Kristina Nielsen
VARAMASI, INDIA

Kristina’s Majors: Linguistics and Anthropology

Academics: We learned Hindi in small groups with other program participants from Virendra Ji and Vimel Ji who have worked with the program for decades. In addition to learning Hindi I took an Urdu language tutorial, one-on-one, from an instructor who became my mentor as well as my teacher and advisor. The rest of the program consisted of a field work project on the subject of my choice.

Participant Observation: I lived in a house by the Ganges with a lower middle-class Indian host family. I had a mother who taught me how to cook Indian food; and a father and three wonderful host sisters, who became just like my real sisters. By living with them, I was able to experience some really unique things and gain an understanding for what it is like to be a daughter in an Indian family.

Fieldwork Project: The field work project was really what drew me to this program. Not many study abroad programs give you the opportunity to try your hand at field work. I chose to study the relationship of Hindi and Urdu and Hindu and Muslim identity. This gave me the opportunity to meet people who I would have never had the opportunity to meet and go to areas of the city that I would never have visited. When it was done, I felt like I’d achieved a major academic and personal accomplishment. I now feel confident going to graduate school and conducting research in the future.

First Impressions: Everything was hot, humid, and loud when I stepped from the airport. I remember thinking, with a mix of nervousness and excitement, “Now I know I’m not in Wisconsin anymore.” Everything was so crowded and full of life. There was a smell in the air, that I would learn to recognize through the course of the year as India’s special, marvelous smell: a mix of betal nut, cow dung, incense, spices and sweat. Now that I’m home, I miss that smell.

"Living in India is a tough experience. You come face to face with a culture vastly different than your own. But if you go with an open mind, India will change your life!"