

Cochi (Kochi) to Alleppy

Alappuszha, India - February 15, 2008

Amy:

We woke up, packed, ate breakfast, and left our beautiful hotel Arches. One of the men working at the front desk ripped up our internet time sheet (which had a tally of our minutes), bobbed his head, and said we should not worry about paying. :)

I had asked for bus directions to Alleppy the day before, and the travel person at the hotel had tried to persuade me to take a car, saying it was faster. I told him that my husband loves buses (which is true) and that we wanted to take a bus, as we didn't have much luggage, even though it would be longer. We walked outside our hotel to find the same movie filming as the day before, directly outside the door. They hadn't blocked off the street from cars or passersby (which continued to honk and squeeze around the film crew), but they were

shooting a movie with lights, and an actor, who looked like Placido Domingo, on a balcony.



filming movie in Cochin

We walked to the bus stop, near the fishing nets, and, after figuring out which side to board the bus, we asked the driver if he was going to a bridge (I forget the name) where we had to catch another bus to Alleppy. He bobbed his head (a "yes" gesture? or no?) so we boarded the big red bus. A few minutes later, a ticket taker came buy and collected our money (10 rupees total for both of us). We drove about 10 minutes, listening to the buses loud sound system all the way, until the ticket-taker man gestured to us that the bus had reached our stop. We got off the bus and asked a few people where to catch the bus to



Video
bus ride

Alleppy. A few minutes later, a bus to Alleppy came (we double-checked with the driver to make sure Alleppy was the destination—he bobbed his head in a way that we thought was not a no) and we boarded another bus to Alleppy. We paid the ticket taker 36 rupees per person, and were on our way. The ride was pleasant and shorter than we had thought. The travel person at Hotel Arches had said that the ride to Alleppy by bus would take 2.5 hours, 1.5 by car.



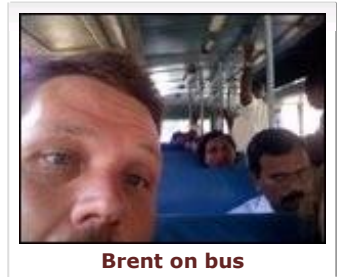
Che Guevara on the bus



bus

Either the bus went faster than usual or was an express bus, b/c the ride took 1 hour. Brent and I had ample room on the bus, which had high seats (I couldn't see in front of my seat) and sliding windows. [Naresh: I could see out the front of the bus. It was insane. I was insane

for watching, but I couldn't help myself. But at least our bus was real big, so in most collisions Newton would have declared us the winner. [Who was it that used to criticize selfish Americans for buying bigger cars because it would make them safer in a crash... oh yeah, that was me.] We got off the bus at the Alleppy bus station and debated whether or not to take another bus or a rickshaw to our homestay. I decided that we should take another bus, since we were already at the bus station. Since the signs on the bus were in Malayalam (the language of Kerala) we had to (again) ask each bus driver if he went to Changancherry (or destination was Nedumudy Bridge/ Pooppally Junction). The third bus we asked went to Changancherry (although his pronunciation was totally different than ours), so we hopped on. We paid 14 rupees and I asked the money taker man to let us know when our stop had come. We drove 7 km and a man tapped me on my back, gesturing for us to go to the back of the bus (to disembark). We got up and off the bus. We didn't see "Pooppallys" right away, so we asked a man where it was located, and he said it was half a kilometer away up the road. We walked up the road and finally found Pooppallys. (www.pooppallys.com)



Brent on bus



Pooppallys homestay is several buildings surrounding a small pond. We walked inside and were greeted by an elderly man (Joseph) who urged us to come and have some cool drinks.

The buildings were dark brown wood, and we learned that Joseph's grandfather had built them 150 years ago. There were many trees & plants surrounding the house and we soon learned that our meals would be cooked with home-grown fruits, spices, and vegetables. (!) We wandered outside to find our friends from Boston (whom we had met in Delhi and had told us about Pooppallys), Mark and Kelly, relaxing on the waterfront. The back of the place faced the backwaters, and we watched boats passing by. Mark and Kelly gave us the 411 about the place, the food (vegetarian) and the owner, Joseph, a retired college "principle" whom Mark described as "your grandfather in Kerala". A woman (who we learned was Joseph's wife) brought us a cool lime and ginger drink. We chatted with Mark and Kelly for a while, and watched canoes, fishing boats, huge houseboats, and ferries pass by, until we were called inside for lunch.



