

India 2011

Saturday, March 19th - Arrival in India



Sarah outside Indira Gandhi Airport

After two days of traveling, we arrived in India very late on Saturday March 19th to the chaos of the Indira Gandhi Airport. After finding Sarah we patiently waited outside for our bus for an hour before finding out that it was trapped behind a parking barrier. Hari Om and welcome to India!

Off to the Lohias Hotel for a few hours of sleep before the trek to Rishikesh.

Sunday, March 20th - The Bus Ride to Rishikesh

We only had 3 hours of sleep before we left the hotel at 6:30 on Sunday morning from Delhi to Rishikesh.

There was hardly any traffic because of Holi, so the trip from Delhi to Rishikesh only took 5 hours (it normally takes 6-8 hours). We were pelted along the way by happy celebrants most people were full of colours (i.e. pink faces and hair and arms.) Every once in a while we heard "SHUT THE WINDOWS!" when we were driving slowly near boys armed with water balloons.



The bus ride

with coloured water balloons and

We were all exhausted, but we arrived in Rishikesh in the early afternoon to settle into our rooms. Upon arrival we were welcomed by Vishva-ji and Chetana-ji and received garlands of fresh flowers.

After a gentle bed time yoga class, everyone settled in for a good night of sleep, and for some, a night of listening to dogs barking and trying to get used to the new time zone.



Joni receiving a garland from Sarah



Chetana-ji and Vishva-ji

Monday, March 21st - Settling In

We had an easy Monday. Early morning yoga with Vishva-ji, a morning workshop then a short walk around Tapovan. It was quite hot in the afternoon and many people found it both mesmerizing and overwhelming. After a while you can see the order in the chaos, but at first it assaults the senses in a big way.



Barb teaching in the meditation hall

Tuesday, March 22nd - Venturing Further Into Town

On Tuesday we were thankful for the small amount of wind as the temperatures are quite hot in the afternoons in March and April. We went for a longer walk through Laxman Jhula and Ram Jhula, and after about 1.5 hours, all of a sudden several people started to look very pale and tired. We quickly headed for the rickshaws and got everyone back to the ashram to rest. In addition to being hot, everyone was still a little tired.

Once you get over the initial barrage of noise, one of the best activities is walking through

the markets. There is an abundance of colours, noises and activity that cannot be found in North America. Today Barb's son Liam was a master at bartering. The first two things he bought, he just opened his money belt and paid what the person was asking. After we taught him how to bargain, he managed to talk the drum seller down from 600 rupees to 250 rupees. We were all pretty impressed and he became hooked on bargaining.



Sarah teaching in the meditation hall

Our days have been busy with morning yoga, workshops from 9am-12pm, walks in town in the afternoons and excursions and activities in the evening.

Some people took advantage of the Tuesday evening Kirtan (devotional singing) in the meditation hall. The sounds were beautiful and peaceful.



Cathy in town



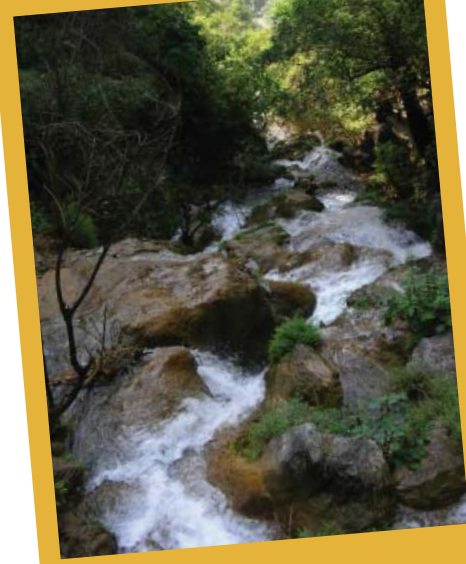
Alex

Wednesday, March 23rd - Free Afternoon to Explore

Everyone was excited to take advantage of their free afternoon today. Some people visited the markets and others rested in the garden.

After bed time yoga, many people were sleeping better after getting used to the noises and the new time zone.

Thursday, March 24th - The Little Waterfall



Mountain stream

At this point, most of us could not remember what day it was anymore. At the morning check-in, everyone was reminded of the day and the activities for the next two days. It was a challenge to balance education with sightseeing and relaxation.

We went up to the little waterfall today, a hike that goes straight up hill near the ashram into the Himalayas.

Although hot, it was a wonderful hike and we certainly got a chance to practice the injury-free walking techniques - in fact, without it, the walking would have been quite exhausting.

The kids are so sweet and say to us, "Hello, hello, how are you?" They all look so 'proper' in their school uniforms.

Friday, March 25th - Nielkandt Temple

Today we rode in jeeps up the mountain to the Nielkandt temple. The views were incredible, the driving was crazy and the honking was laughable, but necessary. All you hear, over and over is, HONK HONK (that is how drivers signal that they are passing).

There was a tiny dog up at the Nielkandt temple. He was so skinny that his hips were sticking out noticeably. No one could resist his cute little puppy eyes.



Beautiful Indian women relaxing from carrying their heavy loads down the mountain



Sandy H, Joni and Sarah in the Jeep



Sandy B, Anne and Joni in the jeep



Liam at Nielkandt Temple

We shuffled through the temple, copying what the locals did at the altar.

We also visited the Hari Krishna temple for joyful dancing and a delicious meal.



