

Perryscope 39



PERRYSCOPE 39, December 2023, is an issue of a personalzine published mostly monthly by **Perry Middlemiss**, 32 Elphin Grove, Hawthorn, Victoria, AUSTRALIA 3122. E: perry@middlemiss.org
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Cover Robyn Mills, Jaipur, India, October 2023.

INTRODUCTION

A complete change of direction this issue. If it all goes wrong then I blame Chong for this, as it was his suggestion. If it works, then it was a great idea *I* had.

Travelling is a wonderful experience, but it does tend to be tiring and rather tough on the wallet, and it throws out my self-imposed publishing schedule. I've noticed that it takes some time for me to get back into the swing of producing the material for these fanzines after I've returned from an overseas trip. I like to think I'm going to write it all up and produce a full-sized, all-singing, all-dancing trip report but it just doesn't happen. I suspect those days are now long gone. These days I eke out a minor set of notes (see **Perryscope 38**) and reckon I've done well.

But Chong suggested something else. He thought I should just publish a set of photos from the trip with, in his words, "pithy" comments to accompany them. "Not a bad idea", I thought, until I noted that I would have to be able to do something witty, or at least partway amusing. Not my strong suit.

So what follows is a trip report, of sorts. It will mostly consist of photos, as Chong suggested, with early comments cobbled together from some FaceBook posts I made along the way, and later ones just thrown up in rather haphazard fashion. Don't expect a lot.

To begin at the start, why India? Basically because we had some COVID-related travel credits that we had to use up with an Australian company, we'd never been there before and because we'd always wanted to go. But India is a big place and there is a lot to see. Do we stick to the "Golden Triangle" of Delhi, Agra and Jaipur in the north, or do we extend and go to Goa or Darjeeling? What about the other big cities of Mumbai or Bangalore? We couldn't fit it all in so we had to make some hard choices.

Delhi and the Taj Mahal were definites, and before long we had a period in Goa organised. The problem then came down to connecting the various parts. How we went about that, along with a whole host of other things, will be explained in the pages that follow. Maybe.

Cover notes:

The tour group stopped at a retail establishment to see how saris and the like were made. And it was also described as a place where you could get shirts and suits made up overnight. I decided on neither. And while I was waiting around the sales staff took a liking to my white beard, saying I looked like a Maharajah. So they dressed me up to suit. The jacket was very tight; if I brought my hands together I suspect it would have ripped right up the back.

Day 1 : Arrival in Delhi

For some reason Robyn always insists on taking a photo of the two of us after we've settle into our seats at the start of any long international flight. I figure it's to make sure we have a record on the way out and on the way back to compare the two. I always look grumpy – my natural resting face – while she's looking relaxed and expectant. A similar photo at the end of the trip will determine if I made it through okay. Robyn? No problem.



We got picked up at the Delhi airport and I sort of figured that the bus staff would be with us from then on, for the next eight days. So I took this photo of the bus guide with Robyn just to prove we made it through the long haul. We never saw him again.

This is our hotel in Delhi. We ended up staying here on four separate occasions over the ensuing three weeks. It was rather isolated as there seemed to be very little around. I guess that's why our tour company picked it as it probably gave them very good rates. The bedrooms were extremely comfortable and



well-appointed and relatively large. The food was served in buffet style with a wide selection of Indian dishes and a few Western style ones as well. The only problem was that it didn't seem to have an accessible bar where you could just sit and have a drink. In terms of the overall trip this was a minor inconvenience, but sometimes, when you spend all day in other people's company it's nice just to find a place where you can sit by yourself, read a book and have a quiet beer.

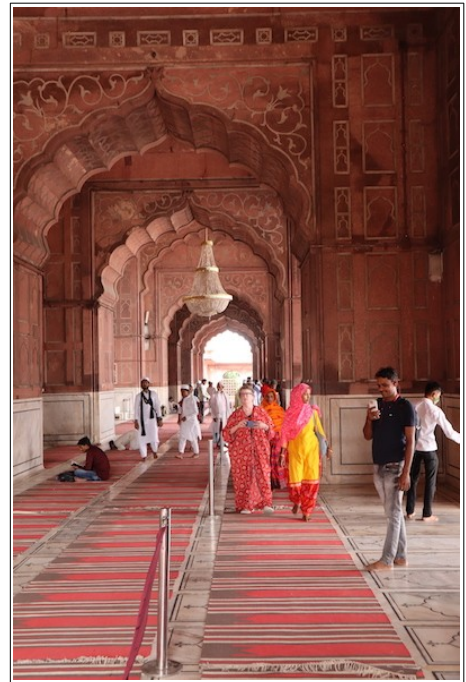
Day 2 : Delhi – Mosques and traffic

Lots and lots of traffic as it worked out. First major day of the tour saw us in and around Delhi with the first stop at the city’s largest mosque, Jama Masjid. It has a massive square for the gathering of the faithful, and a large number of tourists.



The ladies had to have their legs and arms and shoulders covered. I was in long trousers so I was fine.

We were a bit lucky with the weather here: it was hot and humid but nowhere near as smoggy as it would be in the city a few weeks later.



The tour guide was trying to give us some historical background to the building but I was really only catching about half of what he said. Luckily Wikipedia has a good page about the place and notes that it was built by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan between 1644 and 1656. From the outside (see left) it actually looks like a fort with a steep set of stairs up to the main gate from the street, and “look-out” towers at the corners of the complex.

The mosque is still in active use and sits in that part of the city known as Old Delhi, and is adjacent to Chandni Chowk, a shopping bazaar where we were headed next for a rickshaw ride.

