

Ellora caves

Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India - February 2, 2008

Amy:

We woke up early, had breakfast, and met our guide at 8:30. Today, we were going to the Ellora caves and sightseeing in Aurangabad which included the Aurangabad caves, and the “little Taj” monument.



aurangabad one-time capital fort

The ride to the Ellora caves was much shorter than to Ajanta, only about 30 minutes or so. We passed more fields, towns, and a beautiful fort high atop a mountain. It used to be the main fort for India when Aurangabad was the capital.

We arrived at the caves and were able to buy a ticket (Ayaz bought our tickets for all caves and monuments, as did all the guides) and drive right up to the caves. The Ellora caves are not only



Video
Impenetrable fort

Buddhist, but are



Ellora cave, buddha putting his foot down

also Jain and Hindu. We went to the Jain caves first, which looked like the Buddhist caves that we had seen yesterday, except that the Buddha in the carvings was not in full lotus

position, so it was really “Madawati” (or something like that). The Jain caves also tended to be more intricately carved, with much finer detail, either because that’s the

Jain way or because those caves are newer (I don’t know). We went to the Buddhist caves next but didn’t concentrate on them because we’d seen so many Buddhist caves at Ajanta the day before.



more carved rock

Finally were the Hindu caves, which were the most elaborate of all of the caves. In one cave (#16, I think) is the largest



Tale of Rama

freestanding monolith in the world, bigger than the Parthenon in



Video
giant hindu one-rock temple from the back

Greece and 1.5 times as tall. The inner section is 80 meters long. The carved

elephants supporting many parts are nearly life-size. And so on. There were carvings depicting historical scenes (from the Mahabharata and the tales of Rama) and pillars and levels and it was just real big and one huge rock carving inside and out.

After seeing the caves, we stopped at a restroom, one that was much nicer than other restrooms, equipped with a flushing toilet! Luxury! Some of the bathrooms we’ve seen have been less-than-pleasant experiences. In

many cases, there's a bathroom attendant who hands out toilet paper to dry one's hands, and then expects a few rupees in return. Many times, I run full-speed into the restroom and don't have any money, and am therefore met with angry stares and words in Hindi which aren't any of the few phrases I understand.

At this point, Brent was very itchy, so we asked to stop at a pharmacy. But our driver and guide had other plans, and we ended up driving through the city of Aurangabad, up a hill to more caves. These caves (the Aurangabad caves) were smaller and less impressive than Ajanta and Ellora, but were impressive nonetheless. The Aurangabad caves were contemporary of Ellora, so around 500 AD. The most interesting aspect of these caves (I thought) was that they were first Buddhist, then some Hindu carvers came in and added legs, elephant trunks, etc, and made them into Hindu figures. Interesting, eh?

[Naresh: Below the Aurangabad caves is a large section of land that looks like barren desert, which seemed weird in such a fertile place. I learned that a generation or so ago it was all a rich forest, but that it had been denuded for firewood. They're now working on a few experimental sections to learn how it can be reforested.]



Next we went to the "Mini Taj" which was built by Shah Jahan's grandson (Shah Jahan built the Taj) as a copy of the Taj. It is much smaller and only partially made of marble – the domes and some of the foundation is marble, and lesser quality than the Taj. Most of the Little Taj is made of crushed sandstone.

There were Moghul gardens, domes, gates surrounding the building, and a platform, but no mosque on the sides of the building, and the entire building was about ¼ the size of the Taj. There also were not very many tourists, although we heard that many people make pilgrimages to the Little Taj. Poor Little Taj – it would be really impressive if it weren't inevitably compared to the Taj Mahal.



[Our guide told us that the Taj Mahal was made from marble imported from near Jaipur b/c Shah Jahan had a good relationship with the King of Jaipur, so he got marble for free. Also, the quality of the marble in the Taj Mahal is so good that you can shine a flashlight, you can see the light flow through the marble.]

After the little Taj, we (finally) stopped at a pharmacy for Brent's itchy rash, which had spread over much of his body. We bought calamine lotion, which seemed to cool the rash. (We think that Brent might have been allergic to the detergent that was used to clean our clothes). Poor little honey! [Naresh: the rash was most extreme

wherever I'd worn clothes that had been washed at that previous hotel. The scientist in me wants to run an experiment to prove my theory. The sensible side of me is afraid to put on any of those clothes again. The idiot in me accidentally did further the experiment, with "positive" results, by wearing a pair of underwear the next day, forgetting that they'd been washed.]

It was around 2:00 and our guide suggested going back to the hotel for lunch, but we wanted to try a restaurant, so we went to a restaurant in Aurangabad. We dropped off the driver and tipped him – hopefully the right amount – and went inside. The service was slow, even though there were about 12 waiters and staff standing around. (This seems to be pretty common in India – lots of hanging out and chatting). The food was good, but sooooo spicy! I ordered chicken tikka masala and garlic naan -the naan was delish, but the chicken masala was unlike any I had had before and was almost too spicy to eat. Brent ordered "dum aloo Aurangabadi" which was a spicy potato dumpling – and papadum with tomatoes and cilantro – a sort of Indian bruschetta. Our driver waited for us outside (nice!) and drove us back to our hotel. He was really nice, too. [Naresh: so far, that restaurant has my vote for the best food so far—wish I could remember the name.]

Back at the hotel, Brent took some more Benadryl (I'm glad I packed some) and took a nap, and I went outside near the pool to blog. I didn't end up blogging b/c I started chatting with an American couple from Portland. I still cannot believe how many older people we've seen on this trip. I thought we'd be the oldest people by far, but we're not. The couple was traveling for 4 weeks and were on their last leg. They were also blogging and emailing friends and family – they gave us some tips for traveling the backwaters of Kerala (our last stop) which were 1) to take a motorized boat b/c the pole-in-water ones are way too slow 2) to check out the boats b/c they vary in accommodations. They had 3 goals during their trip to India, all of which didn't work out – seeing the Taj during a full moon at sunset (it was foggy), seeing the Lake Palace in Udaipur (tourists can't go unless they're staying at the Palace), and taking a rice boat in Kerala (too slow, didn't see anything). But they had a good time, nonetheless. They were heading from Aurangabad to Bhopal (I have no idea where that is....). They had planned their trip with the help of the Michelin guide, which I found interesting.

Brent joined us at the pool area, but was kind of groggy. He told a garbled joke about putting dog poop in his pockets to thwart pickpockets, and the couple soon left. A few minutes later, we were joined by Brent's new bff, Atul. We chatted with him for a while (a loooooong while) about Indian culture, marriage, religion. He's a Hindu, but he eats meat. He had an arranged marriage (so has every other person we've met

during this trip) and confirmed that the caste system is alive & well in India. (Brent read in the paper that a father was fined by his political party for his son marrying outside his caste.)



We went to dinner, which wasn't very fun b/c Brent was itchy and I was annoyed that the food took so long.

Also, they didn't bring all of our dishes, but charged us for them, and refused to take the items off of our bill. I told one of the people working at the hotel that I was a travel writer reviewing hotels, so I hope that gets back to the restaurant people (!). I showed them!

We went to sleep and got up in the middle of the night (2:00 a.m) and watched "House". It was a repeat – the one with the bad policeman harassing House and his team – but it was still good. It's nice to see movies and tv shows in English!

[Naresh: Usually Amy takes pictures with her mom's camera and I take some with my iPhone. None of the iPhone pictures were available the next day and I learned that the iPhone had stopped snapping pictures at all. A "restore" got the camera working again, at the expense of losing all the other stored data.]

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