

## Lisa's Emails from India Trek

Namaste

So I promised I would write when something had happened...

Well after arriving in Delhi and getting sorted we had a day to rest/get sorted before heading up into himachal pradesh. We just about managed to get out of the hotel in time (thankyou Dante!) and off to the bus stand. We then piled ourselves and our copious luggage onto a rickety old bus and set off for a sixteen hour journey into the mountains - I've had some memorable bus rides but this will stick forever, in fact it will take serious counselling to ever forget parts Of it. The Indian driving style is to hurtle at full pelt at any gap (be it between cars, animals or just the side of the road) and honk the horn as loudly and repeatedly as possible. Scary enough on Delhi roads, but this was on winding mountain roads and around blind corners with sheer drops to the side. Managed no sleep at all, Dan and I munched coconut biscuits and listened to tunes and generally chattered on excitedly. This meant that by the time the drive got really hair-raisins, I was already suffering sleep deprivation. Worked wonders for developing my Zen-like calm, just practiced looking at the equally rickety, horn-honking bus heading straight for us with a warm smile and repeated my mantra 'the bus driver does this every day - what's the chances he'll crash now?' over and over in my head, and every time one or both busses managed to pull aside in the nick of time.

Anyway, we got up here Saturday lunchtime. Got dropped off at a village about 20km from Manali, then a cab ride up to a smaller village called Haripur, our closest habitation. The scenery by now was absolutely stunning, sadly we didn't get to see much of it because almost as soon as we stepped out the cab the rains came down. we all cheered a big hearty yay! for of course the next part of the journey was the 40 minute uphill hike to Soyal (where we're staying) nothing like a wet hike up an unfamiliar mountain after a 16 hour bus journey to pick up spirits. Made it up in one piece, and in fact other than the bits where the rain had already turned the path into a stream, the journey was nowhere near as arduous as Damita had led us to believe.

Soyal is a village of about 15 families, scattered over a mountainside in absolutely beautiful surroundings. I wake up and depending on the window I look out of I have snow-capped peaks, lush green forest, sheer cliff faces or general village life to choose from. The wildlife is fairly diverse, we have monkeys, cows and dogs everywhere, stunning butterflies, eagles, geckos and the biggest fattest spiders I've ever seen (that's a whole other story) village life is fairly simple, though it can be difficult at times. The first two days we had constant rain, and no-one could get back down into Haripur as the path was impassable. Since then the weather had picked up and I can really see why there are so many expats here (about half the people in Soyal are local-born, the rest are expat, mostly Brits but other Europeans too) Life basically revolves around chores, chat, charas, chal and chomp. People spend their days

wandering around visiting, chatting over tea and enjoying the scenery then gathering at someone's house for dinner, more chat and a bit of a boogie - it's all good fun.

Have had a couple of adventures so far (to be honest, everything about the first couple of days felt fairly adventurous) Dan and I had great fun on Saturday night trying to chase fat spiders from our room. We'd settled in nicely and marvelled at the place we're staying. We're in the biggest house in the village, and have a suite of 3 rooms upstairs (hence the great views) Anyway, we were a little dazed and confused, but really happy and chattered all the way home about how great everything was. Got up to the house, still all excited chatter, walked into the room, still fairly excited. Then Dan looked me deep in the eye and said 'Lisa, how do you feel about spiders' now I'm pretty cool about insect life and all, but caught the look in his eye, and said, meaning it with more honesty than ever 'erm, depends how big they are'. Dan considered this for a second then said 'hmmm, really big?' I followed his sight line to see the mother of all spiders sat on our bedroom wall, the size of a small melon. As I allowed that sensory data to sink in I heard 'uh-oh, another one' looked over to the other side of the room, to see spider number one's bigger, uglier brother. Thus ensued 15-20 minutes of hilarity as we learned that a) even big fat bastard spiders can move faster than the average tin pot wielded by a tourist and that b) life hasn't surprised me so much so far that I can't manage a truly awful little girl scream when aforementioned big fat bastard spider runs straight at my feet having evaded the tin pot.

Dan and I also had a couple of Blair witch moments, most notably last night. There is a little electricity in the village, though many people don't bother, but at night, once you're outside you could be anywhere, it's complete and total darkness. I've been learning about one or two paths a day between the various houses of the village, so I can get about regardless of the light. The night before last we learnt the 'short cut' through Marlise's orchard back to ours, a couple of minutes walk. we'd been fighting our way through trees for a good ten minutes, comforting ourselves with 'well it just seems further in the dark' when we realised we must have taken a wrong turning. Sadly, in poor torchlight, one apple tree looks like pretty much any other, as do walls, rocks and streams. In fact the only thing that changes too much by poor torchlight is sound, so that all the village cows suddenly sounded like werewolves. So we wander and wander, going 'it's only a little village, there'll be light somewhere' We eventually stumbled on to our place, look across the orchard and see Marlise's place, a stone's throw away. In fact, if we'd climbed the first wall about a foot further over we'd have been in our garden. Instead we'd wandered right up the hill, and only just avoided falling in the river in the process.