The next hour or so was just chaotic. We piled onto a string of rickshaws, two per vehicle and set off through the tangled, tight little alleyways and streets Chandni Chowk. I had never been in a rickshaw traffic jam before. Not sure I ever want to be in one again. I don't consider myself to be terribly tall but I struggled to squeeze myself into the seat and keep my head from being bounced against the steel bar of the rickshaw roof. But we made it. My buttocks were extremely grateful when we finished.



Last stop of the day was at Gandhi's memorial park. No large monuments here which was interesting; just a large open grassed areas with lots of kids running

around. It seemed appropriate.



Day 3 : Delhi to Jaipur

As happens from time to time on a bus tour, there are days when you just have to sit on the bus and get from one place to another. Such a day was our Day 3. Delhi to Jaipur is about 265 kilometres, which takes about 6 hours, plus stops. A lot of this seems to be spent in getting out of Delhi, which just goes on and on.



Our bus this trip was rather bigger than the one we had in Morocco, and, with 13 on the tour in a 20-seater rather than 16 in a 16-seater, we had a lot more room. Some people had the chance to spread out.

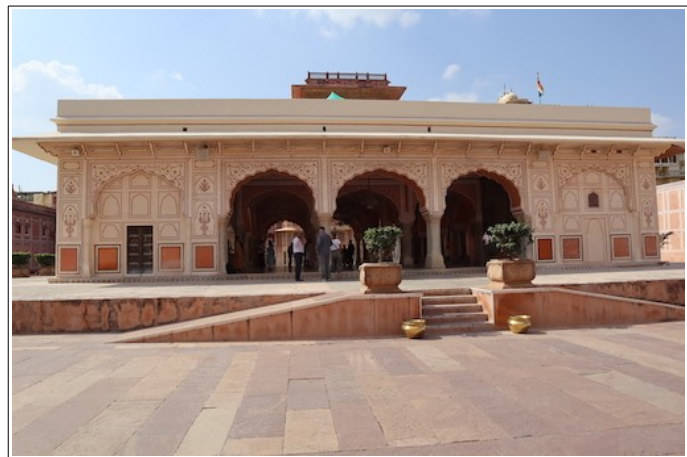


At the bus at 8:00am and we made our hotel in Jaipur at around 3pm. Time to check-in, freshen up and then go out to see the Lakshmi Narayan Temple which is made from the same marble used for the Taj Mahal. We were told that this marble has now been designated only for monuments. You'd have to think that it had been used for some domestic uses and, given the small quantities available, this was not considered the best. It's hard not to agree with that sentiment.

Final stop of the day was at a carpet retailer, and clothing store. Yes, she did buy another camel hair rug, and take the cover photo.

Day 4 : Jaipur

First stop of the day was the Amber Fort, built with white marble and red sandstone. Souvenir sellers everywhere, as we've come to expect. The fort was built around 1592 and still seems in pretty good condition.



We didn't get hassled by any sellers inside the fort so the authorities must have cracked down on that sort of behaviour. That's a good thing. I just like to wander round and have a look at things without being continually confronted by knick-knacks being thrust in front of my face.

There was a seller of perfumes in one of the tunnels on the way out of the fort who was surrounded by all the ladies on our tour as we made our exit. Robyn told

me the prices were reasonable. All the blokes stood on one side and just watched proceedings. It wasn't in any of our best interests to get involved.

Next stop was at a jewellery retailer (another repetition) where again I bought nothing. Neither did Robyn though a few others on the tour seem to be engaging in some heavy retail therapy. In retrospect this is actually a good thing as it tends to take the pressure off

the rest of us. A couple of the ladies on tour obviously had a bit of cash set aside and were buying stuff at every stop.

After that we were off to the City Palace. Built in the period after 1727 when Maharaja Jai Singh II moved his court here. Jaipur remained the capital of the kingdom of Rajasthan until 1949 when the kingdom was incorporated into the Indian nation and Jaipur remained as the administrative and ceremonial capital of the state.



It took a while to get from one site to another, mainly because the roads are so narrow. The traffic in Jaipur is bad but nothing like the levels we experienced in Delhi.



Then it was on to the Jantar Mantar which is the largest of three observatories built by Jai Singh.

The weather was continuing to be rather hot and humid, though the air was not as polluted as in Delhi. We were still tired by the time we got back to the hotel. A shower, dinner, a beer or two and then early to bed.

Day 5 : Jaipur

A lazy sort of day today with nothing scheduled for the morning. Robyn and I went along to an optional, and additional, cookery class at lunch time, but I have to say it was something of a disappointment. In the past the cooking classes we have attended have involved us at all stages: buying, washing, chopping and cooking. Here everything was ready to go when we arrived. The professional cook put everything into the pot for each dish and then invited one of us up to stir the ingredients in the wok or frying pan, which was then transferred to a serving dish. I figured the fire in the background was purely



there for effect; it didn't seem to play any part in the proceedings. Rather than a class it was a demonstration. However, I can say that the food was pretty good, given we ate it just after it was cooked.



After the course we headed back towards the hotel but there was some form of miscommunication and we ended up at a retail store again — and no-one wanted that.

Over to views of the Lake Palace across the water. Several people wanted to carry on to



walk through the various shops along the viewing area but

Robyn and I had had enough of that and decided to catch a tuk-tuk back to the hotel.

Dinner and an early night again.

Day 6 : Jaipur to Agra

Another long bus ride was scheduled for this day though getting out of Jaipur was certainly easier than doing the same in Delhi, even though the traffic was still bad.



