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VOLUNTEER INDIA



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SWAAGAT

"While in Rome do what Romans do": a saying. But practically, can everyone do it? At least I cannot completely. Blending with the scene is essential but to a moderate extent only. I think that most foreigners coming to India would make an attempt to learn several aspects at least with the scope of acceptance from the hosts and some for pure fun. It is nice to see a white woman clad in Saree and a white man in a dhoti. It is very interesting to watch them struggling to eat with hands. It is nice to see them say Vanakkam. There is a place in Madurai called the tailor's market where I think there are more foreigners thronging than the locals to buy Indian clothes. They learn to dance to the tunes of Bollywood, learn yoga, eat Panneer butter masala and butter chickens, do not keep up time (blames "Indian punctuality" in jest), learn to shove themselves into the packed buses, enjoy the auto rickshaw ride, learns the trick of crossing the Indian roads...all of these uniquely Indian. For most people it just stops here and very few go beyond this phase to explore the actual core and values of a different land. After an initial unsettling time the foreigners slowly get in to the swing of Indian living. But, alas, here comes the time when the visa is about to get elapsed or it is time to leave to catch up with the work in their countries. Arriving at their land, there is another adjustment they have to make- something they have been doing all their life yet find tough to adapt to. This is called as "Reverse Culture Shock". I am sure some of you would go through this at some point of time.

"It's so tough to return to your own 'reality' and realize that you don't necessarily agree with your life or your culture or the values underlying it".

JAGADISH KUMAR

COUNTRY DIRECTOR - INDIA

PROJECTS ABROAD

DEEPAVALI IN INDIA

Deepavali (Sanskrit: row of lights) or **Diwali** (contracted spelling) is the Hindu festival of lights, held on the final day of the Hindu calendar (compare New Year's Eve).

It is celebrated by Hindus all over the world, every year. There are two mythological legends associated with



Deepavali. The first Deepavali was held to celebrate the return of the Rama, King of Ayodhya, his wife Seeta and brother Lakshmana to Koshala after a war in which he killed the demon Ravana. It was getting dark, so people along the way lit oil lamps to light their way. Second, it is celebrated in commemoration of the destruction of the demon called **Narakasura** by Lord Krishna. As Lord

Krishna killed Narakasura on the Chaturdasi day (the fourteenth lunar day) it is also known as Narakachaturdasi. So Deepavali is a festival symbolising the destruction of evil forces. Diwali, the festival of lights, is held throughout India.

In South India, **Narakachaturdasi** is the main day of celebration with lot of fire crackers at dawn while in North India the main celebration is on Amavasya evening with Lakshmi Puja followed by lighting of oil lamps in and around the house and bursting of crackers. In Kerala, this is celebrated only by Hindus. It falls on the preceding day of the New Moon in the Malayalam month Thulaam (October-November).

On the day of **Diwali**, all in the house have their oil bath and put on new cloths before sunrise. They also burn crackers. The traditional business community starts their financial new year on **Deepavali** and new account books are opened on this day. Sweets are then served followed by bursting of crackers. Diwali is a very special occasion for the Hindus in India starting from old to young and rich to poor.



- ✓ Care volunteers will be taught about new games which would be useful for the volunteers to teach in their respective placement.
- ✓ Medical volunteers were requested to sign-up for the Hospital visit during which you will visit the Leprosy Hospital, Siddha & Ayurvedha Hospital and to the Mental Health Centre. Volunteers were also taken for a visit to St. Joseph's Hospice - a place for Dyeing Destitute.
- ✓ Projects Abroad India will be organizing veterinary camps at the villages near Madurai. And volunteers will be given an opportunity to observe the Animal Birth Control (ABC) surgery and that will be held at the Thirupparankundram University.
- ✓ Conservation project volunteers will be taken to the Market every Wednesday to canvas about the vermi-compost unit to the near-by villages. Also Projects Abroad India will be taking the volunteers to the children's home to do the follow-up work and to the School for the Environmental awareness campaign.
- ✓ During the month of October Projects Abroad India organises the weekend away trip to the places namely - Kodaikanal and Thekkady.
- ✓ Projects Abroad celebrates the Children's Day at the Care Home - Anbarasi Social Action which is located at the nearby town Dindigul.

