

Exchange Student Report: India

Academic

Studying at ISB was an amazing experience. If you have the opportunity to study there for a couple of months, you should not miss it! Go for it. You will not regret it. The study cycle is different than the one in Taiwan –and even in Latin America-. At ISB, instead of having semesters (or 18 week periods) they have small 6 week terms. Out of these 6 weeks, 5 weeks are for classes (you attend each class for 2

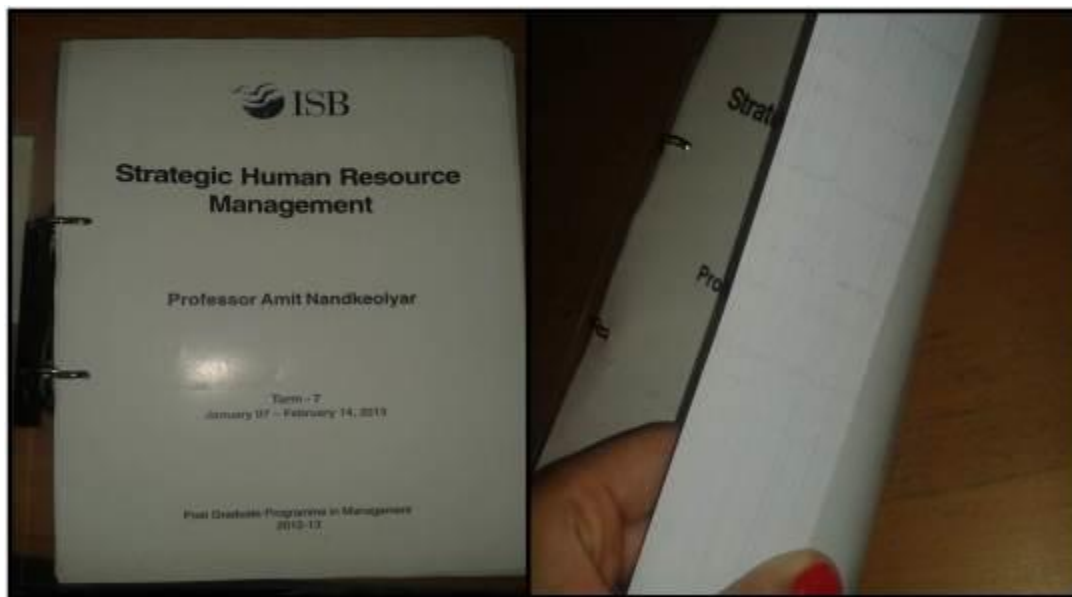


hours, twice a week), and the last one is for final exams.

Their MBA lasts one year, equivalent to 8 terms, where the first 4 terms they take the mandatory courses –you can't go on exchange during this period- and the last 4 terms they take the elective ones. This is the time when you can go.

I went for the last 2 terms (7 and 8), which lasted from January 7th to April 7th. During this time, the weather was nice at the beginning, since it oscillated between 20-25 degrees. But as March and April approached, India proved to be a very hot country. Be prepared!

As for the classes, it was mandatory to take at least 2 courses each term, and no more than 5. With ISB's classes, you really can't take more than that, and honestly taking 4 is what most people can handle, because there are enormous amounts of stuff to read for each class, every class. And also, since each term is so short –compared to what we are used to at NCCU- things go by really fast and there is always, a group meeting or a paper to submit.



I only needed 4 credits to graduate, but decided to take 5 while I was here. During term 7, I took 3 classes, and during term 8, the remaining 2. The main reason was that I needed more time to travel, and even with 3 classes, it was not possible to leave every weekend. So, I thought that by taking only 2, I'd have more free time. These are the classes I took, and what I think about them:

Strategic Human Resource Management: Unfortunately this was the first time this professor was teaching this class –and apparently, also the last one- and you can tell that despite his best efforts, he was not well prepared for it. There is a class at NCCU, called “Strategic Talent Management”, which in spite of being an intensive course, proved to be a lot better than the one at ISB. So, if you are interested in Human Resources, I suggest you take STM at NCCU, and not SHRM at ISB. However, we had a couple of very good guest-speakers from Microsoft and other companies, that had some interesting things to say, and from which I was able to learn a bit.

