

# My India

A DC-3 Airways Charter

By Dave Athay DCA1315

A few years ago, I had the privilege of spending two years in southern India as a volunteer missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I got an eye-level view of the land and people. Most of my traveling was done on public transportation. I didn't do much tourist stuff. But I did visit a lot of people in their homes. This was one of the most defining experiences in my life so far.

I didn't choose India; India chose me. I put my name in to serve a two-year mission anywhere in the world. Out of the thousands of missionaries the church sent out in 2000, 9 of us were sent to India.

For this charter, the India Bangalore Mission of the Church has contracted DC-3 Airways to transport personnel and cargo between its headquarters in Bangalore and its branches throughout the southern part of the subcontinent. I've volunteered to come along as a guide, liaison, and copilot/navigator as necessary. We will start in Bangalore, and follow the route I took.

From Bangalore, we'll fly first to the ancient city of Hyderabad, where I lived for six months. Then, we'll go to the hot southern port city of Chennai (Madras to the English), where I sweated out my first summer in India. From there we'll be back to the much cooler climate of Bangalore before returning for an additional tour on the dusty outskirts of Hyderabad. After returning to Hyderabad, we'll press on to the small, rural city of Rajahmundry, the center of Andhra Pradesh's "rice bowl," and location of an important strategic bridge across the mighty Godavari River. I was only in Rajahmundry for a month, and then I was off to spend my last six months in-country in Visakhapatnam, a major port and steel-producing city on the Andhra coastline. Visakhapatnam is a beautiful city where some comparably large palm-covered hills slide down into the blue-green water of the Bay of Bengal. It's a smaller city, though not as small as Rajahmundry. The place has a comfortable feel to it, and was my favorite place in India.

We'll finish up by going back to Bangalore. We'll check out with the mission headquarters and head home. I never made it up north to see the Taj Mahal, so I'm planning to take the plane from Bangalore up to New Delhi via Agra on my way out of the country for a series of ferry flights to get the company bird back to our regular operational routes in Europe. You'll be able to hop a ride to anywhere you want from New Delhi.

## **Bangalore**

I arrived in Bangalore on October 24, 2000. It took exactly 44 hours from the time my two companions and I left the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, until we arrived at the mission office in Bangalore. After spending my second night in a row on a 747, I was treated to breakfast via British Airways with a spectacular view of the Himalayas.

We landed in Bangalore that evening during the height of the Diwali celebration. Diwali is the Indian festival of light, which came in the form of all kinds of fireworks. Some seemed more like low-grade naval ordnance, and I was kind of surprised as the plane descended to see rockets reaching up toward us and explosions in the streets. But by this time I had been enroute for nearly two days, and I was really too jetlagged to notice very much of anything.

Culture shock started first thing the next morning, with breakfast. It took me a while to get used to eating spicy food three meals a day. After a few days of administrative work, I received my first assignment, and tickets for an overnight train to Hyderabad.

For our first flight, we will be flying a “green” (newly-arrived) missionary, a thousand pounds of church books and supplies, and a ton of humanitarian supplies from Bangalore to Hyderabad. We’ll leave at dawn to get the new guy there in time for a full working day.

**1315-02-01**

VOBG-VOHY

DEP VOBG 2914 ft.

SAI NDB 241.0 crs 008 72 nm

HHY VOR 114.70 crs 013 203 nm

ARR VOHY 1741 ft.

Approx. 1:45

## Hyderabad

### 1315-02-02. To Darur and return. Details are in the flight description.

After dropping off the new missionary in Hyderabad, we are told that our cargo is to be flown directly to its final destination- a charitable organization in nearby Darur village. There is no airport at Darur, but the missionary couple from Latter-day Saint Charities assures us a suitable field is available. This is a bush mission. If you're not comfortable landing off-airport, we don't have to do it, but it will save a considerable amount of time.

