

INDIA – October 2013

It was an okay Jet flight from Terminal 4 Heathrow, although being so cramped made it difficult to sleep.



Spent the afternoon with our guide Hari and the rest of the group: Diana, Penny, Eileen and Peter. The roads in Old Delhi were really busy with all modes of transport; cars and rickshaws seemingly going in all directions. At one set of traffic lights there was even a camel. There were crowds and crowds of people everywhere, the air was filled with different smells, not all pleasant and the noise apart from the constant hooting of horns was something else. Makeshift homes including tents were all around. Apparently these all have an address. Most of the buildings were in a poor state of repair, however, the Colonial buildings must have been quite grand in their time. Everywhere you looked there was litter but despite this the people appeared cheerful and colourful.



We drove past the impressive Red Fort that is over 2kms long and was the seat of Mughal power until it was taken over by the British in 1837. The national flag first flew here when India became independent on 15 August 1947. It looked just like one of the forts that we used to play with as a child.



On the way to the grand mosque Jami Masjid that can hold up to 25,000 we walked through the traditional market of Chandni Chowk where there were tightly packed shops and stalls selling just about anything you could think of. Some roads sold nothing but bicycle parts whilst others were full of firework shops which are especially popular when celebrating cricket victories.



Next we visited Rajghat, the site of Ghandi's cremation where all visiting Heads of State are taken. This quiet, clean, green park was quite a contrast from the crowded hustle and bustle of the streets. Suddenly I was a celebrity with families wanting to take my photograph with them.



Once outside, however, it took ages for our driver to just turn the bus. It is the Muslim feast of sacrifice known as Bakr I'd where a goat is sacrificed to Allah to commemorate Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his own son Ismail. Everywhere you looked there were goats of all sizes and colours some decorated with ribbons and tinsel. We were told that they could fetch as much as £200.



For the first two nights we are staying at the Oberoi Maidens Hotel. Fortunately it was nothing like the Marigold Hotel, everything is in good working order and very Indian. A buffet Indian supper with a bottle of fizzy water cost about £30 but you have to watch out for the taxes and service tax that they add on. Rick is back to his normal holiday job of decanting the gin into a plastic water bottle.

Wednesday 17 October



It was one of those nights when you think you've been asleep for ages and wake up to find its only half a hour past midnight. First visit today was The Qutb complex with its five story Quth Minar tower and 4th century Iron Pillar. We were able to see the Hindu motifs such as bells and garlands on the pillars of the Quwat-ul-Islam Mosque. It was a public holiday and the families were out in force, the men in western clothes and women in some beautiful coloured sari's and others in baggy pyjama like trousers with tunic tops called Salwar-kameez. It was Rick's turn today for the photo call this time with a group of girls.



I really liked the perfectly symmetrical Humayun's Tomb which is said to have been the inspiration for the Taj Mahal. After lunch at a local restaurant we drove around New Delhi along its wide avenues and colonial mansions built by the British in the 1930's when it was made their imperial capital. We saw the government buildings and passed by the India Gate. It is certainly a contrast Old Delhi.

Back at the hotel there was time for a relaxing swim and had another curry under the stars.