**Guide to organising a school visit to Asha**

**IN JUNE:**

1. **IF GOING TO AGRA BY TRAIN,** youneed to organise tickets for the trains with Mr Arora, a local travel agent. He has been used by all the school groups from Northern Ireland to provide this service as well as offering currency exchange services. He will come to the hotel in which you are staying to change money, and this is a very convenient arrangement.

You need to get the info to RK Arora before you leave school in June – as the Shatabdi trains are released 3months ahead of time, so he needs all the information:

Lists of names, passport numbers, and ages; in groups of 6.

1 teacher + 5 pupil’s x 3 (for a group of 15 pupils and 3 staff)

Ask him to put all the groups in same carriage. If this is not possible, maybe put 2 groups in one carriage and 1 group in another - with a male member of staff.

You need to book the Taj Express down and the Shatabdi up. 2nd class AC Chair tickets are what we normally book. At the same time book the coach and guide from Mr Aurora. Just check how much the final bill will be (last time I checked if I could pay for the tickets in sterling when we got the tickets – on the first day when we changed money).

**OR IF GOING TO AGRA BY COACH,** Mr Arora will organise an Executive Coach; just let him know whether or not you are going on the Saturday or Sunday.

**Train/ Coach?**? This depends on you.

The Train station in the morning is quite an experience, one you may not want to miss Also, the journey through the countryside is really interesting.

On the other hand if you go by Coach, it will pick you up at the hotel door, and return you there in a hassle-free way. The journey is a bit longer, but you can stop as many times as you need (Indian service stations are clean, but basic) and you have the coach with you all day

1. With the young people on study leave, get in touch with them to remind them about their VISAS plus give them a list of books that they might want to try to read over the summer hols – even to read 1 of them.
2. Tell them to make the most of the summer sales: linen or cotton trousers, flip flops etc. I think that they can get away with wearing western clothes in the evening – but for the girls – they need to keep to the rules (those tunic type tops that are popular at the moment, are probably quite good to wear). For the guys – they need to think about what they are going to wear on the final day or when you go out for dinner with Kiran or when visiting the British and Irish embassies – so they need to either bring something relatively smart such as a pair of long trousers. or buy some Indian clothes.
3. They need to make sure that they have a couple of sets of clothes to use for painting (outside it could be very hot). These need to be old clothes or something cheap that they buy in the summer sales. Whichever, remind them that **the paint** generally **does not wash out.**

 **IN SEPTEMBER:**

 **MONEY:** order rupees from Mr Arora. £100 per person is the norm.

When ordering cash from your Accounts Department make sure that it comes as **BANK OF ENGLAND NOTES**.

In the past we have **paid the Hotel Bill before we left NI** by BACS and then that would leave only the bill for dinners you have in the hotel and taxis to be paid at the end.

**LUNCHES:**It might be worthwhile asking staff at Asha for some suggestions of fast food outlets near the slum that you are working in.

Dinners out were c. Rs 6,000 to Rs 8,000. Lunches in Kalkaji were c. Rs 5,000. Last year we brought out c. £3.000.

**DECIDE WHAT TIME YOU WANT Mr ARORA TO COME ON THE DAY YOU ARRIVE,** you can always ask him to come back on the Friday before you go to the Taj.

**TRIDENT HOTEL:** In September phone the hotel and book your buffet lunch for the Sunday and mention if anyone in the group has any food allergies (not vegetarian as there will always be vegetarian options in India. They will want you to phone and confirm once you arrive in India.

Find out how much the lunch will cost – (we normally pay for water – but no soft drinks), and bring the cash or school credit card to pay for the meal.

We’ve always called in at the hotel first thing in the morning for a comfort stop and/or a cold drink before setting off for the Taj/ the Fort.

