

ARGENTINA | UPPERCrust DESTINATION

Jujuy

A Pause in Time

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Rarely does one get
a chance to walk
where people walked
10,000 years ago.
Purmamarca...Tilkara...
so alluring...

The giant Cardon Cactus



View from my window

Technically, I hardly spent much time in Salvatore de Jujuy, the capital city of the province of Jujuy. Until I reached this place I was calling it Jujuee, until I heard it pronounced by a local. Sounded like Khoo Khooee or perhaps Who Who-e. Whatever, I just couldn't get it right, right till I left for India.

This was my last stop in Argentina.

Well. Jujuy is right up there, in the northwest of the country very near the borders of Chile and Peru. I reached here straight from Cafayate on what seemed like an exchange programme. I was transported at the town square, from one vehicle to another – the four-wheel drive to a tiny car, from an English-speaking cowboy to a Spanish-speaking guide. All in a jiffy. I was then whizzed up a hill to a hotel, the lawns of which seemed to overhang the sprawling city down below,



Amauta, rustic and traditional architecture

offering a panoramic view. Seated here, I ate an eminently forgettable meal and was then packed off in the same car, where my luggage was stacked, to be driven to I don't know where. What a nice feeling!!

A long, long drive later, half asleep, I was roused by the changing landscape as it unfolded before my sleepy eyes. Hey, what's this, I said to myself, when my car stopped right in the middle of almost nowhere. It looked like we had driven to Ladakh, in India! I was dumbfounded, as I stumbled out of the car, at the doorstep of my hotel, in a dusty, one-horse town. I could hear neighing in my mind and all that was missing were the spurs on my boots. I was transported to an unbelievable location.

From Buenos Aires, to Mendoza, to Salta, Cafayate and now this mountainous terrain was such a transformation! I was in the Andes, in Purmamarca.



Seven wonders of another kind, the seven-coloured mountain

The village of Purmamarca is rather quaint, dotted with tiny shops selling artisanal stuff; pottery, clay objects, woollen socks, shawls, sweaters.





Tilcara, where inhabitants roamed 10,000 years ago

Del Amauta, that's what my nine-roomed *hosteria* was called. Difficult to describe its architecture, it seemed to just grow out of the landscape, a reproduction of the traditional houses of Purmamarca. The building was made of adobe and stone and the interiors was crafted by local herders and carpenters, indeed a unique design. But more interesting is the meaning of *amauta*. Pronounced, 'hamaut'a' in Quechua (language of the Inca Empire), it means, 'The one who loves everyone, no matter what race, religion or social level. *Amauta* is the one who joins heaven with earth, is the connector among all creatures, the one who equilibrates forces and gives each one its space. Nice. Makes a nice name for a newborn, who may just about represent the total meaning of the word and make a difference to the world.

Well, Amauta is very centrally located.

Around the corner, about 60 metres away, this ancient village suddenly comes alive. There is the church and the main square, with a café. The village of Purmamarca is rather quaint, dotted with tiny shops selling artisanal stuff; pottery, clay objects, woollen socks, shawls, sweaters. Right in front of the church, in the square are dozens of open-to-sky



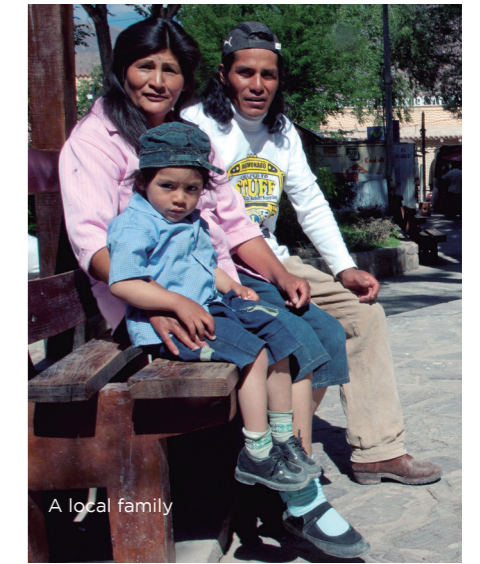
The Hill of Seven Colours is so beautiful. It's what tourists mainly come here to see. It is difficult to capture the brilliance of such colours in a camera.



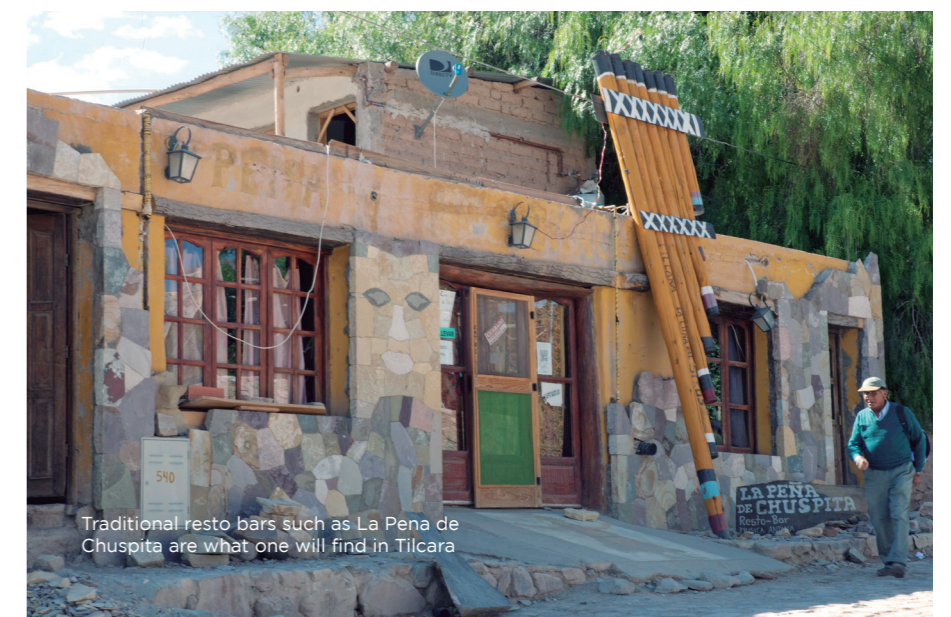
stalls selling more of the above. I picked up a rustic pair of the softest llama wool socks to wear in the winters of Panchgani, where I own a mountain home, as well as some awesome clay artifacts; a girl selling little pots.

