



## Our Program Philosophy for Customized (Faculty-Led) Study Abroad

### “There’s Nothing Like it!”

Himalayan Gap offers customized, faculty-led, immersion/study abroad programs in India that are beyond compare. Designed as short term programs that can take any form -- as a winter-break trip, an extended spring break, a summer school course, and so on, each study abroad program has its own unique itinerary and curriculum. Grounded in an understanding of the value of site-specific, experiential learning, each curriculum is developed as a collaboration between the vision of the sponsoring faculty member and Himalayan Gap directors, Rajiv Lochan, Anu Radha Singh, and Anchal Lochan. Our extensive personal and professional contacts all over India and deep understanding of the culture make (just about) everything possible! So dream, and brainstorm away!

From designing each nitty-gritty of the trip to accompanying the group every single day of the program, we, the designers and organizers, are there with you 24/7. The Himalayan Gap experience is not simply one that rests on creative planning, original activities, and ensuring the safety and comfortable transition of the group in India; it particularly implies the passion, energy, and knowledge of its directors, Rajiv, Anu, and Anchal, who are in constant dialogue with students at all levels. Having lived in both India and the United States for several years, we can boast of a level of cultural sensitivity that allows us to put students at ease such that any sense of alienation or rejection from a foreign culture like India’s is prevented. We are not tour guides that simply accompany the group; we are a family that is passionate about sharing with you our understanding of our country and making sure you encounter India in the most open-hearted way possible. From personally tending to a tummy-ache at three in the morning to explaining how laws pertaining to donations at Hindu temples symbolize



Volunteering at the Naz Foundation, an NGO working on HIV/AIDS issues in low-income communities



At author Sudhir Thapliyal's home: a reading from his novelette, *War at Lambidhar*

the nebulous, if existing, Hindu partition between the sacred and the secular to teaching Ayurvedic cooking at the campsite on our rafting trip along the Ganges, we are committed to deploying our understanding and knowledge of Western and Indian culture to make each program the most meaningful experience for each student.

We work intensely with the faculty member for months (up to a year or two) in advance to carefully design the project while offering innovative ideas and suggestions from our years of experience in both the North American and Indian cultures.

Our program philosophy includes **four active ingredients**, which can be expanded, or minimized, depending on your emphasis. Programs can be designed to meet your institution's curriculum standards for for-credit courses, or alternatively, function as a linked travel-component to an existing course you teach, or finally, a Himalayan Gap study abroad program can be offered as a non-credit, enrichment course, open to a wider audience of students, faculty, and alumni.



Exchanging notes at *Bodhshala*, an NGO run school in the Himalayas



Class discussions by a camp fire

## Site Specific Learning at its Best: Because the World is Your Classroom!

It may be every academic's fantasy, who teach courses relevant to the Indian subcontinent – be they courses on world religion, world literature, global economics, global medicine, engineering, fashion design, world cinema, performing arts and so on – to pair a given text or idea with a visit to a specific PLACE, or kind of place. On a typical cloudy Tuesday, in your North American classroom, the idea will present itself: "What if I was teaching x (insert your favorite article, essay, case-study, or novel) THERE?" Himalayan Gap can design a fluid, site-specific curriculum for you, in which class discussions take place just about anywhere: around a campfire on the banks of the Ganges, at a private concert with Sufi musicians,



Helping at the Bangla Sahib Gurdwara (Sikh Temple) kitchen that feeds 20,000+ people everyday

under a tree on the grounds of the Taj, with tea and conversation at the home of a local historian, in the offices of NGOs, in a theater after a play rehearsal, at the construction site of a dam, in the garden of an ashram, or in the backroom of a local hospital. The list goes on! More formal settings can also be arranged, of course, but the freedom of this model, with its emphasis on first-hand experiences of India as your classroom, promises an education students will never forget!



