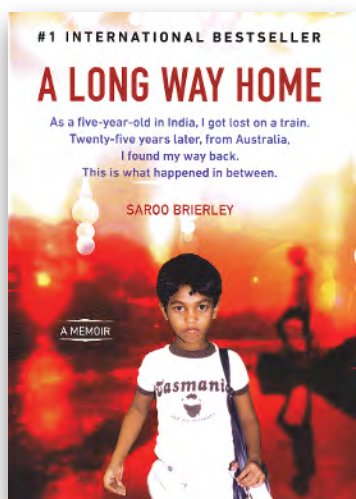




2015-2016 COMMON READ



A Long Way Home: A Memoir by Saroo Brierley



On January 5, 2016 a select group of 15 Texas A&M International University students traveled to India as part of the University's "Reading the Globe Program."

Students participating in the program include: Erik U. Vazquez, Megan J. Unrath, Talitha S. Wisner, Alexia N. Villarreal, Alejandro Benavides, Alexander T. Simpson, Victor A. Rodríguez, Carlos A. Fuentes, Maribel Gomez, Johanna E. Webb, China L. Jennings, Christine A. Segovia, Cynthia M. Urteaga, Emily G. Estrada, Valeria M. Valdez, and Alyssa A. Gibeaut.

Their time in India was highly structured with academic classes, guest lectures, related tours and a service-learning opportunity.

Take a look at pictures and and blog entries from the RTG Ambassadors during their trip. Visit www.instagram.com/tamiureadingtheglobe for more blog entries.

We spent over twenty hours on planes. Fortunately, we had our travel mates sitting next to us all throughout, so we could sympathize with each other's jet lag.

I spent the majority of the plane rides asleep, waking only for the meals provided by the great flight service.



After the transatlantic flight from Houston to Frankfurt, we got a taste of the polished, European lifestyle from the enormous Frankfurt airport. After the enjoyable Lufthansa flight to New Delhi, we completed airport procedures, met our friendly tour guide, and made our way to our hotel.

Thus far, the most surprising aspect of the culture that I've seen here is Indian hospitality. I am writing this on our second day in India, so there is still much to see, but at this point the Indian idea of hospitality is surprisingly incredible. The service provided to us at our stay was very welcoming and attentive.



We were all very grateful for their kindness. We enjoyed a night snack and a breakfast at Novotel, and each were balanced meals with curiously exotic flavors. The names of the foods were any and foreign. Although I will note that the experience was highly memorable, and I encourage all to step beyond their familiar comfort-zones so that you may enjoy the excitement of discovering foreign cultures.

Carlos Fuentes
RTG Ambassador



The Taj Mahal is listed as one of the 7 Wonders of the World. Knowing this, anyone who hasn't visited the building themselves can maybe get the idea that it's an important place and is most probably marvelous. Visiting for the first time myself, I can say that the building's actual entirety and magnitude completely surpasses the idea I had from that title alone. The building was built out of love and heartbreak to hold the remains of the Mughal emperor's passing wife. Architected to be perfect on paper so that no changes would ever be made during or after its completion, the entire enclosure is completely symmetrical and encrusted with semi-precious stones and hand carvings.

Walking in through the front gate, you're able to overlook the beautiful gardens and the Taj Mahal straight ahead. That sight alone is beautiful, however, the experience truly breathtaking for me was found going through the Taj Mahal building itself, past the back doors and onto the platform facing the river. You're above ground and able to overlook the river and the land behind it that only seems to stretch on for miles.

Looking over at the rest of Agra, India, my heart felt full and my mind at peace. There is definitely something I can only describe as magic that flows throughout the place. Up there, the building's history and reason completely overcame me and I found myself in this grasp of a fascinating peace and wonder. Undoubtedly, one has to go see the building for themselves in order to truly receive the enchantment the building reveals.

Christine Segovia
RTG Ambassador



We were given a lecture by Professor Ambika Charak Katoch on the Hindu- Muslim Intersections that are present all throughout India today as well as in the past. She explained the history behind Hinduism and Islam and how they influenced the land now known as India for centuries. Hinduism derived in India, and the term "Hindu" was first used to describe the people that lived in the Indus River Valley civilization. However, when it evolved into a religion, the caste system was born.

Unlike Hinduism, Islam developed in the Middle East, around the Afghanistan area, and was brought to India through invasions. Mosques were built throughout the lands, Hindu temples and sacred grounds were looted for precious stones and metals, and many people were forced to convert to Islam. This was the beginning of the tensions between the two religions that is still witnessed in present day India. However, throughout history the differences were never completely settled which eventually led to the creation of Pakistan and Bangladesh as Islamic countries separated from India. After learning about all of the rich history behind the most popular religions in India, it makes one realize that through every mosque we visit or Hindu temple we view, there was a long struggle and fight to keep to their beliefs.

