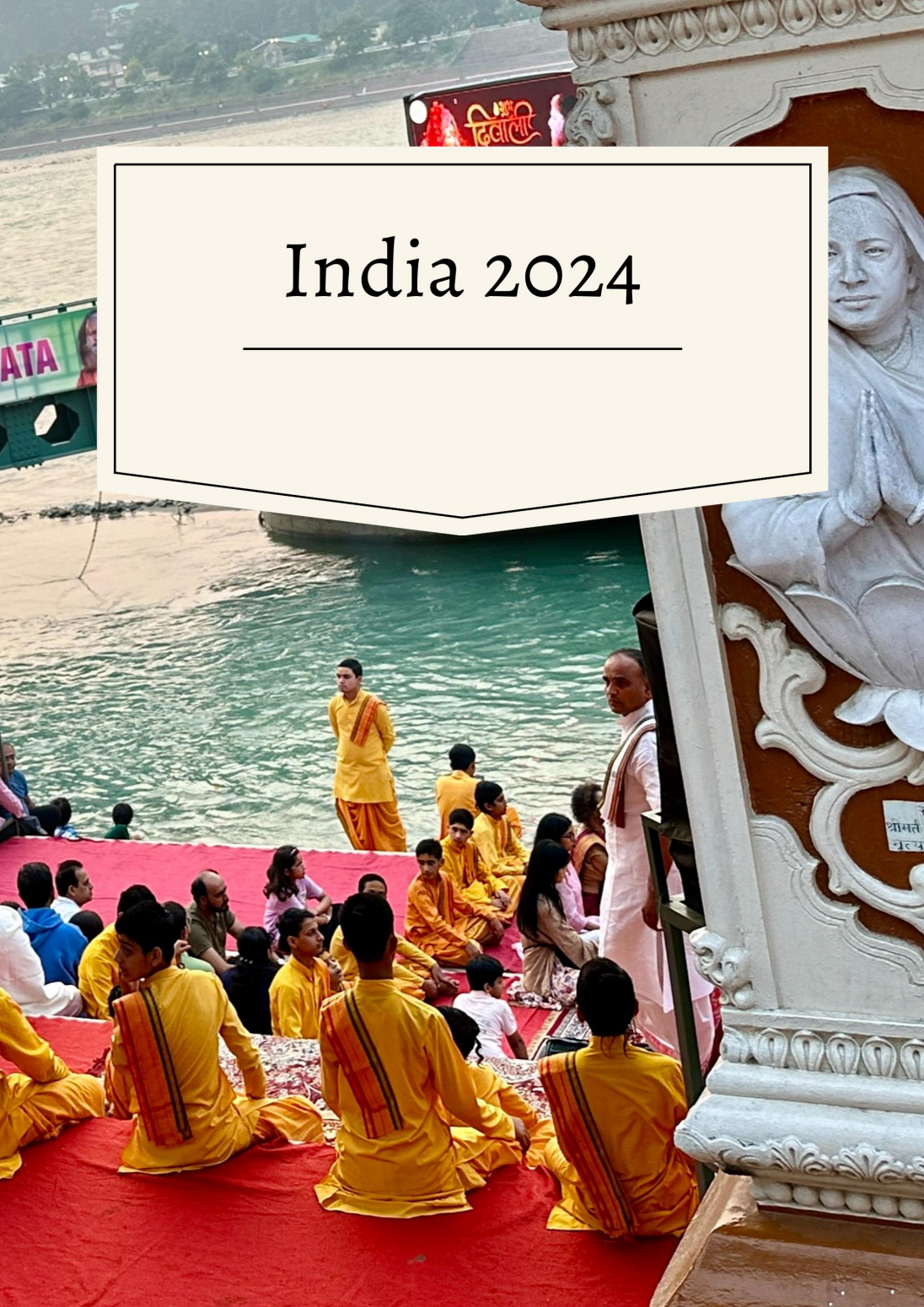


India 2024



And away

25-10-2024

Again I am massively honoured to be taking a trip of fellow Yogis to India for an exciting adventure, I am blessed! After a busy morning getting organised we were only just ready when Linda arrived promptly at 9.05. We all had a quick chat, Dean explained that it was his first time to India and he was nervous about being the token man! We waved Linda's hubby Anthony off, quickly followed by the arrival of Jackie's Luxury Minibus driver, Nigel :) He'd already picked up Alison and Lucy, and as he loaded our cases into the minibus we all marvelled at Lucy's really massive floral case which was packed to the brim!!



