

TRAVEL LUST

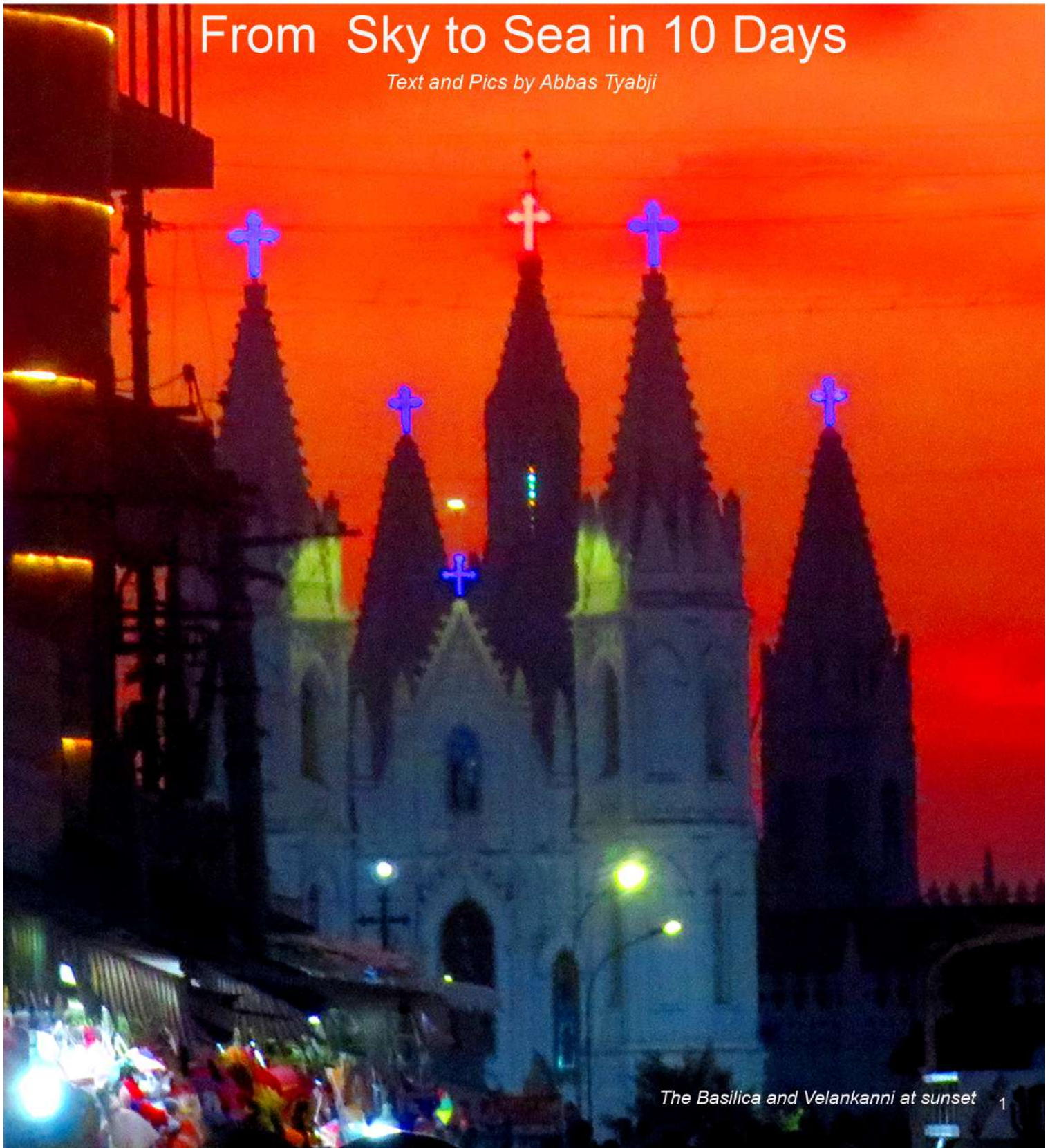
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From Sky to Sea in 10 Days

Text and Pics by Abbas Tyabji



The Basilica and Velankanni at sunset



Interior and exterior of the Basilica at Velankanni which is the Lourdes of South India



This time it was my wife's choice. We were on our annual pilgrimage to Munnar and it was coinciding with her birthday. So I told her to select one hotel where she wanted to stay. And she selected the SHOLA CROWN, one that straddles the Tamil Nadu Kerala border and sits like a crown on the Bodimettu peak, highest point in that area. And so it was. We were four of us, we two and another doctor friend and his wife, just returned from London to settle in Hyderabad.

So we set out from Hyderabad and travelled to Vellore, our usual halt for the first night. After a comfortable night, we set out for Kerala, driving through Villupuram, Trichy and Dindugul before taking on the steep, winding road to the Bodimettu peak. We stopped for a quick lunch just before reaching Shola Crown and then completed our climb to the border where our hotel stood tall.

What a beautiful view unfolded before us. And the extravagant sunset over the hills of Kerala with the swimming pool adding its own charm, was just unforgettable. The next morning, after a trek through the cardamom plantation attached to the hotel, we started our descent to Munnar and our homestay in Anivaratty, about 20 kms ahead.

We got our traditional welcome from Simi, Shiju and their kids, who have become family. The next day, we took off to visit some waterfalls (not much water) and the market at Adimali, after which we just relaxed, looking at the superb view from our balcony.

The next day we had an exciting drive to Kalimali viewpoint which my friends had not seen. The view of the lake winding along the rolling hills, was mesmerising.

