Podcast 106: Five Days In South India

{INTRO:

ME: No, I don't want you to send me a notification. I think it's recording, but I can't honestly tell you. It's doing things. I suppose what I ought to do is just stop it.
LAURA: yeh, just stop it}

{intro music – jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:
Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a podcast looking at unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of. I'm your host, The Barefoot Backpacker, a middle-aged Enby with a passion for offbeat travel, history, culture, and the 'why's behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}

{Music fades. Podcast begins}

Hello :)

It's been an interesting couple of months. As you will have seen on my Instagram and my social media feeds, I managed to hit 100 countries before my 50th birthday, arriving in Norway with a couple of days to spare. I will do some podcastery on my Norway trip specifically, (and on the fact I've hit 100 countries), but all I'll say for now is that I'm quite amazed and also disappointed that it took me that long to visit. It was one of the most comfortable countries I've visited, and nowhere near as hideously expensive as I'd feared. I suspect that's less to do with Norway becoming a budget destination and more to do with the UK becoming an expensive one, but it's happened gradually so I hadn't noticed. Something Something Brexit. Not that I'm a political podcaster, of course.

The other big news in my life is, uhm, to the surprise of absolutely nobody, I have been diagnosed with ADHD. Specifically, combined-type ADHD. I don't know how much you know about ADHD but there's basically two flavours: Inattentive, which is the stereotype 'Attention Deficit Oh A Squirrel', and Hyperactive-Impulsive, which is the stereotype 'Will you stop running about and sit down!?'. I seem to have traits of both. Who knew? Well, that even my parents have barely raised an eyebrow tells you that, well, literally everybody knew. A bit like when I came out as non-binary and one of my close friends said 'no shit sherlock'. I am nothing if not a walking stereotype of many things.

The ADHD diagnosis was very quick. But then it would be because I paid £300 for the privilege of going private. I got the forms in, what, May? June? I don't quite recall. All I can tell you is that it took me two months to fill most of them in, because, "we hold these truths to be self-evident" as they say, and then I needed to get a doctor's appointment because I needed some medical history, but that involved me changing my GP because I was still registered in Scotland despite not having lived there since August 2023, and Scotland has a completely different health system as you might remember from my rantings during the later Covid era. Anyway, I saw my new doctor the week after I came back from Norway, coinciding with a mail from the NHS going 'hey, you're now 50, here's how to take a stool sample so you can send it to us to see if you have Bowel Cancer' and I'm like, yeh no let's not do that right now. I needed my weight, blood pressure, and height for the ADHD assessment, but the doc took a few other deets too. And it seems I'm pretty healthy, with the exception of a slightly high cholesterol level, but I can live with that.

I completed the ADHD paperwork on the Thursday. The next Monday I had a phone call from the ADHD provider (Care ADHD, for the record) saying 'we have your paperwork, are you free Friday?', and I was like, I mean obviously, but also, wow that's quick. The Assessment was scheduled for an hour and it lasted 90 minutes; microphone issues at the assessor's end were only slightly the cause of the excess length. It was quite an intense conversation, not gonna lie it felt like a one-off therapy session, talking about my teenagership and Things That Happened at the time etc. Anyway, she concluded by saying ;yeh, it's clear you have ADHD but you're not as bad as some of the people I've interviewed who can barely function in the world', and I'm like 'yeh I'm old, I've *had* to mask quite a lot'.

At the time of podding, they're passing my deets to the GP in order that conversations about medication can take place, a process they call 'titration' which just makes my mind think of GCSE Chemistry lessons. Medication isn't cheap, but I'm in a position in life where I can afford it, so I'll let you know if it happens and what effect it has. But let's be real, if it has an effect it should be quite noticeable. Even to you, dear listeners.

Aside from that, well, this coming weekend I'll be doing another Ultramarathon, but this one's mostly flat and only 30 miles, so should be finishable for me on both counts. Plus I've done a bit more long-distance training for this one *and* I've got better nutrition (including some fancy running gels), but I'll talk more about that next time once I've done it. Chickens and hatchings, or something.

As for this pod; Laura has been bugging me to talk about our trip to India earlier this year for a while, and because Past Me was always intending to pod it, they did travel diary voice recordings on a near-daily basis to provide a basic framework, or in fact to just use as the pod. Which makes Present Me's job much easier when it comes to recording and editing. If you recall, this was the first part of the trip that ended with the four nights in Maldives, which I podded about not long after we returned. However I wasn't quite sure *how* to pod about the India part of the trip, since it didn't really fit in anywhere and wasn't sure it was long enough to make into a full pod.

Listener, as you might already know, I talk a lot.

{section separation jingle}

The trip was across a little of Southern India, starting in Kochi and taking in the Kerala Backwaters, an overnight train, and the two temple-centric cities of Madurai and Thanjavur. This had us visiting the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

I don't quite know how to say this, so here we go: we were kind of wary of India. There's obviously a whole host of stereotypes of travel there, of being a western tourist there, including, but not limited to, the noise, the hassles, the crowds, the effect of food on your body's systems, and the pollution. A very interesting, a very historical, a very cultural, country, with a few things to be careful of. I always said it was a country I wouldn't feel necessarily comfortable with travelling solo in, which is ridiculous when you consider I've been to neighbouring Bangladesh solo, which is not a country noted for being quiet, empty, or having bland food. And of course India is also historically *the* country where, historically, barefoot backpackers have tended to end up, almost by default, It was one primary end of the hippie trail back in the day, after all.

However, India is also the seventh largest country in the world, and therefore what holds true for one part may not be true everywhere else. And most of the tourists to India tend to visit the North of the country anyway, so there's much less said about the south. Well, apart from Goa, which is firmly on the modern hippie trail, and that's why we didn't go there. We are not yoga-practising, rave-participating, barefoot backpackers. Honest.

But before I talk about the actual trip, let me first tell you about some of the admin we needed to do to get there. We both needed visas, and I also wanted to book the overnight train in advance. Both of these were online tasks, and you would have thought that online admin tasks for a country whose people are stereotypically rendered as some of the most talented technological experts in the world would have made applying for a visa and buying train tickets to be a seamless, simple, and quick task.

It appears all the web designers left for the USA and the UK in about 2008, and no-one updated them since, I'm not saying they were Geocities bad, but aesthetically they were definitely heading in that direction, what with the colour scheme, and the font and layout choice, and the drop-down menus where things were not in order and remarkably difficult to find, The visa website in particular was a huge hassle, for example it kept resetting itself if we keyed in something that even remotely seemed awry, and by resetting I mean, takes us back to the start page and wiped all our answers, without telling us what we were doing apparently wrongly (in one case it was not filling in a box for religion that it specifically said was optional). And then we had issues uploading a photograph, because we had to edit it down to a remarkably small file size but again, it didn't tell us the actual problem, only that it couldn't be done and oh look there's the start page again. It also requested we put every country we'd been to in the last 10 years but only allowed us to choose 20. Granted we're probably outliers in that respect but also, filling in an official form, we'd quite like it to be right and we'd hate to be

refused a visa out of a technicality.

Anyway, we both managed it, eventually, though it took several days of waiting and some very misinterpretable responses that landed in my spam folder. And as you'll now hear, even that wasn't quite the end of the matter. Note the recording for this day, made on our first evening in Kochi, isn't great quality due to us being on different sides of the room at the time, and I didn't realise that until I came to edit it for this podcast. However, in editing, I discovered what one of the options in Audacity actually *does* and it's turned it from 'virtually unlistenable' to 'a little ugly', and that's a win in my book!

{ME: And ... talking. And this is not going to help your sleep! Right so this is day one, and how did we, what what did we do? I ...
LAURA: we had a really interesting customs experience
ME: We did.
LAURA: Never had an experience like that.
ME: We did. We'll, come on to that in a minute. Let's do this chronologically, and say, I mean, my journey to, my journey to the airport was fairly indifferent. Nothing really much happened. I realised the Elizabeth Line didn't run quite as many trains as I thought we did. Or as many trains as Laura thought we did. Erm, airport, got to the airport and realised we'd not done something with our Indian visa that we needed to do, which was printed out.
LAURA: There's nothing in the email though.
ME: Yes, there was nothing. There was nothing to actually tell you that you needed to do it.
LAURA: Nothing as simple as 'have to print it'
ME: But it all worked out fine in the end. We got through check-in. We got, we had a drink in the least Wetherspoonsy Wetherspoons I've ever been to. Didn't have any beers on tap. Well, it had Guinness. I had a London Pride, a bottle of London Pride. I never normally drink when I'm flying, but Laura does. And we had an hour to kill, so we met up in the Wetherspoons. And then we got on the plane and Laura lost half of her things.
LAURA: I still can't believe I lost my Yellow Fever card. Everything else has come back, but that was a bit of an annoying one to have actually lost.
ME: Yeah, I mean, you also lost your water bottle, but I guess that doesn't really matter.
LAURA: Nah. That one didn't have any consequences. The Yellow Fever was irritating.
ME: Yes, the Yellow Fever was awkward. I mean, you shouldn't need it for this trip.
LAURA: Not for this trip, but I'd like it. I really had my mom send an entire freaking care package so that I would have my yellow fever ready, and, gone.
ME: Yeah, dang.
LAURA: What can you do?
ME: What can you do? What can I say about the flight? The first flight was seven hours-ish. It was a flight. I did actually doze a bit towards the end of it, because I was tired at this point. We had a very, very, very, very quick layover at Doha Airport, where we were one of the last people to board the flight because our flight connection was slightly ... well, our flight was slightly late arriving and we had, what, an hour and a bit?
LAURA: Yeah.
ME: So, yeah, by the time we got to the gate, it was already last call. The second plane was a bit... t wasn't quite... it was a smooth flight except for the start of the end.
LAURA: Yes, the two most dangerous parts.
ME: Yes. And it was a bit... It was very, very smoggy arriving into Kochi. We also got food on the flight, which we weren't expecting because it's Indigo and we thought that Indigo was a bit of a budget airline, but we actually got, we got a cucumber sandwich and...
LAURA: Oh, I had a chicken salad sandwich.
Me: Yeah? Nice. Some people get all the fun. And a packet of almonds, which I've still got because I don't like almonds. And a packet of salt and pepper ... things.
LAURA: I don't know what those were. I liked them too, but I don't know what they were.
Me: Yeah. Like... Some kind of peanut puff.
LAURA: Yeah, yeah, puff of some, I don't know, I liked them.
ME: Yeah. And then we got to India and we had our... interesting ... for some reason, we were one of the last, I don't know whether we were one of the last people off the plane, but we were certainly one of the last people through customs. And that's a very interesting, very weird setup. It's like, if you're a foreigner going into India, certainly at Kochi Airport, don't know about anywhere else, if you're a foreigner coming into Kochi Airport, you kind of go onto a side, like a side part of the customs area. And there's about five desks in front of you.

