

Student Guide of Mumbai

2024-2025



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Table of Contents

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- Introduction
- Before leaving for Mumbai: The City, Climate, Languages, Religions, Currency, Water, Veg Diet
- Preparation: Tickets, Accommodation, Student VISA, Vaccines, Indian SIM Card
- Packing for Mumbai: Clothes, Sunscreen, Mosquito Repellants, Medicine, Monsoon Weather
- Life on Campus: Residence, Library, Sports, Classes, Canteen, Wi-Fi, Guest Houses, Security, Access, Nature, Animals, Behaviour
- University Courses and Assessment
- Life in Mumbai: Transportation, What to eat, Where to shop, What to visit
- Culture: Cinema, Theatres, Museums, Music, Diwali Markets, Christmas Markets, Festivities, Weddings
- Traveling around India: Pune, Wadatar, Kolkata, Lucknow
- Cultural Shock: No Shoes, Traffic and Honking, Asked for Pictures by Strangers, Shaking the head, Bargaining
- Some useful words in Hindi

Introduction

Hello everyone!

This is the diary of Mila and Maria and its purpose is to document our experience as international students in Mumbai University. We are hoping that this document will help future students get ready for their trip and get to know a little bit about Mumbai beforehand so they can experience Mumbai to the fullest!



Before leaving for Mumbai

If it is your first time visiting India and the city Mumbai (as it was in our case!), here is a little general information you may want to have in mind:

City: Mumbai is India's financial capital, a vibrant and diverse city and India's largest city by population! New Delhi is the capital and the largest city when it comes to area but Mumbai is the most densely populated city of the subcontinent! As of 2025, Mumbai's population is estimated to be approximately 22.1 million.

Climate: The city of Mumbai has a tropical climate with three main seasons:

- Summer (March–May): Hot and humid, temperatures around 30–35°C (86–95°F).
- Monsoon (June–September): Heavy rainfall, high humidity, frequent flooding. July is the wettest month.
- Winter (November–February): Mild and pleasant, 20–25°C (68–77°F), with cooler nights.

The monsoon can cause waterlogging and traffic issues, so waterproof gear and patience are essential. The humidity in combination with the heavy rain calls for specific apparel that we will cover in the part “Packing for Mumbai”.

Tip! – When you plan your travels around India, avoid the monsoon season if possible.



Languages: Mumbai is in the state of Maharashtra, where the official language is Marathi. Hindi is also widely spoken and English is very common in business, tourism, and education. Gujarati, Urdu, and other regional languages are also spoken by communities, since Mumbai has a big range of different communities from all around India.

Religions: Mumbai is religiously diverse, with people from various backgrounds: Hinduism (~65%), Islam (~20%), Christianity, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Parsi (Zoroastrianism), and others. Temples, mosques, churches, and synagogues are found throughout the city.



Siddhivinayak Temple Mumbai

Currency: The Indian currency is the Indian Rupee (INR ₹) and yes it has the face of Mahatma Gandhi on the banknotes! The exchange rate is 1 EUR = 92.5566 INR. (Mar 25, 2025) and you can exchange some money at the airport upon your arrival. ATMs and digital payments (UPI, Google Pay, Paytm) are widely available but cash is useful for small vendors, taxis, tuk tuks and street food. We used to exchange our euros in Kalina Market next to our favourite grocery store “Nilesh Dry Fruits”.



Water: It is very important to avoid drinking tap water to prevent stomach issues. Stick to sealed bottled water or boiled/filtered water. The recommended brands of bottled water are: Bisleri, Kinley, Aquafina.

Vegetarian Diet: If you are vegetarian, Mumbai will be the most delicious experience you ever had! The diet in India is quite diverse and deeply rooted in culture, religion, and tradition. Mumbai, thanks to its many communities from all around the country, offers a wide range of vegetarian (VEG) and nonvegetarian (NON VEG) options, from street food to elaborate home-cooked festive meals. Even international fast-food chains like McDonald's and Domino's have special vegetarian menus in India! If you are not vegetarian, worry not because you will also find wonderful meat dishes (mostly chicken and mutton), fish dishes and paneer dishes (Indian cottage cheese). Be prepared for an explosion of flavours and to develop an appetite for spicy food!



Tip! – Mango season in Mumbai typically runs from April to June, with Alphonso (Hapus) mangoes being the most famous variety! More fresh fruits and fruit juices can be enjoyed all year long in the local markets, such as coconuts, jamuns, dragon fruits, guavas and custard apples.



Preparation

There are a lot of things to prepare for your trip and the sooner you start the better because this way you can avoid unpleasant surprises and stress!

Tickets: First things first, to plan your trip you need to ask for the specific duration and dates of your semester at the University of Mumbai, since the organization of the academic year in India may differ from the University you are coming from. Once the secretary informs you about the dates, book your tickets (aller-retour!).

Accommodation: Ask the secretary about the options available for international students. There are plenty of University residences on Kalina Campus and we recommend securing a room inside the campus, since you will be very close to your department and you will avoid the daily traffic around the city.

Student VISA: The VISA process can be long and we can't stress enough how important it is to start the process early! At least two months before your arrival in India! First, you need to fill out the online application for the visa on the website <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/>. With the online application you will be asked to upload the following documents:

- Copy of Passport page containing personal particulars;
- Letter of admission from a recognised Indian educational institution with duration of the course;
- Bonafide letter from the school/college;
- Receipt of fee paid to the school/college;
- Document showing financial support for the tuition fee and stay in India;
- Duly filled Student Visa Undertaking form.

Once you upload all the mandatory documents, you are done with the Online VISA Application and you will be able to download a copy of your application. Then, you need to contact your country's Indian Embassy in order to book an appointment for an interview and present physical copies of all the documents listed below:

- Printed Visa Application form, signed in blue, as per signature on passport.
- Original Passport with at least 2 continuous empty pages, in good condition.
- Two photocopies of Passport pages with details.
- Two recent identical colored photographs, with 5 cm x 5cm dimensions, on white background with 70% of face zoom.
- One photocopy of previous Indian Visa, if exists, with stamps of exit/entrance. One photocopy of the previous passport's page with details, in case the visa was pasted there.
- Original admission letter as a proof of admission to a full time course.
- Recognised University/Institution/ School – Copy of Certificate of Registration
- A certificate that the family has enough financial resources to sustain the cost burden in India (tuition fees and the stay in India) is required.
- A receipt of fees paid to the school/university/institution.
- In addition to the above in case of exchange programmes, an exchange of student agreement between the two institutions is required.

During the appointment you may be asked about your studies, the dates of arrival and departure and your accommodation in India. Possibly some additional documents, such as booking confirmation of your tickets, may be required, so keep everything related to your trip in hand. When your visa is approved and ready (normally in a few days) to be collected they will inform you to go back to the Embassy to pick it up! Congratulations! You are almost ready!



Vaccines: At the same time with your VISA process, start looking for the vaccination regulation of your country concerning traveling to India. The list of mandatory and optional vaccines can vary from country to country and you may consult your family doctor in order to decide about the optional vaccines. Do not skip the mandatory ones though!

Indian SIM Card: Last but not least, while in India you need to have an Indian phone number and a plan with enough data to make your life easier! If your phone offers the option of taking an eSIM, then you can get one before your arrival. If not, you can buy a physical SIM card at the airport upon your arrival.

Packing for Mumbai

The last step before your trip begins is packing!

Clothes: Since the weather is mostly warm and humid, you won't need to pack many heavy clothes. Opt for lightweight and loose-fitting clothes made from natural fibers (cotton, linen) to keep your body cool and comfortable. It is best advised to cover most parts of your body to protect it from the strong sun and the mosquitos. If your wardrobe doesn't have enough clothes that fit this description, it is a great excuse to buy some colorful outfits from local markets and embrace the Indian cloth esthetic! It will help a lot with your integration!

Sunscreen: Do not forget to pack your sunscreen and apply it religiously because the sun doesn't joke!

Mosquito repellants: Especially during the night, apply any mosquito repellant of your choice on the exposed parts of your body. In Mumbai you will find a great variety of mosquito repellants, like creams, sprays, roll ons, etc.

Tip! – Our favourite mosquito repellant is the fabric roll on, since this way you avoid immediate contact with your skin and therefore any rash or allergies!

Medicine: Pack any specific prescribed medication you need to take during your stay in India because you may not find the exact same medicine there, as well as some basic first aid kit to have at hand.

Monsoon Weather: If you will be in Mumbai during the Monsoon season, then you will need an umbrella, a raincoat and a pair of waterproof shoes!

You are ready now! Have a nice trip!



Life on the Campus of the University of Mumbai



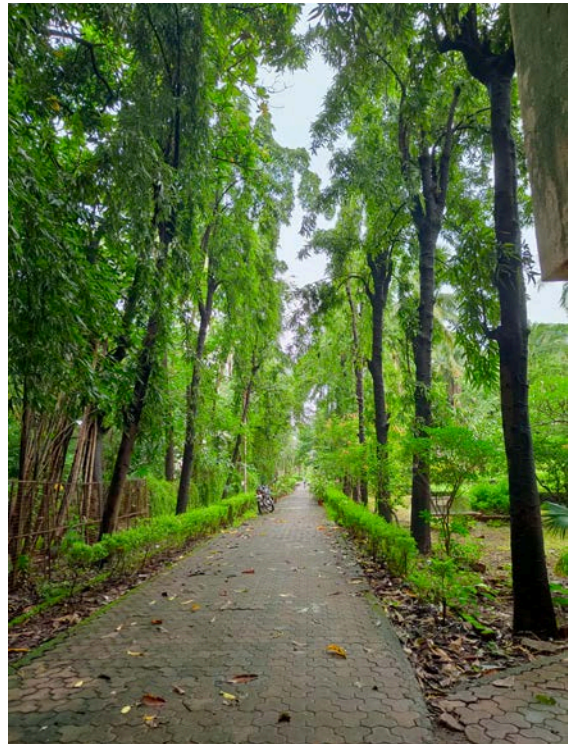
"See no evil, Hear no evil, Speak no evil"

Kalina Campus is huge and very green. Everywhere you will find plants and trees, which is a real luxury in the big city of Mumbai. The air is cleaner, and there is less noise pollution, which creates a more peaceful and pleasant atmosphere. The University of Mumbai offers a wide range of facilities for students. The following is a list of facilities available on campus:

Residences (Hostels) :

- Accommodation for girls : There are three girls' residences on campus. The rooms can be single or double. The new hostel for girls has double rooms with a private bathroom and balcony. The other residences do not have a kitchen or refrigerator and are equipped with fans only. There are no common rooms.
- Security rules: The security hostesses are present 24 hours a day in the residences. There is also a curfew: girls must be in the accommodation before 22:00 each night. Two night permits per month allow you to come back before midnight, and two night outings per month are allowed, but it is forbidden to return before 6:00 in the morning.
- Accommodation for boys: Boys must also observe a curfew until midnight. As with girls, it is forbidden to invite people of a different sex in the residences. The international hotel is exclusively for male students.

