

Jhalawar: Foreigner on display (12/2/2007 to 12/3/2007)

Few tourists make their way to the town of Jhalawar in the southeastern corner of Rajasthan. I was stopping to break up the journey to province of Madhya Pradesh and to check out the 10th century sun temple in nearby Jhalrapatan. However, what I'll remember from Jhalawar was not the old temples, but rather standing in front of a room full of kids with the straightforward yet impossible instruction, "teach English." I was about to head back from Jhalrapatan to my Hotel in Jhalawar, when I met an English teacher who invited me to come see his village. I was hesitant as it was getting late and it would mean spending the night in the village while all my stuff was in my already paid for room in Jhalawar, but eventually decided to see where this "adventure" would lead and accompanied him back to his village. The village was a strip of houses along the road, the kind of place no tourist would go, and none had. Neil Armstrong may have been the first man on the moon, but I was the first foreigner in Salawhi. Alright, so it may not carry the same prestige, but I got stared at like I just arrived from the moon. I felt a little like a trophy as we walked around town so people could see the tall white guy. For most of the kids it was the first time they had seen a foreigner in person. We also stopped by an English night class. This was the first of what would be several impromptu "teach English" requests, a teaching session which was filled with more than a few awkward silences, once we covered where I was from, my age, and marital status. We went to a nearby larger town where school where my host taught was. I ended up sleeping on the floor in one of the class rooms in his school. As I "slept" with my camera bag as a pillow, and using a far from clean blanket to keep me somewhat warm, I was starting to question weather this was a good idea. The next day was "school visit" day as I was whisked around to various schools. Whenever I arrived at a school all activity stopped and I wondered if I was more a distraction than a learn experience for the kids. Nevertheless, the staff and teachers were always thrilled to have me and I had to sit through a number of cell phone picture sessions with the teachers at each school. I also even had autograph requests by a few kids. It doesn't take much more than light skin and brown hair to make you a celebrity in these parts. I sat in on my hosts English class, or rather he had me teach it for him. After the usual questions, he had me go over a poem with them in their reader, which gave me an insight in to the Indian educational system. I was not very impressed. The poem was called "My good right hand." I forget the name of the author. I went over the poem with them and tried to explain what it meant. It was very difficult to get anyone to speak. If I asked any questions that were not the ones listed in the book which half of them had answer keys to, they had no idea. If I asked a question out of the book the students with answer keys would read the answer from the answer book word for word. It seemed very pointless to me. They learn to read words but have very little comprehension. When I was asked at another school to tell the students how they can learn English my response was "Just like you



10th century sun temple in Jhalrapatan, what I originally came to see.

can't learn how to play a musical instrument just by listening to music, you can't learn English just by listening to English, you have to try speak English and not worry about making a mistake." As an example I tried some of my very limited Hindi, they were amused, in which no doubt I made many mistakes. This address was in front of a school wide assembly at one of the public schools in town, and even the mayor of the town showed up to see me speak. No matter what I say about "learning English," Invariably the question everyone always wants to know is if I'm married, and then they are shocked when they learn my age since almost all Indian men are setup with someone by the age of 24. My school visits were an entertaining and educational experience, probably more so for me than the students. I was growing a little tired of being the show and tell item so after a half day of school visits, I was happy to get back to Jhalawar and my semi-clean Hotel room.



Classroom in Salawhi



Smaller village nearby



English class in larger near by town.



English class in larger near by town.



Me in the middle of some students at the public school wide assembly.



Private school where my host taught



There were a few other things besides schools, like the city palace in Jhalawar.