

9 January 2012 India

Thursday January 19th

After all the preparations for having the bedrooms decorated and for Sue to clean while I'm away, Derek arrives at 2.50 on a sunny afternoon. After a cup of tea and a final check we leave at 3.30, to the Toby Carvery between Slough and Heathrow. I treat Derek to the meal which is not bad, but the red wine on the glass stem finds its way onto my clean trousers.

The road to terminal 4 is clear and we arrive at 5.30 for the 8.50 departure. I leave my key with Derek and arrange with him to pick me up at the same place. Check in security are easy and quick but the plane is delayed to 10.30 so there is plenty of time for the papers. The problem is a late departure from Delhi because of the fog. Boarding starts at 9.40 and proceeds efficiently and departures is at 10.30. The plane is comfortable but overheated and the light doesn't work. A good meal is served around twelve: veg curry, potato salad, shrikand with GT, water and tea.

Friday January 20th

After not at lot of sleep, landing time is advertised as 11.25 vice 10.40 but then we are held circling for an hour because of the congestion and fog.

A small breakfast is served with fruit, bun and coffee which is OK.

The airport is much improved and is now much like any other international airport. There is a long way to walk, immigration is fairly quick but the luggage takes a long time to arrive. The way to the metro express is clear. It seems that it is newly opened with few people using it and the staff are helpful. It costs ₹80 (with my first ₹10 coin in my change) for the twenty minute journey to New Delhi at up to 105kph. The train is air conditioned and has station announcements, good signs and platform doors.

It arrives at 'the wrong side of the station, but I cross it and the International Tourist Bureau has all my reservations waiting and the helpful lady reservation superintendent checks them all for me, stressing that the train tomorrow night starts from HN station.

The walk to the Grand Park Inn takes a little over thirty minutes, including a visit to a 'luxury urinal' for ₹1. The main bazaar is quiet and tidier than it used to be. Only a few people want money/pffer services. At Ramakrishna Ashram Marg metro station I join the main road and following the overhead metro line makes route finding easy.

Aat the hotel, my hotel vouchers are waiting for me. I have been 'upgraded' to the Hotel Aster around the corner which is under the same management. The room is OK, if noisy, with show and breakfast is between 7 and 9.0 downstairs.

After a shower I walk back into town and at Ravi Chowk (Connaught Circus) I have a meal at Savarana Bhavan, the South Indian from last time. Paper Dhosa, lime juice, water, ice cream with figs and cashew nuts cost ₹300 with taxes. Dusk is at 6pm. I go to the post office on the main circus for stamps, ₹15, and walk back to the hotel in the dark through the very busy rush hour.

I go to an early bed and have a good night with the ear plugs.

Saturday January 21

I sleep through to sixish and stay in bed until seven. After a shower I'm at breakfast by eight for paratha, curd, juice and coffee. I pack my bag and leave it at the desk and I'm out by 9.30 to a pleasant cool morning, sunny with a little mist and breeze. After some photographs I walk the park as last time but leave at the far side onto Mantir Marg and then to the Birla Mandir. I remember the outside but not the shrine. The shoe guardian wants a tip in spite of the notice. Then more walking to the Gudwara. The guide book compares it with the Golden Temple but its cruder with less atmosphere, but there is a tank.

I then go past the Janta Mantar to the Janpath branch of Savarana. I get a table easily at 12.45 but when I leave at 1.30 there are long queues. It's just as good with a tali, juice, coffee and tip for ₹300, and get a packet of cashew pakora for the train.

Much of Janpath is out of comission because of another bit of the metro. I walk to the Rajpath but this also out of bounds, this time because of seating for a meeting. I sue the museum grounds to sit and read where it's sunny but cool. I then go by a round about route to India Gate and the Bengali market for coffee and Gulab Jaman. Then it's towards CC with a man who works as a coffee server at the Lalit Hotel which charges \$300 a night; he gets \$250 a month but 'the tips are good'. I get the metro from the stop before CC to Karol Bagh; it costs 12/- and is packed. It's a bit further from KB station to the hotel but its easier to pronounce than the nearer station.

I get to the hotel at five to collect the bag and then ride on the metro to Indraprastha which is the nearest station to Hazrat Nizamuddin. It's a 50 minute walk, mostly along the busy M G Marg but there are points of interest: two parks with views of Hanuman's Tomb against the remains of the daylight and a Shanti Stupa which is larger and more elaborate than the one in Leh.

HN station is chaotic and cold. Eventually I find that my train is 3.75 hours late because of the fog using the confusing displays that are partly in Hindi. Two information requests confirm an 11.30 departure vice 8.15; departure rescheduled, greatly regret ... It's cold in the waiting room and I need the vest, shirt, pullover and two jackets. After several inquiries the train turns up at eleven and departs at 11.45, 3.5 hours late. The 3AC is at the end as a portion is detached at Khajarahoo.

There's an unhelpful young girl (talking in a mobile at 1am) but otherwisethe other passengers

are friendly with one elderly man reading 'Mein Kampf'. I get little sleep inspite of it being warmer in the AC than in the lobby.

Sunday 22 January

As dawn breaks we're at Jhansi and make leisurely progress stopping at many local stations. There is no food on the train. I get chai from a platform seller and have my cashew pakora. Eventually we pull into Khajarahoo four hours late at 10.40. It's 7km to the centre and as its a pleasant sunny morning and not too warm, I set out to walk although there are autos available. After a short while I'm tempted by a 20/- front seat which was 50/- earlier and we have a hair raising ride into town, first waiting at the level crossing for my train to be shunted.

The hotel is easy to find and actually back along the road we came along (the station seems to be south rather than the north that guidebook says). I've soon checked in, bathed, handed laundry in and am sitting in the dining room. A veg Jhal Frezi, paratha, lime soda and kheer isn't bad and costs 432/- I sit with yesterday's papers which arrive during the afternoon followed by a rest in the room.

