

New Delhi, India

Aug 5, 2012



Early start as we headed by taxi to the old city to join DeliByCycle tour - 6.30am start... we managed to be a little early so the guide took us around the back street to have coffee... not exactly Starbucks ... but lots of atmosphere ... and the coffee was milk boiled in a big pot with sugar and coffee added ... Hygiene probably wasn't high on the shop keepers list but we seemed to have survived!! No real need for the man on the bench next to me to wake from his slumber - It was early!! The tour we took was called Shah Jahan and our guide Tanzin seemed confident in our cycling ability!

Onto our bright orange bikes and with some level of terror we set off into the craziness of Delhi traffic ... dodging buses, Tuk tuks, bikes, people, motor bikes, dogs, horses, donkeys no one paying any attention to any road rules that may exist!!! Somehow we all mutually dodged each other as our single file of travellers headed into the narrow lane ways of 17th Century Old Delhi!



We whirled past shops, temples and houses 100's of years old ... the sounds of horns tooting, vendors calling to each other and my heart beating out of my chest!!! Some lane ways were very narrow, the electric wires overhead looked like spaghetti!! Kids ran out greeting us, everyone smiled and waved at us crazy tourists on bright orange bikes cycling early on a Sunday morning!! The smells of spices and breakfast curries made us hungry! We headed to the top of the Spice Market for a fantastic view of Delhi ..our eyes watered and our throats burned from the chili laden air.



Back in our bikes and we headed out to the suburbs to the Civil Lines the former British colonial area - big houses, big trees and a world away from Old Delhi.



We stopped for tea under a tree before headed back into the craziness and breakfast at a Al Jawahar! Great morning!

Back to our hotel until later in the afternoon ... The need to shop overtook me ... we headed to Connaught Place to Fab India and my favourite shop Soma!!

Next we met up with our guide from Delhi Food Adventure - a walking tour of Chandni Chowk. Not sure about having to sign an indemnity form ... lucky I'm positive ... 8 restaurants, 3 hours what's the chance of getting sick ... hmm stay posted ... so far so good!! It was fantastic ... amazing food ... street food as well as restaurants ... Everything was a complete assault on my taste buds in the best way!!!



We finished near the Jama Masjid Mosque ... and of course it's Ramadan so crazy busy ... even for Delhi!! Full of Delhi's best we took a Tuk Tuk back to our hotel! Yep - it's great to be back in India!!!

Aug 6, 2012

An easier day today ... a catch up with Jassa our guide over breakfast - great to see him again!! I managed to book a Balinese massage at the Metropolitan Hotel, hmm ok ... it was perhaps 5 stars ... but India makes it affordable!!! After a quick hectic tuk tuk ride we felt a little like impostors as we alighted our shabby tuk tuk at the gates of the very fancy hotel ... explained to the guards we had a spa booking ... obviously we must not have looked like regular guests!!! Once passed the guards we entered the quieter tranquil gardens of the world of the very wealthy!! Guards and footmen in full livery welcomed us like we were frequent guests they are good at their jobs!!! I'm sure they muttered 'impostors' after we passed by!! Down to the spa area we were warmly greeted and the prices reconfirmed with us... hmmm did they think we had no money?!!!!!! I offered to pay immediately .. thinking holy crap what is wrong with our clothes?!!! After all I had my new Soma shirt on!!!!

We were then escorted to separate areas to change, I was supervised by a tiny, beautiful Indian girl who made me feel huge, old and clunky!!!! :) She explained I should use the steam room first, I lost a little in translation about exactly how long I was to remain steaming ...then I was to shower!!

As I steamed away like a chook ..wondering what an acceptable period was .. finally I decided death by dehydration was looming I escaped into the shower!! Magically as I slipped back into robe the young girl appeared to escort me to the massage room .. which was darkened .. full of the scent of rich oils.. and calmness ... very zen!!

My massage lady checked the pressure was correct at intervals whispered instructions in my ear ... 'Everything is alright madam?' 'are you comfortable madam' 'please be turning over madam' 'may I massage your breasts madam?!!!!!!' Wot?????!!!

All too soon the massage was over and we were gliding through to the Craft House .. also part of the Met ... to the most unusual and beautiful gifts .. yes of course we made significant purchases .. didn't want to ruin my shopping reputation!!

We then wandered around Connaught Place shopping and stopping by Soma ... yes again!!

A quick tuk tuk back to our hotel to meet up with Shari & Rosie who had flown in a little earlier!! Back to Connaught Plaza for a quick shop and a bucket sized margarita in a swanky bar!!

