



Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



Visiting the Golden and Blue cities...

by Amaru & Suzanne, November 18th 2009

Our trip through Rajasthan continues, this time we're visiting two Forts in two cities, one Golden and one Blue...

We had a uneventful few hours after leaving Bikaner, the road out to Jaisalmer was mostly empty (in Indian terms of course, we still had the occasional cows here and there walking as if they own the streets and also the insainly overpacked lorries) and very straight through the desert so we made quite good time.

After a while the driver asked if we wanted to see the cranes in Khichan. We had to admit that we had no idea of what he was referring to.... Apparently during the winter months thousands of cranes come to this area and it's quite a sight to see so many in one spot.

Also, as this place was next door to a school, as soon as we got out of the car to have a look we were instantly surrounded by school kids, I had 3-4 boys around me and Suz had 4-5 girls following her.



The road to Jaisalmer...
Some locals next to the road



We've made a quick stop in Khichan
to watch the cranes...

The good thing was that the kids just wanted to chat to us, they weren't looking for money. I was asked lots of different questions such as my name, where I come from etc. The boys were also trying to play tour guides and were telling us a bit about the cranes. Suz noticed that one of the girls was touching her hair and allowed them to get a closer look at it... blond hair must be quite exotic for them.

As we were about to leave all the kids surrounded the car to peak inside and also to wave goodbye to us... we said goodbye and continued on towards Jaisalmer.

We noticed that the military presence was increasing the closer we got to Jaisalmer, which isn't that strange when you realize the Pakistan border is only 90km further on.

We reached Jaisalmer and checked into our hotel, **The Pleasant Haveli** which turned out to be a great choice! As soon as we checked in, the staff made us feel like old friends returning, we were given welcome drinks (more Masala Chai) and shown to our room which was great.

Our first afternoon/evening in the city was spent just wondering the streets and taking it all in, we also had a great dinner with some great Tandoori Chicken (we've done a good job being vegetarians on this trip but if a restaurant has a proper tandoor oven then we have to try the chicken...). On our arrival back to the hotel we were asked if we wanted to join the owner Dilip for some drinks which we did. It was great just sitting down and having a chat to someone who really knows the area. We also found out that this hotel has only existed for less than 2 years. All in all a great way to finish up a great day!



The local kids all gather around the car to see the strange people



"Chillaxing" in Jaisalmer

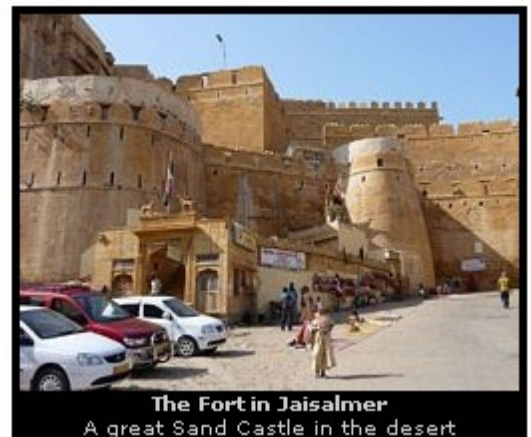
Over the next few days (we stayed in Jaisalmer for three nights) we strolled around town, we went up to the fort and (the fort itself really looks like a big sand castle in the middle of the desert) strolled the many lanes available, which is great as there is no traffic up there (besides from the cows of course), we did a bit of shopping as we had promised ourselves that we would do and just enjoyed exploring the city.

I also decided to have a local shave in one of the many barber shops you see everywhere... First I got a nice and close shave, then I was given a traditional Indian facial massage and finished up with a hair massage... It was all great until the barber decided to style my hair "Indian Style". Suz was cracking up though.... All in all, Jaisalmer was a great city in which to unwind for a few days...

Our next stop was Jodhpur, the Blue City, which we could tell straight away that it was quite a large city. But another thing we also noticed while driving on the streets was the massive mansions we saw, we hadn't even seen this type of houses in Delhi.

Our hotel was an old colonial style house with its own gardens so it was a bit off the hustle and bustle of the city and was nice and quiet.

