

# **The Book on Delhi**

maneuvering through the city's

traps and pitfalls

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To my two beautiful children Nassim and Yummy,  
who walk with me over Asia, Europe and the United States

*“There is only one sin, that sin is theft. When you kill you rob a child of a father, a wife of a husband. When you rape you rob a person’s dignity.*

*All sins are a variation of theft.”*

KHALED HUSSEINI

*“If there are no accomplices, then there will be no thieves.”*

LEONTINE RABESS

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## Acknowledgements

To those who know me , know that I get bored easily. I start a book and at the end get bored, abandon the project for years while starting another. This was not the case for The Book on Delhi. I would like to thank my husband for the motivation and confidence in me enough to encourage me to write this book two years after my journey.

My brother Amar Nath, Usama Reyman and Kiran Karki for the pictures they submitted. Special thanks to my fans who relentlessly urged me with their anxious emails in anticipation for this book. Most of all I thank God for the curious journey he led me through to India and Nepal. I am now beginning to understand this purpose.

## Author's Introduction

It was the ten hour time difference that explained why so many Indians are online when it is the middle of the night in America. On Facebook we are all connected by the acquaintance of a friend of a friend forming a great worldwide chain link. Patriotism is practiced and encouraged by everyone and this principle indoctrinates that one must always speak commendatory and favorably of his country. After all the praises, the acclaims always end by them saying, "You should visit" or "you should come to Delhi".

"I am not mad. I would never go to India. I have seen Danny Boyle's movie *Slumdog Millionaire*, I have read the city of Joy, *Anan Nagar* by Dominique Lapierre. I know I am not supposed to go there".

But the brain has a way of familiarizing information, so that it does not seem inconceivably surreal. It was not long before I started researching India, Delhi, Jaipur, and Chennai. Let me see if I can find an apartment in Jaipur. I will go to google. Ah, here is a nice one, with a garage downstairs, and air-condition. Months later, on arrival to Jaipur, I checked into a hotel. In anticipation of seeing my new apartment I

printed a map from their website. The following morning, with the printed map I went on the streets and hailed an auto rickshaw. The driver looked at the map and drove around in circles looking for the building.

Thankfully I had the contact phone number for the rental agent. He answered promptly. I told him I am on my way to the apartment. He affirmed that he will be there. The auto Rickshaw drove for thirty-five minutes looking for the address and building on the map. It seemed to be invisible, so I called again. The agent answered, I explained that we are having difficulty finding the address. He hung up. The auto Rickshaw driver resorted to asking for directions about the location of the building to various people. We got to the address of the apartment.

There was an empty parcel of land. There was no beautiful apartment structure as the map I had printed suggested.



# 1. Air India

Cheap-O-Air.com Air India is the most economical travel agent online.

From John Fitzgerald Kennedy Airport, New York, we are scheduled to board Kuwait Airways. It is a seven hour, fifteen minutes flight to Heathrow London, there will be an eleven and a half layover then our two day flight will resume at 9:30pm to Delhi on Air India.

Aboard Air Kuwait, the economy cabin service was first class. Meals were five star hotel quality and gifts of backpacks filled with coloring books, crayons and pencil pouches were given to the children. Air India was a rude disgusting joke in comparison. The planes were ancient with deteriorating seats. The air hostesses were over-worked and frustrated and it showed. I sat quietly in my seat and watched as an air hostess insulted a passenger. It was clearly demonstrated by the unpleasant body language of the flight attendants and the rudeness in their tone of voice that they were not happy in their job. Their frustration was taken out on the passengers. I watched a returning Indian student ask for a pair of headphones, and he was ignored. Customer appreciation does not exist on this airline. The food was revolting because the main

ingredient consisted of the hottest chili peppers on the planet.

I started wondering if all their customer service was horrible? Or was I just unlucky? A few years later on a bus crossing frontiers I met a twenty one year old German with an amazing aptitude in English. He was an avid traveler on the way from Kakarbhitta to Kathmandu, Nepal. He said that he had been traveling for three years now. I was intrigued by the number of countries he had visited in South America and china. “How do you manage to afford all these hotels?” I was also curious to know. He said he never stayed in hotels.

“What? Where do you sleep and shower”

Expressionlessly he calmly he replied, “In people’s houses. I go to couchsurfing.com and find a person who would accept me to spend a few days or weeks on their couch”.

This I found truly dangerous... “how did you get to Delhi? Did you fly on air India?” He nodded in the affirmative, “how did you find it?”

“The first time I flew on Air India was from Hong Kong to Delhi. It was an old plane. I think an Airbus 300. The video Projector was a Cathode Ray Tube, like your grandmother’s television set and the black and white films were all in Hindi.”

“Were many of the headrests on the seats missing or broken on their planes?” Instead of answering my question he went on to explain, “...the

thing is, on the flight I took, the bathroom was flooded and there was water and sewage leaking into the carpet into the passenger aisle. The flight attendants spread newspapers on the floor in an attempt to soak up the mess. With all this terrible smell, they gave all the Indian looking passengers a vegetarian meal and the white passengers were given meat. And I mean 'given' not served, because we were not offered the option of another choice menu. It really does not matter because no one could eat seating in stench.