And they have chairs. And you sit down. And you have a very, very strange and long conversation about, you know, where you're going to, what your job is, and all of that stuff. And do you have all the necessary paperwork? And it's all very chatty, and it's all very, like, in-depth.
LAURA: They didn't get as depth for me. I heard them doing it with other people, so they just kind of left me alone.
ME: Yeah. You were one of the lucky ones, I mean, they got in depth with me because they were just interested partly in my hair. And then partly in my job, which is incredibly boring.
LAURA: Which included the best quote of the whole day - Are there ever hackers? There wouldn't be. Or whatever it was.
ME: Yeah, why would any?
LAURA: If they did hack in, they would immediately exit the programme.
Me: Yes. Yes, my job is... it exists. And that's all you need to know.}

I have been through immigration in many countries but that's the first time I've encountered a chair. And the conversation was long enough that you needed one. Very thorough, but also very polite. And oh, it;s not like they take you into a private room to conduct this interview, no, it's done right there in front of the cabins you;d normally just walk up to and be stamped through, at the front of the immigration line, so it's very much in the public space.

But we got through eventually, and, hey, India awaited us!

{section separation jingle}

Our first two nights were spent in Kochi, a city I'd heard of but didn't know a great deal about. As it turns out, it was quite a lovely and gentle introduction to India.

{ME: and then we had a nice little long taxi ride from the airport to the... it was a very long... I don't know how long that journey is, although having now looked at it on a map, I can see that the way into Fort Kochi, you go south quite a long way and then back up. I did get some money changed, which was quite nice. And it was a really nice taxi driver?
LAURA: Yep, he seemed really nice.
MA: Yeah, he seemed really nice. And then we got to the hotel. The hotel is also quite nice. It's got a pool, apparently, and an air con and a fan.
LAURA: The air con is almost a little too air con-y.
ME: Yes.
LAURA: I'm actually still cold. Is there a blanket in there?
ME: There might be. I mean, we might be able to change the temperature of the air con to be fair. I'll have a look.What else? Oh yes, what else can we say? Food?
LAURA: Or hang on here, so we checked in. And then we went on a wander to check out the neighbourhoods. There's tons of like. ..We'll have our ... Yeah, we'll be spoiled for choice tomorrow and Monday for fruit and chai and stuff. Surprisingly few ... I think we just ... They must eat a little bit later, because more things were open. So I think that's just something to note.
ME: Yeah, there's certainly more things open on the way back than on the way there. And when we got to the restaurant that we went to, we were the first people there.
LAURA: And it was like six o'clock, so we're not talking super early, but... early enough.
ME: It was a very nice restaurant.
LAURA: Such an unassuming...
ME: Yeah, very unassuming from the outside. It's like just a doorway leading the steps, leading up in a small sign saying that it's a restaurant. And then you get there and it's... got a very interesting mural on the wall, actually. It's a huge mural that people have sort of like noted that 'we have arrived in this place'. And a lot of it was romantic, cheese-ily romantic. But we had a table by the window and that was very nice. We had a nice little breeze. And we had...well, Keralan Curry. I had a Keralan squid. And Laura had Keralan prawn masala. And we had jeera rice and a couple of bits of bread with it. And It was not spicy.
LAURA: Oh, my God. It was not spicy.
ME: No. It was very good. It was very good.
LAURA: Holy crap, it was good.
ME: It wasn't big, but it was good.
LAURA: Yeah, it was too small. I'm going to argue about the portion size. Not because I'm an American. It

was... a little small.
ME: Yeah. It was also only like £2.40.
LAURA: It was very cheap. It was very, very, very good.
ME: Yes. It was... And on the way back we...
LAURA: Oh, we got the fruit juice.
ME: Yes, yes, yes, yes. Watermelon juice and mango juice and a banana lassi? Banana lassi, yeah, yeah.
LAURA: Yeah, popped into a quick store on the way, since we need water in this part of the world.
ME:We do. And they sell very large bottles of it for like 39p. How big is this bottle? Two litres. It's two litres for about 39p. That's... good.
LAURA: And my masala mix.
ME: Oh, yes, and the masala mix is a packet of ... they look a bit like twiglets and they taste a bit like chicken spice. It's good.
LAURA: Popular in Britain. You see them in like Tescos. All my like Asian friends have them.
ME: I've never had them. I may have to start trying them. Is there anything else that we can say? We haven't quite worked out tomorrow yet. We're going to worry about that tomorrow.
LAURA: Yeah, we'll do that tomorrow.
ME: All I will say is that it's half past eight and we're both absolutely knackered}

{ME: So, Sunday, what did we do Sunday? What did we do Sunday? Sunday we...
LAURA: We woke up early enough so we were trying to find breakfast and then discovered that it was hilariously difficult.
ME: Yes, because nowhere was open for breakfast.
LAURA: Nowhere was open for breakfast. So we went to a tourist cafe that was expensive for the area. But very good.
ME: I mean...
LAURA: I had a great breakfast.
ME: You had a great...I had a chocolate brownie. I don't know what you had, but I had a chocolate brownie.
LAURA: I had an excellent croissantwich ...
ME: I asked for a croissantwich. They charged us for a croissantwich ...
LAURA: No, they tried to charge us for a croissant. We did get it taken off.
ME: Yeah, yeah, yeah.}

One of the reasons for choosing Kochi as a starting point was so we could do a boat tour on the Kerala Backwaters. However, due to a series of language issues and misunderstandings, we failed to arrange it through our hotel for that first day. Not that it was much of an issue, there's plenty of tour operators around that offer trip there so we wandered into one and booked in for the next day. This meant we had our Sunday free, so what could we do?

{ME: So what we did on Sunday was not ... We cafe hopped. We went to the beach.
LAURA: We walked around a lot.
ME: Yeah. We walked around. We went to the beach.
LAURA: We didn't start cafe hopping until two. We... Yeah, we went to the beach. Got a coconut. Went to the actual, onto the beach. And I went wading.
*ME: Yeah. First time in the Indian Ocean, wasn't it? Was it first time *in* the Indian Ocean?*
LAURA: See, I don't know. I don't remember everything I've ever done. I don't think I went in in Singapore. But I might have waded. I don't remember. I know I haven't swum in there. I would remember swimming, but I don't remember all the wadings.
*ME: I know I've set foot in it in Perth and elsewhere on the Western Australia coast. I've *seen* it from Singapore and... I don't know where the boundary is between the Indian and the Pacific Oceans. So, I...Yeah.*
LAURA: Yeah, I don't know either.
ME: Like Bali. Is Bali in the Indian Ocean or in the Pacific? Where is the boundary?
LAURA: I think it's in the Pacific.
ME: I don't know.
LAURA: In my head it's Pacific. If it's in the Indian, then I've definitely swum in the Indian because I swam in Bali. I've swum in Komodo.
ME: It might be one of those where the south bits' the Indian and the north bit's the Pacific. That might be the border. I don't know. I'm not a hydrologist.
LAURA: It ain't my business.

ME: No, no, that's for geographers.
LAURA: That's for the oceanographers.
ME: Oceanographers, yes.
LAURA: Oceanographers. And geographers.
ME: I was trying to say hydrographers, but I don't know if that's a word.
LAURA: I don't know. I guess it probably is actually the geographers who decide these things.
ME: Yes. Possibly.
LAURA: Cos wouldn't an oceanographer, oh anyway, we walked around. It was very hot, but very pleasant, so I didn't really notice the heat. I noticed I was thirsty, but I didn't know notice I wasn't like, even though I was quite sweaty, I didn't care because it was just pleasant. There was that cricket game.
ME: Yeah, we passed the cricket match with the amazingly loud commentary from the chap in the.
LAURA: Even though it seemed to be the equivalent of like a five-side situation. I liked that. We eventually ended up at the bar, but we didn't use it as a bar yet.
ME; Yeah, we were going to stay for one drink, and then we just...
LAURA: One juice.
ME: One juice.
LAURA: Yeah, juice. We needed to specify that we were not on the liquid yet, on the liquor yet.
ME: Then you started to work on stuff, and I went for a walk, and then by the time we got back it was just to stay there. That's basically what happened?
ME: No, it was this place had the Wi-Fi. No, it wasn't Wi-Fi. There was a reason we didn't leave. Air conditioning, that's what it was.
ME: Air conditioning, yeah.
LAURA: The tourist cafe this morning did not have air conditioning, so we couldn't guarantee that anywhere else would have air conditioning. This place, because it was outside, it was breezy, so it was comfortable. That's why we stayed. The plan had been to stay there for one drink, and then cafe hop, but then comfort took over. But the plan had always been to go back, because that was the place where the alcohol was.
ME: Yes, and we did eventually have alcohol.
LAURA: We didn't bother leaving, and you had lunch, because you didn't have breakfast.
ME: Because I didn't have breakfast. I had breakfast. It was a very nice chocolate brownie.
LAURA: It was a nice ... I took a bite. It was good.
ME: It was quite stodgy and moist. It was quite, it was not dry at all, and it was not, you know, crusty.
LAURA: It was good. It was a good brownie.
ME: It was good brownie.
LAURA: Just wasn't intended to be ...
ME: My only breakfast.
LAURA: The whole thing. And I took a bite of your lunch, and it tasted more Chinese than Indian. It was good.
ME: It was ginger chicken, wasn't it? It was ginger chicken
LAURA: yep, with one of the breads. You got the p-one.
ME: I've got the paratha.
LAURA: Paratha, thank you. I was thinking patata. I was like, it's not patata.
ME: Acuna Patata. Yeah, and then we stayed for drinks. I went for a walk. You did work.
LAURA: Well, we stayed for a second juice drink.
ME: Yes.
LAURA: We need to specify this. We only started drinking alcohol because they started harassing me for sitting there without any more things. We started drinking a little bit earlier than I wanted to. That said, we only had the one beer in two hours, so it was fine.
ME: Yes, because they harassed Laura to buy drinks, and then when she'd finished it, did not harass her again for a while. It took a lot of effort.
LAURA: Yeah, you had to go get them.
ME: Yeah, I had to go get them and say, we'd like more drinks.
LAURA: We would like to give you money.
ME: Yes, they were big bottles. They weren't expensive either, were they?
LAURA: No, no, no.
ME: 250, I think?
LAURA: Yeah, 250.
ME: For a 660 ml bottle, and it was between 5% and 6%, apparently, and not for sale outside of Kerala.
LAURA: Between 5% and 6%.

