

India

December 2014 - January 2015

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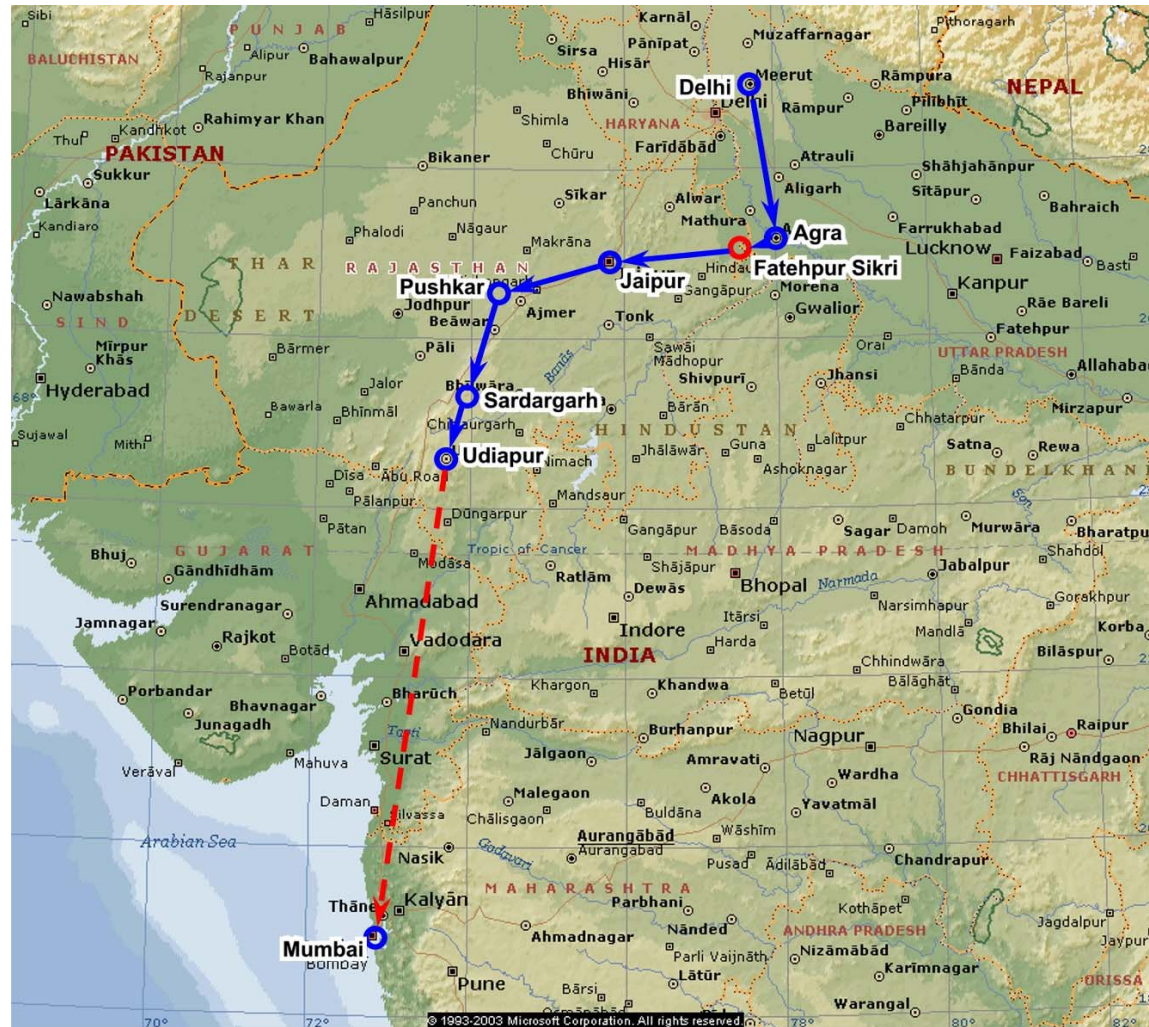
Itinerary

India December 2014 – January 2015

India 2014 - 2015 Itinerary			
26-Dec-14			Depart Melbourne QF35 12:15. Arrive Delhi QF3955 22:55
27-Dec-14	Sat	Indian Family Adventure - A Masala Encounter http://www.globaldrift.com.au/trips/IND-IFA	
28-Dec-14	Sun	Delhi	
29-Dec-14	Mon	Delhi to Agra	
30-Dec-14	Tue	Agra	
31-Dec-14	Wed	Agra to Jaipur	
01-Jan-15	Thu	Jaipur	
02-Jan-15	Fri	Jaipur to Pushkar	
03-Jan-15	Sat	Pushkar to Sardargardh	
04-Jan-15	Sun	Sardargardh	
05-Jan-15	Mon	Sardargardh to Udaipur	
06-Jan-15	Tue	Udaipur	
07-Jan-15	Wed	Udaipur to Mumbai	Flight arranged by Ian
08-Jan-15	Thu	Mumbai	
09-Jan-15	Fri	Depart Mumbai	
10-Jan-15	Sat	Mumbai to Goa	Flight arranged by Ian
11-Jan-15	Sun	Goa	
12-Jan-15	Mon	Goa	Old Goa, Panjim and spice plantation

13-Jan-15	Tue	Goa	
14-Jan-15	Wed	Goa	Anjuna morning market
15-Jan-15	Thu	Goa to Cochin	
16-Jan-15	Fri	Cochin – Athirapally	Backwaters canal tour
17-Jan-15	Sat	Athirapally - Munnar	
18-Jan-15	Sun	Munnar	
19-Jan-15	Mon	Munnar – Thekkaddy	
20-Jan-15	Tue	Thekkaddy – Alleppey	
21-Jan-15	Wed	Alleppey – Kumarakom	
22-Jan-15	Thu	Cochin Sightseeing and Airport Drop Off - Cochin to Singapore	Depart Cochin MI467 23:20
23-Jan-15	Fri	Singapore	Arrive 06:10 Raffles Hotel
24-Jan-15	Sat	Singapore	Raffles Hotel
25-Jan-15	Sun	Singapore	Raffles Hotel
26-Jan-15	Mon	Singapore to Melbourne	Depart Singapore QF8404 22:55
27-Jan-15	Tue		Arrive Melbourne 08:50

Delhi to Mumbai



Kerala

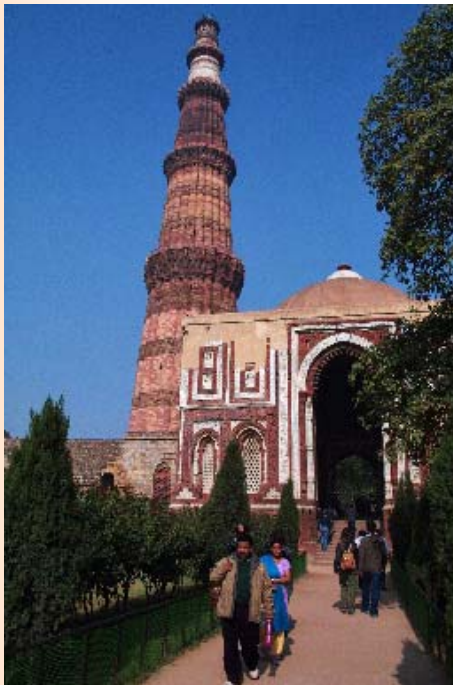


“Tales of India”

The Boxing Day announcement at Melbourne Airport informing us our flight would be delayed due to wheel trouble saw us miss the Singapore Delhi connection. Was this an ominous beginning to a five week holiday or could things only get better’?

Saturday 27th December 2014 Delhi - Connaught Hotel

Day 01



Qutb Minar

In the wee small hours of a deceptively quiet Delhi morning the taxi manoeuvred its way to “The Connaught Hotel” past many

huge lorries with “Please toot your horn” painted on their rear. There were a number of people sleeping rough on the silent streets but little else moved.



Iron Column - Qutb Minar

With daylight and a few hours of sleep clearing the brain fog we started to feel the real chill of a Delhi winter. Nothing however would remove the daily Delhi haze that blanketed the view of the city’s monuments to its AD 6th Century past through to its colonial and modern day history. We forgot about feeling cold when we

read that 25 people had died overnight in Delhi alone from the freezing conditions. Had they been some of those we saw sleeping in the streets?



Qutb Minar

My pre-trip research had listed countless historical sites I assumed would be easy to visit since they were in the same “Old Delhi” vicinity. I had not made allowances for 17 million inhabitants venturing out in cars, taxis, auto rickshaws, trucks, bikes and on foot all trying to perform their daily business and

cope with thousands of Indian and International tourists as well as urchins and others pushing and badgering everyone with trinkets and chai. The same could be said of my research to each port of call on the trip and places with no chance to see.



Step Well - Archaeological Precinct

On the pre “Global Drift” tour day while meeting ‘our family for the next few weeks’ we planned an excursion to Delhi’s early capital found within the Mehrauli Archaeological Park. The site provided an excellent understanding of India’s rich

Mughal history and gave us a chance to chat to a few of our fellow travellers, all friends of Trang’s.



Palace Interior - Archaeological Precinct



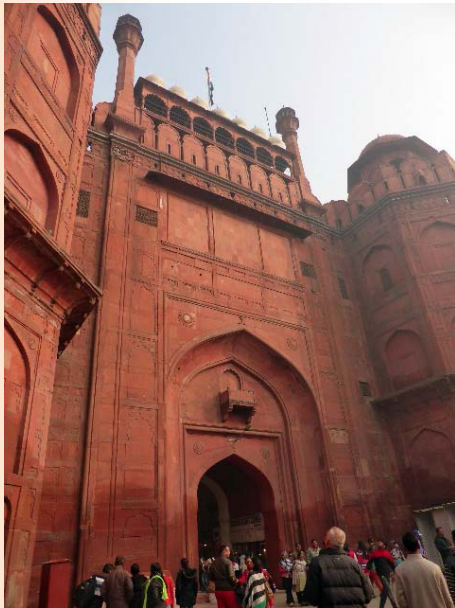
Humayan's Tomb - Delhi

Someone had placed grain on a wall next to the taxi stop; while we waited for the others we spied the harmonious Hindu tolerance of squirrels, pigeons, rats and mice eating together without any fear or malice. The acrid ammonia smell of urine was an early affront to the nose - funny how we got used to it!

For me, this park and all it had to offer was definitely a highlight. The 4thC iron pillar was outstanding, so too the stepwell with a base below the water table for the storage of fresh, clean water. The history of Delhi’s main buildings seemed similar to Cusco, Peru, the foundations of the last kingdom used for the next ruler’s construction. -Hindu buildings over Mughal with the British adding their show of power.

Seeing the footpath line up of men working at desks with ancient typewriters offering legal and Notary Public service was also a great memory from the past. They advertised their writing of “wells and certificating documents”.

https://www.google.com.au/search?q=Delhi's+Mehrauli+Archaeological+Park&rls=com.microsoft:en-AU&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&startIndex=&startPage=1&rlz=117ADRA_enAU427&gfe_rd=cr&ei=WmjJVI_JJ8Xu8wfdgoLABg&gws_rd=ssl



Entrance - Lahore Gate - Red Fort - Delhi

Ian's Delhi notes: *This morning we journey into the teeming centre of "Old Delhi". We enjoy a stop at the stunning Jama Masjid Mosque then take the kids on a colourful walk through the maze of laneways and alleys of Chandni Chowk. Here are the bazaars and stalls of Indian legend. Time for some bargaining and a cup of local*

Chai. This afternoon you are free to explore the city's many sites including the Red Fort and Raj Ghat where Gandhi was cremated. Enjoy dinner in Connaught Place tonight where Delhi's "in" crowd can be found



Red Fort - Delhi

https://www.google.com.au/search?q=Things+to+see+in+India&rls=com.microsoft:en-AU&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&startIndex=&startPage=1&rlz=117ADRA_enAU427&gfe_rd=cr&ei=FI6GVPivLqON8QeSqoGIDw&gws_rd=ssl#rls=com.microsoft:en-AU&q=Things+to+see+in+Delhi/

I had noted Delhi food specialities as: *Butter Chicken, Chicken Changezi, Ishtu, Kebab, Chicken Tikka, and Biryani Rice*

Built on the banks of the Yamuna River, the National Capital Territory of Delhi, Old Delhi and Agra in Uttar Pradesh share the same river which enabled rulers of the past easy travel between cities. We had the chance to see **Humayan's Tomb**, the **India Gate** near the invisible **Parliament House** (due to the dense haze) rode the Rajpath, visited the most interesting Crafts Museum (no photos allowed except that the Zari (sari with golden threads) maker wanted his photo taken by Jim), we visited Birla House where Gandhi was assassinated and enjoyed meals along Connaught Place.



Hall of Private Audience - Red Fort - Delhi

While the driver calmly coped with the chaotic, crazy, hair rising traffic, we were 'entertained' by tiny children risking their lives while touting and performing acrobatic tricks at the car window.

The extremes between the wealthy and the poor were heartbreakingly obvious, not just in appearance but also in behaviour.

