

Pictures from India

I'm back from India, and I'm deathly ill. I was perfectly fine the entire 2 weeks I was there, and then on the way home, like an idiot, I ate a bad salmon on the airplane and 2 days later, home, shivering under 3 huge down comforters and puking my guts out. Actually, I stupidly may have drunk 1/4 of a fountain soda in the Delhi airport too; that might have been a bad idea. I never got sick in India though.

If you read the Lonely Planet guide to India, you'll be terrified to travel there. Actually, you could probably get through the guide without cancelling your flights, but if you go on the actual website you'll consider yourself very brave if you decide to continue with your plans. The frightened masses on the thorn tree forum regurgitate all the stories about the friend of a friend who was murdered, raped, robbed by a taxi driver. The tourists who were poisoned in one of the major tourist towns. People are really frightened of travelling there, and then there's a bunch of the odd tourists who have probably never travelled out of our country relating their first experience with touts; people who will scam your money away from you.

My very short India trip was to the north, which is a pretty intense area to visit. I went to New Delhi, to the most touted area, I visited the Taj Mahal, and then I went to Bodhgaya, in Bihar, the poorest area of India. A place where I'm told most Indians are afraid to travel, yet travelling there, by overnight train from Delhi, was no problem at all. Not scary in the least.

The greatest experience I had was at the Taj, actually. Yes, the Taj is beautiful and a wonderful story, built for a wife who died in childbirth (giving birth to a 14th baby) – it's huge and white and costs enough money so that when you get in there, no one bothers you. So my friend and I walked around in there for a while and then I got tired and sat down on the terrace area and watched people walk around. After about 5 minutes of sitting I was barraged by people wanting to have their picture taken with me – I wondered how strange I actually looked – but then I noticed that everyone was taking pictures of everyone else! People were stopping complete strangers and asking to have their pictures taken with them! Groups of women in saris approached delighted old white women, wanting

to have their pictures taken together. Japanese tourists stopped groups of schoolchildren. Groups of schoolchildren ran after me to have their pictures taken. I thought it was the weirdest, but then the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. My husband, Fang, a 6' tall white man says he experienced the same in Indonesia. I have to admit it was really cool until I was trying to sit in a Thai Buddhist temple and was starting to attract more pictures than the giant golden Buddha.

Bodhgaya was really nice, but starting to get overrun by western tourists. It is sort of an EPCOT center for Buddhists. There are a bunch of temples around from all representatives of Buddhism from all the lands; there's a gleaming gold, pointy Thai Buddhist temple next to a gorgeous Tibetan one. There's another Tibetan with 3D sculptures all over the walls, next to a stark Japanese Zen Buddhist temple. All that I visited had various designs of the story of the life of the Buddha (the famous one) on the walls. There was even an 80-foot statue of the Buddha, with a tiny little toddler doing prostrations circumnambulating it; the tiniest and the biggest.