



India had been calling me for some time. I'd had a number of invitations, been exposed to stories, films, events and people, all creating a compelling and vibrant picture, so that eventually the voice became too loud to ignore. Nudged by an invitation from Dadi Janki, leader of Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, (see ReSource Edition 14) to attend a Peace of Mind Retreat, I happily succumbed, and set off on an inspiring, magical three week tour of India in October 2008.

soothing, stimulating, confusing – and always fully engaging the senses. Throughout the trip, we met nothing but kindness and warmth – it's true that the people of India are generous and eager to help. The different sense of time can lead to Westerners who haven't yet adapted experiencing frustration, but once you understand that difference, life takes on a different hue and you can allow it to flow. And talking of flow, contrast that sense of calm with the traffic – the chaotic, crazy roads where there is really only one rule – whoever is

seen a 4x4 loaded with 20 or more people, with two or three hanging off the back with the door flapping open, doing 50 miles an hour along a dusty, bumpy carriageway, or a scooter carrying a family of five in all their finery to a wedding – then you haven't experienced what India's roads are really about.

I moved through many and varied environments, and never failed to be surprised and delighted by the contrasts. They say **'a picture is worth a thousand words'**; so I want to show you, through images we captured, a selection of the places we visited.

Another saying I recently heard is that **'a metaphor is worth a thousand pictures'**, and the words in the panel, are my expression of the way India can penetrate your being in an inimitable way. I really did feel as if I had been dipped in her liquid warmth and left with a permanent new layer of life's richest offerings, a sense that stays with me still.

## A Passage Through India

I've travelled through Asia before – visiting Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, China – but the closest anywhere ever came to the way India literally grabbed me is Hong Kong, with that abundant life force and energy – and even that doesn't quite compare to India's exhilarating yet demanding presence. She is a harsh mistress in some ways – you need to be mentally strong, physically fit, and flexible to really appreciate the variety, and it's as if India has prior knowledge of your inner weaknesses, your soft spots, which she brings up for your attention.

My experiences of India were as varied as the sub-continent herself, ranging through peaceful, exciting, terrifying, enlightening, challenging,

biggest, wins – and an underlying text of 'whatever you do, don't run into a cow' - or a buffalo, or a camel, or a monkey - or one of the innumerable dogs apparently playing dead. Animals, people, and goods abound on the roads and roadsides, and sometimes stop the traffic completely. And until you have



Mount Abu, Nakki Lake





## Intoxicating India

India is a country of such diversity and contrast, where richness and scarcity sit side by side in astonishing juxtaposition.

To me, she is like an artist of vivacious style and vibrancy who dips her enormous silken paintbrush into a delicious palette, infinite in its variety of colours, scents, sounds, and sights, thereby stunning and suffusing the senses.

With her broad paintbrush fully loaded, she pauses, then playfully flicks those charged bristles towards me, random yet highly targeted. Scoring a direct hit, covering me with atomised droplets of such fine, permeating quality that they penetrate my skin and I absorb them as the unique and irresistible essence of my Indian experience.

Imagine an artist of such skill that your whole being is entranced by her work, your pores hungrily drinking in the intoxicating liquor as you open up to the contrasts, the delights, the shocks – the sheer magnitude of this land of lustrous light.



Goan Beach, Fort Aquada



Hawa Mahal, The *Palace of Winds*

Gyan Sarovar, Mount Abu

## MOUNT ABU, RAJASTHAN

The serenely beautiful setting of Gyan Sarovar, Mount Abu, Rajasthan, home of the World Spiritual University, where I experienced a seven day 'Peace of Mind' retreat, along with around 300 other guests from all around the world.

It was in some ways a surprise to me – my idea of a retreat was of a very relaxing, meditative experience – the methodology of Raja Yoga, though, teaches one to live one's whole life as a meditation, and so we were whisked off on trips and cultural excursions, mountain hikes and even shopping trips.

We were impressed by the superb free hospital facilities provided by the Brahma Kumaris, and the extensive outreach work done in this poor, desert state; their generosity makes a big difference to many lives.

There was literally never a dull moment, and to some of us, the 3.30 am call to the 4.00 am meditation took a lot of getting used to! The periods of silence were very welcome, and we were wrapped in a blanket of such love and generosity, it was a truly magical and life-changing episode.