All the above activities and their dates are liable to change. Anyhow our staff will be in contact with you if there is any change. So, please try to catch up with the staff members to enjoy your time in India.. And by the way please don't forget to celebrate the Ganesh Chaturthi and Pooja festivals during the upcoming month!

Local Fairs & Festivals

Here we introduce the new column in our Newsletter - Local Fairs & Festivals. In this section, we inform you the festivals that has been predominantly celebrated in the southern part of India during the month of November 2011. We hope everyone will enjoy this...!

| Date | Festival | Importance |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| 7 th November | Bakrid | In addition to the religious way of celebrations, people treat the day as a family get together. Also the share will be given also to the friends and neighbours. |
| 14 th November | Children's Day | Former Prime Minister of India - Mr Jawaharlal Nehru's birthday been celebrated as Children's Day all over the country. On this particular day, all the schools will be having special programs such as culture/sports/games organised to make the kids enjoy the day. |

Here Projects Abroad celebrate the birthdays for the following volunteers and the staff members during the month of November 2011.. We wish the following a very happy birthday!!!

Volunteers....

8th November - Ms Lisetta WOUTERS

9th November - Ms Emberly JAY

15th November - Ms Pia OPDAL

15th November - Mr Noah VAILLANCOURT

Birthdays!!!

Staff....

Ms Nadia Chellam - 9th November

Mr Anantha Subramanian - 17th November

Mr Jagadish Kumar - 21st November

Donations

VOLUNTEERS' CONTRIBUTION

◆ Our Care volunteer — Mr Mikkel RASMUSSEN donated some wooden tables and chairs which costs about 30000 INR to the Care placement : Amar Seva Sangam. Thank you Mikkel!

◆ During the Projects Abroad's organised Diwali Celebrations, our Medical volunteer - Ms Ingrid Valent gave some sweets and Chocolates to the children at Vallalar Illam. Also another Medical volunteer - Ms Nicola Frenkel contributed some Stationary materials to the kids at Vallalar Illam. Well done girls!!!



PROJECTS ABROAD CONTRIBUTION

Projects Abroad India contributes 7000 INR to the kids at Vallalar Illam to celebrate the Diwali Festival.



VISIT MADURAI



The best time to visit the Meenakshi Amman temple is from 09:00 to 11:00 am & from 06:00 to 07:00 pm..

Traditional Dance Show available at Madurai – You can watch Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi during the weekend evenings and the name of the place is Kadambhavanam.



Gandhi Museum - the museum where one can see the monuments of Mahatma Gandhi (the great Indian Freedom fighter and leader). The museum will be kept open from 10:00 AM to 13:00 PM and from 14:00 PM to 17:30 PM on all days except during National Holidays!

The rock-cut temple- Thirupparankundram is open from 05:30 am to 01:00 pm and from 16:00 to 21:00 pm. This is the place where you can see White peacocks, a rare variety Indian Bird.



India : a second country and a big family!

I decided to go to India and be a volunteer there for 2 months in the winter of 2011, when I was still an exchange student from France in an Irish university. I had discovered Projects Abroad on the internet and soon asked them to enroll me as I thought it would be reassuring for my family if I was leaving with an organisation that would be there for me if I needed help. Of course they worried anyway, but in spite of all my friends and family could say about me going to live in this unknown and tiny Indian village, I knew that it was the best decision I had taken in a long time. I knew that not only I would be happy over there, but also that I would feel completely at home. And Krishna knows I was right! I knew I was going to be in the same placement that another French girl, Charlotte. We met in Dubai, during a layover, and spent the next two flights together. I was worried we would miss our last flight (from Chennai to Madurai) because we had to check our baggage again. In the end it only took a few minutes and our flight to Madurai was one hour late (which happens all the time actually!). Then, upon our arrival in Madurai, we were greeted by Pandi, from Projects Abroad. Pandi is the adorable and honorable Indian man who would be there for the next months to help us with any sort of problems that may arise and indicate us how to get around. We had our first meal in an Indian restaurant, and at first eating with my right hand was a bit tricky!

Although after a few days, I got used to it and really enjoyed eating with my hand rather than using boring knives and forks.

At my placement, we would eat rice most of the time. It was always mixed with different spicy sauces that were all delicious! But my favorite dishes were chapatti, dosa, naan, which are some sort of bread that Indians eat with a spicy sauce! Without forgetting the excellent Indian desserts, such as payasam!

