considering our dollar goes so far.

4. Travel and Transportation:

As I mentioned, I have taken taxis to places more than 15 km away, because it takes a spectacular amount of time to get anywhere. Heading into Madikeri for shopping, dinner or errands I take an autorickshaw. I love autos! For shorter distances they are affordable and pretty fun. I am glad we have our trusted drivers who charge fairly, as I am sure once I am traveling in other cities I will have to negotiate for a just price. That does contribute to my anxiousness about traveling after I leave: that I have such trustworthy and kind people around my onsite, I haven't had to be on my guard at all! I know my experience and recommendations will change when I am faced with the world outside my jungle valley.

For students in Coorg, I would definitely suggest heading to Nagarhole National Park for a jungle safari. My sister and I went and saw elephants, tigers, bears, a leopard—it was amazing and pretty affordable! I'd also suggest going down to Kerala. Kannur is a relatively short trip and the state (being communist) is totally different than Karnataka.

Question Set #4

1. Professional Learning: Describe the workplace culture at your host organization. How does your personal cultural lens work within the culture of your host organization? What parts of your work have you enjoyed the most? Is there any part of your work that you find particularly challenging? Describe a professional accomplishment that you are proud of - be specific.

My workplace is a traditional plantation structure, with two landowners overseeing three labor-minded families who live on-site, along with one manager and three interns (myself included). I have never worked on a site that was so, for lack of a better word, feudal, and it is sometimes challenging to adapt to such a system. Sometimes Rainforest Retreat feels like a family, a real community, and sometimes it can feel excessively hierarchal with the laborers perhaps overly muted.

I've also noticed that tradition and routine here is extremely important and rigid. For the first month, I tried doing some routines differently--cutting the pineapple in star shape, allowing guests to turn the Wi-Fi on and off themselves - best to not get too creative. That is one of the most challenging things here, is finding the balance between providing my point of view and individuality while still complying by the norms of the workplace. I have decided not to try to change routines in the kitchen or on the farm, but sometimes do try to stretch myself when it comes to guesthouse work and offer suggestions as to how to change or improve operations.

An accomplishment I've had that relates to this specifically was when I suggested we give a presentation on the history and cultural significance of one of our trek sites before we set off on the trek with guests. This suggestion turned into me developing an essay and PowerPoint on the site (a sacred grove, which is a religious site that is used to protect forestland), which I found really engaged guests and excited them for the walk.

2. Cross Cultural Learning: Describe an event where you misunderstood something due to cultural differences. What did you do? What would you do next time?

All of my days are essentially filled with cultural misunderstandings, seeing as the four women I work with on the farm and in the kitchen speak only Kannada. Usually the misunderstandings are minor language problems: I'll cut the carrots the wrong way or hand someone a knife instead of a spoon, and usually I just endure the ridicule and

laugh along! A bigger cultural difference occurred when I attended a neighbor's Pooja (Hindu prayer ritual) with my fellow interns. One intern had to wait inside during the luncheon simply because she was on her period and was considered impure. Obviously this was somewhat shocking to me, and I asked her why, being quite a culturally liberal, young art student, she thought she had to abide by such rules, when instead she could have just kept mum. She explained the cultural connotations to me, and said that just generally, it was best to respect the local norms and offend as few people as possible. Judging something so traditional while at a religious gathering can be seen as highly elitist and disrespectful. While she and I both may think the rule is dated and discriminatory, I learned that you can be consciously aware of the inequalities presented by local custom while simultaneously maintaining respect for and understanding of your friends' and neighbors' traditions.

3. Personal Growth: What are the most important things you have learned about yourself thus far through this experience? What has been the greatest personal challenge? What has been the greatest reward?

