

NYBC GROUP TOUR OF INDIA RETURNS

Walking with the Buddha

Phyllis O'Neil

On Sunday 10 December 2006 our group of 13 returned from the NY Buddhist Church two week tour of Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India. Folks joined us from the New York metro area, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle. I am so glad to have seen Rev. Nakagaki's announcement about the trip hanging outside on the church door as I strolled down Riverside Drive one day. Going to India had been on my list of things to do since my mother returned from a trip there over ten years ago. I looked upon this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to join a purposeful, guided trip of a spiritual and educational nature. For me personally I expect the full impact of the trip to unfold over time. I was most definitely impacted by what I experienced as a heightened presence of the spiritual world than in the U.S. where I grew up and have lived my entire life. I am glad to have had the opportunity to visit India at this time when technology is changing the world so rapidly. In India the cell phone is ubiquitous now in even the most remote places. I also enjoyed seeing the variety of animals roaming freely about -- cows, goats, elephants, camels, donkeys and monkeys.

Our action-packed itinerary kept us constantly on the go whether by plane, train, bus, donkey cart, taxi, rickshaw and for a few, even by motorcycle! As the days passed the group became more and more like a little family, all working together to ensure that even when boarding a pre-dawn sleeper train that everyone and everyone's bags had gotten safely on board.

India was a feast for all the senses -- the people, the food, the animals, the colorful markets and clothing, the ancient sites and temples. We experienced the crowded cities as well as remote country villages. Our itinerary included Mumbai, the Ajanta and Ellora caves, the Taj Mahal, Delhi, Varanasi, Vaishali, where women were first ordained and Buddha delivered his last sermon, Rajgir, where Buddha renounced his royal heritage and came to seek the path of salvation, Sarnath, where the founding of the Sangha occurred, Nalanda, the ancient Buddhist university, Bodh Gaya, the place of Buddha's enlightenment and Calcutta. Highlights of a half-day in Mumbai included the Ghandi House and a Jain temple. A bit of extra time in Calcutta gave us the opportunity to visit the headquarters and museum of Mother Theresa.

I think everyone in the group would agree that a major factor in the overall success of our travels was the gracious and expert services, guidance, *patience* and pleasurable companionship of our constant guide, Mr. Anil Kumar, of Delhi. His accessibility and vigilant attentiveness to all the needs of the group were outstanding. We look forward to trying to show him some of the same graciousness when he visits New York.

Special thanks also for the generosity of the Sri Lankan Buddhist Temple in Vaishali and the Japanese Buddhist Nihon Dera Temple in Bodh Gaya for providing lodging for a couple of nights. And of course to Reverend Nakagaki for all the work he put into organizing the trip!