Only minutes away now from picking up Debs & Debbie at Xscape, who already knew our sad news that Marie had had to cancel last minute due to health problem that needed emergency treatment. We were all gutted, but the most disappointed person of all was most certainly Marie xxx

As our holiday went on we kept up to date with Marie as she slowly began to improve. She was with us in spirit and in our WhatsApp group where we shared loads of pics real time. Then in true Bob, Paul and Ted style we were off...And Away!

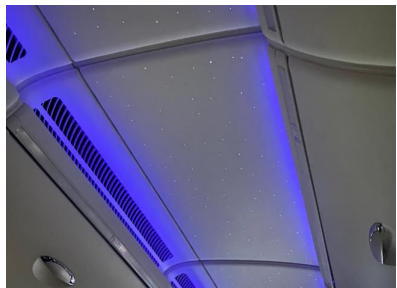
When we got to the airport and checked in we all compared our luggage, but Lucy hit the jackpot with her monster case weighing in at 27kg. We were all excited we had lots of room for purchases with our 30kg allowance!



Airports & Flights

26-10-2024

Arriving at Manchester we were joined by Susan, Sue, Amanda & Sam bringing us to our full compliment of 11, missing Marie :(It didn't take long to all get checked in and find a place to 'perch'. Our base to eat, drink (G&T mostly) and shop. The time whizzed by & we were soon on the Emirates Airbus with its swish entertainment. There was a little kerfuffle around the food, not sure what happened, maybe short staffed or sudden sick leave? If you were veggie you got fed very fast, if you weren't then you had a wait. It took us a while to realise if you wanted to order drinks then the call button on your handset was best!! The exterior cameras were both scary and compelling at the same time! On the other side of the coin, the twinkly star lighting in the interior was calming and charming. Ahhh.... a little sleep. We changed at Dubai and as we had Emirates flights all the way through we didn't have to bother with the cases - yippee! A couple of drinks, a little wash, a mooch about the shops and it was time to get on our Dubai to Delhi flight. On this much shorter flight it seemed like we immediately got our breakfast, great service and great food, soon it was time to land.



Delhi Arrival

26-10-2024

Landing in Delhi was trouble free, we went through the new biometric check in, with facial recognition and automated fingerprint collection, just like the. sci-fi films! Then over to passport control, where the scrutiny starts to worry you! But “it’s all ok in the end, and if it’s not ok, then it’s not the end” - Best Exotic Marigold Hotel

When we get to baggage reclaim all our bags are waiting, slowly all get together and the grab a little currency and go to look for our NNNS contact.

Akaash is our guy, he has a super bright white smile and takes us straight to the Costa Coffee to wait for the minibus to get a bit closer. Then we’re off to the Meridian Plaza Hotel. In the bus he tells us that there are only three rules for owning a car in Delhi - “good horn, good brakes and good luck!”

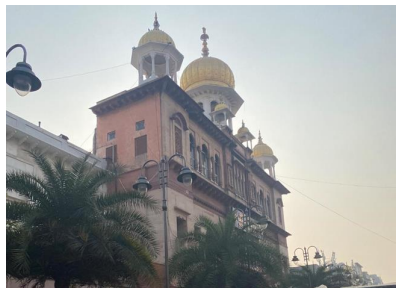


Dizzy Delhi Sightseeing

26-10-2024

A quick spruce up and we are out with our Delhi guide Dharminster Singh. Or Singh as he likes to be called :) We set off across the city, eventually circling the Red Fort and then go to pick up 6 rickshaws for a spin (quite literally) through Chandni-Chowk, the Old Town big market area in Delhi. It's an exciting ride and the drivers manoeuvres are unbelievable, they are so skilled and it's a breathtaking experience! The architecture along this long street is just as spectacular, the Bangla Sahib Sikh Temple (which feeds thousands of people everyday) amongst them.