Retail sales continued, this time with a leather bag salesman who came onto the bus and stayed with us for about 30 minutes, displaying his wares and making some sales. Again, not to me, though he did seem to make a few sales and left the bus happy.

We stopped off at the Chand Baori step well along the way. This is an amazing structure about 30 metres deep, though it's not accessible for the average tourist. That's hardly surprising as I reckon they'd lose one or two a day to falls if the barriers weren't in place. Especially the ones insisting on taking selfies – c'mon, just one more step back. The rest of the drive to Agra was uneventful and we arrived at 3:30pm, after an 8:00 am start. It's a very tiring thing sitting in the bus all day. There isn't much variety of countryside to look at and

the roads are too rough and ready to get any form of sleep. I read a bit but am wary of doing that in a bus that is bouncing around so much.



We had a rather quick turn-around at the hotel, just enough time to drop off the bags and get back onto the bus for our only outing in the evening which was to the Agra Fort. This is also called the Red Fort, though this gets rather confusing as there are other Red Forts around. From there we got some views cross the river to the distant Taj Mahal, with a promise of a closer look the next day. It's really the main reason for including Agra on the tour, after all.

Day 7 : Agra to Delhi

We all decided to skip the sunrise excursion to the Taj Mahal on the advice of the tour guide. His view was that, more than likely, the day would start with a mist rising off the nearby river and so the views of the monument would be obscured. We woke up early, opened the curtains and realised he was right; we were almost fogged in.

By the time we got there about 9am the mist had lifted and we were able to get through the crowds to wander around the grounds. In order to do so, you needed to park about a

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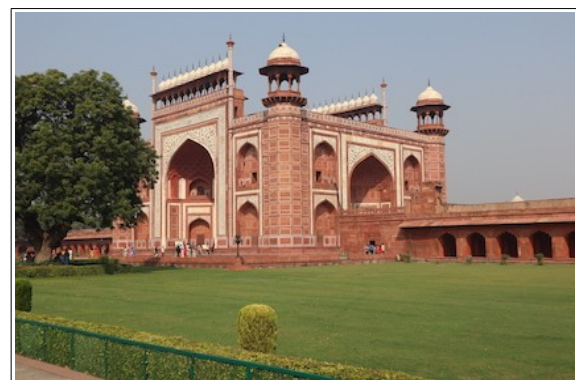
kilometre away from the main entrance where you queued and then picked up your enlarged electric golf cart for the trip to the gate.



Then you took a ride of a minute or so to another entrance where the tour guide bought the actual tickets.



Then you passed through the gate into the courtyard of the fort guarding the mausoleum.



And then, and only then, did you get your first look at the Taj Mahal about half a kilometre off in the distance. The best view, of course, was through the gate (on the right above) at the top of the stairs, directly across from the mausoleum. But so many people wanted to stop and take photos and selfies that unless the security guards kept people moving the place would be totally jammed. So they blew whistles, waved their severe-looking canes and generally attempted to shepherd people through the gate and down the stairs where

there was a lot more viewing room. But first glimpses are sometimes the best, so you hang on for as long as you can, of course.



Again we were stuck with a retail overlay, this time our "official" photographer ("Only 100 rupees a photo"; which translates at about \$A2) who seemed to take an awful lot of pictures. Robyn and I had a few taken, just to get into the spirit of things but the day was starting to warm up and I wanted to get to the mausoleum. It was just over there after all, and we had come all this way.



We finally got to the mausoleum and did a slow single line crawl through the interior — which is not all that large. The external structure is certainly impressive, though the inside is rather a let-down. It reminded Robyn and me of our viewing of Lenin and Uncle Ho, lying in state, in Moscow and Vietnam. No body here to look at unfortunately, just two sarcophagi, with no photos allowed. Didn't stop some people trying to take them of course. The guy in front of me got told off by a guard and he looked quite offended. I took the opportunity to mention all the signs on the way in and just there on the wall. He ignored me. Hardly surprising.



More retail with a stop at a marble shop — nothing purchased — and then on to lunch where our photographer turned up and attempted to sell a full set of photos to everyone. Some of our group bought the lot, with one bill being about \$A90. Robyn and I bought 10. He didn't seem happy but I had no intention of falling for the "I've printed these so you have to buy them" argument.

And after lunch, a long, slow haul back on the bus to New Delhi. The "expressway" out of Agra wasn't too bad but by the time we hit Delhi the traffic was horrendous and it took 2 hours to get from the outskirts of the city to our hotel.

A beer, dinner, buffet, and then goodbyes to the group members who were leaving us the next day.

Day 8 : Delhi to Varanasi

With the "golden triangle" portion of this tour over, Robyn and I continued on with an excursion to Varanasi, on the mighty Ganges River. This was offered as an extension to the original tour but only 5 of the initial thirteen took up the option. Most of the others we spoke too seemed disappointed that they hadn't taken up the extension opportunity, though I suspect a couple had to be back at work rather quickly.

The flight from Delhi to Varanasi (about an hour) didn't leave until 2pm so we left our Delhi hotel about 10:30 and arrived in Varanasi at about 4pm. All was good on the flight but we had all checked in together which made things very smooth; we would not be so lucky on the return (more on that problem later).

A quick stop to drop the bags at the hotel before heading out in the mini-bus to the Ganges to see the nightly Hindu ceremony acknowledging and respecting the river and its place in Indian society and the Hindu religion.



The crowd lines up along the banks of the river all around the platform where the devotees were to perform their ritual. The spectators start arriving before sunset, so by the time we got there all of the seats had been taken. Of course, there were some enterprising some men offering portable plastic seats for the equivalent of \$2 a head. There was no way I could see either Robyn or me being able to sit for an hour or so on the cold concrete, or stand for that

long, so I coughed up the readies for five seats. Our guide said he'd be off somewhere else and would meet up when the ceremony was over.



