

Tender Mercies

Description

Disclaimer: As tender mercies go, this first one was pretty low key, compared with other ones we have seen this week.

But still so exciting! We and two other couples were invited by President and Sister William to visit Agra and see the Taj Mahal!

This happened on Monday. We had a very early start to our day, leaving by 5:15, riding with Anil (the professional driver for the mission) in the mission car. The others — President and Sister William, Elder and Sister Bingham, and Elder and Sister Baird — rode in the mission van. It was a long ride — 2.5 hours — but we enjoyed talking with Anil, who regaled us with his miraculous conversion story!

We got to Agra, and after a pit stop at the Marriott hotel where we were going to have lunch after our tours, it was off to the Taj Mahal.

A crazy number of souvenir hawkers accosted us on the way from the parking lot to the shuttle, but then our tour guide met us and we shuttled away from them.

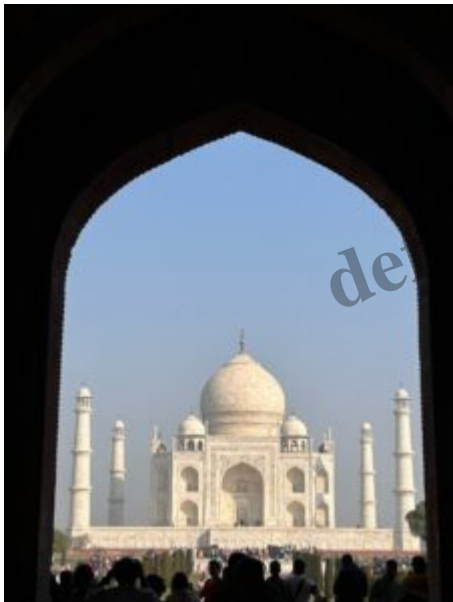


Meeting our guide in Agra

The tour, complete with historical and political commentary, and of course descriptions of the marvelous architecture and workmanship, lasted about 90 minutes. We saw the Taj Mahal from three of four directions, saw the optical illusion of the four towers — one at each corner — whose cylindrical sides looked parallel due to the flare in size at the top to counter the perspective. We went up to the main structure and touched the ivory-white marble facing, then after putting on booties went inside where no photography is allowed.



The Royal Gate (northern entrance) of the Taj Mahal



View through the Royal Gate



After going through the Royal Gate



Excitement as we got closer

Our guide, Muhammed Ali, took many pictures, of couples and the whole group, along with some specialty shots (mirrored and reflected images).



Group shot, L-R President and Sister William, us, Elder and Sister Bingham, Sister and Elder Baird



Our guide having photo fun



Intricate marble carving on exterior wall



Floral carved marble



Carved marble inlaid with semi-precious stones

Interestingly, there were signs around the grounds warning visitors to not tease, irritate, or even make eye contact with the monkeys — however, no monkeys were to be seen, because the groundskeepers had cleared them all out in preparation for visits by dignitaries in conjunction with the G20 Summit to be held in India later this year. I looked it up and learned that India, during its G20 presidency, intends to hold in all about 200 events across the country!

After that, we drove over to the Agra Fort and had another fascinating tour of that structure complex.



Entrance to the Agra Fort



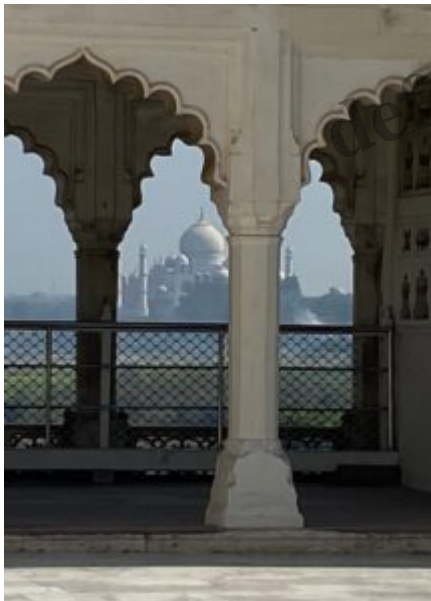
Inside the Agra Fort



A lookout in the Agra Fort



Intricate carvings in
sandstone and marble



The Taj Mahal from the Agra
Fort



In an arched alcove of the Agra Fort



Arched alcove in the residence area of the Agra Fort



Irony: A crematorium next to a mausoleum (the smoke gives it away)



