

Golden Temple Reunion: Bundi to Amritsar (12/27/2007 to 1/1/2008)

From Bundi it was a whirlwind journey up to Amritsar with stops at Ranthambore National Park and Jaipur. At Ranthambore we spent a lot of money (all right relatively a lot ~\$32 each, including the over priced hotel we had to stay at) to not see tigers and drive around in a freezing cold roofless bus while Indian tourists (who were paying a fraction of the price we had to) managed to talk constantly throughout the 3 hour “safari.” Needless to say it was not my favorite place and may have turned me off to Indian game parks for good. I’ve never had much luck with them either; I spent a couple days not seeing Asian Lions in Sasan Gir last time I was in India.

We arrived in Amritsar the morning of New Year’s Eve after a frigid night train journey from Delhi. The Golden Temple at Amritsar is Sikhism’s holiest shrine and draws a constant flow of Sikh pilgrims who bath in the sacred tank surrounding the temple and mediate throughout the enclosure and shrine. Born out of Hinduism and Islam, Sikhism is among the most tolerant of India’s religions where everyone regardless of faith, sex, caste, or nationality is welcomed freely. Not only are they welcomed, but are offered free accommodation and food in the temple’s large guesthouses and 24 hour communal dining hall known as the Langar. Sikhism preaches equality with a goal of breaking out of the cycle of reincarnation becoming one with the one God. A God who like in Islam is never depicted, rather worship centers around a holy book of hymns called the Adi Granth, the original copy of which is housed in the Golden Temple. At the golden temple the hymns from the book are recited continuously 24 hours a day, every day. It’s a fascinating place of constant activity. After checking in to the pilgrim accommodation and eating at the Langar (It’s not just because I’m cheap we had to get the full pilgrim experience, but the price wasn’t bad either), we wandered around the marble walkways enjoying the serenity of the place while we waited for my



Golden Temple, Amritsar.



Pilgrims waiting to get into the Golden Temple, Amritsar.

father to arrive with his students. Even though we had planned the meeting, there is something kind of odd and remarkable at being at a place like the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India and seeing your dad show up who you hadn't seen in nearly a year.

While the Golden Temple is probably not what most people would consider a hot spot to spend New Year's Eve, considering alcohol, tobacco, and any other drugs are strictly forbidden on the grounds, I walked out of my room for a midnight stroll around the temple to an incredible sight of people chanting, mediating, and even bathing (it was very cold). While not your stereotypical New Year's, it was certainly memorable one. To complete total pilgrim experience we took the free pilgrim bus to the train station at 5:30 am the next morning. In what has to rank highly in my top ten bus experiences we packed in to bus filled with Sikh pilgrims. Old women would break in to a hymn and the entire bus would join in. While only a 10 minute ride, for me it was a highlight and perfect way to end our pilgrimage to the Golden Temple.



Myself, my sister, and my dad at the Golden Temple, Amritsar.



Sikh holding an offering plate at the Golden Temple, Amritsar.



Inlaid marble on the Golden Temple, Amritsar.



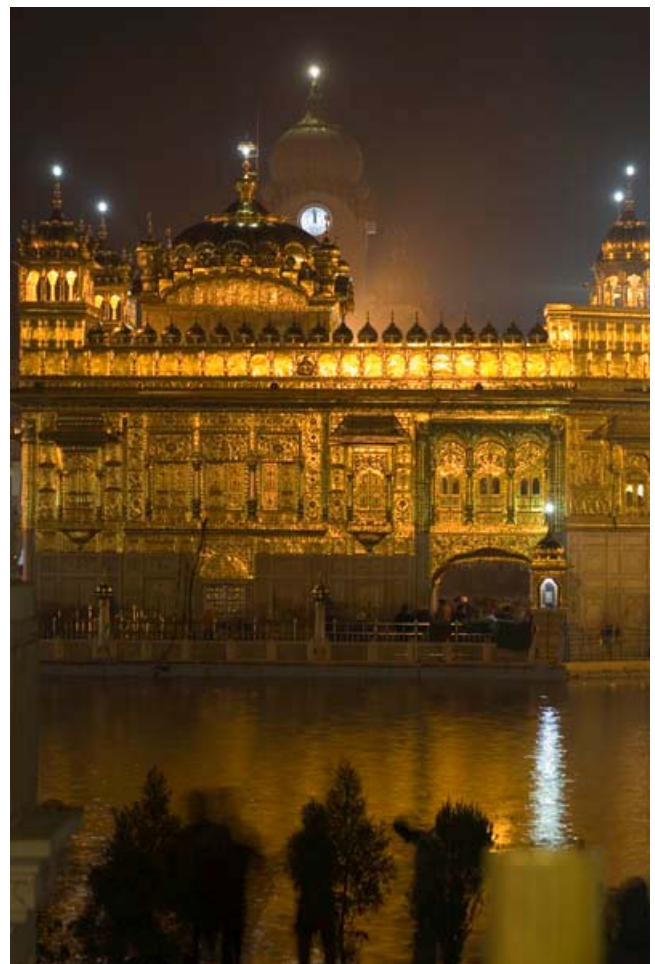
Women praying at the Golden Temple, Amritsar.



Sikh guard, Golden Temple, Amritsar.



Sikh guard, Golden Temple, Amritsar.



Golden Temple with the clock showing midnight on January 1st 2008, actually typical for India the clock was a little slow, Amritsar.



**Me at the Golden Temple,
Amritsar.**



Karin and Jeff at the City palace in Jaipur.



**Karin reflected in mirror work at the
Amber fort near Jaipur.**



A mother and son conversation at the Amber fort near Jaipur.



The Hawa Mahal, "Palace of the Winds," the most recognizable landmark of Jaipur.