

Delhi-cious

Delhi, India - January 19, 2008

Amy:

Where to begin... I am writing this two days later on the train from Delhi to Agra, so we have to jog our collective memory to remember all the many events of the last two days...

We woke up on Saturday and had breakfast on our rooftop garden patio (cornflakes, banana, toast, jam, and coffee served in silver pots covered by adorable warming hoodies). During breakfast, Avnish, the owner, came up to talk to us. He was very affable, and told us stories of his radio show (Market Mantra) and his youth, touring around the world (his father having worked for an airline). It turned out that he wasn't giving the famous "Hidden Delhi" tour, but would be leading a "Delhi Then & Now tour" that day, if there was enough people/interest (thankfully, there was). After lounging around, we took "showers" (with a bucket of warm water and a cup) and got ready for our tour. We met Avnish and an older recently-retired English couple, and set out for the tour.

Avnish drove us to a metro stop, where we parked and got on the metro. The metro is a year old, clean, and much like DC metro – and even cleaner than the Boston T!



metro

There were armed security guards who checked us and our bags, then we boarded the metro. The first stop was calm, then the next stop (Connaught Place/ Gang) was absolute chaos, with thousands of people boarding the metro (most of them students on the way to the university), pushing and shoving.

We disembarked after one more stop, and emerged from the metro into another era. There were thousands of people



Old Delhi

walking/driving bicycle rickshaws/riding bikes down narrow streets of vendors (an auto-parts section, a hardware section, stationery, etc...).



Delhi street scene



Video
street scene movie

Avnish arranged for the five of us to get on 3 bicycle rickshaws, which bumped and jolted through the alleyways and streets of Old Delhi to the Jama Masjid.



Video
some movie



Jama Masjid

The Jama Masj is the oldest and largest mosque in India and is on one of the 2 hills in Delhi. Avnish told us the history of the mosque and facts about Delhi and the many religious groups. We climbed up the steps to enter the mosque, but were told that it was prayer time, so we went for lunch.



Jama Masj again

We (carefully) crossed the street and walked down an alleyway to Karims restaurant which is world-famous and is owned by 4 brothers, each of who works in a section of the restaurant (radiating from the center where the bread and food is made) and receives the money from that restaurant.



lunch

Avnish ordered for us, and we ate a huge delicious meal of leg of lamb, various Indian dishes (I have no idea what they were) and homemade chapatis (bread). We wolfed down our food and “mineral water” (the term for fizzy water like you guys drink, Les!) and had rice pudding for desert. After lunch, we headed back to the mosque.



restaurant workers making breads

At the mosque, Avnish paid an entrance fee (all the fees were included in the tour) and we took off our shoes and entered the mosque. He described the parts of the mosque, the folklore, and architecture, and we walked around and gazed over the city. There were several people praying, and I wanted to take their pictures, but Brent thought better of the idea (which is probably a good thing, or we might have been banished from the mosque).

We left the mosque and took bicycle rickshaws to the stationery/paper part of the old city, where we saw ream of paper being carried on mens’ heads and by carts led by cows. We stopped in a paper store, and the English woman (Lorna) bought some elaborately designed envelopes. We took a rickshaw back to the train station, where we boarded the metro again, this time to New Delhi, which was 2 stations away.

After getting off the metro, we emerged in New Delhi, where there seemed to be a change of five century’s worth of commerce.



New Delhi

The streets in the new city were wider and less chaotic; there were motorized 3-wheeled rickshaws, and far less people on the street. It was like a large modern business district anywhere in the world. We had emerged at the 3rd ring of Connaught place, which was the British-built and is still called “Connaught Circus”.

We went to the Oxford (student) Bookstore, which was in a large modern building, and housed a bookstore and tea shop. The bookstore had a few books in Hindi, but mostly English books, many bestsellers. We sat and drank tea with our new friends – Brent had hot Hindustani tea and I had iced mint tea. I forgot about drinking the ice until I had finished my drink... luckily, I didn't get sick.

After the tea house, we got drove in Avnish's car to an open-air crafts market with goods from all over India. Brent almost bought a shirt, but couldn't find one in his size. Also, he was reluctant to buy one b/c the Hindu sign



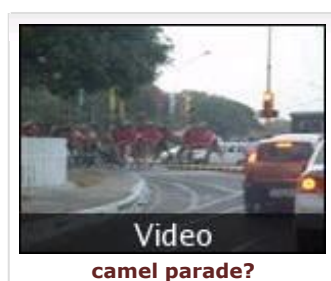
Brent at crafts market

is an inverted swastika, which he didn't think that people at home would appreciate... Avnish wanted one of the ladies to try henna tattoos, but I refused and so did my little friend, Lorna. (I thought that I'd probably end

up a giant orange mess with the henna all over). After watching one of the guards chase away a large monkey, Avnish drove us home. Oh - we saw a camel parade, too, on the ride home. Avnish said that they were preparing for the Jan 26th Independence Day parade.

Back at the guesthouse, we sat with the English couple and filled out a questionnaire of the tour and drank tea/coffee in the main dining room.

We were completely exhausted. but ended up talking to the couple plus another woman from New Zealand for a few hours! The English couple will be traveling for 7 months (and had just begun their journey in Delhi) through India, China, Australia, New Zealand, and ending up in LA, so we may see them in the states. Brent has been so chatty here in India! I guess this is "chatty traveling Brent".



We also met a woman from Slovenia (Anna) who was in one of the rooms upstairs, but Brent and I didn't like her very much – she ordered the "boys" (the boys who worked in the house) around, asking them several times to do her laundry and bring her various items. She kept telling us that the people here were "marvelous" and "lovely" and made sure we knew what a great chakra she had from her many hours of meditation and austerity and superiority to the rest of civilization. She was annoying. Other than Anna, the rest of the people we've met have been great. There is another woman at the guest house from New Zealand, and she's been traveling with her friend for the past 7 weeks. It seems like our measly 5 week trip to India doesn't really measure up!

After being given our hot water bottles, we went to bed and slept very soundly. I think we're finally over our jet lag...

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