I go out for a walk mid afternoon, firstly around the village and then to some of the outlying temples (but not in them which I leave for tomorrow). There are, it's of people wanting to 'talk', which eventually means that they want to sell something or some service.

But it's a pleasant open area with views of the hills and domestic animals. There are various lakes with temples dotting the landscape and plenty of handicraft/gift shops. There is a good sunset and I head for the Paradise Cafe for a pot of ginger and cardamom tea and a Paradise Pancake (honey, chocolate and fruit) for 165/- on a balcony overlooking the lakes the light disappears.

I walk back to the hotel in the dark (not many street lights). There are bikes without lights and cars with very bright lights. At the hotel I have half an hour internet for 50/- and go to bed after the laundry arrives. I have a decent night with just one wakeful period; it's not cold enough for the blanket.

Monday 23 January

I'm finally awake, with a headache at about 7.15, but not fully rested. After a tepid bath (too many bathing at the same time?) to breakfast at eight where two groups (German and French) are noisily eating. The buffet is OK with porridge, fresh fruit, tinned juice, instant coffee, ancient potato paratha and better hash browns. I arrange my bag leisurely and am out at 9.30.

It's a pleasant, mild, sunny morning. I walk to the western group of temples, buy the ₹250 ticket and decline a guide. I explore the fine 1000 year old temples in a beautiful park, except that there is some rubbish dumped in the corner. There are plenty of people but its a large area and so not crowded. It's well described in the guide book and I have time to sit in the sun, look around and

read my book.

A one I leave and go to lunch at the Agrawal restaurant. It's modest but I enjoy my VIP thali and lime soda for ₹160; it's not huge but there's plenty. I walk along a side street to the Chausath Yogini temple at the far side of the lake. This is a crude, granite Jain temple. I have a walk along a country lane but have to retrace most of it to find the hotel for a rest for an hour or so, interrupted by the cleaner.

I go to the Jain Temple group. There are three of which one is particularly grand and another has a concrete accretion. All are in a walled enclosure and with views of the Vinhya Hills. There are the usual youths wanting to practice their English. It's almost sunset but the coaches continue to arrive. The walk back to town is in the dusk with lots of people and activity around the lake. I go to the Paradise again, this time for Masala Chai and a tomato cheese omelette. I'm sitting reading my novel when a woman Ono the next table greets me; she is English from Reading but lives in Turkey with her Turkish partner. We compare travel stories.

I go back to the hotel for an early night; I'm comfortable but get little sleep. Time difference?

Tuesday 24 January

Up at 6.45, bath and breakfast. Same buffet as yesterday but quieter. I spend the morning on the balcony. It's foolish but with a clear blue sky. I pack and am out by 12, book a car (₹300) for 9.30pm and leave my rucksack in the computer room. I go to the centre and to the Malangesvara temple, the 'working' one. It's much quieter than yesterday and I get my tikka after a donation. There are good views into the western group of temples. Afterwards I head for the paradise but it's not really open, but a small boy, the son of the owner cooks me veg pakoda and a pot of ginger tea before the main man arrives. After some reading I go out for a walk in the comfortable weather. There is confusion in signs between Rajgar and Rajnagar but it's a pleasant walk nonetheless along quiet country roads and a slightly busier one.

I go back to the Paradise, where the Turkish couple are there again, for the sunset, computer and tea. At the hotel I have the good buffet dinner for ₹450 and the taxi driver arrives early (8.45 vice 9.30) as it's his last job and it's to my advantage too. I get to the station 1.75hrs before the train. Almost all the travelers in the AC section are westerners heading for Varanasi. In my bay there are German and Polish women. Again I get little sleep.

Wednesday 23rd January

The train arrives in Allahabad at 7.15 just half an hour late, and the walk from the north side of the station to the Hotel Yattrick takes less than half an hour. Check in is 24hrs and so there is no problem. I'm moved from downstairs to an upstairs room ('quieter') which needs preparing. So I have my 'English' breakfast on the lawns with juice, porridge, coffee, scrambled eggs and TBJ.

I'm joined by two English women on an Exodus tour.

When I finish the room is ready and I unpack and shower and spend the rest of the morning reading in the garden. There appears to be a buffet being set out there, but it's for a private party and so I go out for lunch at el Chico around the corner. It seems to be a hang out for the lawyers. I have FLS, veg Chow Chow from the Chinese menu (spicy vegetables with noodles) and HC.

I investigate a book shop for Mark Tully's new book but they don't have a copy. After that I go to the station, and after three over ridges I find my way to the information office to confirm my seat to Lucknow, and confirm that the train goes from the Junction Station at 6am. I ask the chief booking superintendent about Trains at a Glance and he takes me personally behind the scenes in the booking office to get a copy.

I return to the hotel via the Anglican Cathedral. It's a large Gothic building from 1870 in good order and in the Diocese of Lucknow. I walk around but it's locked; the caretaker says 'it's only open on Sundays'. But I'm found by the priest in charge who gets it unlocked and shows me around, chatting the while. Back at the hotel, I have Assam tea on the lawn and a session on the computer (□70 and a good connection) and am able to upload some photos.

After some reading I go to bed at 9.45. It seems noisy but I have a reasonable night.

Thursday 26th January, Republic Day

The day dawns grey and cool, and there is little sun until the afternoon. I take breakfast on the lawn (the temperature is just comfortable with a hint of sunshine) with coffee, juice, fruit, porridge, TBJ, veg cutlet: 'a refreshing Indian breakfast'.

I make a leisurely start at 9.30 for a long walk through the town to the confluence. There are lots of people, noise, tents, boats and a few bathers. The fort is largely occupied by the military, but a little is accessible. There is very much a holiday atmosphere and three pontoon bridges across the Ganga. I go back to the centre via a different route. A little sun helps the sense of direction and many people are happy to help. There is some horrendously traffic and noise along the Grand Trunk Road, complete with overpass. I go back to El Chico at 2.30 for a lunch of mushroom pasta, chocolate brownie and FLS. In the restaurant I see my third and fourth westerners. Then sits back to the hotel for a rest, tea on the lawn followed by a short walk for water and biscuits. The evening in the room followed by a reasonable night.

