

Sunday. 8th February flight to India

Departure from **England**. Derek arrives at 3pm for a leisurely transfer to the airport. After a snowy week the day is the best for a while and the snow and slush on the roads have melted so there is no difficulty about driving. After a cup of tea and a last look around we leave at 3.30 and head for the Fox and Pheasant carvery near Stoke Poges. It starts to rain and it's rather bleak as we head for the airport, arriving at about six for the 9.30 flight - lots of time but I have plenty to read and do. Terminal five is very comfortable and spacious with not too many flights at this time of the evening and seems rather like a department store. Everything goes smoothly and the flight takes off on time and seems to be full. There is dinner (Indian veg, G and T and red wine) and breakfast.

Monday, 9th Feb - Mumbai

The BA flight continues and lands on time at 11.30. The progress through the airport is steady. There is still rebuilding so the terminal is not so comfortable as the domestic one but it is efficient and the pre-paid taxi desk is there. Rs 390 to Colaba and arrival at the Suba Palace at about two after about an hour in the reasonable traffic. It's sunny, not too hot and as always plenty to see.

The room is comfortable with twin beds, new TV with satellite (including BBC world) and I take a shower and a rest.

I go out for cash (Rs10 000 with Nationwide - no trouble). There is a small post office inside the Law Courts for post card stamps but a misunderstanding (Inland instead of England?) yields them at Rs2.50 in spite of help from another customer. I stroll back to the hotel and ask about the rate - they suggest 8 or 10.

After a short rest I check the walking time to CST. The GPO there says Rs12 for post cards which I send to Margaret and Michael and Clive in Oberwald. I get a timetable at Wheelers bookstall, buy ground coffee at the tea and coffee shop and walk back to Trishna at 6.15.

Hyderabadi Pomfret, Stir fried veg, paratha and beer for Rs880, good as ever, and a card for their new branch in London. I hand in laundry and bed at 9.15 for episodic sleep. It's too warm and the AC doesn't seem too efficient.

Tuesday, 10th Feb - Mumbai

After a very episodic night I get up at nine, after various spells of sleep and podcasts. The A/C is not effective and the room is still very warm. After a shower, I feel ready for a leisurely breakfast with S Indian, toast and cornflakes. Soon I'm ready to go out for a walk to Nariman point which I reach after several diversions. There is plenty of evidence of security. The Woodlands Restaurant that I was planning to use is not known; certainly not where the guide book describes. But the water front is attractive and the weather good - not too warm and with a breeze. I head back towards base and find the Hotel Majestic for a cheap lunch as recommended. Veg Thali and coffee for Rs52.

At one I get my ticket for Slum Dog across the road at the Regent Cinema (150 for circle seat) and have time to take my things back to the hotel before the 1.30 start. The cinema is half empty but comfortable with a large screen and lots of volume. We start with National anthem and a flag on the screen, adverts on slides and two halves for the film. The film is rather violent, particularly to start with but an interesting story with lots of flashbacks to explain how Jamal knows the answers.

After the film at 3.30, it's back to the hotel for a while and then to Horniman circle for a sit down with the book and to watch the world go by. Back by a different route via the art festival at Colaba and the Food Inn for a cheese sandwich and lime soda and to the internet cafe. At the hotel it's TV, puzzles, packing retrieving laundry and bed at 9.45 but little sleep.

Wednesday 11 Feb -Mumbai to Siolem

I'm up before alarms (the telephone didn't work) after dozing. Shower, final packing, pay (Rs48) for laundry and away at six. The streets are empty and it's cooler (but still warm) and it takes about 25min to CST with my two rucksacks and to get the papers.

I find the seat immediately but it's not a good one, being next to the AC, but two backpackers use the side seats so I have the bench seat to myself in the usual 2AC. The time passes agreeably enough with the usual reading, teas, coffees, veg cutlet sandwich and some conversation with the backpackers who want to get to Panaji but are booked to Margao - appropriate advice.

The train starts late (about 15min) and gradually gets later and later having to wait on the single line for oncoming trains and even being overtaken. Arrival at Tivim is 1.30hours late (6.45 at dusk) and after buying water I find Tom (who is a Goan from a neighbouring village), my 'transfer' is still waiting and when we get to Siolem Sarah soon arrives to let me in and show me around. Everything is in order apart from the bathroom light. There is a mobile phone to communicate with her. The TV card has expired but she puts on more credit. I go out to find bread, but the local shop has none, but the door guard tells me that the delivery man will come between 6 - 7.30 and use a horn to announce his arrival. After a cup of tea and some biscuits and a little TV to bed with a pill and so more sleep. Perhaps not so warm as Mumbai.

Thursday 12 Feb - Siolem

About 7.15 I hear the bread man and quick dressing and out gets me two large flat rolls for Rs10; he also has milk. Back to bed to for a while and then a shower and breakfast of tea, bread and marmalade

(from home) and to the balcony for a spell of reading.

At about 10.30 I get ready to head to Mapusa with a large rucksack and a shopping list.

The walk along the side road and main road to Siolem church takes about twenty minutes.

As the day is getting warm and humid I decide against the idea of walking to Mapusa. The bus arrives in 10 mins and cost 6/- and standing room only. Mapusa is as I remember, reassuringly familiar. My first destination is the bookshop (Other India) for the one I left behind and two novels, then the gin shop and to the Asoka restaurant for a Masala Dosa and coffee for Rs26. A small shop is very efficient and supplies nearly all I want including loose cocoa. Then to the market for tangerines and the bakery for bread and individual cakes (bolls, a Goan speciality made with Jaggery and a bit like parkin but drier with less ginger).

