

## INDIA – LOOK BEYOND THE LITTER!

...if you do, you will find a place of great sights, sounds and unsophisticated charm!

When it was suggested that I should visit India, I showed reluctant interest! The part of me that is always seeking new and exciting destinations to market and share with clients was telling me that I must go. The conservative side of me kept referring back to stories told in the past about the poverty, the smells, Delhi Belly and the likes! Well, I went and now I can't wait to return!

My experience took me touring in the south of India – with a sobering few days in Mumbai to balance the experience. I soon learnt is that you cannot generalise when it comes to discussing India as the country and the huge population that it hosts, varies greatly from state to state.

Touring in the south is not about visiting grand buildings and the likes but instead about experiencing everyday life in the region. If you see something of interest along the way, you stop, discuss and if appropriate have a go! The scenery is ever changing as you drive through densely populated rural areas with scenes such as women wearing colourful sari working in the rice fields and tea plantations being a highlight.

The food is aromatic rather than hot and we enjoyed it greatly, ate lots and stayed well. Eating street food from recommended stalls and drinking delicious sweet milky coffee from vendors who skillfully flip the coffee from jug to jug to froth the milk was part of the adventure.

Initially I found Mumbai a little confronting. 22 million registered people live in the city and who knows how many others! When passing all the beautiful old buildings such as the University, the Courts and the Victoria Terminus railways station, all a legacy from the British, it's hard not to notice that the streets are clean but they do still provide a home for many. Visits to the Dhobi ghat (washermans colony) Mani Bhaven, Gandhi's house in Mumbai which is now a museum, the flower markets and the station to see the dabbawala network all provide interesting diversions.

Throughout, it was the friendly people going about their everyday lives that made the visit for me. We were always extended a warm welcome and encouraged to interact in activities.

Please read my full report if you would like to share further impressions. I then encourage you to make the journey to discover more for yourself – I am sure you won't have any regrets!