

India

December 2006

*

David Salesin

All rights reserved.

1

London

10 Dec. 2006, 2:02pm, on the road to London.

We arrived in Heathrow on a cloudy afternoon, after an 8½ hour flight from Seattle, and took a taxi into town. I was amazed at the efficient use of space in the small London taxicab. All five of us fit comfortably in the rear seats, with all the baggage stacked next to the driver in front and beneath our seats.



10 Dec. 2006, 6:41pm, at the Savoy Grill.

Crazy as it sounds, we had made reservations at Zaika, an outstanding Indian fusion restaurant, which we had tried and loved the last time we were in London (although we weren't about to go to India that time!). But we were exhausted after the long trip and decided to dine where we were staying instead, at the Savoy. I shot this photo while waiting to order.



10 Dec. 2006, 9:32pm, at the Savoy.

Our flight on to Chennai was leaving early the following morning. After a half-hour stroll around London in the wind and misty rain, we retired to our beautiful “family suite” in this elegant 19th-century hotel. Here, Eleni and Jess are all tucked in and ready to sleep; Jess’s eyes are already half closed after the long day.



2

Madurai

12 Dec. 2006, 2:50pm, Madurai.

The journey from London to Chennai was another 8 hours and 40 minutes of flying. Our flight was delayed two hours, and it took another two hours to get through immigration, recover our bags, and travel to the hotel. We arrived around 4:00am and had about four hours to sleep before returning to the airport for our last connection. We finally reached Madurai that afternoon. Here is our first view of the city as we drove in. [\[Click to play video.\]](#)



12 Dec. 2006, 5:03pm, at the Taj Garden Retreat.

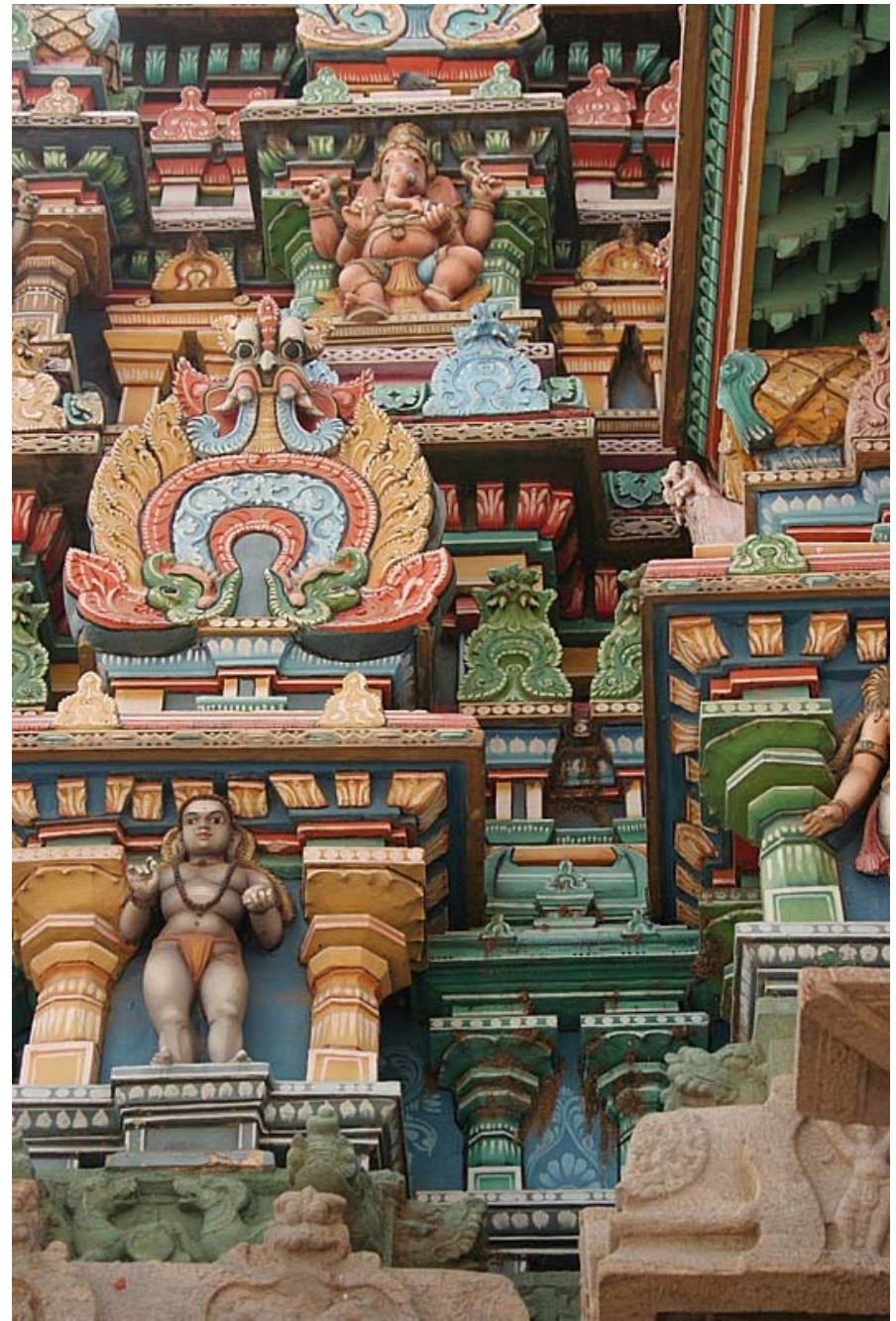
It was warm and lovely in Madurai. The first thing everyone did when we reached the hotel was dive into the pool. It was great to get some fresh air and exercise after so many hours of travel.



13 Dec. 2006, 11:25am, Madurai.

The next day was our first full day in India, and thankfully the other invited speakers to ICVGIP and I were taken on a tour of the city, along with the rest of my family, rather than being asked to attend the day of preliminary programs.

Our first stop was the Meenakshi-Sundareshwara Temple. The temple is actually a large compound, surrounded by fortress walls, and containing some 33,000 sculptures inside. The most prominent features of the temple are its twelve towers, or *gopuras*, each covered with a profusion of gods and demons. Here is a close-up of one.



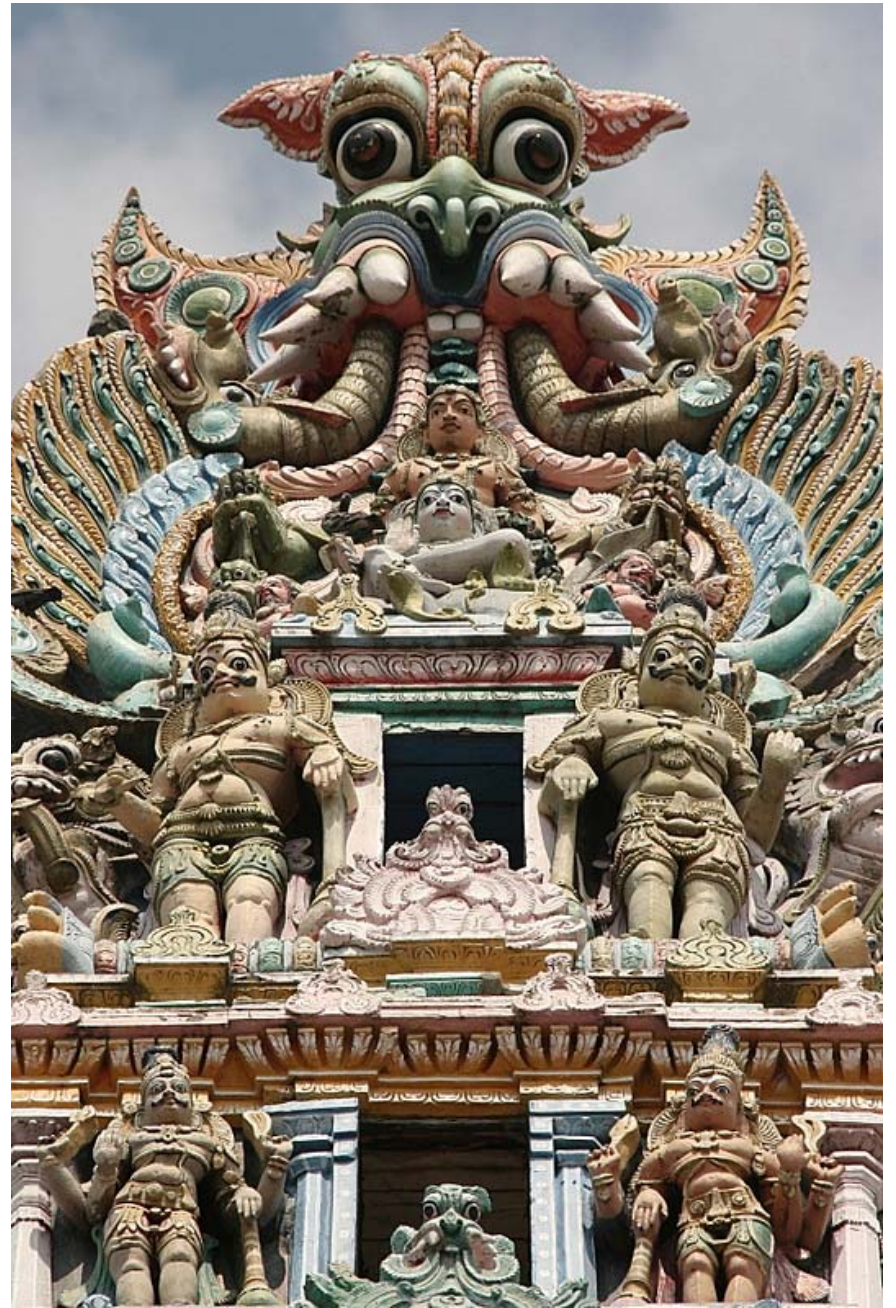
13 Dec. 2006, 11:27am, in the Meenakshi Temple.

Here is one of the gopuras in its entirety – or at least as much of it as I could fit in with my 28mm lens while standing at its base.



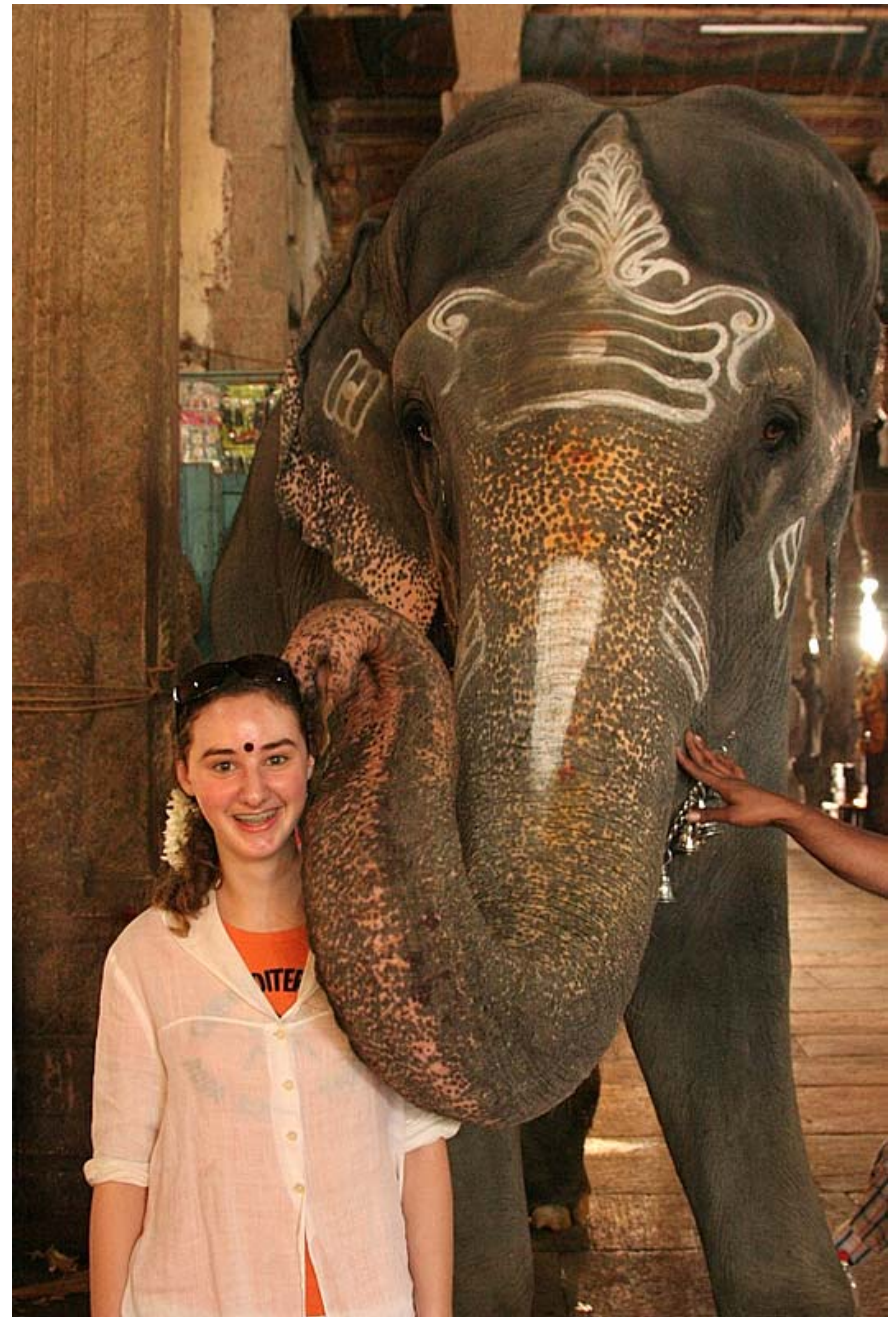
13 Dec. 2006, 11:27am, in the Meenakshi Temple.

And here is a close-up of the tower's peak.



13 Dec. 2006, 11:46am, in the Meenakshi Temple.

Inside the temple there's all kinds of activity. In a couple of places, elephants are stationed to give blessings to anyone willing to pay for them. Oona offered 20 rupees for hers. The elephant used its trunk to take the note from her hand and then bestowed its blessing with a tap on the back of her head.



13 Dec. 2006, 11:49am, in the Meenakshi Temple.

Here is one of the many shrines inside the temple, this one containing a chubby Ganesh, the god of good fortune. This particular Ganesh is known for his sweet tooth, and during a festival in September every year a special offering is made of 300 kilos of rice, 10 kilos of sugar, and 110 coconuts.



13 Dec. 2006, 12:04pm, in the Meenakshi Temple.

This 18th-century ceiling painting in one of the corridors shows the marriage of Meenakshi and Sundareswar (also known as Shiva).

Meenakshi was a beautiful goddess with three breasts. However, as soon as she met her husband, Sundareswar, she lost her third breast, fulfilling a prophecy. Now the two gods preside over the Madurai temple, and they are placed in a bedchamber together each night by the temple priests.



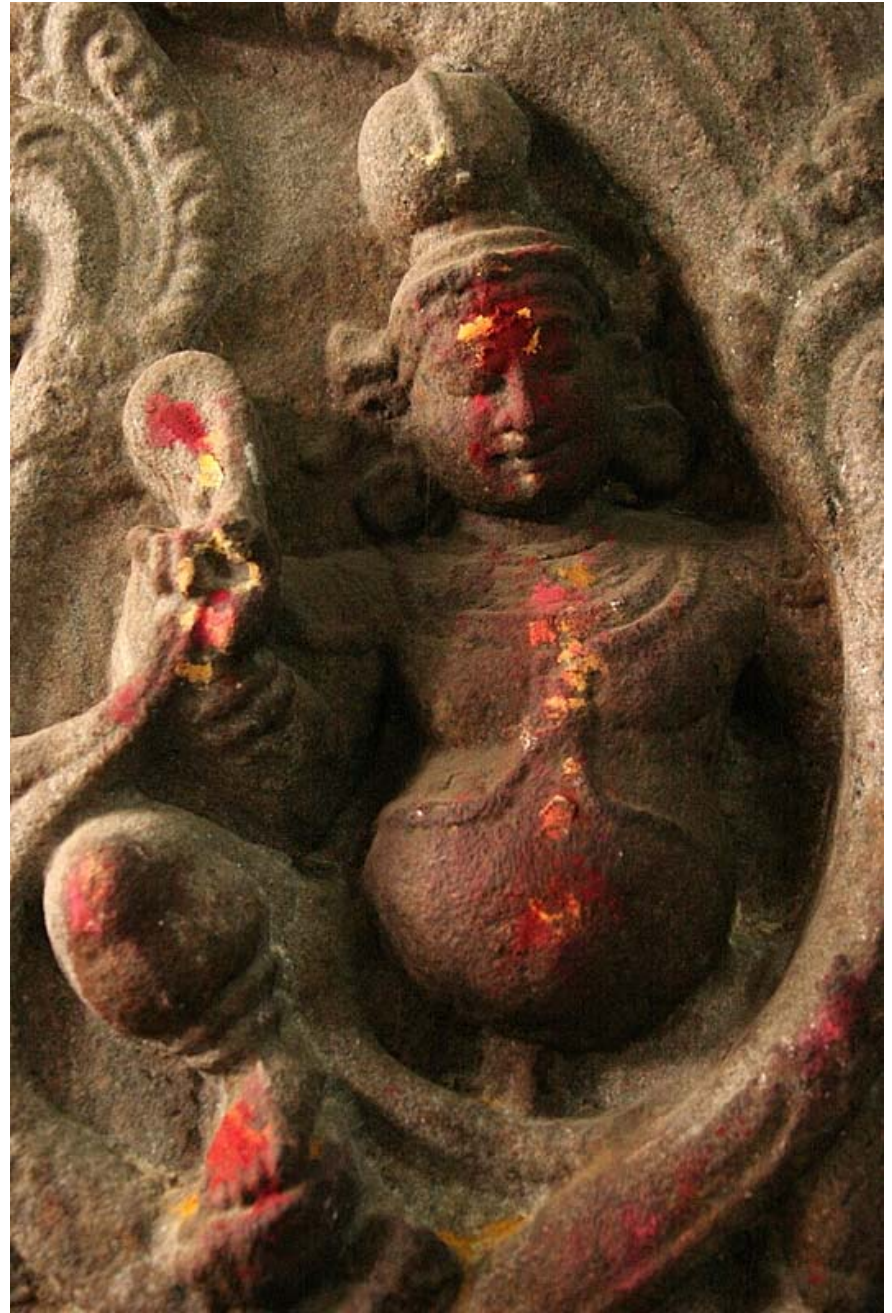
13 Dec. 2006, 12:13pm, in the Meenakshi Temple.

Three of the fifty temple priests. Each wears a *dhoti* tied between the legs, covered with a pink silk cloth. A small bag containing holy ash is folded into the cloth. They wear necklaces containing *rudraksha* beads, which are sacred to Shiva, and they place white ash on their foreheads and arms.



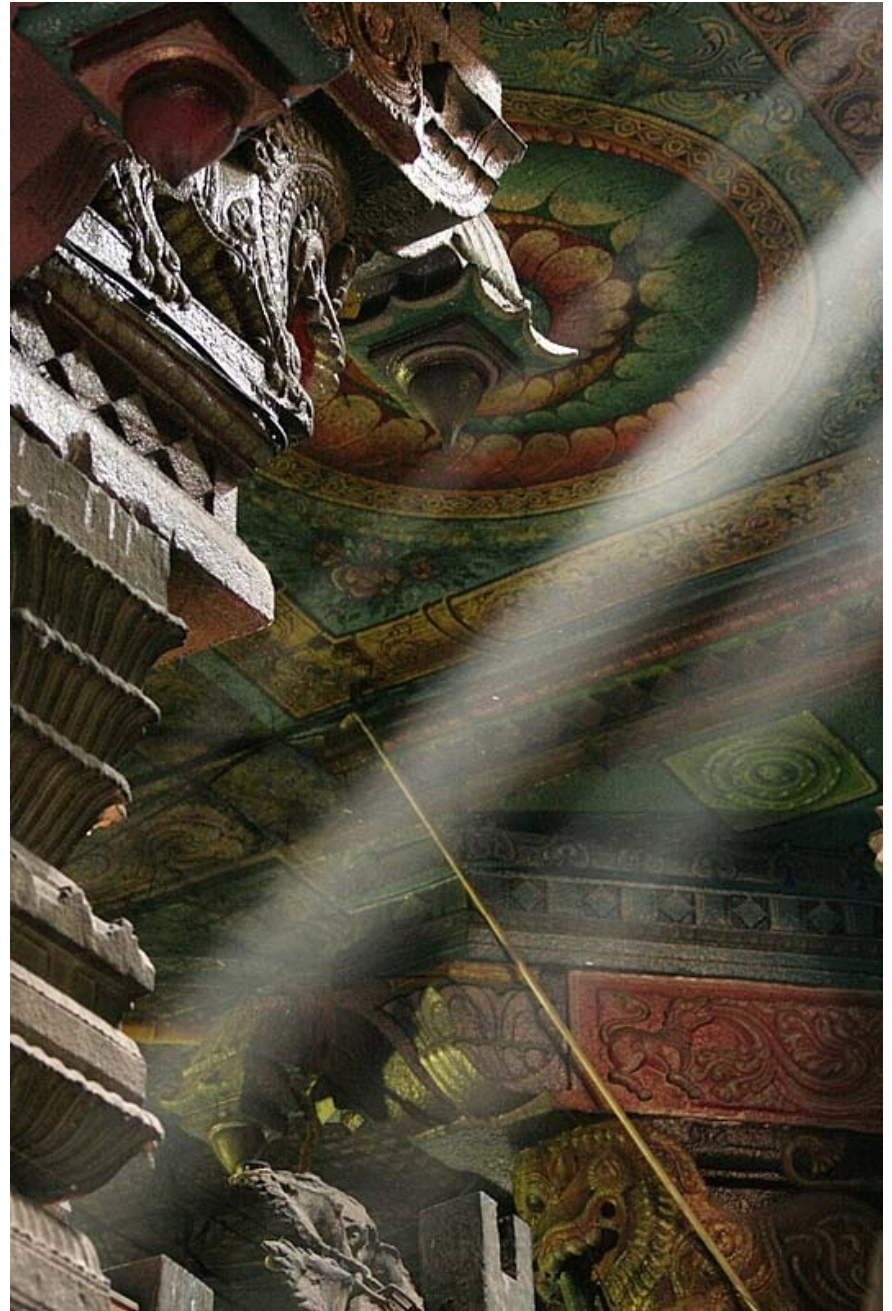
13 Dec. 2006, 12:30pm, in the Meenakshi Temple.

One of the 33,000 sculptures found within the temple compound. This one is carved into a pillar and is about a foot high.



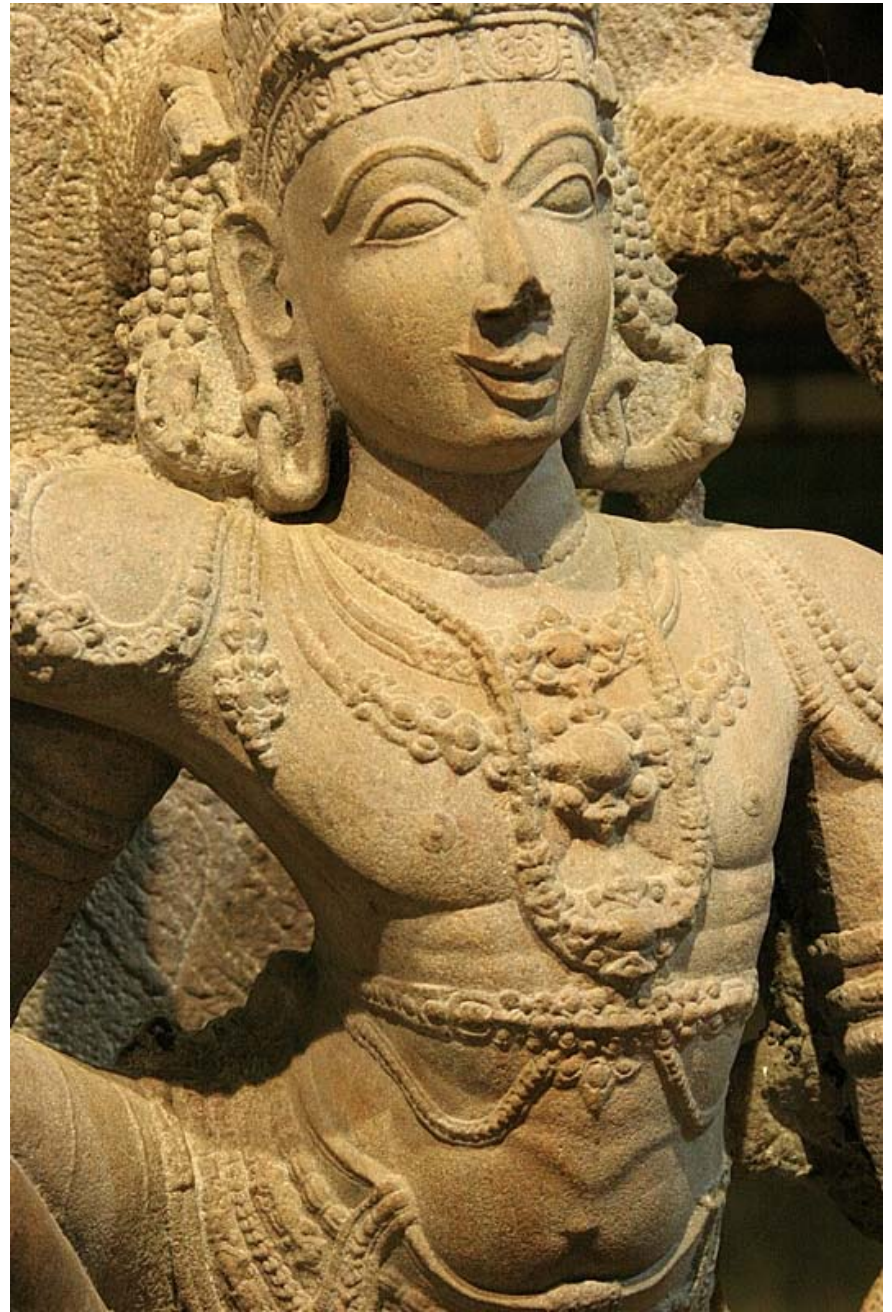
13 Dec. 2006, 12:31pm, in the Meenakshi Temple.

These beams of light were streaming through a window, high up in the temple.



13 Dec. 2006, 1:08pm, in the Meenakshi Temple.

One of the hundreds of statues in the temple's Thousand Pillared Hall.



13 Dec. 2006, 1:33pm, Madurai.

After our visit to the temple, our guide took us to a small shop nearby, from whose rooftop we had terrific views of the various towers, or *gopuras*. Here is one of them, rising far above the trees.



13 Dec. 2006, 1:47pm, Madurai.

Isaiah in the shop with the view. He tells me he was very thirsty at the time.



13 Dec. 2006, 1:52pm, Madurai.

Eleni, downstairs, enjoying the attention of the shopkeepers as they fitted her with various necklaces.



13 Dec. 2006, 5:44pm, Madurai.

Later in the afternoon, we headed out to see some more sights, but it turned out they had all closed for the day. Instead, we wound up milling about on the street with the locals for some time. This is one of the young girls that we met.



13 Dec. 2006, 5:55pm, Madurai.

Two young boys who wanted me to take their picture as well.



13 Dec. 2006, 6:22pm, across from the Tirumalai Nayak Palace in Madurai.

Later in the evening, Ondi, Oona, and Eleni shopped for saris in a tiny shop while Isaiah and I looked around at other shops on the street. Here are some of the wares at a small grocery nearby.



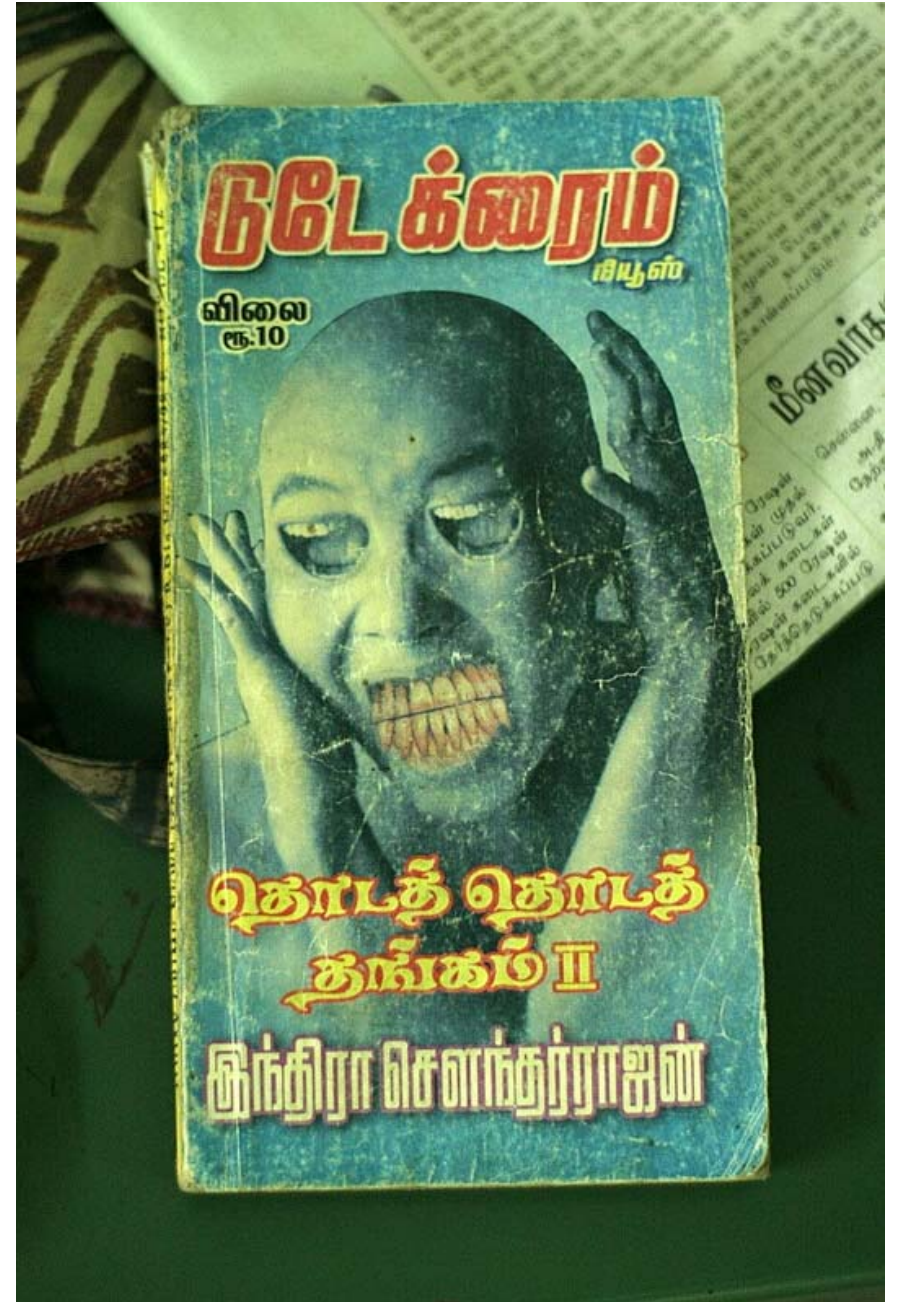
13 Dec. 2006, 6:31pm, across from the Tirumalai Nayak Palace in Madurai.

