

What the nose knows



Helen Towers shares her fun foray into Indian jewellery fashion.

I have always been a fan, from a distance, of nose rings as I think they look so beautiful—whether the tiny glint of a diamond stud, the large hoop which encircles the cheek with dangling jewels which rest on the upper lip, or the delicate chains which sway and quiver on their way to the ear. After I arrived in India, nose rings kept their appeal and what better souvenir of my time in India and a constant reminder of all we will have experienced and learnt in our time here. So I decided to go for it.

Surprisingly, nose rings don't have a historic home in India but in the Middle East. They are even mentioned in the Bible. When Rebekah married Isaac, she was given a nose ring for a wedding gift. They became popular in India in the 16th century during the rule of the Moghul emperors.

Nose piercing, coming second in popularity to ear piercings, can be done either in the nostrils or the septum—that's the bit of cartilage between the nostrils. Nose piercings are significant in Indian culture for a variety of reasons.

According to Ayurvedic belief, the ideal place for the nose ring is the left side of the nose as this area is associated with the female reproductive organs. A piercing in the left nostril can increase fertility and ease the pain or duration of childbirth and menstrual cramps. The Hindu significance of the nose ring is to worship or honor Parvathi—the goddess of marriage. For Muslims, the nose ring is an integral part of the bridal jewelry and considered very auspicious. In some areas of India the size of the nose ring has been considered a sign of financial power. As the family gets richer the nose rings of its women get bigger.

However, fashion is taking the place of tradition and a lot of nose piercing today are solely for aesthetic reasons—they look so cute!

Although in India it is customary to have girls' ears pierced at a very early age, nose piercings are done traditionally around the age of sixteen. Nose piercings take longer to heal than ears as the tissue is thicker and has more nerve endings than the ear lobe. It is also supposed to be more painful than an ear piercing, but I didn't notice myself. I had my ears done at 16 and my nose only about 18 months ago. Neither hurt more than a flu shot.



Nose piercings first spread to the west in the sixties with hippies returning from spiritual adventures in India. Later, there was a rebirth in Europe with the arrival of punk rock and the associated onslaught of body piercings by the rebellious to accompany their tartans and mohawks. There has been a more recent resurgence since the turn of the millennium in the west, and the whole appeal has become more mainstream which I suppose is where my enthusiasm comes in.

I went by myself to have my nose studded as I didn't want anyone to talk me out of it—which might have been relatively easy at the time. I did give my husband some advance warning (he was in favor!), but that was all. The whole procedure was not in the slightest bit alarming, I experienced no problems thereafter, nobody was very shocked or surprised (not even my kids or my family back home) and I love it.

I was talking to an Indian friend back in the US on a recent visit home about my nose piercing. Whereas I see my nose stud as pretty cool and fashion forward (at least for me), she had removed her nose ring, which she had had since she was a teenager, because she thought it looked too 'village' and traditional! That is the beauty of our globalized world...different strokes for different folks! ☺