**ARRIVING AT THE AIRPORT:**

1. BEFOREHAND: Photocopy (5-6 copies) the “Arrivals” form – with relevant info filled in, i.e.: flight number, info about hotel address etc. These forms are given out as you are approaching Delhi (always ask for more copies than you need), and get everyone to fill in their form before they leave the plane. **Example is in the folder.**

As they go through Immigration in the Airport they hand in the form and they **must** make sure that the tear off bit at the bottom is kept safely in their passport (sometimes the security officials will check, and you will not be able to leave the Airport without that bit of paper)

1. **BEFOREHAND:** Photocopy all the passports and visas (on one A4 page together). You need 4 copies: VP in charge of trips, Hotel, Mr Arora for money, trip to Taj.
2. Check the room bookings and get the kids to decide who’s in which room. If you have the list typed out 4 times then it’s fairly straight forward to allocate room numbers when you arrive, 1 copy for the hotel, + 1 copy for each teacher (so everyone knows who is in what room).

 **Arriving at the hotel**

**If arriving during the day:** arrange with Mr Arora to come about 3hrs after your arrival time in Delhi.

One year we arrived on a holiday so instead of going straight to see the Asha HQ we went shopping for clothes, so you would need to BOOK TAXIS to go to GK “N” Block Market after you’ve changed your money..

1. **ROUGH TIMETABLE on the day you arrive:**

BREAKFAST

CHANGING MONEY

TAXIS to go to GK “N” Block Market (If staying at Legend Inn)

FAB INDIA for clothes

LUNCH – Bakery or Café Coffee Day (upstairs on the same side as Fab India)

If staying at Blueberry Hotel or Singh Palace, go to the McDonalds on Sansard Marg (Parliament St) and use the Fab India in Connaught Circle.

I don’t know exactly how long each of these activities will take – and you may actually have time to go somewhere else in the afternoon – maybe do some sightseeing?? India gate / Qutab Minar/ Hyuman’s Tomb. On the other hand you may need to visit another Fab India – the nearest one is at Khan Market (where there is a McDonalds). Check the map of the shops – it’s upstairs from one of the short passages that goes from the front to the back set of shops.

1. ORDER DINER **BEFORE** YOU LEAVE IN THE MORNING + aim for an early night.
2. SHOPPING in **FAB INDIA (**in GK N Block**:** boys’ & men’s upstairs, girls’ in the basement).

**Boys** need: 2-3 shirts and 2 of pairs of trousers.

**Laundry:** All hotels offer a 24hr laundry service and it is relatively inexpensive – so everyone should be able to have an Indian outfit ready to wear for the next day – **this is especially important for the day that you go to Agra.**

**Indian clothes:** some teachers insist that the students wear Indian clothes every time that they go to the slum and then change into their painting clothes when they get there but this is a matter of preference- you may prefer to wear the painting clothes to and from the centre.

**WATER:** remind them again of the rule that no one shares a water bottle, and everyone labels their bottle with their initials. They must be drinking about 2 litres a day.

They should all carry Diaoralyte, but particularly on the day you are in Agra – where it will be much warmer (so if anyone feels tired or exhausted with the heat – put them in the shade and put a sachet of Diaoralyte in their water and watch them drink at least half a litre.

**Don’t forget –** put bottled water in the bathroom so that it can be used when rinsing your mouth after brushing your teeth.

**TRIP TO AGRA**

1. Confirm all the train details + the guide and coach with Mr Arora when you change money on the first day.
2. Confirm with the Trident Hotel that you are coming on the date already booked.

1. Think about money for tips for the driver and guide. Usually Rs 300-400 for the guide and Rs 200-150 for the driver (and any mate he has along).
2. Cost of tickets into the 2 sites is about Rs 1,000 per person – so you need to bring the cash with you.
3. **Water:** if going by train, you can buy water in the station, or on the train. If going by coach, make sure that everyone has a full bottle in the fridge the night before - to bring with them the next day.
4. **Night before**: get everyone to pack their bags ready with whatever they need for a LONG journey – books, music, some cereal bars, camera (+ spare batteries and memory cards) SUNTAN LOTION, maybe a shawl or jumper as it can get quite cold in the evening. most people will be wearing Indian dress – so you must make sure that the laundry is organised so that people have a clean outfit to wear.

I also think it’s a good idea to have dinner in the hotel on the Saturday night, and then have an early night.

