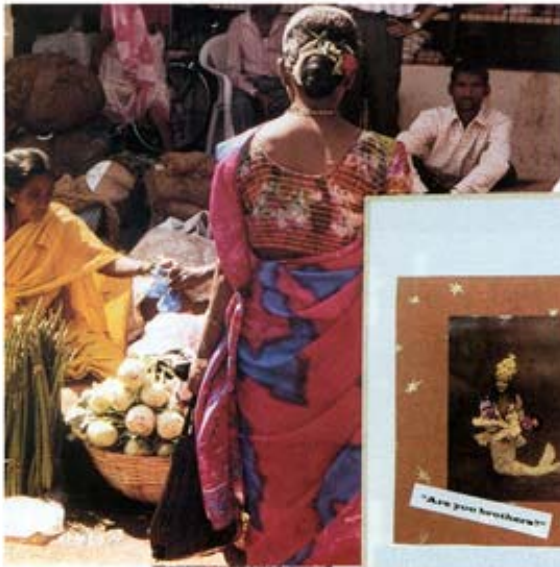
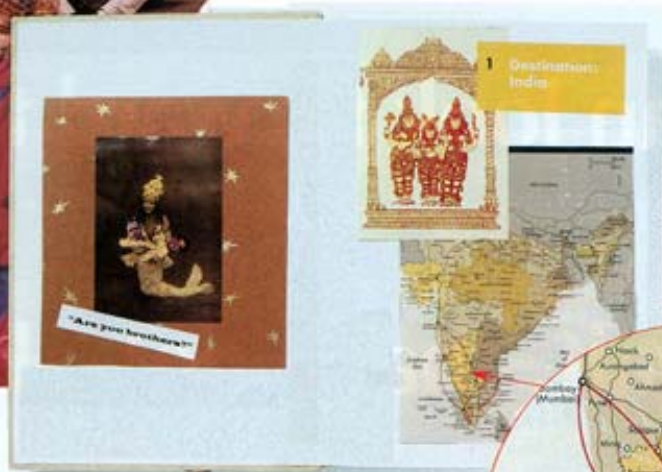


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Above: Market scene in Mapusa, Goa. Right: A temple gopuram in Madurai looms behind Carey Maloney and Hermes Mallea. Below: Maloney gets thwacked by the blessing elephant.



Scrapbook and map from Hermes Mallea and Carey Maloney's journey.



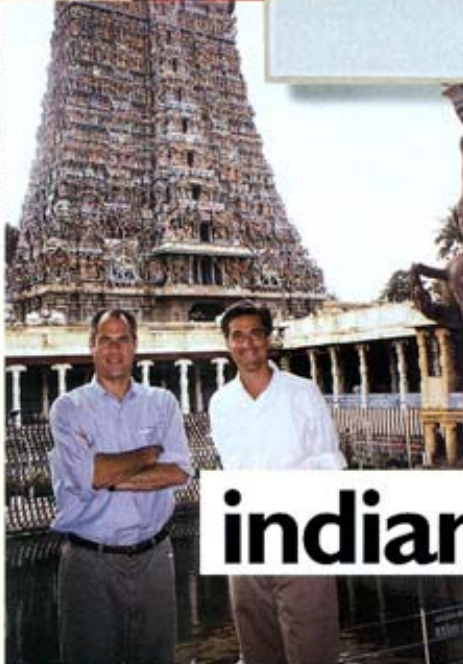
Two maverick explorers go deep south on the Subcontinent

indianCowboys

For several weeks last spring, my partner, Hermes Mallea, and I traveled to Southern India, from the hippie tourist mecca Goa, with its dazzling, unsung Indo-Portuguese architecture, to the multicultural stew of Cochin; from the colonial stronghold of Madras (now Chennai) to the polychromed temples of Madurai. So far, the South is not as heavily toured as Rajasthan and other northern Indian states, and while Europeans have long been exploring the region, Americans are rarely seen here. Go soon . . . >

text by CAREY MALONEY

photography by HERMES MALLEA



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Clockwise from above: A Hindu temple and neighboring synagogue in Cochin; the ballroom of the Braganza Palace in Chandor, Goa; beautiful sari fabrics on display at Ritu Nanda's shop Camelot, in Goa; Mallea in an auto-ricksha; terrace view at Cochin's Malabar House hotel.



