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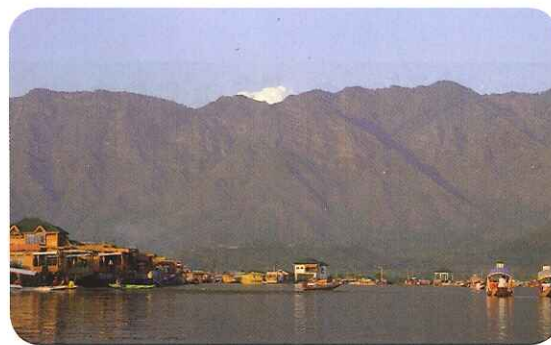
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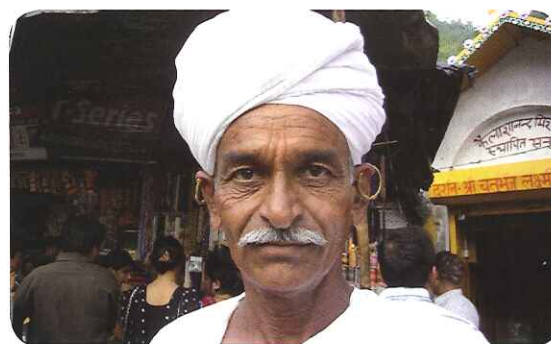
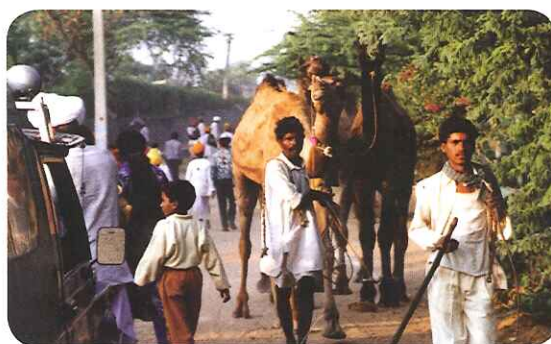
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photo courtesy of Bill Hersey and Tom Rippenglow



Incredible India

There's no kidding about the size and breadth of India. To even attempt to see it would take a lifetime and so we asked two of our most India-literate contributors for recommendations on where to go and what to see on a short vacation. It may be, but the sights, sounds, and experiences encountered are



The Pushkar Camel Fair, Rajasthan, by Bill Hersey

I love to travel, especially adventure travel, and believe me, my trip to the Pushkar Camel fair in Rajasthan in Northern India was a colorful, unique, and exciting experience in every way. Just getting there was, in itself, a real adventure.

I arrived at the New Delhi airport in the evening. There were no flights, trains, or buses to Jaipur so I rented a car with a Hindi student driver. He was good but the wall of trucks and buses, etc., meant that the traffic was horrendous and it took us about three hours to go 40 kilometers. I finally had him find a not-too-bad motel where we could both get a little sleep and start out fresh in the morning. That was a wise decision as traffic was lighter and it was really nice to see rural India waking up.

Pushkar is an ancient, rather secluded holy city with more than 400 ninth-century temples built on the shores of the Anasagar Lake, which is the holiest lake in India for Hindus. There, 52 Ghats (wide stone stairways used by pilgrims to bathe and absolve themselves from past misdeeds. Here I was lucky and got a room in a decent hotel (it even had a pool) for \$75. It was also on the main road coming into town and I could sit on the balcony and watch the endless parade of Rajasthanis people, camels, and other livestock arriving for the four-day festival.

