

Holiday Diaries by Denise Taylor, Award Winning Career Coach and Trainee DJ!



Southern India
22nd December 2007 - 9th January 2008

Saturday 22nd December

We flew to Dubai. It was an easy check in. The flight was a bit delayed, but it's a nice airline and we had good food, there was salmon salad, chicken, chocolate cake, cheese and wine on the journey. There were good films; I watched the Bourne Ultimatum, Lost Legend and Die Hard. At Dubai airport, the duty free was so cheap. We changed planes to fly to Cochin, this wasn't quite as modern an aircraft, and there wasn't quite the choice of films; but it was only a three and a half hour journey (3.5hr).

Sunday 23rd December Cochin

We arrived at [Cochin](#) this morning. Cochin is called the Queen of the Arabian Sea. We had ordered a taxi which was waiting for us and it was a lot less busy on the road going to Cochin than it was when we went to [Delhi](#). We saw a washing machine showroom on fire and a fire engine go rushing towards it.

We liked the hotel. It had a well dressed doorman outside who seemed so proud and I'm so disappointed I completely forgot to take his photograph. The prices of drinks, well it's 125 Rupees for a beer, so it's about £1.50 and 25 Rupees for a lime soda, that's about £0.30p.

We just had a bit of a wander. We found a jewellery store as I wanted to get my pearls restrung so we got that organised. I was a bit disappointed because from the internet it said that the hotel had a swimming pool, but it didn't, but it was a nice hotel and we had a beautiful marble bathroom and they did a decent breakfast, with cooked eggs, fruit juices, etc...

Monday 24th December Fort Cochin

We decided to visit [Fort Cochin](#). We could have got the ferry but we got a bit confused. Anyway, it only cost us about £2.00 to drive there. We went to look at the Chinese fishing nets and we got a bit ripped off, not by much just a couple of pounds and we did get some great photographs. We had a drink at a nice hotel with a tiny swimming pool and we wandered the streets. It was so hot so we went to a shop and got some clothes made up. They said they would do it in about an hour and it took about four hours, but it was nice to have pure linen clothes rather than the clothes we'd taken.

We ate lunch at a street café. Later we visited a spice market and we saw root ginger drying. It was Christmas Eve and there were a lot of Christmas decorations. We got back to the hotel, and arranged to have our laundry done. When we went to dinner, it was all very special and there was a Christmas gift waiting for us.

Tuesday 25th December - Cochin

We had another day to ourselves and we met a couple who were also on our trip. They were from Singapore, and were going off to a Museum so we said we would go with them. It was closed so together we went over to [Vypeen Island](#). Together we got the tuk-tuk to the ferry port and it was so cheap on the ferry. Only 2 Rupees each way. Then we got a tuk-tuk to take us to the beach and we all managed to fit in as it was quite expensive.

The beach was a bit of a disappointment, there was no food for sale, we couldn't get any beer and there weren't any loungers that we could hire so we just walked along the beach. We were interviewed by an Indian TV company and were asked to give our New Year messages. All the Indian people wore their clothes in the sea, I had a paddle in my trousers.

We had a drink and got the ferry back to the hotel, had a beer and a snack at the hotel and met the group at 6pm. We were quite surprised because most of the people there were our age or even older. There were two couples who were in their late 30's early 40's but everyone else were in their 50's and beyond and I think that changed the dimensions of the group compared to last year.

There were a brother and sister who were a bit anti establishment and they hadn't even got the money to pay the local payment that they should have done, so that was a bit odd and later on we found that they got weirder and weirder...

Wednesday 26th December - Cochin

As a group we got the ferry to [Mattancherry](#) and we visited the [Jewish Synagogue at Jew Town](#), the Dutch Palace and St Francis Church. We had already been to Fort Cochin before; so we left the group and went to collect our shopping. We bought some stamps and had some lunch. In the afternoon we started looking for some gifts and I was desperate to find some of the embroidered parasols, but there was just none available. Once we got back to Cochin we went looking for some sandals for Simon and we then had a rest.

