

Journal of my business trip to India  
September 21 – October 2, 2003  
Flew Lufthansa Airlines with a layover in Frankfurt

Day 1  
Delhi

I woke up this morning around 9:30 and called Alan. We took a walk down the street from our hotel to the most unlikely of breakfast spots, McDonalds. What a surprise! They had an entire vegetarian menu! It included several spicy Indian-style veggie patties as well as a Chinese-style veggie patty with spicy ginger-garlic sauce. Afterwards, our Indian business partner Ragu met us at the hotel and took us on a little guided tour of the city. It was truly enlightening. There was, of course, the expected poverty and squalor, cows and dogs and the occasional pig. There was also, as one might expect, a lot of history. One might not expect, however, that a lot of the local history has Moslem roots. In the 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, India was ruled by Moslems who had invaded from the west. One of the most significant local archeological sites is a “minar,” which (surprise) is like a big minaret. It was, they say, a watch tower for the local political leader in the 12<sup>th</sup> century when the local leader, **Firuz Shah**, was a Moslem. In fact, **Firuz Shah** built many of the significant ancient buildings in the city of Delhi.

Another unexpected finding in Delhi was how focused the government is on eco-friendliness. All of the public buses have been converted to compressed natural gas (CNG) engines. Not only that, but all of the little three-wheeled, noisy, sputtering, green taxis have also been converted to CNG. All around us, billboards and marquees of various companies proclaimed their focus on keeping Delhi green and beautiful. I guess they weren't talking exactly about the streets that WE were on.

Delhi did have its share of beauty, though. There were some really cool birds around. The Indian version of a crow is a magpie, which is a lot like a crow but looks much more interesting, with gray and white feathers to accent the black. Also, mynah birds were hopping around in the park, and I saw a couple of wild green parrots. That was the first time I ever saw parrots in the wild, unless you count that time I saw escaped ones flying around Hermosa Beach.

We drove along the main business street in the city and there was a Sunday morning market going on. Ragu suggested that we not get out and shop unless we didn't mind being instantaneously surrounded by a horde of beggars. We heeded his warning and stayed in the car. The salespeople were hocking all kinds of merchandise such as rugs, books, shoes, various knick knacks, and non-merchandise such as pigeons. Apparently Indians like to keep pigeons. They don't eat them.

It's common knowledge that cows are sacred to Hindus, and most people know anecdotally that cows freely roam the streets of India. This is all true. The cows are lazing around in the street all the time. If they happen to choose a spot in the middle of the road, you can forget about driving there because cows are not afraid of car horns. They wander

unhindered through the streets of every city, but there is more to the story. The cows are not roaming because they are revered as gods or any such thing. In fact, these cows are all “owned” by local farmers, and they are used to produce dairy products. In the past, much of India was rural and cows grazed in pastures. As the cities encroached on the farmland, the farmers were forced to take up homes in urban areas, but they didn’t want to give up their cows. Now instead of cows grazing in pastures, the farmers just let the cows out to forage on traffic islands and sidewalk weeds. At some point, the farmer comes out to collect his cows and bring them back to the family hovel.

It was also interesting to learn that women, although they have a much lower literacy rate than men here, are well represented in the workplace. Even technical careers are commonly sought by Indian women. Ragu told us that it’s not uncommon to find nearly 50% women in computer software companies in India.

After a brief but informative tour, Ragu left us at our hotel. After relaxing for a bit, Alan and I decided to go out for dinner. We walked to a small shopping area near the hotel where McDonalds was, along with Pizza Hut and T.G.I. Fridays. We found a nice looking place called Punjabi By Nature that had an extensive vegetarian menu. I enjoyed a fantastic spicy chick-pea curry with basmati rice along with a glass of Indian wine. It was a Cabernet-Shiraz blend that I thought was very good. Alan and I then decided to go have a cup of coffee in the local chain coffee shop called Barista. While we were sitting and drinking our Brazilian espressos, we noticed a young woman walk in and, as we experienced travelers tend to do, we both immediately and instinctively tried to guess what her nationality was. She certainly didn’t look Indian. Of course we each instantly knew what the other was thinking, so I asked Alan, “Where do you think she’s from?”

“Well,” he said, “look at that tattoo on her arm. It looks like Chinese or Japanese characters. I think it says ‘Beijing.’”

“But I don’t think she looks Chinese,” I said. “I think she looks Thai.”

“Yeah,” he replied. “Or maybe Filipino.”

“Yeah,” I agreed. “Maybe some sort of Pacific Islander.”

