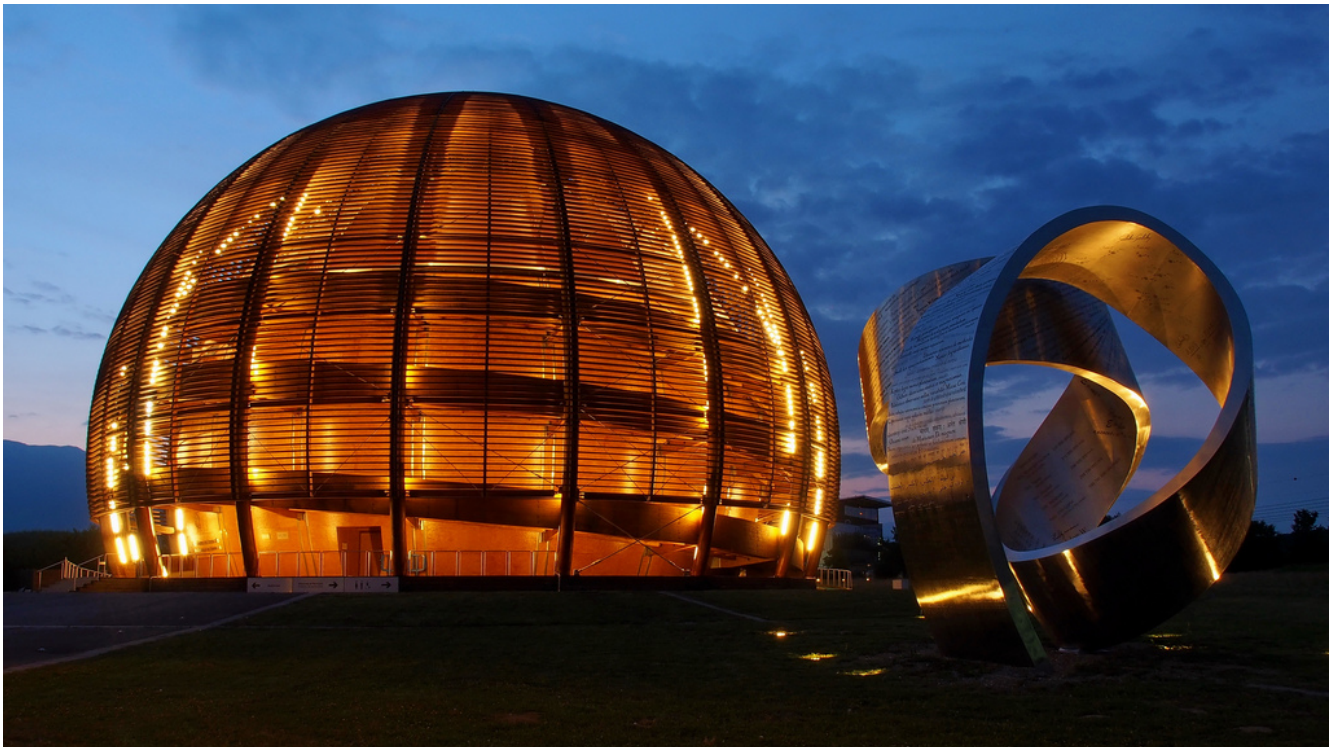


# Dinika Saxena

front-end web developer

## My experience as an Openlab Summer Student at CERN – Part 1



This is my third and final post in a series of blogs I have written to help students understand, apply to, and enjoy the Summer Student Programmes at CERN.

In my first post in this series, I gave a short (sort of) description of the different Summer Student programmes at CERN and in the second one, I discussed some tips that I think might help students submit a good application and enjoy their time there (if selected). So, if you're keen on learning about either of these subjects, check out the links. Also, I recently found out an excellent blog maintained by an Openlab Summer Student, Fatima Noor. It is a goldmine!

Alright, let's get started. I can't promise that it will be a short post.

## Post acceptance and pre-CERN

My journey into CERN began like an adventure. When I received my acceptance e-mail, I was required to fill in my passport number in one of the official documents. I realised that I couldn't do that because I didn't have a passport. So, instead of telling the authorities at

CERN to allow me to submit the papers a few days after the deadline (I was a little too coward for that), I put on my Powerpuff girl suit and decided to get a passport within 10 days. What's more ridiculous than that is the fact that I got the passport on the 9th day. But, I wouldn't wish the torture of trying to acquire an emergency passport on anyone.

Getting the visa was a cakewalk. The organisers of the programme are incredibly immaculate. I think I even got some special attention from the visa people when they learnt that I am going to CERN (ha!).

Almost a week before leaving for Geneva, I developed a slight fever. However, I decided to not make a huge deal out of it because I thought that the people at the airport will hold me back if they learn about it. Needless to say, it was the most stupid thing to do.

The day arrived! I was going to board an aeroplane for the first time ever in my life! The flight was great, but it still bothers me that I missed one of my snacks because I was snoozing.



