

Cross-cultural training material for a new employee at Kumbaka Productions

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Abstract

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<p>Can you imagine how would you feel if suddenly on your way to work a crowd of cows would block the road? Or when you reach the office, the whole staff is covered in colorful powders waiting to throw some at you too?</p> <p>The objective of this product-oriented thesis was to define the elements that might cause a culture shock for a Finnish employee when moving to South India. The goal was to produce a pre-departure booklet as a part of the cross-cultural training for the new employee.</p> <p>The idea for the booklet came already back in 2012 in South India. Background research, writing and process of producing the final product continued during the summer and fall of 2014 commissioned by Kumbaka Productions.</p> <p>The theoretical background for the thesis indicates the importance of cross-cultural training and defines the objectives for the final product. The theoretical part also defines the approach for the complex phenomenon of culture, which was the main frame for the research and production.</p> <p>This pre-departure booklet is in digital form to be visually attractive, to have a more diverse content and to be easily kept up to date. It is informative but light at the same time consisting of region specific knowledge and tips from the Finnish and Scandinavian point of view.</p>	
Keywords cross-cultural training, pre-departure training, International Human Resource Management, culture shock, cultural adjustment, guide book	

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1 Introduction

This product-oriented thesis is done for the commissioning party, Kumbaka Productions, with a goal to create a pre-departure booklet as a part of cross-cultural training for a new employee. The main objective for the final work was to prepare the reader for and ease the expected culture shock. The process of this thesis started during my internship in India and continued throughout the summer and fall of 2014.

1.1 Background and topic

The idea for my thesis came to me during my first month at my work placement in India back in 2012. I found an executive assistant position in South India, Kerala. After accepted for the position for 5 months I never went through any sort of induction, training nor received any information beforehand on the local culture or location. I had been to India before yet still I experienced many ups and downs during the five months due to the lack of training for the cultural differences at work. On top of the challenges at work of course there was the process of adapting to the new environment, people and norms, basically adapting to a totally new culture than my own.

I chose HR and management as my major in HAAGA-HELIA due to my interest in the wellbeing at work and cross-cultural management. During my internship I gained first hand experience on what the lack of cultural awareness and international human recourse management lead to: stress, loss of motivation, depression, weakening performance at work and even health issues.

The topic became more relevant during the spring 2014 when a startup called Kumbaka Productions decided to pursue for new trainees from Finland to India.

1.2 Thesis objectives

The objective of this thesis is to produce an informative and fun booklet for a new employee/trainee for Kumbaka Productions as a part of the cross-cultural training. The booklet is meant to give information about the host country's culture before the arrival. It is not meant to prepare for the job or substitute the cultural orientation on

arrival. It is meant to give a glimpse of the culture and surroundings he or she will be living in and giving a softer landing for the upcoming cultural adaptation process. Culture shock may be inevitable, but recognizing and understanding the key cultural differences have shown to ease the shock.

1.3 Thesis Structure

The structure of this thesis starts by the two main theory parts consisting of International Human Resource Management (IHRM) and Cross-cultural Management. The theory is followed by a detailed description of the plan, schedule, process and creation of the booklet along with a final conclusion. The last part is the booklet itself attached.

2 Importance of cross-cultural training in IHRM

2.1 IHRM

International Human Resource Management (IHRM) is more and more recognized as one of the essential basis for the success in international business. As the existing companies as well as the new rising start-ups all over the world turn multinational and the markets grow global, so increases the significance of managing between different cultures.

“The IHRM function comprises varied responsibilities involved in managing human resources in global corporations, including recruiting and selecting employees, providing preparation and training, and setting up appropriate compensation and performance management programs. Of particular importance is the management of expatriates – employees assigned to a country other than their own.” (Deresky 2008, 342.)

2.2 Cross-cultural training

Cross-cultural training, also called intercultural training, is one of the key components of global staffing and training in IHRM. Focused recruitment and selection process of employee candidates are not alone sufficient. A proper cultural training is necessary to improve success when recruiting and locating employees to foreign countries with culture far from the culture of their origin.

It is easier and more straightforward to train employees about language and practical affairs than to prepare an employee to adapt to another culture. Cross-cultural training is far more complex and deals with very deep-rooted behaviors. The training process should aim and result in the learning of both content and skills to reduce a persons misunderstandings and clumsy behavior. A cross-culturally trained employee should have good skills to interact with the host country individuals. (Deresky 2008, 352.)

Below Fatehi (2008, 596.) illustrates the key elements involved in the process of successful expatriate adjustment.



Figure 1. Components of successful adjustment (Fatehi 2008, 596.)

2.3 The need for cross-cultural training

According to Deresky (2008, 350.) the preparations and training for cross-cultural interactions are vital and necessary. The results of the 2005 Global Relocation Trends Survey reveal how the attrition rates for expatriates were more than double the rate of non-expatriates. As indicated by the study, 21 percent of expatriates left their companies during the assignments and 23 percent left inside a year after returning from the assignment.

Both cross-cultural adjustment problems and practical differences in everyday living present challenges for expatriates and their families.

Everyone who is crossing cultures will face some common challenges while pioneering a life of uprootedness. Eventually, after overcoming these challenges, everyone will also manage to establish working relationships with their new environment. There is a gap between the familiar and easy surroundings of home and the unfamiliarity of the new host environment, which limits one's capabilities to function effectively.

(Kim 2001, 4.)

2.4 Pre-departure training

“Pre-departure preparations serve to reduce the cultural shock that foreigners experience when they enter a new culture.” (Fatehi 2008, 596.) During a pre-departure cross-cultural training the employees are provided with information before entering the host country. Both the material and interpersonal training should develop cultural sensitivity and awareness.

Typical intercultural training programs provided by many multinational companies have a program consisting of many parts, one of them called the documentary approach. The documentary part of the program provides managers with printed materials on a country's culture and history, geography, sociopolitical and economic systems; basically information about anything related to the country. Films or presentations that provide practical information on daily actions such as local transportation, housing, shopping, schools, and finance may also supplement the information in the paper material. (Fatehi 2008, 599.)

