

# INDIA

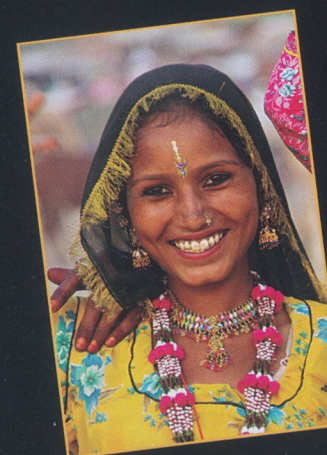
## LAND OF ENCHANTMENT

Story and Photography by Dawn Nicoli



"ONCE YOU VISIT INDIA, YOUR LIFE WILL NEVER BE THE SAME". With a faint, distant smile, those were the words I most often heard from anyone who had ever been to India. Before we left I had wondered exactly what they meant. We soon found out when we embarked on our month long trip, half way around the world. In the past, we had traveled extensively to other exotic locations, and thought we could anticipate what to expect in India. With a population of over two billion people, India might normally discourage someone like me with a dislike of crowds. After looking at photographs of India, my desire to see this amazing place won me over.

We arrived in Delhi after a grueling eighteen hour plane ride, and I knew that we definitely were not in Kansas anymore. We were met by our driver, Om Ji, who spoke little English. Somehow, we quickly learned how to piece together his sentences to comprehend what he was saying. Om Ji, a devout Hindu, and therefore a true vegetarian, had kind, deep-set eyes. For the following two weeks, while we journeyed through the northwest state of Rajasthan, he was our driver, translator, tour guide, and protector.



The next day, after a not so restful sleep on a two inch thick mattress, which we discovered is the standard in all three star hotels; we journeyed to Pushkar, the first town on our itinerary. According to local Hindu legend, Lord Brahma dropped a lotus flower from the sky to kill a demon. In doing so, the petals formed three lakes in the places where they fell in the midst of the desert. This area is called Pushkar or "flower." It is also believed that the Hindu gods converged on the banks of these same lakes, called "ghats", and that during the period of the full moon in October and November, bathing in the waters of the lakes will cleanse one's impurities.

We spent three days in Pushkar, and attended the annual camel festival. Over two hundred thousand people come to trade their camels and cattle at the festival. We walked through the heart of town to the fairgrounds, where we experienced a sensory overload of sights and sounds. People were begging, praying in the temples, sleeping in the streets, and feeding their cows on every corner. There were many other unusual sights.