In the evening we went off to see a **Thalali show**. It was good but it went on too long. We then had dinner with the group.

Thursday 27th December - Ootacamund

After breakfast we took the **tuk-tuk's** to the railway station, we had 6 hours on a train. There was plenty of food to buy, and eating some fresh pineapple was lovely and really, really tasty.

We stopped at a town and then we got a mini bus over to Ooty. [Ootacamund](#) is the famous hill station known as Snooty Ooty. It is located 2286 metres above sea level in the [Nilgiris or Blue Mountains](#). It was founded by the British in the early part of the 19th Century by [John Sullivan](#), a transcriber of the council of The British East India Company.

The train arrived at a town and we had time for a snack and then three hours of fourteen hair pin bends to Ooty. There was lots of overtaking on blind bends although signs said not to – pretty scary!

We stayed at the **Tata Rest Home** for Army officers. It was all faded glory and whilst it could have been lovely it was all rather damp and needed good decoration. It just looked a bit unloved. It's actually very cheap at the Tata Rest Home and we later found out that our breakfast was only 45 Rupee which was just over £0.50p and that included scrambled eggs as well.

That evening the group were going to walk into Ooty to have a meal in one of the many cheap restaurants there, but we decided that we wanted to go somewhere nice, so we went to the [Savoy Hotel](#) and had some expensive gin and Schweppes tonic, I also had a couple of cocktails. The buffet had lots of choice so we really, really enjoyed it there and even had mulligatawny soup. We enjoyed being on our own rather than part of a big group.

Friday 28th December - Coonor

[Coonor](#) is 19 km south of Ooty, this town is where the toy train changes onto rack and pinion track pulled by steam engine.

Breakfast was not until 8.15 so we had a little walk first. This was the day that we were meant to get the **Toy Train** to Coonar. However, by the time we got to the railway station the train was completely full and they decided on an alternative. We got the mini bus down to Coonar – that was an experience because there were 36 hair pin bends.

Here's some quotes along the road side

- "Reach home in peace, not in pieces."
- "Speed Thrills and Kills."
- "Impatient on road, patient in hospital."
- "Never mix drinking and driving."

We visited a tea factory and saw how tea was made and got some good photographs and we then went on to see how herbs were grown and tasted some not very nice wine. We got to the railway station an hour early and were glad we did, it meant we did get on the train. It was an interesting journey back up to Ooty.

In Ooty, we had a look around the botanical gardens. It was just like being in England. I also got to go on the Internet and do my emails. Simon managed to buy some beer and then when we got back to the hotel, and drank the beer on the veranda.

At 6.00pm we left and got a tuk-tuk's to the [Kings Cliff hotel](#), it was recommended. It was a very nice setting, nice panelling, but the place was cold, service was slow and they didn't serve alcohol. We told the tuk-tuk to come back in 3 hours, but should have just made it two; time goes so slowly when you are waiting. I had fish fingers with chips and tartare sauce as a starter, it was a very small portion! Simon had mushroom soup. Then Simon had Shepherd's Pie and I had beef but it really wasn't brilliant. The best bit was the chocolate brownie and ice-cream. They had a CD playing and it was the same one tune going on and on again, they just didn't seem to realise it was stuck. It really was cold and I got a bit chilled.

Saturday 29th December - Masinagudi

On Saturday we left to go to [Masinagudi](#) to stay at a [jungle retreat](#), made entirely of natural materials such as rocks, mud and bamboo. This was a lovely centre. We slept in a dormitory which wasn't ideal, but it was fine. When we went into the dorm I was one of the first into the room and I managed to get a bed up against the wall so I had Simon on one side of the wall on the other so that was a lot better.

There was a nice buffet lunch and we could just chill out that afternoon which was bliss. It was quite hot so we didn't sit around the pool but had a few beers around the bar and in the evening we had an option to go and see the elephants. We saw how they were fed and we had a bit of a drive around looking for wild animals although obviously we were too noisy and didn't see any.