We arrive in the middle of the spice market and jump out for a jostle-y walk in the packed streets. It's almost Diwali and everyone is out shopping for the Hindu equivalent of Christmas. I don't think anyone could prepare us for our novelty value as Europeans, everywhere we went people wanted pics with us and were very excited by us! Eventually we arrive at a very famous special spice loo and tea shop, even Rick Stein has been here. We buy masala tea, saffron and spice mixes. On the way back to the rickshaws we meet the most gorgeous cow, milling about on the street.





India Gate & Lazeez Affaire

26-10-2024

We jump back in the bus (eventually) and head off for a ride round India Gate, it's starting to get dark and the illumination of this war memorial is spectacular. It's a magnificent archway standing at the crossroads of Rajpath, dedicated to the 70000 Indian soldiers who lost their lives in the First World War fighting on behalf of the allied forces. We tour around other diplomatic buildings, the President and Prime Ministers residences are also lit and the whole area was full imposing colonial era architecture, alongside more modern interpretations. Then after a short drive we arrive at Lazeez Affaire, a smart restaurant with a huge menu, we were really ready to eat!



Train Journey

27-10-2024

Early get up & we set off for Delhi Railway Station to board the train for Haridwar, taking our small hotel pack-up with us. Lots of people sleep in the railway station, which can be a bit of a shock. We have a kerfuffle ourselves this time, our guide shows us the way and it takes us five circumnavigations of the station to get nowhere. It was a bit of a nightmare to be honest, but it all worked out in the end when some diplomatic porters came to our rescue. They agreed to carry six cases and show us the way, almost immediately we boarded the train, which was old, but very comfortable, and no sooner had we set off than we were brought our multi-course train breakfast!



Hello Haridwar

27-10-2024

Quite a few people said how much they loved the Shatabdi Express journey, there was lots of time to chat which made the time fly! The railway station shenanigans was a distant memory now, with lots of local colour to see out of the train, as well as the multi-course breakfast! When we arrived we were immediately greeted at the train door by our guide Subhash Dobhal, what a gem this man turned out to be! He got us out of Haridwar station pronto and the two minibuses were just a few hundred yards from the main exit. We were festooned with marigold garlands and Subhash took as many photos as we liked on several of our phones, and his as well!

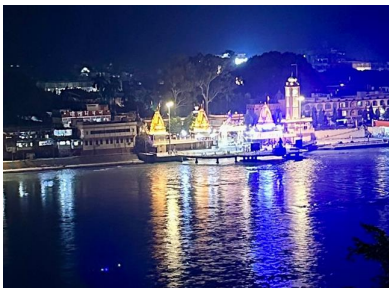
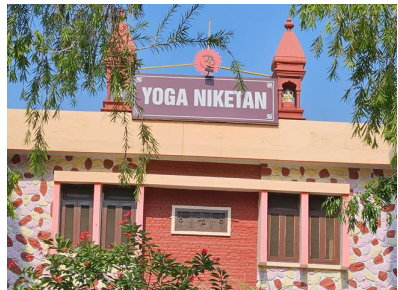
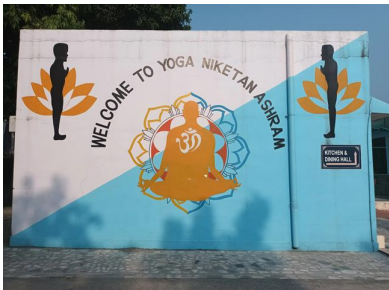




Yoga Niketan Ashram

27-10-2024

It took us about 45 minutes to arrive at the Yoga Niketan Ashram in Rishikesh. We almost immediately ended up in the dining hall for lunch, our metal trays and cups at the ready for the Ashram Dining Room Supervisor to serve us (he did tut and ring his bell whenever we got too chatty and enthusiastic too). We were allocated our rooms and had a look around at the beautiful gardens and views. We lost Sue, she took a bit of finding and when we did she was ready for a sleep rather than another adventure. Knowing she was safe (Amanda headed up the hunt) we headed down the steps to the Ram Jhula Bridge area of Rishikesh.



