

Ben's Two-Week Trip to India 2004-2005

I arrived at Goa Airport after a long flight, delayed a couple of hours. After a long queue to stamp my passport, I panicked slightly when asked for 10% extra charge if I use a visa card at the only exchange booth in the airport. I should have brought more than £10 sterling. Mmm... no rupees, nowhere to stay. Soon I plucked up courage and handed over my immigration slip to exit the airport. Immediately, enthusing taxi drivers were swarming to tell me they could take me for a long detour to find a cash point, at a price. The airport smelled of stagnant swamp. I asked a nice lady holding a large touring agency placard for guidance. She pointed me to an ATM machine just around the corner. Still there is a slight sense of panic: what is my pin no.? How much do I need? How much can I get? I settled for 10,000 (approx £120) and it worked! Mmm... perhaps I should have tried for more... Finally I was persuaded to take a taxi at an agreed price of Rs.500 to find a guesthouse in Candolim. A friendly boy drove me through mad traffic to Calangute (beyond Candolim), to a hotel he knows, explaining first that there is no price difference between a guesthouse and a hotel at high season, then that there is. Mmm... At the hotel I was proud to bargain from a twin room with A/c for Rs.3700 per night, to a single with a larger bed for Rs.1500, also A/c but no hot water. I gave the taxi an extra Rs.100, demanded. Exhausted, I drowsed for half an hour, and then ate some vegetable fried rice - yummy but not spicy. I accepted some chilli sauce that looks like tomato ketchup but green. Walking on the beach, shacks competed with loud music and I headed for a noisy fireworks display. I stopped just before in a deserted area to view the fireworks. Dogs howled in the distance. After 10mins, two dogs came to befriend me. I tried to be amiable without touching, having read all about the danger of rabies, then quickly said goodbye after a few friendly bites in my leg. On returning to the hotel, after playing catch-me with the waves, I was pestered by the room service boy, asking if I wanted a sheet or a blanket, "no, I am fine". Later I wish I had asked for a blanket. The cold shower took some courage.

DAY 1 - 27/12/04

I slept well and feel in sync with the time zone. The breakfast menu is very European. Trying to be authentic, I opted for tea masala and a banana pancake. Soon I was offered an expensive moped, a guided tour and everything under the sun. Thinking of escaping to the beach, I was warned that there was a disaster during the night and swimming might be dangerous due to tidal waves. The TV is put on for proof. The news is not good – earthquake Richter scale 9 has just caused disaster in Southeast Asia, e.g. Phuket where I was in 2000, mostly destroyed. Even several hundred killed on the other side of India. Also some lethal epidemic has killed several more hundreds somewhere else in India. Mmm... this is where it all happens (glad I didn't go to Thailand)! I said "no thanks" to all but water and a map of Goa, then I went straight to the beach hoping for peace and quiet due to big scare and maybe some big waves. It was less noisy than the previous evening, but there were lots of people and no big waves. I quickly gave up searching for space between shacks and accepted a free bed with shade, promising to buy something. Restricting my finances to Rs.200 had been a good idea... it disappeared before lunchtime. Still, Rs.120 was spent having my rucksack straps sewn on by a sandal-selling boy, bargained down from Rs.300. My other achievement of the morning was a long swim out to and around a moored fishing boat that looked deceptively close but took me at least 45mins. By 2.30pm I

