

This is India: the country where everything is possible.

Fascination. That is the first word that comes to mind as I think back to our journey through the North of India. At first glance I thought, where are we? An unorganized clutter. This perception changed as the journey continued. The Indian citizen and the tourist know how to take care of themselves amid all the chaos, they even seem to benefit from it.

What you see, what you smell, the sounds, your taste buds; your senses are constantly stimulated. So, sensational is my second word. And last but not least: unpredictable. Time seems to be of less importance in India. Looking at our transportations via trains, domestic flights and ubers, detours seemed unforeseeable. And yet it was possible. That is also the beauty of traveling, the spontaneity of doing things which lead to being carried away. We spent for example a day extra in Helsinki, Finland, the city of wild berries (mustikka), princess castles and the cold and distant population. In broad contrast to the genuineness of the Indian population the day after!

But let's also keep in mind, next to my admirations, that India faces high to extreme water stress, where 54% of the population directly has to suffer from. ¹ In addition, the intensified crisis in Kashmir which fights for its autonomy from Pakistan and India, as well as the huge gap between rich and poor. In 2006, the ratio between richest states and the poorest regions was 5 to 1 according to the Council for Social Development (CSD) and this gap will expand even more. The difficulty in upward mobility in India is strongly caused by the caste system. This systematic division of the population is still noticeable, not only by their clothing but also by the difference in authority. The Brahmins, the priests for example, are dressed in white, the purest color of all. While workers, farmers or servant wear dark yellow to black colors. For women, the use of colorful shaadi dresses symbolize their status and wealth.

Nevertheless, the Indian population are one of the most humble, true-hearted and welcoming cultures I have ever encountered. Each individual we met, opened up easily to us, told us their story and offered a home-cooked meal or a special *chai tea*.

Hospitality, humbleness and openness are of great importance for Indians and contributes to the communicative character that India has towards tourists. What is better than a culture with little self-interest? I call it altruism in its highest form. Even though chitchats never seem to end, Indians don't do it because they are only interested in your money. The stubborn individualistic mindset of the Western population, in which we want to figure everything out for ourselves (which is very self-sufficient), also brings in a couple of problems. For example, stress (about time), loneliness (do I socialize enough with others?) and the immediate contact with the internet (in which any ways do I get informed myself?).

As a tourist you will integrate easily among the Indian population and Western struggles seem to vanish away for a while. I felt I got in real contact with the Indian culture and enjoyed being in this collective and engaged person. I think as Europeans we have lost contact with this collective value by the pile of individualist problems we are struggling with.

All in all, I came to the conclusion that as a tourist in India you can hardly feel miserable, except when you are confronted with health problems. Man needs little material things to maintain himself, except a passport and a couple of medicines. The fact that our Western problems are resolvable when put in perspective, felt as a great relief as well. It would only be more enriching if we (including myself) would accept unsolicited advice and contact more, which we generally miss out on because we are too busy with ourselves.

Not only the smells, sounds and flavors are elements I won't forget from India, also their collective chaos (or charm?) is something I will keep in mind. As long as you contribute something to the society, you will learn and live a little more.

¹ <https://www.agroberichtenbuitenland.nl/landeninformatie/india/achtergrond/water>