GOA

Our first stop is Goa, a small, affluent state that was a Portuguese colony for 450 years. Palm trees, rice paddies, beaches, and white-washed Baroque churches make tourism big here—and draw all the wrong people. Cheap holidaymakers from Europe, kids looking to do drugs and rave, and lots of Indians, from Bombay and beyond. For them, the beaches are the lure, not the fantastic Indo-Portuguese architecture.

Old Goa—larger in population during the 16th century than either London or Paris—was basically abandoned (rotten climate, enemy attacks, cholera epidemics) by the 19th century. Hugely rich from the spice trade, the city was renowned for its splendor and “dissolute” society. Now the ruins tower over the jungle, along with a few ▷

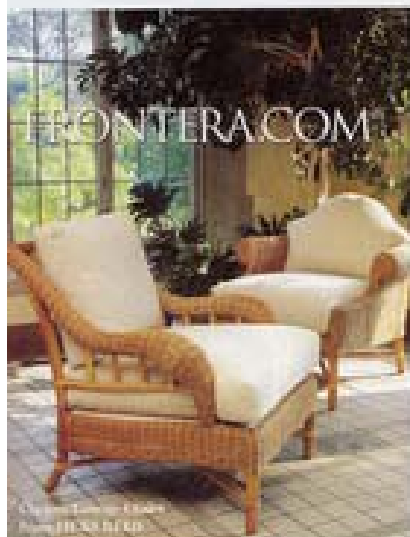
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Clockwise from top left: The Indo-Portuguese Our Lady of Bethlehem Church in Chandor, Goa, dates from the 1640s; Giggles bookshop in Chennai; a room at Cochin's Malabar House; a door at the mid-18th-century Santana da Silva Palace in Margao, Goa; Maloney buys a bronze storage jar in Cochin; one-stop shopping at Craftex.

active churches (Bom Jesus has a reliquary donated by a Tuscan duke to house the wizened body of St. Francis Xavier). Our favorite church is St. Anne's, a 17th-century Baroque masterpiece that stands alone, surrounded by rice paddies (it's a World Monument Endangered Site). Also worthwhile are the Rachol Seminary and its Gulbenkian-funded museum.

As for private residences, many land-owning Brahmins, the highest Hindu caste, converted to Catholicism and built wonderful townhouses and country estates to compete with the Portuguese nobility. (Anyone who has been to Portugal and visited the Queluz Palace can imagine the volatile results such a rivalry would produce.) Goan homes are replete >



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with locally made furniture based on models from Lisbon, Chinese porcelain, French crystal chandeliers, carved rosewood panels, walls painted to imitate damask, scads of portraits, interior patios and courtyards hung with plants and birdcages, and vast verandas. Only one, the Braganza Palace, is officially open to the public, but our travel planner, Cox & Kings, arranged for us to see others, still lived in and loved by original family members, often ladies of a certain age who maintain them (and some are huge, often 50-plus rooms) with the help of one young maid. My personal fave is Doña Rosa Costa Dias, who runs a pale blue-green palace with Baccarat chandeliers and Gothic arches. The beds are Aesthetic Movement with inlaid mirror; the kitchen sports an open fire pit. Pretty great.

COCHIN, KERALA

The state of Kerala is known as "the land of green magic," and indeed, to describe it as "verdant" would be putting it mildly. This is the Spice Coast of Malabar, a trading center where the Phoenicians, Chinese, Arabs, and, much later, Portuguese, Dutch, and British left their mark during past millennia. Kerala is proudly tolerant—both Jews and Christians started settling here around the time of St. Thomas the Apostle, in 52 A.D.—and also boasts the highest literacy and lowest infant-mortality rates in India, thanks to a series of enlightened, benevolent maharajas.

