

Fort Kochi

Cochin, India - February 14, 2008

Naresh:

I woke up early. Amy did not. HBO was there to entertain me with that last third of “Die Hard” (makes John McCain look good; Democrats deserve equal time), and then half of “The Man.” I accidentally played it loud enough to wake up Amy so we could get to breakfast before the 10AM ending time. From the roof of our lodge we got our first daylight view of Kochi. Very green and moist, like Hawaii or Ghana.



Brent at rooftop restaurant

Just two short blocks from our Hotel, The Arches, is the beach where we saw lots of fish and fishermen. Most visually noticeable where the Chinese fishing nets, which are very large nets,

strung between extended logs, counter balanced by more extended logs and counterbalanced by large boulders. Quite big. We couldn't figure out how they worked and would have to wait until high tide to learn.



Brent under a net



Chinese fishing net video

We wandered along south, along the west sea wall of the peninsula that is Fort Kochi, seeing the sights, meeting many friendly people, and enjoying the sea and breeze. We didn't have many goals for the day, other than to get to Jew Town and see the synagogue and Jewish-named shops there. Mostly we just liked saying “Jew Town” and getting away with it (take that, Jesse Jackson). It was a mile, or two, or three to Jew Town, and we walked the whole way. Along the way we found more Christian churches than we've seen elsewhere, goats on the beach, a Dutch cemetery with raised coffins much like in New Orleans, a higher percentage of whities than anywhere else we've yet visited, elephants being loaded on trucks that drove down the street barely scraping the elephant backs under electrical wires, Mother Theresa in a glass case, running sewage-smelling gutters like we'd remembered from Burkina Faso, and some of this and a lot of that. We also saw them decorating a temple and streets with lots of color and lights—it looked like there were set up for a procession and we decided to come back at night to watch it.



elephant preparing for Hindu festival

After a while it was getting hot hot hot, and humid (we understood how Moses must have felt after 40 years in

the desert looking for his own Jew Town), and we were glad to see an ice cream shop, but less glad when we got inside to learn the electricity was off, but glad again that they still had ice cream. We ordered one kind of chocolate from the menu, which we didn't have, then

another kind of chocolate from the menu, which they didn't have, then we asked what they did have and they said "butterscotch," so we had that. Ice cream was a great decision. Refreshed, we resumed our trip to Jew Town.

Jew Town was disappointing. It was very small, and other than a few signs (Amy took pictures of two shops, one with her grandmother's name and another with her grandfather's name) not much to look at. The synagogue was also closed, and wouldn't be open for hours.



Amy in front of synagogue

The Jewish cemetery was a lot like the Dutch one. Jew Street was mostly small shops with art and antiques; we were solicited more there than anywhere else in Kochi by shop owners saying

"come into my shop."

Hot again, we stepped into a restaurant on the edge of the water for cool drinks and fried vegetable yummys (pakodas?)



Amy's grandmother's embroidery



refreshing ice cream

From there Amy took an auto-rickshaw taxi back to the hotel because she was getting very sunburned, leaving me to walk back. I don't know what adventures Amy had on her way back [Amy: I read my

email, talked with a guy at the front desk about how to get a bus tomorrow to our next destination, and took a shower (lots of showers because we get damp very quickly here)], but I got to see a couple miles of various businesses and homes along the waterway. Getting very hot again I was pulled into an air-conditioned cake shop for cake and tea. On leaving my bill was 70 rupees, but the close I had was a 100-rupee bill. It was time for a Rupee Standoff, which is what happens when change is needed in India. The customer says "I don't have change," and the business says "I don't have change," and both sides shrug their shoulders for a while, dig in their pockets, look around, and practice their helpless look until someone caves in either by finding the change (that they knew was there all along), or by fetching change from somewhere else, or by upping or lowering the price, thus losing at Rupee Standoff. (There's probably a prize in economics waiting for someone to explain how much a single rupee is really worth, given that people will change the price of something by at least 10 rupees if it can avoid having to deal with change.)



Brent's pastry shop

Fortunately, it was high tide and so when I was close to the hotel I could watch the operation of the Chinese fishing nets. They weren't nearly as clever as I'd thought.

They simply (not so simple, given that they are made with extended logs to be huge and heavy so that multiple boulders are needed as counterweights) lowered the big nets in the water, waited a bit, and pulled them up, hoping that a dozen or so fish will be caught in the sag in the center. Crows ride the edges of the nets on the way up and try to swoop in for easy prey before the fishermen. I didn't see any crows succeed.

On the way into the hotel a guy at the front desk gave me two roses to bring up, which I did, pretending that I'd remembered it was Valentine's Day and I'd bought flowers. Amy wasn't doing so well in the hotel. She had a headache and felt bad, sun stroke, I guess. After "exuding confidence", rehydrating, and a good nap for a couple of hours we were both good as new so we wandered around for a little bit before dinner, then returned to the hotel roof for dinner.

During dinner we were treated to a dance show. Three women (Amy says it was two) took turns dancing. It looked like Thai dancing (although I've never seen Thai dancing, so I don't know why I say that) with an Indian drum-bases soundtrack. Good stuff, and the food was good too.



Keralan dancers

I was excited then to finally go out to see the once-a-year Hindu festival that was to start that night, that we'd heard about, and that we'd seen

them preparing the streets for. But at the front desk we learned that it wouldn't be until the next night (after we're gone). So we wandered the streets a little bit, found a tailor who sewed Amy's pants, and when asked how much we should pay, he said "as you like".



church

Accommodating culture, these Keralans Amy found

a postcard of the inside of the synagogue. We found Jesus (or was it Mary) in a churchyard where the first



Amy at tailor shop with pic of synagogue

church had been built there in 1505, found the pharmacist from the night before to thank him for curing Amy's skin problem, found ice cream and cake, then found our way back to the hotel. G'night.



Medicine shopkeeper who cured Amy

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