



Rishikesh and the Ganges River a few kilometers up river from Sadhana Mandir.

March 15, 2017

Out of India

Issue 3 from Rishikesh



Sadhana Mandir's dahlia garden.

On February 19 we moved from Lonavla to Rishikesh in northern India. We are staying at Swami Rama's Sadhana Mandir ashram on the southern outskirts of the town. It is not our first time here. We were here twice in 2015. It is a quiet place to meditate and practice our spiritual exercises. We are re-addressing questions, like: Who am I? Why am I here? What is this world? Who is the Divine? What is our relation to the Divine? It makes for lively meditation. We have also enjoyed meeting the people working here, and other visitors we met two years ago. We feel at home here.

In the beginning we had the luxury of separate rooms allowing us to practice independently and more intensely. After a couple weeks we had to move together as more people arrived. We manage it quite well. Though there are classes here, there are not many. The Sadhana Mandir is designed to

do personal reflection as opposed to doing group meditation.



At the juice bar in Kaivalyadham.

Before we left Kaivalyadham, my right ear plugged up and I had to have a doctor clean it out. To do that, I had to go to the city of Pune, 55 miles (90 km) away. The trip is the reason for reporting the ear incident. I went by local train. The 55 miles took 2.5 hours. The train was packed. The cars had facing wooden benches, each bench nominally for three people. Most of the time there were four on each with three or four more standing between the two benches. The aisles were packed as were the entrance aisles at the always-opened doors. I was lucky that it was not a really hot day. The car emptied a bit at some stations only to pack up again at the following station. I took that train four

times and survived. Those 55 miles cost me only 30 rupees (\$0.45).

That was my second experience on third class trains and it will likely be my last. The first was very short. Second class costs only a bit more and is so much more comfortable.



Sunset in Rishikesh.

Before we left Lonavla, Petra's mother appeared to be quite sick (blood in stool). But tests found nothing and she went home with a clean bill of health from the hospital. While they were doing the tests (a couple days), Petra was considering going back to Germany to be with her. In the end she didn't as all the tests were negative. But the scare reminded us that her mom is 87 and it would be good to visit her more often than we have been visiting. So last week Petra changed her return ticket from India. On April 28 we will fly together to London where Petra will get off and fly to her mother's in Germany and stay for three weeks. I will continue to Santa Fe.

There are many birds along the Ganga here. Crows, swallows, and parrots are the big populations. So many others also share the airway. Here are two. I'll have more on the picture page or on the next newsletter.



A kingfisher and a hornbill (?) along the Ganga.

We have managed the weather well so far this year. We arrived in Goa when it was cool and stayed two and a half weeks as it got warmer and warmer. When it was hot there we went to a cool Lonavla. In the three weeks we were there, the temperature inched up each day until it was uncomfortably hot again. We arrived here on February 19. It was cool. It is still cool. But the heat is coming. Before we leave at the end of April, it will be unpleasantly hot here too. So by choosing our accommodations carefully, we were able to live comfortably through the US and German winters this year.



Petra poses with a Sadhana Mandir dahlia.

Sadhana Mandir is an ashram catering to those who want to do meditation and other spiritual practice. We took a class from Dr. Ganasan when we were here in 2015 a couple times. He is one of those teachers you treasure and wear out his threshold as much as you can. We can and have learned much from him. So we have come back to spend a couple months under his wing. His assistance is challenging, loving, and tender at the same time. He is also our friend. We will return to Ganasan any time we are in India.



A Sadhana Mandir flower.

Sadhana Mandir is richly landscaped with many trees and plants. The flower garden is particularly spectacular. Hundreds of huge dahlias line sidewalks that from the central web of travel between buildings.



Petra on the levy.

The Ganges River (The Ganga) flows directly in front of the ashram. A levy runs along it to protect this part of town from flooding.

A walking path stretches along the top of the levy. We can walk three miles into the center of Rishikesh or, the other way, a mile to a dam across the river. We walk to and across the dam twice a day. It is a wonderfully pleasant way to begin and end our day. Along the way Petra feeds cookies to a couple favorite stray dogs that live along the path. Many dogs call the path home and compete daily with each other for their personal territory and food.



*Petra's dogs eager for the next bite.
(13 Mar)*

Many people from the town walk the path both for leisure and exercise. Noisy walk traffic starts around five in the morning. By nine few are walking. That's when we do our first walk. During the hot part of the day the path is empty. We walk again at five when the path is again full of locals walking.



New shoots along the Ganga.

Trees line part of the path. They are mostly leafless now. By the time we leave at the

end of April, leaves and flowers will cover every tree.



Mom with child along with another monkey cross the Ganges path.

Monkeys also share the path with the walkers. Mainly they cross it on their way to the dam superstructure where they walk across the river from the village. Their passage is basically innocuous. Not so just a couple days ago though. We were walking through a crossing group of monkeys. A mother monkey with child was close to us. We didn't notice it. But the monkeys did. One ran up behind Petra and jumped her. Two others were about to do the same. A big one (the Alpha?) with menacing teeth showing charged for me. I raised my arms and screamed loudly with *my* teeth showing at him. He stopped. The others stopped. A bridge guard with a big stick and dog came running. The monkeys departed as quickly as they had first attacked; no one was hurt. That is our first ever hostile encounter with monkeys in India. We suffered only more than an adrenalin rush.

We have pictures of the river path and other scenes at the ashram from our 2015 visit at <http://www.walkingwithawareness.com/IndiaPictures2015Rishikesh2.htm>.

In 2015, several elephants came out of the forest across the river to walk on the banks and bathe. You can see pictures of them at <http://www.walkingwithawareness.com/IndiaPictures2015Rishik1.htm>. Earlier this

month one of them came out again. We have seen no more since.



An elephant who was here in 2015 returned this year.

Indians have a way of making things happen when it seems difficult or impossible. The other day, Indian ingenuity struck again. There was a street light on the river walk that began to flash on and off like a beacon after the power was out during a storm. It didn't stop. It was outside our window making sleep difficult. We reported it to the Sadhana Mandir office. Which government office is responsible for it? I think, that may have been an unanswerable question. The next day, six men from the ashram walked along the path with a ladder and set it against the offending light pole. One man climbed to the top, reached up with a pair of cutters, and snipped the wire supplying the power. Problem solved!

The 13th was Holi, a festival of colors celebrating the activities of some Hindu god. People get carried away applying and throwing bright colored die on each other and innocent passersby. We were colored a bit ourselves, but not garishly as some were.



Morning on the Ganga.

Brother Marty asked what gas costs here in India. In Lonavla it was 74 rupees a liter. That comes 280 rupees a gallon (74*3.79). At 67 rupees to the dollar that is \$4.18 a gallon. In addition to local Indian cars, there are a lot of small Japanese and Korean cars along with larger BMWs and Mercedes.

The banner on the front page is the lower section of the mail tourist area of Rishikesh. We went there last Wednesday for our first outing from Sadhana Mandir. Along the way we visited a couple friends at two other ashrams in Rishikesh. The city was so noisy and busy after two and a half weeks here at quiet Sadhana Mandir.



Want to buy a windmill?

Not so long from now we will have more pictures of Rishikesh as well as Lonavla and Goa on our India page at <http://www.walkingwithawareness.com/IndiaPictureIndex.htm>.

So with six more weeks left in India this spring, we bid you well.

Peace and Joy,

Petra and Mike



Painted up for Holi, the spring festival of colors.