Aug 7 & Aug 8, 2012

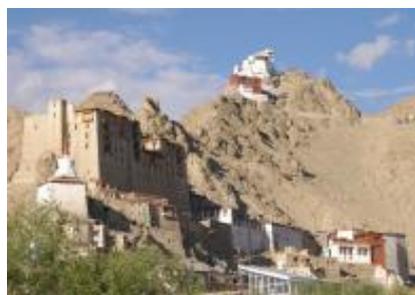
Earlier start to our site seeing of the old market area of Chandi Chowk in Old Delhi, Jama Masjid and the Red Fort. The metro ride to Old Delhi was beyond belief ... women and men travel in separate carriages ... the reason for this is apparent as we were pushed and packed in tighter than sardines!! At our stop it was like a Tsunami of people spewing onto the platform!!! Once we emerged from the platform the heavens opened ... and we were caught in a massive down pour of warm rain!! As we splashed down the streets, a man was having a shower ... with soap - under a down pipe .. dogs were sheltering under cars .. the streets quickly became awash!! Onward towards the mosque and just as we entered the rain stopped! We put on our brightly covered modesty coveralls and wandered around the ancient building!

Next was a cycle rickshaw ride to the Red Fort... chaos again ... laughter all around as the driver navigated the tiny choked lane ways. The Red Fort is very impressive and I enjoyed my second visit more as the heat was not as blistering as last time... young boys and men sneakily snapped or videoed us and every opportunity!! Hilarious .. the braver boys asked to pose with us!!

We hired a car and a driver for the afternoon and took in the sites of Humayun's Tomb which was a trial run for the Taj Mahal, Qutab Complex and we finished up at the Lotus Temple which is for the BaHai Faith! All were impressive and Rosie was particularly impressed with the BaHai ... maybe a convert!! Quick vegetarian dinner and an early night - we had a flight at 5am so up at 1.30am :(

Leh, Ladakh

Aug 9, 2012



Wednesday 8/8 OMG what a ridiculous time to catch a flight ... the flight was about 60 minutes and as we dropped down from the clouds we could see the dramatic scenery of this incredible area. Dry desert and lush valleys where the rivers flowed ... as we dropped lower and lower through the mountains my heart was pounding we were navigating through a tight squeeze - it looked like the wings were about to touch the mountains as we came in to land ... there was a collective 'ohhh' from all the passengers!!!

Transfer to our hotel and Jassa had told us we were in 'lock down' until 5pm so we could start to acclimatize as we are at 3500 meters. No argument from me - I was feeling a bit sick anyway ... and only got worse ... and worse blinding headache, nausea - everything - I have never felt so sick in my life ... I honestly thought I was going to die.



After a terrible night with altitude sickness and Delhi Belly, I had some toast and porridge for breakfast. We then set off sightseeing around Leh, firstly to the Leh Palace - which is perched high on a hill top, then the monastery above it. The views were incredible - we had our first few glimpses of Buddhist monks!! On to Sanpar Gonka then up to a stupa!!!

It is really beautiful here - the mountains are amazing!! Off for two days glamping tomorrow!!!

West Ladakh, India

Aug 10, 2012

Ugh once again we enjoyed the delights of India throughout the night ... dogs barking and fighting, cars tooting and best of all just when we were finally dozing the 3am call to prayer from the nearby minaret!!! Oh joy!! And there is another at about 6am.... so between all that and by Delhi belly ... I'm not loving India as much as usual!!

Today was special though ... we packed and headed to West Ladakh by 4wd with a guide. The scenery was amazing - we passed by dozens of military bases in this very arid almost moon like landscape. Finally we arrived at Likir Monastery, this was the monastery Sabine was so keen to visit. It is spectacular built in the 10th century and currently run by the Dalai Lama's brother. Our local guide asked if a Lama could say a prayer for Sabine, explaining she was meant to be on this trip but had tragically died in a car accident. I had a framed photo of her with me and ... we were escorted into a very special chamber that is used by the Dalai Lama when he visits.

So the prayer for Sabine for her safe journey onwards was held in the very chamber the Dalai Lama uses. As the Lama chanted the prayer and tears flowed down my cheeks I knew Sabine would have been delighted! I felt closure at last. Afterward as Jassa and I hugged each other .. We both agreed we felt she was there.

Next we went to another area in the monastery and were permitted to sit at the back and listen to the Lama's chant, beat the drums and blow the horns. Awesome! There was a school also attached and Shari had brought some pencils with her ... so we sat with the Lama's sipping black tea and waiting for the little Lamas who were about 7 years old to have their lunch break! As the children filed out in their maroon robes they accepted a pencil and let us take some photos!

We had lunch there and headed to the very old Alchi monastery. Here we watched an older woman and a Lama carefully picking through apricots and taking the pips out. They use the pips to make oil. Onward to West Ladakh camp a bit weary only to find major road works and a delay while a huge amount of earth and boulders were pushed into a river. Finally back in the 4wd and our camp site was literally 2 mins up the road!! Yes that's India!!

Aug 11, 2012 - Uletokopo - West Ladakh Resort Camp

Not quite glamping .. not quite a resort .. !!!!

Ready for an early start for our trek but stretch time India meant it was later than planned ... and the hot water is still coming ...