While waiting for Ondi to finish her bargaining, I amused myself by taking photos of the barred window in the dark, desolate room.



13 Dec. 2006, 6:34pm, across from the Tirumalai Nayak Palace in Madurai.

This intriguing novel sat on the table in the anteroom of the sari shop. If only I could read Tamil!



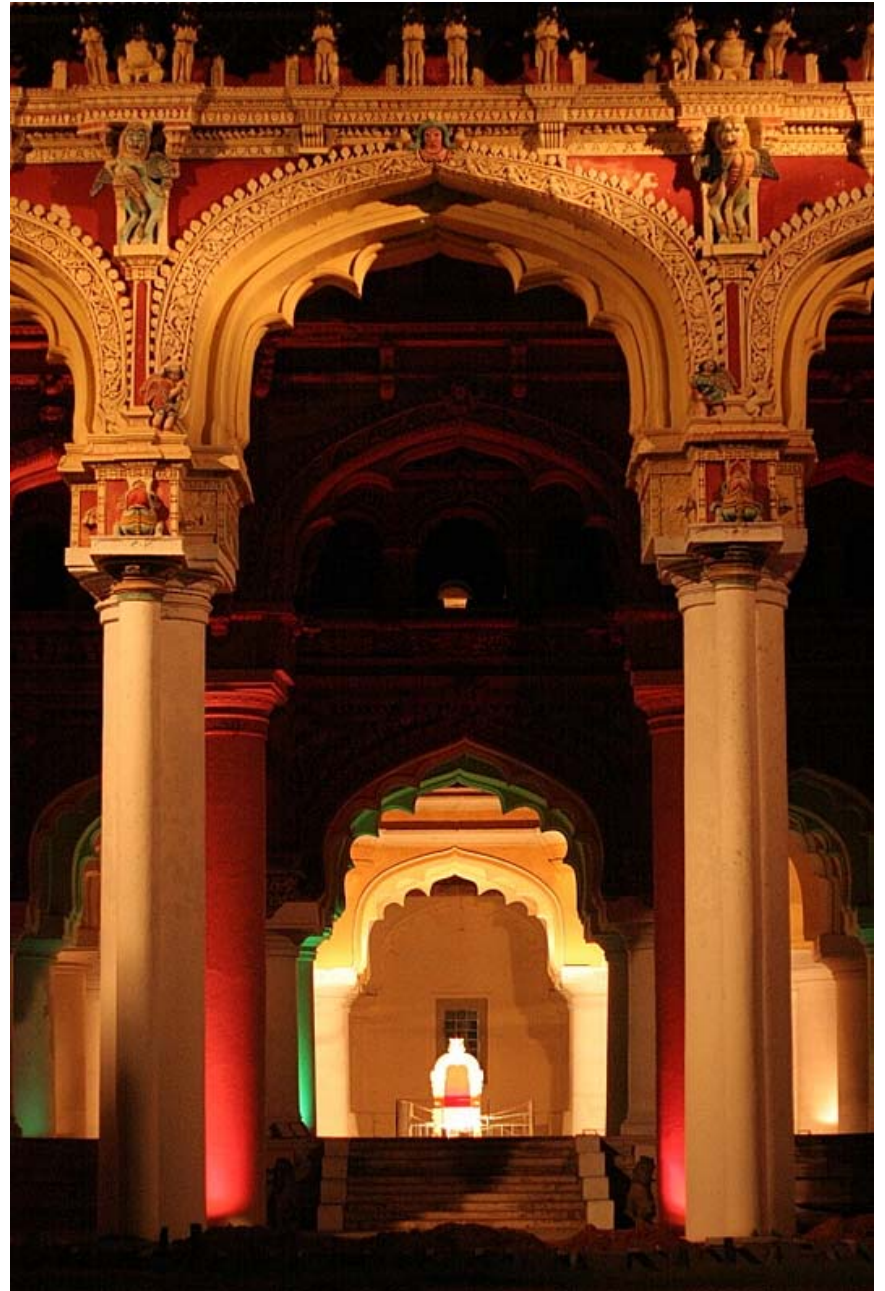
13 Dec. 2006, 6:37pm, across from the Tirumalai Nayak Palace in Madurai.

Ondi still not finished with her purchase, I walked around on the street some more. I peered into this food stall, where a big pot was on the fire.



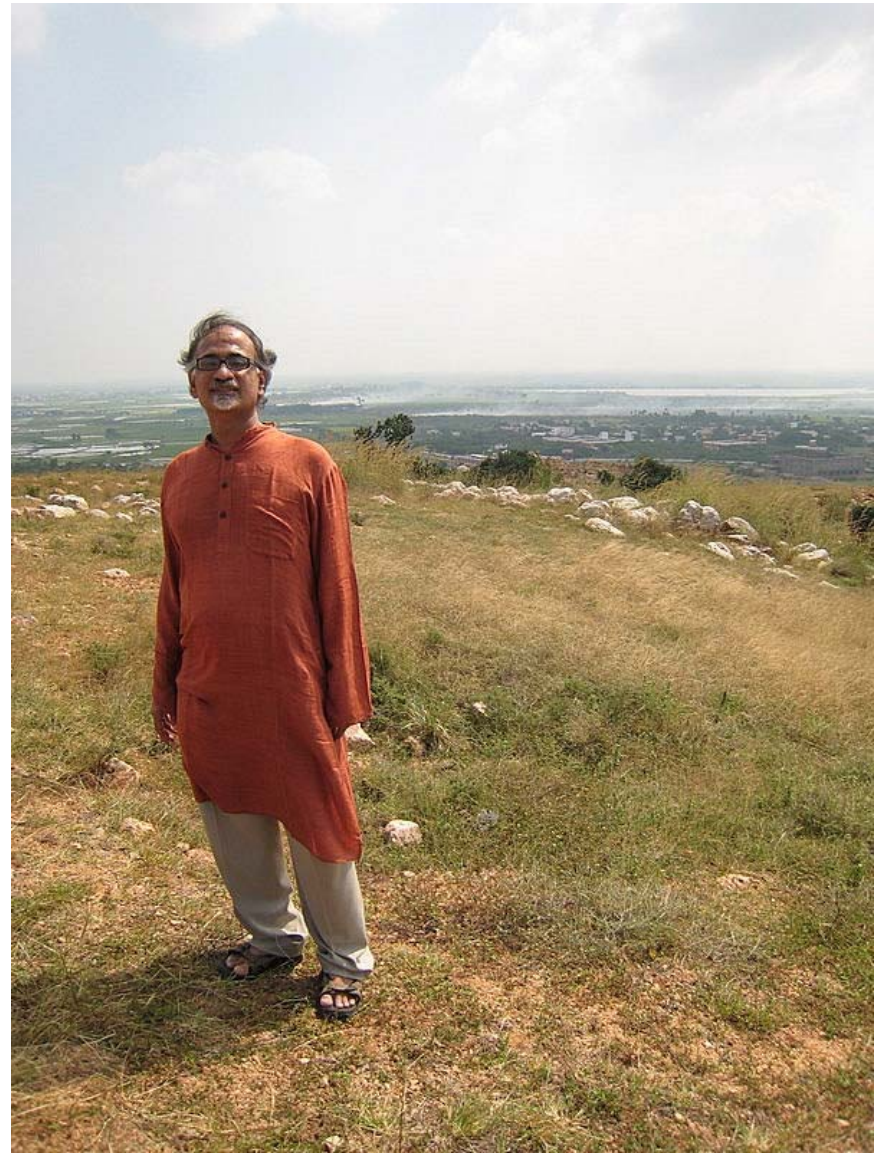
13 Dec. 2006, 6:45pm, in the Thirumalai Nayak Palace.

In the end, Ondi bought one sari for 400 rupees. She finished just in time for us to walk across the street to attend the sound-and-light show at the palace built by Thirumalai Nayak, a 17th-century ruler.



15 Dec. 2006, 11:14am, Madurai.

I spent the next day and a half at the conference. In the morning of the second day, Anandan and I took a long walk from the conference venue. We passed a snake charmer, a boy walking his goat, an old woman shaping dung paddies with her hands, and another carrying a basket of these paddies on her head. We walked through a small village where young boys followed us, shouting "Hello!," and then up a few hundred steps to a small, isolated temple on a hilltop. It was the first time I experienced a sense of uncrowded, open space since arriving in India. Standing among the dry grasses, I almost felt as if I were in California!



15 Dec. 2006, 11:15am, Madurai.

Here I am in that same spot. You can see I'm not exactly dressed for hiking!



15 Dec. 2006, 1:15pm, at the Taj Garden Retreat.

After sampling the university's cafeteria the day before, I decided to return to the hotel for lunch, where the food was fabulous. Isaiah turns out to be a huge fan of South Indian cuisine as well. At this moment, he is eagerly anticipating its arrival.



15 Dec. 2006, 1:51pm, at the Taj Garden Retreat.

Brown University professor Michael Black and his wife, Lee, joined us for lunch as well. It was great having the chance to spend so much time with them and the other invited speakers.



15 Dec. 2006, 3:34pm, Madurai.

That afternoon, Nebojsa Jovic, Phil Torr, his friend Maaeke, and I went back to walk around Madurai some more. First stop was the local pharmacy, where everyone else needed to pick up some medications. All kinds of prescription drugs are available over the counter in India, like Valium, which Phil recommended we take on the way home to ease our 36-hour journey. I decided to pass, although I may regret it yet!



15 Dec. 2006, 3:41pm, Madurai.

A holy man we passed on the street.



15 Dec. 2006, 3:43pm, Madurai.

The streets of Madurai are filled with all kinds of animals, as well as people. Cows are sacred in Hindu culture. They seem to roam about the city freely, feeding on whatever they find around.



15 Dec. 2006, 4:13pm, Madurai.

We stopped in a “5&10 rupee” store to buy some souvenirs. (A rupee is currently worth about 2¼ cents.) The store had quite a selection!



15 Dec. 2006, 4:14pm, Madurai.

Some 10-rupee monkeys. The night before, our driver had given Eleni a similar monkey hanging from his rear-view mirror, as she had admired it so much. I had felt bad about her accepting this gift at the time, but when I discovered they were not so expensive I was a little less concerned.



15 Dec. 2006, 4:41pm, Madurai.

A flower vendor, at his cart on the street beside the temple.



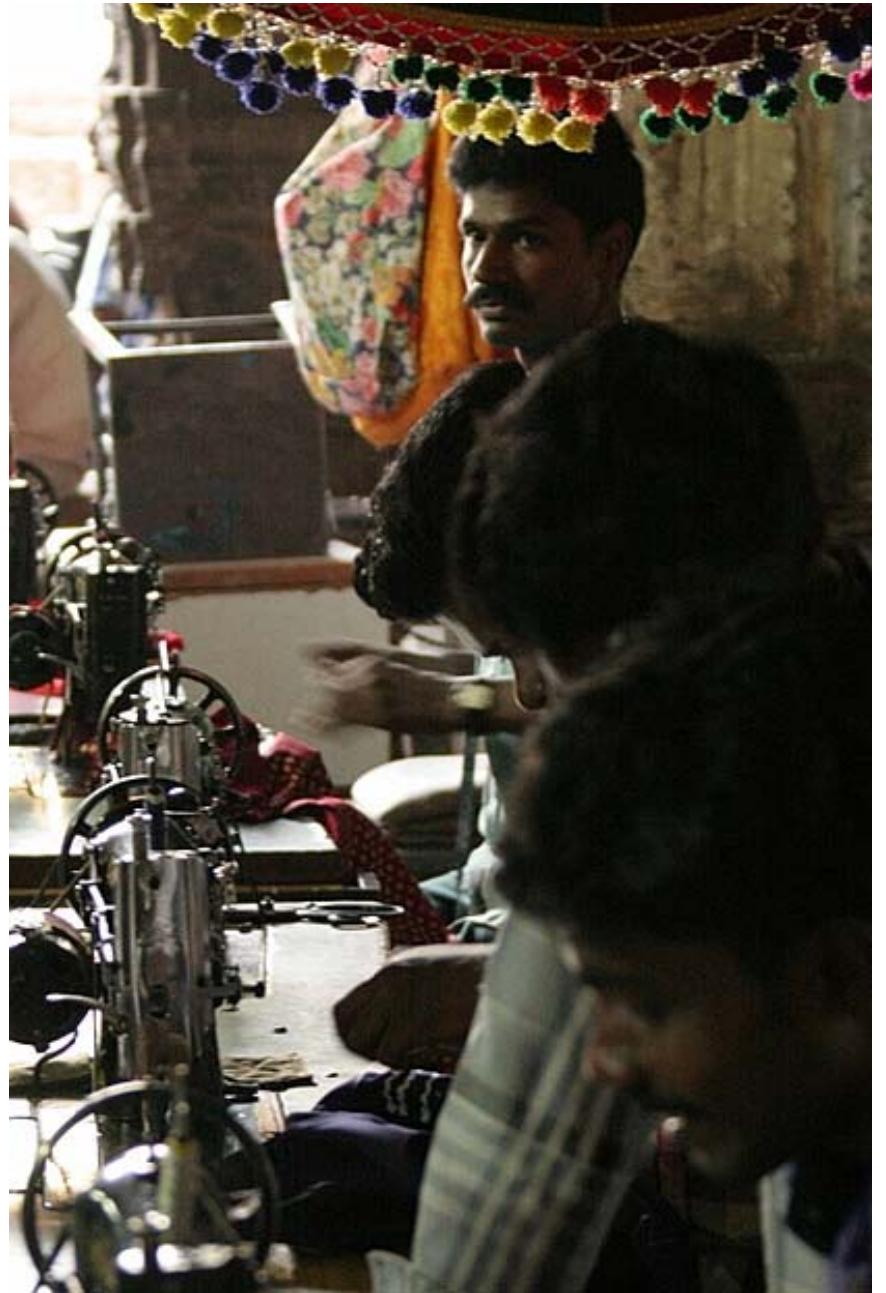
15 Dec. 2006, 4:55pm, Old Madurai.

Just north of the temple is a warren of tiny, covered alleys, known as Old Madurai. The alleys are crammed with craft shops, fabric stores, and tailors. Here is one of the vendors, whose shop my companions had frequented the day before. He was happy to see them again.



15 Dec. 2006, 4:57pm, Old Madurai.

The tailors of Old Madurai are reputed to make faithful renditions of any of your clothes in a matter of hours. These tailors were hard at work, even as the daylight began to fade.



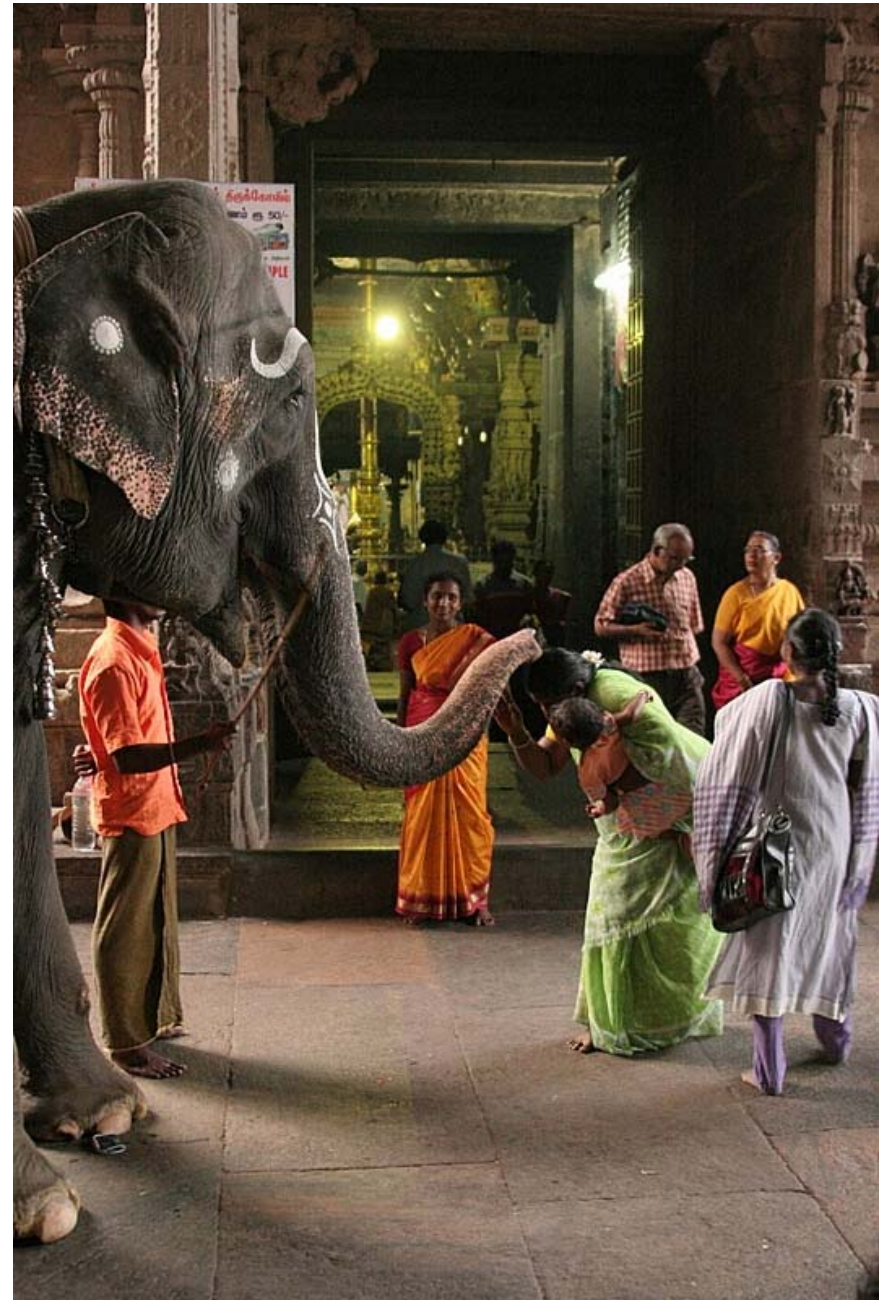
15 Dec. 2006, 5:07pm, Old Madurai.

Just outside, a grocer selling chilies and lentils, both staples of the South Indian diet.



15 Dec. 2006, 5:49pm, in the Meenakshi Temple..

Back inside the Meenakshi Temple, I observed visitors receiving their blessings, one after another, upon offering their rupees to the elephant.



15 Dec. 2006, 6:06pm, in the Meenakshi Temple..

This part of the temple contains figures of Shiva and Kali dancing. Visitors can buy butter balls from a bowl of water in a stall nearby, which they smear on the figures to keep them cooled off.



15 Dec. 2006, 6:21pm, Madurai.

Outside of the temple again, we looked around for Nebojsa, who had disappeared into a tailor's shop about two hours before, while we were in the "5&10 rupee" store. We had counted on the informal network of shopkeepers and touts, who seemed to know where all of us were at all times, to help us find him again. But our network failed us this time, and we eventually departed, figuring that one of the many rickshaw drivers around could take him back separately. And indeed, we found Nebojsa later that evening at the hotel.



15 Dec. 2006, 6:26pm, Madurai.

Here is downtown Madurai by night, as we headed back to our hotel. [\[Click to play video.\]](#)



15 Dec. 2006, 6:53pm, at the Taj Garden Retreat.

Back at the hotel, Eleni showed off her new party dress. Ondi had taken them shopping at Hajeemoosa, an old, and old-fashioned Madurai department store, which she had heard about from her friend Carrie, who grew up in the hills outside town. The well-made dress was 350 rupees, or a little under \$8.

Not everything in India is so cheap. Indeed, there seem to be two completely independent pricing structures: one for Western tourists and goods, which is about the same as you would pay in the U.S.; and another for local people and goods, which can be an order of magnitude less. What's more, I've noticed that quality is quite often *inversely* proportional to price.



15 Dec. 2006, 9:04pm, Madurai.

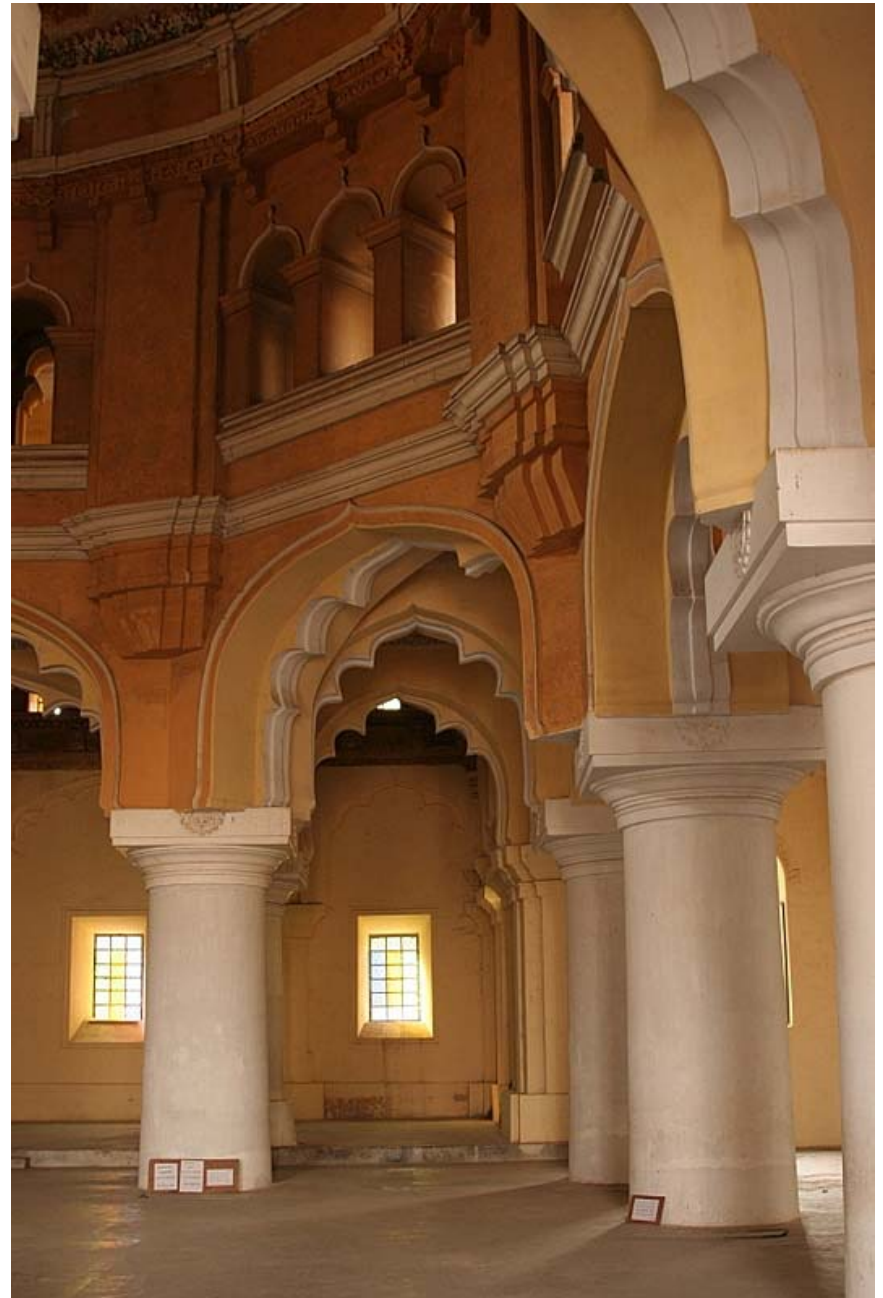
That evening, Anandan brought us to a “real” restaurant in Madurai, somewhere downtown. While waiting for the food to cook, we visited the open-air kitchen, where this tandoor – at least I think that’s what it was – was all fired up and ready to go.

Dinnertime seems to come really late in India. It’s unusual to dine before 8:00 or 9:00pm – kind of like Spain. For me, the main problem with dining so late is allowing enough time to sleep, since the next morning’s working day is not similarly delayed (also like Spain!).



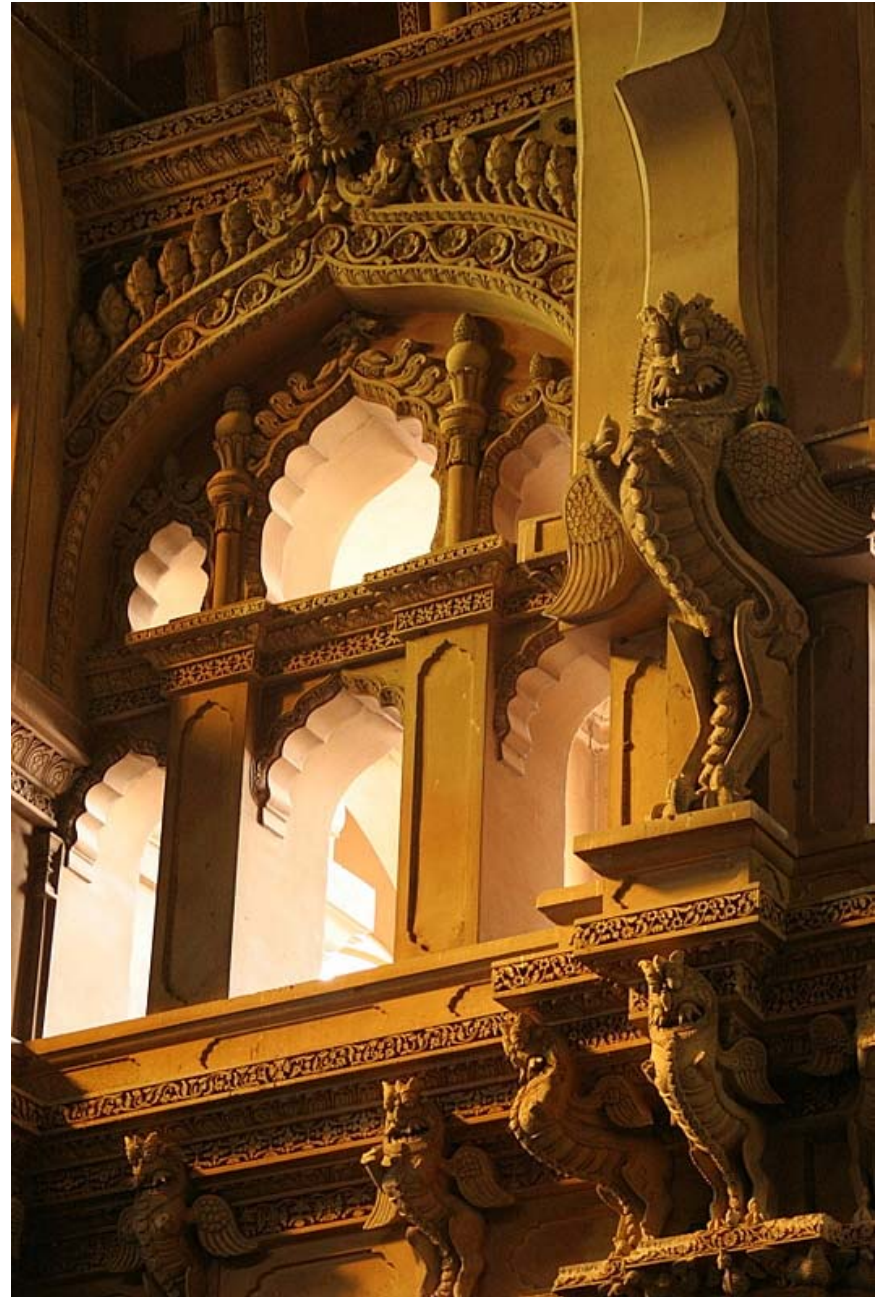
16 Dec. 2006, 3:17pm, in the Thirumalai Nayak Palace.