I was working at Amar Seva Sangam, which is an institution for physically and mentally disabled people. It wasn't easy, but I can't say it was hard either. It can never be easy when you're taking care of children that can't walk or that have a missing arm. Of course it is difficult to see these kids in their condition, but quickly all you see is the positive side of things: these children are getting physiotherapy and most of them will know how to walk after a few years spent in the institution. But there's not a day you will not laugh, and without even knowing it, you will love them as your own children. These children are so amazing, so brave... I miss them all. I got attached pretty intensely to one of them in particular; Guru, that I terribly miss since I'm back. I have a great respect for the people who created

Amar Seva Sangam, M. Ramakrishnan and Sankara Raman, being both physically disabled people. They have created such a heart-warming place that became a second family to me! Being atheist, I'm surprised I also miss the



prayers... You don't know how it feels unless you've sat for 40 minutes around 73 children praying. It is so beautiful and powerful.

The language barrier was a bit difficult and frustrating, but like everything else, you get used to it! I thought that Indian people would know English, at least the basics. Although where I lived, most people just spoke Tamil. It's not a problem really, there's always a way to understand each other. I learned a little bit of Tamil, which was really helpful sometimes! For example, I learned how to say «I don't understand» and ended up using it almost every day. Indians would be enchanted to hear me speak Tamil



and would just laugh, even if I was telling them that I didn't understand a word of what they were saying! But I have to admit it was great when someone could speak English so we could talk about our cultures, our lives and our families. More importantly, I have met so many amazing people that quickly became my friends and confidants. Sangheeta, one of the girls who worked with the disabled kids with me, is one of my Indian girl friends. She is this beautiful Indian woman who is still so native. And that's exactly why she is so precious to me: her spirit hasn't been polluted by globalisation and evolution. Their culture and religion make them so different from Occidentals and I feel very lucky to have met those people.

One of the best days in India was the day of my 23rd birthday. Our kids were invited in a school to perform dances, songs and prayers. Riding the bus for hours with the 73 children (+ members of staff), made this day very special. The kids were so happy to be out for the day that they were clapping their hands and asking me to dance on Tamil songs, which I gladly accepted! The show they performed was so cute and made me so proud of them. Then, we went to the beach with all the kids and it was amazing just to see them so happy to play in the sand and in the ocean... I will never forget this birthday!

The atmosphere in the villages and cities I visited is hard to describe. It's full of smells, often bad, but sometimes you can catch the smell of jasmín hanging from an Indian woman's hair, or the smell of this really funny fruit that is the jackfruit! On the road, it's a complete chaos made of buses, cars, scooters, bikes and rickshaws. There is absolutely no restrictions in India, so everybody drives as they please. Personally I'm pretty surprised I haven't been involved in an accident in 2 months in India, and I have never seen one either. They seem to live quite good in this chaos and to be honest, I felt extremely good too. My time in India was probably the most human experience of my life. I have seen things and met extraordinary people that made me see life in a whole different way...and I have become good friends with other volunteers that share the same interests. Everybody should go to India and see from their own eyes how beautiful this country and its people are.

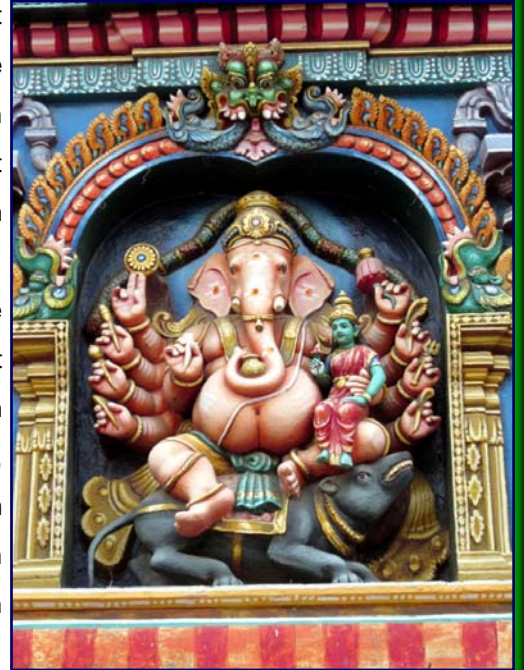
(Advice for future volunteers in Amar Seva Sangam: if you want to spend a nice weekend, allow yourself to leave for 3 days minimum. You have to carefully consider the distance between your placement and the place you want to go. Most of the time it isn't that far away but it always takes at least 4 hours to go anywhere from Amar Seva Sangam. Every journey takes forever because of the state of the roads but also because the bus often stops!! Also, it is useless to pack things such as shampoo, shower gel, etc...They have all these things over there too!!)

