

# Holiday Diaries by Denise Taylor, Award Winning Career Coach and Trainee DJ!



## Trip to Northern India

### The outward journey (December 23/24<sup>th</sup>)

The flight was delayed 90 minutes due to fog. We had been a bit concerned over fog at Heathrow but that had cleared up. We flew with [Jet Airways](#). What a great airline, the food was excellent and you had personal choice over the videos you watched. As it was a night flight I wanted to sleep but I did watch "The Devil Wears Prada". Later I decided to listen to my Ipod, so I could listen to what I wanted!

The flight was delayed in landing, we had missed our landing slot, so with the earlier delay we got in about 4 hours late. We got through customs easily but got ripped off getting a taxi. We were told it would cost about 250INR but were charged 630INR – lesson learned! Do book it in advance!

It was quite a busy drive to the hotel, and so much to see – we noticed beggars being pushed in carts, and heard the beeps of the horns, over and over again. We got to the hotel by 3pm. We had planned to sightsee but I was so tired that we lay on the bed till we met the group. The room was large and we had a Queen size bed.

We met our leader, Veerendra and the rest of the group at 6pm. Our initial meeting took place at The Arpitt Hotel on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor, we kept on walking up and up till we got to the roof. We were the only people from England. We also met Belinda and Sue, Marla and Michael, and Jennifer and Damien from Australia, Nikki and Graham from New Zealand and Theresa and Pamela from America. They were travelling separately. We all had dinner together at the Crossroads restaurant.

Beer cost 120INR for a large bottle. I was so tired I just had dal and rice; Simon had a mutton curry. Even though it was tired I found it hard to get to sleep – too many thoughts and I suppose some apprehensions.

### Delhi (December 25<sup>th</sup>)

We had a hot shower, not knowing when we would get another one. We then had breakfast – the buffet breakfast included Indian breakfast but I just had toast and jam, but I did have a cup of Chai, Indian spiced tea! We met at 0900 and walked to get a local bus. I was able to get a seat, but some western woman were standing. The Indian men were very polite and stood up so the women could sit down.



We got off the bus and walked to the [Jama Masjid Mosque](#), the biggest mosque in India. Lots of children came running up to us and kept on touching us.

We then walked through the streets to old Delhi. Narrow streets with a wide range of shops on other side. We stopped for a cup of chai which was lovely, and less sweet than at breakfast. We then stopped at a food store and ate some fritter



things, can't remember the Indian name but they were cooked fresh for us. They could be sweet or savoury. Simon had a banana one and I had a cashew nut one.

We went to the spice market and got a cycle rickshaw. Because it was a public holiday there was a political meeting/demonstration so we couldn't get through so walked. We went to the main [Sikh temple](#) and as well as sitting down and listening we walked around and saw a group of people making food for the poor, plus the poor sitting around waiting for some food. It was a very calming place to be.

We caught the metro to Connaught Square, quite a modern shopping area and were on our own for the afternoon. The metro is very modern and cost about 10p for our journey. We had a nice meal out, it was Christmas day, and went to some of the fixed price shops to get an idea on prices. I was surprised at how expensive things were - £270 for a bed spread. We got a **tuk tuk** back to the hotel. The driver couldn't find the hotel, but we saw people we knew so got out. This trip cost 50INR. We had 2 rooms to share till we left so we were able to have another shower.



We decided to go back to the same hotel as yesterday as we knew we could get a beer there. This time Simon ate Chinese and I had chicken tikka and paneer saag waller, but this is very different to at home, and I didn't like it as much. The spinach is very fine and there was too much of it.

We left for the railway station at 9pm and traveled in 3 cars. I traveled with our luggage, Simon was in a different car as there wasn't room for both of us. I then had to carry both bags and our fleeces so it was hard going. Our train was due to leave from platform 4 and we could see it was busy. As we walked down the stairs to the platform we wondered how we would fit on the platform it was so chock full of people. Two trains were delayed so 4 trainloads of people on the platform. We were a bit nervous as there was a lot of pushing and shoving and people had huge bundles of bedding etc with them. One poor lady got knocked over and a man fell on top of her and others were trying to push by me but behind me was a lady sat on the floor with a baby so I stood firm to protect her. A train came in and it was ours, and we had to push to get through, honestly we had never experienced anything like this. We were directed to the wrong part of the train Simon knew where we should be and took charge and got all of us in the right place. We did get on the train. and found people sitting in our seats, simon was powerfully persasive and we got to sit down but others took ages to clear them away (they did have seats, but at the other end of the train, and I could understand them not wanting to have to fight through as there were so many people. The compartment became berths for 8 but i never managed to sleep all night - the movement of the train, the bright lights and the hard bench.

