

# Stirling Tour to India - 2008

## Fri 14 /03

I meet a rather excited bunch of parents and boys in the Wimpy at the East London airport. For many this is their first time on a plane let alone an overseas trip. After goodbyes to parents and girlfriends we board our 1 Time flight to Joburg. It's a pleasant flight but rather bumpy landing at overcast OR Tambo. Travelling on the bus to the airport terminal a SA businessman casually inquires as to our destination. On hearing its India he shares with us his dislike for the country. This immediately puts us on the back foot.

Our Emirates flight to Dubai on the 777/300 Boeing, a huge plane, takes off at 14H15. No matter how often I fly it always amazes me how something that heavy gets into the air. It's my first time on Emirates and I am pleasantly surprised. The staff is attentive yet not overbearing and the food is excellent. Flying time is around 7 hours and 41 minutes. It's a smooth flight apart from a half hour of bumping and shaking over Kenya due to stormy conditions.

## Sat 15/03

We touch down in Dubai at 12H00 their time and are amazed to find the transit terminal looking like Sandton Square on Christmas eve. People everywhere, shopping like they might not see a mall again. At 04H00 it's off for Mumbai on our 2 and a half hour flight over the Arabian Sea. We arrive in smoggy Mumbai at 08H15. All goes well until we discover Xoliswa's bag has not arrived. We complete necessary documentation and the airport promise to send this onto our accommodation.

As we move through immigration and the hot smokey air of Mumbai hits us my thoughts go back to the negative words of the fellow I met on the bus in Joburg. **What are we letting ourselves in for?** The coach is waiting, not quite the Hilton Ross experience my inbound groups get in Cape Town but it will do. It's air-conditioned and roadworthy. Baggage is a problem though and we soon run out of boot space and are forced to load the excess bags onto the roof.

Driving through the city one soon becomes aware that it's a city like no other. People for Africa or should I say India, trading everywhere. Mumbai is the economic capital of India and space is limited as the city is situated on 7 islands. Land is more expensive than any place in the world.

We arrive at our accommodation after winding through narrow streets and are pleasantly surprised at the neat clean marble clad interior and air-conditioned en suite rooms. After a short walk to the local mall a few blocks away its time for dinner at our accommodation and our first experience of authentic Indian Curry. Back in the room I flick through the 100 odd satellite channels and discover that apart from 10 or 20 Bollywood movies I am able to catch both the Cheetahs and the Bulls getting hammered overseas. Should have stuck with the Bollywood movies.

## Sun 16 March

Today we are off on a city tour of Mumbai. Our pleasant guide has strict instruction not to bore us with too many monuments and the like. We start with a visit to the Dhobighat. This is a laundry area where laundry men clean the majority of linen used by hotels in the city. This profession is passed down from generation to generation and all cleaning is done manually. Interestingly enough all the cleaners are men. From here it's off to Ghandi's house where we are reminded of the strong connection between our country and India by virtue of the fact that SA was the place where Ghandi first became involved with Human rights issues. From here we drive down Marine Drive in the direction of The Bradbourne International Cricket stadium where our good friend Gaurav has managed to arrange a tour of the international stadium with the president of the cricket club of India personally guiding us. What an experience this turns out to be. We are struck by the old colonial style architecture and décor and the walls covered in world cricket history. The cherry on top is when we are invited to lunch in the restaurant with the members by the president himself.

From here it's off to Tendulkars, the restaurant owned by the little maestro for a few pics and some souvenir shopping in the adjacent shop. En route to Tendulkars we pass a huge local park in the centre of town that must have fifty or more games all going at the same time. Many of the kids in matching coloured clothing complete with their names on shirts. It reminds me a little of when we were kids growing up in PE how we used to set up games all around the boundary during the lunch and tea break at St Georges Park. The difference here however is that in the middle we vaguely make out a full scale club match being played in the centre of all this chaos, complete with players kitted out in whites on a proper wicket. To picture this the best way is to imagine two local club sides opposing one another on a Sat afternoon on a local club oval while within the boundary 50+ individual mini games are all taking place at the same time.