Friday 27th January

The day dawns brightly and when the sun rises above the haze it shines all day in a clear sky.

After a shower it's breakfast on the lawn again but in the sun today, with juice, fruit, porridge,

scrambled eggs, tomatoes, hash browns, TBJ and coffee. Another leisurely start and so apparently does everyone else with the traffic only just building up at 9.30. I go NE in the civil lines with the Catholic Churn first on the agenda. I get to the back entrance which is locked but next door is the Convent School where they kindly take me through the grounds to the front entrance, meeting the principal on the way. The building is open but the organ 'not in use'. The church is not so big nor as well preserved as the Anglican Cathedral but still massive for India. By the front entrance is a large, private, boys' school with impressive buildings and grounds.

From here it is across the road to the Chandra Sekha Azad Park which was Alfred Park. At the far side is a fine library from the British period and to the north the Allahabad museum, a modern brick building, with admission fee of ₹100 (with another ₹100 for a camera). The grounds are attractive but the interior is gloomy with interesting items which are poorly presented and with little interpretation. A long circuit of the university hints of the buildings but little detail. I go back along the main road via the ATM to the hotel at 1pm for lunch in the garden by the pool (a function is being prepared) with breads, juice and a mushroom and pea curry. After a rest I head for the station and on the south side the Khusran Bargh. The walled gardens are extensive but rough, but contain some Mughal Tombs. It's a pleasant place to walk and sit as the sun goes down.

I go back to the hotel to settle the bill and order an early call and use the computer. The function starts and as I fear very noisy with little sleep in prospect. I spend some time packing but there is loud music until after midnight with children running around. I have an argument with the staff and little sleep.

Saturday 28th January

I'm up at 4.15 which is just as well as the 4.30 wake up call doesn't materialize. At 4.15 I set out for the station through the streets empty apart from lots of dogs. I get to the station in half an hour. The train is advertised on number six, but it's eventually change to platform 7. Many trains are running many hours late including one three hours late having only come from Patna. Mine starts here and so it's at the platform and starts just a quarter of an hour late at 6.15. The AC coach fills up at a suburban station. The Indian girl in the next seat allows me to sit next to the window although as usual it's dirty and the sun only emerges through the fog at seven. At eight breakfast arrives: four slices of bread, two small veg cutlets and coffee for ₹30.

The train is reasonably comfortable and soon after the scheduled time of 10.10 we arrive in Lucknow. After taking photos of an American woman in the crowds with her own camera, I join the throngs to leave the station and head for the hotel. It's getting warm now (mid twenties?). The map in the guide book is fairly accurate and I pass several interesting buildings. The two to three miles takes about three quarters of an hour and only the last bit is confusing as the name

on the building is the name of the chain and not the same as the one on my voucher.

Still it's smart, the reception is efficient and I only have to wait ten minutes for the room to be cleaned. A shower makes me feel better and the room has a quiet aspect with central AC. After a cup of Nescafé and some laundry I'm ready to head out for lunch. The lane opposite the hotel turns out motto be the correct one and degenerates into alleys between houses but eventually I find my way to Ashok Marg. The Vyanjan is across the road from where it's marked on the map and styled 'new'. I have a special thal (sic) and FLS for ₹200 and afterwards a coffee across the road at the Indian Coffee House. Around the corner is a bookshop (one of several) where I get the new books by Mark Tully and Amitav Ghosh. After a short walk I go back to the hotel for an early, pretty good, night soon after eight.

Sunday 29th January

I'm awake by six and after podcasts and shower I'm at breakfast by 7.30 where there is a pretty good buffet: Juice, coffee which turns out to be tea, porridge, two bananas, idli/vada and pastries.

It's then a leisureland I'm out by nine for a walk to the Residency. There is a little confusion on the map and a rather roundabout route gets me there by ten. It's an interesting, extensive site with a small museum. The question arises, after the rescue, why did the British not do some rebuilding? There's a German couple with a guide and the American Maggie whom I met yesterday on the train from Allahabad; she's in computer science at Allahabad University but she doesn't think she'll come back!

The Residency is a peaceful place to sit and read until it's time for lunch. I walk back in 30 mins to the city centre for lunch at the same restaurant, same Thal but with tea, and then to the hotel for a rest.

I try to find Wingfield Park but the zoo's there and then a dual carriage way. and so back through the lanes.

I use the computer in the business centre for more news and to upload some photos and am cut off after an hour. A young man tells me its complimentary; later I get a bill for 100/=.

A wedding celebration is in progress outside on my side of the hotel. It gets louder and I'm unable to sleep. After 1 am I go to reception and they give me another room on the other side. It's more comfortable with a double bed instead of two singles but warmer. I get some fitful sleep.

Monday 30th January

I doze until eight or so and then down for a late breakfast as yesterday but the coffee is coffee and the porridge is thinner, and very tasty fruit curd.

I make a leisurely start at ten, walking along MG Marg, which today, Monday, is extremely busy.

Eventually I get back to the banks of the Gomti and the large array of Islamic buildings at Hussainabad. The very tall tower seems to be in better condition than the guide book suggests, but the 'garden' scarcely merits the name. As always there's a mix of slums, falling down monuments and splendour. The first I visit is the Chhota, or Hussainabad Immambara. with its impressive collection of chandeliers and pleasant gardens. From there to the Bara Immambara. I wasted 125/- at the C. I. as I have to buy a 350/- ticket for all the buildings on the site. It's impressive, but not so many chandeliers and the size of the hall may have been great when built, but ... The labyrinth is above with lots of passageways on several levels, with no 'elf and safety'. There are good views from the top, including of the mosque, which isn't open to non-Muslims. There's also a step well, which is well decorated.