After a fruitless search for a paper on to a bus which leaves after about ten minutes and adjures no spiting. The exit from town takes twent minutes through the traffic jams but then sails along to Siolem church where I get out to get milk and litchee juice and walk back to the flat to spend the rest of the afternoon reading and resting.

After a shower I walk along the road to see the sunset over the estuary looking towards the Charpora Fort and the open sea. There are shell fish gatherers on the mud flats and lots of people around with greetings; also lots of dogs. Back after dark for porridge, HC, GT snacks and TV. Bed at 10.15 but little sleep.

Friday 13 Feb - Siolem

Dozing till 6.30 an finally up after the poor night. I have a leisurely breakfast, shower and numerous cups of tea on the balcony until eleven.

I set off with a rucksack for a walk to Vagator. I should have started earlier as it's warm. I go along the main road past Siolem church to Asago in about an hour. The crossroads is near to the Tamarind and I nearly change my mind. The road is fairly busy. Turning right at the crossroads towards Vagator I find that a lot is familiar and soon the Alcove is signposted and I reach it at 1.05. It is much the same but rather more expensive: Veg Pakoda, sweet lime juice, spinach, fried rice, coffee for Rs360. It is pleasant to spend an hour and a half eating on the cliff top in the shade with plenty of breeze.

The it's to the Cyber cafe for emails and to upload some photos and send links to various people. Pippa answers immediately.

The walk back between 3.30 and 5.30 is gentle via Charpora and the coastal road with less traffic but plenty of motor bikes. The road arrives at Siolem church conveniently for milk and juice and then 5l of water (30/- + 20/- deposit) just before the flat.

GT on the balcony until sunset and then in for the usual evening including TV - Fox, National Geographic and BBC followed by a better night.

Saturday 14 Feb - Siolem

It's up earlier for the through bus to Panaji at 7.20 from outside the flat with time for a shower, juice toast and coffee. The bus does indeed turn up and a woman also waiting explains that there is a return bus (to Siolem Godem) at 6.20 and that shee would ask the conductor about an earlier bus (5pm from Panaji). There are plenty of seats and the 12/- ride is very pleasant in the cool morning air. We wait about ten minutes in Mapusa and then continue full and non stop to Panaji arriving at 8.20. The air is still pleasant and I walk via the pottery to check opening times and then to Vihar for a second breakfast - Mysore Dosa, Papaya juice and coffee for 58/-.

I walk through the town towards Miramar and sit on a seat on the edge of the beach. My companion is a 54 year old widower from Goa who is now living in Bangalore. He speaks six languages and his family are in the water. Next a German electrical engineer joins us. He has just arrived in Goa from Frankfurt (via Mumbai and air India) and is heading for Calangute.

He comes from Hameln. After a while I walk along the beach to Donna Paula, the last part along the road stopping for a Limca and horrified by the amount of sugar. At DP I sit in the sun for a while with the papers and then back to the bus stand for a bus back to Panaji. I leave my hat on the bus but can't find it in the bus station.

The next bus is to Old Goa where I revisit the museum of Christian Art but there is little in the shop and after a visit to Bom Jesu I get the bus back. Some shopping in town including the pottery although most of the stuff is imported from Portugal. I manage a plate for Margaret and a tile for me, both from Goa. The bookshop doesn't have Q and A. At the bus stand I find the through bus to Siolem which has no free seats. It runs fast to Mapusa but is due to wait thirty minutes there so I find another to get home at six. The usual evening is followed by a decent night.

Sunday 15 Feb - Siolem

Out for a walk at seven and find that the bus to Panaji does run on Sundays. I follow a circuit through the streets to the Siolem bus stand on the river side. There are plenty of shops, internet cafe and laundry but mostly closed, although two English newspapers are available. Back for breakfast, laundry and the balcony until 11.30 and then the bus to Mapusa for lunch (Ashok, Punjabi Thali and coffee for 65/-) and shopping - a hat for 60 and fruit - lemons (1/- each), pineapple and mango (30). Back to continue the relaxation. Phone Clive with the mobile. Second time lucky but initially he thinks he's speaking to a colleague and we have a surreal conversation. The power fails at six for about two hours so podcasts on bed, and then TV (Nat Geo about raising Abu Simnel and the the great pyramid of Ghiza). To bed (not bad but waken about four).

Monday 16 Feb - Siolem

Up at about 5.45 for shower and a large breakfast with porridge, pineapple, mango and bananas, toast and coffee.

Out at 7.10 in the cool of the morning but the sun is soon up. Through the back streets to the main road as yesterday, then to and over the bridge and left to Morjim. There is a little too much traffic but it's a pleasant walk along the river. I explore Morjim and mistakenly ask for Chopdem (Google map wrong?) which takes me back to the bridge. A bus eventually takes me to Arambol for 10/-. The walk to the beach goes past all the usual tourist tat. I

find an internet cafe but there is no power. The Rice Bowl provides a pancake and tea and the after a walk along the bridge lunch at Fellinis - spaghetti with spinach, mushrooms and cheese, sweet lime juice and port wine and then back to the internet cafe for half an hour. I stroll back to the bus stand via the church (locked) and shop for candles, just missing the bus. Twenty minute later there one to Siolem and I spend the journey chatting to a girl from Lindau who is in India for three months and going to Siolem for the ATM. The evening is as before with no power cut and poor TV. Laundry and bed at 9.30 till 3.30 and then dozing.