A short walk away from Tendulkars, we visit the Gateway to India before boarding a boat and taking to the Arabian Sea for a sail around the bay. On the way back to the hotel we stop off at the Atrium shopping centre, a four level upmarket centre not far from Marine drive and around the corner from Tendulkars first home now owned by his in-laws.

## Mon 17/03

It's match day and the boys are keen as mustard to play some cricket. After all this is why they are here. We are up with the crows - (There are crows everywhere in Mumbai and they make a huge racket every morning) as we leave the hotel early in an attempt to get the cricket underway before the midday heat sets in. First match is against Islam Gym. The wicket looks really good, typical Indian wicket that we have come to expect from watching the ODI's on TV. The ground is beautifully situated alongside Marine drive opposite the sea, while the club house is old colonial with a long history. The outfield however is extremely bumpy and rough with little grass and no clear boundary rope. The Stirling boys win the toss and the skipper Garth Hirst decides to bat first. The boys are off to a solid start with a 90 run opening partnership. They eventually finish on 259 for 6 in 40 overs with Brad Holtshausen top scoring with 85 and Garth Hirst 53. Jade Richards's weighs in with a well played 44. The Islam Gym boys threaten with some big hits but are eventually bowled out for 171 thanks to the clear man of the match Bradley Holtshausen. Brad wins a new BDM bat as the man of the match.

Lunch is in the Islam Gym clubhouse where we are treated to a wonderful curry meal. This is just the beginning of the excellent hospitality we as a group are about to experience on this trip. After a Stirling win it's back to the hotel for a shower and change of clothes before departing for the Phoenix shopping centre. The boys are in good spirits after their win and shop up a storm and enjoy pizza at the Dominoes Franchise while yours truly and the masters in charge enjoy a quite beer at the Sports Bar situated next door to the Tenpin bowling alley.

On returning to the hotel for dinner the boys discover a basketball court downstairs where two groups of Indian boys are playing some serious basketball. It's not long and they have banged on my door to join them in taking on the locals. The Indian boys are extremely experienced and skilled and initially give us the run around. Eventually we get the hang of things and compete for possession but can't seem to shoot baskets. In the second last match our boys come through and finally win a game. The players that shine are Sino, Xolisa, Garth, Phumlani and Curtis. All natural athletes.

## **Tues 18/03 – Day 5**

It's an early start; the wake up call at 5 AM even beats the crows. We check out of our accommodation with the usual procedure of chasing boys for keys and settling bills. Our start to the airport is earlier enough to avoid the majority of the Mumbai traffic. As we drive past the fresh flower market and the veg market I scramble for my camera and once more am reminded not to ever let it be too far from me on this trip. As we arrive at the Mumbai airport the sun begins to rise as an orange ball in the distance. Again my pre conceived ideas of India are shattered as the Kingfisher airline baggage porters arrive all dressed in red and begin loading our luggage onto their trolleys. As this was the first domestic flight I was making in India I had my own ideas on what to expect. I remember Craig Mathews telling us that he made 20 odd internal flights on one of the early Proteas tours to India and some were a little hair raising. Well Kingfisher has changed that perception. From the pretty well dressed girls in red at the check in counter to the new Airbus aeroplane, top service with food to match I can honestly say I have yet to experience a flight of this quality anywhere in South Africa.

We arrive in Delhi mid morning with the mercury hovering around the mid 30's. Our coach is ready and waiting, however we have a slight problem in that the cricket bags don't fit into the boot and the Indians just don't use trailers (definite gap in the market for a trailer hire company). No problem however as we make like locals and stuff these into the aisle of the coach and are soon on our merry way. The traffic is crazy and the going slow but we eventually arrive at our very comfortable accommodation. Delhi is a lot different to Mumbai, unlike Mumbai hedged in by the ocean, space is not a problem in Delhi as the land is flat and plentiful, so there are a lot less high rises and as a result the street and city layout is far less claustrophobic. Our accommodation is very neat and the boys are delighted to discover it has a gym and pool.

