The program outlined in this document is subject to change according to practical realities within India as well as the particular interests of participants. This flexibility allows the Bridge Year cohort to move at its own pace, to be responsive to personal and group interests, and to take advantage of the learning opportunities that result from unexpected events.
Bridge Year Program in India

in partnership with Where There Be Dragons

The Bridge Year Program in India is based in Udaipur, a medium-sized city in the Indian state of Rajasthan. Once the embattled capital of the kingdom of Mewar, Udaipur was home to one of India’s most famous kings who, along with his descendants, built the beautiful palaces and stone walls that remain part of the cityscape to this day. Handicrafts are an important part of the culture of Udaipur, including traditional weaving, puppet-making, and pottery. Udaipur is a diverse city, with large Muslim and Jain minorities, as well as a significant population of Adivasis, the indigenous inhabitants of the region. Udaipur also boasts a thriving civil society with various NGOs and passionate young people dedicated to issues of education, social justice, and environmental preservation.

Arrival and Orientation

Upon arrival in India, Bridge Year participants travel by train and jeep to Satoli, a small Himalayan village in the North Indian state of Uttarakhand. For their first week in Satoli, the group participates in an orientation program held in a rural guest house with comfortable facilities and breathtaking mountain views. During orientation, students discuss their goals for the program, begin introductory Hindi language classes, and participate in a variety of workshops related to Indian culture and society. Students spend the remainder of their time at orientation getting to know their peers, program staff, and members of community organizations working to address a variety of local concerns, such as access to healthcare and education, seed saving and sustainable agriculture, and natural resource protection.

Cultural and Service Learning – Fall

From orientation, Bridge Year participants transition to a four week rural immersion experience. Through rural homestays, service work with community members, and a variety of talks led by local experts, students begin to learn about the realities of life in rural India. Also during this time, students continue with their intensive Hindi language studies and join Bridge Year staff in discussions about community-engaged learning and the importance of developing observation, listening, critical thinking, and relationship-building skills.

The rural immersion experience starts in the village of Satoli, where Bridge Year students work with Aarohi, an organization dedicated to supporting grassroots, community-driven
initiatives in Uttarakhand. Through this partnership, students plant crops and volunteer in after school programs while learning about rural education, public health, food security, and forest management in the Himalaya.

From Satoli, participants move to the village of Munsiyari where they live in rural homestays organized by Himalayan Ark, a local community-run NGO. In Munsiyari, students take part in a daily routine that includes cooking with their homestay mothers, harvesting crops, and collecting firewood with their host siblings. At the same time, participants attend daily workshops at Himal Prakriti, a sister NGO to Himalayan Ark, where they learn about gender issues, community forest management, farming, and initiatives to increase women’s participation in local governance. In collaboration with Himal Prakriti, the Bridge Year group takes part a community-driven infrastructure project, for example, the rehabilitation of a damaged watershed.

Upon leaving Munsiyari, Bridge Year participants embark on their first mountain trek, traversing a section of the Pindari Glacier with spectacular views of the famous Nanda Devi range.

Following the exhilaration of the Himalayan trek, the group travels to Kausani village, where they volunteer with Laxmi Ashram, a girl’s boarding school and ashram where teachers and students seek to embody Gandhian principles. Bridge Year students rotate through daily responsibilities at the school alongside its students, including farming, cooking meals, caring for livestock, preparing the ashram’s signature blend of Tulsi tea, weaving and knitting. During their stay, students also have the opportunity to exchange songs and dances, share simple meals, and discuss ideas about education and the meaning of Gandhian principles in a changing world.

The rural service learning component in Uttarakhand concludes with an extended stay in Ranikhet at the Center for the Contemplation of Nature. In addition to continued Hindi instruction, activities include daily yoga and meditation, as well as discussions related to the geography of India, gender issues, forest ecology, and cultural and religious practices. Along with these lessons, students reflect as a group on their first month in India and prepare for the transition to Udaipur.
Arrival in Udaipur

Bridge Year volunteers arrive in Udaipur in mid-October and immediately begin a weeklong orientation to the city that will be their home-base for the next seven months. Students learn about the history of Udaipur, explore the narrow lanes of the old city, and gain a more nuanced understanding of its complex social dynamics. During orientation, students receive a thorough introduction to service placements opportunities. Participants visit each service site to gain a better understanding of the work, mission, and culture of each organization. Students and organizations are then matched based on the needs of the organization and the general interests of the students. Throughout the Udaipur orientation, participants develop practical skills that help them navigate the city, better integrate into local culture, and adapt more effectively to their service work.