- Address of residences:
 - Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve Girls Hostel : Vidyanagari, Kalina, Santacruz (E), Mumbai-400 098, Capacity: 50.
 - Pandita Ramabai Girls Hostel : Vidyanagari, Kalina, Santacruz (E), Mumbai-400 098, Capacity: 16.
 - Savitribai Phule Girls Hostel : Vidyanagari, Kalina, Santacruz (E), Mumbai-400 098, Capacity: 77.
 - New Girls' Hostel : Next to the Department of Sanskrit, Vidyanagari, Santacruz (East), Mumbai-400098, Capacity: 144.
 - Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil Boys Hostel : Vidyanagari, Kalina, Santacruz (E), Mumbai-400098, capacity: 80.



Library: The University of Mumbai Library was founded in 1857. It has an impressive collection of over 7 lakh of books (700,000), 1,000+ manuscripts , journals, theses, as well as books in various regional and national languages. It is open from 10:00 to 22:00.

Sports: The University of Mumbai has modern sports facilities for students interested in sport. The campus offers facilities for various sports, both indoor and outdoor, such as:

- A large basketball court.
- A gym.
- An indoor badminton court.
- Outdoor gym equipment available for everyone.

Outdoor courts (basketball, etc.) are available without time restrictions.

Canteens: There are up to four canteen locations throughout the campus. The green canteen, located near the Department of French and the Centre for European Studies, is one of the most popular. It is open until 18:00, but the kitchen closes at 16:00. After this time, the canteen works as a cafeteria, where you can buy only drinks and snacks. To have a full meal, it is therefore recommended to have lunch between 11:00 and 15:00. Vidya Nagari/Nehru Library, Kolivery Village, University of Mumbai, Vidya Nagari, Kalina, Santacruz East, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400098, India.



Tip! – Ask for your Uttapam to be extra crispy and with onion, tomato and cheese!

Wi-Fi: The campus has Wi-Fi available throughout the campus as well as in the residences, allowing students to stay connected and easily access online resources.

Guest houses: Within the campus, there are guest houses mainly for visiting professors from other universities. They can also be used to house your parents if you wish to host them. These guest houses are in good condition and their rates are reasonable, especially compared to the cost of accommodation off campus.

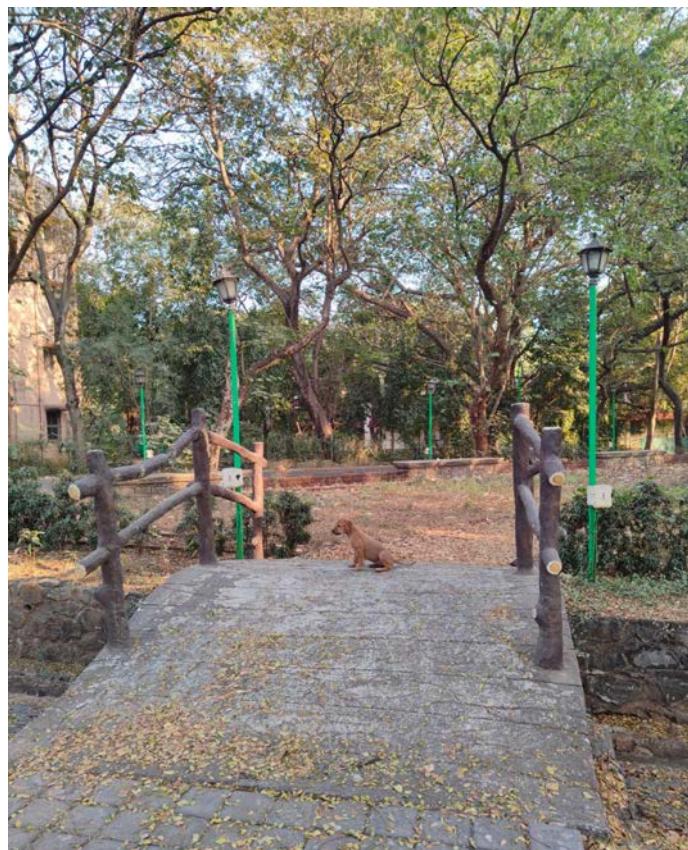
Security: The campus has three main entrances, each guarded by guards. They will usually ask you where you are going, but once your arrival is recorded, they will be informed of your presence.

Access: Buses run through the campus, with specific stops. You can check the timetables on Google Maps, which is regularly updated. Tuk tuks are also allowed, allowing easy access to and around the campus. Gate N°1 is the main entrance to the campus. Outside, you will find bus stops and a multitude of tuk tuks ready to take you wherever you want. Crossing the street you will come to a small shopping center where you will find university equipment stores, restaurants, and more.

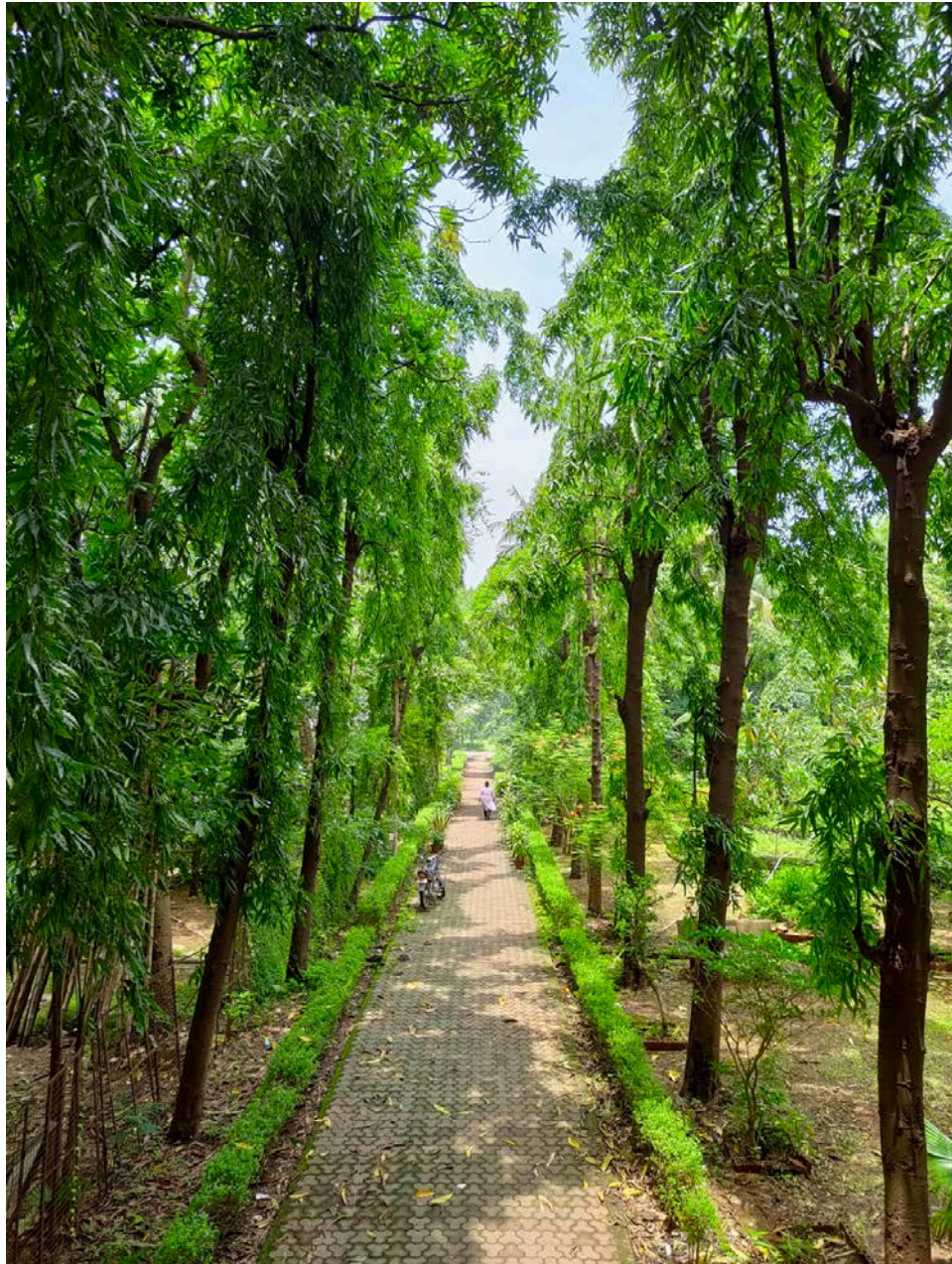
- There is a vegetarian restaurant "Chutney" which is open all day, until 22h00 or 23h00, and specialises in southern Indian cuisine.

