



Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



Stop, Horn Please & Keep Distances...

by Amaru & Suzanne, November 11th 2009

We're finally in India and it's just as crazy and exiting as we thought it would be!

We landed in Delhi at around 2am, walked through immigration without a problem and proceeded to collect our bags. After around 45min they finally arrived and it was time for us to leave the safety zone of the airport and into the real Delhi.

I'm not sure if it was because of the time, or the fact that we've read so much about the arrival and the shock that's supposed to come with it, but it was nowhere near what we were expecting.

Sure, there were a few hundred people waiting there wanting you to use their taxi but we've seen these things before in other countries so we just didn't see what the hype was all about. Anyway, we had pre-arranged for an airport pickup and we quickly found our driver with our name.



"Horn Please"
They certainly use their horns here...



The Qutb Minar
Our first monument in Delhi

While in Delhi we had chosen to stay at a B&B called "Inn at Delhi", the reason for this is that the Budget and Midclass hotels aren't really known to be the best and the top-end were way more than what we were prepared to pay for them. So Bed & Breakfast was really the only way to go.

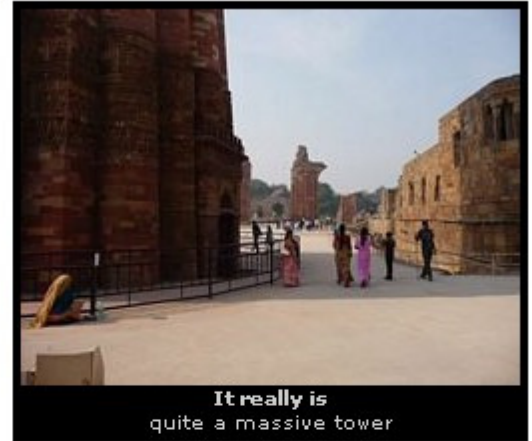
Our driver dropped us off, showed us our room and that was it, no check-in required as it was too late for that. After a few hours of sleep we properly checked in and had our first Indian Breakfast.

We were served an "Indian Omelett" which didn't have any eggs in it, it was made out of chickpeas and spices and tasted great, we were also given lots of fresh fruits and tea (which wasn't the type of Chai I was expecting but still ok).

Right after breakfast we took off with our driver Anil to see some of the sights Delhi has to offer. We didn't really have a plan but decided to let Anil make the decisions for us as he knew best.

Once he drove out of the security compound that our B&B is located in we got our first taste of Delhi traffic... it's absolutely insane and if there are any road rules then no one seems to follow them. Cars, Rickshaws, Trucks, Motorbikes and different kind of animals (cows, camels, elephants etc) all share the roads. They all drive from one lane to the other without a seconds notice, they just drive into roundabouts, they squeeze and push ahead and all of this is made while sounding your horn as many times as possible.

I think that it's actually quite impossible to realize how mental it is until you experience it yourself... and the horns.



It really is quite a massive tower



The tower was built to claim the arrival of Islam

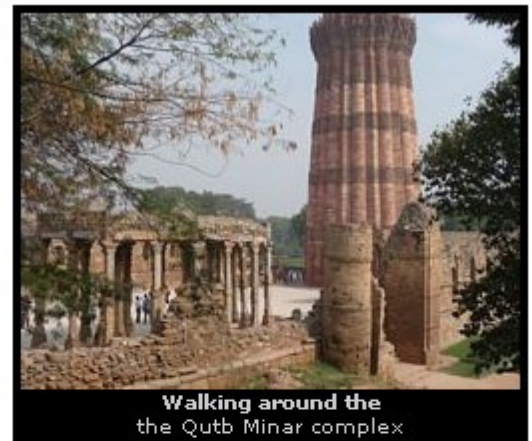
You can tell that most cars have had some sort of fender-bender as almost all cars show signs of it. We were expecting to see plenty of hits and crashes but they do seem to know what they're doing, the only accident we saw was a motorbike that tumbled while trying to squeeze in... lucky for the driver we were all only doing about 10km/h at the time (and sometimes that is quite fast in Delhi traffic).

But enough about the traffic, I'll probably get back to it eventually.

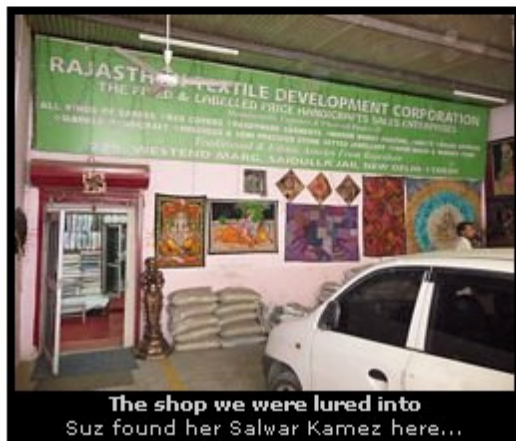
Our first stop of the day was the impressive Qutb Minar, a tower created in the 12th century to show off the Islamic victory over Hinduism. Here we also got our first view of the different prices for Indians and Foreigners. The entry fee for us was around 250 rupees (approx \$AUD 6) while Indians pay 10 rupees... just a slight difference isn't it?

