

## Internship Experience at NARI

[NARI](#) has been having interns from all over the world since early 1970's. Almost all of these volunteers/interns come to NARI with their own funds and for the rural experience. NARI provides them an excellent opportunity to work on rural development. Staying and living in Phaltan also allows these interns to experience life in rural India.

Staying in Phaltan is very reasonable. Thus a comfortable one or two bedroom apartment can be rented for Rs. 1500-2000 per month (US \$ 35-45) and good Indian meals cost Rs. 175-225 per day (US \$ 4-5).

[NARI](#) hosts interns in the areas of agriculture, renewable energy, engineering and sustainable development. Since NARI is an R&D institute, we expect the interns to have a minimum of bachelor's degree in agriculture, engineering or sciences. Interns with master's degree are preferred. NARI benefits from the enthusiasm of these interns and in turn these interns get a rich experience of doing projects relevant to rural India. There is a tremendous opportunity at NARI to get hands on experience of developing technologies.

Recently NARI has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with University of Florida (UF), Gainesville, U.S.A. so that engineering graduate students from UF can come to NARI for a 3-month internship.

Here we list some of the experiences of the interns **in their own words.**

One of the interns (Sebastian Steinfeld) has written a [nice booklet](#) on what to expect when coming to Phaltan for internship. **Please read it.**

### Sander Greenfield

I am a student of the Twente University in the Netherlands. I have a bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering and at present I am doing a masters course in Microelectronics and microsystems. As a part of the study I did an internship at the Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) for 2.5 months (April to June 2005). During this period I worked on motor-assisted cycle rickshaw, the [MAPRA](#).



I came here at the end of April when the temperature during most days was more than 40 degrees Celsius. It was hot but dry and after a few days I became accustomed to the heat and left my air-conditioned hotel room. I took a room in the house of an Indian family in Phaltan town to be more involved in the local culture. I found living in Phaltan to be very cheap and it was a nice experience to manage things by myself in this rural town. I found the people to be very kind and everyone wanted to be my friend. I also had dinner with my landlord's family a couple of times. I became somewhat well known in Phaltan, because I was the only white man who was living in Phaltan in the hot season at that time.

As a part of my internship I have tried to develop a special controller which can measure the load of the MAPRA. With the use of this controller, depending on the amount of load, the motor will turn on/off automatically. The purpose of this controller is to prevent unfriendly use of the batteries and the motor. The system works with a mass spring system, which measures the pedal force. This mass spring system transforms the pedal force into an electric signal, which is processed in an analog electronic controller.

During my internship I also had an opportunity to explore and manage the controller project myself. First I did some theoretical work and later on I did the practical things like building the mass spring system and the controller. I was completely free to develop my own ideas in the envelope provided by my internship guide Dr. Rajvanshi, the Director of NARI. Furthermore I did sometimes practical work together with the NARI technicians. They are very handy with tools and know how to improvise and build systems with local materials.



The institute is very helpful to the interns. If you have any problems with your project or just in routine life, they will help you out. The people of the institute stand behind you, and you can always walk into the office of the president or director and discuss things with them. They guided me very well during the internship, so that I was able to design, build and finish the controller. Furthermore every week the researchers of the institute give a seminar about their work to share their knowledge. I also gave a seminar about my work on the controller, which I had developed, during my last week at the Institute.

When you have free time you can travel around. There are some nice places, which you can visit like Mahabaleshwar, Panchgani, Goa, etc. You can also visit the market in Phaltan town. At this market there are a lot of nice fruits available. The Indian food is quite good. There are some very nice restaurants in town where you can have a good dinner for approximately 60 Rupees. Furthermore in town there is even a small swimming pool with an attached gymnasium. Almost every day you can take a swim here when you are finished with your work. A bicycle is the most useful way to get around in town and to go to the institute. I also had a bicycle, which was given to me by my intern guide Dr. Rajvanshi. You can either buy a new bicycle or get a good second hand one.

The internship at NARI and living in Phaltan was a really nice experience in my life. If it is possible to come back, then I will definitely do so. There are many things I can do during my return visit such as the analog controller which I made during my internship can be incorporated into a microprocessor. Further there are some improvements which can be done in the MAPRA. I can suggest to students and other persons with some engineering background that they can join this institute if they think they can contribute to the research that is being done here. If you are focused, think independently, like to do both theoretical and practical work and are ready to manage things by yourself in the cultural life of rural India, then I recommend that you come to NARI.



**Maelle GEDOUIN and Cecile LE DOARE were two interns from France.** (They worked for two and half months in NARI from June - August 2005. Here is what they have to say about their internship).