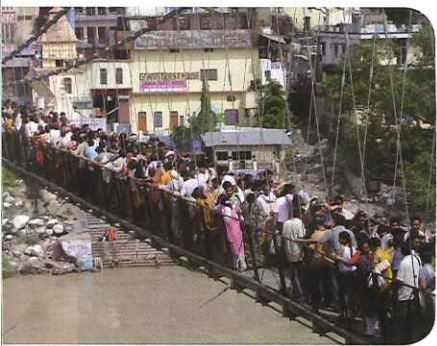
The people of Rajasthan are well known. The men's turbans alone come in a huge variety of bright colors. Men are also proud of their moustaches, which come in all shapes and sizes. The women's fashion scene, too, is truly an explosion of color with bright (red, pink, blue, etc.) saris with gilt, silver, sequin, print motifs, and mirrors on the trimmings. The women of the region are noted for their beauty and accentuate it with heavy gold, silver, and bone jewelry that includes earrings, nose rings, bracelets, anklets, etc. The unusual, very original, and individual look of the holy men (Sadhus) add even more exoticism and mystery to the already spectacular scenarios.

You'll be kept busy all day visiting the Ghats (be sure you have a holy man bless you with a string bracelet) and checking out the auctions and the wheeling and dealing for camels, etc. If your timing is right, you'll see a camel race, horse jumping show, or a tug of war. There are also agricultural exhibitions, art shows, puppet shows, and various sporting events. In the evening, you can visit the many small shops on the long narrow shopping streets. After an inexpensive dinner at one of the open air restaurants, head for the fairgrounds and ride the Ferris wheel for a great view, see a musical or a circus sideshow, and, if you're lucky, an exciting performance of traditional song and dance. The festival is also a place for matchmaking and, as in most places in this world of ours, there's a considerable amount of eye contact and body language.

The festival starts on the night of the full moon in late October or early November and goes on for four days. The colorful diversity and excitement of the Pushkar Camel Fair add up to a once-in-a-lifetime travel experience and will really show you where the expression 'Incredible India' came from.

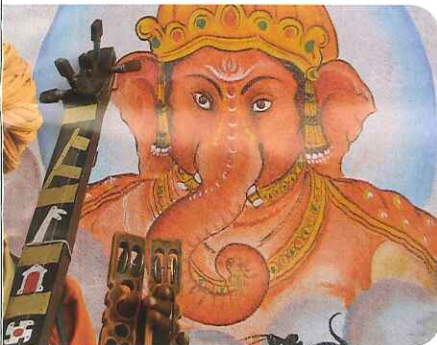
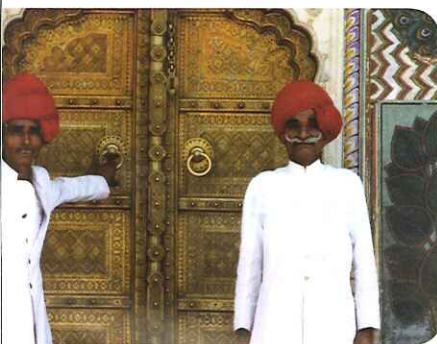
Getting to Pushkar (Ajmer) from Tokyo: By Air: Air India and JAL fly directly to Delhi's Indira Gandhi Airport. **From Delhi to Pushkar. By Air:** From the New Delhi Airport take a flight to Jaipur Airport then go by taxi or bus. **By Road:** Take a bus to Jaipur (Approx five hours), a bus to Ajmer (three hours), and finally a bus to Pushkar (30 minutes). **By Rail:** Take the overnight train from Old Delhi station and arrive in Ajmer the following morning. See www.indianrail.gov.in for more details. From Ajmer take a bus or taxi to Pushkar.





India!

tempt to see everything
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ation. A short vacation
re simply...incredible!