Tuesday 17 Feb - Siolem

Up at 5.45, breakfast etc and out by 7.15. The bus to Panaji passes as I walk to St Anthony's church and then right onto the Charpora road. As always the atmosphere is pleasant but the sun comes up and the temperature goes up. There are several villages along the riverside and then along the road and path to Charpora fort with hazy views all around, with about six other people. I go over the top to the headland and then a rather scrambly descent with one slip and through vegetation to the beach. The walk along the beaches and around the headland to Anjuna is very pleasant and then it's through the network of lanes, guest houses, shops and restaurants to the German Bakery for an excellent toasted cheese and tomato sandwich, cappuccino and orange juice for 160/-. After this rest in the shade, it's back into the sun for the walk along the beach and around the headland to Baga. Internet at 60/- is too expensive but a 8/- bus takes me to Mapusa, but with a long layover at Calungute.

The Ashok in Mapusa is full so shopping for beer and milk before a bus to Siolem by a different route, followed by a twenty minute walk back to the flat. A leisurely afternoon is followed by laundry and TV, which is more interesting.

Wednesday 18 Feb - Siolem

Up at six and after a shower out for a dawn walk along the road away from the main road.

As always it is an excellent time of day with quite a few people around and certainly plenty of dogs of course and the early bus to Panaji. On the way back two warm rolls for breakfast for 5/- from the cyclist seller.

I have a prolonged breakfast of coffee, lots of porridge fruit and rolls, and then podcasts and puzzles with the windows wide open. After washing up it is time to go out as the cleaner 'prefers to work without the client present'.

After about five minutes at the bus stop an express bus to Panaji arrives and it has free seats! What luck, and 12/-. On arrival at Panaji at 11.15 to an internet cafe but it's very slow and I fail to upload photos. I try the Horseshoe restaurant on the riverside but it doesn't open until 12.30 so to another internet cafe which turns out to be much better and the photos are soon uploaded - the machine even has Access and a flat screen monitor.

One hour for 35/-.

Back to the Horseshoe, a Portuguese place. It's OK but not as special as the book suggests and is oversupplied with waiters. Fish curry with rice, cake, small glass of wine and an espresso for 460/=. Bus back to Mapusa and then to Siolem for the balcony and laundry.

The cleaner has been and removed the bottles, including the large water bottle, and the visa photocopy has been removed.. At sunset there is a short power cut but I only just have time to light the candles. I go out for another large bottle of water, TV and bed. I have some toothache, which I hope doesn't develop, and therefore a modest night.

Thursday 19 Feb - Siolem

Up at 5.45 and out at seven. Initially I think of getting a bus to Morjim, but in the end I walk all the way to Arambol. The lady who helped me about the bus to Panaji is waiting at the bus stop.

Again the first hour and a half are very pleasant but gradually it gets warmer and the hat is needed. By getting past the junction to Morjim and heading towards the beach and taking

the next right it is relatively easy to find the way - first along inland lanes and then down to the beach, which is excellent with few people. After a mile or so there is Mandrem Creek and so a detour inland to cross the bridge is needed and then after a couple of false starts back to the beach and then all the way to Arambol, stopping at a beach shack (Cocoloco) for coffee and cheese toast.

The I go into the village for internet, although it's quite slow to upload just four photos, but an interesting email from Christian with good photos. Lunch is at Double Dutch with an argument about smoking - Thai veg and cheese curry, rice and ginger lime soda. After that the bus to Siolem.

No recurrence of toothache and a reasonable night, although it's getting warmer.

Friday 20 Feb - Siolem

I go for an early walk along the road to the Charpora river and upstream to the bridge.

Under it there is a track to a fishing village with and extensive market. After that to the main road and the lanes back to the flat for breakfast and the balcony.

At 11.20 I head out and catch a bus from Godem which goes to Mapusa via the longer route.

The weather is warm and humid and the sun strong. I have a Panjabi thali and coffee at the Ashok. I try two shops for a mobile phone and the second has a better bargain - 1400/- for a basic phone and SIM card and credit. Passport photocopy and photo needed (Govt regulations). I get four photos from another shop for 50/- and then authorisation at the phone shop takes 25 mins.

I head back to Siolem with a working phone after getting fruit at the market. The bus again is a Godem one which takes a roundabout route partly along this morning's walk.

I use the phone to book a room in Margao - La Flor at 710 including tax but not breakfast.

The usual afternoon and a decent although an early awakening.

Saturday 21 Feb - Siolem

Up early and after Porridge, coffee and juice out for the early bus but it's earlier and it passes at 7.10 just before I get to the road. At the main road I immediately catch a bus to Mapusa and then to Panaji, arriving at eight. I use the good light for a walk and photos before going to Vihar for an excellent Paper Masalla Dosa, Papaya juice and coffee for 80/- with the Times of India to read.

I get a bus to Old Goa which is still relatively quiet (except Bom Jesu) and I take lots of photos. Stamps from the PO (still 12/-) and postcards from the museum. After a couple of hours I get the bus back to Panaji and the 'good' internet cafe but get a 'bad' computer and manage to upload no photos. At th bus stand I consider Vagator but there is no direct bus and so to Mapusa. At the mobile shop I learn how to check credit (*123# and scroll down).

