

Round Square International Student Exchange Programme 2023

Roedean-VDJS Exchange

At Roedean School

When Lavanya Singh of Vidya Devi Jindal School was offered the opportunity to represent her school and her country in an exchange programme to *South Africa*, her immediate thought was of sheer amazement. She couldn't even dream this up even if she wanted to, and she can safely say that she had a pretty wild imagination.

Predictably, she was pretty intimidated to know that she was going to travel alone, and stay in the Rainbow Nation for an entire month. Yet, all that hesitation vaporized as the days flew by, and she found herself standing in front of Indira Gandhi International Airport, clad in her most heroic set of baggy clothes surrounded by an embarrassing number of hand baggages. Her dear father, bless his soul, vowed to spend the entire night at the Airport parking lot, until she was safely under the guardianship of the Kanjee family, her hosts. With newfound confidence, she managed to breeze through the formidable horrors of airport formalities and security checks, and in no time, she found herself flying over the sprawling landscape of Johannesburg.

Her first impression of South Africa was how terribly neat it was, relatively speaking of course. She had landed smack in the middle of winters, but all that cold lay forgotten as soon as she met her exchange partner for the first time. Umika Kanjee is something of a wonder. Fiercely determined and disciplined, she impressed Lavanya with her perseverance and strength of character. With her, Lavanya found a brethren of amazing friends, and a family for myself in Roedean School. Her time spent with the host family was filled with warmth, humour and an absurd amount of candy. She was delighted to know that they all had a terrible sweet tooth. Meanwhile, her time in the school was chock-full of learning and a repetitive display of horror on her peers' faces when they discovered Indian students don't use calculators in Mathematics. Her favourite memory was experiencing snow in South Africa. It seldom snows there, and she was bursting at the seams when she saw delicate snowflakes falling and covering the trodden paths of Roedean with their pure glow of white.

Alongside attending school, she was fortunate enough to learn South African history by visiting Constitution Hill. This historic place housed a former prison, used during the Apartheid regime to cage the coloured 'criminals' of South Africa. The tour inside the prison was grim, enough to dampen my cheery temperament, but I made a swift recovery when we paid Kruger National Park a visit. A day-long drive through the African Savannah followed suit, which included amazed gasps, a lot of giraffes, and the anticipation of sighting more wildlife.

However, her favourite trips were always the mundane ones, like grocery shopping (Umika has a penchant for trying out recipes she spotted on Pinterest.) or a clothing haul to pick out outfits.

When it was time to finally bid South Africa and Roedean goodbye, she was honestly quite saddened, but content. Roedean has taught her courtesy and strength, and she hoped Umika would find VDJS as amazing as she found Roedean.

VDJS and Lavanya would welcome Umika with open arms, and a promise of another month of learning and warmth together in September 2024. Until then, she eagerly waited the second half of the exchange to begin.

UMIKA AT VDJS...

Umika Kanjee, a Roedean student, spent one month at VDJS alongside her student exchange partner, Lavanya Singh, trying her hand at a myriad of activities and exploring India and its mesmerizing heritage under the insignia of Round Square.

Umika participated in various co-curricular activities, including learning how to play the Sitar, testing her oratory skills at the VDJS House Nite and furthermore getting the chance to witness the IPSC Music Fest 2023 alongside the VDJS team.

Umika, as part of her cultural excursion, toured Delhi and its architectural wonders, where she marvelled at the amalgamation of Persian, Turkic, Timurid Iranian, and Indian Hindu style of architecture, while trying out some scrumptious Indian street food. Her bucket list included visiting the Humayun's Tomb, The Qutub Minar Complex, Delhi Haat, India Gate and War Memorial, The Lotus Temple, Red Fort and Jantar Mantar.

Along with the exhilarating tourism, Umika got a taste of boarding life at VDJS, where she was exposed to live independently, and a different curriculum than what she was originally accustomed to. She attempted various subjects at VDJS, some new to her, while others familiar. Originally a student of science, she opted for humanities to try her hand at Indian Polity and History.

The Roedean-VDJS Student Exchange proved to be fruitful for both Umika and Lavanya, as they absorbed and adapted to different and unfamiliar environments and learned important lessons beyond their classrooms.