However, both played a huge part in many of the beautiful, historical sites that we visited and will keep visiting throughout India. There are hints of Muslim and Hindu architecture in many sites such as the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort, showing the role that these religions played in India. The lecture allowed me to understand where and how the famous monuments we see and hear about came to be.

Johanna Webb
RTG Ambassador



At the halfway point of our journey in India, our itinerary in Bangalore is as fast paced as the traffic, with as many sightseeing adventures scheduled during the day as possible.

Amid the hubbub of activity, it is easy to forget the importance of patience, respect, and acceptance of ourselves and others.

Professor Raghuram, a world renowned Yogi from the Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samasthana (SVYASA), encouraged our practice of yoga as a means to consciously realign our minds and bodies into a harmonious life force void of the tension accumulated in everyday trivialities. To help us, students, balance our academic and athletic efforts, Professor Raghuram suggested we rise early to practice Sun Salutations, a total of about twenty postures three times over, every morning during the semester. His prior work with Olympic athletes has proven this morning ritual enhances performance by allowing the body ample time to relax at its baseline. His efforts to perpetuate yoga therapy and its benefits are doubled with the help of the Yoga Research Facility, a conjoining department at the world class yoga university which provides contextual evidence supporting the practice. In the labs, students research the effects yoga has on cognitive neuroscience, bio energy, psychophysiology, and much more.

Talitha Wisner
RTG Ambassador



We visited the Elephanta caves near Mumbai. We took a ferry for an hour to the island where the caves are, and that was surprisingly relaxing. Once there, we climbed 120 steps to the top of the island mountain and found ourselves at the threshold of a massive, aged, basalt memorial. Found in the 18th century, this memorial was made for Shiva the Destroyer. Unlike the other edifices we saw that were made for gods, this one was not a temple of worship, so we did not have to remove our shoes to enter. It is believed that this structure was built between the 5th and 7th centuries, but today some of the work has faded and been lost.

We learned that it was not created by slave workers, but by generations of skilled artisans. The seven caves were hollowed rather than constructed. After enjoying the great structures of Shiva, Aghora, Tatpuruṣa, and Vandeva with Sadyojata within the caves, we proceeded back down the mountain, while encountering many, friendly animals like cattle, dogs, and monkeys.

Carlos Fuentes
RTG Ambassador



When watching a movie one rarely considers the work that goes on behind the scenes and before the actors are even cast. Our trip to Bollywood gave us a quick glance into the surreal life of the making of a feature film. Our guides were more than welcoming into their life of acting and show business. The day started off with some karaoke on the bus where they showed us some popular Hindi songs, and we returned the favor by playing song by a classic favorite Selena Quintanilla! After an hour long ride that seemed more like 5 minutes we took a tour of the set company S.J. studios to visit different sets and watched some of the makings of how camera men set up the different shots for each character!

Soon after we were taken into a theater where professional dancers showed us several popular dance moves and invited the crowd to get up and dance! Some brave few ventured up and danced alongside the professionals while other were equally as content watching the whole show from their seats. After photos were taken and smiles exchanged, we were loaded back onto the bus and brought back to reality, but we all left with something. We left with greater appreciation for the arts and the hard working men and women behind the scenes.



We visited the Samarthanam Trust for the Disabled, which is a highly known NGO that serves almost like a boarding school for people of all ages who are underprivileged and have different disabilities. The program works to make life as normal and as full as possible for their people, despite the obstacles they've been given. They do this through a wide variety of programs ranging from computer software designed to teach the visually impaired to highly ranked cricket and dance teams consisting of both blind and deaf students.

The one thing that struck me most about this organization was that walking through the building and meeting the students, I noticed nothing but smiles and happiness. The people were kind, warmhearted, and open regardless of the tough set of cards they were dealt. Their souls were beautiful and filled with spirit. Through this experience, I have been enlightened with an entire new concept of poverty. I found that although their physical state was challenging, their mental and emotional state was always a positive one, whereas in America, it's the complete opposite. Physical poverty is something easy to fix in comparison to spiritual poverty.



The majority of people in first world countries have homes and are well-fed, yet a high number of those same people suffer from depression and anxiety. When placed in a country so full of spirit, it made me realize the reality of spiritual poverty in my country. India and this organization have shown me a lesson I so wish others could witness firsthand.

I have nothing but respect for what the people of this organization are doing, and I plan to follow their progress when I get back home.

Christine Segovia
RTG Ambassador

THE STATE OF ARCHITECTURE

THE STATE OF ARCHITECTURE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART

NGMA

Mumbai



E-mail : ngma.mumbai@gmail.com
Sir Cowasjee Jehangir Public Hall
Mahatma Gandhi Road
Mumbai 400 032
Tel : 022 22881979 / 022 22852457 / 022 22881970
Website : www.ngma.gov.in

