

Friday 25 October



This dog has had too much curry



The girls were carrying bricks to the rooftop

It's a long journey to Jaisalmer and the Gateway Hotel Rawalkot. Raj is an excellent driver in fact he is an excellent all rounder who can communicate well with the young and old alike. He knows where everything is, an ATM, best place to get a good deal and clean toilet stops. Penny has asked him if he could get her a bottle of local rum and he said he has some in his minibus that she could try and if she liked it he would get her one. He is a city boy at heart and yesterday on his day off he was at a bit of a loose end. He keeps his minibus immaculate, always looks cheerful, smart and clean and has a good sense of humour.



Indian life expectancy would no doubt increase enormously if they could sort out the rubbish problem and install main drainage. Rubbish is littered everywhere and blocks up the open drains. I am finding the Hindu philosophy regarding animals a little strange especially that some find dogs and pigs dirty and cats bad luck. There can't be a food shortage because they would be eating their goats, cows and pigs. The journey takes longer than usual, seven hours instead of five because there are quite a few improvements and new roads being made. In fact there is a great deal of building work going on in and around Jodhpur. There is a big army base near Jaisalmer as it is near the Pakistan border. The desert is populated with mostly acacia trees and near last night's hotel there is a lot of salt. After our first toilet stop the previous flat desert gave way to sand dunes. Vodafone adverts are everywhere, almost everyone has a mobile phone but access to social media is causing some problems. We saw our first wind farm and were told that solar energy is becoming popular. As I am writing this we have just had lunch near the underground nuclear test station at Pokharham.



A popular tourist attraction is to see the sun set at Vyas Chhatari at Cenotaph overlooking the fort. Unfortunately the sun was shrouded as it set and we didn't see the fort turn a golden colour. One of the recent cremations had a pile of hair beside it as the family member who performs the service has to shave his head. Everyone can't afford to buy the 250 kgs of wood needed for a cremation and have to settle for 50kgs for the head only and have to throw the rest of the body into the river. Hari took us to a rooftop restaurant where Penny and I tried out the local rum. Best and cheapest food so far. Rick must be only person to put on weight whilst on holiday in India - it's all those chapattis!!!!

Saturday 26 October



Jaisalmer is in the Thar Desert, strategically located on the once busy caravan trade route to Afghanistan and Central Asia. It is called the Golden City because of the yellow sandstone buildings. Before going to the Fort we fed the huge, whiskery cat fish in the lake.



There were lots of dogs around and I felt uneasy especially when a bull came towards us. A man kept close to Hari and followed us around, I wondered if it was the local Mafia. The fort, that is surrounded by Pakistan on three sides, was built in 1156 but has been added to over the years. There are about 4000 people living and working there and about sixty hotels. This is proving a threat to the fort and attempts are being made to move them from the site. We were told not to buy anything from the traders there.



Rick and Peter checking out the dangerous wiring

There was a young boy practicing walking the tightrope and a man with a disgusting four foot moustache. Although some women were washing their houses the open drains in the narrow streets made it feel unclean. However, there was some beautiful intricate sandstone architecture.





The camel ride to see the sunset in the desert was a real adventure. I think we left a little late as Raj really put his foot down, weaving in and out of cows, goats, tractors, lorries and whatever else happened to be in the way. My camel was called Michael Jackson, his trotting felt more like a gallop as we raced across the desert into the crowds waiting for the sunset. My thighs were gripping the camels sides, my wrists were stiff from holding on tightly and my boobs had completely bounced out of my bra! Rick and Peter were worried about their undercarriages. Our camels stopped and let us off amongst the crowds. Rick was most indignant as the ten minute gallop was far from the leisurely forty minute ride we had been promised and we weren't sure how we were going to get back to Hari. All of us apart from Rick had handed over 100 tip which was twice what we were expecting to give. We got completely fleeced and it wasn't long before most of us were out of money. A couple of young girls begging for money made their way to us carrying an almost newborn baby. We all turned away and said "don't look" but it was too late Rick had already clocked it. Rick was being very Richard and when challenged why he looked we had the comment of the evening "they shouldn't be out in the desert this time of night". Doesn't sound so funny now.



Meanwhile somewhere in the sand dunes nearer the setting sun were Hari, Raj and Eileen with a cool box of drinks frantically trying to find out what had happened to us. Our plan was when or if Rick's camel returned we could follow it back to the others. Suddenly we spotted Raj in the distance running towards us. It was a miracle he managed to find us amongst all the tourists. After a lot of arguing and shouting he got our camel handlers to take us back to Hari who had organised rum and cokes and a little girl to dance for us. The bottle of local rum was a great success and we all had a good laugh about our adventure.

Sunday 27 October



It was a long, long journey about 9 hours to our heritage hotel “Arabia Bhenswara” the other side of Jalore. We stopped on the way to see how a desert village manage their water. Four families lived in a newly build substantial sandstone house and although the house was modern they lived very simply. Rick entertained the children with his phone and talk of cricket. A convoy of 37 army trucks went by. A herd of camels were being branded. No one seems to mind you stopping to watch, everyone is friendly and it doesn't matter wherever we stop in the desert someone turns up. At an oasis we met a shepherd who was having to sleep outside on his long journey with his goats and sheep. Before independence our hotel was home to the local landlord of five villages. By restoring it they have given work to the villagers and also retaining part of their culture. It turns out the hotel owners wife is sister to the wife of the Hindu family we had supper with in Jaipur. The hotel looks very much like a dolls house. We hadn't seen many other foreign tourists until we reached Jaisalmer where it was packed with French and Germans. We have been steering clear of salads and I am getting a bit fed up with vegetarian curries. I feel hungry today and am fantasising about a juicy steak and salad.