Our sightseeing tour of the city took us to a few different spots such as the Umaid Bhawan Palace & The Jaswant Thada but it's the fort that the city is really known for, that and the colour blue that a lot of the houses are painted in. Blue used to be a colour only used by the priests but nowadays anyone is allowed to use it to paint their house.



**The Fort in Jaisalmer
A great Sand Castle in the desert**



One of the Jain Temples found inside the Fort

And once you reach the fort on the top of the mountain and look down over the city you can really see the colours and understand why the city is called the Blue City.

At the fort we were handed an audio guide (included in the admission fee) and could tour the fort at our own pace while learning a few things about the fort and its history.

We finished up our city tour by walking around the Sadar Markets surrounding the Clock Tower. The markets were chaotic and crazy as only India can make them, we had several offers to buy great fabrics, silver, spices and artifacts but managed to say no to them all (if we walk past a store and they don't hassle us, we actually try to buy something...).

Jaisalmer was without a doubt our best stop on the trip so far... it's such a great place and we could easily have spent a few more days there relaxing and maybe even done another camel safari ;) Jodhpur was better than I was expecting but it's still a large city which makes it a lot more impersonal, still... the fort is one of the biggest in Rajasthan and well worth a look!

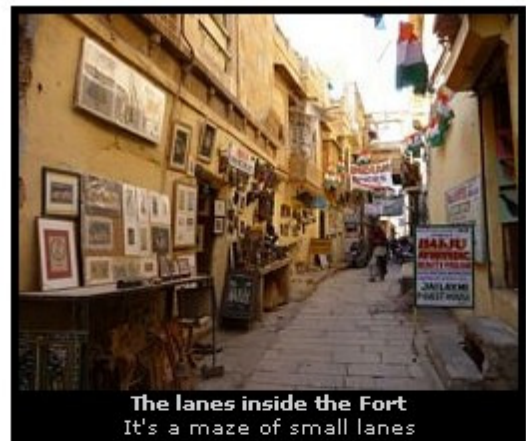
Trip Details:

Bikaner to Jaisalmer - 335km - 7 hours

Jaisalmer to Jodhpur - 300km - 4½ hours



Hmmmmmm.....
Wonder how they check that out?



The lanes inside the Fort
It's a maze of small lanes



Many different sizes and colours available to buy



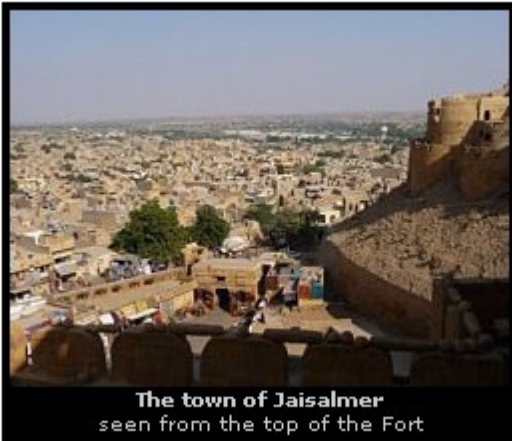
Two Sadhu's
Holy men...



The cows just sit down anywhere
and can make driving difficult



Jaisalmer Fort
It's quite an impressive Fort!



The town of Jaisalmer
seen from the top of the Fort



We're wandering through the local
markets in town



The women
at the markets



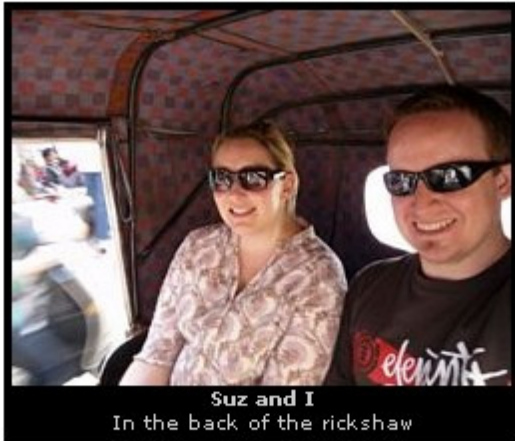
Lunch time
and another Thali for me!



