



A.K. TAYLOR INTERNATIONAL NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2017

INDIA – A PERSONAL TALE FROM ANNE KENT TAYLOR AND SOME INSPIRATIONS FOR TRAVEL IN 2018



India - A Land of Beauty and Colour – Flower Petal Arrangements

Dear Friends and Fellow Travellers,

Where to begin?! It has been a year since I have been in touch and what a year it has been! In this newsletter I am going to concentrate on our trip to India in the hopes that many of you will also be tempted to visit that amazing country...words can barely describe how wonderful our experience was!

But first....as always, I spent many months in Kenya hosting our safari guests and managing my Anne K. Taylor Fund community conservation project. It was fun to make new friends and to share my country, and passion, with so many. This always gives me the greatest pleasure. We designed some unique itineraries to accommodate the special interests of several family safaris.

One that particularly stands out was organizing a cross-country horseback safari, graciously hosted by Llewellyn Dyer and Eloise Best, Borana Lodge's manager, which took our guests through diverse terrain in Northern Kenya including beautiful Borana (inspiration for Pride Rock in Lion King). The final riding stop in the north of Kenya culminated at Ol Malo, a stunning property owned and managed by the Francombes, who are amongst my "oldest" (long term!) friends in Kenya, having grown up together. They have excellent horses and great riding country, with lots of excitement!

Along with the vast expanses of the northern frontier region, we also included a riding and safari stop in southern Kenya at Ol Donyo Lodge with its spectacular views of Mt. Kilimanjaro rising dramatically from endless plains. Green wooded hills form a contrasting backdrop to the Lodge. What can compare to riding close to elephants, giraffe or galloping amongst the gazelle and zebra on the African plains. I also had the pleasure of spending time with these guests, now friends, in the Masai Mara where I shared my AKTF conservation and community work with them which they particularly enjoyed as did I.

Aaah!... On to the wonders of India...in my last newsletter I mentioned India but we – Farley, Jim and I - had yet to embark on our most recent journey there, which we did in April. We happened to be celebrating a particular milestone birthday for me along with a Travel Award that Farley received. Vikram Madhok, Prem Grover and the entire A&K team in India did an amazing job of hosting us and planning our journey with many surprises aided by my brother, Geoffrey Kent. As busy as he is I so appreciated the trouble he took to make our journey extra special in so many ways! Oberoi Hotels hosted us throughout in incomparable style. Their friendly service, beyond-beautiful rooms and gardens, along with their attention to detail is world class. Emirates, a great airline, and one I use frequently when flying to Kenya, also kindly hosted us.



The Grounds of Oberoi Amarvilas, Agra

We returned from India excited to share our fantastic travel experience with everyone. This is a country that must not to be missed! Sometimes the images of India can be negative but in reality it is an incredible destination with lovely, warm people, clean streets (I mention this as it is something one does not often hear!), exotic aromas, wildlife reserves (tigers, rhinos and elephants come to mind!), vibrant colours, many religions, rich history and incomparable hospitality. Whether or not you have been before for business or pleasure, it always has something new and exciting to offer! It had been many years since my previous visit and I was completely “blown away” by how much it had changed.



We were kept busy as we visited our first stop, Delhi, where we were kindly hosted by Vikram and his team. Beyond the must-see sights, of which there are many, a heart-in-mouth rickshaw visit to Old Delhi's narrow, colourful, bustling streets and "interesting" overhead wiring which has to be seen to be believed!; delicious lunches, dinners in five star restaurants with a standout being at the Varq restaurant at the Taj Hotel, where we were their guests; historic forts, ancient mosques and beautiful fragrant gardens. Without exception our hosts were warm and welcoming and did everything in their power to give us the traditional warm Indian welcome - and we felt it!



"High Tech" Overhead Wiring!!



Shopfronts in Old Delhi



Last but not least, I wanted to mention the well-fed friendly Delhi street dogs in their hundreds or thousands! Street dogs in most other places I have visited are unhealthy, starving and defensive but in Delhi I found quite the opposite. They were very peaceful - zen like actually - chubby and healthy. Upon enquiring into this phenomenon, I learned that each morning the ladies will bake for their families *as well as the street dogs* – they adopt several that come to their doors each morning! While they have little to share, this they do with open hearts. As an animal lover, this made me – and, no doubt, the dogs, very happy!

The Taj Mahal – just the words conjure up an ethereal and spiritual place, built as a monument to love, but nothing can even begin to convey the beauty of actually being there and watching the light change on the façade from the pale lavender and blues when it rises from the mist in the morning to the fiery orange and pinks of sunset. It was built on a high point above a river so that the sky behind it would always be an ever-changing canvas on which the Taj is the central beauty.



