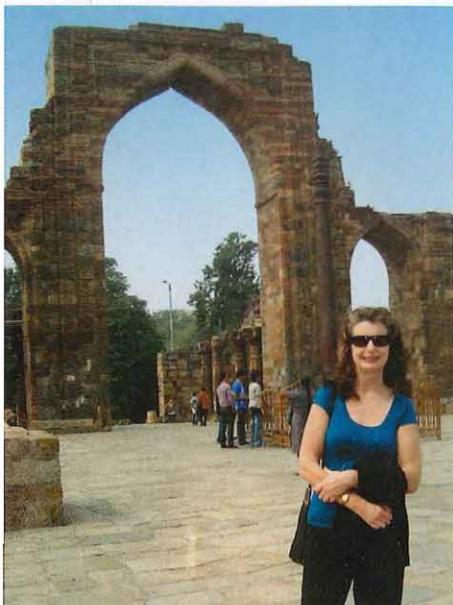


Capturing the Best of Stolen Moments



Into India: I'm shown here at the Qutb Minar Complex, considered the most significant attraction in Delhi, India. It's a must for those interested in ancient history and for people watchers; visitors come here from all over India.

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just read an article from the Associated Press about those who take pride in having visited all 50 American states. The only thing is, there seems to be a bit of controversy over what comprises "visiting." Stepping your foot over the border and touching pavement doesn't count to the diehards. You have to do something significant, they say, like have a meal there or make some sort of transaction. Layovers in airports don't count either. Some say you have to spend the night to make it legitimate.

It got me thinking about what makes a visit anywhere significant. For me, flying into a city for a business meeting and flying right back out without enjoying the destination at all is one of the emptiest feelings I've had. It's a wasted opportunity to not sample a bit of the lifestyle or learn a thing or two about its culture.

I've just returned from Delhi, India, where I was fortunate to attend The Preferred Hotel Group's annual meeting. I was in for an amazing opportunity; the conference was to be held at The Leela Palace, which I'd only heard amazing things about. But before I left, I started feeling blue that I was flying all the way to India and hadn't left enough time to see the Taj Mahal, which takes a full day if you're traveling from Delhi. My frustration ended quickly after I reached out to Greaves Tours, who arranged a fine trip for us. A company executive put us on the express train out of Delhi to Agra at 6 a.m. His colleague met us trainside at Agra a few hours later and drove us to meet our personal guide, who delivered us to the Taj Mahal and explained all of its history to us. The value of this experience? Priceless.

We were even back in time at the Leela for cocktails with our Preferred hosts.

Just a week prior, we took a trip to Savannah, GA. (See page pages 22-25). We flew in and out of Jacksonville, FL, just two hours from Savannah and on the way back down, I realized I wanted to stop off and have lunch in front of the ocean. I needed a fix before I flew back to New York. I didn't have time for a bad experience. All the way down I-95, I racked my brains as to where we could stop for a meal and then I remembered seeing a sign for The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island on the front end of our trip as we drove up to Georgia. I set the GPS on the rental car and before we knew it, we were dining at this stunning resort, ocean in full view, enjoying seafood pasta with a glass of Sauvignon Blanc. Then we got in the car and drove to the airport. It was an elegant complement to our Savannah adventure.

My conclusion to all of this? When you or your clients have just a brief amount of time to do something memorable, be sure it's with a quality supplier. You don't have time to mess with imperfection or incompetence. If you're going to build a portfolio of magic moments for your customers' vacations and the itinerary is jam packed because they want to fit a lot into it, protect yourself by working with a vendor who understands the significance of what a one-hour lunch or a side trip to one of the seven wonders of the world can mean. If you go with the wrong company and something goes awry because someone's not trying to make it really special, that trip to that destination, like that state you only stepped foot in and didn't really experience, doesn't really count after all.

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