



Field Study in Sri Lanka, Agri-Photovoltaics

Before arrival

My application process probably looks quite a lot different from the other travel stories you have read, as I didn't become involved with this project until after summer. The person I was traveling with, Lisa Winkvist, had already been planning a field trip with another partner, but when that person no longer could attend, she asked me if I was interested and of course I said yes! My main motive for joining this project was the excitement of getting to apply our thus far only theoretical knowledge onto a real-life project and of course getting to experience a new country. I started in September on the preparation, and I would say that the earlier one starts, the better. It is a lot of things that need doing, and you don't want to be stressed when deadline comes.

Upon arrival

We only had one day between arrival and getting thrown right into the project, through participation on a two-day workshop that was held at the solar farm. For us, this was a good way to get a head start to the project and a perfect way to meet the central players all in one place. So, although it can be quite intense to do it like we did, I would still recommend people to use the first week to meet with the different people that you will need for the project, as well as try to go and see whatever area you are meant to be studying. This rapid start helped us a lot when it came to laying out the foundation for the rest of our 8 weeks stay, as we could start writing relatively quickly after arriving in Sri Lanka.

Financials

Sri Lanka is in general much cheaper than Sweden, however, don't let that fool you into not making a proper budget. The truth is that most likely you are going to wish to spend a lot more money on food, sightseeing and traveling than you would if you were in Sweden. So, I would recommend making a proper plan of what areas of the country you wish to visit before you leave and make a budget from there. We did not find it difficult to survive on a student's monthly earnings, however we did find that the monthly budget almost always equalled that of our spendings in Sweden.

Accommodation

We got accommodation through the university we were visiting, set up by our contact person. The housing was on university ground and was only a two-minute walk from where we had our workspace set up. I would recommend going through your contact person when booking an accommodation, both as they know what it should cost but also since they know the locations better, so you know you get a good housing. One negative about our accommodation was that there was no kitchen included, so we found ourselves having to eat at restaurants. This became quite the challenge as we found ourselves missing homecooked food and got tired of always having to leave to get food. So, I would recommend carefully looking at the commodities of your chosen place, and make sure it has all that you need.

Project

Our project was on Agri-photovoltaics, systems of agriculture and solar panels, where the two systems can share the area without competing. The project's main motive was looking into an established prototype on Hanthana mountain in Sri Lanka and afterwards making a model that investigated if such a system could be implemented in Sweden. We got some help from our supervisors initially, as to get the project started, but we did notice a fall of towards the end of the project. In some ways this was good, as it allowed us to make our project exactly what we wished it to be, however it could be quite challenging to know what the next steps were when feedback stopped. To rectify this, I would recommend having an upfront discussion with your supervisor about exactly what the expectations are, so you can know throughout the project if you are on the right track. A typical day for us working on the project was sitting on university grounds, writing and researching. We had some interviews with different parties as well as some visits to the research site, which was a fun way to introduce our project while still gaining more knowledge from experts.

Country

We experienced a lot of culture shocks, as you are bound to when visiting another country. Most of them were very positive, Sri Lanka has great people, beautiful nature and a vast and interesting history. We made sure to plan as many travels as we could, because every new place is an opportunity to discover more about the place you are visiting. The only negative culture shock we did notice was people staring, something we as Swedes found quite odd. We never had any negative experiences due to this, but it was quite difficult during some days, sometimes you just want to go to the store without being the centre of attention.

Leisure and social activities

During workdays we didn't do a lot of social activities, mostly rested and walked around the city. However, during the weekends we made sure to travel to different cities in Sri Lanka. We had, before the trip, looked up some places we wished to see but we also asked some locals for tips on where to go. This was a very nice setup, as it allowed the weekdays to be more relaxing and study-focused whilst we still had the weekends to look forward to. I would recommend trying to travel as much as possible, one never knows if one is going to come back to the country so making sure to experience as much as possible is crucial.

Sustainability

I believe we made some strides to reduce our carbon footprint, mainly because we got used to a simpler lifestyle and found out what one really needs, versus what is a comfort we are used to. This is one of the areas in which I found most growth, as I got to examine the way I live and the way I waste. Our project was very closely linked to sustainability, as we investigated a new form of solar system and how that might help make solar power more popular, as today the question of space lingers over many countries. Sri Lanka is a country that is set on moving into a more sustainable way of creating electricity, as they have a goal to remove a big chunk of their fossil fuelled based energy systems by 2030. This project is one of many that try to tackle that goal, and make sure that the expansion of solar doesn't affect agriculture negatively.

Other recommendations and observations

Traveling to another country can be quite scary, and you are always going to look back on things you would have done differently if you got to go on a field study today. But my main tips are:

1. Don't write too much of your rapport before you are in the country, we found that when we saw the project area and heard the professors speak, we got a whole new perspective to what the aim of the subject could be.

2. Plan ahead, but make sure you also leave space for spontaneity. Don't make a set plan of all your visits, you are going to hear about places and wish to go there instead, leave space for that.
3. Update your supervisor in the host country and Sweden often, it helps the project a ton.
4. Enjoy yourself! This is the opportunity of a lifetime so make sure you experience it to the max!