I couldn't sleep. It was noisy, and the light was on. Everytime someone went to the loo I saw a bright light. The looks were interesting and went direct to the ground so you got a cool draft as you sat down.

The train was delayed and got into [Mirzapur](#) about 9.30. We took 3 cars to the Hotel Galaxy and again had two rooms to share so we could freshen up. We had breakfast – toast, jam and an omlet and with our share of the room it cost 165INR per person.

### Sailing down the Ganges



We took cars again and drove to the river. There was a bit of a scramble down the bank but it was fine. 4 of us were to each boat, and the journey was very calming and relaxing. The kitchen boat came alongside us midmorning for chai and biscuits and all the boats came together for lunch. We had great food – rice, salad, dal, potato and vegetable curry plus more chai. Meat, fish and alcohol are prohibited whilst on the River

Ganges and also in Varanasai. We had loo stops, we pulled into the bank and looked for somewhere a bit private.

Each evening, as the sun was setting we got off the boats and had to wade through the water to the sand bank. The boat crew put up our tents. We sat on a rug for our dinner – soup, various curries with chapattis and chai. Plus fruit and custard for pudding. There was a toilet tent covering a hole in the ground. We slept in dome tents and had sleeping mats – we had blankets provided, but I'm glad we took our sleeping bags.

We were on the same boat as Damian and Jennifer. Damian decided to row, he'd seen Michael have a go for 5 minutes, (I think it was for a picture opportunity) but Damien went on for about 30 minutes, showing how tough he was, but he did have blisters the next day! It was vegetarian food on the river as consumption of alcohol, meat and eggs is against Hindu beliefs

## 27<sup>th</sup> December

Our first night camping, I woke at 0600 and went for a 40 minute walk, over 4000 steps, then breakfast with the group. I stood up and just had toast and cereal.

It was quite cold on the river today, so I kept my fleece on all morning and wrapped myself in blankets. We again waded out to the boat, stopped for a break and had to scramble up a sandy bank. It was hard – one of the boat men made me a foot hold, and helped to pull me up, where was Simon? We saw some goats, and children carrying bundles of greens. More chai to drink!

We stopped to walk around the outside of a small fort and we also walked around a small village. We made sure that we greeted people by saying Namaste rather than hello, so we are staying with their culture and not changing the local people to be more westernized.

## 28<sup>th</sup> December



It was late when we set up camp last night and I was tired. I slept better this evening but woke at 3 a.m. It was hard to get back to sleep – the ground was so hard. This was our last day on the boat and it was a lot hotter today, later I noticed how red my face was. We sailed past people washing their clothes in the river. We saw a fantastic fort – [Ramnagar](#) and stopped to look around. From the outside it was amazing, and walking around inside, which cost 12INR you could imagine what it must have been like. We sailed into Varanasai and it

was breathtaking – all these fantastic buildings on the river side. We had lots of steps to climb up and then a bit of a walk to the hotel so we used our bags as rucksacks.

## Varanasi

[Varanasi](#) is known as one of the world's oldest living cities, its history dates back to 1400bc, Varanasi is situated between 2 tributaries of the Ganga – the Varuna and Assi rivers. Also known as Benares (Mughal) and Kashi "City of light" (Hindu). The Ganga, which normally follows a south eastern course changes its path here briefly and flows north through the city. This is considered very auspicious. Shiva is said to have poured the river Ganga down from the Himalayas and Buddha gave his first sermon just outside the city. It is the holiest of the 7 sacred cities of Hinduism. To die here is the receive an instant passport to heaven and release from the



cycle of reincarnation

We just had a couple of hours at the hotel before we were due to meet, so a quick shower - it was wonderful to have a shower and a trip to the internet café. It was a bit temperamental but at 30p for an hour, I can't complain. We met at 4pm and walked along the ghats. Our leader had told us that he would walk a bit ahead of us, as they don't really like guided groups taken along there. After the quiet of the river this was full on, lots of children coming up and asking us to buy things and so many beggars. We were amazed by the architecture – the buildings were like something out of [gormenghast](#). Eventually we reached the burning ghats. A man did ask us if we wanted to come closer, I didn't want to invade on his grief, but from a distance we could see the pyre being built and the body wrapped in cloths. Once the fire was going nicely the body would be put on top and would burn on the steps and just the ashes put on to the river. We walked up a lot of steps to the old town with masses of stalls, a real sensory overload. Once we got to the top we all got into cycle rickshaws to take us back to the hotel – 25 INR, not a lot of money for a 20 minute journey. We then walked back to the start of the ghats to watch a ceremony – it was quite noisy and did not always seem to be in tune. We were given handfuls of marigolds and later we could say a prayer and put them into the water. This was a very peaceful experience. We just had a quiet evening, ate at the hotel and early to bed.