The holiday had said we would go on safari into the wilds of [Bandipur National Park](#). "Bandipur was once the Mysore Maharaja's private hunting ground. It was brought under [Project Tiger](#) in 1974 and is one of the best game sanctuaries in India to observe and photograph wildlife in close proximity. Some animals you may see include the tiger, leopard, elephant, sloth bear, sambar and spotted deer and there is a variety of birdlife, some of the most notable birds being the heron, stork, egret, kite, falcon, peafowl, woodpecker, drongo and the warbler". Umm, didn't get to see anything!

Monday 30th December – Mysore

We could have gone on a jungle walk leaving at 6am but gave it a miss. I wanted to have a relaxing morning. We took the mini bus and there were more hair pin bends on our way to [Mysore](#), down a hill. It was a long and bumpy journey to Mysore and the coach was uncomfortable. All of the seats sloped back so you couldn't sit up straight. Lucky we stopped for a break and drank some coconut juice.

Mysore was first settled in the 15th Century under the Wodeyar dynasty. Just 20 years in the late 18th Century, [Tippu Sultan's](#) had power until the British defeated him. The power returned to the Wodeyars. Once the capital of the prince estate, the city of palaces today is a small easy walk able town surrounding the Maharaja Palace. The Maharaja of Mysore was prior to independence, one of the richest and most powerful rulers in British India. He was one of only 5 rulers to be awarded the 21 gun salute. Mysore is known as Sandalwood City and is also famous for silk.

The hotel was very close to the Palace. Everyone else decided to have a relax, but Simon and I went exploring. We had lunch at a roof top restaurant, with great views. Then we walked all around the outside of the [Mysore Palace](#) and took some photographs and bought some bracelets and anklets. We were offered drugs, but declined!

When we met the group at 6.00pm for our orientation walk we found out that we walked every where we had gone on our own. We then went to the Palace. The reason we went to Mysore on Sunday was because the Palace was just lit up for one day of the week and it was absolutely beautiful. If you look at the photograph you can see how great it was. We decided to leave

the group and do our own thing this evening, 15 minutes was enough, we didn't want to spend over an hour there. We went for a drink, really weren't hungry, so I had a green salad and Simon had tomato soup and a couple of poppadums.

Monday 31st December – Mysore

We had breakfast and then we went to visit the **Durga temple** at [Chamundi Hill](#). We then went to see the famous **Nandi bull statue** and we took some photographs. We had a free afternoon, so had lunch in the hotel and then we went to take some photos at the market and I managed to get some cheap silk.

That evening we had a meal at the home of a Muslim. We got to the station in plenty of time for the overnight 11 hour train journey train to Chennai. Simon had arranged that I had a lower bunk because I really didn't want to be on one of the upper ones, but I still couldn't sleep.

Tuesday 1st January - Manallapuram

I hardly slept at all on the train, but did rest. We had arranged for a car to take us to the [Madras War Cemetery](#). We needed to explain exactly where it was. We managed to stop for breakfast and went to the [Grand Hotel](#). It was divine, a beautiful 5 star hotel a lovely lobby and a glass lift. We opted for a buffet breakfast and had fruit juice, croissants, fresh fruit, toast, eggs, bacon, omelettes and tea, it cost 10 times a normal breakfast but worth every penny. We then went to visit the grave, it was very moving. We spoke to the manager and the two gardeners; we took some photos and rang Mary. We bought all the red roses they had and put them on the grave.

Then we travelled to **Manallurpam**, by private car, so much nicer than bus. The group were due to go for a cycle ride at 3pm, but as the rooms were not ready so they decided to at around 11.00am. I was already hot and bothered, so I didn't go. The hotel has a pool so I decided to relax around it. Simon said I made the right decision as it was very hot, lot's of temples, in depth talks from guides. I lazed by the pool and spoke to two Swedish ladies, Kirsten and Barbara about not doing things, Tony Robbins and about the ashram they were going to stay at for 21 days. I've decided in future holidays I want stay three days in one place.

