

## OUR TRIP TO INDIA



Amyriad of colors, intensity, contrasts, beauty, majesty, diversity, intent gazes, generosity, exotic flavors, aromas, spices, a wide spectrum of religions and deities, its age-old history, cultural wealth, family values, respect and reverence for the elderly. This is the image that remains with me after my visit to India.

31 years ago Mari Carmen and I visited this extraordinary country, and the experienced had such a profound effect on us that we promised to return with our children. On our 50th wedding anniversary, our dream came true, which besides, included our grandchildren. Years before, Jordi had embarked on the adventure of living in Calcutta for a short time, visiting part of the territory by train. And on another occasion, Cari and Nico also had the opportunity to discover India on their own. Fortunately, this time almost everyone came along: 19 people from three generations.

Prior to our trip, Jordi suggested we read *Vislumbres de la India*, (In Light of India) by Octavio Paz. It is an absolutely brilliant book which thoroughly captivated while reading it and undoubtedly prepared me for our immersion into this culture.



During our journey, we had the opportunity to visit Mumbai, Aurangabad, Delhi, Amritsar, Agra, Jaipur and Jodhpur. The hotels in all these places where we stayed are magnificent architectural wonders. Here are some of my impressions:

Mumbai and Delhi, with populations between 20 and 30 million each, are megacities filled with life, light, noise, hustle and bustle. While Mumbai is located on the coast and has a tropical climate, Delhi, the capital, tends to be milder during this time of the year. Besides their ancient monuments and buildings dating from the British colonial period, both cities are equipped with state-of-the-art airports and infrastructure projects.



In the vicinity of Aurangabad, we visited the rock-cut caves of Ajanta and Ellora, carved within the mountains themselves. The former are Buddhist monuments dating from the first century B.C., while the latter are Hindu carvings created during the eighth century of our era.

At the recommendation of Harinder Kohli, a close friend of many years (born and raised in India), we visited Amritsar's Golden Temple, the spiritual center of the Sikh religion. It was this site that became our family's favorite. We were deeply moved that the Sikhs provided free food to the thousands of people who visit this temple every single day!



In Agra, we were enchanted by the view of the sun rising over the spectacular Taj Mahal, commissioned during the 17th century by the Mughal Muslim Emperor Shah Jahan as a posthumous tribute to his wife.

We then headed for Jaipur, the "Pink City" that harbors the "Palace of Winds" and subsequently went to Jodhpur, the "Blue City" the predominant color in this city's buildings, including its many temples and palaces.

This ancestral India coexists with the India that is now a ground-breaking leader in many aspects of the fourth industrial revolution. Over the past thirty years, the country's population rose from 800 million to 1,330 million inhabitants, ranking it as the second most populated nation after China, with 1,380 million.

According to the World Bank, in 2018, India's economic growth is projected at 7.2 percent, in comparison with 3.1 percent of the global economic growth. This country has a huge potential and undoubtedly is advancing at an accelerated rate. For example, whereas in 1960, life expectancy was estimated at 41, it is now approximately around age 70. However, we must point out that India also faces complex challenges as poverty, inequality, social division and insecurity among others.

However, aside from these particular circumstances, the country and the people who hosted us for 19 days will forever remain in our memory. We will always be grateful to Jeetu, our guide; to Julio Jiménez and Marco Espinoza, two talented young Mexicans who hold high-ranking positions, along with Adil and Taab Hassan, successful entrepreneurs in the bakery business; to intellectuals Montek and Isher Ahluwalia, a former government minister, both friends of Harinder (and now ours as well) who, along with Sarita his sister, so warmly welcomed us.

At the end of our tour, I asked each one of my travel companions what they had enjoyed the most. Although I obtained all kinds of answers, the common denominator turned out to be the warm, close-knit family life within the framework of all that is India.



Carlota, one of my granddaughters, observed that she was most gratified to encounter happy people. Rick Ray, who has filmed documentaries on many countries, including India, reached the same conclusion as Carlota. Rick discussed this incongruity with a spiritual leader, who replied that it is neither wealth nor poverty that makes the difference, but feeling dissatisfied with what one has and focusing on what one lacks.

I conclude with the India's traditional greeting: **Namaste, "the divine in me acknowledges the divine in you."**