Our plan was to visit Pondicherry on the return so the next day we started our journey towards Velankanni, where the Church dedicated to Mary is as important for the sick, as Lourdes is in France. Huge throngs collected inside and outside the church, praying for deliverance. We also visited the beach right in front of our hotel and watched a superlative sunset on the backwaters. The next morning we drove to Pondicherry where we found the hotel we had booked, not at all upto our mark, so we shifted to a small but well located homestay right on the beach. We just took in the superlative view while the steady breeze kept us in good spirits. Otherwise it was beastly humid





I got up at sunrise to view the fishing boats coming in with their catch and this was the first time. I saw a tractor being used to pull the boats out of the water, an innovative practice indeed. We had booked an auto to take us around Pondy because the roads are narrow and crowded. It was a wise decision.

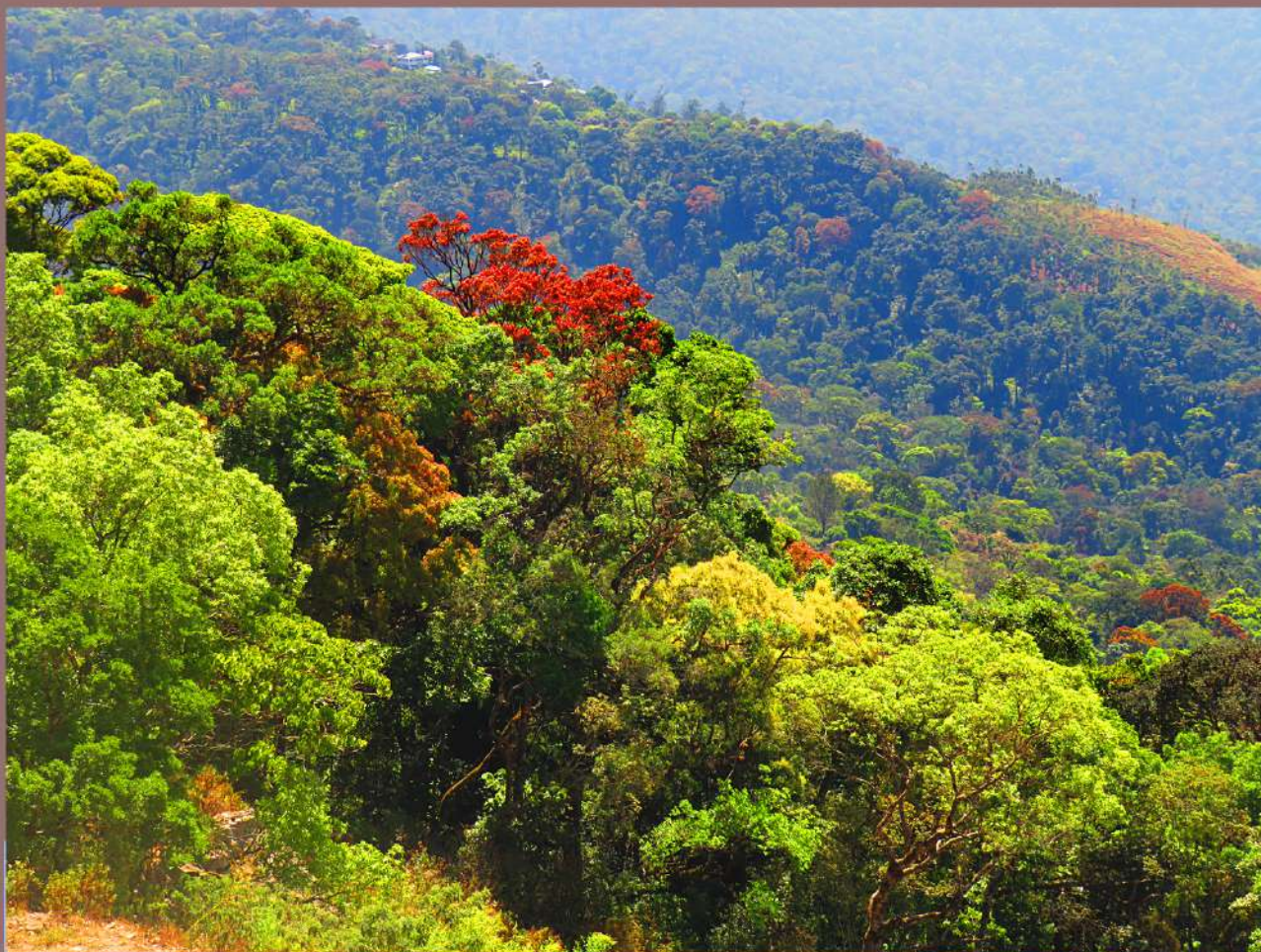
Our first stop was the mangrove boating point from where a motorboat took us deep into the mangrove forest, at places the mangroves forming a complete arch over our heads. Despite the stupefying heat, we found it an interesting experience. Back in the auto, we passed some typically decorated temples which I photographed.

The Golden Globe in Auroville turned out to be a gimmick as we could only reach about 400 m away from the monument.

A little exhausted by the humidity, we decided to call it a day and just relaxed on the beach. After an enjoyable journey, we returned home, with wonderful memories. We were happy that our friends had found the trip to their liking and look forward to more such in future.