I am really happy with how I have adapted to life in India. Since being here, I have realized that I can really tackle anything difficult once I find the humor in a situation. Tarantula in my room? Bucket showers? Lack of toilet paper everywhere (thank you for warning me ahead of time, Jessica!)? I have an excellent ability to laugh everything off and embrace the wonderful fact that I have the opportunity to experience such biological and cultural diversity. The biggest personal challenge has just been to slow down and try not to think too far in the future or read too much (insane) news from back home. I think I have the tendency to always look towards my "next grand adventure/experience," and I have had to stop and remind myself of how extraordinary the present is. It has definitely been rewarding just immersing myself into daily life here and being accepted and cared for by my coworkers. I have met their families and spent time in their gardens and even though we can't communicate in the same language, I think can prove my care for them by pulling my weight at work.

Question Set #5

1. Professional: Have you learned about any new possibilities for career paths? Have you done any informational interviews (formal or informal) to learn about the field?

I have absolutely been introduced to new career opportunities while in India. I think I have realized that all of my varied interests are actually quite easy to bridge together—that maybe I don't have to narrow my interests or specialties as much as I thought I would have to in my career. For instance, feminism/economics/climate change/travel are all deeply interconnected on a material, not just ideological, level, meaning that there are possibilities for careers outside of just academics. I have really never been exposed to agriculture before, and I have discovered that food security and land use are actually really fascinating to me. I would love to pursue work related to ecological land use and its social implications, which would probably entail working for some sort of NGO. I haven't interviewed anyone at the organizational/policy level but I have, maybe more importantly, worked alongside and spoken to many people whom policy would affect, which has given me a really valuable perspective.

2. Cross Cultural: Looking back at your pre-departure journal or notes, how have your impressions of the host culture changed? What is the most frustrating aspect of your host culture? What is the most rewarding aspect?

I tried to be as clear minded as I could going to India—tried to limit any sort of expectations. I think because of that, my experience with Indian culture (Coorg/Kodava culture specifically) has been genuinely unperturbed by confusion or disappointment. The Kodava culture is more liberal than other Indian cultural groups, meaning I never felt overly inhibited as a non-religious white woman. Honestly, I have just been struck by the extreme kindness of my friends and neighbors, how easily people have welcomed me into their communities. That is the most rewarding aspect, feeling as though I am part of the community. That, especially with the women I work with on the farm, I feel as though everyone takes care of me because they want to, not because they have to. There is a lovely sense of camaraderie, which probably spurs from the plantation culture. The language barrier can be frustrating, as many times I have to have directions repeated or wait to complete work until someone is around to

translate, which wastes others' time. Kannada is not an easy language to learn, but I have tried to pick up some phrases here and there to at least help with the basics of a workday.

3. Your Culture Curve: The period of cultural adjustment is often represented by a "W" curve with various peaks and valleys: Honeymoon (peak); Initial Culture Shock (valley); Cultural Adjustment (peak); Further Culture Shock (valley); Further Adjustment (peak); Re-entry Shock (valley). Outline your personal W Curve or cultural adjustments starting from when you arrived in your host country to the present-marking the highs and lows with approximate dates and descriptions of events that represent some of these phases (recognizing of course, that you are still in process of adapting to life back home).

Initial Culture Shock (first week of arrival, mid-March): There was definitely an initial culture shock of arriving at Rainforest Retreat. My living situation is rustic and bug-ridden, and it did take a few days to get used to the simplicity of that (the tarantula in my room strangely shocked me into eventual comfort). It also took a couple of weeks to get used to my farm and guesthouse work, which involves a lot of heavy lifting and some menial tasks. Once I started my research though I think I realized how my time here is so limited, that work of any sort is valuable to my experience.

Cultural Adjustment (Third week, beginning of April): Once I became used to the rainforest ecosystem—leeches, spiders and all—and learned the names of all of my coworkers, I felt like I had finally settled into a routine. I began to be more of myself in interactions and narrowed in on my research topic. This is when I also ventured into Madikeri more, learning more about the area and daily life of Coorg, finding my favorite restaurants (and sweets).