*"We are two students of fourth year in an Agricultural University in Beauvais (France). We are preparing a Master of Science (MSc) in Agriculture and Management. Our school asks us to make a training period during at least 8 weeks during the summer to acquire professional experience. As we were able to have helps from the Conseil Regional de Picardie, a French institution, to make a working period abroad, we decided to realise it in India. We found NARI contact, wrote, and they answered immediately.*

*In NARI, we first worked on a project of a center that would provide courses and give information on Sustainable Development. Its name is "[Center for Sustainable Living](#)". We first thought about a typical weekly schedule. This one could be proposed to the CEOs that would come to the Center (managers, persons that have high responsibilities and influence), with the aim of aware them and lead with them a strong reflection. In relation with that center we worked on a project that consists of finding the maximum number of persons that could be fed from ten acres of land, answering to the human daily needs on the basis of a vegetarian diet. We made the choice of the crops and of their organisation regarding the local situation. Then we calculate the area necessary to answer to the defined needs, with the constraint of an area of ten acres, and found the maximum number of persons that could be fed.*

*In a second time we modelled on Excel sheets some statistical methods used to analyze agronomic and genetic experiments. This enables people to treat the data more easily and quickly. In NARI there was always people to answer to our questions or to help us, what was really enjoyable. That helped us a lot to complete our work and to avoid loss of time.*

*In Phaltan we were first living in a hotel, that was comfortable and really OK, but we were soon looking for a flat to rent. We found it easily with the help of someone working in NARI. We were feeling really comfortable in Phaltan. People were very welcoming. They were really curious of who we are and what we were doing in Phaltan, where we come from... There was always somebody to help us if we were looking for something.*

*During the days off we were able to move a little, but it was not possible to move very far because it is really long by bus. We visited Mahabaleshwar, Pune and around, and it is also possible to go to Pandhrapur and anywhere else in a round of 100 km.*

*Finally, it was a great experience for us, humanly and professionally. We really enjoyed it and hope we will be able to come back in India in the future."*

## My Experience Interning at NARI

Adam Robinson

### **Working at NARI**

I came to Phaltan in mid June of 2005. I came on a Coca-Cola World Citizenship Program Fellowship. This was organized through the University of Florida International Center. I was extremely grateful for opportunity to travel abroad and study engineering, since this type of quite rare in my field. I lack only a small bit of paperwork to complete in Mechanical Engineering.



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Working at NARI has been great for the emphasis on practical, hands-research and development. You likely won't spend much time in front computer here, even though I actually did, just due to my particular project. Using Dr. Rajvanshi's philosophy of 'Just Do It', when it comes to research and development, really showed me how to develop and maintain momentum in experimental work.

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While it is true that equipment is somewhat limited here, this fact helps you learn to do a lot with a little. They are quite experts at this already.

I originally came here alone, but as it turned out, two girls from an agricultural university in France came for almost the same time period. They made excellent company and surely a more enjoyable experience. Additionally, the staff at NARI was exceedingly friendly and easy to work with. They were amazingly helpful both at work and away from it.

### **My Project**

While at NARI, I worked on the Ethanol Stove project. This project had been underway for almost a year before I came and was still going when I left. For my contribution, I rewrote and researched the main project report, conducted a new round of user testing, and worked on some design modifications for reduced carbon monoxide emissions. I also helped train some of the staff in certain software applications and made some exploratory work on another project.

For the Ethanol Stove project here, they developed a cookstove to run on an alcohol/water mixture of relatively low concentration. The significance of this is that at least a third of the world's population relies on solid fuels such as wood, coal, or agricultural wastes for their daily cooking needs. This reliance exists because these fuels are often considered cheap, relative to cleaner burning liquid and gaseous fuels such as kerosene or LPG. This assumption however, does not consider the fact that solid fuel combustion is inefficient and polluting, especially when used indoors, as is often the case. This polluted indoor environment in turn leads to poor health quality and then less ability to earn money, creating a cycle of decline. The significance of the low concentration, near 50%(w/w), is that a mixture with this property may be distilled in a single step, using only solar energy, as demonstrated by another Institute project. This means for complete rural independence in production and use of clean cooking fuels may in fact show a viable path to attacking some of the roots of poverty.

Like LPG and natural gas, alcohol burns quite cleanly, producing few pollutants. But in contrast to these fossil fuels, alcohol may be produced renewably, from certain common crops, such as sugar cane or sweet

sorghum. So if an agrarian economy, such as rural India, were able to produce its own clean cooking fuel instead of relying on expensive imports of fossil fuels, then serious strides could potentially be made in reducing the persistent poverty here.