To Siolem and he balcony from 3pm.

The T of I says that yesterday was the hottest day on record (39.2) and nearly a Goa record (39.8). On the balcony I manage 31 this afternoon, which is relaxing and then TV and an early night.

Sunday 22 Feb - Siolem

A gentle day which is again hot starts with a dawn walk along the lane and bread from the cycle seller and continues with a leisurely breakfast on the balcony.

At 10.30 walk to Siolem Church (St Anthony), Siolem House and along the road to Charpora and Vagator. There is no internet so lunch at the Alcove (Fish curry and watermelon juice).

Two more attempts but no decent connection so a gentle walk back. Troubled by insect bites in bed.

Monday 23 Feb - Siolem

Another hot day. Breakfast and out by 7.45 for the walk to the river and after 25 mins a bus to Keri. The journey takes about 40 mins, new beyond Arambol, and very pleasant. The countryside is interesting, partly along the river and a new bridge is being built. The are few

people on the bus at the terminus where five minutes walk takes me to the ferry which leaves immediately; two cars, a few people and free. It is supposedly two kilometres along the road to the fort but it is less with two ups and downs in the hot sun with excellent views from the road and the fort. The latter is small and has been converted to a 'boutique' hotel with expensive food and drink. The local church is inside the hotel grounds and still used. Back to the ferry which again is immediate and the south along the beach. This is steep and disappearing with work going on to stabilise it. The problems apparently happen during the monsoon. At the south end of the beach there is a beach shack where I have coffee and a cheese sandwich with Goan bread. The owner points out the path to Arambol, which is similar to Anjuna to Baga but with even better views. It is really hot and humid and I arrive at the Rice Bowl dripping and bathed in sweat for lunch (mixed veg in black bean sauce with lime soda). The walk to the bus stand is gentle and after twenty minutes there is a bus to Siolem with plenty of seats. Back to the flat via the back lanes. Laundry and out for more water at sunset.

Tuesday 24 Feb - Siolem

Out for a morning walk and rolls; there is some mist and condensation dripping from roofs and warmer than usual. It is a humid day with some clouds. There is a power cut at breakfast time. I spend the morning sorting out gear and charging everything followed by tea on the balcony.

Out at eleven and walk via Charpora and Badem to the Tamerind but they are not serving lunch (only snacks) and so onto Grandpa's Inn, where it is pleasant to sit on the terrace under the fan to get rid of some sweat. Lunch is Veg pakora, aloo gobi, lime soda and coffee. After an hour or so back along the road, past the Tamarind to a side road on the left, through Assago to Siolem church. The road is very quiet with lots of trees and bushes.

I see the first monkeys today; there are several along the road and I saw one this morning.

The climb over the ridge is sizeable. There is a development of flats before the church and then the familiar walk for the last time. TV and then a reasonable night in spite of the insect bites.

Wednesday 25 Feb - Siolem to Margao

Up at six for breakfast porridge with honey and pineapple. coffee, HC, apple juice, toast and honey. Washing up, packing, returning furniture to where it was, last two hours on the balcony with book. a last look around and leave at 10.40 with rubbish and walk to the road end. There is a bus in about 20 minutes to Mapusa and immediately a non stop bus to Panaji and then non stop to Margao for 22/- in forty minutes followed by local bus to centre for 4/-. The Hotel Le Flor is by the railway lines and respectable with a small AC room with fan and small window and shower, but might be noisy.

I go to the SBI to change money but photocopy of passport and visas needed (which I get at a nearby stall for a rupee). £140 for Rs9814. Longuinhas for lunch - Veg makewhala, aloo paratha, lime soda for 105/-.

I take a bus to Colva via a roundabout route. The bookshop is closed but the next door stall says it will open at 4.30. I visit a beach shack for watermelon juice and watch the beach and sea. I go back to the book shop which is not interested in swapping Mansfield Park but I buy two novels. I have a spell in the cybercafe but with no uploading and start the walk back to Margao which is quite pleasant but there is too much traffic. I eventually decide to catch a bus but by then I'm virtually in Margao. I walk to the hotel and have cheese toast and Bournvita from room service. It's too cold with the AC on and so part way through the night switch to the fan.

Thursday 26 Feb Margao

The night was not too bad and I go down for breakfast after a shower at about seven. I sit in the garden watching the trains and have porridge, toast, coffee, juice and Puri Bhaji for 126/-. After handing in laundry, I get a local bus to the Kadamba bus stand. There is a long

queue for tickets so I'll come back for a ticket to Gokarna. I wait for about 15 mins for a bus to Chandor. The conductor is helpful and after about 45 mins he points out the Breganza house just before the stop by the Church of Our Lady of Bethlehem which has an impressive exterior but is locked. The house is long with lots of bays and an entrance at the centre between the two wings

I visit the west wing first where no photography is allowed and I am shown around by a family member for a donation and see many items from China and take about 20 mins. I'm shown around the east wing by a guide who is quite difficult to understand but allows photos. The wing is less elaborate but with a baroque chapel with the nail of Francis Xavier.

I have a quick look around the village which is swarming with school children and then go for a walk along the road through the paddy fields with views of the hills. After about 20 mins I reach the Fernandez House and then return. The country is attractive but the road is busy.

At the crossroads I get a bus after about 35 mins and get a seat! The bus goes via the town centre but I stay on to get tomorrow's ticket. There is no queue but advance booking is not possible. Today's bus is just about to leave - it is large with plenty of seats available. I take a small bus back to the centre and cool down.