**A view from the plane. This is just one of the many weirdly clicked photographs that you are about to see.**

## At CERN

There was some confusion at the airport but we made our way to the Business Park Hotel eventually. My roommates (a redhead and a party girl) arrived later that evening. We clicked almost instantaneously and then, like mature adults we claimed our territories in the room.



### **The Business Park Hotel – our home for the two months**

The redhead and I walked to the nearby supermarket (Carrefour) the next day and that's when we really bonded. So, if you want to make friends, take a trip to the nearest supermarket with them.

## **First Month**

The day after that was my first day at CERN. I went to meet my supervisor and learnt two things:

- I had not one, but three supervisors, which was a really good thing for me.
- I could refer to them by their first names (say what!)



### **I wish I had a better photo of my building – B31**

After making a really stupid (but honest) remark on the weather there, I decided to keep my mouth shut for the rest of the day and just listen to them. They wanted me to build a pretty dashboard (point noted).

I learned that I was the only girl on my team. I tried to look at the bright side of it. I only had to share the washrooms with a few other people. Sometimes I used to go in there just to stretch and do some dancing and lunges (what's wrong with that?).

The first bomb that was dropped on me goes by the name of **D3.js**. My supervisors could not stop eulogising it and those around me at that time (as well as a thousand other people on the Internet) could not stop telling me how complicated it really is. Scared that I may not be able to complete my project, I researched and collected as many free and highly acclaimed resources there were on D3.js and data visualisation. For the next month, I almost completely wrapped myself up in a cocoon and studied and practised as much as I could.

It was not the best strategy, however. My supervisors tried to figure out if they could help me with anything, but I think they soon realised that I was going to take a LOT of time (they were sweet enough to never say anything to my face. They gave me my space).

Meanwhile, my fever was only getting worse. My body, which firmly believes in stuffing every morsel of food that it can find, was throwing it up three times a day, every day. And, for some weird reason, my hand's skin was getting the kicks out of changing its colour every morning (no kidding).

I was craving spicy and hot food so much! All I wanted was to eat something that burns my lips and numbs my tongue. I never knew I was this Indian.

Even on my toughest days, at exactly 5 pm I would duly get up from my chair at work and rush towards the nearest vending machine at CERN with happiness that only some may have experienced. I had sworn myself to try every bar of chocolate the machine held and I

didn't fail myself. I used to eat at least two bars and drink one cup of hot chocolate every day.



**Like you can see, the food at CERN was really good. I just needed some getting used to.**

One day, while I was having lunch at the restaurant (R2), a girl invited me to join her group of friends sitting on the next table. It wasn't a group. It was a gang of rock stars! They were so cool! Some of them spoke Italian. I told them that I had learnt that language some years back and I tried to prove it by saying something which ended up sounding like the Italian word for male genitalia. It was so embarrassing but that didn't stop them from giving me a short tour of CERN in their car! So awesome!

A few weeks had passed by now and in my mind, I still hadn't made much progress at work. I was getting impatient and more nervous.



**My favourite place at Thoiry. It is a beautiful stream somewhere close to the supermarket.**

At around this time, CERN arranged for our trip to Zurich which was totally hip! It was during this trip that I had the first big idea for my dashboard.

During the third or the fourth week, I hit my lowest point. I wanted to run back to India or go into hiding. And, then the clock struck 5 o'clock and somehow, even in that mood and that health, I had it in me to go to the vending machine and get my daily dose of dessert. On my way back to my building, for the first time, my eyes actually noticed a gallery of images that were hung on the walls of the pathway between the two buildings (my building and the building that housed the vending machine).

Most of these were decades-old sepia pictures of those gigantic computers from the yesteryears, hung chronologically on the glass walls, almost narrating a story that was older than I could bring myself to believe. At that moment, I felt so bad for not fathoming the magnanimity of the opportunity that I had been given. Shouldn't I be more grateful to be a small part of the large organisation that has created history?

So I was a little sick and the antibiotics were not helping. I could still fix that by hogging on tonnes of food like I otherwise would. I could spray extra pepper and salt when no one was looking and I could completely ditch those annoying knives and forks for spoons, plastics forks, and fingers (I am a cave woman). These tactics along with all the love and tomatoes that the redhead gave me helped me recover almost magically. I don't know what I would've done without my redhead.



**A park we went to during our trip to Lausanne that was also organised by CERN**

And then, it was razzle-dazzle time baby!

I also threw a perm on my attitude where the project at CERN was concerned. I started to take it easy. I tried to think that I really had nothing to lose, so I should enjoy the learning.



**I started having my lunch outdoors at this place (instead of at the restaurant). It used to be my me time. Can you see how bad I am at photography?**

Click here to read about my second month at CERN.



## Published by Dinika

I am a front-end web developer and I also love data visualisation. [View all posts by](#)

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1. Pingback: [My experience as an Openlab Summer Student at CERN – Part 2 – Dinika Saxena](#)

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