The next afternoon, we revisited the remains of the Thirumalai Nayak Palace by day. The 17th-century palace was largely dismantled by Thirumalai Nayak's grandson, who used the materials to build his own palace in Tiruchirapalli, about 100km away. Only the Swargavilasa (the "Heavenly Pavilion") here, and an adjoining hall remain.



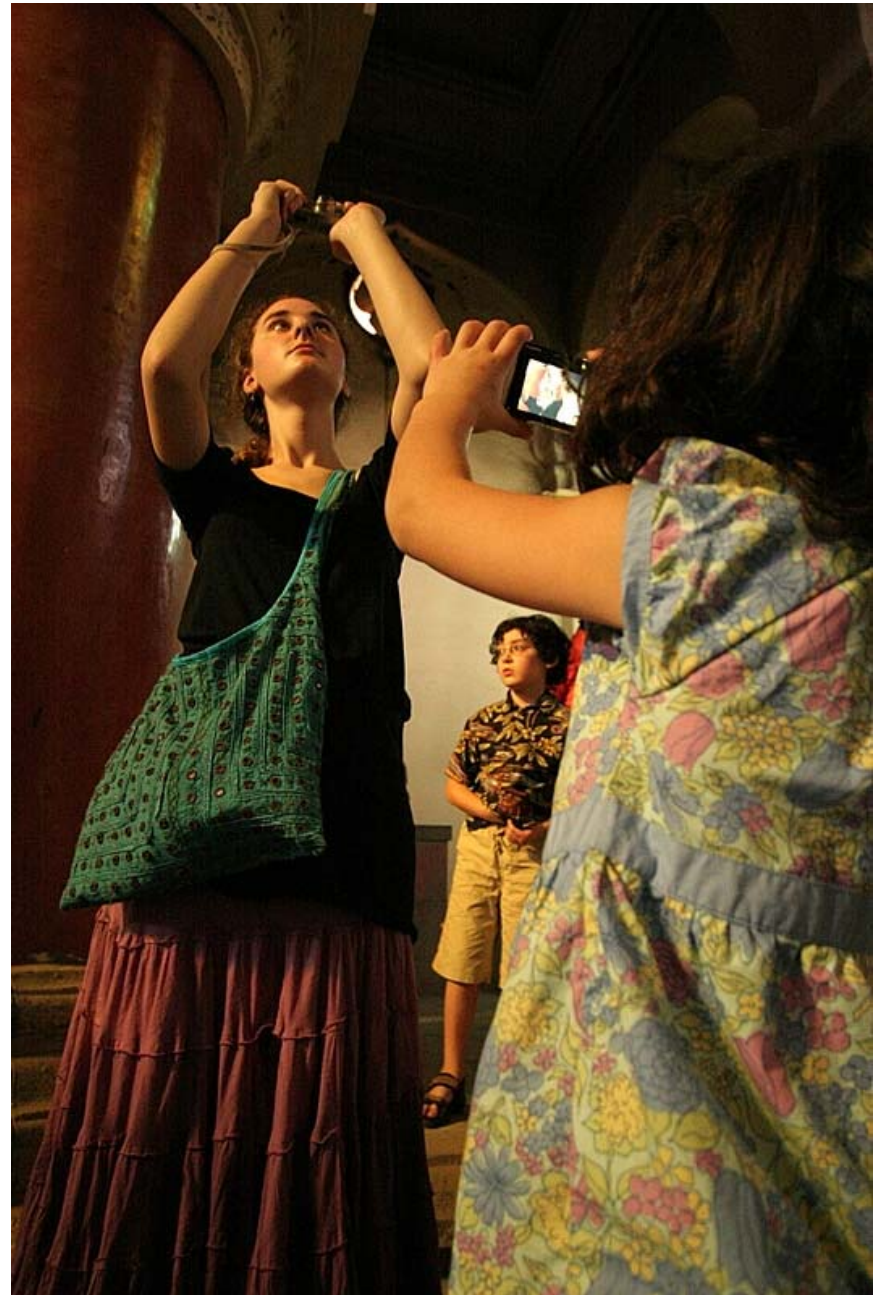
16 Dec. 2006, 3:30pm, in the Thirumalai Nayak Palace.

A detail from the windows illuminating the adjoining hall,
where the Palace Museum now resides.



16 Dec. 2006, 3:36pm, in the Thirumalai Nayak Palace.

Everyone in the family has been getting into taking digital photographs. Unfortunately, we only brought four cameras for the five of us, so Isaiah and Eleni have been trading off the use of one camera at five-minute intervals.



16 Dec. 2006, 3:46pm, in the Thirumalai Nayak Palace.

The kids are also enjoying using the large camera, whenever they can get it out of my hands.



3

Bangalore

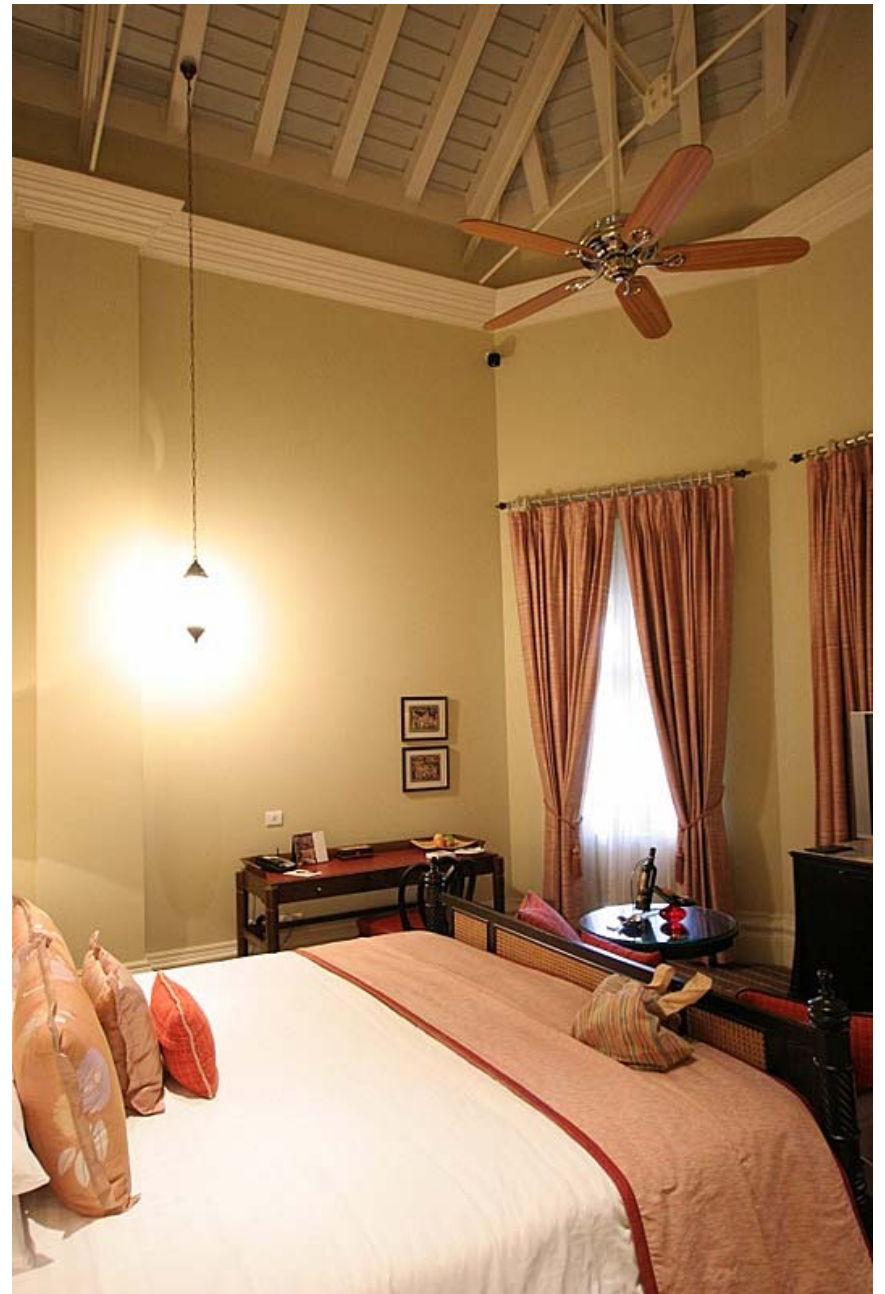
17 Dec. 2006, 12:50pm, Bangalore.

Bangalore is the trendy capital of high tech in India, with a population of nearly eight million. It is full of shopping malls, modern buildings, and Western franchises like Pizza Hut. Our guide book also notes its “lack of cows in large parts of the city.” But you might still find some other animals walking the city streets, as we saw on our way in from the airport. [\[Click to play video.\]](#)



17 Dec. 2006, 1:54pm, at the Taj West End.

In Bangalore, Anandan had arranged two rooms for us at the Taj West End, one of the most beautiful places I have ever stayed. It is situated in an 1887 building, with vaulted ceilings, colonnaded walkways, and 22 acres of immaculately kept grounds, which I circumambulated each day on my very enjoyable runs. Bangalore is up on the Mysore Plateau at 920m, and the weather was markedly cooler here than in Madurai, even a little chilly in the evenings.



18 Dec. 2006, 10:22am, Bangalore.

I spent Monday at Microsoft Research India, at the lab that Anandan founded, and Tuesday at Adobe in Bangalore. I really enjoyed the people I met at both places. Microsoft's office space was especially interesting, having been designed expressly for the research lab. (Adobe's space is currently leased, but Adobe has plans to build its own building in Bangalore soon.)



19 Dec. 2006, 3:05pm, at the City Market.

On Tuesday, after the visit to Adobe and before our flight out, I went off to the City Market in the center of Bangalore with Souvik and Vishakha, two of the young employees there who wanted to spend some extra time together discussing research opportunities. We met up with my family at the market. The produce there was dazzlingly beautiful, like these freshly cut pomegranates.



19 Dec. 2006, 3:06pm, at the City Market.

The woman selling the pomegranates.



19 Dec. 2006, 3:24pm, at the City Market.

Two bunches of bananas, poised on the edge of a step, exactly the way I found them.



19 Dec. 2006, 3:26pm, at the City Market.

The market was filled with huge cones of *bindi*, the brightly colored powder that Hindus place on their foreheads.



19 Dec. 2006, 3:29pm, at the City Market.

Everyone at the market was incredibly friendly, and many asked me to take their pictures.

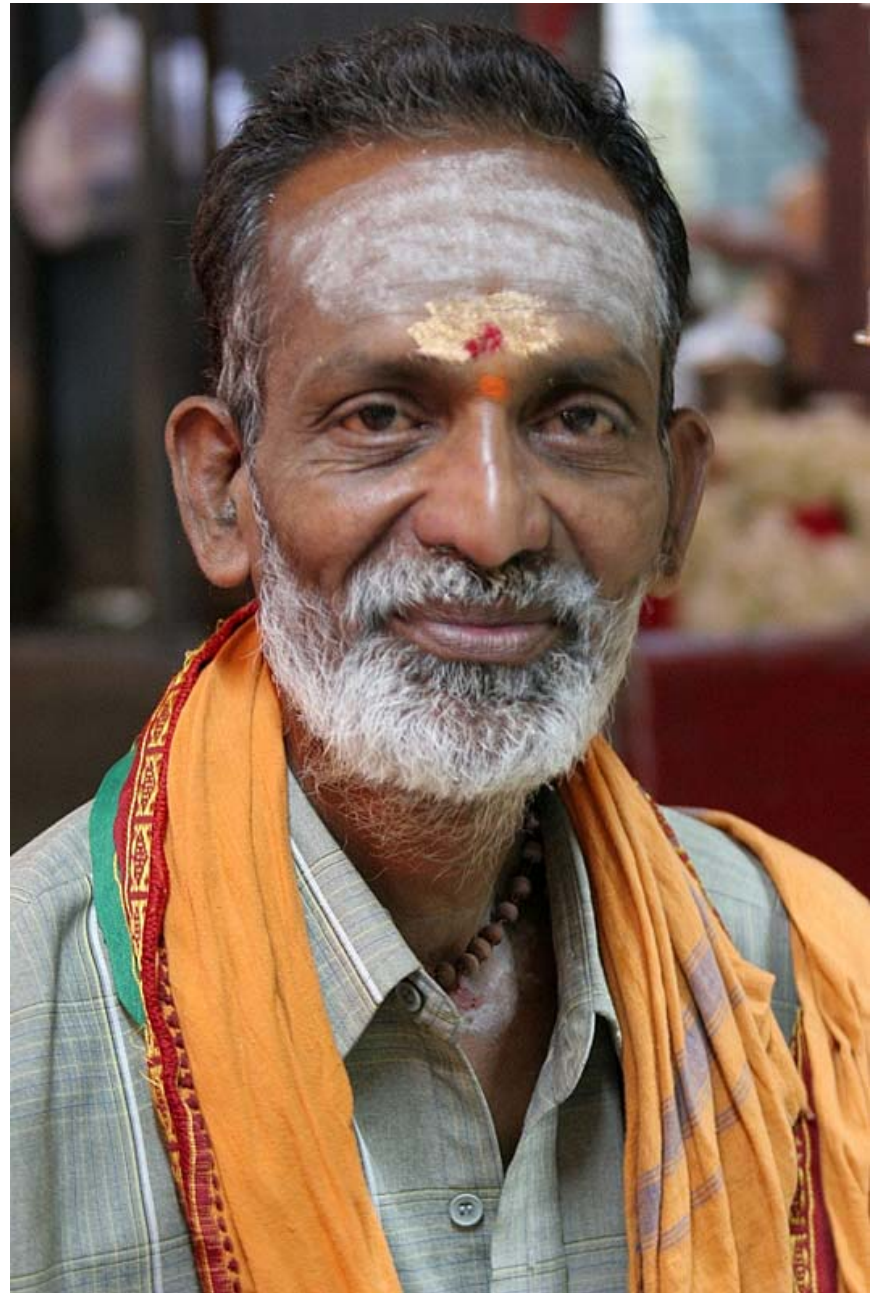
Curiously, I had been discouraged by many of the locals I talked to at Microsoft Research from visiting the market. They were concerned we would be put off by the crowds and dirt, or swindled by hucksters and touts.

It is almost as if there are two Bangalores, existing side by side, or really on top of each other, today: an old Bangalore, exemplified by the City Market; and a new Bangalore, filled with high-end shopping boutiques that cater to all of the new affluence there. (The city is undergoing a high-tech revolution, which has generated a lot of wealth. It is now second only to Silicon Valley in the amount of software it produces. And Bangalore real estate prices, I am told, are now equivalent, on a square-foot for square-foot basis, to Seattle's or San Jose's.)



19 Dec. 2006, 3:40pm, at the City Market.

There must have been hundreds, maybe even thousands, of different flower vendors at the market, each with their own small booth where they strung petals onto long strands, which were sold by the meter. Here is one of the many vendors.



19 Dec. 2006, 3:43pm, at the City Market.

Some other shopkeepers.



19 Dec. 2006, 3:45pm, at the City Market.

A mother and son selling flowers.



19 Dec. 2006, 3:45pm, at the City Market.

Isaiah really took to this flower vendor, after he offered him one of his roses.



19 Dec. 2006, 3:47pm, at the City Market.

More strands of flowers, coiled in their baskets, and sold by the meter.



19 Dec. 2006, 3:59pm, at the City Market.

By the time we left, all the girls had been offered lots of flowers, with the strands tied in their hair by helpful strangers.



19 Dec. 2006, 4:04pm, at the City Market.

On our way out, I bought two bunches of bananas from this lovely shopkeeper. She counted the roughly two dozen bananas, sold at two rupees apiece, four times to make sure she got it right.



19 Dec. 2006, 4:19pm, at the City Market.

The still images simply do not convey the dynamic atmosphere of the market. Here is the scene as we headed back to our car, whose driver was waiting for us to take us to the airport. We were about to make our way across this street. [\[Click to play video.\]](#)



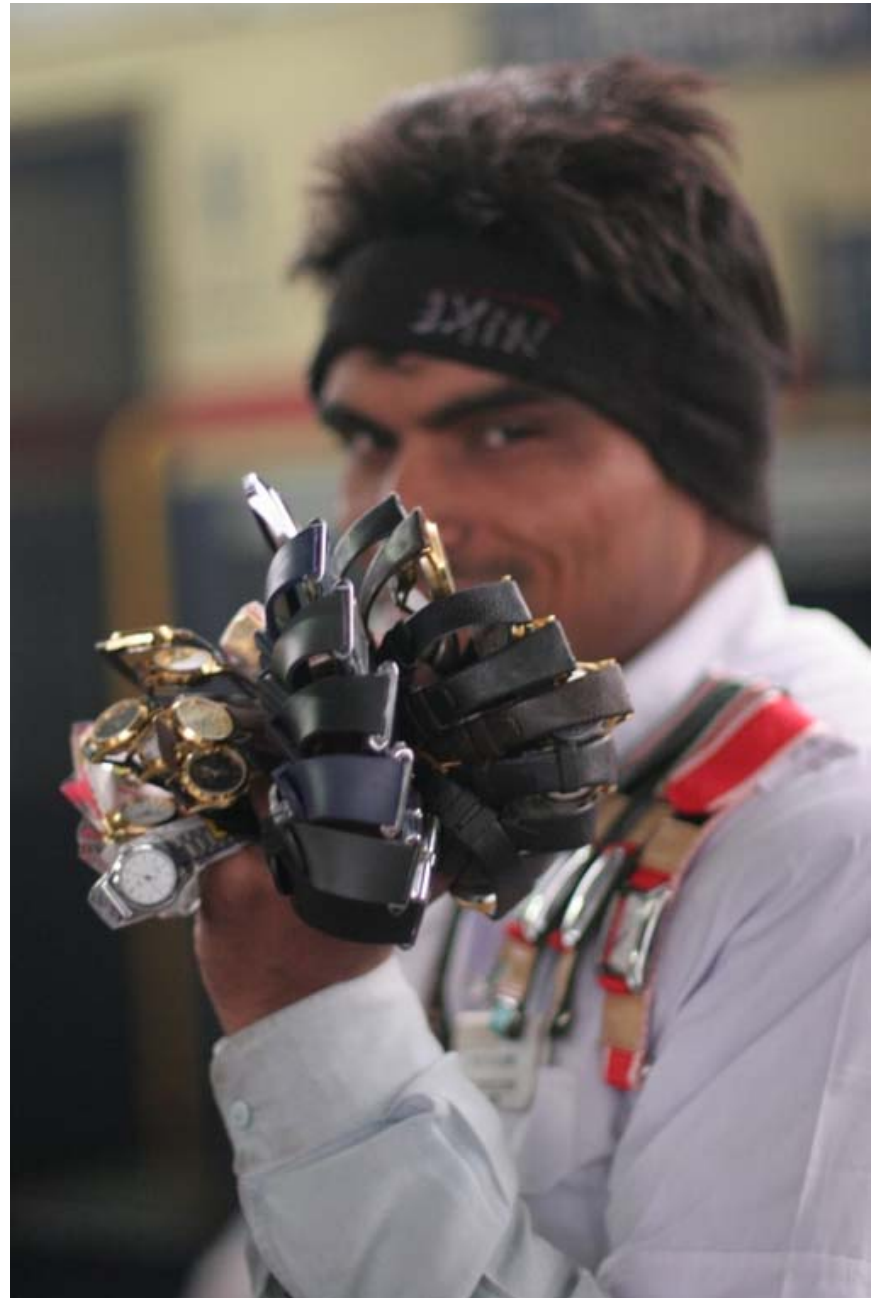
4

Delhi & Agra

21 Dec. 2006, 7:04am, at the Old Delhi Railway Station.

I had originally planned to spend Wednesday and Thursday at Adobe in Noida, a new, planned suburb of Delhi, and Friday with my family in Agra to visit the Taj Mahal. But for the last few years the Taj has been closed on Fridays, so we took a trip there on Thursday instead, in between my two days of work.

I thought it would be more interesting to travel by train than to drive — and indeed it was, right from the start. Wandering about on the misty platform in the predawn twilight were all kinds of interesting characters, including this fellow selling fistfuls of watches.



21 Dec. 2006, 7:06am, at the Old Delhi Railway Station.

One of the passengers on our train, in the third-class seating section. Second class, which we took, was somewhat less Spartan, with glass windows to protect us from the hazy smog as our train slowly made its way to Agra. What should have been a three-hour journey stretched to five as the train crept along.



21 Dec. 2006, 12:46pm, Agra.

In Agra, we were met by Mr. Sony, a sprightly tour operator, who had been contracted to meet us by Romia Malhotra at Adobe. He spirited us away to a pleasant garden restaurant there, where we were entertained by musicians and puppeteers as we enjoyed a fine meal. [\[Click to play video.\]](#)



21 Dec. 2006, 12:54pm, Agra.

This musician, a young boy, was able to rapidly jiggle his head side-to-side in an almost frightening way.

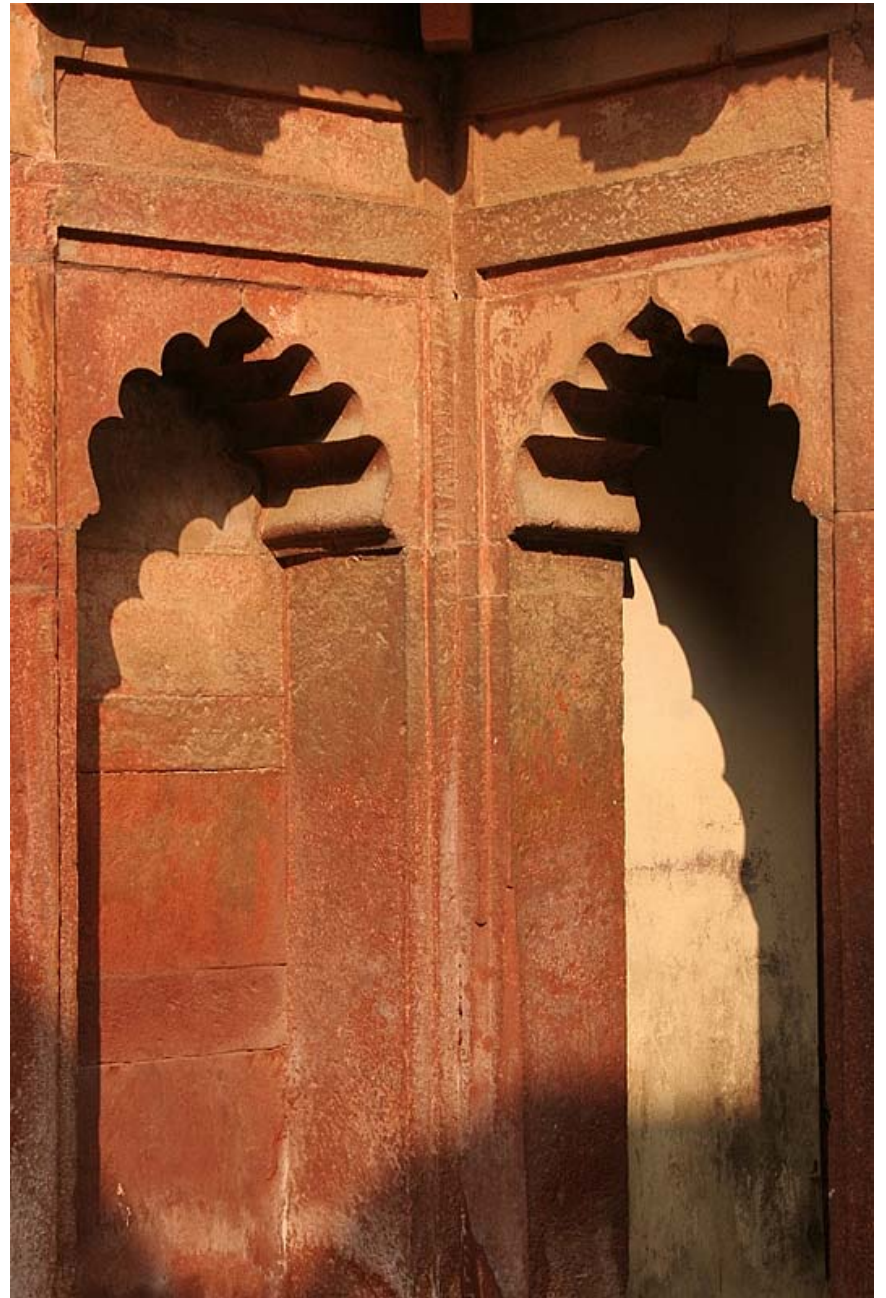


21 Dec. 2006, 2:14pm, Agra Fort.

Mr. Sony introduced us to our tour guide, Mr. Tiwari, at the restaurant.

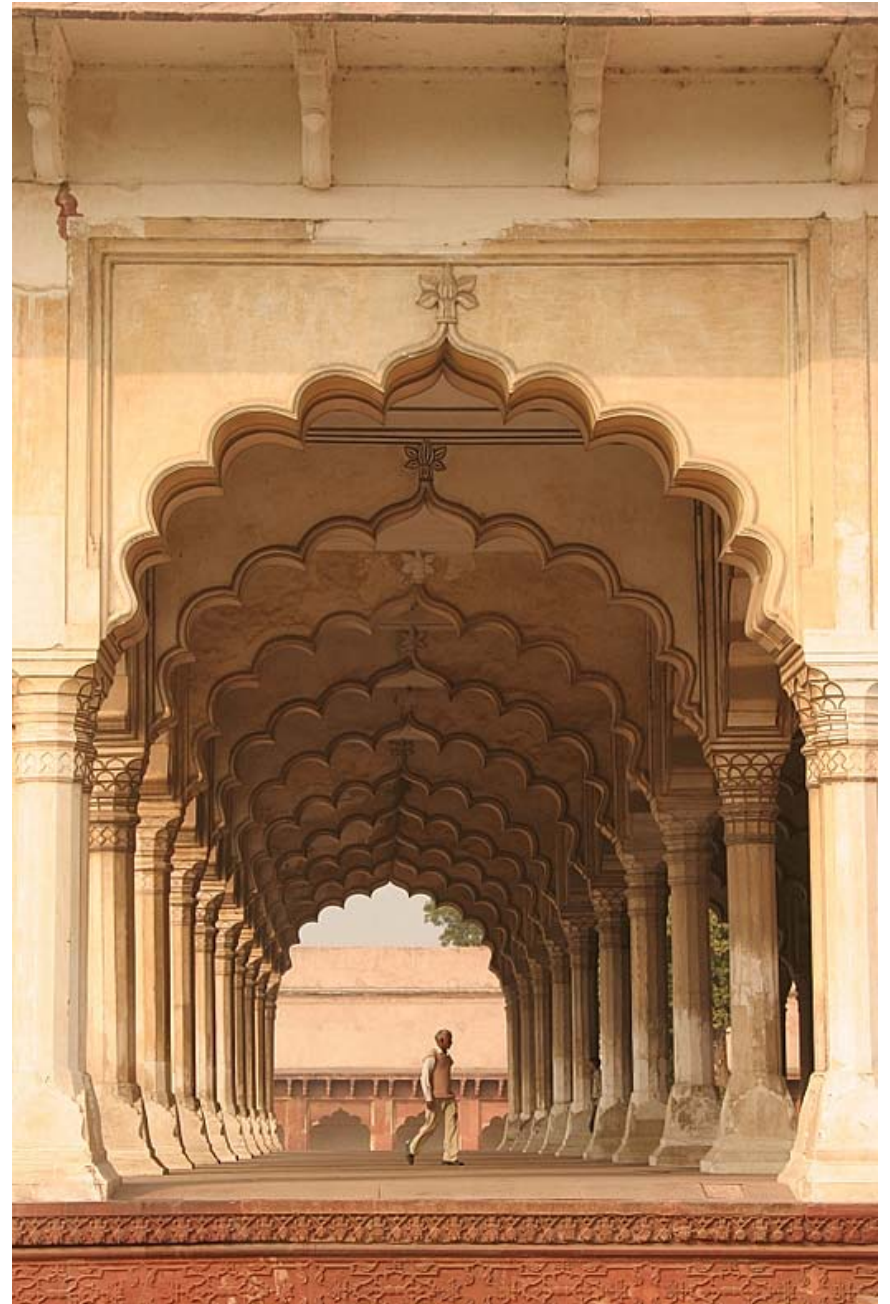
We began our tour right after lunch, beginning with Agra Fort. This citadel was built in the 16th century and became the stronghold for the Moghul empire for several generations.

I was immediately intrigued by the many scalloped windows and doorways, a motif we would see much more of in Rajasthan, in the days to come.