In his book *Managing Internationally*, Fatehi (2008, 598.) lists a set of desired skills to be acquired from an intercultural training:

- *Self-awareness*: The recognition of personal assumptions, values, needs, strengths, and limitations and the understanding of personal response in different cultural settings
- *Culture reading*: The ability to discover and understand the inherent logic in cultural norms and expectations

- *Multiple perspectives*: The ability to suspend judgment about other cultures and appreciate others' perspectives
- *Intercultural communication*: The skill to send and receive verbal and nonverbal messages accurately in different cultures.
- *Cultural flexibility*: The ability to adjust and change expectations and plans in accordance with the host country's cultural requirements
- *Cultural resilience*: The ability to handle culture shock and recover and rebound from setbacks arising from cultural differences.
- *Skills in building interpersonal relationships*: The ability to develop and maintain interpersonal relations with the host country people
- *Intercultural facilitation skills*: The ability to manage cultural differences and use these differences constructively.

3 Cross-cultural management

A famous author, Anais Nin, may not be famous in the world of literature for her ethnological research but she does summarize well our confrontation with other cultures: “We don’t see things as they are, we see them as we are.” (Dumetz 2012, 44.)

Studies and research about culture shock aiming to explain the phenomenon of cross-cultural adaptation process are relatively young. However in today’s business world the amount of interaction across cultures is creating a necessity for managers and employees to become culturally sensitive with in-depth understanding of other cultures.

There exists theories and empirical studies on both short- and long-term cultural adaptation. Most of these have been framed to form models and useful findings pursuing to ease the transition and facilitate a person’s ability to function in the new environment. (Kim 2001, 23.)

3.1 Definition of culture and understanding culture

Numerous approaches exist to better understand and to define the complex concept of culture. As generally understood, the culture of a society comprises the shared values, understandings, assumptions, and goals that are learned from earlier generations, imposed by present members of a society, and passed on the succeeding generations. This shared outlook results, in large part, in common attitudes, codes of conduct, and expectations that subconsciously guide and control certain norms of behavior. (Deresky 2008, 91.)

What is more valuable than finding the perfect definition of culture is to develop ways to better comprehend other cultures and lower the cultural conflicts and misunderstandings. “Some of the keys to a successful cross-cultural experience are to enhance your knowledge about a culture, your communication skills (such as learning a foreign language) and keep an open attitude towards the unexpected.” (Dumetz 2012, 45)

3.2 Cultural sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity, or cultural empathy, means awareness, interest and an honest caring about another person's culture and background. This kind of skill and mindset requires ability to comprehend the perspectives of people coming from other (and very different) societies and also the ability to put oneself in someone else's shoes.

(Deresky 2008, 90.)

3.3 Culture Shock

In her book *International Management*, Deresky (2008, 139.) defines the phenomenon of culture shock as follows: "Cultural shock, or as it is popularly known, "culture shock," is a psychological condition that a person experiences before adapting and adjusting to a new cultural environment. Facing totally unfamiliar signs and signals in daily social interaction in a new environment create anxiety, which we call a cultural shock."

As a contrast for seeing culture shock as a bunch of problematic effects and experiences during the adaptation process there exist studies claiming that culture shock is necessary and encourages an efficient adaptation.

Kim (2001, 19.) discusses how Peter Adler, a well known expert in the field of cultural studies, claims that the experience of a culture shock should be viewed as a more broader context of a "transition shock", a phenomenon leading to deep learning, growth and better self awareness. He explains how culture shock should not be seen as a disease or the adaptation as a medicine for it, but as the very heart of the whole learning experience across cultures and change.

3.4 Challenges of cultural adjustment

The stages of cultural adjustment and the involved phenomenon of culture shock can affect people in many different ways.

Establishing a new life in another culture will present situations that differ from the familiar. A newcomer will inevitably face things and events that do not follow his or her unconscious cultural “script”. (Kim 2001, 50.)

As stated by Chaney and Martin (2011, 82.):

“Entering an unfamiliar culture is stressful; in fact, transitions of any type are both psychologically and physically stressful. The stress of getting ready for the move, of unpacking and getting settled upon arrival, and of adjusting to new foods can be so stressful that people become physically ill. Problems with housing, climate, services, or communication in another language bring additional stress.”

Foreigners can and will make some efforts to learn the symbols, norms and rituals of the new environment for example ways to greet people, key words to use, when to gift people and so on, but it is not likely that one can fully recognize and understand the underlying values of that culture. It can be said that a visitor in a foreign culture returns to a mental state of an infant and often this results to negative feelings such as stress, helplessness and dislike towards the new environment. It is also common that there will be negative physical effects too. Expatriates and migrants have shown to have more need for medical attention shortly after moving in to the new environment than before or after. (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010, 384.)

3.5 Cultural dimensions by Geert Hofstede

Professor Geert Hofstede, who is one of the most known experts in the field of cross-cultural research, has identified five key cultural dimensions: individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity – along with a fifth one often identified as the Long-term orientation, Confucian dynamism or Indulgence. (Dumetz 2012, 78.)

Dumetz (2012, 67.) explains the dimensions as follows:

Power distance (PD) refers to the accepted degree of inequality among people with or without power. A high score in PD indicates that unequal distribution of power is acceptable within society.

Individualism (IDV) versus collectivism refers to the emotional dependence of an individual with respect to groups and organizations. A high score in IDV indicates a lack of interpersonal connections.

Masculinity (MAS) a high score in MAS indicates that a society values traditionally male qualities such as competition, assertiveness, ambition and concern for material possessions whereas the culture of femininity fosters equality and solidarity.

Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) refers to the degree of anxiety individuals feel when being in an unfamiliar situation. A high score of UAI indicates a nation governed by rules and regulations.

Long Term Orientation (LTO) refers to the degree to which a society appreciates long-term as opposed to short-term values and traditions. A high score of LTO indicates the fear of losing one's face. It is also known as Confucian dynamism.