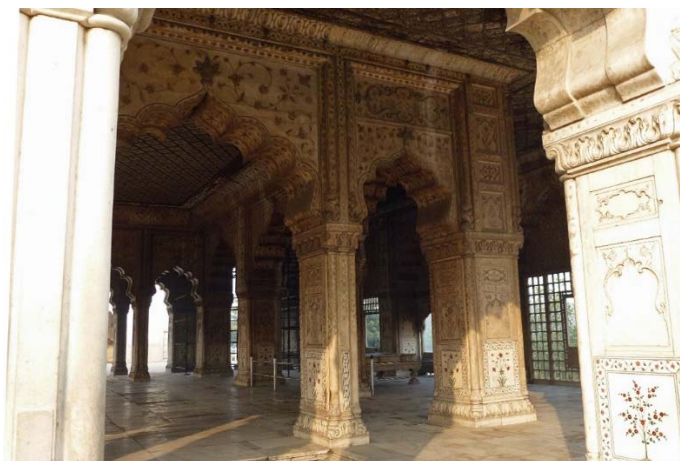


Peace Gong - Gandhi Museum - Birla House - Delhi

Sadly there was no possibility of a walk down Chandni Chowk because of the crowds and horrendous traffic. We had just realised Indian schools were on holidays so parents were touring the country instilling some national pride in their offspring, all good, except they added to the throngs.



Tile decoration - Hall of Private Audience - Red Fort - Delhi



Hall of Private Audience - Red Fort - Delhi

Around all famous monuments and buildings there are fences these days to control crowds. Delhi was armed to the hilt with security guards and guns, after the Parliament House bomb a year ago, no chances were being taken. It was of minor concern

as we were in the very capable and informative hands of Ian and Stephen, our guides who knew the best places to see and attempted to cover as many of these in the restricted time available.

I think every city we visited had a prominent boulevard named MG Road- in memory of their great Mahatma Gandhi.

On one occasion a member of our group decided he wanted a Hamburger from MacDonald's. "No, sorry sir there is only chicken, no beef, no ham, no fish and from memory not even a veggie burger. It takes a few minutes to realise what being in a Hindu/Muslim country means to a place like Macca's.

I had few memories of my previous Indian trip in 1964 but knew now there are far more cars, far less bikes and rickshaws, yet just as many homeless on the streets. The dust and street rubbish along the rutted roads where many cows wander remains the same. I had been there in late spring so knew nothing of the bone chilling freezing Delhi winter; I was ill prepared for it on this visit.

My very own Xian warrior stood guard counting the groups suitcases onto the bus before each hotel departure. The Family tour group was made up of Ian's immediate and extended family as well as his long term friends. On our bus we had Trang, her sister and close friend from uni days as well as her psychologist friends and their husbands and a son. The parents in law of Trang's daughter, Stephen and his partner Chao and the Russell's made 30 starters. We did pretty well with nationalities

as well, Greek Australians, New Zealanders, Spanish, and Vietnamese Canadians and of course Australians.

Monday 29th December 2014 Delhi to Agra - Mansingh Palace Hotel

Day 03



Hall of Private Audience - Red Fort - Delhi

Ian's notes: Delhi to and around Agra.

This morning we journey south through the countryside to the fabled city of Agra, home of the magnificent Taj Mahal. We arrive in time for an orientation of this intimate and

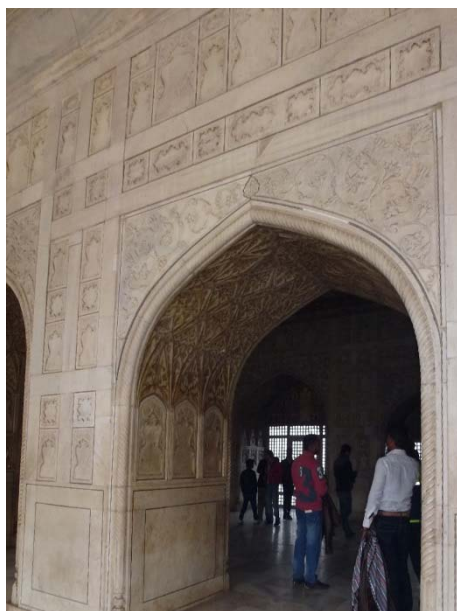
bustling city. Perhaps a sunset drink watching the sun set over the Taj. In the morning We visit the fabled Taj. Known as the 'Teardrop on the face of Humanity,' this monument to love will leave a lifetime impression. Sitting in the shadows of the marble shrine we recall the stories of Shah Jehan and the love of his life, Mumtaz Mahal. Later visit a carpet factory and learn how these local treasures are made. You will have time for an optional visit to the Agra Fort or just take a rickshaw and get lost in the narrow streets.

The road to Agra in a bus without heating, proved bitterly cold. The thick haze once again spoiled our view of everything, especially the Commonwealth Games site and the Indian Grand Prix Track. Although relatively inexpensive, few cars use the new toll roads choosing the slower highways. The road signs suggested; "Please, if you speed you will invite prosecution", or "Please slow down, life is precious!" later another stated "Enjoy your journey and drive safely". Our driver was most careful; he kept to 50 km/h in what appeared to be 2nd gear! We were passed by many overloaded lorries that looked more like a chef's cap or a soufflé bursting over the sides. We were certainly grateful for the heated restaurant coffee/toilet stop; the internal warmth provided by the drinks was a godsend.

As the haze slowly lifted we could see the vast arid landscape, which, with irrigation blossomed into rice and vegetables crops. The poverty of most rural people was painfully obvious. Less cars, more buffalo carts and old bikes. I don't think we saw a new push bike anywhere in India; they are all old and rusty. Tractors with open backed trays ferried countless numbers of farm workers from place to place. Nearby villages of houses constructed from straw and sticks showed people's lives were closely connected to their goats, sheep, cows, donkeys, buffalos and dogs. Women shepherds were herding their flocks to greener pastures. I wondered if they were assisted by the microfinance schemes.

With India's population now over 1 billion it shouldn't be surprising that villages were inundated with dozens of children, often playing cricket in bare feet. Cricket was definitely the young Indian boy's favourite pastime. The Melbourne Boxing Day Test against India was on at that time creating a bit of freindly rivalry as we travelled.

Making a sea of white, the water birds flocked to the irrigated rice paddies where the warm water steamed out of the wells in the cold morning. Along the way we passed peacocks, large owls, parrots, egrets, eagles, and a few Nilgai (deer).



Red Fort - Agra

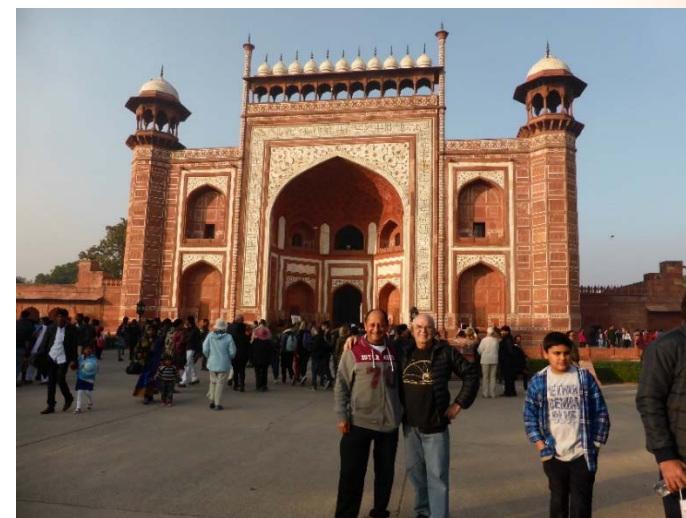
The village grain was dried and stored in pointy topped round grass huts, perhaps protected by many bee hives close by. We passed cow dung cakes drying for fuel and mile after mile of fields of handmade bricks drying ready for firing. The brick kiln chimneys belched smoke adding to the overall haze. There were many compounds with suppliers of very modern expensive Maharaja garden decoration which didn't really sit comfortably, in fact it seemed to mock the poverty of the rural surrounding.

As we drew near Agra outskirts the homes in the sprawling towns displayed solar

panels and satellite discs on their roofs, spelling a major change from rural existence. Countless education institutes and colleges for English, engineering and science were advertised on billboards. Sharma Typing Institute's sign caught my eye, rather out of date, with modern IT! The four lane highways suddenly became about seven or eight lanes as cars, auto rickshaws and motor-bikes filled any tiny available space between the larger trucks and buses in both directions. It was a kamikaze world as vehicles of every description fought for their inch. How come we saw very few accidents? We witnessed none until our last day in Kerala!!

I concentrated looking out the side bus windows so my mind did not invent trouble! At the front near the door of the bus there were helpful phone numbers listed for passengers: local district police, transport help line as well as a woman's help line number.

Rubbish piled high lined every road in the towns. It dawned on me; there was great method in leaving the huge piles of rubbish lying in the streets. First the rag and plastic (definitely the scourge of India) pickers rummaged through in the hope of making a few rupees. Next, the cows, buffalos, pigs, dogs, chooks, rats and crows had their turn to scavenge. By the time the tractor arrived to haul the putrid smelly mess away there was little left, no need for the municipalities to supply rubbish bins at all. For a Muslim city there were an awful lot of pigs with piglets walking around the neighbourhood of Agra and those rubbish piles! I would have thought since the acrimonious deadly partition with Pakistan in 1962 there would be very few Muslims left anywhere in India. How wrong I was.



Taj Mahal Entrance - George and Peter



Carved Marble Panel - Taj Mahal

Our arrival at "Mansingh Palace Hotel" Agra, was delayed not only by the bedlam of chaotic traffic but also by countless wedding carts blocking the way as they prepared for a festival.

We were told Indian drivers had to have good horns, good brakes and good luck to survive on the roads. I would definitely add patience and tolerance as well.



Weaving Demonstration - Agra

There was clearly a varied language to Indian vehicle horns: one short beep-watch out, beep-BEEP beep-a friendly warning or hello, **BEEP BEEP BEEP** get out of my way that's my spot! And so it went right throughout the Indian trip- from the north through to the south!!



Red Fort - Agra

In the afternoon our group visited the Taj Mahal. A magnificent sight marred somewhat by the mist hanging in the valley. As it was a holiday the Taj was also swarming with local and international tourists. Fortunately our premium tickets allowed us to precede the locals in the long queue.

Agra was settled in the 11thC as mentioned on the River Yamuna in southern Uttar Pradesh. The entire region including Delhi is a huge valley, once more we experienced haze from the cold sweeping down off the northern snow and the heat blowing up from the south and settling in the valley. The mornings were again bitterly cold until the sun peeped through to warm the city and its inhabitants.

As we walked into the Taj Mahal complex we spied squirrels stealing peanuts from a stall, the vendor was more interesting in trying to sell her wares to unsuspecting tourists than their

protection. The Taj Mahal is everything people have written over the centuries, delicate yet strong, beautiful just mystifying. The inlaid flowers of precious and semi-precious stones shone in the late afternoon light, sad to see how many stones had been picked out by scavengers. The sunset over the Taj although spoilt slightly by the haze was a glorious deep red.



Taj Mahal

The hair raising rickshaw bike ride to and from the site was another matter; my heart was in my mouth. There was certainly no space spare between us and other vehicles in the tiny streets. Our painfully thin spider legged host rider had to get off and push some of the way as his load was well over the normal limit. Later, I pray he obtained a decent meal to help his recovery.

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[&ei=FI6GVPivLqON8QeSgoGIDw&gws_rd=ssl#rls=com.microsoft:en-AU&q=Things+to+see+in+Agra./](#)

Food noted: paratha, dalmoth, kofta and tandoori as the Mughlai food to try here. Breakfast dishes included samosa, sambhar, idli, garlic butter vegetables, ajwani paratha, aloo bhaji, nandor dosa

Tuesday 30th December 2014 Agra - Mansingh Palace Hotel

Day 04

In the morning we visited the Kanu Carpet Factory, where the weaving process was demonstrated and explained. There were four men sitting side by side at the loom working on sections of the pattern. Their speed at knotting and cutting the many colours and yarns of wools spoke heaps; it took a good 15 minutes to finish a row. The factory owner praised his business as it trained rural families in rug making. My major concern was for the young children of these families, how many were making rugs instead of gaining an education? Their nimble fingers would make knots very quickly!

We were joined by an Intrepid Tour group; not famed for spending a lot of money. The owner's spiel focussed on them, concentrating on the lower cost woollen rugs and it was only as we were about to leave that Jim asked to see some silk rugs. More expensive than the woollen rugs, they

were far more beautiful with a wonderful sheen.

Two rugs were purchased at the rug factory. I don't think Thanasis, Marion and Jim were seduced by the offer of coffee, chai and a cake, the rugs spoke for themselves. Thanasis and Marion purchased a runner for their hallway and Jim purchased a small silk rug.



Red Fort - Agra

On the way back from the carpet factory Jim and I were dropped off at the UNESCO World Heritage site, the Agra Red Fort. As it

proved to be in a far better preserved state compared to Delhi's Red Fort we gained a greater understanding and appreciation of Mughal life and their eye for detail and decoration. It was becoming obvious how well planned and beautiful the Mughal gardens had been, the fountains, perfumed gardens must have been exquisite.



Red Fort - Agra

I was thrilled to see most Indians were wearing their national dress whether it Hindu or Muslim; I was taken by the varieties of costumes and the magnificent colour combinations and superb

decorations used by both men and women. Some of the head-dress was spectacular. The turbans took the prize, 10 x 1 metres of coloured silk curled and wrapped to perfection. The school holidays had encouraged parents in their thousands to

show their children the national monuments, the children were also dressed in their finest and brightest. The foreigners were in the minority, so too locals in western dress.