Once settled in it's off to the Delhi Public school for a net practice. On arrival we are pleased to discover a lush green outfield with good batting wicket. Apart from the fact that the boundaries square of the wicket are a bit short, the conditioning compares with the best school fields back home. After a good workout and a net, with plenty of water in between, it's back on the coach to our new home for the next week and a bit. The boys take a shower and walk two blocks to visit the shops and enjoy some retail therapy in Delhi before returning to the hotel for dinner. You guessed it another Currie. While the boys were out shopping, I wander down the dining room to buy some bottled water and immediately have 4 staff members drop the evening's preparation for dinner and fire a hundred questions at me about our cricket tour. South Africa arrives in 2 weeks and the excitement is palpable. Again we are made to feel like celebrities and I now begin to understand a little of what the national side must feel like when touring, without the pressure of course. Cricket in India is what soccer is to Brazilians.

## **Wed 19/03**

Another early start and after a whirlwind breakfast of cereal, and fried eggs on toast its off on the coach by 08H00 in the direction of the Mohan Meekin brewery field to play DPS Vasundara. As we fight our way through the traffic I promise myself never to complain about the 5PM jam down Old Transkei road again.

On arrival we are blown away by the size of the lush green oval. It's as good as any top club ground in South Africa. What strikes me however is the quality of the fine grass that covers the outfield at most grounds here. They don't seem to be plagued by the thick Kukuya grass that covers so many of our ovals back home and often stops good shots reaching the boundary. After a welcoming speech from the school principle the game is underway with the young DPS side batting first and scoring 117 for 8 in their allotted 35 overs. Best bowling comes from Sino with 3 for 18. The Stirling boys bat well initially with Jade Richards scoring 50 and Jefferson Gamiet 20 before collapsing towards the end but finally manage to hang on and pass the opposition score with 7 sticks down. We are treated as royalty by the opposition to a meal alongside the field, all traditional Indian of course. The after match presentation takes on the feel of a one day International as the boys line up and are treated as dignitaries each receiving a T shirt. Man of the match goes to Jade Richards and he takes home a new BDM bat for his efforts. Back at the hotel we reflect on another wonderful day. These folk are so hospitable and bend over backwards for us. The weather is warm but not unbearable.

The entire group seems to be enjoying the experience, both the cricket and India. No famous Delhi Belly yet apart from the odd sniffle all are well. Personally looking at them from the outside looking in they are starting to gel as a unit. Everyone has played in the first 2 matches and all have contributed positively to the win. Please parents don't give them curry for dinner on the first night back. Andrew and William are doing a superb job taking care of all the needs such as washing, meals, water etc and ensuring the boys are free to concentrate on the cricket and enjoy the experience. William has even taken care of my passport and ticket.

## **Thursday 20 March**

After another early start we wind through the morning traffic arriving at Siri Fort Sports complex. WOW what a complex. Siri Fort is earmarked as the main sports venue for the 2010 common wealth games and is blessed with tennis courts, squash, badminton, swim pool, gym, shooting, cricket, football and golf facilities all set in a lush park like environment. We arrive at the cricket field to find an oval of test match standard. The field is as good as any I have come across in South Africa. I certainly don't think there is a school back home lucky enough to have such a wonderful cricket facility. A unique feature is the fact that there is a tree within the boundary well protected by a wall. The boys are over the moon and can't wait to get going.