But, what can you do... we paid and went in for a view. On our way out again we saw a massive lineup with school children waiting to get in to the complex. When they saw us they all started cheering, waving and saying hello, how are you etc. We felt like such movie stars and didn't mind this at all ;)

Our driver asked if we wanted to do some shopping and since Suz was looking to buy a Salwar Kamez the driver took us to a shop (we knew he'll be getting some sort of commission from this but didn't really care as we actually wanted to visit a shop). It was going great, we were given some great Masala Chai (I'm now officially addicted to this drink and I'm having it where ever we go) and then shown the range on offer. Suz tried on a few, found one she liked and then bought it. Then we had to walk through the rest of the shop looking at all other kind of stuff before we could leave.



Walking around the the Qutb Minar complex



The shop we were lured into Suz found her Salwar Kamez here...

We quickly learnt that this is how these types of shops work, first there is one section (usually fabrics of all kind), then gem stones followed by artifacts, paintings, leather shoes etc. It's like walking into a maze, there is no easy way out once you get in...

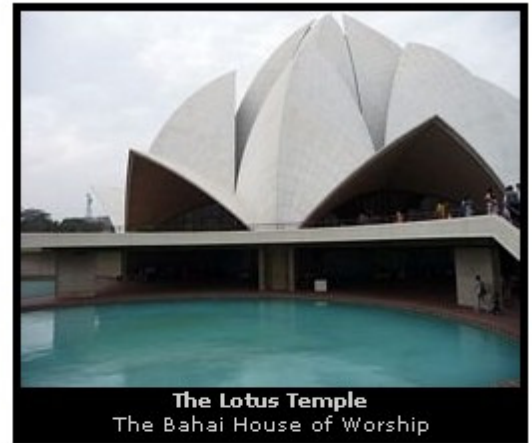
After our shopping experience our driver took us to see the Lotus Temple which was beautiful and very serene, specially once you get inside as you are not allowed to talk in there. The Lotus Temple is part of the Bahai faith which is an independent religion that embraces all other religions.

Before our lunch we also visited Humayun's Tomb which was a predecessor to the Taj Mahal and you can clearly see it in its design.

We decided before our trip that we would only eat vegetarian food in India (unless we see them cook in the tandoor ovens) as a precaution, and also because in India there is no shortage of great vegetarian food. Our first meal was a Thali with some Naan and pickles which was awesome! Looking at the photo it might not look like much but we were both very full once we finished.

During the rest of the day we visited the Gandhi museum (which was very interesting, specially since we had just seen the movie before leaving Australia), we saw the famous street Rajpath with the parliament buildings around it and ended our day at the India Gate.

When we were getting off at the India gate our driver told us to watch out for pickpockets and also not to accept any merchandise as this pretty much means you need to buy it.



The Lotus Temple
The Bahai House of Worship



Suz and I
In front of the Lotus Temple

And yes, there were quite a few hawkers here selling all kinds of junk, but we were firm and just kept saying no... the thing is, saying no once or twice is not really enough, you really need to mean it and say it at least 10 times and if that didn't work, we just ignored them.

On the following day we made a trip to Agra to see the Taj Mahal but that's for the next blog ;)

On our final day in Delhi we wanted to tackle Old Delhi, we managed to make it to the famous mosque only to realize it's closed on Fridays for non-Muslims. Many other shops of Old Delhi were also closed so we couldn't really see much. We ended up seeing the Red Fort at least which was quite large and really good. Suz also managed to run into someone she knew from back home - it's a small world...afterall!

The rest of the day we decided to just relax back at the B&B and also go to the bank to cash in some travellers cheques. We never take these TC's with us but since we needed quite a substantial sum of money to pay our driver for the upcoming Rajasthan trip we had decided to bring TC' instead of money.

The owner of the B&B offered to drive us to the bank (which is to say he sat in front while his driver drove us) where we found out they don't cash TC's. The B&B owner then managed to call someone who said they would send a representative to change money in a while. He arrived at the B&B about an hour later and then looked shocked when we showed the TC's, he said he would not change them (we knew that the owner had specifically said it was TC's and not cash we wanted to change), sat on the phone for 5 min and then just left without saying anything.



The crowds...
in front of the temple



We're almost at
Humayun's Tomb

To say that he got a lashing over the phone from the owners is to put it mildly, he will never have their business ever again... But the problem was that we still didn't have our money so the owner would now drive us to a money changer in one of the top-end hotels. They usually close at 6pm but he arranged for them to stay open to 6.15. Soon enough we were stuck in Delhi traffic though and had to call them and ask them to stay open until 6.30pm. We made it - just in time and finally managed to change our TC's over.... I've never travelled with TC's before and will never again.... too much of a hassle!!

