

## TRIP TO INDIA

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Let me tell you about our recent Royal Rajasthan private tour of India, my wife and I wanted an adventure holiday and were certainly not disappointed.

We arrived in New Delhi on Saturday, 21st September and were met by an air conditioned People Carrier and its Indian driver, Puran. This was to be our means of transport throughout the tour, a distance of around 1899 kilometres. The tour would include visiting Forts, Palaces, Mosques and other historical buildings in many towns and cities throughout Rajasthan. We would be staying in hotels of 1 or 2 nights duration and travelling long distances by day. On arrival at each destination we would be met by a guide who would look after us whilst there.

After arrival in New Delhi we were shown around for several hours before settling into our hotel. The following morning we toured Old Delhi, sightseeing in bustling streets and markets. We travelled by rickshaw and witnessed the many fascinating street scenes. That afternoon we took a flight to Udaipur. Meanwhile overnight our driver had driven there in order to meet us upon our flight arrival, this he did and on time. Here we stayed in a lovely room, four poster bed, and a roof top restaurant and pool.

The following day we did a tour of the city finishing with a sunset cruise on a beautiful lake. The next day we travelled to Jodhpur. This was an unbelievable journey. We met thousands of sheep and goats on different highways being herded by women in colourful saris and men wearing the typical red turban, apparently they were being taken to their winter grazing forests. We also met several herds of camels making the same journey. In Jodhpur we stayed in a beautiful hotel with peacocks and monkeys in the grounds. Our accommodation was in a converted stable block which had previously housed elephants and horses.

Our next stop was at Jaisalmer, a town situated in the yellow sand desert about 130 kilometres from the Pakistan border. The following day more sightseeing, but in the late afternoon we were taken to the sand dunes in the Great Thar Desert where we rode camels for an hour across the desert and into the sand dunes to watch a glorious sunset. Little desert children performed an impromptu dance for us in the sand.

On the 28th September we drove to Bikaner, still desert country where we had more tours of Forts, Palaces etc. We then travelled to Nawalgarh for more sightseeing. Here we stayed in a hotel reminiscent of the British Raj. In earlier times it had been part of a Maharajah's palace. Here we were met by some of the hotel staff, one man was standing rigidly to attention holding a large flag, another anointed our foreheads and sprinkled flower petals and rose water on our heads, in addition to garlands of flowers being placed around our necks. Talk about feeling important? Food here was excellent.

On the 30th we drove to the city of Jaipur, home of the Amber Fort. Here we took a beautifully decorated elephant ride up to the fort, this took about half an hour. After exploring the fort we did more sightseeing and wandering in the colourful bazaars and street markets. In one square we saw a dentist with his stall laid out, on it were various antique instruments, several sets of false teeth and dozens of large flies. Visiting him would be like taking death into your hands I would think.

On the 2nd October we arrived in Agra and checked into the 5 star Jaypee Palace Hotel overnight. It is probably the best hotel we have ever stayed in, absolute luxury in a small suite.

In Agra we visited the Taj Mahal, a sight never to be forgotten. We had an excellent guide, he took us to a private enclosure where we were able to sit down and witness the sunset over the temple. It sparkled with its brilliance. The next day we returned to Delhi for our return home. On our first arrival in Delhi we were greeted by torrential rain, it was the end of the monsoon and bucketed down for two days. However, thereafter everything was fine.

We know the cow is sacred, we encountered thousands of them throughout our journey, straying or lying in the road, how they are not killed in their hundreds I do not know. Traffic in the cities was a nightmare, our driver Puran earned every rupee of his tip, tackling cars, scooters, rickshaws, tuk tuks and lorries (which overtook on the offside, nearside, and even over the top if they had the opportunity). Turning left, right, doing u-turns etc. was hazardous but acceptable. Pedestrian crossings, traffic lights and road indicators meant nothing. Anyway, it was a marvellous trip, fully up to our expectations and we shall be able to talk about it for months to come. The only downside was that I had a touch of the "Delhi belly" for a few days. The trip was organised by a tour operator VISIT ASIA, if anyone wishes to know more do not hesitate to ring me,

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