Just a 15-minute walk from the campus, you'll find Kalina Market, a vibrant place where you can buy fresh fruit, makeup, clothes, food, and everything you need for everyday life. On Monday afternoon/evening, the market offers a weekly lively market.

- Around the campus, you will find several small restaurants offering a variety of Indian cuisine. There are also coffee shops and vending machines offering refreshing drinks and snacks. You will find many local shops selling essential products such as batteries, office equipment, and basic necessities.



Nature: The campus is a true natural sanctuary. Every year, migratory birds stay there. There is also a pond and a small natural center very nice, which is regularly maintained by the gardening staff. This centre is home to a wide variety of tropical plants and other plant species. It is usually open from 9:00 to 18:00. It is a perfect place to relax or study.



Animals: The campus is home to many cats and dogs. They are not aggressive, but it is better not to feed them because the university staff will do it. There are also many birds and squirrels. However, snakes, sometimes venomous, may be present. It is therefore recommended to stay on asphalt trails and avoid grassy areas. If you see a snake, please report it to the guards who will take steps to move it. As the campus is located in a green area, there is a remarkable presence of mosquitoes. It is therefore recommended to use mosquito repellent creams or sprays and always close the windows after 5:00 pm, even if mosquito nets are installed.

Behaviour: It is important to remember that the campus also hosts staff and professors. Therefore, it is essential to maintain respectful behavior, respect for common spaces, local traditions, and place uses.



Tip! – We personally enjoyed the campus for its tranquility and natural beauty. It is a safe place to escape the hectic life of Mumbai. We strongly advise you to explore the campus as much as possible, because it is really huge. You will meet students who walk and some even ride their bikes.

University Courses and Assessment

During our time at the University of Mumbai, we enrolled in five fascinating courses, each offering a unique perspective on literature, philosophy, and cultural studies. Each course was worth 6 credits and consisted of 30 total hours. The courses were structured to include both theoretical lectures and practical components, such as group discussions, presentations, and written assignments. The courses were structured as follows:

- Medieval Literature from Europe (Moyen Age): focused on medieval French literature, comparing it with Indian epics to highlight cultural and literary parallels.
- Francophone Literature : specifically explored the literature of the Indian Ocean region, with a particular focus on the concept of "engagisme" through collaboration with professors from other Indian universities like those in Chennai and Pondicherry.
- Text and Theory: centered on postcolonial theory, analyzing Indian literature through the lens of colonialism and its aftermath.
- Reception of English Literature in India: focused on Indian authors writing in English and the impact of colonialism on literature.
- Western and Eastern Philosophy: divided into two modules, introduced us to the rich Indian philosophical heritage, offering an insightful comparison between Western and Eastern philosophical traditions.

The evaluation system for each course was based on 100 points, divided into two parts:

- 1) Internal Assessment (50 points): This part was completed during the course and included 2 to 3 evaluations. These could be oral presentations, written papers, or other assignments, depending on the professor's choice.
- 2) Final Exam (50 points): At the end of the course, there was a two-hour written exam with potentially two questions, each worth 25 points. These exams tested the full scope of the course material.

Overall, the courses allowed us to approach European literature from a new perspective, blending academic knowledge with the social and cultural context of India. The experience also offered a great opportunity to immerse ourselves in the local culture and engage with the Indian intellectual scene.

Life in Mumbai

Transportation: Mumbai is one of the few cities in India where **tuk-tuks** are equipped with meters. Therefore, just make sure that the driver turns on the meter before starting the race and you pay the indicated amount at the end of the trip. It is a very convenient way to get around, but it is important to always check this out.

Tip! – To avoid any confusion or bad surprises on the rate, it is recommended to use apps like Uber or Ola at the beginning of your stay. This way, you will know the price of the race in advance. Uber can be linked to your credit card, which is convenient so you don't have to carry large sums of cash. Also, it can be difficult to get the change because some drivers don't have small bills.



Important note: In some areas of Mumbai, tuk-tuks do not have access. In these areas you will find many yellow **taxis**. For example, in the south of the city it is easier to travel by taxi.

Local trains (Mumbai Local) are the fastest and cheapest way to get around the city. They are often crowded, especially during peak hours, and there are two classes: first and second. There is also a section for women and children in each class.



Tip! – We recommend travelling with someone who knows the local system well, as it can be a bit confusing at first. It is strongly advised to avoid trains during rush hours, as the trains are extremely crowded.

The closest train station to the University of Mumbai, Kalina campus, is Santa Cruz East. You can access it by taking a tuk-tuk or **bus** from the campus.

Tip! - On your first visit, it is better to go to the Santa Cruz East station, because the Santa Cruz West station is more remote and requires an unnecessary detour. Santa Cruz East is well connected, and nearby you will find a large market. The East market is mainly dedicated to fruits and vegetables, with restaurants and products often oriented towards men and children. After crossing the station, you will arrive on the other side of the West market, which is more for women. You will find many benches of clothes, accessories, as well as jewelry.

There is also a **metro** network in some parts of Mumbai. The metro line is modern, well organized, with air conditioning, and it is very clean. It is mainly used in the north of Mumbai, and can be a comfortable means of transport for trips in this area.

What to eat in Mumbai: As a huge and diverse city, Mumbai is a melting pot of cultures, ethnicities and traditions, which is reflected in its cuisine. You will have the chance to taste a variety of dishes from all over India, each community having its own culinary specialty. It is therefore highly recommended to move around the city, experiment and taste dishes from all parts of India.



However, it is important to pay attention to the choice of restaurants and especially street foods. In the first days, it is advisable to go there accompanied by local people who can guide you to safe places and make you discover delicious local specialties. Once you've taken the time to know the right places, you can explore more on your own. Also, always remember to ask if a dish is spicy and specify your preference in terms of the level of spice (mild, medium or very spicy).

Here are some must-see dishes in Mumbai:

- Vada Pav : This bun with a fried potato dumpling is served with spicy chutneys. It is a popular snack, often eaten for lunch or as a snack.
- Pav Bhaji : A spicy curry made from crushed vegetables, served with buttered toast. It is a typical street dish that can be found everywhere in Mumbai.
- Bhel Puri : A mixture of puffed rice, vegetables, chutneys and spices served in a paper cone. A light and refreshing snack, ideal for hot days in Mumbai.
- Pani Puri : Fried balls stuffed with potatoes and peas, dipped in spicy water. It is one of the most popular snacks in the city.
- Bombay Sandwich : A sandwich filled with fresh vegetables, potatoes and spices. A common snack, often enjoyed during quick lunch breaks. If you are in Santa Cruz East, We recommend that you go to the Santa Cruz East market for a delicious Bombay Sandwich at Sandwizza, located Shop Number 3, Santacruz Railway Station Rd, next to Samrat Matching, Willingdon, Santacruz (West), Mumbai, Maharashtra 400054, India. It is a great place to enjoy this typical dish of Mumbai.

Where to shop in Mumbai: Mumbai is a true shopping capital, with a variety of markets and malls. Here are some places to find everything you're looking for:

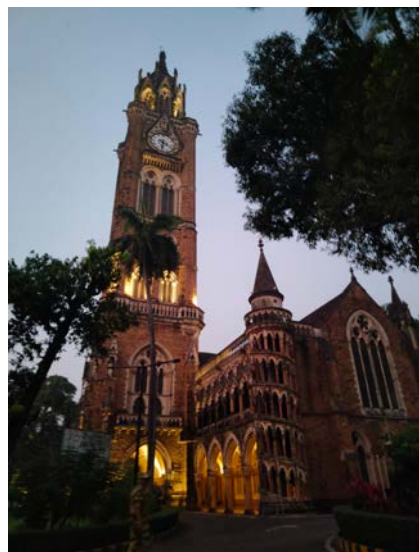
- Apps for shopping: You can download local apps like Ajio, Myntra and Amazon. They are ideal to buy clothes, accessories and other products.
- Grocery shopping and Meal delivery: You can use apps like Wiggy, Zepto, Instamart, Zomato and Blinkit to order takeaway food or groceries. These applications are very convenient to have everything you need directly at home.
- Shopping center near campus : About 15-20 minutes by tuk tuk from the campus, there is a huge mall called Phoenix Marketcity. It is a great place to visit, especially during the monsoon season, as people prefer to stay indoors with rain. The shopping center is home to many restaurants and street food stalls from all over the world, but also from all regions of India. It is a safe place to start your culinary exploration in Mumbai. The address is as follows: PhoenixMarketcity, Lal Bahadur Shastri Marg, Patel Wadi, Kurla West, Kurla, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400070, India.
- Physical local markets and stores:
 - Colaba Causeway : A lively market where you will find clothes, accessories, souvenirs, jewellery and decorative items.

- Zaveri Bazaar : The heart of the jewellery market in Mumbai, it is the perfect place to buy gold and precious stones.
- Chor Bazaar : A flea market famous for its vintage items, antiques and other curiosities. It is a unique place to shop.
- p Bandra Market : This area is a fashionable shopping centre, where you will find designer boutiques, art galleries and luxury clothing stores.



