

Around the country at ₹900 a day!

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Ahmedabad: How do you communicate when the person next to you doesn't speak the same tongue? How do you cope with the balmy dormitories or the missed buses? A total of 96 students of IIT Gandhinagar (IIT-Gn) found the answers to these questions in their 42-day long quest across the length and breadth of the country, where 32 teams explored as many pan-India themes as part of this year's Explorer Fellowship.

Chetan Pahlajani, assistant professor at IIT-Gn and coordinator for the fellowship, said that the fellowship provides a Rs 900 daily budget or Rs 37,800 for each student.

They have to travel continu-

ously for six weeks.

"There are some constraints – the students are not allowed to take air-conditioned buses or trains or live in air-conditioned accommodations. They are not supposed to spend from their own pockets as they have to work out budget for travel, food and lodging from the money they are provided," he said, adding that the students must cover at least six states – at least one in north, northeast and south each.

The outcome takes shape of a project report and a video documentation. IIT-Gn officials said that the primary purpose behind the exercise is to provide exposure to the young students in diversity of the nation and also to impart life lessons



IIT-Gn's fellowship enables students to explore India for six weeks

ranging from dealing with people to budgeting. The experience can break a number of preconceived notions, they added.

"I had not travelled on my own before but when we completed over 10,000 kilometres, it gave me confidence that I can do it. It also enriched us with unique experiences," said

Harsh Shah, a second year B.Tech student.

He added, "For instance, we decided to go to a 24-hour café in Puducherry to escape the stifling dorm before our train journey to Chennai. To our horror, we found that it was open only up to 3am. We spent the night on the desolate beach and just sno-

red away on Chennai platform." His team documented over 100 different street food available in eight states.

Varun Dolla, second-year student in material science, was part of a team that explored farming techniques in 10 states. He said that in Tamil Nadu their application for translating spoken words did not work as expected while interacting with local farmers. "We immediately decided to contact one of our seniors from Tamil Nadu who listened to what the farmers had to say and then translated it on speaker phone. It was a memorable lesson in how to solve an issue and learn. People were mostly friendly wherever we went and took pains to answer our questions," he said.

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