She walked back outside. We eventually finished our coffees and got up to leave. As we walked out the door, we saw a group of people sitting around singing American pop songs to a guy playing guitar. I stopped to listen, and I noticed that the woman about whom we had been talking was there in the group. Looking around, I noticed that they all appeared to be from the same Thai-Filipino-Pacific Islander sort of background. They all seemed pretty friendly so I joined in singing along to a Bryan Adams song. Afterward I turned to Alan and said, “Too bad I didn’t bring my guitar.” The woman with the tattoo said, “You play guitar?” I responded in the affirmative and they immediately asked me to sit and play something. Not being too shy, I did, and we all had a great time as they requested songs and I played them. Finally, during a lull in the music, I asked the woman with the tattoo where she was from. I was very surprised to learn that they were, in fact,

all Indian. They were from the eastern corner of India where it borders Burma, which is an area called Misorum. I found out later that the Miso people have Nepalese roots. They all spoke English very well also. English is one of the official languages of India, as is Hindi. The Miso people also have their own dialect that is also called Miso. It seemed that all of these people spoke all three languages. I learned later that wasn't ENTIRELY true, but it was mostly true. During my experience there, it seemed that most literate Indians spoke at least three languages.

After we played and sang for a while, the tattooed girl, whose name I now knew to be Rim, invited Alan and me along to a dance club with her friends Jon and Rex. Alan and I glanced at each other, and given that we had an important meeting in the morning, we immediately agreed and went walking off toward the club with them. The dance club was called Oxygen. It was small but really nice and not too crowded. The music was house and rap, and I noticed that almost everyone in the club looked like they hailed from the same place as our new friends. Very few of them looked typically "Indian."

Once in the club Rim called her cousin Ivy and she joined us as well. We had a few beers and then started dancing, and we didn't stop dancing until about 3:00 in the morning. It all seems a blur now, but I'm pretty sure that I proposed marriage to at least three different women in there. Afterwards, a bit dazed, giddy, and possibly engaged, I left the bar with Alan and our new friends in search of some food and potable water. We walked over to a small, quaint, roadside eatery. Of course, by "quaint" I mean "filthy." It wasn't so much a restaurant as an uninhabited patch of dirt by the side of the road with a camping stove, some aluminum pots and pans, and a few dirty guys in torn clothes sitting around it cooking some pancake-looking things.

"Oh, you HAVE to try an aloo paratha!" said Ivy.

"Ummmmmm. Ok." I replied. I remembered all the warnings I had heard about avoiding dysentery, and my brain suddenly did a double-take. I'm pretty sure that the logical part of my brain slapped the hungry part, but the hungry part won anyway as it always does. Aloo paratha is a wheat pancake filled with spicy potato curry. It was all cooked, so I figured I probably had at LEAST a 50/50 chance of escaping disease-free, which was good enough for me. The food tasted fantastic, which I promised myself I would try to remember later as I lay in the hospital bed.

We chomped down the food and then went to a different Barista coffee shop, sat around, and drank water until the sun came up. As the conversation started to wane and eyelids started to droop, we exchanged contact information, hugs, and handshakes, and said our goodbyes. Alan and I caught a sputtering green CNG-powered taxi back to our hotel, and as I finish writing this paragraph I have just enough time to catch a quick shower, pack, check out of the hotel, and head off for my 9:00 meeting.

## Day 2 Delhi

Nothing particularly interesting happened today. Except for McDonalds, I've found that it's really not that easy to be vegan here. Everything has butter and cheese in it. In the evening we flew from Delhi to Hyderabad, which is in the south of India. It's another very urban area, with plenty of hotels, shopping, restaurants, and honking car horns. I got a bite to eat (which again wasn't easy) and then went to sleep.

## Day 3 Visakhapatnam

I woke up at 5:00 am to catch a 7:00 flight to Visakhapatnam, commonly referred to as Visak. The flight was delayed a few times so we didn't actually leave until after 8:00. My experiences at the various restaurants, hotels, and airports have only further solidified my belief that there are too many Indian people. I don't mean that to sound racist. It's really a verifiable fact. This is a country 1/3 the size of the United States with four times the population and a 60% poverty rate. Salaries are so low and the population so numerous, in fact, that companies employ far more people than they actually need, just so that people will have jobs. To wit: Hotel lobbies are teeming with valets, doormen, and bellboys. The service is not just attentive; it's downright doting, which gets pretty annoying after about four minutes. I really don't need someone to wheel my bag into the room for me. I tried to take my bag from the valet at the door but he wouldn't have it. He pushed past me, put my bag up on a shelf where I didn't want it, and started to point out where the bathroom, newspaper, and the television were (all in plain view.) I politely said thank you several times before realizing that I just had to ignore him and he'd go away. I knew that he wanted a tip, and I felt badly for his economic situation. I don't mind tipping if someone does me a service, but I just couldn't bring myself to give someone money just for hanging around and performing completely unnecessary and unwanted gestures. It's the objectivist in me.

