

Profugo

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The Kernel



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June Update

By Jenny Koeth

Dear Friends,

Thank you for coming out to JIVA, our spring fundraiser. We enjoyed beautiful dance & music, ate delicious food, made some great connections, and raised \$3200 for our Water for Life project! Thank you especially to the talented performers Bala Devi Chandrashekar, Courtyard Dancers, Shruthilayam Academy, and Three Aksha Dance Ensemble! There is already talk of doing a similar event, but bigger and better at a venue such as the Philadelphia Art Museum. Stay tuned!

The month of May has been about making last minute preparations for our field trip to Wayanad this summer. There are four of us going, myself included. We have a temporary facility to serve as the center of development while we acquire land and construct the permanent facility. These are groundbreaking milestones for our organization, but will require a lot of flexibility as "transactions" in these parts of the world are never simple. Meet our field workers on page 2 of this newsletter and check back on our website as they will be posting updates during their time at the Wayanad Center of Development.

Our packing list includes such things as pipettes/whirlpak sample bags, water tests, GPS readers, and Abney levels (thanks to the advice of EWB-Villanova!). We're also packing with us several reference books that should be handy (The Barefoot Architect by Johan van Lengen, Aquaponic Gardening by Sylvia Bernstein, and Poor Economics by Abhijit Banerjee/Esther Duflo). Let us know if you have any literature or resource suggestions for us!

Thanks to design volunteers Melissa Yates and Janell Hopkins, we're taking a finalized bag design with us. We'll be starting our journey in Bangalore, checking in with an established tailoring workshop (Jacobs Well) and purchasing the needed materials for the production of our bags. We hope to have bags for sale this fall, to help fund our tailoring co-op that will officially launch this summer. Other appointments include visits with ESAF (a development organization in Thrissur), an Aquaponics collaboration with St. Alberts College/University of Wisconsin in Kochi, and an innovative CSA (Heal the Soil) in Bangalore. Stay tuned for updates on our meetings with these and other organizations. Think of us on June 18 as we depart for India and follow us on Twitter (@Profugo_friends) for the latest news.

~Greetings from one profugo to another!



Meet Profugo's Field Fellows

As Profugo looks to join hands with communities in under-developed and developing countries, we could not accomplish our objectives without a team of passionate volunteers. We are currently working in Wayanad, India, and are excited to have field fellows on board to manage and support Profugo's development projects. We are in various phases of planning & implementation of the following projects:

- *Tailoring Workshop & Co-op
- *English Language School
- *Aquaponics
- *Community Supported Agriculture
- *Water for Life (Water, Sanitation & Health)

This summer, we are joined by three field fellows from the US, two of whom will be working at our center of development for the next year. We are excited as we look forward to a year of learning, growing, and collaborating! To support our fellows and projects, please make an online donation at <http://profugo.org/community/menuprofugofelloverview>. Thank you for your partnership!



Isel Otero-Vera from Puerto Rico

Fresh grad from Bryn Mawr College

Why Wayanad? *I first heard about Kerala my junior year of college while taking my Ethics of Development class. In this course we read works by the renowned economist from India, Amartya Sen, who spoke passionately about issues of social justice and economic development. Amartya Sen mentioned Kerala as an exemplary case study for development given the residents' high literacy rate and longer living expectancy. I have wanted to visit Kerala and learn more about it since then.*

How I hope to grow: *I hope to learn how to cook some exceptional biryani and speak conversational Malayalam. Most importantly, I look forward to building wonderful friendships and establishing great relationships with my coworkers in the tailoring workshop and community members.*

Why Wayanad? *I am going to work on community and economic development within the village, namely a water sanitation project and an English Language School. My year with Profugo is the second half of my master's degree. I am working on a Master's International Degree in International Public Service and Development at Rutgers. I just completed a year of intensive classes and an internship in community development within Camden, NJ. The second year is out in the field, in India!*

