



## Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



### Fully Sikh...

by Amaru & Suzanne, November 26th 2009

We're visiting the most sacred site for the Sikh's, the Golden Temple in Amritsar...

The trip here though wasn't without its problems... or rather inconveniences. It all started in Udaipur, we had booked a taxi to the airport to pick us up at 5.30am. We were down there at reception on time but unfortunately our taxi wasn't... Waiting for a taxi at this time in the morning isn't fun as there is no other alternative (we had the same problem in Havana earlier this year) but luckily it showed up eventually and still with plenty of time to reach the airport.

We were supposed to fly to Delhi and then to Amritsar but apparently we had missed that our flight was to make a stop in Jaipur as well... We had to sit in the plane and wait for more passengers to load before we could continue to Delhi. Once in Delhi we had to check in again (luckily our bags were sent all the way) and airports in India are a pain.... I know that these security checks are for us but come on....



We've finally arrived in Amritsar after a long day of flying...



The Golden Temple  
Sikh's holy site

When you pass the security check your carry-on bags are supposed to get a stamp (on the sticker that you need to attach to it), we were about to board the plane when a security guard notices that my sticker doesn't have a stamp on it. So what did I have to do.... Well, I had to go back to X-ray and scan my bag once more.... Annoying!

Anyway, we eventually got on our plane which turned out to be a small propeller plane. No problems with that, it's just that we had seats at the very front and thought we were first in the plane.... it turned out that the plane loads from the back, so we were last. Not having a good day are we?

Unfortunately it doesn't end there either... We had arranged for an airport pickup and sure the driver was there to drive us....

He ended up being one of the most boring and antisocial Indian that we came across, no hello or anything and then while driving to the hotel he was on the mobile phone all the time while swerving in and out of traffic.

We eventually got to the hotel and it turned out to be a dump... The room was dirty, the sheets didn't feel as if they've been washed and the staff were just indifferent... Not only that but as the room was located on ground floor they were very noisy in reception way past midnight while we tried to sleep... We had to eventually call them and tell them to shut the hell up!!

Anyway, we actually tried to get another room in a different hotel for that night but failed but at least we had a better room for our second night.



**There are traditional guards**  
all over the temple grounds



**Plenty of people walk**  
the path surrounding the temple

But enough negative vibes, now to the good stuff. We were still a bit chuffed about the hotel room when we entered the Golden Temple compound but that disappeared quickly. The temple is truly magnificent, it's such a serene and beautiful place to just sit and relax...

As this is a holy Sikh temple you have to cover your head. Suz had a scarf she could use and I managed to find a scarf that cost me a whopping 10 Rs.

The Golden Temple is so amazing that we spent the afternoon there and returned during the evening and the following day as well. As we were sitting there one or two people came up to us to chat and since we'd been in India for a while we'd turned quite cynical when someone approaches you.

It's not easy in a country where you're pretty much seen as a walking ATM to believe that people might actually honestly just want to talk to you.... but that's exactly what we got.

One of the guys we were talking to was studying to become a hotel manager and just wanted to chat in English for a while. Other girls usually came up to Suz and just said hello and how are you. This was the first time in India that we actually felt like people really just wanted to talk.

Of course it helps that Amritsar is nowhere close to as touristic as many of the other places we've visited. Walking down the streets you didn't see many other foreigners and therefore got more people staring at you, we experienced what it might feel like to be a movie star ;)



**There are men wearing**  
turbans of every colour!



**Suz and I**  
Everyone needs to cover their head...

Besides from the Golden Temple we also did the Jallianwala Bagh Memorial. This is a memorial for the thousands of people that were shot and killed by the British during a peaceful demonstration. It was after this that Gandhi decided to boycott anything manufactured by the British...

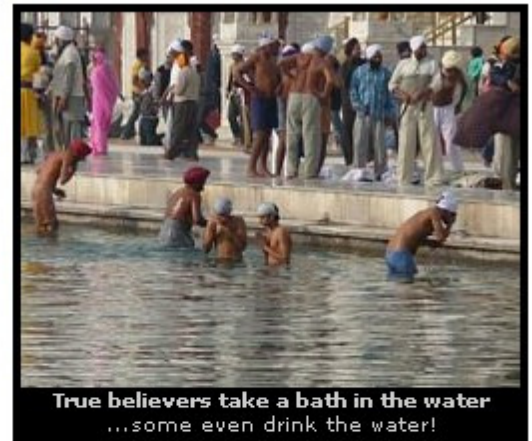
On our last afternoon we took a taxi and drove the 25km to the border between India and Pakistan to experience the border closing ceremony.

