

## **Dowling Club Overseas Trip – Kerala 2020**

Faraz Ali

My first Dowling trip was decorated with meeting incredibly inspiring colleagues, attending high quality educational meetings and enjoying the humbling Keralan hospitality.

As a trainee I had the chance to learn from local and international colleagues in both formal and informal settings, which is indeed a rare pleasure. Our first stop at the Malabar Bonhomie covered range of fantastic sessions including the management of alopecia areata, frontal fibrosing alopecia, psycho-dermatology and genital dermatoses. In particular, the potential role of probiotics and medical honey in the treatment of alopecia was fascinating. I also experienced my first traditional Keralan lunch called ‘Sadya’ which is served on a banana leaf. The various dishes were simply exquisite combining delectable flavours that are truly a once in a lifetime experience! With the average meal amounting to about 2000 calories each, it is safe to say the rest of the trip contributed to significant weight gain. Our stay at Malabar concluded with a lovely dinner gala and dance. Some of our senior colleagues definitely know how to shake a leg to Bollywood tunes!

Our next base was in the Taj Bekal, quite possibly one of the most idyllic and beautiful locations in Kerala. It proved to be a wonderful sanctuary to retreat to at the end of busy clinical days. The highlight for me was the Center of Lymphoedema and Filariasis in Kasaragod, which was the next conference venue. Their holistic approach towards management by combining traditional and aryuvedic medicine was awe-inspiring with patients often travelling days from remote locations to seek treatment. One of the sessions even provided us with a calorific breakdown of the traditional Keralan lunch! The clinical sessions were intriguing and lead to several engaging academic discussions around difficult cases. The presence of a multidisciplinary team and the invaluable contributions of local leads as well as international experts such as Professor Terence Ryan, a mentor for the center, was truly an exceptional opportunity to be a part of. One of the more memorable sessions was an informative breakdown of the educational and interventional strategies the Indian government employs to combat filariasis in endemic areas. There is still a lot of work to be done to eradicate this issue nationally and it is evident that appropriate dissemination of educational material is key. Though not entirely applicable in the UK, the learning points are transferrable particularly in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic. I had the pleasure of presenting on scar sarcoidosis to the esteemed colleagues at this center.

The final stint was spent in the port city of Cochin where we had a wonderful Dowling Club lunch on the Keralan backwaters with truly breath-taking views. We visited the local dermatologists at a tertiary centre and had the opportunity to examine patients with rarer clinical presentations such as cutaneous tuberculosis, leprosy and sporotrichosis.

The trip ended with a formal dinner at a boatyard, concluding the trip of a lifetime. After nine days of traversing through the lush landscape of Kerala, one comes to realise why it truly deserves the title of ‘God’s own country’.