At the entrance of 'Surkanda Devi' shrine – the ascent to the 9,995 feet temple is a 2 km steep climb

Himalayan Gap study abroad programs stress the importance of experiencing a variety of landscapes: rural, urban, and wild! Past programs have begun with physical activity (of varying levels): including yoga, trekking, white water rafting, and camping, in order to accomplish two specific goals; 1) to promote group bonding and internal cohesion within the group, and 2) to offer students the kind of heightened experience that engages all five-senses and produces a full-body memory of being fully present to India, a foreign place. Put simply, students leave with a sense that they “were really there!” They open themselves up -- body, mind and spirit -- to the experiences in store for them in the rest of the curriculum. themselves up -- body, mind and spirit -- to the experiences in store for them in the rest of the curriculum.

## Service: and Other Forms of Participation

There is no such thing as passive learning on a Himalayan Gap program. Active participation can take several forms, ranging from being invited to participate in religious rituals to taking on the responsibilities of a service project. India’s “non-jealous” faiths, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, offer an excellent opportunity for non-believers to participate in profound acts of daily piety, without worrying that they might offend. Students will remember, for example, the exquisite beauty of an *aarti*, a sunset ceremony performed on the banks of the holy river Ganges that combines live music, chanting, candlelight and twilight.



At the Bangla Sahib Gurdwara

Besides feeling included in the daily life of “real India,” many study-abroad students express the desire to “give back.” This is where the service component comes in. Meeting the founders of NGOs, whether they are working on the challenges facing rural education or the problem of children orphaned by AIDS, allows students to begin to think structurally about the causes of social problems and their possible solutions. Time spent volunteering in an orphanage, or a rural school, will deepen your students’ understanding of local solutions to global problems. It will also give students permission to make an emotional connection, not just with the culture, but with

individuals, whose names and faces and stories, they won’t forget.



Learning the myriad ways of draping a sari, at a workshop with Rita Chisti, textile historian & founder of the Sari School

## Hospitality: People to People (Experts, Hosts, Friends)

Himalayan Gap understands that ultimately, it's people that make a place meaningful. Rather than lead a "faceless" program, the kind in which students snap photos from the safe distance of a tour bus, Himalayan Gap promises an



experience that focuses on building relationships. Organized as a series of private workshops, students will have the chance to meet Indian authors, musicians, artists, yogis, theologians, linguists, NGO activists, and, most importantly, scholars in disciplines specific to the focus of your customized curriculum. Meeting a sitar master, for example, who can teach Hindu theology by explaining the musical theories behind specific ragas, (all while sharing his art – filling the room with music -- in real time, and in an intimate space), represents holistic learning at its best.

Besides meeting experts in workshop settings, students will have the profound experience of being welcomed into an Indian home, including our own. Hospitality is a profound component of Indian culture, and a key ingredient in any Himalayan Gap program. The ethic that "a friend of a friend is already a friend" informs the way in which our network of hosts engage our students. This is not a job for us or them, and that makes all the difference!

Of course, the deepest relationship students will form on a Himalayan Gap program will be with us: the founders and staff of Himalayan Gap, because we will stay with your group 24/7. We are there to solve problems, but also to innovate, to be spontaneous, should a student or faculty member want to add a particular experience or amend a particular day's itinerary.



Khajuraho Temples



Yoga lesson at the Camp on the Ganges



Briefing before rafting



Outside *Bodhshala*, a rural middle school run by SIDH (Society for Development of Himalayas)

As a family business – the brainchild of my college-age daughter (and gap year alum), Anchal, my wife Anu, and me (Rajiv), Himalayan Gap represents a highly personalized approach to study abroad that bigger organizations can't duplicate. For Himalayan Gap, facilitating cultural exchange is a personal passion, and seeing students fully and utterly changed by the experience is the best reward possible.