I've discovered something about myself amidst all of this undeserved attention from hotel workers: I really don't like to be helped. I enjoy carrying my own luggage, opening my own doors, hailing my own cabs, and not having someone wait on me. A few Indian people even tried to show me how to open my door with a key, and how to plug an electrical appliance into a wall socket, both of which I found not helpful or polite but bothersome and insulting. I like to complete tasks on my own, with no excuses and as little help as possible. I'm sure it all stems from my childhood and a shrink would have something to say about it, but I don't really want a shrink's help either.

At the airport there are no fewer than six security checks, and often more. Two guards at the front door of the airport check your ticket as you go in. After checking in at the counter, a man checks your boarding pass as you enter the security area. Not 10 feet away, another man sitting at a computer terminal checks your boarding pass again. You then pass through the metal detector. Here nobody bothers emptying their pockets, so everyone sets off the metal detector. It doesn't matter because everyone has to go through

the secondary search anyway. After a cursory sweeping gesture with a hand-held metal detector and a quick frisking, another guard sends you over to the checked baggage area, where you are to identify your checked bags to another security officer before the bags are placed on the airplane. Every person is then frisked again and carry-on bags are searched at the gate. Finally boarding passes are checked one last time at the airplane entrance. It is plainly obvious that this is a government program to employ as many people as possible, particularly because these people are otherwise unemployable.

We checked into our hotel around 11:00 am. The entire hotel smelled of mildew, and my room smelled even more than the rest. The hallways were not carpeted, nor were the rooms, giving the whole place a very institutional feel. One other undesirable effect of hard floors was that it was all very noisy. Any noise made anywhere in the hallway was easily audible in my room. After a meeting with customers in the Indian shipbuilding industry that lasted far too long, I went up to my room, checked my e-mail, and went straight to sleep. It was only about 8:00 pm. Several times during the night I was awakened by noises in the corridor, and even going to bed at 8:00 I ended up not getting enough sleep.

Day 4  
Hyderabad

This morning I had the most amazing breakfast. It consisted of sprouted beans, nuts, and chick peas in various spices, chick pea curry, biryani (a spiced rice dish), idly (a rice pancake served with a spicy vegetable curry soup called *sambar*), and coconut chutney. Afterwards we left for the airport bound for Hyderabad again, where we had a meeting scheduled with another Indian defense (or defence, as they spell it) industry company.

After our meeting, we headed straight back to the airport to catch a plane for Bangalore. I've now been to Hyderabad twice but I still haven't seen it except from a car window. I did manage to snap a bunch of photos from the car on the way to the airport. The terrain around there is very green – big leafy tropical trees and palms, rolling green hills dotted with reddish-orange boulders.

If you plan to drive or even ride in a car in India, you should know the rules. There are, in fact, three rules to remember:

- Rule 1. If there is a traffic cop nearby, do what he says.
- Rule 2. There are no other rules.
- Rule 3. If there are any questions, see rule number 2.

Indians use their car horns as a legitimate means of communication. The car horn code goes something like this:

- 1 beep: "Be careful, I'm passing you."
- 2 beeps: "Hey, watch where you're going. I'm passing you."
- 3 beeps: "What the hell do you think you're doing?! I'm passing you!"

There are numerous other horn signals, but a complete list is beyond the scope of this journal. Just be sure to pass as many other vehicles as possible and you will fit right in. We made the death-defying trip to the airport in a non-air-conditioned car. I lay my head back and closed my eyes, and the myriad smells that wafted through the open window made me choke. India is a country of one smell after another – diesel exhaust, garbage dumps, feces, putrid smoke, and curry. When we reached the airport it was a relief to go indoors again.

Day 5  
Bangalore

There's an Indian custom about which any westerner should be warned before visiting. That is the way they answer questions. Indians answer negative questions correctly. That is, if you ask "There isn't any cheese in there?" an Indian person would answer "yes" if there were no cheese. We Americans would say, "No, there's no cheese" which is actually not the correct answer to the question that was asked. Also, Indians don't usually nod like we do. When an Indian person says yes, or wants to indicate an understanding of the conversation, he shakes his head from side to side. So, in the aforementioned scenario, if there were no cheese in the dish, the Indian person would say "yes" while shaking his head from side to side. Sometimes the head motion is in a figure eight, resembling something between Stevie Wonder and a bobble-head doll in the back window of a car. In any case, it can be very disconcerting to an American when you're having a conversation and the other person keeps shaking his head at you.

