Note: this testimonial is written from a non-Indian perspective; obviously if you are an Indian citizen your experience will be quite different than mine and some of my points may be irrelevant to you.

Visa Application process:

The visa application process from Australia is quite simple. It is handled by VFS Global (http://www.vfs-in-au.net/) and you just need to go to their website to lodge an online application for a student visa. You will be asked for references, both in Australia and in India, during the process. Just be aware of one thing: if your visa is issued for a duration longer than 180 days you will be required to register with the Police in Ahmedabad, which is an extremely time consuming process. You will also need to unregister with the Police when you leave India. Also note that the duration of your visa starts from the day it is issued.

Enrolment procedure (eg bidding process) and recommended subjects to study:

Enrolment procedure

Again, the enrollment procedure at IIM-A is quite simple. About a month before the exchange starts you will receive a package from the PGP (Post-Graduate Program) exchange coordinator containing the description of all subjects available to exchange students (both in PGP, the 2-year MBA program and in PGP-X, the 1-year executive MBA program), as well as a form to indicate your choice of subjects. Most of the subjects have quite large quotas, so it shouldn’t be a problem to get in. Only few subjects have limited seats available, and in that case it is on a first-come, first-serve basis. I also recommend taking classes in PGP-X, as the students are older, have more work experience and are more mature than the ones in PGP, which may add to the class discussions.

Upon arrival at IIM-A you will be required to pay your fees, including books, library, computer services, accommodation and alumni fees (optional). As an exchange student at IIM-A you have the opportunity to become part of the Alumni.

Subjects

Below is a description and assessment of the three subjects that I took while at IIM-A:

“CINE: Understanding Creativity, Innovation, Knowledge, Networks and Entrepreneurship”: This is a popular course given by Prof. Anil Gupta, who is a prominent figure of the IIM-A, as well as in India. The course focuses on innovation in the context of India, and more specifically on grassroots innovation (e.g. innovation at the Bottom Of the Pyramid). The course very much revolves around Prof. Gupta's personality and if you want to have a preview of what the course looks like, please watch his video on TED (http://www.ted.com/talks/anil_gupta_india_s_hidden_hotbeds_of_invention.html). The course involves class presentations, a book review, as well as a group project. The great part is that it introduces you to a very different way of approaching innovation and managing it, with many examples. The downside is that it is based on a lot of student presentations, which may become overlapping after a while.

“LVMR: Leadership, Vision, Meaning and Reality”: This is a course where leadership concepts and dilemmas are introduced and discussed through literature readings. The readings include everything from Sun Tzu to Cervantes, and the Mahabharata. The course involves group presentations and reports, as well as a group project. The good part of the course is its approach, where literature serves to trigger class discussions and where students exchange / defend their point of view regarding their role as future leaders. The downside is that each class is heavily dependent on student participation, which makes lectures uneven, depending on students’ interests. If you take that course, don’t miss Tejdeep Kaur Menon’s intervention, she’s an assistant Director.
General of Police, and her life experiences and insights are breathtaking.

“EIE: Enterprise and Innovation in Education”: As the title says, this course discusses education from an innovation and business perspective. I believe it is a very useful course if your plan to get into the education business, especially in emerging economies, but not only. It discusses many education models, through examples and field visits. The course involves an exam, presentations, as well as a group project. The good part of the course is that it provides true insights into the challenges of education, and the models to address them, in the context of emerging economies. If you plan to take that course, don’t miss the field / school visits, plenty are organized. The downside is that sometimes the lectures lack dynamism and structure, which needs to be compensated by thorough reading of the course material provided.

Other subjects for which I heard good things about include “Business-to-Business Marketing” and “Good Governance and People Living in Poverty”.

Workload at exchange school:

Workload is less than at AGSM, but this is to some extent due to the fact that 3 courses are required on exchange, instead of 4 in each of the three first sessions at AGSM. I believe this allows for more personal readings and work, especially given the fact that the perspective here in India is very different (e.g. with a focus on grassroots innovation, social enterprise, poverty challenges, etc.) and challenges the “western” student.

Accommodation options:

IIM-A requires all of its students to live on campus, and I strongly recommend doing so anyway given the overall convenience it provides. Now, depending on your marital status you will have two alternatives:

(1) If you are single (not my case), you will most probably live in the dorms on the Old Campus. The good thing there is that you will easily get to socialize with other PGP students and participate in the many social events they organize. The downside is that the level of comfort is quite low and the rooms are small, with a high noise level throughout the day and night.

(2) If you are married (my case), you can request an MSH (Married Student Housing) accommodation on the New Campus. The good thing is that you will be living in a very comfortable 60m2 flat, including washing machine and gas stove, with cleaning services provided. The area is also significantly calmer than the Old Campus. The downside is that you will be further away from social activities, as well as from classrooms, which are mostly on the Old Campus. The Old and New Campuses are connected through a small tunnel, and walking from one to the other takes from 5 – 10 min depending on where you are / go. Also note that PGP-X students, as well as 2nd year PGP students, tend to live on the New Campus.

Campus Facilities:

Money

There is a branch of the SBI (State Bank of India) on the Old Campus. This is where you will be requested to pay your fees upon arrival. The branch also has an ATM, which is very convenient, as shops and restaurants are provided on campus.