walking at Pooppallys

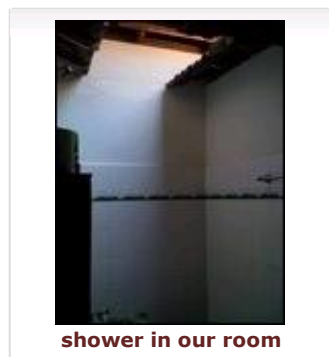


welcome to Pooppallys

Lunch was a delicious, huge, many-course home-cooked meal served by Joseph and his wife. They had prepared jackroot mixed with seasonings, white puffy rice, a lentil

dish, a small fried fish, and about 2 other dishes. All of the dishes were “typical Keralan” food and were made with ginger, coconut, nutmeg, allspice, lemongrass, but were less spicy than regular Keralan fare. Joseph explained that he started the homestay when he retired, 10 year ago, and made the food less spicy to appeal to foreigners. He and his wife started eating the less spicy food and decided that they liked it less spicy, too. We were given mineral water (bottled water) and served plates and plates of food until we were about to burst! After lunch, we talked to Joseph for a while, and he showed us to our room, which was part of a converted barn overlooking the water. There was an open-air shower and many mosquitoes, so he advised us to keep the door to the bathroom shut.

Mark and Kelly had mentioned that they were going to take a backwater cruise, so we decided to crash their cozy twosome and go with them. Joseph had mentioned that a small guided boat would be better (and cheaper) to see the backwaters and the smaller canals that the large houseboats can't enter. After applying loads of sunscreen and taking bottled water from Joseph, we got on a small motorized 2-story canoe for our backwater tour.



shower in our room



ready for boat ride

The three-hour cruise was relaxing and fun (and beautiful- a glimpse into life on the backwaters) Kelly and I chatted and we learned about their trip and adventures in India. They had

gone to Rajasthan as well, but had stayed in homestays and only occasionally booked guided tours. They had



Mark and Kellie on the boat

also been to Benares (Varanasi) and had a great time, although the city was dirty. It was fun waving to the kids on the riverbanks, who were friendly and would yell to us in English, often asking for chocolate or pens.

We saw people bathing and washing clothes, and a Hindu temple and Christian church. We

were all excited to see a hammer and sickle on flags, and one painted on a wall (the Communist party is strong in Kerala. We were able to sit on top of



church in backwaters

the boat in the smaller, shady canals, and watch children coming home from school.



commie flag

We passed about 100 huge houseboats, all shaped like rice, some luxurious with cable t.v. and air conditioning. (We were all very



Video view of backwaters from boat



Video houseboat traffic jam

thankful that we hadn't chosen a houseboat). We meandered along the canals and saw goats, water buffalo, fisherman (Mark told us that he saw one hit the water with his paddle and scare fish into his net). Kelly had brought sweets, so we ate some sweets during the



backwaters



backwaters



Amy & Brent on boat

ride.

When we got back to Pooppallys, Joseph was at the dock to meet us. Brent and Mark tipped the driver, then we went inside for tea.

When it was nearly dark, Mark, Kelly, and Brent decided to go for a walk down the path along the water to see a nearby Hindu temple. I felt dirty and sweaty and decided to take a shower and unpack. [Naresh: Our walk was on a trail along the waterway. It was dark by the time we got the half-mile or so to the temple. We saw dozens of women, mostly in white and all carrying a candle, in a long single-file procession; I don't know how long the entire procession was because we just saw the end. Joseph had said that the people at the temple would not be keen to have us invading so we laid back in the shadows. A girl with her family stopped to chat with us and make small small talk—apparently practicing her English, which was much better than ours.]

A little while later, we were called to dinner, where we sat down in the dining room and met another couple from Belgium. Joseph served us (again) but refused to sit down himself, saying that he'd eat later. We ate another delicious home-cooked meal, a coconut curry, a chicken dish, and several others, all cooked, seasoned and spiced with homegrown ingredients.

We ended up talking for several hours with Mark, Kelly, and the other couple from Belgium. The Belgian woman lives in Pune, and they were in Kerala on their way to diving in the Maldives.

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