

## Monday: finally in Colombo

Leave George behind and we encounter problems and near disaster. We boarded the plane minutes before the flight closed, partly due to horrendous queues for check-in and then for security (and partly because we checked in later than the time specified). Delhi has been the only place, so far, to enquire about my replacement hip when I bleeped disconcertingly on my left side and all pockets had been checked. I already knew the weather forecast for Monday in Colombo was not good so was consequently anxious about turbulence ....none ... until our approach to Colombo when the thing became a tad rocky. It's distinctly unnerving to pass through layers and layers of cloud on your descent. We believe it was at about 500ft (one guy said he saw the ground) when the engines roared dramatically, and up we went. A half hour or so later, exactly the same thing happened after which we turned back to India and landed at Trevanarum on the south west coast – we really did want to go to Kerala but not like this! We were not given clearance to take off for three long hours – lots of waiting around for decisions to be made as to where we should wait and, when they were, there was just a short time before we had to repeat security procedures. After that there were no problems and we landed in Colombo 4 to 5 hours late, the three hour journey taking the same time as Heathrow to Delhi.

Now a major mistake – we hired taxi to take us to the Ramada, Colombo, when we were booked in the Ramada close to the airport!! Finally settled and next morning looked out at seven to see local girls off to school, all in white, long plaits, Sri Lankan Pollyanna style. In the morning, a taxi, back again! to Colombo and the railway station. This was our first time on a train where you could hang from windows and doors. Scenic route along coast. First impressions of SriLanks – very little rubble and dust and much less

evidence of poverty. Had to disembark to complete journey by road and elected for tri-tuk for last 40km. Plucky us!! One minute into journey and an anguished cry from Nick, 'My Camera – the train!! The driver skidded the 180 degrees required, and we shot back to station and both he and Nick shot up the steps back to platform leaving me to mind vehicle and luggage.



Amazingly, some sympathetic soul who had boarded the train in preparation for the return journey to Colombo heard the shouting and passed it out of the window to us! Deliverance! Good Karma! Then the long and dusty journey to our hotel/guest house 7 km beyond Galle.

We are now in something close to Paradise. Our accommodation is in a new building. Raised since the tsunami in 2004, surrounded by a wonderful, well-cared for garden and staff with the most wonderfully amazing smiles. We have visited the beach – wonderful

sand, but it shelves steeply so neither of us have yet gone too far and are wary of the powerful undertow. Watching the young SriLankans diving and somersaulting into surf as the sun went down was great. Such youthful energy and bravado! Simple, nutritious food, well cooked and colourful. Served by delightful staff with the loveliest smiles ever! Hopefully our mishaps are behind us.

#### Thursday: Unawatuna



Yesterday, am, early to beach – blue skies and blue sea and quick dip, cooler in morning. Breakfast good, especially fresh-pressed fruit juice and good coffee.

We went out in tri-tik through Galle and on to silk factory – whole process from egg to splendid garments – greatest temptation was a wrap around gown 2-ply silk approx £60 – no bargaining here but I do now have a silk hat (nowhere near as pricey as Nick's Tilley)! Then inland through suburban jungle,

(much of it cinnamon, small rubber plantation and the odd banana trees) and onwards to Moonstone Mine where we saw mine just 20 metres deep, the panning for stones, the cutting and polishing (see left) and then (of course) the shop.



Admired some earrings (very lovely but too expensive and too dressy) but did buy some ear-rings, silver with teeny, tiny emerald and getting better at bargaining.



Whisked on again to a more sombre place, the museum documenting the 2004 tsunami, which swept up the beach just north-west of here. The exhibits, just photos and also accounts and pictures by children. Having travelled on the local train here (they look to be 2 to 3 times heavier than the average UK train) it is unimaginable that such a monster was swept off the line. Many people were killed and children orphaned. The museum was housed in a shack, the presentation crude, but all the more moving for that. The International rescue effort was documented; also some of the poor/wasted investment in reconstruction since. Finally (well almost) we were taken to the Galle Fort, a Dutch settlement, out by the port. There was a splendid viewing platform and lighthouse and a couple of beaches, one where children played and one where locals, mostly women bathed and shrieked, modestly clothed. In the Fort Complex, there are many handsome,



solid Dutch buildings, a Catholic and Dutch Reform Church. Many buildings, sadly, in need of renovation. A final quick visit to Galle for some shopping, then back to Nor Lanka (our hotel, above), where Nick spent the afternoon, fighting financial issues on the computer and was finally successful. Supper here was a Sri Lankan curry which had to be ordered at lunch-time and was well worth waiting for as we hadn't eaten since breakfast – delicious and beautifully presented, a chicken and a fish dish (the fish is really meaty!) with popadom, a potato dish, dahl and an aubergine salad. The meal was completed with a Sri Lankan coconut pancake – a yummy filling with a touch of maple syrup (will do that again!)

This morn on beach by 8am and bathed in surf followed by a passion fruit juice in the hip beach bar and a leisurely coffee in another – now back a whole 3 hours wasted! Poor us!!

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We said goodbye to an especially loved dog today.



Caspar was my first dog and brought such a lot of pleasure into our lives. I'm not one for crying but I'm afraid the tears were coming thick and fast. Nick took me to a Buddhist Peace Temple towards sunset, midday GMT, stood behind me and traced a trajectory up into the sky. I believe it was about the time dearest Caspar was breathing his last. I didn't understand 'til Nick explained, but this beautiful place on this evening, after a monsoon downpour, was as good a place to say goodbye to him as Nick could have chosen. On our travels thro' India, and here,

we've seen hundreds of dogs, none of them seeming to belong to anybody. At the moment Nick was breaking the news, a small dog appeared on the temple concourse, nuzzled up to me, licking my hand and Nick's feet – the only dog to make contact on our travels, partly because we kept our distance concerned a stray might try to latch on and follow us. It was as if he, a fellow creature, knew exactly how much I had loved my brown furry friend.

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Friday, 28 October

Yes, I had been puzzled by Nick's excessive use of the computer and wondered why it was so important to go at a particular time – for sunset after a torrential storm earlier. Amazingly there was a lovely light in the sky. The Peace Pagoda was a gift from a Japanese Buddhist monk in 2005. There is an image of Hunaman (Hindu God) who it is said, dropped healing herbs here from the Himalayas. So last evening quite sad. I've contacted Natalie and Dave (who have so kindly been minding Caspar since the beginning of September) and Emmeline (who visited our handsome boy to give him some goodbye loving from us) to say how grateful and thankful we are that they were there for him.





Today we tried to put the sadness behind us awhile and went off in the tuk-tuk with Larl. First to a turtle conservation centre and then on to Koggala Lake where we boarded a trimaran and were peacefully taken across the waters to Cinnamon Island where we were shown how the locals produce cinnamon, and then on to Temple Island, a Buddhist Shrine visited by locals when the moon is full. The Buddhist Priest was teaching but his young assistant took us up to the temple where there were many paintings and a splendid Buddha.

Back at Unawatuna we had a light lunch and ordered our last Sri Lankan dinner – another wonderful SriLankan Curry.

Tomorrow we have a marathon travel-wise. Tuk-tuk to Galle, bus to Colombo, taxi/bus to airport, flight to Chennai, transit (3 hours), flight to Singapore and bus to KL (5 hours). So we'll need an early night if we're to handle all that!