Suz
and her humongous Masala Dosa



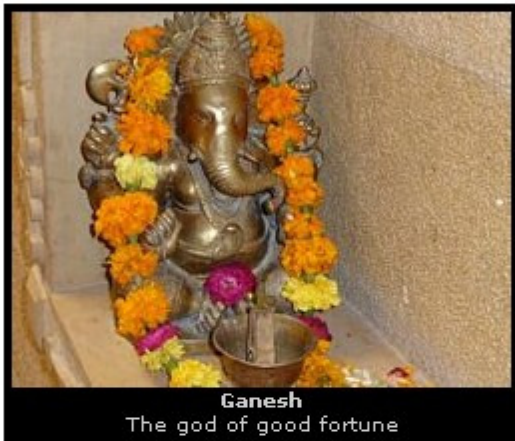
Riding a Rickshaw...
trying to avoid hitting the cows!



Suz and I
In the back of the rickshaw



Jaisalmer Fort
By night!



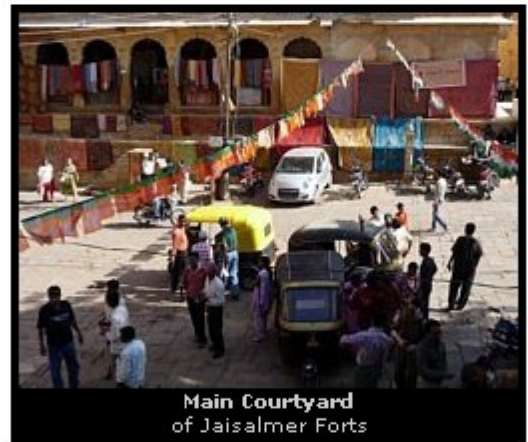
Ganesh
The god of good fortune



Suz proudly displaying
our Mango Lassis



The local way
of carrying a kid



Main Courtyard
of Jaisalmer Forts



Shopping...
We found some great deals here



A newborn calf
he is only a couple of minutes old...



Very decorative
Some of the local village women



I decided to have a shave
and was too lazy to do it myself



After a face and head massage
I was styled as an Indian Man



A great lunch
with a great view...



More local women...
On the streets of Jaisalmer



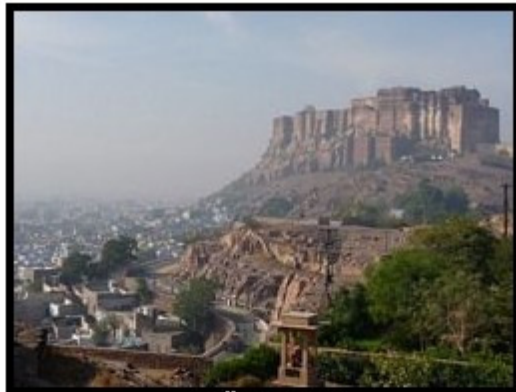
We're in Jodhpur
Visiting the Umaid Bhawan Palace



The Jaswant Thada
is a memorial built out of marble



The Jaswant Thada
is a memorial built out of marble



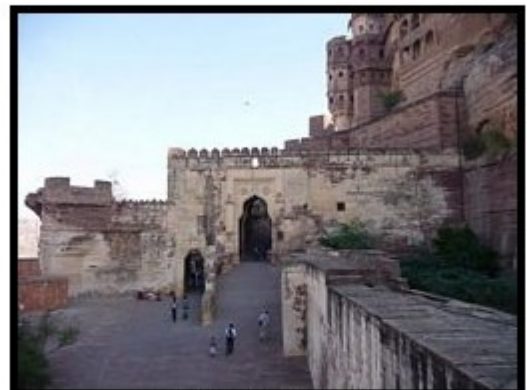
Jodhpur Fort
An absolute massive Fort!



Jodhpur Fort
An absolute massive Fort!