### ***General Information about Living in Phaltan***

The following lists some basic information one might need if planning to intern in Phaltan, organized by category:

1. *People* – The people of Phaltan have been unbelievably warm and welcoming. Before we were here two weeks we had more new friends than we new what to do with. By the end of the time, we had to fend off dinner and tea invitations just to have a quiet night at home for a change. Living in Phaltan offers an amazing opportunity to get to know a part of the real India, away from the tourist circuit or the big city. The people are so honest and friendly here, that you feel at home almost immediately, even despite the basic culture shock.
2. *Language*
  - English – Most but not all people speak at least a bit of English.
  - Hindi – Most people also speak Hindi. Some may have moved here from another part of India, and so they will likely speak Hindi and not Marathi.
  - Marathi – Marathi is the mother tongue of the state of Maharashtra. There is a long glorious history for the Maratha people, so they hold on with pride to their unique language. If, as a foreigner, you learn some words and phrases in Marathi you may well become a mini-celebrity. It's guaranteed that you will cause a commotion and draw an approving crowd every time you use your Marathi in public.
3. *Weather*
  - Hot Season – April, May – temperatures up to the 40's Centigrade with little air-conditioning available. It's best not to come during this time.
  - Monsoon – June through September - overcast and cool but not cold quite agreeable actually. Some rain. Temperatures during the day generally between 25 and 30°C.
  - Mosquitoes – There are a good number of mosquitoes here, but they are not unbearable. Two girls from Northern France, for example, were constantly eaten by mosquitoes, but managed fine with repellent. This Floridian found the mosquitoes here to be weak and puny compared to the ones at home and was not much bothered by them. For example, no sleeping nets were needed to keep mosquitoes at bay. They sell small appliances here that plug into an outlet and supposedly keep mosquitoes from biting. These seemed to work fine.
4. *Economics*
  - Hotel: AC – Room rates at Hotel Aryaman, the main hotel in Phaltan, were Rs450/day, non-AC – Rs200/day. Aryaman also has a decent restaurant and a very friendly and helpful staff. Also, it is a big landmark in town, which is useful.

- Apartment – We were able to find an apartment through someone who works at the institute, but it took close to a month to find a suitable one. For one Bedroom, Hall, and a Kitchen, as they call it here, in a nice, relatively quiet neighborhood, convenient to what we needed was Rs2000/month including utilities and minimal furnishings (no refrigerator). There was no air-conditioning at the apartment, of course, but July through September it wasn't necessary anyway.
- Restaurants – There are several nice restaurants in town. Hotel Aryaman is a pure vegetarian kitchen that serves nice food. Hotel Minar has a very nice garden dining area and serves non-veg as well as veg food. Meals here may run around Rs 100 per person. Hotel Pink Hill, just across the street from NARI was a regular lunch stop. It was not much to look at, but the food was maybe the best in town. Meals here ranged from Rs.35 to 100 per person. Street vendors sold many things ranging from Pau Bhaji – a bread and split-pea soup combination that was quite good – to Chinese food, at prices much lower than restaurants. However, sanitation at these stalls was often questionable.
- Mess – Many of the people who worked at NARI but did not live with their families signed up for a Mess, where a local woman would cook them lunch, which they would pick up before coming to work, and then they would take dinner at her house as a group. This arrangement was quite inexpensive at around Rs10 per person per meal. The food here was basic but plentiful and well made, including a vegetable dish, a dal, rice, chapati (something like a tortilla) and perhaps a yogurt or buttermilk item.
- Cooking – We were able to borrow a gas range from someone at the institute and we had to rent an LPG cylinder from the gas company. The breakdown was Rs900 deposit on the cylinder and valves plus Rs600 in fees and taxes for the gas. We did not need to refill the cylinder during our two months in the apartment, averaging near two meals cooked per day.

Fresh fruits and vegetables were readily available in street markets every day, and were quite inexpensive. Fresh chicken was also available at about Rs80 per bird, trimmed, but you have to pick it out while it's still squawking. Basic commodities were available at dozens of small convenience shops all over the city, including milk, eggs, bread, flour, spices, water, etc. One could expect basic meal materials to run between Rs20 and Rs60 per person per meal, depending on their preferences.

- Water – Bottled water was readily available and we remained quite healthy drinking only that. However, the plastic bottle collection was quite an environmental disaster. Most people here filter and boil their water at home, then carry it in containers.
- Bus – The state bus, or ST as it is popularly called, is again, not much to look at, but it gets the job done and does so cheaply. The three hours bus ride to Pune, the nearest big city with broadband internet available, was about Rs60 one way. In Phaltan, a bus left the station for Pune every half hour between 6:30am and 7pm. Some were express buses and some were not, but they all seemed to take about the same amount of amount of time. You could take the ST to and from NARI for about Rs4 each way, but then you had to take a rickshaw (Rs10 to 15) or walk to the apartment from the ST stand.
- Jeep – Another option for going between cities was private jeeps. They would gather and wait at common departure points for a minimum number of people who wanted to go the same direction. The cost of this was generally the same or a little less than the ST.

