

STROLL

Cherry Hills Village

**MEET THE
SCHNITTMAN
FAMILY**

*Happy
Fourth
of July!*

DELIVERING NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS



City of Agra, home of Taj Mahal



Varanasi



Varanasi

Soulful India

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The idea of India had an auspicious start. A serendipitous encounter at a metaphysical shop called Confia Collective in February 2022. It was there that I was introduced to a woman named Alejandra and as we started to chat, I learned she was a travel consultant, planning a two-week guided trip through India in the spring of 2023. The trip she explained would have two parts, the first week would include culture, history and sightseeing in a popular region known as the Golden Triangle, which includes Delhi, Jaipur and Agra. The second part of the trip would be more spiritual and would include the holy city of Varanasi and then finish in Rishikesh located at the base of the Himalayan mountains. A trip of a lifetime had just landed in my lap and I knew instantly that I wanted to go. She said she needed eight more people to sign up in order to make it happen and I gladly offered to help spread the word. As I spoke to friends about India many were as excited as I was about going, and said yes but had to back out as life happens and plans change. Then an old friend of mine who I don't get to see often came to see me for a facial and asked me what I was up to. Of

course, I had to tell her about how excited I was about my upcoming trip to India and that she should join us. I gave her the dates and that piqued her interest right away. She told me the day of departure was on her fifty-fifth birthday, a good omen and that she too felt the call to India. The trip almost didn't happen due to numbers but things have a way of working themselves out if they are meant to be. Spring of 2023 quickly came around on the calendar and April 14 was finally here. The three of us headed out on our big adventure and twenty-two hours later in Delhi, we would meet our fourth travel companion and guide Harsch. Later we would reflect on how lucky we were that fate brought us together on this magical journey.

We started the first part of our trip with three days in Delhi. The Lotus Temple, India Gate, Red Fort and Raj Ghat (Mahatma Gandhi memorial) were all on the list. The only thing slowing us down from seeing it all was the chaotic rhythms of everyday commuter life. Colorful rickshaws, motorcycles carrying one person or a family of four, pedestrians zigging zagging across 8 lanes of traffic, cars and sacred cows, all jockeying for position to get where

they need to go in the bustling city of 33 million. India now surpasses China in overall population.

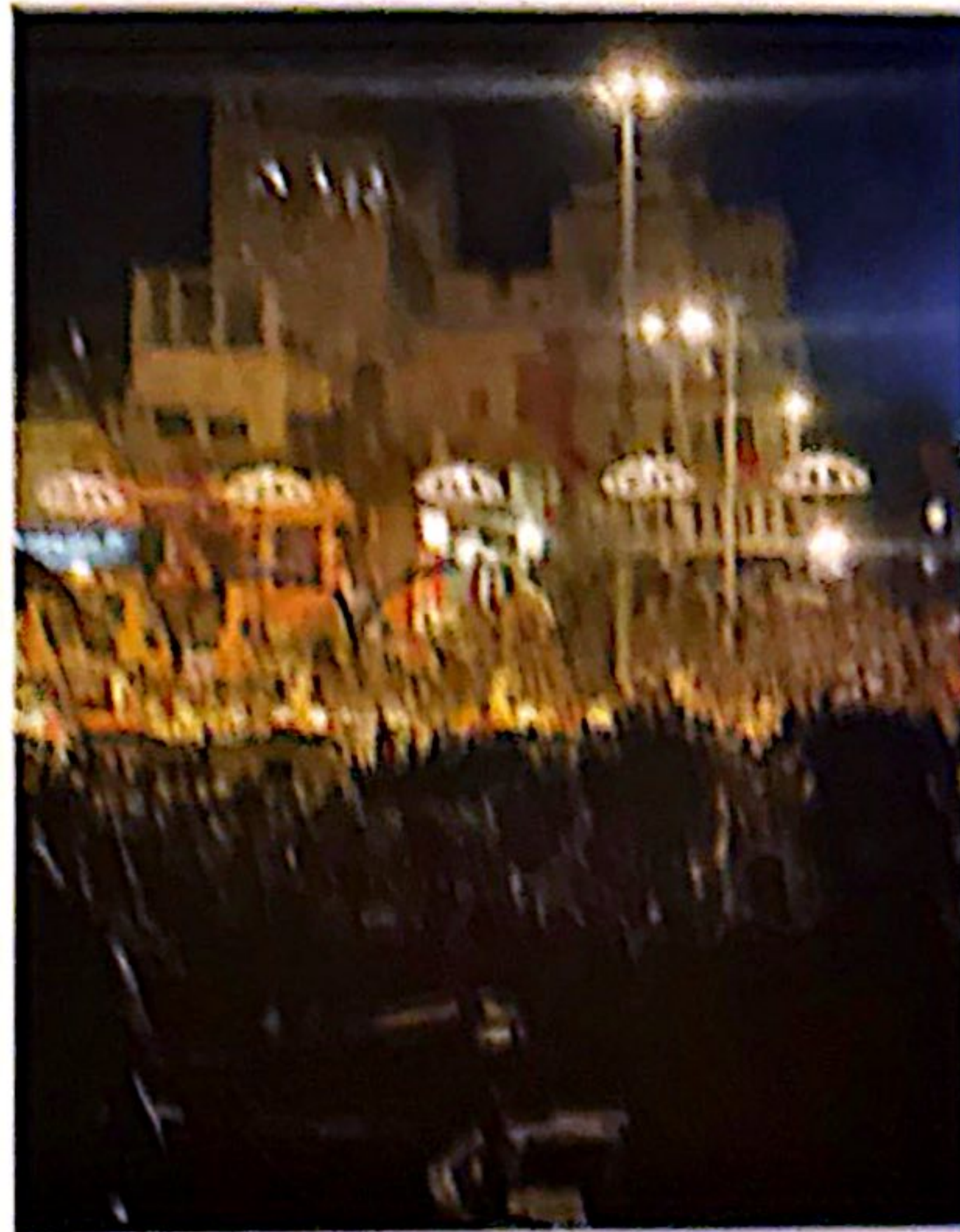
The first stop, on the itinerary, is the Lotus Temple. Known worldwide for its iconic shape resembling a lotus flower symbolizes purity, beauty, fertility, wealth, knowledge and serenity. It is a Bahai Temple emphasizing interfaith harmony, world peace and communal meditation. Next stop, India Gate. An all-Indian war memorial built by the British to honor and memorialize Indian soldiers who died as part of the British India Army during World War One. Next up, we visited the Red Fort in Old Delhi. Commissioned in the 17th century by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. Made of red sandstone and marble. It was the headquarters of Mughal emperors for over 200 years. Today, Red Fort is still used as an active place of worship and raises a flag on Lahore Gate (Aug 15) to celebrate India's Independence Day. The last stop is scheduled in New Delhi, Mahatma Gandhi Memorial, a.k.a., Raj Ghat. A beautiful park-like space, dedicated to one of the most famous political ethicists who inspired nonviolent resistance for India's independence away from British rule.