Food

Several restaurants are provided on campus. The café TANSTAAFL, or CT, is open very late in the night. CT’s food is OK, but there is not much variety. Look for the specials, which tend to be tastier than the food on the menu. The café Joos is next to CT and they make good juices and sandwiches. The mess is the local canteen, where you can pay by the meal, or monthly. But remember there are plenty of restaurants that deliver on campus, including for western food: McDonald’s, Pizza Hut, and for Indian Food: Punjab King, Curries. Curries and a Subway are also at walking distance from campus (10 min). If you are able to cook, people come every day on campus (both Old and New), selling delicious organic fresh fruits and vegetables. Finally, tasty street food and chai are available outside the main gate (Old Campus).
Other

The campus also includes:

- A small pharmacy (Apollo Medical Store, Old Campus), where you can find common medicine, as well as some food essentials, stationary, etc.
- The Library, where you will find space to work in groups or individually,
- A post office, although I recommend avoiding sending / receiving valuable parcels (I still have a parcel retained at the foreign post office after 1.5 month),
- A small, but functional gym, accessible for a subscription of approx. 300 rupees per month. Yoga classes are also available every night next to the gym,
- A dairy shop (Amul), which sells delicious yoghurt and lassies (on the Old Campus, close to the professors' accommodations)

Useful facilities outside campus include:

- A chain of bookshops (Crossword), the biggest one is in Mithakali, a quarter of Ahmedabad,
- Several shopping malls, including Iscon Mall and Gulmohar Park (both in Satellite), as well as Himalaya Mall, which is smaller, but also closer to campus.

All places outside campus are easily accessible using auto-rickshaws that you can find at the Old and New Campus main gates. When taking auto-rickshaws, ask the driver to use the meter. This will spare you unfruitful negotiations over the price of the ride. Prices will vary between 30 and 80 rupees, depending on the distance, unless your destination is far away.

Career Services:

Career Services events include Lateral Placements (for students with professional experience) and Placements (for all students). This is the major focus of most of the Indian PGP students while you will be on exchange. Career Services does not allow exchange students to take part in these events, and attendance to company power-point presentations is discouraged.

Student Life:

As I was living on the New Campus, I attended very few dorm parties or other social events. There are plenty of opportunities to meet Indian students and socialize with them through the dorms, but also in class or through field trips. A major event on campus is Chaos, which takes place in mid-January, and lasts several days. Also, exchange students tend to socialize together, as we share information, discover the city, try new restaurants and organize trips.

Highlights:

- The city of Ahmedabad, which is a very traditional Indian city, far from any tourist path. It is an amazing experience for someone new to India like me. Don’t miss the Heritage Walk (http://www.egovamc.com/heritage/home.asp), which leaves every morning at 8 am from the Swaminarayan Mandir and takes 2h30 to complete. It’s probably the best introduction to the city. Also, have a chai at the House of MG (http://www.houseofmg.com/) afterwards!

- Changing your perspective on business (“what does it mean to do business in India?”) and life (“what does it mean to live in such a huge and diverse country”) through lectures, discussions with Indian students and your own experience of life there.
• Travelling with auto-rickshaws (especially at night). This is a great way to not only experience the hectic traffic, but also observe the life of the city’s inhabitants.

• Field trips organized through courses. I had the opportunity to visit schools and NGOs in villages; others visited slums and spoke with their inhabitants. Try to enroll in as many as possible (even if you don’t follow the specific course), these are unique experiences.

Things AGSM MBA students should consider/be aware of when applying to this school for exchange:

When arriving in Ahmedabad, you cannot expect anything like at the AGSM or other “western” -style MBAs: the classes (at least the ones I took) are socially-oriented in the context of India and comprise mostly Indian students; the students are younger but extremely bright; the environment is not as “fun” (e.g. not many bars, no alcohol and no beaches!); etc. Furthermore, life in Ahmedabad exposes you to extreme poverty and inequality. Children live barefoot on the streets on the other side of IIM-A’s main gate. But if your goal is to experience first-hand the growth of a fascinating country, with its strengths and weaknesses, to shift your view regarding what it means to do business, as well as to work along India’s business leaders of tomorrow, then I don’t think there is a better exchange available. Here are my top, more concrete, tips:

• Visa: Try to avoid getting a visa for more than 180 days if possible. You will save a lot of time. But if you want to discover the inner workings of Indian bureaucracy, get a visa for more than 180 days!

• Students: You cannot expect the same maturity in class participation and discussion as at AGSM, as students are younger with less work experience,

• Lectures: Lectures tend to be less structured and concept-oriented than at AGSM, but rely heavily on concrete and detailed examples,

• Health: I haven’t had any serious health problem. You should make an appointment with a Doctor at the UNSW Health Services and check for vaccinations, medicines, etc. at least enough in advance before you go. One tip to avoid stomach problems is to take yeast; there is a medicine called “Travel Bug” in Australia (http://www.innerhealth.com.au/content/product/ethical-nutrients-travel-bug) and you can find the same thing in India, it’s called “Econorm”. But the best thing to prevent stomach problems, is to be careful (e.g. eat where it is clean, wash your hands, etc.), at least the first few weeks, before your body adjusts.

Please do not hesitate to contact me through AGSM’s Partnerships Coordinator for any further information.