- Autorickshaw – A small, three-wheeled vehicle that can fit up to 4 or 5 passengers. They run about Rs5/km. The rate ended up being about Rs50 one way from Hotel Aryaman to NARI or Rs 20 maximum for anywhere in Phaltan. Of course, there are no meters on the rickshaws in Phaltan, so you have to negotiate your price every time.
- Bicycle – Bicycles are a very common mode of transport in Phaltan. Though the roads were quite daunting at first, we quickly grew accustomed to the slightly controlled chaos of Indian roads, and managed not to get creamed by a truck for almost three months (then we left). General bike prices were (very) Used ~Rs500 - 800, New Rs2500. Some of us had a lot of problems with our bikes and some didn't so it would be good to get a reputable brand of bike, such as an Atlas or Hero.
- Phone Calls – Mobile phones are available here. A basic phone may run something like Rs2000 to purchase. The calling plans are supposed to be reasonable. We mostly relied on the STD/ISD/PCO public phone booths to make our calls home. Almost every corner has one of these booths. Of all the things likely to kill your budget, phone calls are at the head of the list. A 5 to 10 minute phone call to the US ran about Rs100. While that is reasonable on a limited basis, it adds up quickly if you do it often.
- Internet/Computers – At this time, only dial-up connections are available in Phaltan, though there are rumors that broad-band will soon arrive. There are several internet cafes, the best being Net Park, just behind State Bank of India. The rate was Rs25/hr, though if there was more than one other person there, the connection could be maddeningly slow. Also, almost all computers in Phaltan are quite old, slow, and run only Windows 98, so any fancy USB gadgets that you want to use, forget it unless you bring the drivers for it. We were however finally able to transfer digital pictures from camera to CD and then get some nice color prints made at Gandhi Color Lab for Rs5 per 4x6 photo. If you bring your own computer, you must absolutely get a quality surge suppressor. One can be obtained here for about Rs1000. It may be good to buy it here, since they seem reasonable about replacing it if it goes bad. One laptop has already been fried because of not using one of these. Depending on the length of stay, it may be desirable to have some more substantial electrical conditioning equipment, such as a CVT (Continuously Variable Transformer), which is available for rent at reasonable rates.
- Hindi or Marathi Lessons (see section 1 about potential celebrity status) – We were able to take Hindi lessons three nights a week for about 1 hour each session. The fees for this range from about Rs25 to 50 per person per hour. At the very least, it was amazingly useful to just be able to read the Devnagari script (Hindi and Marathi alphabet), since all the bus labels and many shop signs were written in this. A lot of the time, in fact, these signs were simply English words spelled out in Hindi. However, one never had to wait too long for assistance if they needed it.
- Laundry – There are many laundry services around. The going rate is about Rs10 per piece, no matter what size. We ended up mostly doing it by hand ourselves, just for the convenience of not having to wait.
- Utility Service – The electricity goes out quite a lot here. Specifically, Tuesday is designated to have at least 5 hours of electricity cut each day. After a while though, the electricity and water cuts just become a part of normal life, and one hardly even notices them. When it is on, the electricity does fluctuate quite a bit, hence the need for a surge suppressor with a computer or anything else electrical that you want to protect.

- Gym – There is supposedly a gym in Phaltan, but I never did go by to check it out. There are also supposed to be two swimming pools.
5. *Travel* – Please, please plan your stay here so that you have a lot of time to travel before you go home. India is a very large country and travel here is somewhat slow. However, there are some amazing things here that it would be quite a shame to miss.
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## Adrien Jacob from France



### My internship

I came to NARI in April 2006 to finish my Master's degree in general engineering (Ecole Centrale de Lyon, France) with a 5 month internship. This internship has also validated a non technical Master's degree in "Ethics and Sustainable Development". I've been working on several projects: the centre of sustainable living (CSL), biogas and the analysis of the meteorological data collected by NARI since 1983.

Concerning the CSL, I worked on the schedule of the course. The course would be aimed at CEOs and NGO representatives. The main objective is to sensitize them on energy, agriculture, environment and water issues in rural areas and provide them with concrete technological solutions. A case study on Phaltan would conclude the 5 days course. I also worked on the practical details of the course, following the "hands on" attitude of the institute. Then I went further into the module on water management with Elise, another French intern, and studied the economic viability of setting up rainwater harvesting facilities in each village of a Taluka.