A five-minute walk from the square took me to Cerro de las Siete Colores, the Hill of Seven Colours, which is so beautiful. It's what tourists mainly come here to see. It is difficult to capture the brilliance of such colours in a camera, suffice it is to say, it looks like a painting. Yet, were I to see the painting first I would have said, 'Fake, a hill can't have those colours!'

But as you drive around the region,



A local family



Traditional resto bars such as La Peña de Chuspita are what one will find in Tilcara



A gaucho cemetery



Jujuy is of note as one of the most northerly - and highest - of the southern hemisphere's wine-producing regions.



The entrance to the cemetery

you do see more of these coloured hills and they do look different at different times, depending on the time of the day, the angle of the sun.

It was a tiring day so far, what with the long drive from Cafayate, but we were far from done. The guide soon shepherded me into the car once again and grinning, started to drive away. When I asked him where we were going, he said, "Sí, sí, sure." Oh wow, my adventure was continuing.

To find out where we went and just how awesome the experience was, on this trip, you will have to read Salinas Grandes on page 140.

The next day I visited Tilcara, about an hour's drive from Purmamarca, where I bumped into the biggest cactus I have ever set eyes upon. In fact there were loads of cacti, all around, and it was so exotic a sight, I couldn't tear myself away from there. So busy am I shooting pictures, I rarely get mine shot. But here I did, many. You can see one on the editorial page of this magazine.

Well, this area has traces of human habitation which date back more than 10,000 years, making it one of the oldest continuously inhabited settlements of Argentina. Therefore present here is strong indigenous culture with pagan rituals, which I was to discover a little later as I drove around the area observing its mud houses and a local cemetery.

Possibly the biggest attraction in Tilcara is the nearby Pucará de Tilcara, the partially reconstructed ruins of a pre-Inca *pucara*, the Quechua word for fortress, located a few kms away from the town. It is situated on a hill with an impressive view of the valley of the Río Grande.

Since I was very keen to photograph some llamas and also learn more about this animal, I had a date with a llama farmer who had more than two dozens of them. But unfortunately he had taken them uphill for a walk and they were taking their time returning, so I left Tilcara without seeing them since I understood we were getting late for the next appointment. At Dupont Wineries,



The charming 'gates' of Dupont



Cactus in the vineyard, très exotique!



The precarious crossing over to the Dupont Vineyards, which remain out of bounds in winter



Eating out in Purmamarca; just walk around and check for options



Beef, beef and more beef. Asado is what is the good life in Argentina



Empanadas, empanadas, everywhere

the highest located vineyard, I was to visit.

Jujuy is the northernmost viticultural area of Argentina, and has some of the highest vineyards in the world. It is a relatively small wine region and is less commercially established than some of its neighbours; very little Jujuy wine reaches the international market. Torrontes is the most successful and best known of Jujuy's grape varieties. And I love it, among my favourite wines.

Located near Argentina's borders with Chile and Bolivia, Jujuy sits almost entirely within the eastern half of the Andes mountain range. This altitude also raises the intensity and duration of sunlight available to its vineyards.

I was quite excited to visit Dupont and was looking forward to tasting some of its wines. But guess what? We reached there to find no one was there. Not a soul. We looked around, called out, then yelled and knocked on the door of a tiny cottage in the vineyard, and nope, for sure we were the only ones there. Spooky. Reminded



me of Walter de la Mare's, *The Listeners*. Used to be a favourite poem of mine in school and it was now playing out for me personally!

I was getting to understand Argentina more and more. The people here are warm and easy. And so laid-back, they give a damn! So I walked around, shot pictures of some beautiful cactus flower in full bloom (a rare sight), had a one-way conversation with my guide and came away from Dupont. It was a unique sight, cactus interspersed between rows of vines.

If you look at the picture somewhere on these pages, you will see how arduous it was to reach this vineyard. We had stopped at least 10 times to ask for directions, travelled on muddy roads, stony paths, we had precariously crossed a river over shaky metal rails, all in vain! But I am an Indian and just as laid-back as an Argentine, so I could take it in my stride.

But what came out of this drive was something so unique and not a part of my

itinerary, which in any case I could not read because it was entirely in Spanish.

As we were finding our way out from the vineyard, I chanced upon a rather colourful hillside in the distance. Not colourful like the natural stone of one of the seven hills, but man-made. I was not sure if they were flowers dotting the hillside. When I asked my guide what was it, he left the steering wheel and folded his hands like in a *namaste*, placed it on the side of his face which he bent sideways and closed his eyes! I was like, oh my God, open your eyes, you are driving!! But I got the gist, it was a cemetery!

I motioned him to stop, got out and went to explore. The entire hillside had flowers, artificial ones, and there were crypts, some large, some small, in no organised order. It looked charming. I could not figure whether it was a *gaucho* cemetery or what, but it was beautiful and I could see how strongly centuries-old customs and traditions were followed here, in North Argentina.