

India Part 3. Fatehpur Sikri to Ranthambore National Park

Friday dawned and it was a fairly early start. We packed an overnight bag as although we were receiving our suitcases that evening it would be after dinner as we were travelling by train and our bags via coach which was a good 4 hours drive.

We left the Trident Agra after our short but lovely stay and travelled an hour or so to Fatehpur Sikri on the coach. Fatehpur Sikri is a now abandoned city, complete with city

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walls, but once was home to the Mughals, and was in fact their first planned city. It's built out of sandstone and stands impressively on a small hillock with views all around.



Nowadays it's listed as UNESCO world heritage site, and we enjoyed a fascinating tour around with Marvi's amazing commentary, seeing both the winter and summer palaces, along with the ladies and men's quarters.

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The main carpark is about half a mile away so we transferred onto small coaches to get to the entrance. That in itself was quite an experience!

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During our visit we saw some incredible carvings in the sandstone and also some original paintings onto the sandstone of elephants.

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After our visit, we rejoined the coach, and went towards a different hotel which we called into for Lunch. It seemed to be the

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meeting place for several similar groups passing through, but the buildings were particularly grand and the food nice.

Next stop was the train station where we boarded our train for 3 hours, towards Sawai Modpur, where the National park is.



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This train was totally different in feel, and slightly cleaner. We preferred this train to the previous one as the seats were large and leather and it had a bit of a 1920s feel to the carriage. There was a bit of a hoo hah as our booked tickets had different people sat in but good ol' Ian and Marvi soon sorted it and we were on our way. Keith had another interesting toilet experience here - I however just crossed my legs. We almost drank some tea on the train, but thankfully Marvi caught Keith's eye just as we raised the cup to our glass- as if to say "I wouldn't if I were you" - we decanted the tea into an old water bottle and wow it absolutely stank of stale manky water!

We were met off the train by the manager of

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the Raj Vivante Lodge and he had brought a couple of “canter” jeeps to pick us up. This was our first taste of tomorrow’s safari.



After a fabulous welcome at this former hunting lodge (where the British Royal Family stayed in the 1960s, we among with our pool buddies went straight to the pool for an

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evening dip. We were joined by the resident fruit bats who gave quite a show to us, including dipping in the pool whilst we were in it for some water!

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We had a lovely evening at the lodge, including a night cap of Indian Whiskey in the bar

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area- but it was filled in some part with apprehension- we had a very early start tomorrow- 05:15 our wake up call has been booked for – the reason. We're off to hopefully see a tiger on safari. Would we be lucky and see this majestic animal.

Saturday arrived very quickly indeed- I felt like I'd only just nodded off when the alarm went off. Keith and I had a mutual understanding not to talk to each other for at least half an hour- we both do NOT do that time of day. By 6:00 we were on our canters and met by our park ranger who travelled with us the short distance into the park. Before we had got through the gates a group of jeeps had congregated all looking up on the hillside. We soon discovered they had spotted

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the leopard, sat coolly upon his rock, surveying his land below. Apparently the leopard is rarer than the tiger, so it's safe to say the mood was electric. But this was only the start. We drove on through the park, our ranger constantly with one ear listening to the animals' dawn chorus, trying to figure out where the tiger was. We sat for a period of time and nothing other than very timid Spotted deer and Summer deer were around and after probably half an hour of not seeing a huge amount we moved towards the water. We saw a family of wild boar, a kingfisher, parakeets, and even a black Kite - but no tiger. We drove around to another stretch of water and saw a crocodile, and then two more. Still no sign of the tiger and by this time the mood was slipping. Noone

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was ready to moan about not seeing it of course, this is natural surrounding and not a zoo. However I know I was starting to feel disappointed - It's only natural right?! Next thing, near to a family of monkeys, our guide spotted a commotion down over in the distance. A large group of animals were running en mass away- it turned out to be an antelope - but our ranger had other suspicions. Two minutes later he orders us to "hang on tight" and my goodness me, we really needed to. The driver CHARGED a mile or so down a bumpy dirt track with us 15 brits hanging on for dear life, but howling with laughter in the back. Next thing was a blur - we seemed to turn a corner and then we were faced with a real live TIGER, just strolling past us for a sunbath. Wow, just

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wow. I cried and cried and cried! What an INCREDIBLE sight. I'll never forget how beautiful and graceful this creature was. The range moved the van a few feet and we found it's mate on it's way to join him. What an adrenaline packed morning and it wasn't even 09:30am.



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We were returned to the hotel where breakfast was served-the mood in the hotel was ecstatic. No one could believe what we'd seen. It was at this point, Ian, the tour manager admitted that this was a VERY rare occurrence for Great Rail groups.

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We had a few hours of free time before we were back on the canters for Safari round 2. This time we took a more mountainous route which was so bumpy - I don't think I stopped laughing once. it was so so funny bouncing around the back! The bumpiness was what I imagine being flung around inside a tumble drier is like. During the afternoon safari we saw another tiger but this one was further away and also 3 sloth bears and a baby crocodile.

What an absolutely incredible day- when I thought nothing would ever beat being at the Taj Mahal then this happens!

That evening we enjoyed some traditional Indian Music whilst we had our dinner before

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an earlyish night.

Sunday soon arrived and we had some free time to spend at the lodge hotel. We teamed up with another couple and went on a camel ride around the local town. This was a fascinating insight into life here – we passed through the market area and also got caught on the dual carriageway during rush hour. At one point we had a combine harvester UNDER taking us. Mental! We marvelled at the scaffolding attempts (see pic below, can you spot the man free hanging on a self built hanging ladder?!)

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After lunch it was time to bid a very fond farewell to this part of the country. The staff here are excellent- clearly nature lovers, everyone was excited to hear about our sightings and see our pictures- one of the waiter's couldn't wait to show us his picture of the leopard on a nearby hotel wall which he discovered on his way home recently. Wow!

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Our next stop is Jaipur.

Until Next Time

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