

Tribal Health Initiative

Information for medical electives

Tribal Health Initiative is a charitable public trust with a 24 bedded base hospital in a remote forested valley of Tamil Nadu, India, addressing the health needs of the tribal community in the valley. It is a busy hospital with a full-time gynecologist, anesthetist and a surgeon supported by an active community health program promoting preventive care. Out-patients are seen three days a week-on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays, while surgeries and field clinics are done on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Medical Elective Program

We welcome medical electives from all over the world to visit us and experience for themselves the practice of medicine in a completely rural setting. As a medical student it will be intriguing to see the spectrum of diseases that we encounter in general practice, however the fascinating part will be the field and the community work with emphasis on prevention of disease, an integral goal of THI. Language can prove to be a barrier and communication with the patients and nurses maybe a little trying so you will spend your time shadowing doctors for most of the day, be it rounds, OP Clinic, O.R., Field Visits or Field Clinic. Electives who have stayed for long have even performed small procedures under supervision and assisted with surgeries and deliveries. Students from many countries such as USA, UK , Germany, Italy, New Zealand to name a few have lived with us for varied periods of time and many have grown so attached to us that parting was saddening. Some were so enamored that they have returned to visit us again many times.

Ideal Stage to visit

Though we welcome and have hosted medical students at different stages of their schooling it would be prudent for students in their Pre Final Year, Final year or immediately after final year to visit as our establishment is not essentially academic. A basic knowledge of clinical examination, common disorders and management principles would prove helpful in grasping most of the clinical work here.

Best time would be from March to October when the hospital is busy and there are lots to learn and do. However summer (from May to July) can be pretty hot but not intolerable.

Program Schedule

The students will spend the first week getting to know the place and interacting with the team. A timetable can be drawn up for the rest of their stay based on their area of interest. Most teaching will be "on the go", and there will be very few formal classes. Most of the nurses have working knowledge of English and their help can be requested for patient interaction. You will also be able to do simple procedures and in the latter half assist surgeries if you are interested. We will have weekly reviews and can change direction if needed.

We expect that at the end of your elective you will have seen a different type of health care and an uncommon approach to health. For THI, the hospital is only a small part of our effort to improve the health of a community.. Your posting is not mainly for academic improvement only, though that will happen as you go along. This posting is for experiencing how health care is modified and tailored to suit an underprivileged community with available resources. We would be happy if you can understand that health has a social and political dimension which is never taught in our medical colleges.

Facilities available

1) Basic Accommodation:

- a) Accommodation is provided on the hospital campus, close to the common kitchen and staff accommodation. You may have to share a room, based on the availability.
- b) Basic furnishing like lights, ceiling fans and mattress with clean sheets.
- c) Washing machine and mosquito nets provided though it is advisable to bring your mosquito repellent creams. At present there is no malaria here, but you should be immunised against typhoid (if you traveling elsewhere in India), hepatitis A and B .
- d) The THI campus is teetotal and non smoking for everybody. This means no smoking or alcohol even in your room, although you can of course smoke outside the enclosure.

Note: THI runs along the principles of Gandhi and everyone is expected to do their duties as we do not employ persons to do chores. The cleaning of your living space will be left entirely to you. You will have to do your own laundry. A grocery store is available not too far away if essentials are needed.

2) Food:

- a) All 3 meals are traditionally south Indian which is predominantly rice based and completely Vegetarian. The food is prepared hygienically on traditional stoves with local materials and is not extraordinarily spicy though it may tickle a few sensitive taste buds.
- b) Drinking water is not a worry in campus. It is one of the rare places in India where it is safe to drink from the tap. There is no need for bottled water on the campus, but if you would feel happier, do bring your own.
- c) There is a nearby teashop which does sell biscuits, snacks and bananas.

3) Computer and Internet:

Available at the THI Office can be used during or after office hours. Extremely slow given the remoteness of the area therefore downloads and uploads comprising large data may not be feasible.

4) Things you might need to carry:

- a) A manual/handbook of clinical medicine and exam that you are comfortable with.
- b) Toiletries and items of personal nature from bug repellent to anti-malarials.

- c) A phone compatible with local SIM Card. We can provide a local SIM card which shall be returned at the end of your stay here.
- d) Battery operated torch.

Dressing

There are no stringent guidelines for dressing and everyone works in what they are most comfortable in, the philosophy being that who you are is defined by the work you do and not how you dress. However traditional and cultural sensibilities should be kept in mind and modesty might prove beneficial.

For men clean long trousers and shirt or T-shirts with at least short sleeves. For women, local people might find normal western clothing either offensive or provocative, and at best embarrassing. Knee length shalwar Kameez (also known as churidar) is more acceptable and compulsory for patient contact situations or visits to villages, where you will be seen as part of the THI team. Ladies never expose above their ankles, don't wear armless dress. If you are wearing a churidar, it is best draped over with a *dupatta*, unless the upper garment is very loose fitting.

Note: Persons desirous of purchasing traditional Indian clothes may buy the products made by our tribal artisans from the women's group here.

Charges : For those who stay 4 to 8 weeks -We have a basic charge of USD 25/ day. This covers up for your food, accommodation, academic inputs, project area travel, use of computers and internet and pick up and drop from the nearest railway station [Morappur or Vazhapadi]. For those who would like to spend more time with us, there will be a reduction of charges which can be worked out on a case to case basis. For those who would like to stay less than 4 weeks , the transport for pick up and drop is not included.

You will have to pay 25% as non-refundable advance to block your rooms and the rest can be paid by direct bank transfer/ cheque or cash [in Indian Rupees] at the time of departure.

Getting To Sittilingi

Nearest airports are Bengaluru (Bangalore) and Chennai (Tamilnadu).

From Chennai

Chennai is the most convenient place to arrive. There are 3 trains to come to Sittilingi. The best is to take the night Salem Express from Chennai Egmore at 11pm. You will arrive at Vazhapadi Gate at 4.45 am and could be picked up from there, or there is a direct bus to Sittilingi at 6am. If not there are 3 trains to Salem – the Kovai Express at 6.15am, the West Coast Express at 11am or the Yercaud Express at 10pm. Of this the last two stop at a place called Morappur, just before Salem and you could be picked up from there. It is nearer and more convenient than Salem.

Bus: You can take a bus to Salem and take another bus to Sittilingi from Salem.

Note: the buses are all local ones that may not be comfortable and may be overcrowded.

Alternatively you can take a cab or request to be picked up by THI from Dharmapuri or Salem.

Bangalore is nearer but not well connected to Sittilingi by train. If you come to Bangalore ; then Bangalore to Dharmapuri (there's a train starting at 6.15 am everyday). We can pick you up from there or you can then take a bus to Harur and from there, another bus to Sittilingi.

Also visit our website for more directions and you can always contact us for further details.

If you do feel what is written above suits your vision of a medical elective - welcome to Sittilingi!!

To contact

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