was sick of saying “no” to sales, beggars and masseurs, so I left to retrieve more money and find some lunch. At the hotel, I was immediately accosted by an elderly masseur, who seemed very professional, and pricey. I have to credit his salesmanship – my plea for time to have a bite to eat was overturned by the benefit of an empty stomach. My feeble plea for a half instead of whole hour session for two-thirds the price was wiped away with a smile and shake of head. I was ordered to take a quick shower, then given a great full body rub with lots of oil, notably poured all over my head! Eventually I got some more money, paid and the change was kept as a deposit for another session tomorrow. I feel sick of thinking financially. Finally, I sat down at a restaurant in town to order lunch. After 10mins, the waiter informed me that dinner is not served until 6pm. It was already 5.15pm. I found another restaurant and ordered authentic Indian – black lentils, spinach and vegetable pillau rice with salty lassi. It was very delicious, but I did not manage much, and five minutes after leaving the restaurant, I have “Delhi belly”. After emptying myself on the toilet and forcing myself through the cold shower to wash my oily hair, I drift off and am woken by the room boy, offering a blanket. I try to sleep but feel hungry again. Mosquito swatting distracts me. These Indian ones are elusive. They seem to work in pairs. While one distracts, the other bites, a bit like crafty suicide bombers. If one is caught before the other bites, the other quickly disappears to fetch another partner. They seem scarce, never more than one in sight. Another technique they use is flying at high speed, uncomfortably close, across the path of vision of the long-sighted, leaving their target bewildered, staring vacantly into empty space while they nibble from behind. I gave up trying to sleep. Thinking it might be around 10pm, when the hotel stops serving food, I discovered it was 2am. Mmm... perhaps I am not in sync after all. The late lunch restaurant was still open so I had a plate of rice and a cup of tea. Before the next toilet trip, I just managed to walk on the beach for 20mins, amidst dogs, fly-by-night kingfisher birds and a few disco stragglers. I am inspired by my guidebook to explore Gokarna, a much less noisy beach resort in Karnataka, the state south of Goa. Maybe I should wait for my tummy to settle though.

DAY 2 – 28/12/04

The earthquake that happened day-before-yesterday is called “Tsunami disaster”. The estimated death toll is now 22,000, 5,000 in South India alone! I had a tiresome morning trying to connect to the Internet. I lost my temper when the girl started shouting at me for trying to connect for more than one hour. After my compulsory massage (using organic carrot seed oil) and flatly refusing a third appointment, I wasted the rest of the day with a taxi driver the hotel manager insisted I took. My three goals were to get some more money, find a camera and book a train ticket to Gokarna. The money only took two tries, but the rest was difficult. Next we stopped at a large, posh, remotely located Kashmir market/showroom, which the taxi driver insisted I see. The carpets, furniture, tea, fabrics and cardigans were all impressive but costly. E.g. a small carpet/mat (approx. one square metre) was offered for \$595. Mmm... I enjoyed the tour but refrained from spending or even accepting the cup of tea that was profusely offered. Next we passed the ‘Chubby Cheeks Primary School’. At the bus station in Panjim there was a queuing system, just like the one used for getting a tourist visa at the Indian High Commission in London, except I had to pay Rs.10 to join it! The number on the board was 175 and I was given 212, so I walked all the way back to the taxi to fill in the reservation form. On return, 15mins later, they had reached 179, so I figured there would be at least one hour or three to wait. The taxi took me 5km to look for a digital camera. On the way, I saw two young

women, each carrying a large shallow bowl heaped with wet steamy tarmac on their head for the roadworks. I wished I had a camera. After an unsuccessful search (prices seemed extreme) we returned to the bus station and found I had missed my place. Copying the Indians, I barged my way through and gave a lame toilet excuse. I was promptly asked for Rs.40 (gave Rs.50) and was given change for Rs.15. Confused, I asked for a ticket as well as a reservation, but was shoved out of the way. By this, I understood I would need to buy at the station. The driver took me to another town to search for a camera and I dutifully bought him cake and juice as requested. A small deposit was placed on an expensive camera that could be collected tomorrow. On return, the taxi upped the price from Rs.500 to Rs.800 and I grudgingly gave him Rs.700. 5mins later, he knocked on my door and insisted that I give him another hundred. Mmm... sod it, it is only £1.20. Later I bought a beautiful handmade pair of slipper sandals, tasted my first meat in India – ginger butter chicken, and bought myself a couple of cheap throw-away cameras.