Anne & Farley at the Taj Mahal



Carved Marble & Precious Stones

The white marble and hand hewn motifs made up of many tiny inlaid semi-precious stones are dazzling. The descendants of those original craftsmen continue in this specialized field to this day. We were fortunate enough to visit them as they carved and inlaid gem stones into beautiful tables, vases, boxes and everything in between. A craft that is so painstakingly detailed it is hard to imagine in this day and age. We could not even make a dent in the marble when we were given the tools to try!



The Process of the Hand Hewn Designs and Inlaid Marble Vase with Semi-precious Stones

This entire trip combined ancient history with the modern bustling world...Mughal Forts, extravagant palaces, where we had private viewings of the mirrored and bejeweled interiors. Each day we returned very fulfilled (and tired!) to our Oberoi Suites with private pool and gardens! How spoilt we were but it did remind me why I always recommend more leisure time for our guests – I treasured every moment we had in our beautiful accommodation but would have loved to have had more than two nights in each place!

Onward to Jaipur, our first stop was the Amber Fort begun in 1592 which served as the capital of Rajasthan until the 18th Century. ...and then the shopping! One cannot fail to mention that! This particular shopping expedition was to a jewellery shop where we learned that India is in fact the earliest source of all the major gemstones. Needless to say Farley and I could not resist indulging ourselves with a pair of earrings each...which will always bring back the memories of our visit! That, to me, is the joy of shopping whilst travelling – the memories come free, long after the journey is over!



Room at the Oberoi Rajvilas



Pavilion at Oberoi Rajvilas

Just outside Jaipur, we stayed at the gorgeous Oberoi Rajvilas and I could have spent a week there in the gardens, spa and pool. In town we had lunch at the beautiful and historic Rambagh Palace Hotel. It was particularly fun to visit the famous Polo Bar from times past...which my brother remembers well from his polo playing days! The rooms retained their palatial feel with spectacular decoration and historic photos throughout.



Polo Bar



Rooms at the Rambagh Palace Hotel



After lunch, a highlight was a visit to the City Palace where the Maharajah of Jaipur lives. Most of this opulent palace is open to the public but we were privileged to have been allowed behind the scenes into private areas which the family still use. If I have ever felt like a princess this was the time – lounging on red velvet cushions in a room entirely encrusted with semi-precious stones and mirrors. Words cannot really describe this experience... India's history comes alive when one "walks the corridors" of these palaces and the memories will always be with me.



Private Rooms in the City Palace, Jaipur

After the "pink city" of Jaipur, we continued to Udaipur, where we stayed at the Oberoi Udaivilas – our suite once again had its own private pool and garden. (How will I ever be able to travel in any other way, I ask myself!) Udaipur is one of the most photogenic cities in India and is characterized by several large lakes with the Oberoi overlooking the largest, Lake Pichola.



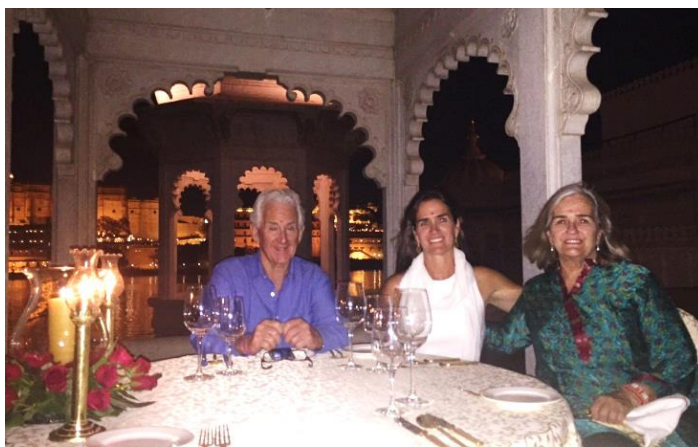
Oberoi Udaivilas



Farley and I went shopping and left Jim to enjoy the spa and our lovely room! Who needs men on such an expedition and he was happy to be left behind as I am sure many men can identify with! India is famous for its gems, silks, cottons, hand-embroidered pashminas AND the speed at which clothes can be tailoredwe had beautiful jackets and silk pants made by the same evening! Jim actually broke down and joined us later. He had cotton slacks and shirts made beautifully and equally as quickly. The price point, I must add, was extremely attractive and irresistible!

The service was incredible with nothing being too much trouble. Now I need to find places to wear these beautiful clothes as I sit on top of the mountains of Montana!! As an aside, the fabulous shop we went to, and where we were treated as family, made clothes for Judi Dench when she was in Udaipur filming "The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel" – which I loved!