Darur village is located at approximately N 17° 25' E 78° 02', or 25 nautical miles out on the 267 radial of the HHY VOR.

When you get there, you will see a river running east to west with a railroad track roughly parallel about a half mile to the north. Land in the clear spot on the north side of the railroad track. (Note: You'll probably need to disable crash detection in FS for this one!) Shut down and unload.



*Charminar*



*Darur Village- I'm the one in sunglasses*

Once we've unloaded, we'll follow the railroad tracks back to Hyderabad. It just so happens the tracks run right by the airport in FS just as they do in real life.

I stayed in Hyderabad (not far from the airport) for my first six months in India. Hyderabad is a very old city, established by Persians. The population of the "old city" (farther south of the airport) is mostly Muslim and that part of town looks like it was taken right out of the middle east. The central feature downtown

is a large memorial/mosque called “Charminar.” (“Char” means “four” and “minar” refers to the minarets or thin, pointed towers found on mosques. Charminar has one on each corner.)

Charminar was built in 1591 and many settled parts of the Hyderabad area predate its construction.

The signature dish of Hyderabadi cuisine is biryani. This is a tasty casserole made of basmati rice, meat, and many spices with names difficult to pronounce and spell. We’ll be sure to grab some before the next leg: Chennai

### 1315-02-03

VOHY-VOMM

DEP VOHY 1741 ft.  
TTP VOR 115.70 crs 166 237 nm  
MMV VOR 112.50 crs 138 52 nm  
ARR VOMM 34 ft.

Approx. 2:05

**Chennai** (formerly known as Madras)

Leaving Hyderabad, we still have 500 lbs. of church materials from Bangalore bound for Chennai. We’ll also be transferring two missionaries. They’ll meet us at the airport at 1700 local time for the flight.

I arrived in Chennai in late spring of 2001, just in time for the blazing hot summer.

Chennai is India’s fourth most-populated city. It was an important strategic and port city under Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial rule, but its existence goes back at least as far as history can record. Legend holds that the Christian apostle St. Thomas preached and was martyred here in approximately 70 A.D. The picture above is the market within walking distance of the apartment I lived in.



I was there for three months, but I remember it as being a pretty tough time. I was living with two to three other missionaries, all of whom were Indian. The food was different, the language was different, and the heat was nearly unbearable at times. But I also got my first mango season, and more importantly proved to myself what kind of a beating I was willing to take to get the job done.



*Me at the beach in Chennai- this area was later hit by an infamous tsunami*

Once we land in Chennai, we'll be met by a local church leader to pick up our remaining cargo and transport the new missionaries to their apartment. With any luck, he'll also bring us some dinner. To dodge the heat, we'll be leaving Chennai before sunrise, with two sleepy young missionaries and a retired couple

on a charitable mission, as well as half a dozen local church leaders on their way to a conference in Bangalore. We've got to land in Bangalore by 0730 to get them there in time for the meeting.

**1315-02-04**

VOMM-VOBG

DEP VOMM 34 ft.  
BBG VOR 115.50 crs  
272 147 nm  
ARR VOBG 2914 ft.

### **Bangalore**

We'll have the rest of the morning to relax in Bangalore before we set out on our next set of flights- a round-robin trip



*Tamilian countryside outside Chennai*

back to Hyderabad, then to the relative “village” of Rajahmundry, Visakhapatnam, Chennai again, and back to Bangalore. This time around we’ll be transporting the mission president (a retired American volunteer on a three-year mission), his wife, and his two young assistants around the southern part of the country on a conference tour. As the leader of the church in India, the mission president is a busy man, and his time is valuable. Even though we’ll only be flying one or two legs a day, punctuality will be vital, and may be the deciding factor in whether or not our company gets further contracts from the church in India.