We probably had to wait about twenty minutes or so before there was any movement towards starting the ceremony. Boats on the river were manoeuvring for position, as were a large number of people on the beach between the platform and the river.



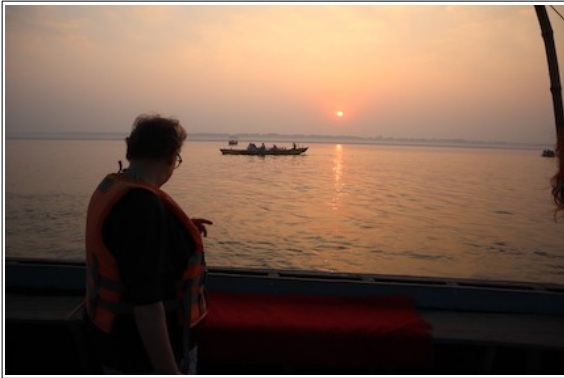
The devotees arrived and took up their places and started the ceremony. It all seemed rather casual as there were people walking around still setting up and finding their seats.

Our guide had plunked us in a good spot right next to the table where the candelabras were to be lit, though for a while I thought the haphazard approach to lighting the candles might get out of hand. And then it was straight back to the hotel for a meal and bed. We had a very early call in the morning.



Day 9 : Varanasi

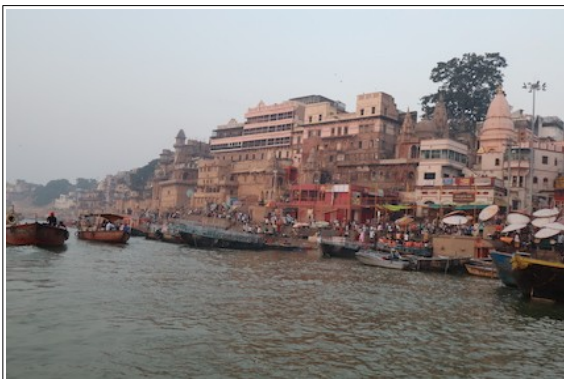
Up at 4am for a 5am pickup so we could get to the Ganges River to watch the sunrise. Normally I'm a bit so-so about opportunities like this as they don't normally amount to much. It was all rather different this time.



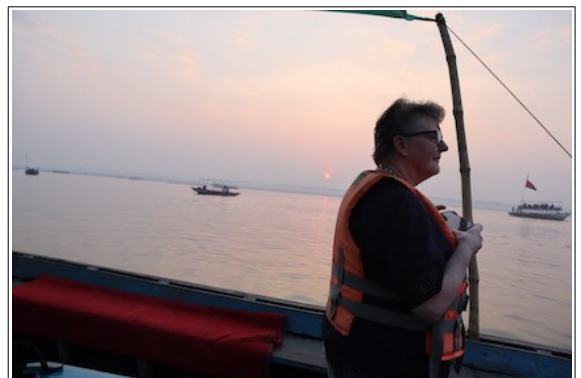
The idea was to get there reasonably early and have a slow river cruise past the Ghats where people come down to bathe away their sins in the river water, and for us to have a look at the funeral pyres.



We found the boat reasonably quickly and set off from the pier. It was hard to figure out if we should be looking to the East for the sunrise or West towards the crowds of people coming down to the river to bathe in the Ganges under the light of the rising sun. So we tried to do both.



There didn't seem to be a lot of traffic on the river, which was a bonus for us, and with only the five of us, our guide and the boat's captain on board we had plenty of room.



The air was completely still and, as you can see here, the river had hardly a ripple. This was no bother to me either way as I don't get sea-sick but it did make for a very smooth ride. It is interesting to note that while the western side of the river (facing the rising sun) is very heavily

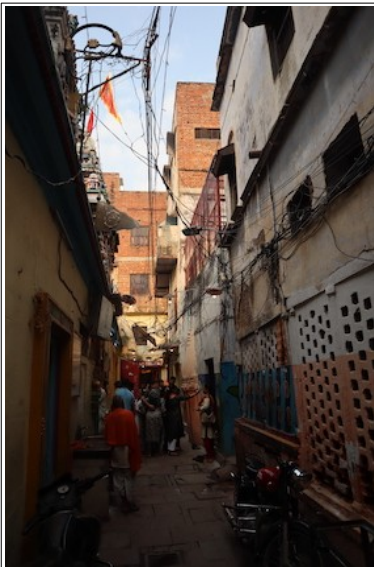
built up, the eastern side is completely empty. It's just a featureless mud/sand flat. (You can see it in the background, below the rising sun, in the photos above.)

Apart from the washing in the river the other main area of activity was the open cremations of bodies on raised platforms.



This isn't as off-putting as it seems as you can only see the fire and smoke, and piles and piles of wood.

After the slow river cruise, which took an hour or so, we set off for a leisurely walk through the old town, with stops at: an oil shop, with a cup of marsala chai; an ATM; and a women's co-op where I probably should have bought a T-shirt, but didn't.



We were back at the hotel by 9am for breakfast and out again at 12 noon for a succession of Buddhist and Hindu temples.

They were interesting, but, frankly, the major part of the day, and a major part of the trip, occurred around dawn.



Day 10 : Varanasi to Delhi

We had a lazy day in the morning with nothing much to do but wait for our 2pm pickup for our 5pm flight back to Delhi. The holiday rep was shepherding three TripaDeal groups through to the airport but dropped us all at departures and left. Our first mistake.