Beautiful 6km walk through a winding road than ran alongside a creek. Starting at 3130 meters and climbing to 3570 meters - so uphill most of the way! We crossed a suspension bridge over the Indus River (in so much better condition than my Nepal trekking days)!!

The scenery was spectacular as we wound around the mountain mostly on the road but there were a few off road short cuts to the Mangyu village. Our itinerary promise of the chance of spotting Ibex and blue sheep was a promise that evaporated like the hot water!!!

Our local guide a called Tserring (maybe ... we are having trouble with her name) said she knew someone in the village and galloped ahead to find her. We managed to puff our way up to the monastery. At the top and as we enjoyed the view Tserring magically appeared again and said she had found the mother of her friend and we 'should be waiting here' and she would return. Waiting, waiting and I was thinking they were probably hiding the ironing and dirty dishes as you do when uninvited guests drop in ...!!

Finally, she returned and took us to the house where we met the mother. Both escorted us into the multi-purpose room – dining, sleeping, etc., Bed rolls in the corner, all immaculate and as we sat cross legged on the mats, the best cups came out of the box they were bought in, black tea arrived and freshly baked doughnut/croissant bread was brought down from the kitchen!!! She wasn't cleaning up she was making us bread!! Bless her!! Then we tried her local beer .. ugh.. I would never be a big drinker in that village!! Finally, the mother appeared again as we were leaving and all I could offer her for her hospitality was a koala which I pinned to her tunic - her smile was priceless!!

Onward to the Ridzong Monastery which nestles high in the mountains. By now the actual temples and Buddhist bits are making my eyes glaze over ... but monasteries are beautiful and the Lamas still enchant me!! Here we saw 4 Lamas in a 4WD ... that's gotta be lucky right?!!

Aug 12, 2012

Hot water ... in buckets arrive at our tent early ... best bucket wash ever!!! We head off to Lamayuru on India's No. 1 highway Full of holes you can disappear in ... Missing bits where the road has fallen into the river hundreds of metres below ... don't be silly... there's no guard rails... they have already fallen in ... blind corners where the drivers just beep and you hope the oncoming ones don't have the Bollywood tunes cranked up too high :(then add convoy after convoy of army trucks ... I begin to wonder if war has been declared ... and how would we know?!!!

Finally the monastery - wow the oldest in Central Ladakh. We are escorted around by a self-appointed guide - a delightful old gentleman who was a picture just waiting to be taken ... he took us to a private part of the monastery that was built in about the 10th century!!!

Once again ... a little koala brought a huge smile to his face and I'm guessing not a lot of Aussies travel here!!



As we are leaving some mini Lamas came up to us while we were at the big prayer drum. Their English was good - they were 10 & 16 but looked much younger .. harsh climate and basic food I guess.... we laughed a lot Shari gave them some pencils and of course I found two more koalas ... lol!!

Long drive back to our hotel in Leh ... straight to lunch at a Kashmiri restaurant Jassa had been telling us about ... fantastic ... but 6 hours later as I'm sitting on the loo reading my kindle ... because it's not worth moving ... I'm thinking they didn't really wash the salad in bottled water :(... Finally when I can move ... another cold shower :(((

Aug 13, 2012 - **Death by Monasterys!!**

Tserring our local guide (who's English is getting easier to understand) had told us about a refugee place for displaced Tibetan aged folk in Leh. We decided on our final assault on the only three remaining monasteries in Ladakh we hadn't seen.... we would visit the home. Shari's Neighbour is a mad knitter



and had knitted a heap of jumpers and hats for an orphanage Shari is associated with in Thailand. Some of these were too big for the kids so this seemed the perfect place to leave them. We had collected boxes of apples and apricots from the previous days travels and brought them along as well. The old folk were sitting around an open area the dirt, watching us get out of our vehicle with great curiosity. They were so surprised and humble to receive firstly the fruit which we distributed evenly amongst the 50 residents then the jumpers and hats. These old folk have nothing except a few clothes and their prayer wheels which they sit swinging gently .. probably dreaming of Tibet and a time so different to now.



The old folk we so grateful it was heart breaking - despite their situation they were laughing and smiling with us ... We all left in tears ... bloody Chinese government - feel like I need to buy one of those Free Tibet badges....

Onward to monastery No. 1 ' and not for the first time

I wonder why they are always at the top of a bloody hill and the steps so steep??? Did I mention we are still at high altitude .. Puff puff puff!!!

There was a delightful old lady whose job was to carry basketfuls of cement on her back up rickety stairs to the roof where renovations were being done - all with a smile and a big grin when I gave her a Polo mint!!! Amazing!!

Short drive to Monastery No.2!! 'Thiksey' Now this one unglazed my eyes!!! A Bollywood movie was being shot here!! I thought the Lama I spotted was too hot to be real!!! Lots of theatrics to observe - I almost got out of going into the temple (they are seriously now all blurring into one!) but Jassa keeps an eye on Shari and I to make sure we get the full tour and don't sneak off!!!