Here in Bangalore we're staying at the 5-star Royal Orchid Park Place hotel and golf resort. I woke up around 6:30, checked e-mail, showered, shaved, ironed my shirt, got dressed, and met my companions in the lobby at 8:30. Since traffic wasn't bad I had time to eat breakfast, which again was simply astounding. I had vegetable patties, hash browns, more idly and a new food called vada, which is like a little fried lentil donut. I wish I could eat like that every day. After breakfast we departed for the seminar, which was about a 20-minute drive through downtown Bangalore. It's a bustling city. They call it the Silicon Valley of India. There are big office buildings, department stores, restaurants, and billboards. I turned my head this way and that, watching all of the cars, motorcycles, and people as we drove. It's a very colorful place. Most of the marquees on the storefronts are hand-painted on a bright yellow or orange background, giving the whole city a sort of carnival ambiance.

Indian fashion is colorful too. Most women wear *sarees*, traditional Indian dresses. A saree consists of a short tight shirt that exposes the stomach and a color-coordinated cloth that wraps around the waist forming a long skirt, and continues up across the chest, over the left shoulder, and down the back. It is usually accessorized with another matching cloth that drapes across the chest and hangs over each shoulder toward the back. These outfits come in a wide array of bright colors like fuchsia, orange, magenta, turquoise, cobalt, and violet. They're usually decorated with traditional Indian floral and paisley patterns, and some of them also have beads or even little mirrors sewn into them. Men

generally wear dress slacks and an untucked dress shirt in solid or subtle plaid patterns, but occasionally you will see men wearing bright colors as well. Businessmen wear shirts and ties, but generally not jackets because it's too hot. I've been wearing my jacket because Indians, like Arizonans, tend to overcompensate with the air conditioning. (I can't believe the spell checker caught "untucked" but let me write "Arizonans.")

Most people here speak English, but I'm having as hard a time understanding them as I did the Brazilians. Their accents are so strong that I can barely catch every third word. It's embarrassing for me to have to constantly ask them to repeat themselves when we're speaking the same language.

After our meeting, our hosts took us out to do some shopping. I wanted to buy some spices and some clothes. We went out to the main shopping area in Bangalore. It was bright and colorful and full of people, yet somehow managed to maintain that special third-world filthiness to which I had become accustomed. I felt like I was in a movie as I moved in and out of various boutiques, each with its own special odor, being shamelessly lied to by stereotypical unscrupulous salesmen. I ended up buying some pungent spices and some really cool Indian clothes.

At dinner I enjoyed the same conversation that I have had at least once every day so far. The conversation went something like this:

"I'm a pure vegetarian. I don't have milk, butter, yogurt, or anything like that."

"Pure vegetarian. Yes sir. Would you like some of this sir?"

"That looks like cheese."

"Cheese. Yes sir."

"I don't eat cheese either."

"Oh. No problem sir. Would you like some of this sir?"

"Is there any milk in there?"

"No sir, no milk."

"That looks like sour cream."

"Yes, there is a little cream in there, sir."

"I don't eat cream either. I'm a pure vegetarian. I don't eat milk, cream, cheese, butter, or any dairy products."

"You can just taste a little, sir."

“No, I can’t. I don’t eat any dairy products.”

"Yes sir. I understand. Would you like some gulfi (ice cream) for dessert?"

And on and on we would go. I later learned that Indians have a different word for their traditional cheese, which they call “cottage cheese,” or *paneer*, and western-style cheese. When I was telling them that I didn’t want cheese, they didn’t understand that I didn’t want *paneer* either. Eventually I did get food, and it was delicious. The food has been so good, in fact, that I regularly eat several servings. I think if I lived here I'd probably get fat.

During dinner I learned a few interesting things about Indian food. I always thought that Basmati rice was THE Indian rice and all Indians ate nothing but. It turns out that Basmati rice doesn’t even come from India, and while northern Indians do prefer Basmati rice for all of their dishes, southern Indians prefer Nellore or Pune rice, which looks to me more like “regular” white rice. South Indians will, however, still use Basmati rice for flavored dishes like pilau or biryani. They say that the quality of rice can be seen in the grains’ length and thickness. I’ve heard that the quality of other things can be measured that way as well, except that in the case of rice, thinner is better.