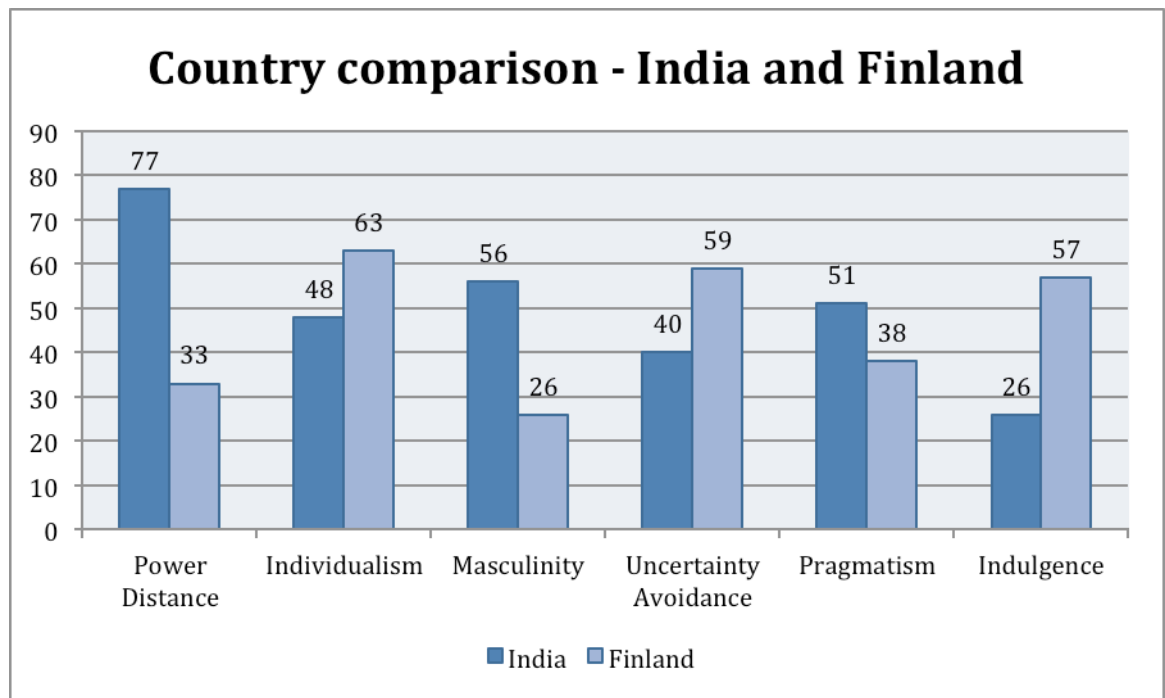


Figure 2. Country comparison – India and Finland

The figure above illustrates the differences of the cultural dimensions of Finland and India based on the scores of the Hofstede model. Based on the results and looking at the figure, the differences between these two countries point out the relevance for cross-cultural training.

4 The process of writing the pre-departure booklet

The idea and interest for creating an informative booklet about the culture of Kerala for someone who had no experience of the place and was about to locate there arose already back in 2012 while I was completing my work placement in South India. I had no training at my workplace and found myself often facing challenges due to not having a proper knowledge of the local culture and environment. The experiences of other interns and expats in the same area I talked with were similar. Lack of proper pre-departure information or onsite training was not extraordinary.

In the spring of 2014 a Finnish-Indian start-up company, Kumbaka Productions, based in the city of Kochi (Kerala, South India), decided to start recruiting interns and young part-time employees from Finland for upcoming projects. Kumbaka Productions produces international short films and documentaries. All of the production is done in India together with other Indian start-ups. Understanding the nature of the work and aiming for a young, creative and “Finndian” crew was going to be a challenge. This resulted in the need for a culturally informative pre-departure booklet.

4.1 Planning and schedule

The whole process of creating the booklet started with a bunch of questions. From the start it was clear why producing such a product was necessary but the identification of the key structure for the content was challenging. After searching through books and the Internet I realized that the most available material on India and its culture was very general and concentrated mostly on North-India. Most of the information was also targeted only for tourists.

Forming a preliminary plan and a timeline in the beginning was harder than I thought. I began by creating lists and searching relevant articles and books from the Internet and the library. I wrote down all the key activities and roughly calculated the time I would need to complete them. Estimating the amount of time spent for each part was

not only influenced by my own time management, but also dependent on the availability of the specific target group of the interviewees in India.

Project timeline				
May	June	July	August	September
Choosing a medium and creating the framework	Gathering background information	Conducting the interviews (10-20)	Compose the first version of the booklet	Edit the draft sections of the booklet
Identifying key activities to complete the booklet	Gathering relevant theory and choosing the research method	Transcribing and analyzing the interviews, gathering other data	Revise the booklet with the company	Revise the final version of the booklet
Creating a schedule and a timeline	Preparing the interviews and contacting the interviewees	Draft the sections and frame of the booklet	Prepare the visual parts of the booklet	Finalize after last corrections

Figure 3. Project timeline

4.2 Interviews

During the first months of planning and conducting research I came into a conclusion that the most effective way is to use interviewing as a method of research. The complex topics of cultural adjustment and culture shock felt best to be explored with a more investigative way than a survey since the goal was to produce a booklet to ease the landing to a new culture. During an interview there would always be a possibility to ask more details with follow-up questions.

“One major advantage of the interview is its adaptability. A skillful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which the questionnaire can never do. The way in which a response is made (the tone of voice, facial expression, hesitation, etc.) can provide information that a written response would conceal. Questionnaire responses have to be taken at face value, but a response in an interview can be developed and clarified.” (Judith Bell 2005,157.)

There were two different target groups to be interviewed in order to gain all the information needed for the booklet. The first group was the Finnish/Scandinavian interns and expats who had lived in this particular city in Kerala. The second was the locals

from the same area. Finding the proper candidates for the interviews was not the difficult part, instead finding the suitable times to conduct them was.

Understanding that the topic in hand can be very personal and possibly sensitive, I chose informal, conversational interview as a method using the pre-structured questions as a flexible frame and giving the interviewees more space around the topic. Most of the interviews were conducted via Skype or phone.

The interviewing process was very time consuming and the set schedule was delayed from the initial plan. Having to transcribe the interviews and then form a frame of content was a lot more work than expected. Overall I felt I succeeded in the interview process well. I managed to get specific insights and valuable answers which made it easy to decide on the content and structure of the booklet.

4.3 The format and structure of the booklet

The decision to create the booklet in electronic form as a PDF format was very easy. As a PDF the whole product and its content is easy to update in the future in case relevant changes occur. In that way the booklet stays “alive” and up to date. The second reason was immediacy. A PDF file is fast and easy to transfer and view electronically from any location with the use of Internet. In today’s world most people have access to Internet via a personal device such as a laptop, smartphone or tablet.