Walking through the cardamom plantation attached to Shola Crown hotel (above) and tea plantations dotting the hills near Munnar





*Colourful forests near Munnar (above) and
the Kalimali Lake seen from Ragamaya hotel*



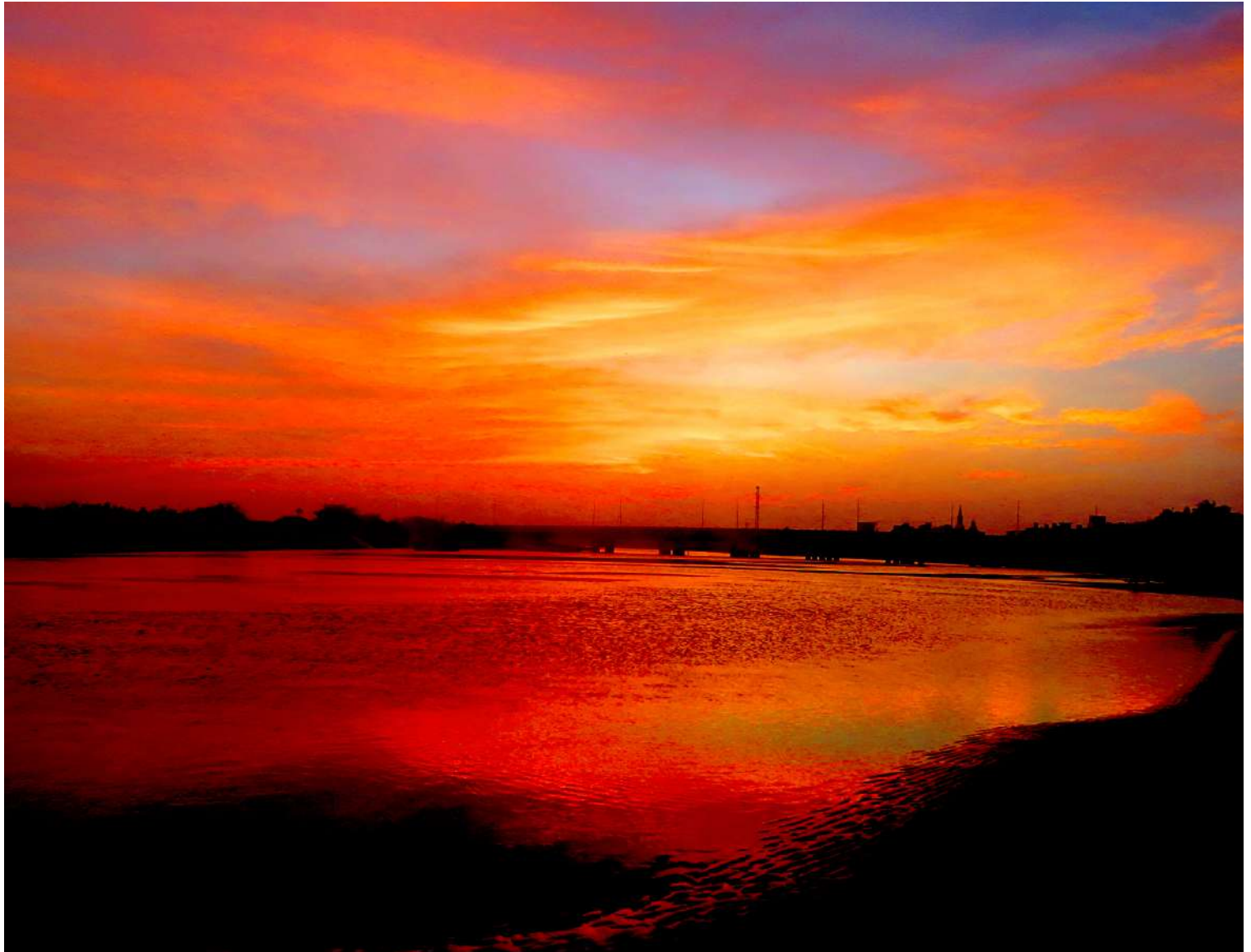
A beautiful sunrise on the hills behind Chinnakanal