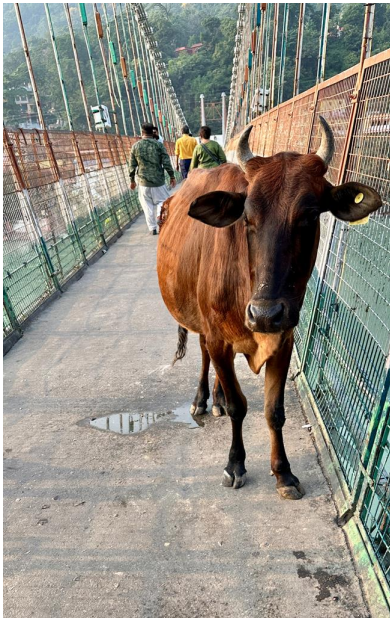


Ram Jhula Bridge

27-10-2024

At the bottom of the steps we crossed the busy road, dodging the tuk-tuks. In no time at all we were through the tuk-tuk station and onto the bustling shopping street. The first port of call was the Jewellers and Money Exchange, Debs got some currency and Susan shopped for jewellery and a pashmina amongst other things. We wandered along seeing monkeys and cows galore! Monkeys on the roofs, a cow on the bridge, a monkey eating a poppadum and almost a herd of cows as we got over the bridge past the Hare Krishna singers. Having had our senses completely assaulted we headed back in time for dinner.





Ashram Daily Schedule

28-10-2024

Morning bell was at 5am on our whole day in the Ashram. This meant getting up around 4.30am to be ready in the Meditation Hall on time. Then after the meditation with Milan there were so many of us the morning Yoga was moved to the larger main hall. The room was full for the charismatic Vimal's physical class, his fast anuloma ujjayi breathing practice was like nothing we'd ever done before. During the free time lots of us sat outside in the lovely sunshine, quietly chatting and enjoying the rest. I'm not sure that many of us slept well the night before, but most of us thoroughly enjoyed the daily ashram schedule. The evening physical practice was Kundalini style followed by another meditation, then a concentrated gazing after dinner.

Next morning we were up about 4.30am again and followed the schedule until just after breakfast. Meditation was a moving experience for some of us, and we'd settled into Vimal's distinctive flowing yoga style, really enjoying the physical session. Then we ate breakfast, checked out and Subhash got the luggage on the bus!

TO SAVE PAPER PLEASE RETURN IT BACK ON CHECKOUT TIME

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(YOGA NIKETAN ASHRAM)

0135-2430227, 2435072, info@yoganiketanashram.org

DAILY SCHEDULE

Morning Bell	05:00hrs
Morning Meditation	05:15hrs-06:15hrs
Morning Yoga	06:30hrs-08:00hrs
Breakfast (Silence Observed)	08:00hrs-09:00hrs
Library	09:00 hrs- 10:00hrs
Yoga "Body Alignment" <i>Vedanta Lecture</i>	10:00 hrs- 11:30hrs
Lunch (Silence Observed)	12:00 hrs- 12:40hrs
Digestive breathing (in Yoga Hall)	12:45 hrs- 13:15hrs
Library Hours with Wi-Fi access	13:15 hrs- 15:00hrs
Lecture, Q&A about yoga, meditation and philosophy	15:15 hrs- 16:00hrs
Evening Tea	16:00 hrs- 16:25hrs
Evening Yoga	16:30 hrs- 17:45hrs
Evening Meditation	18:15 hrs- 19:15hrs
Dinner (Silence Observed)	19:30 hrs- 20:30hrs
- BHAJAN (Holy Hymns), on Tuesday and Thursday after dinner at 0820PM.	
- TRATAKA* (Candle flame Meditation), on Monday, Wednesday & Friday after Dinner at 0820PM.	

NOTE - ALL SADHAKS MUST BE ADEQUATELY DRESSED DURING STAY.

2. ALL SADHAKS ARE REQUESTED TO BE PRESENT AT YOGAMEDITATION HALL AT LEAST 15 MINUTE BEFORE SCHEDULE TIME TO AVOID INCONVENIENCE TO OTHERS. DOORS WILL BE CLOSED AFTER 45 MINUTES OF SCHEDULE TIME.

3. SUNDAY NO CLASSES EXCEPT KARMA YOGA (CLEANING OF MEDITATION YOGA HALL AND SELF ROOM) AT 8:00-9:30HR.

4. BED SHEETS & PILLOW COVERS TO BE REPLACED AFTER EVERY THREE DAYS FROM MAIN OFFICE.

5. MOBILE PHONE IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED AT YOGADINNING HALL.

6. KINDLY KEEP QUIET IN DINING HALL, FINISH YOUR MEALS SOON AND DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME ON GOSSIPING. YOU CAN USE OTHER OUTSIDE AREA FOR THAT.

