



## Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



### You're making me visit a WHAT temple?!?

by Amaru & Suzanne, November 15th 2009

Our road trip has finally begun and after the hectic pace of Delhi the countryside of Rajasthan is well welcomed!

Our mornings didn't have the smoothest of beginnings though... The company that we booked our trip called to advise that our car wasn't available and they would send an ungraded car for no extra cost.

Unfortunately the car that arrived wasn't an upgrade in our eyes, it was a fairly old Indigo that we weren't sure was going to last the entire trip. I made a bit of a fuss and eventually a similar car to the original one was provided. They just had to drive us to it, clean it and we were ready to go.... a bit later than planned but at least happy.

Our car was a so called Ambassador which is a great car... Sure, it might not be as fast as the Indigo they were providing first but it's a lot more comfortable with plenty of leg space and an armrest.... plus it feels like you're sitting on a couch =)



**Dur car**  
An Ambassador



**All sorts of obstructions**  
to maneuver around along the way

Our first destination was the small town of Mandawa. The distance from Delhi is only 260km but getting out of Delhi takes quite a bit of time and the remaining roads are very narrow with plenty of twists and turns. Add on top of this the towns you go through where you need to maneuver people, bikes, rickshaws and cows, you then realise that it will take a bit longer than you might have expected.

After around 5½ hours we reached Mandawa which is a fairly normal ride... On most Indian roads you're happy if you're averaging 40-50km in an hour.

Mandawa is located in the Shekhawati region and is famous for its painted Havelis.

Our hotel was located in a beautiful restored 19th century haveli and our room was absolutely beautiful. The funny (quirky) thing about our room was that when you opened the door you entered a hallway with open roof, to the left was our room, to the right the bathroom... this made it almost feel as if you were leaving your room to use the facilities ;)

After check-in we left to have a look around town... Mandawa is quite small and it didn't take us long to walk up and down the main street while finding quite a few differently painted havelis along the way.

Also, since we'd been in the comfort of the car previously while travelling this was really the first time that we were able to walk by ourselves and explore at our own pace.



One of the many road side toilets that we came across



Our hotel in Mandawa  
Located in an old Haveli

This of course is also going to attract all sorts of people to you... We had a young boy (13-14 years old) asking us if we wanted a tour of the havelis in town for only 50 Rupees (\$AUD 1.25). When we declined his offer he of course persisted for a while and said that we had spent lots of money on airplane, car and hotel... why not spend a little bit on him. Cheeky aren't they...?

And no... we didn't fall for that one either. While walking a few other boys came up to us and started talking... some of them tried to sell us something, others just talked for a while asking us where we were from, what we did for a living etc.

One of the guys tagged along for quite a while, pointing out different places for us.

We were wondering what his game was and eventually he told us that his father had a shop and asked if we were interested in checking it out... Well, he had been a good sport and we liked him so we visited the shop and ended up buying a pashmina from him (after some good haggling of course).

That night we spent in the rooftop restaurant of our hotel, eating some good food while being entertained by some local musicians with dancing and singing. The main guy also came around and we were both asked to join in on the dance.... It might look easy but there are a lot of different moves going on with the hands, feet and head. It was good fun though...



We had a great room  
Hard to show on the photo but it was large

The next morning our trip continued towards Bikaner.



The women have some very colourful dresses

Another 3½ hours later and we had reached our hotel, Vijay Guesthouse, more known as **The Camelman**.

Before anything else though we asked our driver to take us to Deshnok.... home of the Karni Mata temple.

The Karna Mata Temple, or as it's best known; The Rat Temple, has to be one of the weirder temples that we have ever visited. To say that Suz was a bit sceptical about visiting this place is to put it mildly. I did suggest that she could wait outside while I investigated but she wanted to come along as well.

The temple is free to visit so we left our shoes at the entrance and stepped inside...

Karni Mata was a sort of a saint in the 14th century, one of her sons died and was brought back by the gods as a rat... It was also said that everyone from her family would be reincarnated as rats

It didn't take us long to spot the first rat running across the floor, or the second, third, fourth etc... There are hundreds of rats running all over place (unless they're at the milk bowl eating). We had to walk carefully though as we've heard that if you step on one and kill it you have to pay its weight in silver.

