

DRIVING BY **B**raile

Ricky always says that it was the food that attracted him to India. He grew up in Mamaku, a small community near Rotorua, and the Indian lady who ran the shop, “made the most delicious curries in the world. She prepared my palate for India long before I knew I was going there.”

Ricky’s first trip to India in 1990 exposed him to *biryani*, *halva* and *aloo gobi*. He also met many Muslims, and enjoyed the ease with which any conversation could turn into a religious discussion: the delicious food and amazing conversations convinced him he had to return to India. Viv’s first visits to India were made in support of a child sponsorship ministry. Her heart went out to the children there, and she, too, knew that she would return.

Prior to becoming Partners, Ricky and Viv studied in India at the South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS) in a village near Bangalore.

“Living on campus at SAIACS eased us gently into aspects of Indian life, such as irregular bus services that were always going to arrive ‘soon’, markets where the buyer truly had to beware, and auto-rickshaw

drivers who always knew where to go even if it wasn’t where you needed to be!”

After finishing at SAIACS, Ricky and Viv returned to New Zealand, were accepted as Interserve Partners, and in August 2000 they and their baby daughter, Susie, moved to Delhi. Life in Delhi was very different, and everyday travel included arguments with auto-rickshaw drivers over the fare, and near-death experiences as buses brushed past the flimsy three-wheeled rickshaws.

“We lived on the ground floor of a three-storey house, and our landlord, who lived upstairs, always seemed to be visiting.



We thought he was just exhibiting the extraordinary hospitality that is ingrained into Indian life. But then we learned that he struggled with us allowing Susie to cry herself to sleep – when he heard her cry, he would come downstairs – because in his culture, a baby should never be allowed to cry without being comforted.

“We now live in a four-bedroom apartment, on the third floor of an eight storey building. Viv and I both come from farming backgrounds, so it was a challenge at first to adjust to apartment living. In winter the temperature drops down to 4 degrees Celsius, but in summer it gets up to 45 degrees, and we all camp out in the only room with an air conditioner – our bedroom.”

In order to learn Hindi, Ricky attended a Government-run language school, and both he and Viv went to the Landour Language School in Mussoorie each summer for three years. The challenges of dealing with scorpions in the old cabin and leeches on the tracks made the Hindi lessons seem easy!

“We can really only speak survival Hindi, though, enough to shop, and talk about health and work. English, not Hindi, is the common language in our apartment complex, because the people who live here come from all over India, and therefore speak different languages.

“We tend to eat mainly vegetarian style: rice, dhal (lentils), vegetables, and some chicken. The supply of beef is extremely limited in Delhi as it is illegal, however buffalo meat is allowed. It’s definitely a shock coming back to New

Zealand and eating red meat every day.”

After five years of using public transport the family finally bought a car in 2005. For Viv it meant immediate freedom, but Ricky found the transition more of a challenge. He finally came to enjoy driving, though, when he discovered Rule #1: you can do anything as long as you do it slowly enough!

“In India we drive by braille. Everybody has scratch marks on their car, and if you don’t, you have had a shonky panel-beating job. After driving in Delhi, New Zealand roads were a bit of a culture shock: cars are fast, there are so many rules, and drivers seem unforgiving and ill-prepared for anything out of the ordinary. In India we expect everything on the road: cows, elephants, bikes, trucks... going forwards, sideways and backwards. I could be on the motorway, reversing up the fast lane, and that’s okay... People reverse down the flyer because they haven’t taken the right turn-off, and it works, because everything is done at a much slower pace.”

Ricky also found shopping in New Zealand to be a culture shock. “The vast supermarkets and task-oriented shoppers were overwhelming. And I couldn’t get over the enormous range of food to choose from – a whole aisle for breakfast cereals alone!”

Viv is involved in an administrative role at the international school where their children are students. What excites her about the school is the totally Christian culture that honours Jesus, and values each child no matter what

their religious beliefs are. About 70 children, from 19 different nationalities, currently attend the school.

Ricky started his own business in 2002, publishing books in both Hindi and English, with a focus on publications written in and for India, and especially on those written from an Indian Christian perspective. Through his business Ricky encounters people from all walks of life. As he lives out his Christian faith, even in small things like paying invoices promptly, people in the business world notice the difference, and opportunities for conversations about faith have opened up as a result.

Ricky is also passionate about empowering Indian Christians to effectively connect with, and minister to, their Muslim friends and neighbours. He thrives on being able to teach believers how to communicate their faith in a way that will be heard, and has helped to develop a module on Islam for SAIACS’ MTh (Religions) programme.

So how long will this Kiwi family remain in India? “Every time we come back to New Zealand on Home Assignment, we ask ourselves, ‘Are we being effective?’ and ‘Is it still working for our family?’ And if we can tick those boxes, we return to India.” ☺

Ricky and Viv live near Delhi with their two children, Susie and Thomas. They have been working in India for ten years.

