

Part 2 Jodhpur to Bikaner

The next morning in Jodhpur it was another day of touring forts, palaces and mausoleums, followed by a tour of the Sardar Market. The Mehrangarh Fort is at an altitude some 125m higher than the town and covers an area of 5 square kilometres in the heart of the city. From the battlements you can look down on the old city, where many of the houses are painted blue and as a consequence, Jodhpur is known as the Blue City. Traditionally the colour was made from indigo which not only had a cooling effect but also repelled mosquitoes. Within the fort are some magnificent palaces with marvellously carved panels and latticed windows.



The Palace within Mehrangarh Fort

Jodhpur – the Blue City

Some of the carved screens

We walked downhill to the market where narrow alleys lead into bazaars selling spices, vegetables, colourful textiles and silverwork. Later we visited a textile shop which is famous among leading fashion designers world wide.



Colourful goods in the market

Spices and pulses

After a couple of hours of rest and relaxation in the hotel, it was off again on a safari to a Bishnoi village and a visit to a private home where we were given a drink of opium. The opium poppy resin is dried into small blocks and this was crushed into water and strained through camel skin into a jug. We had to drink it from our hands! It must have been very weak as none of us reported any effects at all! Shortly afterwards we went to another Bishnoi village and watched some dhurries being woven. These are two sided hard wearing cotton and camel wool rugs. According to Bill, I rashly went ahead and bought one - obviously the opium was working!



The village head man & mate making opium drinks

My rug, if it turns up!

Other dhurries for sale

The following day we left Jodhpur and headed west towards the Pakistan border and the Thar desert. The rural countryside is very green at present and crops are being harvested. Apparently they had a late and very good monsoon this year so that the desert isn't as dry and sandy as at other times of the year. On the way we passed a large hoarding which said "Driving faster can cause accident. No hurry. No worry"

The Thar desert is the second largest desert in the world and covers western India and south east Pakistan. We stayed overnight in a desert camp, and before dinner we were taken by camel up into the sand dunes to watch the sunset. It was incredibly quiet overnight - I didn't expect to be in such a populous country and feel as though I was in Central Australia.



Five star camping in individual tents



Very comfortable beds

After a very peaceful night we travelled eastwards to Jaisalmer, known as the Golden City because of the colour of the local sandstone. On the way we stopped in a rural area and gate crashed the peaceful morning of a local school teacher and his 30 students from prep to grade 5. There are 4 chalkies among the 14 travellers in our group and they had been asking our guide about schooling, so he bought some packets of coloured pencils in the market and we invaded the next school we came across! Schooling is not compulsory but the government provides a nourishing school lunch so that there is a fairly good turn up in poorer areas. They learn English and all rather shyly wished us a good morning. The teacher seemed rather nervous of us - our teachers said later that we were probably more intimidating than a School Inspector.



School's in - invaded by 14 curious Australians



Hindi characters on the left, English on the right

We headed on west to our next city Jaisalmer.