A Day of Site Seeing

May 17, 2015 By Greg Jefferys

17th May... 4 a.m.
The body clock is still on Oz time. I woke up this morning thinking about my auto driver (auto-rickshaw) who pretty much sums up how things work in India when money is involved. I need to remind myself about it.

So on my first day here I went out looking for a barber who the hotel told me was up the road a bit. On the way a fellow leaning against his yellow rickshaw asked if I wanted to be driven somewhere. I said no, that I was going to a barber for a shave, he wobbled his head and smiled and that was it. I walked on but could not see the barber. A few minutes later the rickshaw man drove past, pulled over and pointed back to where I had come from and told me that I had walked past the barber and pointed out where it was. He smiled, wobbled his head and told me I walked too fast and drove off.

So I found the barber, had the best shave and beard trim I have ever had and went back to the hotel. Over that day I hired two auto rickshaws and was not very happy with either driver. In the late afternoon I saw the fellow who had directed me to the barber. I had a chat with him and asked him if I could hire him for the whole day tomorrow and how much it would cost? He thought about it and replied 700 rupees ($15). I thought that was too little an amount and said 1000 rupees for the whole day. He smiled, wobbled his head and agreed and we met the next morning at 10 a.m.

Getting to Fort St George
Raj was a good choice. His spoken English was a bit difficult for me to understand but he understood everything that I said if I did not speak too fast; and he (eventually) took me to all the places I needed to go.

Then at the end of the day we got back to the hotel and I handed him a 1000 rupee note. A downcast look swept across his face, “Oh no sir, Oh no this is not enough. I have given you the whole day, not working for other people. I have driven you to the Fort Saint George and the hospital and many places. Many hours. This is not enough.”
“But yesterday we agreed on 1,000.”
“Yes sir but it is such a long day, the traffic was bad... etc etc.” It is a classic driver’s ploy, it happens 90% of the time. They agree to take you for a cheap price and then at the end the price doubles or triples and they haggle and weep and plead and get angry until you pay more and then smile, wobble the head and say thank you very much when you pay up. It’s the game!

I had thought to avoid all that by offering more at the start and, if Raj turned out to be good at his job, I would hire him for the week and give him a good bonus at the end. But no we still had to do the dance.

So I paid him the 1,500 and he was happy but (unknowingly) lost his big bonus.

Now the reason I have rambled on with this story is to show something that pervades India, not all of India and certainly not everyone but it is pervasive. In India nothing is set in stone. Agreements, prices, knowledge, locations even. “Do you know how to get to Fort St George?” I asked Raj. “Oh yes sir, no problem.”

But really Raj has no idea where or what Fort St George is… He stops at various points and asks people but we end up at a museum somewhere that has nothing to do with Fort St George. So I go and ask for directions to get to Fort St George from a museum attendant then call Raj over to get the directions in Tamil from the museum man.

It takes a while but eventually we do get to Fort St George, it just takes time and patience, lots of patience.

With the distributor whose email is not working it will be the same. I will get to him eventually and I will get the Sofosbuvir. It will take some time and some patience: but I will get there.

9 a.m.
I received this email this morning and it made me realise how lucky I am that my Hep C stayed dormant until now when there are very effective drugs available (even though we have to fly to India to get them).

Stay safe out there Greg, really good reading your story. I have had hep C for 13 years diagnosed and 30 years before that. Did 4 courses of old treatment. Had a Transplant had to have loads of other ops because of the HepC 8-9 Hernias, really bad back op and now a week ago I’ve started Harvoni and Peg treatment, I come from the UK and you’re right: Why do they wait till

you’re nearly dead till they treat you, seems bloody crazy! My new liver is screwed, very cirrhotic... asked my nurse what I scored from 1 to 10 (1 is good 10 is bad) she said at least a 7. Have a good day mate contact me if you want to. M.

8 p.m.
Had a long email from the very helpful S in Dehli. He passed on a phone number for the distributor for Cilia, another one of the Indian pharmaceudical companies who have a licence agreement with GILEAD. S explained again to me, in greater detail, how different the distribution of pharmaceuticals is in India. He explained that the Indian pharmacies rarely carry stock of the very expensive drugs such as Sofosbuvir and that it is common for the Companies to have a local distributor who one can buy direct from. This explains all my confusion and slightly paranoid fears.

Apart from that nothing significant to report. It was so bloody hot today I had to retreat to the air conditioned safety of the hotel or risk drowning in my own sweat!

Tomorrow is D Day. I will phone the Mylan distributor and the Cilia distributor and, hopefully, at the end of the day I will have my Sofosbuvir in my room.

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