

A Great Weekend Getaway

By Nancy Zrymiak

Fort Cochin, a quiet town on the Arabian Sea, is a one hour flight from Bangalore but feels like a world away. Fort Cochin makes for a great weekend getaway or the starting point to a trip to the Kerala backwaters, nearby Cherai Beach or elsewhere in Kerala.

There are deals to be had, especially when travelling during monsoon season. My family of four took a comfortable one hour „Go Air“ flight from Bangalore to Kochi. The cost was Rs 0 (yes, zero) for the flight plus taxes, Rs 4000 each return. Not a bad price.

We quickly arranged for a prepaid taxi at the airport and set off for Fort Cochin, 90 minutes away. The town may be quiet but the port is bustling with fishing boats large and small, with horns to match. The town itself has one or two storey buildings dating back 500 years to when the Portuguese and Dutch set up shop, trading spices, teas and other wares.

The famous chinese fishing nets



he first afternoon we took a ten minute rickshaw ride to Jew town. There is a 350- year- old Synagogue, the oldest in India, and shops selling jewellery, carvings, antiques and spices. The buildings are colourful and the streets narrow.

The Synagogue is closed on Saturdays and it happened to be closed on Friday when we were there, so we missed out seeing the inside of it. But it was a nice lazy afternoon browsing in shops and sipping cappuccinos.

Fort Cochin is a walking town and the next morning we walked along the beachfront where Chinese fishing nets are set up. They look like giant Praying Mantises lined up one after another. On the beach a group of men pull down on an elaborate set of ropes, lowering huge rocks (weights) and a big square net is raised out of the water. Someone scurries out along bamboo poles to check the catch. The men release the rocks, and the net is lowered into the water again. The fish are taken to one of many stalls along the beach and are soon for sale.



Photos by Nancy Zrymiak

By the sea



Vintage houses, vintage cars

The men repeat this every ten minutes or so and are happy to have tourists come and try their hand at it. Just show a bit of interest and they'll soon be calling you over to help them out!

A short walk from the water is Princess Street, lined with shops and restaurants. We enjoyed the aromas of shops selling essential oils and pretty glass bottles to put them into. There are so many oils to choose from but I finally narrowed my favourite down to Kerala oil.

Nearby, we found Teapot, an eatery which has delicious Kerala spiced chicken curry, samosas, and huge pieces of Death by Chocolate - need I say more.

A little further on is St. Francis Church, said to be India's oldest European church. Kerala has a large Christian population but we were still surprised to see so many churches. As we drove out of town Sunday morning, churchgoers filled the streets and the churches.

With Fort Cochin's laid back feel and old European charm, you may feel like you've left the country altogether. But that's the beauty of it - you haven't left the country - this is just one more of the many sides of India.