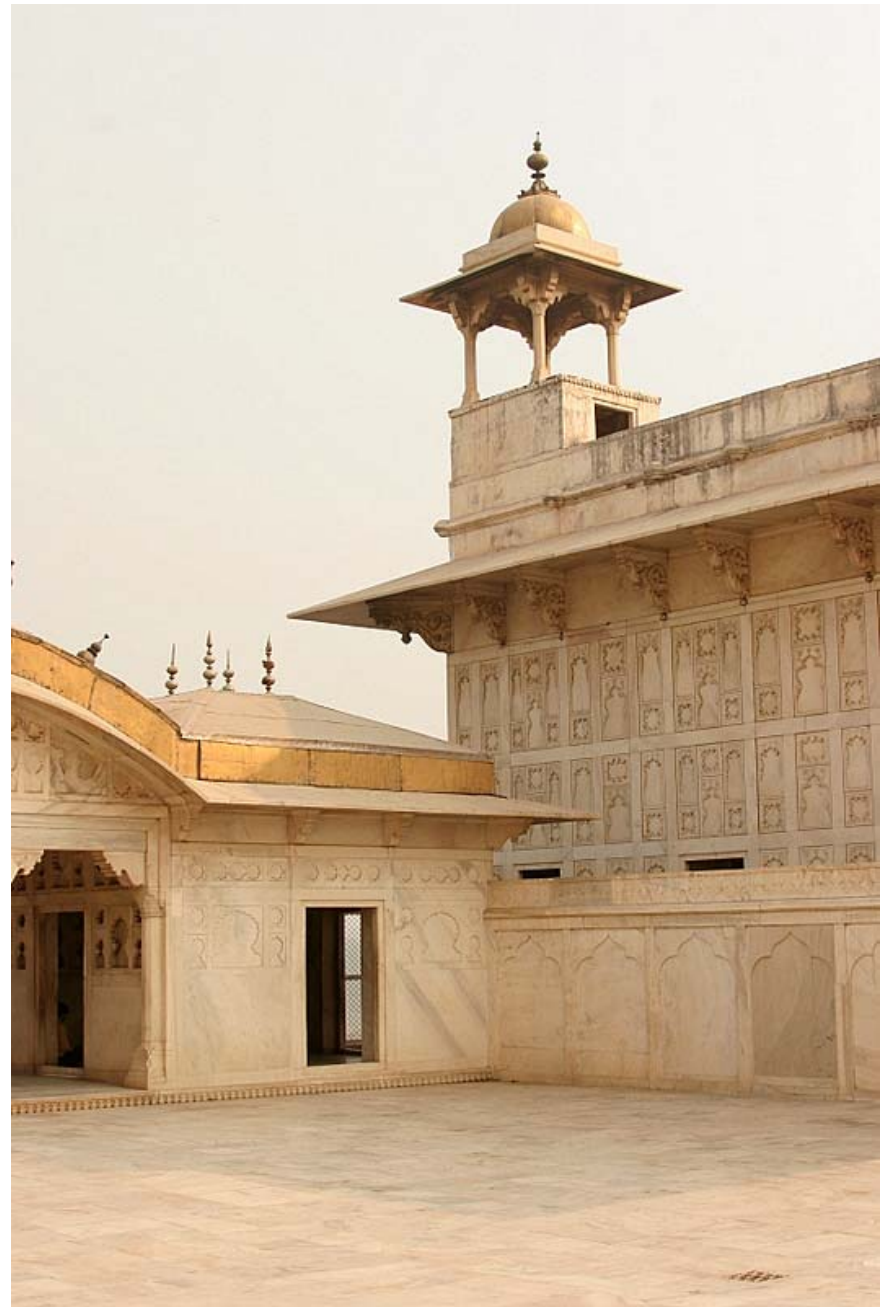
21 Dec. 2006, 2:18pm, Agra Fort.

A view of the Diwan-i-Am, the “Hall of Public Audiences.” This magnificent hall was constructed by Shah Jahan in 1628, and was ornately decorated at the time with brocade, carpets, and satin canopies. Behind it (to the right in the photo) is the Diwan-i-Khas, or “Hall of Private Audiences,” which used to house the renowned Peacock Throne, where the emperor sat to receive important dignitaries. The throne was later moved to Delhi and eventually looted by the notorious plunderer Nadir Shah of Persia in the 18th century. It remains in Iran today.



21 Dec. 2006, 2:25pm, Agra Fort.

A view of the courtyard in front of the Khas Mahal ("Private Palace"), part of the emperor's living quarters. This is where Shah Jahan, the builder of the Taj Mahal, was imprisoned by his own son, who had usurped his throne. Shah Jahan spent the last eight years of his life here.



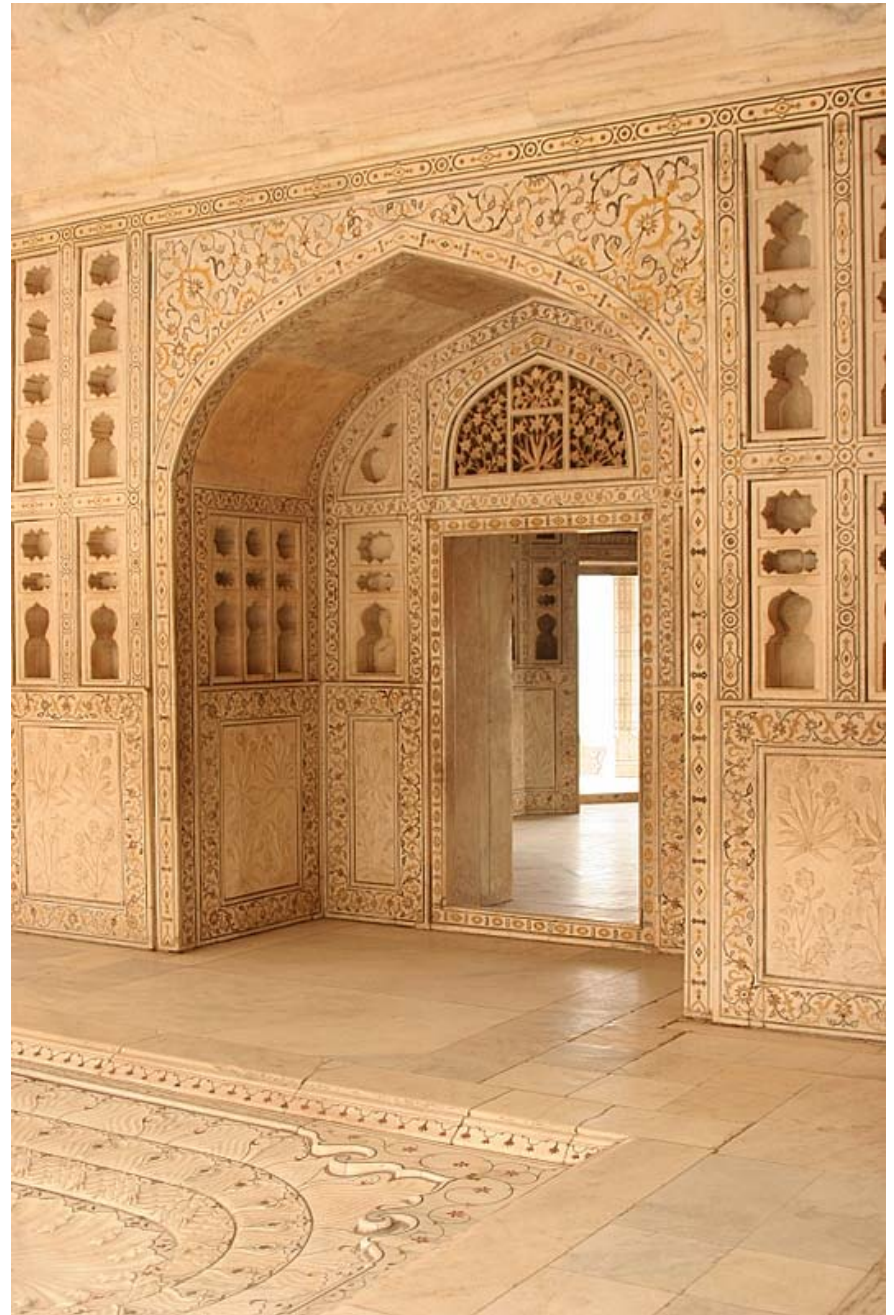
21 Dec. 2006, 2:29pm, Agra Fort.

The Musamman Burj. From this octagonal pavilion, Shah Jahan is said to have looked out wistfully upon the Taj Mahal, his beloved wife's tomb.



21 Dec. 2006, 2:30pm, Agra Fort.

Inside the Khas Mahal, or Private Palace.



21 Dec. 2006, 2:31pm, Agra Fort.

A detail of the inlaid patterns on the wall of the Khas Mahal.



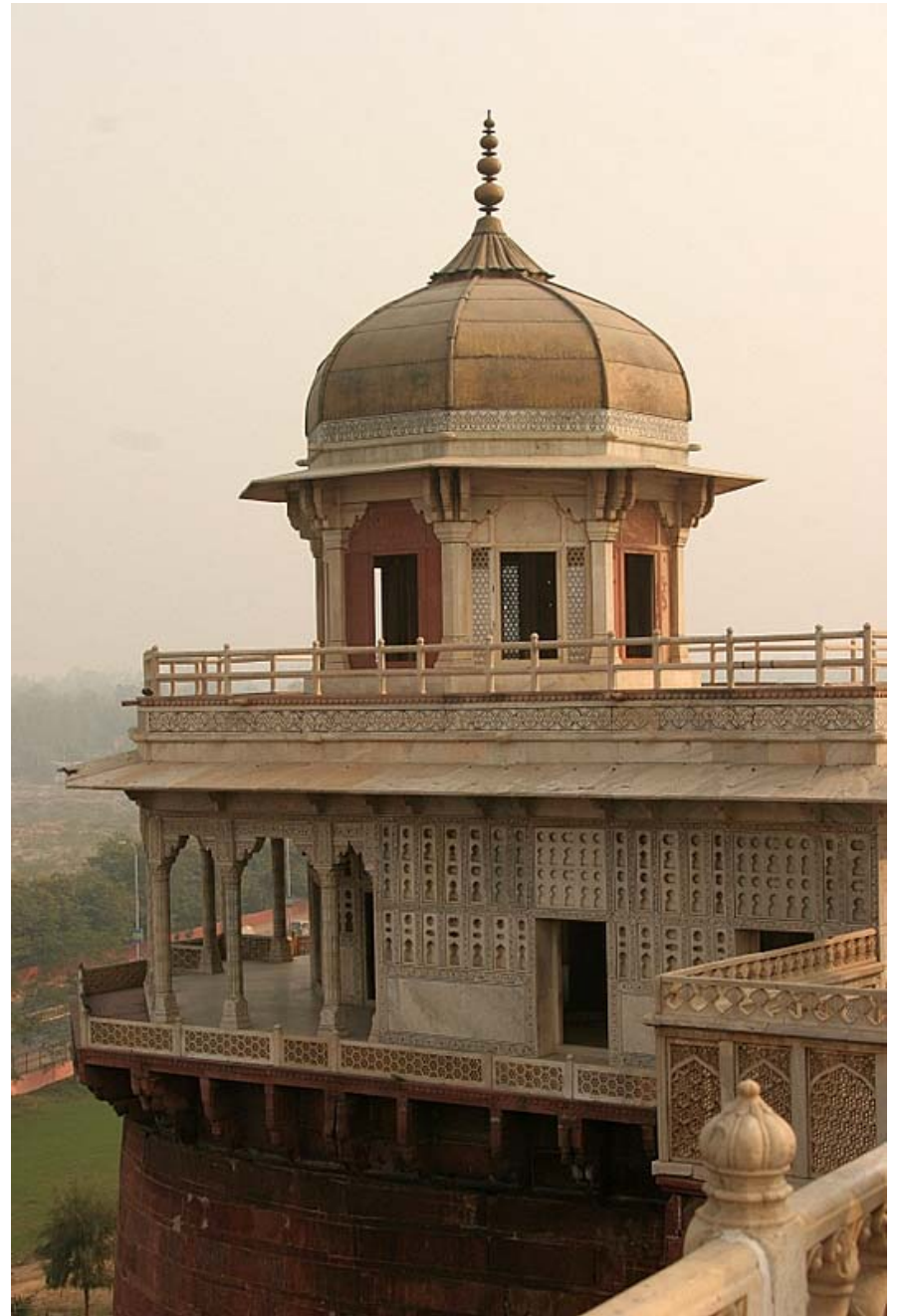
21 Dec. 2006, 2:35pm, Agra Fort.

A medley of scalloped archways.



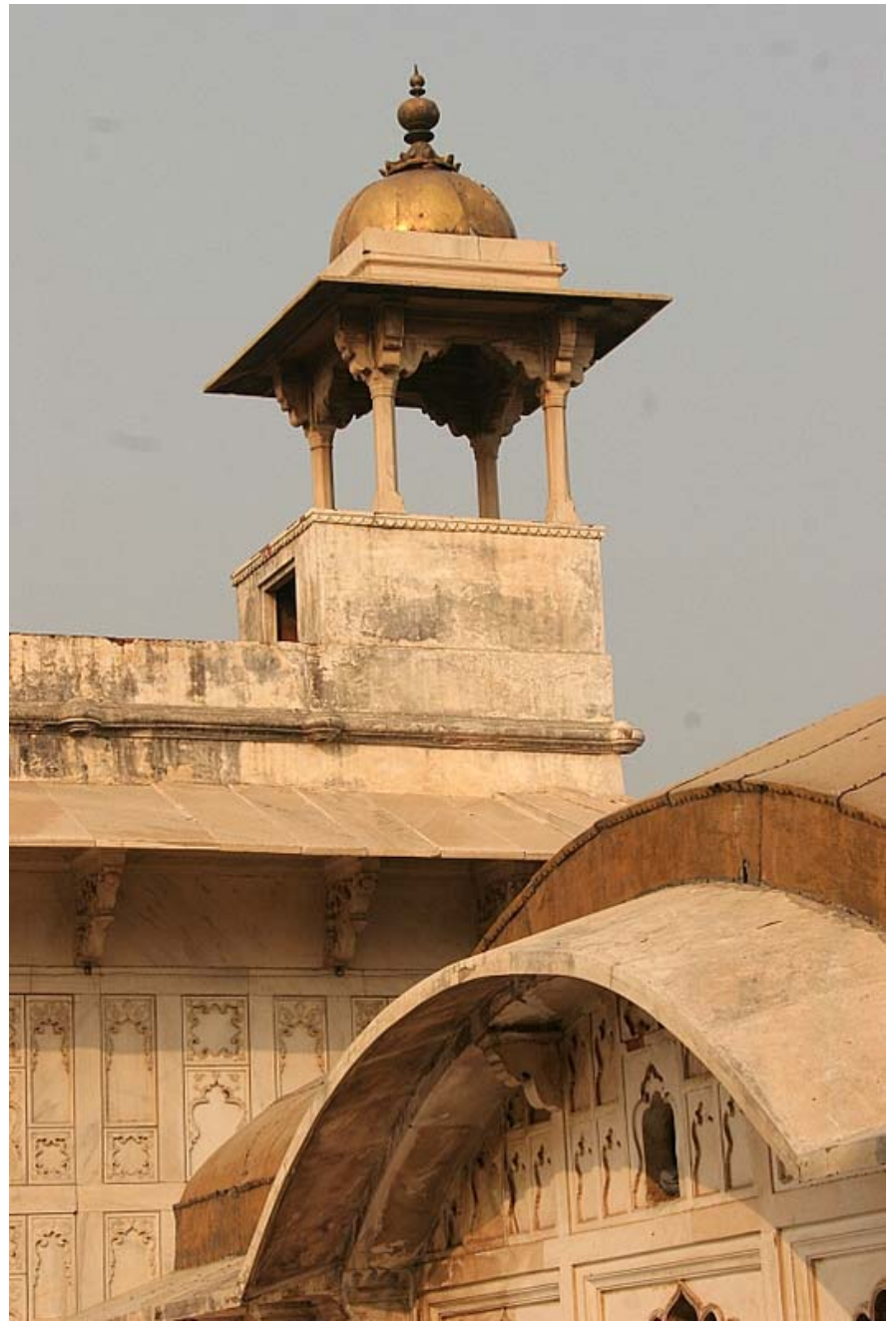
21 Dec. 2006, 2:38pm, Agra Fort.

Looking out upon the Mina Masjid, which was the emperor's own private mosque.



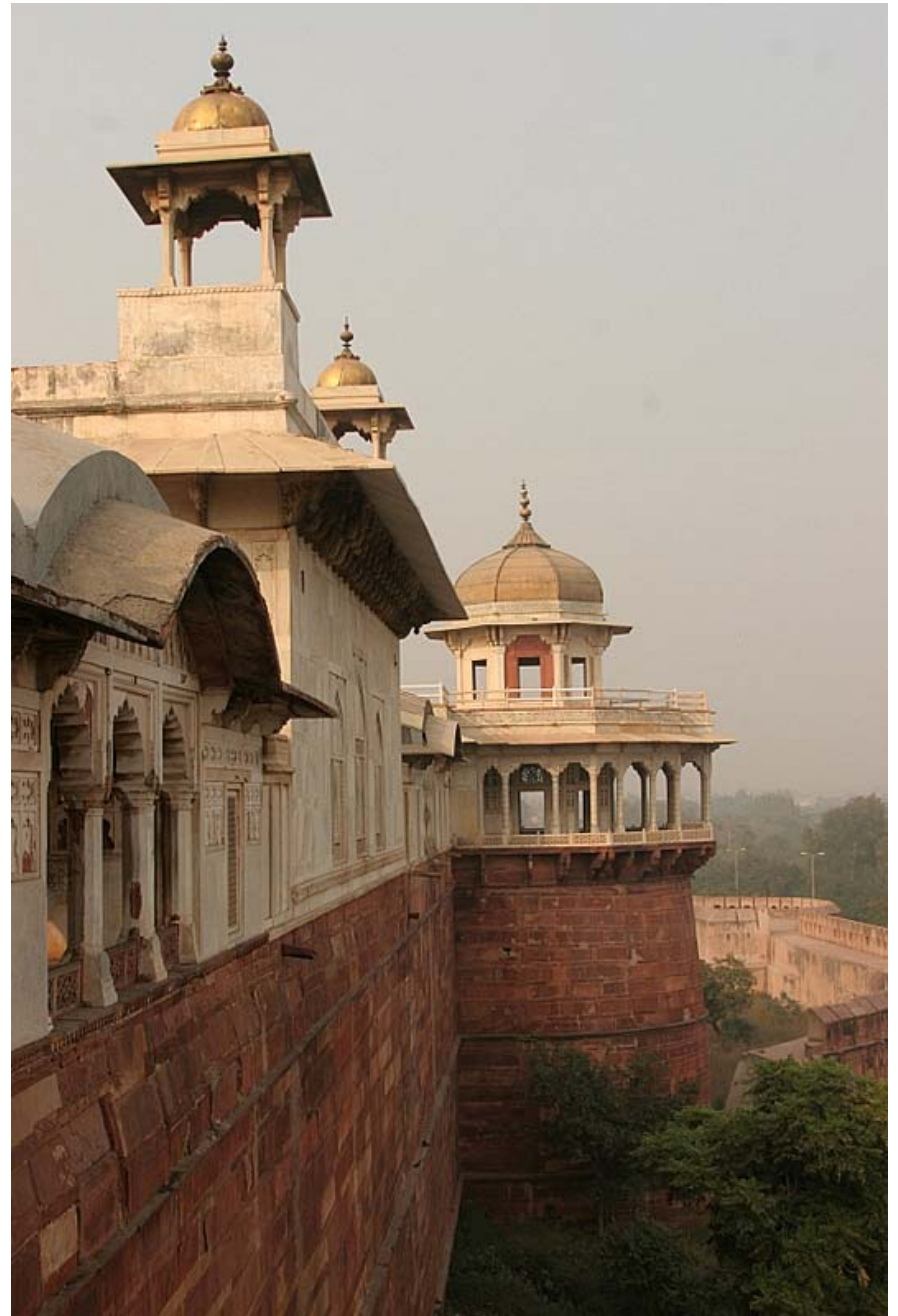
21 Dec. 2006, 2:48pm, Agra Fort.

Another view of the Khas Mahal.



21 Dec. 2006, 2:51pm, Agra Fort.

A view upon the Khas Mahal (near) and Musamman Burj (far), the parts of the palace where Shah Jahan was imprisoned for eight years.



21 Dec. 2006, 3:14pm, Agra Fort.

As there were so many aggressive touts outside the fort, I stowed my big camera just before leaving the gates. However, I couldn't resist this image looking back at the massive fortress walls. Once again, I was glad to have my pocket-sized Canon Elph handy at all times.



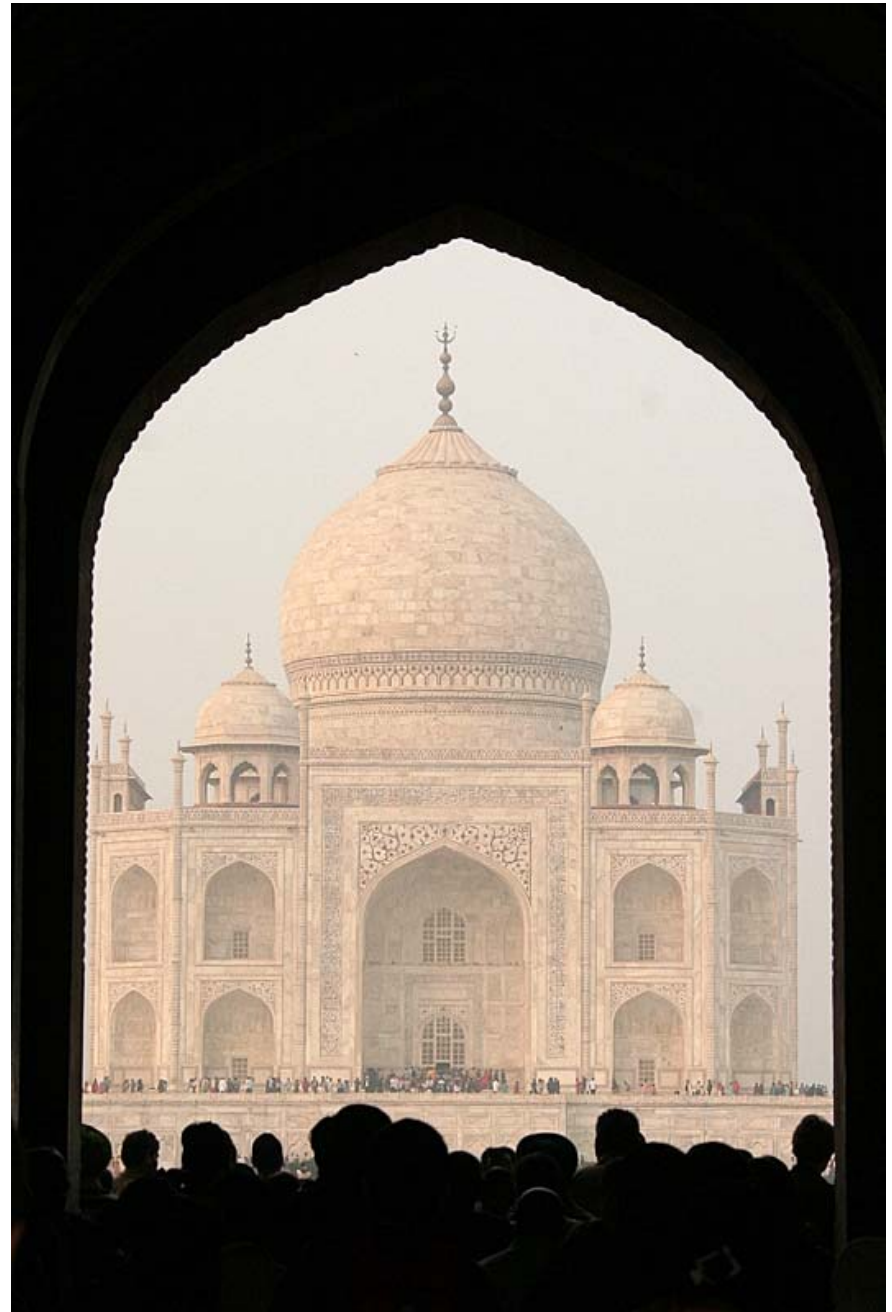
21 Dec. 2006, 4:21pm, at the entrance gate to the Taj Mahal.

After Agra Fort, we drove to a viewpoint of the Baby Taj, then headed over to the Taj Mahal to be sure to have enough time there before dark. The line to enter took nearly an hour. (Indeed, Mr. Tiwari was annoyed that I would not allow him to help us cut the line.) As Isaiah and I finally passed through the gate, these women crowded behind us to enter.



21 Dec. 2006, 4:30pm, at the Taj Mahal.

My very first view of the Taj, as we entered this archway amid the masses from a pavilion outside. The Taj Mahal really is an awe-inspiring sight. In the misty air of Agra, it appears to glow from within, shimmering like a mirage. It is the most beautiful piece of architecture I have ever seen – or probably ever will see.

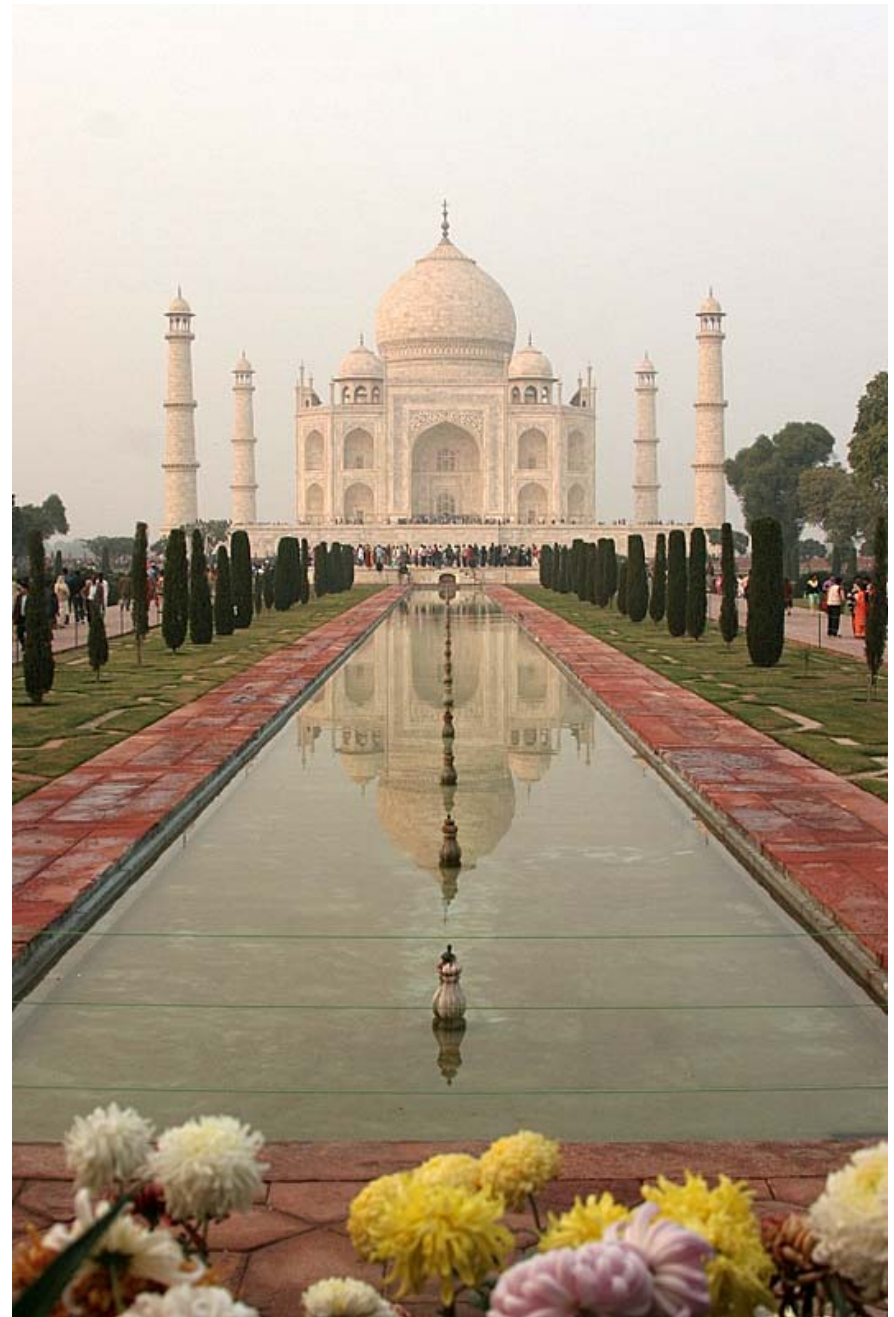


21 Dec. 2006, 4:33pm, at the Taj Mahal.

The Taj Mahal, seen over its reflecting pool. The fountains in the watercourse are often turned off, as they were today, so that the reflection is not spoiled.

