

# A Breathtaking Experience.... Majestic India



Lesley J Saunders

**A**lthough there are many wonderful places throughout the world, there are a few places that are so humbling and yet so majestic that they take your breath away. Throughout my travels I have visited many awe-inspiring places but a few stand out above the rest. One of those memorable journeys is Petra in Jordan - a stunning experience which is very hard to describe. As you take in the amazing structures, an emotion overwhelms you that tingles throughout your body. I couldn't believe my luck when I came across a similar encounter in India. As you walk around the corners, you are met with the most amazing topography, lustrous temples standing proud and rock formations commanding attention. For those of you that have had the opportunity to visit this marvellous place you will know I am talking about Hampi in Northern Karnataka. The tranquility that engulfs this wonderful World Heritage Site was in stark contrast to some of the astonishing Indian cities that I have had the pleasure of visiting.

As I walked around the monuments and sites I couldn't help but smile. Although a serene mystic place, the cheerfulness of the people was still as infectious as I have found throughout my travels within India. From vendors to tourists, I couldn't help but get lost in the emotions of these individuals.

I was in awe of the precision with which the young men handled the magnificent

elephants as they bathed them in the river. The tourists watching this everyday occurrence were amazed at the exercise while the locals didn't appear to notice anything new and continued with their daily chores. It is on occasions like this that I stop and realise just how much we take for granted. When had I last observed a tradition in the city I come from, acknowledging its uniqueness? I really do not remember!

There were groups of men and women that had travelled specifically to visit Hampi. The striking colours of their attire projected a three dimensional visual against the surreal background of the stunning scenery. Here I was amidst this amazing World Heritage Site and still the vibrant colours of India that I had become so familiar with engulfed me. The jewellery worn by the women glistened in the bright sunlight adding extra richness to a location already rich in history.

I watched the children playing, totally oblivious to their surroundings, the usual joy on their faces as they became engrossed in their games. Hopefully they would grow up to appreciate this magical place and not

become complacent about it as we so often do. The young boy masquerading in his sunglasses amused me. He was so proud when he viewed the photograph I had taken that before I knew what was happening, I was surrounded by youngsters competing to get their photographs taken. Some of the professional models could learn from the poses these children displayed! The young girl adorned in a vivid blue dress complimented by vibrant orange bows placed tenderly in her hair was unaware of what was happening around her; the most important thing to her at that moment was enjoying the kernel from the coconut she was eating.

As I weaved through the lanes, they became alive with activity, vendors selling their wares, craftsmen displaying their skills, tourists spell bound by the atmosphere, teenagers giggling and children running around. I observed the 'Holy Man' zigzagging his way amongst the crowds stopping to bestow his blessing on those who had the time to spare and individuals who purposely approached him. The women carrying their heavy loads not having the time to stop and



▲ **Majestic!** How can something so large be so elegant and gentle? I never stop to be amazed at these majestic creatures. As this elephant took his bath he was comfortable in his surroundings and did not allow the many viewers to upset his bath time.



▲ **What a Blessing!** I observed the 'Holy Man' zigzagging his way amongst the crowds, stopping to bestow his blessing on those who had the time to spare and individuals who purposely approached him. What smiles he brought to peoples face!

chat, the determination in their face was one of someone with a deadline to complete.

The sun was getting hotter and it was time to rest with an ice cold drink! I sat back in the shade watching the family drying their clothes after having fun cooling off in the river. The small motor boats ferried people back and forth to the opposite sides of the water with the

passengers gingerly exiting the vessel but smiles beaming across their faces. It is these special moments that I realise just how important my camera is, what better way to capture such timeless moments but through a lens of a camera. As they say, every picture tells a story and I certainly have a story book from my short trip to such a fascinating corner of India.



▲ **Shaded!** Was this women using her basket for shade in the hot sun? No she was carrying her wares with a definite stride. I wouldn't suggest anyone get in the way of her mission.

After resting, I strolled to the hub of Hampi where shops displayed their goods, the aromas of food and coffee filled the air and the hustle and bustle of people stretched along the streets. Groups of families and friends blocked the pavements as they talked and laughed amongst themselves, again evidence of closeness amongst families. These wonderful moments often transport me back to the times when as a child we would go on a family outing to the countryside, packed lunches and outdoor games for amusement. How precious those trips were, family and friends spending quality time together trying desperately to find a balance between work and pleasure. My observations of India show that this is not an issue as family always comes first and quality time is automatically a part of a daily routine. I'm sure many European countries could learn from the Indian way of life. I know I certainly have!

I never said goodbye to Hampi I know I will return again.

You can read more about my perceptions and experiences and why I choose to capture the images that I do in my travels, in further editions of *Asian Photography*.

Happy Clicking!

— Lesley J Saunders