

Travelogue

Minor Field Study in Chennai, India, autumn 2008.

Introduction

We, Camilla Axelsson and Theres Kvarnström, are two grad students in energy system engineering at Uppsala University and the Swedish University of Agricultural Science (SLU). Our Minor Field Study was to perform a feasibility study on building a Waste-to-Energy facility in India. In co-operation with Borlänge Energy AB we were going to investigate the possibility of combine a solution for two of India's major problems; power shortage and waste management.



How we found out about the project

In December 2007 Borlänge Energy send out an e-mail to all students in the fourth grade within the program Master of Science in Energy System, searching for students to do projects in either China, India, Chile or Rumania concerning Waste-to-Energy. We replied the same day and agreed on that India would be the most interesting place for us to go.

The MFS application and the preparations

In January we had four busy days to complete the MFS scholarship application. Writing the application forced us to think through our project which we had not yet had time to do. If you are sending the application to more then one University, which is preferable, be aware of the different requirements for the reports. A couple of weeks after handing in the report we found out that we got the scholarship.

The trip was planed to take off in the middle of August. The two weeks before the trip we concentrated full time on the preparations for the project. We visited a Waste-to-Energy facility in Norrköping and one in Linköping. We went to Borlänge to see their plant and to meet our supervisor Ronny Arnberg.

Preparations

Here are some things that you should consider before travelling to Chennai:

Vaccination

The vaccinations that we took were: Havrix, Tyfoid, Dukoral and Polio. We were told that there was no Malaria in Chennai so we did not by any malaria pills. When we arrived to Chennai they said that Malaria does exist in Chennai. (The friend of one of our friend got it.) We were told that you could buy Malaria pills in drugstores in Chennai, but we choose not to because of the possible negative side effects.

What you should pack

- Lonely planet: Has been a good guide in Chennai and on our trips. If you are just going to be in the southern part, we would recommend the thinner version because it is quite heavy
- Clothes: The state Tamil Nadu, were Chennai is situated, is very religious. When you go to your office or go to meetings you should wear clothes that cover your shoulders and ankles and they should not be tight. We recommend you not to bring too much clothes from Sweden. When we arrived to Chennai we bought a lot of Indian clothes. They are very comfortable in warm weather and it is very appreciated by the Indians

that you meet, because it shows that you adapt to their culture. If you do not feel comfortable in Indian clothes you can always buy Western clothes in apartment stores. But for the first days we recommend you to bring a couple of thin, long trousers from Sweden and short sleeved shirts. If you like to party once in a while, you should bring some party clothes as well. It is ok to wear tighter clothes that do not cover your shoulders in the night clubs, but you should wear a scarf on the way to the place.

- USB-memory
- Products from the pharmacy: Alcolgel (hand disinfection), Immodium and some kind of Probiotika (good bacteria)
- Y3 for hand washing clothes
- A small torch is good to have, when it is a power cut. And there are a lot of power cuts!
- Mosquito repellent. You can also buy mosquito repellent lotion in Chennai specially adapted to the mosquito's in the area and that smells good!

What you should not pack

- Shampoo, conditioner, lotion etc.
- Adapter

Computer

If you are going to bring a lap top, make sure that your wire less connection works. They have wire less connection possibilities in a lot of offices, cafés and hotels.

Season

The hottest season in Chennai is between April and July. The temperatures could rise up to 40 degrees and it can be quite tough to be there this time of the year. In the middle of October until the middle of December there is monsoon in Chennai. Usually it rains a couple of days and then the weather is fine a couple of days. Sometimes during the monsoon the roads get flooded and in worse case it can take up to 5 hours to go 3 km. This could complicate the fieldwork. Between August and October and between January and March the climate is more convenient, the temperature is between 25-35 degrees.

Hotel

We lived at Hotel Chandra Park. It is very clean and very price worthy and the staff is very nice. You can find it in Lonely planet.

VISA

If you go early in the morning to the embassy in Stockholm, you can get the VISA in the afternoon. If you live far from Stockholm and not plan to go there before the trip it is possible to send them your passport with all the needed information that you find on www.indien.nu and you have your VISA after five days.

The trip

We left Sweden the 19th of August 2008. We had an airport pickup waiting for us in Chennai, which we recommend if you arrive late at night, and got safely to our hotel. The hotel that we booked on internet the day before, Hotel Chandra Park, turned out to be a very good choice. The rooms were clean, had air condition and were without insects. The staff was friendly and the food at the restaurant was cheap and tasteful. Because of these reasons we decided to stay there for the rest of our stay even though an apartment would have been a cheaper solution.

Borlänge Energi has a co-operation with the Non Government Organisation (NGO) Hand in Hand Trust who partly work with Solid Waste Management (SWM) in Chennai. They have three offices, one outside Chennai in Kanchepuram and two in Chennai city area. We got a desk at one of the city offices. The first weeks we took the city train to the office every day. We had internet access and well informed people who could help us with information and getting interviews. But the heat without air condition during the daily power cuts that lasted a couple of hours made it unbearable to stay in the office. With only short battery time and no

internet access it was hard to get anything done during these hours. And after a couple of weeks without any interviews we decided to try on our own. We dressed properly in our Indian clothes and went to visit the departments that we wanted to interview. It went out well, after some waiting time we got to meet some relevant persons and got the information we were looking for. If we did not get the information we came for, we always got something else valuable out of the meeting. Indian people are in general very friendly and helpful.

The rest of our stay we worked at the office in the morning. After lunch when the two hour long power cut started, we went for interviews or worked in cafés or at the hotel. We found it hard to concentrate on writing during the time in India, so we decided to focus on collecting information. It is easy to get data and details when you are in India but ones you get back to Sweden it is more difficult; Indians do not always answer to e-mails.

We really enjoyed our stay in India. We even prolonged the trip with one month so totally we stayed for three and a half months. The last weeks we had vacation in Kerala to get some sun and in Delhi to do some shopping. It was a nice reward even though the time in Chennai had been great.

Contact with other foreigners

It was easy to get to know other foreigners and Indians. Already after the first week we had a group of people to hang out with. There were people who work at a foreign company as expats or are students like us writing a master thesis or doing an internship. Once a week there is an “expats night” at one of the clubs in Chennai for all the foreigner, go there if you want to meet people! (Facebook group: Chennai Expats Network)

When you come to Chennai

Cafés

- Amethyst: Our favourite café. It is like an oasis in the middle of the city. This is the perfect café to work at with a nice environment and wireless connection.
- Ecstasy café: It is situated in the same building as the Sathyam cinema: They have amazing luxury chocolate pieces and very nice coffee. Have wireless internet.
- Café Coffee Day: They have the best coffee in Chennai.

Beaches

- Ideal Beach Resort: If you want to swim at the beaches in Chennai you need to swim with your clothes on. But if you go to a beach resort it is ok to wear a bikini or shorts. Ideal Beach resort is a very nice resort where you can go for a day trip. You can hire a taxi for a whole day for around 300 SEK and you can fill it up with your friends!

Party

- You can not drink alcohol in restaurants, just in hotels. That is why all the night clubs are in 5 star hotels. Night clubs closes at 11 pm.

Traffic

- The traffic can be quite dangerous in Chennai. The easiest and cheapest way to travel is with an autorrichaw which is a small three wheeled car. When you want to go longer distances or if you travel late at night it can be a better idea to hire a taxi. Number to a cheap and good call taxi: 044-2723 2755.

Contact details

If you are interested to know more take a look at our blogg: indienbloggen.blogg.se or e-mail us at: camaxel@gmail.com, thereskvarnstrom@gmail.com.