

# Passage to India Newsletter 6



Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025

## Extracts from travel diary

### Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> March

Today I travel to Goa. I have been to the west coast of India on a number of previous occasions but always by train – a journey of around 15 hours. This time, however, I have chosen to fly which takes just 50 minutes. From my window seat I watch as the landscape below becomes greener and river ways and watercourses make their way to the sea. There to meet me in the airport is Mr Reuben, a retired headteacher, and his wife Prabha whom I have known for many years. They take me to my hotel which is pictured at the top of this newsletter and is a short walk from the beach.

### Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> March

This is my first full day in Goa which I am treating as a sort of “retreat”. I have a nicely airconditioned room which is a wonderful refuge from a daytime temperature of 36°C and very high humidity. My first act is to go for an early morning walk on the beach; to pray before the sun rises and the heat becomes too much of a distraction. On the beach are dozens of others who are also walking or jogging. I am intrigued that many of the walkers are carrying wooden batons. One is even carrying half a snooker que.



### Friday 7<sup>th</sup> March

Once again, I am on the beach before dawn. The stick carriers are out too. Are they armed against early morning muggers? Out of curiosity, I Google this phenomenon and discover they are carrying these sticks because of dog attacks! Surely this is an overreaction, I think, as the dogs I have seen so far have been pretty harmless. On my way back, however, two dogs suddenly rush at me out of nowhere, snarling and barking. Fortunately, I have the presence of mind to stand my ground and shout and waive my arms at them. It lasts only a few seconds but leaves me very unnerved. One bite could make life very complicated. At the hotel lobby later, I ask a rather bemused receptionist if I can have a stick to carry with me on the beach.

### Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> March

Equipped with a three-foot stick provided by the hotel, I set off on my prayer walk. Going out ‘armed and dangerous’ is not exactly conducive to quiet early morning prayer. Even with my stick, further aggressive approaches from more dogs makes me decide that these walks that I had been looking forward to should perhaps be abandoned – there is no point in taking unnecessary risks.

### Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> March

This is my first Sunday when I am not “on duty”. On my walk into the nearby village yesterday I had noted that the local catholic church had a 9.00am service in English and I go along to attend this. The priest reads the story of Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness. When it came to narrating the words of the devil as he tempts Jesus. He puts on a rather comical voice that reminds me of something out of Monty Python which I quite warm to. I love how God’s word is an ever flowing river of understanding.



### Monday 10<sup>th</sup> March

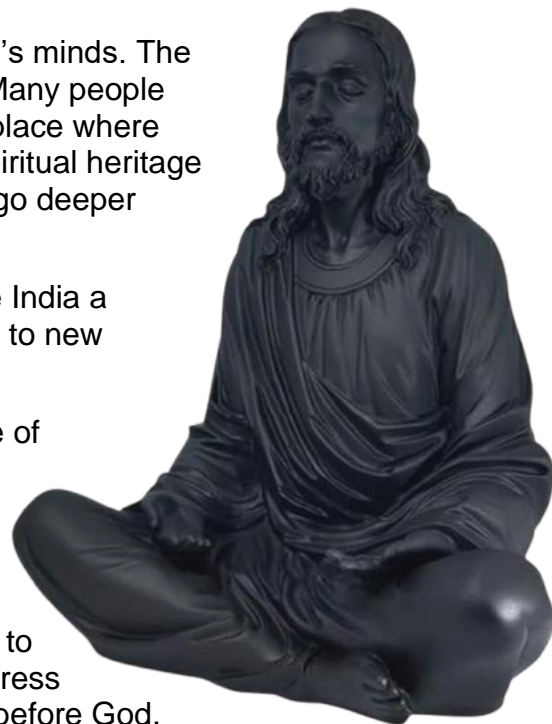
Goa is the go-to beach destination for those wanting big sandy coastlines and warm water. There is a lot to do from scuba diving to scenic tours of the interior. I am a little tempted to rush around and fit in lots of activity while I’m here but need to remind myself that I have come to “be” rather than “do”. In a funny sort of way, the dogs on the beach have curtailed my propensity for doing too much and I find myself almost grateful that their intervention has helped me slow down. I am becoming increasingly quiet and reflective.

India conjures up a whole range of ideas and images in people's minds. The Beatles famously came here at the height of the hippy craze. Many people come hoping to "find" themselves and it is certainly a spiritual place where faith is treated very seriously. People are very proud of their spiritual heritage and for this reason, it always feels like a place where one can go deeper into the mysteries of life.

The colours, the fragrances and amazing range of tastes make India a place where the senses are reinvigorated, where you feel alive to new experiences and opportunities. The Spirit is very present here.

Anyone who has visited my study will know that I have a statue of Jesus seated in the lotus position sitting in openness to God. I find it an important reminder that at the heart of all Jesus' activity was a stillness before God from which he drew his power to do so much.

The lotus position may not be something everyone would want to adopt but posture is important and open hands particularly express a willingness to receive. I am here to receive and to sit quietly before God.



### **The work of a Sabbatical**

I came away without any real plan other than to be open and available to God and what He might want to say to me during the unusual experience of being quiet and still over a protracted period. I have learned repeatedly that trying to set the agenda for God is pretty hopeless. This is not how God works so and I came to India with a blank sheet, an empty Journal, nothing in the diary and no timetable for how things were to go.

This, if I'm honest, is not my preferred modus operandi but I have been pleasantly surprised by all that God has been able to do. It feels a little like taking the car in to have it serviced. You may have a sense that the vehicle isn't running as smoothly as usual but only when the experts at the garage take a proper look, are you able to get the diagnosis of all the other issues that need addressing as well. Being on Sabbatical can feel like coming in for a long overdue service and God is now tinkering away under the bonnet.

One of the dominant themes to emerge from my trip so far has been the need to simply 'let go'. We like to be in control, don't we? We have a plan for how things will work out and a timetable for when. Invariably, however, things don't always follow this course, and we suffer as a result. Suffering often stems from an inability to let go, whether this be letting go of a loved one, or a resentment or an expectation of how things should be.

The truth that God loves us is given to us repeatedly in the Bible, but it can be hard to trust enough to 'let go' of the many ways that we seek to control our lives and the lives of those around us. Trusting to God's loving purposes allows us to relinquish some of the control we crave.



## **For Prayer**



Please can you pray for the following:

- For all who encounter danger in their everyday lives – especially emergency services.
- Please pray for an openness in us all to allow God to perform running repairs.
- A willingness to "Let go and let God."