



# Old Delhi, New Experiences

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Dear Javed,

I hope that you are well in London town — and that you are missing me! Let me say at the outset that this message comes to you courtesy of one and a half cheese masala dosas and the most enormous vanilla-enriched cold coffee milkshake I've ever consumed. That too, at 9 pm, in a country that doesn't quite see the point of decaf. So if I sound a little hyper, you will understand why...

I can just imagine the look of horror on your face as you read about my reckless self-caffeination! It's true, it's not like me. But after the day that Katy and I have just survived, I will confess to savouring every miniscule caffeinated jolt of that delicious concoction.

Anyway, this trip is changing me in mysterious ways. For example, while vegetarianism has never really appealed to me before, I am now perilously close to being seduced into the belief that this could be a viable lifestyle for me. Don't worry, though, I have no intention of inflicting it on you — before or after the wedding!

Part of this vegetarian wanna-be(haviour) on my part can of course be attributed to the amazing variety of non-sentient — or more accurately, "never were sentient" — items

that make up the gastronomic final frontier in the Indian restaurants that Katy and I have been exploring. Furthermore, after today's experience, I'm convinced that dosas must be the ultimate comfort food, specially designed for the spicily-inclined. I mean, how can you go wrong with a deceptively feather-light wrapping of paper-thin savoury pastry, deep-fried and filled with deliciously seasoned potatoes, with a little chopped carrot and a few peas thrown in as a nod to healthy eating?! The generous amount of cheese lining the inside of my dosa really put the comfort into this bout of comfort eating.

Anyway, our day started well. We were both determined to get in as much activity as possible before the melting caramel haze of the intense afternoon heat here seeped into our bones and sapped our determination to get things done — and seen! I recognise that Katy and I feel driven to make the most of this two-week break in northern India. We should have known better, I suppose, than to arrive in Delhi at what is still the height of summer. The autumnal shades of early September in London had lulled us both into believing that India would just be a warmer version of what we were so keen to leave behind. Though you did try to warn me, I admit

that! I should have listened to you. Instead, despite being born in Bangladesh, I now find myself having to admit that the many intervening years spent studying and working in Britain have left me completely disoriented in terms of how the subcontinent functions, from its weather patterns to the vagaries of public transport and the eccentric characters one invariably encounters in the course of travelling. And while that wouldn't be considered an acceptable excuse by any of my deshi brethren (except, perhaps, you), the truth is, I have more than once on this trip found myself experiencing the peculiar disorientation of a brown foreigner.

My Hindi, it turns out, is a lot worse than rusty; it's more like fossilised, based as it is almost entirely on a childhood diet of occasional Bollywood movies and a few family vacations. Needless to say, on the latter occasions, I at least had the luxury of relying on my parents, who are both fluent in Hindi. Unlike them, my Hindi is in such appalling shape that as a bona fide Northern Indian, Naina had already warned Katy at our last meeting in London that she mustn't rely on my non-existent communication