At the chosen restaurants so far we had been fortunate in obtaining some excellent local wines to complement our meals;

a 2012 Shiraz was selected and enjoyed on several occasions. Kingfisher was the selected beer while lime and soda became a hit with me.

A short trip to view the Taj from the other side of the river was arranged but the evening fog rolled in and the Taj was obscured.

Wednesday 31st December 2014

Agra to Jaipur – Bissau Palace Hotel

Day 05



Fatehpur Sikri

Ian's notes: Agra to and around Jaipur.

We head west and first stop at the amazing barren 16th century city of Fatehpur Sikri. Built by Akbar it exhibits the splendour of a

Mughal city and was left pristine when abandoned due to lack of water. We learn of the mysteries of this ancient kingdom frozen in time. Continuing on we arrive at Jaipur, known as the Pink City. Jaipur is all that Rajasthan has to offer. Brilliant colours, forts and palaces and a bustling city centre. We stay in a Heritage Palace Hotel decorated in traditional Mughal Rajasthan style. In the morning we take a short drive to the Amber Palace. We climb aboard our elephants who will trudge us up the hill to the palace courtyard. We return to Jaipur to visit the famed Hawa Mahal (Palace of the Winds) and have time to explore the Mubarak Mahal. The Maharajas museum has a superb collection of Royal costumes and pashmina shawls. A busy day concludes with a night of Bollywood cinema at the Raj Mandir Theatre

<http://www.transindiatravels.com/rajasthan/jaipur/tourist-places-to-visit-in-jaipur> recommended food for the area included Samundari Rattan, Shaama Murgh, Mass Ro Mozzo, upwa, palak poori.

https://www.google.com.au/search?q=Things+to+see+in+India&rls=com.microsoft:en-AU&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&startIndex=&startPage=1&rlz=117ADRA_enAU427&gfe_rd=cr

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Sign - Fatehpur Sikri

As we departed the city the haze/fog again prevented us viewing the Taj from the other side of the river, disappointing as I'm sure it would have been spectacular to see the majestic inlaid marble monument again.

As we made our way out of Agra on the wide banks of River Yamuna the washer men were thrashing the living daylight out of hotel sheets and towels while buffalo, cows and birds ambled passed or over the damp washing laid out on the banks. Around the next corner at an intersection called 'labourer's corner' there were hundreds of hopeful men waiting for the opportunity of a job of any sort, trade or labouring.

Once on the highway I felt quite at home amongst the gum trees that lined the roads. We passed countless impressive highway entry gates or arches of (I assume) prospective new housing estates that went no further than a few metres into large open tracts of land. One had 'OMG City' across the top of the arch! Did that have the same meaning?

Twenty three km from Agra we stopped at Fatehpur Sikri, the Mughal emperor Akbar's capital from 1571 to 1585. An amazing crumbling walled city deserted after 13 years due to lack of water. Akbar tastefully celebrated Judaism and the Hindu, Christian and Muslim religions of his three wives within the city's architecture. The Hindu wife's palace was the most

sumptuous as she produced an heir. The swastika, lotus flower and Star of David are a prominent part of Hindu culture and design, we witnessed many and varying examples. My simply wish for today was for all religions to gain a better understanding of each other!



Fatehpur Sikri

[https://www.google.com.au/search?q=Fatehpursikri+India&rls=com.microsoft:en-AU&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-](https://www.google.com.au/search?q=Fatehpursikri+India&rls=com.microsoft:en-AU&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&startIndex=&startPage=1&rlz=117ADRA_enAU427&gfe_rd=cr&ei=l7vJVLyPBNDu8weC94GwCQ&gws_rd=ssl)

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Marble Screens - Fatehpur Sikri

At new building sites we saw bamboo scaffolding tied together at odd angles with bamboo strips, these extended up for many stories. It looked decidedly unsafe for the builders particularly when they were carrying heavy loads of cement to the top floors. In some cases the bamboo scaffolding held concrete ledges and

bay windows precariously until they were completed. Throughout the India we visited there were countless buildings half constructed, incomplete roads and compounds, never to be completed. I asked several times for reasons mostly I was told corruption or bankruptcy however a newspaper article indicated that many were so badly constructed builders were ordered to stop. India's homeless rate is so high; it was frustrating to see these incomplete 'possible dwellings' adding to the problem.

Along the roads we travelled there were small lightweight colourful kites flying in the breeze controlled by children. It brought memories of the skilled fliers who had broken glass tails on kites and fought endless battles in Malaysian competitions. There were signs inviting us to enter various bars to try the best English wine and beer. Does England have vineyards?

Flamboyant Jaipur or the Pink City was founded by the Amber ruler, Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II in 1727; it is the capital of Rajasthan. This city indeed the whole state stands out instantly as being different, not only in architecture but also with its jewellery, textiles, cultural string puppets and brilliant designs. To get to Bissau Palace Hotel (and the home of one of Jaipur's noble families), the bus had to negotiate a very narrow street with

the main market operating on both sides. Chickens were losing their heads and skinned in seconds, goats were tethered waiting the same fate, and the strong odour of the fish greeted the visitor well before its sight.

The market had a wide range of fruit and vegetables on offer. Melons, apples, bananas, pomegranates, and grapes seemed the most common. Indians favourite vegetable- red onions always take pride of place on stalls along with potatoes, garlic, okra, snake beans, tomatoes, red carrots and cucumbers. We slept through the hotel's New Year's Eve party and fireworks waking up to welcome rain, our first for the trip. It damped the constant penetrating dust for a few hours.

Thursday 1st January 2015

Jaipur – Bissau Palace Hotel

Day 06

This morning we visited the Amber Fort. On the way we stopped at the Hawa Mahal, so named because it was essentially a high screen wall built so the women of the royal household could observe street festivities while unseen from the outside.

Outside we saw (and heard) a snake charmer and nearby I bought some Mughal slippers and was asked "What is your good name, madam?"



Chandpole Gate – Jaipur

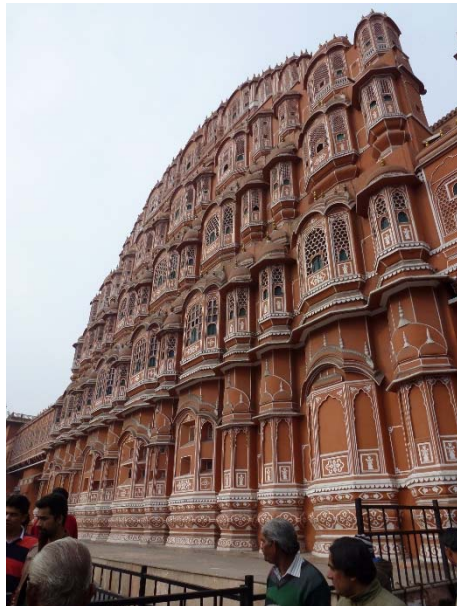


Bissau Palace Hotel – Jaipur

Due to the crowds it took an age to get up the hill to the Amber Fort uncomfortably rocking side to side on the back of an elephant. (Straddling the neck is so much better) While waiting we had to develop new methods of distracting the many touters selling books and Jewellery etc. they were like blow flies at an Ozzie BBQ and just as

annoying. There were women in colourful saris with many bangles and ear rings pretending to dig or sweep the grass hoping someone would take their photo for a few rupees.

From the top looking at the opposite mountain you would have thought you were seeing the Great Wall of China, in the valley you could see a picturesque lake and garden. We loved the carved marble mosque; its elaborate mirror decoration was superb so too the gentle reflected light filtering through the carved marble filigreed walls.



Palace of the Winds - Jaipur

In the evening we enjoyed a walk through the many narrow streets of the bazaar, it was reminiscent of Old Hanoi streets with designated crafts and trades. The bunched electricity wires stringing from pole to pole throughout the cities of India seemed to be an eye sore, but countless photos are taken of them by international tourists.



Elephant Taxis to Pink Palace

At one temple we saw a wonderful sign "Please put off your shoes. Short pants are not allowed inside" Most of the women on the trip *'had'* to visit jewellery stores to check out the famed Rajasthan gems, there were many purchases made by happy ladies, yours truly included! As we left the shop I noticed 3 rather masculine older women who were heavily made up with lots of jewellery. The romantic in me wondered if they were eunuchs from times past, if so their lives



Pink Palace - Jaipur

had been destroyed at the will of the ruling class. (More likely transvestites)

Ian's family trip was suffering a few problems quite out of Ian's control. In Agra his nephew was rushed to hospital with peritonitis, the family was forced to give the trip away. Ian's father in law came down with a serious chest infection, Ron and Marg ended up leaving the trip a few days later. Lee sprained her ankle, Mary and I had difficulties with gluten and wheat flour



Pink Palace - Jaipur

products. There were a few minor overnight tummy upsets, nothing serious. Ian kept

the designated routine flowing particularly well while he coped with each new issue.

Friday 2nd January 2015 Jaipur to Pushkar - Hotel Pushkar Palace

Day 07

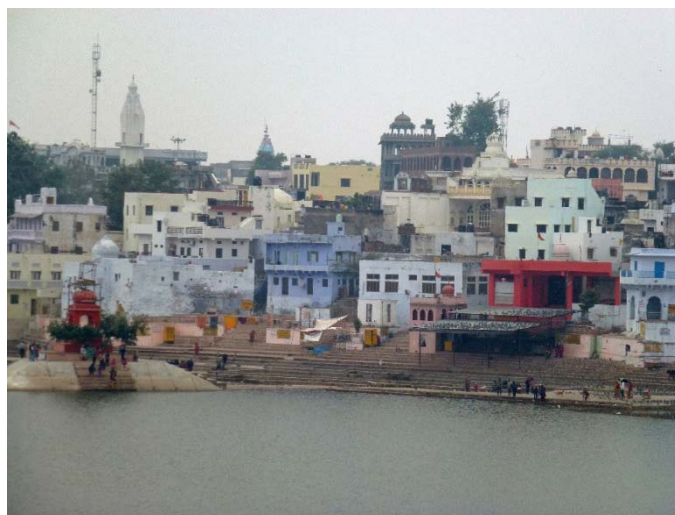
Ian's notes: Jaipur to and around Pushkar:

A short drive takes us to the desert pilgrimage town of Pushkar. We will absorb the spiritual atmosphere by the lake and are engulfed by the sounds and colours of this tribal haunt. We can visit the only Brahman temple in India. Later there are optional camel rides and a morning climb for a stunning sunrise

https://www.google.com.au/search?q=Things+to+see+in+Pushkar+India&rls=com.microsoft:en-AU&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&startIndex=&startPage=1&rlz=117ADRA_enAU427&gfe_rd=cr&ei=SynLVKPFJPJLB9AXYiYGwCg&gws_rd=ssl

While driving from Jaipur to Pushkar there were roadside ditches full of putrid water used for absolutely everything by the villages. The buffalos wallowed and drank there; the humans washed their clothes as well as themselves while dogs, chickens

and birds scratched at the edge. From the same ditch a young girl collected water in a large bucket which she carried on her head, please don't tell me they drank that water as well.



Lake Pushkar

We saw women checking their children's hair for head lice, right next to the open air barber shop! Extremely important considering school resumed the following day.

Until now we had seen few road side or street shrines with offerings to the gods. In the Pushkar surrounds there were many

small Hindu shrines. On the tops of the long mountain range just outside town there were shrines on each of the highest points.



Politicians! - Pushkar

An interesting observation at this point, when local Hindu rural women saw our bus advancing on them, they pulled their sari down and completely obscured their face. Was this because men were on the bus? Sadly my mind was drawn to the serious global domestic violence problem for women, and particularly an issue in the whole sub-continent, of bride-burning or dowry deaths. Records show that more than 8,000 young brides per year die from acid or kerosene burns at the hands of their husbands or

mothers-in-law because it's felt her family had paid insufficient dowry. Scarred women would definitely cover their faces from the stares of others.



Fort Sardargarh

On arriving at the outskirts of Pushkar there was a security gate to pass through for town entry, next to the gate a sign informed visitors of the town rules. “No alcohol, no animal products, no animal foods”, this place was strictly vegetarian. Set on the banks of a lake in Rajasthan, Pushkar has

followed the Brahma God and been a Holy Hindu town since BC times. As we wandered the narrow streets checking out the tourist shops we experienced none of the scams by “Holy Men” we were warned of. Perhaps it was not the ‘right time of the year’ instead; the cows ruled the street and took precedence over everyone and everything!

All cars and auto rickshaws carefully weaved their way around the holy animal.

On our wanders we found an excellent international standard young jeweller who designed and made his own interesting silver and gold pieces from Australian gold and silver using local stones. So why didn't I invest?—beats me!! What I did buy was Aravind Adiga's “The White Tiger” a savagely brilliant novel providing a humorously sad insight into Indian life. It forced to me look closer at aspects of Indian culture, not all of which were pretty

The very cloudy, rather dirty lake with lots of ‘odd things’ floating on it had stepped surrounds. This appeared home to thousands of rats of the air: pigeons and mynahs, even the monkeys played second fiddle, they were definitely out numbered. The lake's edge showed great activity, women slapped their washing against the stone step while others took their daily bath.

At the Hotel Pushkar Palace, our evening meal could have been a banquet, but we were tiring of these as the same dishes reappeared. The pokora had been great since I was unable to

eat the naans, naans or chapatti. Meat free A La Carte accompanied by lime soda was the Pushkar way to go, no red wine here. Up to now Tikka or Tandoori had been the favourite for those who could tolerate the spices, however fried rice and vegetables did the job in this town. We only stayed one night, at breakfast the following morning without thinking I asked for an egg! “You will not get an egg anywhere in Pushkar” was the response. This place was vegan not vegetarian!! Oh dear, I would ‘very much have liked an omelette’!



