

Ma-Gnarly, Dude!

I arranged time off my teaching post in Northern India to visit Manali, a mountain town with heavy Western influence a few hundred kilometres east of my school. Manali is famous for its hippie drug scene, but of course that was of no interest to me! Rather, the town nestles in the Himalayas and is perfect for trekking and meeting other travellers over a drink and a good meal. Getting there is a different story, however. For eleven long hours, on windy mountain roads, I froze in the back of the jeep. I was too polite or too tired to ask the driver to close the windows. Despite the late hour, the full moon bathed the valleys and scenery in a silver gleam, which at least added some ambience to the cold journey.

Our hotel was a bit of a dive, but cheap. Despite being a mountain town, the phenomena of double glazing and central heating have not caught on and night time temperatures hovered near zero. We found a great local place to have breakfast that served pancakes, porridge and peanut butter toast, all luxury items in the Himalayas! One restaurant, however, excelled all expectations with this amazing treat: The “Hello to the Queen” dessert is something I have to bring home. Take a large bowl and put lots of biscuit crumbs on the bottom. Add a few slices of banana and drown what you have in hot chocolate sauce. On top, place two or three scoops of vanilla ice-cream. Delicious!

On arriving home from Manali, I found a one-foot lizard, or ‘toilet dragon’, if you will, in my toilet.

As if that was not enough excitement, later that evening a neighbour was struck by lightning. We were alerted by cries of agony coming from elsewhere in the village. There was a downpour outside, but I donned head-torch, raincoat and trousers to discover the cause of the commotion. We followed the crowd that was already aroused to the house of the man. He was in a bed on the porch, a white sheet covering most of his body, groaning. The story went that the twenty-five year old had climbed a tree in the thunderstorm at night with the intention of – would you believe - getting honey from a bees' nest. Lightning struck the tree he was clinging to: the shock caused him to fall, further injuring his foot on contact with the ground. Amazingly,

he survived and, last I heard, was in a critical condition the nearest hospital, three hours drive away.

You can read more about my Indian adventures online at www.ShedPlant.net.