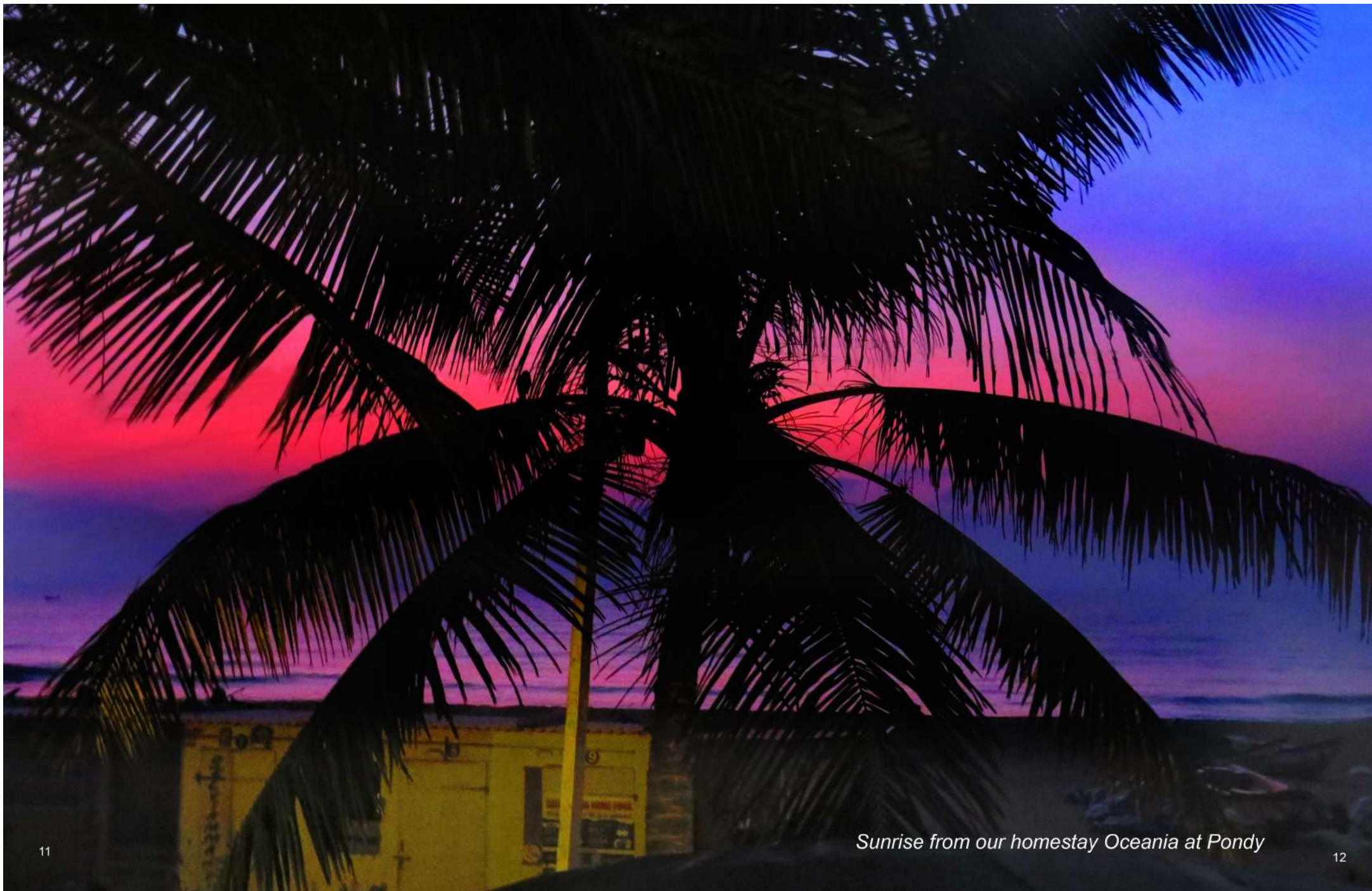
Thatched huts between Velankanni and Pondicherry

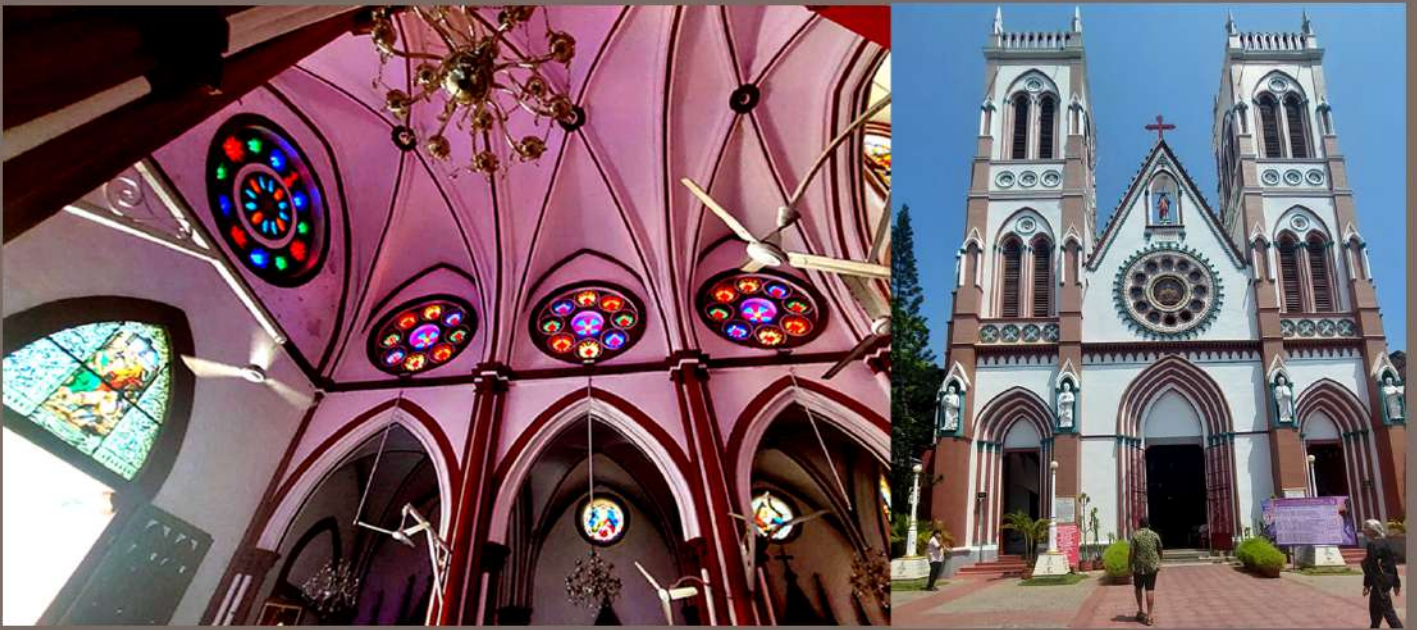




Sunset at Velankanni (above) and Dr.Ehsan, his wife Yasmeen and my wife Parveen boating through mangrove forests near Pondy (below). Photo taken by Abbas Tyabji