Bangalore is situated on a high plateau in the southern state of Karnataka. The city enjoys a much cooler climate than the others I was in. Our apartment had neither heat nor air conditioning, and I don’t recall ever missing either. Bangalore is a major center for businesses with international connections, tourists, and rich retirees. To illustrate the climate difference: I felt cool stepping onto the air conditioned train leaving Chennai, and cool again when I got off the train in Bangalore.

I was in Bangalore for about four months, including September, 2001. The uncertain situation of Americans abroad in a country with a significant Islamic population almost led to us all being evacuated. But the decision was made to let us stay, and I never felt unsafe, although I was certainly distracted.

## **1315-02-05**

VOBG-VOHY- same as before

After the conference in Bangalore, the boss wants to leave right away so as to be in Hyderabad by 1700 local. He likes to conduct personal interviews with the missionaries when he makes his rounds, and would like to get them done this evening so as to be able to start the conference the next morning.

## **Hyderabad**

After four months in Bangalore, I was sent back to Hyderabad. This time I was in another area just outside the city to the west, about halfway to Darur village. The area was more spread out, but there weren’t any farms that I could see. It was during this time that I really began to love the Telugu people (the main population of the state of Andhra Pradesh). I’d been to two other states, and coming back to Hyderabad after nearly 8 months was like coming home. I was fortunate to be able to remain in Andhra until I left for home back in the States.

Things go well in Hyderabad this time, but some unexpected business requires the mission president to stay an extra night. To make up for the lost time, we’ll be leaving before dawn the next day. The boss wants to crank the engines up at 0430 to arrive in Rajahmundry just after dawn. You’ll see Rajahmundry for the first time just as I did- in the gray morning light on the Godavari Express, while crossing the river for which it was named.

I never saw the airport in Rajahmundry. I got conflicting reports as to whether or not it was even open. I do know that a company in Hyderabad offers helicopter flights to Rajahmundry and Visakhapatnam. In any case, we'd better leave Hyderabad with a full bag of gas, since there probably won't be anything available in Rajahmundry.

**1315-02-06**

VOHY-VORY

DEP VOHY 1741 ft.  
KM NDB 340.0 crs 099 97 nm  
RY NDB 366.0 crs 097 96 nm  
ARR VORY 146 ft.

Approx. 1:30

### **Rajahmundry**

Rajahmundry is a “village” of about 300,000 people in East Godavari District of southwestern Andhra Pradesh. East Godavari is the cultural home of the Telugu people and held to be the place where the purest form of their language is spoken. By the time I got there, I had been in India long enough to appreciate this, and I was able to notice a difference.

Compared to the hustle-and-bustle of large cities like Chennai, Bangalore, and Hyderabad, Rajahmundry is a sleepy farm town. For us, it meant it was safe enough to ride bicycles. After riding on crowded buses, I really enjoyed having my own personal transportation,



*Sunset on the Godavari River, Rajahmundry*



even if I did have to pedal it.

Things go smoothly in Rajahmundry, and the boss decides to press on. Plan to get us to Visakhapatnam around sunset.

**1315-02-07**

VORY-VEVZ

DEP VORY 146 ft.

VVZ VOR 114.00 crs 069 89 nm

VEVZ bears 339 at 4 nm

ARR VEVZ 10 ft.

Approx. 0:40

## Visakhapatnam

This was the end of the line for me. After only a month in Rajahmundry, I was transferred to Visakhapatnam, a beautiful city on the eastern coast of Andhra. I had six months left until I was going home. By this point I was thoroughly adjusted to life in India, which allowed me to truly savor my last few months in the country. It helped that the city was beautiful and fairly clean (much more so than Chennai), and I really started to get along well with many of the local church members.

Visakhapatnam is a smaller city. I don't know the exact population, but it's definitely bigger than Rajahmundry and definitely smaller than Hyderabad. It's home to a number of important institutions: Andhra University, one of the two Indian Naval Academies, and a large steel mill. The major port is also home of the Indian Navy's Eastern Fleet.