The second was our allowing the father-son couple (who were travelling with only carry-on luggage) to go through first. By the time the other three of us (Robyn, Janet and me) got to the check-in we hit a major snag. Our airline check-in person was adamant that we were only allowed 15kg for the flight — our tour documentation said 20. When we had all checked in together at Delhi for the flight over the five passengers were counted together so our check-in luggage weight was fine. But now we were down to the three of us and as we

were carrying 63kg between us we were in a bit of trouble. The check-in attendant finally called in her supervisor but for some reason they kept on insisting we were a party of twelve (the other two TripaDeal groups consisted of 20 people in one and 7 in the other, so they had included us with the smaller of these). We ended up talking to the other groups and they seemed to get their luggage allowance increased to 20kg each. But we had to spend about 15 minutes arguing in order to get ours through. In the end the check-in staff just gave up, Robyn ended up with all three bags allocated to her and we were let go. Things might have gone smoother if the rep had stayed with us.

Something to remember next time.

Back to the Delhi hotel about 7pm and final dinners and farewells.

Day 11 : Delhi to Kerala

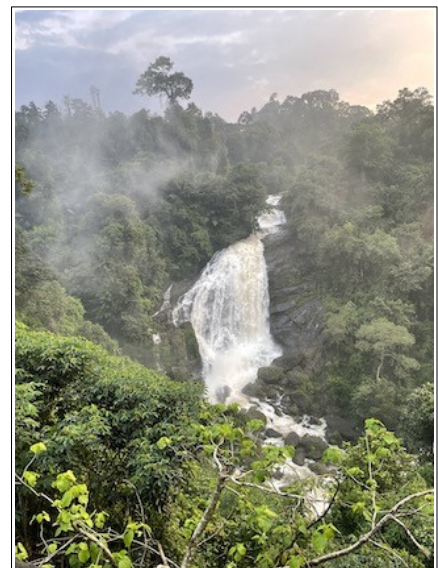
At this point we are halfway through our Indian holiday and over the TripaDeal section. Ten days to go, half on a tour of Kerala and half at a resort in Goa.

When we came to book flights from Delhi to Kochi in Kerala via Air India (we needed the extra luggage allowance) we had a choice of three departure times: 5am, 6am and 11am. It was to be a three-hour flight. Our Kerala tour company had been trying to get us to leave as early as we could because, they said, there was so much to see in their state. Sure, but as we would need to leave the hotel three hours before the flight to ensure we could get to the airport and check-in properly, we decided that 11am was our best option. Too many crazy early starts already.

The flight was pretty easy: 45 minutes to the airport, checked-in online, bags dropped, snooze and read on the plane.



We arrived at Kochi at 5pm and were picked up by our tour guide/driver. First stop was to visit the tour company office to make the final payment for the tour. I'm not sure why they didn't want to accept the full payment before we left home but there it is. The overnight stop was to be in Munnar, an old Hill Station situated at about 1,600 metres above sea level.



The first thing you notice about Kerala is how green and lush it is, a huge contrast to the dry northern plateau lands of Delhi, Jaipur and Agra.

The drive through the hills and along the mountain ridge was interesting with a few stops at waterfalls along the way, but we missed some of it after it got dark. We finally made the hotel at 7:30pm. Checked-in, and found we were in a resort where the rooms are in clumps of two or three, spread out around a hill, among the trees. Luckily the resort provided an electric cart to transport us to the room, and a bit later to the restaurant for dinner.

It was wonderfully cool, and I seriously thought about wearing a jacket!



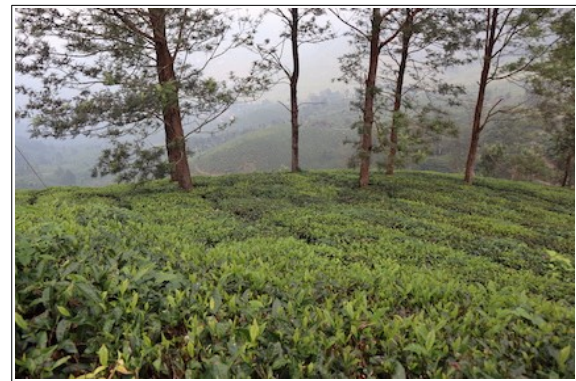
Day 12 : Munnar



If the drive up to Munnar started to show us a different India then we were almost convinced we were in another country when we woke up in the morning. Looking out of the bedroom window across the hill-tops full of trees and greenery was a very refreshing change. As was the fact that the temperature was cool and pleasant.

After breakfast we drove down

some side tracks on the hill-side near the hotel to get up close to the tea-plantations. The lush greenery reminded me of the mountainous regions of Bali, a world away. The bushes seemed to be continually trimmed by a team of tea-pickers so that they came to resemble a carpet spread out over the hills, interspersed with the



odd tree to provide a bit of variety.



Later in the morning we visited the Eravikulam National Park, with a long walk up the winding road to the top of the hill, accompanied along the way by a few tahir, or mountain goats. I was glad the day was cool and cloudy as I thought that we, in our usual unfit state, might have struggled to get up to the top but we kept on moving along, stopping every now and then to photograph the goats and to look at the views and before we knew



it we'd made the summit. I was also glad we hadn't hit anything like this in the first few days of our tour. Having two weeks or so walking around interesting sites had helped get our legs into some sort of shape.

There were a few small stops during the day at a tea plantation museum – interesting but not overly inspiring – and a chocolate retail outlet, before the major event of the day, a Kathakali Dance show followed by a martial arts demonstration next door.



