

Bringing homesick to a new level

After yesterday's lengthy plant-centric post, it is nice to turn my attention to our temporary home here in Bangalore. We have been living in the Centenary Visitors House (guest house) of the [Indian Institute of Science](#) (IISc) since March 30, with a return date of May 28. Homesick has new meaning to me!

Bangalore - renamed Bengaluru, though no one seems to like or use that name - is often called the IT capital of India. Its population has risen about 65% between 2001 and 2011, from just over 5 million to nearly 8.5 million with the accompanying problems of great disparity of wealth (about 2 million people live in slums, while others live in enormous luxury apartments), extreme congestion, severe air pollution, and inadequate infrastructure.



Tangle of wires are draped in tree along busy sidewalk. I also love the sign, "Do Not Jump Signal."

It is

okay to drive on the narrow, broken sidewalk or on the wrong side of the street, but mind the light.

About a year ago The Guardian ran a slideshow, [The other side of India's IT capital Bengaluru – in pictures](#), that illustrates some of these problems, and more recently, Apr. 17, 2013, Mark Tran wrote, [Bengaluru rues rapid growth as India's IT hub](#).

We are living in an oasis, here in Bangalore. The Institute, established in 1903, is located on a heavily wooded campus of more than 400 acres. We get around this large, woodsy campus on bicycles provided by an on-campus, bicycle rental company. Though not flashy, the bicycles are

practical and only cost 1,000 rupees (\$20) for one month.



Functional, if not glamorous.

Our apartment is located at the northeast end of the campus, right next to a gate that exits onto New BEL Road. One step out of this protected enclave is a shock indeed. Traffic is either dead stopped or flying by at unimaginable speeds. Motorcycles drive on the wrong side of the divided road when needed, or on the sidewalk if that will work. The hierarchy of right-of-way goes from big to little. Buses and trucks wait for no one, big cars come next, then small cars, auto rickshaws (tuk-tuks) next, then motorcycles, followed by scooters, bicycles and lastly people. We have been in India for over four months and I still dread crossing the street here in Bangalore. Yet, in this cacophony, one rarely sees accidents - truly a mystery to me.

To reduce the stress of this bustling city we decided to rent an air-conditioned taxi for weekend outings. For the bargain price of roughly \$16 our driver spends four hours taking us where we want to go, dropping us off, picking us up when we call, and returning us safely home. Last week we

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went to the [National Gallery of Modern Art](#) followed by lunch at a cowboy-style restaurant called [Millers 46](#) (see what I mean about homesick?).



No apologies, it was great!



Not a bad imitation of a hamburger in cow-loving India.

This weekend our expedition included an all-you-can-eat breakfast buffet in an extremely fancy, extremely western Sheraton Hotel. I loaded my plate with sausages, roasted potatoes and tomatoes, salad (oh, I really do miss salad), and quiche. Fresh baked bread, fresh-squeezed orange juice, fresh fruit, and fresh-brewed coffee made this a fresh and delicious meal. It feels good just to think on it!



We crave air-conditioning and bathrooms with toilet paper.

After sating ourselves on a great western breakfast we called our driver who arrived promptly and took us to a most un-American (alas) but very Indian destination, a great independent bookstore. With only an hour left, I spent the whole time at [Blossom Book House](#) reading children's comic books of Hindu stories so I could pick the best ones for my nephew and niece. I bought six.

There are things about India that I will not miss but these amazing bookstores are not among them. Before going to Blossom, I noted that there are at least four other independent bookstores in the same general area. I look forward to returning with more time to browse, and know that I will crave these great establishments when I'm back in the states.

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