We did hear drums and chanting and dashed into another temple there and it was in full swing .. loads of Lamas with yellow hats, little Lamas blowing conch shells, beating drums and chanting - it was fantastic. Another older Lama carried a teapot and was pouring yellow liquid into people's palms .. apparently according to Tserrings frenzied gesturing to me I was to drink some and splash the rest on my head ... Two lots of serious gastro so far - I don't care how holy it is I'm not drinking it!! So I splashed it on my head - for the rest of the day I looked like Cameron Diaz out of 'Something about Mary' with the stuck up hair!!

No.3 Monastery was really a palace/monastery (Shey Palace) yes .. Up a zillion stairs .. must be good for my thighs ...!!! Thank god .. tick .. we have seen them all now!! Every one!!! Don't get me wrong they are beautiful and full of history ... but we all know history is not my strong point - I overload quickly!!

Disket, Ladakh



Aug 16, 2012 - India Independence Day!!

Or as I will remember it - Two Hump Camel Day!!! Up early to navigate the World's highest Navigable Road. Yes the WORLD's Highest!! (5602 metres or about 18000 ft) obviously the drive wasn't straight up ... Round and round, blind corner after blind corner, one lane that's squeezes into two ... Lots of tooting at bends and combined prayers from all of us on board our 4x4 - shear drops - very few barricades .. quite a few trucks upside down on the hillside below remind us how dangerous this road is ... up, up and finally we are in the clouds and in line with the glaciers. The road surface is horrendous .. but the views are spectacular ... simply stunning!

Finally we reach the top!! Thousands of prayer flags are strung everywhere .. I can understand .. serious prayers are needed to make it safely this far .. There is a souvenir shop - the highest in the world and to my shock I buy nothing .. perhaps it was my trembling hands, lack of oxygen or the freezing cold!! My

shopping reputation in tatters we went into the cafe and had a magnificent little cup of full of black tea with cardamom! Warmed us up - so we had another!!

As we wind our way down the other side we meet heaps of traffic as it's a public holiday. Our dynamic driver delivers us safely to the bottom of the mountain! Well done! Pity we have to drive back again tomorrow :((

Onward to what I have been so excited about ... a ride on a two hump camel!!! One hump is so yesterday!!! It was just on lunch time and the camel drivers were wandering off for lunch ... but they agreed to take us for a 30min ride. My camel was obviously miffed about delayed lunch and reluctantly dragged herself around the circuit!!! The humpy bits are kind of soft and wobbly and flop around a bit!! Great fun except the downhill bit where I thought I was going to glide through my camels ears!!! Tick that off the bucket list!!!



Lunch at a roadside cafe where the waiter patiently explained it was only Indian Food ... hmm as one would expect in India!! Great lunch and we were in for a final treat before camp ... another monastery!! Lol!! There's always one more!!!! It was new and quite brilliant ... but I was more interested in watching the sand storm roaring up the valley! Brilliant!!

Finally to our camp .. very glam .. gorgeous Swiss chalet tents set amongst a huge veggie and flower garden - very pretty and ... yes hot water!!! Lovely!!!

East Ladakh, India

Aug 17, 2012

Early start to our last day in Leh! Once again we ride along the challenging, death defying roads of India - this time we wind to the top of the world's third highest roadway (and the worst toilet so far!!) enroute to Pangong Lake.

Once at the top the altitude bit me again and I took a visit to the army medical centre feeling very poorly! Oxygen check, more Panadol and 'be getting lower now' we set off down the other side on equally horrendous roads...



Ten hours round trip to see a blue lake and sit on a Yak!!! Why not?!!! It's India!!!

Back to the Yak Tail Hotel for our final night - where we feel at home with the intermittent hot water, broken toilet seat, power blackouts, rock hard beds, barking dogs all night and the minarets calling those to prayer at three am ... but the meals are wonderful and the staff very friendly!!!

Dinner started with a song prepared by Shari and Rosie which was to the tune of 12 days of Xmas about our Leh Trip - it was hilarious - included the cold showers, lack of the mystical blue sheep ... etc!!

Leh / Agra / Jaipur

Aug 18, 2012

We left Leh very early Saturday to allow enough time to navigate the 5 separate security checks had my spare camera batteries confiscated!!! Not sure what they thought i would do with 4 AA Duracell's!! Flight from Leh no way as scary as coming in!! Reached Delhi in no time and our delightful driver Mr Satisfaction was waiting for us in a brand new people mover!!! Very impressive ... off we set for Agra ... only a couple of hours on the brand new freeway Jassa said ... but of course it's India and the new freeway is blocked by angry farmers protesting something - so the old road ... jammed all the way with every imaginable mode of transport then some!!



Finally we arrive at the Crystal Palace and were pleasantly surprised by our rooms, bathrooms and HOT water!!!

Off to the Red Fort, Baby Taj and view of sunset over Taj Mahal by tuk tuks! Crazy traffic .. Cows, monkeys, bullocks, horses, mental as anything ... All good - pretty hot though - our local guide banged on a bit too much but gave up on us in the end I think!!