I also realised a program to analyse the meteorological data using statistical tools. The main objectives were to provide average curves and figures on the local weather in Phaltan, and to identify possible trends, especially warming.

Finally I did some bibliographic research on biogas (methane from decomposed organic matter) to give an overview of this technology and raise its main issues.

Thanks to the extensive library and the help of the staff of NARI, I have learnt a lot in areas initially unfamiliar to me (agriculture, irrigation, water harvesting and treatment, biogas) and found concrete applications of theoretical knowledge learnt in school, such as statistics. I have also expanded my knowledge by helping punctually other researchers (statistics in cross breeding for example). Finally, more than knowledge, **I acquired in NARI a pragmatic and holistic way of thinking that is not taught in any school.**

### Life in Phaltan

Other interns have already provided thorough information about the life in Phaltan, I will just add a few comments:

#### 1. *People*

- I confirm that the people of Phaltan are amazingly welcoming and honest. Actually a few days after my arrival I did the unbelievable mistake of leaving most of my important papers (plane tickets etc.) and a lot of money in a cyber cafe. I got all my papers back and not a single rupee was missing... Also people in my neighbourhood were very friendly and helpful whenever I had a problem (I did fall sick sometimes).



- On the other hand you should be aware that in big cities it's another story. Many people will just try to get as much money as they can from you. That is why you should plan your trip from Mumbai to Phaltan very properly so that people won't be able to fool you (both Elise and me got cheated by people selling fake bus tickets). Once you're in Phaltan you can travel very easily with villagers who will be happy to guide you safely (they will come to meet you on their own after the news of your arrival has spread).

2. *Weather*

- The transition between summer and monsoon is very quick. Weather will change from very hot and dry to cool and humid in not more than 10 days. It is thus advised to be careful in that period since many diseases may spread.

3. *Economics*

- My budget was around Rs 14000 per month. I did go very often to the restaurant (approx Rs 100 per meal), called in France quite often and was living in a flat (around Rs 2000 per month). It should be possible to spend much less by preparing your own food.

4. *Communication*

- Having a cell phone is extremely convenient to call abroad and in India. You can bring your own, unlock it and get a local operator like Airtel. During my stay they launched a very interesting scheme for foreign calls: for Rs 97 per month, you can call European and American landlines for Rs 3/min only! It should be noted though that these operators only sell prepaid cards and that the lower the cost of the card, the lower is the credit you'll get for the same amount of money. For example, a Rs 550 card will only grant you Rs 250 credits, while a Rs 3300 card will allow Rs 2800 talk time. You can even connect to the internet through you cell phone provided you have a laptop and the data cable to connect them.

- Some cyber cafes are getting newer computers and accept USB memory sticks without any drivers. But the connection is still pretty slow.

5. *Transport*

- A bicycle is the best solution to move around in Phaltan and even visit nearby places. Very good tyres are mandatory if you don't want to spend all your time trying to find places to fix your punctures.

6. *Leisure*

- The swimming pool is a nice way to relax after your day of work and it is the only way to do some sport during the hot season. If you go in the late afternoon, there won't be too many people. You can take a monthly subscription (Rs 550) but I advise you to pay per hour (Rs 25). The water is quite clean, even if it is not perfectly transparent...

- There are many places to visit around Phaltan like:

- Singnapur : temple on a hill top.
- Jejury: another nice temple.
- Mahabaleshwar: beautiful hill station.
- Sajanghar: Shivaji fort near Satara.
- Varugar: another Shivaji fort not far from Phaltan.
- Finally there's a nice waterfall not far from Varugar. You can go there by bicycle and swim in it during the monsoon (otherwise there won't be any water).

- Also festivals and functions happen all the time, so it is very unlikely that you'll feel bored.

***Impressions of a French intern Elise Levasseur a student of 3<sup>rd</sup> year in ISTOM, Cergy-Pontoise, France. She worked in NARI for a short time from June 11, 2006 to August 30, 2006.***

Work:

I worked on the sorghum program already underway at the Institute. The main aim of this program is to develop a complete technology for producing syrup from sweet sorghum and to develop hybrids containing maximum sucrose at grain maturity.

I carried out an economic analysis on syrup production from sweet sorghum. Through this study, I have learnt the methodology of an economic analysis, which parameters do I have to take into consideration and how to distinguish a traditional farm from a mechanized farm. The farm manager of this institute was always helpful and available to help me in my work



Likewise, NARI wanted to study sorghum resistance to the shoot fly. Thus, I went to count the infected plants cultivated in the plot in order to analyze the shoot fly resistance for each variety.