## 29<sup>th</sup> December

This morning we took tuktuks to [Sarnath](#), the birth place of Buddhism where Buddha gave his first sermon in 528BC. He preached for 5 days on taking the middle path, avoiding extremes He explained to them his four noble truths:

1. suffering is universal
2. the cause of suffering is desire
3. the cure is to eliminate desire
4. The way to separate yourself from your desire is to follow the Noble Eightfold Path, which is: right taught understanding, speech, action, livelihood, effort, concentration and contemplation.

There were many temples – Jains, Hindu and many Buddhist temples, from different countries, all a bit different. At the Tibetan one we bought some prayer flags and we did talk to various holy men. In the afternoon we decided to go shopping and went to a silk factory – well, we thought it was going to be a factory, but actually it was the showroom. We were after some material, ok I was after some material, plus a bedspread. We sat on the floor in a room with white cloth on the floor and I think every single bedspread he had was put in front of us. Never mind that I had said that I wanted blue, we saw reds and greens and browns. In the end we made a good choice, and I did get a reduction on the price, but my bartering skills got better as we spent more time in India. So as well as a bedspread (actually a duvet cover and pillows, but quite ornate) we bought some green silk ready for me to have a trouser suit made and some silk for a historical reenactment dress.



That evening we went to a flower ceremony. We walked to the river, got on a boat and were taken onto the Ganges as the sun began to set. We had a sitar and tabla player and some men who placed candles in little bowls with petals. As it got darker they were given to us, so we could make a wish/ say a prayer and let them go into the water – it was a lovely sight to see! Again we just ate at the hotel, it had been quite a big day.

## 30<sup>th</sup> December

We had a free morning and I went for a walk on my own first thing, it was nice and quiet and I walked around some of the back streets, I was perfectly safe. After breakfast a couple of people tried to encourage us to go back to the silk shop but we thought we had spent enough. We did go to another

shop – Open Hands and bought some scarves and I had a last go on the Internet, including burning my photos to disc. We left at 2pm to go to the station ready to get the 4pm train to [Agra](#). This was going to be a long overnight journey.

Agra, the city of love, was first made the capital of India in 1501 by the Lodi dynasty. In 1526, Barbur defeated the Lodis, and for the next two centuries, Agra alternated with Delhi as the Mughal capital.

The station was a lot more relaxed than at Delhi and we had no problems in finding our carriage and seats. We were in the two berths, which meant we had a table between us before we converted it to a bed. We'd taken some sandwiches from the hotel and as it was Nicki and Marla's birthday we had cakes. We sat close to 6 very noisy ozzy girls. There was so much to look at though, both out of the window and also the people walking through selling chai, newspapers, fruit and lots of different food.

### **31<sup>st</sup> December**

Sometime in the night I felt queezy and had to rush to the loo. I went 5 times and felt terrible. About 5am I was sick but this was just water. Nicki, the nurse in our group gave me a couple of Imodeon tablets but I felt so awful. The train was due to arrive at 6am but due to delays, partly due to fog, it was nearly 12.00 before we got in, so the journey had taken nearly 20 hours. Luckily we were on the platform nearest to the exit as I felt so weak. Bless him, Simon carried both cases. We piled everything on to the bus, just for us, but I felt really rough on the journey to the hotel.

At the hotel we were again festooned with a garland. I wanted to sleep and slept through until 6pm! I was so cold, probably because I was ill, so I was really pleased we had our sleeping bags with us and Simon let me have both of them, both during the afternoon and at night.

Going to bed meant I missed out on visiting the [Red Fort](#) but I really wasn't up to it. Simon also chose not to go, instead he found a place selling beer and he sat in a back room talking with some locals. One chap, apparently was saying about how great the British had been with the railway, roads and schools. Later Simon went out with the others to see the outside of the Taj – we are going to see it tomorrow morning before our 0900 six hour bus ride to Jaipur.

