

India



Himachal Pradesh,
Delhi, Punjab, Uttar
Pradesh & Rajasthan....

November 2018



Back again in New Delhi



We arrived just after midnight on the 12th of November to New Delhi. The e-visa que took us some 40 minutes to get through. Our driver Singh was outside to pick-us-up and transfer us to our hotel the Claridge in Delhi. We were upgrade to a suite, and went to bed. After breakfast we met-up with our Indian tour organizer Mr. Mukesh Joshi from Travel Spirit International and partner of Kon-Tikiresor to India. They had arranged an extra guided tour for us so we went off to see a little bit of Delhi during the morning and afternoon. We started off at Old Delhi where we visited Jama Mashid mosque and also made a rickshaw ride around the old quarters and narrow streets aligned with small shops. We stopped and bought a scarf in one of the well assorted shops.

We continued to have lunch at the Lazeez Affaire restaurant. The restaurant seemed to be a hot-stop for other tourist groups, but the food was really good and most likely 3-4 times more expensive c.w. other nearby restaurants. Next stop was the 600-year-old well of Rajon Ki Boali. Then back to the hotel for a quick change of clothes and off again we went. We had to drive some 45 minutes to get the private home of a young Indian lady who ran cooking classes at her home. The name was Tastesutra and we got to make delicious Indian food from raw materials. Apart from a typical curry to Chapati bread we also tried and made some superb starters and dessert.



New Delhi to Kalka and Shimla

The states of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh

On our third day in India we made an early start to get to the train station and catch our train to Kalka. This was a 4-hour ride in airconditioned class. We then changed platform and got on our **"Toy train" The Himalayan Queen**, which set-out to Shimla. This narrow-width train took us through some 150+ tunnels over and high up into the mountains. We arrived 1 hour late into Shimla and were picked-up up by our guide and a driver at the small crowded hill-station. Traffic was were congested with only a few main roads and too many cars. We were taken to our hotel **the classic Clarks Hotel established back in 1898**. A very stylish old 5-star hotel with large rooms and smaller rooms – almost like having an apartment to yourself. We took a walk through the old centre and then decided to take dinner at the hotel as the smaller restaurants did not look to tempting. The food we tried was local from the region and very tasty.

Tour operator www.adventureexplorer.in Jitender Thakur for Himachal Pradesh region.

Lodge – Now called the Indian Institute of Advance Technology. Lots of Makak and Langur monkeys around the temple site. The Vice Royal Lodge was built back in 1882-88 was used as the Base for the British during their rule of India. All the Viceroy who served did so from here making Shimla the capital of the Indian empire. The last Viceroy from Brittan to service was Lord Mountbatten who also was responsible for the negotiations and letting India become independent in 1947. All these negotiations took place here in this building.





Shimla – the former summer Capitol

After this stop we continued to the old golf course outside of Shimla. This was really not much to see. Back to the city of Shimla and a walk through the old town. This was more interesting specially to walk along “the Mall” – which is a long street filled with shops and people. Make sure to see the “local” part of “The Mall” which is much more colourful then the upper level with more modern shops. Last, but not least, we so the town-hall building, the Scandal Point, the church – Christ Church – and the Gaiety Theatre where many prominent actors had performed. Rudyard Kipling had made performances here among others.

Dinner was taken back at our lovely hotel – The Clarks. We really got the royal treatment here with the best service possible. The lounge bar where one could take a drink and decide what to eat was nice as well as the food and service down in the restaurant. First class all the way.

On the fourth day we went back to Delhi, this time by car transport from Shimla to Chandigarh which took us some 4 hours traveling down again on the winding roads. From Chandigarh we took a domestic flight to Delhi where we were met and transported back again to our hotel – The Claridge Resort. We stopped on the way to buy some wine to bring along to Pushkar which is “dry” and alcohol is forbidden at restaurants and shops. We were again upgraded at the hotel. This time to a Suite with our own roof-top balcony – very stylish indeed. We took dinner at the excellent restaurant Dharba in the hotel. Highly recommend.

