

My First Journey to India

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Every summer, a group of Penn State students travels to India to work in the HOINA children's home. The home, essentially an orphanage, houses, feeds, clothes, and educates approximately 200 children. During the past month, I was lucky enough to take part in this annual program, and I experienced an amazing journey.

Before this trip, I had never traveled outside the United States or been on an airplane, so every bit of the trip seemed extra thrilling. I will always remember our first bus ride once we left the airport in Visakhapatnam. To someone accustomed to American city life, I had difficulty comprehending the scene that I witnessed. Heaps of trash, open sewers, and sick beggars became commonplace sights. Buses, cars, trucks, auto rickshaws, bicycles,



Children at school on Independence Day

motorcycles, and pedestrians vied for dominance on the muddy roads and passed one another with minimal regard to opposing traffic. Cows, dogs, chickens, and water buffaloes roamed everywhere without seeming to notice the chaos surrounding them.



An auto rickshaw near Visakhapatnam

Although we did travel around the area on occasion, our group spent most of our time working hard at the orphanage. During our stay, we removed dozens of termite-infested windows, constructed a bridge between the Boys' Home and the Girls' Home, decorated the driveways with brightly

painted tires, created numerous mosaics out of broken tiles, painted signs, helped to prepare meals, taught English lessons to the staff, and assisted the children with their studies. In the intense heat, our hard work was even more difficult. Each day, we were already sweating by breakfast, and, as the day wore on, the temperature steadily climbed.

The children at the orphanage truly made our stay worthwhile. They addressed us as “brother” and “sister,” and we reciprocated. We all sincerely cared for the children, and they appreciated our presence. Before coming



En route from Kothavalasa to the Araku Valley

to HOINA, many of the children had undergone horrible experiences. Mr. Anand, the general manager of HOINA, told us many powerful stories about the pasts of individual children. Despite those hardships, never in my life have I met more loving, joyful children. A large number of them cried when we departed, and I miss them already.

Aside from an afternoon in Delhi, we spent all of our time near the city of Visakhapatnam in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Thus, while we experienced India, we only experienced a small portion of India. I consider this trip to be my first journey to India because I know that I shall return. I wish to see more regions of the country and to stay for a longer period of time. Compared to American prices, everything is incredible inexpensive in India, and perhaps I could travel around the country when I graduate from college in two years. I look forward to another adventure.



Sitting on a bus returning to HOINA