Day 6  
Bangalore

The next day we had more meetings and then went to visit a giant statue of Shiva, one of the three main deities of the Hindu faith: Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the protector; and Shiva, the destroyer. There are a number of goddesses such as Lakshmi, Durga, and Saraswati who are also worshipped by Hindus. They are depicted as families. For example, Saraswati is the daughter of Shiva and Durga. Each also has his or her own special powers for which he or she is revered. Durga, for example, is the protector of good and destroyer of evil. Shiva and Durga are also the parents of Ganesh, the elephant-headed deity often depicted in cheap wooden carvings that tourists buy. The story goes that Shiva’s wife one day got it in her head to have a child, so she made one out of clay while Shiva wasn’t looking. I happen to know some women who have gone to similar lengths, but I digress. Since Shiva didn’t recognize his son and vice versa, Ganesh stopped Shiva at the temple entrance and wouldn’t let him enter. Shiva got a little upset, as deities sometimes do, so he chopped off Ganesh’s head. (Vishnu is known as a generally angry God.) Needless to say, this little tirade upset his wife so she demanded that he find a new head for his son. Vishnu, being the good husband, sent off a search party to get the head of the first creature they came across. That creature happened to be an elephant, and thus was born the *cranium elephantus* known as Ganesh, the Hindu god of knowledge and removing obstacles. I joined my Indian hosts in a few Hindu rituals to pay respect to their god, and floated a lighted candle on the pool of water in front of the 50-foot statue, which apparently is a way to negate all of my past sins. I’ll drink to that!



After another brief business meeting, I went to a music store and bought a few CDs of Indian pop music. I've always been a fan of good percussion and Indians are some of the best percussionists in the world. Alan and I then went back to the hotel. As we were walking in, we spotted a stand of fruit trees near the hotel driveway swarming with bats. I went in and grabbed my camera and spent the next 15 or 20 minutes trying to get a picture of a bat in flight. I found this to be difficult, especially dodging the flying guano. Eventually I did manage to get a few good shots, and the bats didn't.

Day 7  
Pune

I had a terrible night's sleep and at 6:30 Alan and I went out to the golf course where I had my first golf lesson. The teacher said that I did very well, which I believe means that I didn't injure myself or anyone else. I've never really thought of myself as the golfing type, but I do have an inexplicable fascination with watching golf on television. I'm really not sure why. Indian golf courses have a bunch of generally friendly stray dogs running around. Luckily none of them are trained to fetch.

At 9:30 we flew to Pune, which is known as "the Detroit of India," not a complimentary moniker, but it just means that Pune is the center of the Indian automobile industry. Here we were planning to give a seminar for a bunch of engineers from various car companies. We had the afternoon free, so one of our Indian cohorts took us around for some sightseeing. We went first to a state-owned house first built by one of the Maharajas in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and which was the place where Mohandas Gandhi was interred by the British when he was arrested in 1942. Here they had a number of photographs of Gandhi along with the story of his upbringing, spiritual development, political advancement, personal relationships, and his effect on the history and psyche of India. They displayed the room where his long-time secretary passed away, which had a devastating effect on Gandhi. In the building's courtyard stood a stone monument where Gandhi's ashes were laid to rest. Standing in front of it was a powerful experience that I won't soon forget.

Next we visited a museum of Indian artifacts, most of which dated from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but a few of which were as much as 700 years old. Some of them were fairly mundane – copper cooking utensils from the 1800s and such, but some were simply astounding. There was a collection of doors from old homes and temples, painstakingly carved with intricate patterns of flowers, animals, and Hindu gods. They had a number of statues and images of Brahma, Vishnu, Krishna (a later form of Vishnu), Shiva, Ganesh, and their associated goddesses. There were weapons, beads, clothing, combs, makeup boxes (for storing turmeric powder used to make dots on foreheads), mirrors, buddhas, and lanterns. The artistry and craftsmanship was consistently superb, in such materials as wood, copper, brass, jade, and ivory.

As the sun was beginning to set, we made our way to a Hindu temple to the previously-mentioned god Ganesh. Every Hindu temple honors just one of the gods or goddesses, and each family has a particular god or goddess that they pray to. Entering the temple,

each person must remove his or her shoes and then ring a bell that is hung from the top of the doorway. I did so and then walked into the white stone structure. The temple was a large open space with a statue of Ganesh housed in a small room in the center. People were carrying around trays of food that were being sold by an elderly man who seemed to be tending the statue of Ganesh. The food was not being eaten. It was to be used as offerings to Ganesh. Others were down on their knees, bowing toward the statue, and still others actually lay prone with their faces to the floor. Having been raised Jewish and developed into an atheist, bowing to a statue of an elephant-headed man struck me as silly, but if it keeps everyone vegetarian, more power to them.

