

INDIA EDUCATIONAL 2015 – Delhi-Agra-Jaipur

(28th August – 03rd September)

India is a cultural treasure trove. Few countries in the world have such an ancient and diverse culture as India's. Stretching back in an unbroken sweep over 5000 years, India's culture has been enriched by successive waves of migration like the great Moghul Emperors and the British Raj, which influenced and was absorbed into the Indian way of life. It is this variety which is a special hallmark of India. Its art, architecture, monuments, costumes, music and dance, language and literature are not gathering dust in museums but thrillingly alive and everywhere you look. I welcome you to discover the richness of India's culture.



Tour highlights included

- 1 night Delhi
- 1 night Agra
- 2 nights Jaipur
- 1 night Gurgaon

Day 01: 29th August (London-Delhi)

On arrival to Delhi Airport flying from London Heathrow with British Airways direct we were met by our ground handlers **“Travel World Experiences”**. After a 30 minute transfer from Delhi Airport we arrived at **“The Leela Palace New Delhi”** hotel where we spent our 1st night. Because we arrived early in the morning in Delhi we had time to freshen up, have lunch at the hotel before being driven into Old Delhi where we visited the **“Jama Masjid”**



This great mosque of Old Delhi is the largest in India, with a courtyard capable of holding 25,000 devotees. It was begun in 1644 and ended up being the final architectural extravagance of Shah Jahan, the **Mughal emperor** who built the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort.

Mughal emperors were members of the Timurid Dynasty who ruled the Mughal Empire in South Asia (mainly corresponding to the modern countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Northern India) from the early 16th century to the early 18th century. During the 18th century their power rapidly dwindled and, with the establishment of the British Raj, the last of the emperors was deposed in 1857.

Following on from Jama Masjid we jumped on to our 1st form of local transportation, a **“Rickshaw”** that chauffeured me around the busy streets of the mile long Chandni Chowk otherwise called **“The Silver Street”**. This really was a great experience in getting up close and seeing how street life was lived in Old Town Delhi. En-route back to Leela Palace will drove past **“India Gate”** (an **“Arc-de-Triomphe”** like archway in the middle of a crossroad. Almost similar to its French counterpart, it commemorates the 70,000 Indian soldiers who lost their lives fighting for the British Army during the World War I).



We had two further hotel site inspections at **“The Claridges”** and my favorite **“The Imperial”** where we were given dinner in **“Daniell’s Tavern”**. My recommendation for a one or two night stay in Delhi would definitely be **“The Imperial”**. It is voted as one of the best city break hotels in Asia, it is filled with colonial heritage and is situated in the heart of the

Capitals city. Another reason would be because it has one of the top ten restaurants in the World “The Spice Route”.

Day 2: 30th Aug (Delhi-Agra)

There are two main ways of travelling between Delhi and Agra, one is by road transfer which takes approximately 4-5 hours depending on traffic out of Delhi. The other is by rail on the “Shatabdi Train” which unfortunately departs daily from Delhi Railway Station at 06:00am. Again I would strongly recommend this form of transport as you travel through the rural areas of India passing through old villages and crop fields. It really is a great way to see India. We had breakfast provided by The Leela Palace hotel although they do serve food on the train which is included in the cost of your 1st class rail ticket which cost £17.00 approx. On Arrival to Agra at 08:00am (two hour journey time) we were met again by our ground handlers “**TWX**” and taken to our hotel “**ITC Mughal**” where we stayed for 1 night. (I would question whether or not you actually need to stay in Agra for 1 night which I will explain my reasons further on).

Agra was the capital of the Mughal Empire and other than being great rulers they were great builders. Taj Mahal, the greatest of them all is a masterpiece of Mughal architecture at its best.

How many of us thought the Taj Mahal was a Palace, if you did then like myself you are wrong. It was built as a “**mausoleum**” (a tomb)



Taj Mahal took 22 years to build and was built by Shah Jahan who also built the Great Mosque of Old Delhi as an expression of love for his wife Mumtaz Mahal who died whilst giving birth to their 14th Child. I have detailed a link to where you can read the full history of how & why Taj Mahal was built.

The history of Taj Mahal: <http://www.tajmahal.org.uk/history.html>

Other main tourist attractions in Agra we saw were “The Red Fort of Agra” and “Fatehpur Sikri”. Further information about both attractions can be found on UNESCOS World Heritage website (<http://whc.unesco.org/>)

My reason for not staying a night in Agra would be because if you opted for the early morning train from Delhi to Agra you would have arrived in Agra and at your hotel no later

than 09:00am. Your room won't be ready until 1-2pm. This means you have to occupy yourselves for at least 5 hours. It will take no more than half a day to see the Taj Mahal and The Red Fort of Agra or alternatively Fatehpuri Sikri (other opportunities will arise to visit a Fort in Jaipur or Udaipur depending on your itinerary, so unless you're really into your heritage sites then I would concentrate on Taj Mahal and Fatehpuri Sikri.