Manallapuram is 60km south of [Chennai](#), It's a small fishing village, which was once part of the Pallava dynasty kingdom. There are 14 cave temples, 9 Ratha's, Mona Olympic Temples, 3 stone temples and four rock panels.

When Simon came back we went for a walk but it's more of the same. I tried to get a beer, well we tried to a beer, but it was impossible so we drank from the minbar. We listened to traffic noise; it's all too noisy for me.

We decided to eat at the rooftop restaurant, what a disappointment! Only beer, there was no other alcoholic drinks, we ordered starters and mains. Our mains came after 40 minutes and our starters about 10 minutes after that. They've got no idea! So I was getting quite angry.

We got the bill and put the exactly the right money. It was all so disappointing and I'd wanted pudding so went to the shop over the road and bought chocolate.

Wednesday 2nd January – Pondicherry and Auroville

Pondicherry is the former trading haunt of Greeks, Romans and finally the French until 1954.

We had a basic breakfast and left at 8.45am for [Pondicherry](#) and [Auroville](#). The journey was interesting, basic houses, and amazing salt pans. Auroville is an experiment in community living. 'The City of Dawn' or Auroville, is located 10km north of Pondicherry. "The Mother" started work on this universal town in 1968 and 30 years later it is still incomplete. There's 50 settlements spread across 20 square kilometres, a large modern architectural marvel, the [Matramandir](#) houses a meditation room that holds the largest single glass crystal in the world.

We had to watch two films before we could visit the outside of the gold sphere and I had juice and cake.

We arrived at our Pondicherry hotel; it's quite impressive with the large drive. It was around 1.15pm we were all due to meet at 4.00pm, but we said we would walk on our own. We looked at the hotel restaurant, it was really depressing. No windows and very utilitarian furniture It was easy to follow a map. We went to a paper factory and bought some cards, a bit of browsing and had lunch at a nice hotel, "[The Promenade Hotel](#)" on the seafront.

We then had a walk around the French Quarter, used the internet but had to get tuk-tuk's as we got lost. We had our evening meal at [The Rendezvous](#), a French restaurant. I got my chips about 20 minutes before my Cauliflower Au Gratin. Simon had chicken and chips.

Thursday 3rd January- Madurai

We arrived in [Madurai](#) late afternoon, again travelling by train. We visited the [Sri Meenakshi temple](#) which lies at the heart of the city. We also wandered around the streets. The temple is surrounded by bustling small streets filled with bazaars. Legends has it that when a Panja King founded the town, Lord Shiva, was present in drops of nectar fell from his matted locks at the place and that's how it got its name. That evening we ate at the hotel and met a couple from Gloucestershire. They are well over 60 and doing a 9 week holiday on their own, much more adventurous than us.

Friday 4th January - Thekkady

We woke early so we went and got some cash from the ATM. We had a cup of hot Chai, ooh you'd love chai! We saw a man ironing and took his photo. We had breakfast at the roof top I rant Everyone was getting a public bus to the next place. We decided to get a car with Margo, so much nicer, I was getting fed up of the low class of travelling and was spoilt with the car journey we had taken. We got here before 12pm, almost 2 hours before the rest and could go to our rooms right away,

Named after Thekkan or teak trees, the small village of [Thekkady](#) is the only entrance point to the [Periyar Tiger Reserve](#) which is renowned for its biodiversity. Declared a protected the area in 1933, and covers 777 square kilometres, this tropical forest of teak, rosewood and

bamboo, its home to tigers, elephants, langur, leopards, bore, deer and antelope, not to mention a rich variety of birds and reptiles.

We strolled down the main road, loads of shops all selling similar things. I booked for an **Ayurvedic** massage. Lots of oils massaged in, using quite a hard pressure. The oil was rubbed off and then I had a steam bath. My skin felt great and the oil was great for my hair.