Off to dinner at a roof top open restaurant under a huge tree...just beautiful. Best sleep - but up at 4.45am on a mission to be the first people at the Taj!! Almost made it - group of UK Rangers (girl guides) just beat us! They were obviously more prepared than us!!!

Taj was outstanding - didn't mind about seeing it again - its breathtaking!! Lots of photos .. missed those confiscated batteries!! Yes ... we all sat on the 'Princess Diana Seat' for one of those classic Taj photos!!! Lol!!!

Back to hotel for breakfast then a quiet trip to Jaipur via Fatehpur Sikri. - I hate this bloody place - its sooooo hot 45-50'C - all red brick, paving ... it's the hottest place on earth ... unbelievable ... I thought I was just going to turn into a puddle of water!! No Mr Khan this time - he didn't return Jassa's call ... maybe he knew that bored Aussie was on the trip again ... We lost Rosie and were delayed a little ... by the time we were all frantic and on the verge of heat exhaustion we found her and finally back on the road to Jaipur 3 hours India stretch time took about 5 hours to go about 130km!!

Shari and amused ourselves trying to take pictures of ladies wearing orange saris ... hilarious fun ... crap photos ... We were travelling too fast ..for India ... lots of tree shots and orange blurs!!

Finally reach our hotel ... Dera Rawatsar ... Omg .. It is beautiful ... the rooms amazing ... and it has a pool... and Gin & Tonic ... we are happy Rustic Indian Travellers!!!

Dinner in the dining room was fantastic!!! What a great day!!

Aug 19, 2012

We set off to conquer the tourist highlights of the Pink City!! Our delightful local guide was waiting for us at our hotel ... he gave us a quick resume .. he guided Prince Charles twice ... turned his nose up at the mention of Camilla, (he preferred Diana) and he worked for the last Raj for 10 years) I'm guessing he would have been in his 70's - beautiful English and very charming. It's what we expected as we are travelling with Queen Rosie and Princess Shari after all!!



First stop a world famous Lassi from the Lassi Wallah - served in clay pots .. it's a yogurt drink .. yes we could understand why he is world famous as we sipped the thick creamy curds!!! Hmmm

On to the Palace of the Winds, City Palace and the Amber Fort - which has had lots of renovations happening since my last visit ... and elephants have been reintroduced to take tourists up the hill to the Fort. I know I will ride most things at least once ... but not these poor animals! Took lots of photos as they looked amazing .. but I don't agree with this treatment of them at all. So no rupees from me!!

Just as we arrived at the Observatory - the heavens open and the long awaited Monsoon began! Bucketing down isn't strong enough ... on to the City Palace and we were drowned in minutes!!! We ducked and weaved around .. a secret passage only our guide knew saved us from a few more bucket loads of rain ... great palace!

On now to drop off Jassa and the guide and commence another pilgrimage for me to Soma!! Lol!!! Today is Eid (end of Ramadan) so the streets are crazy with traffic, people, animals the odd parade (very colourful) and yes they are now all flooded as well!! We get tangled in a traffic jam .. Grid lock ... but enough room for someone to move from the left and bang into the front of our brand new people mover!!! Lol!! It was only a scrape along the crash bar .. seriously no one could really move more than a few inches ... but there was a whole lot of screaming and our driver Mr Satisfaction certainly was getting no satisfaction!!! Lol!! On to Soma .. which had moved and caused a little delay .. but finally arrived in Soma heaven ... a bedspread, matching curtains, various pillow cases, table cloth, cutlery set, plate and a dress set me back less than A\$85 ... yes I love Some - (kind of like Laura Ashley goes Indian)!!!

On to the market area Shari's on a mission for quilt covers ... down we go into the bowels of a shop near the Pink Palace It's a tiny room stacked high with quilts, pillow cases, etc. Shari is after a certain yellow cover fearing three tourists were about to die in a quilt Tsunami Shari settled on a nice dark silk set ...tired .. we were dragged into the next shop .. and sat again while almost every shade of yellow quilt in existence in Jaipur was brought to us ... but alas not the right shade ... no matter how many times we said yellow and no elephants ... the message was lost in translation ... we laughed heaps ... bought Saris (not for me - Julie's!!!) Exhausted took a tuk tuk back to prepare for our big night out!!

Quick dinner at a restaurant we went to last time ... once again despite the grubbiness the food is great and I'm ok today!!! We were off to see a brand new release Bollywood movie.. TIGER!! All the big names were in it!!! We had seats in the box sort of area so we could view the full show ... and I don't mean just the movie!! Before the lights even dimmed there was dancing, shouting, whistling from the mostly young men in the audience!! It was hilarious ... when the dancing on screen started some of the guys would jump on to the stage and dance along -- hilarious!!!! I love India - we are so boring in Australia!! The pure joy of these guys in a packed cinema was delightful to watch!!!! Off to Pushkar tomorrow - new city for me!!!