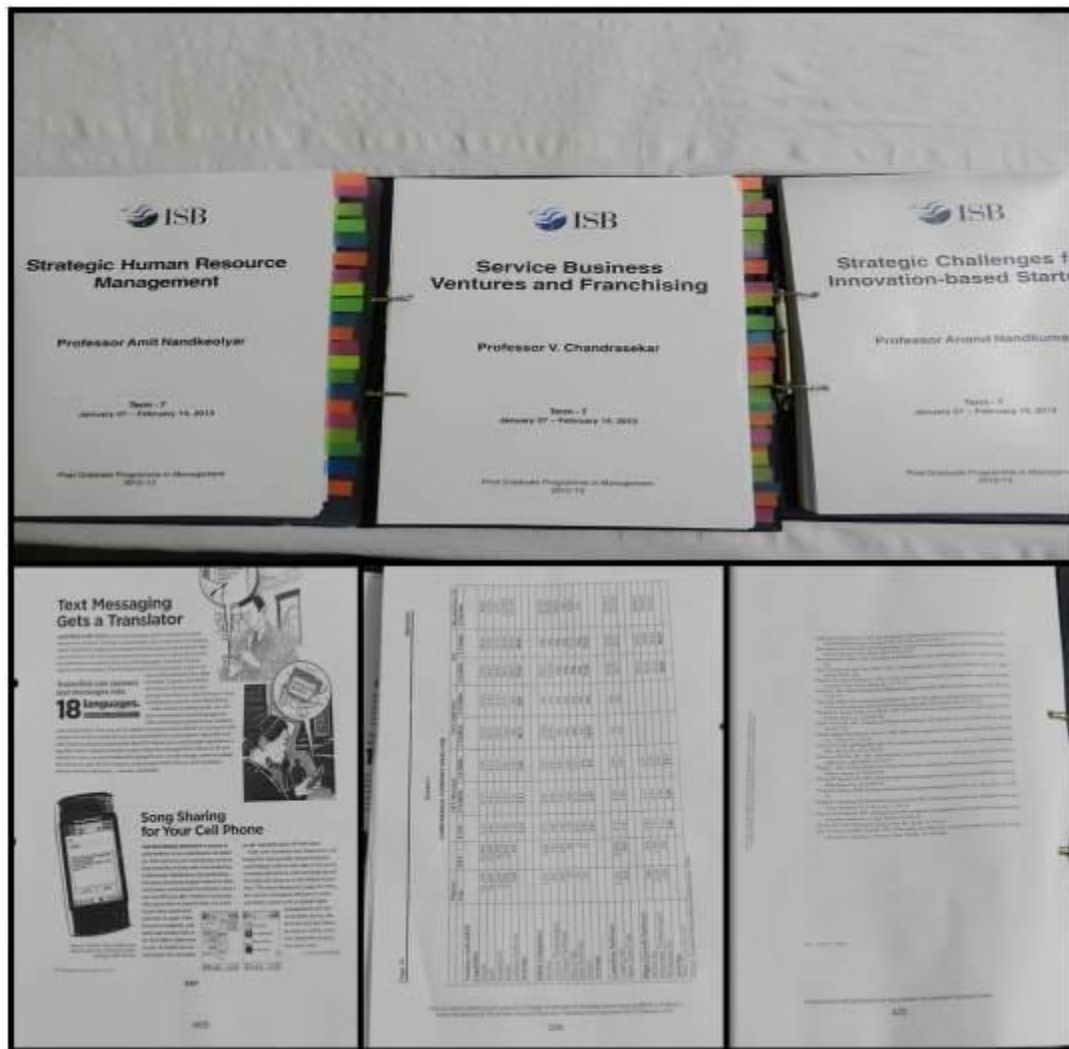
Service Business Ventures and Franchising: The professor for this class had a great deal of experience dealing with start-ups, and franchising especially in the hotel and travel industry. From what I could understand, he was some sort of eminence in India, he knew many people, he was there when a lot of the big enterprises started, and he was even one of the initiators of ISB. His lectures are not so good: he hasn't learned how to use Power Point, so his lectures will always be on printed slides (a piece of paper), and they can turn a bit boring.