A cool pattern in a garden at the Agra Fort

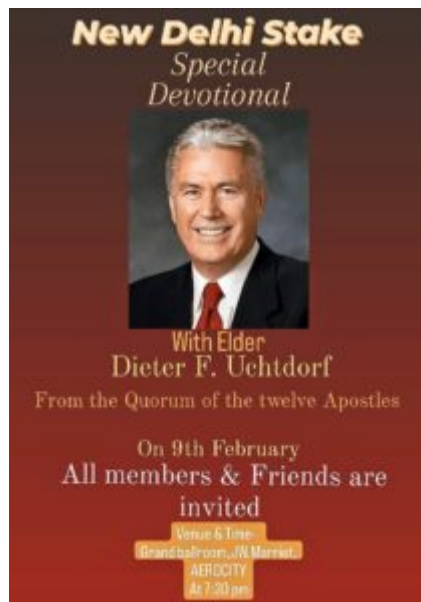
Saying goodbye to our guide, we went back to the hotel for a delicious buffet lunch with all the Northern Indian food we could eat. We swapped with the Bairds for the trip back to New Delhi and had a delightful conversation with President and Sister William.

Another huge highlight of our week was meeting Elder Uchtdorf. He was visiting India this week to meet with government officials, and also the missionaries and the members.



Elder Uchtdorf along with other church officials meeting with government officials including the Chief Minister of Delhi, and a Member of Parliament (roughly equivalent in the USA to State Governor and State Senator)

Thursday is when we saw him and Sister Uchtdorf, shook their hands, had pictures taken, and most significantly were taught and edified by their words in the afternoon Mission Conference, and again that evening at a New Delhi Stake special devotional. One thing Elder Uchtdorf said, more than once, and that really stuck in my mind, was that Christ is the center of everything. It reverberated and resonated and surfaced in some thoughts I will share below.



A great evening with an Apostle of the Lord — see his Instagram post:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CokiVxVvzNG/?igshid=MDJmNzVkMjY=>

We met again with Vinay Stephen on Friday. What a good man! He took us to see two buildings they

have and use for their charitable work, and for which we are working on a proposal to refurbish and make them more suitable to helping more people. (Like adding on a kitchen to serve meals to some of the homeless.)

The people we saw who are employed by the Sadik Masih Society, as well as Vinay himself (their director), have a great spirit about them, and it is a joy to try to figure out ways we can collaborate with them on humanitarian projects to serve the poor and needy.



We met Rohit and Yash — two great social workers

Here are my thoughts as I pondered our collaboration with these good people.

How do we learn to make Jesus — the center of everything — the Author and Finisher of our faith — how do we make Him the central focus of our lives?

Taunya reiterated the hows in her talk today (see below). Pray to Heavenly Father, read and study the scriptures (feast on the words of Christ), and serve.

Another thought: Learn to look for and see Him everywhere, in every sight we see with our natural **and** our spiritual eyes, especially looking at people and seeing the Light of Christ in their eyes. See the goodness and virtue in them.

It was Monday evening that the Bishop of our ward here asked Taunya and me if we would give the talks, which we did today in Sacrament Meeting. It was fun, although a little stressful, as any of you who have given talks can relate to!

And now for the great news! It was a wonderful tender mercy that we have been certified to move! The inscrutable gears of bureaucracy fell into place and the paperwork was completed. (The e-certificates were emailed to us as proof!) We are now one step closer to moving to our new assignment.

More info to come as we learn more!

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