Pushkar, India

Aug 21, 2012

21/8 Lazy start to the day after our late night movie!!! Off to Pushkar a few Indian hours away ... very pleasant drive and a stop half way at Coffee Time - like Indian Starbucks!! Good coffee!!

Checked into Pushkar Palace Heritage Lakeside Hotel!! OMG it's a beautiful old heritage hotel - wonderfully furnished - wide verandas and a view over the lake!!! We are very happy Rustic Indians!!



In no time we were booked in for massages and drinking banana Lasses on the veranda watching what was happening around the lake!! (Would have been gin and tonic but it's a dry state!!!) Just perfect!!!

Shared a massage room with Ray - he had a male and I had a female .. hmm me only in knickers felt rather exposed ... in front of the male masseuse but I guess he's seen lots a boobs before me :(!! Great massage, nice oil and a finished off with a good head rub!!! Ahh! The aches in my neck from the Yak Tail and the crazy mountain roads were soothed away ... wonderful!!!



Later we set off with Jassa and a holy man from the Brahman Caste who took us on a walking tour of the town. All the way from Agra we had seen very colourful pilgrims walking along the road, apparently heading here. The Pushkar Lake is very holy and this is where the only Brahman Temple exists in India! So picture hundreds and hundreds of pilgrims, women carrying their bag or case on their head, baby in their arms, really colourful saris, some ladies with nose rings... all heading to this one temple along a very crowded street lined with shops on either side selling everything from bangles, clothes, huge vats of cooking oil bubbles with Indian sweets!! Throw in a huge amount of cows - mostly Brahmins of course sitting and standing amongst the confusion and us wide eyed!! Not a lot of foreign tourists as such ... and some of the tribal woman looked as shocked at seeing us as we did seeing them!!

Lots of smiles all around and photos taken and shown to their amazement!!!! We had to take our shoes off to visit the Brahman temple ... Jassa took care of them and our bags - nothing was allowed in the temple... as the monsoon rains have commenced .. we paddled in our bare feet .. slopping through mud, slush and cow s*** up the narrow holy steps with hundreds of sari clad women, children and men - all the pilgrims who had walked up to 300kms to get here.

Tight fit was an understatement as we ascended the steps ... everyone was good natured ... we chatted to the squished children, smiled at their mothers .. as we ever so slowly made our way to the holy place - where a statue of a Brahman cow made of sapphire with silver eyes awaited us. Wet, squished by hundreds of holy pilgrims, walking in slop (still with my infected toe) I felt I was on the brink of 'too much India' lol!! First time ever!!!

We squeezed back through the masses, the cows, holy men in their saffron robes, to Jassa waiting for us in a cafe, talking on his mobile phone while a cow grazed at his feet, inside the shop!!! Oh yes!! I do still love India!!

Next we wandered back along the street to the Ghats where the pilgrims bathe and offer blessings to the gods. We sat on the steps with our holy man, who gave us a tin plate each of rose petals, rice, red colouring, saffron and sugar - representing family, friendship, sweet life and good health. We said a few prayers ... repeating his chant .. he put some red colouring on our forehead along with a few grains of rice .. then we were to throw the rest in the lake!! A very peaceful experience .. glad we didn't have to actually jump in like the pilgrims - the lake looked far from clean!! At the completion of the service he tied a band of holy thread around our wrist - apparently known as 'The Pushkar Passport!'

As we wandered back from there to our hotel the streets were alive with so many people, motorbikes (also carrying pilgrims) a few camels were led past .. so much colour, so much noise - our senses overloaded with so much activity! We stopped at one of the boiling vats and had some sweet pancake thing ... like it was made from condensed milk .. delicious!!!

Dinner at the Sunset Cafe overlooking the lake. As we sat watching the sun set, the holy men chat, the drummers beating out their tunes we felt very comfortable and at one with India!!

Aug 22, 2012

We wake to the sound pouring monsoon rain ... we have another wonderful Indian breakfast in the restaurant overlooking the lake - very pleasant. Off on a road trip to Chandelao!!

Chandelao, India

Aug 23, 2012



We arrived at Chandelao Garh, the home of the local Lord it is a medieval fort that has been converted into a small hotel and ... we are the only guests at the moment!! Our rooms are the old horse stables ... which have been beautifully renovated .. the owner Mr Pradhuman Singh is delightful and very regal!!! As are his Labrador and dash-hound pooches!! After a lovely lunch ... a great massage and a rest we head off late in the afternoon on a village walk!! Children scream with delight when they see us and line up for 'one photo' which really means 10!! They are so happy, just wanting their picture taken, not asking for money, pens or lollies...

The women are really interesting .. the ones who have come from outside this village to marry must cover their faces with a veil and those who have grown up in the village and married a local man can have their faces uncovered. They wear a lot of gold .. even I have gold envy!!! Through their nose, on their forehead, round their neck, wrists .. and the men all have pierced ears with gold flowers with rubies ... in a daisy pattern!