We are staying at the Malabar House, a restored compound that's very "designed" and handsome, with both colonial and Indian antiques, smart paint colors, handwoven textiles, and little garden patios and terraces off the rooms. It's located in Fort Cochin, the oldest section of town, which is currently enjoying a revival. Both our friend David Petrovsky, a Hudson, New York, antiques dealer, and Joerg Drechsel, the hotel's owner, have recommended a store called Craftex, plus some others, in a two-block shopping area of Jew Town, so while HM lunches with a local FFC (First Family of Cochin), I hop in a taxi and lurch in the rather extreme heat to the bustling antiques market.

There are tons (literally) of great mer-

chandise in the shops, but I am always daunted by the prospect of bargaining. I make a beeline for Craftex and meet the proprietor, Ramesh, who keeps his stock in three side-by-side two-story buildings. Within 20 minutes Ramesh and I are cookin', and I am committed to a shipping container's worth of stuff. FYI: Once you commit to a container, you are free. Huge bronze cooking pots and wooden rice bowls, a seven-foot-tall tiered granite oil lamp, plus simpler finds like tin boxes painted to look like luggage, in blue or red or green (I took three in each color, for \$11 total); not to mention the clothes you've decided are superfluous or the books you've read or decided not to read. All will get shipped back home.

The next morning I return to Craftex with HM in tow. Now Ramesh has two besotted New Yorkers on his hands. In my buying frenzy, I bash my forehead against a five-foot-high mahogany door frame—now I know why they call it a "hardwood." When HM's face comes back into focus, I realize I'm covered in blood. Words like "cholera" and "typhoid" flood my mind. HM madly swipes away at me with Lysol hand cleaner (always in the knapsack—add it to your shopping list!) while Ramesh looks on, his face stricken.

No one ever said shopping was easy.

CHENNAI (FORMERLY MADRAS), TAMIL NADU

For the first time during our trip we are in a huge, teeming Indian city, and we love it. We've obviously been in the sticks for too long.

Madrass was the headquarters of the British East India Company, and it's easy to see how the Empire was established here. The scale and quality of the colonial architecture is staggering. Four immense columns would suffice on St. George's Cathedral, but 30 were used (it also wins the Best Cemetery Award). Equally incredible are the Regency-period Old Government House and banqueting hall, St. Andrew's Kirk (Best Dome Award), and St. Mary's Church, the oldest Anglican church in Asia, built in 1673 and chock-full of memorial plaques and statues. The 1922 railroad station is a prime example of Indo-Saracenic architecture, and we are also ▶



A granite temple lamp and other M (Group) loot at Craftex in Cochin.

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lucky enough to snag an invitation to check out Chettinad House, a 1929 Beaux-Arts palace overflowing with racing trophies and family portraits. A staff of 100 keeps it shining; even the resident golden retriever has a bindi on its forehead.

An easy side trip to the coast is Mamallapuram, a village noted for its stone carving, particularly the unbelievable boulders in the shape of "model" temples, life-size elephants, and what must be the world's largest bas-relief, all carved around the 7th century. On the way back we stop at the DakshinaChitra, an educational park featuring reconstructed buildings and houses from Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

We can't miss going to the movies now that we're in India. Chennai produces more of them—some say about 900 a year—than any other city in the world, although Bombay,

a.k.a. "Bollywood," gets all the attention. Indians love movies, but they approach them conservatively, to say the least. Holding hands onscreen, maybe, but no kissing. Just lots of near misses and crashing waves. Controversial director Deepa Mehta has been trying to film *Water*, but was forced to close down her production. Hindu widows driven to prostitution just doesn't fly here.

MADURAI, TAMIL NADU

Rising above the ancient temple city of Madurai, a center of Hindu civilization since the 6th century B.C., are four 12-story-high *gopurams*, hulking towers that are actually gates to the Meenakshi Amman Temple complex, one of the largest and oldest in India (15,000 people visit daily). The monoliths are solid masses of bright polychrome gods and demons; it is said that there are more than 30 million figures in the complex.

This is not a place devoted to passive worship—this temple is hummin'. Pilgrims, priests, hawkers, beggars, acolytes, tourists—people coming and going, eating, bathing, shopping for souvenirs. And worshiping. The main shrines to the fish-eyed (and three-breasted) goddess Meenakshi and her husband, Sundareswar, are closed to non-Hindus. Every night, Meenakshi is taken to Sundareswar's bedchamber: the fertility cult believes that nightly lovemaking ensures his fidelity. Other gods include fat Ganesh, the elephant god of prosperity, and Hanuman, the monkey god. Our favorite temple attraction, though, is the blessing elephant, which thwacks you on the head when you give it a coin. We got rid of lots of change. *

(For details, see page 94)



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THE DETAILS

The country code for India is 91.