Street Market – Pushkar

Ian's notes: Pushkar to and around Sardargarh:



Main Gate - Fort Sardargarh

Driving south we head for the sprawling hilltop fort of Sardargarh. Off the beaten track we get a taste of the glory and infamy of a time when Rajput honour meant more than life itself. We stay at the Heritage Fort of Sardargarh as guests of the Rao or Lord of the Region and his family. A day of adventure or relaxation. There is an optional jeep safari visiting small villages

and searching for some of the local wildlife including leopards and deer. Our hosts Dharitri and Mahipal will regale us with stories of the region and introduce us to the secrets of their stunning fort. Dinner is served on the rooftop courtyard and the sounds of local villagers performing traditional songs make for a memorable evening.



Fort Sardargarh

India is abounding with palaces from times gone-by that have been converted into museums and hotels. A good solution since the government changed rules on Maharajas receiving funds and allowances to maintain their lavish lifestyle. Better to have guests than let the places deteriorate into ruins. As we rounded a bend in the road we saw the Sardargarh Fort Heritage Hotel on the top of a hill, it was most impressive.

Sardar Singh, a powerful Dhodhia warrior (one of the ancient Kshatriya Indian races- not Mogul), took from 1738 to 1743 to build the Sardargarh Fort. In 1760 the fort, its surrounding lands and lake became a Princely. Established to protect the region, it was one of 442 such places in India. Princely's were established during the British rule, using a local landlord as ruler to ensure stability. The scars of a cannon ball hit on the side of the external wall was evidence left after an unsuccessful mid-1800's war against the fort.



Sardargarh Town

Driving up the winding roads to the fort we were conscious of how clean the landscape was, no plastic bags clinging to trees and fences, no bundles of rubbish lining around. All the children ran

towards the bus waving and greeting our arrival. This proved to be a happy contented well run country district.

We arrived late morning and were asked to place our lunch orders as we arrived with our bags. As I had enjoyed quite different biryani in most towns so far, I again ordered the dish. The group arrived at the designated lunchtime spot; we ordered drinks while we waited for the food. Food arrived for the others, they ate and departed, Jim and I were still unattended.



Courtyard - Fort Sardargarh

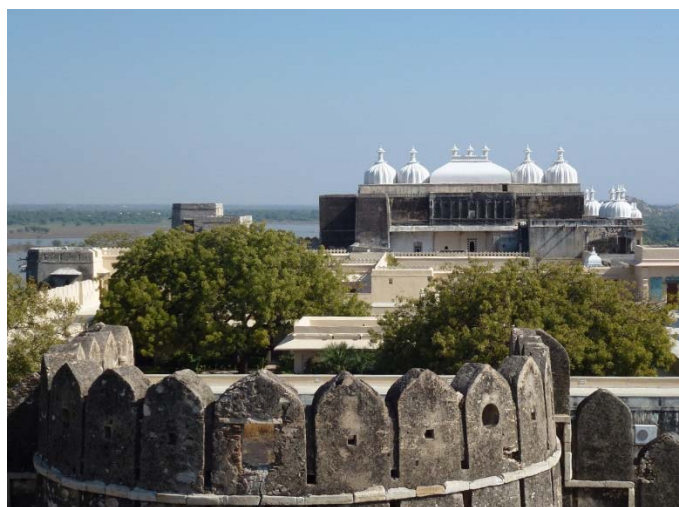
After one and half hours of waiting, yours truly was not patient! We later learnt from a most apologetic Monica, the landlord and owner's wife how time consuming and difficult this traditional dish is to make.

First the chicken is marinated and partially cooked in spices; vegetables are added and allowed to steam slowly. A layer of lightly fried spiced rice is placed in a heavy-based cooker, the chicken and vegetables are gently placed on top followed by the rest of the rice and covered in stock. The food is then steamed until all is cooked and the flavours have blended through. By this time, Jim mumbled that he didn't want to see another biryani, let alone curry for the rest of the holiday. Steak and three veg for him!

Sunday 4th January 2015 Sardargarh - Sardargarh Heritage Hotel

Day 09

After breakfast on the terrace Monica took us around the entire fort (much larger than you first assumed) explaining the history and the original uses for each section. In one of the towers she showed some amazing antique finds which will eventually be placed in their museum. It was from this position they could spy any enemy invasion, a small opening gave direct view to the external gates, these had long elephant spikes to dash the hopes of invaders.



Fort Sardargarh



Discussion with Villagers - Sardargarh



Antelope - Sardargarh

Monica explained the stages of development over the past few years for the conversion into the resort and the efforts of her husband and herself to build a new business. The central area, once the rooms for the countless princesses and wives now houses many guest's suite rooms, we had wondered what the rings around the walls had been for. When at peace in the 1800's this was the living quarters for the many wives however during war this entire area was covered with

canvas to billet the soldiers, hence the rings.

The conversion still has many stages to complete, however the future already looks bright for a relaxing retreat resort. Throughout the entertaining area on ledges are marble bowls of beautifully decorated rose petals, there are selected antique cooking bowls as well.



Little Owls - Sardargarh

In the afternoon the landlord, Mahipal Singh, a direct descendant of the first owner took Jim and I on a tour of his "Princely state". We passed wheat fields (not rice as we had thought) large white, rose, black and green marble industries (the prized green marble goes to Saudi Arabia) We saw tiny owls huddled together, antelope roaming in the wilderness (not liked by the farmers as they eat the cattle's grass), kingfisher and blue jade near the lakes (not appreciated because they eat the fish) We met a hermit 'religious' man who no longer speaks and lives under a

great Banyan tree, he rings bells as his celebration of life. His hair and beard had never been cut, they reached below his knees.



Sardargarh Sunset



Recluse - Sardargarh

Rudyard Kipling's creative verse had me believe you would find a "holy Man" with his shrine under every Banyan Tree, not so. Although we did find examples of shrines under the wide spread of the great tree, this was my first somewhat similar example.

We witness the lord's calm guidance and effective relationship with the locals at a

road building site. The women huddled together covering their faces while the men appeared from nowhere to listen to their lord's wise counsel. We then went into the village to meet the headman's wife and family. We were offered masala chai in their large compound as we chatted to the children practicing their English. The lord coerced the wife to show us the family's wealth; a very thick heavy long silver belt, very heavy thick silver anklets (which left nasty calices on her ankles) and many ear to nose

rings. Once again the respect for the lord by all villagers was obvious.

We enjoyed excellent buffets dinners accompanied by fine Indian wine and Kalbelia music in a magical walled courtyard setting which featured water gardens. By the second night other guests had arrived to soak up and enjoy these amazing surroundings.

Monday 5th January 2015

Sardargarh to Udaipur - Udai Kothi Hotel

Day 10



Udai Kothi Hotel - Udaipur

On our final morning at Sardargarh after breakfast we received a warm farewell from

the lord and lady of the fort which made us feel very special indeed. This was one place we would enjoy returning to.

Ian's notes; Sardargarh to and around Udaipur:

We head south to the fabled romantic city on the lake, Udaipur. We enjoy an orientation walk and a chai in the crumbling old city centre. We dine tonight at the rooftop restaurant of the Udai Kothi overlooking the stunning old city and lake Some say Udaipur is the most beautiful and classical city in the east.

The Lake Palace is a testament to the style and crafting of the Rajput lords of the region. The city is teeming with palaces and Haveli, truly a sight to savour. After breakfast we take a short walk into the City Palace and museums, where the mosaics, miniatures and crystal galleries will hold our attention for most of the morning. The afternoon is free with a cruise on the lake

recommended or chai in one of the local tea shops overlooking the city. This evening we take part in an interesting family friendly cooking class followed by dinner



City Palace - Udaipur

Our last stop in Rajasthan state was Udaipur, founded in 1559 by Maharana Udai Singh II who was a relation and friend of Sardar Singh from Sardargarh. We were staying at the Udai Kothi a most impressive looking hotel. Accurately named little Venice, Udaipur is a pleasant busy city of lakes and palaces, all be it with an odour! The pleasant smell of spices is outmaneuvered by fumes and acrid smell of urine not to mention the masses and press of humanity simply trying to survive amongst it all.

The Main City Palace is now an interesting museum run by a Charitable Foundation started by the Maharana of Mewar, the owner of the palace, who still lives in one section. It is a very grand example of

Mughal architecture with inner courtyards and gardens which have brilliant tiling work in the courtyards. There were many visiting Indian middle class family groups, making the most of the extremely low entry cost for locals 25 rupees (A\$50c) compared to 250 rupees (A\$5.00) for international visitors. These people make no allowances for age or frailty and proceed to walk straight through or in front of everybody! They were the 'new' Indian and therefore they come first!!

Some Indian men sport amazing moustaches, at the museum I saw the winner, a prize winning walrus job, it was a huge white mass that swept up across the cheeks on either sides. He knew it was great and with a big smile he twirled the ends constantly.

I was pleased to see so many school groups taking advantage of their national treasures. One small group of kids was ever so poor (going by their misfit clothes and lack of shoes) but never could you have found a happier smiling group so filled with joy at their outing. Although the caste system is outlawed it is easy to

distinguish the different groups simply by how they are dressed and the way they behave.



Lake Palace - Udaipur

Tuesday 6th January 2015

Udaipur - Udai Kothi Hotel

Day 11

Early in the morning we cruised around the main lake along with the ducks and swans to take advantage of the best view of the many palaces, temple domes, mosque minarets and stupas, as well as the hotels of the city around it.

We also enjoyed partaking in a cookery class and eating the results. We didn't have to chop the '*oon-yans* or *pat-AA-toes*', just stir them in the pot as the teacher's assistant was most efficient out the back. Using the same recipes the teacher, Mr Shakti, has 4 such classes a day and has been doing it for 15 years. By that time I believe I'd be wanting the change a few things! His Indian "Spice Box" shop proved popular as it had a good range of stock.

Udaipur had great shopping, lots of Kashmiri men selling shawls, cushions and clothes, I couldn't help myself! My hat and its badges had proved intriguing to some locals; I was stopped several times by people saying "I am very much liking your hat", I'd spend a few minutes explaining the significance of each badge. Unfortunately except for one, I was unable to add to my badge collection.

proved confusing. It was difficult for staff to understand flour was wheat –just in a different form. In the end the response to my question was “Yes, I have dishes, Yes not without flour”. It was a good thing I brought health bars with me for such moments.

Slices of raw onions and lime were served with most meals to Jim's delight especially as the lime took the tartness of the onion away but NOT the bad breath! I called Jim, Mr Oon-yan Man after he'd eaten them!



Cooking Class - Udaipur



Cooking Class - Udaipur



Laundromat - Udaipur

Wednesday 7th January 2015 Udaipur to Mumbai - Fariyas Hotel

Day 12

Ian's notes: Udaipur to and around
Mumbai:

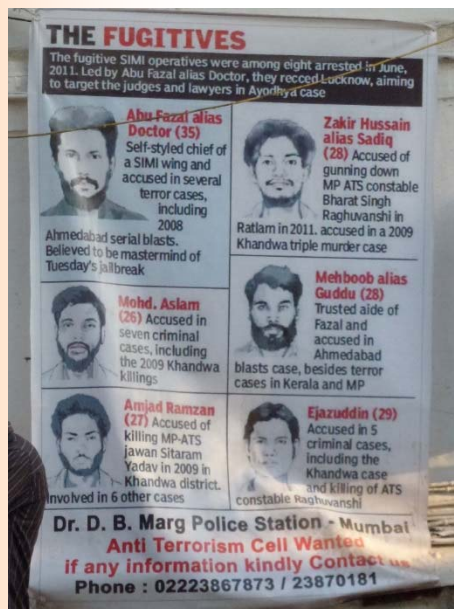
A morning free in Udaipur then a short flight to the vibrant metropolis of Mumbai. This evening we will hopefully be in time for a stroll along the beach of Chowpatty with other Mumbai families and sample local favourites of Dal Puri and Dai Wada on the

sands. For early risers we can jump into a pre-dawn rickshaw and head down to the old Sassoon docks to see the fishing boats arriving with their catch of the night. See, hear and taste the essence of India before breakfast. We have time today to explore the legendary Crawford Market, which is the old bastion of British Bombay. With luck we may lunch at the Bombay Cricket Club on the lawns of the old ground. A visit to Mumbai is not complete without a stop at the "Gateway of India". In the evening gather for a drink at the legendary Taj Mahal hotel and head out for a

delightful farewell dinner together. Time to share our stories and toast the magnificent experiences we have savoured

https://www.google.com.au/search?q=Attractions+in+Mumbai&ls=com.microsoft:en-AU&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&startIndex=&startPage=1&rlz=1I7ADRA_enAU427&gfe_rd=cr&ei=ZQ_PVN7aBaiN8QeDuYCADA&gws_rd=ssl

Recommended foods included: Masala Curry, Kolhapuri, Bhayl(fritters) saoji chicken, Maratha curry.