ME: Yeah, it was just kingfisher. It was nothing terribly exciting for my beer blogger friends. And then we had food, evening meal there as well.
LAURA: Yeah, we got curries and breads and rice.
ME: I can't remember what curry you had.
LAURA: I know what I had. I don't know what you had.
ME: I can't remember what I had. What did you have?
LAURA: I had the Aleppi prawn curry.
ME: Oh, yeah, yeah.
LAURA: And it was good, but not as good as the previous night.
ME: Did I have the fish curry?
LAURA: I have no idea what you had. I have no idea what you had.
ME: I think I may have had a fish curry.
LAURA: And then we split the ... ghee rice this time.
ME: Yes, the ghee rice was nice.
LAURA: And then I got two chapattis, and you got some other bread. Did you get chapattis too, or did you get...
ME: I think I might have had another one. No, yeah, possibly. I don't know.
LAURA: But the total, I got a pineapple juice, a mango lassi, four beers, and the curry, and then we split the chapattis, and we split the rice. And I, in total, spent about 16 pounds once I converted my half of the bill, or my bit of the bill. 16 pounds for all that.
ME: Yeah, it's nice, isn't it?
LAURA: That's the most expensive meal trip so far.
ME: Yeah.
LAURA: That's just because of the beers.
ME: Yeah, we had... I mean, they tried to charge us for nine beers, and we only had eight, but even so.
LAURA: Did they?
ME: Yeah.}

Honestly, much of the rest of the two weeks was a bit like this – not doing a heck of a lot, ending up in a cafe or some such, and just idling the day away. Laura had a pet project to work on, while I was just happy writing and thinking about blogs and future podcasts.

This seem too to be a good point to talk about the first of the hotels we stayed in.

{ME: What did you think of that hotel? Apart from the fact that they had one charging point in the entire room.
LAURA: The charging point was annoying. It was okay. I think that's what it is. It was a good location. It wasn't, like, the best hotel I've ever stayed in, but I liked the location, so I can't complain. It was pricey.
ME: It was pricey.
LAURA: It was expensive. And it wasn't the best hotel I've ever stayed in. And it was kind of weird that my bedroom looked out over the hallway.
ME: Yes. It was a very nice hallway. It was decorated in lights and what have you, but it was still in the hallway. There was a window.
LAURA: Yeah, it was just like their walls.
ME: Yeah. I mean, to be honest, my followers on YouTube will know that I have posted maybe a picture from a Premier Inn that looks out onto a wall.
LAURA: Yeah, but that wall was right next to the window. At least Premier Inn gives you, like, an alley.
ME: The little things.
LAURA: Yeah, it's the little things. I smell a new tagline.
ME: Yes.
LAURA: But this wasn't even ... there was no alley. It was just the wall was right there.
ME: Yeah.}

Clearly we are not the standard, dedicated, attention-to-detail travel bloggers. I am not a guidebook. I am a storyteller. You listen to me once you *get* to a place, not when you're planning a trip *to* a place.

{section separation jingle}

As stated earlier, one of the main reasons we were in Kochi at all was to visit the Backwaters. One of those places that other, more standard, more dedicated, more guidebook-styled travel bloggers always rave about.

The Backwaters are, in case you don't know, are a series of lagoons, canals, and other waterways (around 900km of them in total), that cover much of the state of Kerala. Indeed Vembanad Lake is the longest lake in the whole country, and covers an area of 2,000 square kilometres, which is just slightly smaller than Herefordshire or half the size of the US State of Rhode Island. For a lake, it's pretty big, for sure. The Backwaters as a whole are slightly salty ('brackish' is the technical term) and home to a significant amount of wildlife (especially birds, frogs, otters, and similar creatures), and much of it passes through woodland that runs up to the water's edge.

Unsurprisingly, it's popular with tourists, and many companies and individuals operate vessels of different sizes and facilities to cruise along them. Some of them you can even overnight on. Usually though you hire a boat for a 3-to-5 hour cruise, and get to see, well, water.

{ME: And then, I guess, yesterday.
LAURA: Yeah, yesterday.
ME: Oh, yeah, we got up. We had somewhere else for breakfast.
LAURA: Yeah, because in our wandering, our very pleasant wandering on Sunday, we saw the place that advertised dosa breakfast. So we went back there and got the dose of breakfast. I tried to order a roast garlic one and the very nice young man promptly told me to order something else. So I did. I got the butter dosa or the butter masala. That's what I got, the butter masala dosa, which was good, but oily. Like, I think I don't know if I need to have another one on the trip. Not because it wasn't tasty, but it was just it was oily enough that I got a bit of stomach ache afterwards. And I got a chai. My first chai on the trip, which was very good.
ME: I did get the garlic.
LAURA: The roast garlic one?
ME: The roast garlic, because why not? And Laura had a bite of it and she went, that's really nice. But yes, maybe the chap was right.
LAURA: Yep. Like one bite was perfectly fine. Two bites would have been okay. But the dosas were like 10 bites. I think by then it would have been less okay.
ME: It was a little, there was spice in it.
LAURA: The only spice we've really had so far. Kerala's known for being spicy, but they definitely gave us the tourist version of the meals.
Yeah.
ME: My squid on the first night had a little bit of a kick to it.
LAURA: Only a little, because I yoinked a sip of it. It wasn't a sip, you know what I mean, a bite. I could have eaten that, no problem.
ME: Then we...
LAURA: Then we went back to the hotel, grabbed our bags, went to the tourist board, dropped the bags there. And then we were half an hour early, but because it was a private tour, it didn't matter. So we took the taxi.
ME: Yeah, it was a long taxi ride, but two hours ish. An hour or two hours. And because you'd had the dosa you were thinking of it, that was something that was going on, because it was quite a bouncy...
LAURA: I mean, you said you had the same.
ME: Yes, I did.
*LAURA: So, *we*.*
ME: Yes. It was fine once I got on the boat. And then we had three hours sailing around the Backwaters of Kerala.
LAURA: Well, we had three hours sailing near some houses in open water.
ME: Yeah.Well, we went through India's largest lake, and yeah.
LAURA: Well ifthere's one thing I don't really need to see ... It's big lakes.
ME: When I was looking back at my pictures, it did look quite nice on the pictures. I think that's just because I was taking pictures of the nice bits.
LAURA: Yeah.
ME: And there was that one section where...
LAURA: There was the one section that looked like the pictures and the stuff I actually wanted to see. In other words, I just felt like I was a hostage on a boat for two and a half hours. Being like, why am I not in Kochi?
ME: Yeah.
LAURA: Like it was a long day to go see something that wasn't worth seeing. In the way that we did it, I think if

we did an overnight or something, it would be worth it, because you could actually...
ME: Yeah. I think you'd have to do an overnight. Because you could do longer trips than three hours. But I think even like a five hour trip would just get you more of the same. Possibly like one other nice little passage.
LAURA: Yeah. I think we just did it wrong. I didn't know. It's not like a regret, just a... I don't think it was worth a... In the same way that now I don't really think being here is worth it. I wish we'd been in Kochi longer. It's really where I'm starting to land. Nothing we could do about it. But yeah.
ME: We weren't to know.
LAURA: We weren't to know. That's what your blogs are for. Tell other people.
ME: Yes. We do these things, so you don't have to.
LAURA: So you could learn from our misadventures. Not that in a complaining way, but just in a... If you're spending all the money and the time and the stress and all that to come over here, you want to kind of do it as well as you want, based on what you're after.
ME: And you can do the research, but the research doesn't tell you everything.
LAURA: Yeah, I didn't see... Yeah, I didn't see anywhere online saying that like the three hour... But maybe it's because people are doing longer ones.
ME: Yeah.
LAURA: So I just didn't see people doing this shorter. I don't know.
ME: Also, I think quite a few people do overnight in Alleppi first, so they can start earlier.
LAURA: Yeah. So they can do like the full hour, the eight hour. Yeah.
ME: But I mean, one thing to say is that there weren't that many people around. It did feel quite quiet.
LAURA: It felt so empty. Both. Kochi was empty. Alleppi was even more empty. I didn't see ... the only other tour, well, at least like non-Asian tourists that I saw were on the few of the other boats. And even then, most of the boats were entirely...
ME: Indian.
LAURA: Yeah, Indian or Asian. I don't know where people are from, but non-white people. I'll just... Let's just say it that way. Of course, at least in Kochi, there were like white people, not as nearly as many as I expected because it seems very clearly not to be in the 'on' season right now, which is nice. Come in February, all. But there was like nobody in the wetland.
ME: Yeah.
LAURA: No tourists. No western tourists in the wetland. The backwaters or whatever the hell they're called.
ME: Yeah. We always couldn't really determine what people called them.Which didn't help.
LAURA: Which didn't help.}

So yeh, our conclusion is, the Backwaters are cool in parts, but to really get the full appeal, you pretty much have to overnight there. It'd be really peaceful and serene at night there I'd imagine, especially as after a certain time you're not allowed to sail, so there'd be no boat noises either. If you're only doing a day cruise, it takes so long to get to the prettiest bits that you're not really there for that long. And they take you through the edge of Vembanad Lake which is ... flat and watery, and honestly not what you're there for.