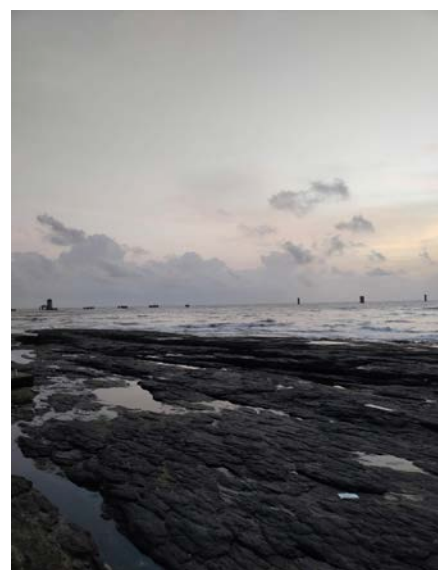
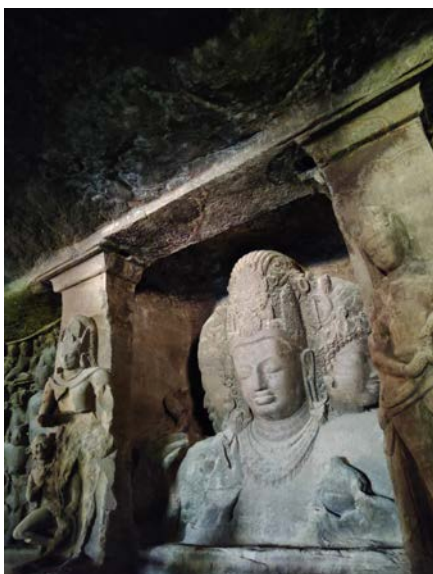
What to visit in Mumbai: Mumbai offers many interesting places to visit. Some must-haves include:

- Bandra: This neighborhood is a mix of urban life and natural beauty. Don't miss the Bandra-Worli Sea Link, a superb suspension road with beautiful views of the sea. There are also beaches like Juhu Beach and nice cafes to explore.
- South Mumbai: This historic area of the city includes iconic sites such as Gateway of India, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus, and Marine Drive (the iconic "Coast of Mumbai"). Colaba and Fort are perfect places to stroll, shop and discover colonial architecture.





- Markets: Crawford Market is a must-see for fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as exotic produce. You will also find spices and local produce in many lively markets around the city.
- Beaches: Juhu Beach and Versova Beach are popular places to relax, swim or just enjoy the sunset.
- Elephanta Island: This island is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is home to ancient temples and impressive rock carvings. Accessible by ferry from the port of Mumbai, this is a perfect day trip.




Culture in Mumbai: Mumbai, as the cultural capital of India, offers a wealth of cultural experiences that reflect the city's diversity. Key aspects of culture in Mumbai include:

- **Cinema:** In Mumbai, you can discover a wide variety of Indian films, which are usually screened in different local languages, such as Marathi, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, and others, with subtitles in English. This allows for a diverse cinematic experience, ideal for those who wish to explore different Indian cultures through cinema. The cinemas in Mumbai also offer a wide selection of popcorn and snacks. What is quite unique is that food orders are usually taken by staff and then delivered directly to the cinema during the screening. A true service up to the experience!

Interesting cultural aspect! - Before each film, the national anthem of India is broadcast, and all the spectators stand up out of respect for the anthem and the nation.

National Anthem of India



Written by -
Rabindranath Tagore

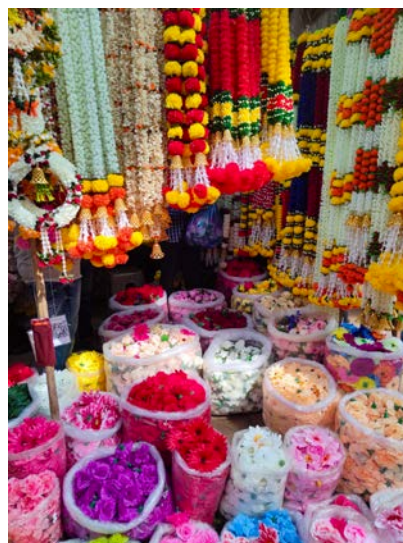
Jana-gana-mana-adhinayaka, jaya he
Bharata-bhagya-vidhata.
Punjab-Sindh-Gujarat-Maratha
Dravida-Utkala-Banga
Vindhya-Himachala-Yamuna-Ganga
Uchchala-Jaladhi-taranga.
Tava shubha name jage,
Tava shubha asisa mage,
Gahe tava jaya gatha,
Jana-gana-mangala-dayaka jaya he
Bharata-bhagya-vidhata.
Jaya he, jaya he, jaya he, Jaya jaya jaya, jaya
he!

- **Theatre:** The Prithvi Theatre, located in Juhu, is one of the most iconic theatres in Mumbai, offering a unique experience of the Indian theatre scene. It is recommended to arrive in advance, as delays are not tolerated out of respect for the artists. The theatre offers performances in Hindi and English, often very popular. Next to the theatre is a popular restaurant where you can enjoy tasty food in a pleasant atmosphere. The Prithvi Theatre is a must-see for discovering Mumbai's art and culture, and you can also explore the nearby NCPA (National Centre for the Performing Arts) for other artistic performances.
- **Museums:** There are several fascinating museums in Mumbai that allow you to immerse yourself in Indian history and culture:
- **The Navy Museum:** located near Gateway of India, it offers a beautiful view of the Arabian Sea and tells the naval history of India
- **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya Museum** (formerly known as the Prince of Wales Museum), a world-renowned museum with an impressive collection of Indian art, sculptures and archaeological artifacts.

- The Mumbai Museum of Modern Art (MOMA): for contemporary art lovers, this museum features works by Indian and international modern masters.



- Diwali and Christmas markets: In Mumbai, Diwali and Christmas markets are a must-see. Diwali markets are vibrant and filled with colourful decorations, lanterns and gifts. You can also buy traditional sweets like laddoos and barfis, as well as decorated household items. Christmas markets are equally lively, especially around Carter Road and Bandra, with festive decorations and vendors offering crafts and decorations.



- **Holidays in Mumbai:** Mumbai is a city of festivals, where different communities celebrate events throughout the year. Here are some of the most popular:
- **Ganesh Chaturthi :** This is one of the most iconic festivals in Mumbai, usually celebrated at the end of the monsoon season, often in early September. This holiday is particularly important in Maharashtra, where it is celebrated in a lavish manner. In Mumbai, millions of people participate in the festivities in honour of Ganesh, the elephant god. The streets are decorated with beautiful statues of Ganesh, and colorful processions cross the city. At the end of these processions, the statues of Ganesh are immersed in the waters of the sea, a ritual symbolizing the god's return to the cosmos. Modaks are prepared, traditional sweets that Ganesh loves, and the coconut is broken, symbolizing human ego, which is eliminated through the wisdom and energy that Ganesh infuses.

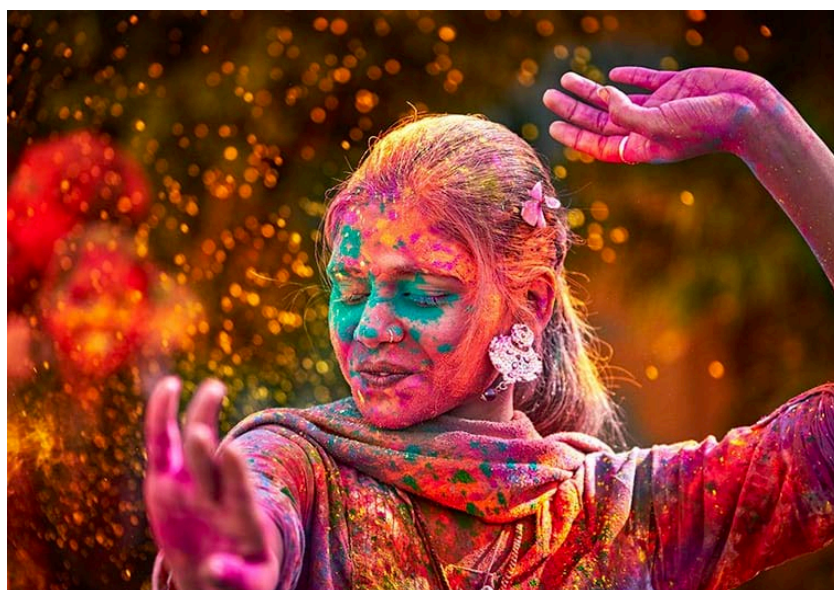
This festival is the most sacred day dedicated to Ganesh and one of the most popular Hindu celebrations. I urge you to immerse yourself in these lively and colourful celebrations, it is a unique and spiritual experience that will allow you to discover Indian culture in all its splendor.



- Diwali: The festival of lights, celebrated by the Hindus, is another major festival. The streets glow with rows of diya (oil lamps) and fireworks illuminate the sky.



- Holi: The festival of colours, where people throw colourful powders at each other, is an immersive and joyful experience to be had in Mumbai.



- Eid: Muslim celebrations mark the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and are accompanied by festive meals and community prayers. The streets are lit up, and the markets are filled with sweets and traditional clothes.
- Weddings: Weddings in Mumbai are truly festive events. A typical Indian wedding is filled with rituals and celebrations that last several days. It is not uncommon to see wedding parties with lavish decorations, dazzling traditional outfits and haunting music. If you are lucky enough to be invited to a wedding, it is a fantastic opportunity to explore Indian culture in its most festive and colorful form. Weddings are often celebrated with traditional ceremonies and dances such as garba and dandiya.



Traveling around India

Just one semester was way too little for our traveling aspirations! But we can't complain! We had the opportunity to visit different parts of India and this was by far our favourite part of this experience!

Pune:

Firstly, during the month of August, we visited the city of Pune with a good friend from the Department of French. We traveled by the most luxurious train! Pune is another vibrant city in the western Indian state of Maharashtra. It is known as the "Oxford of the East" due to its prestigious educational institutions. This city blends rich history, culture, and modernity. We paid a visit to the Shaniwar Wada, a historical fortification of Pune, known for its history and the legendary *Bajirao Mastani* story. We also saw a Lal Mahal, meaning "Red Palace," a historic monument established in 1630 AD by Shahaji Bhosale for his wife Jijabai and their son, Shivaji Maharaj and it served as Shivaji's childhood residence. Of course we *clicked* a lot of nice pictures during those precious sunny days of the Monsoon season (don't forget your sunscreen!).



Wadatar:

The next trip was in September. We visited a small traditional village located in the Devgad sub-district of Sindhudurg district, Maharashtra. The village is situated near the Wadatar Bridge, a point of interest that has been featured in various social media posts and videos, highlighting the scenic beauty of the area. Wadatar's economy is primarily based on agriculture and local trades, reflecting the rural character of the region. The village maintains a traditional lifestyle, with cultural and religious events playing a significant role in the community's social fabric.