Successful Arrests - Mumbai

It was a 4.00am start to our departure from Udaipur to Mumbai (Bombay) juggling our tiffin boxes along with everything else. This day proved to be the worst possible nightmare for any tour leader; a member of our group suffered a heart attack and died on the plane. John had not been the best for several days and certainly didn't look well as we contemplated the tiffin box's stale sandwiches and unwashed fruit and waited to board the plane delayed by massive security checks. Our hearts went out to partner Melanie and their family back in New Zealand, we prayed the actions required in the following few hours would

be swift and uncomplicated. We were later informed the security checks were due to a Mumbai terrorist threat, especially around the Taj Mahal Hotel close to our accommodation.



Boatyard and Slums - Mumbai



At the Beach - Mumbai

Mumbai, capital of Maharashtra state, is India's most populous city with over 20 million inhabitants. It is India's financial powerhouse, a melting pot of many races, the pulse point of many religions as well as a fashion epicentre. Settled on the Arabian Sea, the town started on 7 Konkan fishing Islands, the Portuguese arrived in 1498, followed by the British in 1661. The local languages are Marathi, Hindi, Parsis and English.



Beach Girls - Mumbai

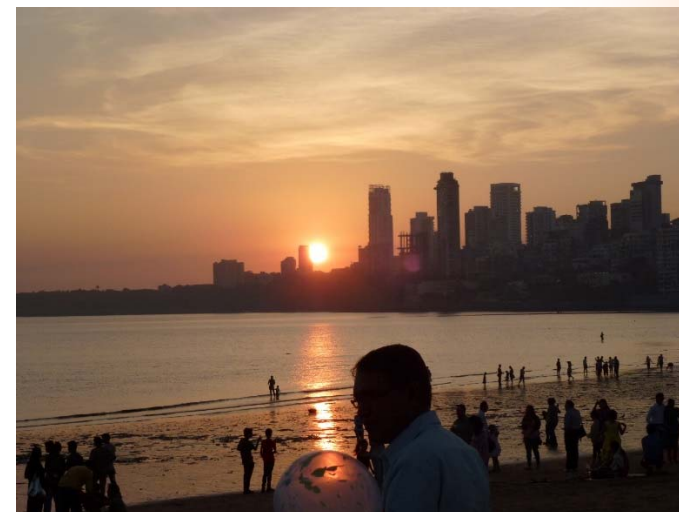
Our Fariyas Hotel was just off the main beach road, the beach front and a large bay. If you looked to the left along the beach you saw the first absolutely appalling filthy slums dwellings we'd seen (more like a flimsy cardboard city). Turn to your right, the other direction you have glamorous homes and hotels, look out to sea and there were many naval boats anchored in the bay. Along the water front children with their mother's help were begging. Just back from the beach, in the jewellery shops the glitzy artificial gold and silver with imitation gems appeared

lavish. At “the backside” of our hotel we found the local market, just as interesting and smelly as the others we have seen.

In India everyone is up with technology and all have a mobile phone, even the street sweepers and rag pickers! It is cheaper for the government this way; they don’t have lay miles of expensive cables for landlines! In the late afternoon we headed along the boulevard to Chowpatty, near Aksa Beach, definitely Mumbai’s widest beach and most popular meeting spot. All come to see the evening sunset leave a golden glow over the water. This memorable sight is enjoyed by tourists and all sections of the local

community (rich and poor). There were Asians, Persians, European, Saudi Arabians, South Africans and of course, our Ozzy mob! Full burka Muslim women were wadding in the water up to their waist and caring for the children while their skimpily clad husbands swam close by. The Indian street sellers were doing a roaring trade with soft drinks, fairy floss, small colourful wind wheels and cooked corn on the cob.

We enjoyed a walk along the sand, Jim with his camera must have looked like a Bollywood talent scout, and lots of local people wanted their photo taken. While buying a drink I spied a large poster of Indian fugitives-it displayed their photo and suspected crime. I thought of the book I’d just finished ‘White Tiger’ Oh Dear!!



Sunset - Aksa Beach - Chowpatty

Thursday 8th January 2015

Mumbai - Fariyas Hotel

Day 13

On an exploratory city bus ride we passed many great Mumbai sites such as the Haji Ali Dargah Mosque, the Madh Fort, and the Britain Raj symbol commemorating WW1-the Gateway of India, securely barricaded like its neighbour, the Taj Mahal Hotel. (The local police had been told to ‘pull up their sock’ about the terrorist threat!)The Bombay (not Mumbai) High Court was not far away, near the famous cricket ground. The city gardens overlooking the bay are beautiful and should be the boast of the town. “

It did not take long for us to realise there was absolute calm and order on the road, no rickshaws or bikes in car lanes, no mayhem. Cars stayed in their lanes and drove at a sensible speed; they stopped when the traffic lights turned red and went when it turned green. Oh this was a joy! Was it the British influence or does sanity prevailed in Mumbai?

We passed a local railway station and saw trains with few people on board, unlike the crowded taxis everywhere.

The local paper wrote 16,000 commuters travelled daily and now they have their first woman train driver in Mumbai. On that particular day the fares were about to double causing outrage. We didn’t see a peak hour train but certainly saw old rattling buses bursting at the seams in most cities visited.



India Gate - Mumbai



Dohbi Ghat - Mumbai



Hanging Garden - Mumbai



Warning Sign - Boot House - Hanging Garden - Mumbai



Skyscrapers - Mumbai

We were told people sit patiently in traffic jams for several hours waiting for things to happen and cars to move to allow them to get to work or attend a meeting. On occasions they have simply given up and returned home; 'go missing in action- no mission accomplished'. With over 23 million inhabitants of course there would be many traffic jams!



Taj Mahal Hotel - Mumbai

In the afternoon we took the opportunity to visit the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya Museum (formally the Prince of Wales and less of a mouthful to say) The building is an example of beautiful British, 'Luyten' architecture. The well laid out exhibits had fine examples of Indian archaeology and culture. A small intricately carved ivory box took my eye along with a superb display of 'Baluchar Silk Weavings' from Bengal.



Sign - Near India Gate - Mumbai

Sadly little is spent on archaeological digs in India to discover the country's amazing history, so necessary, I think, for the fast growing well educated youth to understand their past.

Returning from the museum by taxi, a very colourful procession passed lead by a buffalo decked with marigold leis pulling a highly decorated and colourful chariot. It

was celebrating the 100th anniversary of Ghandi's return from South Africa.



Boot House - Hanging Garden - Mumbai

Suzuki Marutis appears the chosen car of the masses; in past times for those could afford, it was the Ambassador (Morris Oxford) which sported curtains or louvered windows. They're still on the roads and driven sedately. The Ambassador brought

back memories of a Malaysian uncle. The car was always crammed with bodies; my two children would have their noses pressed to the windows looking for men in Dhothi (loin cloth) folded up over their knees. They would scream with delight should they think they spied 'dingle dangles'!



Sign - Sir Pherozeshah Mehta Garden - Mumbai

In Mumbai, finally we were warm and lapped it up; the thicker clothes were cast

to the bottom of the bag. How great it felt to change into lightweight clothes for a walk around the hotel vicinity and feel the sun's warmth seep into our bodies.

Our hotel was proof of the Mumbai melting pot; there were Saudi, South African Muslims, Northern Africans, Chinese, Japanese and others I couldn't identify.

One fully covered Emirates woman with eyes barely visible hopped in the lift with me; she proceeded to uncover her face to chat. When I reached my floor she thanked me for talking to her!!

Still conscious of the slums nearby, I read in the newspaper, 2 patients died of Tuberculosis every 3 minutes in Mumbai.

With such poor housing conditions the news sadly wasn't a shock. Also it was not surprising with the huge numbers of Indians who spit and hawk loudly in the street, even from under a burka!

Mumbai like so many other cities is a jumble of new high rise buildings, right next to incomplete ghost constructions or next to

crumbling old places past their glory and ready for redevelopment. A property market dream with so many affordable houses required for the homeless and an architect's nightmare! We read that India is still considered to be an establishing country, yet the extreme wealth of the new middle class is so obvious.

Saturday 10th January 2015

Mumbai to Goa - Resort Terra Paraiso

Day 15

A much smaller group headed to Goa for a few days of relaxation next to the beach. I wasn't sad to leave the Mumbai hotel, cigarette smoke had regularly filtered under our door as I endured Delhi belly! We had experienced a great mix of hotels; some were particularly grand while others reminded me of tired wrinkled old 'ladies of the night' tarted up to appear years younger! Jim had woken one morning complaining a party had kept him awake, on closer examination he found his phone had been playing music all night!

Goa: *foods of the area include; vegetarian and fish curry, pork balchao and Crab Xec Xec.*

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goa>

Built on the Konkani plateau at the edge of the Arabian Sea, with the Western Ghats Mountains behind, Goa is the smallest yet richest Indian state. It is divided into north and south districts by the Mandovi River. Rock art dates its history at 30,000yrs. The Portuguese remained in Goa for 450 years until 1961; the main religions are Hindu and Catholic. Goa's population surprisingly barely exceeds 1.5 million, its tropical temperatures, very pleasant.

I think it was the first town where we were not woken by the Muezzin 'Allah-Hu Akbar' (God is Great) call to pray before dawn. It is often said that missionary religions take on the culture of the host country. We had seen Hindu road-side shrines in other states but now not only were there many Hindu shrines but also

similar highly decorated shrines with offerings celebrating Catholicism. Once we even passed a sign for St Mary's Ashram! Goa has the second highest level of education in India after Kerala. Every road had dozens of signs inviting locals to seek enrolment in one educational institution or another. It was hard to know if they were offering a degree, diploma or certificate at completion but they certainly offered every conceivable course. It was suggested in the newspaper that in the near future Hindu script could well be converted to Roman script for ease of students.

The relatively short journey from Goa airport to our 'Resort Terra Paraiso' hotel took forever in the old bus; the roads were narrow, busy and very congested. The ride proved particularly rough, so much so I jolted and jarred my back badly. I'm sure my face would have soured the milk for paneer. If I'd been an old chook, I'd have lost my head and been boiled for penicillin soup! After one

vallium, 2 neurophin, 2 whiskeys, and a very happy and ready for the soothing massage the hotel offered.
liberal rub of 'Denco' cream. I was high,

Sunday 11th January 2015

Goa - Resort Terra Paraiso

Day 16

R & R day



Road to the Beach - Goa



Beach - Goa



Resort Terra Paraiso - Goa

Monday 12th January 2015

Goa - Resort Terra Paraiso

Day 17

Before dawn each morning I took the opportunity to walk along the deserted (except for dogs) Calangute Beach, it wasn't many minutes before others join me in the beach exercise. Most walkers had great waddies in their hand, were these for the djinns, the beach wallahs or the dogs? I skirted around them! As it became lighter the countless beach-hut restaurants and

fishing boats became visible. As returning boats full of fish were washed close to the shore the fishermen relied on the beach walkers to help draw the boat up on to the sand. The full sunrise brought the massive beach crowds; it was time for me to depart.

This morning we toured Old Goa

http://www.travel-india-go-a-guide.com/old_go-a.html

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Goa

A World Heritage site the city was founded in the 15th century as a port on the banks of the Mandovi river by the rulers of the Bijapur Sultanate. The city was built to replace Govapuri, which lay a few kilometres to the south and had been used as a port by the Kadamba and Vijayanagar kings. Old Goa was the second capital after Bijapur of the rule of Adil Shahi Dynasty. It was surrounded by a moat and contained the Shah's palace, and his mosques and temples.

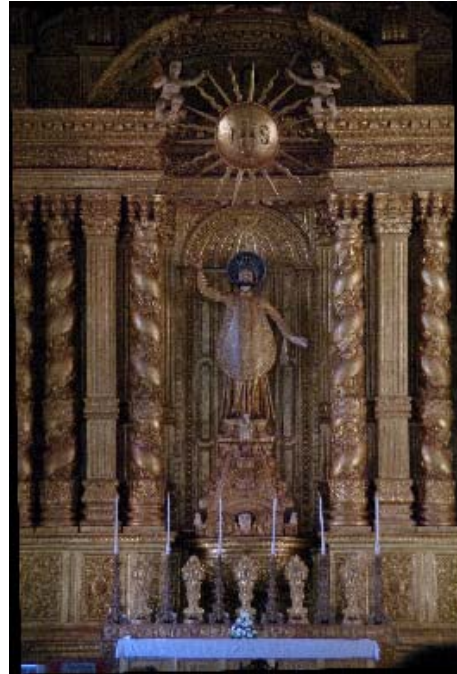


Basilica of Bom Jesus - Old Goa

The city was captured by the Portuguese, and was under Portuguese rule from 1510 as the administrative seat of Portuguese India. The Viceroy's residence was transferred in 1759 to the future capital, Panaji (then Pangim), at the time a village about 9 kilometres to its west.

During the mid-16th century, the Portuguese colony of Goa, especially Velha Goa, was the centre of Christianisation in the East.[2] The city was evangelised by all religious orders, since all of them had their headquarters there.[3] The population was roughly 200,000 by

1543. Malaria and cholera epidemics ravaged the city in the 17th century and it was largely abandoned; only having a remaining population of 1,500 in 1775.