I go to these places so you can go there better.

After the Backwaters we headed back in the taxi to Kochi, to while away a few hours before our night train to Madurai. And there was one place Laura needed to go. Some of us like to tick things off when we visit new cities and countries; maybe have a local beer, or see the city hall, or watch a sporting event. Laura's is ... along those lines, for sure.

{ME: so then we came back and we had food.
LAURA: We had so much time to kill.
ME: We had a lot of time to kill. We went back to the first restaurant we had to have a couple of juices.
LAURA: We got to that, split another squid masala.Which was yummy. And I got two mango lassis. And they were good. And then we got ourselves a tuk-tuk to McDonald's.
ME: Of course. Go to McDonald's in every country you go to.
LAURA: Got a paneer sandwich, which was a bit meh, but that's fine. It's McDonald's. I don't require... I don't need a lot.
ME: No. And it was cheap.
LAURA: It was cheap, yeah. It was a lot cheaper than, obviously, than like a European or American McDonald's. But that's just what you expect. Even our expensive meals here are still way cheaper.
ME: And oh yes, no beef on the menu.

LAURA: We sat there for a while. Yeah, no beef. No Big Mac. Sat there for a while. Sat there for another two hours. Oh my God, it was so much killing time.
ME: Because we had an overnight train and it left it, well, supposed to leave it at half past midnight.
LAURA: We walked to the train station. Easy walk, but very warm.
ME: Yep.
LAURA: And then loitered around the train station for two hours. It was just a little loitering. Yesterday was just a bit of... And now we're doing the exact same thing. And I think in Thanjavur it's going to be like, we're just loitering.}

The thing with McDonald's is that it's such a universal concept that it's very easy to see differences between countries and cultures, because you have a reference point, a control group. So, the McDonald's in India has no Big Macs, or indeed any beef burgers on their menu, but they have a great array of flavoured chicken burgers. The ones in Philippines sell spaghetti. And the UK appears to be the only country where they sell the bacon roll. Which is, I mean, as exciting as it sounds and ... reflective of British cuisine, for sure.

{section separation jingle}

And so to the obligatory cultural experience – an Indian train, and an overnight one to boot. Loud, hectic, chaotic, life. Well, no, not exactly ...

{ME: The train was... I mean, the railway station was a lot less hectic than I was fearing. The train was a lot...
LAURA: Wasn't hectic at all. Wasn't hectic at all.
ME: Wasn't hectic at all. And in principle, the train is really organised. And they announce where your coach is going to be. And there's signs on the platform saying every single... Where every single coach is. These trains are huge. There are 25 carriages.
LAURA: They're huge. Holy crap, they're big.
ME: And I don't know, trains in the UK... I mean, the longest we've got is 11 coaches on the West Coast Avantis. Our platforms... Apart from St Pancras International, I don't think our platforms can cope with the 25 carriage train. And they're quite long carriages as well.
LAURA: It's a huge train. Like, I don't really know how to quite explain how big them just, like, come to India, see it in person. It's massive. That's a massive, massive train. But it was really well organised. And I think our issue is just we didn't... It's our first time using it, so we didn't quite know. Like, there's going to be somewhere on the carriage that says what the name of the carriage is. We just didn't know where to look for it.
ME: Yeah. We were stood in what we... What I think still is was the right place.
LAURA: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
ME: The train didn't quite... It was one... It was basically one number down, but...
LAURA: But like a local person would know how to migitage, how to, like, deal with it, but we didn't. And we couldn't find the carriage number on the carriage. It'll be... It's got to be somewhere. We didn't know what we were doing.
ME: I mean, it didn't take long to get to the right place.
LAURA: No, and people were very helpful.
ME: People were very helpful.
LAURA: People were very, very helpful. So, yeah. We both had the top bunks. There wasn't a lot of space, though, so I quickly made up my bed and then crawled up so then you could make your bed and then our two cabin-mates could then get in and make their bed. And yeah, I think I fell asleep almost. I fell asleep really, really fast. Woke up a couple times just because, like, if a train lurched or something, but that was very comfortable. I mean, not, you know, not like a king-sized feather bed or anything, but like a solid... It wasn't like a plane where you're just kind of cat-napping and it's really two days instead of one because you didn't sleep. Like, I consider last night I slept. Like, the train left around one. We got here at 9.30 and I say I slept at least eight hours of that night. That eight and a half. Like, I did a good job. Good job, body.
ME: I slept less than that, but then I'm also considerably taller.
LAURA: Yeah, you're big. The beds were small. I'm five foot six, sort of 166 centimetres, I think. 165-ish. I think, yeah, I think I'm 165 centimetres, which is slightly, slightly, slightly below 5'6". I'm like five, five and three quarters or something, I thought. But yeah, I think I'm 165 centimetres and my head... There was a little pillow, like an airplane-sized pillow, and I had it shoved up against the wall and I had my head on the pillow, obviously. And I still, like, my ankles was about where the bed ended, so my feet were off unless I bent myself slightly. But yeah, so that's just to give an idea of the size of the bed, whereas you are a little bit more than 155 centimetres.

ME: I'm 6'3" or 1m91-ish, 1m91, and I generally sleep with my legs bent anyway. But yeah, I was less comfortable than you were. I still slept. I didn't sleep as much, but I still slept.
LAURA: But you still slept enough?
ME: Yeah.
LAURA: How much?
ME: I don't know. I kept waking up, but I kept coming back sleeping.
LAURA: Or was it a cat nap? But like a plane level bea?
ME: No, no, no, no, no. It was more like a...
LAURA: So like, is it closer to airplane level or bed level? Where is it on that scale?
ME: You know sometimes when you set an alarm for five o'clock in the morning and your brain doesn't want to sleep?
LAURA: Yeah, yeah.
ME: Yeah, it was that sort of level.
LAURA: Oh, bummer.
ME: So it was fine.
LAURA: No, I leaned in.
ME: It was fine, but it was still...
LAURA: I leaned in to the experience and drifted away into unconscious bliss.
ME: I had trouble getting on and off the bed.
LAURA: Yeah, you were. It's because you're very large. And...
ME: And very, very, very, very dyspraxic.
LAURA: We got a couple of different issues here.
ME: I did use the train toilet once.
LAURA: Oh, did you?
ME: Yes.
LAURA: How was that? I absolutely did not.
ME: It was an Indian style squat toilet, but it was clean.
LAURA: Oh, that's good. Yeah, I saw they had the squat toilet and the western toilet you could use.
ME: I didn't see the western toilet.
LAURA: Yeah, when we walked in.
ME: That might have been more useful for what I need.
LAURA: Yeah. No, it was was one and the other. And there was soap and you could wash your hands.
ME: There wasn't soap. Oh, yeah, no, there was soap. What there wasn't was a particularly good water system. So I had to keep doing that, sort of shaking the tap to get the water out, which seemed to work.
LAURA: Yeah, you got your hands clean.
ME: Yeah, I got my hands clean. Very clean, actually. What there wasn't was a towel.
LAURA: No, that's...
ME: That's...
LAURA: I don't use towels that much anymore. My mom's always gets, like, irked at me. My whole life, she's always grumped at me because I don't bother drying my hands. And she's like...
ME: I just don't like wet hands.
LAURA: I'm just like, I don't mind wet hands and I don't mind water being on the thing. Like it's water. As long as it's not paper, it dries.}

So apart from the train stopping one carriage out of kilter as compared with the platform signage, it was quite a seamless trip. Indeed the biggest confusion was working out which platform the train was coming in on in the first place, as the destination board didn't show the exact same train number, and also had the origin and destination of the train rather than where it stopped, neither of which we actually knew. But the station only has two platforms so once we worked out which direction we were going in, it was fine.

As cultural experiences go, it was comfortably underwhelming. And cheap (how cheap?). I absolutely would do that again, even thought I don't fit on the beds very well. But then I do like trains.

And the only people we met on the train were our two cabin buddies, who drifted into the town like backpackers on a mission, never to be seen again. For some reason we thought they looked Swedish.

{section separation jingle}

Me: Hello :) It's time for a mid-episode break. Half time. Seventh Innings Stretch. That sort of thing. Put the kettle on. Grab a snack. Get comfortable. I'm just here to remind you ways in which you can get in touch and help this podcast out. You probably know this already, but in case you don't:

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Now, on with the show}

{section separation jingle}

So, we arrived in Madurai, our second Indian city, and we were here for temples and architecture. Things however didn't go quite to plan from the very beginning ...

{LAURA: And then we got to Madurai.
ME: Yeah.
LAURA: Got our tuk-tuk.
ME: To the hotel, which is quite nice.
LAURA: To the hotel.
ME: It's a very comfortable room. It's a very comfortable bed, anyway.
LAURA: It's a really comfy bed. And then we're like, all right, where are the temples? So we open up Google, look at where the temples were, and then we're like, let's check their opening hours. And now, we're sitting here at noon, doing this voice memo, instead of looking at the temples that we came here to see. Because apparently, the daytime time is when the Hindu gods need to sleep. So we cannot disturb them.
ME: They'll open at like 5.45 in the morning, close at half 11.
LAURA': Like we just kind of. missed them. Yeah.
ME: I mean, we could have made them if we'd have gone straight from the railway station, but that would involve just carrying our bags around. And we also wouldn't really know where we were going.
LAURA: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
ME: So yeah, so we're just lying here, doing things, waiting for them to open again, about 4.
LAURA: We were just waiting once again waiting.
ME: To be fair, we haven't had lunch yet.
LAURA: Yeah, we can kill a little bit of time with food, but like...
ME: And we didn't have breakfast, but then considering how much we...
LAUAR: We've been eating a lot.
ME: I mean, I ate a lot at McDonald's last night.
LAURA: We've been eating a lot. Like, I'm not hungry at all, and I haven't yet. I'll obviously be happy to eat, because, maybe. Not skinny for a reason. But...}

We did indeed go out to lunch though, because it gave us something to do. And it also gave us an insight into parts of the town we might not otherwise have seen.