Barb at Hari Krishna



Mmm - Our meal at Hari Krishna



Jacqueline, Sarah and Barb at Hari Krishna

Saturday, March 26th - Rishikesh and Dinner and Movie at the Ramanas Orphanage

It is hard to believe that our first week is already over.

On Saturday morning we took Rickshaws to Rishikesh. We started by going down to the Triveni Ghat - steps that lead down to the Ganges river where people bathe or just put their feet in the water. In the rainy season, the Ganges swells to the top of the stairs and sometimes sweeps houses away. Our friend Amit said that last year he had to walk 200 kms to get back home because he was caught unexpectedly by the floods.



Triveni Ghat

We had a good laugh in the Rishikesh market today. We saw shoes that looked exactly like converse sneakers but had the brand 'Converge - All Stairs' And we also saw 'Abibas' running shoes. We also took some funny pictures of the mannequins. James had a suit custom made and Sandy H had a Punjabi outfit made. We spent quite a while waiting in the material shop and the boys were pretty interested in Liam's ipod games, so Liam let them play too.



Converge All Stairs

We are traveling with such a nice group of people. It is hard to believe that we are already through our first week here. The next week will fly by quickly.



Video Games at the Material Store



James

It sure is hard to walk by the beggars - many of whom are missing limbs or carrying babies. I think that our monthly donations to the Helping Hands for India organization is an excellent way for us to make a difference, so we have just been saying hello and walking by.

Many of us have a soft spot for the dogs who are so thin and often have deformities. The cows are treated quite nicely.

This evening, we went for pizza and a movie at the Ramanas Orphanage. The orphanage is such a beautiful place doing wonderful work. There are 60 permanent residents plus hundreds of children who come to school during the days. Children can stay here until they are 18 years old.



Jacqueline and JP at the Orphanage

Sunday, March 27th - A Day of Rest

Everyone enjoyed a free day doing whatever activities they wanted. Most people ventured to the markets at some point during the day, returning with exciting and exotic purchases for themselves and friends.



the Orphanage

Monday, March 28th - Visit

with Dr. Arora

We had a presentation from Dr. Arora today. Dr. Arora is both an Ayurvedic doctor as well as a conventionally trained doctor. It was the most clear and well presented talk on Ayurveda that I have heard and most of the group really enjoyed hearing him speak. Although Ayurveda is not for everyone, some of us went to see Dr. Arora to have our doshas identified and hear some words of wisdom. He was right on the mark for most of the assessments and people were very impressed by him.

Tuesday, March 29th - The Big Waterfall

On Tuesday some of us hiked up to the big waterfall. Much of the trail had been washed out from landslides, so it was a bit treacherous in some areas. There is a



Monkey on the bridge



Barb and Mannequin

village up above the waterfall and the mountain people walk up and down the steep, rocky trails in flip flops seemingly without effort.

At the end of our hike, we took a dip in the pool under the big waterfall. What a thrill and certainly a highlight of the trip. We picked up Sandy H and Anne on our return down

the mountain and they both looked so peaceful and radiant while waiting for us.

Wednesday, March 30th - Delivering Books to the Orphanage



Rest break

This morning we went to the orphanage to drop off some of the books and school supplies that we brought along. When we arrived, the kids playing in the yard quickly zoned in on the books and descended upon us. A boy who was about 8 or 9 years old found a 'Bob the Builder' book with sound buttons that you press. He picked it up, looked at Liam and said, "You sit with me" then he and Liam started reading it together.

The boy kept both hands firmly on the book so that no one could take it, but later had to give it up to the library. The kids also really liked the pop-up books and the books with textures and lots of pictures.



Anne



Beautifully made steps on the trail



Joni sorting books for the orphanage



Sandy at the fire puja

Thursday, March 31st - One-on-One Sessions

Only a few days left. We are reluctantly starting to think of returning home. Today we began our one-on-one sessions, and otherwise, everyone had two free days on Thursday and Friday. There was a lot of excitement in the air as people explored the local towns, sampled the many local eateries, bought gifts for friends and family and, for some, explored the mountains on their own.



Cathy

Friday, April 1st - Aarte and Vasundhara Palace

After a free day, we had a beautiful night attending the Aarte then dining on a wonderful meal at the Vasundhara Palace restaurant.



Sandy H, Amit and Sarah at the Aarte



Vasundhara Palace

Saturday, April 2nd - Banofi Pie at Amit's House in the Mountains

Our friend Amit invited us to his beautiful home in the mountains for home made Banofi pie, turmeric tea and pakoras. It was a delicious treat and another highlight of the trip.

Night time became CRAZY when India won the world cricket championships. Some of us gave up trying to sleep as there were full on fireworks right outside our windows. We were kept awake by firecrackers that sounded like automatic rifle fire, spectacular fireworks, shouting, cheering, crazy music. It was joyful and exciting to experience.

Sunday, April 2nd
- Heading Home

Sadly we packed up to leave today. The drive was unexpectedly long (9 hours) and we were very grateful to arrive at the airport at 10pm. We said goodbye to Sarah who left for Laos then headed back in to the



Anand Prakash Ashram



Amit

chaos of Indira Gandhi Airport once again.

Lots of love,

Barb and Sarah



Barb Pierce
Ratan Jyothi



Sarah Wall
Shobhana



The Ganges