Basilica of Bom Jesus - Old Goa

It was then that the viceroy moved to Pangim. It continued to be the de jure capital of Goa until 1843, when the capital was then shifted to Pangim (Ponnjê in Konkani, Nova Goa in Portuguese and Panjim in English). The abandoned city came to be known as "Velha Goa" (in Portuguese, 'Old Goa'), to distinguish it

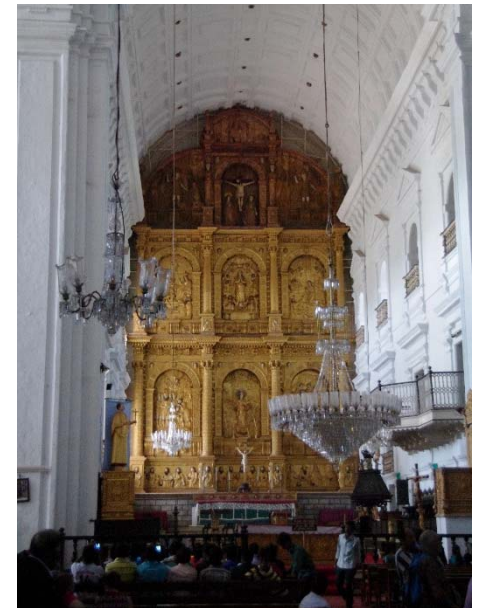
from the new capital Nova Goa (Panjim) and probably also Goa Velha (also meaning "Old Goa"), which was the Portuguese name for the town located on the old site of Govapuri.



Church of St Francis of Assisi - Old Goa

Old Goa contains churches affiliated to various congregations, including the Se Cathedral (the seat of the Archbishop of Goa), the Church of St. Francis of Assisi, the Church of S. Caetano, and notably, the Basilica of Bom Jesus which contains the

relics of Saint Francis Xavier, which is celebrated every year on 3 December with novenas beginning on 24 November



Sé Cathedral - Old Goa

Attached to the Church of St Francis of Assisi is a museum containing relics of Portuguese colonial history; including portraits of all the Portuguese governors of Goa.

There were dozens of interesting 'hero' stones in the church gallery; these were intricately carved headstones providing a history of the soldier's life, family and cause of death.

Velha Goa was incorporated into the Republic of India in 1961, together with the rest of Goa.

In recent years the cathedral has been struck twice by lightening.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Vaz#Canonisation



Coconut Picker – Spice Plantation – Goa

There was great excitement in Goa while we were there as a native of Goa, Joseph Vaz, was to be canonised in Sri Lanka by Pope Francis on the 14th January 2015.



Church of St Francis of Assisi and Museum – Old Goa



Church of St Francis of Assisi – Old Goa

The Goan government subsidised the airfares of 500 people to attend the event.



Old Panjim – Goa



Fisherman's Paradise – Goa

Our bus took a winding road up through the cool tropical forest to a Spice Farm. We walked through the plantation and learnt the

virtues of each plant before sampling foods using them. They served a very refreshing tea made from ginger, lemon grass, cinnamon and cardamom.

Passing the many wasted rice farms along the road on our way back indicated to us agricultural work is no longer popular; land lies fallow waiting for owners to adjust to new, faster, mechanical farming methods.

While traveling along Goa's partially completed roads it occurred that no longer were dozens of women carrying heavy containers of rocks on their heads for manual road construction, while the men stood around to 'supervise'. This state employed men with huge machines; automation had arrived to build quicker and hopefully safer roads.

Tourism had converted the Old Portuguese quarter into an interesting shopping and eating hub without destroying the old charm or blue tile street signs.

Goans are better educated, healthier, chubbier and happier people; they eat well and are less likely employed to do menial tasks. There were no spider-legged rickshaw drivers having to survive here!! However we did see motorbikes carrying entire families of 4/5/6 people all bar the driver without helmets. Some women were side-saddle carrying new born babies.

Every bus, taxi and auto-rickshaw has a name some a religious, others could relate to family or a rock band; Names such as Royal Princess and Mercedes Bends on old auto-rickshaws, while cars had angel, love machine, Jesus, Mary, Martha just to name a few!

Tuesday 13th January 2015

Goa - Resort Terra Paraiso

Day 18



Memorial Column - Panjim - Goa



Tile Picture - Goa Museum



Gallery Gitanjali - Panjim Inn - Goa

In the morning Jim and I took a taxi to Panaji to visit the Goa Museum built in 1996. Because of the tropical climate the

building looked much older. It had pre and post Goa medieval artefacts along with a good Portuguese collection.

Sadly the interior was neglected and the exhibits were deteriorating.



Ceremonial Wagon - Goa Museum

After a very pleasant lunch at the Panjim Inn, The Verandah Restaurant, we walked through the streets, past the Immaculate Conception Church and the Panjim Municipal Gardens to the Mondavi River.

Of course I could not resist a visit to a very classy shop.



Lottery Barrel - Goa Museum



Inscription - Memorial Column - Panjim - Goa

Panaji, capital of Goa was established at the mouth of the river's estuary where we saw many large gaudy decorated casino boats at the harbour inviting all foolish enough to lose their money! Anchored nearby and resembling a ship's graveyard were rusted

shells of old iron ore carriers. Because of corruption from illegal mining, the government closed the iron ore mining industry down, leaving the huge ships nowhere to go, just beached!



Casino - One of Many - Mondavi River - Panjim Goa



Jennie's Birthday Dinner

For many of the group this was the last day and in the evening George took us to a very popular Greek restaurant right on the

beach front. Were we really in Goa? The music, dancing and plate throwing gave a strong reminder of the Greek Islands! We were celebrating both George and my birthdays as the large red

sun set slowly behind the horizon. I had enjoyed lobster the night before so settled for the popular Greek shashlik like many others!

Wednesday 14th January 2015 Goa - Resort Terra Paraiso

Day 19



Sacred Cow - Anjuna Morning Market - Goa

Our morning was spent at the Ajuna Morning Market browsing the myriad stalls. Many were selling the same things to the tourists that you see in almost every market in Asia and for that matter the world. Not much that was of interest to us but I did find a few knick knacks for presents and a very good moonstone pendant. I was not

impressed with the setting, however, the stone was excellent.



Spice and Tea Stall - Anjuna Morning Market - Goa

In the afternoon we had time to read the newspaper in Goa, topics such as 'PM Narendra Modi's internal problems with issues of land acquisition, religious tensions, infrastructure and crimes against women to international topics of the impending visits of UN Sec-Gen Ban Ki Moon to discuss global climate change and the much heralded visit of US President Obama'.



Jewelry Stalls - Anjuna Morning Market - Goa



Fishing Boats - Goa

One advertisement that caught the eye was placed by a private investigator suggesting he offer his assistance helping with

arranged marriage preparation. It was offering to 'check out the wares' advertised by the family and to even take a look at the 'future mother-in-law'!

Thursday 15th January 2015

Goa to Cochin - Dunes Hotel

Day 20

Next morning we farewelled the team and headed south on our own to Kerala.

Kerala: On the Malabar Coast, tropical Kerala (God's Own Country) has a 3,000BC history. The princely kingdoms of Travancore and Cochin joined in 1956 to form Kerala State. It has a 15thC Portuguese history as well as Dutch and British influence. It was on the 'Old Silk Road Route' mainly because of its rich spices (especially pepper) and tea trade. With 36 million people of many nationalities and religions, it has the best standard of education and the lowest population growth in India. These days Kerala is noted internationally for its backwater canal boat

trips and old Chinese fishing nets still in use by the fishermen.

https://www.google.com.au/search?q=Kerala&rls=com.microsoft:en-AU&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&startIndex=&startPage=1&rlz=117ADRA_enAU427&gfe_rd=cr&ei=CWvRVJSpF6aN8QekhYCQCQ&gws_rd=ssl
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kochi>

We landed at Kochi (Cochin) airport and waited an age in humid sticky heat to be collected due to a mix-up. The drive to the Dunes Hotel gave us an inkling of great architecture, clean streets, good roads with patient drivers who still love to use beep their horn! The full length of the main road is in chaos because of construction of the 'underfinanced' new metro. The Government suggested using the accrued money in non-residents bank accounts to pay for the rail.

The other point of interest was the government's new ruling on alcohol and cigarettes; both banned in all public places. Cigarettes and alcohol can only be purchased through government outlets in restricted amounts; we saw long queues outside some of these places and men emerging with two bottles. Some hotel and restaurant venues have exiting licences to sell until 2020, causing unrest! Police conduct very regular alcohol breathalyser tests at many major intersections, our driver was stopped several times during our short stay.

Kochi like the rest of India had countless signs for educational institutions; however this time they often mentioned enticements for scholarships to Australia, Canada and UK!

Friday 16th January 2015 Cochin to Athirapally – KAA Resort

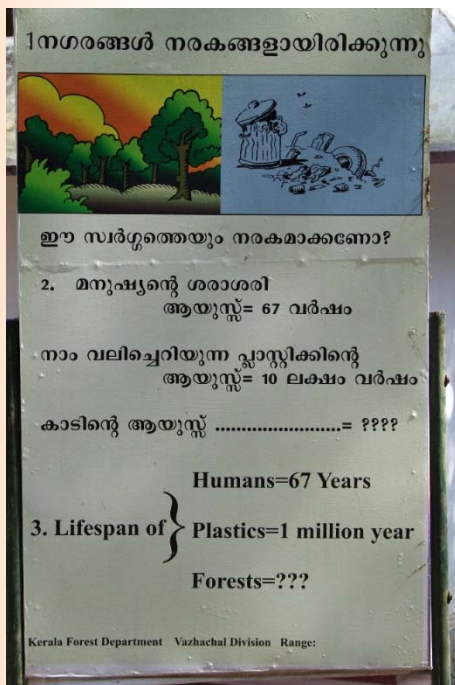
Day 21

Kandamkulathy Ayursoukhyam Ayurvedic Resort

With an early morning pick up by our great driver Sudhi, we were off to the hills! Well, that was after we found more batteries for my hearing aids.

We were heading to a "Lake Resort" on the banks of the beautiful Vazhachal River. Along every road we travelled there were political advertisements and hammer and sickle flags sprucing

either the ruling Congress Party or the two Communist Parties, one Maoist, the other Unionist dominated, who appeared to be at loggerheads while we were there.



Environmental Sign - Athirapally Waterfall

We visited another spice farm on the way that had a cure for everything. As we arrived the female guide eyed us up and down trying to identify any problem we may have. Cinnamon oil cures rheumatism and arthritis, turmeric cures cancer and breaks up gall bladder stones, cardamom stops

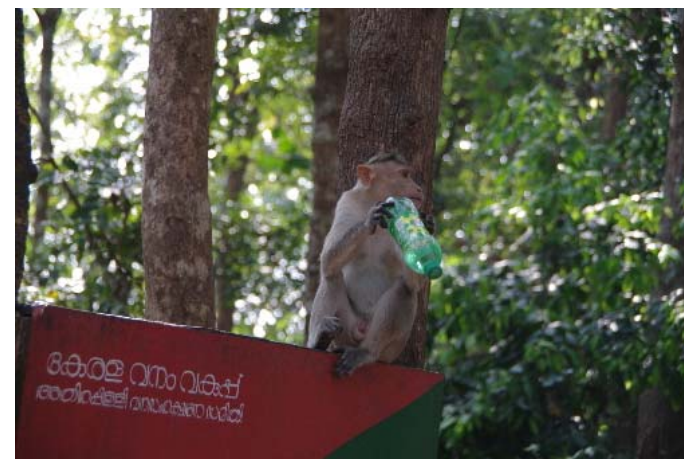
depression and helps menstruation, lime and honey stops allergies, other local spices I'd not heard of stopped renal failure, diabetes, coughs and colds and helped the memory and removed gas, worms and piles! She informed Jim most seriously that slimming herbs would help him greatly. It was fun at first; I waited for a cure for old age or something to assist longevity, nothing going! I ended up buying some cardamom seeds just to run away! After all those spices in you, you would have to be either cured or dead!



Vazhachal River - Kandamkulathy Ayursoukhyam Ayurvedic Resort

The tropical dense foliage of the countryside created a peaceful paradise full of wonderful blooms, such a contrast to Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. We saw hibiscus, bougainvillea, frangipani, bonfire salvia, poinsettia, oleanders and breadfruit intermingled with mango trees, palms, teak and many gum trees. Some of the impressive large properties we passed certainly made Toorak mansions look small. At the higher levels we passed through banana, coconut, rubber and oil palm

plantations, even bamboo forests. Our driver informed us that the value of rubber exports was now higher than tea.



Thieving Monkey - Athirapally Waterfall



Athirapally Waterfall

I had been taught the 'place or role' of a woman in India. When we arrived at any new hotel the staff would pick up Jim's bag and invite him to follow! I was left standing to fend for myself each

time. I had to run after them dragging my own bag along, no assistance offered. Once, twice three, four times, so one day I let fly- sadly Jim took the brunt as the Indian men would simply not have understood my wrath!



Warning Sign - Kandamkulathy Ayursoukhyam Ayurvedic Resort

The allocated room, old and tired with a tarpaulin over the roof was reminiscent of a Malaysian rubber plantation workers quarters. It featured brown walls, brown curtains, and brown floor tiles and yes a brown blanket on the rickety bed. The questionable furniture and bathroom (with naphthalene balls in

One American- Indian told Jim she had booked in for an 18 days retreat, Mmmmmmmh!

As we walked down to the incredibly wide river bed a sign told us there was no swimming allowed because of: "CAUTION! There are Dangerous Natural Rock formations in this river. Do not proceed – Management hold no responsibility for any Injuries or Accident."

