



YOUR GUIDE TO PUNE

By Marcella Zandonai
and Euroculture
Students

Personal Notes

This guide is something that I would have loved to have read before going to Pune. This contains most of my and “my student’s” wisdom therefore value it for what it is. I wanted it to be something from students to students (and visiting professors and admins like me), something that could be a valuable tool for those in need. Pune will be challenging but everyone went there, had a meaningful time and came back alive. Therefore, you can also do it. You can, really, I know that! Have a nice trip 😊

Acknowledgments

This guide was possible thanks to the scholarship I personally received from the Euroculture Consortium (thank you Marloes!) and the initial guidance of my colleague Lars. Once in Pune I had the honor to be hosted by Vaishnavi, Arati and Praveen, three wonderful people who really took care of me so much! I have now an Indian family there. When it came to understanding the local rules and customs I have to thank “my students” who very firstly lost but also super skilled and could first navigate this unknown world themselves and then support me in doing the same: Constance, Laila, Ivo, Nane, Anna, Valentin, Philipp, Sophie, Leroy, Mara and Nora. I would also really thank all the Pune University staff that helped me when most needed! And finally, I need to thank all the other local students because they were just amazing: they took care of us, they organized activities for us and were always happy to share and just to be there!

Disclaimer 1: this guide is based both on personal experience and web information. The date of this guide counts (2022), since India is a fast-paced developing country and everyday something new comes out. Therefore, do read this guide but also double check all your information before actually going to Pune.

Disclaimer 2: India is different....really different! Traffic might be too much for you, food is completely different, people are often staring at you and asking for selfies because most of the times you will be the only European person around, everything tends to be very confusing and chaotic and, for example, when it rains everything becomes mud and it is not easy to go around. People can be too touchy sometimes (they might push you around in buses to make more space for example) and they may seem impolite. Despite, slowly you will find your place there and you will start having friends and undergo various activities. So be patient, do rely on your fellow students and accept India for what it is.

Disclaimer 3: Remember that two, three or four of you (Euroculture students) will be there but also there will be some other (most likely German) students; this is due to the Namaste scholarship program of the University of Goettingen¹. This means that you will be around seven or eight people who can (and should) really mingle to support each other. Most of the times you will be seeing them every day since they tend to have the same courses. Moreover, do make friends wherever you will be/live. In most of the below accommodation you will be surrounded by international people anyways (Thai, Omanis, Iranians etc) who live in India to undergo English classes to ameliorate their language. Do not hesitate to get to know them: they will also take care of you 😊

¹ <https://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/call+for+applications+for+namaste%2B+scholarship/616983.html>

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AFTER Arrival in Pune/India

Getting there (Transports and SIM cards)

Pune International Airport is located approximately 10 km north-east of Pune in the state of Maharashtra, India: <https://www.aai.aero/en/airports/pune>. A rickshaw or motorbike ride with Rapido (see chapter “Pune: neighborhood, advices and things to see”) will be 30 to 40 minutes (without traffic) and will cost between 100 and 250 rupees.



So, once you get there, make sure you have a local SIM to be able to use internet and to book a transport online. I got AIRTEL SIM card which with 250 rupees every 28 days offers you 1.5 GB per day and free calls in India. I had a layover in Delhi and I had to buy my SIM there because even the airport Wifi requires you to have a local number. In Delhi I paid 750 rupees for my SIM and this I knew it was a SCAM. A friend of mine in Mumbai paid 1000 rupees for the same SIM. Anyway, even knowing about this SCAM I could not help but buy it because my layover was too long. I am not sure what is the situation of Pune airport but I suppose that even there, people try and make you buy a SIM card for more than it's actual price. Despite, when you arrive in a foreign country, the first thing is to get connected and to start moving around so, do not worry: pay what you have to pay and think that in 28 days you will download the APP and then recharge for one third of the price you just paid.

If you want to travel to India and you want to cover big distances in a short period of time, I would advise you to fly. There are some very cheap companies and flights. You can find the company names below. To give you an idea my flight Pune-Bengalore – bought only a week before the journey - only costed 45 Euros while my friend's flight Mumbai – Bangalore only costed 28 Euros with IndiGo²!

