

Well tour: er's India notebook

Smith

I had a lamb-burger. It was the best fast food I've ever eaten and it was only 60 rupees. (About \$1.50)

January 12, 1998

Ashraya International, Bangalore
I've escaped!

I'm not longer in India! Or, at least, that's how it seems. Tonight, Chuck, Jon and I decided to flee India and spend a night...umm...researching westernization?

We started with a quick trip to the Cybercafe, where I checked my SAPC e-mail account and e-mailed some friends at home. Then, we went to Wimpy's again, and then to a bar. It was sort of an American evening. The e-mail and the fast food went fine, but the bar had live singers who sang in the high voices Indian music is famous for.

I've learned a lot about the sort of hold culture has on one. When I saw CNN American Edition this afternoon, I almost cried. I really like India, but somehow

hearing about the snowstorms at home was interesting.

January 16, 1998

Hotel Ritz, Mysore

Went to a movie called *Dil tu pagal hai*. (Hindi for "love is stupid"). It was three hours long and included a lot of dancing. The movie was almost entirely in Hindi, although it wasn't that hard to follow as the plot made the average American movie look like James Joyce. It was approximately on the level of "George of the Jungle," which was the movie on the plane to Amsterdam.

Still it was entertaining for a while, although I really had to fight to keep myself from walking out the last half hour.

January 18, 1998

Chandra Towers, Madras

A cool surprise awaited Kristi Reifenrath and me when we got to our hotel. We'd been given the "Queen Elizabeth suite," one of the four nicest rooms in the hotel. We had a little living room and a really nice refrigerator. We invited the group to come and hang out for a while. We ordered room service milkshakes and talked until midnight.

January 22, 1998

Shore Temple Beach Resort, Mamallapuram

Every day, a guy marches a large herd of cows along the beach. Today I went out with my camera and took a bunch of pictures of them. The cows were still decorated from Pongel, a holiday when Hindus paint the cows to thank them.

January 26, 1998

West End Hotel, Bombay

I've been sick to my stomach three mornings in a row. Jon and Neil are making jokes about the immaculate conception. I haven't been sick in India that much and I've eaten in some restaurants with conditions that I wouldn't stand

for at home. A few people have gotten really sick, but it hasn't been as bad as I expected at all.

When I have gotten sick, I've noticed that the biggest symptom is homesickness. Somehow, being sick makes me long for home.

Even now, I don't miss hot water, consistent electricity or hamburgers. I miss my family and my friends. It's kind of ironic that one must have to travel internationally to learn what makes a homeland.

January 28, 1998

West End Hotel, Bombay

My last night in India. Neal had named our group "My rickshaw driver told me tours," a joke on our trusting nature. A bunch of people, led by Eriko Fujisaka, had gone out and bought a rickshaw horn and had it engraved for Neal. He loved it.

Neal took us for a walk out to the beach and we watched the sun set over the Arabian sea. I took almost a whole roll of film. I guess I just wanted one more chance to see India, to grab the experience and take it home with me.

January 29, 1998

Somewhere over the Atlantic

We had an eight-hour layover in Amsterdam. I went to a coffee shop with Larisa Blair and Andi. Then Andi and I went to Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum. I nearly jumped out of my skin a few times. Something about the wax statues really creped me out. Still, I got a lot of neat pictures on my last roll of film. The very last picture I will take on this trip was of a glass case full of wax body parts in the Madame Toussad's gift shop.

January 31, 1998

McLean, Virginia

Coming back to America has been a shock. It seems very clean and quiet, but somehow, I miss India's noise just a bit. My high school was having a one-act



festival and a friend of mine directed one of the plays, so I went to see it. After the show, I went backstage to give her some flowers and I saw all the actors running around, many of them hugging each other and crying. Everything was so important to them.

It was then that the India trip snapped into focus. Two years ago, I'd been one of those hugging, crying actors. Now, that all seemed so far away. I felt so mellow. In some ways, I guess that's what the India trip is all about.

India really has mellowed me out and calmed me down. I've had a lot of people comment on it, particularly since I'm not usually a mellow person at all.

I guess after you've walked down the street and had to step around piles of cow dung, been assaulted by 20 children begging for chocolate and pens, and gone for weeks without hot water, the little dramas of life don't seem that serious anymore.

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