

Udaipur: The Venice of India

Udaipur, Rajasthan, India - January 30, 2008

Naresh:

Call me Naresh. My parents did, or nearly did. Actually they called me “Brent”, which means the same thing as “Naresh”. And because folks in these parts have trouble with “Brent” I am now known as “Naresh”. Mira nam Naresh hain.

Note to Indian readers: do not read the rest of this paragraph because I don't want you to think I'm an offensive racist. Just skip this paragraph and jump to the next one. OKBye. I don't only have an Indian name.

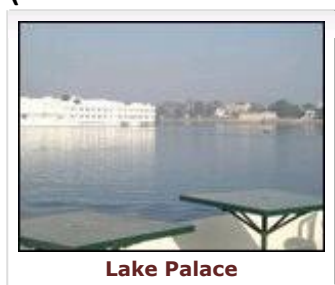
Yesterday morning Amy and I woke up and realized that we now have an Indian smell. You know that smell, Americans, come on, admit it: that spicy smell as if the person has eaten nothing but Indian food for weeks on end. Yeah, we smell like that now. And as long as we're in an offensive paragraph, but none of the offended aren't reading it, here's another thing: in cars their steering wheels are on the wrong side and they drive on the left side of the street. How crazy is that?

Udaipur is a lovely city. It's surrounded by a mountain range (which our guide said was the oldest in the world) that gives it a whole lot more water than most of Rajasthan. So it is lush and green compared to the deserts we have been seeing. Our guide, Mangu, brought us to Lake Pichola, the largest of five man-made lakes in the city, all of which are interconnected by canals.

Lake Pichola has two large building/islands in it. One is the Lake Palace Hotel, a big white building featured (we've heard often) in the James Bond film, Octopussy.

(Later, downtown, we'll see quite a few signs for different restaurants that all claim to have the highest view in the city, and that all run Octopussy continually during dinner—alas, we won't have the pleasure of attending any of these highest-in-the-city showings of Octopussy dinner theater.) Lake Palace Hotel is only for hotel guests (and is an HRH hotel, standing for “His Royal Highness” or “Historic Register Hotel”) or those using the restaurant, so we went to the other palace: The Pleasure Palace, which the Maharajahs used to use in the hot weather for entertainment.

With it's cool gardens, fountains, balconies, and excellent restrooms (Amy was started to feel a bit ill at this point), we could see ourselves



Lake Palace



view from
Pleasure Palace

building such a palace. Maybe when we get back to “The Shores” we’ll begin construction.

While waiting on the doc for our boat, Mongu learned that I was into computery stuff and so we chatted about how to promote web sites such as his <http://www.mewartoursntrekking.com/> and our <http://YIQYAQ.com/>. We didn’t have any great ideas except to try to get <http://www.mewartoursntrekking.com/> and <http://YIQYAQ.com/> mentioned in as many other web sites as possible so they’d show up in search a lot. Then our boat came and we stopped discussing <http://www.mewartoursntrekking.com/> and <http://YIQYAQ.com/>. To learn more, visit <http://www.mewartoursntrekking.com/> and <http://YIQYAQ.com/>.

On the boat ride around the lake we chatted it up with a London couple who are soon to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. They were nice, with dry humor, and funny accents (those brits always sound funny, don’t they), exactly what you’d expect. Amy was surprised that so many older people come “on holiday” to India.

Back on shore we toured the king and queens palace (where Amy bought some water at a 5x royal markup to ease her ill-ease—by lunchtime she would be feeling OK). The ruling family here had been in charge for a whopping 1500 years, and the capital of their empire had been in Udaipur for hundreds of years, and each Maharena added new stuff, and so the palace was huge, with different sections of different ages and designs. It was like the Winchester Mystery House, but a lot prettier. Chinese tiles here, Belgian glass there, China from somewhere else, Indian marble elsewhere, etc.... In one section they had some interesting pictures showing hundreds of people in various stages of some event (e.g. a wedding), so it was interesting to see in one still display what everyone (cooks, cleaners, kings, noblemen, etc...) was up to add the same time. We hadn’t paid the camera fee for this place, but snuck in one photo of one such painting so we could look at it more later when we’d have enough leisure time to locate Waldo.

There was also a wall for elephant fighting, a scale for weight the maharena to give him his weight in gold, lots and lots of stuff.

Our guide always called the ruler there “the maharena” which he said was like the maharajas we’d seen everywhere else, but one step above. The old Maharenas where capable of amazing feats, such as cutting in half a warring opponents’s body, their armor, and their horse, all in a single stroke. Hey..... Maharena!