Airlines Operating on Pune Airport

1. Indigo - 6E
2. Airasia India - I5
3. Jet Airways - 9W
4. Spicejet - SG
5. Goair - G8
6. Vistara - UK
7. Air India - AI

Pune: Neighborhood, Advices and Things to See

One of the most important industrial and educational hubs of India, with an estimated population of 7.4 million as of 2020. Pune was initially given pride of place by Shivaji and the ruling Peshwas, who made it their capital. The British invaded the city in 1817 and, thanks to its cool and dry climate, soon made it the Bombay Presidency's monsoon capital³. As of 2021, Pune Metropolitan Region is the largest in Maharashtra by area, with a geographical area of 7,256 sq km. It has been ranked "the most livable city in India" several times⁴. Pune is heavily polluted and with significant traffic (acoustic as well as car traffic) if compared to Europe.

² <https://www.goindigo.in/>

³ <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/india/maharashtra/pune>

⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pune>

When traveling outside Pune one realizes that the latter can be even worst in bigger cities (logically).

People on the street speak mostly Marathi, Hindi and a bit of English but DO NOT expect everyone to understand you. Do expect people to try and help you however they can but keep in mind that if you want to have a conversation longer than “I go to Koregaon Park. Good bus this?” you might be disappointed. Some words you might want to know are:

Namaskar = Hallo

Bai = Bye

Hoy = Yes

Nae = No

Danya Vaad = Thank you (this is the same in Hindi so, wherever you travel, you can always say it)

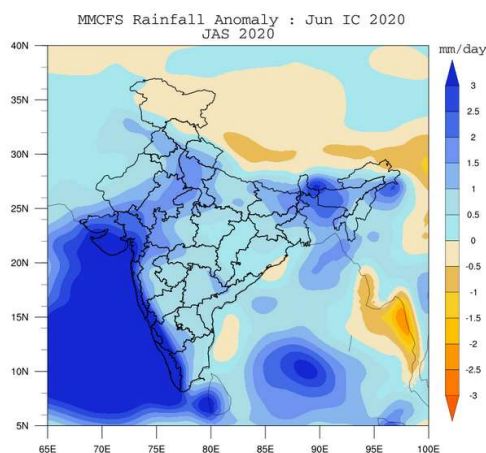
Pune is usually safe (my Indian family also confirmed this to me). There are almost always people around and in the city center (FC Road for example) it is pretty safe to walk alone at night (yes, as a solo female too). It is also safe to take Olas or Rapidos at midnight (done, all good). In terms of robbing, I also always felt pretty safe. Nothing ever happened, people are pretty nice and often helping out. Now, please do not take my words as a “bible” and always verify yourself all the information. Ask around, be alone at night, see how you feel and then act: be aware but not afraid and everything will be fine. I asked my host family, they confirmed the safety till midnight, due to “people around” and so I went around several times and all was good. People around you (your local fellow students) will tend to be a bit worried (like

everywhere in the world) if you go around at night alone but do not worry: they only do it because they care about you and they want you to have the best time ever in Pune. Thank them and keep going around alone, if this is what you feel you want to do (like I did).

The weather is also something to consider: June, July, August and September are within the **monsoon season** PLUS Pune is on the perfect spot for the rain. This means that one can expect rain every day. A waterproof jacket (or at least an umbrella) is advisable. Moreover, rain means mud and mud means difficulties while walking around, especially

when encountering road work. Please do not underestimate puddles - since they can be deeper than you think! - or soil accumulation on the road; the might cover a huge hole (personally experimented: never again, thank you!). Do you see the imagine on your left? If you check the dark bluest spot, there is where Pune is, together with the most rain!

Monsoon Rainfall (July–September) Forecasts based on June initial conditions, from IMD/IITM



