

Happy New Year from New Delhi!

## Description

We made it to India! Our flight was long but we endured the discomfort and were so very happy to get off the plane, safe and sound on the ground — a tad earlier than expected. Elder and Sister Baird were on our same flight, but a row behind and on the opposite side, so we had no interactions with them except in the terminal before and after.

So many blessings came as we got our bearings over the past three days.

We are staying with the humanitarian couple who have been here since July, Josh and Jawan Jones, in the spare bedroom of their apartment. We are pretty much joined at the hip with them for 4-6 weeks while we learn the ropes before being sent elsewhere.

First impressions of New Delhi: Bad air and dirty streets, women in colorful attire, men in drab. Mix some culture shock with jet lag (which by now is not too bad) and get emphatically outside comfort zone feelings!

Friday morning we went with the Joneses to a school where there was supposed to be a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the just-installed RO (Reverse Osmosis) water-filtration unit there.

We were accompanied by Deepanshu, our 25-year-old translator. He is a returned missionary native who the Joneses hire at \$20 a day (a very decent wage here) to help them with language and other logistics.

Getting to the school was quite the adrenaline rush as cars and scooters and bicycles whizzed by and very VERY near us. But our Uber driver got us there without incident. The sights were amazing, for example the many green trees lining the roads. There was one stretch that had cows on one side and monkeys on the other. In the trees or on the roadside fences, so many monkeys!

We were disappointed to learn that the RO unit was not operational, and they did not have a ribbon-cutting celebration planned. Some kind of miscommunication. What they were having was a year-end song-and-dance school program. We were the celebrities there, even though the celebration wasn't for us. The kids were fascinated to see us and talk with us (especially Taunya) and take selfies with us. We even got the "Hon'ble Guests" seats while they dress-rehearsed. They were amazing! Some of the student performers came and, per custom, touched all our feet, as a show of thanks and respect just for our being there and clapping for their performance. A young man who has composed music and written songs for Bollywood movies was there working with some of the kids. We got to meet him and talk to him for a

fascinating few minutes.

We then got another (slightly less scary) ride to the Mission Office. There we gave the mission secretary the information she needed to do our FRRO (Foreigners Regional Registration Office) paperwork, which when approved will allow us to go and stay in other cities in India.

Lunch followed at the Ambience, a large mall not too far away. We had a good meal of familiar Indian food, which Josh and Jawan treated us to in honor of our arrival.

Dinner was snacks at the Bingham's (where the Bairds are also staying). Elder and Sister Bingham are MLS (Member and Leader Support) missionaries (like the Bairds) who have been here since October. The eight of us played a card game and chatted into the evening.

Saturday was for shopping. We walked to the Priya mall, a 10-minute walk from the apartment. First order of business was getting some rupees from the ATM. Then the swarm began. Beggar children, maybe 8 or 9 years old, mostly girls, came and started aggressively asking for money. It was hard saying no, sorry, not today. Constant pleas: "Sir, sir, sir — kahna (food)" while pointing to their mouths. Heart tuggings to give them something were strong, but we resisted so as not to encourage more and more of this behavior, which, for better or worse, is what they know. We know there is a better way to meet their needs, but our mission is in a different arena.

After getting a few groceries we came back home, rested a bit, then with a few tries, I got my Uber app configured but waited to use it for the return trip from the Ambience mall. Josh requested the Uber driver for the trip there. First on the agenda — "linner" at another nice restaurant.

At this mall there are no beggar children, security won't let them near the place. So after eating we were unmolested as we got more ATM cash. We bought some yoga mats at a sporting goods store, because we need to get back to doing yoga in the mornings! To get home, my first time using Uber went okay, though we had to wait several minutes while the driver was stuck in traffic near the mall entrance.

Dinner again was snacks at the Bingham's, celebrating New Year's Eve. Sister William and her 13-year-old daughter Dolly were there. With just a little persuasion, Dolly played her guitar and sang for us. She's quite good, with a beautiful young voice! We played another card game afterwards.

This morning we went to Church in the basement of the Mission Home building. There were about 40 people there (normally 70-80, but some were gone for the weekend). We met President William (our mission president), who just got back from a visit to two cities in the south of the mission, including Visakhapatnam, where we (and the Bairds) will be going in a few weeks!

Visak (for short) is a coastal city with a bit more temperate climate (though

still hot), and the language spoken there — in the state the city is in — is Telugu, not Hindi! We think it will be fun to try to learn a little of that language, to add to our tiny bit of Hindi.

President William told us that in a couple of weeks we will make a trip there! Perhaps even before we have our FRRO registration, we'll stay a week or so in a hotel to check things out and scout around. Maybe stay in the apartment we will be renting, though our stay can't be long term until we have official permission.

To close this post, I'll mention one blessing of quiet inspiration, a tiny but much appreciated tender mercy from above. This happened at the airport while going through immigration, a not so stress-free process, not least because I had a hard time hearing the officer to follow his instructions.

I've gotten into the habit of tossing my boarding pass after exiting the plane on each leg of a journey. But a barely discernible nudge had me holding onto the boarding pass for the last leg from Chicago to New Delhi. And it's a good thing, because the officer asked for it. It was such a relief to have it to give!



Welcome to School!



Inside school, teacher on left,  
Deepanshu on right



Schoolgirls wearing and creating art



Taunya's Fan Club



Getting ready to sing and dance

<http://firstthreeodds.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/traditional-dance.mp4>



Ambience Mall



Precarious egg transport!



Mooo!

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