Emily Davies, from Philadelphia, PA **Grad student at Rutgers University**



How I hope to grow: *I hope to grow in many ways. One is professionally. I want to be more knowledgeable and proficient when it comes to implementing and carrying out economic and community development projects. I also want to grow as a person, to have a more open mind and heart.*

Victoria Peltonen from San Antonio, Texas **Student at Bryn Mawr College**

Why Wayanad? *Volunteering abroad has been a life interest of mine, and India is somewhere I've never been. I hope to get to know people who live a life completely different from my own and to broaden my understanding of the world and the people in it. In doing this, I hope to help improve their way of life in any way I can.*

How I hope to grow: *I believe that with every friendship and relationship a person grows, intentionally and unintentionally. I hope that my time in India, however short, exposes me to new experiences and that I continue to be open to these opportunities to grow in understanding of others and in understanding myself.*



Cross Cultural Life Tips

The choice to live overseas in a developing country is one of the most adventurous and life changing decisions a person can make. When I moved to Nairobi, Kenya in 2006, I had no way of knowing what lay ahead. All I knew was the undeniable urge which pushed me outward—out of my own culture and into completely new ways of living and being. For three years I experienced the unique joys and pains of expatriate life. It was a constant journey of learning more about the world, and even more about myself. No two people have identical experiences overseas. However, there are many common themes which my fellow American nomads and I encountered.

The first theme in these experiences is a strong need for community. Loneliness is frequently a reality of life overseas. Traveling with one or two others is a huge help. But, especially for longer times overseas, you will want to branch out and befriend locals. True friendships with locals may evolve slowly and can be harder to find. When such friendships develop, they tend to follow different patterns and customs. For instance due to safety concerns in Nairobi, I could not go out at night with my Kenyan friends the way I did with my college friends. Instead, I learned the joys of a leisurely afternoon tea time. Although these relationships may require a lot of work to establish, I cannot stress how integral having local friends was to my wellbeing overseas. This is where many of my most enriching cultural moments occurred and where I came to finally feel “at home” in Kenya.

Living in areas with significant language barriers presents a more formidable challenge. An important way that I connected with young Kenyans was by learning and using the local slang. Language learning goes a long way toward establishing street cred with locals. It is through the humbling process of practicing and making mistakes that deep bonds of trust can form. Common ground is established, everyone can share a good laugh, and the language learner demonstrates great respect for the local customs.

Control is another major theme in most overseas experiences- more specifically the realization that you don't have much of it. When I first arrived in Kenya, I was essentially a toddler all over again. I could not communicate well, shopping was a daunting endeavor, even crossing the street was beyond my abilities. I was completely reliant on my host organization. With time I became fairly independent, but the sense of vulnerability never left me. I never forgot that I was an outsider in a very different world.

Americans generally find a great sense of identity in productivity and hard work. We often desire busy-ness, schedules, and efficiency. However, this is not the norm in many other countries. The pace of life in developing countries is often slower and more focused on relationships than tasks. Americans who are used to having every moment accounted for suddenly find themselves with oodles of down time and little choice in the matter. Expats who learn to expect setbacks and cope with loose schedules will fare much better in the long term.

No matter how open minded and culturally sensitive one is when entering another country, it is never an easy adjustment. Everyone experiences culture shock at least once—that moment when you are utterly fed up and disenchanted with all the strangeness around you. Take heart! The

By Julie Nichol



moment of despair may lead to a moment of deep personal growth. The key is to push through it. Take a little break, get a good night's sleep, and find ways to reengage as soon as possible. For me the keys to processing life and refreshing myself in Kenya were simple: finding American food, internet time, and an American friend or journal page where I could pour out my troubles.

Despite the sacrifices and difficulties I have encountered in life overseas, they have always been far outnumbered by the joys and benefits.