The last reason was to keep the booklet interesting by making it visually attractive and interactive. The usage of images, audio and video would serve as a key for the reader to get an experience, not just words to digest. Considering the fact that the company recruits young students of videography and cinematography, a booklet addressed for such audience could include visually interesting aspects.

The final structure of the booklet consists of an introduction explaining what it is about and how the reader can get the best out of the reading. This is followed by two separate parts about Kerala in general and the city of Kochi where the new employee/intern will be living. Next there is a part about the people, communication and oth-

er relative cultural topics and finally a part explaining what culture shock is describing the different stages. In the end there is a collection of tips how to cope with the cultural adjustment process. Most of these chapters include pictures, links and special survival tips for the reader to become familiar with the culture and be able to prepare for the upcoming differences and new situations.

5 Conclusion

In my opinion the project of creating this pre-departure booklet about the culture of Kerala was a success. The relevant theory together with the insightful stories from the interviewees enabled me to produce an informative, fun and visual booklet which is easily updatable too in the future.

The process took longer than I had planned, but maybe that was necessary for the final version to become as informative and even more detailed that I expected. Writing the booklet was easy once the interviews were finally done. It was easy for me to find the interviewees since I had a relevant network of friends and other contacts already but the fact that these people were scattered all around the globe made it hard for me to set the proper time and means for a useful interview.

The interviewing process taught me the importance of forming the questions and guiding the conversation. The topic is very interesting for me and I found the whole conversational interviewing challenging and time consuming, but also rewarding.

Before starting the whole thesis work I had an image in my head how I would schedule my writing and work and thought it would be easy to keep up with the original plan. The truth is, that handling a project like thesis needs a lot of self-leadership skills. When you set your own deadlines it is not always easy to get up and write because there is no one to tell you what to do. However this wasn't a big challenge since I have experience of working independently and managing my own schedules and time on my own.

The topic of this thesis is very close to my heart and it really was important to be interested in the whole idea and reason of this work, otherwise the lack of motivation would have affected the process. Time was the biggest challenge and I feel I could have spent a bit more of it digging into the theory part even though I am content and confident about the support of the existing background information for this thesis. In the end, I really appreciated all the effort and motivation I managed to keep up even when sometimes the reading and writing was hard.

Along the way between reading, interviewing, drafting and writing I learned a lot about the whole concept of cultural adaptation and everything related. All this not only gave me the ability to produce a useful booklet but also gave me answers to many unresolved feelings and experiences I have had while living abroad.

The final booklet gives a glimpse of Kerala from a western perspective. It is targeted for the new employee of Kumbaka Productions and should be reviewed and kept up-to-date.

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Attachments

Attachment 1. Interview questions

1. How did you end up working/living in Kerala?
2. Tell me about your first days in Kerala?
3. What were the biggest surprises you remember?
4. Tell me about the weather, food and places you visited?
5. What were the most difficult situations you faced?
6. How did you react and did these feelings disappear?
7. What were the most fun and amazing experiences?
8. Did you find yourself missing anything from home? Did you feel homesick?
9. Describe your closest friends and colleagues, how did you spend your free time?
10. What's the best thing about Kerala? Kochi?
11. Where would you take your friend who comes to visit you from Finland for a couple of weeks?

Attachment 2. Kerala in a Coconut-shell, Your pre-departure guide for the culture and the shock

Kerala in a coconut-shell

Your pre-departure guide for the culture and the shock



Kumbaka Productions, 2014

Panampilly Avenue, Panampilly Nagar, Ernakulam, Kerala, India

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1 Hello

Namaskar!

You are reading the pre-departure culture shock orientation booklet for Kerala, India.

While reading this, at times, you will most likely wonder what did you get yourself into, but as said in India: don't worry chicken curry!

The best way to use this booklet is to go through it carefully, enjoy the new and exciting, the scary and unexpected, and then finally forget the most what you read. Don't get us wrong, it is always always (Indians use the same word twice to give more emphasis for the meaning) wise to be prepared for an upcoming move to another country, especially when it is in another continent you can be more than sure you will face a culture shock or two. But the reality is, from day one, the actual experience of living in Kerala (or actually, where ever in India) will blow your socks off no matter how prepared you may think you are.

In other words, you can consider this booklet as a good way to get familiar with the unavoidable adventures that Kerala and Kochi have to offer for a foreigner in day-to-day life. This booklet has been tailored together with foreigners and locals to give a glimpse of Kerala and Kochi with very handy and specific information along with survival tips for a newcomer.

After reading this booklet you will

- Have an overall idea of the culture of Kerala
- Be more familiar with the city of Kochi
- Have a good list of survival tips
- Know a few fun facts of here and there
- Be prepared for the inevitable culture shock

See you soon!

2 Kerala, the land of coconuts

The state of Kerala (locally referred to as Keralam) is located in the southwestern coast of India. Habited by more than 33 million people called malayalees, Kerala has the Arabian Sea to its east and the state of Tamil Nadu to its west. Kerala has the highest literacy rate in India, the literacy rate of women being one of the highest in Asia. The state also ranks highest in life expectancy and cleanliness. Trivandrum is the capital city of Kerala.

Malayalam, which belongs to the Dravidian language group, is the official language of Kerala. More than half of the population practices Hinduism, followed by Islam and Christianity.

The word kera means coconut in Malayalam and the word Kerala(m) literally means the land of coconuts.



Fresh coconut.

2.1 The backwaters

The Kerala backwaters consist of a chain of lagoons and lakes interconnected with a large network of both natural and manmade rivers and canals. The backwaters have a very unique ecosystem where the freshwater from the rivers meets the seawater from the Arabian Sea.



Houseboat at the backwaters.



The Chinese fish nets at Fort Cochin.

2.2 Malayalam

Malayalam also known as Kairali, belongs to the Dravidian language family and is the official language of the state of Kerala. Most of the population speaks fluent English and Hindi, due to their statuses of official languages of India.

