



MEMORANDUM

TO: 2009 Vellore Group

FR: Dr. Ruth Berggren

DT: July 22, 2008

RE: Traveling to Vellore

Here's a summary of what you need to know about your elective at the Christian Medical College (CMC) in Vellore:

Elective – The name of the elective is MEDI 7003, Elective in International Medicine.

Getting Started – Dr. Anand Job (princi@cmcvellore.ac.in) is vice principal and the key person for you at CMC, but, like everyone else, is very, very busy. Before you contact him, check out the CMC web site (<http://cmch-vellore.edu/>) and familiarize yourself with what's going on. When you send your information to Dr. Job, they can open a file on you. In your email, specify that you are from UTHSC San Antonio and that you are one of the students with a scholarship to visit there, and provide your travel dates and contact info. You might state in the letter that you plan to be an 'observer' which spares you having to get official clearance from the government, etc.

Tickets – Where to get tickets? Best advice is to look for the cheap sites – asia.com, Travelocity.com, cheaptickets.com. A travel agent may not be the least expensive. Those of you going in January and February should book early to get the best prices. Another thought might be a cheaper flight from Houston to London and a separate ticket from London to Chennai. If you do this, however, be sure to leave enough time between flights for delays as it's likely that the two tickets will be on different airlines and possibly different terminals. If you are going through Heathrow or Gatwick in London, give yourself even more time for the transfers and the security tends to be very tight and the lines exceedingly long and slow.

Passport and Visa – You will need a travel visa for India – a tourist visa is what you need since you will be an “observer” and not a “student.” There is a Consulate in Houston. You should allow **at least six weeks to secure a visa** as the office is slow and understaffed. Your passport will need to be valid for six months beyond your return date. People who have been before recommend doing this in even further in advance and either traveling to Houston to expedite the process or sending your passport with the other required information and photographs via a trackable service, such as UPS or Fedex. We have had several stories over the years of very much delayed visas. If you go to Houston, they will turn the visa around in a day for you. One person can take all the passports, money and any other visa requirements for a whole group.

Vaccinations and What to Take – Everything that's recommended? Or less? It's a personal choice. We suggest that you all see Dr. Beth Walter, Associate Professor of Medicine in the Section of Infectious Diseases here at UTHSCSA. She runs a travel clinic over at Christus Santa Rosa on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons and on Friday mornings. The address of the clinic is 2829 Babcock, Suite 235. To get an appointment, call 592-0340. Dr. Walter is aware of your destination at Vellore, but if your travels will take you elsewhere, be sure to let her know. It is important to know that the Hepatitis A series takes six months to complete, and the typhoid vaccine should be completed two weeks before travel. It is also critical to start your malaria medication a week before you go and continue on for six weeks after you get back.

Your Scholarship Checks – Stephanie De La Vega at the Center (567-0795) will let you know when your checks will be ready and we will be asking you to sign a waiver-of-liability form and review other travel documents recommended by UTHSCSA.

Weather – Vellore and India in general will be much warmer in April than in January and February. Check the Web for average temperatures.

Arriving – If you are travelling as a group, set a meeting point for your group in the Chennai airport ahead of time. Past travelers suggest you book a hostel or hotel in Chennai before you arrive on the plane with airport pick-up confirmed via email. We highly suggest you stay overnight rather than travel to Vellore after dark. Traffic accidents are of great concern to travelers in India – especially at night – as there are so many people, vehicles and animals using the roads.

Your hotel can help you to arrange a taxi to CMC Vellore in the morning (\$45 is the approximate cost of a taxi all the way to Vellore) or you can contact the CMC Deputy Director in advance to arrange for van or taxi pick up from Chennai to Vellore (3 people per taxi – the Center will provide you with the name and contact information for the CMC's new Deputy Director as soon as possible)

When Walking – Don't forget to LOOK RIGHT when crossing the streets. Cars, bicycles, taxis, buses, trucks in all their numbers drive on the left-hand side of the road.

Registering – CMC Hospital and the College (medical school) are about two miles apart. Students should first check in at the CMC campus at the Principal's office. Bring your identification with you, as well as your photos. You will need to have four passport-sized photos of yourself when you arrive at CMC on your first day.

That afternoon you can go to the hospital (via autorickshaw or the #2 bus) to meet with the Deputy Director and to pay your \$100 enrollment fee (remember to keep this receipt and give it back to the Principal on campus).