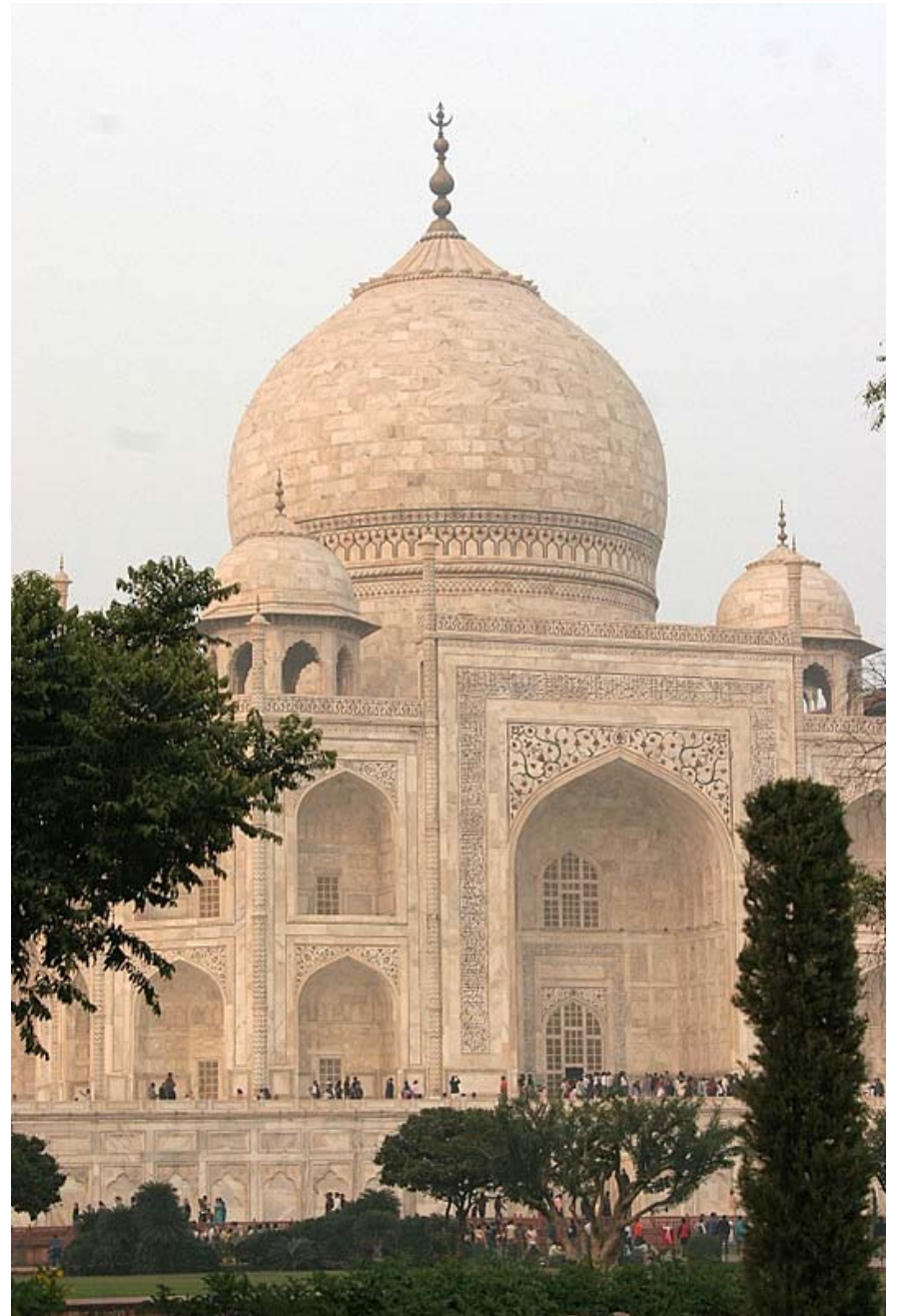
The Taj was built by Emperor Shah Jahan as a monument to his second wife, Mumtaz Mahal, who died giving birth to their fourteenth child in 1631. It took 22 years to build using 20,000 laborers from all over India and Central Asia, at a cost of about \$70 million in today's dollars.

An interesting architectural feature is the marble platform, upon which the Taj is raised. The effect is a backdrop of pure sky. The four minarets on the corners of the platform are not quite vertical, leaning out a little. They might have been designed to fall away from the Taj in the event of an earthquake.



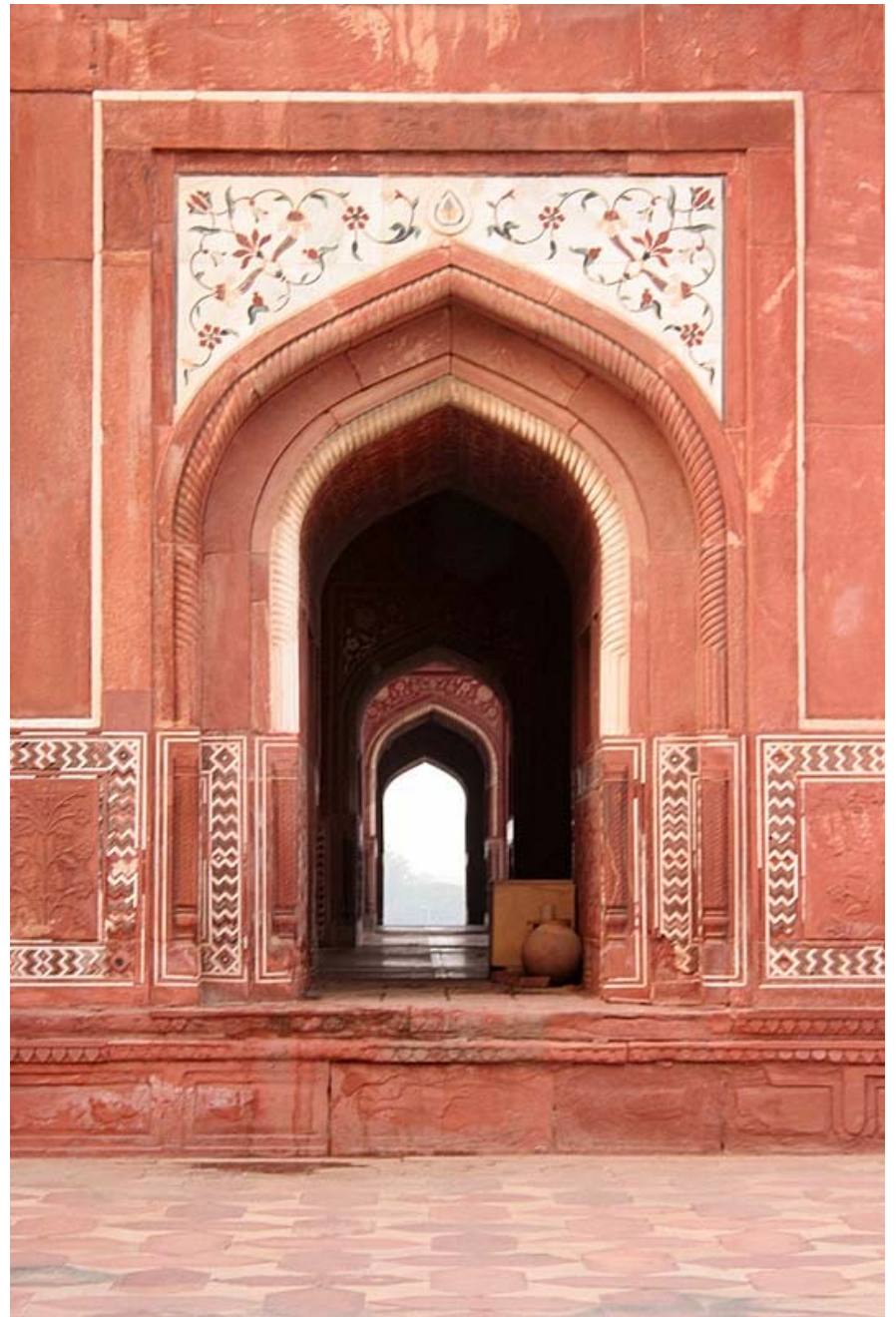
21 Dec. 2006, 4:44pm, at the Taj Mahal.

The views of the Taj are constantly shifting as you approach. You also begin to get a sense of its enormous scale, as well as the intricate ornamental carvings and inlays in the semitranslucent white marble.



21 Dec. 2006, 4:56pm, at the Taj Mahal.

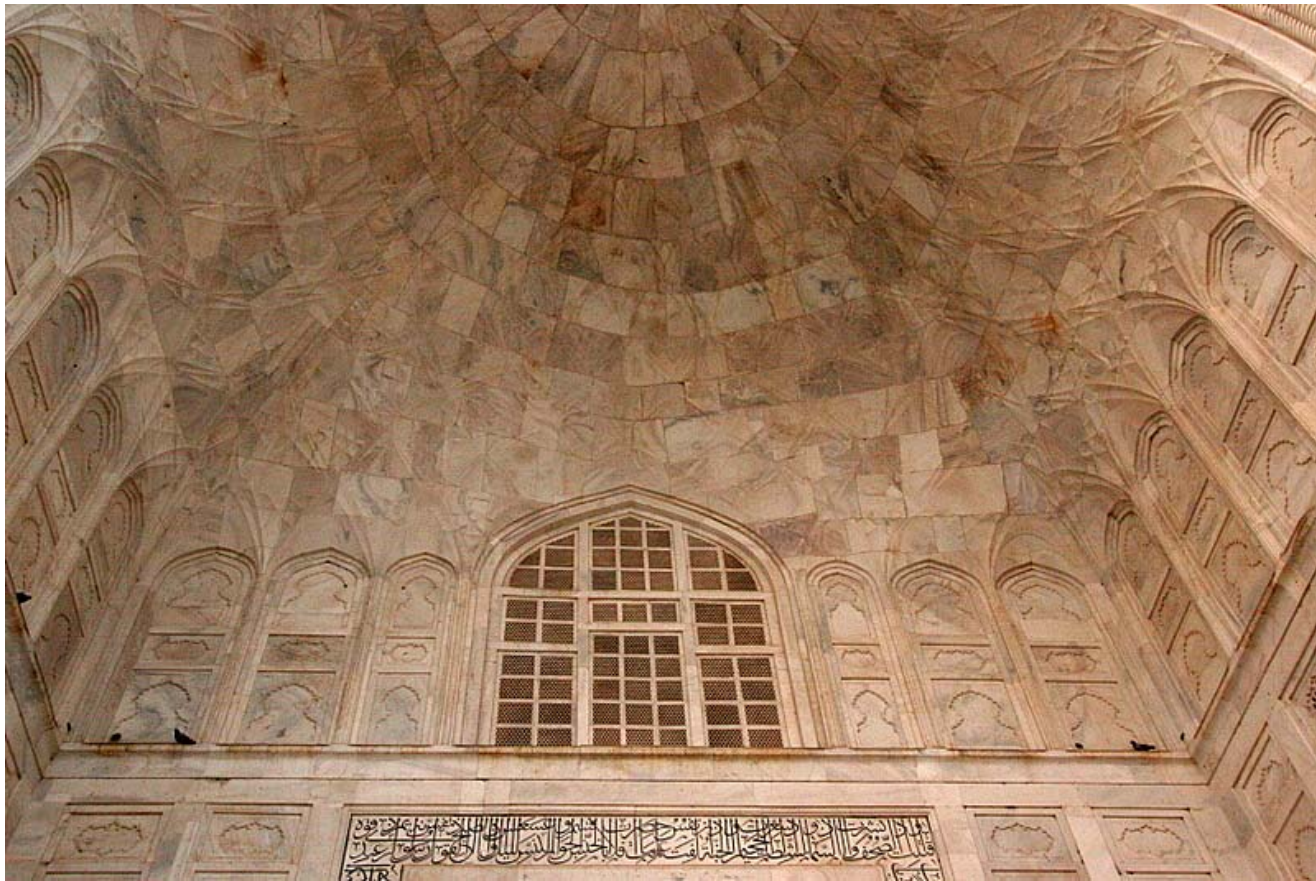
A doorway of the red sandstone mosque, which lies to the west of the Taj on the same marble platform.



21 Dec. 2006, 5:04pm, at the Taj Mahal.

Inside the Taj Mahal's main entryway, looking upward at the vaulted arch, embellished with quotations from the Quran.

We also entered inside, where photographs were not allowed, unfortunately.



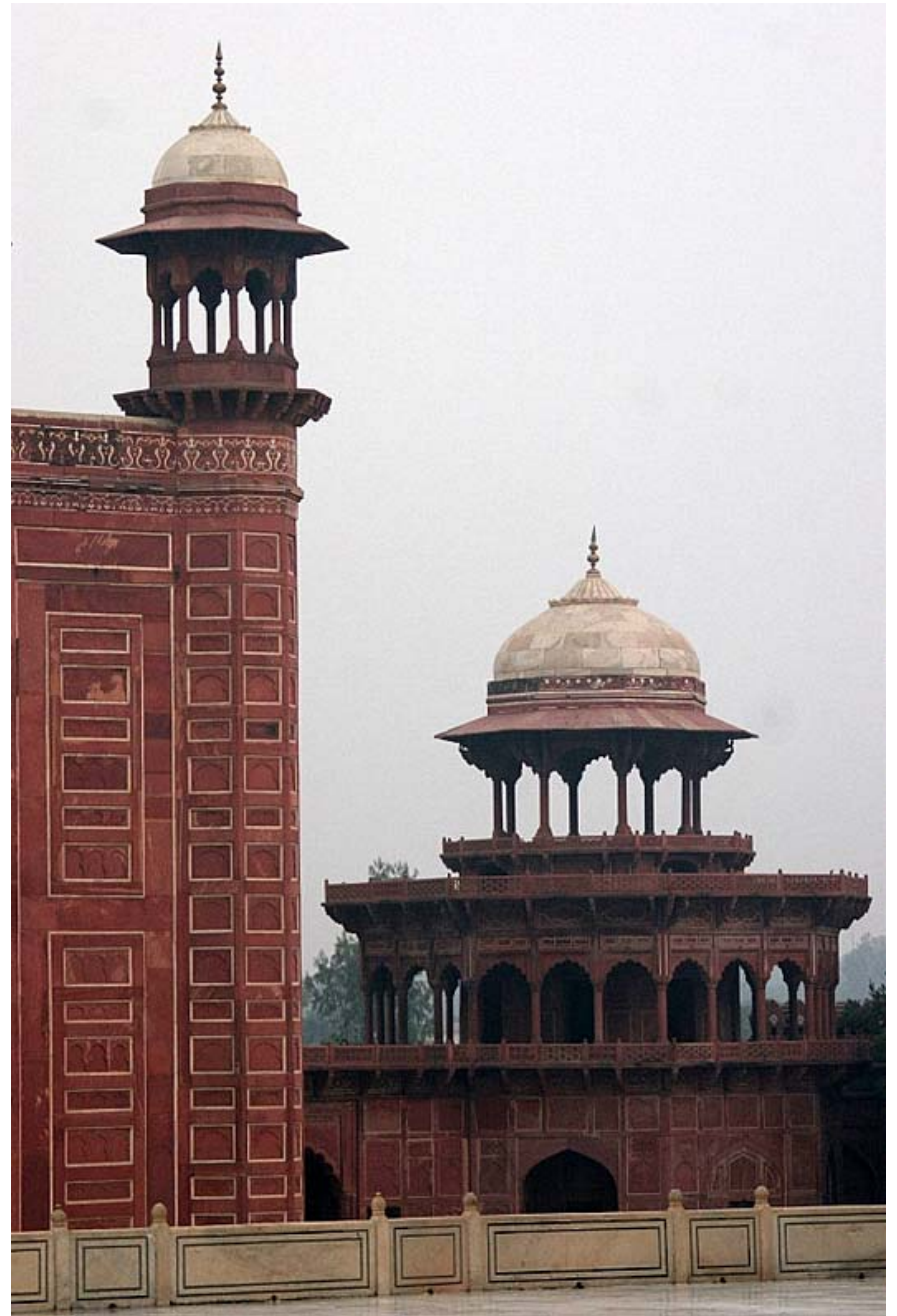
21 Dec. 2006, 5:06pm, at the Taj Mahal.

A detail of the fine carving and inlay on the exterior walls of the Taj. In all, 43 different semiprecious stones were used for the ornamental inlay.



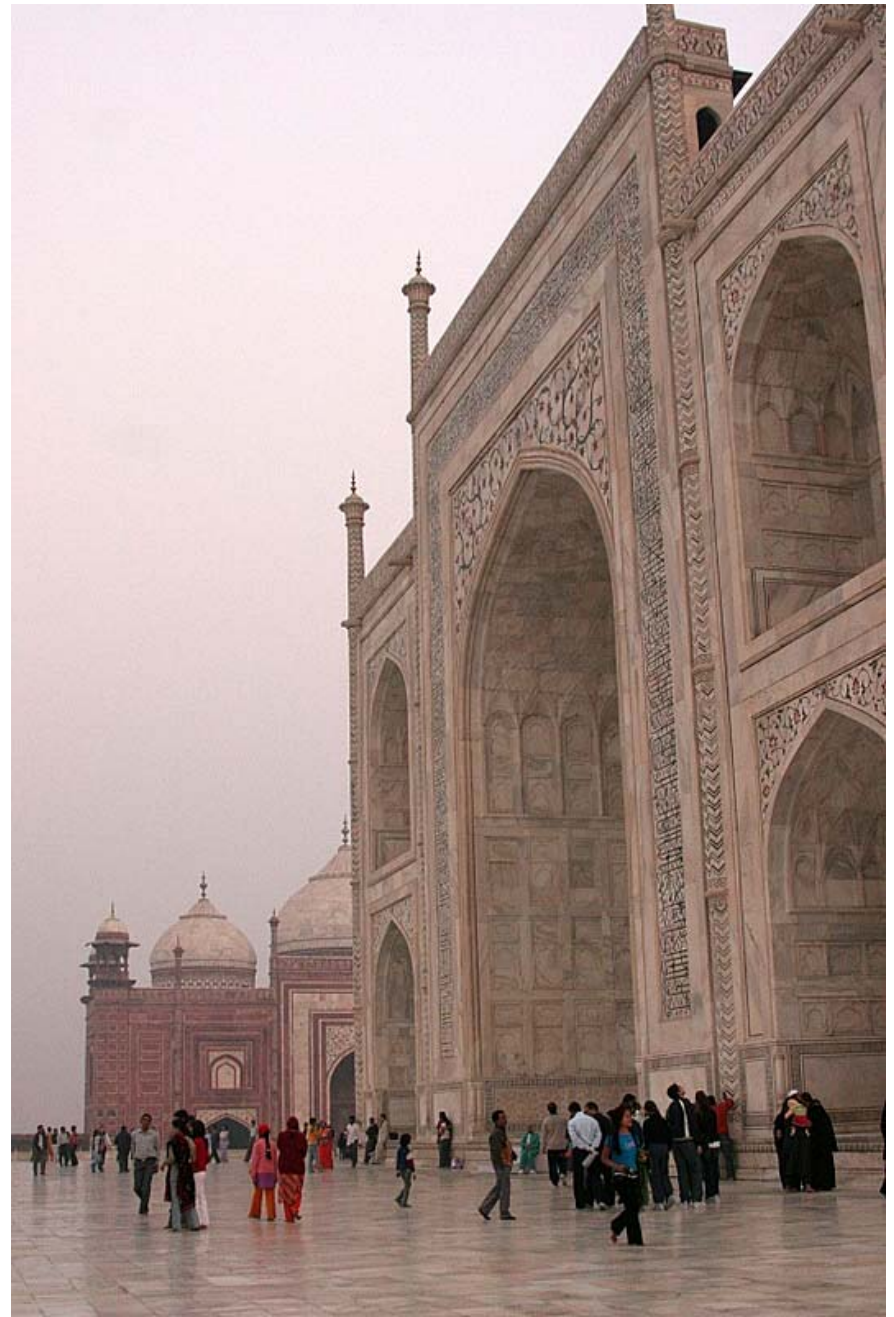
21 Dec. 2006, 5:28pm, at the Taj Mahal.

Views of the *jawab*, a building on the east side of the Taj used to house travelers.



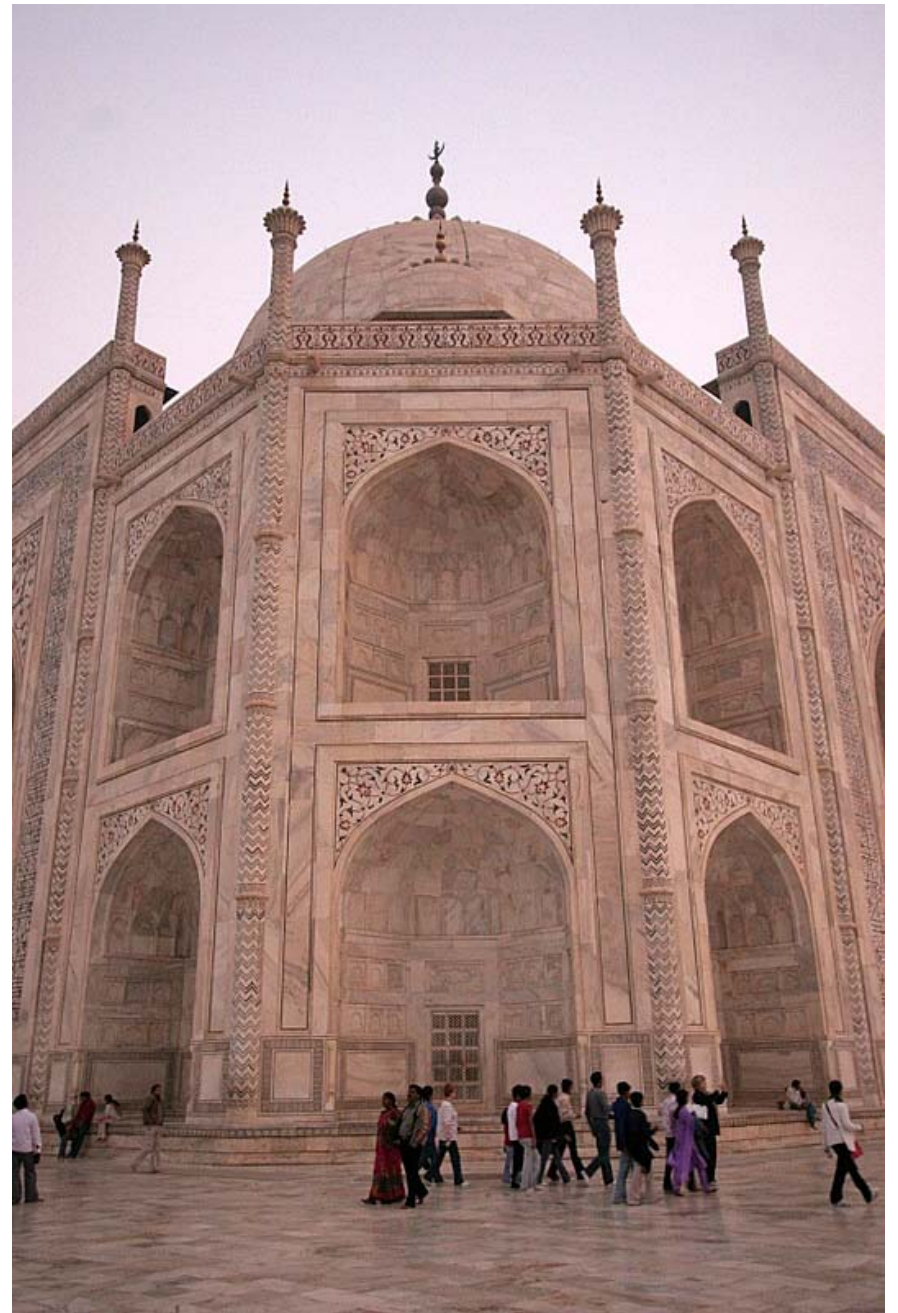
21 Dec. 2006, 5:37pm, at the Taj Mahal.

A view from the platform on the back side of the Taj. The Taj is an exercise in perfect symmetry, with each of its four faces identical.



21 Dec. 2006, 5:38pm, at the Taj Mahal.

Here, I used a wide-angle lens to capture the entire face of the Taj, from bottom to top.



21 Dec. 2006, 5:42pm, at the Taj Mahal.

A portion of the mosque overlooking the Yamuna River, on whose banks the Taj is built, as darkness began to descend.



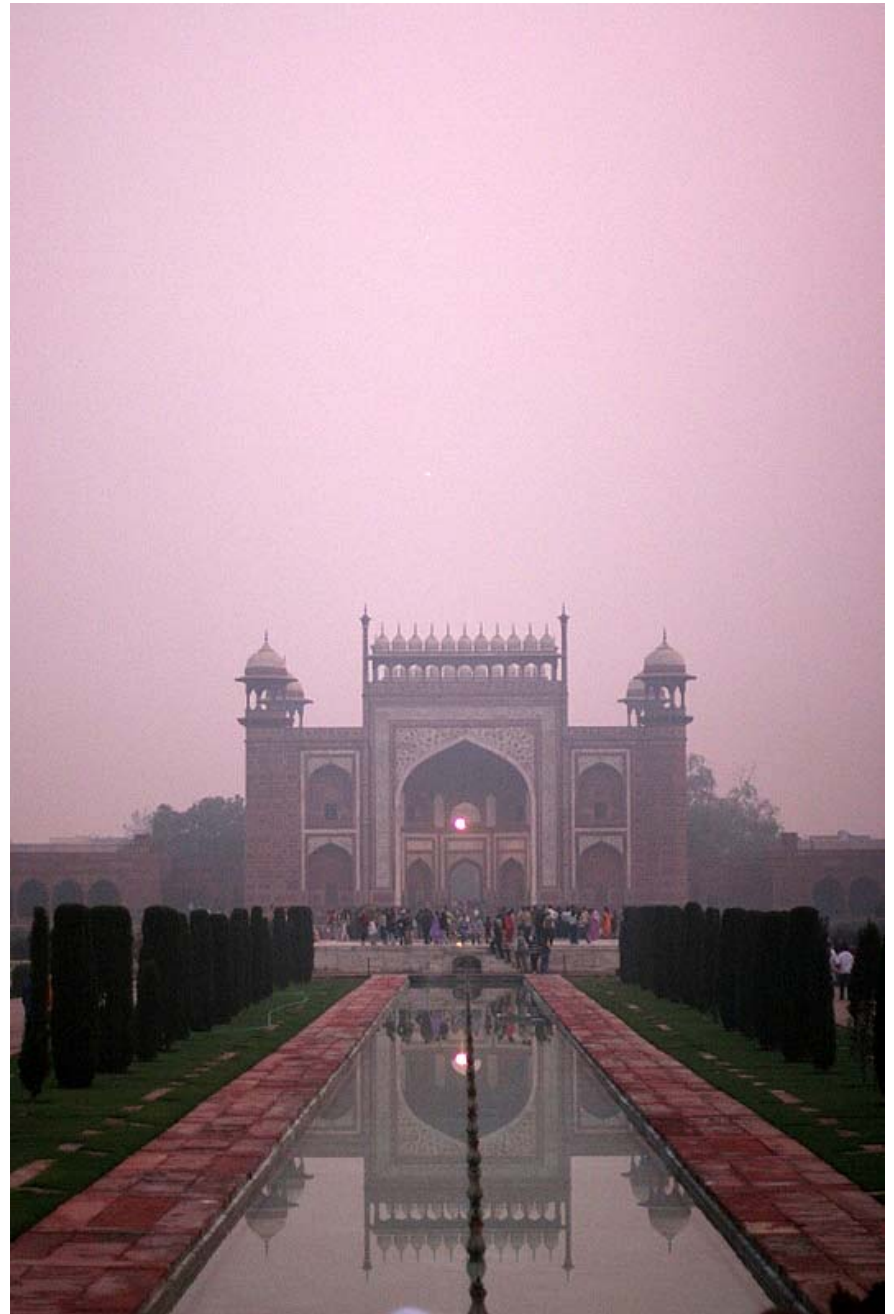
21 Dec. 2006, 5:45pm, at the Taj Mahal.

Mr. Tiwari, our guide, along with Eleni, Ondi, and Isaiah. Ondi is actually trying to protect herself from the mosquitoes, which were beginning to come out.



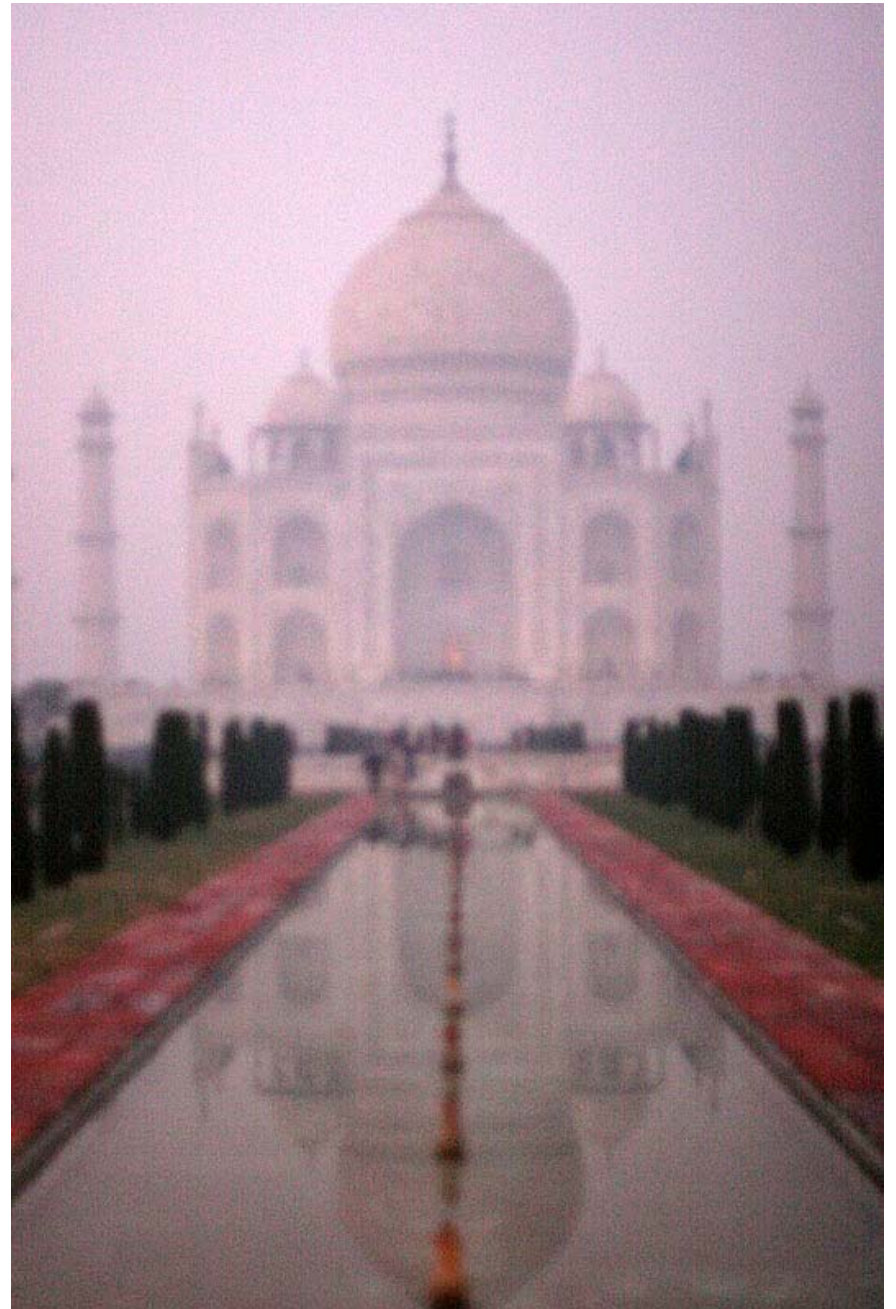
21 Dec. 2006, 5:48pm, at the Taj Mahal.