Then it's a walk back to the city centre by a different route with lots of hospitals and the railway through the city railway station; the map is reasonably accurate. I light on a cyber cafe at 15/- instead of the 100/- at the hotel. The connection is decent but the computer is slow. Still I catch up with emails.

Then it's compass navigation back to the hotel for tea and biscuits (first food since breakfast) and a rest. I have food from room service at six - veg medley, rice, pickle and HC for 420/-, do laundry and to bed around 8.30 for a reasonable night although the room is rather warm (24deg). The AC seems to make little difference and I switch it off, but the fan is helpful.

Tuesday 31st January

Up at 6.45, shower and breakfast at 7.30 including a freshly cooked cheese omelette. I'm out by 8.30 and head north to Shahnajaf Immambara. It's smaller and low key but with a good display of chandeliers, but no photographs inside. There's an Islamic girls' school behind. The Botanic Gardens are only open from 6 to 8.30 for 'morning walk' - perhaps tomorrow. Further along the road is the enclosed Sikander Bagh which is peaceful but with no particular planting. I try to find the City Museum which is supposed to be near the zoo but asking several people yields nothing. I make a brief tour of the city centre: Trinity Church with its gloomy interior, British memorials and the GPO which is palatial both inside and out.

I try to get postcards at the bookshop; there is a huge pile but apparently none of Lucknow. The Methodist church is there with its white stucco but there is no sign of the Cathedral.

I go to the hotel for a rest and out for lunch, at my regular, but the service isn't so good and they seem to be getting ready for some event.

Back to the hotel for a relaxing evening with plenty of reading and uploading photographs in the business centre. It's a very poor night for no apparent reason.

Wednesday 1st February

I'm up at 5.45 and after a shower out for the walk to the Botanic Garden for my morning walk with many others. The sun is rising and as always it's a good time of day to be out. The extensive gardens are a mixture of planting and research with the trees labelled but the houses locked, and

all for 1/- entry.

I get back for breakfast at 7.30 with the usual comprehensive spread. There is time for careful packing and reading before checking out and leaving about ten. The walk to the station retraces the route of Saturday, but being familiar seems shorter, and I take photos of the Raj Bhavan; Lucknow is the capital of Uttar Pradesh. The station seems not as well organised as that of Allahabad but the train is just 15 minutes late on platform 4. I settle into the compartment. Across is a lady doctor from Lucknow, also going to Gwalior and seems to have ridden far fewer trains than I. She is feisty with very definite views, including that I should learn Hindi, which would be useful, even in the south. Half way through the journey we're on time but at Jhansi we arrive nearly an hour late and wait for half an hour, and arrive at Gwalior at 10.15 instead of nine. luckily the Hotel Regency is just around the corner from the station and easy to find with plan and compass.

I'm soon settled in. There was no food on the train but I'm past ordering food from room service; I just want to get to bed which I do before 11.30 for a good night.

Thursday 2nd February

After a pretty well continuous night up to six I'm up at 6.45 for a shower and breakfast. There is no porridge but a good spread in the spick and span coffee shop with fresh juice. back in the room there's a mouse and I leave them to deal with it as I leave at 8.30.

I go via the station for water and a newspaper. The streets are very busy and noisy, but the map is accurate. At the statue of the Rani of Jhansi there's a good place to sit and then it's via Fort Road which seems to have several names and about two to three kilometres to the Fort gate, at the NE corner of the fort. There's an Archaeological Museum with plenty of stonework and carvings.

Then it's up the cobbled approach to the fort with turns and gates and increasingly good views of the city, which sprawls over a huge area. The last ate is below the Man Mandir Palace which still has some of the colour on the carving. The tickets are several and confusing. T the north is the Madya Pradesh portion for 250/-, largely ruined over a large area. The Archaeological Society of India's part is 100/- for better renovated and cared for temples and mandirs. Again the views over the surrounding plains are huge. The 'top of the rock' is a large plain with several temples, tanks and Scindia School (very upper class with cricket matches in progress). After a couple of temples I head for the Gurdwara where there is a genuine welcome, especially from an elderly gentleman. I must have some food after my visit. I have a dish of very good tea served by the young helpers who are interested in my visits to Amritsar and Southall.

After another temple my camera battery gives up. Walking down to the other gate there are lots of Jain carvings - I'll have to come back tomorrow. It's a walk of about three kilometres back to the station. En route I'm held up at a level crossing with a narrow gauge railway (less than 1m?). I stop at the station for more water and then back to the hotel.

I go to the hotel restaurant for dinner. There are no half dishes, so a lot of Biryani, daland roti with FLS.

There is a noisy wedding celebration, but they finish soon after ten so it's not too bad and I have a reasonable night.

Friday 3rd February

I'm up and to breakfast at 7.30. There is porridge, together with fruit, juice, cornflakes, coffee and South Indian. There is another clear sky apart from bad pollution.

I start walking, but the map's scale is variable and there are some new roads. After an hour I give up and get a rickshaw ride to the Jai Villas palace for 40/-; I'd gone too far south. On arrival there's 3 minutes to opening time at ten. I chat to a teacher, wh's keen on English Literature, and his students.

It costs 300/- plus 60/- for the camera, but there is an excellent museum with all sorts of memorabilia, rooms like National Trust properties and dining rooms with huge chandeliers.

Then it's more walking with the inadequate map. The Indian Coffee house has disappeared and so I walk to the Jain carvings on the way up to the fort it is getting warm. I treat myself to a rickshaw back to the station for 50/-.

I have a meal at ICH, which still exists, at the station: upstairs for Masal Dosa and downstairs for tea. I return to the hotel for reading until 7pm when the office computer is available for 100/-. There is a fast connection which is useful for uploading photographs.