This place would have teemed with animal and bird life before Homo-sapiens arrived with clubs, spears and guns. It was a haven for small birds and gave total peace for those on retreat (who also had to be blind)! As time

all drainage holes) was however, clean. The room clock had stopped at 12.45 pm some years previously and that was when both time and the service ceased along with punctuality. Its name was Kandamkulathy Ayursoukhyam Ayurvedic Resort, a non-smoking non-drinking health 'Hide-away' with a very long name.

stood still here, meals were an issue. They took for ever, even after a rousing and a "now, now" or a "quick, quick" and a thump on the table- we waited! The driver waited!! We were to go to the beautiful Athirapally Waterfalls which during monsoon would have been spectacular.

It's a very popular place; we saw many playing in the water pools while others picnicked.

As we departed a monkey grabbed a water bottle out of an unsuspecting woman's hand and proceeded to open it and drink!

Saturday 17th January 2015

Athirapally to Munnar - Tea County, Munnar

Day 22

The next day we continued our drive up into heaven on an ever winding road well above the tropical tree line into tea plantation country and the rich Indians' hill resorts of Munnar.

On the way we visited a spice plantation. Here we were told the wonders of Indian spices and the

many ailments that could be treated. It seemed anything could be cured as long as you took the right spice for the recommended time – several weeks.

On the first evening we watched Kathakali, a classical Indian dance drama normally performed in temples.

The costumes, facial expressions and hand movements were definitely classic, very Indian and simply brilliant. The play was followed by the far more locally popular Kalarippayattu, traditional Indian martial arts. This is a mixture of karate, kung-fu, judo, and a hell of a lot of courage. All well worth the visit and far more appealing

than another promised elephant ride on the way up the hill!!



Making Latex - Spice Plantation - Munnar



Kathakali Classical Dance Drama - Munnar

After last night the Tea County, Munnar, was heaven.



Christian Festival Procession - Kerala



Kalaippayatta - Traditional Martial Arts - Munnar



Kathakali Classical Dance Drama - Munnar



Rose Garden - Tea County Hotel - Munnar

Sunday 18th January 2015

Munnar - Tea County, Munnar

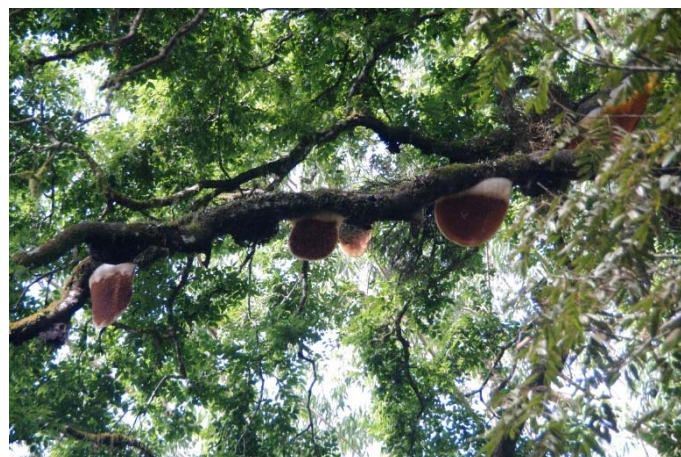
Day 23



**Eucalypts a long way from home -
Munnar**

In the morning we went for a sightseeing tour through the countryside. Along the way Sudhi drew our attention to a tree covered in wild bee hives that overhung the road. After passing through kilometre after kilometre of tea plantations we came to the Kerala State Electricity Board's Madupetty Dam, a popular spot for locals for picnicking and boating. On our way back to Munnar we visited an impressive plant nursery and rose garden. The ambiance of the countryside was tranquil, cool and very

soothing, the rivers and lakes that dotted the valleys were surrounded by very high mountains.



Native Bee Hives - Munnar



Madupetty Reservoir - Munnar - Kerala

The reverie was sometimes spoilt by the jolt from potholes created by the heavy monsoon rains washing the roads away. It gave plenty of time to think. I realised then that since arriving in

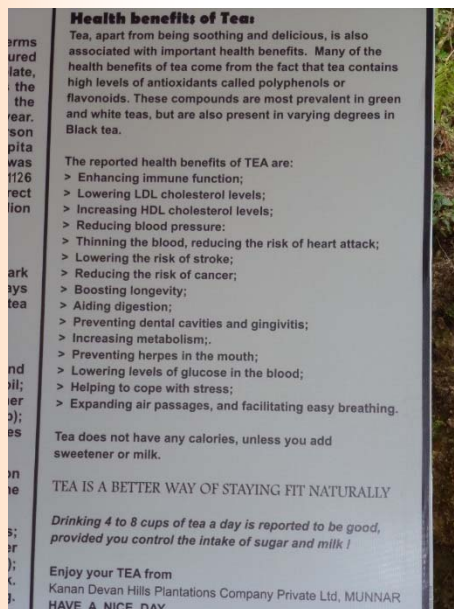
Goa there were no more red dyed hair and beards on Muslim men, (a sign they had gone to Mecca for their Haj). More importantly there were no more ghastly stained red walls from the spitting of chewed beetle nut and no more red stained teeth from the same! Hallelujah!



Tea Picker - Munnar



Plant Nursery - Munnar



Benefits of Tea - Kanan Devan Hills Tea Museum - Munnar

The miles of hairy bends on the tiny winding roads, like English lanes, were near impossible for the large buses to manoeuvre, equally so for others to pass them. Even drivers from other Indian states were making heavy weather of the trip. We saw countless signs warning to beware of elephants on the roads – needless to say we saw none. Our eyes nearly popped out of our heads though when we saw several European cyclists with heavy panniers on the back trundling up those incredible hills. They had to negotiate the city traffic well

before they hit this section of their trip. We took our hats off to them.



Nilgira Tahr - Eravikulam National Park - Munnar



Good Advice - Eravikulam National Park - Munnar

The tea plantations surrounding Munnar are owned by the Kanan Devan Hills Plantations Company which is owned by the employees, although the former owner, TATA, still has a small

shareholding. The history of the company is interesting, dating back to 1877. The tea plants were nestled closely between large boulders on hillsides and shaded throughout by silky oaks; there were eucalyptus trees (for fire wood) and jacarandas (for shade) at the boundaries.

The original land acquisition from the hill tribes for the tea plantations was done similarly to the way Australian aborigines 'gave' their land! Hence there is still trouble today!



Another Sign - Eravikulam National Park - Munnar

The Tea Museum visit started a bit like the spice farm visit; tea can cure everything and would keep you healthy for 100 years! It was also news that the first Eucalyptus plant seeds arrived from Australia inside a woman's stocking! Boy! It must have been a large stocking; there are millions of gum trees in India!! The women leaf pickers no longer pluck the tea leaves as the advertisements tell us, they use hedge cutters with a bag attached. Because of the narrow rows between the tea plants

mechanical harvesters would be impossible, anyway that would do away with jobs for the women; they were the only ones working the plantations!

Eravikulam National Park is the highest Indian point south of the Himalayas and famed for its Gaur, Indian Muntjac and Sambar Deer. Golden Jackal, Jungle Cat, Wild dog, Dhole, leopard and tigers along with Nilgiri langur, Stripe-necked Mongoose, Indian Porcupine, palm squirrel and elephants. After a long strenuous

walk in the warm sunshine we saw one lizard and a family of 4 nilgira tahr (deer.)

http://kdhptea.com/learn_history.html

Monday 19th January 2015

Munnar to Thekkaddy - Tigers Roare Hotel

Day 24



Tea Plantation - Munnar

The next day at Thekkady we enjoyed a 4WD trip with Sudhi's friend who took us into Tamil Nadu. First we went through the forest region with hundreds of monkeys on the road, then miles of rice and vegetable farms which were hidden behind roadside

banyan trees with shrines and so called 'Holy Men'. All very pleasant, nothing prepared us for the townships. The horrendous change at the first township was extreme. Tiny hovels and shanty shop huts, many buffalo carts, lots of bikes, rutted roads, few cars and no electricity. How do these people cope knowing it's the 21st Century?

We were told by our driver that farmers preferred using women farm hands as they are paid half the wages of men and work twice as hard!! He thought that was most appropriate!

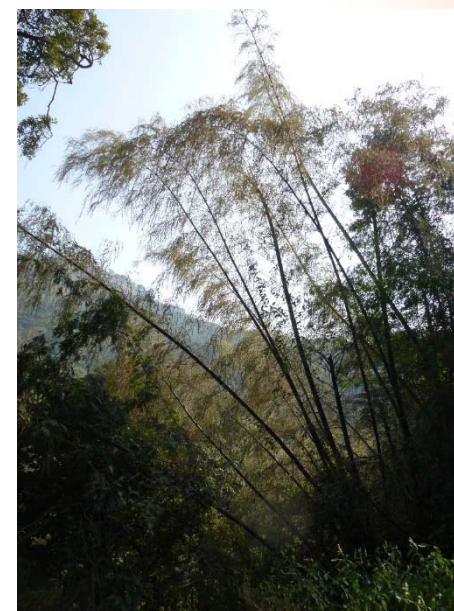
Tamil Nadu was definitely the poorest Indian state we visited. It is the only place now where coconut husks are used for coir matting because it is so labour intensive and inexpensive to buy!. We visited a winery and thought to purchase some of

their red wine until we read non-alcoholic on the label!



Coconut Seller - Tamil Nadu

Later on our return journey to Kerala from Tamil Nadu we were shown a towering bamboo forest covered in white flowers.



Flowering Bamboo - Tamil Nadu

This variety of bamboo flowers once in 80 years, how amazing to actually see it. Back in Thekkaddy we drove to the highest lookout for what would have been a brilliant view had the haze not covered the mountain range. With all the gum trees in

India I asked about the threat of bushfires,
they had no idea what I was talking about.

Tuesday 20th January 2015

Thekkaddy to Alleppey (Kerala Backwaters) - Houseboat

Day 25



In a vineyard - Tamil Nadu



Ducks Galore! - Kerala Backwaters



Dish Washing Time - Kerala Backwaters



Houseboat - Kerala Backwaters



Mud Boat - Kerala Backwaters



One of Many Churches - Kerala Backwaters

Descending from Thekkaddy to the Kerala Backwaters we passed plantations of rubber, cardamom and pepper corn vines. These were protected by tropical trees with red tipped ferns growing high on their trunks. Coffee and cocoa plantations close by were nearly obscured by morning glory and lantana.

In the small townships on this day, we passed hundreds of children marshalling ready to start or walking to add their contribution to state's "Run Kerala Run".



St Mary's Forane Syrian Catholic Church - Kerala Backwaters



St Mary's Forane Syrian Catholic Church - Kerala Backwaters

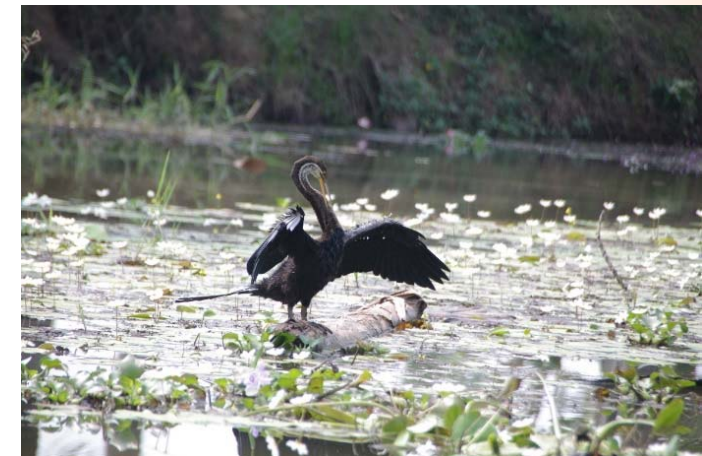
This was in preparation for the National Games to be held in Kerala later in the year. As we had departed Kochi on the first morning we had witnessed the very start of the run. We saw a highly decorated bullock cart and hundreds of young people behind waiting for Cricketer Sachin Tendulkar, now India's Sports Ambassador, to perform the starting honours. As the days passed we had seen political and business groups jumping in for some publicity, now it was the Kerala school students turn to be enthused, some were barefooted, others wore thongs to run in!

The feast of St Sebastian was being celebrated in one town as well, a procession of hundreds of people carrying colourful maharaja umbrellas and plates of offerings walking to their church along the highway.

Our next treat was to spend time on a house-boat cruising the backwaters surrounded by rice paddies at varying stages of development. They can plant and harvest 3 crops per year.



Water Lilies - Kerala Backwaters



Cormorant drying wings - Kerala Backwaters

In this region there are fewer cars as canoe taxis carry anything from food, building material to children off to school. At 12:00 noon there was a mass exodus of raffia and bamboo made house-boats heading out on to the waters-ways, a bit like the start of the Sydney to Hobart without the fanfare or support vessels!

As we watched the world go by at our very leisurely pace, I asked Jim how he felt "Like my new Buddha statue, relaxed, smiling and very contented!" Just so, without a care in the world- and no newspapers or computers as well!