Vashistha Cave

29-10-2024

We walked up to the exit and waited for the bus (it had taken our cases to The Lemon Tree where we were staying next). We huddled under the Yoga Niketan Ashram sign for one last photo, not sure what the rest of the day might bring. Vashistha Cave was kind of lost on quite a few of us, it was busy inside the very small space and most people went in for a quick look around and came back out fairly fast. I think it's safe to say no-one found enlightenment on this occasion, unlike the sages with giant reputations who had lived in the caves hundreds of years ago. We strolled out along the banks of the Ganges, it was a beautiful sunny day, and we fancied a little dip.



Ganges Dip

29-10-2024

It was such a gorgeous day, the surrounding hills and trees, butterflies and sunshine meant it seemed natural to have a dip in the water, it was actually quite warm. Susan was straight in there with a full submerge straight away, she continued to look full of joy, which was very inviting. Sam followed Susan, with Debbie and Linda not too far behind. Then Lucy and Sue joined everyone, it was an auspicious moment as my phone declared 11.11 for more pics. I handed my phone to Alison who took more pics as I waded in and then she joined us along with Debs. Eventually we all got out and had a little potter along the bank with Amanda & Dean.





Lemon Tree Hotel

29-10-2024

We were heading back off to the bus wondering what to do with the spare hour we had before check in at The Lemon Tree Premier Hotel, then the perfect solution emerged. A trip to The Divine Coffee shop, renowned for its spectacular cakes, so we jumped on the bus and headed over there. We all decided on savoury food instead of cake and wolfed it down without taking any photos, except for one of the beautiful sand mandalas for Diwali. Similarly when we arrived at Lemon Tree we were all too excited about the beautiful rooms to take pictures and the only ones we seem to have are of food, only salad and deserts though!! Ganges air works up an appetite!

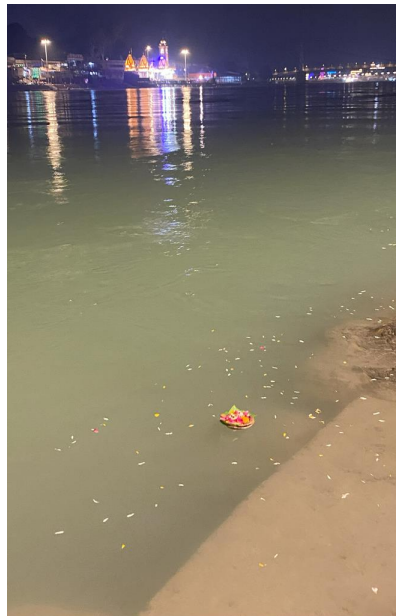




Gangaarti @ Ram Jhula

29-10-2024

What can you say about the evening fire ceremony ritual, practiced everyday, along the banks of the bountiful River Ganges? It's spectacular!! This ghat is quite small and has a really intimate celebrations every day (ghat is the word for the shallow stone steps down to the river bank). As the sun went down we had a front seat view of the fire ceremony, we all had a hand-painted bindi (a bright dot of colour at your eyebrow centre), joined in the chanting and floated out a flower festooned 'boat' each into the river. Then back to The Lemon Tree Premier Hotel in time for dinner!