{ME: Last time we did this, we were in Madurai.
LAURA: In the room thinking we would have nothing to do, which was incorrect.
ME: Indeed. So, what did we do? We went out, we went looking for somewhere to eat.
LAURA: We left the house cos we were hungry. Cos we hadn't eaten yet that day. Which was surprisingly difficult to find.
ME: Yes.
LAURA: There was no... India's been weirdly hard to find food, except for, ironically, the smallest town.
ME: That's a lot of that.

LAURA: But we finally found somewhere that was open and seemed... Yeah, I had momos.
ME: Momos, yes.
LAURA: Interesting momos.
ME: We had what was it? We had chicken.
LAURA: Paneer tikka.
ME: Paneer tikka
LAURA: And then chicken harilan or something.
ME: Harilan.
LAURA: It tasted like a normal chicken momo filling. So, like, that's what tasted like to me. So, basically... And they were fried. So, we got one fried chicken one and one fried paneer tikka one. The paneer tikka one tasted Indian.
ME: Yes.
LAURA: Spice-wise. The momo one tasted like the normal Nepalese momo.
ME: It was like five mini ones, wasn't it?
LAURA: Yeah, so they're ten total.
ME: And we had lassi with it, but lassi with ice cream.
LAURA: Yeah.
ME: Yeah, so mine was had a chocolate ice cream. What was yours?
LAURA: Strawberry.
ME: Strawberry, yes.
LAURA: We expected it to be, like, strawberry-flavoured lassi, but no, no. It was a plain yogurt lassi with a scoop of ice cream.
ME: Yeah, and it worked quite well. It was a huge stein as well. It was fairly big.
LAURA: The biggest one so far.
ME: But it was just a random little stall on a random street, nowhere near the city centre.
LAURA: Yeah.
ME: And we wandered through a residential bit. It was sort of very narrow and...
LAURA: Colourful.
ME: Very colourful. And we got followed back at the children.
LAURA: Yeah, they were bored.
ME: Yeah, they were probably the most exciting thing they'd seen all week.
LAURA: And then we went back to a main road and found a chai stall.
ME: Oh, yeah, I forgot about the chai stall.
LAURA: I'll never forget about the chai.
ME: Well, I mean, I've just posted a picture of it to Instagram Stories.
LAURE: Never, never forget the chai. Yeah, we had chai, which was yummy, because chai is always yummy. And then we continued onwards across the bridge to the city centre, so the actual, you know, city.
ME: It felt... It felt a bit more... This is a weird thing to say. It felt a bit more Indian.
LAURA: Yeah, more stereotypical.
ME: More stereotypically Indian, yeah. Fewer signs in English, because that's one thing I noticed in Kochi. A lot of the signs were in English, like the advertising boardings and things like that. Whereas here, there were a lot more...
LAURA: And not just in the tourist area. Like in actual, like, Indian Kochi. Was still quite... There was a lot of English. And it seems like a wealthy area. Whereas MAdurai, I felt, yeah, didn't have English and didn't feel quite as well off.
ME: It felt more Indian, but equally it wasn't as ... The stereotypical impression you have of India, this wasn't it. It felt like you said Southeast Asia, didn't it?
LAURA: Kerala, not really yesterday. Kerala, felt like Southeast Asia. Madurai, didn't. Didn't really feel like anywhere I've been. Because I've never been to India, so there you go. Kerala, Kochi, felt like Southeast Asia.}

But we were in Madurai to do some Touristy Things, so off we went. The two main places we were headed for were the Thirumalai Nayakkar Mahal and the Meenakshi Amman Temple. The former is a palace built in the early 1600s, by Tirumala Nayaka, the King of a nation that covered much of what is now Tamil Nadu. The region at the time saw a lot of European traders passing through and it's believed the King hired an Italian architect to build it, others suggest it was a mere influence. It's a large courtyard surrounded by columns, so an interesting place for simple Instagram selfies. They're fond of that in India, I felt.

The latter is a large Hindu temple, parts of which were constructed in the 1200s, and basically serves as the

spiritual centre of Madurai and one of the main pilgrimage points for some branches of Hinduism (it's particularly important for devotees of the deities Shiva and Parvati). Definitely somewhere you'd want to see if you're interested in South Asian religion and theology.

However.

{LAURA: we went to that palace.
ME: We went to a palace, yes, that was quite full of columns, basically.
LAURA: Yeah, it was designed by an Italian, so it was like... It was like if the Medici family had ordered an Indian palace. Like it had very renaissance vibes, but with Indian arches. And it was empty!
ME: Very empty.
LAURA: February in South India, I recommend.
ME: Don't know where anyone was. And then we tried to go into the temple, didn't we? Well, we had a wander around the city as well, before that.
LAURA: Once we were done with the palace, we walked around some more colourful alleyways. And then went to the temple, which is the reason we went to Madurai, because it looked so cool.
ME: Yes, and it probably does look cool.
LAURA: Probably does look great.
ME: However
LAURA: When they are done restoring it. I've never in my life anywhere seen the level of scaffolding. It was all of the main temples, from the top of them to the bottom of them.
ME: And all of the main temples.
LAURA: All of them.
ME: At the same time.
LAURA: It would be like if you went to Paris, and Notre Dame, and the Eiffel Tower, and Sacre Coeur, and the Arc de Triomphe were all completely covered in scaffolding. And not just a little bit. I feel like people are going to imagine, like, oh, usually the steeple of the church has scaffold. No, no. No, no. This is the entire thing, from top to bottom.
ME: We did not go in.
LAURA: We did not.
ME: We looked at it from the outside, and then we looked at it from the top of an antique shop. We didn't get that, I don't think it was that great a view.
LAURA: No. And then it rained.
ME: It rained a lot.
LAURA: Not yet. It just rained a little bit.
ME: Oh, yeah. No, it rained a little bit.
LAURA: It rained a little bit. And then we went back out into the street. Got a orange coconut.
ME: Oh, yeah. I'd forgotten the orange coconut. Which tastes the same as a green coconut.
LAURA: And then it started to actually rain, but at that point we were determined to go to at least one freaking temple in the city of temples.
ME: So we did.
LAURA: So we persevered and got yelled at.
ME: It was a very, very strange.
LAURA: It's a really weird experience. It was a nice temple.
ME: It was a nice temple. For like 30 seconds that weren't chaotic.
LAURA: But it was raining really, really hard. So we kind of just got stuck under the awning with like other people who were done with the temple and then all the people asking for alms.}

This smaller temple may have been the Arulmigu Koodal Azhagar Temple, in the South-West of the city centre; it seems to have been in the right place taking into account the roads and the surrounding buildings. It was not a good time to visit, it seems. But yeh, we had a browse. And that was all.

Largely because of the rain, not gonna lie.

{ME: *I presume that we went back to the hotel.*
LAURA: Then yeah, because it was pouring.
ME: Absolutely.
LAURA: It was pouring rain. Like there were puddles everywhere. Like rivers. It wasn't even puddles. They

were. And like obviously we have sandals and we're covered in nasty, nasty mosquito bites. Oh my God. This is like one of the worst I think I've ever experienced in my life. So we're just walking through rivers.
ME: With a cow next to us.
LAURA: With multiple cows, you know, doing their cow business on the street. And now that water is going to be mixed with the cow stuff, probably people stuff.
ME: Yeah.
LAURA: Dog, cat, plus whatever else is on the street and it's just seeping into the open wounds of which between the two of us, we've probably got like 70 that were going underwater. Just not good. Not a great moment. But thankfully there are tuk-tuks everywhere.
ME: There are.
LAURA: And we are clearly tourist. We're the type. So they're going to go, hey, you want to get in? And they know we're going to say yes.
ME: Yeah. The hotel was a little way out of town.
LAURA: Not bad. But this feels much more remote.
ME: Probably isn't that much further, but it just feels.
LAURA: Yeah. It's a sprawl. It's the difference. But it's fine. We then, we got home stripped and changed them to dry things because everything. I really can't emphasize.
ME: How wet we were.
LAURA: The level of downpour, which ... my phone broke. That was actually very stressful. It's fine.
ME: Yeah.
LAURA: But I was worried.
ME: Did it say something like can't charge because it was too wet?
LAURA: Yeah. It said there was too much water detected. Not great. Not good.}

Once we'd dried out a bit, and the rain had eased a bit more, we went out in search of food. Surprisingly awkward again, but maybe I just seem to pick hotels that aren't ... central? But it was worth the search, though.