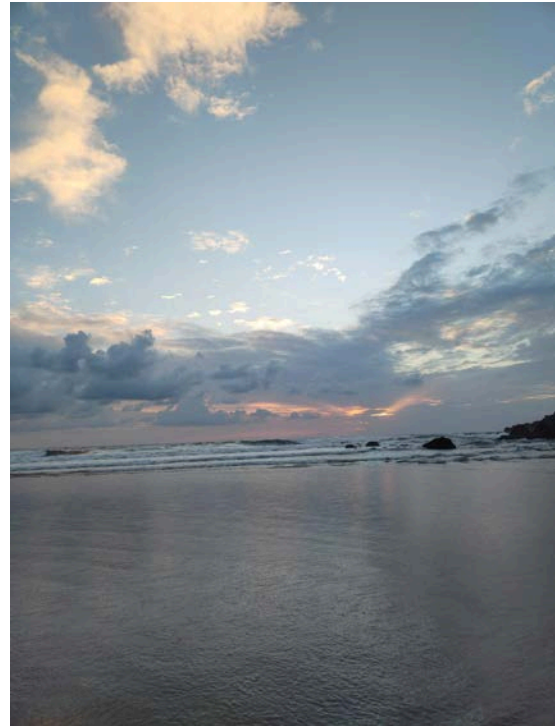


We hope the pictures are worth the thousands of words which are rightfully needed to describe the natural beauty of the scenery. Living with a traditional Indian family gave us a lot of insight about the daily routines of rural India and we had the chance to try home-cooked delicacies. Visiting the school of the village and the houses that hosted a Ganesh statue showed us the local hospitality and generosity of each and every person. The immersion of all the Ganesh statues in the river, the prayer, the dance, the music, the decoration, the sarees, the food: everything contributed to the festive and mystic atmosphere of the celebration of the Ganpati festival.





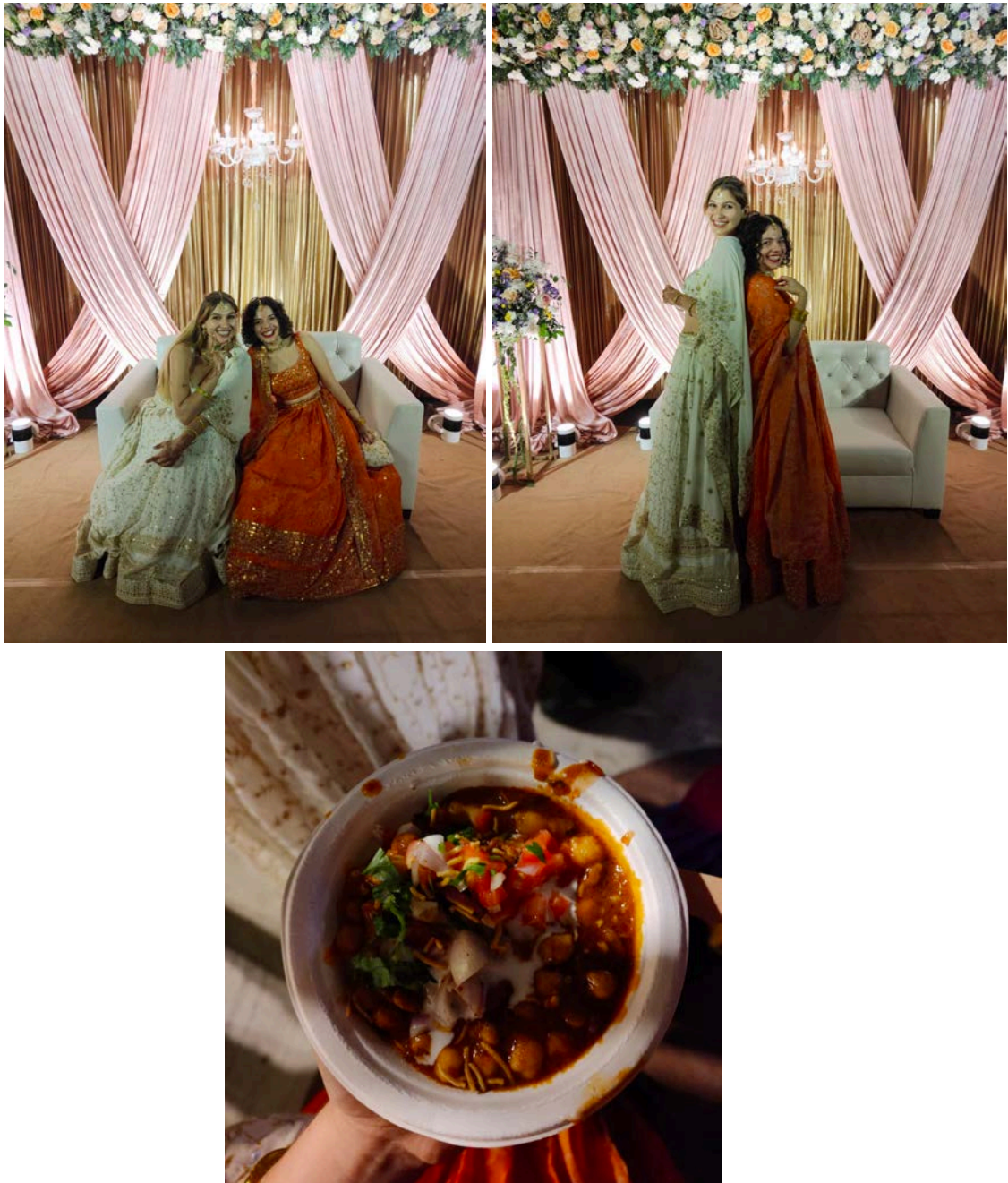
We can't forget the trip to one of the prettiest beaches of the coast, where we let our hair down (literally and figuratively) to feel the peaceful breeze of the Indian Ocean! A trip to the local mango factory to stock up on delicious mango goodies and souvenirs was very much needed! And for a splash of history to our days, we dropped by the Vijaydurg Fort, one of Maharashtra's most significant sea forts, located in Sindhudurg district on the Konkan coast. It was a key naval base for the Maratha Empire, built to defend against foreign invasions.



Tip! – Always enjoy your Modak with some melted ghee on top! Thank us later!

Kolkata:

At the beginning of December, we started our long trip to Kolkata and West Bengal. First stop was Kolkata, the cultural capital of India, in order to attend a beautiful Indian wedding and try mouthwatering dishes from Bengal. Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) is the capital of West Bengal and one of India's most spirited cities, known for its rich history, art, literature, and delicious food. It was the British capital of India until 1911, leaving a strong colonial influence.



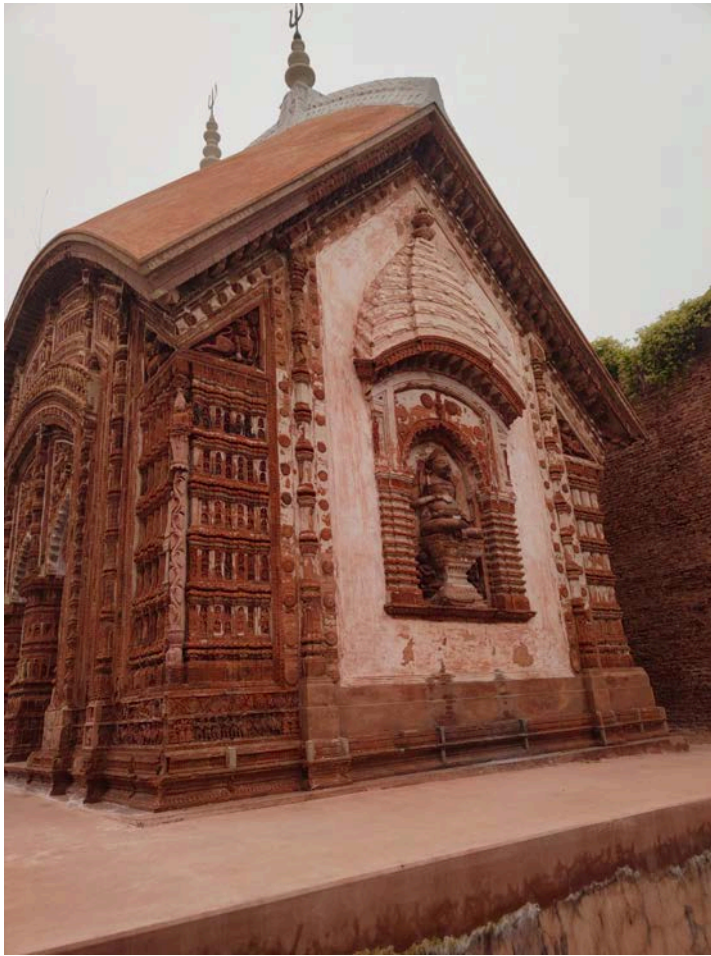
After the festivities of the wedding, early the next morning, the train led us to the small but historical city of Jiagan in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal.

