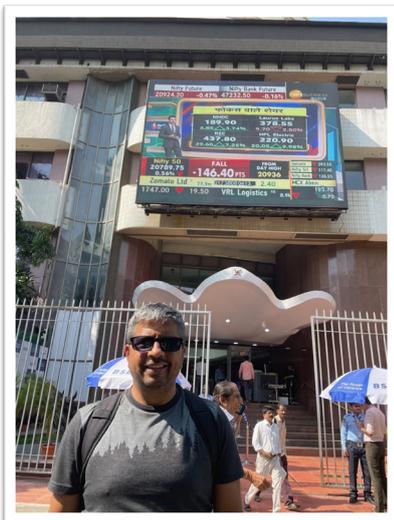


INDIA:

AN IRRESISTIBLE FORCE THAT'S FOUND ITS MOJO



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I have just returned after having spent a 3 1/2-week trip to northern India. The original purpose of my trip was to meet up with my daughter who is currently studying just outside Pune and to visit some of the well-known, well-trodden sites in the famous Golden Triangle. As a British Indian, the country has always had a place in my heart; however, my experience on this trip showed some hard logic as to why India will be a global force to be reckoned with in the future. I've tried to capture some of my thoughts in the blog below. I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I enjoyed the journey.

Build it and they will come

Construction, construction, construction. In every city we visited, we saw numerous examples of new infrastructure being built. From the new underground in Mumbai, the bullet train to Ahmedabad, and the network of major highways connecting cities, it was clear that **India was on a journey to modernization at breakneck speed**. We used trains, planes, and automobiles during the trip. While the roads are much better than my last trip 30 years ago, I can't say the same for Indian drivers. From the ubiquitous blaring of horns to the random collection of wildlife and motorbikes carrying entire families, traveling by road remains an equally thrilling and terrifying experience.



Food, glorious food

We've all heard about Delhi Belly and the horror stories around the general sanitation situation in India. Well, that's all changed. My family of four (including one very fussy eater) was not visited by Delhi Belly at all throughout the trip. We ate in hotels, restaurants, train stations, street vendors, and with family. The **standard of food hygiene was high pretty much everywhere**. Many restaurants now wash all vegetables with filtered water, which meant that even the previously avoided salad became a part of the diet. Besides one or two exceptional places, toilets and **general sanitation quality were very good**. Although I still recommend carrying your own toilet roll! I cannot be sure, but this reflects well on one of the earliest initiatives of the Modi government to install hygienic sanitation facilities and reduce open defecation.

That'll do nicely, Sir



Some of you may remember this phrase from an old American Express credit card advertisement. I had the expectation that in India most things were done using hard cash. However, except for most street vendors, **nearly every establishment readily accepted credit cards** and even Apple Pay. This increasing trend towards digital payments also has some positive economic impacts. The **increasing formalization of financial transactions** and digital transfers means more ability for the government to receive taxes and also pay benefits without the risk of theft in the payment chain.

It's not about Modi, it's all about Modi

Wherever we travelled, we were not very far away from a banner, a billboard, or a TV screen showing an image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Every new road, airport terminal, or train line seemed to be either instigated, sponsored, or inaugurated by him. The **India development story is about a country brimming with huge swathes of untapped potential** that just never being able to realise it. It is clear that while some of the rhetoric from the Modi-led BJP government is divisive, they have delivered policies and programs that have **catalysed the country's growth** in a way that is only now being recognized globally. The overwhelming view from conversations with tuk-tuk drivers, waiters, and locals we met was that they supported the development, and most were convinced the elections would be a formality.



In conclusion

Without a shadow of a doubt, **this is a country on the move**. Confident on the global stage and vibrant domestically, there is a feeling of inevitability about India's rise. As I waited for over 45 minutes for my checked baggage to arrive at the carousel in Heathrow Airport, I realised that any preconceived notions I had of India as a developing country were backward-looking. **This is a country that has found its mojo**.

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