A look back across the ornamental gardens at the south gate, from which we had entered and originally viewed the Taj.



21 Dec. 2006, 5:59pm, at the Taj Mahal.

By the time we got back to the south gate, it was very nearly dark, and the automatic focus on my camera no longer functioned. I shot this image from a handheld position with my fastest lens (a 50mm lens with f1.4) at the highest ISO setting. Although the image is blurry I rather like the effect.



21 Dec. 2006, 6:03pm, at the Taj Mahal.

As we departed, I took one last shot of the Taj, manually setting the focal length, and using a long exposure with my camera supported on a low stone wall. The availability of a suitable support forced me to use a non-axial view, which, although I might not have thought to choose it otherwise, quite pleased me in the end.



21 Dec. 2006, 7:00pm, Agra.

That evening, Mr. Tiwari took us to a factory, where (we were told) the descendents of the craftsman of the Taj Mahal use the very same inlay process today to make beautiful artifacts, like tables, coasters, and plates.

Here is a view of one of the finely crafted tables for sale, this one circular with about a 30" diameter, selling for somewhere around \$5000, including shipping. We were actually quite tempted to buy, although I felt it wiser to take a card and order from home if we were still interested once we returned.



21 Dec. 2006, 8:51pm, at the Agra railway station.

We had tickets on an express train back to Delhi, which was supposed to leave Agra at 8:30 and arrive Delhi two hours later. However, on account of the persistent fog, our train was running at least two hours late.

We passed a good deal of the time at the restaurant in the Agra station, where a *mehndi* came with the meal if you spent Rs. 100 (about \$2.25) or more. We spent enough for both Oona and Eleni to get one. (Isaiah originally wanted one too, but demurred when we informed him that the decoration was normally just for women and girls.)

Here, Eleni anticipates her own *mehndi* after watching Oona get hers.



21 Dec. 2006, 8:54pm, at the Agra railway station.

Eleni, getting her *mehndi*. The decoration is traditionally given to a bride and her bridesmaids. The liquid being applied is made from crushed henna leaves and water. After a half hour or so, the liquid dries and flakes off, leaving an ornamental stain on the skin, which seems to last for about a week.



15 Dec. 2006, 8:55pm, at the Agra railway station.

Eleni's just completed *mehndi*.



21 Dec. 2006, 10:55pm, at the Agra railway station.

The train was ultimately delayed until a little after 11:00pm. We finally got back to the Delhi station at 2:00am and our hotel room around 2:30am, about 20 hours after we had left. It was a very long day, and I had to get up in six hours' time to head back to the office in Noida.



22 Dec. 2006, 8:13pm, New Delhi.

Remarkably, I felt fine the next day, and had a very productive set of meetings at Adobe and even gave a second 90-minute talk there. Back with my family that evening, we took Karan Singh's recommendation (a friend who grew up in Delhi), and headed to Bukhara, which he described as "the best North Indian food in town." Here is their open kitchen, which was the view from my seat.



5

Rajasthan

23 Dec. 2006, 6:15pm, Udaipur.

The next day we headed to Udaipur, a relatively small, tranquil city (with a population about the size of Seattle's) in Rajasthan, about an hour's flight from Delhi.

Delhi's pervasive, persistent "fog," as it is known (I would use a term more like "smog" to describe the smoky, hazy, orange-colored air, which is apparently the norm this time of year), was beginning to take its toll on all of us, and we were glad to be back in a sunny and relatively pollution-free environment.

We arrived at Udai Kothi, a cheery hotel in the center of town, around dusk, where we were greeted with traditional garlands of marigolds. We had originally hoped to stay at the hotel, but when we tried to book our rooms they were already full. Fortunately, the owners had just opened a new place, Udai Bagh, a set of seven luxurious tent cabins in a bucolic setting a few kilometers from town, where there was still some space. Our stay there was tranquil and lovely, but somewhat inconvenient as we had to drive to and from the hotel, about 20 minutes each way, for dinners and breakfast.



23 Dec. 2006, 8:45pm, Udaipur

We did love the dinners though at Udai Kothi. The food was the best we had eaten so far. And the musicians were wonderful. Here, Eleni performs her self-described “napkin dance” to the live music. [\[Click to play video.\]](#)



24 Dec. 2006, 11:37am, Udaipur.

The next morning, we went off with Saleem, who was (supposedly) the brother of the man who had driven us to the hotel from the airport (although he did not look like him at all). In any event, he presented his services to us as a guide, and we decided to take him up on the offer.

Here is a shot I took from his car, as we headed out of town. Everywhere in Rajasthan, it seems, we saw beautifully clad peasants, usually women, with impeccable posture carrying huge loads on their heads.



24 Dec. 2006, 12:04pm, Udaipur.

Our first stop was Ahar, a kind of cemetery built for the maharajas of Mewar, a little outside of town – and well off the beaten tourist track. The kids loved running around among and climbing upon the 250 or so cenotaphs, which were built for the deceased rulers by their descendents.



24 Dec. 2006, 12:08pm, Udaipur.

The cenotaphs were a photographer's paradise, with infinitely many angles and variations. I could have stayed there all day.



24 Dec. 2006, 12:14pm, Udaipur.

Here is a view of a carving on one of the largest cenotaphs. As Saleem described it to us, the carving depicts the maharajah and his twelve wives, who all committed *sutee*, or ritualized self-immolation, on the grave of the maharajah on the day after his death. This cenotaph was a memorial to them all.



24 Dec. 2006, 12:42pm, Udaipur.

Another shot from the car, as we headed to Saheliyon-ki-Bari (“Garden of the Maids of Honor”). As we passed by, Saleem let us in on an old Indian saying: “Elephants are for kings and beggars,” as these were the only people who could afford to feed them. This one seemed to be fending for itself, as it munched on a large branch from a tree along the road, which it had just taken down.



24 Dec. 2006, 12:53pm, Udaipur.

The gardens were very popular with Indian tourists. They included extensive grounds and a nice lotus pool. This spray of bright bougainvillea caught my eye.



24 Dec. 2006, 1:05pm, Udaipur.

A small kiosk at the garden was renting traditional clothing, which visitors were dressing their children in for photos. I couldn't resist taking a few photos myself.



24 Dec. 2006, 1:06pm, Udaipur.

Another child dressed in traditional garb for a photo.



24 Dec. 2006, 1:22pm, Udaipur.

Back on the road, we passed this man feeding his camels popcorn at a turnout.



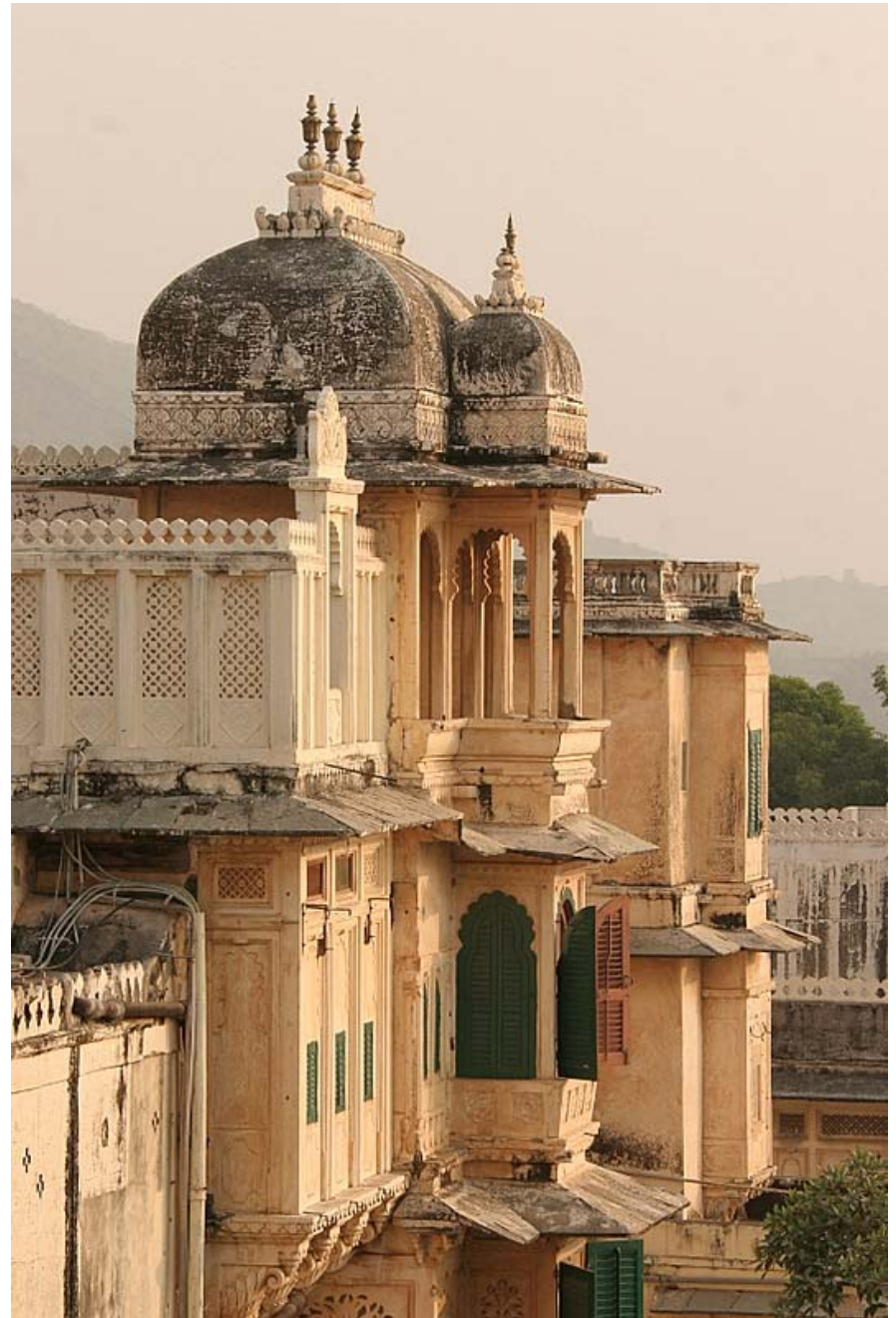
24 Dec. 2006, 4:28pm, Udaipur.

The next stop on our tour was City Palace, the largest palace in Rajasthan. It is actually a conglomeration of buildings built by various maharajas over 300 years, starting in the 16th century. It fronts onto Lake Pichola, the beautiful and serene lake beside which the city was founded.



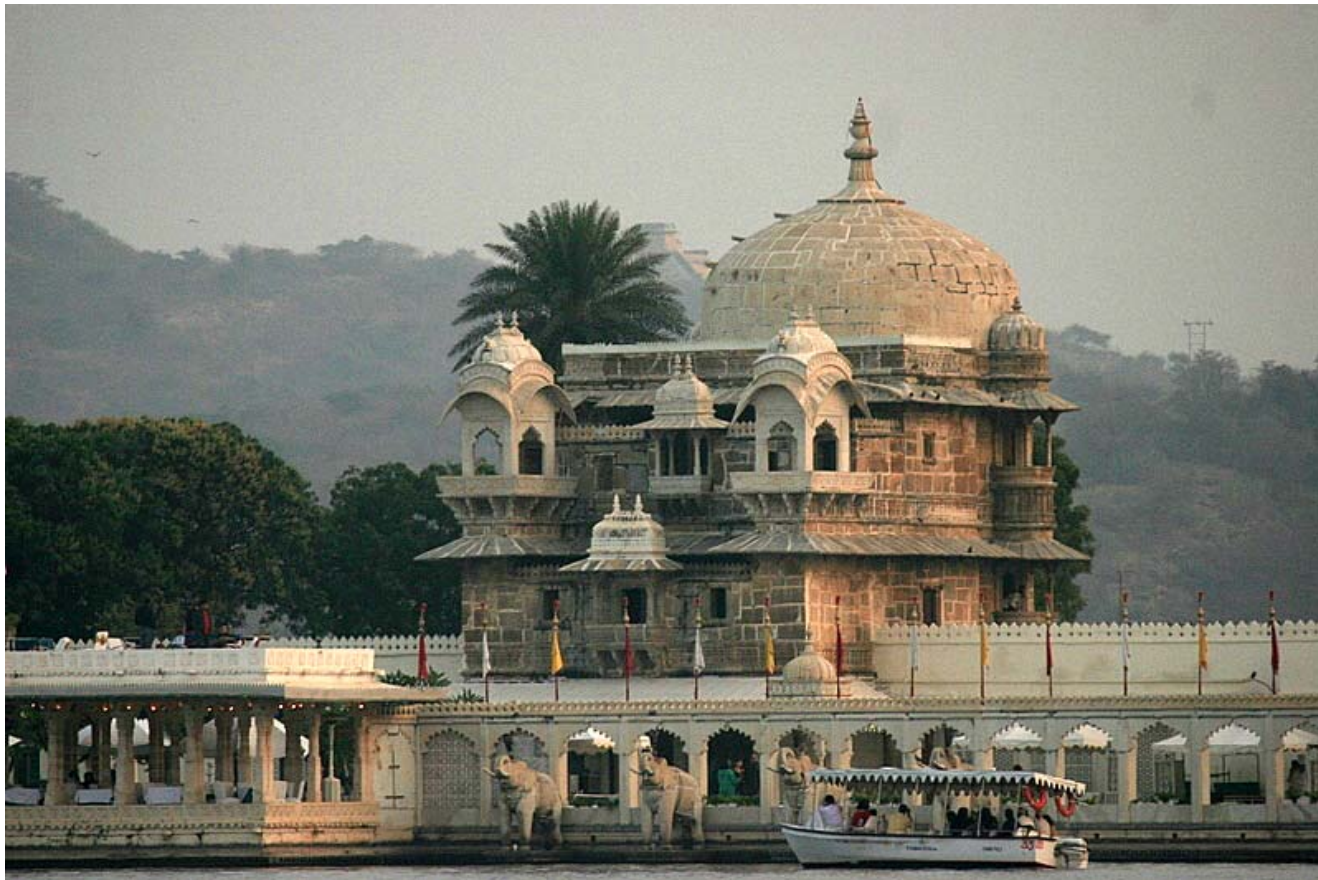
24 Dec. 2006, 4:32pm, Udaipur.

A view out over another part of the palace.



24 Dec. 2006, 5:28pm, Udaipur.

After visiting the palace, we took a boat ride on Lake Pichola, where we went ashore on Jag Mandir, one of the lake's two islands. The island contains this small palace, built by Karan Singh (a different one from the friend who recommended the restaurant in Delhi) in 1615. Singh offered the palace as a refuge to Shah Jahan, who lived here in the 1620s and purportedly later used it as a model for the Taj Mahal. Just three royal servants live on the island today.



24 Dec. 2006, 6:02pm, Udaipur.

Another view of City Palace, as we returned to shore. The palace currently houses two different luxury hotels.



24 Dec. 2006, 6:07pm, Udaipur.

A view at dusk of the lake's smaller island, Jag Niwas, which is completely covered with another 17th-century palace, now also a luxury hotel.



24 Dec. 2006, 6:59pm, Shilpgram.

After dark, we drove out to Shilpgram, a rural arts and crafts center about 5km from town, where a week-long crafts festival is held around Christmas each year.

Perhaps I was becoming quite acclimated to India, because walking around I could almost imagine myself at Bumbershoot, the annual music and crafts festival held Labor Day weekend in Seattle.

Still, the wares were somewhat different, like these Rajasthani puppets.



24 Dec. 2006, 7:35pm, Shilpgram.

They had a number of simple, hand-powered rides set up, which the kids really enjoyed. [Click to play video.]



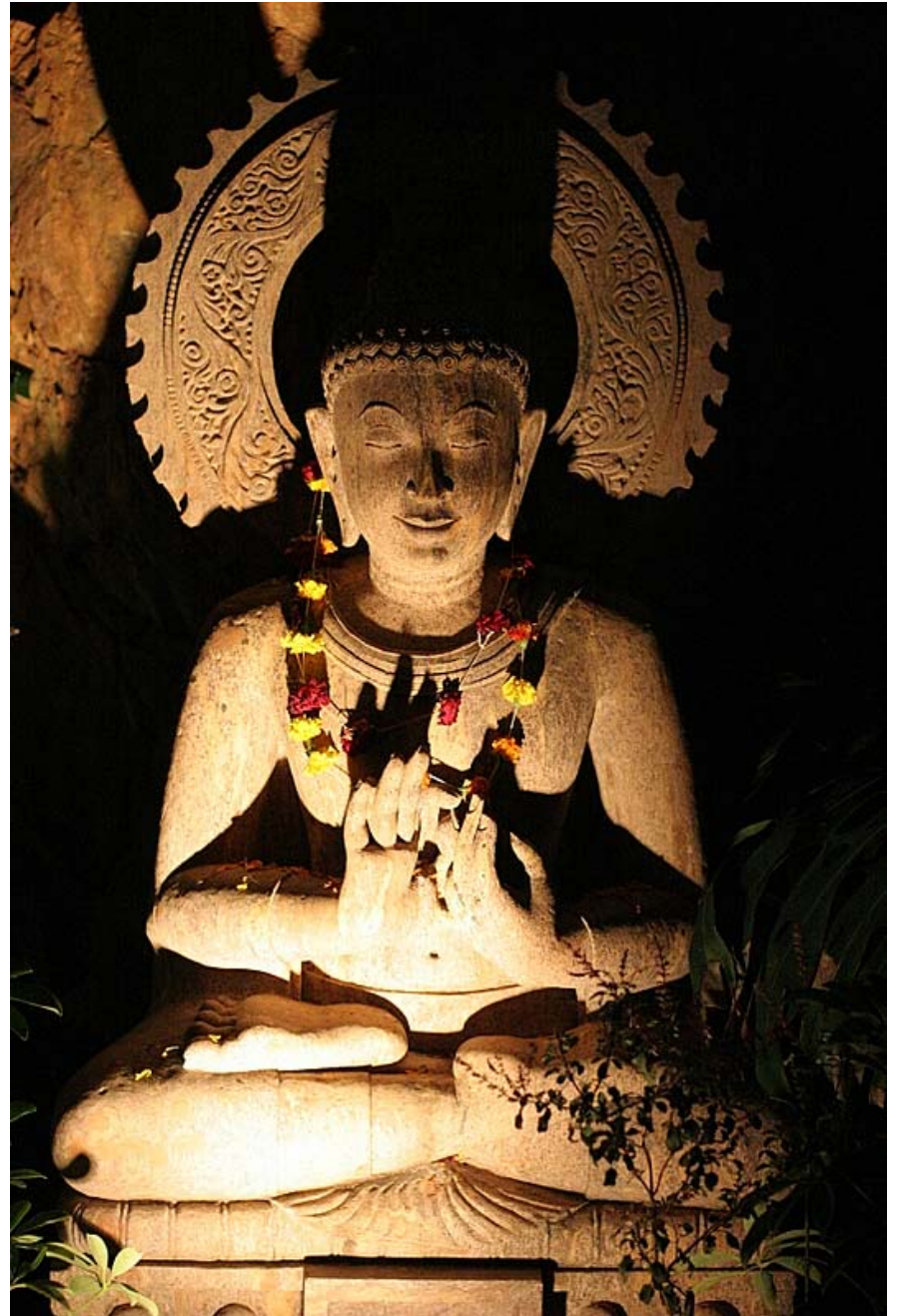
24 Dec. 2006, 8:28pm, Udaipur.

Finally, we headed back to Udai Kothi, where a special Christmas Eve dinner and celebration was being prepared. For the occasion, they roasted this goat on the lawn and stuffed it with a mixture of rice, nuts, and raisins.



24 Dec. 2006, 8:29pm, Udaipur.

A Buddha on the grounds of Udai Kothi, which I passed on my way back to the rooftop restaurant, where the festive meal was taking place.



24 Dec. 2006, 8:32pm, Udaipur.

I shot this image while waiting in the queue for the buffet: a small potted plant on the rooftop where we dined. The f1.4 50mm lens does a remarkable job of capturing sharp images in very low light (perhaps primarily because the automatic focus works so well through the large aperture).



24 Dec. 2006, 9:36pm, Udaipur.

Daisy, the hotel's proprietor and clearly the mastermind behind both Udai Kothi and Udai Bagh, had organized not only the festive meal but also musicians and dancers to help celebrate the occasion. Here is one of the dancers, who sat on the ground while she moved from the hips, dancing with the upper part of her body.



25 Dec. 2006, 3:19pm, Jaipur.

The next morning, we got up early and flew to Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan. After settling in at our new hotel, the very peaceful Alsisar Haveli, Isaiah, Ondi, and I walked into town.

Walking around Jaipur is pretty different from back home. For one thing, there are no sidewalks. For another, you have to dodge oxcarts, camel carts, cows, bulls, autorickshaws, bicycle rickshaws, motorcycles, cars, trucks, buses, and the occasional pig – all in a huge free for all – as well as hazards dumped on the road itself.



25 Dec. 2006, 3:24pm, Jaipur.

Crossing the road can also be difficult, although at times you just don't have a choice. You simply look for the best break in traffic that you can – and dive across.

Jaipur is also known as the “Pink City” for the rose pink wash used on the walls of its old city, as you can see in the background.



25 Dec. 2006, 3:34pm, Jaipur.

In town, they sell every kind of food imaginable — and some that I hadn't imagined before.

I think this might be some type of confection made with dates, but I confess I didn't try it, so I can't tell you for sure.



25 Dec. 2006, 3:50pm, Jaipur.

I'm not sure what these were either, but there were a lot of people selling them. I suspect they are some types of cheese, although Ondi thought they might be breads.



25 Dec. 2006, 3:55pm, Jaipur.

Some Santa outfits, heaped in a corner. I suspect these didn't sell in time for the holiday, and they are pretty useless now.



25 Dec. 2006, 4:06pm, Jaipur.

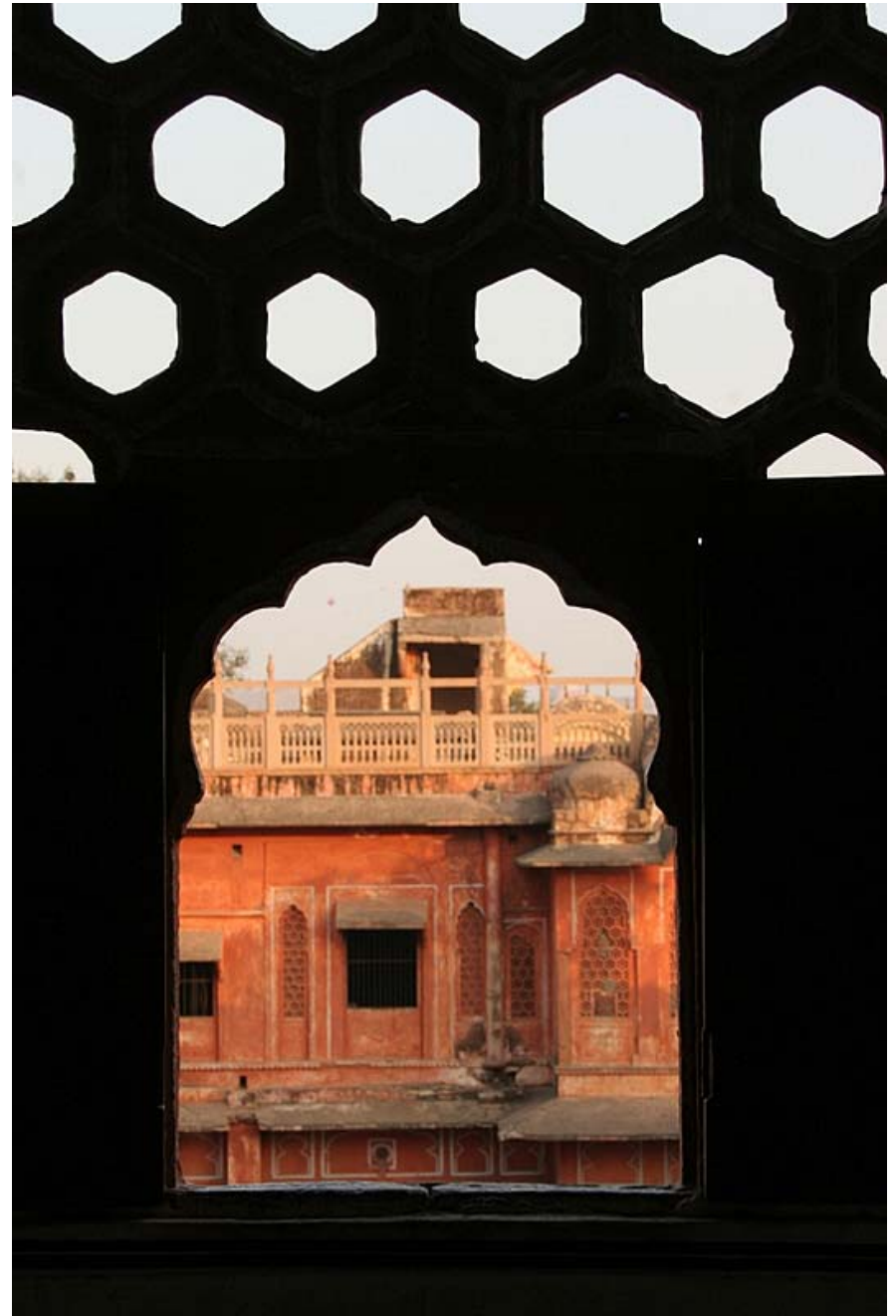
A makeshift metal shop along the street. Everywhere, people were hard at work — and generally with a bare minimum of infrastructure, like this umbrella to provide shade and give some definition to the workspace.



25 Dec. 2006, 4:45pm, Jaipur.

After almost an hour and a half of walking through town (and occasionally darting out of the way as a bull came trotting past), we eventually reached Hawa Mahal ("Palace of Winds"), Jaipur's most famous landmark.

The palace, which is actually quite tiny, was built in 1799 to allow the women of the court to watch street processions while remaining in strict *purdah*. The façade has 593 small windows and balconies; here is a view across the street from one.



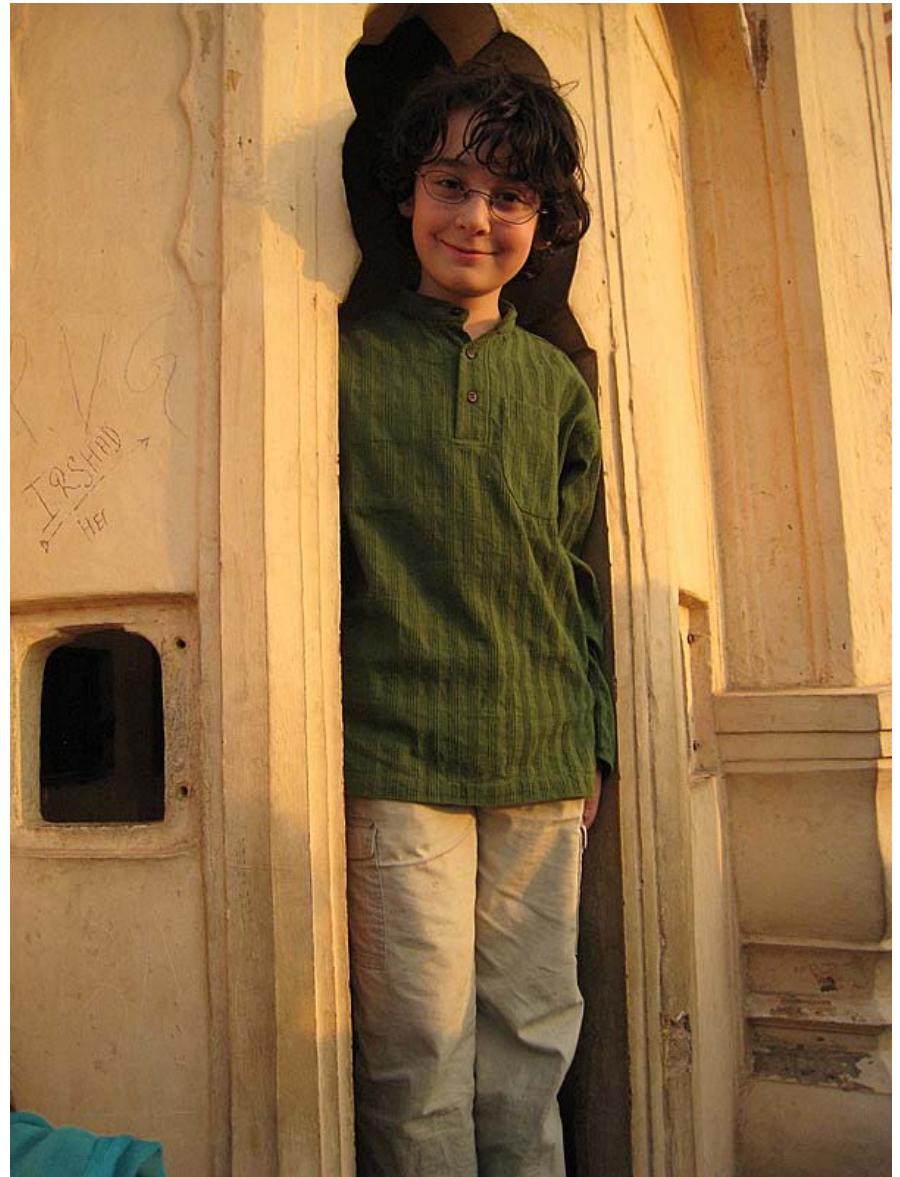
25 Dec. 2006, 4:47pm, Jaipur.