Ms Magaly DAO | France

Mein indisches Abenteuer

„Warum denn Indien? Kannst du nicht lieber nach Amerika gehen?“ Mit solchen oder ähnlichen Fragen haben mich viele Freunde und Verwandte konfrontiert, nachdem sie von meinen Reiseplänen erfahren hatten: ein mehrmonatiges Journalismus-Praktikum im südindischen Tamil Nadu mit Projects Abroad. Ich hatte gerade mein Studium beendet und wollte noch einmal raus, „ganz weit weg“, bevor ich entgültig ins Berufsleben starte.

Es war meine erste Reise außerhalb Europas und somit war der große Kulturschock nicht nur vorprogrammiert, sondern geradezu fest eingeplant und höchst willkommen. Direkt nach meiner Ankunft auf dem Flughafen Madurai ging es los. Zugegeben, im ersten Moment habe ich in dem Taxi, das mich zu meiner Gastfamilie bringen sollte, tatsächlich noch nach einem Sicherheitsgurt gesucht. Solche deutschen Reflexe habe ich mir jedoch schleunigst abgewöhnt! Schon während dieser ersten Taxifahrt hat mich



der indische Alltag völlig in Beschlag genommen und mir deutlich gemacht, dass Indien und Mitteleuropa zwei verschiedene Welten sind bzw. dass das Leben hier und dort nach einem anderen Rhythmus verläuft. Besser, schlechter? Weder noch. Eben anders!

Um diese fremde Welt jemandem zu beschreiben, der sie nicht selbst erlebt hat, kann man sich nur auf einschlägige Adjektive beschränken: bunt, laut, heiß, aufregend, chaotisch. In Wirklichkeit ist Südindien jedoch viel mehr als das, und vor allen Dingen unendlich faszinierend! Jeden Tag gibt es neue Erfahrungen für alle Sinne zu entdecken und neue Begegnungen zu erleben. Die freilaufende Kuh auf der Straße, der heilige Elefant im Tempel, das scharf gewürzte Essen im Restaurant, die leuchtend bunten Saris der Inderinnen und das irrwitzige Fahr- und Hupverhalten der Rikschafahrer sind nur wenige Beispiele für den niemals langweiligen Alltag in Madurai und Umgebung. Jede

Mahlzeit wird zur kulinarischen Horizonterweiterung und jede Straßenüberquerung zum Abenteuer.

Auch das Journalismusprojekt von Projects Abroad ist immer für eine Überraschung gut. Hierzu sollte man allerdings wissen, dass die Bürostrukturen beim Madurai Messenger (der einzigen englischsprachigen Zeitschrift in der Stadt) mit europäischen Verhältnissen nur bedingt zu vergleichen sind. Vorsichtig formuliert, gleicht die Organisation häufig einem Balanceakt zwischen systematischer Improvisation und reinem Zufallsprinzip! Mit ein wenig Eigeninitiative, guten Englischkenntnissen und viel Spaß am Schreiben stehen den freiwilligen Praktikanten aus aller Welt jedoch viele Möglichkeiten offen, die Journalismusbüros in ihren Heimatländern wahrscheinlich kaum zu bieten hätten. Der Themenschwerpunkt des Madurai Messenger liegt auf dem breit gefächerten Bereich "Human Interest".



An potenziellem Stoff für lesenswerte Artikel und interessanten Interviewpartnern mangelt es hier nie; sei es der selbsternannte Wunderheiler aus dem Nachbardorf oder das siebenjährige Wunderkind mit Weltrekord! Darüber hinaus habe ich schnell festgestellt, dass ein Interview mit dem ganz normalen Mann von nebenan ebenso spannend sein kann wie eins mit einer Lokalberühmtheit. Ähnliches gilt für die passenden Artikelfotos: Lohnenswerte Motive und fotobegeisterte Menschen lauern buchstäblich an jeder Ecke.

