

Greetings from Vizag!

Description

Or as it's officially known, Visakhapatnam, a way-smaller-than-New-Delhi city of *only* 2.4 million (!) on India's east coast — the Bay of Bengal. 17° North latitude, 83° East longitude. Tropical weather indeed, high temps in the upper 80s to lower 90s, with **high** humidity. But the air is so much cleaner than Delhi's!

Here's the blow-by-blow of our once-again-unusual week — which saw no humanitarian outreach efforts to speak of, as we're just getting settled in.

Monday

We packed, weighed, repacked and wondered how we were going to fit everything in our suitcases. We eventually did, and were (only!) 34 Kg overweight! We bought some flowers and a card for Elder and Sister Jones, as a small token of our appreciation for all their excellent help and training. They were out and about while we did this so they were surprised when they came back. They and the three other couples took us out to dinner to say farewell, although not so much farewell from the Bairds, as they were going to be coming to Vizag too, and very soon after us.

Tuesday

Getting to Vizag was something of a hassle at the airport, pre-flight, but nothing earthshattering. The flight was 2.5 hours, and included a meal — which we weren't expecting but were very grateful for! Post-flight went smoothly, our bags were some of the first ones off (LIFO advantage!) and our drivers were there to meet us and take us to our new apartment—which is very nice!



Lansum Square — our new home



Note the scaffolding — ground floor clothes store opening soon

default watermark



Front room of our apartment



Dining and living room



Kitchen



Master bedroom



One of three bathrooms —
shower curtain coming!



View from the balcony on the 17th floor



Yes, those are saris (and other clothes) drying on the rooftop below

Wednesday

We were planning on spending a quiet day getting organized, making shopping lists, relaxing a bit. But at 11:20 the Vizag 1st Branch President called to invite us to come to a wedding! It was supposed to start at 11:30, but we didn't get there until 12:10, and still arrived in time for the opening song and prayer!

The program included introductions of the bride and groom by friends and family members, and marriage counsel by branch and district leaders. The actual ceremony was conducted by another brother who had a license to perform civil marriages. He was a pastor in a different church before his conversion. The ceremony was long, about 20 minutes, after which the couple hung flower garlands around each other, and another pair of matching neckware, among other things.

Lalitha and Satya were the bride and groom. She's a recent convert, he's currently taking the lessons. They were a very nice couple, pleased to meet us afterwards, even inviting us to participate in the wedding cake ceremony, which had them first cutting and serving each other small pieces of cake, then inviting many others (including us) to likewise serve them and be served by them.

The wedding overall was quite different from the first one we went to! The venue was much more modest (the cultural hall of the soon-to-be-Stake center) and the food served after the ceremony could fit on three 10-ft-long tables. It looked catered so we weren't concerned about eating it. There were neither utensils nor napkins — everyone ate with their fingers, so we did too. A nearby washroom provided the sink to wash our hands afterwards.



Bride and groom with family and new friends



Either that or eat standing up

After coming back to the apartment, we decided to look for a grocery store nearby. Google maps found one, which turned out to be a hole-in-the-wall type of store, not exactly what we were looking for, so we went with Google Maps' second choice. It then led us on a walk through a slum, which elicited a lot of stares and giggles, mostly from the little kids. But some of the adults looked at us warily, almost like we were intruders in their realm. And when we got to the Google Maps' destination point, the store wasn't there! We asked and got directions to another one about half a mile further, so we were still able to pick up a few groceries. It made us smile that 6-8 employees of that modest store drew near and competed for the opportunity to try to help us find what we were looking for!

Thursday

We found a mall where we had lunch after looking around a little, and then went on a short walk to a

big supermarket. We picked up a few more essentials and were disappointed at what we couldn't find — like vanilla extract for making chocolate-chip cookies, or banana bread. But we ordered that and some other hard-to-find things online.



Laying sod at Lansum Square entrance



Carrying sod on her head —
no wheelbarrow?!



Cringeworthy electrical wiring



What child safety laws?!



Watch this traffic circle...

<http://firstthreeodds.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/cows-still-rule-in-vizag.mp4>

Cows still rule in Vizag!

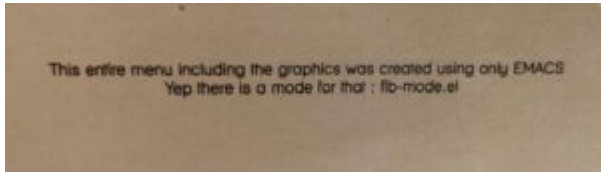
<http://firstthreeodds.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/typical-sights-and-sounds-riding-along-in-vizag.mp4>

Typical sights and sounds riding along in Vizag.

Friday

We went back to the big supermarket today, and had an interesting encounter. A lady came up to us and just started talking. Her English was good, and so it was easy to understand her story. She's been trying to talk to people who look American in hopes they can help her find a job in the US. She's a widow with two grown daughters, both in college. She has a bachelor's degree in special education. She just wants to have a better life than she thinks she can have here — being a widow with daughters in India comes with many disadvantages. I kept thinking, the restored gospel would give her a better life regardless of where she lives, however, we were not at liberty to steer the conversation in that direction.

The *Flying Spaghetti Monster* restaurant, near the Andhra University campus, was our choice for dinner. The name was fun, it looked interesting, and the Italian food we ate there was okay, but it was noisy and the service was very slow. Still, reading their witty menu was amusing, and it even made reference to EMACS (for all you former students)!



This menu was created using EMACS — not!



Not a real elephant

Saturday

We decided to check out the beach today. We took an auto-rickshaw to the Ramakrishna Beach, and spent about 45 minutes just walking along the beach and observing the (mostly domestic we assumed) tourists frolicking and relaxing there. It was fun to see palm trees on a beach again! Towards the end of our walk, a half dozen people approached us and asked if they could take selfies with us. We couldn't refuse!



Relaxing at the beach



I guess it looks seaworthy...



Made it to the flag monument!

Sunday

We did our morning routine, yoga, breakfast, etc., but this time we decided to check out a nearby park and get in a little walking exercise.



Prasanthi Park pavilion



Foliage in the park



Walking path in the park

Our leisurely morning made us almost late for church, as the Vizag 2nd Branch met at 11. But we were there before 11, and were warmly greeted by several branch members who were excited to see a missionary couple!

The meeting started in English, but the two speakers switched to Telugu soon after starting their talks, only intermittently coming back to English. They were very excited as they shared their messages, about the importance of staying on the covenant path, and repenting and forgiving.

Afterwards, two members asked me to give them a priesthood blessing with help from another Melchizedek priesthood holder. Their simple faith was wonderful to behold!

Taunya had a better time in Relief Society than I had in Priesthood, as Elders Quorum was almost exclusively Telugu. An occasional English word was written on the board, and interspersed in long passionate comments by several of the brethren.

We chatted with and had some lunch with the Bairds, who arrived yesterday and are happy to be here and to serve the members and leaders. They have such a good spirit and zest for the work!

We met with the district presidency for a few minutes, and discussed ways they could help us carry out the Church's mission to care for the poor and needy in this area.

Back to the apartment to reflect on life's little adventures, and the big adventures that are still to come!

Date Created

26 Feb 2023

Author

rickneff