## A Note on Health, Safety, and Communication

Ensuring that our group stays, safe, adequately comfortable is of prime importance to us. Each trip is designed with a sharp eye for availability of medical care and emergency response at a reasonable distance. Having lived, traveled, and led programs all over India, we have established personal connections with several doctors, clinics, and hospitals, that are a phone call away in time of need. Our careful and intensive process of proposing and planning different activities and itineraries ensures that regions that are politically or geologically unstable are avoided. Moreover, our deep personal involvement with the group during the program enables us to be receptive and attentive to all personal and medical needs of our students and faculty. From keeping the entire group's friends and family posted of our activities on a daily (if not bi-daily) "email/video/Skype newsletter", to providing access to medical care virtually everywhere (with doctors available round the clock on the phone), to spontaneously making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the little sense of "home" on a long train ride, we strive to make our students feel secure in a way that precludes any sense of rejection or alienation from the host culture appearing challenging in the wrong kind of way.

## Testimonials



Barbara & Sudhir Thapliyal- New Year's Eve

After three weeks in India and as a 70 year old woman keeping up with 20 year old students and daily unique mind-altering experiences with Rajiv and the Himalayan Gap experience, I feel like I've rediscovered my childhood and the spirit caring and love that is implicit in being young, taken care of and challenged all at the same time.

Rajiv and Anu pushed everyone of us beyond our comfort zone, exposed us to the rainbow of cultures, religions and people that is India today and yesterday and put together an active and stimulating agenda that few folks, if any, could pull off.

Having traveled to many countries, trekked, observed and learned worldwide, I have never before immersed myself so joyfully or completely as I did with Rajiv and his awesome wife Anu here in this land of contrasts, complexities and 330 million Gods!!!!

**Barbara G Gardener**

**Member and former Chair of the Board of trustees of Framingham State University**

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A session with Anuradha Joshi & Pawan Gupta, founders of SIDH, an NGO focused on supporting Himalayan communities

I would recommend Himalayan Gap's customized study abroad programs to any faculty member considering developing a faculty-lead program to India. In my experience, a Himalayan Gap program represents the exact opposite of a "canned" tour

of India, the kind offered by traditional tour-operators. Collaborating with the family team of Rajiv Lochan, Anchal Lochan, and Anu Radha Singh, offers a faculty member the chance to develop something truly unique. In contrast to a travel company, which focuses on sightseeing narrowly defined, Rajiv and Anu are interested in facilitating real cultural exchange, with all of the complex layers that dialogue implies.

The program we developed in collaboration had so much content, and so much heart. While it's been more than a month since we returned from our India J-term, not a day goes by when I don't hear from a fellow faculty member about how a newly returned J-term student has come alive in class: making relevant connections between her course work and her recent experiences in India, and inspiring everyone else within earshot!

So what makes a Himalayan Gap program have so much content and so much heart? To begin with, the students were made to feel welcome in a way that allowed them to open up to new experiences and new ideas. Rajiv met us at the airport with a garland of flowers for each traveler. Over the





At the Masjed-e Jahan-Numa (the ‘World-reflecting Mosque’), commonly known as the Jama Masjid

next few days, India would open her doors to us; we had tea at the home of a local author and historian, a reading and New Year’s Eve celebration at the home of an Indian novelist (complete with a bonfire and a conga line!), a book-signing with an author we’d read as part of our preparatory course – and the list goes on. All of the FORA’s (friends of Rajiv and Anu’s) we met in our three-week stay, had a genuine excitement about meeting us; they fielded our questions, and complicated our world view in the process. Suddenly India was no longer just a place: it was a “peopled” place full of new relationships with artists, musicians, authors, historians, gurus and yogis.



Besides the collective hospitality we experienced, there was the daily care we received from Rajiv and Anu, or alternatively, from Rajiv and his daughter, Anchal, as two family members were traveling with us at all times. Paradoxically, Rajiv’s influence made us feel remarkably cared for, while consistently challenged. Not only did Rajiv take care of all of our communication needs (arranging for cell phones, wifi where needed, etc), but he kept in daily contact with our families at home, by sending them photographs, videos and a running narrative about our itinerary, so that the students didn’t have to. This personal touch, which meant so much to parents back home, meant that students were freed up to be truly present to India, 24/7, only to have their experiences be all the more appreciated and understood, once they got home.