I have a reasonable night until 4.30, but then wakeful.

Saturday 4th February

I'm up at 6.30 and head for breakfast at 7.15 but it's not ready. It gradually arrives, but there is no porridge. I pack and check out at 8.15, refusing a lift to the station which is just around the corner. The Shatabdi Express is advertised as right time at 9.38, but in fact it is 20 minutes late. The train is comfortable with moquette seating and large, not too tinted windows.

Water comes first, and then tea (a tea kit with hot water in a cardboard cup labelled 'tomato soup') and biscuits. There is a western group (from East Europe?) taking up half the coach which gets out at Jhansi. Lunch is decent with tomato soup, rice, roti, veg curry, dal and ice cream. The carriage is rather warm with AC suspect.

We arrive at Bhopal 20 minutes late at 3.30 to a warm 28deg, but I elect to walk on the Google maps estimate of 3.5km. The first 45 minutes is OK, although with a migraine, But then it gets complicated and is further. Local people seem not to know that way. I had through the hospital and then down to the lake where I find V I P Road, the hotel's address. But how far along? I accept a lift from two cheerful men in a van to the end of the hotel's drive. The hotel is up above the lake and I don't think the standard guest arrives on foot but I made very welcome and am

soon settled into my 'standard room'. It has a balcony and a view over the lake. I have a shower, teas, do laundry and send shirts, trousers and jacket to the Hotel laundry. I order a car for 9 am tomorrow. I spend the rest of the time reading and have a snack (chilli garlic cheese toast and complimentary fruit) from room service.

The room is relatively quiet and the bed comfortable, if rather narrow, and I have a reasonable night. I awake several times and I feel a cold developing.

Sunday 5th February

This is my middle day and I awaken at six and am up by seven for a shower and then breakfast at 7:30. I eat it on the Terrace cereal and porridge, fruit, juice, coffee, cheese omelette hash browns, bread and 'marmalade'. The staff are cheery and I return to my room when I get a call at 8:45 to say that the car is ready.

It is someone by microphone from the car park and is small but comfortable. The morning is bright, initially cool but soon gets warmer. The drive to Sanchi takes about an hour and 20 minutes where the ticket is Rs.250 +10 for parking. The site with its iconic great stupa is well kept but perhaps over restored. There's plenty to see and pleasant places to sit so the 2 1/2 hours is well spent. The sun gets quite warm and the newspaper later reports 28°. There's an English couple who are staying at the same hotel in Bhopal. I might see them later and we compare notes on our journeys.

I go back to the car via the publications shop where I get good postcards (eight for Rs.50). With the help of another driver I arrange to go to the Gupta caves at Udaygiri which is a small village near to Vidisha and is about 10 km from Sanchi. I guide meets me (I gave him Rs.100) and although I usually don't want one I wouldn't have found the caves without him and he has the keys. The caves are mildly interesting and only one is really deep with pillars carved from the living rock. There is quite a climb up the rocky steps and the rest house there is very basic. It doesn't look as though it's in use. There are good views from the top including the Betwa and Bes rivers and the Vidisha.

Then it's back to Bhopal and the drive takes an hour and a half for me approximately 80 km. It's time for tea at 3:30 followed by relaxing and supper at 7.30. The English couple are there waiting for their midnight train to Aurangabad. I have a decent meal of tandoori cheese and veg, potatoes FLC, rice pudding but it costs Rs.800.

It's a fairly broken night, quite warm as the air conditioning doesn't seem to have much effect and my cold is developing.

Monday 6th February

Up at 6:30 and after a look around the hotel, breakfast as before at 7:30. There is a business man from Finland on the next table with an Indian colleague, and afterwards I go back to the room for a couple of hours relaxing. I go out at about 10 and walk along the lake side to where I got a lift yesterday; it takes about 50 minutes. From there I walk through the old town starting at

Imam Square where there are some interesting decaying buildings. I go to the GPO to post cards and to the Taj-ul-Masjid, the 'third largest mosque in the world' and it certainly is large. It has a friendly feel with not many people around. There is one western couple with a guide and several boys in a class.

Then I go along the other Hamidia Road reversing yesterday's route. The Indian Coffee House is not where the guide shows it but Manohar is there and supplies a decent Thali and fresh sweet lime juice and a cup of tea.

After that I go for a long walk through the polluted old town, a smelly veg market and the Moti Masjid. Nearby is a decent bookshop where I get a book of short stories by Kushwant Singh. My walk then takes me across the embankment of the big upper lake, alongside the lower lake with various small parks. The city is very spread out and this side is pleasanter. I go back along the lake side to get back by five for tea, And arrange a rickshaw for seven and breakfast at 6:45, and pay the bill. The server is down for the computer in the lobby so I taken to the club lounge when I get free use of a good computer. I'm in bed by nine but get little sleep; it's warm and I have a head cold.

Tuesday 7th February

Eventually I get up by six, have a cup of coffee, pack and go to breakfast at 6:30 for cornflakes, fruit, omelette, toast and coffee. The rickshaw is five minutes late but I get to the station in good time for the scheduled at 7:50 departure. As expected, and frustratingly, it's running late: nearly 2 1/2 hours coming from Jamu Tawi.

A medical student helps me to check the time and platform and so after that joins me on that platform. He is going to Ujjain, on the same train but in sleeper class. Plenty of conversation helps pass the time until the train arrives.

There is confusion about the seating but we are soon settled. There are noisy young children and an army colonel also going to Ujjain where he is currently living having been brought up in Bikaner. He is very intelligent with many good ideas but very dismissive of Muslims. Podcasts and sneezing help pass the time from Ujjain to Indore. It's another bustling city and a policeman helps me to get an auto to the Hotel Fortune Landmark. It's a large place, very well organised and comfortable and a bath is comforting.

There is any good computer for free in the business centre. I have veg pakora in the room and a little of BBC world and then bed by nine. The A/C is effective and at 22° C it's fine to sleep which I mostly do through to seven.