1. Check with the hotel staff exactly what your timings are for the next day and order breakfast and timings for the taxis collecting you in the morning and the evening:

**If going by train** (and staying at the Legend Inn):

1. **Breakfast @ 5.30am**, with everyone down and their bags ready to go.
2. **Order the taxis for 6am** the night before, to drop you off to **Nizamuddin Railway Station** in the morning, and you must leave by 6.10am at the latest.
3. Staff **MUST bring their PASSPORTS** and the **photocopies of the pupil’s passports** and visa in their group and their tickets.
4. Be careful that each taxi group looks out for everyone else when they arrive at Nizamuddin Station. Check the **gantry signage** as to what **platform** the **Taj Express** is leaving from. Your seats are normally in the AC 2nd class chair carriages that are along the gantry and then turn down on the RHS. When you’ve got everyone together in a group on the platform – take a few of the boys and buy water for everyone. (Buy extra water at Agra Fort if you need it – just say to the guide).

When the train arrives check the numbers of the carriages as they go past – and make your way up to the correct carriage (the list should be outside the door).

Toilets on the train – at the end of each carriage there are 2 toilets – 1 western, 1 Indian)

1. The group is usually met at Agra Cantonment Station by a member of Mr Arora’s staff. Go to the Trident Hotel in the coach/ MPVs supplied with the guide for a toilet and drinks stop.
2. **On the way home**: Get the guide to phone and **check if the Bhopal Shatabdi is on time**. If it is, then leave the coffee shop at **7.45pm**. When you arrive at the Agra Can’t station check with the guide exactly which platform the Shatabdi arrives into – and then **wait in the mixed waiting** **room** in the station building until it’s time to go across the gantry to the platform you need - the electronic signage inside the waiting room tells you when the trains are due in, or if they are late.

The Shatabdi free offers bottles of water (ok) + free dinner with ice-cream (**not OK)**

1. Time for taxis to collect you at New **Delhi Railway Station** that evening. However, make sure that you know which **exit gate** you are being collected at, and check that is the gate you walk towards when you get up on to the gantry.

 **If going by coach:**

1. Book the Executive Coach with Mr Arora to leave the hotel @ 6am. You can ask the driver to stop whenever you need (usually a couple of times). The journey will take about 3hrs.
2. On arriving at Agra, go to the Trident Hotel in the coach for a toilet and drinks stop, and the guide will meet you there. Head to the Fort 9.30 - 9.45am.
3. The coach will be with you for the whole time.
4. After lunch at the Trident (12/12.30 – 2.30pm) head to the Taj Mahal.
5. Leave the Taj by 5.30pm and head to McDonalds or Costa Coffee for a drink and a snack. Toilets are available (just ask the staff where they are).
6. Depart 7 – 7.30pm, arriving back at your hotel 10.30 -11pm.
7. **Visit the Taj then the Fort??** In the past we have visited the Taj first and the Fort in the afternoon. However, last year, we went to the Agra Fort first, which seemed to work well, partly because they were not outside in the midday sun, and everyone seemed to really enjoy the tour of the Fort, because you were in and out of buildings in the shade at times; and didn’t have to queue in the midday sun to get into the Mausoleum at the Taj. Going to the Taj Mahal in the afternoon meant that we had lots of really good photo opportunities with the sun starting to set just before we left.
8. 11.30am – 1.30pm ~ Guided tour of Taj Mahal or Agra Fort

3.30pm – 5pm ~ guided tour of Fort or Taj.

At the Taj you **must not** bring food/ipods etc in bags – **all of these things MUST be left in the taxis.** At the Taj you can bring your camera and the water bottle that they will give you (it’s part of the ticket price).

Both the Taj and the Fort have toilets (but they are not great).

**Do not** buy anything from the hawkers etc. Keep the group together – no one should get separated whilst taking photos etc.

**Be careful of your belongings!**

Sometimes people will **ask to take your photo,** sometimes with them in it!! – this is OK, **BUT** under **no circumstances** would an Indian boy/man be allowed to put their arm round an Indian girl – SO they are not allowed to do it with our girls.

