

## India General Surgery Elective

**Exchange rate:** In April 2013 the exchange rate was roughly 50 rupees for 1 dollar.

**Travel:** I flew United Airlines via Lufthansa Airlines stopping in Germany on my way to New Delhi (US to Germany ~ 9 hrs 45 min, Germany to New Delhi ~ 7hr 15 min). On my return trip, I flew directly from Delhi to Newark (~ 15 hours). The round trip flight cost ~\$1700. There are multiple travel options from Delhi to Lucknow including flight, train or bus. I flew from Delhi to Lucknow (1 hour) and purchased this ticket separately for ~4100 rupees (~\$80). Keep in mind the luggage weight limit is 20 kg. I was charged about 2500 rupees (~\$50) for my additional luggage weight. I have heard the trains can be pretty comfortable but the trip is about 5 hours. The major buses are comparable to older greyhounds with ac and reclining chairs, but there are no power outlets or a restroom on the bus. When I took the bus on a separate trip, it took multiple bathroom and food stops. At the airport, KGMU had arranged transportation for me. There is a booth near the airport exit where you can get a prepaid taxi to take you to KGMU. Prepaid taxis are recommended because then you avoid having to haggle over pricing with someone that may not speak English.

**Things To Take:** In addition to the obvious passport and other necessary travel documents, the following are things that I would recommend taking: towel, body wash, loofah, bar of soap, toilet paper, scrubs, white coat, over the counter anti-diarrhea, plug adapter (I purchased this at the airport in Delhi), water, comfortable walking shoes and casual warm-weather clothing for some sight-seeing, nice casual for outing. There is a major mall with a grocery store about 15 minutes from the hospital in Lucknow where you can purchase any basic items you may need including toiletries.

**Dress For Men:** White coat, kakis and a button up for rounds, no tie. I brought one suit and a tie but never wore it. Scrubs for OR. When we went out, nice jeans and a polo or button up were appropriate. I brought a nicer pair of shoes for rounds/going out and running shoes for sightseeing and working out.

**Weather:** I went during the month of April. Generally, it felt like San Antonio or Houston does in June, pretty warm and humid, with temperature around upper 90's, touching 100 fahrenheit. It never rained during my trip.

**Food:** You can set up your own eating schedule with the hostel. They will provide veg meals for around 50 rupees per meal. My breakfast and dinner were delivered to my room within a half hour time frame every day. The hostel also provided a restaurant pamphlet for when I wanted to order non-veg options (chicken or fish), which cost about 150-400 rupees. I had to give a day's notice when I ordered non-veg food. I had my lunches at the department of surgery. The attendings eat together most days and bring a decent amount of food which they share with each other. When you go out to eat with the other residents, they consider you their guest and will not let you pay for a meal. In this context it is not appropriate to offer to pay for them or yourself.

**My Experience:** I spent three weeks with the Department of General Surgery under Dr. A. A. Sonkar and one week with the Department of Urology. Dr. Sonkar is a surgical oncologist and

interested in international academic cooperation. (He has spent time in many other countries and rotated through MD Anderson.) Our rounds usually started at 10 am and were performed in English. Rarely in the academic setting did I struggle to understand what was being said as nearly all of the lectures and communication were performed in English. Two mornings during the week, before rounding, I went to resident-given lectures over a variety of surgical topics. In the afternoon I went to the OR to watch surgeries. They will let you scrub in if you ask, but you will not get to do much as there is also a senior and junior resident scrubbed in with the attending. I got more out of observing. That being said, if you would like more hands-on experience, spend the night in the trauma center. The chief resident runs the trauma service at night, and there is ample opportunity to scrub into cases, the vast majority of which are blunt trauma (i.e. vehicle accidents) and perforation peritonitis. I was able to scrub into multiple cases when I stayed overnight. Once a week the team had clinic where I saw a great variety of advanced pathology. KGMU is an academic center and, as such, serves a very poor patient population. Therefore, you see many diseases at a very advanced stage. The schedule in urology was similar to the general surgery schedule, but urology has more clinic time. I spent a day at Sanja Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences also in Lucknow. This institution trains fellows only. I would definitely recommend spending a day here observing as it is quite a different experience from KGMU.

**Additional Tips:** An Internet access card is available. I paid 450 rupees for 1.5 GBs. They provided me with a phone to make calls locally. I would keep a record of the numbers they give you in case you need to get a hold of someone. If you would like to visit the Taj Mahal (in the city of Agra), I would recommend doing it at the beginning or end of your trip since Agra is located nearly half way between New Delhi and Lucknow. I went at the end of my rotation and it worked out great. A KGMU resident I spent time with helped me book the trip (scheduling train or bus transportation in India can be confusing). Also, Dr Sonkar set me up with a resident from the local medical college in Agra to take me around the city. This saved me a lot of money and really maximized my time/experience in Agra. Make sure the water you drink is either bottled or filtered. The hostel provides filtered water for you. My room had a fridge and air conditioning as well as a single bed, desk, closet and tv. There is a workout gym on the bottom floor of the hostel that has table tennis and basic workout equipment. Overall, everyone was very accommodating and took the time to explain things when I asked. I would like to go back in the future.