Accommodation – Students who traveled in 2008 recommended staying on the CMC campus, which is safe and quiet, and away from the traffic. There is clean water and some nice trails, access to food from nearby hotels and the campus store, a phone, a computer room and laundry services. If you do choose to stay on campus, you will check in at "Big Bungalow." The places to stay on campus with air-conditioning are the International Hostel, Johnson house (a nice common area with a TV, refrigerator, etc.) and the Big Bungalow Annex. There is also a newer housing complex available, though last year's students found it to be less desirable (and home to many roaches!). Campus rooms will need to be reserved in advance through the Deputy Director and they do fill up quickly (Again, the Center will get you this contact information as soon as it is available).

Several students have stayed in the Aavana Hotel which is across the road from CMC Hospital. Reports are that it was quite comfortable and cost the equivalent of \$10-12 a day. Many students liked the hotel and said it gave their group a sense of the city. It is best to inquire about housing before you go.

Get the address of the hotel where you are staying before you leave and keep it handy. You will need to know this in case of lost luggage. If staying on campus, the address is as follows. Locally, autorickshaws will know where to take you if you say "CMC bagayam."

Big Bungalow
CMC Campus
Bagayam
Thorappadi post
Vellore 632002

Internet Access – This is available in the library, which is just across from the hotel – and it's high speed. There is also Internet access in the College library. Not all Internet access at CMC is high-speed, by any

means, and USB ports are not always available. We recommend saving your work frequently, as connections are not always reliable.

Cash – Some students who have gone in the past recommend taking \$100 or \$200 in emergency cash (You will need \$100 registration fee when you arrive). There are ATMs everywhere with reasonable rates, and we do not recommend travelers checks as it's a hassle to find places to cash them and rates are very variable. However, keep in mind that students have reported a general distaste for making change and the even greater distaste for giving coins in change, and ATMs give only large bills (example: a ticket may be 41 rupees but they will only grudgingly accept a 50).

Clothes – Don't bring a lot, as many of you will be moving around during your time there and you will certainly find comfortable and inexpensive clothing to buy near CMC and during your weekend visits. Even though the weather is hot, it is important to show your respect for your hosts by dressing professionally. Women should dress modestly in keeping with the local custom, which means that your legs (including your ankles) and shoulders should be covered. Casual attire (long shirts, slacks, dresses, no ties) is fine for the hospital as well as nurse and doctor rounds, and most people wear sandals at all times.

Best rotations – A must-do is CHAD (Community Health and Development). Some students really liked Nurse Rounds, which is more interactive than Doctor Rounds, but both are recommended. Another favorite is the Leprosy Clinic, which is usually a one-day trip. With Doctor Rounds, you tend to be very much an observer. You can sign up for rotations in any area that interests you. There may also be opportunities to participate in conferences or special events on campus.

Keeping a journal – We encourage you to take a notebook with you to record your impressions on the spot while they are fresh. We require students to submit a blog, and you can do this while in India or, if you prefer, keep a journal and convert it into electronic form when you return.

We are very interested to share your reactions and observations with the many donors who have helped us fund these trips. It helps them have some first-hand involvement and stay committed to the program, plus this lets them know we really appreciate their gift. And since we cannot be with all of you in Vellore, your blogs are key in receiving a grade for your elective. Keep in mind that they are due to the Center **within two weeks of the end of your rotation**. Some good blogs from previous years are listed at the end of this document.

Grading – You will receive a letter grade for MEDI 7003, which is a 2-credit elective for fourth-year students. Grades are determined based on the content of your blogs. To receive an A, your writing and photos should demonstrate that you

- reflected on medical and social experiences throughout your rotations and travels
- composed a 1-2 page original essay that demonstrates in-depth understanding of one tropical disease
- participated in three medical rotations

Food – There is lots of good food everywhere: bakeries, restaurants and other places. The students who did not get sick at all maintain it was because they were very strict about not drinking water except bottled water, or eating fruits or vegetables they did not peel themselves. In general, avoid street food or anything raw, including salads and fresh fruit plates at restaurants. You may want to bring Powerbars and powdered Gatorade.

Safety – The students who have traveled to Vellore in the past have told us they felt very safe during the trip and travels around afterwards, but we still advise that women do not go out alone, especially after dark. Also, be aware that driving conditions are not always ideal, and can be especially dangerous at night. Many students have taken the precaution of registering with the American Embassy, which can also be helpful in terms of receiving emails for traveler information updates.

The Guidebook to get – Unanimous agreement about *The Lonely Planet's India* as being the one item not to forget to pack!

Student Blogs

January 2008

Rachel Hassan - <http://rachelhassan.blogspot.com/>

February 2008

Colin Stewart - <http://colinindia.blogspot.com/>

April 2008

Christopher Patton - <http://vellore-n-after.blogspot.com/>

April 2007

Bharvi Oza - <http://bharvioza.blogspot.com/>

Find more student blogs at <http://www.texashumanities.org/paulbrandscholarship.cfm>