Opposition for the day is the Madan Lal academy. Madan Lal is the ex test player who runs his academy from Siri Fort. One picks up the excitement from both sides as they line up to oppose each other with a sense of playing for national pride. The Indian skipper wins the toss and decides to bat on another typical grassless Indian wicket. There is a bit of bounce early on and Roy Coates soon wacks one of the opposition batters on the side of the head. Unfortunately the boy was silly enough to bat without a helmet and has to leave the field for treatment. Stirling bowl really well and Madan Lal academy never really score freely. The pick of the bowlers has to be Phumlani Mfazwe with 1 for 29. Phumi also makes a wonderful diving save on the boundary to stop a certain 4 which really impresses the locals who already hold South African fielders in high esteem. ML are eventually bowled out for 168. The Stirling boys bowled exceptionally well but poor catching lets them down with 3 dropped catches and one player, no names mentioned, dropping 3. Stirling start their innings like a house on fire with an opening stand of 58 between Brad Holthausen who weighs in with 33 and Xoliswa Kwacha 31. This is the start they were looking for. But alas the batting soon starts falling apart as the rest of the top order fails. Only some brief resistance from Jade Essendrup 25 offers any hope but the rest crumble around him as the boys fail to come to grips with the spin attack of the Indian boys on a pitch that's started to show visible wear finishing on 136 all out.

It's been another wonderfully warm day in Delhi. The venue has been magnificent and hospitality superb and the excitement amongst the locals who chat with us and stop to watch has been infectious. I spent an hour or two in the early part of the morning catching up my report on the lap top in the air conditioned coffee shop alongside the ground. Unfortunately a little Delhi belly set in and I found my self running for the nearest loo.

What an experience. Although this is a 5 star sporting venue with the best facilities they still have the old style Indian toilets which are set in the floor. A porcelain hole in the floor and nothing to sit on is possibly the best description. When you are desperate what can you do? As the saying goes, when in India..... Only sorry I could not take a pic and show the folks back home.

We complete the day with some shopping in the area not far from the hotel. The boys return full of glee having managed to squeeze 9 bodies into a tuk tuk. I tell them I am sure they have broken the Tuk tuk world record. Another curry dinner for the group. I pass on this still feeling a bit sensitive and depart for an early night.

## **Friday 21 March**

We meet for breakfast at 07H30. After collecting clean laundry from house keeping we are on the coach and on our way by 08H20. The cost of laundry is far cheaper than in hotels back home. Everything is done manually here and I guess labour is cheap and plentiful.

Our drive to the ground this morning is a short trip as the Delhi Public School Murathara Rd is very close to our accommodation. This is the same ground the boys held their first practice on arriving in Delhi Tuesday afternoon. It's a wonderful cricket venue but not quite in the same class as Siri Fort, our match venue the day before. Having said this as Andrew Dewar, the master in charge rightly observes its possibly far better conditioned than most South African school ovals.

Today is a big game for the Stirling boys. Delhi Public School is one of the top independent schools in Delhi. The huge modern academic block with canteen and boarding house impressively border the lush playing fields. The local cricket coach, employed by the Department of sport in India has warned the Stirling boys that this will be one of their toughest matches. The DPS side is very young as most of their players have recently completed the final exams in March and left school. The key player is a boy called Charanjeet who represents the Delhi under-17 state team.

Garth Hirst wins the toss and decides to bat on another grassless sun baked wicket. Stirling are soon in trouble with Jefferson Gamiet bowled before a run has been added. Xoliswa looks promising although living dangerously always looking to hit the ball in the air and chase after the wide deliveries. As the biblical verse goes, "you live by the sword you die by the sword" and he is soon out to an easy catch at point. Jade Richards bats well and is the backbone of the innings scoring 58 before being caught. Jade is such a good striker of the ball and one feels he was the key to a good total and getting out playing a lazy shot when he looked set for a 100 did his team no favours. The rest of the innings sees a steady procession of wickets. Only Daniel Norton scores a well played 25 before throwing away his wicket with a silly shot when all that was required of him was to keep going and hold up his end allowing Roy Coates to take the risks. Stirling eventually finishes on 167 for 9. The local coach shares that par here is at least 220 – 250.