It's also supposed to be good luck if one of the rats (or kabas as they're referred to) run over your feet... well I guess we're very lucky people now...



**The cows are everywhere**  
And they barely move for traffic



**The streets of Mandawa**  
Just showing what they look like...

Back in Bikaner we had a bit of a relaxing time that afternoon/evening and the following morning before we embarked on a camel trek.

We had elected to only do a short one as camels are said not to be the most comfortable of animals to ride. Saying that though, I found that if you use the stirrups quite a bit to support yourself it's actually not bad and I found the ride to be great. It was also quite a relief to be away from all the hustle and bustle, it was just Suz and I, our camels and their handlers.... no one else.

We eventually found our way to the dinner spot where we were treated to some Masala Chai (Mmmmm...) and got talking to the owner and some other people that were also travelling.

It turns out that we were joined for dinner by about 14 others that were on a tour. Most of the people in the group were Indian-Australians from Adelaide. We got talking to their organisers and Mr Vijay, the owner of the hotel and camel tours, and spent the night under the stars having some great food, drink combined with song and dance.

Mandawa was a great little town and even though Bikaner might not be the most attractive of places to visit, Mr Vijay and his hospitality makes up for it... We've come across some great people on this trip already but Mr Vijay is one of the best ones.... He is such a charming man and makes everybody feel very welcome everywhere, we can warmly recommend him to anyone else who might be travelling this area. We'll gladly visit again in the future.... for now though, on towards Jaisalmer!

#### **Trip Details:**

Delhi to Mandawa - 260km - 5½ hours

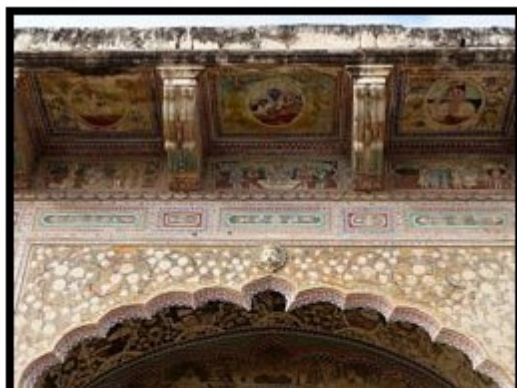
Mandawa to Bikaner - 200km - 3½ hours



**People of Mandawa**  
Going about their business



**One of the many shops**  
You'll find everywhere



**Mandawa and its region**  
is famous for its Havelis



**Mandawa Havelis**  
Many beautiful buildings in the area



**Our afternoon snack...**  
Some beers, Papadums & Bjuja snacks



**Suz reading about our next destination**  
and what we can expect...



**Evening**  
in Mandawa



**Dinner at our hotel**  
Nice rooftop restaurant



**Our entertainment for the night**  
Singing and dancing



**Suz was dragged up to participate**  
She did a better job than me...



**We're in Deshnok**  
Visiting the rat temple



**So many small details...**  
on the entrance to the temple



**The holy shrine...**  
No non-Indians allowed!



**Rats running all over the place**  
One of the weirder temples we've visited



**Oh how sweet...**  
They left some milk out for the small ones



**Not impressed...**  
Suz really isn't impressed with the temple



**The Camel Man**  
Vijay's guesthouse in Bikaner



**Camel trekking in the desert**  
Moving along at a slow pace...



**One of our camels**  
About to have a snack



**Our shadows**  
reflecting in the sand



**Suz and her camel**  
are quite ahead now...



**We've stopped**  
to have a short break



**Suz and I**  
Tramping through the desert



**I really enjoyed my ride**  
And wasn't too uncomfortable



**Riding a camel**  
into the sunset



**The sun is setting**  
over the desert in Bikaner



**Suz and I**  
with our camels



**The setting for our dinner**  
Now we're just waiting for the others...



**The sun is setting**  
in the desert



**The sun is setting**  
in the desert



**Suz is dancing with the others**  
They've taught her some new moves



**BBQ out in the desert**  
Cooking our chicken....

[Back to Top](#)