I've been umming and arrhing about going out tonight. I don't really feel up to it but think I will feel very sad left here on my own. I did go out to dinner, even though I felt rough. I just had roti, a bit like a plain naan. There was entertainment, and we had to get up at 05.30 next day. We decided to leave early but so did everyone else. Oh, almost forgot, the honeymoon couple had flower petals all around their bed and on the floor.

### **1<sup>st</sup> January 2007**

We were awake by 4.30 with going to bed early last night, so plenty of time before our walk to the Taj Mahal. Our hotel was only a 10 minute walk away and the reason we were leaving so early was so we would be there before the crowds.



The sun hadn't even risen when we got there, but there was hardly a queue so we got in really quickly. Our first view of the [Taj Mahal](#) was where is it? We walked through the gateway to a heavy mist. The sun did come up and we got some great pictures, including one on the bench like Princess Diana, but I do have a couple of people in the background. We needed to be back to the hotel ready to leave at 9 for the six hour bus ride to [Jaipur](#). We had time for some breakfast and I was hungry.

We left 10 minutes late for the bus, and I was getting concerned that we would miss it, but the tuk-tuks got us there on time. The bus was quite old and dirty, but ok. As we drove along we saw so many stalls selling vegetables – I wonder how any one makes any money. I also notice that people don't sit but squat, very low to the floor, they must have such strong leg muscles.

It was a long bus ride to [Jaipur](#), but we had a decent stop along the way and also took some photos of monkeys. When we arrived in Jaipur we were dropped off in the city centre and then got tuk-tuks to the hotel. This is the nicest hotel so far, with a little garden at the front. We had time to chill and shower, and I could use the Internet. We had our evening meal at an Italian – Chicken, we have had so much vegetarian, However, this set my tummy off again! 3 trips to the loo at the restaurant, and then again in the hotel. But all was ok at night.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2007

[Jaipur](#), known as the Pink city, a traditional colour of welcome, which was used in 1853 by Maharajah Man Singh II in honour of the visit of Prince Albert, Prince of Wales to Rajasthan. The capital of Rajasthan, surrounded by the Aravalli range, Jaipur is situated in the heart of the Thar desert.

As a group we took tuk-tuks to the [Amber Fort](#). Our driver was great, very informative and he wants to be an Intrepid tour leader. There were a lot of steps up but I did it! We decided to keep him for the rest of the day and went shopping! I bought some many brilliant things from sun umbrellas to topaz jewellery.



We got back in time to visit [Ladli](#). This is an NGO that deals specifically with street kids in Jaipur and their rights, basic needs and future skills. Girls are taught how to make jewellery and are a mixture of street girls, who otherwise would be begging at intersections and orphans.

That evening we went to see a Bollywood film at the most famous cinema, [Jaipur's Raj Mandir](#).

## 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2007

We left the hotel at 8.30. More tuk-tuks to the bus station. We had reserved seats and the journey was one of the best – there were good roads, 3 lanes at times and people stayed in their lanes. We saw 2 or 3 toll booths so that must help pay for the upkeep and development of the roads. As we approached [Kishangargh](#) we saw a lot of sign boards for marble and this is one of the main centres in India. We got off the bus at Kishangargh and transferred to jeeps. This was quite a long and bumpy journey but eventually we saw the fort. We were staying at the majestic [Roopangarh Fort](#). We learned that Sting and Trudi Styler had stayed here. That afternoon we had a walk around the village and took photographs, the children were very keen to have their photos taken and I made sure that later I posted photographs for them.



## 4<sup>th</sup> January



More travel by Jeeps to [Pushkar](#). This was about 90 minutes journey. With its white-washed temples set around a sacred lake, Pushkar is one of the essential pilgrimage destinations for a Hindu. There are about 400 temples. We had time for a quick walk around the village before heading into the desert for our camel trek. I don't like camel

riding! I just wanted to get off and so rode on the camel cart, which was still very uncomfortable. We camped overnight and it was so cold! I did not enjoy this trip, but it was certainly different. Simon of course was great riding his camel and didn't need any one to help him.

### **6<sup>th</sup> January**

We went out to take photos early this morning. Everything looks so very different in the morning, women cleaning the roads and people going to work. We had lunch near the lake. In the afternoon , we crossed over Snake Mountain to the Muslim city of Ajmer, to catch the **train** back to Delhi. This was a great journey and they gave us so much food! Just kept on coming road – tea and biscuits, soup, dinner, ice cream!