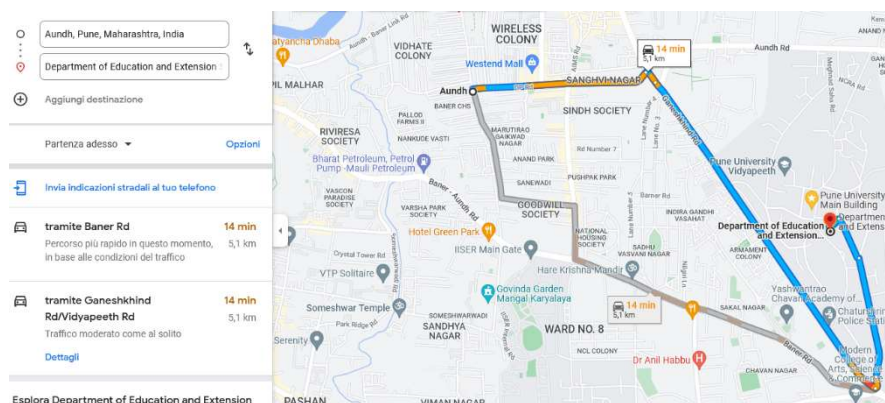
There are several German institutions in Pune such as the DAAD⁵, the Goethe Institut⁶ and the Foreign Language Department⁷. Several German Universities have partnerships with Pune University and the Goethe Institute offers German courses. The people working there are very open minded and will have time for a coffee with you. Pune is pretty “German” as a city and most of Colleges and Universities have partnerships with German institutions; you would be surprised how many Indians in Pune speak German...maybe even better than you! Most of them dream of going to Germany and so they would always be enthusiastic to speak in German with you (if you do, of course!).

If at some point you might suffer from Western melancholy do not hesitate to jump on a Rapido or an OLA (see chapters below) and go to KP (Koregaon Park): there you will find high prices



(for sure) but a quite and green neighborhood with Western Restaurants and white people (rare findings otherwise). Some of the most interesting nights (clubs and concerts or live music) tend to be concentrated there too. Osho Meditation Center⁸ is also located there (very expensive if you ask me).

During the 2022 Winter Semester, most of the students staid in an area called Aundh. From there till University is just 14 minutes ride and 50 minutes' walk. Aundh has developed significantly as a residential area with proximity to the University of Pune⁹. Most of the students in 2022 were living in this area.



There are also several sightseeing in Pune such as:

⁵ <https://www.daad.in/en/about-us/daad-in-india/daad-information-point-pune/>

⁶ <https://www.goethe.de/ins/in/en/sta/pun.html>

⁷ http://www.unipune.ac.in/dept/fine_arts/foreign_languages/

⁸ <https://www.osho.com/osho-meditation-resort>

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aundh,_Pune

Shri Dinkar Gangadhar Kelkar Museum



Choc-abloc with rare exhibits and artifacts, dating back to the Mughal and Maratha Periods, collected by Kelkar Museum over a period of 70 years, this Museum is a visual delight.

Lal Mahal



The Palace is supposed to have been built by Dadaji Konddev in 1640. It is believed that Shivaji was brought up here by his mother and Konddev.

Shaniwar Wada



The historic seven-storied palace of the Peshwa Rule was built by Bajirao I Peshwa in 1736.

Parvati Hill



This is a famous landmark on the southern end of the city. A group of beautiful temples of Shiva, Ganesha, Vishnu and Kartikeya.

Aga Khan Palace



Also known as Kasturba Gandhi Memorial or Kasturba Samadhi, this palace is a memorial of the great Mahatma.

Shindyanchi Chhatri



The memorial to the great warrior Mahadji Shinde is one of the Architectural marvels of Pune.

Pataleshwar Cave Temples



These are 8th century temples carved out of a single huge rock.

Sinhagad



Sinhagad reverberates with many a tale of bravery. It was considered to be one of the many impregnable forts in Western India

And many more¹⁰!

If you want to explore the State of Maharashtra you can jump on a train or a bus and in more or less 4 hours you can be in Mumbai¹¹ the state's capital: busy and trafficked city near the ocean. Otherwise, you can visit Ellora¹² with its UNESCO caves or do a hiking trip to Lonnava¹³. If you do not mind sleeping on a night bus, you can even get to Goa in a night, wake up there and jump into the sea (in November, after the monsoon season is better!). If you want to go to Goa remember to learn how to drive a scooter since it is there the best way of going around the state and the beaches.

Transport within the city (Rapido, Ola, Uber)



People in Pune either have a bike or walk or have a car. Those who do not want to walk or do not have any other mean, tend to use a couple of very useful apps or go to a rickshaw that waits on the street (there are many) and ask for the fee to the specific place they want to go. The option offered to tourists are usually high prices (around 200 rupees...A LOT!) or the use of "meter". Watch out with the "meter" method since it is based on both the time the driver takes to reach the destination and the

kilometers done while driving (like a European taxi, more or less). The risk is drivers taking you around to let the meter go on and on and make you pay more. Better always to decided the price BEFORE starting the ride. Do not be shy: bargain is the way! If you want to be stress-free (more or less) then here you have some apps that might help you.

