

My Guiding Experience in India

On returning back to England it became impossible for me to talk to anyone without mentioning what an amazing time I'd had in India, telling them what a 'life changing experience' it had been, and although this sounded like any other travellers cliché there really was no other way for me to express how amazing my trip was! The group I travelled with were awesome, we all got on so well and formed really strong friendships whilst we were away, it was like having our own little family.

We began our trip in Mumbai. Now I'd heard that the road system in India was a bit 'manic' but it wasn't until I was sat in the back of a rickety taxi driving into the centre of Mumbai that I realised just how 'manic' it could be. There didn't seem to be any trace of a highway code like we have in England, I think they substituted this for a lot of horn beeping instead! Anyway, we all managed to survive the journey and agreed that it was one of the scariest but funniest experiences we'd ever had.

Whilst exploring the streets of Mumbai there was so much to look at; markets, buildings, food, people, it was a total culture overload but I loved being in a city where I was constantly being absorbed by new experiences. On our second day in Mumbai we had a chance to visit some of the famous sights - the Gate of India, the Hanging Gardens, the Dhobi Ghat - I enjoyed seeing the Dobi Ghat the most; I just couldn't believe how it was possible to wash and iron all of those clothes without losing any when I always manage to lose at least one sock every time I do a wash. After we'd had lunch in a local restaurant (which was delicious!) we travelled down to Pune to the Sangam World Centre.

Sangam was such a beautiful place to stay in. All the staff were amazing, throughout the programme they were friendly, helpful and always enthusiastic, really making us feel like we were a part of the Sangam family. We took part in loads of different activities in which we experienced Indian culture, from eating a traditional Dosa lunch to laughter yoga as well as exploring the local town of Pune and buying our own Sari!

The main purpose in staying at Sangam was to 'Discover Your Potential'. During my stay I volunteered with a local community partnership called Ishwari. Ishwari is a training centre for young women which aims to build self-esteem and self-development through a number of different activities. We attended the centre for five days. Each day we prepared a number of different crafts (knitting, friendship bracelets, jewellery making) and taught the women how to make these. It was really rewarding knowing that we were helping these women to become more independent, giving them the skills to earn their own income. The best thing about working in Ishwari was that we interacted with the women every day and despite the language barrier we were still able to play games, sing songs and laugh together, forming friendships with one another.

So I think it's clear that going to India was a life changing experience for me. I've discovered that I have the potential to make a change to people's lives, I've learnt about the traditions of India's culture and I've made many new guiding friends.

I can't wait to go back as a volunteer in the future!

