

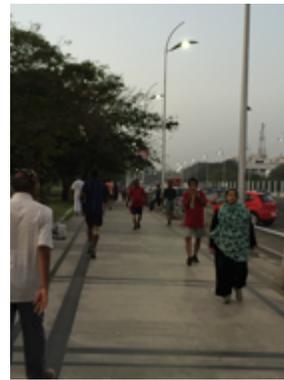
Chennai Journal #2 12-16-15

Vannakam! Greetings from Chennai! Writing a journal from here is much different than writing from Shanghai. I find it easier to write about what is new and strange. I've been in Chennai so many times over the past 20 years that most things I encounter in my daily life here are familiar. So I'm trying to look with fresh eyes at what I now take for granted to make the familiar strange again. For my Indian friends, this will of course all be familiar!

I decided to start with our daily routine as a way to look more closely. Today, like most days, we got up at 5 a.m. to go to Marina Beach to walk. Marina Beach runs along the Bay of Bengal, part of the Indian Ocean. It is over 8 miles long and is the world's second longest natural urban beach (after Rio).



A three-wheeler picks us up, driven by Balu who has been taking Appa (Ravi's father) to the beach for many years. It's nice in the early morning while the streets are quiet. We pass women sweeping/washing their front stoops or making kolam designs with rice flour on the entryway. We see small coffee and tea stands gearing up for the day. Sometimes we see a small group of people singing bajans (devotional songs) as they walk around the nearby temple. Yesterday was the beginning of an auspicious month so every day priests and devotees walk the gods around the streets surrounding the temple.



It is still dark when we arrive at the beach. People walk or run in pairs or small groups along the beach road. There are groups doing calisthenics or yoga. We often see a group that does a laughing yoga (they stand in a circle, one person starts laughing and then everyone else follows suit -one of these days I want to join them). Several times we've seen studios filming at the beach in the early morning. Near Indian Republic Day in January we see troops on horses and marching on foot preparing for the celebrations. Sometimes we see farmers drive a herd of water buffaloes down to the beach for a wash. The fishing people who live in shacks along the shore prepare to go out in their boats as the night fishing group comes back to shore, the lanterns on their boats glowing in the early dawn. People set up stands to sell aloe drinks and other health remedies.



Ravi's father has been walking at this beach daily for the past 50 years! He is now 93 and one of the oldest beach walkers so everyone knows and greets him as they pass by.



We get home around 6 a.m, have coffee and read the newspaper. I sit on the front porch swing, or on the balcony outside our bedroom and enjoy the early morning coolness before the sun hits the spot where I am sitting. The household is in full gear. Ravi's sister Rama may be chopping vegetables or making chappati. Lakshmi arrives and is sweeping or washing dishes. Lalita comes a little later and begins preparing the morning meal. Lakshmi's son and daughter-in-law work in the garden, watering plants. Yesterday, a man came by to climb the coconut trees and knock down the ripe coconuts. The trees are very tall and he shinnies up the tree barefoot with just a rope around his waist! There are several bags of coconuts that are stored for daily use. We each drink the fresh, sweet water from a coconut through a straw. Then the man uses his machete to cut them open so we can eat the coconut meat inside. Yum!

Two pages and I've only described the first two hours of the day! What do you think? Is this an interesting way to proceed? Let me know.

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