



District 5340 Rotary 5340 2007-08 GSE Team to India



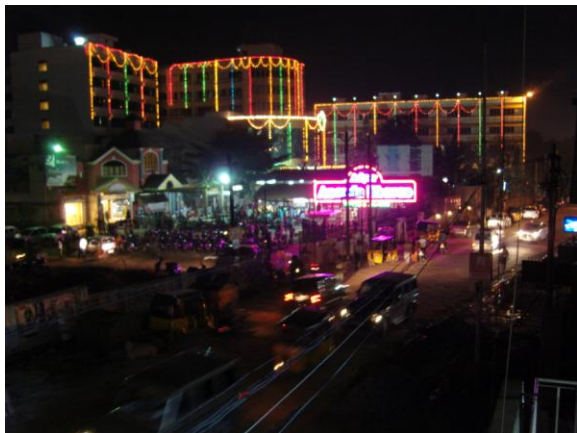
December 31, 2007

Let me start out by apologizing for such a tardy posting. The flight, while uneventful, was long! Having departed on December 26th, we saw three sunrises (San Diego, Brussels, and Chennai) before we reached Trichy at 11.30 on December 28th.



We were warmly and enthusiastically welcomed – and fed constantly. From the time we arrived until 3.00 pm on December 30th we have been at the District Conference. Despite India's vaunted ability at IT outsourcing there was not a single internet connection available to the 1,100 attendees at the conference. Incidentally, isn't that spectacular attendance - almost 42% of the Rotarians in the District!!!

Each member of the GSE team did an outstanding job with their presentation. Not surprisingly, each has been complimented individually and collectively by Rotarians and members of their leadership team. The GSE Chair told me that ours was the best GSE presentation since they began participating in the GSE program.



District Conference Hotel



Welcome Music

We have met the outbound team from D3000 to D5340. They are wonderful people: two men and two women - a headmistress, a college instructor, and two teachers. Their leader is a Criminal Lawyer.



The team is fully engaged chatting with the hundreds of Rotarians and strangers they meet on the streets and even in the Airport.



Not surprisingly, every member is going through some variation of culture shock and appreciation of what we have at home. Each is going to process what they have seen, heard, and experienced quite differently. So rather than try to synthesize and summarize their feelings, I have asked each of them to share their brief and sleep-deprived impressions with you.

Anthony La Rue

This has been the first time I have ever been out the United States of America. I enjoyed all aspects of travelling to Trichy when we finally started our journey from San Diego. I arrived in Trichy, Friday, December 28, 2007. As soon as we retrieved our luggage and walked out of the airport, I received a beautiful lei of flowers from members of Rotary district 3000. We were taken to the Hotel Feminia where we meet other Rotarians. The Rotarians of Rotary District 3000 are very nice and have treated the GSE Team and I with the utmost respect.

My observations thus far have been filled with joy and despair. Tamil Nadu is a very traditional place where norms and values are commonplace. The “Indian way” as they have stated numerous times means that they accept their current condition with the distain belief that when they die; their next life will bring them a better status. It is hard not to notice the poverty and hard times that many of these people encounter. The lack of a proper education for many of the citizens has proven to be the missing element to the success of the nation. Furthermore the lack of government resources such as public schools has also proven to be the missing key to India’s success. The little time that I have spent in Trichy, I must say that the people who love here are kind and very respectful.

I really miss Shannon (my girlfriend), family, and friends. I would love to be there celebrating the New Year with everyone but I know there is a reason for me to be in India and cherishing every moment of this experience. I hope I will find many projects that I can bring back to my local Rotary club to fund. I look forward to the rest of the trip and the wonderful things I will encounter.



Julie Tandon

Today we climbed the 417 steps of the Rock Fort temple and were blessed by a priest, by an elephant's trunk, and by panoramic views of the city of Trichy. But even more enjoyable than the visit to the historic site were the kind "hellos" and "thank yous" we received from many Indian families on their Sunday outing. Were they thanking us for visiting their city, or was "thank you" the best way they could think of to extend a friendly welcome to us?

Everywhere we go, we are welcomed with the utmost hospitality. When I mistakenly gave a 500 rupee note to a cashier to pay for a 50 rupee phone call, she and her colleagues pressed the bill in my hand and said, "No, madam. Only 50. Please be careful!" So much for the idea that travelers will always be taken advantage of.

Although I have been to Northern India before, I am experiencing the shock of adapting to a new culture all over again. In the south, men and women seem to be kept separate from each other and in general, the lifestyle seems more conservative. Ironically, however, I don't have to cover my head upon entering a temple as a woman might in the North.

Upon entering the Rotary Conference, I was greeted by bearing a tray offering candied sugar and a red powder called "kum-kum" which is applied to ladies foreheads. In the north, the powder is applied to the forehead by the person offering; so when I was asked to take some myself I instead asked the man to apply it for me. The poor man complied after some urging from his compatriots – but not without a few nervous giggles from the whole group. Later I was told only a father or a husband may apply the powder to a woman's forehead! My only solace is that I know that even my mistake will be accepted kindly in India.

I have been very lucky to be welcomed into a lovely host family; a Hindu and a Christian who had a decidedly un-conservative "love" marriage (as opposed to the usual arranged marriage). In India, labels and generalizations are not so easily applied.