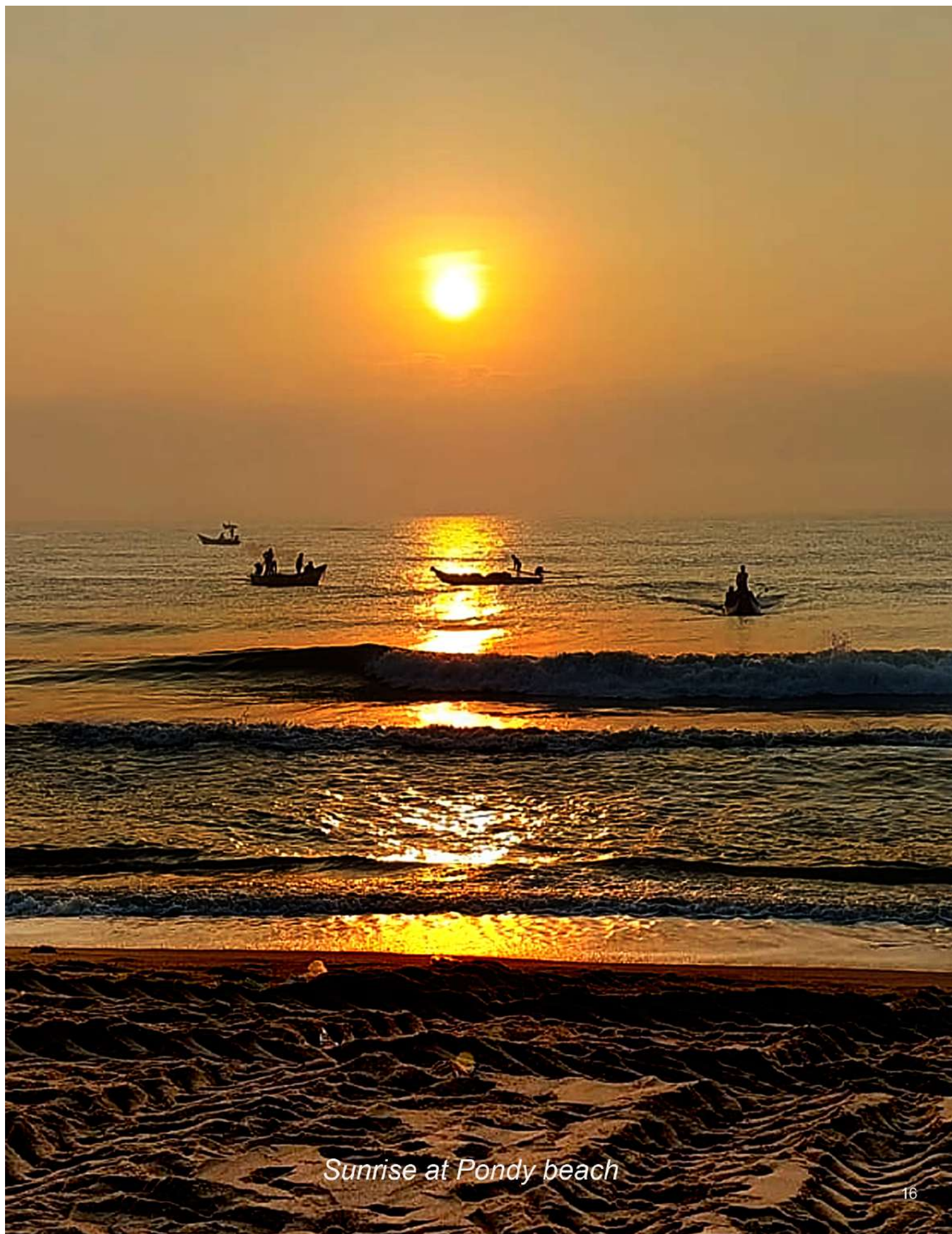
Images of the superbly decorated Church of the Sacred Heart , Pondy