I go out about four and visit markets, gardens (with reading) and internet cafe. there is central downloading from camera and reasonable uploading (via Google Chrome browser).

Then to the Gaylin Chinese restaurant for OK veg spring rolls, veg Manchurian with ginger, fried rice and a small beer. back to the hotel for Bournvita. The laundry has not been returned. I have a shower and to bed for a reasonable night.

Friday 27 Feb Margao to Gokarna

I waken early and podcast until 6.30 when a shower is disturbed by the arrival of laundry - so I have a clean shirt for breakfast (at seven)! As yesterday except idli/vada instead of puri. Packing and bill and I leave the bigger rucksack at the reception.

I go for a photo session around town - gardens, lots of Portuguese houses, Holy Spirit church and the old market square, up to Our Lady of the Mount and then back to town to Loguinhos for coffee and chocolate cake (modest) and to the hotel to pick up the rucksack. I take the local bus to the Kadamba bus stand with plenty of time for the 1pm departure for Gokarna. The bus arrives at 12.40 so there is plenty of time to get settled into a seat. It's nearly full on departure and more get in in town and en route. The journey is excellent with good scenery; quite hilly and wooded with some sea side spells and several towns (four hours, 75/-).

On arrival it is easy to find the Gokarna International Hotel where I had booked a room from Margao - a large AC room for 700 + 8% tax. It is gloomy in the power cut ('on at 6pm') and the bathroom is grubby, but it does have a bath, which is welcome.

Out at 6.15 for a stroll. The roads are busy with holiday makers/pilgrims with plenty of westerners. There are two very impressive temple carts and an active beach. Then it's back to the hotel and restaurant which is largely a beer dive, very dim but the food is very tasty (Veg Hydrebadi, fried rice and a small beer for 165/-). I find out that the bus to Udupi leaves at 6.45, the alternative is to change.

A decent night.

Saturday 28 Feb Gokarna

I enjoy listening to podcasts in bed and up for a bath at seven and down for breakfast at 7.30 to a different restaurant. The staff are cheery and are surprised at my large order; they expect someone else. Porridge with honey and banana, masala dosa, tea/butter/jam, large mug of milky coffee, mosambi juice, all good for 170/-. After this I go out for a walk through the 'suburbs' with lots of bustle and children going to school, and temples and then back through town to the hotel to cool down, but the power is off for an hour. So I read on the balcony, have a bath and cool down when the power comes on.

At one I go out again and via the coastal path (largely laterite) to Kudle beach with the hippies. There are not many people and I get a snack at the beach cafe - cheese toast and

cinnamon tea (poor).

I go back to Gokarna in the hot sun. There are good views along the coast, particularly to the north. After another look at the beach to the internet cafe by the post office which is reasonably good but two photos take about 20 to upload. Back to cool down and then to the breakfast restaurant for a veg thali, lime soda and pineapple juice with an extra onion bhaji. Then a short walk and back to the room and a battle for laundry which I eventually get at ten and so to bed, but sleep is a long time coming and the alarm is set for 5.20.

Sunday 1 March Gokarna to Udupi

I'm up before the alarm for a cold shower and out by six; it's dark and overcast. To the bus stand where all the notices are in Kannada. First I'm told Udupi at 6.45; at 6.30 'it's not coming today - get the 7.00 to Kumta where there is a connection'. The large KMTTC bus leaves early and there is a reasonable amount of room. First of all we return via the salt pans to the NH17 and it is a pleasant ride taking an hour through the rolling wooded countryside. At Kumta there is a bus due at eight and it leaves at 8.10. Again there are seats available but the 'semi deluxe' turns out to have very uncomfortable seats which slope forward. The ride is OK but the scenery deteriorates and the temperature increases.

Arrival at Udupi is at 11.50 against the scheduled 11.35 and the city is hot, sunny and dusty.

It is reasonably easy to find the Hotel Swaresh Hreitage (booked from Gokarna) and I have a choice of rooms and choose super deluxe AC at 1000 + 12% tax. It has a bath tub, balcony, AC, two beds, seats and TV. After a bath I head for the AC restaurant for a Punjabi veg thali, beer and sweet lime juice for 125/-.

After a rest I go out for a walk and am impressed by an orderly, prosperous town with remarkably little litter, but there is no sign of the temples.

Back to the hotel, hand in laundry, phone hotel Hilltown in Madikeri (OK for 5 nights) and then Derek. I get room service to bring veg cutlets, pakoda, HC and have an early night (OK until 5 am).

Monday 2 March Udupi

Podcasts until 6, shower, and to breakfast in the no A/C restaurant on the ground floor - juice, 2 coffees, huge paper masala dosa, toast butter and jam.

Soon out - right and right to the temple square. The tank is not impressive; the monasteries (maths) and temples OK, one S Indian style Gopuram and three impressive temple carts (with another under cover) and an elephant. I then go for an extensive walk through the eastern suburbs and into the edge of the countryside, with several dead ends and back along the main road. I buy juice and 'mountain dew' to mix with lunchtime beer.