DAY 3 – 29/12/04

Shortly after waking, I heard my elderly masseur muttering outside my door, trying to attract my attention. I ignored him and brushed my teeth. Next I vacated my room, circumvented many offers of an extortionate taxi to the railway station, and bathed blissfully in the sea for a short spell. Then I took a self-arranged taxi. It was still a pain leaving the hotel, with a waiter begging for a bigger tip. This taxi driver was less crazy than yesterday's; he only beeped his horn about twice a minute. In India, the monosyllabic language of traffic contains 'beep', which means: "hello", "goodbye", "let me overtake", "you cannot/can overtake", "slow down", "hurry up" and many other things, usually "I am". Another language spoken verbosely is "beep beep", which incidentally means the same thing, but they never understand each other. During the long journey to the station, I tried to take a few flying shots with my new camera. They were probably all terrible, but I am not certain. At one junction, I wished I had a camcorder or tape recorder. Everybody, from all directions, was beeping horns; on top of which, a policeman blew his whistle. The two memorable shots I missed were: a group of long horned cattle, grazing freely by the busy roadside, and a homeless looking family just off the road, with an unbelievably small well-dressed child, standing alone on two feet. At the station I thought I had plenty of time because we left at 12.30 and my train was due to leave at 14.20. However, I panicked slightly when I saw it was already 14.25 and quickly ran around, looking for a place to buy my ticket. Soon, a calm Indian assured me that my piece of paper that said "Ticket Reservation Rs.39" (39 rupees=48p, I only paid Rs.15) had a plus between "Ticket" and "Reservation". After checking the board, he explained I had not confirmed my reservation and would have to find unreserved space, available in all but one carriage. He also assured me that my train was due at half past on the nearest platform. Mmm... By 3pm, when the train arrived, I had double checked all the above info and bought myself 5 small bananas (Rs.10) for lunch. Once on the train, I regretted not having eaten any on the platform. The train was jam-packed beyond belief and drove with doors wide-open. I was lucky to find the corner of a large red metal box in the doorway to sit on. On route to Gokarna Road, the train kept stopping and squeezing yet more people in, apart from one stop where a few people got out and took my seat with them. I was nervous that I might miss my station, as I did not know how many stops there were and some had no sign of a name. Sooner than expected, I saw the platform clearly marked "Gokarna Road". Reaching it before the train left was a challenge. Outside the station all the taxi drivers were shouting "Om beach",

not “Gokarna”, and I ended up sharing a ride there instead with a couple who turned out to be brother and sister: James and Pi. According to my guidebook, accommodation is reasonable in Gokarna, but Om beach used to be the “all-but-exclusive preserve of a hardcore hippy fringe” with hammocks, basic huts and a slowly developing future resort. As the maddest ever taxi driver drove us 7km on a fiercely rough, potholed track, my companions assured me that accommodation would not be a problem. Ommm... it was. After leaving the taxi at the end of the track, climbing down the last hundred feet of rocks to the beach, six failed requests for a room (a couple had a bare mattress on the ground for Rs.50), an un-assuring rumour that theft was common and people got mugged at night, and a tip from a beach bather, I found luxury accom. – a hut with bare mattress on a bed with a mosquito net, available for one night only (Rs.100). Actually, there was also a thin sheet. James, Pi and I celebrated with some delicious food (fish curry) and beer. James explained that the Tsunami wave (death toll now 66,000) hit south Goa (between where I was then and now) while they had been eating in a seafront restaurant around 10pm. The wave was not a wall but simply took 90 secs to rise and flood the restaurant, knocking over tables and chairs. It also flooded the estuary, receding with a mixture of sewage, mattresses, broken glass etc. He showed me a photo of a confused cow walking through the trashed restaurant the next morning. I cannot believe I had been in north Goa, daring the waves to catch me, for half an hour on Boxing Day, after this occurred in south Goa, before it reached the top of the beach I was walking on. The wave must have slowed down from an initial 800kph to less than 80kph, but still reaking havoc. During the night, the waves were loud nearby, a pig snorted occasionally, dogs barked, I was visited by a large spider, oh and by a rat. Ommm.

DAY 4 – 30/12/04

Today’s adventure was walking from Om to Gokarna with Pi and James. My guidebook says distance = 8km. The locals said 40 minutes walk (Indian time). It took us at least one and a half hours to get around the first headland to the next beach; clambering on large rocks, slipping on steep hillsides and squeezing through dense thorny vegetation (we must have missed the shortcut). I took a wrong turn at one point, lost my companions and found it very awkward to descend what I had only just managed to climb. I found them soon on the one kilometre beach between headlands and we walked to the other end for lunch. According to my book, we were now one quarter of the way! The rest was much easier and we arrived in Gokarna long before dark. Before I said goodbye and found a room at Nimmu house, we were whisked around a temple and had some red dye dabbed on our foreheads, for a price. Nimmu House is cheap and sparse, but the brothers who are running it are very kind and helpful. I toured the town and was helped to find a large sheet by a 10-12yr old girl who ran her family shop. I gained her respect by haggling a lot. The rest of the evening was spent on the Internet, where I was informed that my brother Martin had just died. This did not shock me, it gave me more a sense of relief, because his presence feels no different than before, and all the time I have known him, he was not comfortable in his body or the physical world.