However, the final project is one of the most interesting things I've done in the MBA, both from NCCU as from ISB, because instead of working on some case that is already solved, or that happened a couple of years ago, you get to work with a real company, and this makes the class totally worth it. Especially if you are interested in forming a business soon, you will be able to learn hands-on what it's all about, and you'll be able to prove to yourself how much you've actually learned from the MBA, while you try to fix some of the companies' problems.

Strategic Challenges for Innovation-based startups: During the 7th term, I believe this was my favorite class. Not only did the professor was good, and capable of keeping the class entertained, but I also feel I learned a lot. Despite the fact that in the beginning I didn't consider taking this class, when I went to sample it, I realized there were many students there because they already knew the professor was good. When one reads the name of the class, one is tempted to think it'll be just a bunch of readings, and nothing material, just a lot of different subjective matters. But that was not the case. Not at all. The cases he presents are interesting and up-to-date, and through the entire course, he follows a methodology that in the end, leads you to know who to value if your idea is worth using or not.

Microfinance: If Strategic Challenges for Innovation-based startups was my favorite class in term 7, this one was for term 8. This was the only class where the professor was a woman, and from what I could grasp, she also taught other courses at ISB that students really liked. She keeps a good pace, there are a lot of readings to do –but then again, so do the other classes-, the quizzes are not easy, but if you are truly interested in Microfinance, I suggest you take this class because you will learn, not only from the India experience, but also from other Asian, African, and Latin American countries. I would totally recommend this class!

Strategy, Leadership and Resource Management in Family Business: I would have to say this was the worst class I took at ISB, even worse than Strategic Human Resource Management. And I was not the only one who thought this way, some of the classmates I talked to also felt that it was not worth the time. The professor is a business consultant for family businesses, so he has a great deal of experience in the matter; however, all the cases were from Indian families and I think that the cultural issue is only applicable to India. In my opinion, this entire course could be summarized in a 2 hour lecture. I strongly suggest not taking this class, and investing your time on another one that will give you more knowledge.



All in all, ISB is an excellent school. It is a lot more rigorous than NCCU and you can feel that from the very beginning. The fact that their terms are so short and you have so many readings and assignments to do, will at least help you learn how to manage your time. Professors are also tougher to grade, so in my experience, it was not so easy to get an A.

Students are said to be very competitive, they are after all, the best of the best in India. However, when it comes to the last 2 terms, everyone is tired, and most of them have already been placed with a company, so competition comes down.

Life and culture

I had never been in India before this exchange program. When I first arrived, the news about many rapes going on in Delhi was on the spotlight, so it was not without fear that I decided to go nonetheless. Once there, you realize that things are not as bad as they seem, and although there are certainly dangerous cities, it would be unfair that all of India is like that. It is not.

It must be said that living inside ISB is like living inside a bubble in India. The campus is really nice, very clean, everything is new, and there is more staff ready to help you than you can ever imagine. Too much, if you ask me.



There are two different possibilities: you can get your own private studio, which are great if you value your privacy, but they are also more expensive. Or you can choose to live in an apartment with 3 other people. I chose the 2nd one, and would do it all over again, because it helped me get to know more people, and learn more about the Indian culture. Had I gone for the studio, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to mingle and live with other Indian girls.

This is what the room in the apartment looks like:



And this is the rest of the apartment:



Your classmates and housemates at ISB will always be willing to help you. Whether you are lost, sick, or simply need to chill, they will be there and point you in the right direction to get where you need to. I was sick once while being there, and had many friendly people to help me, take me to the hospital, and look after me.