Sunrise at Pondy beach and fishing boats going out to sea





Sunrise at Pondy beach



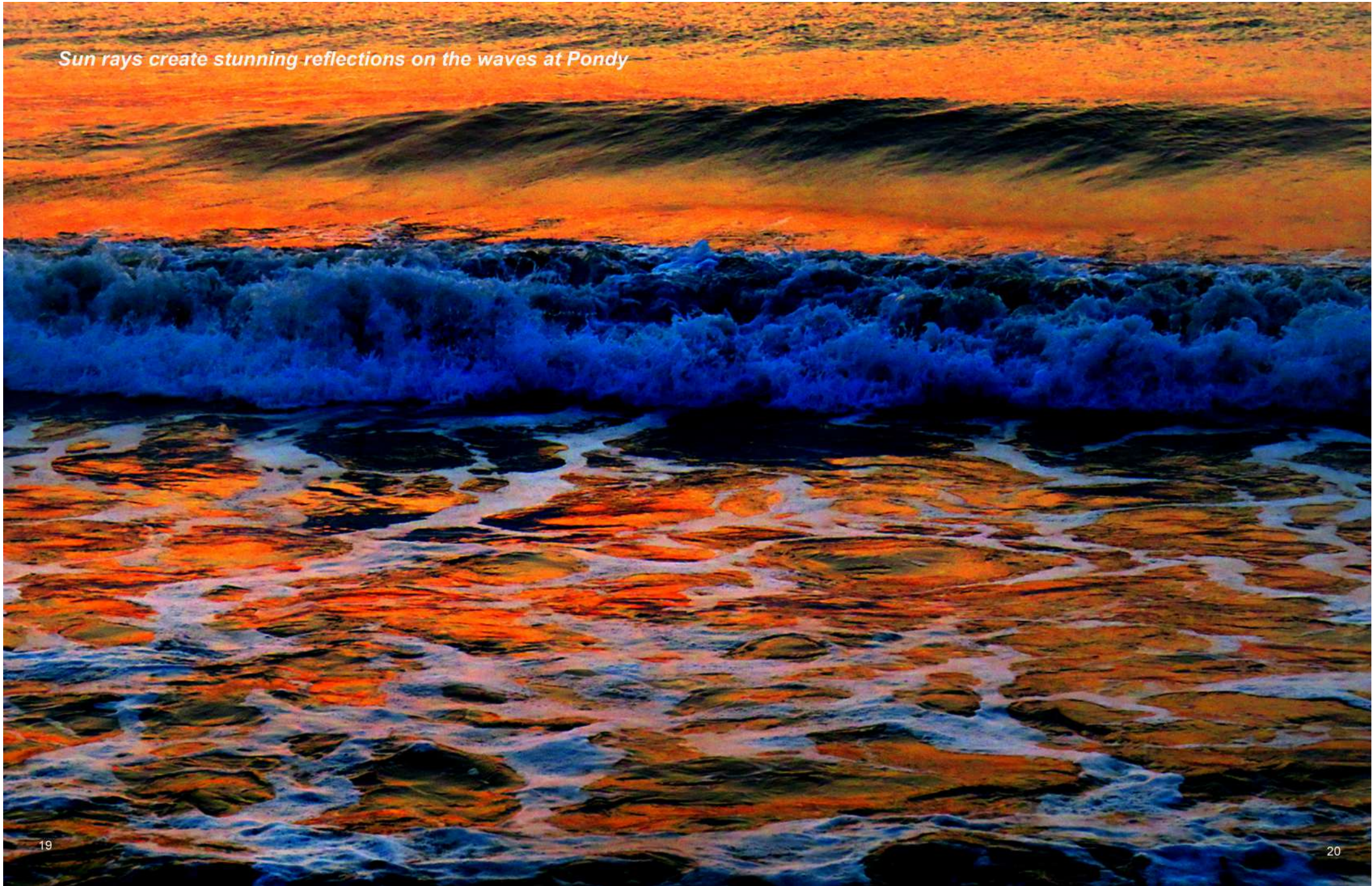
A boat ride through the mangrove forest near Pondy provides some excellent views





Shore temple at Mahabalipuram (above), a typically dressed policeman in Pondy with me on right and my friend Dr. Ehsan on left. At bottom right is the thatched roof of our beach front homestay Oceania.

Sun rays create stunning reflections on the waves at Pondy





Colourful temple architecture of Pondy



Top Experiences in Cinque Terre

Gem of Florence Region

Text and Photos by The Kim Kim Team



General view of Cinque Terre villages hugging the coastline



*Colourful fishing boats line the shore at Cinque Terre (above)
and another view of the cliff hugging villages (below)*



Cinque Terre means "Five Lands," or more commonly referred to as "Five Villages." Here you'll find the centuries-old fishing harbors of Riomaggiore, Corniglia, Manarola, Vernazza, and Monterosso al Mare hugging the rocky Ligurian Coast in northwest Italy. The best way to explore the region is either by foot, train, or boat, as cars cannot enter the quaint hamlets (although you can park at the entrance and walk from there).

Enjoy hiking between the villages on the area's famed pathways, or cruising along the coast in a kayak or boat tour. Taste some of the local gastronomy and visit a winery overlooking the sea. Peruse the craft shops, wander the cobbled streets, and attend a sculpting class to dive a bit deeper into the local culture.

Walking in Cinque Terre

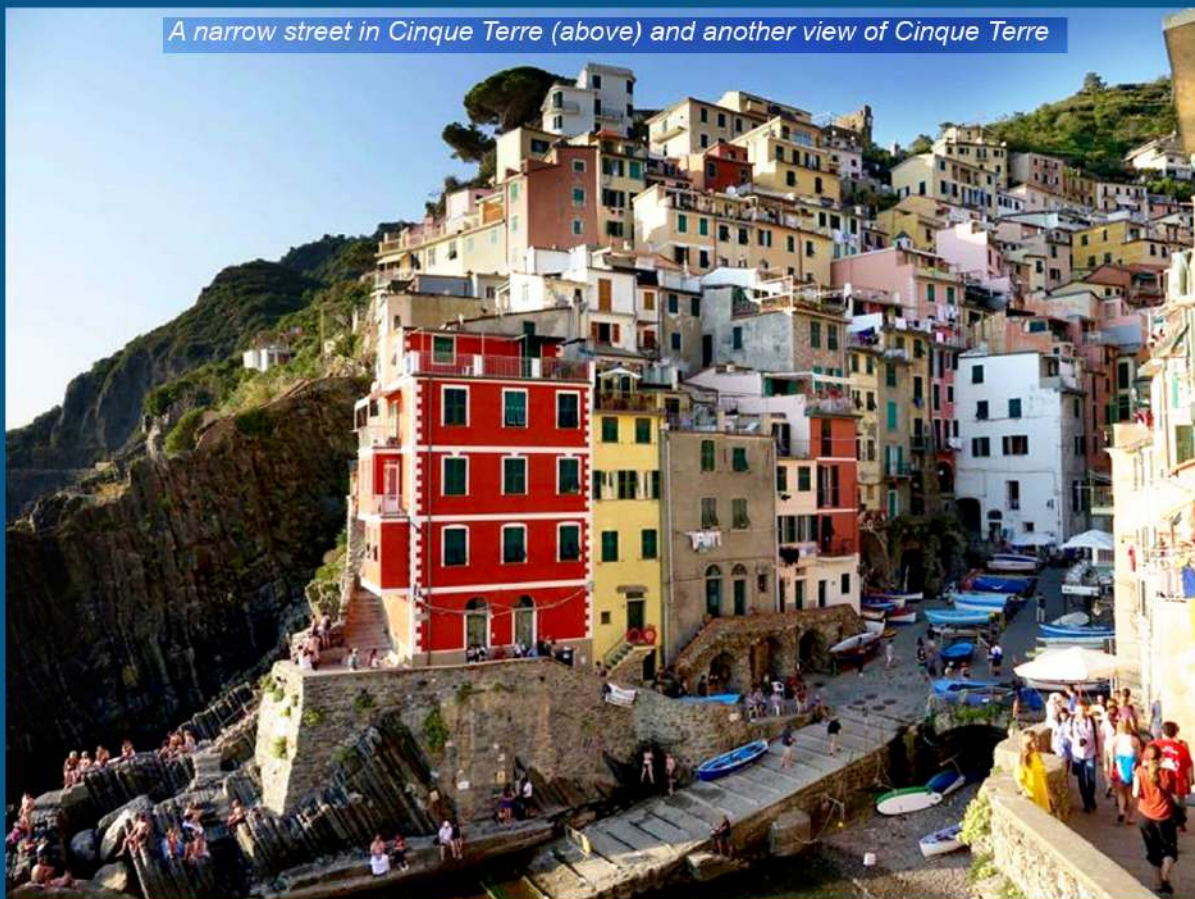
Hiking between the villages of Cinque Terre isn't an easy task, but you can save some energy by walking short sections or combining the route with trains or boats. Either way, any effort is worth it for the incredible views!