Wednesday 8th February

I'm up at 7:30 feeling rather better but still sneezing. I go to breakfast at eight where there are over attentive staff, for fresh water melon juice, coffee, muesli, fresh fruits and South Indian. I pack leisurely and am ready by 9:10 when the reception calls a rickshaw to take me to the bus stand for Rs.150 in 20 minutes. The driver is cheerful with 'my own business' and offers to drop

me at Mandu for Rs.1000 but finds me the bus to Dhar which leaves at 9:45.

There is plenty of room to start with but the bus soon fills up. It's a pleasant journey eastwards through farming land and small towns and villages along the national highway with several smooth stretches but also some very rough diversions where it is being reconstructed with new bridges. We reach Dhar, a busy town, just before 12. In about 20 minutes a bus to Mandu comes and leaves in about 10 minutes but it stops in the town for a further 10 minutes.

The road is a country lane heading south with little traffic but it's very rough and slow. There are plenty of villages with people getting on and off all the time, and some times the bus is very full. The countryside gets more interesting and hilly as we approach Mandu.

After the last village the road winds through the defences and gates and then up to the centre of the small village. On the way are various tombs and in the centre of the village is the mosque and other buildings. The hotel is a 20 minute walk south along the road which has several hotels and shops then isolated cottages in farming land but all the while tombs and mosques. My final arrival is at 2:30 to my 'luxury' tent. I go straight to the restaurant for lunch, a Thali and sweet lime soda. I go back to the tent to do laundry but there is no hot water. Eventually someone from reception finds the right power switch for the geyser. The air conditioning is efficient but it proves later that heating is also needed it gets down to 15° inside overnight. I read on the balcony until five and then go out for a pre sunset stroll viewing several tombs, village life and the mosques across the fields and buy water and biscuits from a small shop.

I go back for some TV and an early night but this is a mistake as a party of girls arrives after eight and are noisy until after 10. I sleep then but with odd dreams.

Thursday 9th February

Podcasts from six and up at 7.30. After a shower to breakfast with cornflakes, papaya, cheese omelette, TBJ and instant coffee. I'm out of while it's still cool but intensely bright; there is no pollution here, just some dust. I go south along the road past the partly empty lake, Sagar Talao which has some fishermen. There are lots of mud/tilled cottages with plenty of cattle, goats and children. The crops are mostly rice and wheat. I go to the Rewa Kund with bathing and laundry ghats and get a ticket for the southern group for 100/-. The palace of Baz Bahadur has well kept grounds, courtyards a dry pool and pavilions. A group in a coach from MH arrives. Further up the road and quite a bit higher is the Roupmati's Pavilion on top of a 300m high cliff overlooking the plains to the south and a pleasant place to sit reading, at least until lots of noisy tourists arrive. Then it's a gentle stroll back, taking in the Jali Mahal behind some cottages. It's beginning to get warmer and very dusty.

After a wash I go to lunch at 1 pm I have vegetable dumplings, dal, two Parathas and Indian sweet fresh lime soda and tea. I have an afternoon on the terrace reading as the temperature climbs to 29° with no power for most of the time.

At about four I go out for a walk, a little south to start with to take photos of the local group of

mosques tombs and the caravanserai. I then go towards town with gradually more cottages and small shops. It doesn't seem so far as yesterday; it is always the case. I go to the 'English wine shop' for a bottle of beer for Rs.120 and back along the road stopping to get namkeens.

I get settled into the tent with TV and shower and then power goes off. A man comes to put it right with some sparks but it soon goes again. This time we have major sparks and a fuse blows. I change the nets three times and again in one the shower fitting feels like fusing the system. I express the fact that I can't live in a tent and don't feel safe and then move my things again this time into a cottage where almost everything works. The cosy evening with beer and snacks has disappeared; I watch some TV and go to bed.

Friday 10th February

I have a reasonable night until five and then podcasts on till 6:30. After a shower et cetera I am out by 7:30 for a walk along the lake. The morning light is excellent and it is peaceful with very few motorbikes and a large group of monkeys. I go back for breakfast and find that the group of girls is leaving but there are several groups in the dining room. Breakfast is as yesterday except for veg cutlet and tea.

The weather is as before you with a clear bright sky breezy a strong sun but not too warm out of the sun. The walk north along the road to the centre takes 20 minutes and a ticket for the Jama Masjid and the neighbouring sites is again Rs.100. There are not many people looking around apart from a couple of loud young men. The grounds are well kept with lots of bushes full of yellow flowers. Also behind the mosque is the tomb of Hoshang Shah. Leaving the mosque I go across the road to Ashrafi Mahal. On one side workers are clearing rocks for another building and beyond is a Hindu temple. I go further north along the road towards Dhar. The cafeteria at the Malwa Retreat isn't open but the Roopmati next door serves me milky coffee and a plate of Parlé G biscuits in a garden overlooking the gorge.

There is more sightseeing including two step wells and Gada Shah's 'shop' and then I go through the Delhi gate and various other defences partly on the current road. There are excellent views across the dry hills and gorges and of one reservoir. I head back up the road taking a short visit to Chisti Khan's palace which is ruined and locked and then go back to the Roopmati for lunch: Mushroom curry, dhal nan and fresh lime soda for Rs.200.

Back along the road I find a cafe with just one Internet station Rs.60 with a poor keyboard but a good connection. I go back to the hotel for a rest and reading and then go out at 5:30 which is rather late for a sunset walk. Then it's TV but next door there is a noisy TV blaring behind a locked door with no one present at 10pm. After getting that sorted I have a poor night taking a long time to sleep and then I am awake by a baby crying at five and two phone calls at 6:30.

Saturday 11th February

I go out for a rather grumpy walk at sunrise to the Palace at the western edge of the plateau. As the plaque says it's of no architectural interest but the location is good; there are some monkeys

and also lots of dogs including one that I suspect is rabid. I go back for an attentive breakfast with Vada Masala.