Hotel Yoga Studio

30-10-2024

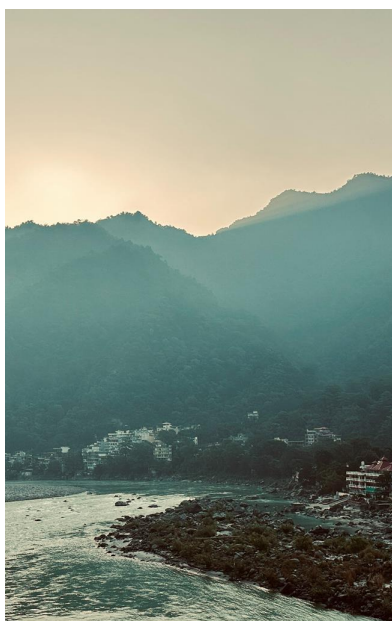
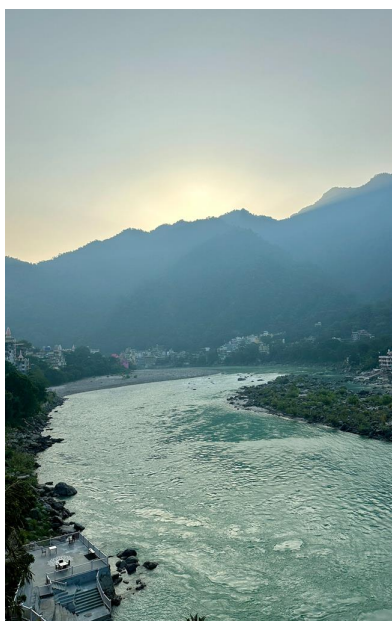
We were up early on this beautiful day and practiced Yoga with the hotel teacher followed by Yoga with Jacqui. The view of the Himalayas and the Ganges river from the studio was spectacular. We pondered upon the theme Milan, the meditation teacher at Yoga Niketan, had spoken about. "There are two ways to live your life, one is living with the notion of time, and the other is living with the notion of eternity. We are part of the fabric and the rhythm of the Universe, a movement of energy. The Universe's forces come in waves and so do those of our bodies."



WHAT IF WE ARE NOT
PHYSICAL BEINGS HAVING A
SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE?
WHAT IF INSTEAD WE ARE
SPIRITUAL BEINGS HAVING A
PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE?









Walking Tour Ram Jhula

30-10-2024

Tuk-tuks to the water taxi, then across the Ganges to explore more Ashrams, statues and the SHOPS! It was all so gripping we cancelled our 6pm Yoga and excitedly explored the area more. We got lost inside a secret shop selling the most beautiful quality jewellery, statues and singing bowls. When we eventually escaped we moved on to amazing grounds of Parmath Niketan and Swarg Ashram. Then Subhash declared a meeting point and time for a regroup and off we all went. Sue wanted fabric, so with a few recommendations from shopkeepers we found a great shop, it didn't take Sue long to choose a beautiful silky fabric at a bargain price.

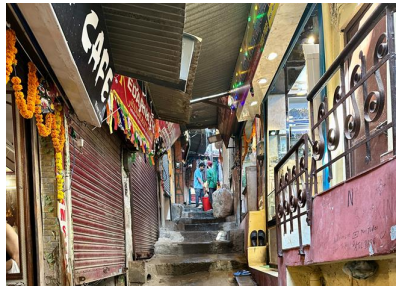




Quiet morning around the pool

31-10-2024

After Yoga and breakfast we all needed a bit of R&R (and maybe a little bit of shopping and a sneaky cake at Divine). Sunbathing around the pool, chatting and relaxing was a popular option, the stunning weather continued! We didn't have to be ready to go out until after lunchtime, everyone was really looking forward to the Beatles Ashram and working with Gopal at Dayanad Ashram.



Back to Janki Setu Bridge

31-10-2024

We all got organised for the Beatles tour and outdoor Yoga session with Gopal, then Subhash organised the tuk-tuks back to Janki Setu Bridge where we'd finished our tour last night. Picking up from where we left off we walked down the riverbank, the shops disappearing in favour of smallholdings with animals and crops.



Beatles Ashram

31-10-2024

Lots of us LOVED the Beatles Ashram, there's so much to see and it's quite a magical place. It is right at the side of the Ganges but up a hill, you can still hear the powerful river flowing in the distance and catch glimpses of it through the trees. The photos we took, particularly of the murals, say everything you need to know about this amazing derelict ashram, lots of conversations about the fact it would be amazing to restore it.

From here we walked back over Janki Setu Bridge toward the Dayanad Ashram, seeing families who were having lots of fun splashing about in the shallows of the Ganges.





Gopal @ Dayanad Ashram

09-11-2024

Gopal is a fabulous Yoga Teacher at the Dayanad Ashram in Rishikesh. He is the most lovely smiley humble man, with an amazing talent and wealth of knowledge. He delivered a couple of really amazing classes for us in 2018 and although he was hard to track down it was worth the work. On an outdoor roof terrace Gopal revisited his amazing assisted shoulder stretch and then fixed everyone's back with a manoeuvre which involved magic. It was something like him getting you to do balasana, whilst he did a bakasana balance on your back, please don't try this at home, this guy is a complete expert!! Back in time for Hotel Yoga & Dinner!



