

Experiencing another world

A report from Karlin Reus

On 25 of August I left Europe for the first time. I arrived on Kolkata Airport two o'clock in the morning and my first Indian encounter was a man of the airport crew who told me that my luggage could not make the transfer to the airplane to Kolkata and that it still enjoyed the sun in Doha.

Thank god that Ramjit and Lakshmiram picked me up from the airport a few hours later after that chaotic arrival so I had some support while I made my first steps in a completely new culture.

My first impressions from India were overwhelming. On Indian streets everyone lives with each other. People cook, wash, work and live simultaneously.

Animals find their ways through that batch and cars do not drive orderly and defensively in their line but press the horn every moment possible.

For me India was noisy, colourful and chaotic.

After a one hour taxi drive to Kolkata train station and another 1,5 hour drive we arrived in the villages.

There, I was welcomed in such a heart warming way that I immediately felt comfortable although it was all new to me and my eyes must have been as big as micky mouse's.

Every day a woman called Parbati cooked for me and soon I became very close with her and her family. Her food was delicious although I had to get used to eat rice almost three times a day.

Every evening we sat together and talked about the different worlds we come from and our views on life and our every-day problems. Through them I got a good insight in the village life.

During my stay in the villages I lived in the guest-room of the community center 'Prantik' in Ghosaldanga.

Next to me lived a young man called Anil who studies the Sanskrit at the University of Santiniketan. He was mostly responsible for me and he soon became like a big brother for me.

One night he really rescued me because a mouse, a snake and thousands of big flying ants decided to celebrate a big party in my room.

Soon I got to know every child of the village because they were so curious and knocked at my door every time I was alone.

Very often, we played creative games together and ran laughing and screaming through the village streets. Most of the kids are not shy and easy to get to know.

I really did not need to be scared that they would not like me or would not understand me.

There were the most open minded kids I ever met in my life.

Language was a problem sometimes because they could only speak a few words of English.

But we found other ways to communicate and I experienced that language is not the only way to connect to people.

After a few days of acclimatization I spoke with Boro, the head of the RSV-School, about my plan for my three months stay in the villages.

I should teach English in the morning and evening school in Ghosaldanga and start some own projects at the RSV-School and in the village Bishnubati.

I was very free to organize my activities.

The English lessons in Ghosaldanga were my main projects.

There I had the chance to give the children something they can use for their future life.

This was an idealistic idea and soon I experienced the obstacles which come with this work.

Most of the kids started from level zero, especially in spoken English.

Furthermore, there was only little to add on from past volunteers because the kids forgot most of it and there was no learning material left.

Nevertheless, I found my way to teach some English basics and every time it was really nice to see how ambitious the children learn and how fast they can make progress because of that.

The volunteers Clara and Kilian who spend one month at RSV-school while I was in the villages developed a 'First Aid Book For Volunteers' which I considered a very reasonable idea. So at the end of my stay, and so should every future volunteer, I wrote an English report about my stay and my projects and left all my material there.

At RSV-School I started a little spoken English study group with the teachers so they could improve their practical English and use it in their own English lessons.

We had a lot of fun while for example trying to speak about one random subject for one minute.

In Bishnubati I did a few yoga and dancing activities with the children but mostly I concentrated on the work with the children in Ghosaldanga because I was closer to them and otherwise it had been too much to deal with for me.

So I started a creative dancing project with the children of Ghosaldanga.

Very soon after I arrived we could show a little choreography on the 'Teacher's Day' on 5th of September.

It was a really nice experience to work on such a project and then to actually show it to people. I was very proud of my protégés and I felt that the children and me developed an actual team spirit.

In my free time I got the chance to attend some other projects of the village organization like the Nutrition Program and the Health Check Up. There, I got a really good insight in the further work of the organization.

In addition, the Puja holidays gave an occasion for me to get a glimpse on Hindu culture. Anil took me to Bolpur and we watched the ostentatious decorated houses and temples and some of the religious worshippings.

The work with the children and the teachers in the villages was always a giving and receiving because as much as they learned from me I could learn from them on a human level. The first time in my life I got to encounter completely different living conditions, a completely different culture and different values.

I developed relations to people I could barely connect to through my language, people who share a completely different perspective on life.

It was a chance for me to grow and to support the work in the village.

All in all, the time in the villages was a big inspiration for me and I am determined to come back!