DAY 5 – 31/12/04

This morning, my kind hosts rented me a motorbike with a two-stroke engine. This was awkward to start, but when it went... Today was the most enjoyable day so far. I drove 120km to the Jog falls, the highest waterfall in India. It was great to feel free, winding on steep zigzags through the jungle, passing the odd bright green paddy field

with hot sunshine and a cool breeze. Okay, there was a high risk factor, but it made life feel worth treasuring. I learnt from the practical side that beep languages are very important. I respect that Indian traffic is more aurally than visually orientated. If a driver was deaf in India, it would be equivalent to a blind driver in Britain. The statement "I am", for instance, is used to great effect when approaching a blind bend on a narrow road, to inform potential on-coming traffic. "Hello" is also an important part of Indian culture. I appreciated this on the more remote half of my ride, because nearly everybody I passed waved to me. This helped me feel connected with everyone, especially after giving one shy Indian who spoke no English, a lift for 30km. The falls were impressive, but the ride was the best bit. On my return, a couple of large monkeys leapt across my path. I only glimpsed them for a moment. The ox and cows plodding freely and undisturbed on busy roads were so common, I forgot how they initially shocked me. Later, I was amused by some skipping cows, running from some distant fireworks on the beach. Cows, like Indian drivers, do not signal, are aurally orientated and feel they have the right of way if they are large. My New Year's Eve was spent with a bottle of beer, while digesting a delicious peanut-cashew-banana lassi. I did not even realize that the moment had passed.

DAY 6 – 1/01/05

I went for an early swim and sunbathe to watch the crabs digging everywhere. Breakfast was a bit too rich with lemon lassi and fresh fruit yoghurt muesli. The rest of the day was spent shopping and having my hair cut (which included a head massage for Rs.20). The tailor measured me to make some trousers and I spent a long time looking at Indian drums. Eventually I was persuaded to buy some. I wanted to buy some at the end of my trip, but these were good and I was tired of salesmanship. By the time I was waiting for food, my stomach was cramping (I had missed lunch). I only managed a little rice and later I was very sick from both ends. Not a pleasant night.

DAY 7 – 2/01/05

One of the hosting brothers was very sympathetic because I looked pale green and served me a lemon tea. I moved to a more comfortable room (at three times the price, or £2.40 more) and spent the morning dozing. Later I took the motorbike I had promised to rent out for a spin. I found myself erring unusually on the side of caution; perhaps because of my delicate condition. When one of the few roads marked on my map of the state turned into a rough dirt track, I turned back so as to avoid the risk of a puncture. I retired early to my quieter room, to have a long night's sleep, punctuated by loud mosquito whining.

DAY 8 – 3/01/05

I felt a bit better after the long night's rest, but still have a runny tummy, not to mention a sore bottom. I planned to visit the Bad... falls and stopped for a bit of breakfast on the way, but had to return quickly to relieve myself for the second time. Soon I was on my way, exploring new territory to the northeast. The Ghat hills took a little longer to reach. A large lorry driving around the corner towards me on the wrong side of the main road confused me. Luckily I stood my ground and he corrected himself just in time. He was avoiding a pothole. After passing a large group of small monkeys, I turned right onto a small road for the last few km to the falls. The road was rougher but tarmac for 10km until just after a crossroad. Not wanting to risk a puncture, I turned back and explored the other arms of the crossroad. One also turned