Enjoy a walking tour through the picturesque towns of Riomaggiore, Monterosso, Vernazza, and Manarola, four of the famous Cinque Terre villages. This moderate walking tour is the perfect compromise for those who want to hike in Cinque Terre but don't have time for the lengthy trails between the towns. Start with a train ride to Riomaggiore. The trail here starts from the station and stretches through the town toward its historic core. Along the way, admire the views of Via dell'Amore and the scenic coastline. Then, make a stop to visit the old church of St. John the Baptist and stroll down the main road to the port.

Next, you'll take the train to the village of Manarola. Then, walk up the main street to St. Lawrence Church, from where the trail extends through vineyards to the coast. Enjoy the views of the vineyards, perhaps catching glimpses of farmers as they harvest the grapes and produce the wines. If you'd like, you can stop at one of the wineries and sample some of the refreshing white wines known in the region, along with some delicious snacks.

A narrow street in Cinque Terre (above) and another view of Cinque Terre





The sea around Cinque Terre is really inviting

Continue to Monterosso via train and take the path that follows the seaside. You'll make your way into the old part of the town, passing by olive groves, lemon trees, and churches. Visit the nearby Oratorio dei Neri to view its 1,600 puzzling figures and enjoy some free time to eat lunch and relax on the coast. In the afternoon, you'll take the train to Vernazza, where you can enjoy an incredible view from above the town. You might recognize the scenery here, as it's a famous spot to take photos of colorful Vernazza. Then, descend into the village and stop for a well-deserved gelato break and free time.



Lisbon: Portugal's Vivacious Capital

With its sharp Atlantic light and sky-high miradouros, Lisbon is an instant heart-stealer making serious waves in food, drink, art and design, says Kerry Walker

Some pics of Lisbon by Naazli Hannan and pics of Algarve by Davinder Singh



*General View of Lisbon (above) and
a tram moving through the narrow streets*

No matter how often you return, you'll always see Lisbon afresh. The Portuguese capital twinkles with exciting new openings – from boutique hotels and restaurants to roof terraces and bars, all with a pinch of historic soul and the wrappings of 21st-century cool. This is a place you sense, not see. Imagining that the medieval Castelo de São Jorge and the stately riverfront Praça do Comércio don't exist for a moment will open your eyes to its real wonder.

These streets are full of poetry, with light bouncing off the piercing blue Tagus River and azulejo tiles, intricately cobbled calçadas and creamy white Manueline facades carved during the age of great explorers. Go beyond the tourist trail and you'll soon find neighbourhoods full of life and laughter, fado and street art. It's in the back alleys, where that unexpected cafe, leafy plaza or sunset miradouro (viewpoint) awaits, that you'll fall in love with Lisbon.





The Monastery of Jeronimus is one of the most prominent landmarks of Lisbon (top and below right)



The Praco de Commercia





The Praca de Comercio



Interior of the Jeronimus monastery

Best time to visit Lisbon

Summers are crowded and hot, with temperatures shooting well above 30C, and Lisbon really has its party groove on now, with headliners like June's Festas de Santos Populares (Festivals of the Popular Saints) and big-name music and arts festivals like July's NOS Alive. The weather can still be warm in spring and autumn, with temperatures hovering between 20C and 25C. Calmer and cheaper, these are better seasons for exploring. In wetter, chillier winter, Lisbon is at its quietest.

