



James D. Hackbarth  
Vientiane, Laos  
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Dear Friends,

As the good ship the S.S. Rajula set sail so began the next leg of our journey. The 6-day trip from Penang, Malaya, to Negapattinam, India, allowed us time to catch up on some much needed sleep. Our ship made the Indian port at 5 AM and needless to say, I wasn't on deck for the big event! By eleven the last of the passengers and cargo were over the side of the ship and in the small sail boats which took us to shore. The Bay of Bengal waters were very calm and the two-hour trip to shore allowed us to view several jellyfish and sea snakes in the water. Whenever one would come into view, the boatsmen would get quite excited. The jellyfish if touched by a swimmer would give a very bad sting, and the snakes are known to have one of the most deadly bites of any in the world.

Up to this point, it had been my belief that the Customs House of Thailand was one of the worst ones in the world. The first day in India proved me wrong. After two hours of standing in line, we finally got to the man with the little rubber stamp. It took us another hour to go the next five feet. It seems that very few Americans ever come to Negapattinam, and our passports were somewhat of a curiosity. To make a long story short, all of the Custom people read our passports from cover to cover.

Now this is only half of the story. We still didn't have the motorcycle through Customs...This took three days time including a quick trip to Madras to get some papers signed. While in Madras a funny thing happened, which at the time didn't seem too funny. We arrived at the train station quite tired and dirty after an all-night ride. Walking out the entrance to the station we saw the government rest house across the street. Miles, my friend, went to see if they had a room, and I stayed with our bags. Two hours later he had not returned. When he left the guest house he got fowled up in his directions. Well, anyway, he stood for two hours at the other end of the train station thinking all kinds of bad thoughts about me for leaving and I the same for him. I was afraid to move for fear he would come back and then we really would be goofed up. Well, at last he started to look around, about the same time as I did. We spotted each other and after giving each other a good talking to, figured out what had happened.

Returning to Negapattinam after a one-day tour of Madras, we collected the motorcycle and were again on our way.

After one day of driving in India I began to question our intelligence and if it would be wise to continue with the cycle. The road was rough, winding, filled with people and animals, and unmarked! We had more close calls of hitting kids on bicycles than I care to remember. The Indian people had no sense of danger or

speed. They would hear us coming and then step into the road to watch us. The only problem is they would not move out of the way again. One time two persons stood watching us so that I had to come to a dead stop about two feet from them and then motion them out of the way with my hand. Had we been going ten miles an hour faster, I would have hit them both.

Up to this point I can say I have never been in a country that I did not enjoy. I kept telling myself that India was a nice country and that we had just run into a few bad situations. Looking back now, I feel I was wrong in thinking I was wrong! I hope I never again have to go through that country..It is about two hundred years behind the human race!

In other countries we have been to there was always someone who would try to get money from the rich Americans. Here it was every person you met. Here, people would even give you wrong directions and lead you down dead-end streets so they could laugh at you. You would ask for directions to find a road and they would ask for money to tell you. At times, we would have so many beggars around us that we could not move. If we would go into a temple several people would always walk along with us and then demand money because they had taken us on a tour. We would go into a place that said 25 anas (5¢) on a sign and they would try to charge 5 rupics (\$1.20). We would take a picture of some object and someone would see you taking it and run in front of the camera. Afterward they would come up and try to charge you for taking their picture.

The one and last thing that really began to get on our nerves after a while was the way people would stare at us. We always had fifteen or twenty people standing around with their mouth hanging open and a moronic stare on their faces. It actually got to the point when you would go to the bathroom they would try to follow you in. Well, anyway, after five days of this we had all we could take. We put the cycle on the train and headed for Delhi.

The train was little better than a cattle car, but it was taking us to the Peace Corps Hostel where we knew some white intelligent beings would be.

Delhi gave me one of the biggest surprises of my life. The first day in the Peace Corps Hostel turned out to be one of relaxation. While reading a book in the living room, two girls walked in. They looked at me and I looked at them. All of a sudden the one began to jump up and down and scream as only girls can. They turned out to be two very close friends from the days at U.C.L.A. and were on their way home from the Peace Corps in Ethiopia, Africa. In a way it seems kind of funny. We saw each other two years ago in California and here we meet 12,000 miles away on vacation.

Delhi was again somewhat of a disappointment. After five days of the city and seeing it more to say we had then for interest, we were off to Agra and the Taj Mahal for the only two days that I really enjoyed in the country.

The Taj Mahal is everything that has ever been written about it. It is the most beautiful structure I have ever seen. For those who are not familiar with its history, it is rightly regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The Taj, as it is called, is the mausoleum of the Empress Arjumand Bano Begum. She was born in 1592, married at 19, and after 17 years of married life had 17 children. She died about

1626 and in 1631 her husband started to build the Taj at a cost of \$139,000,000 as a lasting memory to her. The vast building made of white marble, red sandstone, and thousands of precious stones, took 20,000 workers over 6 years to build!

Our first view of the Taj was by the light of a full moon. We were told that thousands of people plan their visit to the Taj just so they can be there at the full of the moon; and as luck would have it, that's when we stumbled in. The white marble against the dark moonlit sky was indeed a beautiful sight; and may I say that if for no other reason the trip to India was worth while just to see the Taj.

The next day we again returned to the Taj to take pictures. With my telephoto lens, I had been taking pictures of people most of the morning. As I was walking from one area to another, I heard the patter of small feet moving quite rapidly behind me. Thinking it was most likely another beggar, I started walking as fast as I could. When I did stop and look, here was a very small boy about two years old with white shirt and tie, suit coat, sweat on his forehead, red face from running, and two big tears in his eyes and just about ready to cry, standing behind me. His only question was, "Would you like to take my picture?" Boy, did I feel like a "heel"! His father came up a few seconds later. He turned out to be one of the electrical engineers for the City of Agra. He said he had seen me taking pictures of the children and was wondering if I wanted to take one of his son. We spent a very enjoyable hour together taking several pictures.

The afternoon was spent at what is called the Red Fort. We hired a guide who turned out to be more interesting than the tour. He was well over seventy years old and had fought in the First World War. His knowledge of both the history of the Fort and the world was astounding. His toothless mouth and brush-like white beard kept us laughing the whole trip. He knew he was funny and did his best to give us a show.

We left Agra again by train for a small town called Patna. At this point we were supposed to find a boat to take us across the Ganges River. This is also the City where the people thought it was funny to give us wrong directions which cost us one full day of travel and 200 miles of travel over very bad roads that was not necessary.

Finding we could not cross the river with the cycle here, we started East to the only bridge. Crossing the bridge we came to a second bridge that was down for repair. We were told that the only way to cross to the other side was by an 80-mile detour to the East. The truth was a temporary bridge had been built two miles to the West. The good black top road soon turned into a gravel road which turned into mud which became impossible to go on with the cycle. We were just about in real trouble because of the gas problem. One of the few nice fellows we met said there was one way out. That was to travel along the top of a dike that followed the river for about 30 miles. This would take us to a road which we should be able to get over which would get us back to the main road. We had nothing to lose and much to gain, because he said there was one gas station in the town.

We followed the dike as he suggested. It did lead to the bad road which was solid mud for about a mile, which did get us back to the good road. One day later we were out of India and on our way to Nepal.

James D. Hackbarth  
IVS/USAID  
c/o American Embassy  
APO San Francisco 96352

Best Wishes...  
Jim

P.S. Permission to publish this letter, in whole or in part, must be secured from International Voluntary Services, Inc., 1555 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.