I'm not usually much interested in folk dances as I tend to see them as "stuff put on by the locals to attract the tourists", but this was especially interesting, colorful and very loud.

The martial arts display that followed was okay with lots of participants attempting to belt the hell out of each other with swords and sticks. It really only got going



when some of the participants started to jump through fire hoops. A quick look around the theatre introduced me to the Indian version of "not a lot of exits". I was just glad when we made it back to the Tall Trees resort overnight.

Day 13 : Munnar to Threkkady

Most of the day was taken up with driving the 160 kilometres from Munnar to Threkkady stopping off along the way at a spice plantation where Robyn got the chance to buy some Indian spices. These were probably just as readily available back home for a similar price but it's the thought that you actually bought them "on site", so to speak, that gives you that warm feeling of tourist goals achieved.

As we had experienced during our TripaDeal portion of this holiday we were often dropped at retail outlets in the guise of an interesting tourism experience. This can get a bit tedious when the wares on show are things that I might want to look at but which I have no interest in purchasing. Luckily enough, in Kerala, we seemed to mostly drop into local merchants selling food items. This morning's version: honey. At least here we learned that India has a native form of bee that is not any larger than a



mosquito, yet which still produces honey with an interesting flavour. The output, as you might expect, is rather low from each hive, and the price is rather high. We settled on purchasing their standard product.

We had been given the chance of an elephant ride in our travel brochures and I think our driver was quite put out by the fact that while we were happy to visit the elephant enclosure and have a look at them, we had no intention of actually riding one of them. Robyn was worried about her hip replacement and I'm opposed to



riding an animal that is probably far more intelligent than I am.

Lunch at a roadside stop where we noticed a young couple at the next table eating something that looked interesting. We asked the guide what it was and ordered that.



The late-afternoon activity was a boat ride across a lake with the chance to see some of the local wildlife wandering around the lake shore. I should have brought a telescopic lens as that was the only way we were going to get a decent look at anything. It was relaxing. The young English couple from lunch happened to be on our boat so we had a chance for a chat about what we were up to in India and what we'd done. Always an interesting experience.

Overnight at the Amaana resort, and again we seemed to be put into a room that was the farthest from the reception counter. Luckily the porters jumped in to help and seemed okay with the miserly amount I tipped them. They must hate Australians with their inability to tip in any meaningful way.

Day 14 : Threkkady to Alleppey



Another longish drive (170 kilometres) as we finally left the hills and headed down to the coastal areas to pick up a houseboat for a leisurely time on the Kerala backwater canals. We thought we were going okay but arrived a bit late due to some major road-works near the canals that held us up for 20 minutes or so.



Our guide seemed a bit worried about the hour and had been



making calls from the car so by the time we arrived at the demarcation point we had the boat's porter waiting for us. The captain of the boat didn't seem all that fussed, we were the only two on his vessel and he was getting paid whether we left on time or not.



We settled in and had a late lunch of fried river fish which was wonderful. And then it was a lazy



afternoon cruising along the canals and slowly dozing off from time to time. Overnight on the boat.



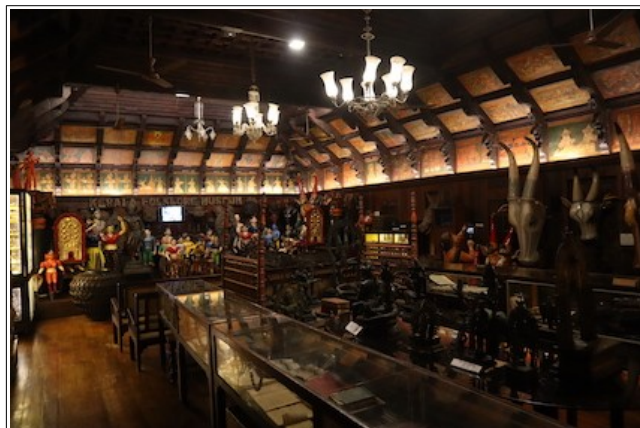
Day 15 : Alleppey to Kochi



This was to be our last day with the Kerala tour company. After breakfast on the boat we were dropped off back at our demarkation point and then driven down to the Alleppey beach for a wander along the sand. First people we meet? The young English couple from two days before. It seems that all of the tour companies drop people off here. I'm really not sure why as there isn't much about. I suppose in one sense it was interesting to stand on the western shore of India knowing that the next stop was probably Ethiopia. It may well not be, but I frankly don't care. It was the rather exotic thought that counted.

And then it was into Kochi for a visit to the Kerala Folklore Museum. I'm normally not too keen on "museums" of this sort, finding that they are turn out to be far less than advertised. This was one of those remarkable exceptions. With over 6000 artefacts over three levels it was impossible to get any sort of story out of the collection here. It was an eclectic mish-mash of interesting material that remained true to it being collected by just one person. We spent a couple of hours here, when normally I would have been through something like this in about 30 minutes.

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This was followed by lunch and a wander around the older areas of town to see the Chinese fishing nets, St Francis Church (built by Vasco de Gama), the Dutch Palace, Jew Street.

We were then dropped off at our hotel which we had thought was near the railway station. Well, near is a relative term, and I suppose 5 kilometres is “near” when the tour company wanted to put us into a place that was about 10 kilometres further out. But we had an early

train departure in the morning (at about 5am) and we wanted to be somewhere relatively close so we wouldn't be rushed for the train in the morning. Good idea. Rather different outcome.

