

SEMESTER EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE

Article from a student studying abroad in India



Hello!

I'm Minoru Tarumi, a third-year student in the School of Integrated Arts and Sciences at Hiroshima University. Currently, I am taking part in a semester exchange program at Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS) Pilani, India.

In this article, I would like to share some highlights about the academic environment here, how classes are structured, and what I have learned through this unique experience.

Class Structure at BITS Pilani

Classes at BITS Pilani differ significantly from those at Japanese universities! Each session is one hour long and is held three times a week. Unlike the quarter system at Hiroshima University, where courses change every term, students here continue with the same classes throughout an entire semester. This system has both advantages and challenges:

Advantages:

- Each session allows you to focus deeply on the material.
- In-depth exploration of topics.
- Regular sessions enhance memory retention.

Challenges:

- Frequent cancellations can disrupt the flow of learning.
- Studying the same subject for an entire semester may feel monotonous.

Additionally, all classes are conducted in English. Initially, I struggled a bit with the Indian accent. However, the slower pace of speech made it easier to adjust, and I soon became used to it!



The Iconic Clock Tower of BITS Pilani

Aside from the clock tower, there are research labs and classrooms, which highlights the large number of academic facilities!

Unique Features of Learning at BITS Pilani

Through my time at BITS Pilani, I have observed three standout features of the academic environment:

1. A Flexible Attendance Policy:

One of the most unique aspects of BITS Pilani is 0 attendance policy! Assignments and exams solely decide final grades, which means students could pass a course without ever attending a class.

Personally, I found attending lectures essential for a better understanding of the material, so I participated in nearly all my classes. However, this system allows students to adapt their learning methods according to their preferences. I believe this is a strong point of the university.

2. Student-Developed Learning Support Apps

BITS Pilani students have created apps to support their academic and campus life! One of the most popular apps provides access to past exam papers, lecture notes, and class schedules. This app has been an invaluable tool for preparing for exams and managing my schedule.

Having such resources easily available helps to reduce disparities in access to materials. Additionally, students have also developed apps for events like university festivals making campus life more convenient.

3. Emphasis on Practical Learning

At BITS Pilani, there is a strong focus on hands-on learning! Many science and technology courses pair theoretical lectures with practical sessions, allowing students to apply what they have learned.

For example, I have found that working on lab projects immediately after theoretical lectures helps me solidify my understanding of the material and see how theory translates into practice. This integrated approach makes learning more engaging and effective.

My Academic Experience at BITS Pilani

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
8:00AM				Optimization 8:00AM-9:00AM		
8:30AM						
9:00AM						
9:30AM						
10:00AM						
10:30AM						
11:00AM		Data Science 11:00AM-12:00PM		Data Science 11:00AM-12:00PM	Data Science 11:00AM-12:00PM	Deep Learning (Practical) 11:00AM-1:00PM
11:30AM						
12:00PM	Optimization 12:00PM-1:00PM	Deep Learning 12:00PM-1:00PM	Optimization 12:00PM-1:00PM	Deep Learning 12:00PM-1:00PM	Deep Learning 12:00PM-1:00PM	
12:30PM						
1:00PM						
1:30PM						
2:00PM	Game Theory 2:00PM-3:00PM	Data Science (Practical) 2:00PM-4:00PM	Game Theory 2:00PM-3:00PM		Game Theory 2:00PM-3:00PM	
2:30PM						
3:00PM	Bhagavad Gita 3:00PM-4:00PM		Bhagavad Gita 3:00PM-4:00PM		Bhagavad Gita 3:00PM-4:00PM	
3:30PM						
4:00PM						
4:30PM						
5:00PM						
5:30PM	Classical Music 5:00PM-6:00PM		Classical Music 5:00PM-6:00PM		Classical Music 5:00PM-6:00PM	
6:00PM						

Here is a glimpse of my weekly schedule at BITS Pilani

In addition to courses related to my major, I also took classes on Indian culture. For example, I studied the Bhagavad Gita, one of the most important text Indian philosophies, and learned about Indian classical music. These courses were fascinating and offered me a deeper understanding of India's rich cultural heritage.

“Learning about India while living here has added a unique and irreplaceable dimension to my time at BITS Pilani”

To Future Challenges:

My time at BITS Pilani has been filled with fresh and stimulating experiences. Adjusting to differences in the academic system and collaborating with local students on assignments and projects has broadened my perspective and introduced me to new ways of learning. I look forward to deepening my knowledge further and applying these experiences to future challenges.

Frequently Asked Questions about studying in India

Q. I love curry! Are there any classes on how to cook curry?

A. Unfortunately, no...

BITS Pilani does not offer cooking classes, but there are plenty of opportunities to make yourself be in Indian culture through other courses! For example, I have gained deeper insights into Indian philosophy and music through classes on the Bhagavad Gita and Indian classical music.

If you are eager to learn how to cook curry, you can ask your friends, professors, or even cafeteria staff. Many people here are happy to share their recipes, and exploring Indian cuisine could be a fun and delicious side project during your exchange program!

Q. I am Cow Lover. Do cows ever wander into classrooms?

A. Not really...

While it is common to see cows on the streets outside campus, they do not come to campus grounds or into classrooms. However, dogs are a frequent sight on campus and occasionally join lectures! If they are not disruptive, they are allowed to stay, and students coexist peacefully with them.

In addition to dogs, the campus is home to squirrels, woodpeckers, and even peacocks. Observing them adds a touch of nature to campus life, making it a vibrant and unique environment.



A dog relaxing on Campus