Mount Abu; you can see what an idyllic spot this is; it reminded me of a little Geneva in India! The building on the right is a delightful heritage Hotel called Jaipur House (see picture page 29), where we indulged in an excellent afternoon tea with splendid views from the elevated terrace. The unusual rock formation is called Toad Rock.

## GOA

A week at Fort Aguada in lushly tropical Goa, where I met up with my partner Alan Johnson, offered a taste of paradise – the monsoon had just ended, and there were few tourists. Finding large, delicious veggie Samosas from the nearest takeaway made it almost home from home – except these cost a tiny 6 rupees - just 5 pence!

We were surrounded by butterflies and dragonflies – with a Black Cobra putting in a brief appearance, just to stir things up, much to the consternation of the gardeners, who spent the afternoon flushing it out and removing it to a safer place. (For it, or us, we weren't quite sure!) It was HOT – the hottest October day for over 30 years, a sweltering 38°C and very humid.





Jal Mahal Sunken Palace, Jaipur



Pink City, Jaipur street scene



Gaitore: A Cenotaph dedicated to a Maharaja of Jaipur

## JAIPUR, RAJASTHAN

Jaipur was the first planned city of India, and the broad, straight streets of the centre reflect this. The history of Jaipur dates back to 1727, during the reign of Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II. The city was designed strictly according to 'Shilpa Shastra', the ancient treatise on architecture. In 1853, when Prince

of Wales visited Jaipur, the whole city was painted pink to welcome him - hence the name Pink City.

We travelled round Jaipur in a rickshaw, an exciting, if somewhat hair raising, experience, it gave us a really good feel for the sights, sounds and smells of the street life and access to places we might otherwise not have discovered.



Calangute, Goa street scene

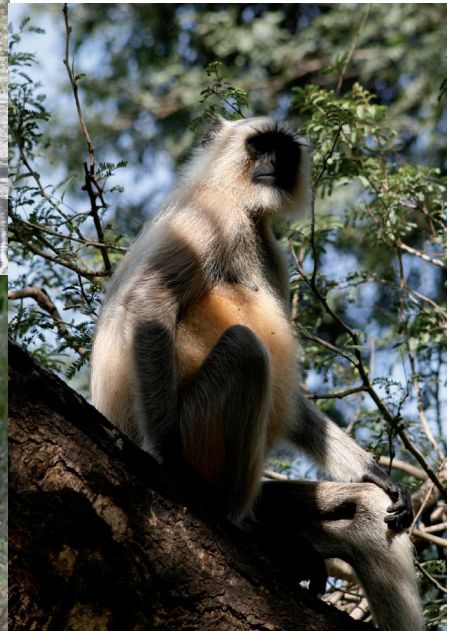


Jaipur street scene





It seems we arrived at just the right time, and that we even had good ‘karma’, according to the locals, as we were able to see several tigers in the course of our three day safari. The excitement of being so close to these amazing creatures was almost indescribable, a real privilege – in fact, quite an emotional experience for all concerned, and something I would recommend wholeheartedly if you have the chance to visit. As the photographs illustrate, there are not only tigers in the reserve, but a wide range of game in a truly stunning setting.



Would I return to India – the answer is a resounding ‘Yes’ – we’ve only scratched the surface, and once this amazing place is in your blood, her siren call is insistent and irresistible. We can’t wait for the next time!

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## RANTHAMBORE

Once we knew we were going to India, we started to look for the most enriching experiences there – and something that really stood out as a must-do, must-see was to go on a tiger safari. These big cats seen in their natural environment held great fascination, and we found ourselves heading for Ranthambore National Park in Rajasthan, a protected area, one of the few places in India where

tigers are still regularly seen, even in the daytime, and are breeding. Formerly a hunting preserve for the Maharaja of Jaipur, Ranthambore covers an area of 392 sq. km. and is nestled between the **Aravali** and **Vindhya** mountain ranges. This deciduous forest was once a part of the magnificent jungles of Central India. The rugged terrain, hills and open valleys with lakes and pools makes it a really romantic and picturesque place to be.

Our time in Ranthambore was arranged by Isango! They specialise in exciting and colourful ‘experiences’ which they offer to both consumers and travel professionals. The Isango! team has built the largest collection of enriching experiences around the world, and provides easy access to what were once hard-to-book products.

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