Chill out day & Diwali Festival

01-11-2024

Up for Hotel Yoga, this is our last morning session, then after breakfast there's lots of time to chill again. Pool time, shopping, the usual suspects. Lots of people go out shopping for last minute things, another trip to Divine for cakes and the shops on the steps next to there prove popular, also some of us go back to Ram Jhula too. A little bit of packing and then it's time for more Hotel Yoga, 3-4pm, a strange class working towards some sort of headstand! Then we're all spruced up ready to go out for the Diwali Celebrations, Subhash organises the tuk-tuks and we're off. We head down to Triveni Ghat and watch a bit of the Ganga Aarti there, it's absolutely mad busy!





We get our shoes back and walk up the hill past the vendors selling holy water containers, marigold garlands and decorations and turn into the area where the tailors are. The town is absolutely buzzing and heaving with people, it's difficult to stay together, but somehow we manage it. Then we walk to the traditional sweet shop and Subhash gets us something to try, it's super sweet and kind of milky.



We walk for another few minutes and come to the Shri Bharat Temple, where we queue for a blessing, listening to around 20 boys chanting enthusiastically. Again we are adorned with a bindi and in awe of the buzzing celebrations.

Later Sam and Susan are invited to a Kirtan, with fire ceremony, fireworks and food. This sounds like an amazing experience and maybe one for another visit to India!

Vande Bharat Express Train

02-11-2024

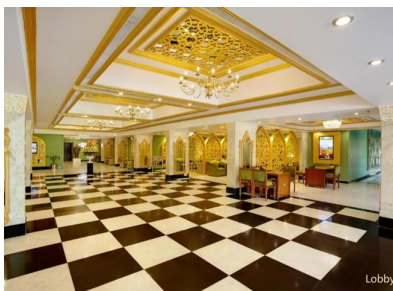
This is one of our days with a long journey. We set off early with a packup breakfast from The Lemon Tree, sadly waving them goodbye. Subhash takes us back to Haridwar and we wait on the platform for the Vande Bharat Express Train. As ever we are attracting a lot of attention from the locals, they want pics with us and are excited about meeting Europeans (there are not many of us over there right now). The swish train pulls in and the porters put our cases in the racks, we say a sad farewell to Subhash and get in our really comfortable seats, this is a faster train and we'll be in Delhi in around 3.75hrs. When we arrive we get straight on a bus to Agra!



Clark Shiraz Hotel

09-11-2024

After a 5 hour drive we arrive at the Clark Shiraz Hotel, with its swish lobby, we get a little lemon apperitivo (alcohol free I think) and get checked in. Some of us are faster to the bar than others, but we all make it there quite quickly, fairly motivated after a week without a drop of alcohol in the dry town of Rishikesh. A super surprise for Jacqui, the gift of the most beautiful chakra om necklace, bowled over!! We have such a lovely evening eating and drinking together!!

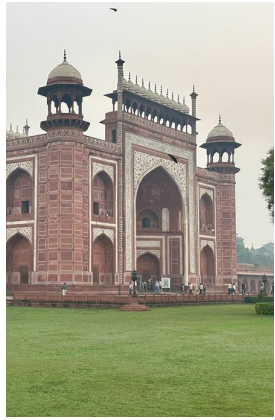
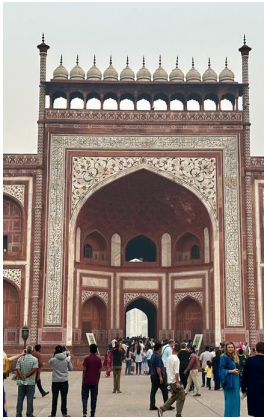
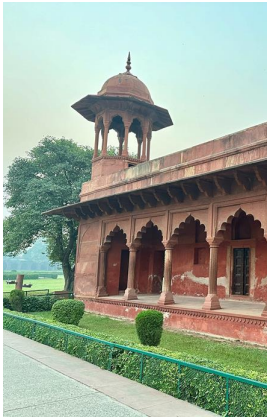


Taj Mahal

03-11-2024

We leave the Clark Shiraz at 6am and travel the 20min journey on our bus with the sun still below the horizon. Walking with our guide Ram towards the entrance it's still quite dark, slowly the sun is now rising. We collect our tokens and enter the very special place Emperor Shahjehan built for his wife Mumtaz, the greatest love story ever told. Ram told us the history of the buildings and we soaked it in, taking lots of photos. The gatehouses to the Taj are made of red stone, deliberately contrasting the pure white marble of the Taj itself, so when you first glimpse the Taj through the gate it's breath-taking.