Around the temple was one of the few places in the city where there remained a number of trees in one place. From the tops of these trees came the most amazing cacophony of squawks, chirps, peeps, and caws. The trees were filled with all sorts of different birds, and you could see them soaring around above the trees as well. I recognized crows and egrets, but there must have been ten or 15 species of birds that I had never seen before. At one point I saw a large, graceful bird soaring high above the trees and off into the distance. I noticed that this bird had a very strange shape, and when I studied it more closely I realized that it was, in fact, a bat with a wingspan of about four feet. There was also a bunch of large birds of prey circling above the temple. At first I thought they could be vultures, but they might have been some kind of eagle.

We were getting hungry around this time, so we went to a nearby restaurant. It was about 6:45 pm, so the restaurant had not yet begun serving dinner. Most Indian people eat dinner between 8:30 and 9:30 pm. We got some snacks: pav bhaji, bread with a tomato-based curry, and aloo masala dosa, which is a large fried wheat pancake wrapped around curried potatoes. They were both delicious, and I ate everything using only my right hand, as is the custom in India. Don't ask why. It had started raining by this time, so we skipped visiting another temple to the goddess of wealth and went back to the hotel.

I think of myself as a low-maintenance person but I found Indian hotels pretty annoying, and because I hadn't slept much I was a particularly grumbly tonight. Every person I passed would smile and say "good evening, sir," and each time I became more irritated. Whenever I displayed any effort, whether it was carrying my computer, opening my door, or pressing the elevator button, some guy would come running (literally) toward me and try to do it for me. By the end of the evening I felt like the Grinch, sneering at everyone who said "good evening" to me. It also didn't help that this particular hotel had "floor phones" that they used to communicate with the workers. Each level had a telephone that rang very loudly in order to get the attention of anyone who happened to be working on that floor. The door of my room happened to be a few feet away from this phone, and it rang about every five minutes. I called to the front desk and asked for a different room, so they moved me from room 308 to room 320, which faced a bar with very loud live music until 11:30 pm. Normally I suppose I would have enjoyed this cultural opportunity but in my current grumpy state I didn't appreciate it. I called down to the desk again and they moved me to room 309, right next door to the original room. They apologized for the inconvenience but there was nothing that they could do about the floor phone. At one point I heard the phone ring very loudly and looked out my door. It turned out that the

phone I was hearing wasn't even the one on my floor, but on the floor below. Anyway, I was extremely tired and I had no trouble falling asleep. In the morning, less cranky, I said good morning to the hundred or so bellboys in the hallway and thanked the people at the front desk for being so accommodating.

Day 8  
Pune/Delhi

After the seminar in the morning I set off for Delhi because my new friends there had invited me back to see Ivy sing at a club. When I arrived at 9:00 pm I found out that not only was Ivy not singing that night (because she had caught a cold), but they couldn't meet me until almost midnight. When they finally showed up, it turned out that they were late because they had been waiting for Ivy's boyfriend, who went by the name of Moose. The four of us then went back to the Oxygen nightclub and danced the night away. At one point, I was dancing with Ivy (her boyfriend was nowhere to be found) and a tall, lanky Indian guy came up behind her and did the sandwich thing with the two of us. I didn't really mind that since I wasn't Ivy's boyfriend or anything. Ivy didn't seem to mind too much either, even when his hands started roaming up and down her hips. I didn't know what to think, though, when his hands moved from her hips to mine. I thought maybe it was normal, since it is common in India to see completely heterosexual men walking down the street with arms around each other or with pinkies entwined. After a moment, though, his hands started moving a little too much for my comfort, so I backed away. Ivy then excused herself to go to the bathroom. I wasn't going to start dancing with this guy, so I sat down on a nearby couch and just bopped along in my chair, watching the other dancers who were mostly friends of Rim and Ivy. It didn't take long for the new guy to sit down on the arm of the sofa next to me and try to talk to me. Between the loud music and his accent, my half of the conversation was mostly the word "what?" interspersed with polite but purposefully uninterested laughter, being very careful not to make eye contact. I suppose that at that moment I felt like a woman. It was an interesting experience that I would not care to repeat.

It seemed like everyone in the nightclub carried a mobile phone. Indians are just as attached to their mobile phones as anyone. They have the color screens with pictures of their friends and relatives, games, and SMS text messaging. As I've been observing everyone using their phones, I have noticed an interesting trend. Back in the beginning of electronic communication, we had the telegraph. People could send words by wire. We then developed the telephone, so people could talk. Next came the facsimile machine so we could now send pictures, each picture being worth about 1000 words, give or take. We then regressed to the mobile phone, so people could forget to call us while we're out as well as at home. After that we relapsed to SMS text messaging, sending words back and forth with no live interaction. Now I've noticed that there are some mobile phones that, when receiving an SMS message, will make a particular noise: beep beep beep... beeeeeeeep beeeeeeeep... beep beep beep. That's "SMS" in Morse code. We have now come full circle.

