



Essence of India I

Thursday 5 – Thursday 11 February 2009

First Programme Letter for Participants

Greetings from Sangam!

This letter gives you background information on India, Sangam and your event. We look forward to getting to know you and expect to share a fun, adventurous, thought-provoking and maybe life-changing time!

Event Objectives

The Essence of India I WAGGGS International Event will develop a participant's potential through:

1. *Learning* about WAGGGS, it's Member Organizations, themes, projects, regions and World Centres, sharing the international friendship that Girl Guiding and Girl Scouting offers.
2. *Experiencing* the unique culture of India through its traditions, history and people.
3. *Participating* in activities and workshops related to leadership, advocacy and Indian culture.

Theme

Experience Indian culture through its dance, music, crafts, food, fashion and more! This is a great introduction to the diversity of this ancient, yet changing country. Visit historical sites and experience the 'emerging' India, while learning about everyday challenges and successes here, in one of the world's oldest civilizations. Learn how India's many and varied religions co-exist side by side in Sangam's own neighbourhood, and share your own Guiding and Scouting activities with our community partners.

Participation

Already enrolled in this event are 16 representatives from the United Kingdom. Guides and Scouts from other countries have also expressed interest in sending participants and it is sure to fill up as it is one of the most popular events here. At Sangam, you will also meet nineteen local and eight international staff members.

Spaces are still available in this event if you know others who would be interested in attending.

Language

This Sangam event will be conducted in English.

Written Material

Contact Sangam (or your group leader) if you have not received health forms, travel memos, or the 'Coming to Sangam' document; this contains information on accommodation, weather, dress, currency, food, what to bring, and more. Please read this information carefully. The health forms and travel memo should be completed and sent to Sangam as early as possible.

Travel Reminders

If you have not already done so, please consult with your doctor about any immunizations or medications that may be recommended for your trip. Also, you need a passport that is valid for six months beyond the date of departure from India in order to apply for the required 3 or 6-months Tourist visa (which starts from the date issued; more details provided in the next letter.) Do check when your passport expires and renew if necessary!

Please note that events begin after lunch on the first day (5/02/09) and end after lunch on the last day (11/02/09).

A Different Culture

India is a large country in which each region has its own language, food, customs, and dress. There is a great diversity of religion, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism. While here, you will be introduced to many aspects of Indian culture. Taking time to learn about India's people, history, and geography before coming will enrich your visit and prepare you for the experiences you will make.

Travelling to India can be quite overwhelming. Your eyes, ears, nose and tongue will experience many new sensations, some of them might be enjoyable, some may seem distressing. Be aware that many things will be different to the ones at the place you call home. Keep your senses open to the new tastes which you are able try and to the experiences you will make – only if you do, you have a chance to find out about the new culture which you will meet! You will find that things which might seem strange at the beginning are not so foreign after all when you have tried them, asked people about it and explored Pune and its surroundings yourself.

Remember that culture is not created to entertain visitors; it is there to suit people's needs and situations. There are reasons for why cultures are the way they are – even if it is not apparent to the visitor. When we use words like "strange" "funny" or "weird" we are judging. When you hear yourself use these words, stop and rephrase the thought in a non-judging way. Do not oversimplify – exotic and not, wealth and poverty, east and west. Especially, be careful of comparing two countries in this way. Nothing is ever this simple!

There are many books which are interesting to read and give you a good idea about Indian society, some we would recommend are Rohinton Mistry's *Tales of Firozsha Baag*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Gregory David Roberts' *Shantaram*, Suketu Mehta's *Maximum City: Bombay Lost & Found* or William Sutcliffe's *Are You Experienced?* which all tell very different tales of India seen with different eyes in different times. A non-fictional but never-the-less easy and very interesting read is *Culture Shock! India* which is available in different languages, as well as different authors depending in which language you prefer to read it.

At Sangam your event schedule is designed carefully to gradually introduce you to the unique culture of India and to help you to enjoy and learn about local specialities, making your stay at Sangam a perfect beginning of a longer trip in India. Or, if you choose to finish your Indian visit with a Sangam event, you will find that it provides a relaxed closure and deepen your knowledge.

At Sangam, you will have the opportunity to get insight views of Indian life and culture, which might challenge your views of your own culture too. The peacefulness of Sangam is a wonderful base to explore the diversity of India and we are looking forward to share it with you!

Sangam's Daily Routine

AM

- 8.00 Server Patrol sets Dining Room tables, Flag & Reflection patrol(s) set-up
Snapshot patrol writes a few words about the previous day
- 8.15 Flag & Reflections – the spiritual element of our Movement, preferably not specific to a particular religion, or else incorporating aspects of various religions
- 8.30 Continental Breakfast – choice of egg, porridge, toast, cereal, and fruit

9.30	1 st morning session
11.00	Morning Tea & Biscuit Break, shop at Sangam's Yahdei
11.30	2 nd morning session
12.45	Server patrol sets tables
	PM
1.00	Vegetarian Indian Lunch – chapatti (whole wheat flat bread), rice, dhal (lentil sauce) and assorted vegetables safely prepared with filtered water and minimum spice
2.00	'INDIAN SIESTA' - swim, explore, read your event book, write your journal...
3.30	1 st afternoon session
4.30	Afternoon Tea & Biscuit Break, shop at Sangam's Yahdei
5.00	2 nd afternoon session
5.45	Server patrol sets tables
6.30	International Dinner – often non-vegetarian (though always with vegetarian option) Italian, Chinese, Mexican, etc.
8.00	Evening session
9.15	Evening Tea & Biscuit Break

At Sangam event participants are assigned to patrols, mixing travel and dorm groups as much as possible. Patrols have daily tasks such as clearing tables at meals, presenting the daily flag ceremony, reflections, etc.

Preparing for Your Event

If you are interested in bringing something to give away, the most useful item is money! Our community partners find that the most effective donations are financial ones, since they are able to make any amount go a long way by purchasing items here in Pune, which also supports the local economy.

You might have donors sponsoring part of your trip and thus wishing to know detailed information about your event. This is very hard to give so much ahead in time in India. Do share with them all you already know and direct them to our website (www.sangamworldcentre.org).

Use the WAGGGS website (www.wagggsworld.org) and your national Association's resources to learn more about our World Movement. You may discover common traditions that unite us and aspects that make each Association unique.

In the Future...

We will send two additional programme letters approximately six months and three months before your event. These will give more information such as who else will be participating in your event and updates about programme activities and how to prepare. In the meantime, please begin researching Indian culture a bit, as mentioned above, as well as reviewing information about the Guiding / Girl Scouting Movement in your country to share with others.

We look forward to welcoming you to Sangam. Please feel free to contact us if you would like any additional information - we are always happy to help if we can!

Yours in the Spirit of Sangam

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9 months prior arrival - checklist

- tell about your participation to your friends and see if anybody still would like to join
- check if you have received the travel memo, health form and the travel arrangements document
- fill in and send back your health form and travel arrangements document as soon as possible
- consult with your doctor about any immunizations or medications
- check validity of your passport – to obtain a 6 months tourist visa, it needs to be valid at least 6 months beyond the date of departure from India
- begin to learn about India