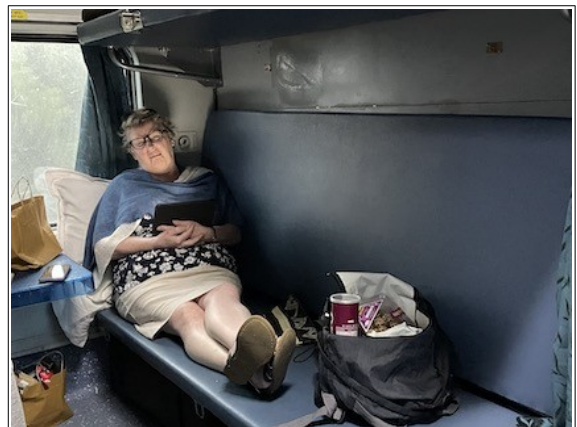


Day 16 : Kochi to Goa

Robyn and I had always had this inkling to try a long train trip of some sort during our time in India. If we hadn't come to Kerala we would have probably gone north to Darjeeling as we also wanted to take the dinky little hill train up to the tea plantations there. But we couldn't work out how to fit both Darjeeling and Kerala into the time frame of the trip so we had to drop that.

With the resort in Goa as a definite booking we had the opportunity to travel on a very long train journey from Kochi to Goa. It looked like it fitted the bill: a long, slow train up the west coast of India, with a chance to see some trains stations and Indian rail passengers along the way. But it wasn't going to be easy.

Up at 3:30am, for a 4:30 pickup; 15 minutes to the train station to be a bit early for the 5:05 arrival (only ten minutes allocated to board) only to find the train was delayed by about 45-50 minutes. When we arrived our train was listed on the electronic departure board but the later it got, and with more trains arriving on time, ours slipped off the list. No-one else around us seemed to be bothered and it was lucky we started up a few conversations with people around us as we nearly boarded a local train that looked like the one we needed.



Safely on and in our cabin which we knew upfront to be a sleeper. The bags were stowed under the bottom bunks and the porters paid off (rather too much it seemed but I was just happy to be on board). Things started slowly and got slower and slower as the day went on. We later learned that there had been a derailment in the southern part of India which threw out a lot of the train schedules. In such cases the Indian rail authorities decide that one train will be held up to allow for others to, mostly, stick to their timetables. We were the unlucky ones.

Such is the travelling life.

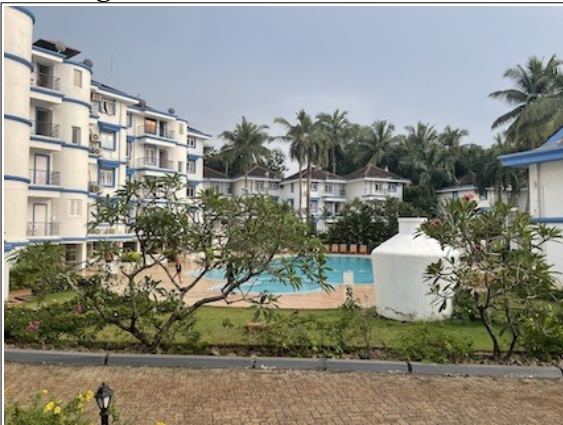
We had started 80 minutes late and by the time we got to Goa it was 10pm and we were 5 hours behind schedule. Our major worry was that there would be no-one at the reception desk when we arrived. We should have know better. This is India after all.



We've been on the go too long, so time for a shower a few snacks and then bed. Too late for any dinner as the local restaurants were closed.

Day 17 : Goa

We had always intended our first day in Goa to be a lazy one. So we spent the day washing clothes and lazing around the resort with an occasional wander up and down the street outside looking at the nearby restaurants, finding the nearest ATM and bottle shop – the usual sort of thing.



Robyn met an English bloke down at the pool who had spent quite some time at the resort over the years and told her which restaurants were best. Over the next few days we tried a few and weren't disappointed. I mainly slept, watched the cricket on the tv, downloaded photos from my phone and camera to my laptop and just waited for dinner.

Day 18 : Goa

One of the reasons why we wanted to visit Goa was that it had been the centre for a number of European countries in India, the Portuguese and the British in particular. And where we had come across these “cultural melting-pots” previously (eg Hong Kong, Alexandria, Macau) we’d always come away thinking that we had seen something a bit different.



The trouble is you can't do that by sitting by the pool at the resort, so we headed off this day to have a look at a museum and a couple of old Portuguese houses that were within about 30 minutes of the resort.



We were fully aware that we were seeing how the upper classes of the day lived a few hundred years back but the aim was to get a view of that lifestyle. Some of these houses had been in the same family for hundreds of years but had now fallen on hard times and you could see that they were struggling to make ends meet.



We stopped off at the local beach for lunch at small restaurant and then back to the resort. By early afternoon we were usually worn out by the heat and humidity.

Day 19 : Goa

Continuing our interest in things Portuguese in Goa, we decided to make the 40-minute drive over to North Goa and visit the town of Panjim, which is now the capital of the state.



Robyn had, during her extensive internet searches, found a small Goan travel company that ran heritage walks through the old Portuguese part of the city.



This 2-hour Fontainhas Heritage Walk ran through the Old Latin Quarter, starting in Tobacco Square and wandering in a wide circle through the old streets lined with traditional Portuguese homes, to



Panjim's oldest bakery where we tried some



wonderful Portuguese baked tarts. It was all great stuff though we were glad that it was rather short and flat, and

that there were frequent stops along the way, as the day was very hot and humid, as usual.



A lot of the houses had signs out the front forbidding photographs being taken. Our guide explained that it was due to the large number of Instagramers who knocked on doors, pushed in, were rude and made life hell for the residents. We did the best we could to comply.

