

German Expat in Bollywood...

...My Experience in the Maximum City



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“Don’t settle down and sit in one place; move around, be nomadic make each day a new horizon.”

- Jon Krakauer



My first experience in India, when I landed in Kolkatta, the City of Joy, 16 years ago, was overwhelming by so many beautiful people, smells and sounds. The city of Berlin, where I grew up, seemed to be a village in comparison to Kolkata.

Well that trip marked the beginning of my love for India and its people. A few years later I landed in the Maximum City – Mumbai at the invitation of my friend (now my Business Partner) Arfi to see options to set up an independent production house (see epilogue).

To move to India required convincing my family and friends, who thought “I lost it”. I followed my heart and decided to settle down in Andheri West. Thus began my life as an Expat in India. A journey that I am enjoying to date.

My first experience was finding an apartment, guess what single woman, a foreigner and Bollywood producer just made my search a little difficult. Oooh Lala, as I always say, this was just the beginning of an exciting journey.



I landed up just a few days before the big festival of Ganpati. The sound of drums, the colourful celebrations, lights and music attracted me towards the festivities. Yes, I was happy to walk alone in the middle of the biggest Vissrajan procession on the entire stretch of Juhu Tara road. It was an experience of a life time. The religious fervour, the celebrations and happiness on faces of people just added to the flavour.

This walk in the midst of the biggest congregation of Mumbai was like a baptism for me. Having walked through several miles and interacting with thousands of people, made me feel part of them.

Being a crusader of climate change and a European, cycling is in my blood. I decided to commute across Mumbai on a cycle. Yes, my local friends freaked out, it's unsafe, the traffic is crazy, you will get knocked down, were the various advises I got. But guess what I again took a leap of faith and today its over 9 years that I ride my cycle from Malad to Bandra at times even late night. I have never felt safety to be a concern, yes, people do look up bewildered and wave to me – it's all part of the fun, in 35°C and 95% humidity cycling can be a great workout !



Few key things that I learnt in my first few days:

- ❑ IST means Indian Stretchable Time. Lol this was a good one when people say, meet me at the Café at 11, it meant they will leave their house at 11 to meet me hopefully by noon 😊
- ❑ When people nod their head sideways, it's a Yes and not a No !!
- ❑ How to buy fish at Versova Koliwada...yes, I am not a European going to any fancy Supermarket but going to the local wet fish market, haggling with the fisherwomen to buy my seafood (even my local friends have never done this..lol).
- ❑ Travelling in the Local Train (not Metro) in a higher speed than any car. Non air-conditioned coach, with a few hundred odd people, jostling for space and guess what every hour is a rush hour in this Maximum City. You can even be stuck in a traffic jam at 2 am !! The City never sleeps. The local trains are a life line ferrying over 4 million people daily , it's a melting pot of cultures, languages, ethnicity like the entire country packed up in one Coach.

#BollywoodisaReligion



Bollywood is perhaps the only religion, which keeps India together, which is larger than Europe, with twice as much people speaking over 400 languages.

Never in any part of the world or history has the art of entertainment kept over 1.3 billion people speak one language or act like one of them. The Bollywood actors are idolised, at times worshipped, which gives them acult status even in Germany.

India being a diverse country not only in terms of ethnicity, social strata and religion has a huge Socio-Economic divide. A fault line that is most peaceful, visible and on the face yet it defies logic as there is no civil unrest between the top 5% that control 95% of wealth and these at the lower 95% that control 5% wealth.

Multiplexes selling tickets and popcorn at prices more expensive than many parts of western world stand next to single hall cinemas, where the common man goes and enjoys a movie perhaps by paying his a 3 day salary to see his favourite actor first day first show.

Power of Cinema at its best, this should be a subject of study at the Ivy League.

Bottomline: India grows on you; patience and....

....Time is the Key thing

As I sign off, I will say India is a country, a sub continent having over 100+ cultures, half dozen religions, 400+ languages and a population of 1.3 billion...it's a continent in itself and is a melting point for all those who love art, history and culture

Being an Ancient civilisation, it has a history not many can boast off, its been invaded by the Mongols, Turks, Afghans, Portuguese, Dutch and of course the British people, yet it has maintained its character and culture

Despite bad press on safety, I have never felt unsafe as a woman, key thing is make local friends, have a good social circle, meet like minded people and attend Art, Film Festivals and yes the Page 3 Parties (parties hosted by the high heeled)

India may not be love at first sight, but it grows on you – there is a good saying, “you cry when you land and you cry when you leave”

For me its been a decade long journey, I am as comfortable in Mumbai as I am in Berlin and will encourage everyone to come and be part of this 5000 year civilisation which has taken the best from all its invasions and the grit of people is something which not many civilisations can boast off

Epilogue (1/2)



15 years ago film business in Europe and India was open to new markets and new experiments. We believed in the idea that films can cross and connect cultures. This was one of the reasons, why I came to Mumbai 10 years ago. At that time Hollywood films had a market share of 5-8% and Indian cinema had an exciting future. Films like “Lunchbox”, “LOEV“ and other films made a good start. Many independent film producers in the world believed they would make it with new stories into new markets. While I was living and working in Mumbai, I was fascinated by the great creativity and the new stories emerging from this continent. People were open and full of enthusiasm.

Epilogue (2/2)



Over the years, cultures and business grew together in a globalized world in a different way than I expected 15 years ago. Still it gave me the possibility to live and work in a beautiful city like Mumbai with more than 500 years of history present everywhere. Today there is more knowledge and understanding between huge continents like Europe and India, and this cooperation and love for each other's cultures should be protected.

A word about

the Author



Katharina studied business and economics in Berlin and Paris at the University of Paris-IX Dauphine, where she obtained her MBA in International Economics. She drove right into film business and has been part of the film fraternity for over 30 years. Beginning her career in film distribution and world-sales at MK2 Marin Karmitz in Paris,

She moved to Toronto, Canada, to pursue her career in film production. After getting to know the North-American film business, she has helmed varied roles in the industry, in both national and international productions, developing feature films, series and documentaries.

Today under her the Banner – Bombay Berlin Film Productions – together with her business partner Arfi Lamba, she has successfully produced feature films and documentaries that have been released at various international film festivals. Her productions have been released in the cinemas or on channels such as 3Sat / ZDF or platforms such as Netflix with another one in the development for a platform. She spends six months in Mumbai and the other six in Berlin.

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