The DPS boys look completely in control while batting as both Roy Coates and Curtis produce full toss after full toss. It's a much undisciplined spell of bowling, possibly trying too hard to produce wicket taking balls. DPS appear to be cruising when all of a sudden Curtis produces a special ball and has Yadav caught behind. The new batsman is clean bowled the very next ball by an express Yorker from Curtis placing him on a hatrick. Again loose bowling lets DPS off the hook and they bat really well punishing the loose deliveries and working the ball all around the wicket, running well between the wickets to keep the scoreboard ticking over. DPS pass Stirlings score 3 balls into the 26th over finishing the match with a boundary and only 3 wickets down.

Man of the match goes to Negi the DPS captain who took 3 for 17 in 8 overs. The main difference between the two side's one feels is not so much ability but rather the fact that the Indian boys seem to understand better the application required to win these matches. While Stirling were always looking to penetrate the field with expansive shots the DPS boys showed far more patience in working the ball with soft hands and accumulating singles while putting away the bad deliveries.

Once again it's been another wonderfully warm day in Delhi, a slight breeze but nothing to write home about. The sight screen in fact is white cotton sheets tied to a metal frame. Something we could never do at the coast back home as they would be torn to shreds by the wind. Again the hospitality and lunch has been top drawer. Lunch consists of some sort of local pastry with veg and potato filling, chips, sandwiches, cake, banana and juice. From here it's back to the hotel before visiting another mall. The boys disappear to buy gifts and ice creams at the local McDonalds while I decide to devour a Pizza at a very good Italian restaurant in the mall. No curry for me tonight.

### **Saturday 22 March**

Today is the first day we truly relax and do nothing. It makes for a welcome change. It's Holi day, otherwise known as "the festival of colours". We have been advised by our guide to lie low in the morning as people take to the streets drinking and throwing coloured powders and paint at one another and kids throw water balloons from buildings. Most of the group sleep late and only surface for breakfast at 09H00. We spend the rest of the morning relaxing and reading.

At 14H00 we meet the coach and our guide for the day at reception to start our city tour. By this time the streets are deserted and it's a strange feeling driving in Delhi without traffic. We start our tour looking for a McDonalds as the boys are starving. No luck here as they are still closed. Eventually we find a local franchise called Nirula's that sells really good mutton burgers and pizzas.

Before starting our tour, we stop off at a tourist market and buy some gifts for the folk back home. I need to get something for the ladies in my office and my wife of course. This is never an easy task.

With full tummy's we are soon on our way to a tomb built by one of the wives of the early Mogul Emperors for her husband. We are struck by the incredible architecture and the size of the place. It's a very popular tourist spot and the boys soon spot some good looking young blonde ladies who seem to be quite excited to see the boys. No time to linger though and we are soon off to a tower built by Muslims from Afghanistan to commemorate their victory over the Hindus in the war from 1198 – 1210. A wonderful piece of architecture that extends up into the sky. We are not allowed in however as entry to the tower has been closed to the public since 1981 when a power failure occurred while the tower was full of visiting people and a stampede broke out in the darkness and 27 school children were killed.

From the tower, it's back to the hotel for dinner. We have specifically requested a non curry dish tonight as the boys feel they have had far too much of the hot and spicy.

## Sunday 23 March

Its match day, again we are up early for breakfast and on the coach by 08H00. Although the school we are playing against is in Delhi and only a 45 min drive from our accommodation, we enter another state to get to the Dav Public School. The school have sent their bus to fetch us. It's a huge yellow and black school bus and a lot bigger than most other modes of transport which allows us to make good time as size counts in the Delhi traffic. Two of the opposition players have come along for the ride, one is the head boy. These boys are extremely friendly and helpful and provide us with wonderful insight and info on the Indian culture and city of Delhi. The head boy wants to study medicine or play professional cricket, he tells me. After watching him bowl I think to myself its best he stick with medicine.

On arrival at the school we are all blown away by the reception we receive. The girls are all in traditional dress and lined up at the front door to receive us with garlands and the red spot they apply to the forehead. From here we are escorted into a fancy staff room with huge padded wing back chairs. Very much like a room the cabinet of a small country would meet in to make governing decisions. Pretty soon the head of games appears along with the Head. After the welcoming speeches the boys are presented with medals and a commemorative trophy. As is the tradition in India, William, Andrew and I are presented with bouquets of flowers.