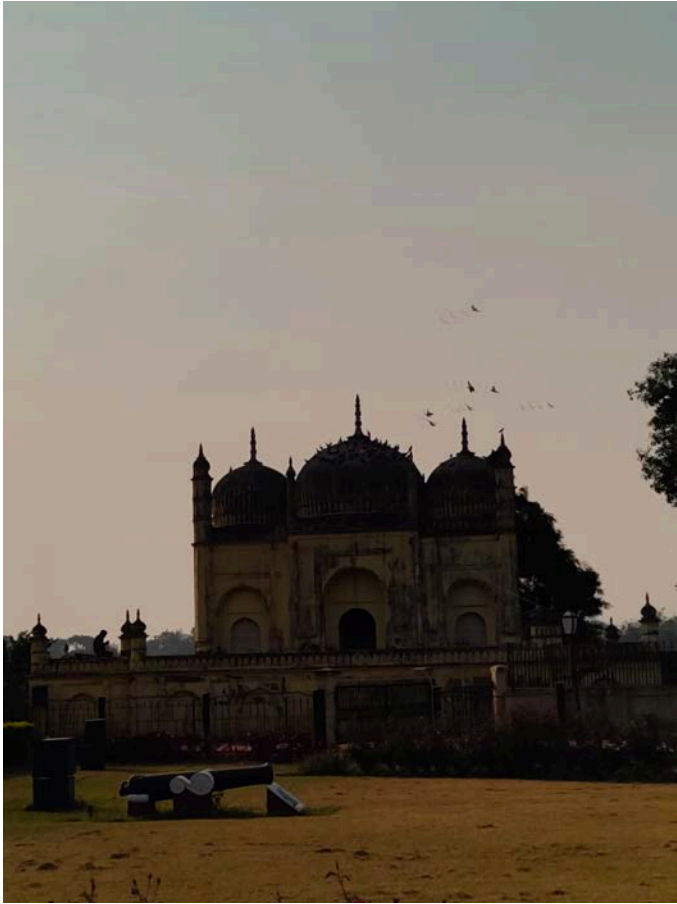
It is known for its rich heritage, connection to the Nawabs of Bengal, and famous terracotta temples. It was known for its silk trade and banking activities, playing a key role in Bengal's economic history. The town still has remnants of old mansions and colonial-era buildings from its glorious past and we had the opportunity to spend the night and have a Jain dinner in one of those mansions.

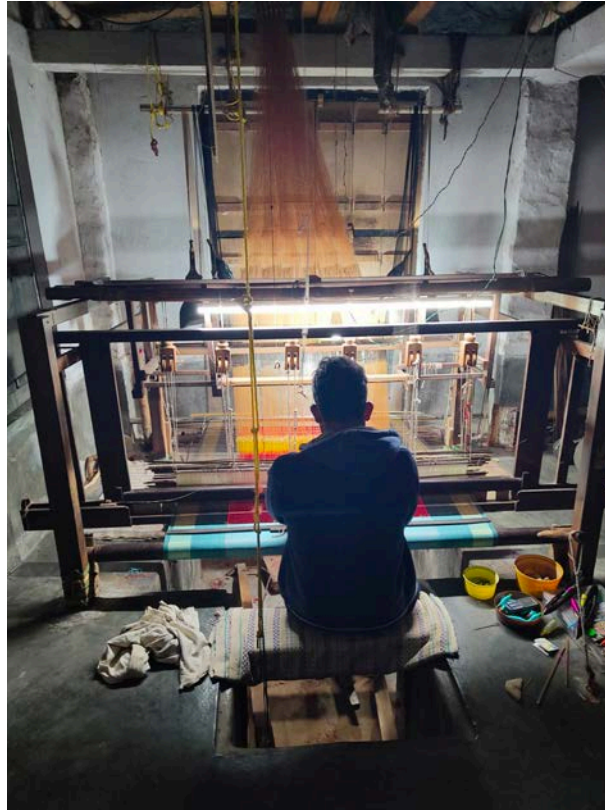


The temperature dropped significantly in this part of India but that didn't bother us, since we were determined to visit most of the places. The Nashipur Rajbari palace, the Katra Mosque, the Hazarduari Palace, the Motijheel, some famous Terracotta Temples famous for their terracotta carvings and Jain temples. We enjoyed the sunset by the river Bhagirathi, a branch of the Ganges, we were carried away by the melodies of local instruments and we explored local places of silk weaving and handicrafts.

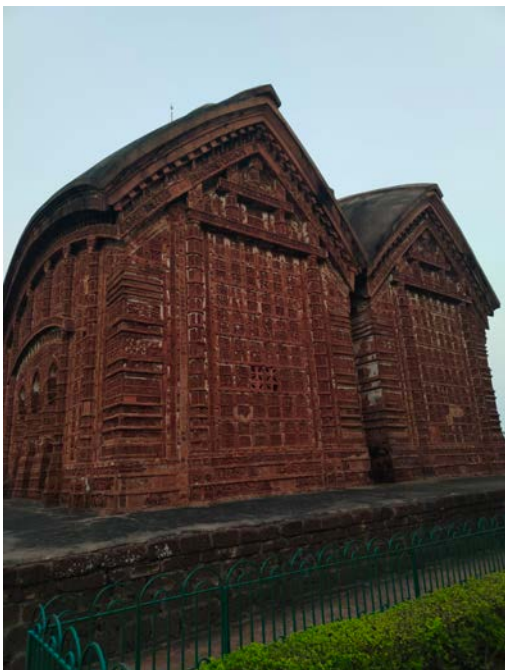






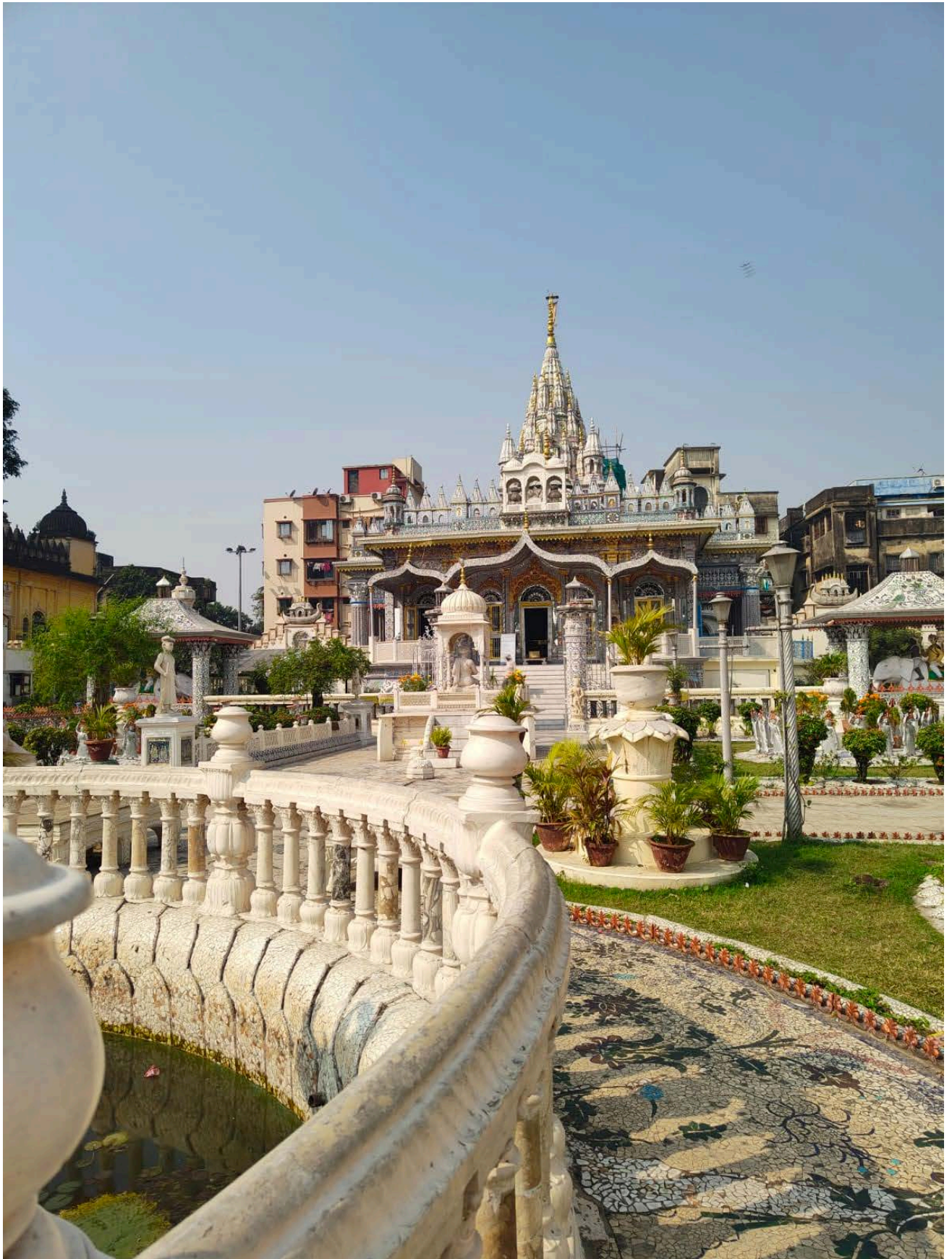


In our visit to West Bengal we learned about Rabindranath Tagore, who was a poet, philosopher, artist, and the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. Tagore's works, especially his poems and songs, have had a lasting impact on Indian literature, culture and education. We visited Universities, terracotta temples, markets and saree industries. The diet in Bengal is more based on meat and fish than Mumbai.



And then we finish where we started, at the lively city of Kolkata. A visit to the Victoria Memorial was worth our time in order to learn more about the colonial influence and history. A guided tour around the city is highly recommended since in every road and every corner there is a piece of history or a cultural reference. Some highlights are: the Writers Building, St. John's Church, the Parshwanath Jain Temple and the Flower Market. An evening boat cruise around the river offered us the opportunity to see the Sri Ramakrishna Temple.





Parshwanath Jain Temple, Kolkata

And by far our favourite place in Kolkata was the famous College Street, also known as Boipara (Book Street), is one of the largest book markets in India. It is filled with old and new bookshops, selling every kind of book including rare and antique books. Universities and other literary institutions line the street. The nostalgic literary atmosphere is completed with the presence of the Indian Coffee House, a historic coffee house where intellectuals, writers, and students gather, offering a haven for book lovers.



