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Feature Writing

The Fear Women have In India

It was a hot and sunny day in Cochin. 20-year-old Georgia Mullherm, Tampa, had just gotten off an adventurous tuk-tuk ride with some friends. They laughed and smiled as they walked down the street on their way to the market.

Everything changed within a few seconds. As she walked down the street, a stranger approached and groped her chest. Two men standing nearby ran after the man. One of the men tripped him and the other hit him. Unfortunately, that wasn't enough. The groper got up and ran away.

Mullherm expressed her anger towards her incident in Cochin. "I was filled with rage and I was pissed off that the guy had the audacity to grab my chest," Mullherm said. "I knew this was a problem in India but I never thought it'd happen to me."

This is only one incident amongst the hundreds experienced by young women traveling through India. Women are harassed by men everyday whether it's through staring, groping, asking for photos or taking photos without asking at all. Here are some of the stories told by women who recently traveled through the country.

Elle Bergevin, 20, Chicago

Just a student excited for her first visit to India. Elle Bergevin was trying to enjoy a breathtaking experience at the Taj Mahal until her perfect moment was ruined. " I was taking photos with my friends when I noticed these random men

staring at me," Bergevin said. Being a tall young woman with long blonde hair, this wasn't unexpected for Bergevin. She had experienced this on most of her travels.

"They kept looking at me and whispering back and fourth to each other," Bergevin said. "It really started to piss me off because I looked at them and pretty much told them to stop and they just laughed."

Alexa Lagestee, 20, Chicago

Student Alexa Lagestee was intrigued learning the history of the Agra Fort when she noticed a man taking photos of some young women a few feet away. "I saw this guy taking photos of some other girls and I was confused at what was going on," Lagestee said. "I walked over to the girls to give them a heads up about what I saw. I just wanted them to watch out."

Lagestee thought everything was fine until the man began taking photos of her. "I was so annoyed and I yelled at the guy," Lagestee said. "I kept wondering why the hell the guy was being so obvious? Why wouldn't he leave any of us alone?"

Lagestee explained that her frustration was due to the lack of respect and privacy. Women feel exploited and taken advantage of even when the harassment is from a distance.

Lindsey Nichols, 20, Milwaukee

While exploring the streets of Delhi with a group of friends, Lindsey Nichols found herself in an uncomfortable situation. "We were all walking around and going to shops when I noticed a large group of men staring at me and my friends," Nichols

said. "It was unsettling to say the least. The men looked us up and down while making inappropriate remarks."

Lindsey explained that she was with a large group accompanied by other male friends. "I was told we wouldn't get harassed as much if we were with other guys," Nichols said. "Obviously that wasn't true. They openly stared at us like pieces of meat."

Gemma Valdes, 20, San Diego

Student, Gemma Valdes was excited for her wild rickshaw ride through the streets of Delhi. Only a few minuets into the ride, she began to feel extreme discomfort. "I was actually really exited and then my experience went down the drain," Valdes said. "It wasn't the first time and I knew it wasn't the last time it would happen – the uncomfortable staring."

Valdes explained that the staring was usually from a far and it didn't bother her. This was a much different situation. " We were stuck in traffic and that's when I sort of freaked out," Valdes said. "I felt as if I was trapped. The men were inches away in tuk-tuks and they were making me feel extremely uncomfortable."

The traffic was at a standstill for five or so minuets. " The men kept smirking and winking at me," Valdes said. "I was just sitting there clenching my purse hoping no one would touch me or grab my stuff."

It's hard to imagine what the women of India deal with each day. The men see nothing wrong with invading personal space or acting inappropriately. Women have no choice but to deal with their surroundings. Hopefully social norms will change in the future and these sorts of actions will be deemed unacceptable.