From the school we are transported a short way to the Yamuna sports grounds. They are doing extensive work to these facilities in order to get things up to speed for the 2010 commonwealth games. The ground we soon notice is not nearly as good as those we have played on over the last few days. The pitch however looks like an excellent batting wicket. Dav win the toss and decide to bat first and are soon in trouble. There is a steady procession of wickets with Dav eventually being bowled out for 94. Best bowling for Stirling comes from Daniel Norton taking 2 for 5 in 8 overs followed by Craig Burton who manages 3 for 30 in his 8. Lunch is a pleasant affair, with chicken burgers from McDonalds, chips, fruit, juice and a slice of cake supplied by the school.

Stirling pass the Dav total with ease. Brad Holtzhausen scoring 37 not out along with Jade Richard who also finishes unbeaten on 12. Xolisa Kwatsha bats well for his 30 and is the only wicket to fall.

Stirling win by 9 runs and man of the match goes to Daniel Norton who gets to take home a brand new BDM bat. On the way back to the city centre, my friend Mr Singh takes me past a factory brands shop that sells all the excess slow moving retail stock from the branded stores in town. This gives me the opportunity to by a few gifts and I make a mental note to try return with the boys.

Back at our accommodation I walk past the internet room and spot our boys acquainting themselves with some American girls. These girls are all from the same school in the States and are over in India as Christian missionaries. I couldn't resist the opportunity of informing the girls that our boys may be on a mission of a different kind. It's all very friendly however and the girls laugh and the boys tell me to go and phone home. Much to the amazement of the Americans the boys then load 9 into a tuk tuk (some kind of world record I'm sure) and make there way to Connaught circle with the girl's cameras clicking furiously in order to show this to the folk back home.

## Monday 24 March

It's a free day. The boys ask the coach driver to take them over to the discount Brands shopping centre I visited the day before. Only problem is I have no idea how to get there. To make matters worse, although the store is in Delhi it falls into a different state and we are required to pay state taxes to enter. After a morning of weaving in and out the Delhi traffic and many phone calls we finally make it to our destination. It appears the trip is worthwhile and the group spends a small fortune in Rupees buying gifts, sports shoes and gifts for back home. On the return trip we stop off near Connaught square and order the Burger combo from McDonalds before

returning to our accommodation. William, Andrew and I decide to explore the nearby craft emporium while the boys walk back.

That evening, the two masters and I decide to board a Tuk Tuk and find a decent restaurant. Picture this, the three of us squashed into the back of a Tuk Tuk zipping through the streets of Delhi amazed at how close we seem to get to other vehicles without actually hitting anything. After visiting a couple of restaurants the driver has recommended, we settle on the safe bet of TGIF as I had been there the night before and could vouch for the Pizzas and besides they play good music.

## **Tues 25 March**

Today we are off to the University Jamia oval to play Sadar Patel school. It's a huge oval, well grassed with the standard grassless wicket we have come to expect and a quick outfield.

Garth loses the toss for the 6<sup>th</sup> straight time on the tour (I'm sure he just doesn't know which side of the rupee coin is heads or which is tails and is being conned every time). Sadar decide to bat first and score 203 for 8 in their 40 overs. Daniel Norton proves to be the best bowler with figures of 4 for 31 off 8 overs.

The boys don't do themselves any favours chasing this total and are soon rolled out for 92. One felt they might have had a chance if they could have put a partnership together but apart from Bruce Durant who bats well for his 27 and Garth Hirst who scores a patient 14 the rest manage to add very little. At the conclusion the boys test each other with some high catches before the principal arrives to present the awards and thank us for playing against her boys.

For dinner we eat in and I notice even the KFC gang are joining us as they have exhausted their pocket money.

