

View From Abroad — Learning new smells while abroad | Campus Times

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Courtesy of Scott Strenger

People always tell you that going abroad is an eye-opening experience. For me it has been more of a nose-opening experience. The smells here in India change frequently and are often quite potent. One moment you may be on the side of the road enjoying the sweet smell of masala corn, and then out of nowhere an auto rickshaw will nearly knock you over, leaving a trail of visible exhaust.

While over here, it's easy to get used to the surroundings and forget you are in a foreign country. With one good whiff of cow manure you will be

checking your pulse, entirely aware that something is different. Rochester may have its arsenal of smells (late nights in Gleason Library, anyone?) but India takes the gold on the variety of fragrances one can find.

I have come to associate distinct smells with specific attributes of Indian society. When trekking through 2,000-year-old Buddhist caves you pick up a soggy scent of rocks and bat urine — this is history.

When hiking through a national park there is a fresh scent of fresh air and blossoming flowers — this is nature.

When you are grabbed by sweaty hands and spun around in a festival dance, such that you do not know from which direction the smell is coming — this is community.

The most appreciated smells are those you receive when entering a house and being overwhelmed by spices that you can barely pronounce but will lick off the plate — this is home.

For the moment, India is my home. I have immersed myself in its rich culture and am learning everything I can, from the polite “namaskar” greeting gesture, to the most popular Bollywood dances. In words, photos and videos I can provide you with great details of village children who grab at my shirt asking for money, but until you can sniff their unwashed bodies you cannot come close to fully comprehending their daily struggles.

In lieu of all the challenges modern India endures, there is a scent of hope. My peers here are inspiring and there is no doubt that global convergence will create an aroma unparalleled to anything we know of today. With a bit of luck we can all breathe this in together.

Strenger is a member of the class of 2012.