I also helped another French intern in developing a watershed module for rural Maharashtra. Thanks to the knowledge of the researchers at the Institute, I have learnt how to carry out a research project and how to plan and execute it.

NARI is a good place to tackle different subjects: agriculture, renewable energy, pathology, process of transformation (syrup making from sweet sorghum), sustainable development, etc. Every Thursday, there is an Institute seminar given by a NARI researcher. The topics have been various but most include the work done in the Institute.

Accommodation:

The Institute was kind enough to give me a free accommodation, which I shared with a pathologist from the institute. She was living near the institute (fifteen minutes by bike) with others NARI's workers. They are accommodated in individual houses with basic facilities.

Thus, it was a very good experience to live with an Indian woman who taught me about the Indian culture.

## **Sebastian Steinfeld (February 2007)**

### **My internship at NARI**

It all started when I was younger and I first realised that I liked chillies thanks to a classroom dare. That night, I ordered a lamb Rogan Josh from my local Indian restaurant and my love affair with India had begun.

10 years later, I found myself, having graduated with a Masters degree in Physics at Oxford University never having had a gap year, taking the insane decision to move into law where I was to become a lawyer for an intense city firm in London. With my commencement date for imprisonment fast approaching, and having still never been to India, I made the decision to buy the “Lonely Planet” and plan my trip there using every last day of freedom I had left.

Although I originally wanted to simply tour around India, when I saw the “volunteer” section of the lonely planet, I changed my mind. Going into a big city firm I knew that I would never have a chance to do voluntary work again. My new goal was to use all the skills I had developed both in science and law to make life for India’s poor just that little bit better. And I don’t just mean doing something that would make ME feel like I’ve done something, but actually doing something that I could see made a clear observable difference to the quality of life of India’s poor at least in some small way. Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute stood out head and shoulders above the rest for this purpose.

However, with only 1 month (February) to work, and with NARI’s recommended time period at 3 months, time was fast running out. So with youthful vigour and head first decisiveness I immediately applied for an internship sacrificing covering letter and CV presentations for sheer speed. Within the day I received the following reply: ‘splendid, look forward to seeing you’. “‘splendid, look forward to seeing you’, what the hell was that?” I said as I was sitting on my comfy leather seat in front of my super-speed broadband internet connection in a pleasantly heated house in Central London, the largest city in the first world. “How is ‘splendid, look forward to seeing you’ enough information on which to base a 3000 mile journey across continents from one of the world’s most developed places to one of the world’s least?” The days were ticking down, the obstacles were many, and I could fast see what would probably be the only noble goal I would ever have in my life slipping away. So I made the decision: I would get myself to NARI’s headquarters in Phaltan, India or get severely lost in the countryside of a completely foreign country trying.

I booked my plane for a couple of days time, scoured NARI’s website for every bit of usable information and everything went smoothly until I realised that I had forgotten one thing: my damned visa. So, after a frenzy of phone calls to Indian embassies all around the world where it was still day, I discovered eventually there was a way to get that visa in 1 day. At 3:00am in the morning, I left my house, navigated the appallingly limited night bus transportation system and cued over night outside the Indian High Commissioner.

After my visa troubles, I successfully continued my plan by getting on the plane, arriving in Mumbai, flying to Pune and finally arriving in Phaltan where I hoped to simply walk into NARI, say “hi” and receive a reply of “hi” rather than “who are you, what are you doing here?” But that would have to wait for the morning. At that moment, it was dark and I was in a place far from home with all kinds of strange vehicles offering me lifts to some place called “Arrarrar” or something like that. Of course, later, I would find myself taking regular trips to the Aaryamaan hotel, the best hotel in town; because I absolutely loved the food I ate that first tense night. But then, all I was concerned with was getting to the hotel to sleep. After a long 5 minutes of painful negotiations, using all my Charades and acting skills, I agreed with the driver of one of those strange vehicles (that I would later routinely call “an auto”) that the “Arrarrar” was in fact a hotel. We then finally moved on to the price. I asked “how much?”

“25 Rupees”

“I know that game” I thought to myself, fresh from the scars of Salvador (Brazil) where some of the most aggressive tourist attacking touts in the world live. This assumption that a Westerner could not be treated honestly outside the first world was to prove my first mistake. About 15 minutes of sheer haggling later, I had succeeded in getting the price down to about 24 Rupees. I had saved myself about 1 penny for 15 minutes work. Not exactly above minimum wage. Feeling ripped off I consented and paced off to the Aaryamaan.

