

Update 5: 8th March – somewhere in the Indian Ocean

It rained today and I could just imagine I was on the North Sea if it wasn't for the temperature! I am back at sea after the mammoth port layovers. I've been to Myanmar and India since the last update



I have been to so many temples and monasteries I've lost count! All with bare feet, as you had to take off shoes and socks everywhere we went. The layover began with a rare treat – after a day touring Yangon and visiting its large temple a couple of us headed to a 5* hotel in the city. It had the fastest Wi-Fi I have ever seen – after the lack of internet connections I have had over the last 10 weeks this was incredible! Call me shallow but seriously decent Wi-Fi, an infinity pool and non-ship food and I was in heaven. It was close the local markets so we also got to wander around and get a sense of the small businesses along the streets and tourist markets.



The last three days in Myanmar were spent visiting various rural areas a few hours drive from Yangon. I really enjoyed seeing the local villages and talking to the community members. We even toured an old monastery at dusk – using iPhone torches to guide our way. Everywhere you go you

see stupas – they look like gold coloured handbells



As we sailed down a river en route to our hotel on the second day I must have seen at least 50 stupas. On one set of hills I counted 11. So everywhere you go you see gold shrines, statues and stupas – sometimes in the most random of places



I also saw a lot of monks! It's an option many parents wish for – these young boys get fed and an education – no small thing in such a poor country



There's this thing called dock time. It's when you fail to get back on the ship before OST – on ship time. If you are not back by then then all sorts of red flags go up! If you haven't timed it right then you might end up in the queue waiting to have

your bags checked when the dreaded OST time comes round. So what that means in the next port is you are restricted to the ship for your 'penalty' period! So there's a massive relief to get back to the ship on time – as well as the joy of coming back 'home' to your room.

Myanmar was another port where we sailed up a river so we had to wait for the tide to leave. It was also a commercial port so more than an hour to Yangon and with a lovely waft from the petroleum dock next to us - all the tables and deck were grey from the silty spray hitting the ship as we left.

We only had 4 days back on ship before we hit the chaos that was India. We docked early in the morning but it wasn't until 2pm we finally had our passports back. I didn't do much that day apart from head off to find a sim card. That's the golden ticket in every port – find a sim so you can get internet. But India was the biggest faff ever to sort this! I also saw dolphins in the port – finally!



On day 2 I had my field class – we visited a fishing village, a rain water harvesting project and built sea defences. In the afternoon we visited a microenterprise run by women who make and sell poppadums. Supported by a woman's empowerment fund set up by the Indian government it supports groups of women to set up and run such micro-businesses. We even got to chat with the previous mayor of Cochin.



The next day I had to get up at ridiculous o'clock (2.30am) to travel on a three day trip to see the Taj Mahal. It was fun to see it – but the 12 hours of travel each way (bus to airport, 3.5hr flight to Delhi, 4 hr bus to Agra) was not so fun. Lots of driving so I got a real sense of the countryside too



It was also the Holi festival – which is pretty hard to describe other than explain people smear coloured paint powder on each other for the day! That day we also saw the Lotus temple – a non-denominational place for people to worship that I think looks like a giant orange squeezer!



So today we are officially past the half way point. Over 13600 nautical miles done and 6 weeks left! We are currently somewhere in the Indian Ocean, en route to Mauritius for a fuel stop and then heading to Cape Town.

Yesterday was Neptune Day when we crossed the equator. The day the voyagers graduate from being pollywogs to shellbacks! It's a SAS tradition that involves being covered in green gloop, jumping in the pool, swimming across, climbing out to kiss a fish, and greet Neptune. Also some voyagers shave off their hair – at least 50 of them did – not me though (it takes too long to grow back!). Apparently there was a cyclone in Mauritius so the ship is a little rocky today! Hopefully it will be gone by the time we get there!

Diane