Lunch is from room service - special veg thali and small beer. Rest during the afternoon with some stomach disturbance. Out at four and to the temples for photos with better light (although there is some cloud) and then to the internet cafe. IE5 which doesn't work well with Google and therefore no photo uploads. It's very hot and sweat is literally dripping onto the keyboard and running down my back. A few emails (there's a power cut, and so using the computer by candlelight) and then back to the hotel, via the bus station to check timings for tomorrow. Laundry not ready ('at nine', but it arrives at 8.30 - amazing!). Packing and podcasts and an early night which is reasonable until 5.

Tuesday, 3 March Udupi to Madikeri

Up at six, bath, finish packing and down to check out at seven. A brief breakfast of coffee, toast, butter and jam and to the bus stand. It's already warm and humid although misty and cloudy. The bus to Madikeri is at eight and has few people on board, although more join en route (Rs116). For part of the way I have a double seat to myself and it isn't as uncomfortable as the last bus. The route is along the NH17, fast to the suburbs of Mangalore and then 20 mins in the bus station and a departure at ten. From here it's a much slower road with a lot of road works and trucks and buses on the road.

After a while we leave the main road to head towards Madikeri. Now it's slow because of the

long hills and bends. But the countryside is attractive with lots of flowering shrubs, banana plants, trees and coffee bushes. Arrival in Madikeri is at 2.15. I check into the Hilltown hotel, choose a standard double at Rs800 + 8% tax and hurry to the restaurant which closes at three. Kashmiri Kofta, Veg fried rice, Lime soda and Mosabi juice for 170/-.

I go out for a look around, cash from the ATM and back to the hotel garden which is a small area behind the car park but a pleasant place to read the paper and a book but no service.

In for a shower and to unpack, out for water and bed by nine for an episodic night.

Wednesday, 4 March Madikeri

Up at 6.30 for shower and down to breakfast at seven - OJ, pot of coffee, cornflakes with hot milk, Mysore Masala Dhosa for 130/-. The coffee is odd, but not unpleasant - a large white 'teapot' of hot milk and a small metal jug of very concentrated coffee. I have a leisurely breakfast with the Times of India which had been delivered under the door, and leave at nine for the walk to the Alsi Falls. The weather is cool and overcast. Walking through the town I ask at junctions and finally reach the country road which leads to a few coffee estates but otherwise only to the falls. The road is attractive with good views and lots of ups and downs. There is not much traffic and the distance is nearer to six kilometres rather than the guidebook's nine. The falls are worth visiting with a suspension bridge in front and plenty of tourists who have arrived by bus - and plenty of requests for photos.

After half an hour I return by the same route. The sun is now out and the temperature has risen considerably. I return through the town by a different route and visit a supermarket for some goodies.

Then it's back to the hotel for a pot of tea in the lobby (same system as the coffee) followed by reading in the garden until four, then a shower and to the restaurant, but only snacks are available. A visit to an internet cafe is largely wasted time. Back to the restaurant at 6.30 for mushroom masala, roti, lime soda. Reading in the room and bed at nine, but little sleep.

Thursday, 5 March Madikeri

Up at six, bag ready to go and breakfast at seven (coconut masala, toast, juice and coffee) and to the private bus stand for the bus to Bhagamandala. It is already there and leaves at 7.50, and at 8.05 from the petrol station. There are seats available, but I soon get packed with people travelling to work and lots of schoolchildren in various coloured uniforms.

Because of the frequent stops and the initially poor, steep and winding road it takes two hours for the 37km, 23/= journey. But it's a beautiful route with lots of coffee and banana and then rice paddy but the latter is dry. Some of the coffee fields have all the bushes in flower with a sweet scent almost like jasmine; others have no flowers (I later find that it depends on irrigation or not). In the background there are rounded hills up to 1800m. Bhagamandala is at 900m and is a small village with the large temple enclosure and bathing ghats. I take photos of the outside of the temple and then enter it. A notice says no photos but others are taking them and when I ask it is OK except in the shrines. The building is heavily restored by the Karnataka government.

A quiet road leads out of the village and it turns out to be a delight with a few houses in splendid gardens, then farmland with the hills in the background. It's getting warm but not unpleasant. I walk for about an hour and 50mins back followed by a cooling sit in the bus shelter. The bus arrives at 12.50 and leaves at 1.10. It's a much quieter journey and in spite of two breakdowns takes an hour and a half. On arrival in M there are lots of people clamouring to get on. There is a short walk to the post office, then to the hotel and out for a meal. The Capitol is only open for drinks but the top floor of the Choice is open and I have Szechuan Noodles (hot with red chillies), lime soda and juice.

Back at the hotel there is a large party of youngsters (I hope they are not too noisy) and after reading I have a shower, retrieve laundry (51/=). More reading, Mansfield Park film on TV (very superficial) and bed at nine for a better night.

Friday, 6 March Madikeri

I am awake at five but I doze and listen to podcasts until seven and breakfast at 7.30 (vada samba, pot of coffee, cornflakes, juice and toast. The group is in the lobby with their luggage and leave at 8.15; they didn't impinge much.

The day is relaxed. At about 9.30 to the fort (jail, temple, palace housing local government offices and a church holding a small museum for 2/=). From there I take a walk across town passing some very attractive bungalows to a ridge with views across the rolling countryside. I go along an earthen track which is almost level for about a km with views to the left. I left my hat behind and regret it later. Back along the road to the public gardens (another 2/= and beautifully kept) with a miniature railway. Back past the PO and the fort to the Capitol restaurant for a tasty thali and small sprite for 30/= followed by afternoon reading in the garden until four.

Our for another walk but fail to find the temple but a pleasant walk nonetheless.

