

At the end of their AFS exchange in India, we asked some recent AFSers from the USA to answer two questions:

- ❑ What elements of your host culture, compared to US culture, did you find most difficult to adjust to in the areas of family, school and/or social life?
- ❑ Please note any advice you would like to share with AFSers destined for your host country.

Here are some of their responses:

It was difficult to adjust to the way that my host parents interacted with me, the idea of maids and having them do many chores, the maturity [level] of some of my classmates, the everyday prayer that my host family did. Expect anything and be prepared to have to make your own plans without depending on your family all of the time. Accents can be difficult to understand as you might misunderstand the tone. Keep a balanced head and don't overreact. Learn the main spoken language even if your friends and family do not normally speak it. Natives will be impressed and happier to help you if you try, even if they already know English.

Annah, Year, 2010

Get used to lots of people and noise, at least if you live in New Delhi like I did. You will be stared at everywhere you go, there's nothing you can do about it, so just try to get used to it, although this is easier said than done. The people will almost always be very kind and welcoming, but be careful in crowds of people and watch your possessions. Get used to the heat. It's unimaginable at first, but if you're like me, you'll actually miss it once you're gone. Be careful on and around the roads; they're insane at first. I thought that I was in a video game during my first car ride in Delhi...Be involved in your school, it's the best way to make friends. I lived too far away from my school and classmates to be able to spend much time with my friends and I know that this affected my experience. Do your best to learn the language, it's very easy to simply speak English with everyone. Just enjoy your time...it will be the shortest 10 1/2 months of your life and you will miss it so much when it's over.

Clara, Year, 2010

The school in India was very different than the school here in the U.S. but I was able to easily adjust by talking with my classmates and teachers. Socially it is hard to adjust because many of my peers were studying almost 24/7 but I did make friends by spending time with them for a few minutes at a time. Do not be surprised if someone comments on your weight,

it is perfectly normal in their society to do so. Be aware that most Indians do not follow the same rules of cleanliness we use (I can elaborate if I make a presentation). Money is a common topic of discussion. Be open and ready to experience anything, try new things you will never regret it!

Marianna Year, 2009

The most difficult part of adapting to Indian culture was by far the superstitions and beliefs of my host family, not exactly the religious beliefs, but the cultural taboos and (bad)luck-oriented ones. Remember to keep an open mind. Some Indians are very liberal and act just like Americans, but others are more conservative in comparison, as my host family was, and believe in many customs and practices that you may think are totally ridiculous and ignorant. But remember, this is their way of life, and whatever your personal views are, you must adjust to and adopt their way of life, since you are now part of their family. It will also leave a better impression on them if you are intimately into their lifestyle. And if you're going during the summer, drink LOTS OF WATER. Very important. I almost fainted one day because of the heat and dehydration, and I ended up having a 103 degree fever that night. Just drink a few glasses a day and you'll be fine.

Max, Summer, 2009

In India, people don't really say what they mean. Also, there are a lot of specific rituals that I didn't understand at first so I felt awkward about participating. However, you will earn the respect of those around you by hiding your confusion and at least trying to participate. India is a chaotic, beautiful, vivacious country, where nothing happens on time or the way you want it to, so let go of that stress and realize that a definite answer to an Indian really doesn't mean anything definite. As long as you know this, you'll be fine. Also, don't joke about religion, and realize that the country keeps all topics such as sex, drugs, and



alcohol under the radar, so try not to discuss any of these topics.

Kate, Summer, 2009

School was pretty stressful. There were many communication problems, the organizations was not very good, and the weather was very hot.

Malcolm, Summer, 2009

The school and the heat. It was much harder to concentrate with the loud ac running in the background or without the ac.

Hang, Summer, 2009

The complete lack of independence that is so much a part of Indian culture was incredibly hard to adjust to. My host family would decide what I was going to wear, who I could spend time with, what/ how much I would eat, etc. Also, the Indian social life, which is centered primarily on family and not peers my own age, was difficult to adjust to. Just be patient and keep a positive attitude! It's easy to get frustrated when you are unable to make decisions for yourself and aren't able to spend your time in the ways you are used to, but don't get too distracted by your frustrations to not realize what an incredible experience you are having! Embrace your new culture and you will absolutely love it!

Sara, Summer, 2009