

Aurangabad to Mumbai

- country to city

Mumbai, India - February 3, 2008

Amy:

We woke up and had a leisurely morning. We were scheduled to be picked up at 1:30, but had to be out of our room at 11:45. We ate breakfast at the buffet and talked to the waiter, who was nice. I assured him that our trip to Ajanta was fine (I had told him before that I was worried about the trip) b/c I'm sure he was up at night worrying.

I packed our bags and attempted to use the internet in the main office, which still wasn't working. I didn't know it at the time, but I was charged every time I (attempted) to get online. Perhaps they should have told me this before I tried, eh? Brent and I sat by the pool for most of the morning, reading and writing. We ate grilled cheese sandwiches & coke for lunch, and just lazed around. We were going to have a ping-pong tournament, but the ball was broken. We also talked to Brent's friend, Atul, who told us that he went to a wedding reception with 1000 people! I thought our wedding was big... He told us about the debt that is often accrued by families planning weddings. Sounds painful.



We were picked up by a driver at 1:30 p.m. and driven to the train station. At the station, a tour representative met and waited with us (about an hour and a half) 'til our train came. He was pleasant and very young – just 21 year old, and had a Harley Davidson belt buckle. (Brent and I thought that was funny). After looking at our train reservation and seeing Brent's age (the reservation had names, ages, passport numbers) he was shocked, and said that he thought that Brent was around 30 years old! [Naresh: They'll say anything to get a bigger tip.] He asked Brent about what countries were part of Europe and asked about the cost of meals in the US.

For most of the time at the station, we waited in the 1st class waiting room, which was nicer and cleaner than the 2nd class waiting room in Jaipur. Brent and I took turns walking around the station; Brent walked up and down all of the platforms and took some pictures. I bought a book and a flashlight (a "torch" they're called here). We were shocked to see passengers walk across the tracks from one platform to another! There were also some goats on the track, which made me nervous. In the station, a woman's voice on the loudspeaker projects the near constant sound of announcements. Most of the announcements start with "kripya" which we learned means "please" in Hindi. The announcements in Hindi are followed by the same announcement in English; both

are difficult to understand b/c the station is very noisy.



Train Station Panorama

When the train came to the station, the tour guy and driver took our bags and we rushed onto the train. They told us that the train would only stop for 10 minutes, so we had to quickly find our car and assigned seat. On this train, we were in “chair class” seats, which were actual seats, not rows of benches converted to beds at night. This train car was our fanciest yet! We put the luggage on the overhead rack, tipped the tour guy, and rolled out of the station.



Nice coach train

Our train was about an hour late leaving Aurangabad (so we left at 3:30 instead of 2:30) but somehow, we managed to arrive in Mumbai on schedule (7 hours later, at 10:05 p.m.). The train ride was pleasant. We were offered “snacks” – Brent got a veggie cutlet and 2 pieces of white bread, and I got 2 pieces of bread and an omlette. We also bought some candies on the train that I wolfed down and forgot to share with Brent...

[Naresh: Amy shared a little bit: she accidentally dropped some of the candy on the floor, which was much appreciated by a mouse that later scurried over to maintain train cleanliness.]



Candy man on the train

For most of the ride, we read books; I bought a book in the station and Brent read the paper and “The Age of Kali” by William Dalrymple, which he recommends. We also read some trivia cards, so as to keep our trivia skills sharp (are you reading this, SF trivia team?) and attempted to complete some crossword puzzles. I slept a little, and Brent shooed a mouse away from our feet (yuck). At least he says he saw a mouse... I’m hoping he was just kidding. [Naresh: not a mouse; a cute, furry, long-tailed, scurrying train janitor that likes dropped candy.] We saw a few roaches, too, btw, but unlike some establishments (such as Kinkaid’s) reporting a roach will not get one a free dessert.



Staying up-to-date

Mumbai was the final stop on the train route, which was helpful b/c we didn’t have to continuously watch & try to decipher the signs at the station. We disembarked and quickly found the exit, which was a feat b/c the station (Victoria Terminal) is the largest and busiest train station in Asia. Outside the station was a sea of black and yellow cabs; it seemed as though we had gone back in time (and to England).

We took a cab to our hotel, which was about a mile from the hotel, in an area called “Churchgate”. Our hotel was next to the Ambassador Hotel (a hotel with a revolving

restaurant on top) so we used that as a landmark. At our hotel, the Chateau Windsor, we were greeted by a bellhop who took our luggage and escorted us to an old elevator, and the doorman took us up to the lobby on the 5th floor. The hotel looked dingy, old, and decrepit from the outside, and the lobby looked the same. I was a little worried, but we were shown to our room, which was newly-renovated and beautiful! The only problem with the room is that we have to go outside the room to use the bathroom. The room had 2 balconies overlooking the street and a comfy bed. We ordered room service, grilled cheese and beer (a hotel employee went to a nearby restaurant to get the food), and went to sleep.



Our Mumbai room

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