

# Do your memories of a trip change over time?

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The more I travel, the more I get asked where's my favourite destination. I usually say that I don't know, that choosing would be like picking your favourite child — each place (or kid) too different to compare. However, there are some people who keep on pressing. "There must be one place that sticks out in your mind," they insist. And so, I crack. I imagine when my parents get pressured into disclosing who their favourite child is. They say, me. And I say, India

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Here's the odd part: I'm a writer (some would even call me a travel writer) and I've never written about my favourite kid... err, destination before. In fact, India is the big adventure I took after leaving my legal government job five years ago to go back to grad school to become a writer. That trip and the start of my writing career go hand in hand.

To be honest, I'm not sure why I haven't written a story about such a beautiful country. Maybe it's because the right opportunity never came along. Maybe it's because it was such a special trip, that I wanted to keep it just for me, keep the stories to myself. Maybe it's because I was too busy travelling to (and writing about) Brazil and Japan and the Arctic (and beyond) that India was

left behind.

Here's the thing: when I've travelled to any other place in the past five years, I've almost immediately written a story or two about it. I make up my mind as to what the most interesting stories are to tell. Brazil marked a challenging time in my and my sister's relationship; Japan provided me with the opportunity to meet a working *maiko* (apprentice geisha); and in the Arctic, I met Margaret Atwood and participated in some dynamic cultural programming. And now, when people ask me about these destinations, these tend to be the stories I tell. I recount the stories I've written and published, whether good or bad; and many of the other memories fade away.

But with India, as the years have gone by, something interesting has happened. I've grown fonder of the country. I'm not sure why. Maybe it's because I'm nostalgic for a time when I was 24, travelling with my childhood best friend and not making travel as part of my living. Maybe it's because it was such a special trip and experience. However, my gut instinct is that because I've never written down my stories from that adventure, my memories and feelings about that trip and the country as a whole have changed over time. Don't get me wrong, I never disliked India, but because I never wrote down (and committed to) one narrative of the country, I still recount dozens and dozens of stories and memories I have from that adventure, and remember what a diverse and humble country it is. The good stories I tell make my love for the country grow stronger. I usually forget about the bad stories, but when I do remember them, they're almost funny, similar to recounting an old, silly fight had with a partner or friend.

I'm sure there's research out there to support the notion that as time goes on, our memories change about past trips, past loves, past experiences. Maybe they grow stronger and fonder, maybe the opposite happens.

And now, I get to the part about India. And my strongest, fondest memories? The people. India is a country faced with many challenges: poverty, public health, women's rights, and beyond. Yet, so many of the people there are happy and vibrant and resilient.

There was the group of teenage girls, on our second or third day in Mumbai, dressed head to toe in beautiful Indian fabrics, their hair and makeup flawless, who wanted to take photos with us. "You're so beautiful," they said. I didn't understand. Here I was, wearing a baggy shirt and leggings, sweating in the heat of summer. They looked more 'beautiful,' in my opinion. I'd later learn how common of an occurrence this was. Indians are very curious about foreigners, to see culture and appearance so different to their own. They often associate white skin with the allure of Hollywood and Disney.



There was the man who stopped us in the street and told my best friend to drink more water. After a few minutes of conversation, we realized he was a psychic. We bought him some chai tea and chatted for hours. Let me be clear: I'm not sure I

believe in psychics. But, somehow, he knew about my problems with my right knee (I had surgery from an old hockey injury five years prior), the fact that I was in the process of changing careers, and that I had always felt like an outcast. He knew my best friend had just gone through a devastating year (a break-up) and that she had lost a parent when she was quite young (her mom).

Then, there was the family of four, who we met on our train ride up into the mountain town of Shimla. There was a father and mother and their two teenage girls. Only one of them spoke English, but we bonded over their offering of homemade *naan* and *chana masala*. They gave us directions and told us about the general store they ran back in Delhi. We ran into them again the next day and they invited us to come stay at their home. We hadn't planned on travelling to Delhi, but we rearranged our plans to spend our last day in India with them, before catching our flight back to Canada. They fed us, welcomed us, and treated us like family.



There was the guy who gave up his seat for my best friend and me when we got shuffled to an overcrowded bus in the middle of the night. There were the ladies who decorated our hands in henna, likely overcharged us and then followed us around hoping for more business. There was the little kid who charmed us with his hugs and smiles to make a few rupees for him and his grandfather.

In the moment, some of these interactions seemed consequential, trivial even. But as time has gone on, these are the stories I tell, these are the stories I remember. I've fallen in love with the country more over time, digging into my actual memory and nostalgia for a trip gone by, as opposed to an old newspaper or magazine, where my opinions will forever remain recorded in print. I wonder now, that I've published these words for the world to see, if my opinion of India will ever change.

I'll get back to you in five years.