- **Books:** Bring them only for the plane ride over. India is filled with terrific bookstores, such as Idiom in Cochin and Giggles in Chennai.
- **Car and driver:** The only way to get around in India. We went for top-of-the-line, paying about \$50 a day for a "grand" car with a well-turned-out driver. Tip generously: drivers sit in the heat all day long; what's another \$15 or \$20?
- **Clothing:** India is not St. Barth. Bright tropical colors and prints are best left to the locals, whereas khakis and other dingy colors are appropriate for tourists. Practically every hotel we stayed at had its fashion victim—a "Bombay blond" wearing a sari, a photo-shoot stylist sheathed in a *lungi* (a wrap skirt favored by Indian men). Indians don't wear shorts, ever. So you shouldn't. Take one pair; two max. As for shoes, while I could have exchanged my blue-and-white sneakers for hash in Goa, sturdy Gucci and Brooks Brothers lug-sole loafers were better suited to the trip. Take plenty of new, intact socks as well—Hindu temples require shoeless feet.
- **Food:** The best in India is found in hotels. Sad—and boring—but true.

In Goa, the Nilaya Hermitage hotel's dining room, on a terrace with a lovely vista, has very good food. Le Restaurant Français operates on a theme, this year's being Belle Époque Parisian bordello, with chandeliers and curtains hanging from a canopy of trees. Coming in 2001: "Circus."

In Chennai, the Chola Sheraton's Peshawri serves delicious grilled meats from Northern India, which we were craving after so much time on the vegan circuit.

- **Hotels:** In Goa, the Nilaya Hermitage (832-27 67 93) is situated on a hill above the coast, with a beautiful pool carved out of the rock. Designed to the nines—lots of whimsical color, gold-painted domes, etc. Hillside rooms 1 through 4 are the best. In Cochin, we were thrilled with the stylish Malabar House (484-22 11 99) and can also recommend the Brunton Boatyard (484-22 14 61), which overlooks the scenic, busy harbor.

In Chennai, we had a columned room with a view of the pool at the Taj Connamara (44-852-0123 or 800-448-8355), but the place was under renovation. The Chola Sheraton (44-828-0101 or 800-325-3535) is very snappy and luxe, and the Taj Coromandel (44-827-2827 or 800-223-6800) even has a patisserie in its shopping arcade. Who needs a minibar?

In Madurai, the Taj Garden Retreat (452-60 10 20 or 800-448-8355) boasts sweeping views of the valley and the temple *gopurams* that dominate the "skyline." Stay in the oldest part of the 19th-century house—the rooms open onto large verandas.

- **Inter-India travel:** Domestic flights between large cities are a must. Driving can be a nightmare.
- **Required reading:** *The Age of Kali*, by William Dalrymple (Flamingo, 1999); *India Style*, by Monisha Bharadwaj (Soma Books, 1998); *No Full Stops in India*, by Mark Tully (Penguin, 1991); *Third Class Ticket*, by Heather Wood (Penguin, 1984).
- **Shipping:** A perfect solution for getting all the stuff you acquire home is sending everything by container. Ours was organized by Craftex, in Cochin, where we literally did one-stop shopping.
- **Shopping:** Buying is our talent, not bargaining. If you like something and want it, who cares if the price is a little inflated? But Indians haggle, so when in Rome.... (Keep in mind that "antiques" can't be exported from India, although the difference between "antique" and "old-looking" is often negligible.) Our favorite decor shop in India was Ritu Nanda's Camelot, on the banks of the Mandovi River in Goa. Also, Goa's "hippie" market at Anjuna (Wednesdays) and locals' market at Mapusa (Fridays) are musts.
- **Travel planners:** Essential for a complicated trip like ours. We used Cox & Kings (in the States, call 800-999-1758).

—C.M.