Besides keeping daily tabs on our personal health, our cash flow (who needs to change money?) and our safety, Rajiv brought an ambition to the trip that challenged us at every turn. On the second day of the trip, we spent the day at a rural school, founded by an NGO focused on supporting Himalayan communities and reversing the pattern of “rural flight.” After listening to the headmaster of the school explain the school’s holistic pedagogy, drawn partly from Gandhi’s early writings, my students were challenged to ask themselves “big” questions: “What is progress?” “What constitutes quality of life?” “Who is education for?” “What counts as education?” Similarly, when we visited the NAZ foundations care home for orphans with HIV, the emphasis was on innovative local responses to a global problem. Confronting the reality of poverty, or disease, was one thing, but the deeper pedagogical goal was to inspire students to think structurally about the problems they were witnessing (what are the root causes?), and to listen-in on current solutions, by having direct contact the activists themselves – the change makers.

Rajiv brings a level of cultural sensitivity and care to his programming that is invaluable. As a person who has lived in both India and America, he is able to actively bridge the cultures. In practice, this meant that he fed us nostalgic peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on our train ride back from Agra to Delhi, while making sure, throughout the trip, that we never behaved as “ugly Americans,” insensitive to our surroundings. Rajiv has the unique quality of being paternal without being



Bicycle excursion to a Dalit village near Khajuraho – ‘Dalit’ refers to the traditionally designated caste of ‘untouchables’  
 ‘Dalit’ is a Sanskrit word, which means “crushed” or “suppressed”

paternalistic. He earned the nickname, “Papa Rajiv,” just as Anu quickly became our “Anu-Mamma,” but he never talked down to, or babied the students; instead, he took them seriously as individual thinkers, engaging them in long conversations on the train, or around the campfire. Most impressive was his impulse to individualize, or customize, the trip for each student. For Rachael, a pre-med, biology major, this meant that he found a way to include three separate visits to area hospitals –rural and urban, so that Rachael could make observations about healthcare in India, and consider returning to the subcontinent as a health-care provider. All told, Rajiv, Anu and Anchal got to know each and every student traveler. Rajiv got up at 5:00am in the morning to start preparing Tom’s birthday surprise – a photo calendar of the trip and a customized cake, complete with an original poem. We ended the day with a late night feast in Tom’s honor; Tom could not believe how lucky he was to be the recipient of so much good will and emotion! We all share Tom’s gratitude.

Please feel free to contact me as a reference. I would love to talk in more detail about the rewards of collaborating with Himalayan Gap.

**Dr. Lisa Eck**  
**Associate Professor of World Literature, Framingham State University**

Rajiv &Anu, I cannot thank you enough for being ambassadors of India and opening up your home to us. You taught me more about India in 3 weeks than I ever thought was possible. I cannot express how grateful I am to the both of you for everything that you did. I wish I could repay you for everything you did for me (and for us) but I know it isn’t possible.

Thank you again for everything – to the moon and back!

**Erin Keilly**  
**Student, Framingham State University**

Unlike my trips into England and Japan, the latter being far too short to form any true impression, the journey into India exposed me to a great many things. We saw the beauty of love made manifest by the Taj Mahal, where I had a birthday song sung, and the mighty kitchens of the Sikh temple, which pump out more than twenty thousand meals a day for anyone who is hungry. We visited the top of the mountains, rang the bell multiple times at a monastery before we found ourselves in Mussoorie. We visited a holy city filled with statues of Gods, such as Hanuman with his funny sense of loyalty and Lord Shiva sitting in the Ganges. We saw the richest of the rich and the poorest of the poor in India with our own eyes, not through a camera lens or on a computer screen.