We met the group at 4.45pm and we visited the spice farm. We saw growing: black pepper, cloves, nutmeg tree (also known as mace), curry plant, turmeric root, ginger root, powder puff flower, double hibiscus, hair nut tree, spider, cinnamon tree (x2), chili plant, custard apple (x3), tiny bees making black honey, turmeric plant (x2), long papaya, arabica coffee, vanilla, lemon (x2), cocoa bean (x2), breadfruit tree, telegraph plant, a sign, cardemom, bamboo, cinnamon, red pineapple.

Then we all had dinner in banana leaves and we had to eat with our hands, I find this disgusting, so I didn't eat much at all. Later we went on the net and bought some snacks for early breakfast. Tomorrow we are up at 6.00am for a jungle walk.

Saturday 5th January

We were woken at 6.00am for our jungle walk. We had to wear neutral coloured clothes and long trousers. We took tuk-tuk's to the park and eventually given leech socks (but I still got leeches in my shoes) and went across the river on a bamboo raft. We met a local forest guide for a 3 hour walk in the park to try and find some of the herds of wild elephant it's famous for. We were given leech socks but still got some leeches in our shoes. Whilst it was very interesting we only saw some monkeys, and squirrels but not much. Lots of noises and monkey, bird sounds. We got very muddy and both of us sat on the raft and trudged through the mud. We got back about 11.00am, had a shower to make sure we didn't have any leeches on us. We then had lunch out, chicken and chips, not very adventurous but I am getting fed up with Indian food. We sat around the cottages, we needed a rest. Mid afternoon we went to the lake and were unable to get tickets for the lake so was bit of wasted journey but we could take a few more photos of monkeys.

We had a local walk, found the internet and called my mum. We got back to the hotel at about 4.50pm and then just sat and chatted about businesses, we then had dinner and VJ and Kelly joined us.

Sunday 6th January

Breakfast was at 7.00am as we had to leave at 7.30am. Two vehicles to take us to **Kollyam**, the journey was long, I hadn't expected 4 hours by road and we stopped to take some photo's on route. When we got to Kollyam, we got on a boat, it was quite hot so I stayed down stairs. It was lovely taking photographs but it was noisy because of the engine.

We arrived at our home stay; it was nice but a bit of a building site. It was about 3.00pm when we had lunch, a traditional **keralean meal**. There was an option of a village walk or a trip on a pole boat but we decided to stay chilled and the people didn't get back until about 8.30pm and said it was all dark on the boat anyway.

It was after 9.00pm by the time we finally ate 2 sardines and potato stuffed with japati.

Monday 7th January

We woke at 7.00am and we went to use our bathroom, it wasn't en-suite but it was our bathroom and Kelly was in it – unbelievable!

We had an Indian breakfast, it was okay but I prefer English breakfasts. Chappati's, chick pea mix and banana fritters and then a bus to **Appalley**. Along with Jan and Mark we decided to stay in Appaley a while and get a taxi back. Appaley is where the boats leave from but not very touristy, however we took some interesting photographs.

When we got back to the hotel in Cochin we were pleased to be back. We liked the hotel, it was 3 stars and much nicer than everywhere else we have stayed, we had showers, a beer and we went to get my pearls and we met everyone else at 6.45pm for a farewell drink and a meal.

Tuesday 8th January

This was my shopping day, but I woke up and was ill, we did go to the Internet and I did manage to go online for about half an hour but I was feeling worse and worse, so I spent my last day in India in bed and running to the loo. Not my final day of shopping that I had planned, but never mind, as Simon said I would have only wished I hadn't bought it afterwards.

Wednesday 9th January

On the Wednesday we left at 7.00am, went to the airport; it was quite quiet and relaxed compared to being at [Delhi](#) and we came back via Dubai. It was uneventful and we got back at 9.30pm and we both realised we think we have had enough of the low quality hotels and are going to have a bit of pampering next time.