

India

We initially had mixed thoughts about focusing a trip report on only one country but our visit to India really challenged us in terms of reviewing such a large country. India is the second most populous country in the world at approximately 1.34 billion people. China is slightly larger at 1.41 billion but the rate of population change favors India at approximately +1.1% annual growth compared to +.39%. The land mass of China, however, is three times the size of India and can better absorb the huge population. In fact, China and the United States are nearly equal in size if one counts in Hawaii and Alaska. The United States population is just under 327 million. China and India combined equal approximately 37% of the world's population. We give you these numbers to try and get a grip on what it is like to actually live in one of these countries. Our view of China was limited to Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Haikou which are immense, vibrant cities -- and one recreation area -- but more represent the "good face" of China than an in-depth look at the "real" China. India seems a country of extremes: second highest concentration of computer and information technology companies while 340 million citizens are illiterate, a population that venerates beauty in woman but not the overall role of women (more female abortions, infanticides, and "accidents") leading to a ratio of notably more men than women in the country, one million people living in a Mumbai slum in a city that has 26 billionaires, and where the top one percent of wage earners own 58 percent of the country and finally, where a caste system that dates back thousands of years has been outlawed but is in evidence everywhere. Again, we realize that we only saw four coastal cities in the country and have no view into the interior states or the northern portion of India which has its own unique challenges and neighbors.

General

Crossing from Southeast Asia to the Bay of Bengal and then around the Indian Ocean to the Arabian Sea has been a breeze ... literally. The seas have been calm and while we have seen little ocean traffic for long stretches, the closer we came to ports the more ships seemed to just appear. The ports we visited have been major trading centers for centuries for the Dutch, Portuguese, English, French, and Chinese and their influence is evident in every city. The weather has been very hot and routinely is in the 90s with high humidity. Lorraine and I have become "waterholics" which has helped a lot as a number of the excursions have lasted 6-8 hours.

Food remains outstanding and even more reflective of the countries we visit as new head chefs have come onboard and we had a special India Night with many, many local dishes. The curries are terrific but one needs to ask about how spicy they are before filling a plate. Fortunately, the gelato is outstanding as ever and the best way to cool off. At least that is what we tell ourselves. The entertainment has picked back up with a number of people coming onboard from the UK and the US. Comedian Jeff Stevenson, magician Jamie Allen and vocalist Paul Emmanuel all performed a second show together (we described them in the last trip report.) Among our new performers was Steve Stevens, a comedian and vocalist who is a regular on BBC radio. He played the ukulele, the trumpet and sang which sounds like a strange combination but worked for him and for us. Steve was followed by the group Virtuosos, a pianist and a clarinet player with advanced degrees from the Royal College of Music, London. The clarinet player was James Meldrum from the UK and the pianist was Maciej Kassak, originally from Poland. These are two serious musicians who played selections from George Gershwin

to include our favorite, Rhapsody in Blue. A very nice evening performance. Next up was a vocalist and comedian named Mike Doyle. Described by our Cruise Director as “peculiar,” he started off slowly with a song and then shifted into hilarious riffs on the various nationalities that he has run into on ships. He did a great imitation of US southern drawl followed by mocking the New Zealand national rugby team, The All Blacks, by doing their famous war chant executed before each rugby match. This was followed by making fun of the Aussies onboard by imitating a didgeridoo instrument (described in other trip reports) just using the microphone. Mike has a rubber face and his expressions were hysterical. Reminded us strongly of the late, great comedian Jonathon Winters. Mike IS peculiar but we loved him. Our next performer was a great singer, Lorraine Brown, who flew in from New York City. She has had a career on stage, TV, and international cabaret. She featured songs by Diana Ross and Anne Murray. She was great! The last performance before leaving India was by the Chawan Classical Music Orchestra. This was traditional entertainment from India with excellent, brightly costumed men and women doing folk dances to classical music.

Our guest lectures also rotated and we now have Alex Fowler, Viking Resident Artist, who is regular exhibitor at the Royal Society of Portrait Painters in London. Lorraine has taken four group art classes with Alex, three for watercolors and one for line drawing. We also have Terrence Greenberg who had a 29-year career with the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and is an Asia specialist. Next is Michael Stone, an archaeologist and museum curator. We also have John F. Kelly, PhD, a Fulbright scholar who holds a doctorate in political science, is an attorney and served in the Michigan State Senate. He gave a great presentation on Indian culture and society. We have Marcus Sherwood, a teacher and lecturer on classical history and the influence of ancient civilizations on modern culture. Our last guest lecturer is Carin Bondar, PhD, a biologist and TED presenter, she earned her doctorate from the University of British Columbia. She is a naturalist, explorer and the host of numerous National Geographic specials and hosts her own TV show in British Columbia. She gave a fascinating lecture on the relationship of certain species of dolphins and birds and local indigenous tribes.