Back on the road, our guide stopped by a stand a bought

us a light lunch to go, and we proceeded to Saheliyon-ki-baba, a large ornamental garden that has many sections, with five huge fountains in different themes. The water wasn't running when we were there (ironically, the fountains used to be gravity powered, but since switching to electricity they can now only run for certain scheduled hours), but it was still very beautiful. We stopped in one of the gardens and the guide left us alone to eat the food he'd bought (two huge samosas and too many sweet sweet jalebis), and to make out on



pre-lunch backbend

a park bench for a while. (only tourists hold hands or touch each other – Indians do not).

We next disappointed the tour guide because we were not in the mood to see any local crafts, either the best in

the world jewelry or best in the world paper prints. I don't know if tour guides get commissions on this kind of thing, or what, but we just were not in the mood for shopping (sorry Mongu). But he was nice about it and took us up through the center of town, through many narrow curvy streets to a Hindu temple at the top.



Hindu temple

The temple was tall, and on a tall hill, and nicely carved. Inside were about a dozen older women on the floor chatting it up with each other. We were told that these ladies were retired and that this was their socialization. There were also erotic designs on the outside of the temple.



Hindu temple



erotic pix

From there we decided we didn't want a ride back to our hotel, and so stayed there in the center of the old town. Amy bought a pair of pants from a young tailor, because the pants she brought had ripped and the hotel sewing kit was inadequate for the size of the rip. (Note: the rip was not due to anything my petite little Amy had done; it was just the pants' time.) Amy wanted to cut and sew the pants herself, but I insisted that the tailor would do a better job himself and that it was worth the extra 50 cents to splurge on custom tailoring.

While the pants were being finished we wandered through the old streets. It reminded me a lot of some old European cities, with narrow alleyways barely big enough for one small car, and shopkeepers and cafes (and cows?). One little section looked even more European as the restaurant became German (most of them on the highest patio in the city showing Octopussy). We had delicious chocolate cake and tea in Café Edelweiss, but soon café became way too European as many customers took out their cigarettes and smoked the place up; so we left. Pants were awaiting.

I like to wander, lost. Amy did a nice thing and then just let us wander around the streets, not knowing where we were going and not looking at a map. (Thanks, Amy, you're the best.) We found a Tibetan section selling nothing that was Tibetan. Then we found a very large and nice park with a big flower garden, a toy train big enough to ride, and something of a zoo (thought dogs and rats were the most common animal we saw near the little zoo section). This opened to a large field and big children's playground, with people picnicking and resting on the grass, and a long car-free walkway for exercise.



garden & fire
in background

That park was extremely pleasant, and I recommend a visit there but I won't tell you where it is or the name of it because we were the only foreigners there and I don't want to ruin it. To make matters worse, I faux paus'ed and gave foreigners a bad name: One guy there said "namascar" to me while I was walking by, and by the time I processed that statement and realized that "namascar" was the same thing as "namaste" but more formal, I was too far away to respond (about 3 miles and 2 hours away, to be exact). So, thanks to me, foreigners have a reputation in that park for being rude and are probably not welcomed back. Sorry.

A quick auto-rickshaw ride back to our hotel and we went right off to visit the internet café guy (Ricky) who loaned us the Windows XP a day earlier. I was determined to give him money for helping out in a time of need, but he refused to take anything. So I asked to pay for a copy of the disk, in case I needed it again during our trip; he went off and made a disk, but again refused to take any money at all. Instead he had someone bring us some chai and we sat and chatted for a while. A few years ago he'd visited the U.S. (SF, Pittsburgh, grand canyon, Disney world), and seen family in the bay area.

BTW, the internet café was quiet at the time, and would be (and will be?) for quite a while because the primary pipe that carries the interweb between this and other parts of the world broke. They expect it will take about a week to fix, and so India BPO is hurting (and we can seldom read any non-Indian web sites and cannot post to travelpod.com—my rediffmail works fine, but nobody has every sent email to that account but me). That internet guy, Ricky, was so helpful yesterday that by himself he should have earned enough karma points that the pipe will probably fix itself. (The cause of the problem is not clear, but rumor is that someone tried to flush a giant wad of porn from one continent to another, it formed a clog in the middle, and it will take a week for inter-draino to dissolve.)

The day ended with us sitting for a while in the hotels' patio, dinner in its restaurant (chatting up the formerly unpleasant waiter who turned pleasant after chatting),

and bed.

Before ending this Udaiper description, here are shout outs to some of my favorite peeps: First, to the internet guy, Ricky. Thanks. You saved our butts.

Second to the Hotel Paras Mahal. I love this hotel. Rooms are great. Food is great and well priced. Nice patio. Very nice people. Laundry service. In a busy part of town, close to shops and stands and a mini-walmarty place. And free wifi.

Finally, to Mungo the tour guy. I think I stiffed him a bit with the tip. I never know how much to tip so just grab something from my wallet. But in this case it may have been too little. So make it up to Mungo for me and visit <http://www.mewartoursntrekking.com/> and tell him how to better get business through the site, especially from foreigners who like to do trekking for a few days, which is his specialty.

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