Below a link to get to know the language and common phrases:

http://wikitravel.org/en/Malayalam_phrasebook

For further reading you may order Malayalam in 30 Days Through English

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/14288375-learn-malayalam-in-30-days-through-english>

2.3 Weather

Kerala has a pleasant tropical climate throughout the year. The climate on the coast of Arabian Sea and the midst of the low land Ghats and backwaters is hot and tropical. On the mountain areas such as Wayanad, Munnar and Thekkady the weather is much cooler and less humid. Kerala has two rainy seasons, the monsoons.

The Southwest monsoon is called Edavappatthy and lasts from June to September. The Northeast Monsoon, Thulam, starts from mid October to November. During the rains the weather can get humid, might vary and drop from the normal range of between 28-35 °C.

Survival tip:

Humidity causes damage to electronic devices; it is wise to take good care and cover your laptops and other electronic devices especially during the monsoons.

Even when you wash laundry, it might take a few days to dry if it rains excessively.

Carry an umbrella or a raincoat with you; and instead of shoes and socks, choose flip-flops!

During the dry season the weather gets really hot. Remember to drink enough water, at least 2-3 litres a day. Sometimes it is good to balance the salts and minerals by mixing a bag of electrolytes (can be found in all the pharmacies) to a one liter bottle of water.

2.4 Religion

Kerala, like most of the states in India consist of a mix of many different religions and you can see Temples, churches and mosques in every part of the state, often side by side. It is even said that in Kerala the festivals of all religions are celebrated equally by all the citizens, be it a part of any religious tradition. 56% of the population are Hindus, 24% Muslims and 19% Christians. The remaining minority includes Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism and Judaism.

2.5 Festivals of Kerala

2.5.1 Onam

Onam is the biggest festival in Kerala celebrated in the months of August-September. The celebrations of harvest and harmony last around 10 days with delicious Sadya food, colorful pookalam flower decorations, traditional Snake Boat race, Pulikali dance and much more.



Pulikali dancers painted as tigers during Onam.

2.5.2 Vishu

Vishu is considered to be the most auspicious day to start anything new and it is celebrated in mid April. During Vishu people hang yellow konna flowers on top of their beds and doorsills so these flowers will be the first thing to be seen when waking up on Vishu morning.

2.5.3 Diwali

Kerala is the only state in India where the festival of Diwali is not a major celebration. However the various North Indian communities in different parts of Kerala do make sure you will see and hear the loud and colorful fire crackers through out the Diwali.

2.5.4 Trissur Pooram

The most famous temple festival of Kerala is the Trissur Pooram happening in the city of Trissur usually April-May. The festival has a parade of 30 to 50 decorated elephants along with a huge group of temple orchestration consisting 150 to 200 musicians.



Trissur Pooram elephants.

2.6 Music and arts

2.6.1 Kathakali

Kathakali is a classical dance-drama originated from Kerala. A typical Kathakali performance starts with a preparation with face painting and dressing up which goes on for hours. The show itself consists of detailed gestures and accurate body movements together with a mythical story, singing and particular drumming.



Kathakali dancer.

2.6.2 Kalaripayattu

Kalaripayattu is one of the oldest martial arts in the world originated and practiced in Kerala. This fighting system includes kicks, stikes, weaponry and healing methods and is often practiced by many classical dancers as well.

2.6.3 Mohiniyattam

Mohiniyattam is a classical and sensual dance with graceful body movements and specific eye movement. Women only perform this dance. Traditionally the dancer wears a white and gold dress, a lot of golden ornaments and bells in her ankles.



Mohiniyattam dancer.

2.7 Music

Kerala has a long and rich history in music, Carnatic music being the most known. Some of the typical instruments used in Carnatic music are chenda and tabla drums. Chembai Vaidyanatha is one of the most known Carnatic music singers from Palakkad, Kerala.

Nowadays the new bands and the music scene in Kerala have had influence from other music genres and the new bands have combinations of the western and Asian instruments.



Vidwan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGduLMiyiVY>

Avial

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPsz2raYePI>

2.8 Ayurveda

Ayurveda is a 5000 years old science of life and healthcare originated from India. It has a holistic method to maintain health through herb and oil treatments, specific diet and yogic exercises.

Kerala is known for its high standard Ayurveda resorts and Yoga centers.

2.9 Transportation

Traffic can be quite mad for the western perspective. Most drivers do not follow any traffic rules and the only rule that there seems to be is the bigger and more expensive vehicle you drive, the more rights you have.

The streets of Kerala hardly have wandering cows around although you can spot a few occasionally. Especially in the cities you will see a lot of traffic blocks. Motorcycles and

scooters are very common and considering the amount of traffic, the easiest to get by. Parking is usually difficult if you use a car.

2.9.1 Buses

Every district and city has its own set of government and private buses. The names of the buses are determined by their final destination, which is usually written on the front in Malayalam.

In Kochi the blue ones are government buses and red ones private buses. The ticket sellers yell out the names of the final destinations when the bus reaches the busstop. For trips outside Kochi and around Kerala, the long-distance buses are called KSRTC-buses. The KSRTC Central Bus Station is near the Junction Railway Station, Enquiry Ph: 2372033. Private buses operate from High Court.

2.9.2 Rickshaw

Rickshaws, or three wheelers, are a very common way to get around the city. The fare is 15 rs minimum for 1.5 kilometers. Usually the drivers charge extra during the nighttime.

Survival tip: Rickshaw drivers might be eager to charge a foreigner a double or even a triple price. Make sure you agree the price before you get in and get to know the distances and the common fees. You can always bargain with the prices.

2.9.3 Train

Indian train is definitely a must see must experience thing when living in the country. India has one of the largest railway networks of the world. Trains are the fastest and easiest way to travel from a city to city with a low price.

The ticket prices vary from the class cheapest being the third class seats, followed by second sleeper and finally AC class.

Survival tip:

Trains are often late, sometimes for many hours. However if one doesn't come in time another connection is fast available. The trains are also often completely packed so finding a seat even if you have booked one can be a hassle. The best way is to ask the inspector to show you the seat and make sure you get the one booked

2.9.4 Horn honking

For some reason Indians just simply love horn honking in the traffic. Even though it is loud and might seem unnecessary at first, it goes well with the irregular harmony of the traffic with its own rules, far from any set traffic regulations. All drivers (bus, car, rickshaw, motorcycle) use the horn probably more than indicator lights or brakes, so if you want to learn the flow of the traffic, learn the honk!