Excursions

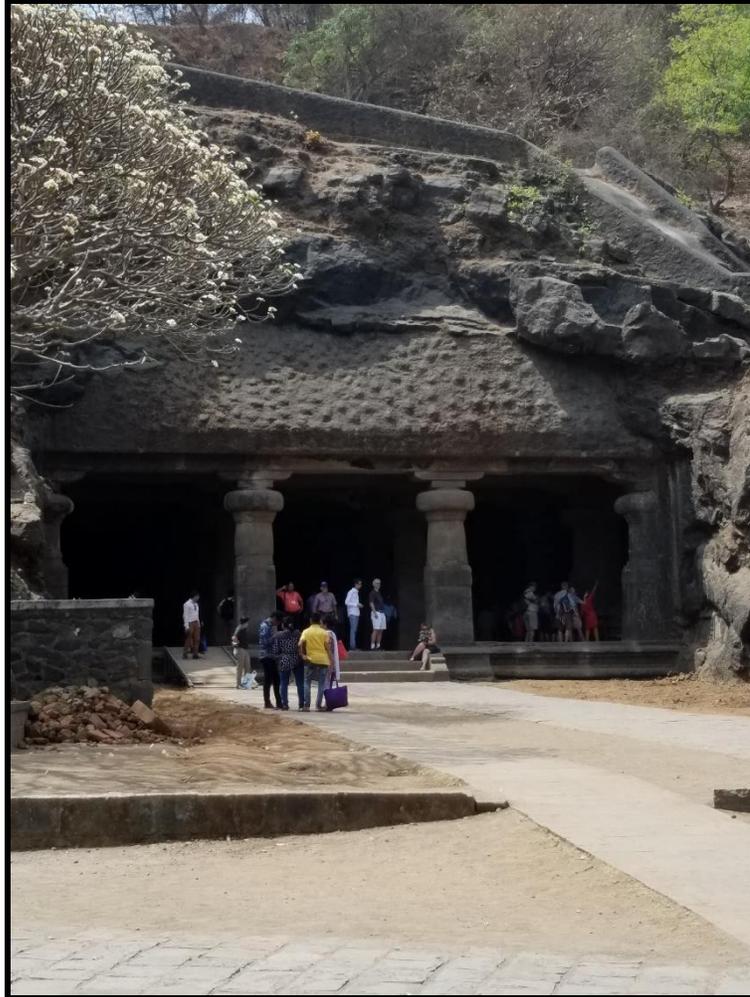
- 1. Chennai (Tamil Nadu).** Our first stop in India was the capital city of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Chennai (formerly known as Madras) was the former bastion of the British East India Company and houses the State Legislature, Secretariat, and High Court. It is home to Marina, the second longest beach in the world (filled with carts used as mobile stores). Interestingly, the skyline is almost skyscraper free with the tallest buildings 10 stories or less. The population of the city proper is 4.9 million while the immediate suburbs contribute another 4.1 million. Our excursion was the Mylapore Heritage Walk and Parakum Rail. Mylapore is a town south of the city proper which roughly translates to “peacock town.” We literally walked the town’s streets and alleys visiting several Hindu temples, a local home, and had lunch at a vegetarian restaurant. As this was a Sunday we were assured that we were walking through less crowded areas which nonetheless were packed with motorcycles (many more than motor scooters), three-wheeled “taxis,” and foot traffic. Markets were open selling mostly fruit and vegetables or dried spices which is consistent with the Hindu-majority population that eats little meat. Extremes in the “haves” and “have nots” were in evidence everywhere. People were simply dressed or conspicuously over dressed and there were many street peddlers following our tour group. Anyone decently dressed had a cell phone. Whatever positives we saw were