Laundry to boy, shower, snack in room (onion pakoda, veg cutlet and HC) and early night for a long sleep.

Saturday, 7 March Madikeri

Wake at 5.30 and up at 6.15 and breakfast at seven (Vada rasam, cornflakes, toast, OJ and coffee). To the state bus stand for the bus to Kushalnagar which starts soon with seats available but soon fills up and soon becomes crowded. The conductor charges 20/= for a ticket which says 16/=. Initially the journey is through coffee fields but we are soon down to the plane and more open cultivation, with arrival in K after 1hr 10 mins to warm and humid air and a bustling town.

Everyone knows the way to the Golden Temple and I walk rather than take an auto for the 4km of which two is along the main Mysore road but then right at a village along a quiet country lane with plenty of autos back and forth and I'm offered a lift on a tractor! The whole walk takes just under an hour in the hot sun and the hat is welcome. Several Buddha statues are seen on the hill and soon the back entrance to the compound. After a cold Lilt I start sight seeing with the simple Buddhas and prayer wheels and then the more and more elaborately decorated temples which are very reminiscent of Bangkok. Everything is immaculate with beautiful gardens, monks of all ages and increasing numbers of tourists. I spend about 90 mins looking around and check the inevitable shops with some beggars. The internet cafe hasn't 'enough power' and after another walk through the compound I head back to Kushalnagar.

On the outskirts there is an efficient cyber cafe at 20/= for an hour. At the bus stand there is a bus for Madikeri waiting with a couple of seats and leaves about ten minutes later, crowded. This time the conductor asks for 20/= but gives me a ticket for 19/= and a rupee change. Half way back we pass a broken down bus and we take on board many of its passengers; the bus is now very full and has problems climbing the hills and engaging first gear. The journey takes 75mins and I head for the hotel garden for some reading, laundry, shower and dinner at 6.45 (Biriani, dal, lime soda, HC). TV in bed, sleep at 9.30 until five.

Sunday, 8 March Madikeri to Hassan

Podcasts from five, up at 6.25 and breakfast at seven (Masala dosa (very oily), coffee, juice, toast), pack, check out and to government bus stand at 8.15. There is a bus to Hassan in which 'will depart at 8.30' but at 8.50 we're told to chane to a 'super deluxe' which leaves at 8.55.

It is the same route as far as Kushalnagar, but faster, and then across country to Hassan stopping at several bus stands where the Hindu comes in useful. There are two pieces about Michael Wood's 'A Story of India' which is just launching in the US; apparently it was made with American money with the BBC paying to screen it. The journey is interesting with lots of villages and farmland although the area is arid with Agaves and cacti and just before Hassan there is a large dam. Arrival is at 12.40, passing the hotel on the approach to the terminus, which makes it easy to find in the hot and dusty town.

After checking in I head to the Veg restaurant for a deluxe Thali (tomato soup, papad, three

curries, rice, naan, coconut gulab jaman, ice cream, lime soda for 100/=.

After a rest and some reading I go exploring, including the 2km to the station. There is a passenger train to Mysore at 2.15 which takes three hours but the one in the opposite direction is in the station and is packed and therefore the bus is more convenient (and runs more often). Back to town. market, internet (30/= and slow) in the hotel building. Back in room for beer and snacks from room service. bed at 9.30, reasonable to four. The AC is efficient and gets the temperature down to 19.

Monday, 9 March Hassan

Up at 6.15 and breakfast in the non AC restaurant overlooking the road - South Indian breakfast (Idli, Vada, Masala Dosa, coffee and juice). Bus stand at 7.40 for a bus to Halebid (Halebeedu) which leaves at eight, arriving at 8.50 for 20/=. The Hoysalesvara temple near the bus stand and immaculately set in extensive lawns and free apart from a footwear parking fee. Not too many people have arrived and it is not too warm. The carvings are impressive and the gardens and lawns go down to a large reservoir. From here it's about a kilometre to the other sites - Basthalli garden with Bastis (Jain Temples) and the Kadesvara Temple, both very quiet and set in gardens and surrounded by farmland including a splendid field of cabbages under the palm trees.

Back to the bus stand and immediately there is a bus to Bedur, 10/= and 30 mins and again through farmland. Belur is a much bigger, busy town and it's a 1km walk from the bus to the temple. Shoes and cell phone and bag (with torch) to different places. There is a gopuram and several temples and columns within the compound. There is some festival in the main temple with loud drums and wind instruments which is being filmed.

From the bus stand I take the bus to Chickmalagur for the ride (40mins, 18/=), seeing the cathedral from the bus. After a stroll around the town, with views to quite substantial hills behind and lots of smells of roasting coffee, back to the bus stand and again there is a bus straight away back to Hassan (1hr 45, 38/=) arriving back at 3.20. Post Office, water, hotel for shower, laundry in. There is no TV signal (power problem apparently). In the veg restaurant it is S Indian time so I have a Paper Dosa tea and apple juice (56/-). A relaxing evening and an interrupted night.

Tuesday, 10 March Hassan

Start as yesterday, and to bus stand, but the bus to Channarayapatna leaves at about 7.45 and it's 45min through attractive countryside. The weather is different - fresher, clearer with more clouds coming up from Sri Lanka according to the forecast.

At 'patna there is a direct connection to Shravan Belgola on a small bus with a conductress!