This is an event that takes place every afternoon at sunset and is made into quite a show. The first thing we noticed when we arrived, were the security lines... one for women and one for men. And of course since the women are mostly all dressed in Sari's it takes a while for them to pass through....

Once we were both through we found our way to the seats and sat down and awaited the show. It almost felt like you were at a big sporting event, there are great grandstands and they are all packed with Indian people waving flags and chanting patriotic songs. On the other side of the border it's of course the other way around.

Once the ceremony started it was difficult to keep a straight face, first of all the guards storm down towards the gate and once they reach it they start stomping their feet and then try to kick their own head in (think John Cleese from Monty Python and the Ministry of Silly Walks). Seeing this done once by one guard is hilarious, seeing it done by 2-3 guards at the same time is just too much ;)

The ceremony lasted for about 30min and it was a great show.



**True believers take a bath in the water**  
...some even drink the water!



**The surroundings of the Golden Temple**  
are quite a sight!

The next morning we caught the Amritsar-Delhi express train at 5.15am. The train was very comfortable, breakfast and tea was provided and as the seats had power outlets we were able to keep the laptop plugged in to write the blog and watch movies.

Upon arrival in Delhi it took us a little while to locate our driver, we ended up walking to the wrong side of the train station just to come back again. But, we finally found him and ended up back at The Inn At Delhi once more... And it almost felt like coming back home (specially after the lousy hotels in Amritsar).

On our last day in Delhi we had planned to visit Old Delhi and have lunch at a restaurant called Karim's that gets rave reviews everywhere...

Unfortunately there was some sort of Muslim holiday going on and the restaurant was closed... figures! So we just ended up strolling the streets of Old Delhi for a last time before we headed back home to our hotel and later that night the airport, it was time to go home!

Amritsar was a great place to visit, even though we were not in the mood when we arrived the tranquility of the Golden Temple changed our mood straight away! The town is also great as I mentioned it's not jam-packed with tourists as many other cities in Rajasthan were. And of course, there is the border closing ceremony which is almost reason alone to visit.

Our trip has come to an end this time, we've gotten our first taste of India and we've got to say, it was nowhere near as bad as we had thought it would be.... Sure, you have to deal with pollution, congestion and very poor people but you also see some amazing sights and meet some really nice and friendly people.

Would we return? Sure we will, there is still much more to see. Our next trip to India (whenever that will be) will more than likely be based in the South!



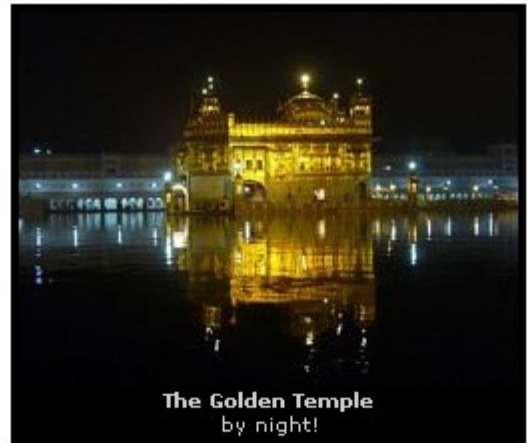
**It's a very relaxed and surreal feeling**  
to just sit and watch the Golden Temple



**Suz and the Golden Temple**  
We spent a bit of time just sitting...



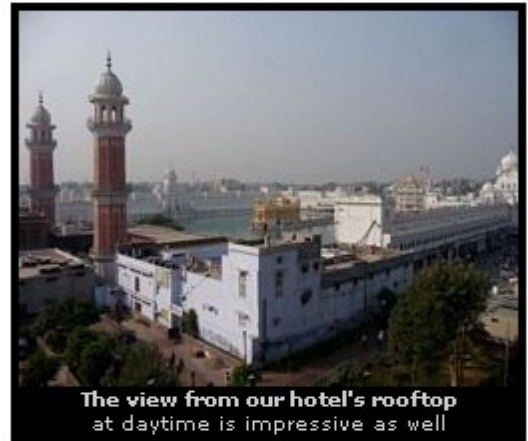
**The Golden Temple**  
during sunset...