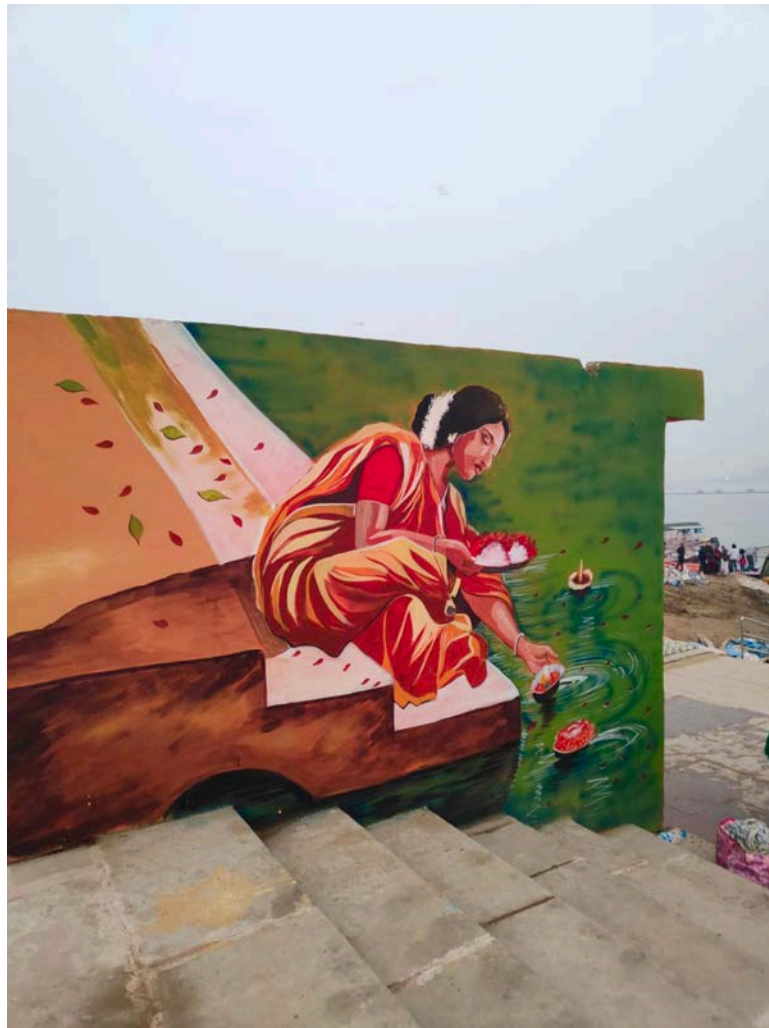
Lucknow:

During our trip to Uttar Pradesh, a state in the north of India, accompanied by Professor Vydia Vencatesan, we had the opportunity to visit three emblematic cities, each with its own cultural, historical and spiritual wealth. It was a fascinating and immersive experience, which allowed us to discover India from a unique angle.



Allahabad (Prayagraj)

Allahabad, recently renamed Prayagraj, is a city of great spiritual importance, especially because of the Kumbh Mela, one of the largest religious gatherings in the world. The Kumbh Mela 2025 will take place from January 13 to March 8, and millions of pilgrims will come to bathe in the Sangam, the confluence of the three sacred rivers: the Ganges, the Yamuna and the Sarasvati. We were lucky enough to visit the city at the end of December, just before the start of the festival, and we could see the installation of temporary infrastructures that welcome millions of people during the Kumbh Mela.



Allahabad is also known for its University of Allahabad, one of the oldest in the country, with a beautiful campus and impressive colonial buildings. The city's infrastructure is superb, and it remains a major educational centre in India.



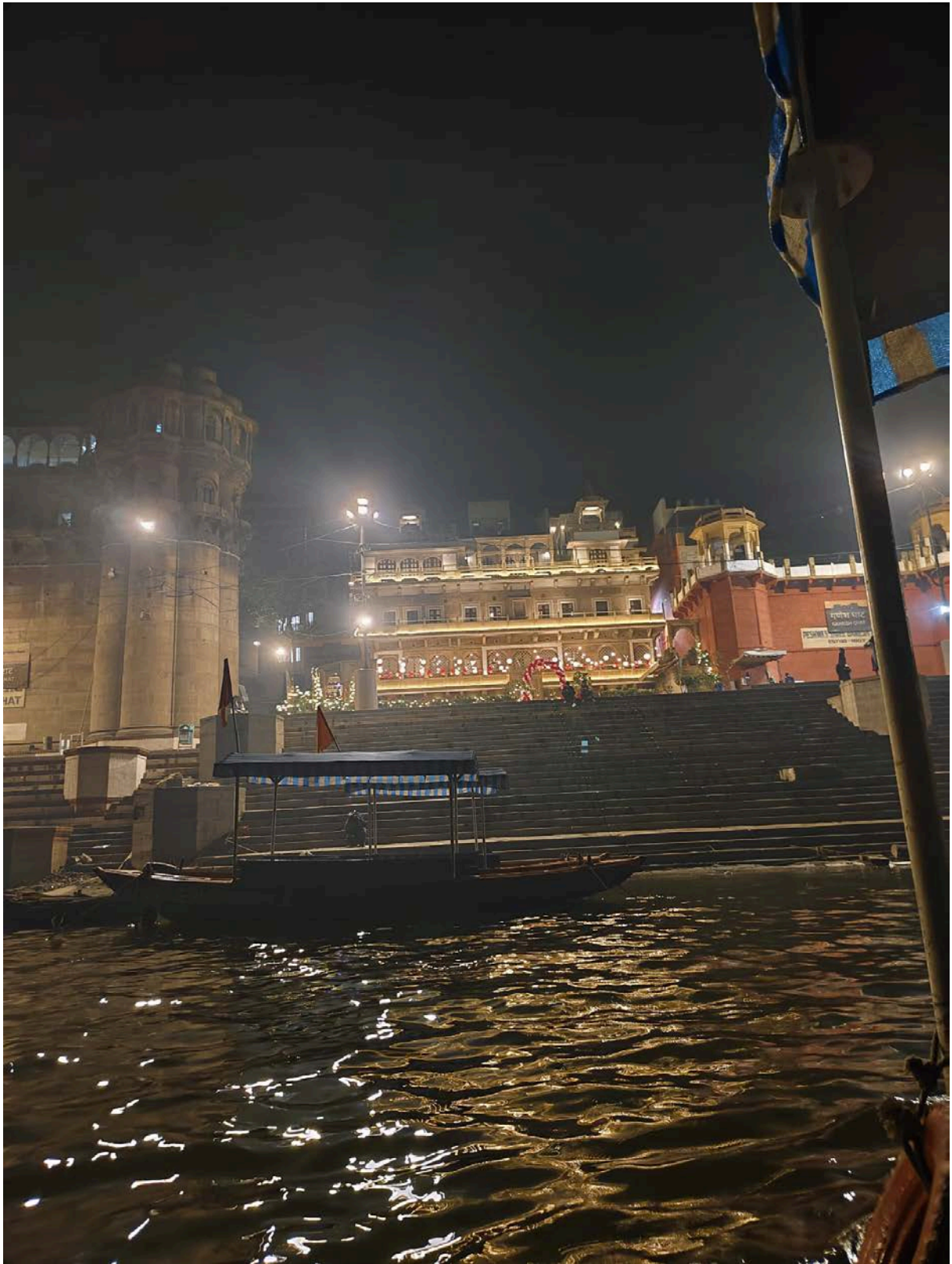
Varanasi

Our next stop was Varanasi, one of the oldest and most spiritual cities in the world, considered as the religious capital of India. It is a city where life and death coexist, and where spirituality permeates every corner. We visited the Hindu University of Banaras (BHU), one of the largest university campuses in India, with extensive green spaces and facilities for sports activities.



One of the most memorable experiences in Varanasi was a night cruise on the Ganges, where the atmosphere was magical, with candles lit and the night enveloping everything. After that we visited a traditional restaurant where we tasted excellent local dishes, famous for their rich and authentic taste.





The Varanasi market is famous for its silk saris and other handmade textiles. We had the opportunity to touch high quality silk and admire the skill of craftsmen who create exceptional works, a lasting memory of our passage.



Lucknow

Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, is a city steeped in history and culture. Once the capital of the Mughal emperors, then British, Lucknow is full of magnificent colonial buildings and sumptuous mausoleums. It is also known for its fine cuisine. We explored the city's markets and enjoyed local specialties, such as delicious kebabs and meat dishes of incredible tenderness.