A porter with a dusty and slightly creased uniform picked up my immense bag as I headed into the reception. The floor, in need of sweeping, was lit from bulbs whose electricity wires were clearly visible. After 5 minutes of pointless noises coming from the mouths of both me and the manager, the manager eventually showed me a sign with room prices both in English and some Indian language. I pointed to the room I wanted and he gave me the key. This form of communication was to prove very useful for the rest of my stay.

The room was in no better condition than the lobby with the shower leaking, the windows fragile and the hot water tap proving to be just for show. It took 5 minutes with my hand in the water waiting fruitlessly for the water to get hot before I realised that latter detail. However after everything I'd been through, I was not about to be defeated by a shower whose water supply's boiler was not so much broken as non-existent. When I put my left arm, hot and sweaty after a very long day's journey, into the shower, I felt a short sharp shock going from my arm straight to the pain centre of the brain. 2 seconds later, my bodies natural adaptation procedures subdued the pain. I repeated the process with my right arm; and my legs, body and finally the head. This water torture was to become a daily incident in my life at Phaltan but although I still find it somewhat unpleasant, it became much easier to bear after the 5<sup>th</sup> time. Finally, shivering but clean, I got the first bit of good rest in about 40 hours.

The next day, after yet another completely unsuccessful haggle attempt wasting another 15 minutes, I caught an auto to “Neemka”. It was crunch time. After 3000 miles of arduous travelling across land and sea, I had finally arrived in a small farm type place recognisable only by a sign saying “Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute”, three of four surprisingly sturdy buildings and a hut that looked like a cross between a sophisticated high tech University scientific laboratory and the back cover of ‘DIY for dummies’. I walked into the only office where I could see administrative workings going on and declared myself ready for duty.

The poor receptionist whose English is not exactly fluent did not have the slightest clue what I was talking about. Bewilderment shone from ear to ear radiating unstopably out of his body like gamma rays. A further short conversation between him, me and his assistant resulted only in 2 unstopably bemused looks in my direction. It was time for the big guns. I had one final card to play and now was the time to use it. I had, for some reason only my subconscious knew, thought it a good idea to print the correspondence of every email between me and NARI right up to the “splendid, look forward to seeing you”. Would it work, or would I have to start heading back to Mumbai? When produced, like magic, the bemused looks faded into normality as realisation of why I was there dawned on them. They told me to wait for about an hour as Professor Anil Rajvanshi had not yet arrived. I was later to learn that that hour contained extreme telecommunications activity as the staff worked overtime trying to learn the purpose of my presence. I was even to learn that my presence was a shock to Professor Rajvanshi who, despite

his emails, had never actually expected me to make the journey. But for now, all I knew was that I was simply waiting for the Professor to arrive and that when he did, he would be expecting me and would assign me to a project. I had finally arrived. Now for the final and hardest part of my plan: actually making a difference.

I was given literature to choose my project and I finally settled on a noise problem with the Lantern. To help, I was given a book on fluid mechanics to read from scratch. Despite being criticised for inability to write on the grounds of bad spelling in my CV and covering letters, I also helped with written and presentational issues regarding the centre for sustainable development and I wrote an introduction booklet. This gave future interns the details I would have loved to have known on my first few days in one clear document.

After a week, however, I had really settled into the place. Sure the place was a dump, but it was a clean dump, a homely dump. Just because every wall of every building had at least one crack in it and the paint work often came off on my hands when touched didn't mean I could not be comfortable, eat well and generally do the things I enjoyed. I had found swimming pools, tennis courts, basket ball courts and all the sporting activities I could want. I had agonisingly slow internet cafes (but none the less, internet), an Indian mobile phone, and ample communications between our village and the outside world. I had countless offers for friendship from the local population who made me feel like a celebrity, and I met a lot of great people. I had butchers with freshly cut meat, fruit markets with some of the tastiest fruit I have ever had, off-licences, clothes shop, even sweet shops selling Cadbury's chocolates all at a fraction of the price of London prices. I could live like a king, getting everything and anything I wanted when I wanted without any consequences. With great weather on top, what more could one really want????

Okay, yes you're right. Women. I love women and here, this commodity was in drastically short supply. With no Westerners at all, I had to rely on the local population. And the local population does not supply. I was told that the women all but live completely separate worlds to men. The idea of flirting, parties, mixed social contact is almost completely alien. I asked, "If it was such a social faux pas to meet women, how did anybody ever get married?" The reply was, "by arrangement".

However, I was told that for a bit of flirting fun the big cities are very different. There one can go to clubs and meet people without the worry that those people might be socially scarred for life. However I did not yet fully explore that option (by 'not fully' I of course lamely mean not at all).