## **Wed 25 March**

Today we depart for Agra and Jaipur. We packed the night before and arranged an early breakfast with the kitchen. The plan is to depart at 06H30 and avoid the earl morning Delhi traffic. All goes well except the coach only arrives at 06H50. Driving through Delhi toward the outskirts of the city we pass through the industrial area before reaching the rural sector. Its not quite the wide open spaces of the Karoo though and between the farm lands and rural settlements we notice many well developed modern housing estates or townhouse developments as we would call them, before stopping at a roadside stop that looks really well set up for tourists. The toilets are wonderfully clean which is always our main concern and after picking up a cool drink or two it's off towards Agra. On arriving in Agra we are amazed at the traffic jam at a railway junction just before the entrance to the Taj. There is this mass of cars and bikes all trying to vie for position, edging forward jockeying for position to cross the railway line like liquid flowing into a huge funnel but not quite with the same fluidity. The coach seems to make quicker progress than the Toyota Venture I am in and I think this has something to do with size. The simple rule is that if you are in a bigger vehicle the smaller cars and bikes seem to give way or run the risk of being bulldozed.

It's really warm in Agra and we meet our guide at the main entrance before commencing the long walk to the pay point braving the street wise locals along the way selling all kinds of Taj related knickknacks. No question, it's an impressive building all made from white marble set in huge gardens and the glare caused by the sun on the marble makes sunglasses a must. From here it's off to a nearby Pizza hut for lunch before making our way to Jaipur. This proves to be a long journey. The distance is only 275 km's but progress is slow due to the roadworks, the restrictive speed limit and other road users. Its wheat farming area and the locals pile wheat high onto the back of slow moving trailers pulled by tractors and pull canvas sheets over the load to keep it in place.

Eventually we arrive at our hotel in Jaipur just after 22H00. The old fellow who owns the place and goes by the title of wing commander is on hand to welcome us and proves to be very accommodating. Fortunately dinner is ready and proves to be very tasty. The boys are exhausted and off to bed straight after dinner in anticipation of a full program the following day.

## Thursday 26 March

After breakfast we make our way through the beautiful city of Jaipur (known as the Pink city due to the pink colour of all the buildings in the old quarter) towards a palace on the hillside called Amber Fort where we are surprised to find hundreds of tourists at 08H30 already queuing for the elephant rides up the hill to the palace. And we thought the early morning queue for Table Mountain was a problem.

After queuing for over an hour and chatting to tourists from all over the world, we finally get to board the elephants and make our way up the hill. The elephant jockeys are thrilled to hear the boys are cricketers from South Africa and treat us to a special trip up the hill with some racing ahead overtaking many a bemused tourist. They are not so pleased when the boys fail to tip them of course. I explain to the guide that they are school boys and not wealthy tourists. Once on top we walk down and board the coach before making our way to the DPS School Jaipur. Unlike some of the schools in Delhi who were on holiday when we played them, for DPS Jaipur it's a normal school day. Again the welcome is wonderful. Pretty Indian girl's line the main entrance to the impressive school building and garland the boys and apply the red dot on the forehead. The field is small and the pitch not the best we have seen on tour. Our hosts however have gone to great lengths to create a carnival atmosphere with covered canvass areas and chairs for the boys and girls from the school to watch the match during their break, a public address system operated by a very enthusiastic pupil to announce scores at the conclusion of every over and a seating area for VIP guests.

The match gets off to a cracking start with Garth once more losing the toss and the locals deciding to bat first. Its fireworks from ball one as the two openers make merry launching deliveries from Roy and Phumlani over the short boundary with ease. We go to lunch in the school cafeteria with DPS Jaipur having scored 261 for 4 in 20 overs. Mohamed Ahmd causes most of the damage bashing 131 in around 15 overs (watch out for this name he has a future in cricket) and Bhupesh 52.