Our trip has just begun and already we are filled with many impressions of a beautiful people and of the many inexplicably diverse faces of India.

Sarah Clark

As I sit in my host family's home, I can hear the myriad of sounds outside – the ever present honking of car horns, jubilant Indian music combined with the chirping of birds and the persistent crowing of a neighbor's rooster.

Everyone said this trip would change my life – I am beginning to think they were right. I have only been in India for three days, but I have already had so many amazing experiences. Despite the jet lag, the feeling of being homesick, and the intense humidity – I am having the time of my life.

First of all, I have confirmed it – there are many cows just hanging out – on the side of the road, in front of a market, in the middle of the street. They sit and watch the chaotic world race by.

Traffic in India is constant and seems to be an organized free for all. Cars, motorbikes, auto rickshaws dart in and out of traffic constantly beeping the horn, but at the same time everyone seems to know exactly what they are doing – the craziness seems somehow to flow.

Most of all I have been amazed at the hospitality we have been shown. From the Indian man who helped me drag my very heavy suitcase off the luggage conveyer belt to the woman who helped me understand a speech given in Tamil by translating the major points into English. At all times the Indian people are ready and willing to help us and forgive immediately any cultural mistakes we make – which I am sure have been constant.

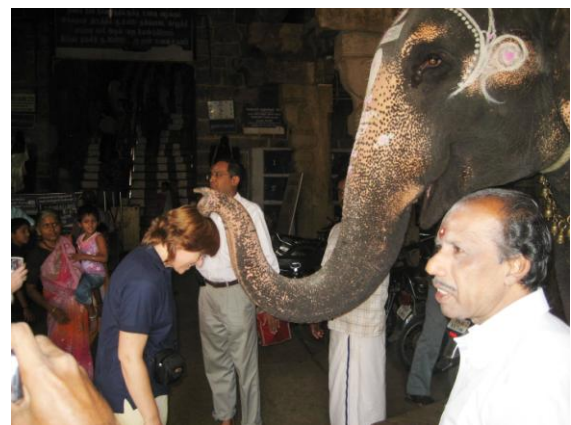
So far this trip has been exhausting and overwhelming, but always an unforgettable experience!

Bridget Persons

Three steps forward, one step back. A car ride in India reveals a Bollywood dance. At first glance the choreography is chaotic, but soon a hierarchy of lead to chorus shines through. Trucks and buses are the headliners taking center stage. Cars are featured artists nudging a corps of motorcycles and auto rickshaws out of the way. All leap and spin to the soundtrack of horns, over potholes, around cows, goats, pigs, horses, dogs, and donkeys; between ox carts and people. Stage left, girls with flower strewn hair fly by with a wave. To the right, women glide under baskets filled with goods. It is a dance of action and purpose taking place on a twisting stage.

The sounds around me take me back to the foreign movies I have seen. Motorcycle horns bleep, their engines putt, putt, brrroom. Bells ring calling the household to goods sold. The sing song voice of a salesman calling out his wares echoes through the house of clean smooth stone floors. The chirps of birds whose voices I do not recognize float on the breeze of ceiling fans. Curtains flow across doorways. The allow privacy in bedrooms while still allowing any possible cool air in this Indian “winter” to flow through.

The smells fill the mind as well. At the moment it is of spices for my breakfast from the kitchen. Many times it is a smoky scent – incense somewhere. In the street the nose finds exhaust and animals and damp and spices.



Tim Dobbins

“Vanakam” from India! After a long and exhausting journey, we have finally arrived. We were greeted warmly at the airport in Trichy by Rotarians armed with beautiful garlands of flowers – an indicator of the kindness that we have been experiencing over the last five days.

We were able to attend the District 3000 annual conference where we presented what we had prepared about San Diego, our educational system and our own personal lives. The presentation went wonderfully, and I am so pleased it did after months of preparation.

We were able to meet the incoming GSE team from D3000 to San Diego and one of the teachers gave me a Tamil phrase to say at the beginning of my speech: “Nalla Iru-keengala” – which means “How are you feeling today?” My attempt at Tamil was met with applause and many smiles. I felt for a moment at least, the gap had been bridged.

We have visited many temples. We have been blessed by an elephant, battled mosquitoes, experimented with new foods, and overall have already learned how wonderful the Indian people are!

Larry Sundram:

I returned to India after an absence of more than 20 years to find that this is still a place of mystifying contrasts. Any statement about conditions here are probably true. Great wealth amidst depressing poverty; multitudes of doctors but persistent diseases; powerful economy but crumbling infrastructure; a wise, peaceful, and ancient culture that accepts outdated, unfair and calcified roles based on caste and gender.

This is a country where the head of the ruling legislative party is a foreign-born, Catholic woman (Sonia Gandhi) who stepped aside so a Sikh (Manmohan Singh) could be sworn in as Prime Minister by a the President of India who happens to be a Muslim (Abdul Kalam), to lead a nation that's 82% Hindu – what an example of diversity and acceptance among the leaders and its people. India is maddening in its potential and its extremes!

Stay tuned.....

P.S. Our rural and packed itinerary makes internet access difficult. If you would like to direct email to a member of the team please send it to me and I will make sure they see it.

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