One wonderful surprise was a private birthday dinner that my brother arranged for us. We boarded a motor boat under a moonlit sky and chugged to the Taj Lake Palace Hotel (voted THE most romantic hotel in the world by Conde Nast) situated on its own private island. We were led past hundreds of flickering candles and flower petals arranged in intricate designs along the way to our delicious private dinner, set in a pergola under a full moon. Farley, at this stage, was jokingly bemoaning the fact that on such a romantic evening she was with her parents! It was an evening to remember.



Taj Lake Palace Hotel Dinner

We spent the morning with our guide, Sunny, visiting the City Palace which is the largest in Rajasthan. Sunny shared his knowledge of "miniatures" which was fascinating. These large paintings (pictured below), using only natural colors, were painted in the 1500s and show a level of detail and three dimensional perspectives that were quite incredible for the time.





Next stop was Mumbai, a bustling and dynamic waterfront city, sometimes called the “New York of India” (or as our guide joked, “New York is actually the Bombay of America”!). It is considered the place where fortunes can be made for people of all backgrounds. The industrious nature of India never fails to show itself -- I was told that many people in Mumbai work three jobs in order to be able to make ends meet as it is also an expensive city.

The highlight here was a 5 a.m. departure for a fascinating tour of Mumbai before dawn – and NO traffic! To see the city wake was wonderful and my favourite highlight was a visit to the flower market, which was colourful and fragrant (unlike the fish market!) I was in heaven as I love flowers and seeing them in such profusion was pure delight. There are stories to almost everything in India and in the flower world a delightful one is about the lotus flower – the saying goes that the lotus grows in mucky conditions, but matures into a beautiful flower – in human terms there is hope for everyone no matter what the circumstances of our birth.



Lotus Flower



Marigold Garland



Flower Market

The vegetable market was interesting in that, before dawn, the vendors set up their stands on the streets – vegetables of every type and hue. By 8.00 a.m. they are all cleared away and the traffic takes over! Interestingly, in Mumbai, traffic laws are strictly enforced and obeyed. Not often the case elsewhere in India!



Vegetable Market



Roman Nosed Goat



Vegetable Market on the Street

Farley had to return to her family and Jim and I continued to Ananda in the Himalayas, an Ayurvedic Wellness Spa. This was the perfect place to end our “exotic safari” in India and one I would highly recommend to anyone who may be seeking peace and tranquility. Set in the foothills of the Himalayas, Ananda brought me peace and joy. Without exception the staff were a total delight...the wellness spa offered traditional Ayurvedic treatments as well as some more modern offerings, inspiring yoga lessons and meditation, excellent locally grown food, the menu was planned according to one’s dosha (body type) - and no Coca Cola which was a challenge for me!! There were daily lectures on many different subjects which were inspiring and thought provoking. At the end of five days I felt peaceful (not too common for me!), energized and ready to take on the world again! I wish I could have stayed for weeks! Maybe for my next birthday!



Ananda in the Himalayas



Ayurvedic Wellness Spa



Birthday Serenade

I do hope that I can persuade some of you to visit India as we did...it was the most incredible journey on so many levels – and we did not even begin to cover all of it! It was particularly fun for us to spend time with Farley on an “adult” adventure - another time we would love to take the grandchildren but this time it was for us alone!

Beyond India, we have also enjoyed planning fabulous journeys to many other exotic destinations...For example I am currently working with friends on a family trip to the French Polynesian Islands and, they don't know it yet, but I am going to jump into one of their suitcases as it is all so enticing!

Other regions to which we have recently organized travel adventures for our guests are Japan with all that this fascinating country has to offer, South America (Patagonia, Buenos Aires, wine country in Mendoza and Galapagos for families) and Antarctica, an amazing experience and there are often "specials" on offer. Do please be in touch if you would like to learn more about this wonderland of spectacular icebergs, penguins, whales, seals and birds....several of the latter commute from the Arctic to the Antarctic which makes my commute to Africa look paltry!

In Africa, of course, there are many wonderful and varied adventures to be experienced – gorilla treks in Rwanda or Uganda, which I would recommend should be on everyone's "bucket list"....an awe inspiring experience in the real sense of the word; camel assisted walking safaris in the vastness of Northern Kenya; the wildebeest migration in both Kenya and Tanzaniaand so much more.

We wish you all a very happy Thanksgiving and Holiday Season thereafter....and we hope to be able to assist you with your travel plans in 2018 and beyond. Thanks to all of you who have entrusted us with your travel plans this year to destinations all around the globe. We are most grateful and hope that you will be in touch with us again to help with future adventures. It gives us great personal pleasure to share our years of experience in the travel industry, and love of the world, with our guests.



With warm regards,

Anne Kent Taylor

Anne Kent Taylor
A.K. Taylor International