However, if money was no object then there would be any hesitation in recommending a 1 night stay at "**Oberoi Amarvilas**". This would not only allow you more time to take full advantage of all Agra's attractions but because of its location you will experience the beauty of the Taj Mahal as the sunrises or sunsets. (Please note that although you are allowed to book just 1 night at Oberoi Amarvilas you must also have another night's accommodation booked somewhere else on your itinerary staying at an Oberoi property). Other alternative hotels in Agra are "The Gateway Hotel" or "The Trident".



Taj Mahal at Sunrise



Taj Mahal at Sunset

Day 3: 31st August (Agra-Jaipur)

After setting off early after breakfast we knew we had a long day ahead of us as the driving distance between both cities was approximately 5 hours. To break our Journey up we had a guided tour of Fatehpuri Sikri (37kms outside of Agra). Fatehpuri Sikri otherwise known as the "City of Victory" was built by the Great Mughal Emperor, Akbar, as his capital and palace in the Late 16th Century. In 1585, however, Akbar abandoned Fatehpur Sikri to fight against the Afghan tribes and choose a new capital, Lahore. Fatehpur Sikri was to be the seat of the great Mughal court only once more for three months in 1619, when Jahangir sought refuge there from the plague that devastated Agra. The site was then finally abandoned, until its archaeological exploration in 1892.

Continuing on with our journey we stopped in a village called Pahersa where we had a brief site inspection before having lunch at a property called “Chandra Mahal Haveli”. (Haveli’s are private mansions in India usually one with historical and architectural significance and would make a great alternative overnight stop if you didn’t stay in Agra as previously mentioned).

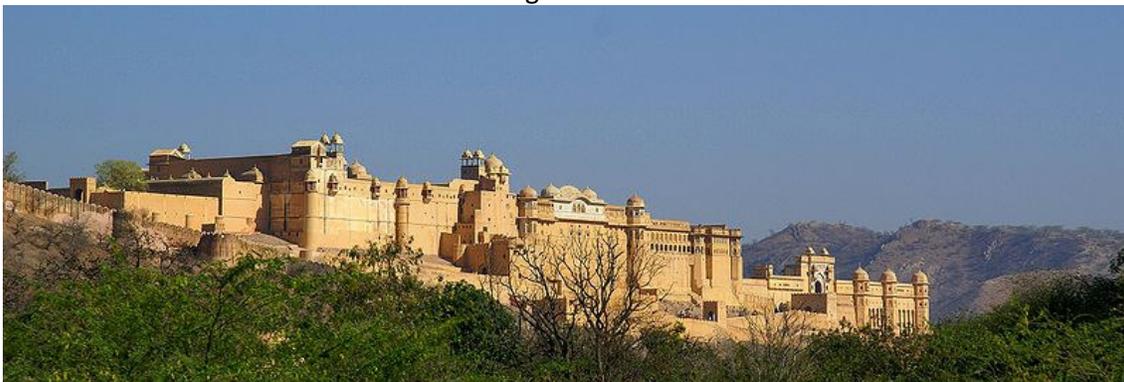
The hotel can arrange such activities like a walk around the village where you will come across vegetable and lentil fields, a walk around this region provides a close insight to village life in India.



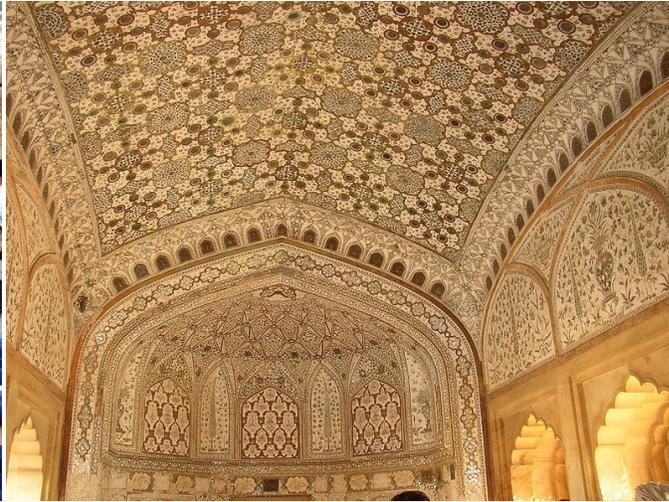
We continued on with our journey to Jaipur the capital of Rajasthan, popularly known as the “Pink City” as the pink sandstone was used to construct the buildings in old walled city. Once we had checked in at the “Samode Haveli” for our 2 night stay in Jaipur we went on to visit the “Oberoi Rajvillas”. This like its sister hotel in Agra was a stunning property. It’s a perfect place to explore one of India’s exotic and vibrant cities.