Müsste ich aus all meinen neugewonnenen Erfahrungen in Indien die beste auswählen, wäre es das Leben in der Gastfamilie. Mutter und Tochter haben mich und meine Mitbewohnerinnen nicht nur als Schwestern angesprochen („Akka“ / „Thangachi“), wie es unter Frauen und Mädchen in Tamil Nadu üblich ist, sondern uns auch so behandelt. Sprachlich wie kulturell haben wir während der gemeinsamen Abende unglaublich viel voneinander gelernt! Durch den Familienanschluss lässt es sich weitaus besser und authentischer in die indische Kultur eintauchen als während eines Hotelurlaubs. So war meine Gastmutter für mich z.B. die ideale Lehrmeisterin im Sari-Wickeln und meine Gastschwester eine begabte Henna-Künstlerin. Gleichzeitig ist man durch die gemeinsame Unterbringung mit anderen Freiwilligen niemals allein in der fremden Kultur. Zusammen lässt es sich eben am besten darüber staunen, wenn man von Dorfkindern nach Autogrammen gefragt wird, wenn der über 70-jährige Yoga-Lehrer plötzlich einen Kopfstand macht, wenn ein mit vier Personen und zwei Kisten völlig überladenes Motorrad vorbeibraust... und und und.

Zugegeben: Es war nicht immer leicht. Oft gab es Sprachbarrieren zu überwinden, oft musste wegen Stromausfall bei Kerzenschein geduscht werden, oft wurde eine vierstündige Busfahrt (was in Indien übrigens als Kurzstrecke verstanden wird) zur Belastungsprobe für Rücken und Nerven. Dennoch möchte ich keinen Tag meines indischen Abenteuers missen! Jetzt nach meiner Rückkehr kann ich meinen Verwandten und Freunden deshalb sagen: „Ja, klar hätte ich auch nach Amerika gehen können. Aber ich bin sehr froh, stattdessen in Indien gewesen zu sein!“



Ms Kristina WILSHUSEN | Germany

Upcoming Weekend – Munnar

It is one of the attractions that contributed to Kerala's popularity as a travel destination among domestic and foreign travelers. Situated at the confluence of three mountain streams - Muthirapuzha, Nallathanni and Kundala, the hill station of Munnar once used to be the summer resort of the erstwhile British administration in south India. This hill station is marked by vast expanses of tea plantations, colonial bungalows, rivulets, waterfalls and cool weather. It is also an ideal destination for trekking and mountain biking.

One of the main attractions near Munnar is the Eravikulam National Park. This park is famous for its endangered inhabitant - the Nilgiri Tahr. The park is also home to several species of rare butterflies, animals and birds. A great place for trekking, the park offers a magnificent view of the tea plantations and also the rolling hills caressed by blankets of mists. The park becomes a hot destination when the hill slopes here get covered in a carpet of blue, resulting from the flowering of Neelakurinji. It is a plant endemic to this



part of the Western Ghats which blooms once in twelve years. Anamudi Peak is the highest peak in south India and is situated inside the Eravikulam National Park.

Another place of interest, Mattupetty is known for its storage masonry dam and the beautiful lake, which offers pleasurable boat rides, enabling one to enjoy the surrounding hills and landscape. Mattupetty fame is also attributed to the dairy farm run by the Indo-Swiss Livestock Project, where one would come across different high yielding breeds of cows. Near the town of Munnar is Chinnakanal and the waterfalls here, popularly known as Power House Waterfalls,

cascade down a steep rock. The spot is enriched with the scenic view of the Western Ghat ranges.

Munnar has a legacy of its own when it comes to the origins and evolution of tea plantations. Taking account of this legacy and to preserve and showcase some of the exquisite and interesting aspects on the genesis and growth of tea plantations in Kerala's high ranges, a museum exclusively for tea was opened some years ago by Tata Tea in Munnar. This Tea Museum houses curios, photographs and machineries; all of which have a story to tell on the origins and growth of tea



plantations in Munnar. The museum is located at the Nallathanni Estate of Tata Tea in Munnar and is worth a visit.

Udhagamandalam / Ooty

Ooty is one of the important and interesting tourist spot of Tamilnadu. This place is also a place of visit in the summer season for its chill climate. Udhagamandalam-Ooty in short is called as the "Queen of Hills". It is located at the tri junction of Tamilnadu, Kerala and Karnataka. It is located in the Nilgris (also called as Blue Mountain).

