

Last day in Jaipur

Jaipur, Rajasthan, India - January 24, 2008

Amy:

Another delicious breakfast buffet, and a minor faux pas: a comment card (they keep asking us to fill in comment cards perhaps b/c the hotel is new) read there and then by staff (I hate to be bothered when I'm hungry) followed by apologies. Met a nice waiter that Brent had talked to last night (during his meatfest) from Shimla, a city up north. Brent liked him b/c he said that Brent's Hindi was good. Brent went to the gym to workout and I went across the street to call my mom. It was around 9:15 a.m. and the STD/ISD (local and international phone calling rooms) weren't open yet. It was scary crossing the street and I wished that Brent were with me to navigate. It's hard to get used to looking right, then left. Cars seem to speed up and pass each other with reckless abandon. Yesterday, we saw a human traffic light, i.e. a man in a center platform guiding traffic with success. I wish there were more lights or men in platforms – Brent just pointed out that lights are mostly ignored, except by our driver when we're in the car.



Brent & his internet buddy

Today, our train is at midnight to Jaisalmer – an overnight train



barefoot runners in park

where we are in regular sleeping class, no blankets or bedding. (we'll search around to buy a blanket for the train and for our camel ride!) We have a late check out from the hotel (2:00) and are leaving there while we wander around. I think our driver is picking us up at the hotel at 8:30 to take us to the train station, but I'm not sure. Even when all parties speak English (or "Hinglish" – Hindi and English) there can be room for miscommunication.

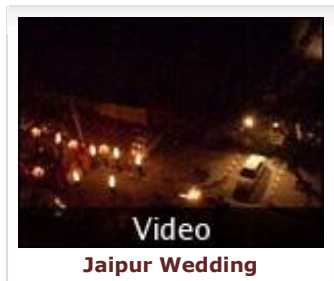
Now we're sitting in our corner hotel room, getting in as much hotel time as we can before the 2:00 checkout—our room has windows on 2 sides overlooking the city. Other than the roosting pigeons outside, which actually haven't been bothering me too much, our room is amazing. We're about seven floors up and we can see across the city for miles to the surrounding mountains. (We were told the name of the mountain range, but can't remember now.) From our room, we can see a traffic circle/rotary and many high-rises, a park, and lots of other buildings. Brent has been gazing down to the street commenting on the horrible drivers. (I just took a video) Horns honking is a constant sound; really constant all day, but stopping at night. Our guide told us that it's wise not to be on the highways at night b/c drivers take opium to stay awake and may accidentally take too much.(!) I'm glad we're taking the train. The Lonely Planet guidebook said that there are waiting rooms at

the train station that one can rent, so we may do that later, as we're being dropped off several hours before our train leaves. The last time I was in India, I remember there being 2 separate waiting rooms, one for males and one for females. It'll be interesting to see what the Jaipur railway station looks like...

Now we're in the Jaipur railway waiting station – a “sleeper car” waiting room – a large, gray room with people sleeping on blankets on the floor, rows of chairs, a multicolored schedule and an enormous clock on the wall, many of us trying to share the few wall sockets and everyone taking turns at the one socket that doesn't work, thinking that everyone else just wasn't doing it right But I'm getting ahead of myself...

We checked out of the hotel at 2:00 and left our bags. We walked (carefully) through the mess of traffic about ¼ mile (it seemed like 10 miles) to the internet café we had been to the day before. The man working there recognized us and kicked some kids off of the computer (despite our protests). Or maybe they worked there. Brent plugged in the ethernet cable and I uploaded some blogs while he read Scientific American (having not yet found Scientific Indian at the local news stands). Our internet café buddy gave us a small cup of hot chai. Yum. I also took his picture with Brent and promised to send him a copy.

When the computer battery ran out, we left the café and went to a little store to stock up on items for our train ride: water, soda, biscuits and candy (the 4 food groups). We decided to take a motor rickshaw (instead of walking and trying to avoid cars) to the nearby park. We had met a rickshaw driver earlier in the day who said he would drive us, so we took him up on his offer. Brent negotiated a ride with him from the park to a restaurant that he had found in the Lonely Planet (once again, thanks, mom!). We were dropped off in a beautiful park, the largest in Jaipur, we were told. There was a golf course, a Stonehenge-looking sculpture, flowers gardens, couples sitting on the grass and people running barefoot (Brent was jealous). The weather had warmed and we leisurely walked through the park.



We next went to a fancy rotating restaurant on the top of a hotel called “Om”. It was a vegetarian restaurant (it would be so easy to be a vegetarian in India – Shannon, James, and Giles would be psyched!) and was delicious. The restaurant wasn't technically rotating yet – it was starting at 7:00



and we got there around 5:45. It did move for about 5 minutes, but we think they were just practicing. At one point, the waiter came over to our table and insistently spooned a great deal of food onto Brent's plate, as if he needs help eating! It was pretty funny. Oh – there is lots of burping in India – one of the waiters was belching continuously. It was kind of gross. The meal was really good – expensive, for Indian standards, but good. We left the restaurant and took a rickshaw back to our hotel. Back at our old haunt, we went up to the rooftop restaurant to kill some time and have a drink. On the roof, we saw our old favorite waiter and sat under the heat lamps (it was so cold and windy that Brent wasn't even annoyed at the heat lamps!). From the roof, we saw that there was a wedding procession, complete with brightly colored lamps and a parade and marching band with the bridegroom on a horse. (Back in Agra we were told that this is usually the only time a groom has ridden a horse, and sometimes they've been celebrating a bit too much and so fall off.) We saw fireworks displays all over the city, which we were told were from the many weddings throughout the city. We were told that the stars are often consulted for planning weddings, so this date was likely an auspicious one.

Down at the lobby, we were met by a man who was the tour agency representative sent to drive us to the train station. On the way, we stopped at a hotel market bazaar and bought some blankets for the train (and camel); they first showed us beautiful multi-crafted quilts for hundreds of dollars, but then we found the 13 dollar blankets. The tour agency man came inside the train station with us and made sure we were safely in the station waiting room. He was really helpful, and probably thinks we're crazy for taking the train (at midnight) with the common people. But that's the way we rollllllllllllll!



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Commentary: A tiny paragraph on page 4 of today's Times of India says that 58 have died in Uttar Pradesh this winter due to the unusually cold season. On page 11 we learn that every three seconds one child dies in India. But here's the front-page news item: an actor in New York died of an overdose.

- Next entry: [Train kept a rolling... Jaipur to Jaisalmer](#)
- Previous entry: [In the Pink – City of Jaipur](#)
- Lots more Jaipur pictures [here](#)
- [Index of all blog entries](#)