Himalayan Mountains



Jaipur also known as the Pink City. Amber Fort, Jaipur.



Varanasi



Hawa Mahal also known as Wind Palace

After 8 busy days in Delhi, we drove five hours and made our way to Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan. Also known as the Pink City and the Jewel of India, Jaipur is home to artisans, philosophers, and musicians and is known around the world for its opulent architecture, colorful bazaars, indigenous elephants, luxury textiles, jewelry making, and precious and semi-precious gemstones. Some of the highlights on the itinerary, Hawa Mahal (Wind Palace) with its honeycomb facade and 953 windows, Amber Fort, Jaigarh Fort and Jal Mahal were all must-see highlights. One night we were invited to the private home of a friend of a friend for dinner and an astrological reading that was on fleek. When we returned to the hotel there was a henna artist who beautifully designed tattoos on our hands and arms. With so much to see in a packed 3-day schedule, Jaipur is definitely a city to spend more time in.

Our last stop in the Golden Triangle was a four-hour drive from Jaipur to Agra, the capital of Uttar Pradesh and home to the Taj Mahal. To see the Taj Mahal for the first time as the sun was setting was truly breathtaking. It seemed surreal and appeared to be floating somehow. A marble mausoleum built out of love by

Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan for his favorite wife, Empress Mumtaz Mahal after she died giving birth to their fourteenth child. The Taj Mahal is recognized as the greatest architectural accomplishment of the Mughal Empire. Made entirely of white marble, 28 variety gemstones, and at one time gold trim. It is also known for its symmetry in design, balance, and numbers. I can truly understand and appreciate now why this beauty is included as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It is opulence overload. Other mentionable sights visited in Agra were Agra Fort, Tomb of I'timad-ud-Daulah and a quick visit to a marble workshop to learn the craftsmanship of the timeless trade.

I highly recommend staying at the Oberoi Amarvilas Agra. The people and service made our stay memorable. A bonus to our room was having a balcony that overlooked the property and the Taj Mahal in the distance. This luxury hotel is truly beautiful and provided a lovely oasis after our busy days of sightseeing in 103 degree temperatures. It is worth the splurge and I highly recommend waking up for a sunrise view of the Taj Mahal with cappuccino and chocolate.

Next up on the trip, was a flight to the ancient city of

Varanasi where we would spend the next three days sightseeing. Varanasi is the oldest city in the world. Mark Twain once said, "Varanasi is older than history, older than tradition, older than legend and looks twice as old as all of them put together". It is a spiritual and holy place where over 2.5 million pilgrims make their way annually. It is home to 23,000 temples and 85 ghats. Ghats are steps that lead down to the Ganges (water) for bathing, cremation and ceremonies. We took a sunset boat ride to see the ancient city at dusk and to witness the Agni pooja ceremony that takes place nightly. Nine priests gather wearing sarees on individual platforms and dance to music and fire, honoring Lord Shiva and the universe itself. Fifty thousand people were at the sacred festivities the night we were there as it coincided with the ending of the Muslim holiday Ramadan. It was a spiritual experience full of energy that is hard to describe in words. After the ceremony ended many people placed prayer candles in the holy Ganges that illuminated the night sky. The next day we woke at 4:30 in the morning for a sunrise boat ride. It was quieter and more serene than the night before. We witnessed bathing rituals, baptisms and morning