

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

This is an excerpt from the humorous first impressions recorded by an Allegheny College faculty member when they first visited India.

Being in India was an experience that is hard to describe. There is so much sensory overload---so many people in such a small space---so much color---so many sharp contrasts---so much history---so many complex flavors---so many beautiful people ---so many Hindu gods (not that gods are bad, but I can't keep track of them all) --- so, so, so, much to absorb and process. I finally realized that we began to travel out of the western sphere when I sensed for the first time in my life that there is no possible way for me to adequately acclimate into this culture no matter how much I learn or how much I try. It's more complex and foreign to me than I had previously understood. I try hard to bring a humble approach to this country and its people, as it is clear that I have much to learn from them.

Traveling on my first day in India in an autorickshaw (read: a three-wheeled vespa scooter with a carriage for passengers on the back), I shared the road with the following:

Taxis

Motorcycles

Hand-propelled wagons, carts, and flatbed contraptions

Scooters

Bicycles

Trucks

Bicycle-propelled wagons, carts, and flatbed contraptions

Bullock carts (wooden carts and wheels powered by oxen)

Government vehicles, their windows encased in wire mesh (to prevent rocks and other missiles from shattering the glass)

Rickshaws (both motor powered and human cycle powered)

Pedestrians

Buses

The only form of ground transportation I haven't seen here is a skateboard.¹ From the bullock carts to the government vehicles, we span at least four centuries of transportation forms.

Maneuvering in traffic (or being a passenger in this traffic) is not for the faint of heart, and the noise can be deafening, until I figured out that everyone uses their horn or bell as a way of telling others, "Hey, I'm next to you." Of course, the great irony of this is that everyone else responds back ("Hey, I'm next to you"), and the auditory cacophony goes on.

Once I figured it out, it didn't bother me as much

¹ Remember this when we're in the Udaipur City Palace....

