

Kolkata.....the 10th

We arrived from Purulia on Saturday evening around 10. The train ride was interesting. The doors between the cars were open and we got to hang out of the side and feel the rush of wind as we flew thru the countryside. Kara was hit on by an Indian who offered her cocaine...he was pretty buzzed on it himself and I had to let him know that I was around. He also tried to sneak photos of Nafeeza on his cell phone...very weird.

Yesterday we walked about the new market for awhile, mostly western style things and a lot of Chinese plastic crap, kinda like Walmart. Kara got offered some hash by one of the street vendors. Drugs are plentiful in the large cities like this, many westerners are frequent customers. Never wanted to spend time in a foreign jail! There were a few nice stores with fine jewelry and things taken from the Ladok area of Northern India/Nepal. Very old prayer wheels and vases adorned with coral and turquoise and Buddha's.

At noon we met up with my friend Carmel. I had met her in 2006 here at Mother Theresa's and then the following summer she came to WV for a long visit. She completed her masters in Social Work and has found a job in Melbourne, Australia beginning in January. We had lunch and caught up a little and then we arranged to meet later in the afternoon.

We did meet at the Kolkata Metro and took the ride to the Kalighat area. Carmel was taking Kara to the best place to get Henna on her hands. It was pretty cool watching the guy create these incredible designs on the front and back of her hands. You end up with this heavy black ink that dries and then flakes off leaving the design to wear off over the course of the next three weeks or so.

We ended up later at dinner in a place frequented by the hostel crowd. Many of them work at the NGO's around the city and spend considerable time in India. We topped the night off with some great jasmine tea.

Being in Kolkata is a continuous learning curve. There are literally thousands of beggars on the streets and you really can't give to anyone because there isn't enough to go around. There is a fair amount of begging that is a scam...women borrow babies and then plead for money or for you to buy milk. If you buy milk they take it back to the vendor and split the money. I'm told that the Kolkata Mafia runs these scams. There are also hundreds of thousand living on the street, stretching tarps over the sidewalks, setting up small stands to sell foods and other wares. There are a lot of wandering dogs, cows, heaps of trash everywhere, smells that gag and some that drift from the food and chi vendors that open the senses in pleasing ways. The air in Kolkata is very dirty. I imagine that in one day of breathing this you consume more than a pack of cigarettes plus all the other chemicals spewn by the industries, vehicles, open fires and the like.

I got up this morning at 6am to get the "Mother House", this where you can sign up to volunteer at the Kalighat homeless shelter. Kara and I decided to give our afternoon in service rather than being the tourist. I will let you know what that is like.

We leave tomorrow for Nepal. I am excited to see my friends there again and new adventures. Till then.....

Peace

chuck