Again we are confident our boys can give a good account of themselves (come on national pride is at stake the Proteas have just started the first test and are batting well on day two on their way to a formidable total). The key is the opening partnership. The opening bowler for the locals is a slim lad and not particularly tall but he comes charging in off a long run up and his first ball flies past the bat. Young Brad who has a tremendous eye I might add, is easily beaten for pace. Standing on the square leg boundary I can tell that this boy is possibly one of the quickest school boy bowlers I have seen. Fortunately Brad survives the first over with lots of plays and misses. At the other end the bowling is far less venomous and Xolisa decides to cash in on the short boundaries with a six and one or two more boundaries. This pattern continues for the next couple of overs and one senses that if Brad can keep his head and see off "Brett Lee" and allow Xoliswa to make hay at the other end we may just witness a spectacular run chase. Unfortunately this is not to be as the express Jagsimiran bowls Brad who has allowed pride to take over in an attempt to launch the ball over cow. What impresses me about this young quick is not only his pace but his length. On a wicket where the ball is never going to fly around the batters ears it's impossible to extract any real bounce and so he relies on a superb length and his sheer pace. Xolisa is all timing at the other end and bats really well for his 34 before getting out and the rest offer little resistance being bowled out for 98.

The cricket loving head, Mr Cain, handles the after match presentation. An ex cricketer himself he mentions that if it weren't for our game today he would be glued to his TV watching the test. He also tells of how as a young person he loved listening to Charles Fortunes cricket commentaries. The boys enjoy the cake and cold drinks on

offer in the cafeteria before making their way to the coach and departing for a guide's house near the main highway. Before we board the bus we are held up by Phumlani who is attracted to a group of local boarding house girls who have come to watch and soon is drawn like a bee to honey. I spoil the party by attempting to capture this on camera and the shy girls soon disperse. The Indian girls are very reserved I might add.

It's a huge lovely home on three levels with white marble floors and in true Indian style houses the entire extended family. We are welcomed in and treated like royalty and our hosts father presents all the boys with gifts before treating all of us to a tasty traditional dinner. Before long it's back on the coach and off in the direction of Delhi. After a long drive through the evening we finally arrive at the International airport just before 02H00. There is a toll road pay point close to Delhi and the traffic here is chaotic. At one stage we feared we might miss the flight but in the end we managed to make check in with a few minutes to spare. The Airport is chaotic and the service from the locals at the Emirates desk is no where near that experienced on the Emirates flight over. The security at boarding is also very frustrating and after much haggling over extra baggage weight etc. we manage to take our seats on the flight for Dubai.

## **Friday 27 March**

We arrive in Dubai at sunrise. And after a short time in the transit terminal and some over priced cups of coffee, we are soon on our way back home. Flying out of Dubai during the day one is amazed at the desert terrain that surrounds the city. From the air one can make out lush green sports complexes surrounded by desert sand. We arrive back home in good old EL at 08h00 to smiling parents and even happier girlfriends having thoroughly enjoyed Incredible India.

## **Summary**

The weather is wonderful, people are warm and non violent, incredibly hospitable and welcoming and off course crazy about cricket and to top this have a special warmth for cricketers from South Africa. We were made to feel like celebrities where ever we went. Contrary to popular stories doing the rounds about poor fields and uneven pitches, in most cases we experienced quite the opposite. The standard of cricket is exceptional, of course we did play weaker teams as well and this proves it's possible to arrange opposition based on the strength of the touring side.

The traditional food is exceptionally spicy no doubt and not necessarily hot and they seem to serve it wherever we went. It can be too much after a few days but fortunately India has a good number of western franchise restaurants from KFC to Pizza Hut which provide some respite. The dreaded Delhi Belly manifests itself more by way of a sudden urge to use the loo as opposed to full scale diarrhoea. So while many of us had days where we needed to be within range of a loo, no one ended up bedridden. This results more from the fact that we are not used to the spicy food rather than any other more sinister reasons.

Our accommodation was more than adequate, there are plenty of Western type shopping malls with Ten pin etc to keep kids happy. They loved using the Tuk Tuks which are fairly cheap and plentiful. All in all, a fantastic experience.