The other exchange students will also become your closest friends while you are there. While my stay at ISB, there were around 20 exchange students, coming from USA, Canada, Italy, Germany, Netherlands, South Africa, Japan, Australia, and other countries. Get to know them, as you will most likely spend most of your free time with them, and –hopefully- travel with them as well.

Indian food is delicious. Or, at least I liked it very much. It is full of flavor, and yes, also spices. With time, you will learn there are differences with South Indian and North Indian food. If you ask me: North Indian is much better! The best part is that food is super cheap, and you can eat with around \$2.00 - \$3.00 US

dollars. Also, there is a cafeteria at ISB which opens from 8 am to 10 pm, and they have a wide variety of dishes to choose from: it is highly unlikely that you will get bored. It is also very safe to eat the food from school, and they have a water plant so that you can easily drink tap water.



This was my favorite Indian food: paneer parathas



One of the best things about going on exchange to India is the possibility to travel around such an amazing and mystical country. And I did that as much as I could. Over the 3 months that I spent there, I tried to travel as much as I could, both north and south, and these are the places I went to:

Goa: Known for being the most beautiful beach in India, you can't miss it! The only beach I've been where there are more cows than people resting at the beach. The capital of Goa was also colonized by Portuguese people, so they have many catholic churches and their infrastructure is different from what you will see in the rest of the country.



Mumbai: The most expensive city in India. If you go here, be ready to spend more. Nevertheless is a city worth going to, 2 to 3 days should be enough. If you saw “Slum dog millionaire”, there are tours provided by “Reality Tours” that will take you to the actual slum. It is a great reality-check experience.

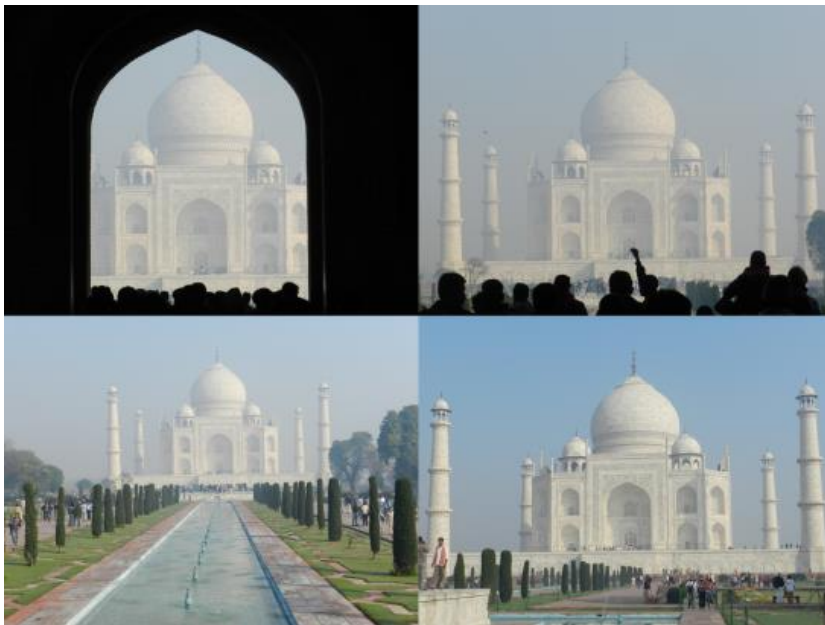
This is the Gateway of India in Mumbai:



Delhi: The capital of India has many forts and important touristic spots you want to go to. The difference between Old Delhi and New Delhi is quite evident, and something you will enjoy.



Agra: Home to the Taj Mahal, there is not much to see in this small town, but the Taj itself... which is reason enough to go there! I mean how you go to India and not visit the Taj, right? One day here will be more than enough time.



