

Kodungallor: Hang'en with the fisher-folk (2/27/2008-2/28/2008)

A to remain nameless worry some aunt once asked me, "How do you know what bus to get on? What happens if you get on the wrong bus?" To which my reply was, "I guess I go somewhere else then." It had actually never happened to me until recently while attempting to go from Thrissur to the town of Kodungallor. I arrived at the bus station in Thrissur and asked for the bus to "Kodungallor," at least I thought I did. With out hesitation, as if I had been perfectly understood, I was directed to a bus, where again I received a positive response to my enquiry. As we headed off I felt something was amiss as recognized we were on the road to Guruvayur, northeast of Thrissur (a town I had visited a few days earlier), while I wanted to go to southeast of Thrissur. Furthermore, the bus fare was less than I had expected based on the distance I wanted to go. A half an hour into the journey I was pretty sure I was going to the wrong place, just wasn't sure where that wrong place was. Fortunately, I had recently made a dollar investment in a Kerla road atlas, and when I finally did reach the destination of Kunnankulam, which apparently sounds exactly the way I pronounced Kodungallor, I was able to navigate a "scenic" way to my original destination of Kodungallor without having to back track to Thrissur. In the end the error only cost me about an hour and a half of time and about an extra 30 cents in bus fares.

The town of Kodungallor was not in the guidebook I had, but there was a description of it in my Kerla road atlas, in addition someone had written favorably about the place on an Indian travel related internet discussion board. Since it was on the way to my next destination of Cochin (at least it would have been if I caught the correct bus) I figured I'd break the journey there and check it out. A religiously diverse place, Kodungallor is home to a venerated Hindu temple, the first Mosque in India (built by a regional leader in the late 7th century who was converted to Islam by Arab traders and is said to have gone to Mecca and met the prophet Mohammed), and the place were St. Thomas first landed in India in 52 A.D. These sites are of more historical interest than visual, the Mosque was heavily altered in the 1970s so that only a few traces in the inner prayer hall are original. The church that was built on the site of St. Thomas's arrival is a fairly recent structure but with one of the more bizarre interiors I have seen, featuring a large painting of a human heart above an altar. Supposedly there is a relic from St. Thomas enshrined there. I'm guessing it's allegedly his heart by the art work, but I'm not certain.

What I enjoyed most about the area was hanging out in the morning with the Fishermen who's Chinese style nets lined the northern end of Vypin Island, a long narrow strip of land that stretches on its southern end from Cochin to the harbor near Kodungallor on its northern end. As I walked from net to net, I got invited to hang out for a while at a few of the nets, although the lack of English spoken by the fishermen usually limited the conversations to my name and my country. I eventually came upon a couple guys working one net that were hanging out with a third who ran a restaurant in Singapore and could speak English which considerably helps the flow of conversation. It's always helpful when the two parties involved in a conversation speak the same language. So I ended up spending a while at their net and even got to try my hand at fishing, Chinese net style. Fishing with a Chinese net really just involves pulling a rope that lifts the net out of the water, but I did catch some fish one of the two times I helped pull the net in. A 50% success rate is actually pretty good from what I observed. Not wanting to press my luck I quite the fishing industry while I was ahead.



Chinese fishing net on the north end of Vypin Island. Near Kodungallor.



Chinese fishing net on the north end of Vypin Island. Near Kodungallor.



Fishermen pulling up a Chinese fishing net on the north end of Vypin Island. Near Kodungallor.



Fisherman grabbing fish from a Chinese fishing net on the north end of Vypin Island. Near Kodungallor.



Fisherman posing with his fairly modest catch considering the size of the Chinese fishing net. But I suppose its more than you would get with a poll. North end of Vypin Island. Near Kodungallor.



Chinese fishing net on the north end of Vypin Island. Near Kodungallor.



The two fisherman I was hanging out with for the longest time on the north end of Vypin Island. Near Kodungallor.



Fisherman grabbing fish from a Chinese fishing net on the north end of Vypin Island. Near Kodungallor.



Chinese fishing nets on the north end of Vypin Island. Near Kodungallor.



Me helping to pull up a Chinese fishing net on the north end of Vypin Island. Near Kodungallor. And for those who are studying this picture closely, yes, I am wearing my shirt backwards something I didn't realize until I saw the picture. When you only have 3 shirts, sometimes you have to go "Chris-Cross style" to change up the look.



Fish "I caught" rather helped lift out of the water, north end of Vypin Island. Near Kodungallor.



Chinese fishing nets on the north end of Vypin Island. Near Kodungallor.



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First mosque in India (7th century), near Kodungallor. The lamp in the middle is old and supposedly the mihrab although it is obviously repainted.



Bizarre interior to the church marking the spot where St. Thomas was said to have first landed in India in 52 A.D.