Please note that what locals do, is to run the three apps at the same time and accept the first ride they get from any of the active apps. One very annoying thing is that some drivers just cancel on you with no reason. Therefore, let the three apps run at the same time, be glad when someone accept your ride but do not close all the apps until the driver actually came to you and you gave him your PIN code to start the ride. This way if the driver cancel, you always have others app still running in the background and maybe another driver accepts your request.

¹⁰ <https://www.aai.aero/en/airports/city-info/pune/Tourist-Place>

¹¹ <https://mumbaitourism.travel/top-places-to-visit-in-mumbai>

¹² <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/243>

¹³ <https://traveltriangle.com/blog/things-to-do-in-lonavala/>

- **Rapido** (cheap and more or less reliable). With Rapido you can book either motorbikes or rickshaws. For motorbikes you sit – without a helmet – behind a driver and you can follow the route on your phone to check if he/she is actually taking you where you told him/her (do not forget to put your other end safely on the motorbike to avoid falling off of it). At the end of the ride you can rate the experience. One of the most annoying things is drivers not being able to use the app, calling you – speaking Marathi or course – asking you things that you do not know. Solution? Grab the first person around you that you feel is trustworthy and ask him/her to speak with the driver for you. This always works. Prices can vary: late night or early morning it is more expensive (max 200 rupees for 7 kms) and during heavy rainfall as well. On your phone once the driver has accepted your ride, you can follow its movement through a GPS. If after a while you see that the driver does not move, do not be afraid of just cancel the ride: you will not lose anything apart from time.



- **Uber (the poshy alternative)** With Uber you can only book cars or rickshaw, no motorbike (motorbikes tend to be way less expensive). At the end of the ride you can rate the experience. On your phone once the driver has accepted your ride, you can follow its movement through a GPS. If after a while you see that the driver does not move, do not be afraid of just cancel the ride: you will not lose anything apart from time.



- **Ola:** Ola has a price range in between Rapido and Uber. The concept is similar and you can book both rickshaw and motorbikes. At the end of the ride you can rate the experience. On your phone once the driver has accepted your ride, you can follow its movement through a GPS. If after a while you see that the driver does not move, do not be afraid of just cancel the ride: you will not lose anything apart from time.



! SideNote: in some places in India (the Bengaluru airport, for example) Ola and Rapido do not work: only Uber. In the southern state of Kerala Rapido does not exist and TK is the local app! This means that the moment you change either city or state (in case you want to travel around) make sure to get to know how people get around the city.



- **Public Buses:** They work but you never know when they come or where exactly they go. An advice is to stop them by waving your hand and scream the place where you want to go; the checkers are usually men with brown uniforms always working on buses. Google Maps has more or less all the bus routes so, you can more or less rely on it (not always and not 100%). Price-wise, if for a 20 minutes Rapido ride is 80, for a bus is 15 rupees. Quite cheap!

Transport Outside the city + Travel Tips

Everything is far, really far. Mumbai is considered to be near and it's a 4-hours train ride. India is huge, really, but if you are committed you can really start traveling south and see one city each day (done that in 21 days). If you do not have a local bank and ATM card then you cannot use all the very useful application Indians use for booking trains or buses.



This means that you have two alternatives. You either go to a travel agency and buy the tickets (buses, night busses and trains) though them, or you go to any train station (called Junction, like "Pune junction" for example) and you can buy a very cheap train ticket at the counter. The issue here is that this kind of tickets are for the lowest class and so you might be a bit shocked about: what kind of people there will be, how their behavior will be and how they will occupy all the possible space in the train. In NO way this kind of train compartments are dangerous. We never felt any danger. It is just low hygiene standards and maybe some loud noises all the times and some people discharging their bladder where it is not so convenient, especially if the train ride lasts 6 hours and you have just started it.

Another super convenient (but not so comfortable) way of traveling outside Pune is to take government busses. Forget about reading the direction they are going to, since it is everything written down in the local language of each State and there is nothing in Latin letters.



The best way is to go to any "Bus Stand" (for example "Pune Bus Stand") and start screaming and/or ask the drivers you see around (brown t-shirts and pants - see picture - and always money in their hands). If you can roll "Rs" and you train the pronunciation 3 minutes before, people can understand you perfectly and will direct you to the right bus. Sometimes to get to a destination you will have to take many busses but this is easy to understand. Even in Tamil Nadu (southern part of India) where people are known for not speaking English, is easy to get by with such a conversation (example):

We: "Trichy Trichy!!!"