Day 4: 01st Sept (full day city tour)

After breakfast, we drove just outside Jaipur to the ancient’s capital of Amber (pronounced Amer) to see the fabulous Amber Fort. The fort is surrounded by fortified battlements and overlooks the moat lake. Ruins and remains still exist and are spread over the Aravalli Hills and crenulated walls lattice the surrounding area.



An elephant will spare you the trouble of reaching up to the fortress. Once on top stroll through the sprawling complex of courtyards and halls. Many of the rooms have delightful wall paintings, with precious stones and mirrors inlaid in the walls.



Following visit of Amber Fort, continue for “City Palace”. The magnificent City Palace is in the centre of the pink city of Jaipur, enclosed by high walls and set amidst fine gardens and courtyards. Then we walked to the adjacent “Jantar Mantar” also called “Astronomical Observatory” made by the Maharaja of Jaipur (Maharaja means great or high King). Built in 1726 and is one of the five such astronomical wonders constructed by Sawai Jai Singh and makes accurate predictions even to this day.



Rest of the afternoon was spent visiting other hotels in Jaipur such as the Hilton, ITC Rajputana and finishing up for afternoon tea in the Rambagh Palace gardens (one of the Leading Hotels of the World).

<http://www.tajhotels.com/Luxury/Grand-Palaces-And-Iconic-Hotels/Rambagh-Palace-Jaipur/History-And-Heritage.html>

Dinner was hosted that evening at “Shahpura House Jaipur” which was probably one of my favourite hotels visited throughout the entire trip. To this day it is still be run by one of the descendants of Maha Rao Shekhaji.



The attention to detail was stunning; every room had its own identity with modern facilities. You could sense the history from its presents displayed throughout the hotel on its walls. Most evenings (weather permitted) they would put on a show of Indian dancers whilst guests sat and enjoyed their evening meals outside on the terraces. I invite you to take a closer look at their website for further information <http://www.shahpurahouse.com/>

Day 5: 02nd September (Jaipur-Gurgaon)

This journey would normally be done by flying between Jaipur and Delhi because Gurgaon is where you generally stay before flying back home from Delhi. It’s closer to the airport. However we drove between both cities which take’s approximately 5 hours.

On route we stopped off at “Tree of Life” which is a Spa Resort in the Aravalli hills, 40 minutes’ drive South of Jaipur. This would be a great extension to Jaipur if you wanted to unwind and relax after a hectic 6 days of travelling.

<http://www.treeofliferesorts.com/jaipur/homepage.html>

Another benefit to staying at “Tree of Life” is that its supports the local village “kukas”. This will allow you the opportunity to interact with local village life.

After a brief site inspection of the resort we headed back to Gurgaon for our overnight stay at the Leela Gurgaon. A short 20 minute drive from the hotel to Delhi Aiport.

Day 06: 03rd September (Delhi-London Heathrow)

My reasons why India is a great holiday destination

- **Because of its size there are many historical & architectural sights to be seen and discovered.**
- **It offers great value. You can travel as cheaply or as lavishly as you want in India and that's definitely part of its appeal as a tourist destination.**
- **Indian Hospitality. They are honoured to have you come and stay in their Hotels.**
- **The Food. Forget about what we are served up in our local Indian restaurants. Indians really know how to get the best flavours out of all the local spices.**
- **Shopping. Everyone loves to pick a bargain up when shopping and there's no better place than an Indian market. The handicrafts are eye catching and well made.**

5/6 days is enough time to see Delhi, Agra & Jaipur especially if you wanted to add on a beach location afterwards. In my opinion you would need no more than a full day in Delhi, so depending on what time your flight arrives into Delhi would determine whether you needed a 1 or 2 night stopover. Early morning train journey to Agra will give you the afternoon to see the Taj Mahal & the Red Fort of Agra. I personally would only stay in Agra if I was staying at the Oberoi solely for its sunset/sunrise position overlooking the Taj Mahal. Three nights in Jaipur would be sufficient time to see all the sites and possibly give you a day to rest before flying on to your next destination.

If I can answer any questions or if you would like me to put together an itinerary then please don't hesitate to contact me on 01708 224000

Regards,

Trevor Prior

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