overwhelmed by the negative of major sanitation issues. Trash and plastic bottles were everywhere and there seemed to be no municipal efforts to address the problem. The house we toured was over 100 years old and had many small rooms and one tiny kitchen. Four families shared the home which is set aside for workers serving the local Hindu temple. We did spot three satellite TV lines coming into the house. Lunch was fine but highly spiced and even the locals were drinking bottled water. After lunch, we walked to an elevated train station for our 20-minute ride back to the bus and the ship. The escalator up to the train was “not working today” which translated to us as “not in the last 10 years.” We waited 30 minutes for an express train that was supposed to run every 10 minutes. We had First Class tickets. Now, if you have ever seen the award-winning, Australian movie about India called “Lion,” you have fixed in your mind the Indian train system. It is an accurate depiction. The first class car had wooden benches with torn cushions and the walls were sheathed in thin metal. There was a separate car labelled “Women only” which was explained to us as affording Hindu women modesty and helping prevent harassment and assault apparently common in the regular cars. The price of a First Class ticket was the equivalent to 75 cents US while the regular coach fare was 7.5 cents. The average per capita income in India as of 2017 is \$1,610 per year. Note: while waiting for the train, we looked out of the train station to find tons of garbage stacked behind stone walls lining the train tracks. We will point out that every time we saw children they smiled, laughed and waved to us and wanted us to take their picture. Everyone on our tour was quiet on the way back to the ship.

- 2. Cochin (Kerala).** Known as the “Queen of the Arabian Sea,” this city of 600,000 is also known as Kochi and has been an important port for over 1,000 years. Lying within the state of Kerala, the city has exported spices for hundreds of years and still is the world’s leading producer of pepper. The climate of Cochin, like Chennai, is tropical and everywhere one could see trees full of bananas, coconuts, jack fruit, and mangos, and papaya. Ideal temperatures and rainfall allow the planting of three rice crops annually and fishing and fish farming are strong segments of the economy. Rather than visit more temples and the city proper, we took a long excursion called Local Life on Kerala’s Backwaters. Driving south, we saw numerous shops (all with open fronts and pull down, garage doors when closed.) Again, many more motorcycles than scooters and many, many tourist buses. There are resorts south in Kerala that take advantage of the five lakes and numerous canals that run through the local community. Elaborate houseboats were everywhere but we were told they are all booked by tourists and that all locals live in modest houses by the canals and larger bodies of water. The water is brackish which means a combination of salt water and fresh water. Women were washing clothes, young men were fishing, and children were swimming in all of the waterways. Our trip on the water was close to two hours and provided a good respite from the heat and humidity. We stopped by boat at Lake Palace Resort, a 5-star resort, for lunch which was, naturally, various vegetable and fish curries. There was a beef curry but it was marked HOT so we did not risk it. After a shorter boat ride, we returned to the bus and the 1.5 hour trip back to the ship. We felt a bit better about India after the excursion because the local community had obviously adapted over generations to their simple way of life and, once again, families waved and smiled and the pace of life seemed more in balance. A good excursion. Note: Potable water is only available in this part of Kerala two or three times a week.

3. **Mormugao (Goa).** Mormugao is actually the town and main port for the state of Goa. The state of Goa was the cultural center of the Portuguese colony in India for over 450 years and its influence is everywhere, especially in the colonial architecture and several Catholic churches. Old Town, Goa is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and contains the Se Cathedral, one of the largest churches in Asia. The cathedral took over 90 years to build based on a lack of funds and a changing political climate. It is beautiful today. The Mormugao municipal region is just over 100,000 in population, while the state of Goa is about 1.7 million, very small compared to all other states in India. Our excursion was A Drive through the Goa Region which focused on Old Town Goa with its churches and Portuguese buildings. There were several parks and numerous well-kept homes that gave one the feeling of visiting an older European city. Small shops still were open air but, frankly, the sanitation was much better with cleaner streets and more municipal trash receptacles. New housing construction was in evidence capitalizing on a cluster concept rather than building after building. Of course, there was traffic and lots of people selling goods but the feel was better than in previous cities. Interestingly, taxi service was mostly by motorcycle which only takes one passenger but is a quick way to get around the crowded streets. As noted by our guide, no helmet law and the existence of local gambling houses and locally produced alcohol has caused a surge in DUI accidents. There was a separate excursion taken by other passengers which was a boat cruise up the Cumbharjua Canal whose backwaters contain the largest concentration of crocodiles in Goa. No one reported seeing women washing clothes, young men fishing, or children swimming in these waters. Another excursion was to a luxury beachfront resort for swimming and enjoying cool drinks under swaying coconut palm trees. Hopefully, this gives you all a feel for how complex life is in this region and in the whole of India and we have not even talked about religions or impact of the caste system.