The driver: "No today. Kunyakumari - Madurai - Trichy"

We: "Bus 1 and then Bus 2?"

The driver: "EH! Kunyakumari – Madurai. Madurai -Trichy"

We: "Thank you!"

Ps: Make sure to know your geography before traveling. Otherwise these names have no meaning for you and you do not really know the direction you are going.

I personally consider night busses the best option, especially when you do not have time or you want to avoid losing time by staying awake on a bus for hours and hours. Of course, not all buses drive decently and so sleeping is sometimes a challenge (this depends also on the traffic, not only on the driver, to be honest).

Once you reach a city and in order to get to your accommodation, you can either use the Ola and Rapido application or take a local city bus. Please note that these apps work SO differently in every city you go. Sometimes one of them does not work, sometimes none of them work (in Kerala, no Rapido or Ola were existing). When it comes to public buses, please follow the long-distance busses rule of “rolling the R, knowing your geography and screaming the name of the place you want to go to”. In Tamil Nadu (southern state in India) ALL public buses within the cities are FREE for women!

To fetch accommodations around, you can use the classics: Hostel World, AirBnB, Booking, Agoda. Make sure to choose the best rated hotel because a 5 rating in India means a 1 rating in Europe and I believe you do not want to discover that kind of places. Check the reviews as well! Remember that both food and accommodation are subject to GST (Tax) so the price indicated on your app or in your email will NEVER be the same you will pay in the end: it will always be a bit higher.

The University of Pune

The University is a huge area full of trees and far away from traffic. From the main gate to the Department of Sociology is a 20-minute walk. If you go to Uni with Rapido or Ola you can reach the Department and avoid this walking time too. The department is found on Google Maps under the following name:

Department of Education and
Extension Savitribai Phule Pune
University

डिपार्टमेंट ऑफ एज्युकेशन आणि एक्स्टेंशन सावित्रीबाई फुले पुणे
युनिवर्सिटी

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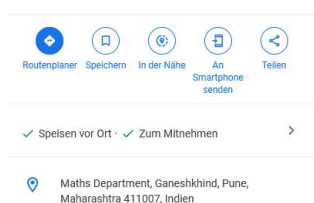
Once you enter in the department (you can see it because from the road you see a huge tank from the Department of Defense) you have on your right the office where you can ask for information and then the next door is the “Euroculture room”: there you can study and chill with your peers. In the same corridor you can find on the left, Shruti’s office and on the right Hermat’s office (respectively, current head of Department and his Assistant). If you continue down the corridor and you turn left, you will have classroom number 1 and 2. There you will have most of your lectures. There is always a university dog going around: he is calm and nice so do not be afraid!

At the University you can also sign up for the library (you will need some passport pictures for doing so), sign up for the gym (you will need some passport pictures for doing so) and for Yoga classes in the morning. In India, for some reasons, having **passport pictures always with you**

is a great idea. For many bureaucratic procedures it is, in fact, required. I, for instance had to have some for getting my money from Western Union¹⁴.



Savitribai Phule Pune University
Food Mall
4,2 ★★★★★ 182 Rezensionen ⓘ
Food-Court



The toilet at Uni are of two types: Indian (a hole without toilet paper but with a water bucket) and western style (a WC without toilet paper). Bring toilet paper if the bucket isn't an option for you. Outside the toilet there is a sink and there, soap is mostly available.

There are also two main Cafeterias and they are very different from each other. One is more like a canteen (25 rupees for a half Thali¹⁵ and 50 for a full Thali) while the other one is more a food court/mall where you can find almost any Indian dish you can imagine (cheap prices but not as cheap as the other one). Most of the food in India is anyway vegetarian. Here you can mostly pay in cash only (unless you have an Indian account, then you can pay with PayTm¹⁶)

Money, International Cards and ATMs

This side is a bit tricky. 1 Euro correspond to 80 rupees, more or less. For a Thali, you can pay as less as 100 rupees (in Aundh) but even 250 rupees. For an Ola or Rapido ride of around 7 kms you can expect to be asked (more or less) 80-100 rupees. For a bus ride, it would be 10-20 rupees. For a drink in Koregaon Park, you might be asked to pay even 400 rupees. For any tourist attraction in Pune they will ask you 300 rupees.