We wandered to the well and watched the young girls haul the water up into water containers to carry on their heads .. much laughter when Rosie and Ray jumped into help!!!

Back to the Fort and the Gin and Tonics were calling Rosie and I!! Dinner on the rooftop of the fort overlooking the village was a perfect end to a great day!

Aug 24, 2012

Rooftop breakfast was delightful ... listening to the village come alive! Off on a jeep safari to a few nearby villages - but first a stop at the local school so Shari could deposit the remaining pencils she brought from home. So many children sitting quietly, waving shyly at us ... absolutely fantastic!

On to the villages, bouncing along in a jeep that is probably older than time itself light monsoon rain falling ... didn't deter anyone man, woman or child from asking for 'one photo!!' groups of woman formed instantly posing for photos! Their saris are so colourful and their faces so pretty! The men with their turbans are amazing. Mix in a heap of cows and goats a few camels and a heap of dogs ... and you really need to watch where you step!!

We visited the local shoe maker, potters and sewing ladies, saw wild buck, deer and village life that probably hadn't changed in 100 years! Incredible India!!

Onward to the city of Jodhpur - far from the quiet village ... looked a bit dodgy as we tried to find our hotel ... lots of people gave us directions ... all different ... then we stopped in front of the Ratan Villas ... and our jaws dropped!! Amazing!! Yes we

love you Rustic India .. quick change and we have ordered lunch and lollid in the pool!!! Ahhh!!

Jodhpur, India

Aug 25, 2012



Off through the bustling traffic of the Blue City, far from the peaceful little hamlet of Chandelao we make our way to the Meherangarh Fort - one of the largest forts in India! Yes of course it's on top of a hill and has a zillion steps to climb!!

Breathless, from the top of the fort you can see the many blue painted houses below - they are first white washed then again painted with a dash of indigo in the white wash, which is partly to assist with cooling and the blue is believed to help keep the insect population away ... I'm not sure how effective it is ... there are a lot of flies .. !!

The Fort is magnificent and I think beside us and a couple of Japanese girls we were the only non-Indian tourists... so once again we featured heavily in everyone's happy snaps...!!! By now we are feeling like Rock Gods with a constant following of paparazzi tracking our every move!! Haha so funny for a few middle aged tourists racing across India!!! The young boys in particular like photos with us girls - they brush Raj Ray away - not so keen to have a lasting memory of him .. doesn't bear to think about what they do or say about our photos as they show there friends!! I'm hoping it's with kindness ... but sometimes particularly with the more tribal woman we both look at each other - do a double take with surprise ... then smile acknowledging two very different worlds colliding!!

After the Fort, we make our way down the hill to another of Jassa's favourite places .. which almost always involves food .. this time it was the best Lassi place in India ... it's too thick to go up a straw you eat it with a spoon ... how good? Excellent!! Still of course there was more to come ... dinner on an open rooftop overlooking Jodhpur, with the well-lit Fort towering behind us.... Gin and Tonics and an amazing dinner saw the close of another incredible day in India!!

Udaipur, India

Aug 25, 2012



A very slow and steady journey with Mr Satisfaction, our last day with him and he was keen to make it last. Despite some of the roads being new, straight and mostly animal and vehicle free the speed does not hover even briefly over 65kph! Honestly Shari and I debated whether we could run faster but safely as he promised we were delivered to Jagat Niwas Palace, Udaipur ... exhausted!!

Our rooms were as promised with a lake view and a cushioned alcove area to enjoy the view ... and we did!!

Off to a culture show and I was surprised to see the same older lady I'm thinking maybe 70ish) still dancing and balancing 9 pots on her head ... I couldn't do what she was doing with one pot glued to my head!!

Off to dinner on the rooftop of our hotel ... Overlooking the beautiful lake ... gin and tonics seemed so right and of course for me tandoori chicken ... I know ...But I love it!!!

A great night's sleep and waking to the lapping water next to our room ... into the alcove very early I watched India wake ... people bathing ... washing clothes ... moving into their day as the sun slowly rose.

Breakfast with a view in the restaurant and then off to see the sights! I beg not to do the Hindu temple (again) and I still have fearful memories of the City Palace tour where sweat dripped from every limb as I tried to work out what a Tiger War was and only at the last painting did I understand the guide was referring to Tug of Wars between elephants) nope wasn't up for any if that again .. so I shopped instead!!!

Wandered around the lovely shops waiting for the others having a cool drink with Jassa, not a tug of war in sight!! Lol!! Happy days!!

I managed to convince everyone to go next door to the beautiful Palace Hotel to have a poolside cocktail ... then Shari saw foot massages were very reasonable at \$8.00 each, the cocktail was \$5 and Ray was in need of a shave, which came with a head massage, nose trim, neck trim, cutthroat razor and hot towels for about \$6 - this is all at a 5 star hotel!!

Dinner had generally been costly us about \$3-\$6 with drinks!! Most expensive was rooftop Jodhpur with drinks \$15 for two .. seriously good food lots of it and the drinks are g&ts for me and beers for Ray!!!