into stony dirt, the other seemed good quality, but was overgrown with jungle. Soon I reached a huge gap in the road, which explained why. It was as if an earthquake had split it in two. On closer inspection, it was only one metre deep. Like yesterday, I had to add a patch of yellow to the brightly coloured jungle. The whole place was deserted and it felt late for lunch, so I headed back. An animal leapt across the road that looked like a super-fit dog, ran like a leopard and was the colour of a lion. Later I was told it was a Jackal. The saying goes that they never show their face, only their tail. Back on the main road, I stopped at the first place I found for some lunch. Asking for some rice was more difficult than I anticipated, but after ten minutes they understood. I was served thali: a thin vegetable curry with rice, beetroot and shallots with lemon. Before I had finished, I was given another portion of each. I made rather a mess, not being used to eating with my fingers as they do. This was embarrassing because about six people gathered around to watch me. They wanted Rs.20 for the meal, or “some dollars”. I showed them my English coins (1x20p, 2x5p, 1x2p). After understanding that 20p was nearly Rs.20, they asked only for my English coins, so I left them that and 17 rupees I also had in change. They then frantically squabbled over the English money, which was so amusing, it made my day. I picked up a hitchhiker on return. My Oakley cycling sunglasses with prescription lenses are the icing on the cake. They protect my eyes from dusty wind and bright sunshine while adding to colourful scenery. I don't know how my passenger survived without any! The evening was spent looking at fine cloth with the tailor, who had finished my trousers, but had left some nasty black oil stains there from his pedal-powered sewing machine. Rohid, the Nimmu brother who studies Ayurvedic medicine, served me another lemon tea. He suggested I should go to his college in Siddabor, near the Jog falls, to get treatment for sensitive digestion from his tutor.

DAY 9 – 4/01/05

For breakfast I had the world's most delicious orange juice, some banana/coconut porridge and a massala tea. Then I went for a swim and drank coconut water from an unripe green coconut. It tasted slightly salty, like a rehydrant electrolyte solution. I did not do much for the whole day, except visit the tailor for my trousers at last, look at lots of other cloth (“Lungi”s) and hand sewn wall-hangings, and discuss Ayurvedic treatment with Rohid. He persuaded me that I should accompany him tomorrow to his college/hospital and have a three-day treatment for my stomach. This means not eating anything tomorrow, so I treated myself to a Sag Paneer with rice in the evening. I also bought a cheap alarm clock, to wake up early. It did not appear to work very reliably. I chucked my roll of toilet paper because it had somehow become soaked in water, where I had left it in the toilet area.

DAY 10 – 5/01/05

Having taken up the offer to have my digestive system cleansed in Ayurvedic style, I needed to be up at 6am to catch a lift on the back of Rohid's motorbike. I did not sleep deeply, not trusting the alarm clock, and was woken at 4:15 by the Indian downstairs who had to milk the cow. I was not allowed to eat anything all day. The ride was chilly, very bumpy, and stunningly beautiful with a big sunrise. It took three and a quarter hours to reach Siddapur. I noticed lots of children on the way, walking to school. Most had uniforms, but only half wore anything on their feet. The Ayurvedic College hospital looks desolate; a concrete block in the middle of an empty field of wasteland. What have I let myself in for? After being led here and there and told to wait, I was interviewed by the lecturer / doctor, whose name seems to be “Sir”.

He sent me for a blood test, but as luck would have it, the relevant personnel were out for the day. Next, I was told to take my clothes off and was given a full body massage by two students at once. It was not entirely comfortable on a flat bed of wrought iron. While I lay there, some steam was wafted at me from the end of a hose. I was then told to eat a spoonful of substance that looked like dark shit (*Operculina turpethum*) a natural laxative. It was now 12:30 and I was led to a large cubic cell with its own toilet and bed, where I was instructed to drink a cup of hot water every half hour until 17:30, and not to fall asleep. After half an hour, I already caught myself drifting off. The bare walls and emptiness with bars on the windows did not feel like a great holiday. The laxative did not make me feel too good either, especially with no toilet paper. But hey, I may as well do the whole works (full Monty). At 17:30, after emptying bowels a few times, I was taken out for a cup of sweet tea and some fresh air. Later I was given some rice soup (over-boiled rice in hot water) and some salt to add. Finally, my blood pressure was checked and I was told to go to sleep at 10pm. One of the students lent me a book: 'Tell me your Dreams' by Sidney Sheldon. I read a little, but soon had to blow my candle out. Sleeping was not easy because the cistern leaked and caused a constant loud trickle down the drain.