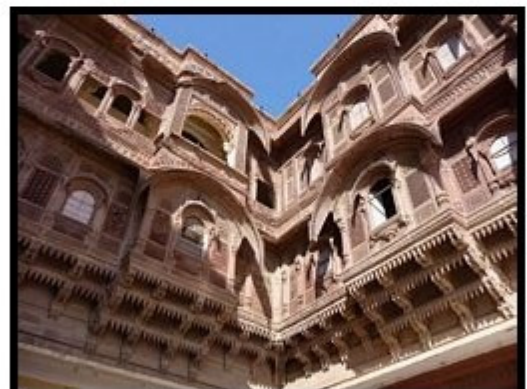
We walked through the Fort
with our audio guides...



The entrance to the Fort
in Jodhpur



The hand prints left by the widows
of the Maharaja



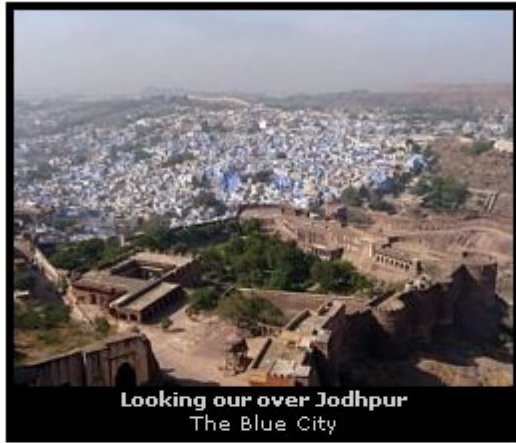
Inside Jodhpur Fort
Some very intricate work



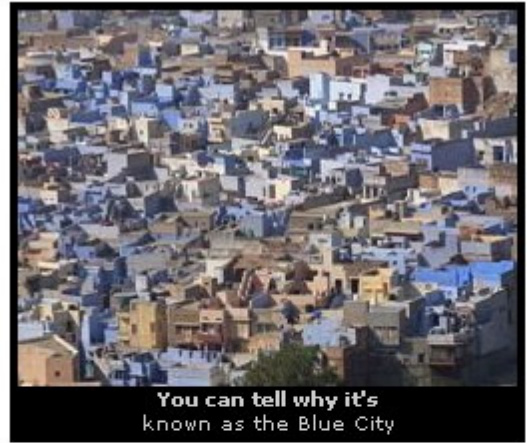
We found this man and his pipe
inside the fort



"Lungs at work - Please don't smoke"
Great sign!



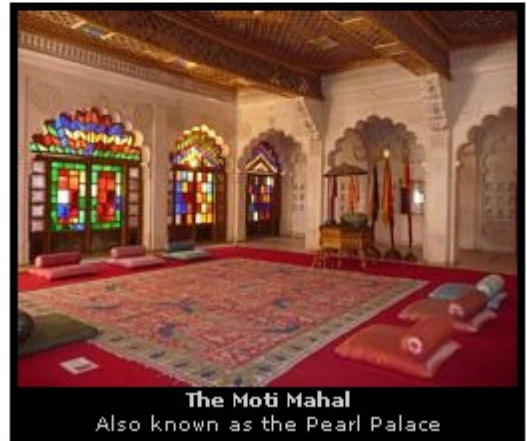
Looking our over Jodhpur
The Blue City



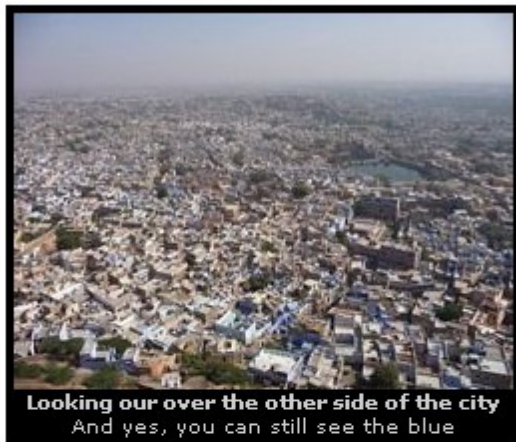
You can tell why it's
known as the Blue City



The private chamber of the Maharaja
The Takhat Vilas



The Moti Mahal
Also known as the Pearl Palace



Looking our over the other side of the city
And yes, you can still see the blue



The Sadar Markets
Food, Spices and much more for sale



The Clock Tower
Located at the centre of Sadar Markets



It's election time here
and there's lots of people on the streets...