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Our plan for today was to drive to Sri Lanka's east coast to the main town of Trincomallee. Along the way we got sidetracked. I've been telling Peter (driver) and Pransantha (guide) that we like cultural walks, that we don't need a "hiking trail" to enjoy walking in an area, that much of what is happening in Sri Lanka on the street is by nature interesting to us because it is so different and colorful.



Faces of Sri Lanka - these are mostly Muslim kids in a Montessori kindergarten

As we were driving east on route A12, I was preoccupied with reading ahead in my guidebook about Trincomallee when Prasantha said "Dan, would you like to do some walking here?" I looked up to find that we had slowed down to enter a small town, and that the street was lined with colorful shops and colorfully dressed people. Prasantha explained that this is a Muslim majority town, with some Hindu, and both those cultures like bright colors! The women especially like to dress in bright dresses or saris.





A youth association marching for...something. Prasantha and Peter seemed to think it was related to a youth sports association promoting their organization. Perhaps looking for donations?

So we pulled into a gas station, hoping to use that as the walk start. Toilets were abysmal, however, and Peter assured me that with the group we would use a hotel along the way prior to arriving. Prasantha and I started out down the sidewalk, drawing long and curious looks as we walked. Clearly they could tell that I was not from around here, especially with my fair skin and broad brimmed walking hat.





Scenes from today's walk - the bakery truck!

People have been friendly throughout the 5 days I've been in country — lots of smiles; lots of curious and open looks, and a desire to connect.



The ubiquitous banana vendor. Prasantha says you can survive for five days on bananas alone, even without water.

We'd driven around the area before starting, identifying country roads off Main Street (yes, it is truly called "Main Street"), and Prasantha and I walked past the lavender-colored Catholic Church, past the health clinic, and turned left down the country dirt road. Homes were spaced out surprisingly well, with spacious "yards" of tropical greenery. At the next turn, a primary school was situated on the corner, and Prasantha walked boldly up to the door and got the attention of the teacher. It was a kindergarten class — apparently Montessori is well established throughout the country - and the kids were smartly dressed in their yellow and blue uniforms.





This is the situation three minutes after Prasantha started talking to the kindergarten teacher. The boys had all escaped into the playground and were making the most of our interruption.

Prasantha rattled on for a few minutes with the smiling young teacher. He'd told me the door was shut and the windows too to help the kids focus on the subject matter, which happened to be performing arts. We'd interrupted a performance of singing with several of the kids "on stage" performing. Prasantha and the teacher talked about bringing our group by to visit, with the promise that we'd donate some school supplies. She was receptive, with a dazzling white smile and the characteristic head waggle that indicates assent and listening both on the Indian subcontinent and apparently here in Sri Lanka.



Tuk tuks are colorful and clean in Sri Lanka

We finished the walk back on Main Street, purchased a few bananas (25 different varieties grow in Sri Lanka), and headed once more for Trincomallee. We weren't yet finished with interruptions, however. Prasantha is a nature guide more than a walking guide, and he is ever-attune to opportunities to spot birds and wildlife. As we passed a shrinking reservoir, he clucked something sharp and commanding to Peter and the car was quickly pulled over to the side of the road.





A truck decorated in this manner indicates a Hindu owner - we're moving north and east into Hindu country

We climbed out, crossed the road, and began walking along the dike. I mentioned in an earlier post that instead of lakes, Sri Lanka has hundreds of reservoirs, or tanks. They are often seasonal, filled by the double monsoon, then fading as the dry season sucks the moisture from the tank. Water levels in this tank were receding, and the shoreline and water itself were teeming with birds, large birds!



Love this shot of painted storks busy beneath the water and the pelican floating placidly above

We edged our way along the dike as slowly and quietly as we could. Prasantha started ticking off the names of the birds we were seeing. Most remarkable were the several dozen painted storks. Several other large wading birds were hunting for food as well—ibises, egrets, pelicans, and herons, with a bunch of kites (raptors) fighting over fish. Storks were the stars, however, and in one photo I captured three different species: painted storks, woolly-necked storks, and the endangered lesser adjutant stork.





The one in back is endangered - the Lesser adjutant stork. The one in front is about ready to trip on himself.

It's been another colorful day. The evening ended in a lovely seaside resort, right on the banks of the Indian Ocean! Tomorrow is a full moon, and in Sri Lanka, that's a big deal. The full moon is celebrated especially by the Buddhists, so we'll see what tomorrow brings. Tonight, on the way to dinner, I gazed up at a moon that was nearly full (it gets dark early in the tropics — around 6:30 pm). The irony was that while I was looking up at what seemed to be a crystal clear sky, with a big bright moon beaming down on me, off to the north I saw flashes of lightning! I still have a long ways to go in figuring out Sri Lanka!





Hard to fit these guys all into one frame

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