Back to the resort for lunch and a rest; the usual.

Day 20 : Goa

I'd tried a few Indian whiskies prior to this journey so when we realised that the Paul John distillery was just up the coast from our Goa resort we decided to head there for a half day tour. I had also been lucky enough to have tried a



bottle of Paul John a year or so back as part of a subscription I have to a Whisky Club, so I knew what to expect. Even so we had a very good tour, being the only visitors in the place.



Then distillery is undergoing a major expansion of their distilling area, so that part of the site was out of bounds and we weren't allowed to take any photos of the work being done. Not sure why, but there you are.



After a short video and a tour of the facilities, including their store room, we got down to the tastings. Normally you only get a chance to try two or three but they were being generous this day, or maybe it was because we were the only two booked in, so we ended up with a taste of the whole range, whiskies and gins. As I recalled the whiskies were excellent.



And, yes, finally, I bought a couple of bottles; the only things I was to bring back from India, other than the photos and memories.

Day 21 : Goa to Delhi

Another major travelling day with our main activity being the flight from Goa to Delhi before our flight back home to Melbourne on the following day.

The reason why we had to travel back to Delhi rather than flying out of India from Goa was the simple fact that we still had the return leg of the TripaDeal tour package to complete. The last ten days or so had been an extension to the original itinerary which required the return flight back home from Delhi.

We had been hearing reports of the increasing air pollution in Delhi over the previous week or so. But we hadn't realised its severity until we were mid-flight from Goa. The pilot came over the address system to announce that we would be landing about 15 minutes late. Visibility was so low that planes approaching Delhi had been ordered into holding patterns to ensure traffic control could be certain of their separation. As we approached it looked like Delhi was smothered in some form of dirty fog.

Robyn had a pick-up arranged to take us from the airport to the hotel so we didn't have spend time messing about getting a cab. The air was still and thick. There didn't seem to be any other way to describe it.

Delhi is surrounded by farmlands and as the latest harvest had been completed the farmers had cleared their lands by burning off the remaining stubble. And as Delhi is a city that has "climate" rather than variable weather the air sits over the region and just doesn't move.

We had hoped to go somewhere away from the hotel for dinner but we were advised to stay close. In other words, stay inside in the air-conditioning.

Visibility on the ground was down to about a few hundred metres and the streetlights sent down cones of light that reminded me of foggy nights in England. The US Air Quality Index measures air particulate levels between 0 and 500. Anything about 300 is considered hazardous. The air quality index in Delhi that day was in the 430s. We didn't want to go anywhere.

Day 22, 23 : Delhi, and Delhi to Melbourne

On our last day in Delhi Robyn had arranged a late checkout at our hotel so we had the room until 6pm. In order to fill in the time we had decided to take a guided food walking tour of Old Delhi. But we were a bit worried about the air quality. The hotel checked and told us the tour was still on, and the driver was on time.



Perryscope 39

It soon became obvious that the air quality had improved a lot overnight. It still wasn't great but it was far better than the night before.



I recognised some of the areas we passed through in Delhi on the way to the tour start-point but hadn't actually realised that we were headed back to the Jama Masjid mosque where we'd been on day 2. Then we'd been on rickshaws but this time on foot. (You can see the effect of the smog on the right.)



It didn't take long to realise that it didn't matter if you were on foot or in a rickshaw, the traffic was just as bad; blockages and traffic

jams everywhere. Our guide kept us moving ahead towards the next stop. He had originally wanted us to move our tour to the afternoon session but that was going to be impossible given our evening flight times so we had only the guide and the two of us on the tour. I felt a bit sorry for him though he

seemed okay about it.



Over the next three hours we wandered through the back streets of Chandni Chowk stopping here and there at a street vendor selling something savoury or something sweet,

remembering to sanitise our hands as often as we could. Some of the street vendors had been here nearly all of their lives and some have become internet celebrities due to the number of times they've been photographed. It turned out to be a wonderful tour and a fitting end to our time in Delhi.



In the end I was glad to head back to the hotel where I could lie on the bed and watch a bit of World Cup cricket on the television before heading out to the airport and our flight home.



And that, thankfully, was completely uneventful, which is the only way it should be.

Conclusions

Would I go again? The simple answer is “yes”, though I would certainly steer clear of Delhi if I could. I was happy to have been there but have no real desire to return. If we ever did go back we’d probably head north to Darjeeling – I still want to take the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway – and maybe head out northwest to the Punjab, although that may be a bit tough given the prevailing political tensions in that area.

It’s a very big, diverse, colourful country. It would be ridiculous to think that I had seen enough. The trouble as always, as I move rapidly into my late 60s, is whether we are either going to have the time to get everywhere we’d like to go, and if we are going to remain fit and active enough to enjoy it when we get there. All of these things have to be taken into consideration when deciding on our next destinations.

And if you know Robyn and me at all you won’t be surprised to learn that we’ve already decided on our next two overseas trips: Scotland in August 2024, and South America in October 2025. We’re well into planning both of those already.

After that? Well, the list is long and could well be longer, but it has to include Antarctica and Southern Africa at some point. As the late Anthony Bourdain once put it: “Travel changes you. As you move through this life and this world you change things slightly, you leave marks behind, however small. And in return, life—and travel—leaves marks on you. Most of the time, those marks—on your body or on your heart—are beautiful. Often, though, they hurt.” We are a product of those marks; hopefully a better one after each journey.

This fanzine acknowledges the members of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land on which it is produced in Hawthorn, Victoria, and pays respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.