Homestay

Program participants live with families in Udaipur, providing them with a unique opportunity to practice language skills, establish relationships, and integrate more fully into local society. Participants can expect comfortable but modest accommodations that include a private bedroom furnished with a twin bed, a desk, a chair, and a place for clothing. While some homes may have showers, participants should be prepared for bucket baths (usually cold) for bathing. Most meals are prepared by and enjoyed with the homestay family. These meals are typically vegetarian, as is customary in India.
Language Instruction

Hindi language training begins during orientation and continues through early April. For the first four months of the program, Bridge Year participants engage in five to eight hours of Hindi language training each week. Starting in January, language instruction continues, but with less frequency, allowing more time for other activities. One-on-one tutoring is available throughout the program for those in need of extra attention.

Language instructors in India can be fairly strict and generally have high expectations for their pupils. Students should expect around five hours of homework and self-study each week. While the first few months might be challenging for students, conversational competence can be attained relatively quickly.

Service Placement

Participants spend six to eight hours per day, four days per week, at their service placement. Travel to and from the service site depends on the assignment, but can range from a 15-minute walk to a 30 minute rickshaw ride. Staff help orient students to their respective assignments and provide continuous support throughout the program. Below is a list of host organizations in Udaipur that receive Bridge Year volunteers. This list is not comprehensive, but provides examples of the types of service assignments in which students might be placed based on their interest and the needs of the partner organizations.
Seva Mandir (http://www.sevamandir.org/what-we-do) is one of India’s leading development nonprofit organizations that seeks to “transform lives through participatory development.” It currently works with 360,000 people across 700 villages of southern Rajasthan, where more than 90% of the population relies on subsistence agriculture and most people live on less than 35 cents a day. For 50 years, Seva Mandir has worked in partnership with these communities, not only to improve their material well-being, but also to build stronger and more empowered communities. Their programs focus on governance, health, education, sustainable use of natural resources, women’s empowerment, youth development, child care, and social enterprise. Seva Mandir’s approach is distinctive in that it does not simply deliver aid, but instead uses every development project as a way to build stronger communities based on democratic principles. Volunteer opportunities may include teaching, supporting research projects, community outreach activities, health education, and technical and administrative support.

Jagran Jan Vikas Samiti (https://jagranjan.org/programmes/) Jagran Jan Vikas Samiti’s (JJVS) mission is to “create an egalitarian social order where basic needs are fulfilled, economic inequalities are minimized, and where democratic decision-making provides for the common good.” JJVS was founded by a group of social workers from the village of Vali who sought to promote social change among tribal groups in southern Rajasthan. JJVS works to improve access to healthcare and other resources as well as to generate awareness of healthcare rights. They also seek to improve social, economic and environmental conditions in rural areas by fostering collaboration among local tribal groups and empowering community members to leverage available resources. Programs focus on the preservation of traditional medicine, community development, education, sustainability, water management, agriculture, and women’s empowerment. Volunteer opportunities may include research related to traditional medicine, documentary work, using geographic information systems to track community initiatives, technological support, teaching and facilitating health campaigns, microfinance proposals, translation, and health education.

Jandaksha Trust (http://www.jandaksha.com) is an organization dedicated to improving the lives of women migrant laborers in Udaipur. Jandaksha Trust documents working and living conditions while finding ways to help women secure basic rights, build skills to attain a better livelihood, and access education and health services. The number of women in the labor workforce has increased rapidly in the last decade and Jandaksha Trust works to
provide these women with legal assistance, labor registration, economic sustainability, and financial literacy. Through its center and various activities, more than eleven thousand migrant laborers have received support from Jandaksha. Volunteer opportunities may include teaching, supporting research projects, documenting and recording case studies, assisting with health education and other interventions, and providing administrative assistance.

