

2 weeks ... Namaskaram ... Namaste Hello!

I have been here two weeks already. Time has gone so fast but I also feel like I've been here a lifetime.

The area where I am staying in the Malappuram District of Kerala could not be more beautiful. The house is situated at the foot of huge mountains amongst a dense sea of green. We are surrounded by rubber plantations, banana trees, coconut trees and papaya trees. There are hundreds of tropical birds, colourful butterflies and dragonflies flying around constantly. Also the beautiful national bird of India, the peacock, roams freely and you can spot one or two usually in the mornings or evenings. They look so elegant when they are sat on a wall with their gorgeous feathers draping down behind.

View from the roof terrace

I find that the best time of day to appreciate the view is at 6.30am when I go for my morning run (ok not every day but I am trying!). The sky is usually clear with the sun just peeking over the tips of the mountains and the temperature is perfect. I am definitely ready for the cold water shower when I return though! There is also a roof terrace that is perfect for catching a few rays of sun here and there!



It has been very hot and muggy every day and often very cloudy, (blue skies are about as common as back home) this builds up throughout the day and normally creates a huge thunderstorm by the evening/nighttime. This has sometimes left us without electricity, meaning candlelight from 6pm!

Namaskaram means Hello in Malayalam, the Kerala local language. It is the 9th most common language in India (with 3% of the population speaking it). The locals say that it is the hardest language to learn in the world but the most important as you are always bound to meet another Keralan somewhere in the world. They definitely like to spread their wings and travel, everyone knows someone who is working or living in another country. I met one woman who has two daughters working in a hospital in Liverpool! Despite this, I am definitely learning more Hindi (Namaste=Hello). This is because the two girls who work in the kitchen-Ignacia and Karuna-come from Assam in the North East and they speak mainly Hindi with very little Malayalam or English. For the first week and a half, we were not teaching in the school so I spent a lot of time getting to know them and helping in the kitchen.



Me with Ignacia and Karuna

The food was never a worry for me, someone who will eat anything and everything; however I have to say that it is incredible. Ignacia and Karuna do an amazing job to make 3 good meals for 12 of us every day! It is all homemade and wherever possible taken from the garden. So we are eating a lot of papaya, banana and coconut as well as a yummy root vegetable called cassava (or tapioca) among other things. It is nearly always made into a curry and served with either rice or chapatti's, but nothing has been too spicy so far. I am quite enjoying eating it all with my hands.

As well as the two kitchen girls, me and Ruth (who is also from England) are living with 2 young teachers, (Priya and Jyothi) both from elsewhere in Kerala and have been working at the school for just a few months, and 6 religious sisters. We all get along really well and there is always a great atmosphere in the house.

We have been into the local town a few times now (Pookuttumpadem), even managed to open a bank account and buy a local sim card, it's the perfect size to get to know your way around within a few visits. I have not seen another westerner since being here so we definitely stand out a mile off, but everyone is starting to get to know us and where we are working

Tropical bird in a papaya tree outside my window



and people cannot help us enough! Whenever we stand at the bus stop for too long, there is bound to be a school child come up to us wanting to practice their English and ask why we are here.

We also took a 'day' trip into the nearest city (Calicut); where I was able to see the crazy Indian city life that I got to know and love from last time (when I was in Calcutta). Indian drivers must sign a death wish every time they get behind the wheel; there is absolutely no order on the roads! Overtaking is done left, right and centre, on the straight and narrow as well as bends (It's best not to look!) I don't think I will have any hearing left by the end of the year, as instead of mirrors or indicators people rely on beeping their horns to let another vehicle know they are there. I say 'day' because it ended up being an overnight trip as we missed the last bus and the heavens opened to release the biggest downpour of the century (slight exaggeration but was still quite an experience...) Luckily there is another Assumption community in Calicut which we had to call on and hope they could help us out. They were definitely our Guardian Angels that night, providing us with a meal, shower and bed (even fresh clothes to sleep in) which was very much appreciated!

I really feel I'm settling into the daily routines and the local community and I'm excited to start teaching properly this week. My timetable consists of 17 lessons a week, teaching classes from Kindergarten to Class 6, English, Games and Geography, so I will definitely be kept busy!

There is so much more I could write but I will leave it there for now.

Stephanie Beech

Me and Ruth being officially welcomed into the school

