

COCHIN, KERALA, INDIA

Fifteen Minutes of Fame



Envisioning the chaos and pollution of [Delhi](#), it was some relief to find that Cochin, the first stop on our southern India tour, was relatively unpolluted and sane. Cochin has always been a trading city, and there are descriptions of the picturesque Portuguese sections, colorful Chinese fishing nets, etc. We didn't find it particularly picturesque, but the food was good and we found a ultramodern, superfast Internet cafe, so we were happy. And it was cheap... even better.



Especially in India, you never know what unusual event you'll unwittingly walk into. We were luxuriating in the a/c of the superfast Internet cafe, when a film crew came in. We figured it was just some promo piece for the local news or something - we ignored them & kept on surfing. One of the things Kathy was doing was ordering more of these great no-stink T-shirts we'd found in a catalog - they have some fabric that kills bacteria, and are a godsend for backpacking. It turns out they also have men's underwear in the same fabric, and Kathy had a full page featuring men's briefs

on her display. We were the only foreigners at the cafe, and at this point the cameraman decided to do a close-up on us (and the underwear). I was leaning over and discussing underwear with Scott when we received our 15 minutes of fame (more like 60 seconds of fame). He muttered "this is annoying", and the cameraman moved on, as if on cue.



We then learned that it wasn't for the local news, it was for some TV series that needed an Internet cafe scene. We looked around, and there was a big crowd of onlookers outside, watching the stars. An armed guard was stationed at the door. So, if you're watching Indian TV in the next few months, watch the for foreigners discussing men's underwear

After meeting up with the other Intrepid group members, we headed off to see the famous Kathakali dance performed. It is the



trademark for the state of Kerala, and the traditional version is danced at a Hindu temple, lasting all night and telling the story of good and evil, gods and demons. Tourist versions of the dance last for about 45 minutes. Dancers train for years, and every movement and muscle twitch has meaning. The costume & makeup is elaborate - and the audience gets to watch it being put on! The performance was in a sweltering tent, but thankfully they had a ceiling fan - which promptly went out (along with the lights) as we sat down. The lights/fan flickered off and on a couple times, and we finally went outside to cool off before the show started. Behind the theater, one of the assistants had climbed up power pole and was finagling with the lines, trying to get the power to come back. It never did - and we watched the performance the way they do in a temple, illuminated only by a kerosene lamp. The dance pictures you see here are much more than we saw at the dance

(the pictures are lit by our flash - we were in the front row.).



Adding the jowls is supposed to make the dancer look “bigger than life”



After 45 minutes of make-up prep, here’s the result—the “good guy” in the dance



The demon, dressed as a woman, who tries to entrap the good guy. She doesn’t succeed.



Business district in Cochin—not a cow in sight



Trying to get the lights back on for the dance performance