Day 9  
Delhi/Pune

Eventually we found Moose sitting on a curb outside with his head between his knees. He was so drunk that he could barely stand. Rim, Ivy, and I got him in a taxi and took him back to their place. After putting him to bed, the three of us stayed up and talked until 5:30 in the morning, when I had to leave for the airport to catch my flight back to Pune. I arrived back at the hotel around 11:00 and met up with my colleagues. The three of us then headed off for our meeting. Of course I could barely stay awake during the proceedings. I kept popping strong peppermints to keep myself awake. The customers probably thought I was a freak. After getting back to the hotel around 5:00 pm, I went straight to sleep. I was awakened once around 8:30 pm by a telephone call. It was the laundry service calling to ask if they could disturb me even though I had a do not disturb sign on the door. I told them that, no, I really did not want to be disturbed, but now that they had awakened me, they should bring my laundry up.

Day 10  
Nashik

I woke up again around 5:30, which gave me plenty of time to check e-mail before heading off with the others for a car ride to Nashik. Nashik is about 180 km from Pune (112 miles), but that's a 5 hour drive because these are Indian kilometers. The roads have potholes the size of swimming pools and the drivers are like a cross between Nascar and bumper cars. Our driver was no exception. It didn't seem to make a lick of difference to him if we made it to our meeting or if we died trying. Luckily we did not die, but we saw the remains of three accidents along the way in which someone probably did. We drove through some beautiful mountainous countryside, stopping occasionally along the way for drinks and the associated bathroom breaks. Of course, "bathroom break" in India doesn't necessarily mean there were any bathrooms around, and if there were, one might not want to actually go in.

All along the road we saw feral dogs, whether we were in the middle of a city or in the most remote rural area. Dogs in India have become part of the ecosystem, having set up their own society not intertwined with, but alongside that of the humans. There were puppies nuzzling their mothers, packs out searching for food, and carcasses being eaten by magpies. The dogs are ignored by Indians, and they scrounge for scraps of food wherever they can. My instinct was to try to "save" one, but of course it was impossible.

Banyan trees also lined the road to Nashik. These trees are distinctive because as they grow, tendrils reach down from the branches toward the ground. They look sort of like fingers, and the trees seem to take on a demonic quality. When one reaches the earth, it takes root and becomes another trunk. As this new trunk grows, it can merge with nearby trunks to become one larger trunk. Very old banyan trees can easily have trunks 10 feet across.

The meeting at the Mahindra automobile company went smoothly, and we set out for the five hour drive back to Pune. My rear end was already sore, and it was completely numb by the time we reached the hotel. I had a quick but delicious dinner of *masala pori*, which are pastry shells about the size of golf balls with a sweet and spicy potato and onion curry inside. Our Indian cohort Dinesh told me that it would be so spicy that I would cry, but it really wasn't that spicy. Afterwards I went back to my room and went to sleep.

Day 11

Pune/Bombay

This morning I realized that I had caught Ivy's cold. I wanted to load up on vitamin C, so I ordered four glasses of mango juice from room service. I met the rest of the crew in the hotel lobby for our last meeting of the trip, which was nearby. It was at the Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI), whose facility was set high on a hill overlooking the city of Pune. The setting provided a nice view of the city below. (I considered using a more colorful word such as "spectacular" or "breathtaking" rather than "nice," but it was neither of those. It was just nice.) As in Rio de Janeiro, in India the hills contain the poorest, most wretched neighborhoods. The drive up to the ARAI facility was pretty depressing. The homes were constructed primarily of tree branches, cloth, and corrugated steel panels. Some of the nicer places were made of concrete, and one or two even had a door, but those were the exception. There were heaps of garbage strewn by the side of the road, and the whole place stunk unbearably. Most places in the city smelled bad, but this place was by far the worst. Being an optimist, I did consider the upside – you would never have to worry about somebody knowing you farted. As the underpowered van plodded up the hill, the driver was honking at various other vehicles, and it struck me that when he beeped it twice in succession, the van's horn sounded just like the Road Runner in the old Warner Brothers cartoons. It was funny to me, but I suspected that the others around us wouldn't get the joke.

After yet another successful meeting, I told my Indian hosts that I was interested in checking out a musical instrument store. We looked in the telephone book and called the nearest place, but they were closed. Then one of my companions, Jay, told me that he would call his friend who was a professional musician. This turned out to be a great idea because while local law says that businesses must close their front door at lunch time, Jay's friend told us that this particular music store kept the back door open. We drove over to see what we could see. On the way, I pointed out to Alan a place along the road that I found curious. It was called "Man Meet, exclusive chat place." I thought it was strange because, despite my experience at Oxygen, I knew that India had strict morality laws and I didn't think that a gay bar would have been allowed. I pointed it out to Dinesh. He told us that in Hindi, *man* means heart, *meet* means sweet, and *chat* means snacks, so this was not actually a place for gay men to converse, but a place for sweethearts to eat. Talk about being lost in translation!