Indians now pay through PayTm and Indian Google Pay (different from the European one, which does not work in India) all the time. Unfortunately, international Banks are not supported



on any Indian application (not even for booking trains, buses or ordering online food). This is why the only option you have is cash.

In tourist area or Western shops (and in some exception in big and important Indian shops too) you can pay with your Visa and/or MasterCard. Make sure to ask if your card works, before ordering anything. In Goa, for instance, you can pay with MasterCard or Visa almost everywhere.

If you stay along time in India you might as well research into which international cards tend to work better there and which ones DO NOT charge you for withdrawing. Revolut¹⁷ and Barclays¹⁸ do not have withdrawals extra charges. Despite, some Indian banks charge for every transaction when they operate with international cards. ICICI Bank¹⁹, for examples does not charge any extra cash. Therefore, if you would have Revolut and you would take out money, you would just be subject to the conversion rate of the day. Another thing to consider is that the maximum withdrawal for international cards in ANY Indian ATM is of 10.000 rupees (150 euros, more or less) per day. Not much, really.

¹⁴ <https://www.westernunion.com/us/en/home.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/indian-thali#Regional-variations>

¹⁶ <https://paytm.com/>

¹⁷ <https://www.revolut.com/>

¹⁸ <https://www.barclays.co.uk/travel/managing-money-abroad/travel-wallet/>

¹⁹ <https://www.icicibank.com/>

contacts of our Alumni who went to Pune or just write an email to the India Office²³. They will be more than happy to help!

Despite potentially being able to choose between renting private rooms or long-term hostel, some of your fellow student feel advising you to go to the hostel provided by the Indian Office instead of looking for private accommodations for the following reason:



- landlords tend to make you wait before giving you the contract (the latter being very important for registering yourself once in Pune)
- finding a private accommodation is mostly based on knowing someone in Pune
- people do not want to rent for just 3 or 4 months (the time that you will be in Pune)

There is also the option of the **Student Hostel on Campus**. Most of your Indians fellow students will be living there. So far, no one I know went and lived there. Despite, before going to Pune, consider also this option and



take into account that, since it is an accommodation thought for Indian students, you might encounter some impediments. The first two I can think of are the “Indian shower” (picture on the left) and the “Indian WC” to name a few – good old buckets (picture on the right). Some of you might be super flexible (good on you!) but some of you might not. Therefore, please take all these advice into account when choosing an accommodation. Moreover, remember that for you to make your life easier it would be advisable to find an accommodation near or with your fellow students. That way you could go to school and/or go out in the night together and go back home accompanied too. This would help improving your mood, even during gloomy and difficult days.

Culture in Pune: Ready to Celebrate?!

There is so much to experience and see in Pune during the month of August²⁴ because of two reasons: August is one of the holiest months for Hindus and because in Pune Ganesh (the elephant God) is particularly loved. When I was there last year I celebrated Krishna’s birthday with drums, dances and human castles all over the city and also Ganesh



Ganpati, the Ganesha’s biggest festival in the whole country. The staff in the University not only will try its best to organize a wonderful culture-rich welcome week for you but it will also invite you to join them for some meaningful celebrations. The 15th of August is, for example, the day in which Indian celebrate their country,



²³ india.office@uni-goettingen.de

²⁴ <https://www.prokerala.com/general/calendar/hinducalendar.php?year=2023&mon=august&sb=1>

their flag and gather for some important ceremonies. Last year the students were invited to join the University flag-rising for this special occasion.

Therefore, do not be afraid to immerge yourself in such celebrations and let the culture in Oune to amaze you fully!

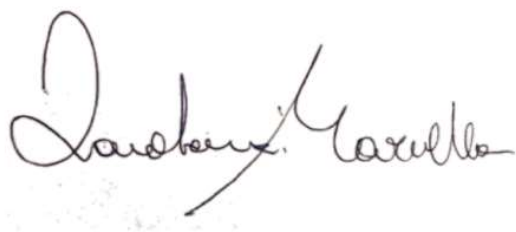
Last Considerations: Start or End?

And with these last remarks, I leave you to experience one of the (possibly) most challenging but enriching experiences of your Euroculture journey.

Hope all was useful for you. If only I had someone like me writing such things and helping me out! But you are lucky today. Have a nice day and enjoy India and Pune.

Nice to “meet you”

Marcella Zandonai

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Marcella Zandonai', with a large, stylized initial 'M'.