

Khajuraho, Photo phest 1, January 8, 2017

Highlights of Khajuraho: the temples, of course; Pappu meeting me at the airport and guiding me for the next three days (unbidden but not unappreciated); Kashmiri Mario talking, in front of his shop, over Kashmiri tea, of Ladakhi goat's chin hairs; curries for dinner.



Khajuraho is a clean and quiet town. Flat. The only relief is clambering up and down temple steps. All the major gods are represented. Each night there's a Shiva puja which can be heard clearly all over the central town, even in the Siddharth cafe where I could be writing this. In reality, I'm at the airport waiting for my flight to Varanasi.



The earliest temples, built in the shikhara style, are more than 1000 years old. Given that, they're in decent condition and with restoration work ongoing. The outer walls are covered with statues - of gods, demons, incarnations of Krishna, and copulating couples (or trios, etc.). The temples are famous for the erotic sculptures of scenes from the Kama Sutra, but these represent a fraction of all the carvings. This is one of the tamer ones.



Most of the temples - and the best preserved ones - are in "the Western Group". I visited these late afternoon of my arrival day and again the following morning. My guide took me to see all the outlying temples the third morning, including one that had been rediscovered and rescued from the mud eight years ago by local women. The story of that temple and meeting this lady from Russia remind me that there are all types of archaeologists.



Climbing and photography are the main preoccupations of tourists. If it sounds easy, just watch the ladies climb down the many steps below them, elegantly handling their saris.



Most photos are taken with cell phones. If you have a real camera fellow tourists will assume you know how to use a simple cell phone and will not be pleased if you exhibit limitations. One Chinese lady, with husband, required me to retake their pic three times until they and the temple behind them were sited just so. Others are much more flexible and will let you take their photo without a second thought.



Varanasi, Photo phest 2, January 13, 2017

The Ganges is the sacred river and it's most sacred where it flows through Varanasi. The Indian lives here and the tourist comes here for this reason.



For the local Indians, buying and selling, bathing, clothes washing, flying kites, pujas, cremations, and touting tourists seem to be the main activities.



Tourist activities - Indian and foreigner - include a boat ride, eating curries, taking meditation courses, photography, glorying in the vibe, and avoiding (or responding to) the touts.



The boat, of course, can be a vehicle of transport in addition to a means of sightseeing. These guys could be doing what any of us tourists do - or not.



It's also not incongruous, I guess, when grieving adjacent to the cremation grounds enters a new age with the granddaughter and her cell phone.



Washing isn't the end of the line, so to speak. There's drying, folding, and delivering.



There are also times when the locals are the tourists.



The river is the common element here. I'm just sitting or walking on the ghats and snapping. Along the Ganges life's a festival.