I'm sure there's loads I'm missing, but I'm in an internet cafe in Manali and my time is about to run. In short, I having a great time in the mountains, it's truly awe-inspiring scenery, a good, simple life and lovely people, whether local or expat. will be back up there tonight and for the next few weeks, though we're coming back down to Manali on Friday for a party. will check back in with you then.

Hope all is going well with ya Big love

Lisa xx

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Namaste

Back in Manali, so thought an update was due. Bit worried by what I might find when I run back to up the road to the others, last time I went off to email Dan managed to nearly amputate his finger falling on a sprite bottle and had been dragged to hospital, drugged, stitched and sent off by the time I got back. Means this week has been more slowly paced, all gentle walks and comfort food. The weather has been incredible, though it's raining a little today. During the day it's been clear blue skies as far as the eye can see and hot like you wouldn't believe, getting a bit of a mountain tan no less.

Spent the week adjusting properly to village life, my Hindi is coming on a little, picking up a few words each day, my digestive system has slowly gotten used to the rural diet and I've finally perfected my toilet methods - it's all good. Most village houses don't have a toilet at all, so you have the luxury of choosing any area of nature's bounty as your bathroom - excepting near running water. Those that do have traditional squat toilets, my balletic poise means doing the business is no problem, but I've spent all week trying to find the perfect technique for the wash down afterwards, as toilet paper is not an option. wish you could have been there to see the practice I put in, I've just about managed to not fall into the hole yet, but I've nearly fallen just about everywhere else, including out of the yellow tarpaulin that functions as a door. The upside of the outdoor bathroom is that showering can be a dream. Damita's shower is out in the garden, just a curtain wrapped around some poles with a bucket of water you've just boiled yourself on an outside fire. You strip off and are perfectly discrete, yet you've got mountain everywhere, you're in a lush, fragrant garden and the sun is beating down on you - pukka.

Felt the need for it after my first night out on the mountain party circuit on Friday. You must understand (as I now clearly do) that a new girl is a very welcome addition to any party. very few women up here, even fewer who are single, and lots of very horny old hippies, it's a magical combination. I spent the entire night fending off the advances of every man there, so much testosterone flying I was filthy with it, and none of them actually listening to a word I said. Felt like nowhere was safe. Most of them were probably ok guys, but the cumulative effect, after 12 hours, was overwhelming, would have felt fresher the next day if they'd each just cracked one off over me (sorry mum)

Still really enjoying things, doing a fair amount of reading and writing when I get time to myself, and there's always a new view to find, or an old favourite to sink into. wishing I could scoop up everyone from back home and plop you down up here - wonderfully refreshing.

Plan to be up here for about a month longer, will write again when there is more to tell.  
Take care

Big love Lisa

xx

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Namaste

This is a quickie to apologise for the long inbox absence, connections up here, coupled with many power cuts mean that I've spent hours over the last few weeks trying to get in touch and all for nothing! Suffice to say I have many stories to share, I'm back in Delhi next weekend, I'll write an excruciatingly long mail then

Till then, love n kisses

Lisa x

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\*gumana = road trip (Hindi) Namaste all!

Hope things are well wherever you are and whatever you're doing. Apologies again for the huge break but I had a change of plan up in the mountains. I became really good friends with my landlady, Gehari, and when I said I was off to Delhi and then to Agra she was proper upset, so one whisky led to another and one idea led to another and somehow we decided that she was going to come with me. It's not decent for a married woman to travel unaccompanied so we had a few days in Delhi, went down to Agra then back up to the mountains for Diwali. I got back in to Delhi yesterday, my 3rd 16 hour bus journey, in 10 days (although this one made good time, and I met a couple of pukka English boys so it went fairly well)

Me and Gehari had an awesome time, she's never been out of the valley before, never seen a train, never seen flat land. we had 6 days of running about like mad women, she was desperate to see and do everything we possibly could in the time available. we saw all the sites of Delhi and endured rather than enjoyed Agra, site of the Taj. It's a vile place, dirty, smelly, a shitty little industrial town where the main industry seem to be creaming every possible rupee from the tourists. The Taj was magnificent, we spent 3 hours there, watching the light play on the marble, sitting in the gardens and chatting to people

left right and centre (Gehari doesn't get to meet many people usually)I have loads of pics but can't find a functioning scanner yet, I'll get them to you ASAP

Other than that I'm just continuing to enjoy all India has to offer. The boys from the bus, Carl and Paul, along with their mate Rick are great Deli company, years in India between them but they're here to have fun, and seem to get into more scrapes than the average

Indian traveller, 3 real monkey boys. Carl is really similar to Tony Man back home, right down to late night Spongles requests. The other two are nutters and run up and down the main bazaar causing havoc, playing with the locals, dancing, hijacking rickshaws, and yesterday paying a masseur 100Rs to give a cow a massage. Hence I'm having a very fun time in Delhi, seeing a different side to when I've been here before.

On Sunday I'm on a train to Jaipur in Rajasthan for 3 weeks touring around in the desert. After that down south to find a shanti tree house on a beach somewhere and sunbathe for Christmas. Then Marie, Cath and Tony come out to join me. Life is sweet.

More I was going to write, but I'm getting very hot in here so maybe next week.