2.10 Indian Rupee (INR)

Rupee is the currency of India. The modern rupee is subdivided into 100 paise, 50 paise being the smallest coin available. Cash is a common means of payment but especially in the bigger cities of Kerala credit cards are also accepted in most malls, brand outlets and 5 star hotels and restaurants. ATM's that accept most international credit and debit cards can be found almost everywhere.

At the moment one euro is around 80 rupees but the rate fluctuates quite a lot.

Survival tip: India has a tipping culture. It is always good to carry some cash with you just in case smaller shops and street vendors do not accept cards.

2.11 Clothing in Kerala

2.11.1 Mundu

The Mundu is a white garment worn by men around the waste. Mundi is often worn during visiting temples or in festive occasions. Lungi is a similar piece of clothing worn more often as it is more casual. Lungi comes in various colors and is sometimes worn by women too in the rural areas.

What exactly is a mundu

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4dJvMTJ2U4>



Man in a mundu.

2.11.2 Saree

A saree is an Indian garment worn by women consisting of a long drape of 5-7 meters long and a blouse. The saree is wrapped around the waist and one shoulder in a particular fashion leaving the mid waist bare. The traditional Kerala saree is white with a golden lining.

Women often wear a lot of jewelry such as big earrings and bangles on their hands. It is common to wear a bindhi on the forehead. Against the common belief that a bindhi indicates the caste of a woman, the fact is that it is actually an accessory, just like a ring or a necklace.

How to wear a saree

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jorqok0ydig>

Even today women use the traditional sarees, however the younger generation has adopted the western clothing styles and it is common to wear jeans, dresses and skirts. In the business scene men wear straight pants and even ties and jackets, but usually a common business wear is smart casual.

For women it is advisable not to reveal too much especially in the non-touristic areas. Wearing miniskirts or small tops showing your cleavage can lead to a lot of staring and

unwanted attention. When entering a temple or a church, always cover your shoulders and legs and remove your shoes.

Survival tip Kerala's climate is hot so sometimes it can be challenging to wear something covering instead of a small top and shorts. Try to choose fabrics that breathe and wear a hat under the hot Kerala sun. Flip flops are common and comfortable shoes in any occasion.

2.12 Kerala food and eating

Kerala is world famous for its spicy or coconut based dishes. The traditional Kerala kitchen consists of vegetarian and non-vegetarian food; typical Keralite non-vegetarian foods consist of fish and other seafood such as Kerala is also known with its health benefits and has influence from the thousands of years old science of Ayurveda. Rice serves a central role in many of the dishes.

2.12.1 Puttu

Puttu is a breakfast dish of steamed cylinders of ground rice layered with coconut. It can be served with chickpea curry or banana.



Puttu with fish curry.

2.12.2 Dosa and Masala Dosa

Dosa is either a soft or crispy, fermented pancake made from rice batter and urad dal. Stuffing a large and crispy Dosa with lightly cooked potatoes, onions, green chilli and spices makes a Masala Dosa.

Dosas are usually served with either sambar or white coconut chutney.



Dosa with chutney and sambar.

2.12.3 Sadya – the traditional lunch

Sadya is a traditional midday spread that can be found in most restaurants during lunch hours. This vegetarian dish is also considered an essential part of the hindu celebrations such as weddings and festivals. Sadya is an elaborate combination of 16 to 60 dishes with a pile of Kerala Matta Rice (Red rice) served on a banana leaf.



Sadya on a banana leaf.

2.12.4 Kappa and Karimeen fry

Fried Karimeen fish with boiled tapioca is a famous dinner food in Kerala. Karimeen is considered as an expensive delicacy.

2.12.5 Chai

Chai simply means tea with milk when you order it in a restaurant. Masala chai is the traditional Indian tea mixed with spices such as cardamom, ginger, cinnamon, cloves etc.



Survival tip: Chai is always served with a lot of sugar. If you like your tea not explosively sweet, remember to ask less sugar with it.

2.12.6 Toddy (palm wine)

Toddy, often called *Kallu* by the locals, is an alcoholic beverage created from the sap of a palm tree. The taste is sour and depending on the fermentation and distillation process, the color is either white or clear.



Making toddy.

2.12.7 Kulukki Sarbath

In Malayalam the words “Kulukki” means “Shaken” and “Sarbath” means juice. Kulukki is a popular shaken lemonade drink served cool in many corner juice and snack stalls.

It is said the best Kulukki Sarbath is served at the High Court Junction in Kochi. If you order the special Kulukki, you get a combination of passion fruit, lime, honey and green chilli!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fj5cHJC80h0>

2.13 Water and drinking:

Most of the tap water in Kerala and India is unfit for consumption, so it is best to avoid drinking tap water. In Kerala the tap water is usable for eg brushing your teeth and showering, washing clothes etc. Bottled water can be purchased almost in every corner shop or supermarket. Most households have a refillable water dispenser in the kitchen. If you think you might be travelling to areas with no clean water available, always carry enough bottled water and water purifier tablets with you.

2.14 Eating habits

In Kerala, like in other parts of India, people eat with their hands, particularly with their right hand. If the dish is served with chapatti, naan-bread or roti, using only the right hand a small piece of bread is torn and used to cup a mouthful of rice and curry into your mouth. If the food is served without the bread, the rice and curry is simply mixed with the hand, made into a small ball and placed in the mouth.

This might be difficult to learn at first but with practice and good humor it will become easy. In the restaurants there is always a place for washing your hands before and especially after the meal. You might see people gargling water and spitting it into the sinks in public to clean their mouths from all the curry.

Survival tip: Restaurant will provide forks and knives when asked and you can always ask for a spoon too when visiting Indian friends and family.

Toilets in India

In India it is often hard to find a proper public toilet. In most places that do have a rest room, offer both the “Indian” and the “Western” toilets. The cleanliness of the restrooms are not always the same as in the west.

Survival tip:

The restrooms and public toilets often do not have toilet paper. Instead they have a water tab and a bucket. It is advisable to carry toilet paper and wet wipes with you all the time.