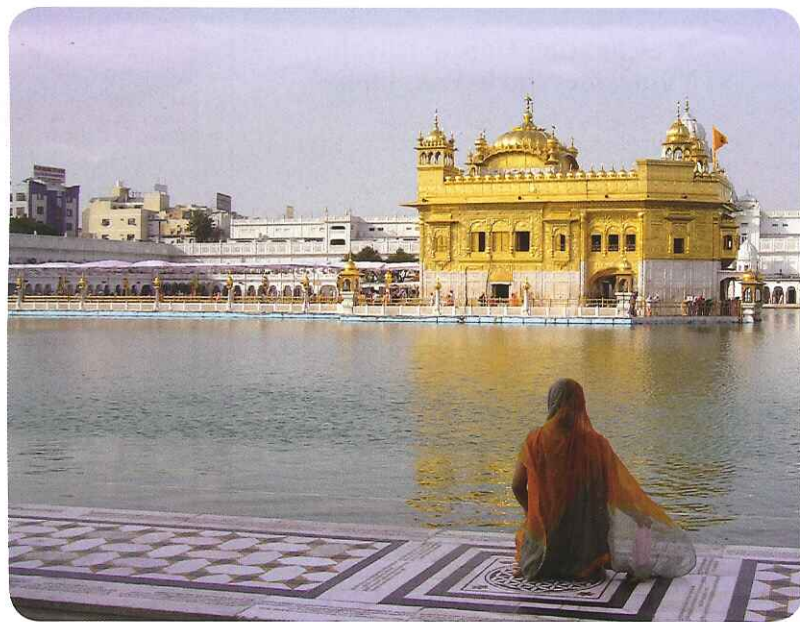
Life Along the River Ganges, by Dani Rippingale

If there is one word to sum up India it has to be diversity. From the culture and traditions to the food and terrain, India seems to capture people's imaginations and lure travelers from all walks of life. Considered the river of India, the Ganges receives millions of Hindu worshippers who make the pilgrimage every year during Yatra. 2,510km in length, the holy river is worshipped in her personified form as the goddess and the mother, Ganga. Dipping into the Ganges is believed to cleanse oneself of sins and help attain salvation. Many are familiar with holy city of Varanasi, however to the north travelers can enjoy the icy glacial waters of the Ganges as it flows from its origins in the central Himalayan range. During the summer months the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand attracts travelers seeking adventure, spirituality, and beautiful natural surroundings.

Situated on the banks of the Ganges, the bustling holy city of Rishikesh (literally, 'place of sages') has long been a lure for spiritual seekers—including The Beatles in the late sixties. Visitors can stay in one of the countless ashrams, or guesthouses, situated between the Ram and Lakshman Jhula suspension bridges and practice yoga, meditate, or just watch life go by. Every evening, Arati, a Hindu fire ceremony giving reverence to the Mother Ganga, is held on her banks at Niketan Ashram.

For those wanting to escape the bustle, retreat locations situated in the natural surroundings of the Garhwal Himalayan Mountains are available from reputable adventure companies like Tiger Paw www.tigerpawadventures.com. With something for everyone including rock-climbing, yoga, temple visits, river rafting on the Ganga, game fishing, national park jeep safaris, trekking to local villages, bird-watching, nature walks and mountain biking along the pilgrim trail, this part of India will never fail to excite. **W**

Getting there from Tokyo: By Air: Air India and JAL fly directly to Delhi's Indira Gandhi Airport. Once in India you can travel independently or be organized by a trusted travel company from your time of arrival. **From Delhi to Uttarakhand. By Air:** Kingfisher Airlines offers a 60-minute flight from New Delhi to Jolly Grant Airport in Dehra Dun. The final leg to Rishikesh (32km) is by taxi. **By Road:** 235 km from Delhi (6-7 hours). **By Rail:** India has the most extensive rail system in the world and is a wonderful way to travel. There are several trains from Delhi to Hardiwar with your choice of travel class (approx 5-7 hours). See www.indianrail.gov.in for more details. Taxi 24km to Rishikesh.



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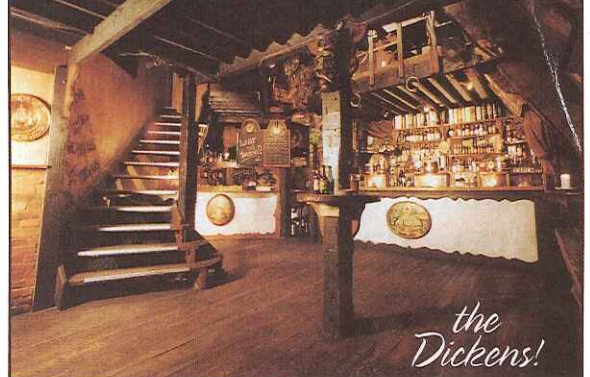
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