




# IISER HIGHLIGHTS



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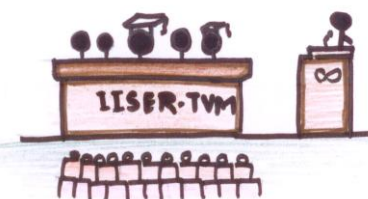
- Pranav Khandelwal

## READY, STEADY, GO...



Sixteen students from seven different states, this is what formed the youngest faction of the IISER family on the first day, 16 August 2008, our reporting day. More students were expected to join in the coming week. The first day was more of an informal interaction session between our parents, us and the teachers. After finishing the usual paper work done at the time of admission (submission of transcripts, general information form), the gathering was addressed by the director Dr. E. D. Jemmis. We were informed about the goal of IISER and what importance it holds in the progress of our country. Some general questions were also addressed to. This was followed by lunch where our pallet was treated to authentic Kerala food! For many of us it was a novel experience. In the end I must say that no stone was left unturned by the faculty and the director to clear all our doubts and make our parents feel confident of their child's future.

Surprise, surprise.....our first working day, 18<sup>th</sup> August 2008, we had a visitor – Shri M.A. Baby (Hon'ble Minister for Education and Cultural Affairs, Govt of Kerala). This surprise surely made us feel special but also showed the trust and responsibility the Government had entrusted us with. Referring to the current global scenario, he emphasized that scientific research was the way forward for the progress of a country. IISER-TVM being located in Kerala, the home for many world renowned institutions would gain a lot from the expertise of these institutions. Collaborating with them would further strengthen research and help explore new areas of research.



## Teachers' day

We have a very enthusiastic group of teachers. Always willing to help us, make us understand and always pushing us to think out of the box'; 5<sup>th</sup> September 2008 – of thanking them for their continuous support own small way we thanked them by and gifted each of them a pen set. Having fields of research is something we are proud of!



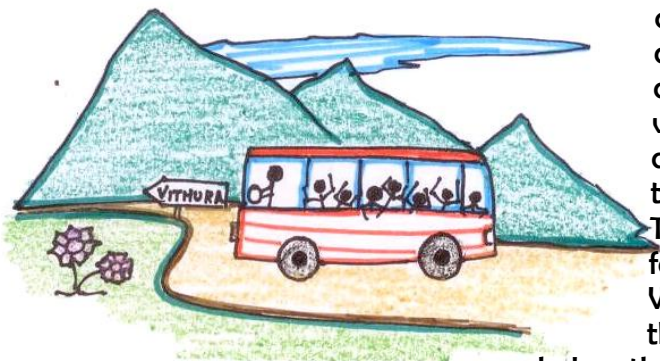
## *Onashamsakal!*



Authentic Kerala delicacies to flatter our taste buds and a speech on the importance of the festival, this marked the festival of Onam at IISER- TVM, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2008. It was the first time that many of us were celebrating this festival. Of course, we had a holiday and to add to the celebrative mood we had an Onam 'feast' for the entire IISER family. Having the tastefully made curries and rice on a banana leaf just added to the overall Kerala experience. To finish the sixteen varieties of curries along with the payasam was a never ending task! This was the first time our entire family had come together and so in a way it was an opportunity for everyone to interact with each other and get to know each other better. The feast was followed by a speech by Unnikrishnan sir on the importance of this day. He gave us a historical background of this festival and how it is celebrated throughout Kerala. We thoroughly enjoyed every bit of it and are looking forward to celebrate it with our increasing family in the coming years.

## *Vithura, here we come*

Two hundred acres filled with Mother Nature's creations, far away from man-made concrete jungles. This is where our campus will be located - Vithura, 40 km from the city of Trivandrum, at the foothills of Ponmudi. To see our future campus a trip was organized on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2008. The road journey to our destination was very scenic; waterfalls and rubber plantations were a



common spectacle. Since Ponmudi and Vithura are not very far away, we went to Ponmudi first and then Vithura. Those who come from cities would be spell bound looking at such beauty and abundance of greenery. 'Heaven on Earth', this could surely qualify for that beautiful place. The landscape was totally untampered and as far as one could see, greenery was everywhere! We had a small trek with Shajahan sir to one of the hills. This was followed by a picnic lunch below the open sky, amidst breath taking beauty. Next

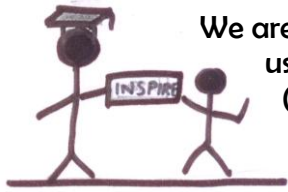
stop -Vithura. Vithura is at the foothills and is equally bestowed with greenery, it even has a small stream running through it. We named it 'IISER nadi (stream)'. Being cut off from the noise and air pollution of a city, this is surely a place where a student would love to stay and pursue his/her research. This is where a research institute ought to be situated. We walked along the boundary for some time and then were back in our bus, hoping that we would shift to our new campus soon.

## *Diwali*

The festival of lights – Diwali, was celebrated on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2008. Dinner was organized at the boys' hostel. We had made all the arrangements for crackers and candles (a substitute for diyas!). A small flute and vocal performance by some of us also took place. We never knew that some of us were so talented. Then we went to a nearby temple to offer prayers on such an auspicious occasion. This was followed by dinner which like Onam had many delicacies. Our Director Dr. E.D Jemmis really got things going by lighting a few crackers. In the next hour or so, we were all busy bursting crackers and celebrating the festival of Diwali. The hostel corridors were lit up with candles and when the lights were off, the site was truly breathtaking.