Mosquitoes

Especially during the monsoon, the amount of mosquitoes can get irritating. In the city it is still fairly okay but living closer to the rivers you can see a clear difference.

Survival tip: Hanging a mosquito net over your bed guarantees you a goodnight sleep. Odomos, the most popular mosquitoes repellent, can be found in most super-markets around Kerala. Odomos comes as cream and spray.

Another tip from the locals is to split a lime into half and poke fresh cloves in the flesh of the fruit. Placing these all around the room keeps the mosquitoes away.

Power cuts

Kerala has power cuts regularly every day. On top of the scheduled power cuts you should know there are unexpected power cuts all over the city. It is impossible to predict when they occur or how long they last. Most habited buildings in the city, restaurants and offices have generators, which will automatically turn on when such event occurs.

Survival tip:

Keep a torch and candles in the house ready for sudden power cuts.

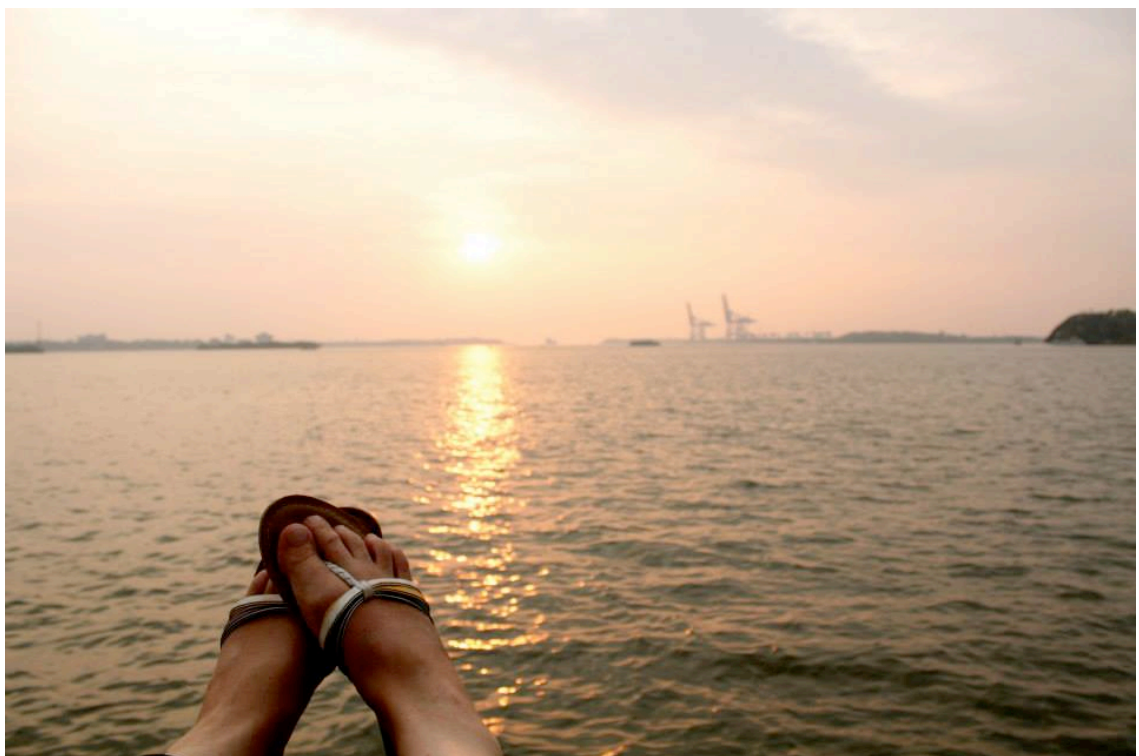
Hartals (strikes)

Hartal is a form of protest or strike by either political parties or different unions. Kerala witnesses more than 100 hartals annually and it usually involves a total shutdown of workplaces, offices, shops or means of transportation. An upcoming hartal is often announced in the news eg a bus strike between 06:00am and 06:00 pm or so.

3 Kochi (Ernakulam)

Kochi (also referred to as Cochin) is a major port city on the coast of the Arabian Sea. It belongs to the district of Ernakulam and actually the locals commonly call the mainland part of the city Ernakulam. Kochi was one of the main hubs of spice trade and over the years has grown to become the commercial hub of Kerala.

Kochi's main railway station is called the Ernakulam Junction (also known as Ernakulam South). Cochin International Airport is located at Nedumbassery, around 32 km from the central city area. Currently the Kochi Metro is under construction.



Kochi harbor sunset.

3.1 Health care

Kochi has one of the best hospital and healthcare facilities in India. The city has a large number of advanced hospitals and facilities and has become a major destination for people all around the world seeking advanced healthcare and dentistry. Some of the most recognized ones are Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Centre, Sunrise Hospital Kakkanad, Specialist Hospital Ernakulam, Medical Trust Hospital, PVS Memorial

Hospital Kaloor, Lakeshore Hospital, Lisie Hospital. In case of a need for smaller incidents or eg painkillers, pharmacies can be found all over the city of Kochi.

Survival tip: the healthcare is not expensive in Kerala even though the standard is equal to many western countries. It is good to check that your travel and health insurance is recognized in all the hospitals of Kerala.

3.2 Shopping

Kochi has a good number of big shopping malls such as Oberon Mall, Lulu Mall, Gould Souk and Bay Pride Mall. Most malls have a movie theatre and a lot of western brands available. The recently built Lulu mall has even an ice skating ring in its top floor.

3.2.1 M.G. Road

M.G. Road is the main commercial road of Kochi. M.G stands for Mahatma Gandhi and almost every big Indian city has its own Mahatma Gandhi Road. Alongside of the road are the largest textile and jewelry outlets, several famous retail stores, hospitals, and banks, leading hotels, and industries like Cochin Shipyard.

3.2.2 Marine Drive

Marine Drive is a coast promenade facing the Kochi backwaters with small shops and cafes along its walk. Opposite to Marine Drive is a shopping complex called Penta Menaka where one can find many mobile phone and electronics shops.

3.3 Sports

Kochi has a vast variety for free time activities and sports. The city has a good number of quality gyms Talwalkars Gym and Gold's Gym being the most popular.