A view onto the upper floors of the palace itself. The intricate series of doorways and tiny windows make the building appear much bigger than it is. In reality, it is more like a miniature set, almost something out of Disneyland.



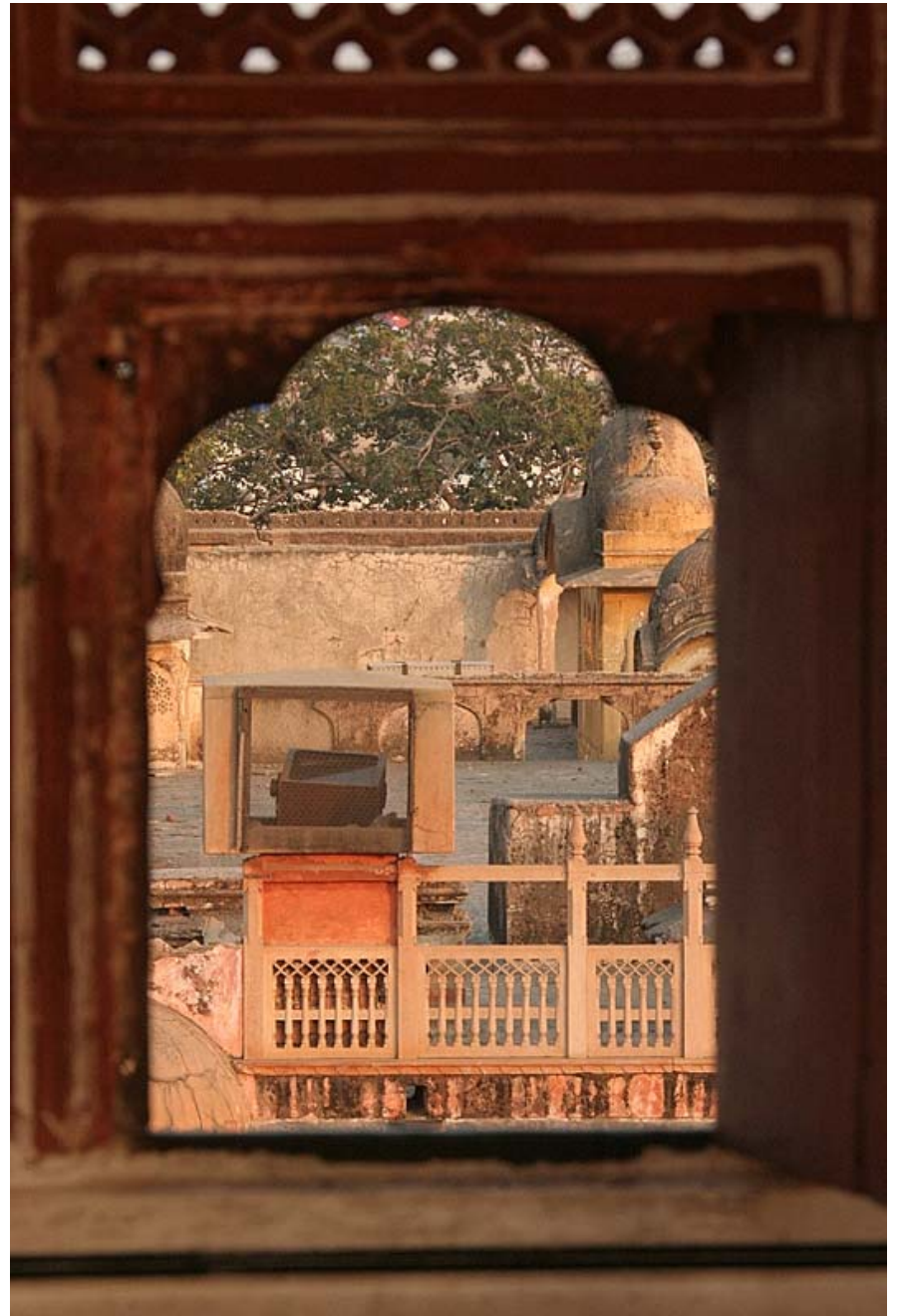
25 Dec. 2006, 4:49pm, Jaipur.

Isaiah, peering out of one of the many small doors.



25 Dec. 2006, 4:56pm, Jaipur.

Another view of the town through one of the many small windows in the palace's façade.



25 Dec. 2006, 5:22pm, Jaipur.

After visiting the palace, we wandered through one of the city's numerous labyrinthine bazaars. Each bazaar specializes in its own type of goods. The one we happened into clearly specialized in textiles.

Here is one of the hundreds and hundreds of small shops that we passed as we wandered around, literally quite lost in the arcades.



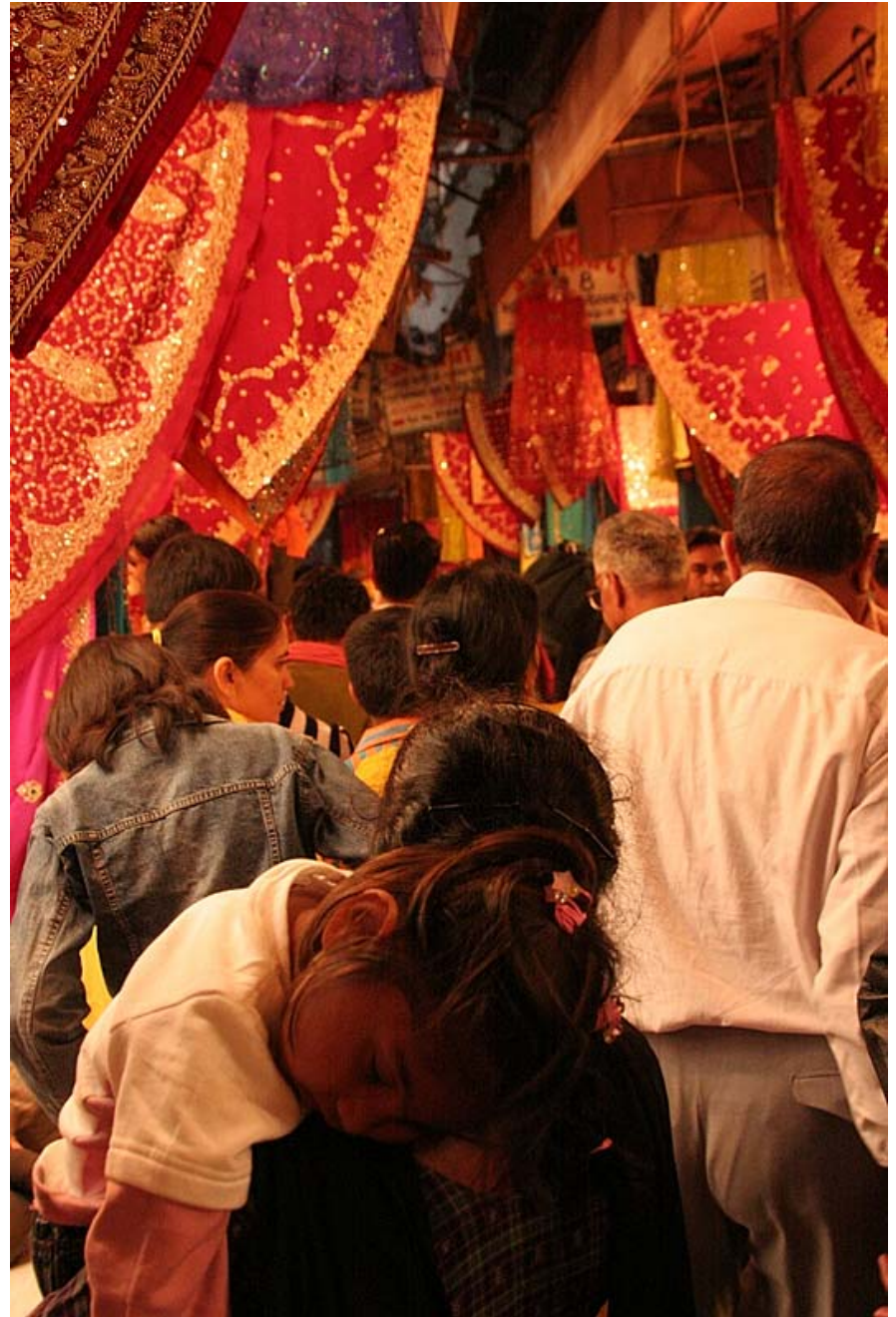
25 Dec. 2006, 5:25pm, Jaipur.

A close-up of two of the fabrics. I was particularly taken by the appearance of the diaphanous blue cloth over the red and gold pattern.



25 Dec. 2006, 5:45pm, Jaipur.

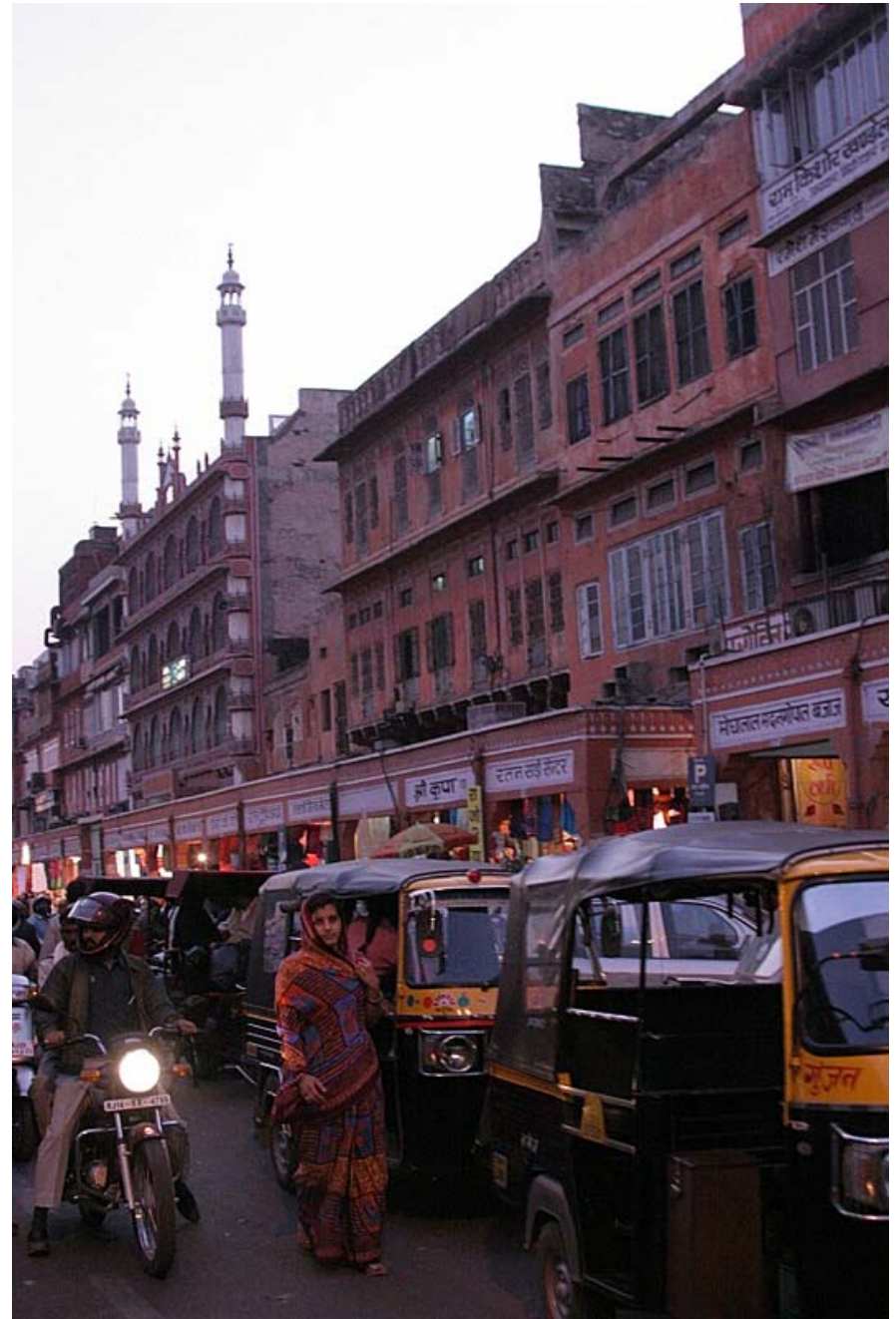
Still wandering around the bazaar some twenty minutes later, I waited for a momentary break in the flow of the crowd. I was hoping to be able to stand in one place just long enough to take this photo without being mowed down by other pedestrians or even the occasional rickshaw or motorbike passing through.



25 Dec. 2006, 5:51pm, Jaipur.

Finally back outside, a few minutes later, we asked around for a bicycle rickshaw driver who might know the way back to our hotel. (I figured that with the traffic, a bicycle could go just as fast as a motorized vehicle, and I didn't see any reason to add to the polluted air if we could help it.)

Here is the scene on the street as darkness descended.



25 Dec. 2006, 5:52pm, Jaipur.

Having found a willing driver, the three of us crammed into the back seat of a bicycle rickshaw. Actually, Ondi and Isaiah were on the seat. I was in a kind of precarious makeshift basket suspended out behind. At least it gave me some good opportunities to take photos of the drivers following us.



25 Dec. 2006, 6:01pm, Jaipur.

The traffic was crazy, but I was right at least that we all moved at the same speed. At one point, we got sideswiped by an autorickshaw. Fortunately, we all had our hands on the inside of the carriage, and no harm was done. Still, by the end of the ride, Ondi vowed never to take a bicycle rickshaw again – at least not such a dilapidated version as the one we had been in.



25 Dec. 2006, 7:25pm, Jaipur.

Back at the Alsisar Haveli that evening, we were treated to another puppet show as we dined outdoors in the cool evening air.

Here, Eleni is cuddling two of the puppets, which the puppeteer wanted to sell us. We eventually broke down, but settled for two smaller (also cheaper, and easier-to-pack) puppets instead.



25 Dec. 2006, 7:25pm, Jaipur.

The hotel made a bonfire, which kept us warm while we dined. Isaiah, especially, loved watching it burn down — and would have stayed there all night if we hadn't dragged him off to bed.



25 Dec. 2006, 8:17pm, Jaipur.

Isaiah, shortly before being hauled off to bed. (His cheeks are flushed from eating lots of straight chili paste. He kept daring the waiter to bring stronger and stronger versions.)



26 Dec. 2006, 11:13am, Jaipur.

The next morning, we headed off to the fort-palace of Amber, about 11km outside of town. On the way, we got this nice view of the eastern façade of Hawa Mahal, through which I had taken photos of the street where we were now the day before.



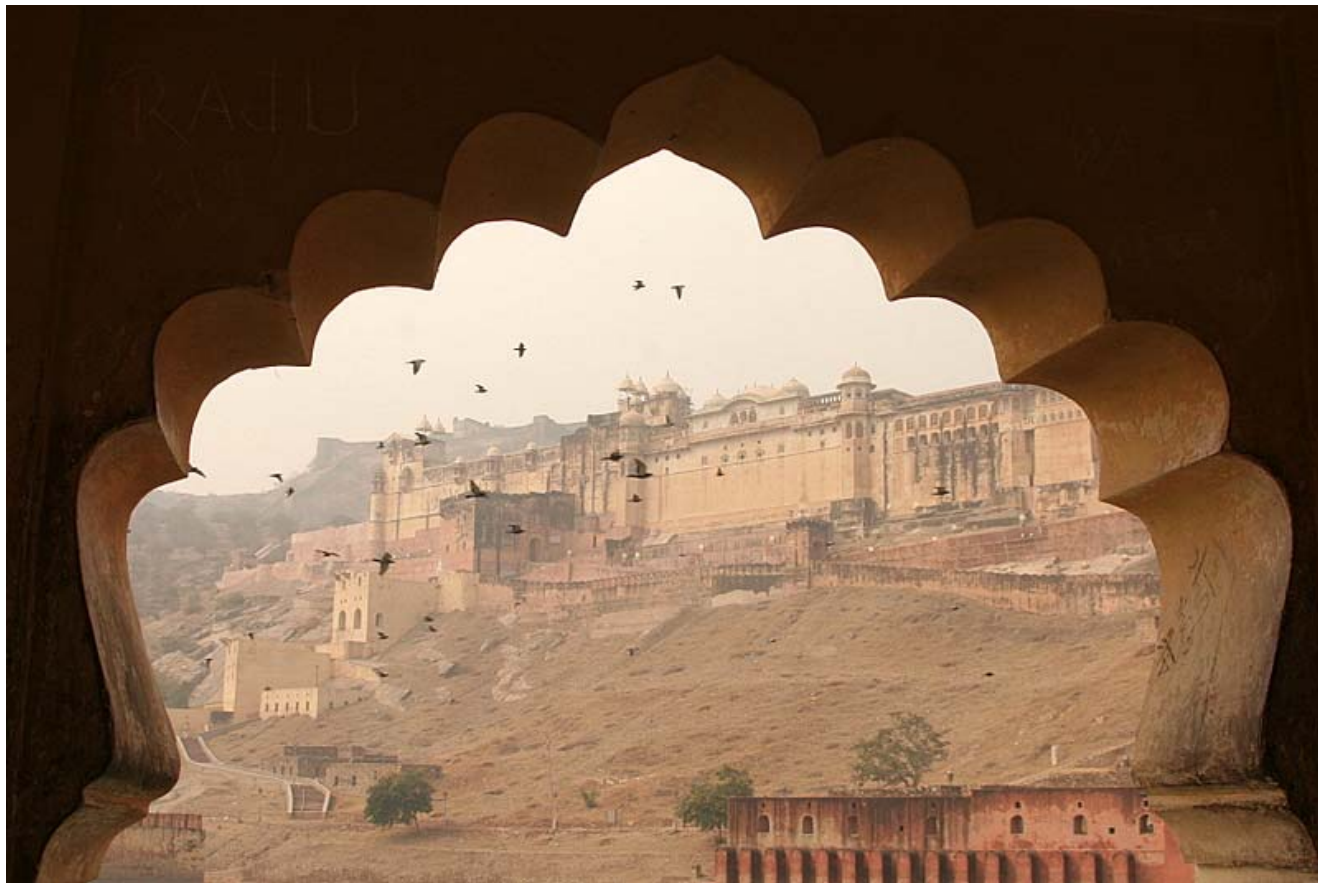
26 Dec. 2006, 11:34am, on the road to Amber.

Close to Amber, we saw this fellow riding along on an elephant. I shot this photo through the windshield of the car.



26 Dec. 2006, 11:39am, Amber.

Our first view of Amber Fort, built in 1592.



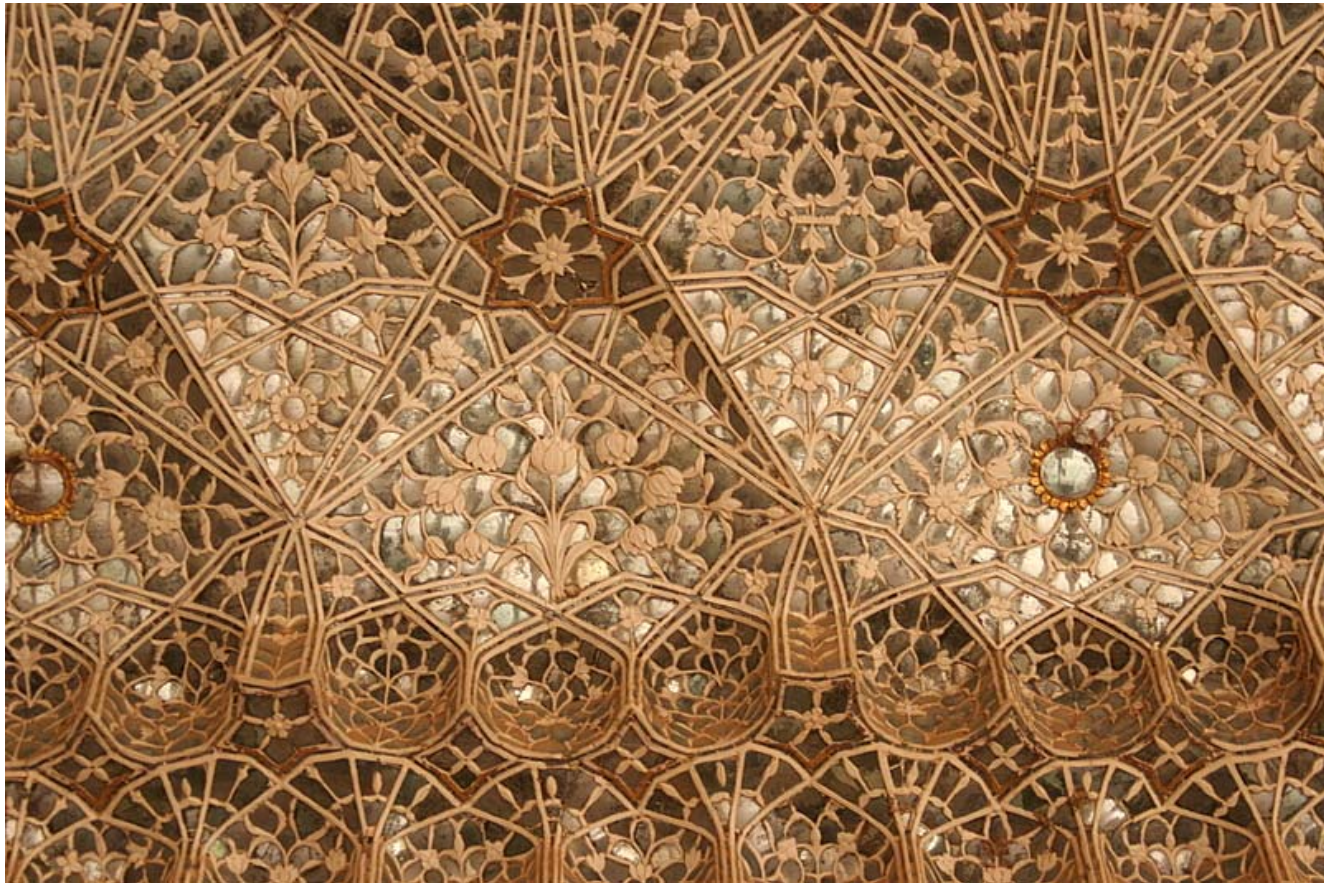
26 Dec. 2006, 11:42am, Amber.

A snake charmer on the walking path up to the fort.



26 Dec. 2006, 12:34pm, Amber Fort.

The halls of the fort-palace are covered with intricate inlay across the walls and ceiling, including small convex mirrors imported from Belgium. Here is a detail of these patterns.



26 Dec. 2006, 12:38pm, Amber Fort.

And here is a view of the wall and ceiling together. It is difficult to see where the wall ends and the ceiling begins.



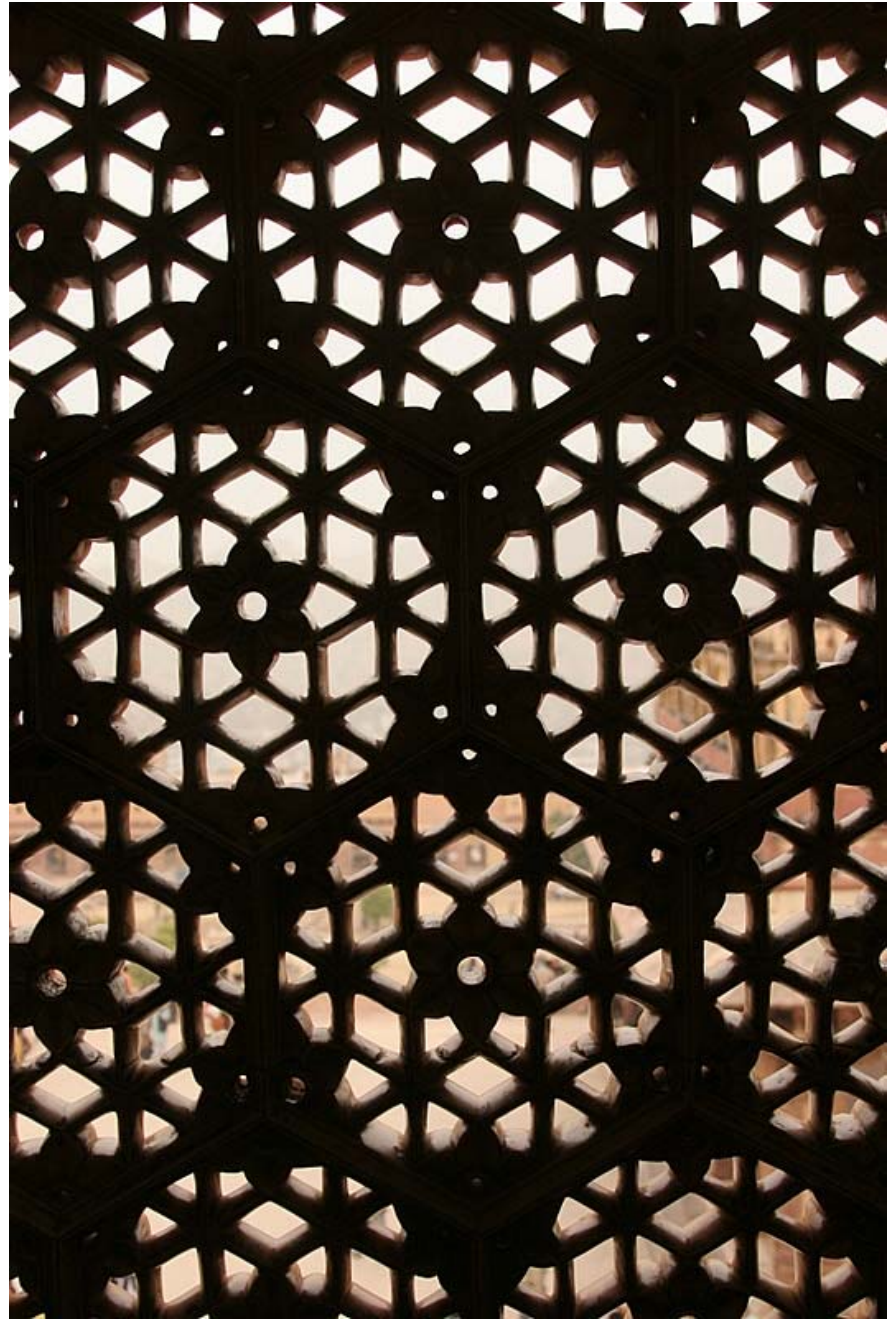
26 Dec. 2006, 12:38pm, Amber Fort.

A detail of the ceiling tiles, including the inlays of convex mirrors, and the round flat mirrors in the centers of the tiled motifs.



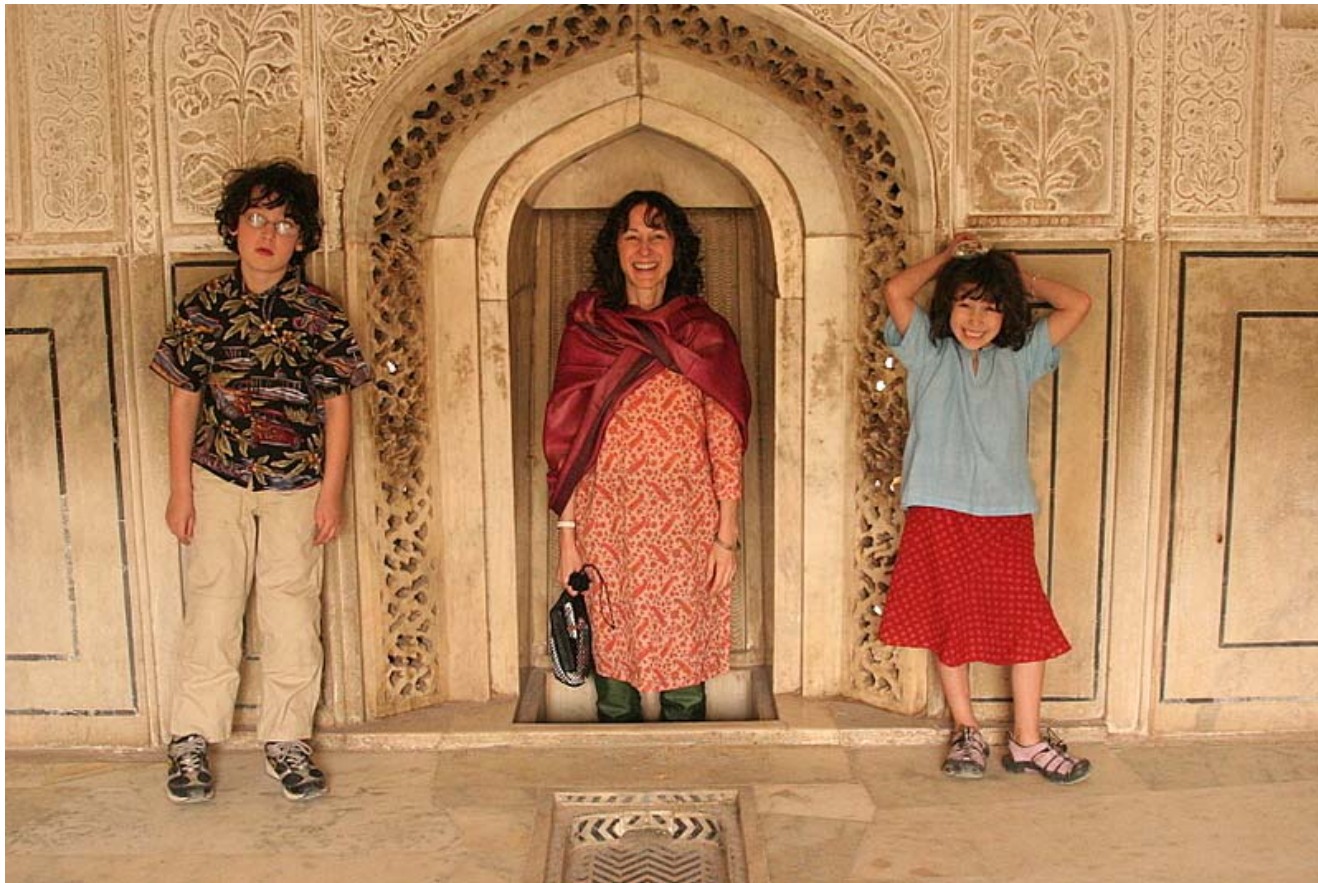
26 Dec. 2006, 12:43pm, Amber Fort.

