

Hello to all,

I am sitting on a Friday evening in a crowded Internet joint in the main bazar in Delhi. There are about 15 people in the small room where Internet connection is offered for 20 rupees an hour (about 2 IS). We landed on Thursday morning last week in Mumbai (Bombay). That is one huge city that has the same role that Tel Aviv has in Israel. We took a cab to the parents of Prateek - an Indian friend that works at Algorithmic Research since 97. Since we had one day in Mumbai, Prateek suggested that we pay them a visit. It was a great welcome to India and other than seeing a typical(?) Indian home, we enjoyed the talk with the father, who's a very knowledgeable man, and the cooking of the Sari-dressed mother (who hardly spoke English).

The next day we flew to Varanasi, the holy city on the Ganges. That was a cultural shock, but a pleasant one I should say. The intensity of the street scenes are unmatched by any other street scenes in the world that I have seen so far. The traffic is amazingly tense and vibrant, and driving there is like playing a computer game: a truck from the left, an auto-rickshaw from the right, a beggar ahead, a cow behind, bikes from above and sick dogs from below. If you blink for only half a second, you miss a complete episode and may find yourself crashed or (if walking) stepping into a pile of sheet. It's the colorful people, wearing so many types of clothes. It's the misery and poverty that do not stop nor slow down the life race even one bit. It's the fact that people treat the street like their home (which it is for many) so you see people cooking, eating, bathing, peeing, sheeting, shaving, sleeping and what not in the street.

The main attraction in Varanasi is the Ganges, the Ghats (those wide stairs that lead down to this holliest and dirtiest of rivers), and the cremation of bodies. We took a boat ride at dawn along the river to watch the various rituals that take place there. Fantastic display. It seems that the bathing in the Ganges is as important to the Hindu as the Haj is for the muslims. It is certainly fascinating to behold those moments from the side.

I will make it short because the connection here sucks and I may lose this letter. After Varanasi we took the night train to Agra. The main attraction there is the Taj Mahal. Words are not enough to describe that amazing building. Even if I saw it in pictures so many times, even if there was no water in the reflection pool, even if the morning was a bit hazy, at least at sunrise, this monument and the serenity there are breath-taking. An island of beauty in sea of something else.

And then Delhi - the capital. A huge city that has no charm, but has a lot of other things. Good food, amazingly large markets, numerous monuments, huge avenues, turnabouts (circles), buildings and parks in New Delhi, and one of the worst air pollution! Yesterday night we went to a great restaurant, followed by a tasty Indian ice-cream and, finally, a real Indian movie. We went to one of the popular cinema-houses in Delhi to watch the latest from Bollywood (the largest film industry in the world - the Bombay Hollywood). That was the movie "jungle" which we followed and enjoyed despite the lack of translation.

I'll sign off now. Tomorrow we fly to Leh, in Laddakh. That's in the Himalayas and we hope for a less humid weather there.

All the best,
Tamir