DAY 11 – 6/01/05

I was awake early when the janitor knocked on my door. The trickling water was driving me crazy. The diversion of drips via the cistern lid into a large bucket that I had attempted last night, had not worked. I fiddled around a bit more within the cistern and managed to fix it. Mmm, if only I did that yesterday. Breakfast was a cup of sweet tea and some plain white bread. I was told that during treatment, I should avoid sunlight, spicy food, exercise, cold water, talking too much, daytime snoozing and should drink plenty of warm water. At 10am was told to hold my right thumb tightly in my left hand for half an hour with my eyes closed, while lying without a pillow, then to eat more bread with medicated jam, labelled 'Manoll'. After this, I was given a very oily full body massage back at the iron bed, followed by steam. Next, some cotton wool was stuck in my ears and some drops of oil poured up my nose. I was told to keep the c. w. in my ears for half an hour, then "have a bath" with the bucket provided. This was not as tricky as I had anticipated. Lunch was supposed to be without spice, but it tasted spicy to me. It was dhal sauce with rice and chapatti. I carefully picked out a few rings of sliced chilli. After reading for a while and having my blood sampled, I was taken mid-afternoon to lie on the iron bed, where cotton pads soaked in herbal lotion were bandaged over my eyes. Then for about half an hour, warm water (also medicated) was poured over my forehead in what sounded like a complicated procedure, involving several people, pots and pans and a gas stove. Apparently the water contained *Glycyrrhiza Glabra*, which calms the mind and improves complexion. I am not sure what it has to do with digestion. *Shirodhara* is the name of this process. About 5pm, I was taken for a cup of Chai and at 20:30 the evening meal was exactly the same as lunch. I noticed that though the college has male and female students, the separation is extreme. They not only have separate hostels at opposite ends of the campus, they don't eat together, they hardly talk to each other, and they have to sit separately while attending the same class. So far, every student and doctor who has treated me, or has been allowed to observe my case, has been male. I am often asked if I am married. They find it amusing to call me a bachelor. I have read most of the Sheldon book about a female with multiple personality disorder in one day, very unusual for me. A large section of the book is set

in a prisoners' mental hospital, which I relate well to in my cubic cell with bars on the window.

DAY 12 – 7/01/05 (Day of Martin's Funeral in UK)

Like yesterday, I was told to hold my right thumb before going for a massage, only this time the doctor was not happy that I was unable to explain exactly how it felt. I was told to hold it for another 10 minutes ... and observe. Eventually, I was given a full body massage, with the doctor instructing male students on what to do to me. This was followed by wafting steam, a facial massage and oil drops up my nose while I held my left thumb. I had finished the book, so I asked for a newspaper to read. 'The Times of India' was not very interesting, except for strange use of English. India seems behind Europe on many different levels, e.g.: technology -5yrs, Fashion -10yrs, Culture +/-50yrs. Lunch was the same as yesterday, except there was also some chickpea curry. I was told in the middle of my meal to chew it properly. Mmm, I thought I was a very good chewer. In the afternoon I had Shirdhara again, except this time I was told to wear a T-shirt ... a couple of female students were present. Afterwards the T-shirt was stained yellow, so after changing, the doctor asked a female cleaner to take it away and wash it. She brought it back 5mins later and I thanked her. Then I realized it was exactly as before, so I washed it myself. That seems to be the end of my treatment, though I am not allowed to leave until after 10am tomorrow, and I should carry on drinking hot water and avoiding all those things. This is getting a bit boring, so after tea, I asked the student guiding me if anybody had a game to play, chess for instance. I watched a lizard crawl around the room and fell asleep for half an hour after experiencing 15mins darkness due to a power-cut. After dinner, the doctor explained to me why he had been constantly checking my blood pressure, pulse, tongue, the top of my nose, and the sides of my forehead. He said these are all affected by the treatment I have received, and if they had not remained uniform, he would have accordingly prescribed something different. He advised me to start every day for the next month or two with some sweet Ayurvedic Tonic 'Manoll' on plain bread and a cup of hot water or lemon tea. Nobody brought any games to play, so I read a couple of Swami lectures from the Krsna Consciousness Movement. The easiest route to enlightenment, so they say, is through chanting, e.g.: "Hare Krsna". This sounds to me like brainwashing. Mmm, enlightenment = clean brain.