These experiences would never have happened if I had decided to go into India on my own like the typical tourist; there is no denying this. If we hadn’t gone through the Himalayan Gap program, we would’ve never seen so much of India and met





After an introduction to Hindi with Chitrnanj Datt, Principal of the Language School, we posed for this shot

the interesting people that we did. I mean, it isn't typical to meet a handful of authors, the headmasters of a privately funded school, and the publishers of a feminist book company; these things just don't happen unless you have someone in the



country your visiting who is able to open the door for you. Anu and Rajiv opened the doors for our group. These two, who literally became our parents during this trip, encouraged us to try new things, but did not coddle us like children. We were always consulted about all the activities we had planned, and were able to make changes as needed. They showed us the highest level of hospitality, taking us into their home as though we were relatives having just returned from being abroad, and feeding us delicious home cooking. I will always remember my birthday in India, as Rajiv went out of his way to start setting up some birthday festivities once it was learned that I would be turning twenty-two. The man woke up at about 5 A.M. to start working on a special birthday card, which is something I never would've expected. It is details like these that made this trip a tremendous joy, and I have to again stress the importance of Anu and Rajiv's presence in this trip. If it hadn't been for them and their desire to show us a great time in India, I would not have had nearly as much fun as I did, and I would've

never created a connection to India that will allow me to return some day. All there is now is to work on my plan for next time I venture into India.

**Thomas Duda,**  
**Student, Framingham State University**

The Himalayan Gap program exceeded our wildest expectations. Being realistic in our expectations, we dared not hope for nor expect it to have such an impact on our daughter. But it did. Obviously, much of this was due to her exposure to the rich Indian and Nepalese cultures, but what made this program particularly unique and special was the integral role of Rajiv and Anu in the day-to-day activities of the participants. Our daughter developed a strong, genuine bond with Rajiv and Anu, and they with her. As a result, we feel our family has been expanded. They are extraordinary individuals, wealthy in wisdom, who connected with each participant. And as parents themselves, they understood the needs of parents who had sent their 18-year-old daughter halfway around the world, on her own, to be with people they had never met. Rajiv and Anu had excellent instincts about when to communicate with us, and for that we were grateful. In sum, our daughter absolutely loved the time she spent with Himalayan Gap, and we love the myriad ways in which she grew. We recommend this program with enormous enthusiasm.

**Terry Huffington, parent**



Harmonium and Tabla recital with Mathura Das

My experience in India lasted only three and a half months. I initially chose Himalayan Gap because I liked the points on the website: taking several months of Hindi classes, teaching English at a middle school, trekking to Everest base camp, and generally being able to immerse myself in Indian culture. But those bullet points gave way to some of the most rewarding, enjoyable experiences I've ever had. Learning Hindi endowed me with the ability to learn the backgrounds of my Indian friends and barter for local goods. Teaching English allowed me to watch Hindi-speaking children, ages twelve through sixteen, memorize a twelve-page English dialogue in three weeks in order to perform a Lion King remake. Exploring my artistic interests (of which I thought I had few) enabled me to move my bell-covered ankles to the beat of a tabla in traditional Indian dance. Trekking up to Everest base camp involved catching a three AM flight on a twelve-seat plane from Kathmandu to Lukla, spending cold nights in tea houses playing cards with the people who had long ago become my family, and standing atop a peak at 18,400 feet, finally knowing what it meant to feel on top of the world. Most importantly, the simple phrase "becoming immersed in Indian culture" meant watching fireworks on the doorstep of a local friend's house on the eve of Deewali, attempting to dance in a sari, celebrating my roommate's birthday over candle-lit Gulab Jamun, and learning the incredible stories of my second Pa and Ma, my host parents.

It's fair to say that Himalayan Gap influenced who I will become in the greatest of ways. Like an excellent novel, I was completely engrossed in it while there and will be forever altered by it long after its end. It challenged and changed me. Now, a car isn't my only mode of transportation, I have more to talk about than boarding school, I've become interested in Hinduism and Buddhism, and I'm more at peace with myself than I've ever been. But mostly, I'm just grateful—for the people and places that opened my eyes and for the family that I gained in Rajiv, Anu, Katherine and Roxie. I recommend this program with all my heart.

**Lindsay Dittman, student**



At our home in Delhi: girls showing off the "camel pants" we gifted them, the recording of our theme song "Oh India", and our African grey parrot, Fiona

YouTube link to the theme song [Oh India!](#)

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