**Asthā Sansthan** ([http://www.astha.ngo](http://www.astha.ngo)) Astha is a Hindi word that means “faith,” and it was with faith in the strength of people and their capacities that Astha was formed in 1986 by a small group of dedicated social workers. With years of work experience in the fields of adult education, rural development, drought management, and agricultural development, Astha’s founders brought their diverse interests and knowledge to meet the many challenges of day to day life in Rajasthan. The organization seeks to build a society without discrimination based on caste, class or gender, where the poor have control of their own livelihood, and where people coexist with nature. Volunteer opportunities may include supporting ongoing research projects, assisting with data collection and analysis, translations, planning events, and organizing awareness campaigns.

**Sadhna** ([https://sadhna.org/](https://sadhna.org/)) was established to provide alternative sources of income and promote financial security and independence for women living in rural communities. Sadhna focuses on teaching artisanal skills to produce crafts that are then sold on the fair-trade market. Sadhna also helps women build support networks and cooperatives to promote community empowerment and encourage self-advocacy. In addition to income generation, Sadhna offers workshops related to education, hygiene, leadership, financial literacy, and others. Volunteer opportunities may include assistance with research into marketing and fair trade, longitudinal studies, participation in educational and awareness campaigns, and designing media or publicity materials.

**Vikalp Sansthan** ([http://vikalpindia.org](http://vikalpindia.org)) Vikalp is a Hindi word that means an “alternative,” and Vikalp Sansthan seeks alternatives to existing social structures that are marked by discrimination, violence, and unequal opportunities for women and girls. The organization addresses issues related to gender-based violence, unequal access to education, child marriage, and works with survivors to rebuild their lives. Vikalp works toward raising a new generation of young people ready to challenge unequal power structures. Since 2004, the organization has expanded to include more than 400 regular volunteers and it has influenced over 200,000 “change-makers” through their classes and outreach efforts. Vikalp operates out of its main office in Udaipur and works through volunteers in nine districts and 231 villages throughout Rajasthan. Volunteer opportunities may include teaching sports, planning awareness-raising and community outreach programs, and providing creative media and technological support.

**Jatan Sansthan** ([www.jatansansthan.org](http://www.jatansansthan.org)) is a grassroots organization based in the state of Rajasthan. They seek “a society where people lead a healthy, safe, and empowered life, free from all forms of discrimination” and provide needed services—especially education and healthcare—to children, youth, and women in rural areas. Their services and trainings relate to maternal health, sexual and reproductive health, migrant support services, women's empowerment and livelihood, childhood education, and local government empowerment. Jatan encourages youth participation on all levels of decision-making to foster a deeper sense of agency. The administrative office is based in Udaipur, but Jatan has three field offices in districts outside the city. Volunteer opportunities may include assisting in research projects,
supporting awareness campaigns, organizing community outreach activities with youth groups, facilitating democratic participation activities, and health education.

**ARTH**, or “Action Research and Training for Health” ([http://arth.in/about-us](http://arth.in/about-us)), is a public health organization that was founded in 1997 with the aim of improving access to health care and bolstering the existing health care system through research, training, and advocacy. ARTH conducts research to improve health conditions and care of women, adolescents and children with an emphasis on rural and tribal communities. They also train health care personnel in best practices, and provide services to said communities to improve the status of women. Volunteers can participate in a variety of areas including health research on topics such as reproductive health and child nutrition, training and organization of campaigns, and assisting with political advocacy in addition to administrative assistance.

**Aajeevika Bureau** ([www.aajeevika.org](http://www.aajeevika.org)) Aajeevika Bureau’s mission is to provide lasting solutions to the economic, social and legal problems of migrant workers. They combine advocacy, research, and technical support to advance their work assisting migrant workers and have helped define new agendas, priorities, and programs to be adopted by government and industry. They offer a variety of services and security both at the source of migration and at the destination; their interventions have included registration and photo ID provision for laborers, skills training and job placement, legal aid, family and health support, among others. Volunteer opportunities may include assisting with research and follow-up projects, designing financial literacy or health interventions, assistance with media or publications, and providing administrative support.