I make a leisurely start heading north to the bazaar for the Royal Enclave which is left at the bus stand and past the Maharajah Hotel which claims to be best for budget choice but doesn't attract me. The group of buildings is extensive and impressive with a tank and another largely dry lake. There is a 'Ship Palace' which is long thin and high and a simple pillared mosque and lots of other buildings with good gardens and seats and even a 'lady's urinal'.

I go back to the Roopmati for lunch again and it is okay but not so good and then the walk back to the hotel is warm. I have an afternoon rest and fix a car for 10 AM tomorrow at Rs.1500. A German party arrives in a 'Rollendes Hotel'. I go out for a last sunset walk along the lake and through the fields. I get supper offered at one of the cottages and then go back along the road. I have an evening of TV and reading. A party of students arrives and they a bit chattery but there is no loud noise. It is bed at nine for a decent night.

Sunday 12th February

I am up at seven and after a shower go out for a walk along the lake. Again a beautiful clear morning but not so cool. I have breakfast at 8:15; there is a French group there and my meal is as before but with masala omelette.

There is time to read along with the packing before I meet Mr Vishwas at 9:45 and we're soon underway. He is a cheery soul and the car is small but comfortable. We start along the Dhar Road but soon head off right along a variety of roads which are mostly good but with one very poor to the NH3 heading towards Indore and Agra. This is a very smooth dual carriageway. There is a pay plaza which costs me 15 rupees but we are bowling along at 80 km an hour until we reach the outskirts of Indore. Apart from two cigarettes for Mr V it's very enjoyable. After a 2 km I handed over to a local rickshaw with Mr V paying. With a little apprehension we duck and dive through narrow lanes but we are heading in the correct general direction and we arrive at the Fortune Landmark at 12:05. The receptionist recognises me and just needs a signature.

I'm sat in the coffee shop with coffee until the room is ready. I order a car for ₹500 to the station at 5:15 and a vegetarian packed breakfast and wait to see what my upgraded room will be like. The room is comfortable with sofa and double bed, large flat TV, coffee making stuff, but a shower, the best yet with a removable head.

After a shower I go to the Ambrosia restaurant for lunch with the Sunday buffet costing Rs.650 plus taxes with unlimited wine which I'm suspicious about but three glasses of red Jacobs Creek later it's OK. Really meal with out wine is ₹550. I have Chinese and Indian main courses, a delicious halva and recognisable apple strudel but no custard and rice pudding with coffee.

I go back to the room to rest and find their towels already changed. About five I go to the business centre to upload lots of photographs and send some emails. I spend the evening of reading with TV puzzles and tea. There is some celebration outside; it's going to be a noisy

night. The pillows are large and effective as is the air conditioning. So not too bad not but wake up at four anticipating the wake-up calls. I shower, have coffee and to reception at 5:30 bill and into car by 5:40.

Monday 13th February

The ride to stay at the station is quick and comfortable with seat belt and even the driver wears one. I arrive at six for the 655 departure. Another train is at the platform but leaves at 6:20 and mine arrives; the ACC see is dirty and ramshackle but I have a window seat and the window isn't too dirty. The countryside's flat and arid but there are lots of crops, largely wheat, where there's irrigation. I eat my packed breakfast which has cucumber and tomato sandwiches, crisps, two bananas and one unidentified fruit with tea from the vendor. The pace of the train is modest with lots of stops; we leave and arrive spot on time 1030 in Bhopal.

I go to platform one to check the time 14:40 and platform of the Shatabdi to Jhansi which is the return working of the one I use from Gwalior to Bhopal. Then it's back over the bridge saying no no no Hamidia Road and Manohar. It's too early for lunch but I sit in the back room, the front being very busy, by my self for masala dosa, mosabi juice, rasmali and coffee. After lunch I treat myself to a small box of sweets from the excellent selection.

Then it's back to the station where there's a large upper-class waiting room but it's stuffy with insects and better on that platform which is pleasantly warm. There is plenty of time for reading. The train arrives from Delhi at 1405 and after 20 minutes cleaning we can board and it is as comfortable as before. With the 1440 departure we soon have tea, sandwich, samosa and sweet and then I spend the time reading and watching the fairly flat scenery go by. The train arrives promptly at 5:45 in Jhansi to the elaborate station with plinthead locomotive outside in the grounds of the railway headquarters.

The town doesn't live up to its initial impact - it's provincial India in decay. About 3 km past the police station and two bazaars I get to the Jhansi hotel and a dreadful room which is dirty with no AC and is onto a noisy street. The A/C room has 'a problem with bathroom' and after negotiation and tea the manager takes me to another hotel the Chanda. Here it's noisy and decaying but at least there is AC of a sort. Eventually I have a towel and a top bed sheet but no hot water. After some puzzles I go to bed by 930, and get some episodic sleep in spite of the noise.

Tuesday 14th February

I am awake at 4:30 and again at 6:30 when I have a cold shower and go to breakfast at 8 which is moderate with a bread omelette, masala, apples and bananas, buttered toast, no jam warm milk tea; cereal doesn't appear.

I am out by 915 and walk to the bus stand but I am tempted for the last kilometre by a tempo for five rupees. There's a bus to Datia loading and it leaves three quarters fall at 10:05, but of course picks up until by full. We stand for about 10 minutes very near to the Hotel Chander.

The road north to Datia is being rebuilt and is very rough and slow and the journey takes an hour

and a half for the 34 km. It's a rocky landscape with a few hills. Just before the bus stand is a lake and palace but it's not my goal. A gentle walk through the town is interesting and quite clean and folk are happy to point me in the right direction. The Givind Mandir is an impressive sight with the glimpses through the streets. It has square plan with lots of pavilions and seven or so stories. And so it proves - it is somewhat decayed but there has been some restoration. A guide, Lakhan, costs me ₹150 but there is no entry fee. Three quarters of an hour sees most of the palace with lots of steps and some good views of the town, lakes and other buildings.

