

Topic: Typical India

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The unforgettable trip to India started on 5th January, 2012. At this time it was winter in Germany. Our flight started about 5 o'clock in the morning in Munich/ Germany. A lot of flights were cancelled because of the stormy weather, but ours was scheduled. So Kristina, Stefan, Marcus and me went inside the aircraft. We were worried about being in the plane, because we could hear the storm outside. Even when the plane was at the terminal for boarding it swung from side to side. The take-off was very bumpy. We just saw the wings rushing past the windows. After some minutes we reached the flight level and everything was fine up to the moment we circulated above our first stop, London/ England. The weather was similar to Germany, so we had to wait more than one hour for a landing permission. After some time we got the permission and landed bumpier than we started in Germany. At the airport we had one hour left for our connecting flight. For the passport control we were separated in groups of two and couldn't see the other group. After passing the control we waited for the others but nobody was coming. Ten minutes before our gate closed we decided to go to the terminal for departure. The way was much longer than we expected. To change the terminals we had to go by transit and several lifts. With 10 kg hand baggage we ran through the airport. Finally I reached the gate but it was closed. I did not know what to do now, so I wanted to ask Stefan... but where was he? I turned around and around standing there alone with my hand baggage in front of a closed gate, but I could not find him. I went to the next gate to ask what I should do now. I showed my boarding pass to the personnel and he said "This is your gate, it changed. Your friends are waiting inside. Have a nice flight." What a relief! I went in the aircraft and looked for my friends. Marcus was sitting there, and so was Kristina. But where was Stefan? He was still missing. We were all shocked and tried to call him but he did not answer the call. After several minutes a person with a face totally turned into red and out of breath came into the plane. Finally Stefan had arrived and our trip to India could start.



In the airplane on the way to India

After eight hours flying we reached Mumbai/ India. Now we had to wait for another eight hours before we could check in for the next flight. Therefore we took place in the waiting hall of the airport of Mumbai. But what was that? We could hear a loud honking from the streets. Coming from Germany we were not familiar with this sound, but during our stay we learned that honking is one of the most important behavior while driving on the streets of India. The drivers there honk almost every time. They honk when they have contraflow on a small street, when a sharp curve is coming, when they want to overtake or even when they pass a crossroad. In Germany honking is like saying "Hurry up!" In India it is more like "Hey, I am here and I noticed you". So sometimes I felt more comfortable if I crossed a street and the cars were honking. If somebody honks he definitely saw you crossing the street. And never trust a crosswalk because nearly nobody will stop. If there is any gap between the cars: just run to cross the street!

Being in Manipal we had to register in the city and at the university. With the great help of our classmate Suma we handled that in three days. The bureaucracy in India is a little bit crazy, especially at the university. In Germany you go to the office or you just have to visit a homepage. You will get a form to fill in, you give your signature and after this everything is fine. In India you go to the office you have to go. The people there will tell you have to go to another office to get the form for the form. But to get the pre-form you have to write a letter to the chief warden or the head of the department. With this you go to an office. Here you will get your pre-form. Therefore they need a passport photo. With this pre-form you go back to the first office. But they will tell you to make a copy of this form. So you have to go to the next copy shop to get a copy. Afterwards you go back to the office. They will ask you for a second photograph. Now you get the form you wanted and you can fill in the blanks. You think it is done? No. Now you have to go to a third office to get one more signature. After taking one more copy you can go back to the second office to submit finally the registration form. The biggest problem is the waiting time. Between every step you have to wait at least 20 minutes. So maybe the last office is already closed before you can reach it.

In the first weeks we went regularly to the food court for having food. There we noticed a behavior we heard about before coming to India: They eat with their right hand. So it was not uncommon for us, but we all wanted to try it. Eating rice with just five fingers was the biggest challenge, but after some time we all had got the knack. For having some small things like toast, coffee, fruits, sweets or soft drinks we went to the next supermarket. Another typical Indian characteristic was waiting at the cash point. In Germany we build queues to pay our stuff with one person standing behind the other. Do not try to build a queue in India. It will not work out. The next person will jump the queue. Indians do not build queues, they build

clusters. Sometimes it will happen that they have not enough coins for change. In that case you will get some sweets :)

All in all, on the one hand India is a really unusual country, but on the other hand you can feel like being at home. All the people are very friendly, curious and helpful. If you are once in India just walk down the street and smile at anybody. In 99 percent they will smile back. Try the same in Germany: In 99 percent they will look away or even more serious.