## *Getting INSPIRE- d!*



We are lucky to be entitled to get a stipend every month to help in our studies and motivate us in our future research. This has now been replaced by a scholarship called 'INSPIRE' (Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research) launched by the Department of Science and Technology. This was launched by the Prime Minister of India – Shri Manmohan Singh on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2008 in the presence of Shri Kapil Sibal– Minister of Science and Technology and other prominent dignitaries. Four of us were selected to represent our institute at this event along with our Director. The Prime Minister in his addressing speech gave an outline of the various schemes for undergraduate and post graduate students and how they would be implemented in the future. He also emphasized that the Government was committed to do all that is necessary to rejuvenate research at the university level. There was also a presentation on the recently launched 'Chandrayaan' mission and its need at such a time. Later on Jemmis sir was kind enough to take us for a bit of site-seeing around Delhi, we were truly lucky, since, where does one have the opportunity to be accompanied by the Director himself!

## *Back to work*

Our winter break began on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2008. We were scheduled to reopen on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2009- the first day of our second semester. Our Institute was now a semester old! We all shared our holiday experiences with the Director and it was more of settling down during the first day than studies. We organized a chess tournament during the first month. The tournament was divided into two stages – knockout and league. It lasted over two weeks and Pavan Sharma emerged the winner. Gopikrishnan M. was the runner up and he also won the prize for finishing a game in the least number of moves. A staggering 3 steps!

Along with the assignments and revisions, there were always the frequent cricket matches on Saturdays to look forward to. The cricket matches had everyone playing actively, non-teaching staff, faculty, and students of course. In the midst of all this fun, Shajahan sir accompanied us to our trip to the city's planetarium and science museum. The science museum has many interactive simulations on various branches of engineering and science.

## *Republic day*

We celebrated Republic day on the 26<sup>th</sup> January 2009 in our institute. Our Director hoisted the national tricolour. He reminded us of our role as responsible citizens and the faith the nation had entrusted in us. We were imagining how ten years down the line we would look back at this day, when the IISER family would have grown from a mere thirty to thousands! Representing the diverse cultures we all belong to, we sang patriotic songs and poems in Malayalam, Telugu and Hindi.



## *Laying the foundation, our home to be*

The foundation stone laying ceremony at Vithura took place on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2009. It was inaugurated by Shri Vayalar Ravi (Hon'ble Union Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Overseas Affairs). The programme was attended by Shri M .A. Baby (Hon'ble Minister for Education & Cultural Affairs) Mr. M. Vijayakumar (Hon'ble Minister for Ports & Parliamentary Affairs) Mr. Varkala Radhakrishnan (Hon'ble Member of Parliament), Mr. G. Karthikeyan (Hon'ble MLA), scientists, faculty, research scholars from neighbouring institutes and large number of residents of Vithura. Mr. Ashok Thakur, Additional Secretary-Ministry of HRD, Govt. of India, prof. M.R.S Rao, Chairman BoG, and Mr. Kuruville John, Principal Secretary, Higher Education, Govt. of Kerala were also present. The Govt. of Kerala, through its various officials and functionaries, helped to make the function a success. The proceedings were started by lighting diyas by the chief guest. Various dignitaries in their speech emphasized the importance of the establishment of IISER in Kerala and how it would help to make Kerala a centre of world class research. They requested the people of Vithura to look after us since we came from different states and may find it difficult adjusting there.



## *National Science Day*

There wouldn't have been a better way to celebrate National Science Day -2009, than by having Dr. Umesh Varshney give us an interactive talk on protein synthesis. We made posters highlighting the day.

## *Know Thy Brain*

In an attempt to gauge our 'Self-Knowledge', Mohanakumar sir challenged us all to some exciting and curious aspects of the brain and nervous system in his quiz "Know Thy Brain". It was interesting to find out that Einstein's brain weighed less than the average, and that the digestive system has its own 'mind', the enteric nervous system (we all knew that intuitively, didn't we?) and many such interesting facts. It was followed by a chemistry quiz organised by Ayan Datta sir.

## *TBGRI field trip*

Kerala – wherever your eyes wander there is nothing but nature in its purest, untampered form. Mountains, trees, oceans-everything is here! It is also home to Asia's largest biodiversity park 'Tropical Botanical Garden and Research Institute' (TBGRI). Mohankumar sir took us to TBGRI in April. Spread over 300 acres, it houses 3,500 species of plants of which 842 have medicinal value. We were shown various species of plants which included those of *Ficus*, jasmines, balsams, cacti and succulents. We also saw the orchidarium, glass house and visited the research laboratories. An insight into the current areas of research was also given by the institute's research staff. It was a learning experience for all of us and a chance to see the rarest species of plants on earth!



## *How to write a paper*



Being students of science we will be going into different frontiers of research, presenting and publishing papers plays a very important role in our scientific career. To help cultivate our paper writing skills, a workshop on paper writing and presentation was conducted by Nakula sir.

This workshop helped us cultivate the basic writing and presentation skills. A lot of topics right from the format of writing to abstract writing, acknowledgements and footnotes were covered. This was accompanied by a writing exercise in which each one of us took up a topic and wrote couple of pages keeping all the methods of writing in mind.

At the end of the day, this was a much needed workshop for all of us, as it helped us to develop the skills required in paper writing and gave us hands on experience to apply this knowledge gained.

## *Already a year old, and still growing!*

Time really moves fast. Looking back at the semesters, one begins to wonder how all that time flew by.

This year has been one of intense activity and continuous stimulation with all the talks, colloquia and lab visits to the other research institutes, and of course the lectures and exams. And here we are, already through a year and growing.....