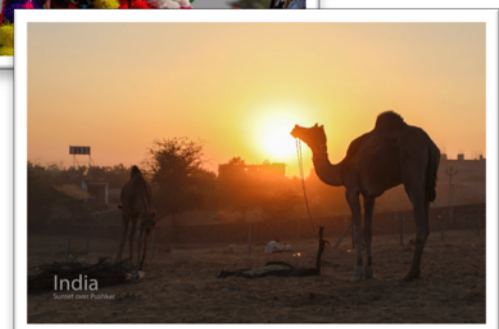




Pushkar Camel Fair (1)

We continued our journey and had an early start to the train station as the train departed already at 06:05. Mukesh our local representative from Spirit International travel and the partner of Kon-tiki resor met us and made sure we got on the right train and compartment. The journey took 7 hours. We arrived at **Ajmer** where Mr. Singh had already the day before travelled down with our car to meet up and transport us to the **Royal Dessert Camp in Puskar**. This is an arrangement of exclusive tented camp with tents which include your own bathroom etc. After a quick lunch (so so) we went to **the Mela (Camel Market grounds)** and walked the maze of streets in Pushkar. We saw the famous Brahma temple and the Pushkar lake with some 50+ quats leading down to the water. They were today preparing for an evening light festival. We made it back to the grounds where they keep all the camels, horses and other animals. People come here from all over to sell and buy camels and breed horses. Back to the Royal Dessert camp a late dinner and then back to bed.

The following day we slept in a little and only got up at 08:00 AM. Had breakfast and went back to the Mela grounds and walked around to see all the activities going on. There was a Camel dance competition as well as horse dance competition. Also, a competition for the best decorated camel. This and many other things going on. There are many professional photographers who come to this festival to capture the colours of all the ongoing activities. Many of the local people (some Indian gypsies) pose for photography for money. We went back one last time to catch the camels at sunset. Lunch and dinner taken at the Dessert Camp. We had a bottle of wine brought with us (luckily) from Delhi as it is "dry" in Pushkar. No meat and no alcohol allowed.





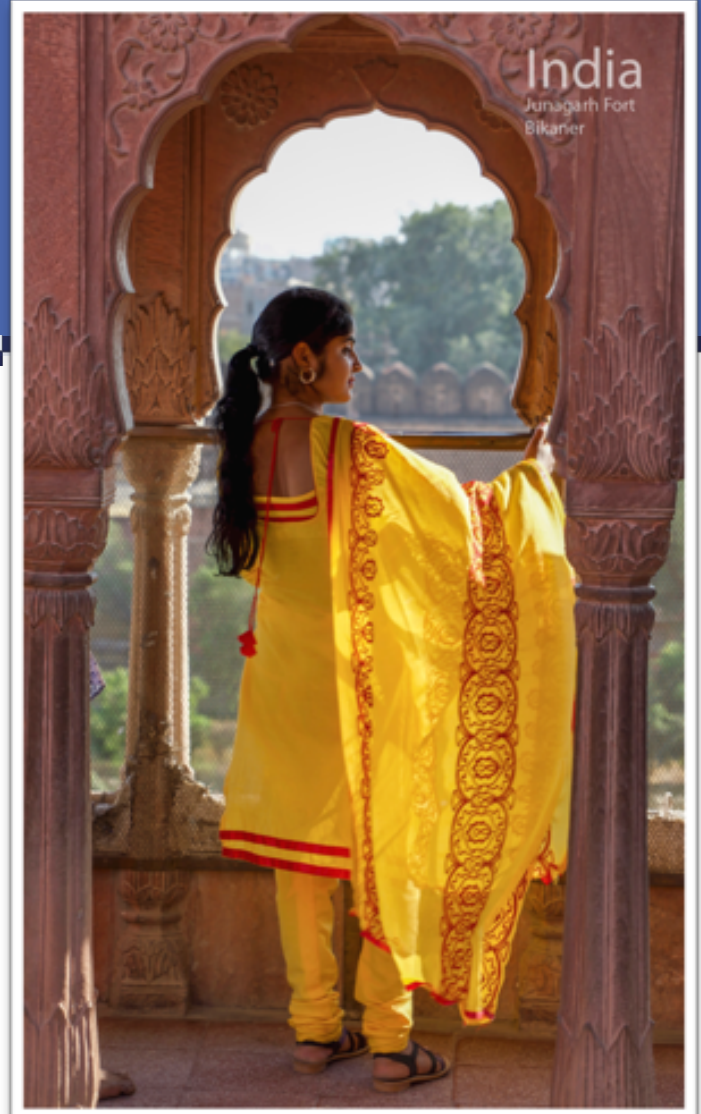
Pushkar Camel Fair (2)





Bikaner

We continued our journey by car this time to Bikaner. Singh picked-us-up and transported us the ca: 5-hours' drive to Bikaner. We first took lunch at an **excellent restaurant named Haradar Haveli**. We continued to see the most interesting sights of Bikaner such as the splendid Fort: **Fort Junagarh, the Lallgarh Palace and some old merchant houses in the old town** as well as the local market in the old town as well. We rounded off the day and **checked-in at the 5-star hotel Narendra Bhawan** where we also took dinner. The hotel was really top-of-the-line and resembled an old Maharadja castle from former days.