4. **Mumbai (Maharashtra).** Spread over seven islands, the city was renamed from Bombay in 1995 as part of an effort by a right-wing Hindu nationalist party to move away from what was described as an unwanted legacy of British colonial rule. With a metro population of over 22 million, Mumbai is the fourth largest city in the world. Over 41% of the people live in slums, yet the city itself is remarkably clean in terms of trash pickup and overall sanitation. Municipal workers are heavily focused on keeping the city clean. Housing is generally vertical with a very large commuting population. Unique to the city is a food delivery service (dabbawalas) that brings in hot meals for lunch (prepared at home) to over 200,000 customers and then picks up the food containers for the next day. Over 5,000 workers are employed in this capacity. The system has been studied by the Harvard Business School and FedEx. As we were visiting on a Saturday most traffic was tourists (from abroad and local in India) visiting popular religious and cultural sites. Our first excursion of the day was called Elephanta Caves. We took a bus to the harbor ferry area and took a one-hour boat ride to Elephanta Island. On the island is located a Hindu shrine dedicated to the god, Shiva, the Destroyer, and one of the three primary Hindu gods along with Brahma and Vishnu.



The shrine is huge. It is carved out of basalt rock and contains several large rooms (25' ceilings and 130' square) that contain nine panels depicting various forms of Shiva. They look like bas relief until you remember that chambers themselves were carved out of solid rock.



Our guide was excellent and gave us commentary on the background of Shiva and why the “destroyer” title is not a negative as Shiva focuses on evil. Death to a Hindu is a positive in that one hopes to be reborn into a better life. We were also delighted to see a very large monkey population outside of the temple and Lorraine has some excellent pictures of monkey families with newborns. Note: the walk to the temple included walking down a long pier and then climbing over 120 steep stone steps.

It was 90 degrees and very humid and even with our exercise program, we stopped once to catch our breath. Another passenger in a different group suffered heat exhaustion on the climb and had to be helped down the temple steps. I passed on our second excursion to have lunch but Lorraine must have had an energy reserve and she went on a tour called Mumbai at a Glance. This tour travelled along the city’s Marine Drive with its art deco architecture, visited the Hanging Gardens and Kamala Nehru Park, and stopped at Mani Bhavan, the Mumbai home of Mahatma Gandhi. Lorraine stood on the balcony where Gandhi gave many of his most famous speeches. The tour continued by driving by Victoria Terminus railway station and Mumbai University. A final photo stop was at the Gateway to India built to commemorate the visit of the King George V and Queen Mary in 1911.

Trying to describe India in a trip report is a fool’s errand. Eighty percent of the population is Hindu and 13% is Muslim. India has 22 official languages with an additional 150 languages represented in significant population numbers. Hundreds more dialects exist as do a larger number of cultural identities. English and Hindi are the two most widely spoken languages and are taught in all schools. While the caste system was made illegal in the Indian Constitution in 1950, the reality is that the system still functions, particularly in rural India which makes up 67% of the population. While there are four main castes, these further divide into 3,000 castes which in turn become 25,000 sub-castes based upon occupation. Castes impact job eligibility, marriage, and most facets of life. While in India, there were several riots and eight deaths over an issue of government enforcement of laws against discrimination of the group below the lowest caste, the Dalits (formerly the untouchables). There was also a riot over a decision on water rights on the Cauvery River in Chennai. We were aware of both of these issues because we had enrolled in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) sponsored by the US State Department. We receive e-mails through this program and the embassy and consulates in each country we visit know where we are and how to contact us and family.

We did find the people of India welcoming and children were especially open to us. There are cars and motorcycles all over the place and everyone seems to be selling something. Vendors were persistent but in some cases, aggressive so one had to be firm when saying, “No thank you.” Food is good but spicy and the weather during our visit was hot. Locals say they have three seasons, “Hot, Hotter and Hottest.” We think we were fortunate not to be here in the wet (monsoon) season. Lastly, we did talk to fellow passengers who took the side excursions to the Taj Mahal and they all liked the trip but complained about the smog, poor sanitation, and large crowds (hence the new limits on how long one can visit the Taj Mahal during a day.) They also noted large fields of wheat ... all being cut by hand!

We are headed across the Arabian Sea to Muscat, Oman and then over the Red Sea to Aqaba, Jordan. Looking forward to sights in the Middle East. We are in the last quarter of the trip but certainly not counting the days.