

India Best of Rajasthan

A client travel report by Vera Cornell

November 2008

India is an adventure rather than a holiday. A feast for your eyes, colourful and exotic. She is certainly not for the faint-hearted. She is noisy, boisterous, dirty and cruel but has much appeal for the intrepid traveller who takes the time to appreciate her.

I had the privilege of travelling in her north eastern region, Rajasthan with Bunnik Tours. We arrived in New Delhi on Diwali, which is a cross between our Christmas & New Years celebration. It was like landing in Beirut! Firecrackers going all night. The smoke and smog were worse than anything I had experienced previously. The roads were chaos, the traffic worse. It can take 3 hours to travel 60 kms even in the countryside. Potholes, rubble, cows, dogs and unfortunate street people everywhere. But so colourful with women in their beautiful saris. God knows how they keep them so clean.

Our tour took us to some amazing places. Alsisar an almost deserted city of fabulous old Havalis. Rich merchant homes that had been spectacular in their heyday when the city had been part of the silk route from China. These huge homes have just been left to the ravages of time as their owners have moved to more lucrative places to trade. Our hotel there, Indra Villas was one of these amazing buildings that has been renovated.

We visited the Rat Temple of Karri Matra where thousands of rats are revered. Yuk, walking barefoot through sticky rat pee is something I'll remember for a while. The shrieks of horror from fellow tourists ringing in my ears. The locals just go about their business hand feeding the rats that they believe are their ancestors. They even eat some of rat food themselves and believe it imparts good fortune if a rat touches you. Not if it touches me!

One of my highlights was a night in a desert camp with a camel ride into the dunes to watch the sunset. We had a great time sipping rum & cokes with local musicians and dancers performing for us. Spectacular! Unfortunately my better half indulged a little too much and had to be walked back to camp, as he couldn't safely get back on his camel.

Another amazing experience was our entry into the Amber Fort by elephant. We had seen many elephants just as part of the traffic scene in the cities but to actually have the chance to ride on one. Wow.

The main reason we chose this particular tour was to see the annual Pushkar Camel Fair. It didn't disappoint. The fair was so exotic, with thousands of camels, many decorated so colourfully. Gorgeous, Marwari horses that are indigenous to Rajasthan. These are noted for their dancing ability and their special scimitar shaped ears. Our accommodation here was something special too. The beautiful Pushkar Resort, an oasis in the desert with the best food we had eaten during our stay in India.

We saw so much amazing architecture, intricate stone work on forts and temples throughout the country but without a doubt the Taj Mahal is special. I never realised how a building could touch one's heart until seeing it. It's a most romantic memorial to a great love story. The Taj Mahal really needs to be seen in person. There is no way a picture can do it justice.

India is a place that you will either love or hate. She is very corrupt and there is one price for tourists and another for locals. For westerners the frustration of having to bargain for everything is difficult. The beggars are also hard for us to ignore but in the end the experience of India is worth it all.