Jodhpur – the Blue City

We continued our journey by car this time to Bikaner. Singh picked-us-up and off we went. Our first stop was the Karni Mata Temple of rats some 30 km outside of Bikaner. We then continued to Jodhpur where we were met by our local guide who took us up to the **Mehrangarth Fort** which was the main attraction on Jodhpur together with **the Mausoleum Jaswanth Thada** where all the dead Maharajas have a temple and resting place. Well actually, their ashes have been spread in Varanasi and the Ganges river. On the back-side of the Fort we stopped to have a view over **the “Blue City”** where all the buildings are painted in different blue colours. We walked down and strolled along the narrow alleys here and ended up at a guest-house with a view to enjoy the sunset and a cold beer. Having travelled most of the day, we were ready to go and check in at our **hotel The Kothi Heritage** in the centre of the old town. A private house belonging to a former Army chief of a Maharaja back some 4 generations – still owned and operated by the same family. This was more a 3-star hotel than anything else, but with great service and hospitality. Dinner was taken on mats on the roof-top restaurant – very nice. Prices





Jaipur – the Pink city

Very much like the previous day. Started off by travelling some 6 hours today – a bit too much really, but the roads were more or less ok. We arrived at around 2 PM to Jaipur where the local guide met-up and made sure we covered the main sights of this city also known as **“The Pink City”**. All the houses in the old town were painted in an orange-pinkish colour to honour the Prince of Wales upon his visit some 200 years ago. We started off to see **the Hawa Mahal Palace of winds** and continued to see **the lovely City Palace**. We then went outside of the city up the hill to see three forts of which one **the Amber Fort** was visited. Very crowded with lots of tourists, but well worth a visit in deed. We then went back down-town to an “Apple-store” as I needed to get a cable for my computer. We checked-in at our hotel – **The Taj Jai Mahal Hotel, supposedly a 5-star hotel and one of the best in the area**. We took dinner here and went to bed early as we had a very early flight the following morning to Varanasi.





Varanasi – the Holy city

We had to get up at 03:45 in order to be ready to leave the hotel at 04:20 and a 06:00 flight to Varanasi. After arrival at 07:45 AM we were picked-up and transported to our hotel **The Brijrama Hotel** for an early check-in and a brunch before exploring Varanasi. We started out by visiting Banaras Hindu University which hosted some 40,000 students and over 5000 teachers. Continuing onwards to see some of the most important Hindu temples – such as – Dhurga and Sri Kashi. We went back to take a walk along the river Ganges (Ganga in Hindu) which was packed with pilgrims wanting to come to bathe and worship in Varanasi and Ganges. We also saw the Cremation of dead bodies taking place right near the river. Cows, people in the midst – a real chaos, but of course very interesting.

Back for a short rest to our hotel and “High tea” at 4:15 PM, complimentary by the hotel. The hotel is a 5-star old Maharaja palace converted into a top-class hotel, located right on the river. You needed to be transported from where the cars pick-up and drop-off people to the hotel by boat.

Tour operator for the whole Indian journey is Kon-tikiresor www.kon-tikiresor.se from Sweden with the local partner Travel Spirit International www.tsiindiatravel.com from India



INDIA (Varanasi)



At 6:00 PM, we were met by our guide again and taken down to the main Ghat for the evening celebration of Aarti That Goddess Ganga. 7 Brahmins performed the evening ceremony with chanting, fireworks, bell-ringing cheered on by thousands of Hindu people and some tourists of course.

We had dinner at the hotel, quite ok but disappointing as there is a 500-meter radius from river Ganga where meat and alcohol is not allowed. The last day on our visit to Varanasi and India started out with an early morning (06:00 AM) before sunrise trip on the river. This was beautiful as we got to see the many people coming down for a morning swim/ceremony in the river. The cremations also fully going on. Apparently, there are some 2-300 people per day being cremated here. Back for breakfast and packing at the hotel before leaving for some more sightseeing. Apart from visiting Saranat – the holiest place for Buddhists we requested to stop and visit with some Hirdjas (Kinner) the minority transgender group living hidden away mostly, as they are not socially accepted by people in general. They do have voting rights today, but very little has changed for them and they also have difficulties to get proper jobs. They mostly depend on begging and prostitution. We went to a slum-area and were allowed to sit and talk with two of these transgender persons. We also made a donation which was appreciated.

Had lunch at Surya Hotel & Restaurants in Varanasi. Good food but poor service. Off to the airport for our last stretch – a flight to Delhi.

