

To eat and run - Delhi to Agra

Delhi, India - January 21, 2008

Amy:

After sleeping soundly almost the entire night, (a first since our trip began) I woke up and started packing (one of my favorite things to do). I rang the bell that calls for one of the servant boys (how quickly one gets used to ordering people around) and one came running upstairs. I gave him our breakfast order, and also a bag of m&ms that I had brought for people on our trip. Brent woke up and we took bucket showers and went downstairs for breakfast, since it was cold upstairs on the patio and warmer in the house.

We ate breakfast, and then Usha joined us and gave us our bill. It turns out that they don't accept credit cards, so Avnish drove Brent to the atm machine, and I went upstairs to finish packing. (Oh —I took a Polaroid picture of Avnish & Usha and gave it to them) Brent came back, and we gathered our things and said goodbye. Then we left the house (it was 9:30 and our train was leaving at 10:30), walked to the corner, and tried to hail a cab or auto rickshaw. We tried and tried, but only 2 unoccupied rickshaws came by, and neither would take us to the train station! It was getting late and our train was leaving in 45 minutes. It was so stressful! We decided to go back to the house and hope that Avnish offered us a ride. I ran ahead and breathlessly explained what had happened. Luckily, Avnish offered to drive us, and we ran downstairs to his car.

We drove through traffic and had a frantic ride to the train station. Avnish told us that we should have left earlier (thanks!) and that the traffic is always bad in Delhi. He suggested finding a cooli (baggage handler) who would know what platform our train was on, and could carry our bags and run through the station. [PHOTO_ID_R=cooli-at-train-station.jpg] He dropped us off outside the station (to avoid the gridlock outside the station) and we ran inside and through the station. We found a cooli and he took one of our bags and put it on his head, and guided us through the station, up and around platforms. We climbed into our train car, past a few Indian people, to the foreigner compartment, where we were assigned seats.

After running full-speed through the station to catch the train, it left 40 minutes late! We spent the next 3 hours talking to the 4 people in our compartment who were from New Zealand. Other than Zena, warrior princess, I had never met anyone from New Zealand. And I guess hadn't really met her, either. They were great and gave us lots of suggestions for places to visit and see. They had been traveling for 7 weeks and had another 2 left — once again, making our trip seem piddly). We exchanged names and addresses.

The train car itself was old and dirty, with long vinyl seats, two facing each other (with two overhead for luggage) and one opposite. On overnight trains, the seats fold down into beds, so there are 2 or 3 bunk beds, one on top of the other. The



New Zealanders on train

number of bunk beds depends on the class of train, 2 for 1st class, 3 for 2nd class. On the train is a continuous parade of vendors selling everything from chai

(tea) to fruit to packets of food in banana leaves. There are also lots of beggars, some horribly deformed, which is heart wrenching and awful. At the train station platforms on the way, vendors sell items through the bars of the train windows. I went to the restroom on the train, and I think I'll include a picture to tell this story:



Brent and friend on train



vendor on train



bathroom in train

When we arrived in Agra, we were met by a sea of auto rickshaws. We were approached by a young man, who showed us a card with a list of set fares. We decided to go with him, and we chatted with him for a while, and decided to hire him to take us around to the sites for the rest of the day and the next morning. First we went to our hotel, which was really nice and fancy, much nicer than I had expected (www.howardplazahotel.com). We were greeted by a sultan- looking man with a handlebar moustache opening the door. At the front



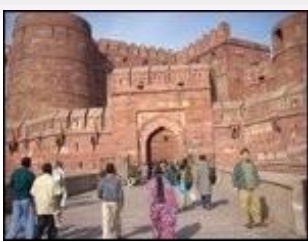
movie - Agra street scene

desk, we were able to practice our extensive knowledge of Hindi, which people really seem to appreciate (or else they're just very polite). We went up to our room, which was complete luxury! There was even a TV! We had a mini bar! Complete luxury. (though we opened a water and were charged about \$6!).



Brent flying high in hotel

We went outside to find Shabbu waiting for us to take us sightseeing in his motor rickshaw. We wound around the city of Agra, which was much like Delhi, but smaller with more traffic circles. There also seemed to be more cows and pigs wandering in the streets, and maybe a bit more trash on the street. We drove to Agra Fort (also called "The Red Fort, since it is made of Red Sandstone) and Shabbu dropped us off. We walked to the gate and paid an entrance fee (\$5. for non- Indians, 50 cents for Indians) and walked inside the walled fortress. Oh – I almost forgot to mention the "hawkers", men selling jewelry and goods around the tourist sites – were numerous and pushy. (We were told to ignore them).



Agra fort

There were hundreds and hundreds of tourists also visiting the fort, which was built by the son of Shah Jahan (the moghul who built the Taj Mahal), who later

imprisoned his father in the fort, so he would be cursed by seeing the Taj Mahal, but not being able to live there. The fort walls are 2 miles long (maybe?) or so. The inside contains ruins of a palace with ornate carvings done in Mughul style. We wandered around the fort for an hour and a half, then met Shabbu outside.



Agra (red) fort



artwork



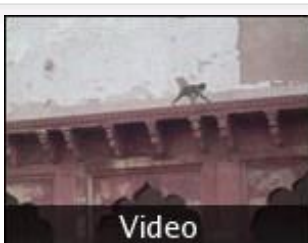
examining artwork



screen

There were many horse-drawn

carriages for tourists outside the fort as well. tag:Next,



movie - monkeys at Red Fort

we drove across the river to the Itimad-ud-daulah (aka "Baby Taj") which was built before the Taj Mahal, but on a smaller scale and less elaborate. The Baby

Taj was very impressive, with interesting colored conglomerate

stones cut into interlocking shapes and patterns. For variety of patterns and colors, if not for size, Baby Taj exceeds its grown-up namesake.



Amy & Brent at Baby Taj



(Taj in back)

Our final stop of the night was across the river to see the Taj Mahal sunset on the riverbanks. Shabbu dropped us off and told us not to pay the entrance fee to go in the garden, but rather to walk alongside the garden to the river.



movie - camel at riverbanks of Taj Mahal

Avnish (back in Delhi) had given us the same advice, and had also said that if we were lucky, we would also see a funeral cremation on the banks of the river, which we did.



goat movie



(with Taj in back)

was stunning, especially reflected in the water.



sunset and burning bodies



Taj Mahal
reflected in river

Shabbu drove us back to the hotel, and we arranged to meet him at 6:00 in the morning to see the Taj at sunrise.



Brent holding up Taj

We were tired when we got to our hotel room, and Brent was shivery and had a sore throat. We decided to order room service, mainly b/c we were curious about what “nachos” would be! So we ordered nachos, samosas, hot tea, lassi (yogurt drink), and a chicken/cheese grilled sandwich. We realized that we hadn’t had a real lunch (we had stopped for chips and candy earlier when we bought batteries) and were hungry, so we wolfed down the food, called for a wake-up call, and went to sleep. FYI: “nachos” are some thick naan-ish fried chips with a bowl of chutney.



room service in hotel
(nachos?)

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