1. When the tour is finished in the afternoon, you can stop off at McDonalds or go to Costa Coffee before you head back to the station– **not** to some craft emporium or carpet or marble workshop!

**PLACES TO GO SHOPPING: They must stay in groups of 3-4 (preferably with a boy in each group when you are in Sarogini Nagar market).**

1. Cottage Industries Emporium on Janpath – this shop has 5-6 levels of craft items from all over India. It has a **small café and toilets**. The prices are fair and the quality is good, and there is NO bargaining. You can change money inside the shop (but you must remember to bring your passport!!). In each department you “buy” your goods and receive a “chitty”, and you **pay for all** **your purchases** **at the end** – at the 2-3 kiosks on the ground floor. Once your chitties have been stamped “**PAID”**, you can collect the goods at the side door.

It is important that you set a time limit, leaving at least 30mins to get through payment; and decide whether you are going to meet inside/ outside the front door or outside the side door.

1. Dilli Haat: You have to pay a token Rs 15 or Rs 20 per person – but it is a safe place to shop – even in the early evening, with no beggars. There are craft stalls from different states in India (they take it in turn to come). You can bargain here…start at half the suggested price, and work up! There are toilets and cafes to get a drink.
2. Sarogini Nagar Market (closed on Monday): this is a typical Indian Bazaar. Lots of shops but beggars too. **Do not go here in the early evening.** In the proper shops, you pay the set price, but there are often sales at Diwali– so always ask for discount/ “best price”. At the stalls, bartering is expected – start at one third…and work your way up very slowly! Do not pay Rs500 for a pair of fake Ray bans - you can get them for Rs50 if you bargain hard! You can buy water from the stalls.
3. South Extension 1 & 2 (closed on Monday): This is a bit like shopping in the Victoria Centre in Belfast (sort of!) with a dual carriageway through the middle (use the underpass to go from South Ex 1 to 2). There are a number of western branded shops as well as local shops (all Jewellery shops will always have armed guards outside them). There is a large Barista coffee shop which is nice to sit in and chill, a McDonalds (and an excellent Chinese – Daitchi. I would often send the kids off to shop and then check with Daitchi that they can take us for dinner at 7.30 - 8pm (Indians tend to eat later).
4. Vasunt Kunj which is near the Asha HQ: Quite small, but does have a good Fab India.
5. Saket – Select City Walk (a bit like the Trafford Centre in Manchester - only bigger and much posher) 175 shops and cafes and very safe, but again they should be in groups of 3-4.
6. Khan Market (on the tube line and is closed on a Monday): small, enclosed version of South Ex – lots of shops and restaurants, but it is very busy, so might be difficult to book tables for a large group.
7. Greater Kailash M Block Market (is closed on Tuesday), GK M Block is near the Legend Inn in south east Delhi: it’s a small enclosed rectangle of shops – safe for the young people to potter around in groups. It has a Barista and Café Coffee Day + a good Indian – Moti Mahal; a Pizza Hut and a Chinese – Lee’s Garden.
8. Afternoon tea in the IMPERIAL HOTEL on Janpath: epic 1911 Art Deco 5\* hotel. This is a real treat. If you go to the patisserie – La Baguette, you can buy the bun/ tart that you want and then take it through to the veranda of the 1911 restaurant and order your tea/ coffee/ cold drink, and take your bun out of the box and put it on the plate (its what everyone does). Formal afternoon tea is served in The Atrium, but it is expensive (as it is back home), and you have to be smartly dressed (no flip flops for the boys)!

**USING THE METRO:**

If there is a metro station near your hotel, I would recommend that a couple of staff go down and visit before deciding to take the students on a journey.

You need to look carefully at the metro map and decide where you would like to go. All staff must know the name of your home station and your planned destination as you will not be travelling in the same carriage.

There is always a **Pink** section of the platform for the girls to wait and a **Pink Carriage** for the girls to travel in, so the boys should try to get into the next carriage.

It is cheaper to buy a multiple ticket / tokens - than a single journey (just like at home) so that is what I have done in the past.