

### Unveiling Unexpected Horizons: From Kashmir to Kerala

In the pages of our lives, some chapters stand out as vivid surprises. I'm Muneer Hussain Dar, MSc student from Kashmir University and my journey at SCTIMST turned out to be exactly that – a remarkable experience that defied expectations.

As a part of research exposure programme under **DST INSPIRE**, we went on an adventure that took us to the heart of Kerala. I had never been to this beautiful state before, and it's safe to say I had more questions than answers about what awaited me. Curious about the safety and living conditions, I approached the higher-ups, including the Registrar, with inquiries through emails. Their reassuring words, assuring me that everything would be taken care of, provided a glimmer of comfort. But it was Dr Jayasree Mam, the Chairperson of the SCTIMST INSPIRE committee, who truly put my concerns to rest. Little did I know that my journey had already begun, and it was going to be a tale of surprises. Serendipitously, the HOD of the chemistry department, Kerala University who had met me at Srinagar airport, continued to be a guiding presence, his congeniality offering solace during our journey. Coming down at Trivandrum airport, I was greeted by a vehicle arranged by the Institute – a gesture that left me impressed. The tropical heat was a change, but the camaraderie of friends who had already arrived at the hostel, along with the warm welcome by the hostel caretaker, melted away any initial discomfort.

Morning broke, and the program officially kicked off with lab visits and presentations orchestrated by Dr. Renjith. Navigating through the various divisions of the institute was an eye-opener, and our journeys extended to institutions like Kerala University, CSIR NIST. Dr Jayasree Mam and Dr Renjith, the gracious hosts that they are, welcomed us with open arms. The lab visits set the stage for us to select projects aligned with our interests. I found my niche in the division of biophotonics and imaging, where I felt an inexplicable sense of belonging – it was like finding a second family.



Dr Siva postdoc fellow at the division emerged as a guiding light who always guided me in the lab, his words resonating deeply, complemented by moments of camaraderie over cups of tea, watching movies and thoughtful gifts. Navigating the research landscape had its challenges, but the camaraderie of Kirthika and the unwavering support of Anjana, a fellow PhD student, were a source of strength. My lab mates, too, became my pillars of support, transcending professional boundaries and forming bonds that felt like family. Amidst this backdrop, friendships blossomed like vibrant flowers. Birthdays turned into collective celebrations, and a genuine sense of belonging permeated the air. Besides learning technical things, the love and care showered upon me by my lab mates have been etched in my heart – a tapestry of moments that time will never fade.



Within the hostel's walls, my companions Abhijeet, Suramya, Ishika, and Nagarajan, were not just fellow lodgers – they became my extended family. Their actions transcended mere kindness, embodying a sense of camaraderie that turned our living space into a haven of shared experiences.



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all eat a meal in the canteen, a microcosm of the egalitarian spirit that prevailed. Even in mundane actions like public transport, the decency of Kerala's people shown through a simple ring of the bell by a passenger signaled a stop, a stark contrast to the chaos of many places. It was a place where kindness thrived, and helping hands were readily extended.

The 15th of August, a day of celebration, took on a unique flavor in Kerala. Joining director, scientists, doctors, security persons and fellow students, I experienced a sense of unity and joy that I had never felt before in any other place. The love and acceptance of the people of Kerala had a profound impact on my spirit and I whole heartedly joined the days celebration. Among my fondest memories are the friendships I forged. From celebrating birthdays together to the heartfelt farewell gestures, each moment became a cherished memory. The culmination of our time was marked by Dr Jayasree Mam's lunch treat and a surprise cake party by hostel mates – a testament to the bonds formed during our stay.

As I turn the pages of my time at SCTIMST Kerala, I'm left with an overwhelming sense of gratitude. This journey went beyond academics; it was a transformative experience that rewrote my perceptions and instilled lasting memories. With a heart full of appreciation, I step forward into new adventures, carrying the warmth of Kerala.

Suramya was one of my Kitchenmate in the hostel where we fused our culinary skills to create a harmonious blend of flavors. Sharing utensils, recipes, and stories, bridging the gap between the northernmost and southernmost corners of India through our shared meals. Abhijeet's kindness showcased the true essence of unity, when our induction cooker faltered, he didn't hesitate to lend me his, embodying the spirit of sharing that characterized our shared space. It was more than an appliance; it symbolized the bonds we had formed – ones that transcended material things. Yet, this sense of unity extended far beyond these names. Every person under that roof, including, Anuja played a part in making my stay truly memorable.

As I interacted with the people of Kerala, a different world unfolded before me. Their humility, warmth, and genuine nature left an indelible mark, creating a sense of belonging I hadn't anticipated. What struck me most was the absence of hierarchies – from sweepers, doctors to scientists,



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*(Mr Muneer, MSc student, Kashmir Univ, has been a participant of DST INSPIRE Program for the students of North-East states and Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh at SCTIMST)*