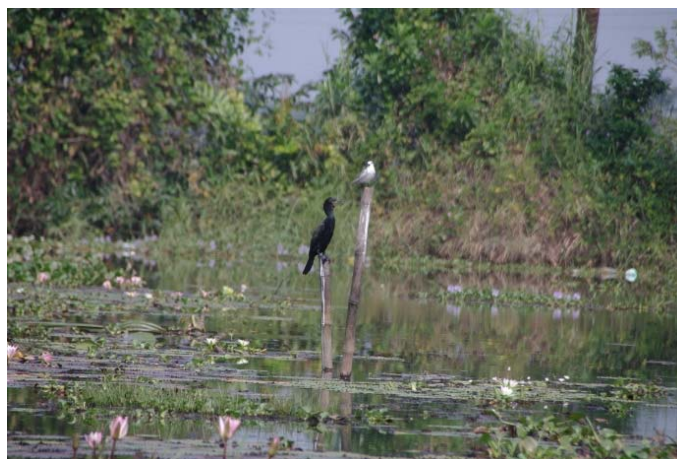
You had to forget about the polluted canal water filled with rubbish, the water lilies were thriving beautifully regardless. There were school kids washing their lunch plates a few metres away from the dredging of sand for building and levee replacement. Many women were thrashing their clothes clean on large stones, sadly not always in unison while others collected water or bathed, fish were scaled and green groceries delivered by canoe. Gallons of water were pumped back into the canal from the rice paddies and a little further along men were busy boat building and coating the canoes with bitumen. Even soldiers were conducting children's swimming classes in preparation for the National Games.

Most men in this state seem to wear a kavani (lion cloth folded up) and women, a mundus (at type of sari)! It was during a stop to visit to the St Mary's Forane Syrian Catholic Church, built in 427 AD, that I

learnt that St Thomas came to Kerala in 52 AD. That's not long after Christ died!



Dredging Mud to Rebuild Canal Banks - Kerala Backwaters



Birds - Backwaters Canal - Kerala



Whispering Palms Resort - Kumarakom

We moored for the night in a peaceful spot near a banana and rice plantation. People walked along the bank and waved to us as white egrets in the thousands settled nearby on the rice paddy or waterlilies. Kingfishers, dragon flies flew by and sea eagles dived for their dinner as we sat and relaxed. Thousands of ducks had been allowed out of their coup upstream as they swam close by there was a deafening quack of pleasure from them as they enjoyed their outing.

Our meals, prepared on board, were delicious. We enjoyed traditionally cooked pomfret fish and baby lobsters served with rice, fresh vegetables and chapatti (for Jim) In the morning we were given delicious rice pancakes with palm sugar, caraway seeds and coconut steamed in a banana leaf. We woke to music and singing and thought a small unusual mosque must have been nearby- it was the local Hindu call to pray, very pleasant!



Snake Bird - Kerala Backwaters



Flower - Kerala Backwaters

At 9:00 our houseboat docked at Alleppey and we re-joined Sudhi for the short drive to our lakeside resort at Kumarakom. A pleasant location!

After lunch we went into smaller canals in an open canoe to see much the same but at a closer level; here we saw 2 tortoises sunning themselves on the bank.

Our last day in India was spent in Kochi's old part catching up with its historical past. The Vasco De Gamas church, the Basilica, the synagogue and the Mattanchery (Dutch) Palace museum. We saw the tomb where Vasco da Gama had been buried. I read the script which said that when his body was taken to Malacca, the prepared tomb was too small; they broke his neck while putting (pushing) the body in!

Jews arrived in Cochin, Kerala in the year 379 AD, they prospered for centuries but sadly there are only 7 families left in the town and synagogue. We watch the old Chinese styled fishing nets being lowered into the sea by 7 men; sadly they only catch 2 fish, not a good way to earn a living!.

Again with time on our hands we had scoured the newspapers:



Dutch Palace Museum - Old Kochi



Entrance to Synagogue – Old Kochi

*Despite the government initiatives, NGO's reported there was a far higher rate of children's deaths than reported. In one state of India alone, more than 306 children, many of whom were girls have died from malnutrition in less than 12 months.

*Because of time poor parents, many children's diets have been reduced to commercial snacks and paan masala causing malnutrition. The article advised

"They must be given bottled water- God's own holy water!"



Colonial Building – Jewtown – Old Kochi

*Kerala students are being sent to harvest crops in a bid to help the farmers, it was reported that they are very happy and sing while they work!

*Report from the Bombay High Court-"The new Domestic Violence act appears sound but has failed its purpose with many cases delayed and no action taken for months, if not years".

* Also from the same court. Dowry deaths are still far too high and need a court of their own.

* While landing, a Spice Jet plane hit a buffalo cow that was roaming on the runway, no one hurt!

*5 tigers, 2 of them cubs have lost their lives in less than 3 months from malnutrition in national parks. Yet another report stated that tiger numbers were up 30% in Kerala.

*A baby girl was abandoned by her father because the mother was a different community (caste).

*With improved education and an increase in non-farming jobs, people could now move out of poverty and their 'scheduled caste' as urbanization is reducing inequality. PM pleaded with people to only buy "Made in India" to help this process.



Basilica – Old Kochi

* Without a good education people were condemned to a lifetime of insecurity, deprivation. In some states the education levels are well below standard. Although compulsory, some parents refused to send their children to school because of the poorly trained teachers and the violence inflicted on students.



Vasco da Gama's Church – Old Kochi



Chinese Fishing Nets – Old Kochi

*All army personnel (India's 2nd largest employer) without being asked had donated one day's pay' the PM's Relief fund- the PM didn't even know it had happened. They only knew when they received their reduced pay-packet!

India for me is a country of total extremes in education, transport and conditions. It's depressing to see the extreme wealth and abject poverty. The pariah (pandits) or previous untouchable's caste is still there but camouflaged by correctness. People appear to accept their lot in life and leave much to fate but I feel this is very deceptive. I left India with more questions unanswered than answered and many frustrations that a masseur could not have rub away

We were leaving India and were off to Singapore!

Friday 23rd January to Monday 26th January Singapore - Raffles Hotel

Day 28-30

Singapore: Just north of the equator, Singapore has been settled since the 2ndC AD. Originally called Temasek by the Malays and Singapura by others, it suffered during the Japanese invasion in February 1942, the Japanese changed the name to Syonan-To. Because of the scarcity of water, land and natural resources it joined Malaysia in 1963; 2 years later it became

independent. A very multicultural country, its population comprises of 75% Chinese, with Malay, Indian and Eurasian making the other 25%. It is now a world leader with countless international attributes in medicine, education, technology and science.

<https://www.google.com.au/search?q=Singapore&rls=com.microsoft:en-AU&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF->

[8&startIndex=&startPage=1&rlz=117ADRA_enAU427&gfe_rd=cr&ei=JYeGVP28BaaN8Qeo6IDwDA&gws_rd=ssl](https://www.google.com.au/search?q=Singapore&rls=com.microsoft:en-AU&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&startIndex=&startPage=1&rlz=117ADRA_enAU427&gfe_rd=cr&ei=JYeGVP28BaaN8Qeo6IDwDA&gws_rd=ssl)

Our early morning arrival in Singapore had no delays of any kind- just when you want one! Even our taxi got us to Raffles Hotel in double quick time on the excellent highways. We knew rooms would not be ready until 2.00pm! We thought we would simply have to wait about 6 hours! First they offered us a sterling silver pot of coffee with fine china cups to refresh ourselves while reading the

Straits Times. Then they offered breakfast on the house to us. This was followed by the suggested that we *could* have an earlier room if we were prepared to accept a room that two single beds. They seemed to be apologizing as they spoke as if it was their fault and not totally ours!



Foyer - Raffles Hotel - Singapore

We ummhed and arrd and then accepted the room!

We had been upgraded to a suite onto a courtyard. The furniture; all antique had come from the original Raffles, probably not Sir Stamford's from 1819.



Malay Palace - Arab Quarter - Singapore



Raffles Hotel - Singapore

It had a dining and sitting room; the two beds were large double ones, a very large green marble dressing room and a huge white marble bathroom. We had a palace and loved every minute of it.



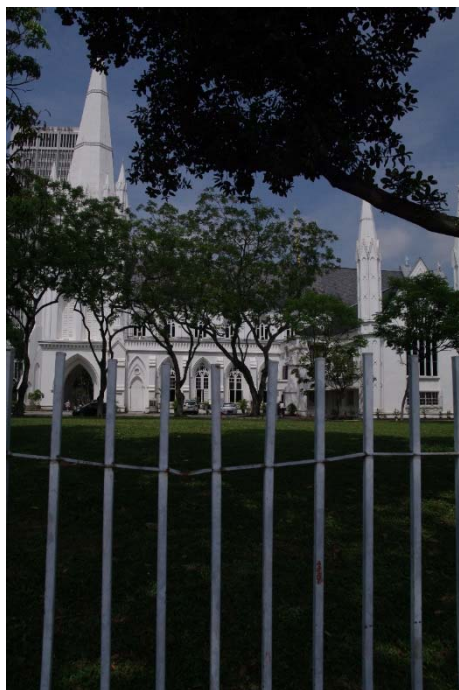
Courtyard - Raffles Hotel - Singapore



Dining Room - Raffles Hotel - Singapore

All linen was changed with the daily clean and we were brought a large bowl of fresh fruit with the newspaper each morning. They also replenished ice bucket for our 'non- Raffles' single malt whisky! Each evening as they turn down the beds they left a bedtime short story on the pillow; generally it had some mention

to Raffles from the past. We were totally enjoying four days of luxurious heaven.



St Andrew's Cathedral Singapore

As Jim and I walked around this amazing city of inspiring architecture we recognized very little from years gone by. Many of the old haunts are gone; the land reclamation throws the old navigational skills out! The place is pristine clean and very green, with trees on every avenue, even the river and canal was odourless and clean! No more transport junks milling around the canal steps.



Skyline - Singapore

Going alone in 1965 has proved the by far the best solution for Singapore and its people! However in finding the 3 famous and very popular ethnic areas of the Malays (Arab Town), the Indians (Little India) and the Chinese (China Town) we were disappointed to find little or no reference to the bustling trade of the by-gone eras. These places and their people put Singapore on the map. The places are now full of trendy eateries, fashion shops and tourist interests. The many genuine jewellery shops are still there in abundance, thank goodness.

We would have liked to see a museum set up at each 'town' in an old renovated two story shop-house dedicated to the bustling industries and trades that made the city rich and famous. Even the Exhibition of 700 years of Singapore History at the Museum did not do justice to the hard work of the trading past!

Orchid Road did not resemble the place we remembered! The kampongs have gone, perhaps that was wise because the land could be better used for high-rise accommodation for the bursting population of the 1970's.



Super Trees - Gardens by the Bay - Singapore



Gardens by the Sea - Singapore



Cloud Forest - Gardens by the Sea - Singapore



Performer - Flower Dome - Gardens by the Sea - Singapore

Of course things must change- but does *everything* have to go? We spoke to many young Singaporeans (in fact- often they started to conversations) who knew nothing of the past we spoke about.

The Raffles sponsored an excellent journalist's photographic exhibition, shots from trouble spots around the world, it was very moving and definitely worth spending the time to browse past the exhibits.



Marina Bay Sands Hotel - Singapore



Flower Dome - Gardens by the Sea - Singapore

Having obtained a 3 day train pass we were making full use of it. We found our way to the "Gardens by the Sea" and the Botanical Gardens, both spectacular yet quite

different. The "Gardens by the Sea" is a very new concept of environmentally friendly use of reclaimed land, brilliantly landscaped with plants from around the world. With Chinese New Year just around the corner they had one garden dedicated totally to the event.



Swan Lake - Singapore Botanical Gardens



Heading for the Water - Singapore Botanical Gardens



Fountain - Orchid Garden - Singapore Botanical Gardens



Orchids - Orchid Garden - Singapore Botanical Gardens

The flower dome and the cloud forest along with the amazing Super-trees allowed children (and lots of mainland Chinese) to explore and discover the role plants play in our world.



Chinatown - Singapore

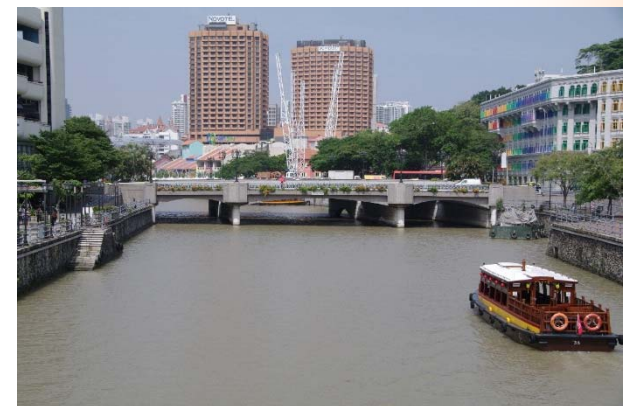


Street Art - Chinatown - Singapore

The Botanical gardens on the other hand are classically traditional with sweeping lawns, large 200 year old trees, graceful lakes for the swans and ducks, mustn't forget to mention the huge lizard near the lake! My favourite sections were the orchid gardens and the one with plants specifically to attract butterflies. Mind you the large bromeliad section was pretty special as well.



Some of the past remains - Singapore



Singapore River

As our last full day was Sunday, and Singapore maids day off, wherever we went we saw hundreds of Pilipino girls and men enjoying the sunshine and rest. Along with the many *very expensive* cars on the road, it really emphasized and brought home the message of how very wealthy Singaporeans have become these days.



Parliament House - Singapore



Singapore Cricket Club

When I think of Singapore's food! I think of dishes like crispy skin duck, roast pork and Singapore noodles; we certainly indulged in these and lots more! Curry was definitely off our menu for a while.

Singapore was a blissful way to end our busy Indian adventure.

We were greeted at home by the surprise return visit of a family of 4 Tawny Frog-Mouths, not owls, so the web told us!