{LAURA: *So then we went outside looking for dinner. But again, weirdly hard to find food in this country. So we walked a while down the street, gave up, went back, found the hotel receptionist and was like, hello, where should we eat? And he pointed, he was like, there's this restaurant 100 meters away and we went 'cool'. And we found it right away. But then someone decided that it wasn't the restaurant that we were recommended.*
ME: They didn't have the same name as he said. That was all.
LAURA: So we meandered on words along the road.
ME: It was dry by now.
LAURA: And so giving up. Yes, yes, yes. We were not doing that. We would have gone to Popeyes if it was.
ME: Yeah, there was a Popeyes on the corner.
LAURA: Closer than anything else. But we were like, no, no. So we went back to that restaurant and just sat down and hoped for the best.
ME: It was one of those kind of open to the, open to the winds restaurants where you just sort of casually, like it was like a canteen where you just casually wander in and.
LAURA: It's the pretty standard type of restaurants outside of like Europe and North America really. But luckily the waiter spoke English or good enough for our purposes anyways. So we got chicken biryani and the house sauces.
ME: Yes.
LAURA: And it was delicious.
ME: It was very nice.
LAURA: Very good. On banana leaves.
ME: Yep. We didn't have any bread with it.
LAURA: We didn't have any bread. We didn't have any juice or anything. Just.. I should have asked for some kind of juicy thing. Were there tears? Maybe. Not many.
ME; No.
LAURA: Not many. But they did. They did make an appearance.
ME: Yes. The food is supposed to be really spicy down in South India and.
LAURA: Not been too bad at all. But I wonder if they've like just not done like just not bothered with us. Because the fact that it's now it's been how many meals? Saturday? Sunday. Well Sunday only one will count. Let's say, let's say there's been about 10 meals. One of them somewhere along the way should have been the stereotypical level of spicy and we haven't. So I'm guessing they basically looked at us and gone, don't put any chilli in there. Or something. But that was good. Then we went back and, oh I got my snacks.

ME: Oh yes.
LAURA: We just went up to a random stall because I wanted water and then he had some snacks. So I just pointed to all the buckets and I was like, I would like everything. And it was good. My peanut brittle and whatever the flip those spiral things were.
ME: I've no idea.
LAURA: They were very good. I've seen them before. I don't know what they are. And then we slept. In the bed. And not a train}

{section separation jingle}

And so to Thanjavur, the last Indian city on our list. The previous day we'd been advised that the train we wanted to catch from Madurai was full, no tickets left for sale, but that there were always spaces in third class. The impression we got from the train staff in Madurai was that this was free, but that it required a lot of elbow use. That whole stereotype of people leaning out the doors and clinging onto the framework around the windows and the roof? That.

Not a spoiler alert; we did not do that, as I managed to get into the Indian Railways app and, lo!, there were tickets available in 1st class; a two-person cabin.

{ME: Speaking of trains.
LAURA: Yep. Then today came. We had breakfast. The hotel had a very good breakfast. Which we were like, which we ate a lot of.
ME: It was like rice and I think it was a vegetable curry and.
LAURA: Some various bread options.
ME: Yes.
LAURA: And some very good fresh fruit.
ME: Yes.
LAURA: That was like fresh fruit.
ME: It was watermelon and.
LAURA: It's that same melon stuff we had in Laos, and I think we had the same conversation of what is this. Promptly forgot all about it. And here we are here in three months later going. Hey you again. It's good. I just don't know fully what it is. It's a melon of some variety.
ME: They do really like watermelon here.
LAURA: Yeah.
ME: It's just everywhere.
LAURA: Yep. A region after my own heart. Okay. Then we went back upstairs. We packed up. And we ordered a tuk-tuk. I'm like hailed a tuk-tuk off the street. To the train station.
ME: To the train station where we got train.
LAURA: Yep. Much easier. And much more seamless thing. We still had to ask for help.
ME: But we got there.
LAURA: We got there.
ME: Yes.
LAURA: Quicker. And with less fat. And our train friends were there. We made friends. Who are not Swedish.
ME: No they are not Swedish.
LAURA: Or Italian.
ME: Or Italian. And one of them is called Roberto Carlos. Which ...
LAURA: We got the private birth though. Which was nice.
ME: Yes. So we had four hours in a basically a cabin with two beds. And it was just me and Laura. And it was just nice to watch the world go by.
LAURA: I was on the top bunk, so I did not see the world. But I listened to music, which was nice. And it was. comfortable.
ME: Yes.
LAURA: Air conditioning.
ME: Yes.
LAURA: There were two different signs on the wall, saying for immediate assistance, xall these numbers. One was if we were having technical issues. So the plugs to charge the phones worked. They worked. I used it. They worked. And there was a sign saying if it's not working. Let the train people know and they'll come fix it. And

the other sign said like call this number if there is an issue with the toilet. Which I needed. And I was nervous about using the toilet. Because you hear things. You know. Cleanest train toilet I have ever ever ever seen.
ME: And it had soap.
LAURA: And it had soap. So I, you could, you could, there was a western style one. And the squat toilet. I used the squat toilet. It was very, very clean. Very whatever. And then I was able to wash my hands with soap afterwards. Great. And yeah, our same birth-mates from two nights ago that we slept with were also there. SO we said hi to them.
ME: It was a very comfortable four hours. And we didn't see him, but there was a chap going past every so often. "Chai, chai".
LAURA: I'm so sad I missed that. I would have had the chai. I heard him saying things. But I thought he was saying the name of like the station that was coming or something.
ME: So did I at first.
LAURA: Yeah. Now we know.
ME: Now we know. Next time again.
LAURA: Next time we catch a train in India.
ME: And we reached Thanjavur or however you pronounce it. It's spelt Thanjevur but it's pronounced Thanjevol or something?
LAURA: The neighbourhood that the trains were going through looked so nice. I'm so sad we couldn't walk around. They looked so nice. It's just like beautiful, calm, palm tree lines. Neighbourhoods. All we can ask for.}

So it was a nice, pleasant, easy journey to Thanjavur. It's not a city we knew a lot about, except that it had a big temple complex in it, because of course it did. We hoped this temple would be much easier and more satisfactory to visit than any of those in Madurai.

Of course, our first problem came long before the temples and palaces. Thanjavur is not a tourist city. And we don't speak Tamil.

{ME: So we got to the railway station. And it was very calm, very fine, very easy. With one slight problem. The slight problem being the only one in our hotel was.
LAURA: It was a little chaotic actually. I wouldn't have called it calm. The taxi situation in the city is like nothing I have ever experienced. And I don't know. I've taken taxis.
ME: You've taken taxi.
LAURA: A fair few places. But this was a, this was weird. He didn't know where our hotel was. And at first we were like, yeah, fair enough. It's a bit out. We are staying out. We are not staying near the city center. So fair enough. And it's just a little hotel. Why would he know the name of it? Didn't, no flagging here. No, nothing. No problem. Where it got a little weird. And also hard because we only had the English obviously. And he didn't speak, there's no English in this town. Very, very little English. And then obviously because the alphabet's different. Like the written language is very, it's not like, it's not like being in Italy and not having any overlap. Like there's a lot, there's no overlap here. So the English writing for the hotel address obviously meant nothing to him. And again, didn't think anything of that was like, okay, whatever. Perfectly normal intercultural interaction. Where it got weird was when we pulled up the map, put it in his phone, on his phone because we don't have data. He gives us his phone, we put in the address of the hotel into Google Maps and we give him his phone back thinking, okay, now he has the map. He will follow the map.
ME: Not what happened, is it?
LAURA: No, no. We get in the car, not the tuk-tuk, the car. I was sad because I wanted to take the tuk-tuk, whatever. And the guy gives us back the phone and we were like,
ME: but it's your phone.
LAURA: It is your phone. But there's no language overlap. So when we just kept the phone and kind of watched the map and then it became clear that the reason we had the phone was so that we could watch the map and tell him where to go despite having no language overlap and having never been here before. But we made it.
ME: We made it.
LAURA: And the check in with Seamless, no problem. Got the chauffeur to the hotel room again, which seems to be a thing here.
ME: Yeah, yeah, no apparent reason whatsoever.
LAURA: They just take you to your room here and they show you a route, a little tour. They're like, this is the toilet. Here is your bed, which is very nice.

ME: And then they come back about three days later with the toilet paper.
LAURA: They're very nice. It's very catered, I suppose. But I appreciate it. But then we very quickly researched the timings and then we went, oh crap, we have an hour to do everything. Back out we go. So we went back to the main road, tried to find a tuk-tuk, which took longer than expected. But we found one. Once again, no English, no Tamil on our end. We show him the map of the palace, which is ...
ME: one of the big things in the city.
LAURA: The big thing to do. And he kind of just blinked at us for a bit. But then he called somebody and then he looked at me and was like, palace and I went, palace. And he went, okay. So we got in the back, hoped we were going to the palace. We did go to the palace.
ME: We did get to the palace.}

It would be interesting to ponder how I'd've managed this had I been travelling solo. Laura would have had no problems. Laura's an extrovert who isn't riddled with social anxiety and neurodiversities.

Anyway. The palace. This was one of the two main spots we wanted to see in the city. It's called the Thanjavur Maratha Palace, or Thanjavur Aranmanai, and as you might have guessed is another ex-kingly site. This one dates from the mid 1500s tho it's been changed and expanded quite a bit since then. It contains a big courtyard area with sculptures, and several side rooms that have museum exhibits, one of which goes into quite a bit of detail about Nataraja – Shiva in the guise of the cosmic dancer – and what the meanings of each of his poses are. There's also a bell-tower just next to the main body of the palace, weirdly detached

{LAURA: We paid, yeah, paid.
ME: 600.
LAURA: Yeah, 300 each. Just like £2.80 or whatever.
ME: That includes the camera thing.
LAURA: Oh yeah, they charge you for camera use here. Which is fine.
ME: It's only not much. It's like 50p.
LAURA: And then...
MEL: Yeah, palace wasn't that big, but it was quite nice to sort of wander around.
LAURA: Yeah, it was worth a two pound 80 entry fee.
ME: Yeah.
LAURA: Had a whale skeleton, ranconly
ME: Yes, yeah. Huge whale skeleton.I mean, whales are huge. And lots of images of dancing.
LAURA: Lots of, yeah, lots of really cool bronze. Like Hindu things. Some of them very, very old. Like from the 700s. Most of them weren't quite that. I think the average is probably like 11th, 12th century. But there were things that were older. And things that were newer.
ME: There was a nice little setting and a nice little garden.
LAURA: Yeah, really lovely. Really peaceful. And it was next to a school. So like a girl came up to us to practice her English. Which has happened a few times this trip. The kids, the brave kids come up to say hi and they practice their English. Almost always girls, I've noticed. The girls are the brave ones. Ladies.}

We then had a wander around the city, and it reminded us that Thanjavur is very much not a tourist city. Well, I mean, it is a well-visited city, but domestically – this is not a place that sees very many foreign tourists. At all.