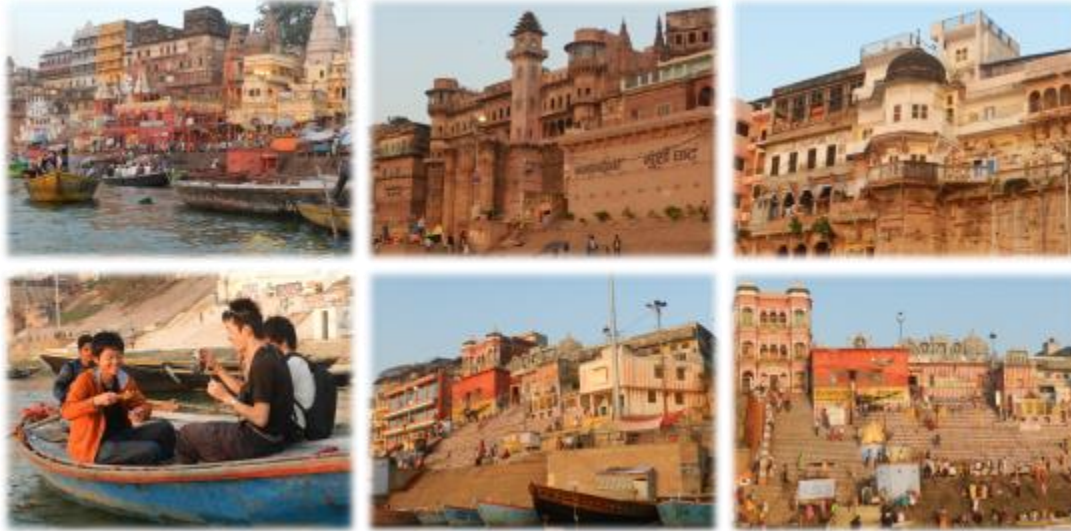
Jaipur: If there is a city with beautiful forts and castles that is Jaipur. Only 4 hours away from Agra, you can go there after visiting the Taj Mahal. There are plenty of hotels where you can stay and places to visit. My favorite one was Hawa Mahal (or wind palace).



Pondicherry: If you saw “Life of Pi”, you know that Pondicherry is the most French town in India. Go there on a long weekend, and indulge yourself with some nice pastries, good coffee and excellent meat. This cute little town will show you a side of India, you won’t see anywhere else.



Varanasi: The holiest city in India, the place where you can see, boat, and bath inside the Ganges, so that your soul will be purified. The entire environment in Varanasi makes you aware that you are in India, deep inside one of the most ancient and interesting cultures in the world.



Notice for future students

India is an amazing country. I loved every second I was there, but it is also not an easy country to live in. There will always be people trying to sell you something, and trying to rip you off... I think it's in their genes.

It can get very tiring having to negotiate every small thing you buy, and even then, end up wondering if you paid the right price or you just made a fool out of yourself. Don't let this stop you from coming and enjoying India. When you put all –the good and the bad- on a scale, you realize that the benefits and learning India has to offer is much bigger than the negative side.

If you are a girl, try not to travel alone... especially in the north. I did go to Varanasi on my own, and I was OK, but the recommendation from my Indian friends was not to do that up north. South is a different story.

Come to India with an open mind. It is very –very- different from Taiwan, and also from Latin America. But if you set your mind ready to enjoy, and appreciate what life has given you, I'm sure you'll end up loving this country as much as I do.

As for ISB, take the classes that seem interesting, take advantage of the first 2 days where you can test every one of the classes you want, and then decide. ISB has rankings for all their classes and professors, so be sure to visit the website and bit for the highest ranking classes: they are –obviously- the best ones.

Take the opportunity to learn as much as you can, and to take courses that are not offered in Taiwan: they have plenty of them! But also, take the time to travel and to know the people and their culture. As important as classes are, the best memories you'll have are the ones you shared with awesome people, and there's a great deal of things you can also learn from them too.

If you get homesick, don't worry, it happens to all of us. Write an e-mail to your family and friends, look for someone to talk and/or hang out in India, and make the best you can out of your time there. Good luck!