

THE EXPLORER FELLOWSHIP: GETTING TO KNOW OUR MOTHERLAND

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THE EXPLORER FELLOWSHIP: GETTING TO KNOW OUR MOTHERLAND

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Hi everyone, I hope you all had an awesome July and by now you must have already geared up to make your August a fabulous one! Without wasting any more time, let me give you a glimpse of what I would be talking about today. It is the one and only - 'Explorer Fellowship'. So, what was the very first thing that you imagined when you read this term? Words like 'travel, tour, inquire....' would have swum across your mind. Let me tell you, 'Explorer Fellowship' at IIT Gandhinagar is exactly the blend of all these expressions!

This kind of fellowship is the very first among any IIT and is aimed to enhance the connection of students with their society- to boost their social outreach! How? Well... by simply giving them a golden chance to embark on a journey through diverse states of India wherein they would come across and experience diverse cultures and lifestyles. I sincerely believe that for all 'travel-mongers' out there, it is definitely an inescapable opportunity!

To be precise, the 'Explorer Fellowship' is an annual summer-program that enables the students of IIT Gandhinagar to undertake a six-week adventure across the country. They are organised in small teams and must 'explore' at least six states- one each in the Northern, North-Eastern and Southern parts of India on a budget. For this, they need to plan their trip economically. They should travel by sleeper-class in trains or by the state government buses and should stay at low-cost accommodations like dharamsalas- all this is done with the aim to inculcate a sense of '*how a common man's life goes across different parts of India*', within the students. Isn't it adventurous, interesting and educative at the same time?

Folks, let us familiarize ourselves with a bit of quick history about this ingenious programme: It was launched in December 2014 and since then it has been a center of numerous enthusiastic responses. Every year, many graduation, post-graduation and Ph.D. students apply to this programme. In words of Prof. S.K. Jain (Director, IIT Gandhinagar), "This fellowship is not just to give students a taste of adventure, it is to engulf them with ground level realities of our country. As an engineer, students should model their innovations around simplifying the travails of the less privileged.

Prof. Jaison Manjaly (Dean, Student Affairs), points out that one of the main aims of this institute

is to develop true leaders of our society and not just engineers! He says, "We want to be a university and not just an engineering college". This is what I think makes all the difference! The institute is not just limited to educating its students to become successful in their respective career-fields, but it also takes care of their interests, understands their passion and provides them with all that is necessary to build a prosperous society in future which includes giving them an idea about the 'diverse yet unified' lifestyles of India across her different states!

Now, let me give you an idea of what the students, who successfully completed their journeys, think about this programme... well, they always come back with innumerable exciting stories to share with us! Samarth Kashyap is one of the fellows who visited 13 states and he elaborates, "It is an unfair notion that inhabitants of North Eastern states aren't welcoming to those from the other parts of India. During our return from Itanagar to Sikkim, we met an old lady who helped us with our travel bookings and dropped us to our destination safely. We also met a young girl who took us on a tour through the city and filled our backpacks with fruits and supplies for our journey. All this help was offered without any condition of monetary return." According to some other students, they were interested in applying for civil services examinations and this 6-week trip helped them to build stronger perspectives about the country's politics, economy and culture.

India being such a diverse country in numerous aspect, it is very important to understand these to their core. To guide a society, one needs to get a grasp of any situation and only then it can be addressed effectively. In the regular course-curriculum, students are loaded with academic responsibilities which are indeed required for academic excellence but these also take up most of their time. Hence, it 'sort-of' becomes tough to meet and talk to new people/ society and have fun. Opportunities like the 'Explorer Fellowship' are supposed to keep the boredom born from these excessive studies in check as well as provide the students with the lucky chance to know their motherland in the best possible way! In this way, the students also get refreshed and recharged to 'lift' more academic responsibilities on their shoulders in future... otherwise; all work and no fun will definitely make Jack a dull boy!!!

As John Adams rightly said, "There are two educations. One should teach us how to make a living and the other how to live!" and IIT Gandhinagar is constantly trying to inculcate both these types in its students by means of various initiatives like this Fellowship. I am really proud to be a part of this Institute.

So, this is it from my end today guys. Will see you all soon with yet another topic of this series... till then *au revoir!*

Posted By- Apeksha Srivastava, M.Tech student- Biological Engineering (16210113)



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