"It is true that the planes are terribly kept, but what worried me the entire time was my growing fear. I was afraid that the plane would have not survived the eight hour flight from London to Delhi."

## 2. Currency

The Indian currency upon conversion is Rupee sixty four, and thirteen paisa to the United States Dollar, however this figure will easily be rounded off to sixty rupees per dollar during commerce with the Indians.

One Euro yields seventy Rupees and twenty eight paisa. On changing funds or receiving transfers one never receives the exact amount. For instance, in all the years I have stayed in India, I have never seen a paisa. Yes, it is what we would call cents. This legal tender is handy at many occasions but the name paisa is more popular than the coinage itself.

At the airport there are a few mini banking outlets where the tellers are anxious to convert large amounts of currency into rupees for arriving travelers as though they are receiving a commission.

One would think that the United States dollar or the Euro is an international currency. Not so in India. Western Currency is refused like hot stones. And don't even try sending the precious rupee out of India, if a family member needs emergency funds back home. I had this issue the first month where I needed to send money to my daughter in New

York.

After consulting three Western Union outlets, a very professional agent at a bank who also dealt with western Union Money transfers explained to me that the rupee is not allowed to be sent outside of India. There are certain government issued documents that are needed to open a bank account like a PAN Card. These documents are only issued to Indian Nationals so I could not use the bank, since the regulations indicate that I should have an account within the bank in order to use the wire transfer service.

I explained to her that I am indeed paying in Rupee but the receiver will collect funds in United States Dollars as she is in New York.

She said this is illegal. It is illegal for Western Union or MoneyGram to wire funds outside of India. We are allowed to receive money but are not allowed to send money outside as this is subtracting from the wealth of India's economy.

I could not believe this. It was one rude joke after another. In order to send money outside of India, one should hold a bank account in India, and have proof of where his funds originate from.

Only the Reserve Bank of India has the power to allow remittances to

other countries. The Reserve Bank of India has delegated this power to other banks to remit the amounts in Indian Rupees or in other currencies. If an Indian wants to transfer funds to another country he will be given some paper work to be filled out with a questionnaire, asking the purpose of his transaction. There is a procedure with every transaction, for example, if he is performing a transfer for business he needs to provide an Import Export Code. It is a number written on his export License. This license is issued by the Indian Government Authorities. And it is not a card one obtains right away. It takes six months to two years to acquire an import/export License. The procedure to transfer money differs from purpose. In order to remit school fees one needs to produce the letter of such demand.

Online banking, with a bank outside of India allows people to use the Internet to wire transfer funds. A PayPal account is very efficient. Once a debit card is added to the PayPal account, the other party should have a PayPal account also. The option 'send money to friends or family' can be selected and for fees less than three percent of the amount being sent is charged. I have found this way very effective in transferring money although it takes up to three days.

### 3. Voltage

Because there is so little square footage in Delhi per person, apartment builders and landlords tend to construct multi-level edifices for accommodation. This is feasible because the sky belongs to no one. The impracticality of this is situating the breaker box on the outside of the building. This breaker box controls all the electrical capacity within the house. The major problem with situating such an important device on the exterior is that it becomes accessible to anyone and everyone. Your neighbors, idle passerby's or someone who is bored. There were many times, the neighbors children would 'accidentally' turn off my power from outside while I am using the computer or doing laundry. Initially I thought that the city had too many power outages, then at night everyone had electricity except me. It was how I discovered the problem. On confronting them, they would simply apologize. In Delhi at the affiliate school I attended in South Extension, the School's breaker box was situated on the exterior of the building, on the wall adjacent to the steps, allowing the electricity supply to be manipulated by any and every one. Residential power supplied in India is a two wire; 220 volts, permitted variation of 6%, and the maximum load is 40 amperes. There the frequency is 50 Hz and a combination of receptacles for types C, D and M is usually always present. Many power outlets are universal and

accept many plugs without adapter. Remember just because it fits does not mean it is the working 220 volt.

Most electrical power systems are prone to slight variations in voltage due to demand or other factors. Many former 220V countries have converted or are in the process of converting to the EU standard of 230 Volts. Generally, this difference is inconsequential, as most appliances are built to tolerate current a certain percentage above or below the rated voltage. However, severe variations in current will damage electrical equipment.

Practically, the voltage in many places varies from 200V to 240V. But if a load like a 1000 watt heater or 2000 watt heater is applied, there could be some difference. Almost all Local appliances work normally. Now a days, most of the electronic gadgets have voltage regulators, built in. For large appliances, voltage stabilizers are available some will cause rapidly changing voltage (generally referred as flickering) this is harmful for all inductive loads.

In the United states, the power is nominally 120 volts with a permitted variation of 5% or 114-126 Appliances are supposed to cope with 110 to 130 although I have seen ranges 115-125 and it used to be said 115 was the delivered voltage.