In summary here are my top tips for brave souls moving overseas:

- Put sincere effort into language learning.
- Have the attitude of a humble guest. Listen, listen, listen before you speak. Frequently, just don't speak at all. For example, assume that no local person wants to hear your opinion on the shortcomings of their government. They may, however, want to share their own frustrations about it.
- Ask locals lots of questions and ask them to teach you things (such as language, basket making, cooking, anything!)
- Learn about and respect local etiquette in customs such as meals, gift giving, gender roles, and dress.
- Do not give away money haphazardly. If you are considering a financial gift or loan, first consult with a local person whom you respect and trust.
- Find outlets to refresh and relax.
- Expect that you will make cultural blunders and possibly even be an “ugly American” sometimes. It's okay. Just keep learning and growing.
- Attitude is everything. Approaching stressful or confusing situations with humor, calm, and gratitude will drastically improve your life.
- Stock up on peanut butter (This is probably available your host country)
- Take pictures, write about your impressions, and share them with folks back home.

Julie Nichol (MA International Development) has a passion for world cultures and global health. She works for the Center for Disease Control in New York City, although her heart remains in East Africa.

From One Volunteer to Another

By Heather Newton

I just returned from five months in India, and it was one of the most rewarding times in my life to date. When I first boarded the plane to fly to India for a volunteer position with Habitat for Humanity, I had no expectations in mind as to what life would look like or what kind of challenges I might face. With a few deep breaths and a sleep aid, I survived the flight and quickly realized once I landed that having no expectations was the very best thing I could have done. As a result of my time, I learned valuable life lessons to share with other volunteers that will hopefully make your time as rich as mine was.

India is a place where the face of culture is so diverse and rich that you cannot possibly read enough books to prepare for your first meeting. Instead, you must humble yourself under India's tutelage and purpose to learn through constant perception and an arsenal of questions. Fortunately, the people are wonderfully patient when it comes to sharing insights about their expansive home and will often invite you into their home to learn first-hand from their way of life. For those willing to posture themselves as a student to such people, they will soon find that by the end of their time in India that they have transitioned from a learner to an adopted family member. The relationships will undeniably become the very richest aspect of your time and will surely help you to face some of the more challenging aspects of life in India.

When many people think of India, images of dire poverty conditions flash through their mind. Being home to one billion of the world's populations, government corruption and a lack of infrastructure has created a chasm that many of poorest fall into. The caste system bludgeons many on the lower classes in India with prejudices that they cannot surmount. The need for education, health care, housing, food, sanitation, and clean water are just a few of the many issues existing in India today. Walking down the street, the needs are apparent and unavoidable. A volunteer can easily feel overwhelmed and rendered immovable when it comes to meeting the need, but it is important to realize that positive change, though slow to come, will bring about long-lasting benefits. With one step, one cause, and one person at a time, you can bring about incredible change in an incredible land.

When the challenges dishearten you, just breathe and remind yourself that your service matters. In my own experience, self-care was one of the most important activities to practice. I adopted a regimen of podcasts that would help me to disengage long enough to reenergize my brain and provide my spirit with rest. The truth of the matter is that being overwhelmed at times is very likely when one spends a greater length of time anywhere in the world. By staying in tune to your own needs, you can come to



understand how to re-center without burning out. Whether that is podcasts, books, movies, or the occasional call home, adopt a system that you can instituted to care for yourself whenever you find yourself lonely, overwhelmed, or discouraged. This practice is paramount to your success as a volunteer with an organization such as Profugo.

By the end of your time, you will come to see through the relationships built how much of an impact you made. Sometimes, it feels imperceptible day to day, but your willingness to volunteer abroad is undeniable and serves as an example for communities back at home. You will grow as a person and your worldview will totally be shifted so that you return home with a greater appreciation for what you have as well as a greater awareness of the needs throughout the world. It takes realistic expectations, patience with yourself, and openness to community, and self-care practices in order to make your volunteer experience the very best it can be no matter where you go in the world. The point is to take the challenge to go, build community, and see the world from a different view. I was fortunate enough to challenge myself to go and build community and, as a result, I will now carry a piece of India with me wherever I go.

Heather Newton is a recent graduate of Eastern University with a master degree in International Development. She spent five months in India after Eastern working with Habitat for Humanity in Chennai. Currently, she is traveling through Alaska and plans to find a job working with disadvantaged groups of women internationally.