Wander back through the busy alleyways ... stop for banana cake and decide a boat trip might be nice. \$2 each for half hour tour on the lake sounds reasonable!! Whirl around the Lake Palace, then past the really flash hotel where the Aussie cricketers stay .. the boat was not just for us ... There was an Indian family of about 10 on board with us - but when we got on any idea they had of enjoying the lake view was forgotten .. pictures of us with our bright red life jackets on we're way more interesting! Lol!! Yes, the four kids got the remaining koalas ... everyone happy!!!

Great lunch overlooking the lake and a relax in the alcove reading for the rest of the afternoon!!

Beautiful dinner by the lake with amazing views if the Lake Palace and City Palace. Another great day in Rajasthan!!!

Varanasi, India

Aug 26, 2012

Huge day, up early for our flight to Delhi and then three hour wait for flight to Varanasi. Bit excited about going here for the first time!



Finally we land and jump in the mini bus for the long haul to the hotel. Our first experience with the horrendous traffic conditions in Varanasi. The roads are terrible, over crowded with anything that moves on legs or wheels ... ugh.

Finally we make it to our hotel - Palace on the Ganges - exhausted and we are happy to find Felix waiting for us!! Quick decision to have a freshen up then beers on the hotel roof where we can watch the flooded Ganges race past.

It's very hot and humid and somehow Jassa has managed to find us some cold beers!! We watch the sun set from the roof and wonder if the water will go down enough for our early morning boat ride. Dinner and drinks on the roof until the beer runs out about the same time exhaustion takes over!

Up early, Ganges river boats have been cancelled due to the flooding so we head off on foot to the Ghats just near our hotel and watch the early morning chaos of pilgrims dunking themselves in the very murky Ganges, a young man oblivious to everyone practicing his yoga, kids selling flowers on banana leaves or little plates to make a blessing ... cows, dogs, walking pilgrims, holy men in saffron robes ... it's all a crazy scene ... and this is just the nearby Ghats!! We head off in the mini bus towards the main Ghats ... traffic is terrible .. as we now know it always is ... dropped off at the point where we walk in from ... all the streets are really dirty, cow s*** and cows everywhere, far worse than any other place we have been ... and crowds of people all making their way to the Holy River. As we are herded to the river we notice many people begging, more than usual and lots of small children are also begging. In amongst all this we pass many school kids on the front of their Dads motorbike, looking immaculate heading off to school ... some are so tiny!!!

Finally we reach the steps where people bathe from and the ceremonies are held .. but most of the steps are underwater so we follow our local guide who has the inside knowledge to a temple where we can watch the proceedings from a rooftop. The colours, smells and seeing the passion on people's faces as they dunk themselves in river is amazing! We look at the river and see absolute filth .. rubbish floating, thousands of people bathing, ash remains of recently departed being thrown in, loads of empty boats moored causing more chaos, a bit further out we see what looks like partial cremations float by it's like watching a train wreck ... so much is happening you can't take it all in and you can't look away...

After a Masala tea we head back along the alleyways ... that are so crowded with people, cows and dogs to the area where the cremations take place ... along the way we give way to a body shrouded on a stretcher being taken to the cremation site. India just whacks you in the face with everything at once ... I elect not to go up

into the actual burning site .. near enough is good enough for me ... It's hot, it stinks and I'm not loving Varanasi!

Finally we crawl back through the traffic to our hotel for a wash and breakfast.. and try and take in what we have seen.

Out again bouncing along the terrible roads to Sarnath which is a pilgrimage place for Buddhists. Lord Buddha preached his first sermon here. We are passed by a 4WD with a shrouded body strapped to the roof ...

Off to the Vishwanath Mandir and the Mother India Temple ... it's stinking hot ... it's taken ages to get here ...and I don't ever do history well!!!! :(

Finally back to the hotel and a lazy afternoon of reading and visiting Open Hand for late lunch.

We rally again for another go at the traffic this time on cycle rickshaws ... I have never been in a bigger traffic jam ... half way through Jassa saves us with some hot samosas he has seen just freshly cooked. We finally make it to the roof of a building to watch the ceremony performed by Hindu Priests in honour of the sacred river. This is usually watched from the river in boats but it is too dangerous with the floods. Very colourful and smoky ceremony ... lots of burning incense, chanting and drumming ... monkeys cheekily run past us and jump on the roof near us .. Ray amuses himself by counting geckos, and I watch people below bathing in the water.

Out to dinner via another traffic nightmare - nice dinner our last before we fly to Delhi and head in different directions homeward bound. Fantastic trip, I still love India... glad I've been to Varanasi but nope ... not going back there!!!

Thanks to Queen Rosie, Shari Samousa and Ray for sharing this adventure with me, to Jassa our amazing guide who smooths the bumps and understands that I like shopping more than history and Felix and Gwen for all their organizing!!! Well done!!