So did I accomplish my goals in such a short time?

Although at the start, I was more of a burden by taking up people's time as they explained to me how things worked, I still like to think I did. The introduction booklet will hopefully encourage more people to come and those new recruits could then do some ground breaking work that would not, but for my booklet, have been done. My contribution to the centre for sustainable development may hopefully encourage greater investment into the rural poor communities which may again affect people's every day lives just that little bit. And my work in successfully solving the noise in the Lantern problems (after a great amount of over time reading and thinking) could one day help the rural poor read at night in a peaceful environment in areas without electricity.

If any of the above turns out to actually happen, then I would be very happy.

My time here has been rewarding, challenging and enjoyable. I am extremely glad I went and I would encourage anybody who has real scientific, business or entrepreneurial skills to do this and make a real difference to potentially hundreds of thousands of lives.



Sebastian hard at work in making a difference!

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**Caroline Dalby and Laura Hinckel from ISTOM, France.** (*Unedited version of their write-up*)

We are students of ISTOM, an engineering school of agronomics, in third year, in Cergy (near Paris). As a part of our study we did an internship during 3 months at NARI from June to September 2007.

We worked on biogas experiment. We began to study the yield, we tested different inputs and we do some calculations about the efficiency of the system. Then we studied possibilities of implantation of biogas reactors in rural areas. For that we sound out some household in Phaltan.



During the training we lived in an unfurnished flat lend by NARI. We had a lot of very nice neighbours who are always available to help us. They help us to buy everything we need to fit out the flat.

The first month, we take our dinner in a family for only 500 Rs for a month. It is a good way to speak with local people and to learn more about Indian culture. After we do our own cooking with all the fruits and vegetables available in the market. We can in this way eat some food without spicy!

For the lunch, we went in a restaurant next the institute for 800 Rs per month. We drink always mineral water or water treated with some medicine.

We went during the monsoon so there are a lot of mosquitoes. We had mosquitoes net and repulsive spray, but you can also buy in Phaltan some appliance that you can put in plug.

### **Restaurants:**

We tested some restaurant in Phaltan:

- hotel Madu Deep
- hotel jeet (with a very nice garden)
- hotel Aryaman
- hotel Sahara (just near our flat)

### **Transports:**

We bought bicycles to move in Phaltan (it is possible to resell them in the shop after the training). You can also travel by auto-rickshaw (20 Rs from Jintee naka to city) or by bus (4 Rs). For travel around Phaltan, the best way is the bus (cheap and the bus network in India is very expanded).

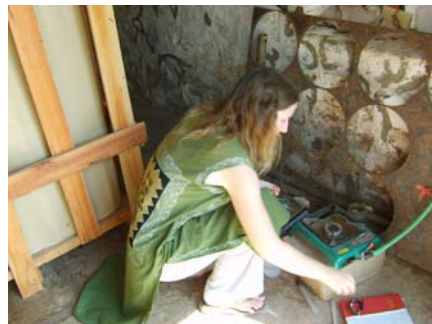
## Leisure:

There are two cinemas in Phaltan, but the movies are only in Hindi or maharati language. However Bollywood movies contain a lot of songs and dances so you could spend a good moment even if you don't speak these languages. But there are very few girls who go to cinema, when we went we are the only two girls in the room.

If you want to see some movies in English, there is a one shop who borrow some DVDs but the quality are some time not very good.

## Places around Phaltan:

- Pandrapur : beautiful temple near a river
- Signapur : temple where we can see some monkeys
- Gondawale : temple where you can take lunch
- Jijuri : an other temple
  
- Waterfalls : - Dumlwadi : around 10km from Phaltan
- Dhom : near Satara



-The nearest big city is Pune (2h30 to 3h by bus). There are many things to do there :

- the snake park
- Koregon Park : nice place with many good restaurant
- the garden of ashram: beautiful place and ideal to relax
- there is an English library : (address)

-Baramati : a city bigger than Phaltan where there is a train station. There are some restaurants where you can eat occidental food like pastas (Taj city Inn for example). You can also buy cheese there but we don't test it.

## Festivals :

During this period there are lots of festivals:

- 18/07 : Palaki, lot of people walk during one month in direction of Pandrapur
- 22/07 : Baid Pola, festival of cows (people paint the cow)
- 15/08 : Freedom day
- 19/08 : Nagpanshami, festival of snake (all the men play with kites)
- 28/08 : Raksha Bandham, festival of brother and sister. All the sister give bracelet to their brother, and brother make gift to the sister
- 04/09 : Gokulastmi : Krisna birthday
- 15/09 : Ganesh festival

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