

May/June News Bulletin from Goa

Greetings from a rainy Goa.

The monsoon season has suddenly started in Goa, after 7 months of almost continuous sunshine from November to May. Most of the children who have parents went home for 2 weeks leaving those who are orphans in the homes. It was good to spend concentrated time with each one, and take them on trips to the beach while the weather was still good. Instead of having to cram up to 70 children into the minibus, we only had 20 to take and now everyone could have a seat. As usual they had great fun in the water, and it was also an opportunity for all of them to have a much needed bath, given that the pump in the small boys house had stopped worked and they had no water from their well. After several days without it being fixed the small boys all had to move in with the big boys in their house, which was not too much of a problem considering most of them were away on holiday. Fortunately the pump was fixed before the end of the holiday and they were able to return to their own home.



Now with the start of the monsoon it's been pouring with rain with such ferocity that it is sometimes too painful on the top of the head to go out for my morning jog along the beach. I don't mind the getting wet - it's very refreshing especially in the heat and humidity, and with waterproof skin all you need is a pair of shorts - but I shall have to buy myself a tight fitting cap that won't get blown off.

I've been very busy for the last two weeks, getting ready for the new school year, helping with the admission of new children to the homes, and searching for those who occasionally disappear. The children who have parents to visit during the holiday sometimes get very homesick after returning, and yesterday 2 went missing. We eventually found them 30 miles away with their family, having walked from school and caught buses. They were only 8 and 10, but given their experience on the streets, these children are very capable of fending for themselves.

Compiling pupil records and ordering and distributing stationery and clothing for the pupils has become one of my main occupations, but taking 130 children to a small shop in a crowded market to buy sandals was not a good idea - not mine, I hasten to add. We took the kids to the shop in groups of 10, but even then, it took ages to get served with so many other parents wanting new shoes for the start of the new year. In the end, I decided to take home one pair of every size from small 7 to large 9, and then compile an order after letting the children try them one by one.

Donations have been generous, allowing the Centre to buy new uniforms, raincoats, umbrellas, sandals, school bags, lunch boxes, water bottles and stationery for all the children who go to the state school in Santa Cruz. However, at present I am the only person with a car who can transport things - all the other vehicles have broken down. So when I visit the three homes each day with more supplies, kids surround the car, eagerly wanting to know what I have brought for them.

I try to be very orderly in distributing things, calling them into the room one by one, ticking their name off as they collect their goods, and making sure everything is labelled with their name. Otherwise there would be chaos, with children clamouring for what they want and sometimes taking what doesn't belong to them. Many have grown up on the streets where it is considered a legitimate occupation to steal in order to feed the family. Therefore, new things have a habit of disappearing, especially shoes. Unfortunately all the children who go to the school provided by the homes are not getting anything new at the moment since they do not have to travel to go to school. So it is very sad seeing their disappointed faces as equipment is given out to the others.

The Centre is trying to get more places for children in the local state school but places are limited, and the school is not ready to accept them if their level of ability is not commensurate with their age. As a result the school belonging to the home is trying to educate those who are less able in order to try and close the gap. One good thing is that the local government has recently agreed for schools to continue teaching subjects in English after a big fight from parents who didn't want the local language Konkani to be forced on them. Many children who come from outside Goa would be disadvantaged since they are unable to speak Konkani. Although they may speak other languages such as Hindi, the only common one is English, especially for people from the south.

I am hoping to take a holiday myself, before the monsoon sets in across the whole of India, so I have been contemplating a trip to Kolkata (Calcutta) on the east coast. One of the staff is going there to visit family and we may travel altogether with my other friend/volunteer in the Nano (car), taking three days to get there. It is about 1500 miles away, and although it would be a long journey we could take turns in driving and see a lot more of India on the way. The car has proved very reliable so far, apart from the blower/AC not working just when we needed it – (it turned out to be a fuse), and the suspension seems to handle the rough roads really well.

We put the car to the test recently when we travelled 150 km north for the weekend to stay with a family in the state of Marashtra. We visited an orchard, teeming with delicious mangos, an Emu farm, a waterfall under which you could sit and receive a refreshing pummelling from a cool river, a massive fort on the coast (Vijaydurg) with huge walls 2km long that you could walk around, and some beautiful beaches, almost deserted, with big waves to swim through. Instead of taking the Mumbai highway back to Goa, we followed the sat nav along a lovely coastal route, negotiating some very small and rough roads, full of potholes but empty of traffic.



I can't believe I've been in Goa for nearly 5 months now. I've made some lovely friends, including a Christian family who welcome people to their home for a time of prayer, fellowship and bible study. They are very supportive when things become difficult and stressful in the Home and it's been good to find someone I can go to for encouragement, support and a few moments peace after a busy day.

I hope you are all well back home and look forward to seeing some of you between August and October when I visit the UK for a break before going out in October for another 6 months. Meanwhile, please feel free to phone anytime up to 6.00 pm (BST) by dialling the local access number first to get cheap rate. Best wishes, Tim

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