*The view north from Kailasagiri hill, Visakhapatnam*

The city itself stretches along the beach and is bounded by a large hill on the south end which guards the entrance to a large natural harbor, and another hill on the north end named Kailasagiri. The airport lies well west of the main city, closer to the steel mill.

After spending the day in Visakhapatnam, the boss wants to make it back to Bangalore by nightfall.

**1315-02-08**

VEVZ-VOBG

DEP VEVZ

Follow coastline to Chennai or fly 236 for 225 nm,  
then 179 for 154 nm to MMV VOR 112.50

From Chennai, fly direct to Bangalore BBG VOR  
115.50 crs 271 145 nm

ARR VOBG

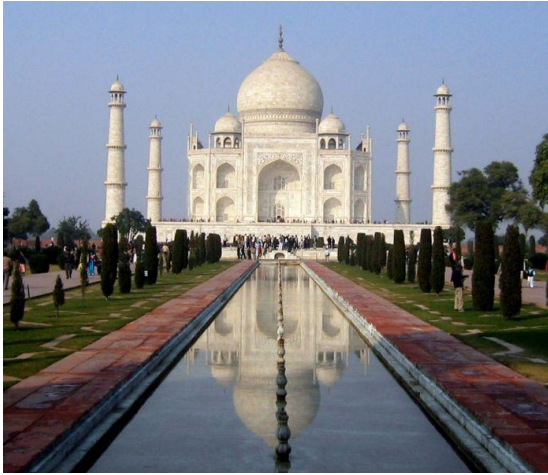
Approx. 3:30



*Pretending to ride a scooter in  
Visakhapatnam*

## The Long Journey Home

As soon as I was truly comfortable in India, it seemed, it was time to go home. While my arrival had been drawn-out (four legs by air, for 44 hours, followed by an overnight train ride), departure was swift: I was spirited away from Visakhapatnam to Bangalore via jet airliner, with a short layover in Chennai. After a brief checkout, I left Bangalore after sunset one day on a Lufthansa 747 and was reunited with my family at JFK the next afternoon after only two legs and a two-hour layover in Frankfurt.



The adjustment back to life in the States was almost as strange as getting used to life in India, although of course it was faster. Within a few weeks, it started to feel as if I had just been asleep for two years and the whole thing was just a really strange dream that required another skin test for tuberculosis six months after I woke up.

Since I never made it up to northern India, I never got to see what is perhaps the most famous landmark in the country: the Taj Mahal. The conclusion of this charter,

therefore, will be a series of ferry flights from Bangalore to New Delhi, with a stopover in Agra to see the Taj.

The trip should be completed in three legs, with the second one ending at Agra and the final destination New Delhi. The intermediate stopover, however, is negotiable. A suggested routing follows:

**1315-02-09**

VOBG-VANP

DEP VOBG 2914 ft.

SAI NDB 241.0 crs 008 72 nm

HHY VOR 114.70 crs 013 203 nm

NNP VOR 112.70 crs 010 220 nm

ARR VANP 1012 ft.

Approx. 3:10

**1315-02-10**

VANP-VIAG

DEP VANP 1012 ft.  
JB NDB 301.0 crs 025 137 nm  
KKJ VOR 116.40 crs 356 98 nm  
GWA VOR 112.80 crs 315 128 nm  
AG NDB 249.5 crs 346 54 nm  
ARR VIAG 551 ft.

Approx. 2:40

**1315-02-11**

VIAG-VIDP

DEP VIAG 551 ft.  
SKA VOR 117.20 crs 310 65 nm  
DPN VOR 116.10 crs 006 43 nm  
ARR VIDP 744 ft.

Approx. 0:45

Thanks for flying the My India charter! Please send questions and/or comments to:  
[davidathay@hotmail.com](mailto:davidathay@hotmail.com)

Also, special thanks to John Lawler (DCA 0852) for helping me get this charter published, and making the Bangalore fireworks and Darur Village airstrip.