I then go around the lake to the 'tourist motel' for lunch which is reasonable : seasonable vegetables Dahl, papads, paratha, fresh lime soda and tea. There is no sweet so I have the ones from Bhopal. I continue the walk around the lake through a wedding celebration with the tent over the road together with discarded food remnants and back through the streets to the bus stand. There's a bus waiting for Jhansi, which is more comfortable than the outward one and it leaves after a few minutes for the Rs.20 journey. Again there is a longish stop and filling up before we get underway but it's quicker- about one hour and I can see more. Most of the way we follow the railway. I get off just past the hotel and so after a quick visit to the park am ensconced for the evening. It takes an hour to get the air conditioning working and a bucket of hot water for a bath but then it's relaxing reading and music. I'm in bed by 930 for a much better night with less noise.

Wednesday 15th February

I wake at five and listen to podcasts until I get up at 7 to get things sorted and to breakfast at 7:45, but there are no staff. I go out for a circuit of the fort, to the ATM and into the fort for Rs.100. I am back for breakfast at nine with fruit (the apples are peeled this time) plus tea, juice, toast but no omelette.

After packing I am away by 945. A rickshaw outside offers ₹200 to Orchha which I accept. It's a newish one and we speed along getting to Orchha in about half an hour for the 16 km. He drops me in the bazaar, about 10 minutes walk from the Betwa Retreat by the rocky river. The room isn't ready (but it's a cottage not a tent) so I leave my rucksack and go for an hour's walk along the river. First impressions are very positive with the fort, temples, Chattris (translated as cenotaphs) and the wide river with rapids and tombs in the countryside alongside.

I'm in the cottage by 1130 and do some laundry and send some to reception. The room is quite small but comfortable with an old TV which has no BBC world and a shower with geyser etc. I have lunch on the terrace outside the restaurant with Chinese chop Suey, veg Manchuria, Spring Rolls and fresh lime soda. The afternoon is spent reading in the room and out about four I go out for a look around the village. There is an Internet cafe for Rs.30 and I get water and then back at 6:30 with reading till bedtime. There is some noise from the restaurant but it's okay if a bit cold at 20°.

Thursday 16th February

Podcasts and up by 630 for a walk past the Chattris along the river. I am back for a modest

breakfast at eight as an Italian group is leaving and some French arrive. I linger with a pot of weak coffee and eventually get some bananas.

After a shower and organisation I am out by 10 to the fort which costs ₹250 and ₹25 for the camera. It's an extensive site with palaces and temples and tombs, camel stables, horse stables, wheatfields and lanes down to the river. It's a good place to stroll around as well as seeing the buildings. Some of them have animals, cows and goats, and people living in them. There are good views of the river with lots of rocks and rapids. In one of the palaces I meet a German couple from Berlin who are staying at the Sheesh Mahal in the fort complex. They have a large room with good views but mixed food. In other there is a couple from south Yorkshire who have a flat in Calengute for three months and are having a 'holiday' away from it. At 12:30 I go for lunch at the Sheesh Mahal. It's the same menu as at the other Madhya Pradesh tourism places and I have cottage cheese dumplings with veg pullao, fresh lime soda and tea.

I then go to be too big palaces: Jahangir and Raja Mahals. Each is a large warren of passage ways, staircases and precarious perches. In the latter there are surviving murals. After exhaustive viewing I take a stroll down to the viewpoint over the river, but the museum is not open and so it's back to the hotel.

I'm offered a more comfortable room which is away from the kitchen with a double bed. So with help I move things. There is a pleasant terrace and better AC and a heater but the geyser doesn't work. After an hour and five men the element is replaced and I have hot water, the bathroom is cleaned and my laundry's returned. I have a comfortable evening but the drums and music start after nine and therefore it is a long time before sleep.

Friday 17th February

I wake after fitful sleep at six and listen to podcasts until 7.15. I take breakfast on the Terrace at eight and it is better with scrambled eggs, juice, toast, butter, marmalade and coffee. While I'm going for coffee crows attack and take most of the butter.

It is a leisurely day reading on the terrace and several short sight seeing trips.

At tea time I meet two Australian women who after a chat come back to the terrace for drinks. We arrange to have dinner together tomorrow. I go back to her room for reading and puzzles but there is loud wedding music, 20 minutes peace, and then it starts again until about one am.

Saturday 18th February

I am up eventually at 7:15 and tired. Breakfast is scrambled egg on toast, cornflakes, juice, coffee, toast and marmalade.

Rest.

Walk up river.

Village for hot chocolate and banana porridge and Internet.

Rest and read.

Walk across the bridge and along the road and back to room.

I have a shower and then go out to the Orchha Resort for dinner with the two Australians who have Greek parentage: Katharina and Maria. It's too early at 6:30 so we have drinks before the buffet at seven. This is similar to lunch yesterday. There is plenty of conversation and also with another couple who are Belgian. About 11 I go back and there is some wedding music but not so bad as yesterday.

Sunday 19th February

Start up at seven and out for a walk in the clear cool morning. After a turn around the village I go back to the terrace for a breakfast of cheese omelette, fruit juice and coffee.

I spend most of the morning reading outside the room. I pack and check out at 10:30 and go to the village for a second breakfast of tea, banana porridge and papaya juice. To Australians pass by and stop for Jules and then before 12 I'm on the road to Jhansi. The walk is rather hot and sweaty.

Insect ridden Internet cafe.

Rather better hotel for dinner.

Wait at the station for the overnight train to Delhi.

Sunday 20th February

Breakfast at the usual, walk to hotel for morning check in.

Morning walking in Delhi.

Afternoon rest and sleep.

Monday 21st February

Leisurely breakfast and walk to New Delhi for metro to airport.