A view to the front of the fort through a carved slab of marble.



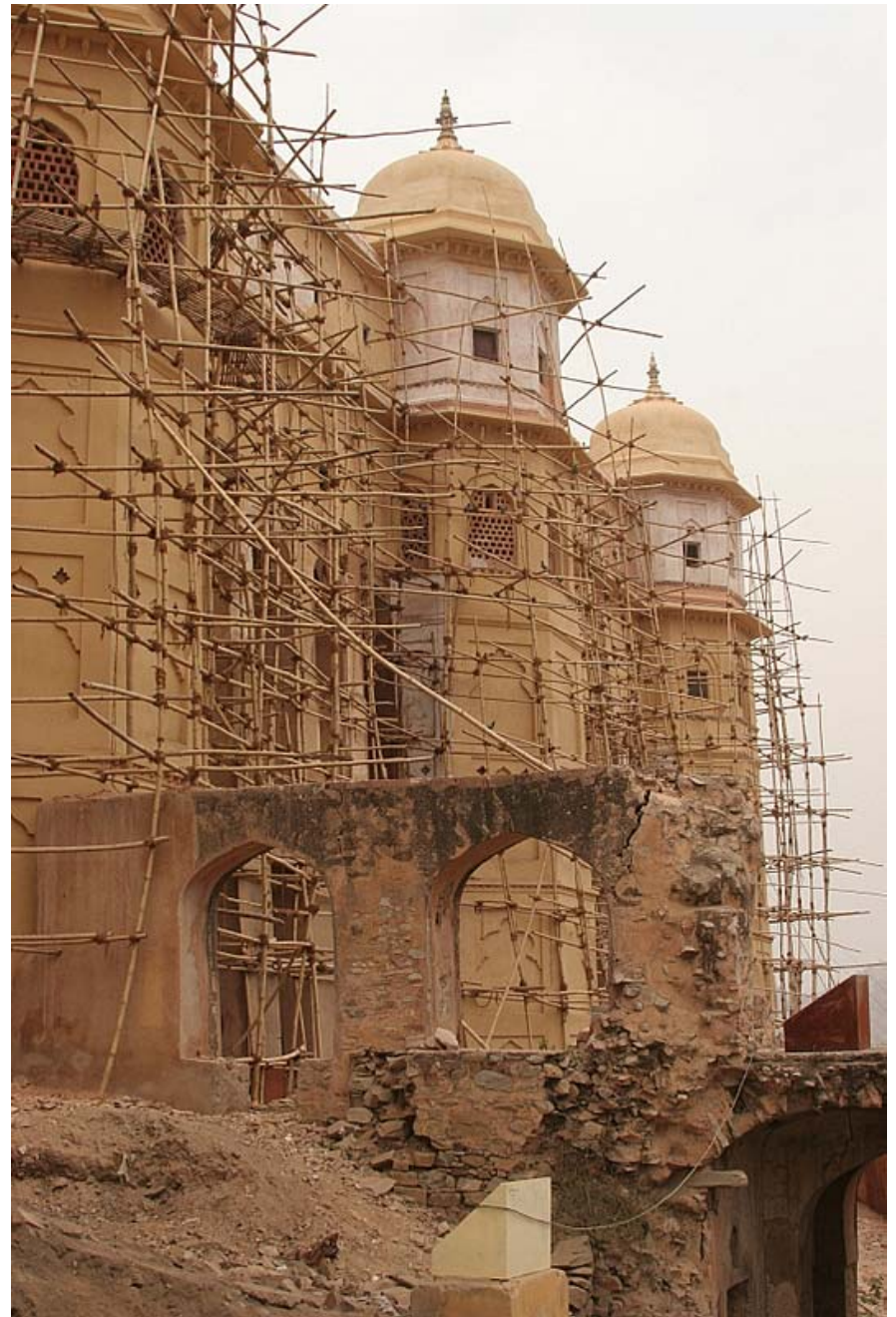
26 Dec. 2006, 1:01pm, Amber Fort.

Ondi and kids in the Sikh Niwas (“Hall of Pleasure”). The carved piece of stone encircling the doorway Ondi is standing in served as an air conditioner: Cool air flowed out of the vents from running water behind. The cooling water then passed through the room via the channel at the bottom of the frame.



26 Dec. 2006, 1:17pm, Amber Fort.

Bamboo scaffolding supports ongoing renovations to the exterior of the fort.



26 Dec. 2006, 1:18pm, Amber Fort.

“Old Jaipur,” as seen from the fort. According to the guide we hired, many of these buildings are still in use today. I would have walked over to take a closer look around, but by this time the rest of my family was anxious to head back.



26 Dec. 2006, 2:18pm, Jaipur.

This camel cart was stuck in traffic, along with us, as we headed back to Jaipur for lunch.

We took the rest of the afternoon to chill out on the grounds of our quiet hotel, resting up ahead of our early morning flight back to the south the next morning.



6

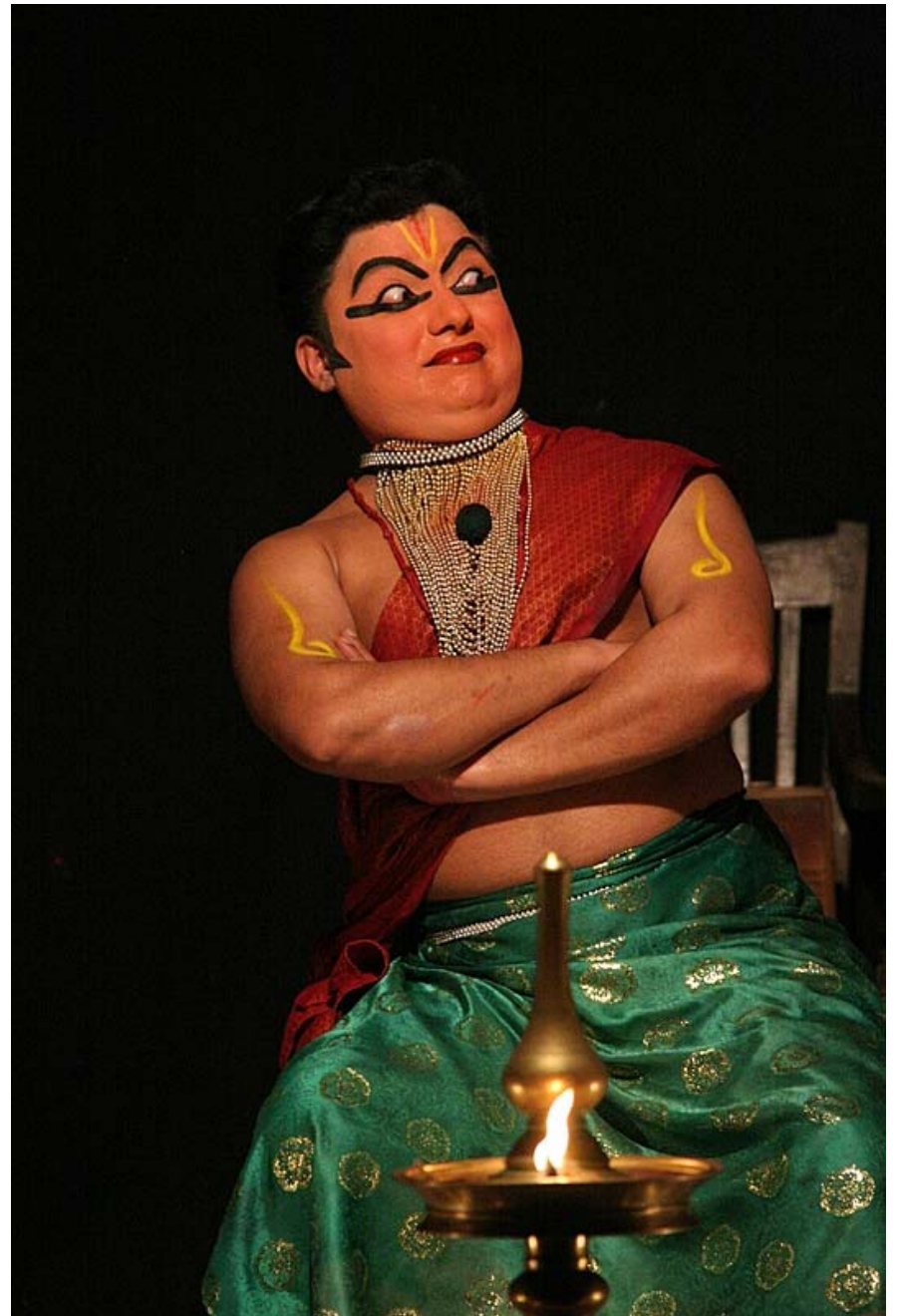
Kerala

27 Dec. 2006, 6:48pm, Fort Cochin.

It was late afternoon by the time we arrived in Fort Cochin, after two flights with a nearly four-hour layover in between in Mumbai, and then another hour a half drive from the Kochi airport.

When we arrived at our homestay, I mentioned my interest in seeing Kathakali dance, a unique form of ritualized theater found only in Kerala, which I had read about in the guidebook. It turned out that a performance was just about to begin nearby, and we rushed over to see it.

The performance we saw began with an instructional demonstration, in which an announcer spoke words like “happy,” “angry,” “yes,” “no,” or “breasts,” and the dancer acted them out quite convincingly with pantomime. This provided a visual vocabulary for the real performance that followed.



27 Dec. 2006, 7:17pm, Fort Cochin.

In the real performance, the same actor (I think) appeared in full costume and acted out a story from the Ramayana, the epic story of Rama, the seventh of Vishnu's ten incarnations.

As the kids were getting restless, and as we had a 7:45pm reservation at a nearby restaurant where there was yet another dance performance about to begin, we left before the theater piece was through. But Ondi and I, at least, found Kathakali dance quite interesting, and we very much enjoyed the rhythmic, musical accompaniment as well.



27 Dec. 2006, 8:07pm, Fort Cochin.

At Malabar House, where we dined, we had some of the very best food of our trip – which is truly saying a lot, as the food nearly everywhere in India was excellent (including on the flights!).

The dance performance was also terrific, and very different from the Kathakali dance we had just seen. There were two performers who took turns on the stage: a young girl (pictured here), probably around 10 years old, whose performance was energetic, spunky, and precise; and an older girl, probably in her late teens, whose dance was more flowing.



27 Dec. 2006, 8:20pm, Fort Cochin.

The older dancer also added more technical moves, such as carrying a vase on her head and locomoting across the floor on a plate as she danced.



28 Dec. 2006, 11:03am, Fort Cochin.

The next morning, we visited the delightful center of Fort Cochin, which was a few minutes away from our homestay on foot. The small streets there had galleries showing all sorts of beautiful fabrics, like the one pictured here.

I also stopped in at a tailor and bought some pants and three shirts, all for Rs. 1000 (about \$22). After wearing them for a few days, however, I developed a rash all over my arms and legs, which may or may not be related to the clothes. I do hope it will go away soon!

(P.S. The rash seems to have been caused by an allergic reaction to Malarone, the anti-malarial we were all taking, rather than the clothing.)



28 Dec. 2006, 11:42am, Fort Cochin.

Fort Cochin sits on the Lakshadweep Sea. We walked back along River Road, which runs along the shore. The seashore is lined with these Chinese fishing nets, which traders from the court of Kublai Khan are said to have introduced to the Malabar region back in the 13th century. The nets, which are lowered and raised by levers and weights, take four men to operate.



28 Dec. 2006, 12:37pm, Fort Cochin.

After ordering lunch, I headed back to the tailors to check on his progress. I went by way of a small side street, where I found this weathered doorway.



28 Dec. 2006, 12:56pm, Fort Cochin.

The food at Malabar House was so good the night before that we had returned there for lunch. It was a whole lot less crowded at lunchtime, but every bit as slow. When I returned from the tailors, the food was still nowhere in sight. While waiting for the meal to arrive, Eleni and I experimented with self-portraits, making use of the mirror on the wall opposite my seat at the table.

(You can see that my beard has grown in. I generally like to shave with hot water, and the last time we had more than a couple of minutes' supply was our hotel in Delhi, which we had left almost a week before.)



28 Dec. 2006, 1:07pm, Fort Cochin.

Our seafood *thali* at last!!



28 Dec. 2006, 2:21pm, Fort Cochin.

After lunch we visited Jew Town, a district of Fort Cochin that once held a thriving Jewish community. Here is a detail from a wall along Synagogue Lane, the narrow street housing the still functioning 16th-century synagogue. (No photos were allowed inside, unfortunately.) Legend has it that the Jews of Kochi first arrived in 587 BCE, having escaped the occupation of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Only seven Jewish families remain in Kochi today, as most decided to emigrate to Israel when they received free passage there in the 1950s.

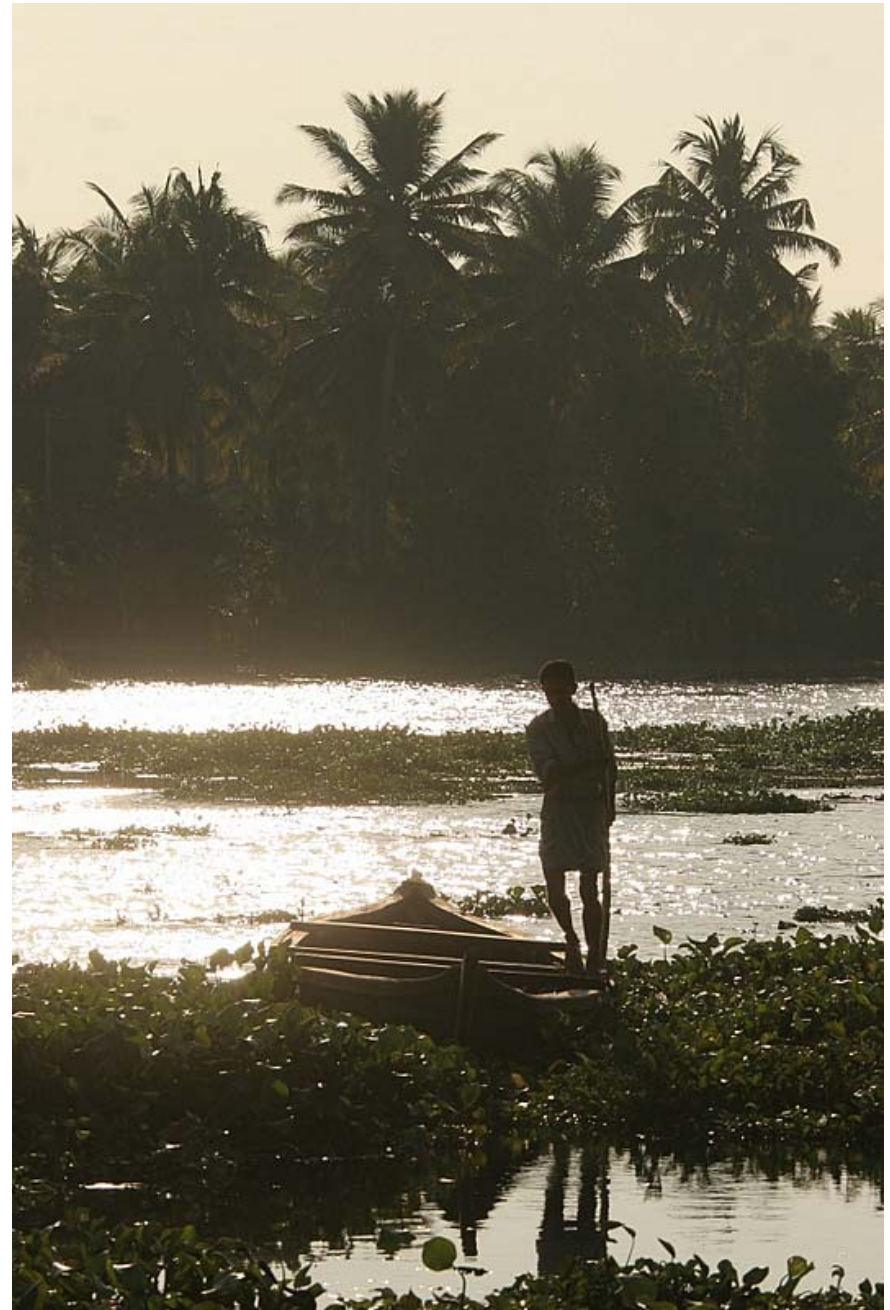


28 Dec. 2006, 4:50pm, at Philipkutty's Farm.

We left Fort Cochin that afternoon, and headed toward Vechoor, in the Kottayam District, to Philipkutty's Farm.

A few months before our trip, I had begun a subscription to National Geographic Traveler, and the very first issue that arrived contained a special section on India. The article mentioned Philipkutty's Farm, a small homestay on a secluded island in the backwaters of Kerala, which we would have never known about otherwise. We contacted Anu, the proprietor, by email, but alas at that time we were already too late to be able to book a room for more than one night. Nonetheless, we enjoyed every minute that we were able to spend there.

At this moment, our transport to the island was arriving: a canoe being punted across the backwaters to retrieve us.



28 Dec. 2006, 5:18pm, at Philipkutty's Farm.

This was my first view of a Kerala houseboat. These boats ply the backwaters of Kerala and come in all shapes and sizes but generally have this sort of bulbous caterpillar form. (They remind me, above all, of the "Ohmu" in Miyazaki's *Nausicaa and the Valley of the Wind*.) Their exterior is constructed with woven palm fronds, the same material used for traditional rooftops in the region.



28 Dec. 2006, 5:29pm, at Philipkutty's Farm.

A view of our delightful bedroom at Philipkutty's Farm. Our cabin had two rooms: this bedroom on one end, and a small living room on the other, as well as a full bathroom in the center.



28 Dec. 2006, 5:44pm, at Philipkutti's Farm.

Anu greeted us when we arrived at the farm. As we drank ginger lime – a concoction of fresh lime juice, freshly grated ginger, sugar, and water – she gave us a little more background on the homestay.

The homestay was her husband Philip's lifelong ambition. He started it seven years ago on farmland that he had inherited from his grandfather, who built the 750-acre island in the early 1950s. Sadly, Philip died suddenly of a heart attack one year ago, at the age of 37, and since then Anu has run the place on her own, with help from her mother-in-law and a wonderful staff.

Once we were settled in, Anu sent us off on a sunset cruise with tea, biscuits, and fried plantains. As we were staying for just one night, she wanted to make sure we didn't miss out on anything. Here is a view of the farm as we pulled away in our canoe.



28 Dec. 2006, 5:51pm, at Philipkutty's Farm.

Our short cruise took us past this houseboat in the setting sun, as it anchored for the night.



28 Dec. 2006, 5:56pm, at Philipkutty's Farm.

A view looking back at our captain, who is punting the boat.



28 Dec. 2006, 6:01pm, at Philipkutty's Farm.

Our view of the sunset, with some fishermen a few meters away.



28 Dec. 2006, 6:03pm, at Philipkutty's Farm.

Some coconut palms, as seen from our canoe in the marshy waters.



28 Dec. 2006, 6:13pm, at Philipkutty's Farm.

Eleni, enjoying the sunset cruise.



28 Dec. 2006, 6:19pm, at Philipkutty's Farm.

Eleni and Isaiah on the way back to the farm, trying out a new song that Ondi taught them.



28 Dec. 2006, 8:31pm, at Philipkutty's Farm.

Ani, Anu's 3-year old daughter, with Eleni behind her. Our kids and Anu's got along great. For most of the evening they played together while the grown-ups ate and talked.



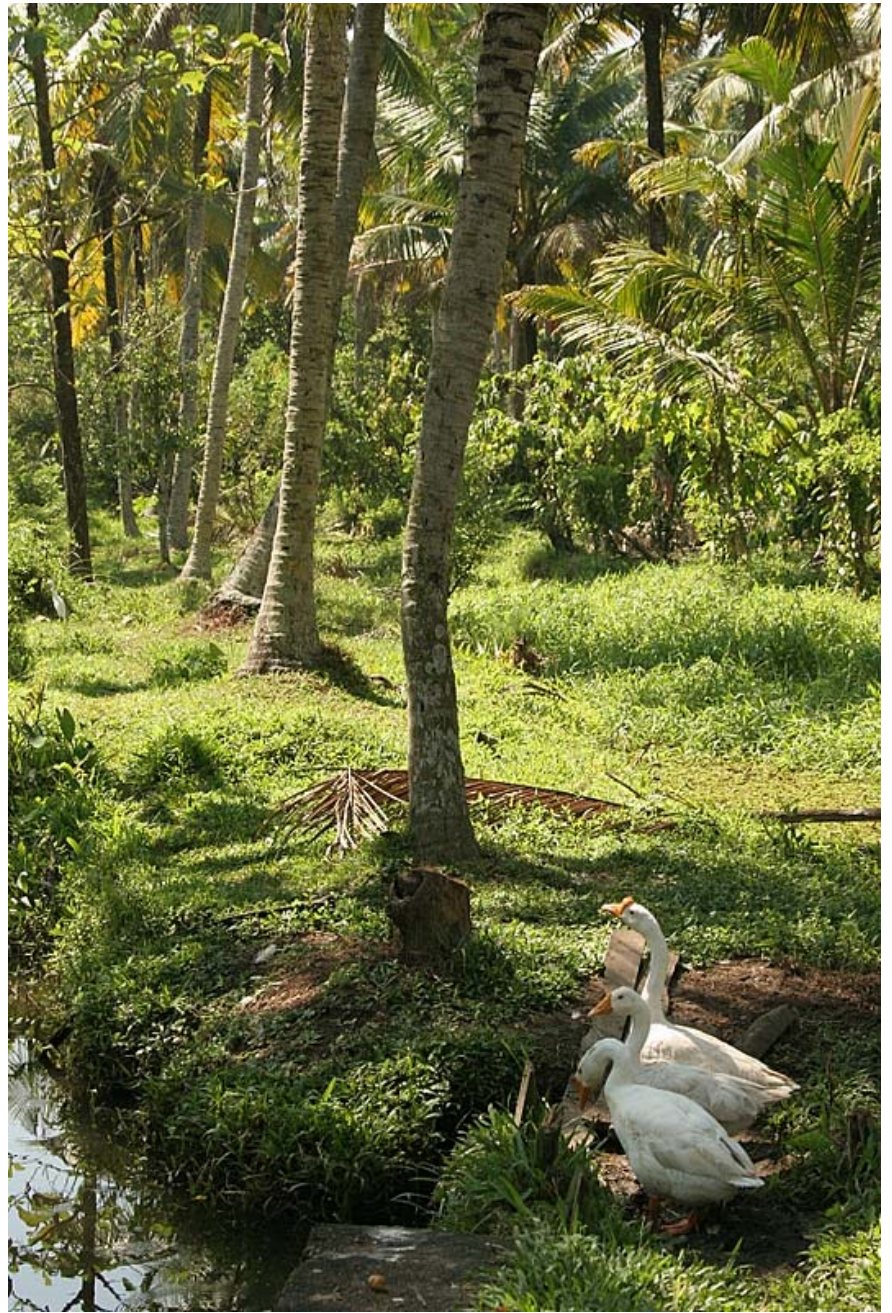
29 Dec. 2006, 11:14am, at Philipkutty's Farm.

The next morning, we got a tour of the 55-acre farm. We saw figs, guavas, fenugreek, vanilla, nutmeg, coconut, okra, tamarind, turmeric, cocoa, bananas, black pepper, cinnamon, mango, jackfruit, papaya, ginger, cucumbers, long beans (and probably other things I'm forgetting) – all grown on the organic farm, many of which we had the opportunity to sample in the delectable meals cooked by “Mummy,” Anu's mother-in-law.



29 Dec. 2006, 11:26am, at Philipkutty's Farm.

Some geese on the farm. (They also had ducks.)



29 Dec. 2006, 11:44am, at Philipkutty's Farm.

A view of our cabin from the farm.



29 Dec. 2006, 1:06pm, at Philipkutty's Farm.

Mummy, in the kitchen, making *apam*, the local spongy bread, which was absolutely delicious! In the rear, you can see her assistant frying fresh fish filets in ground curry spices.



29 Dec. 2006, 1:11pm, at Philipkutty's Farm.

The finished *apam*. By the time I photographed these, my mouth was really watering, having sampled them the night before. Disappointingly, they must have been for someone else's lunch, as they weren't included in ours that day! ☹



29 Dec. 2006, 1:21pm, at Philipkutty's Farm.

The relaxed enjoyment we felt during our stay on the farm is reflected in Ondi's face.



29 Dec. 2006, 4:27pm, at Philipkutty's Farm.

Philip, Anu's 9-year old son. Isaiah and Philip really bonded during our short stay there. They became almost inseparable.



29 Dec. 2006, 4:32pm, at Philipkutty's Farm.

Ani and Anu, just before our depart.

Next time we will book further in advance so that we can stay more than one night!



29 Dec. 2006, 4:44pm, at Philipkutty's Farm.

At last we took our leave of the farm. This fisherman sailed by as we were quietly punted back to the mainland to meet the taxi that awaited us there.



30 Dec. 2006, 10:27am, Alleppey.

We spent our last night at a small place called Palm Grove Lake Resort, which was outside of Alleppey (also known as Alappuzha), sleeping under mosquito nets, as the cabins had no screens.

The next morning, I hired a local boatman to take Isaiah and me around on a canoe through the backwaters nearby. He began by heading out onto Vembanad Lake, which was filled with houseboats cruising by.



30 Dec. 2006, 10:59am, Alleppey.

Later, after a stop at the boatman's house, where he shook down some coconuts and cut them open for us as refreshment, we cruised some of the narrower passageways, which I found even more scenic, not to mention more shady.



30 Dec. 2006, 10:59am, Alleppey.

Many of the villagers in Kerala live right along the backwaters, which they use for bathing, laundry, transportation, and commerce. These boys welcomed us as we floated by.



30 Dec. 2006, 11:01am, Alleppey.

A typical scene along the canal: a houseboat moored alongside a dilapidated hut.



30 Dec. 2006, 11:33am, Alleppey.

A narrow, shady canal.



30 Dec. 2006, 1:34pm, Alleppey. Our departure from Kerala turned out to be more exciting than anticipated. Vijesh, who managed the cabins where we spent our last night, had heard about widespread demonstrations taking place in protest of Saddam Hussein's execution, which had unexpectedly occurred hours before. He was concerned that our taxi might be stoned, overturned, or worse if we encountered a crowd that learned we were Americans. Indeed, it was difficult for him to find a taxi that would take us at all. Eventually, a nice, young man who was unmarried and said he had nothing to lose agreed to make the trip in his small car. Vijesh put special "Airport" signs on the front and back windshields, and had us all cover up, in hopes these measures might protect us. He also helped us concoct a story about being Muslims from Wellington, New Zealand — a safer story than being from Canada, let alone the U.S., he felt. There *was* some violence it turned out: protestors in Kochi, which we skirted on our way to the airport, attacked an American bank office and were injured by police wielding clubs, and elsewhere in Kerala effigies of Bush were burned. But we didn't witness any of this violence ourselves. After a rather tense, three-hour drive, we made it to the airport without incident.



31 Dec. 2006, 9:44am, on the way back to London.

It was a very long trip home. We arrived back in Chennai around 10:30pm that evening, then hauled our sleeping children around through the various crowded security checkpoints, ticketing, and immigration desks, until we could finally board our flight back to London, which departed at 4:00am.

Once arriving in London, we had another four-hour layover before our final flight home. But, as fate would have it, once aboard we discovered there was an equipment problem with the plane. Eventually, British Airways commandeered a new plane to take us home. However, once we had boarded that flight and were all ready to go, it turned out that the machine that loads the luggage had broken down, and couldn't be moved out of the way to allow the plane to be pushed back. Ultimately, the crew timed out, and we were put up for the night at the airport Hilton.

We finally made it home on New Year's Day, about 24 hours after we had expected – and about 64 hours after leaving the Palm Grove Lake Resort in Alleppey.

All in all, it was an exhausting but very worthwhile trip!