**Shikshantar Andolan** ([http://www.shikshantar.org/](http://www.shikshantar.org/)) was created in 1998 to help participants reclaim control over their own learning processes and rebuild “learning webs” within their communities. They promote an alternative to formal educational institutions in the Gandhian spirit of *satyagraha* or “non-violence” and non-cooperation with an unjust educational system and global political economy. Shikshantar offers “unschooling” opportunities, including workshops on a variety of topics from permaculture to computer repair, homeschooling, and filmmaking. The center supports green initiatives and upholds the value of localized, indigenous knowledge. The program and its participants have generated several sustainable and environmental initiatives, including a thriving guesthouse, organic restaurant, a shop featuring “up cycled” goods, and two heritage walking tour organizations. Volunteer opportunities include organizing community learning events and workshops, assisting with event planning, providing additional media and administrative support with Shikshantar’s Vimukt Shiksha Publishing House and Community Filmmaking Studio, and offering a daily peer-to-peer co-learning presence for community learners from all ages and backgrounds.
**Program House**

Program participants have access to the Bridge Year Program House, a centrally located building which serves as meeting place and “home” to the Bridge Year group. Here, students can find a place to relax, meet with on-site staff, cook or share meals, and host guest speakers and performances. The program house has a classroom, kitchen, library, lounge area, and an office with a laptop and internet access for volunteer use.

**Cultural Enrichment Activities**

The following activities are available to Bridge Year participants to add context to both their service work and their overall cultural experience in India.

**Guest Speakers:** Over the course of the program, guest lecturers and local experts are invited to discuss and present on diverse topics including India’s history, religions, geography, the caste system, philosophy, gender issues, urbanization, the arts, the environment, and politics.

**Independent Enrichment Activities:** Bridge Year participants will be introduced to and have the opportunity to engage in extracurricular activities including local sports, arts, and one-on-one mentorships in music, dance or other subjects of personal interest. These outlets are meant to help students pursue individual interests and engage in local culture and community more independently. Examples of enrichment topics include: Indian cooking classes, leather book binding, cricket playing, weaving, traditional block printing, traditional or Bollywood dance, instruments (such as sitar, flute, or *tabla*), clothing design/tailoring, Kathputhli (or Rajasthani puppet making and performance), Rajasthani miniature painting,
natural beauty product and soap making, community theater, silversmithing/jewelry making, stone carving Vedic astrology, Ayurvedic medicine, Yoga Asana, Mewari language, and Sanskrit.

**Excursions:** Bridge Year participants also partake in at least two program-sponsored excursions outside of the city of Udaipur. Excursion destinations depend on many factors including weather, time constraints, student interest, and relevance to the overall program, but a number of different options are available. Possibilities include a rural village stay in a tribal community close to Udaipur; a long weekend in Jodhpur, Jaipur and/or elsewhere in Rajasthan; a student-planned excursion to Gujarat or Madhya Pradesh; among others. To the greatest extent possible, ownership of the experience is given to the student group, empowering Bridge Year participants to work with on-site staff to research, plan, and manage the logistics for these group expeditions.

**Student-led Spring Excursion & Service Work**

Students depart Udaipur in late April, traveling by train and plane to the Ladakh region on the edge of the Tibetan Plateau in the northernmost part of India. The excursion introduces students to a unique culture and environment, altogether different from the months spent in Uttarakhand and Rajasthan. This experience invites students to broaden their perspectives on service learning, development topics, and environmental issues, as well as further explore India’s cultural, spiritual, and linguistic dynamism.
Bridge Year participants engage in a variety of activities, including rural homestays, service learning, meetings with local organizations, and a multi-day trek in the surrounding mountain ranges. In recent years, Bridge Year groups have been working in coordination with the non-profit the Students’ Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL) (http://www.secmol.org/). SECMOL was founded in 1988 by a group of young Ladakhis with the aim of reforming the educational system of Ladakh. Its activities include youth camps, English language exchange, sustainable farming, solar energy projects, and ecotourism among other projects. In addition to the time at SECMOL, the group spends a week in a Ladakhi village homestay and hikes in the surrounding mountains.

**Program Wrap Up**

During the final week of the program, participants travel to the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand for a Transference Workshop. Individually and as a group, participants identify, examine, and assimilate the lessons learned from their experience of the previous nine months. They also have an opportunity to prepare for their return home, plan goals for the future, and anticipate the ways in which they can best integrate their experience into daily life at Princeton.