DAY 13 – 8/01/05

I was expecting a Yoga lesson on an empty stomach from a student at 6.30am, but he did not turn up. After breakfast he explained that the doors had been locked. Mmm so it was a bit prison-like. He said the main rules of yoga are to have an empty stomach and a straight back. I should inhale sharply through the nose 15 + times, while making a ring with 1st finger and thumb in each hand. Next, with my right hand, I should make a fist with straight thumb and 3rd finger (cellists' terminology). The thumb should block one nostril to inhale, followed by the 3rd finger blocking the other to exhale, 10 times. The third exercise is to exhale slowly saying "Ommm" 5 times while making rings with each 3rd finger and thumb. Ommm. My journey back to Gokarna was exciting. First I had to catch a bus to Kumta. While waiting beside a bus at the bus station, I was pushed rudely from behind. I turned around to discover it was a cow squeezing past. When on the bus, I noticed an ox (or maybe a bull) stepping into the crowded waiting room. Just as I found the camera, the bus pulled away. I managed to get a seat near the back, but it was painfully bumpy. 3 hours later I

changed buses at Kumpta. The next bus was so full, 3 people were hanging on the step outside. I was told to move back, a near impossible task with my rucksack on my back. This bus was bigger, and the journey was swifter... thankfully. On my return, Rohid's parents (Nimmu + husband) had a room waiting for me. Soon Rohid called from the hospital to check I was okay, what nice people. I escaped to swim for an hour, took a shower, and then went shopping with my remaining rupees. The first thing I passed was a cow walking with a huge piece of cardboard in its mouth. Ommm, wish I had the camera. For the evening meal I chose Paneer Manchurian out of curiosity. (It has nothing to do with Manchunian!) It was a bit disappointing, deep-fried cheese in a spicy sweet caramel – not very healthy.

DAY 14 – 9/01/05

By the time I had packed, after enjoying a lemon tea and toast from Nimmu, my taxi had already arrived to take me to the airport. I asked for ten more minutes and wrote a quick email to tell everyone I was on my way and all was well. I thought of trying to phone and confirm my flight, but I had no number to call and had been assured I would not need to. The journey was eventful with the usual mad traffic and lorries crawling to overtake each other around hairpins. It crossed my mind we were bound to see an accident during the 4-hour drive. Sure enough, we passed one and the driver stopped to check because another taxi his firm was involved. I asked the driver to stop for lunch somewhere cheap and he kindly obliged. Afterwards, he passed a friend of his, who we picked up. After being dropped at the national airport terminal and finding my way from there to the international one, I discovered that my flight had been cancelled. Ommm, perhaps I should have confirmed it. Actually, a replacement is going tomorrow morning. I was told to wait for a while to see if any other uninformed passengers would arrive. Several did. One lady had confirmed 48 hrs in advance as she was supposed to and was told nothing of the delay, so I did not feel too stupid. Anyway, that passenger showed so much anger, I was happy to sit back and smile, tapping my drum. After waiting a couple more hours, we were directed to join a bus that took us to a hotel for a free meal and accommodation. The hotel, 5km from the airport, was much better than I expected. I was given a private room with a king size bed, hot shower, empty fridge, A.C. etc... even a TV! I immediately took advantage of the towels provided and took a hot shower. Later, another passenger bought me a beer and gave me Rs.100 (I only had Rs.20 left). I felt well looked after. Dinner was an okay buffet, better than anything found on an airplane I suppose. I used my new found wealth to access the Internet and re-inform everyone I had contacted earlier, telling of the 14hr delay. I checked out the TV in my room, but had to swap plug points with the fridge before it worked. It was not worth the effort.

DAY 14 extended to 15 – 10/01/05

A 4am courtesy call informed me that we should depart at 4.30am. Yawn... At the airport, I was pulled aside and asked what my bag contained. "A couple of drums" I said. "Are you sure there is no medicine"? "Oh, yeah, a couple of bottles of Ayurvedic medicine" I admitted. That was satisfactory. The 8.30am flight departure was followed by 13 hours mostly flying with a short stop in Bahrain. My neighbouring passenger, who was a counsellor, discussed how in her opinion, psychotherapy was the most self-indulgent thing to do. After arriving home, I discovered that nobody had checked their email for any of the messages I had gone out of my way to send, regarding my return journey. Never mind, I am back.