



## Indian Dreamtime By Sean Gray

### The multi-painted colours of Pushkar

India still haunts me in my dreams. After being worn down, wound up and strung out for close to five months I reflected upon the start of the trip with a vague nostalgia, not because anything was more or less idyllic back then, but because I was green: hungry to see everything.

After a number of varied experiences and impressions of the towns through Rajasthan, which I was told was India's most backward state, the town of Pushkar was the one to grind me to a stop. Situated just across from Delhi is a plot of land where the North meets the centre. This plot of land is Rajasthan, a state built on a largely barren desert terrain, liberally littered with strange desert towns, some of which are complete with dried lakes which I'm told "look delightful in the right season."

These small towns and villages were the places I learnt why they said Rajasthan was backwards, not the customs or ways of the people but the environment itself. Every house was old, and was usually overlooked by a fort, or in Pushkar's case a temple or four, plus the 300 plus ghats.

After some long gruelling hours on trains which seemed slightly more modern than the stations we passed through, Pushkar seemed the perfect place to go and wait for the Holi festival which apparently Pushkar, a holy city, celebrates with extra fervour. And it was.

Pushkar was a mission to get to, which is perhaps why the few people bothered enough to make the two hour overcrowded bus trip, for a distance of 11km, ever left. It was a place to put off going back to the circuit, to recharge your batteries, refuel and unwind. It was very worth it, in the long run, as when situations got rough I

used to turn to my girlfriend and say "Do you remember Pushkar? How simple and great life was?"

"Do you remember our guesthouse was run by a few kids? Do you remember haggling with touts over our specification of the hotel having a swimming pool, after finding a lot of merit in the idea of cooling off when you're in the dry desert heat? How we were taken to a place in the back alleys by a man who had the job of pushing carts of humans, livestock and luggage about, in that order. How the guesthouse didn't have a pool but said we could go to the hotel next door to use their derelict pool?

Do you remember being charmed?"

Everything was a little shady thus far, the room we took was on the second level of a three story building, the top floor being a restaurant/den for strangers and guests. Later I learnt that the hotel also doubled as a brothel on the odd occasion. From the rooftop den, you could see the Holy Ghats, where religious ceremonies took place at any one of the hundreds of temples there. As in all Indian Holy towns there were rules and sadhus, rules were: no meat, no alcohol, no eggs. Sadhus were the holy men who appeared in greater numbers in sacred cities. They were easily recognizable by their saffron robes, few possessions and long dreadlocks. The sadhus begged alms for a living, and were the only ones permitted by law to smoke marijuana as a spiritual stimulant, which they did in abundance through small clay pipes called chillums.

But like most anywhere else in India rules could be bent, broken, swallowed or re-made.

One such instance came during my daily morning walks, exploring