Which meant we were the only white people eating and drinking at the cafes around the centre. I wonder what they thought of us.

{LAURA: Anyway, once we were done with the palace, we then walked around the city center. Which is quite small. It's definitely a small place.
ME: It's a very small place. There's not many tourists. We seem to be going from the touristy bit. The further we go, we seem to be going to more Indian. That's quite a nice way of doing it.
LAURA: Yeah, we did it really well, I think. We started off in the very touristy bit. And then, Madurai's, not touristy, but also not not touristy. And then here.
ME: Yeah, we are the tourists.
LAURA: This one's a bit more off the beaten path, I think, for most people. Not that we didn't see others. There were other, like our train mates. And there were other, there was clearly at least a couple of what seemed to be tours. But they were separate tours. There were at least a few others. But not nearly as many as like Kochi or anything. Not that there were that many in Kochi.

ME: No.
LAURA: It's just not, yeah. I wonder when the high season is. Not now. Anyway, we walked around the city center for a little bit. Just taking in the sights and the sounds. Whilst walking, we had a destination. But we kind of took our time to get there. But then we were really thirsty. Like really, really thirsty. So we were like, it is fruit stand time. So we found a fruit stand and proceeded to have the weirdest fucking drink. It was good. It was weird.
ME: What what it called? Fruit, fruit mix, fruit.
LAURA: Fruit mixer.
ME: Fruit mixer, yeah. And it did what it said on the tin.
LAURA: It was so bizarre.
ME: Some kind of thick juice with fruit in it.
LAURA: It was like milk or yogurt.
ME: Yeah.
LAURA: It was, it was like a milky yogurt. I don't know. Let's go with a milky yogurt. But then with like diced up fruits of multiple types. Like there were strawberries. There were pomegranate seeds. There was at least one other something in there.
ME: There was something like mango.
LAURA: So you think mango?
ME: Probably wasn't.
LAURA: So it was just like - I think it was milk. Like I think it was some kind of, they seem, they're really into their milks here. There seem to be a lot of milks, which makes sense from like lassi and all that. Like yogurt and like the cow. Like it makes sense that there's a lot of milk and milk adjacent liquids. But I, yeah, it was just like, it was good once the dirt layer was off.
ME: Yeah. It was a bit earthy at the top.
LAURA: Yeah. The top was definitely covered in dirt. But once that was gone through, it was good. It was just, it was a bit odd because it was, you couldn't really drink it. It was like when you, yeah, you described it very well.
ME: Yeah. It's like having a drink with lots of ice in it.
LAURA: Yeah. Where you, where you can't just drink it because there's so many bits. So it was refreshing, but also when you're like, I was like, I would, I just wanted like a bottle of something that I could just down them 10 seconds and you couldn't do it with that. But it was good.
ME: It was good.
LAURA: Odd, but good. And then paid for it with a very large bill.
ME: Yeah. So it was 40 rupees and I only had 30. So I had to pay with a 500 rupee note and she glared at me. Which is understandable. I would do the same.
LAURA: She was slightly irked. Not really irked, but slightly irked.}

The main reason we were in Thanjavur though was the temple. This is the Brihadeeswara Temple, it's from the 11th Century, it covers 18 hectares, which is marginally bigger than Nigel Farage's ego, and makes it one of the 15 largest Hindu temples in the world, and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It has a 65m-ish tall tower, and a wide area around it for ambling, with a number of smaller shrines at the corners and along the edges. Despite what you might hear, it's made of granite, evidently we can't tell one stone from another. It *looked* like sandstone, you know? It was that kind of shade.

It was also very busy, but because of its size, there was plenty of space to keep to yourself. Or, you know, bump into two Mexican backpackers you keep meeting on trains.

{LAURA: And then we continued to the actual destination, which was the temple, which was very cool.
ME: It was very cool. Very big. I mean, it was crowded, but it was also big enough to not feel crowded.
LAURA: Saw our train mates again.
ME: Yes. Lots of people wanted selfies with us all.
LAURA: Yeah. No, I did not participate in that.
ME: Yes.
LAURA: I dipped down. Bouri got real over that. But it was really cool. We were there when the sun was setting. So maybe we've got there kind of at golden hour. So we've got some cool pictures with the like beautiful red or like red tinted stone.
ME: It's presumably sandstone or I guess it's sandstone. It looks like sandstone.
LAURA: I will bow to that you on that one. But yeah, really, just yeah, really cool. Obviously very old, but still

a very active temple. Like we were just kind of awkwardly gawking at things. Well, because there was a festival that started off today. So we were just there awkwardly gawking at everything. The throngs of worshippers were busy, you know,
ME: they're giving offerings.
LAURA: Yeah, we're just like in the way.Yeah, that was really cool. They had like a loud speaker. Piping in. And lots of people, lots of people and a lot more people like we were leaving around sunset.
ME: There were a lot of people.
LAURA: Ooh, good, good golly. The line had grown.
ME: I don't think there was a line to go in. I think there was a line to get the food for the offerings.
LAURA: Yeah, but that line didn't exist when we got there.
ME: No, it didn't exist then when we left, it was like from the entrance all the way back to the road pretty much.
LAURA: Yeah, it didn't grow in the way that it hadn't existed before.
ME: Yeah, we kind of got there at the right time.We left at the right time. But yeah, nearly everybody there was Indian and like there were very few.
LAURA: Yeah, there weren't many. Like they were there, we saw a few others, but...
ME: Families, they're all families.
LAURA: Indian families.
ME: Yes, Indian families.
LAURA: Yeah, not tourists. I think, yeah, our Mexican friends were the youngest tourists by like a decade and then me and then you. I feel like pretty much all the other tourists I saw in Thanjavur are retired. Or at least they look like they might. Hopefully they are retired now. But yeah, that was really cool. I'm glad we did that.
ME: Yeah, that was very cool. That's kind of why we came here in the first place really.
LAURA: Yep, those two things. We got to do it.
ME: Unlike Madurai.}

Having visited the temple, and leaving before the festival got into full swing, we were pretty much done, so it was time to head home.

{LAURA: And then the evening really began.}

Understatement of the entire trip, not gonna lie.

{LAURA: Yeah, so then... We walked away from the temple.
ME: Walk away from the traffic jams.
LAURA: Walk away from the traffic a bit and then... find a tuk-tuk
ME: Which took longer than expected.
LAURA: Yeah, that's not too long. By longer than expected, we didn't get it instantly. We had to wait like two whole minutes. Just to give you an idea of how easy tuk-tuks are to get.
ME: when a two minute wait is notable.
LAURA: What, a two minute wait. It's like, excuse me. Where?
ME: So, do you remember the problems that we had at the railway station?
LAURA: So once again, in the five hours between the first taxi and the second... No, four hours between the first taxi and the second taxi. We had not yet learned Tamil. And the taxi drivers of the city had not yet learned English. And we were still staying pretty far out of the town center. As such. We find a tuk-tuk driver and we show him the map. And once again, I'm like, right. Here we are clearly... The map has English and Tamil. Our little blue dot very clearly in the city center. The little dropped pin very clearly down there a little bit. We got it. And the tuk-tuk driver looked at the phone. And then barked over at somebody else who came over. And that somebody else had slightly better English. And so tried. And then very quickly, we all moved over to a stall. Like a store where the store owners spoke a little bit more English. Or he was better with phones. One or the other. I don't actually know .
ME: I suspect it was the latter.
LAURA: Yeah. But he did speak slightly more English. Like he was at least able to say like a full sentence in English. This is not by the way, I mean, belittling like we're in their country. I don't care that they speak English. It's the map situation. But I'm really amused.
ME: In Tamil. We cannot stress enough. The map had a Tamil translation. Or transliteration.
LAURA: He clearly was idle though. But my favourite was when the shopkeeper, he had my phone. And things got serious when he put his glasses on. We were all very invested to figure out where to take us. So

finally the shopkeeper tells the tuk-tuk driver. The second took took driver. The first one was long gone. He was like, no, no. I'm not getting involved in this. So he gave my phone back to me. And the tuk-tuk guy was like, okay, let's go. And we were like, okay. So we get in. And once again, we had to direct the whole way. And he really, really wanted to turn left. Like the entire way. And it was, and by entire way, I mean that was a long, we aren't staying close to the city center. Really need to emphasize this.
ME: It's about five kilometres, but feels a lot further.
LAURA: It feels a lot further. And so it was just the straight road with every 30 seconds. The guy going left, but in Tamil. We just couldn't tell you because he was hand gestures. And we were then just like straight with our own hand gestures. So he'd keep going. And then the next road came. Let, no the whole way. This is how it went. And we finally, finally, finally got to the left turn. And we were like, we go left now. So he starts turning the took took left.
ME: Sadly, however, the map.
LAURA: It was a gate.
ME: The map may not have been updated for a while.
LAURA: So he very begrudgingly got back onto the main road. And we went to the left on the next one. And then we went down a little bit more. And then he kind of basically just was like, I'm dropping you off here now. And we went, yeah, okay, that's fine.
ME: It was like a street away.
LAURA: But he was done. He was done.
ME: He was done.
LAURA: He was so done in the fact that we gave him, we didn't have the exact change. So we gave him too much. And he just looked at us, looked at the money, looked at us and went happy journey. And we were like, all right, fine. Fair enough, dude.
ME: And then he drove past our hotel.
LAURA :And then he drove past the hotel.}

Our time in Thanjavur might have been short, but it was certainly entertaining, And you'd've thought, welp, back at the hotel now, nothing else can happen, right? Surely dinner won't be an experience to be talked about long on a podcast? Right?