We made it to the musical instrument store just before it started pouring rain. I was looking at the *tables* (Indian hand drums) but I couldn't buy one because they were made with leather. I looked at the guitars and started to laugh. They were horrible cheap

constructions with names like “Givson,” “Giblon,” and “Takamin.” (For you non-musicians, there are two famous high-quality guitar makers called Gibson and Takamine.) After looking around at all the cheap knockoffs, a box sitting on a shelf caught my eye. It had buttons and knobs on it. I took it off the shelf, and noticed a bunch of Hindi words on it, and a plug that said “speaker.” I asked the guy behind the counter what it was. He took it from me, plugged it into the wall, pushed a button, and out came the most fantastic Indian rhythms on synthesized traditional drums! This was ideal. Not only did I not have to buy a tabla, I didn’t have to learn how to play the rhythms or anything. He plugged in another box, twiddled some knobs, pushed a button, and from this box came a synthesized sitar, a traditional Indian stringed instrument. Immediately I knew that I must have these two boxes. He quoted me a price and I didn’t even haggle. They were cheap by American standards anyway, and it was probably the most money he had made at one time all year.

Electronic boxes in hand, we drove to the airport where Alan and I said goodbye to our Indian friends and caught a flight to Bombay, which is now officially called Mumbai although a lot of people still use the former name. We arrived at the domestic airport and caught a shuttle over to the international airport, which is just a few minutes away. Alan was catching a flight to Singapore, so we parted ways and I headed over to the Lufthansa terminal. A man in street clothes holding a walkie-talkie asked me what flight I was on. I was immediately suspicious of him, which probably reflects more on me than it does on him. I told him that I was on the 2:50 am flight on Lufthansa. He told me that I could not check in until 1:00 and that he could send me over to a hotel that Lufthansa uses for transit passengers where I might be able to hang out until check-in time. I didn’t want to just stay in the Lufthansa lounge all night, but I felt like it might be a scam, and I considered asking the man for his business card. As the hotel shuttle bus pulled around the corner, I figured that at least the hotel did exist and nothing too bad could happen. When I got to the hotel, predictably, they told me that I couldn’t just hang out or valet the bags, but I would have to take a room, and that it would cost \$65. I said, “Forget it. I’m going back to the airport,” to which the desk clerk replied, “30 dollars.” I probably could have talked him down more, but I’ll be the first to admit I’m not the shrewdest negotiator. I considered my options and figured that \$30 was reasonable for a place to put my bags and hang out in privacy until 1:00. Upon seeing the room, however, I thought maybe I had overpaid.

The cold was really hitting me now, so I stashed my bags and went out for more mango juice. I wasn’t sure if I could trust an Indian decongestant, or even where to find one. I strolled along the streets and bought a few gifts for people. I was the only white person anywhere in sight, and I did get a few funny looks from the locals. The salesmen would start salivating as soon as I walked in the door. There were Hindu festivals in honor of the Mother Goddess going on this time of year, and the streets were lined with colorful flashing lights. I passed a store that was selling small suitcases, so I bought one knowing that I would have a hard time carrying my new electronic music boxes around. After about an hour of shopping, I headed back to my hotel room. I did my best to avoid all of the bellboys, valets, and concierges in this tiny, cheap hotel, which wasn’t easy. About a half hour later, a short skinny man in a tuxedo knocked on my door and asked me if I

wanted anything from the bar, a soda or beer perhaps. I told him I didn't want anything, so he asked if I wanted any water. I replied politely in the negative, so he suggested that maybe I would like some coffee or tea. I remembered why I had tried to avoid them. I wasn't about to give these guys any more money since I was already paying \$30 just for a place to sit. As he was starting to offer something else to drink, I closed the door. All this time I had managed to avoid any gastrointestinal trouble, but tonight the "Delhi belly" finally hit me, so my last night in India it wasn't just my nose that was running. It might have had something to do with the 12 or so raw hot peppers that I had eaten at lunch.

Around midnight I took the hotel van back to the airport and caught my flight to Frankfurt without incident. Overall I can say that India had been just what I had expected. The filth and poverty was beautifully offset by the fantastic food and unique, colorful culture. I had a standing invitation from my new friends in Delhi to come visit again. It would be worth it just for the food, I think. I wonder if I can just get take-out.