

I never, ever, thought I'd hear my name sung at Eden Gardens

Exclusive Touring India was more than just cricket for England batsman **Nick Compton**, who kept this diary and took the photographs from an experience of a lifetime

I will never forget the story of my grandfather's first visit to India. He was playing in the Ranji Trophy final at the Cricket Club of India in Bombay. It was the height of summer and, just before he was due to bat, an Indian businessman approached him and offered a rupee for every run he made.

With dollar signs in his eyes (cricketers were paid very little back then) my grandfather strode to the wicket focused and hungry. Almost seven hours and 249 runs later, dripping with sweat and on his knees he crawled back to the changing room to find a folded letter on his bag.

Expecting a handsome cheque, he unfolded the paper but nothing fell out. Instead were the hastily scribbled words: "I'm sorry Mr Compton but I had to attend a very urgent meeting in Delhi. Very, very well batted!"

India was a country Denis adored. He felt such a strong bond with a people who were so passionate about the game he loved that for me to go there with England promised so much. Unfortunately, I was not approached by any rich businessmen!

Oct 25-29 (Dubai)

Tough training conditions with Graham Gooch putting us through our paces. Netting for six balls and then sprinting back and forth between overs, weighed down with bricks. Then in to face another over followed by 10 burpees (similar to squat thrusts). Forty minutes of this in searing heat was great preparation.

Oct 29-Nov 6 (Mumbai)

The deluge of flashes from hundreds of mobile phones and the Indian media hit us as soon as we set foot off the plane. "Welcome to India" I thought, but actually it felt pretty cool being escorted to our coach like some political figure. Straight off the plane and into a coach not having to wait for bags and transfers and queues. This is a life I can get used to.

Our first warm-up game and the first chance to slip on an England shirt. Questions of whether I belonged or was good enough to play with guys I have watched and looked up to went through my mind. In some ways it was surreal and, without trying to sound too clichéd, it was something you dream of.

Setting ourselves up as a unit to get big first-innings totals is something we prioritised, especially Cooky, who led from the front. His clarity and execution were noticeable immediately and his emotional balance on and off the field was even more impressive. This is a man who is comfortable with himself, who respects hard work but is very pragmatic when it comes to his cricket. There are no frills. I found it very calming and helpful.

Nov 7-20 (Ahmedabad)

It was clear the Board of Control for Cricket in India was not going to give us any real competition to warm up against. The wickets were flat, there were no spinners of any credibility and the standard of cricket was below par. On the flip side, all the batters scored runs. I learnt a huge amount working in the nets with Mushtaq Ahmed and Graham Gooch.

Playing spin nowadays is about getting your bat out in front of your pad and playing the line of the ball.

Being able to get right forward and right back is key because it gives you time to score (off the back foot) and can nullify the spin on the front foot. It is a hard balance to strike because on slow wickets that turn you need to give yourself enough time to get used to the bounce or lack of it but at the same time you cannot just defend because spinners can get on top of you and subsequently changing gears can be tougher. At times I was guilty of this but I trusted my defence. Sadly it didn't work out for us and we lost the first Test comprehensively.

Nov 21-Dec 1 (Mumbai)

Arriving in Mumbai was the highlight for me, not only because there is more to do but my family came over to watch. Staying in the Taj Palace Hotel also made things pretty good as well. I am often asked what we do in the evenings on long tours. India can be tough because there are not always many chances to get out and it can be quite claustrophobic. Even when you leave the hotel people swarm around you to take a snap.

It does make you laugh, especially when hanging around Monty Panesar. He soon became a hero and hearing him talk Hindi and acting silly, often taking the phone and then a photo of them, did make me chuckle.

We did manage to get to the cinema to watch the James Bond film but when we had to stand up and sing the national anthem it was not like your ordinary visit to the local Odeon.

The wicket for the second Test turned and bounced early and we hit the ground running by being really aggressive. Monty took Sachin's wicket with perhaps the ball of the decade. I can remember the goosebumps that ran through me. Monty was on fire, you could see that look in those big bulging eyes coming alive with every ball. He later said to me, "Bro I've never bowled better". You could see how much he was buzzing. The Montstar was back.

Watching how KP got out in Ahmedabad and then play what is the best knock I have ever had the privilege of being close to said a lot about his character. He is tough and says it how it is. He has been a huge help, talking about the game, watching him practise and mentally how he analyses his own performance. He sticks to his guns and moves on very quickly.

We share the fact we were both brought up in Durban so we had a bit in common. He is a funny guy and never ceases to take the mickey out of me and my strangely shaped elbows.

Going out there and smashing it in the second innings really pleased me. I knew from the night before there would be a run chase of some sort and I had to go out there, not give a s--- and just smash it. To be out there for my first Test win with my parents in the stands was incredibly special.