{ME: Now you might think that was the funniest thing that happened this evening.
LAURA: So then we were like, all right, let's go find dinner. Because unlike the other nights, there did seem to be a lot of food around. So we go back to the main road and we look around to see what we could eat. And we see right by our hotel, there was a place that had like pictures of foods. We were like, okay, cool, done. So we go over and we sit down and we're just like, well, hope they know what to do with us. So a man comes over and says, like, want or something. Like clearly, clearly, like asking what we wanted, but not the English to do it. And again, we still didn't speak Tamil. And so we said, what, like, what do you like? And he blinked and then went away. And then soon a very lovely young man, big fan of him. My new favourite person came over and in beautiful flawless English asked us what we wanted. So then we asked what he liked. And then he just listed up breads.
ME: And I was like, we want something slightly more than bread.
LAURA: More than more than bread. And he seemed really confused by that. That's probably a, an us issue. I don't really know how else we could have explained. But that's okay. Um, we finally got across that we wanted more than bread. And then he mentioned noodles and we were like, noodles. What are Indian noodles? And then he was like, well, of course we have Indian noodles. Look, okay, let's do that. So I ordered that with my bread. And then you ordered the same thing. And he looked at you and went, I will put her order in and come back when you're ready. So he goes off, puts my order in, comes back. You reiterate that you want the noodles. So he goes, okay. And then somehow we also ended up with chicken poppers. What are they called? Not poppers. Chicken.
ME: He called it just dry chicken.
LAURA: No, but he called it, he didn't, he called it the chicken pop. I've seen it on the menus. Like in the UK, I've seen, wasn't it poppers?
ME: It could well have been poppers.
LAURA: It's on menus. Like it's on Indian and Chinese menus in the UK. So it's like a thing. I was going to bug me now. Because I'm worried that I'm just saying poppers because of your thing earlier.
ME: Yeah, yeah.
LAURA: Because I just read.
ME: I'm sure he just said dry chicken.

LAURA: No, he called it. He called it whatever it's called on the menus. That's going to irk me now. Whatever. I'll look at that later. I'm going with chicken poppers for now, but I don't think that's quite right. I think that was your conversation earlier that has me thinking of it. But anyway, so we somehow also ended up with those, which was basically chicken wings.
ME: Like not exactly, but chicken drumsticks.
LAURA: Yeah, yeah, yeah, drumsticks.
ME: Which were very, very, very, very nice.
LAURA: They were very good, yeah.
ME: But first, we had, we did actually have bread and a lot of the sauces, didn't we?
LAURA: Yeah, we got...
ME: Gravies.
LAURA: Um, I can never say it. Pate. Pate. It was that bread.
ME: Paratha.
LAURA: Paratha, yeah. Which we didn't order. We just ordered. We ordered multiple chapattis, but he brought us... I can't say this word.
ME: Paratha.
LAURA: Parathas, thank you. Just because I can't remember what they're called. Parathas. Instead. And then he came by with lots and lots of sauces for us to try.
ME: There was a couple of chicken gravies. A crab, fish, sambal, and a tomatoey one.
LAURA: Yeah, I don't really know. I don't remember what they were. The last one was tomato. I don't remember what the... It reminded me of that thing from this morning. The curry sauce from a restaurant. The chicken ones were the nummiest ones. And then, yeah, and then the noodles came, which were deceivingly large.
ME: They were...
LAURA: There were so many noodles. It was good.
ME: It was very good.
LAURA: I'd never seen anything like it before. It was basically like a Chinese... It was not Chinese, it was an Indian, like, spaghetti with all, like, things. I don't know. It was... hat's not quite the right description, but...
ME: Yeah, I don't know what is the right description.
LAURA: I'd never come across it before.
ME: I know it had chillies in it. It had bits of chicken in it and stuff, but... The noodles themselves were quite short, but they were quite thick.
LAURA: Yeah, that's why I kind of was like, they were just spaghetti-ish.
ME: It's always like spaghetti if you chopped the spaghetti.
LAURA: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's a good... Um...
ME: Well, what's the one I had? Well, not spaghetti, the thicker one. Was it linguine, or something like that?
LAURA: Maybe, yeah. Isn't linguine... Skinnier? I thought linguine was the skinny one.
ME: I thought pasta was linguine.
LAURA: And then I wanted the chapatti that I'd asked for. Which took us like a second to get ordered, but we got there. And it was very good. I think that was the best one we've had all... The best chapatti that we've had all trip. And we've had some good chapattis.
ME: And then you took a photograph of the dustbin.
LAURA: Yeah. Just... He was a delight. That was just like the most delightful interaction. I miss people in my life.
ME: A person who's dustbin she took a photograph of looked really confused about the fact that we were taking a photograph. And it was very funny.
LAURA: Lollipop. That's what he called it. A chicken lollipop. That's what he called it when he put it down. He said it was a chicken lollipop. So I was actually close with Popper, to be fair.
ME: Yes. Yes.
LAURA: That wasn't too far off. Anyways, yes. He... Oh, he was such a delight. He was. Big fan of the waiter. I miss flirting with people. We just had a nice little flirtation going. I miss flirting. Yes. So he helped us order. It was all very good. The pasta was... The noodles. Sorry. Noodles. It's an American thing that we say pasta. We interchange them. You imagine my surprise when I moved to the UK like a decade ago. And people kept getting mad at me because I was interchanging the words. They're not the same thing, obviously. But colloquially. Anyway. Whatever. That's a tangent. But they was... It wasn't spicy, though. He kept coming up and giving us lots of sauces. He was giving us the chilli sauce.
ME: Yes. The chilli sauce and that other sauce.
LAURA: And then, yeah, the tomato sauce that had like a Chinese thing, like a taste to it. And then he was

like... Oh, like fake aghast. Like it was clearly a jokey situation. Like, how dare you? This is South India. And then, yeah, it was all in the banana leaf.
ME: It was.
LAURA: Big fan of the banana leaf.
ME: And he told us how to fold up the banana leaf.
LAURA: And he came over and much to the amusement of the older women in the restaurant, they were watching. We were their television for the situation. He came over and showed us how to... Do all of it, really. He showed us how to have the plate... Have it like sitting. He told us where to put our water glasses.
ME: Always on the left side.
LAURA: Apparently. He could have just put been fucking with us.
ME: He could have just put been fucking with us.
LAURA: But then at the end, yeah, he showed us how to close up the banana leaf so that things wouldn't fall out. And I think we were doing it right. But he said, he was very insistent that we were not doing it correctly. But we finally got that all cut up. Lots of giggles to be had by everybody involved. And then the guy, like someone else who worked there came by to pick up the banana leaf plates with the tub that they keep. That's like their garbage can. And obviously, a little tourist to me was like a fascinating titbit of the thing. So I took a picture of the tub with all the banana leaves. And then I walked off to get my hands washed.
ME: And he just looked at me in a combination of aghastness and horror. And just basically, it's all like the Indian equivalent of what the fuck.
LAURA: I made him hold.
ME: Horror and confusion.
LAURA: I made him hold the trash can to me so that I could take a picture. Like fair enough.
ME: He is going to be dining out on that story for years that some strange American came by and took a picture of his rubbish bin.
LAURA: Yeah, they probably haven't had any other, they probably haven't had any other western tourists in there.
ME: I did kind of want to ask our friendly server guy when the last time he had, he last saw a westerner in there. I didn't imagine it would be very common.
LAURA: It wouldn't be common because yeah, this hotel is down and then it's just a random hole in the wall. Even if there happened to be another non-Asian tourist around here, there's still a ton of options to eat.
ME: People wouldn't come all the way to India to go to that city. If they went all the way to the city, they wouldn't stay in a hotel that was this far away. And if they stayed in a hotel this far away, they wouldn't go down that side street and go there.
LAURA: Yeah, it's just a really random side street. It's all just very random. But I'm happy to have had a very delightful dinner following the goofiest tuk-tuk ride
ME: Yes}

And that, pretty much, is that. Our next day was spent breakfasting then getting a taxi to the nearby airport at Tiruchirappalli, an hour or so away along a quite boring, quite straight, dual carriageway through some forgettable plains. The airport was quite nice, with big leather reclining seats that went quite a way back and felt like you were on a beach, The flight to Sri Lanka was ... well, that's a tale for another podcast, but let's just say for an hour-long flight, it was certainly memorable, and not in a bad way.

{section separation jingle}

So you might well ask, what were our takeouts from our trip. I guess it would be these:
* Those stereotypes you have of travelling in India? They don't apply in the South. It was a pleasure to travel and to visit, and we didn't have any problems. Well, not negative ones
* It's very possible to get by using just English; we spent time in two areas with very different regional languages. However you will encounter the odd issue, so it will help to learn the basics. Not that that helps when trying to explain to a tuk-tuk driver the geography of his own city, but still
* That said, stay in hotels near the city centres, or be prepared for some very interesting conversations and rides
* There doesn't seem to be many tourists, or at least not at the time of year we went, which was a very pleasant and comfortable time to travel. Except the rain in Madurai. But even so
* Have patience with the admin websites and it'll come good in the end
* Indian trains are better than UK trains
* The food in South India is mostly really good, though you may have to assure the staff you know what a spice

is
* There is always another temple

I think it would be interesting to do a trip across India from the south to the north, and see how it gradually changes, by which time you'd be quite used to the country.

{end pod jingle}

Well that's about all for this pod. Tune in next time for another adventure beyond the brochure. Until then, wherever you may wander, remember to take a map, and if you're feeling off-colour, keep on getting better.

Outro voiceover:
Thank you for listening to this episode of Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure. I hope you enjoyed it; if you did, tell your friends that I rocked your socks. If you wear socks when listening to my pod; that's your call not mine. And don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice.

You can tweet me @rtwbarefoot, and I'm the same name on YouTube, BlueSky, and Pinterest, or you can find me as Barefoot Backpacker on Instagram, Discord, and Facebook. Don't forget to sign up for my newsletter, and if you really like what I do, you can slip me the cost of a beer through my Patreon, in return for access to rare extra content.

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Show-notes are available on my website: barefoot-backpacker.com.

Until next time, have safe journeys. Bye for now.}