Nilgris is a beautiful mountain range which is a part of Western Ghats. Totally there are three places to visit

namely Kothagiri, Coonoor and Ooty. Among these three Ooty is given the primal importance because of its scenic beauty and excellent climate conditions. Nilgris is oldest than the Great Himalayas. Like icing on a cake Ooty adds



pride to this mountain range.

Just like any other hill station there are a lot of scenic view points in Ooty and each one of them have been converted into a good tourist attraction.

Botanical Garden - Ooty:

Located inside the limits of Ooty, it is the most famous tourist attraction in Ooty. This garden was laid out in 1848 and is currently maintained by the horticulture department of Tamil Nadu. There is a beautiful green lawn where one can relax with friends and family. There are trees collected from



different parts of the world. Shrubs and hedges are cut to resemble animals and look really beautiful. During the month of May, there is an annual summer festival inside the garden where there are flower shows and various cultural programs that showcase the talent of the locals people.

During the month of May, there will be boat races held at the Ooty Lake. Adjacent to lake there are a lot of the other places of interest for tourist that have come up. To mention few - Toy train ride, 3-D shows, Tora-tora ride, Car rides (something similar to go-carting). Outside lake there are ponies available for rides.

Dodabetta Peak is the highest peak of Nilgris hills as well as in south India. It lies at the junction of Western and Eastern Ghats.

Wellington:

It is a very scenic and serene place. The golf course is one of the most beautiful golf courses I have seen. Nearer to Ooty is the Mudumalai National Forest where one can go for camping and safari. There are vast variety of animals and birds in this forest.

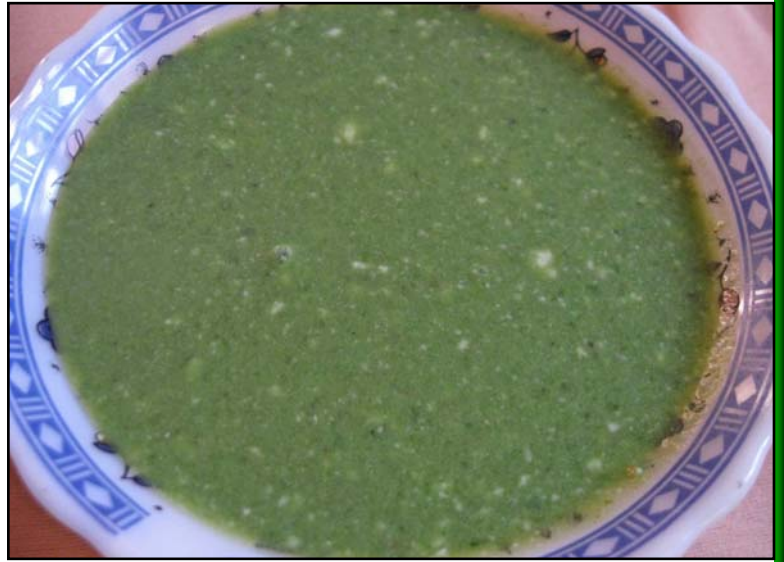


Spinach Thambli Recipe

Spinach is probably one of the best healthy leafy vegetables since it contains high levels of iron compared to other vegetables. Spinach Tambli is a light and delectable condiment. This is a very simple dish that can be prepared within 15mins. A very healthy and tasty dish that goes well with hot rice.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup Spinach (Palak)
- 2 tbsp Cilantro (Coriander leaves)
- 1 cup Buttermilk
- 2 tsp Cumin Seeds (Jeera)
- A pinch of Asafetida (Hing)
- ½ tsp Black Pepper Powder
- 4 Green Chillies
- 2 tsp Vegetable Oil
- Salt (to taste)
- Water (as required)



How to make Spinach Tambli:

- ✓ Boil water and blanch the spinach for 2 minutes.
- ✓ Drain the spinach and set aside to cool.
- ✓ Place the blanched spinach leaves in a food processor.
- ✓ Add green chillies, cilantro and black pepper. Blend to a puree.
- ✓ Transfer the spinach puree to a bowl.
- ✓ Add buttermilk and enough water to form a thick consistency.
- ✓ Heat vegetable oil in a kadai.
- ✓ Add asafetida and cumin seeds. Stir fry for 10 seconds.
- ✓ Add this mixture to the spinach mixture.
- ✓ Add salt to taste and mix well.
- ✓ Serve fresh with steamed rice.

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