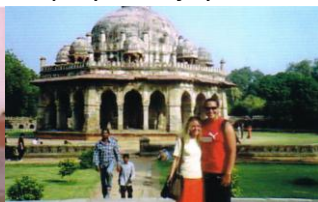
Big love to ya

Lisa x

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Namaste

this is just a quickie as I finally found a scanner. hope you enjoy, the kids are Umila (Gehari's daughter) and Nia (niece) the background. josh and might be interested in the tomb in Delhi. the plc of me



with Pinku (son) in janie in particular photo at humayuns and Gehari is at the

Baby Taj in agra, my also attaching a plc from



favourite photo so far. I'm carol's leaving do for

Preston manor fancies 'the babe in



peeps - carol, EVERYONE the green'

I'm now in Jaipur, the Arabian nights.

which is hot, pink, and like I'm supposed to be

carrying on around Rajasthan, though Paul and Ricky, my mad new Delhi mates have pretty much convinced me to scratch the whole plan and join them for a month of island hopping in the Andaman islands, about 1000kms east of India in the bay of Bengal, apparently its paradise, and they're great company. I have until mid next week to decide, but to be honest I think my minds made up so I'll probably be on a train to Kolkata at the weekend, in preparation for the 4 day boat ride to the islands. but this is India, so who knows what might take my fancy in between?

anyway, hope all are still doing well, please let me know what's going on with you too, missing my friends big-style

big love Lisa

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Ps watty - can you send me the contact details of the Kolkata school - not sure but I might be able to spend a couple of days there next week

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Namaste

How's things? I've done a lot of travelling since I last wrote but I'm now settled for a week or so. I'm in Kolkata, having travelled 1500km on Saturday night on a remarkably comfortable night train from Delhi. Much better than the train I got from Jaipur to Delhi on Thursday, particularly since that one had run over a giant pig just outside of town and had been delayed for about an hour as a result, largely because everyone decamped from the train en masse to have a look at the remains of the pig smeared along the tracks. Seriously, it was a GIANT pig, Jaipur has the biggest pigs I've ever seen and we felt this one as we went over, I stopped just short of getting off the train, got to the door before I asked myself whether I really wanted to see another messed up animal and decided that no, what with countless dead dogs in the road, mutilated horses, beaten up monkeys and slaughtered goats a ripped up pig wasn't an emotional experience I really required.

Had a good time in Jaipur, the pink city. Saw and caught the most beautiful sunset of my life the tiger fort that overlooks the city. Jaipur is in desert but surrounded by hills so the light over bands between the hills as the sun goes down. people, including a guy who can only be casualty at the tender age of 19. He was last catch a Delhi bound train, and though I didn't on the grapevine that he'd run onto some seen sporting a very mashed face.



some wicked temples so far from the top of the middle of the the city falls in wide Met some interesting described as a drugs seen staggering off to see him there I heard trouble and was last

Delhi was great, my fourth time there already and I'm starting to feel right at home on the Pahar Ganj. I even have a nickname amongst a lot of the wallahs, Madam Bhangra Ji, as a result of a fun and drunken night at my fave hotel last weekend, when me, Rick and Paul got the wallahs up and showing us Bhangra - got some funky new shapes to throw.

I already really like Kolkata, so I've decided to stay for a week and get involved with the school that Watty (2 towns) was at last year. I met the guy who runs it in London afterwards and hopefully I'll be able to meet him today to sort something out. Kolkata is unusual, it was the capital of British India, and built largely by and for them so in places it resembles a European capital, all wide tree lined boulevards and green space. A huge piece of parkland called the midian cuts a swathe through the heart of the city alongside the river, and

yesterday as I wandered around watching cricket matches, political rallies and religious meetings it could have

Hyde park. except any time I sat down to read I would look up after 5 minutes and find a circle of seated Indian men staring at me from a 20 foot radius. So that's one face of Kolkata, the other face is also a relic of the raj, mass poverty as a result of partition, when the state of Bengal was cut in 2. Kolkata more than any other city suffered mass refugee movement, and although you're always to some degree aware of the poverty that permeates the country, here it is unavoidable, my walk through the midian also brought me face to face with the diseased, dying and disabled in far greater numbers than I've seen elsewhere. Looking forward to the chance to give a little something back.

So I'll be here for a week, I fly out to Port Blair in the Andaman's on Sunday, island hop for a month then fly back to the mainland to meet Marie, cath and t-man.

Would love to hear how things are going with you, drop me a line if you get the chance. Hope you're happy and well

Big love

Lisa xx

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Namaste all

again found a scanner so here's some pics from Jaipur.

I met the ashok band one night at a chai stall, they'd just finished playing a very raucous wedding procession which had ended at the hotel opposite ours. the monkey temple baths were awesome, you can't tell from the pic but the place was swarming with monkeys, v planet of the apes at times. the dress up picture was taken as George and I about to leave for the wedding, evenings naturally, this being one of my most memorable my Taj I have my eyes closed in the photo (you should see pics sometime)



still having a great time, off to see the school this afternoon, if we can work out how I can be useful I'll say here for the week.

big love

Lisa xx