It takes about 20 mins and the hills are visible as we approach the village - large humps of granite. I set off up the steps (700 according to the guide book) stopping at various temples en route to the main enclosure on top with several more Bastis and the statue.

Outside the enclosure there is a quiet rocky dome with excellent views. There are several westerners including a Swiss man from the Bodensee. Down to retrieve my shoes and to the other side of the tank to climb the smaller hill with more temples and views to the larger.

Down to walk around the town which has signs of the imminent Holi (tomorrow) and catch a bus to 'patna where there seems little to detain and a bus back to Hassan gets me back in time for lunch - de luxe Thali, Lime Soda and tea for 108/=. There seems to be nowhere at the bus stand to enquire about buses to Mysore, but the hotel receptionist checks - half hourly from five. After a rest, out for internet and barbers (40/=) and back for podcasts.

No power to TV, interrupted night.

Wednesday, 11 March Hassan to Mysore

Up at six, breakfast and to bus stand at 8.30. A bus seems to be ready to go to Mysore, but it touts for custom for 15 mins before leaving.

The weather again is rather fresher with plenty of clouds and the drive is enjoyable, initially through open country with a few towns but more built up towards Mysore. On the way in we

pass the Green Hotel - so it would have been convenient for arrival. After a 'tour' of the city we arrive at the bus stand and then there is a hot walk to the hotel asking at Bombay Tiffany's sweet shop for BT hotel, which is very near to the Dasaprakash for lunch - a Thali (not so big as last time, but plenty of seconds), coffee and lime soda. Market and sweet stall and then after cooling off back at the hotel out to the station for ticket to Bangalore (20mins) and timetables (15 mins). Bookshop for Q and A and Indian Odyssey, hotel and out again for photos. A storm seems to be brewing, but it doesn't materialise. All around the city palace and through the town o two churches, slightly lost, water and back to hotel. Restful evening and disturbed night.

Thursday, 12 March Mysore

Up at six and at 6.45 to the Dasaprakash for breakfast - butter masala dosa, toast, butter, jam, pot of coffee, pineapple juice.

Then to the bus stand for the bus to Bannur which is very crowded with people running towards it as it approaches. It takes 45 mins, mostly standing. Bannur is a small dusty town with packed derelict minibuses waiting. There is a bus to Somnathpur 'in 10 mins'. I elect to walk but the guide's 3km lovely walk is signposted at 8km, 2km along the main road and then a side road through farming country with tor-like hills and slightly too much traffic for comfort. The buses that pass are packed with people on the roofs and hanging from the sides.

Eventually to the temple, which is exquisite. There are very few people around and is in pleasant grounds and then back to the bus stop. After 15 mins a bus arrives and I actually get inside, and actually get a seat for the last few minutes. There is a 20 mins wait on the roadside for the bus to Mysore which is not so crowded. Lunch at the Ramanshree Hotel - expensive and average food and a quarrel about the bill. Back to the hotel for rest and cooling. Out for shopping - tea, honey and coffee, and internet with a good fast connection.

Check time for morning opening (8am) for online check-in. Back to hotel to read Slumdog Millionaire. Bed at ten with a pill - better, but wake during the night feeling agitated.

Friday, 13 March Mysore to Bangalore

Up at 6.30 and to Dasaprakesh for breakfast - Masala dosa, TBJ, coffee, grape juice (very sweet). Internet check in (open at 8.30). Back for packing and check out and leave big bag at reception. Out again and reading in the gardens by the palace where it is very peaceful apart from the traffic. Then to the Art Gallery which is much better than the book suggests although the labels are poor - 20/= and two sets of PCs for PMAG at 45/= each.

To the Shilpashi for lunch, which is almost empty on the roof terrace. Veg chop suey. Lime soda and coffee. Retrieve bag from the hotel and walk to the station where the train is waiting and starts on time at 14.20 with not many in the executive class. There are large, comfortable seats, water, tea, biscuits. We are 15 mins late into Bangalore and people barge on before we can get off. There is hassle from room and taxi touts and I walk to the hotel (Kamrat Yattrinivas) which I had booked by phone (30 mins). After a shower I check the bookshops for the new book by Vikas Swarap but of them has it and then to the Vijay residency for supper. I choose a special south Indian meal, which turns out to be potentially huge - a large bowl of spicy tomato soup with papads, then a moderate Thali with four puris, four curries, sambhar, curd raita, sweet, no rice? Seconds offered and I ask for two more puris but four arrive with more dishes of the curries. I nearly get through these when veg pullao, gravy and lentils arrive. I eat some - it's very good and am then offered white rice - no, no. The ice cream and fruit salad arrive, all for 110. With Lime soda to start and Horlicks to finish, 180/=. All very jolly and a tip earned! Back across the road to the hotel feeling bloated and the room is hot (no AC, 28). Packing - hold and cabin bags for a quick get away tomorrow (car booked for 900/=). Cold shower and to bed, but little sleep and a lot of banging.

Saturday, 14 March flight home

Eventually I get up at 4.20, shower check out and the car arrives and we are underway before five. The roads are almost empty and we are at the airport, 37km away by 5.30. The airport is brand new and efficient. There is heightened security, but everything is smooth and quick. I have a first breakfast at the Illy cafe 250/= for Yogurt (good), cappuccino (good), croissant (OK),, Indian marmalade (!). Books from Crossword, no decent mugs. Last to board, excellent seat by emergency door (online check in), front row of economy. Good breakfast and settle down to read.