Delhi was an interesting place to see, the traffic is insane, the whole city looks like a big construction site and it has some great monuments and museums to show.... We had a good time but still couldn't wait to get out into the countryside of Rajasthan!



Humayun's Tomb
Looks quite similar to the Taj Mahal



The Taj Mahal was actually
built after this tomb



Time for Lunch!
A Thali for two....



The Gandhi Museum is housed
where he spent his last days



These steps show the path
Gandhi took just before he was shot



And this is the spot
where he was shot and killed



A big shrine dedicated to
World Peace



"My Life is My Message"
M.K. Gandhi



Looking out over
the Presidents Estate



There are statues
of Elephants everywhere



The Central Secretariat
Finance and External Affairs ministry



India Gate
Located at the other end of the Rajpath



One of the many, many hawkers
found at India gate



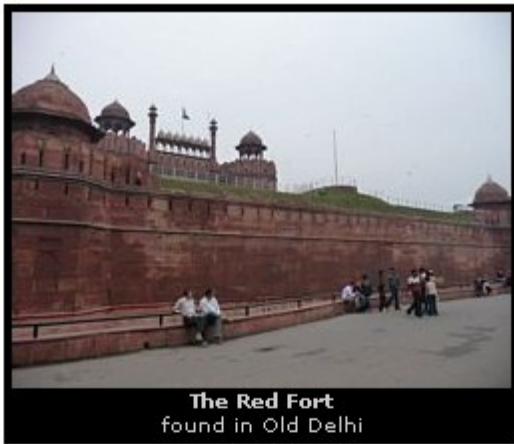
Enjoying one of many great meals
served to us at our B&B



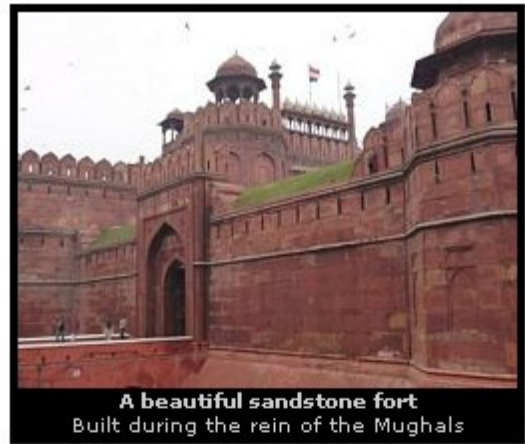
We're heading into Old Delhi and the
number of Bike Rickshaws is increasing



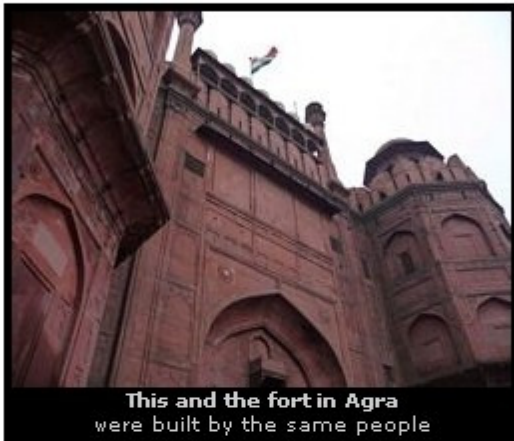
No matter where you go in Delhi
you'll see mounds of sand, rocks etc.



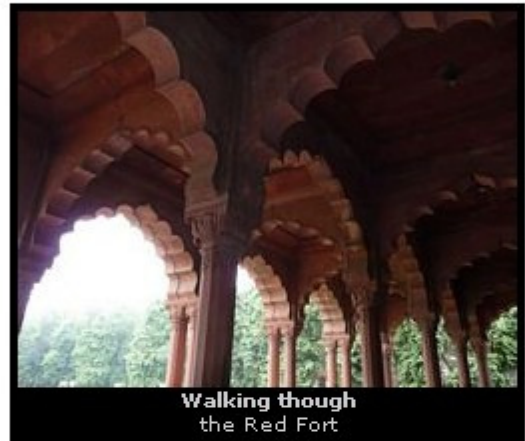
The Red Fort
found in Old Delhi



A beautiful sandstone fort
Built during the rein of the Mughals



This and the fort in Agra
were built by the same people



Walking though
the Red Fort



The decoration is very similar
to the one found at the Taj Mahal



Always very colourful!
Almost all Indian women wear the Saree's



It's very common to see young men
walking and holding hands



We're still inside The Red Fort
It's a big area with lots to see



Suz and I
On the back of a Bike Rickshaw



Our driver Anil
He took us all around Delhi and to Agra



Our last night in Delhi
Chilling in the common room



The streets of Delhi
With Cows, Camels and Elephants

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