Honeymoon (mid-April to mid-May): What is so fun about Rainforest Retreat is all of the guests and groups that come through. From April to May, we had a few university groups come through learning about various things (plant biology, entomology). It was a blast learning and adventuring with other students. One entomology group from Toronto spent over a week here, and I learned so much about the insect life of the rainforest, which I had completely ignored previously. My sister also came and visited India, and being able to confidently share my knowledge of the ecosystem and culture was an excellent feeling. We also traveled to Kerala and Wayanad, and it was a great break from the farm, and the juxtaposition really showed me how fantastic my site is.

Further Culture Shock (early May): I was reminded of the cultural gender disparities when I attended the pooja I wrote to you about before. I maybe overestimated the liberalness of Coorg culture, and I think it was important that I was again exposed to the fragility of gender assumptions in India.

Further Adjustment (early May): My reevaluation of gender norms did provide me with fuel for my research, and I think that my final paper and exploration of female agricultural roles is more less abridged because of my experiences.

Re-Entry Shock (end of May): I cannot believe that I have already been in India for essentially 11 weeks. I think I am trying to balance finishing my work and making the most of my last days on the farm, and it is definitely slightly manic. There's this desire to ensure I've scraped my plate clean, that no tree has gone unappreciated, no trail untread. It is difficult to consider returning to my job in downtown Seattle, sitting in I-5 traffic... I think I just have to make sure not to hole up with my computer and writing for the next two weeks!

4. Articulating your Experience: Please write one paragraph to sum up your experience, touching on the professional, the cross-cultural and the personal. Discuss your learning, the rewards and maybe challenges of the program. You may think of this as a summary you might give in an interview, or to a fellow student who was asking you about your internship.

Rainforest Retreat is a delicate, diverse ecosystem. Half coffee plantation, half guesthouse, it is a surprisingly international center for organic culture. My time here has reignited my appreciation for biology's many dividends

and has exposed me to the realities of organic farming—the cultural, political and personal institutions that both inhibit and encourage the expansion of the organic model. Geographically, green, mountainous Coorg is a repository of a rich cultural history that offers endless topics of study. While the spiders and snakes may not be so welcoming, Coorgis made me feel as though I was an integral part of their community, and I am so grateful for the opportunity to live and work with them. Sujata and Anurag Goel, who own the plantation, were an incredible source of information, inspiration and guidance for me while I was at Rainforest Retreat, and I would encourage any and everyone to spend time here to tap into their knowledge.

Question Set #6

1. Looking back at your pre-departure journal or notes, how have your impressions of the host culture changed?

I assumed that I would be introduced as a sort of outlier/observer at my internship, and that my cultural and ethnic differences would maintain that distance. I never expected to be so wholly welcomed into the community at Rainforest Retreat, welcomed despite my language barrier. I think I expected people to be more wary of me, or that I would get more attention because of my whiteness, but in Coorg these aspects were not issues. As long as I did my work and was kind to my colleagues, I was simply treated with respect and kindness in return. I think because of the plantation culture there does have to be a level of trust between workers at Rainforest, and since Madikeri town is a city of plantation owners/workers, no one is really hung up on things like race or gender if it doesn't affect your work. I realize that this is atypical for other parts of India, especially now that I am venturing into more urban areas and find myself attracting more attention. I didn't expect Coorg to have such regional differences.

2. What words of advice do you have for future interns as they prepare for this internship and living in your host country/culture?

I have so many site-specific notes and suggestions! Once you get used to living in the rainforest—with its spiders, rolling electricity, lack of hot water—you have to get used to living on a plantation, where there is always work to be done and your reputation sort of hangs on your work ethic. As an intern, you do less "hard labor," but there are very taxing days of lifting and harvesting, etc. And these are activities that you aren't doing for yourself, but for the farm, for your "boss," and that is sometimes difficult to get used to if you are normally an independent researcher/worker. There is so much to learn from the forest, though, and it is never difficult to be motivated to work on academics when you're constantly surrounded by a wealth of information. I would just reiterate the need to eliminate expectations, which is what I found really helped me acclimate to life at Rainforest since I didn't find myself disappointed or overly surprised. While I can't yet speak for India as a whole, I do feel well-versed in Coorg routine and I would just assure any student that as long as they are serious about their work, they will find life with Coorgis very pleasant.