

Last Delhi-ghtful day

Delhi, India - January 20, 2008

Amy:

We woke up and decided to have breakfast at a restaurant (outside the guesthouse), explore the city, and cram the rest of Delhi into day into our one remaining day. I read The Lonely Planet guidebook (thanks, mom!) highlights of Delhi, and we decided that we would see 1) Connaught Place 2) The Ghandi Smriti (museum), 3) The India gate and the parliament grounds. We also had to go to the New Delhi railway station to buy train tickets to go to Agra for the following day.



cricket game at Connaught PI

We walked to the metro, which was a much longer walk than I had anticipated. Luckily, Brent is very patient and tunes out most of my whining and complaining (this was a theme throughout the day). Usha, the owner of the guesthouse, had given us a map, so we were able to easily find the metro station. Once at the station was a different story; we went to buy metro chips/tickets, had only large bills, and had to find someone to make change. Then, we didn't know where to stand on the platform or which train to take... We realized that it was much easier to navigate with Avnish, and also seemed cheaper b/c he paid for everything and charged us for the entire tour the next day. We met a young man on the train who spoke to us in American-sounding English and told us that he was going to California soon to meet Arnold Schwarzenegger.

We found our way to Connaught Place, where we planned to eat at Wangers (welcome to Wangers!), a popular bakery that was recommended to us by the Kiwi at our guesthouse (she referred to herself as a kiwi, so that's what we called her). The bakery and almost every other store in Connaught Place was closed b/c it was Sunday morning. We watched a game of cricket (played on the street) for a while, then walked around Connaught Place until we found a restaurant that was open.



preparing for the day at Connaught PI



Amy (barely awake) in coffee shop

We ended up at the United Coffee House, which was also recommended to us by the Lonely Planet and the Kiwi. It reminded me of Eastern Europe, even though I've never been. The restaurant wasn't just a coffee house, and had an extensive menu from all over the world. Delicious!

We ate, and then took a motor rickshaw to the train

station. At the train station, we walked through a sea of rickshaws inside the building to the 2nd floor. We followed the signs and arrows for “foreigner ticket purchase” and went in a small room where we saw other non-Indians. Right then, I had déjà vu and realized that I had been in the same room 11 years ago! We realized that Brent didn’t have his passport with him, and that buying a ticket could be problematic without one. But we persevered, filled out a ticket request form (“tickets, please” eh Giles) and went to the counter where we were met by the villain in the movie, No Country for Old Men. We were told that we’d have to talk to the man at the front counter. We went to the man in front, who told us that we’d have to take another train that allowed non-passport-holding people (which doesn’t make sense). I remembered this scene from the last time I was in the Delhi railway station – i.e. being told something bizarre and untrue - and I remembered arguing with the person until he relented and gave me a ticket. This time, we waited while the NCFOM man pushed some keys on his ancient computer (one that we recognized from the computer museum). Then he asked where we were staying and the price of a room there. (?). Very strange. Then he became Mr. Chatty and much nicer, and said that we could get on a train the next day at 10:30 a.m.

We left the station, and got on an auto rickshaw to the India Gate, a tourist spot that I had seen the last time I was in Delhi. When we got there, the entire area was closed to prepare for an independence day parade on January 26th. (we later learned) There was also an important politician (Mr. Brown) in town, which may have been the reason for the closure as well. We got out of the



Connaught Place - our favorite restaurant



sea of rickshaws outside Delhi train station

rickshaw (b/c the driver wanted to charge us more to drive around) and walked past a stadium, many armed guards, and government buildings, and finally ending up at the Delhi zoo.

We decided to wander around the zoo, which turned out to be huge and nicely arranged for leisurely walking, with lots of room for the animals (Andrea would have loved it). We saw many birds, tigers, bears, giraffes, and the worst reptile house I’ve ever seen, where most of the reptiles were plastic.



Delhi zoo

From the zoo, we took an auto rickshaw to the Gandhi Smriti Museum. The driver (a nice Sikh man wearing a turban) couldn’t find the museum, so he had to pull over and ask for directions several times. The museum & the grounds were beautiful – our museum tour at the room where Gandhi had his final 170 days. The museum had several large dioramas depicting events in Gandhi’s life, as well as statues, and quotes by and about Gandhi.

Also, we saw a remarkably small display containing the sum of all his worldly possessions (eye glasses, cane, eating utensils) We watched a short movie about Gandhi's final moments, and then went upstairs to see the interpretive art displays, which, to me, seemed like a strange thing to put in that museum. We walked outside to see the manicured grounds of the museum where cement footsteps marking Gandhi's last steps before he was shot, and a monument at the exact location where he died.

From the museum, we took another auto rickshaw back to Connaught Place. Our rickshaw driver was Sikh, and Brent thought that he was the same driver who left us off. What a racist! We planned to have dinner at a restaurant that we had found in The Lonely Planet guidebook but it was closed, so we went to a Chinese restaurant. We were told that Delhi has great restaurants, and we thought we'd be having lots of Indian food during our trip so we should try other cuisines! The restaurant turned out to be very good. We went to a pastry shop afterwards (the one that was closed in the morning) and bought some pastries to take back to our guesthouse. We took the metro back to our suburb (Karol Bagh) then we took a bicycle rickshaw to our guesthouse. The bicycle rickshaw got lost trying to find his way to our guesthouse, and it took us a long time to get home (and, I admit, voices were raised).



Back at our peaceful rooftop terrace, we were exhausted, but started talking to an American couple from Boston who were visiting India for the woman's (Kelly) 40th birthday. They were really friendly and ended up giving us lots of suggestions for guesthouses in Kerala. They were also going to Agra the following day, but were taking the 6:00 a.m. train. (I had decided that we should have a leisurely morning the following day, and that we could see Agra in an afternoon/morning, so we would take a later train)

After receiving our warm water bottles, we went to sleep.

To say that Delhi is chaotic is an understatement – there are constant horns honking, near misses/traffic collisions on rickshaws (both bicycle and 3-wheel motor), seemingly no traffic laws or signals, and no lane markings. That said, the city is much cleaner than the last time I had been there (11 years ago) with less garbage, pollution, diesel smell, smog, filth. We learned that the auto rickshaws now use compressed natural gas and there seems to be a real campaign to stop litter (say “no” to plastic).

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