Dance and yoga classes are easy to find as well as facilities for basketball, cricket, football and tennis. Kochi has 3 golf courses, the oldest one located in the beautiful Bolgatty Palace area.

3.4 Cafes

Even though India is a tea country, the new generation has become keen to enjoy their free time in the cafes with a latte and friends. The best ones in the city area are Cocoa Tree, Café Papaya, Café Coffee Day, Kahawa (with wireless internet) Matteo, French Toast and Coffee Beanz.



Coffee break at Matteo, Marine Drive.

Papaya Café

<https://www.facebook.com/MusicMoviesMocha>

Cocoa Tree

<https://www.facebook.com/cocoatreecafe>

Kahawa

<https://www.facebook.com/kahawakochi>

3.5 Night life

The most popular bars and clubs in Kochi are The Ava Lounge Bar located upstairs and in the rooftop area of Dream Hotel, Ramadan club, Casino, Glow, Holiday Inn Bar and Crown Plaza.



Survival tip: Kingfisher is THE beer brand from India. Remember to have a taste!

3.6 Fort Cochin

Fort Cochin is a former fishing village, current touristic beach and coastline region in Kochi. The most known tourist attractions are the beautiful Chinese fishnets, The Dutch cemetery and Mattancherry Palace.

For a fun weekend trip it is easy to take the Fort Cochin boat from Marine Drive for only 7 rupees. The 15-minute boat ride ends takes you to the heart of the hotels and cafes where you can walk to places such as David's hall (café and with an art gallery), Oy's café and Kashi art café.



Fort Cochin sunset.



At Kashi Art Café.

4 The Kerala way

4.1 Communication

Indian communication style has a desire to maintain a harmony in the relationships, which means that the style of communication is often indirect. A yes doesn't always mean yes and a no doesn't always mean no. A smile is often expressed even in a negative situation not to "lose face" in front of others or as a gesture of respect towards a person of higher position.

4.1.1 Namaste hands

Namaste literally means: the divine in me respects the divine in you. Namaste is a common way to say hello even though nowadays the word hello has become more common in Kerala. The Namaste hands (palms pressed together) are a way to greet, show respect and say your goodbyes.

A normal handshake has become common especially in the business scene.

4.1.2 The head wobble

The head wobble also called as the Indian headshake is a form of non verbal communication. It either indicate yes, no or maybe, depending on the context. At first it may be hard to read the meaning but as you get to know the common ways in the communication you might choose to use the head wobble yourself too.

4.2 People and relationships

India has a male dominate culture. In Kerala the women have the most equal position in India even though the usual norm of the roles of men and women still differs from the west. Most Indian organizations are managed and run from top to down with very strict system of hierarchy and power distance.

Indians focus more on the longer-term process and value relationships over results and individuality. This often means, that even if a business meeting is set at 15.00 sharp, Indians might turn up an hour late due to a family obligation, religious reason or just because they had a chai break with an old friend and got stuck in the traffic. This is considered normal and acceptable.

4.2.1 Family and marriage

The holistic culture shows in the family centered norms and morals. Elders, family traditions and parents and their wishes are respected over ones individual choices. Arranged marriages and career choices made by parents are common. The arranged marriages might first sound like a horrific idea but in Kerala the couple usually meets and dates for a while before agreeing to marriage. In Kerala the so-called love marriages have become more and more common as the new generation has influences from the west and the traditional system is on the verge of modernization.

4.2.2 The Caste system

The caste system has been illegal in India since 1947 but has not ceased to exist due to its strong cultural roots. Even if the names of the caste have disappeared the hierarchy between the people are very clear. The workers stay as workers and the royals stay royals without mixing with each other. In Kerala the commercialization and western influences have had their impact on the social structure but the traditions live strong.

5 Culture shock

Culture shock is something everyone will face in one way or another. Moving from Finland to a country like India means the cultural adjustment might require some time. The way a person adjusts to new depend on the level of his or her cultural sensitivity, pre-obtained experience and knowledge, personality, attitude towards change and many other factors.

The stages of cultural adjustment and culture shock are pretty much the same but the time span and personal reaction to these stages are individual. It is always good to be aware of the possible reactions during cultural adjustment even if not all the phases have such a big impact to all of us.

5.1.1 Stages of culture shock

The honeymoon stage

First few days or weeks are filled with emotions like excitement, eagerness, and euphoria since everything and everyone is new and exciting.

The frustration stage

This stage is the first strong negative reaction including feelings of sadness, exhaustion, homesickness, anger or desire to withdraw. This can lead to sleeping problems, loss of appetite, unexplained crying, over eating and even physical health issues such as colds or headache.

The adjustment stage

During this stage a person becomes more comfortable and familiar with the new culture, it's people, language, food etc. Overcoming the frustration stage a person starts to build friendships and feel less disconnected with the new culture.

The acceptance stage

This stage may take from months to year to attain. At this point a person can see the good and the bad in their own and the host culture and be able to compare them neutrally. The person will feel less like a foreigner and more like the country and its culture is a second home.

5.1.2 Tips for easing culture shock

Keeping in touch with your family and friends back home is a good way to stay connected with your own identity and have that small escape trip back home via Skype or messaging. Nowadays it is easy to just video call on the way to the supermarket to any part of the world, but one should also not isolate completely from the new environment. Even if the adjusting process can get tough at times, it will most certainly stay tough if you “stay at home” while abroad.

Getting to know people and building friendships is important. Engaging in social activities with different people from the very beginning helps you to find people, who you like spending time with and connect with the environment,

Explore the new environment and learn to move around by yourself. Stay safe but maintain a sense of adventure too.

Establishing stability and routine in your daily life is a good way to handle stress and anxiety when everything feels foreign. This can be a regular morning swim or a cup of tea before bed every evening. Create something familiar in the unfamiliar.

Learning the local language can be a fun experience even if it means you have to put some effort to it. It not only helps you with some daily activities but gives you an opportunity to connect with the people and understand their humor and ways to see the world.

Hobbies and especially physical activities and sports give you a possibility to take care of your health and express yourself. If possible, find out if you can continue the hobbies you do back home or maybe try something new, something only this new area can offer.

Maintain a sense of humor. Laugh at your own mistakes (learn from them too) and keep looking at the positive and fun side of things.