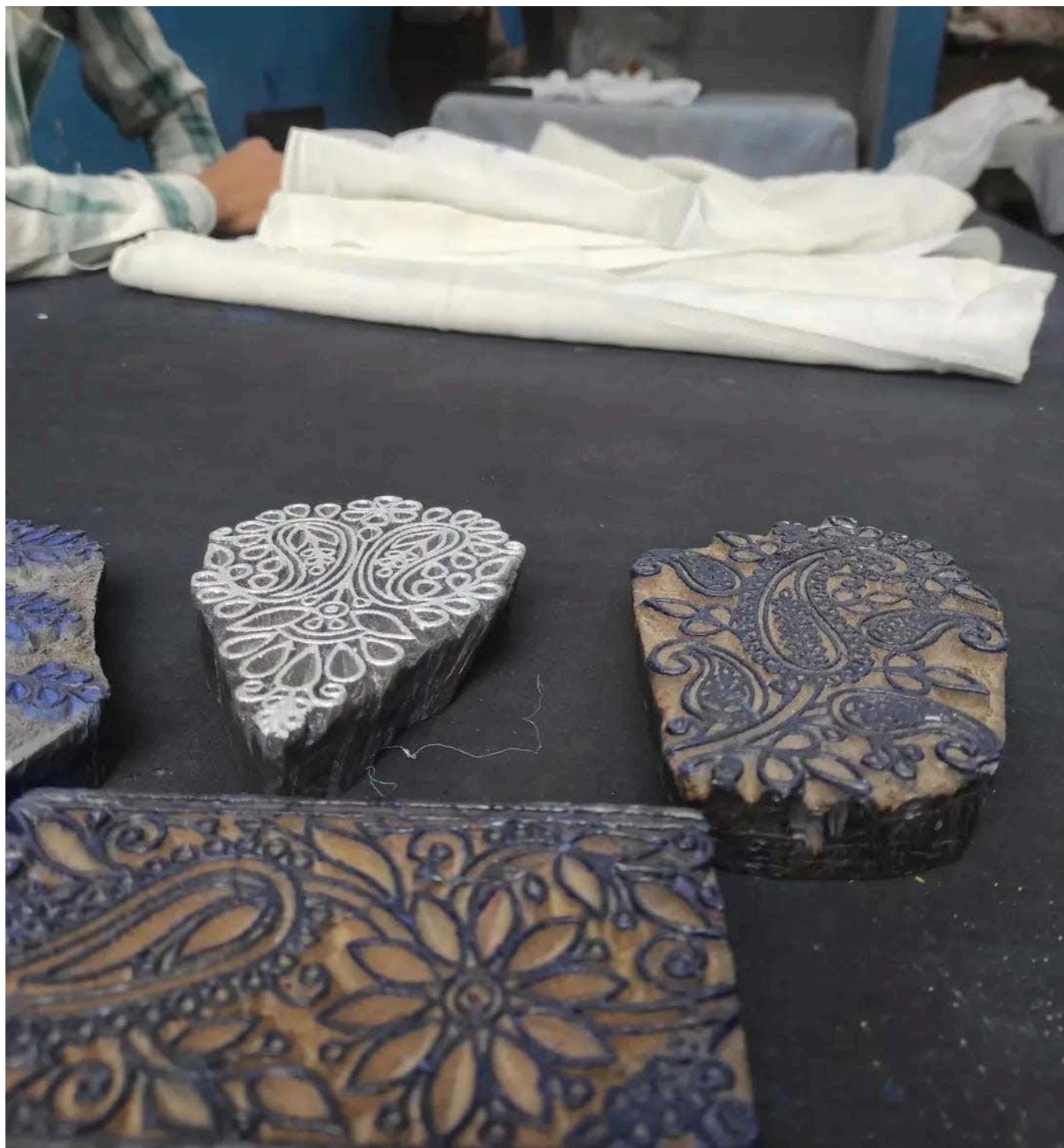
One of the most fascinating aspects of Lucknow is its craftsmanship. We visited workshops where artisans create silver shoes and pieces of art in zari zardozi. This style of embroidery, which uses

gold and silver threads, was introduced to India in the 12th century and has become highly prized by the aristocratic classes. Today, it is still used to make luxury clothing, especially for weddings and special occasions.



Lucknow is also famous for its Chikan Kari, a handmade embroidery art, which is one of the oldest embroidery techniques in India. It is made on white cotton, and the artisans go through several stages to create these magnificent works. Strolling through the Islamic quarter, we were able to appreciate the refined perfumes and kurti (traditional blouses) embroidered with this ancestral technique.





Traditional Wooden Printing Blocks



Lucknow's Silver Footwear

India: A journey between spirituality, culture and art

This trip through Uttar Pradesh has allowed us to discover cities steeped in spirituality and traditions. Allahabad, with its Kumbh Mela, Varanasi, the sacred city of Ganges, and Lucknow, cradle of exceptional craftsmanship, have enriched our understanding of India. These cities are not only places of passage but living witnesses of Indian history and culture.

Although we did not have time to explore everything, this trip was an unforgettable dive into the soul of India, a country where culture, spirituality and art meet at every corner. It was a life experience, and we know that we will come back to discover even more of these hidden wonders.

We recommend visiting all the places that we have visited and in case you have more time, pay a visit to Goa and New Delhi! We will visit them for sure on our next trip to India!

Cultural shock

Experiencing culture shock is common when visiting a new place, especially in a country as diverse as India. Here are some cultural differences that we noticed and some propositions for a smooth adaptation!

1. No Shoes

In India, it's a tradition to remove shoes when entering homes, temples, and certain sacred or clean places. This practice is deeply rooted in the culture, symbolizing respect, cleanliness, and humility. When visiting someone's home, a temple, or even some restaurants and shops, you may be asked to remove your shoes. Respecting this custom shows respect for the local culture, and it's a good idea to wear easy-to-remove shoes when out and about.



2. Traffic and Honking

Traffic in major Indian cities like Mumbai can be chaotic. There are often no strict lanes, and vehicles, including cars, buses, auto-rickshaws (tuk tuk), and bikes, move in all directions. Honking is used frequently as a warning, not out of aggression, to alert other drivers or pedestrians. The honking can feel overwhelming at first. In the absence of organized traffic systems, honking becomes a way of communicating, whether it's to warn someone of your presence or simply to keep the flow moving. Patience is key! It can take some time to adjust, but keeping calm and taking in the new experience can make it more manageable.



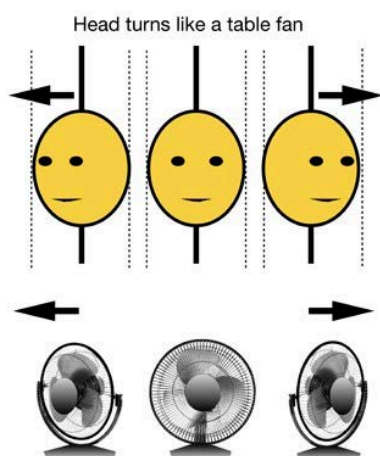
3. Asked for Pictures by Strangers

Many tourists, especially foreigners, are often seen as curious or fascinating by locals. In more rural or less touristy areas, people may ask for photos as a way to capture a memory or simply to interact with someone from another culture. You may be asked to pose for photos with strangers or children, especially if you're in a traditional or scenic area. Some may even ask for selfies. It's up to you whether you want to participate or not. Politely declining is completely okay. If you feel comfortable, though, it can be a fun experience.

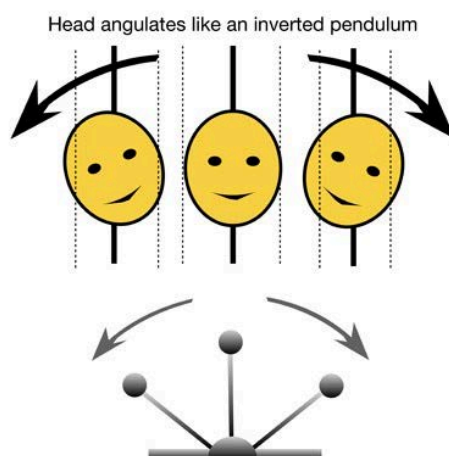
4. Shaking the Head for "Yes" or "No"

In India the act of shaking the head (a side-to-side wobble) can indicate affirmation or agreement, which can be confusing if you're used to a simple yes or no gesture. Sometimes, the head wobble is used instead of a verbal yes or no, and it can lead to misunderstandings if you come from a different cultural background! Just ask for clarification if you're unsure! You'll get used to this non-verbal communication with time.

The Indian NO



The Indian HARMONY Yes



5. Bargaining

Bargaining is a common and traditional practice in many parts of India, especially in markets, street shops, and even some restaurants. The price of goods is often set higher than the actual value, giving room for negotiation. Don't be afraid to negotiate! Always try to bring the price down to a level that feels fair. Start by offering about half of the asking price and work your way up from there until both parties are satisfied with the price.



Tip! – Do a little market research when you go to a new market before you buy anything and of course bargain for the goods you like to get the best deal! You will be an expert in no time!

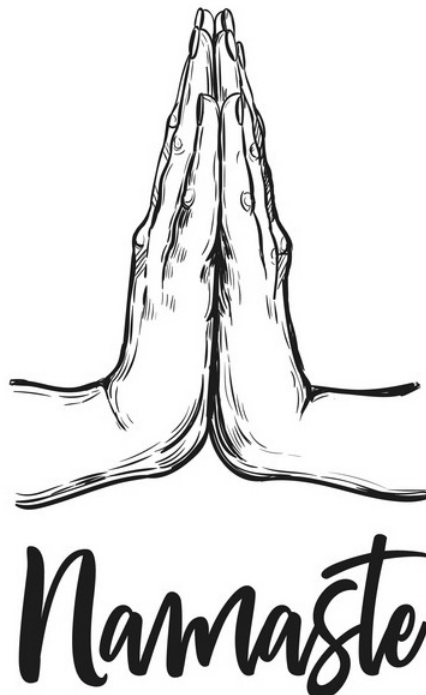
In general, be open-minded, embrace the differences and approach new experiences with curiosity rather than frustration. Don't be afraid to ask locals or fellow students for clarification or advice about cultural practices. The experience of culture shock is part of the journey (a funny part we may say), and over time, you'll likely find yourself adapting to the local customs, seeing them as unique and enriching rather than confusing.



Some useful words in Hindi

Here are the meanings of some Hindi words that you will hear often and they may come handy to you:

- ❖ *Namaste* (नमस्ते): a common greeting in India, used to say hello or goodbye. It's a respectful gesture when you place your hands together in a prayer position and bow slightly.
- ❖ *Thik Hai* (ठीक है) : it means "Okay" or "Alright". It is often used to show agreement or that something is fine.
- ❖ *Nahi* (नहीं): "No" or "Not". It is used for negation or refusal.
- ❖ *Chalo* (चलो) : it means "Let's go" or "Come on". It's used when you want to suggest moving or leaving.
- ❖ *Dhanyavad* (धन्यवाद) : "Thank you". A polite way to express gratitude.
- ❖ *Chai* (चाय) : "Tea". A popular beverage in India, typically made with black tea leaves, spices, milk, and sugar. It is an integral part of Indian culture.



For any further information, do not hesitate to contact us directly through email:

milayonkova.ivanova@studio.unibo.it

marymarkantoni@gmail.com

Enjoy your experience!

Mila, Maria