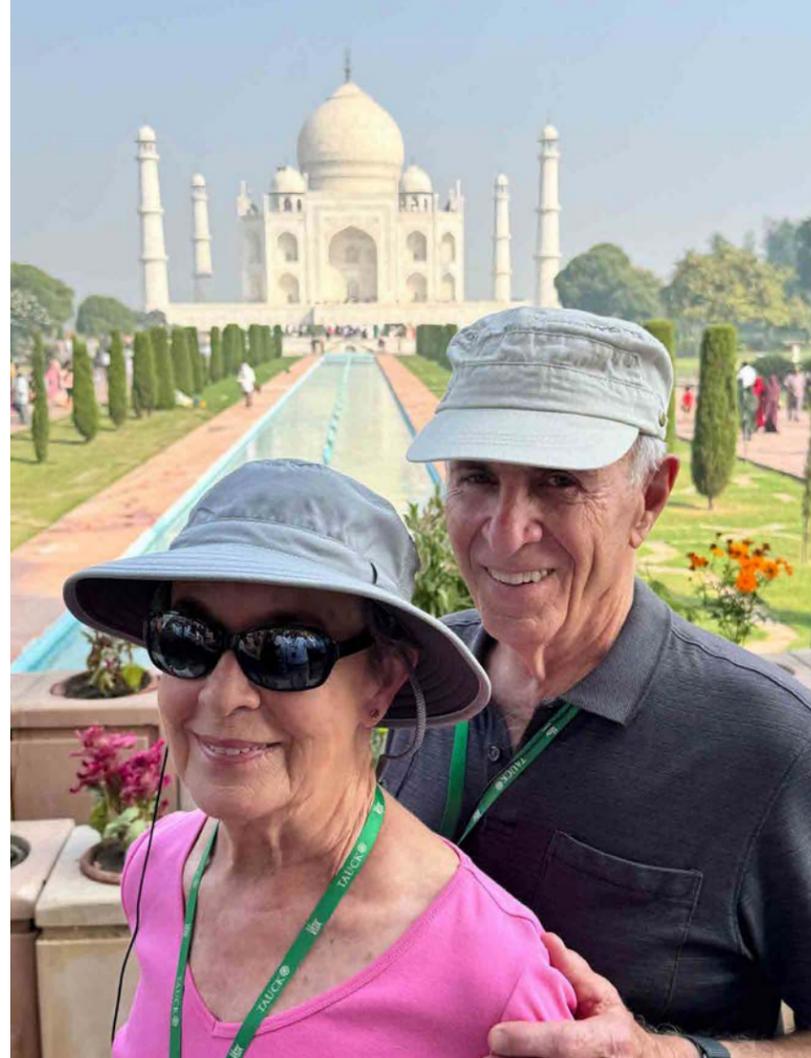




VP Vacations



The Henderson's Trip TO INDIA

By Mike and Judy Henderson

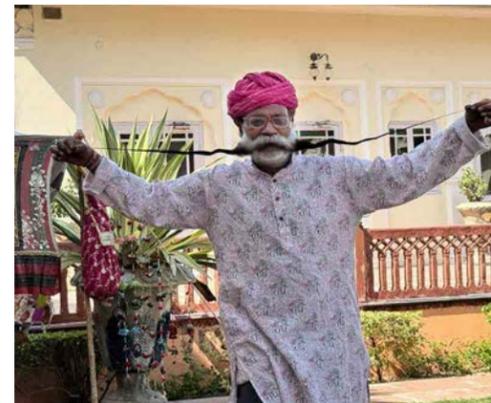
It all began with a simple question: "Would you be interested in taking a trip to India?" Since I've never turned down a travel suggestion, I said "Sure!". We found an 18-day tour with Tauck, one of our favorite companies, and signed up.

Choosing the right season was a big consideration. October 20-November 6 was probably going to be cooler, but not rainy. These decisions are always a bit dicey. We went for it.

Beginning in Delhi, we started with a one-day private tour taking in the old, central market area and traveling by pedal rickshaws on the narrow roads. It was our first exposure to being on the streets in India, learning that the most

important part of any moving vehicle is the horn. It was a crazy cacophony of honks and beeps, mostly announcing "I'm here, and I'm moving into this space, so beware!". Our guide explained that it was even more crowded than usual because Diwali was coming, and everyone was out buying things for the holiday, which is a 5-day celebration rivaling Christmas and New Year all-in-one.

The following day we met with our 21-member tour group, and Tour Director Annie. Over two days, we toured New Delhi, the capital city of India, visited the site where Mahatma Gandhi spent his last days, and two UNESCO World Heritage sites which gave us some



background of the Mughal empire and Persian-influenced architecture.

The next day a short flight took us to Varanasi, a city dating from the 6th century BC. Steps leading down to the river Ganges give access to the faithful as they perform ancient rites. We witnessed "putting the river to sleep" at dusk, set candles in the river in remembrance of a loved one, and saw the site where cremations are held, on the riverbank. Of all the memorable things we saw on this trip, our time in Varanasi was the most unique.

Another short flight brought us to Agra, where we saw the one building in the world which is possibly the most-photographed ever: the Taj Mahal. A massive building, perfect in every detail, that seems to simply float in space in ethereal beauty. We were fortunate to have local guides who pointed out the perfect photo-op locations, as we saw the shadows and colors subtly change with the rising sun.

Other cities we visited included Jaipur, with its Amber Fort and Palace, and Udaipur, with temples and spice markets. Another flight took us south to Kochi, the center of the coconut trade and rice fields. Then, to Kerala and the Kumarakom resort, with a visit to a local village where we saw demonstrations of local craft skills.

Ending our tour in Mumbai, the commercial heart of the country, we walked through the elegant Victorian-style train station and saw impressive city and university buildings. As we traveled home, we reflected on all we had seen. India is a fascinating and complicated country. A mix of Hindu, Islamic, and British histories, it is a thought-provoking experience.

You can see our complete trip at www.mikeandjudytravel.com.

