

# Living India – A Semester Abroad Field Program

## Proposal by Dr. Colleen McVeigh

The following proposal was developed following a reconnaissance trip made to India in May/June 2009. This trip was made possible in part by a travel grant generously provided by Vancouver Island University under its Faculty and Staff Travel and Study Abroad Grant Program, Spring 2009.

### What?

Living India is designed as an experiential- based semester abroad program offering 9 to 15 course credits to participating VIU students.

Possible Courses Offered by the Department of Anthropology:

- Anth 312 – Medical Anthropology (with special focus on India)
- Anth 315 – Field Methods in Anthropology (exact title?)
- Anth 325A – Ethnology of the Himalayas
- Anth 390/490 – Directed Studies / Independent Project
- Anth (?) – Special Topics – ideally this would be a broad topics course with assignments administered and graded by a VIU faculty member. It would be accompanied by lectures presented each week by local guest speakers.

### Why?

The purpose of the program is two-fold:

- to ground students in the history and culture of the Indian Himalaya using experiential-based learning methods
- to provide tangible field-based experience as well as opportunities for students to directly apply field methodologies commonly used in anthropology and the social sciences

### Where?

The Living India program will introduce participants to the Indian Himalayas, and will be based predominantly in the Mussorie region of the State of Uttarakhand. Participants will be housed first in the town of

Mussorie and later in Sainji Village (Kempty district), with field trips offered to outlying areas throughout the program.

## Who?

This program is being spearheaded by the Department of Anthropology under the direction of Dr. Colleen McVeigh, but may be run collaboratively with other department members as well as faculty from other interested departments.

### Participants

- 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year VIU students
- Numbers: 8-16 (Anth only program: 8-10; Collaborative program: 12-16)

### VIU Faculty Reps

- Anth Department: Faculty representative Dr. Colleen Erin McVeigh

Other departments: Faculty from two other departments have expressed interest in collaborating:

- Philosophy Dept – Robert Pepper-Smith
- Phys. Ed. Dept – Les Melbion

### Contacts in India

- Lori McFadyen Chauhan, Sainji Village, Kempty Falls (Lori is a former student of ours who graduated from Mal U-C with a BA in anth, went on to complete a Masters in Anth at Simon Fraser, and is now a PhD Candidate at McGill U)
- Kunwar Chauhan, Sainji village resident and long-time District Political Officer, Kempty region (Kunwar Singh is also Lori's husband)
- Landoor Language School, Mussoorie

### Contacts in Canada

- Suzanne Chatwin, Nanaimo (Suzanne is also a former student of ours who lived in Sainji village for 3 months (May-July 2009) and participated in many of the fieldtrips and activities outlined below - see How? Section)

### Contacts at VIU

- Audrey Hanson – 740-6312

## How?

Estimated Cost: \$7000 - \$7500 cdn

### Includes:

Food and Accommodation (Delhi, Mussoorie, Sainji, Fieldtrips)

International Travel (airfare, visa, travel insurance)

Local Travel (trains, buses, taxis, jeeps/mini-bus)

Guest Speakers

Local staff (cooks, laundry, drivers, etc.)

Equipment and Supplies (includes medical kit, books, teaching materials, water treatment system)

Language School

Field Trips

### Schedule

#### ***September – Nanaimo + India***

- Orientation and Preparation (3 weeks) – VIU Nanaimo  
+logistic arrangements+ meetings+lectures+films+packing+travel
- Travel to India and Program Site (1 week)  
+acclimatization and intro to Delhi (3 days) + field trip to Taj Mahal (2 days) + travel to Mussoorie (1 day)

#### ***October – Mussoorie, India***

- Contact and Cultural Immersion  
language classes + local field trips + guest speakers + lectures (3 weeks) + Gangotri pilgrimage (6-7 days)

#### ***November – Sainji Village, India***

- Fieldwork Experience and Study Tours  
Sainji village home stay (2 weeks) + Yamuna pilgrimage (5 days) + Yamuna river and temple tour (1 day) + Rishikesh (3-4 days) + Corbett National Park (2-3 days)

#### ***December – India + Nanaimo***

- Travel Home  
Travel to Delhi (1 day) + Optional trip to Jaipur, Rajasthan (3-4 days) + Travel Home (2 days)

#### ***January – Wrap-up***

- Debrief session and potluck

### Field Trips

Many of these trips can be arranged with the help of our local contacts, Lori and Kunwar Chauhan

- Delhi: The Red Fort + Dilli Haat + The Lotus Temple + The Old Market + Pahar Ganj + Connaught Place
- Mussoorie: Tibetan village + Orchard Farm + Indian astrologer + Language School + Churches + Mussoorie Development Institute
- Greater Mussoorie Area: Kempty Falls + Sainji Village + Gerald Berremen's village (name?) + Kolti + Textile village + Temple visits + Archaeological site and temple + Yamuna River Rafting and Swimming
- Dehra Dun: Group Home for Autistic Children (contact Lottis in Sweden – [lottisar@spray.se](mailto:lottisar@spray.se))
- Sacred Pilgrimages: Yamunotri + Gangotri (high-altitude mountain trekking)
- Sites outside Uttarakhand: Rishikesh + The Corbett National Park + Dharamsala + Agra + Jaipur (Rajasthan)

### Guest Speakers

Speakers can be arranged with the help of Lori and Kunwar Chauhan

- Aurvedic Doctor
- Indian Astrologer
- Local Historian
- Chairman of the Mussoorie Development Institute
- Indian musicians
- Local writer/poet (Mussoorie bookstore every Saturday)
- Lori McFadyen – Canadian anthropologist and local resident
- Local teachers – many schools in the area
- Local school children's traditional song and dance program

### Internship Possibilities

- The Development Institute

## When?

The program would ideally be offered in the Fall term, which is why it is being considered as a semester abroad program instead of a regular field school. There are two main reasons for this both of which are practical in nature.

- 1) Climatically, India is at its hottest in May-June-July when field schools are typically offered. Seasonal temperatures are hot - usually in the 40C+ range (it was 48C in Delhi in May!) and consistently humid. The heat makes travel difficult, especially for the climatically uninitiated Canadian, which makes people more prone to dehydration and other illnesses.
- 2) May-June is the Indian holiday season, when schools are out and families are on the move. Because of the number of Indian travelers and tourists at this time, travel arrangements are difficult to book (buses, trains, etc.) and the roads, particularly the narrow mountain roads of Uttarakhand, are jammed and busy. Both of these factors increased the difficulty of travel at this particular time of year.

The best time to travel to the Uttarakhand region is in the Fall, particularly in October and November, when temperatures are pleasant and traffic is minimum. Alternatively, a field program in Spring semester would also be possible, in Feb-March before temperatures heat up.