It was the first time I had been in a changing room after a Test match victory and witnessing the celebrations, hearing the speeches, and raising a toast to five-wicket hauls and hundreds scored. These are moments you savour. It took me back to club cricket, chatting about the day and having a few laughs over a beer. In county cricket, these moments have become so rare because we are always on the go.



We had three days off to relax and enjoy winning our first Test. I have always found India fascinating and it is a great place to get out the camera. I also managed to visit a coach I met years ago. He took me a couple of hours away to a field where he helps out. Again it was an early start driving through busy streets and out into the suburbs. Suddenly out of nowhere this field appeared and there were about 50 children of different age groups diligently going through routines. I took part in a few drills, chatted about batting, about England, and asked them what they were learning.

Dec 2-11 (Calcutta)

Before the game started we visited the Future Hope orphanage. Interacting with these kids, singing hymns and songs took me back to days of school assembly. These kids were brilliant at chess. I was checkmate in about five moves. I was done, dusted and shown up by a 10 year-

old so we left the classroom to play hockey on the roof, which was more like how to bruise and batter your shins. It is obvious but doing things like this does give you perspective, keeps feet on the floor and takes your mind off the game or thoughts on yourself.

I also did some work for Frank Water, a charity that supplies fresh water to remote parts of India. Millions of people die each year from diseases caused by poor drinking water and Frank Water has done unbelievably to create and sustain this initiative.

Cooky lost the toss again for the third Test, but we managed to restrict them to a modest score given the flat nature of the wicket. Steven Finn, with his pace and bounce, made a great foil for James Anderson, who regained his confidence and swing. Watching Jimmy's skill as he ripped through the Indian batting line-up was one of those series-winning moments. I also got my maiden fifty – a good feeling.



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It was tough because I really did not feel in control and as I tried to fine-sweep one, the ball brushed my glove and I was out lbw. It was a tough decision and raised the issue of the review system's absence, which I feel should either be used in all countries or not at all. In the second innings, chasing 42 proved tricky. We lost a few early wickets which raised the heart rate but watching Ian Bell return to form was pleasing and I knew if I could hold my nerve we would be home and dry. Two Test wins on the bounce and both times

I have been out there to savour the moments. I even heard the Barmy Army singing my name as we had two runs to knock off. I'm not sure of the words but the sound of Compton resonating around Eden Gardens was something I never thought would ever happen.

Dec 12-18 (Nagpur)

The last Test was always going to be a battle. It is easy to think about the flight home and getting back to loved ones for Christmas. Winning two Tests, the effort and the emotions, takes it out of you. I'm glad Cooky pulled us all aside and made it clear we had an opportunity to do something very few international teams have done in history.

In the field the lieutenant is Matt Prior. He is a hard taskmaster but is the reason why I felt energy levels and our fielding were superior to theirs. Fielding is tough. The precision and attention to detail which Matt places in fielders



Clockwise, from top left: Checkmate With Monty Panesar at the orphanage, on way to defeat by a small child

National obsession I found a huge field with hundreds of people playing cricket

Land of contrasts We were never far from poverty in India

Well-earned break Our on-pitch lieutenant Matt Prior enjoys 40 winks in Nagpur

Local knowledge The early-morning light, colours, expressions and clothes in Mumbai capture the eye

Risky business Workers near Mumbai train station grab a lift

is impressive. It can be hard work having to move a metre or two and occasionally I was caught napping, much to his dismay, but you realise that being precise can be the difference between a wicket or not. Every over, every session is crucial, no let-up, a diving stop, a tap on the backside to keep the bowlers going.

The pitch was dry and this time we won the toss. We were batting. I edged a ball early from Sharma [to wicketkeeper MS Dhoni]. It was poor batting. We limped our way to 330 which we felt with the slowness of the wicket and lack of bounce was not too bad. Then came the turning point – some early wickets for us but for the first time two Indian batsmen dug in and played very well. I thought we were going to go all day without a wicket but we kept going on the toughest day of fielding I have ever had. The rewards came late that night with Jimmy again showing skill to take four wickets. We just had to hold our nerve and bat long

in that second innings. Cooky made sure we did not look forward further than the over we were facing. After every over we made sure we regrouped and focused on getting through the next over. Suddenly 30 overs had gone and while it was painful watching at times, it gave us a platform and tired their bowlers.

Jonathan Trott and Bell produced their best innings on the tour and played beautifully. Celebrations were slightly muted, sometimes the sheer weight of eight weeks catches up with you. When you get across the line a quiet beer, a few songs can suffice. I managed to soak my England cap in some beer, get some shirts signed and we headed for the airport. I perhaps have not realised the enormity of the last eight weeks, making history and being a part of it. I am sure it will sink in over Christmas. I wanted to thank everyone for their support and help. It has definitely been the proudest moment of my life to date.