**The Golden Temple**  
by night!



**The view from our hotel's rooftop**  
The second hotel we checked into...



**The view from our hotel's rooftop**  
at daytime is impressive as well



**Not very impressive...**  
The way garbage is handled in India



**We're visiting the**  
Jallianwala Bagh Memorial



**The Jallianwala Bagh is where**  
thousands were shot dead by the British



**An Eternal Flame**  
Always burns in memory of the dead



**Wondering the grounds of the  
Jallianwala Bagh Memorial**



**A building showing evidence  
of the damage caused by the bullets**



**The Memorial Well where hundreds  
died trying to escape the bullets**



**The new and the old...  
Found on the streets of Amritsar**



**Traffic Jam  
On the streets of Amritsar**



**Fresh Fruit  
can be found everywhere...**



**Just some local people  
walking the streets**



**Lunch time!  
Thali? Why not....**



We're at the India-Pakistan Border to watch the border closing ceremony



Security is tight and the line-up is long...



Men are searched on the spot



Women need to pass the secluded section which takes forever to reach!



The stands are packed with people Almost feels like being at a sports event



India - Pakistan That's the border...



And here come the guards ready to perform the closing ceremony



It's quite a spectacle to see them rushing past you on their way to the gate



**And here comes the high-kick**  
Think of John Cleese and silly walks...



**Both sides doing it now...**  
The Pakistani guard has his routine as well



**The lowering of the flags**  
The border is now closed for the night



**Transporting the Indian Flag**  
into its resting quarters...



**"The Largest Democracy in the World"**  
Is it really when the caste system exists?



**Shoes, shoes and more shoes...**  
Suz trying to decide what to get



**Do you know what he's serving here?**  
We're not sure but you find it everywhere...



**It's 4.50am**  
and we're catching a train



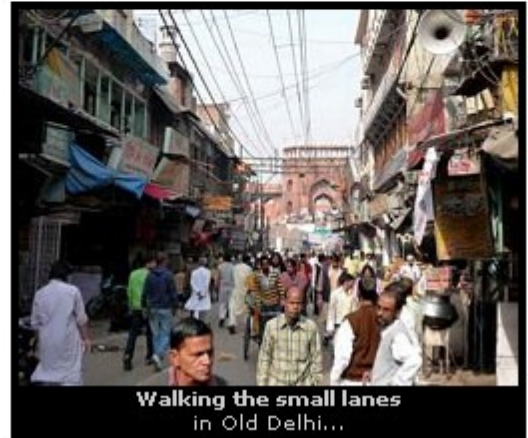
**Express train Amritsar to Delhi**  
A very comfortable train ride...



**We've arrived in New Delhi Train Station**  
Now we just need to find our driver...



**More sightseeing in Delhi**  
We're at Connaught Place at the moment



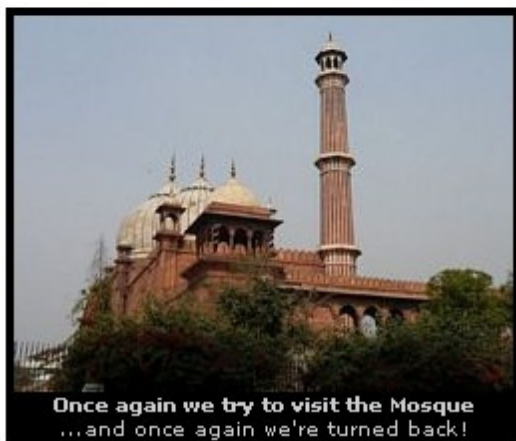
**Walking the small lanes**  
in Old Delhi...



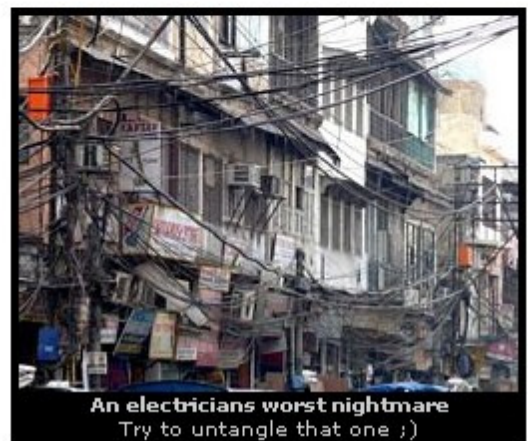
**This almost looks like some sort of pasta**  
Mmmmm... pasta!



**That's a lot of paper**  
the guy is leading though Old Delhi



**Once again we try to visit the Mosque**  
...and once again we're turned back!



**An electricians worst nightmare**  
Try to untangle that one ;)