Best things to do

Lisbon is a high-rise city – but not because of its skyscrapers. Straddling seven hills, the Portuguese capital requires a lot of puff, with never-ending cobbled stairways, streets sweeping dramatically down to the glinting Tagus River and eyrie-like miradouros with 360-degree views of the castle-crowned cityscape rippling away to the Atlantic. Elevador da Bica has been dubbed “the most photographed funicular in Lisbon” The city's vintage elevadores are a brilliant burst of the past and give you a head start to the heights. If you're going for the most famous one, Elevador de Santa Justa, get there nice and early as queues mount by midday. The neo-Gothic confection was designed by Raoul Mesnier du Ponsard (Gustave Eiffel's protégé). Elevador da Glória and Elevador da Bica also negotiate the hills. Competition for the best view is hot, but the pine-shaded, highest-of-the-high Miradouro Senhora do Monte wows with dress-circle views of the city, reaching from the castle across the river to Cristo Rei (Lisbon's very own Christ the Redeemer).



Arco da rua Augusta



Intersting Architecture of Lisbon

Get lost in Alfama and Graça

Slipping away from the crowds into one of Lisbon's oldest, highest neighbourhoods is a morning well spent. Begin in the medina-like Alfama, Lisbon's old Moorish quarter, where lanes stacked with houses in bright pastels and azulejos (decorative tiles) offer snapshots of daily life, kids playing, old folk gossiping, sardines sizzling on grills at one-pan taverns, melancholic fado (Portuguese folk music) wafting through windows. Launch your walk with a mood-lifting view over spires, domes and red rooftops at the Largo das Portas do Sol. As you stroll, keep an eye out for the black-and-white portraits on limestone of the neighbourhood's most charismatic elderly characters by British artist Camilla Watson, who has immortalised

Alfama's history in its walls. For more of a walk, continue into neighbouring Graça, full of artsy cafes and bars. Historic Renaissance, twin-spired Monastery of São Vicente de Fora, where the cloisters dance with baroque azulejos, and the gracefully domed, bone-white National Pantheon, with cenotaphs paying homage to great explorers like Vasco da Gama and Prince Henry the Navigator.

Scroll back to the Age of Discoveries in Belem

The lure of the sea is palpable in nautical-flavoured Belém, where the Tagus River broadens to embrace the Atlantic and gulls wheel on the salty breeze. During the Age of Discovery in the 15th and 16th centuries, this is where great navigators set sail for the new world aboard mighty caravels. In the early 16th century, King Manuel I had a blast spending his new world riches on Jerónimos Monastery and Torre de Belém. Portugal's finest examples of Manueline style, they are now a joint Unesco World Heritage site. If you want to visit the monastery, make sure you start queueing before it opens at 9.30am to dodge the biggest crowds. Built in 1501 to celebrate Vasco da Gama's discovery of a safe sea passage to India, its exquisite cloisters are a riot of stone, with twisting turrets, scalloped arches and rope-like columns carved from pale limestone. Otherwise, nip into the church of Santa Maria de Belém. Under columns that soar into a spider web of stone, the monks of the Order of Hieronymites once prayed for the king's soul and gave spiritual guidance to sailors.

The Sintra Pena Palace, located high above the city of Lisbon is one of the Must Dos when in Portugal



The attractive skyline of Lisbon seen from the sea



The historic Torre de Belém located in the middle of the sea is an iconic structure



One of the most interesting caves in the Algarve



The Algarve is one of the most visited areas of Portugal, with rugged cliffs, caves and other interesting land formations

Afterwards, wander along the river to the fortress-like Torre de Belém. Below the western tower, look out for the stone rhinoceros recalling the live one an Indian sultan gave to King Manuel I as a gift (he kept it as a pet). Or for a deeper dive into maritime history, visit the Navy Museum, which has an incredible stash of maps, model ships, cannon balls and shipwreck treasures catapulting you back in time.



Where to stay in Lisbon

At the budget end of the spectrum, Lisbon has a flurry of terrific hostels, many with a boutiquey feel and private rooms, making them just as appealing as hotels for solo travellers or small groups of friends. Take Lisbon Lounge Hostel in Baixa's heart, for instance, where you'll find bright, restful digs designed by local artists



The Lago de Fogo or the Lake of Fire in the Azores, is one of the many large, pretty lakes found in the country (above) and members of Davinder Singh's family in the Algarve region



ABOUT THE EDITOR

Abbas A. Tyabji is a Hyderabad, India, based photo journalist, who left Tata Motors, one of the largest auto makers in India after heading the Publications Division of the Company over a career spanning nearly 3 decades.

During his tenure he travelled all over India and to neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Mauritius and the Middle East on photo journalistic assignments. His articles, pictures and photo features appeared not only in the Company publications but in national and international magazines.



Abbas Tyabji receiving the President of India Award for Excellence in Designing and Printing from then President of India Dr. N. Sanjeeva Reddy

He was invited by the then People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (S Yemen) to photograph the natural and man made wonders of that ancient land and prepare publicity material for their govt. The effort was appreciated by Govt officials and even India's Ambassador to S Yemen wrote an appreciation letter to Tatas on his efforts.

He is the recipient of over 50 national and international awards including:

The President of India's Award for Excellence in Designing and Printing on TWO OCCASIONS

Best Feature Writer Award from the Association of Business Communicators of India 4 times

Best Photo Feature Award from the Association of Business Communicators of India 5 times

The internationally circulated magazine "Bus Ride" from the US found his pictures so exceptional that they selected 2 for the First Place Award in their 1989 Worldwide photo competition, the only time in their history that two pictures were given this honour.

Almost half a dozen of his pictures appeared in Japanese calendars and dozens have graced Indian calendars.

He has also published a book on Hyderabad, for which the text, photography and design was done by him.

For his photo journalistic achievements he has found mention in "Who's Who of India", and "Reference Asia".

He also operates guided, customised tours from Hyderabad and is listed in LONELY PLANET as a Tour Guide.

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