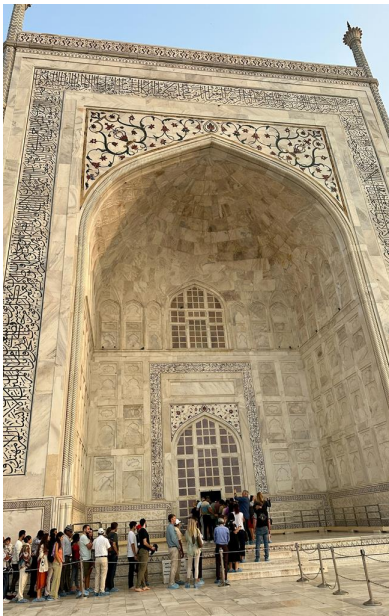


When we got to enter the marble clad surround of the Taj Mahal itself in bare feet, we felt the warmth of the sun beneath us and around us. As the sun rose it shone spectacularly on the white marble, giving everything around us a warm glow.









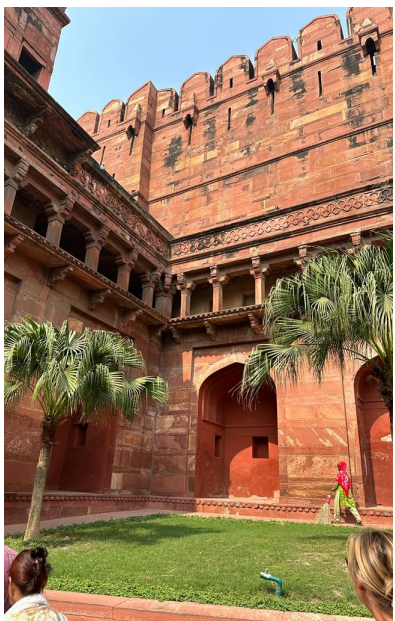
We had a lovely invite to have coffee in the Taj gardens, this has the most amazing views of the Taj Mahal from the side, it was a special moment. When we arrived we sat around the outdoor tables, our drinks were served, but then we were most surprised by the arrival of freshly cooked pakoras and chips, along with biscuits & cake. Feeling like hobbits on a first breakfast we tucked in, knowing that our hotel breakfast was awaiting us.

Agra Fort

03-11-2024

After our second breakfast at Clark Shiraz Hotel we packed up for the last time, everyone checked out and our drivers loaded up the bus with our cases. We set off for Agra Fort, where Emperor Shahjehan was imprisoned with a view of his beloved wife's mausoleum, by his son, it's a very sad story! The Fort is also very impressive, but for the Emperor he was still held in a couple of (very big) rooms against his will. Ram told us all about the fort, most of it is essentially a barracks as 75% of it is still occupied by the Indian Army.









Time to go home

03-11-2024

Leaving Agra Fort and heading for the airport Ram had one last surprise. We visited some marble marquetry artists, mostly because of the especially wonderful toilets! Despite none of us getting Delhi Belly on our trip some of us visited these three times, not because we needed to, mostly to avoid the very hard sell on the beautiful, but extremely expensive tables, ornaments and sculptures. Those of us who chose to buy anything mostly settled for a simple coaster or small ornament, what a lovely gift or memento.



On our way to the airport now, we have just one more marvel at Indian family life. How is it possible to fit a family of five on a moped and scoot along the motorway at high speed. Encouraging the little ones to have a sleep on the curve of the fuel tank, not needing any hands to hold on (take a close look) and how do they choose who wears the helmet? Maybe we have a lot to learn from these people, who have THE most beautiful smiles and an outlook on life we can learn so much from.

We climb aboard the airplane and enjoy each others company on our journey back home, laughing and chatting about our incredible India adventure <3



Our Thoughts

10-11-2024

