

## First impressions of India

JANUARY 2015...

Day 1:

It's 2 am and I'm awake thinking about my first few hours yesterday in India. Trying to distil and capture in my head that amazing first impression so that I can keep it forever. Wondering why we fall in love with some places and not with others.... I'm in love with this place, I know that already. Even as we landed, and I saw slum housing pushing up against the high fence of the airport with its wide open mown spaces, confronting me with the contrast between the riches of international travel and the reality of life here. On our way from the airport, even as we drove past ramshackle shanties where people busily went about their day's business, past tall unfinished buildings like open mouths with no architectural plan, to the fading crumbling mildewed grandeur of glorious old buildings in the centre of Mumbai. People chatting to each other as they sat on the dusty footpath. The crush of humanity everywhere. The busy-ness. The tooting of horns as cars careered from lane to lane in the mess of traffic. A beggar at traffic lights tapping with the stump of his arm on our window to get attention. The sudden appearance of a huge open park stretching away in the centre of Mumbai where men in turbans were playing cricket in whites, swallowed up again by the throbbing city full of cars, trucks, taxis, red buses, a man looking vacantly out of the bus until he caught my eye, a crazy youth on a motorbike and flapping shirt zipping in and out and around the traffic at a crazy speed. A woman in a pink sari moving in the breeze, sitting sedately on a new pink motor scooter with bright pink fingernails, driving perilously close to the deep gutter.....