

In the Pink – City of Jaipur

Jaipur, Rajasthan, India - January 23, 2008

Brent:

We woke up this morning in Jaipur, the pink city. Last thing I remember it was evening and we were waiting to watch Heroes on TV at 8pm (I wonder if it was any good). By the time I awoke Amy had already been up for hours writing blogs of the past few days and washing all our clothes in the bathtub (India is teaching her to be a good little hard-working primary wife).



Amber Fort - view from entrance

We were way too cold last night, so we asked the hotel to send up blankets and/or someone to fix the heating. They did both (another blanket and a separate portable heater). Another delicious hotel buffet

breakfast, and then we met today's guide, Amer, (from the warrior class) in the lobby at 8:30 am. Amer was the most Americanized person we'd met yet, and had spent a year at IIT, so we could discuss a few computer languages. Amer proved to be an excellent and very helpful guide, whose help was to be exceeded only later by his father (but I get ahead of myself).

Amer and our driver drove us through the pink walls into the pink city and we learned something at every moment (about the walls, the shopkeepers of hundreds of years ago and now, politics, invasions, and so on). After several kilometers through the city (all the walls really are pink, or much like a terra cotta vase), we left the walled (older) city and went up a mountain on other (even) older city. This city was where the head military guy lived—this was the guy who was the brother of the primary wife of the ghost-city (Fateput Sikri) king.



Amber Fort

We're too special to simply walk up the path to the city, so we rode up on the back of an elephant. They have 90 elephants each taking five trips up the mountain each day, carrying two-persons each time, so we were one of the today's elite 900 (limited numbers set by an animal rights group – also no male elephants b/c they're too aggressive). I felt kind of like an ancient invading warrior king, and kind of like a cheesy tourist. While we waited in line for the elephants many vendors ("hawkers") tried to sell us cheap cheap stuff. The Japanese group in front of us got the hardest sell, at one point one of the hawkers was piling little wooden elephants onto the guy in front of us (maybe they figured if 90 elephants can carry all of us, maybe one Japanese guy could carry 90 elephants?)



silouetted at Amber Fort

The fort was impressive in its Hindu and Muslim decorative ways. Our

guide was extremely informative and put up with a lot from us (e.g. I informed him of the ancient technology whereby they could use an outdoor stone to know if it was raining), which made this fort visit the best yet. We learned, and I took careful notes, about the methods used to successfully maintain and entertain 12 wives and over a hundred concubines. We learned about old building, heating, and cooling techniques, as well as decorative methods.

One of the most unique aspects of this fort was the Wall of Mirrors. The walls and ceiling were covered with tiny mirrors, many of which were still intact. Apparently, back in the day, a mirrored disco ball couldn't hold a candle to what a candle could do within the hall of mirrors. In ancient times, different colored carpets would be laid down in the mirrored hall to either warm or cool the room.

Our next stop on the tour was the astronomy/astrological section of the kings of hundreds of years ago. A very large sundial was used to measure time as accurate as 20 seconds. That



wasn't good enough so they built a humongous sundial for better accuracy. This garden of astronomy/astrology tools then had sunken giant holes with huge slabs and marking for further calculations and measurements. Really quite astounding in its workmanship and detail all for getting exact details on when and where one was born for reading horoscopes. (They should have just invented US magazine if they want to know exactly what the stars are doing at any instant.)

Then came the moment we most fear in any guided tour: the visit to a crafts shop. We're new at the guided tour thing, but learning that the tour companies set up deals at certain shops. This was a fun one, though, part of some cooperative (of 400 families/3000 people) of carpet and cloth making. A real nice guy showed us how to print some cloth, then showed us weavers doing their thing (making carpets), and post-weaving production of singe-ing and clipping, all with the desired effect of impressing on us what an exacting and time-consuming process good carpet making can be. Then he took us to a large room, gave us a coke and a tea, and snapped his team of men to attention, speaking while he rolled out ream after ream of beautiful carpets ("notice the single-knot style we saw outside, and the double-knots, and patterns, and difficult circles"). Like synchronized swimmers, his team would turn carpets around to show how they played in the light. We had vowed not to buy anything, but, darnit, they were such nice guys, and the tea was good, and, you know, "cooperative" is such a feel- good term, and.... Let's just say that we hope something will be arriving in the mail around the time we get back home, and that it will look good on the floor of our entryway.



Brent and guide

We'd had more itinerary planned for the day, but instead devoted the rest of the tour peoples' time to working out changes of plans that would keep us off the highway roads, whatever it took.

Our tour guide's father, at the tour office, helped us redo plans, to avoid one city here, take an overnight train there, and elsewhere a plane. What a good father and son team.

At the train station, trying to finagle a way to get tickets for a sold-out train (in the end buying a seat from Delhi even though we're not in Delhi), we met the British couple who were on our Delhi Then & Now Tour (India really must be a small country, since we keep meeting the same tourists again and again—either that, or everyone owns the same edition of The Lonely Planet.) They were also in the middle of changing their plans so they'd spend less time traveling and more time lounging on the beaches of Goa.

With our mission so smoothly accomplished the driver took us back to our hotel. We were concerned that we'd deprived him of a couple of days driving, but he seemed OK with it (everyone in India does seem to be OK with everything) and looked forward to having a day off. Amy took some time to freshen up in the room, while I wandered around our local area trying to find an internet spot (our hotel is charging over \$26 a day for WiFi, which just seems wrong and I wasn't going to stand for it). It took a while, but eventually I found a nice internet café (conveniently located next to a tasty pastry shop) who would let us plug in a laptop for 15 rupees (less than 40 cents) per hour, so I came back to the hotel, got Amy and the laptop, and went back for enough time to post a bog before the internet café closed. The internet "café" was in a small room down a hallway, with 4 kiosks with old-ish looking computers and a man sitting at a desk. Behind him was an old printer.



Jaipur - pink city



rock star room

The guy at the internet café was very nice and described Kerala (where he's from in south India and where we're going) to Amy. We said "Oh, you're from Kerla, so you must know our friend Vinod" and we learned he had a good sense of humor. We'll try again tomorrow and get more internet time.

Our hotel has a nice-looking barbecue restaurant on the top floor, overlooking Jaipur from near the center, so we had some big plans to go there this evening for a nice romantic dinner. But Amy's been asleep since 8:00, it's now after 9:00, and I have a feeling the dinner ain't gonna happen. Ah, just as well. We've probably been eating too much anyway (that's what our elephant said). Day after tomorrow we're going on a camel safari, and

we don't want that one- meal-too-many to be the proverbial dish that broke the camel's back.

....update. It's now an hour later. I decided to go up to the tandoori restaurant anyway. Ordered a drink.

Ordered a bowl of soup. Ordered enough meat platter for two, to share with Amy for when she woke up, and had it sent down to the room. When it came, I sat on the bed and nibbled. And nibbled. And nibbled. Now it's gone and I realize I am way overly stuffed. And I haven't saved any food for my wonderful wife. A wise travel writer is about to have said (in the second half of this very sentence) that a vacation's success lies in the art of imaginatively adjusting to bad decisions. As bad decisions go I think that stuffing myself to the gills on tandoori ranks very low. Good night.



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