



Off to an IT training in India

From Ingrid Weidner, freelance writer, Munich

Programming is no longer the only area for which India offers the best value-for-money, now there is also a training company that offers certification trainings that are cheaper than in Europe, including travel. There's hardly any time to get to know India, however.

New Delhi in May. Slowly the ventilation fan propels on the ceiling. The air-conditioning buzzes and in the background, ambient noise from the streets enters the darkened room. The shrieking noise from the telephone breaks the monotony: "Madam, your taxi is waiting." Those who travel for IT Training in India experience the heat only in intervals. The acclimatized minibus that brings the students to Koenig Solutions' training centre waits in front of the hotel. The road winds through narrow streets, via street markets, shops, colorful billboards and a lot of people. Bicycles, motor-rickshaws, pedestrians, cows and cars share the same stretch of road. The scene through the windshield is like a film set.

Learning without windows

Majority of their time the students spend in a small, windowless room. In these cubicles await computers, teachers and a concentrated calm on all those who want to learn, worldwide. Especially students from the UK, Benelux and Germany fly to the New Delhi metropolis. But also in the Middle East, the US, Africa and Australia IT professionals are packing their bags to get further education in India. About 200 students per month book a course with Koenig. There they learn about the new features of software they already know, get acquainted with security measures against hacking, or stay for a few weeks to go through an entire certification program.

The idea for offshore training came to Rohit Aggarwal about ten years ago. In 1993, he founded the company for training in Delhi. Originally, he focused on the domestic market, but for the last ten years he provides training and certification to foreigners under the 'Koenig Solutions' name. The idea: the participants, usually experienced IT professionals, come to an Indian training centre for a number of weeks to go through an intensive course. The cost of this training, including airfare, accommodation and taxes is much lower than with European or American suppliers. "Offshore training is a silent revolution. In five years time, changes in the training market will become more apparent" says the 41-year-old Aggarwal with conviction.

Norbert Thaler stays in Delhi for no less than 4 weeks for an 'Oracle Certified Master for Java Enterprise' course. The 53-year-old freelancer compared the prices to those of German and European training providers. In Delhi, it will cost him about 3.200 euro to get the qualification. When he adds the costs for the air travel, the accommodation, pocket-money and meals, he will be

spending about 4000 euro. In Europe, he would have paid between 10.000 and 12.000 euro only for the course fee. "I booked in February, and started the course mid-April."

Certificate as investment

Thaler sees certification as an investment for his future, because the freelancer wants to be employed as a Java-Architect. He actually booked a group-course, but as it turns out he has the luxury of a one-on-one training, and is very impressed with his trainer. "He has thorough answers to all my questions, I'm learning a lot over here." Jai Kumar is happy with this appraisal, even though the master in Information Technology doesn't feel comfortable with such explicit praise. Since 2006, Kumar works for Koenig Solutions. "Education is my passion", he says, adding humbly that of course he should have answers to all the students' questions.

Every course takes place, irrespective of the number of participants. "It is our problem when not enough people show an interest" says Aggarwal. In any way, the (adult) students learn in groups of three to maximum five persons. Those who want to learn faster or in a more individual way, can book one-on-one training. Every student can contact his teacher up to three months after the training with additional questions.

Those who want to learn as much as possible in a short period of time have little opportunity to experience the exotic Delhi. The heavy training schedule starts at 08:30 hrs and lasts at least till 17:00 hrs, and that's Monday to Saturday. In the evening, the minibus brings the exhausted students back to their accommodations. Besides the 'Koenig Inn' hotel, which only accommodates students from the training provider, there are also apartments. The education tourists take their breakfast and dinner with their colleagues. Most of them pass their evenings in their rooms, working on the material they learned that day. Even for lunch, most of the students do not set foot outside the training centre. Instead, they use the delivery service from fast food chains. A few eat at an Indian restaurant.

Hope for a better job

Sebastian Weller booked two courses at once. To the Microsoft certification course MCITP, he will add the Cisco qualification CCNA (Cisco Certified Network Associate). The whole program takes him 44 days in Delhi: "I'm paying for the course myself and am very happy with the training." Weller hopes that this training will get him closer to his dream: getting a work permit in Australia. "Every day I study until at least midnight. These are tough days, but I hope that it will improve my opportunities for a job." Different from Thaler, Weller opted for the cheaper apartment formula. He has his own room, but shares the bathroom and kitchen with two other students. About practical things like cooking and cleaning, the apartment dwellers need not worry. A chef makes them breakfast, cleans the apartment and awaits them in the evenings with warm supper. "I can focus completely on studying" he says happily.

Lower prices are also important for employers. Tobias Peschkov got an education budget of 6.500 euro from his employer, the German military. He only had to take a few additional days of leave for a 6 week Microsoft and Cisco certification training in Delhi. The heat doesn't bother him, and the fact that English is the language used for trainings works fine for him.

Koenig offers a learning environment without any distractions. This involves a whole package of services which start with transfers from the airport. In the company's own hotel, the whole infrastructure is geared toward the student: large single rooms, WLAN connection and dining room and fitness centre in the basement. The provider also rents apartments. More than 160 employees work in service and administration. Those who want to take a yoga course, medical treatment or just want to buy a sari for their children can turn to the concierge service. That students like good coffee during breaks was new to the organizer, but meanwhile this problem has been solved too.

Also, other Indian companies see opportunities in the outsourcing of training. Aggarwal welcomes the competition, because this will take the exotic phenomenon further down the mainstream. The innovative entrepreneur wants to convince his competitors that uniform quality standards are necessary and that some kind of quality label would be a good idea for marketing. At this moment, his former students are his best advertising: "70% of our customers come back to us for a course within a number of years."

The cook is the perfect wife

Only a few students visit the tourist sites in Delhi. Some -like Weller and Thaler- take the complimentary Sunday excursion to the Taj Mahal, which is about 4 hours away by car. All take home different impressions. For Thaler, his days in Delhi were a well-dosed adventure that he couldn't have managed to get through without the friendly help of the staff. Even everyday things, like buying shampoo in the neighborhood, are not easy. The heat kept the 53-year-old from sleeping quite a few times: "next time I'm coming in the winter". Timo Hummell, an IT professional from Frankfurt Am Main, has fond memories of a visit to a disco and a Bollywood movie. But most of all he remembers the service at his apartment: "our cook would be the perfect housewife for me."

IT training with Koenig

Koenig Solutions, founded in 1993 by Rohit Aggarwal in New Delhi, offers IT training and certification courses exclusively to foreigners since 2002. Lined up are courses for all contemporary software, network and security systems, as well as project management and language courses in English and Hindi. Koenig Solutions has four training centers in India and employs about 300 people, of which 140 are IT trainers.
