

Heather's update - July 20th 2009

Greetings from Varanasi! Yes, I am back in Varanasi. Thank you all who were praying for my visa run. I obtained another 6 month visa in Bangkok.

I had a lovely time in Bangkok, but also experienced a bit of culture shock. I was not expecting this. I did not realise how different Bangkok is to India. Right from the time I landed I noticed the differences. When I went to get a taxi outside the airport I was NOT met with the usual chaos of a swarm of people trying to get me to use their taxi. The Thai drivers were lined up in a nice orderly queue, and the one at the front took me to his taxi. We drove on good roads with cars keeping to their lanes (not a 3 lane road with 5 or more lanes of traffic + animals wandering at will) and it took me a while to work out another big difference. We were in evening rush hour traffic, but it was QUIET. No horns. In India, all modes of transport compete to see who has the loudest horn.

The first thing I did when I got to my guesthouse was go out and have a beef burger at McDonalds. Yes I know, I go all the way to Thailand and eat in McDonalds, but in India you can't get beef burgers. Bangkok is a very clean city. It has loads of very large shopping centres and I found myself overwhelmed by it all. I remember years ago a friend on the Mercy Ship telling me that when the ship docks in a Western country you can always hear the ship crew in the shops exclaiming loudly 'Oh there's....., and they've got....etc.' I found myself doing that. The shops were like shops back home. I could get the little things from home that I can't get hold of easily in India.



Lumphini Park in the city centre



Bangkok



Wat Arun (temple of Dawn)

The only touristy thing I did was travel up the river to visit the Grand Palace and Wat Pho. Thailand is a Buddhist country, but you can also see a lot of Hindu influence. The Grand Palace grounds have a temple housing the 'Emerald Buddha' and Wat Pho is a temple for the 'Reclining Buddha' (a colossal statue). Many people would come to worship these statues.



The Grand Palace has many elaborate structures.



Statues guarding the gates/entrances



The Reclining Buddha (head, head..... feet)

I got back to Varanasi on the 10th. It is nice to be back. It feels like I was never away as I have just slotted back into the routine. I was able to take a visiting American team into the Leprosy colony last week. They sang songs, shared testimonies and scripture. The people there are really open. We had the opportunity to pray with them. Please could you also pray for them, that God will bring not only physical healing but spiritual healing.



The Hindi school that my colleagues run has restarted. The children's ministry continues with teams going to two villages and the boy's jail. We just managed to finish the program on Tuesday when the rain started. When it rains in India it REALLY rains. Thank God that the monsoon started a few weeks ago. It was late, and lots of people, especially farmers, were getting quite concerned.

My Hindi classes will restart in a few weeks when my language helper, Amit, returns from the course he was doing. Also, my medical co-worker, Aran, returns then too. Last week I spent a morning doing basic health checks on the widows. It gave me an opportunity to pray with them. We currently have 8 widows resident in the home and quite a few others as staff or employed by Hope Arts (the bakery and handicraft micro-enterprise aiming to provide widows with employment). Let me share one of our resident's stories. I don't know how long ago it was that she came to stay at the Ashram, but here is her story:

Mahasundri



Y staff received information of a widow in a difficult situation, lying down in front of the platform at the railway station. Hearing of this we sent some staff there. She is 55 years old. She had not eaten for many days, she was very thin. We informed the police that we were taking her to the Ashram. She was in very bad condition; we thought that she would die. We put her in the van and took her to the hospital. The doctors told us to give her food and a good wash and she will recover. Her recovery was very good, our staff worked very hard. After some time she began

walking again. Communication is difficult as she does not speak much Hindi. We had a visitor come who knew her Bengali language. He translated so we could find out her story. She came to Varanasi with the hope of finding somewhere to stay after her husband had died and her children had been killed in front of her. The people who gave her an address in Varanasi, with the promise of somewhere nice that she could spend the rest of her years, had given her a false address, so she was searching in Varanasi for this place. During this time she had eaten all of her food and spent all her money.

She is a sweet lady. Her health is quite good, except for arthritis in her arm. Please pray for her.

Thank you for all your prayers and support. I really appreciate it and want to thank you again for being a part of this ministry.

Lots of love

Heather

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