



ACCESS IS

a **state** of **mind**

In July 2013, with his mantra 'access is a state of mind' ringing in his ears, Dave Shraga set off to Anjuna, a small village in Goa, India, to undertake research for his university studies, along with Origin PA, Nic Moran and some big concerns about travelling in the rainy season (monsoon!).

Dave explains, "The plan was to be in Goa for 10 weeks, working with Video Volunteers – a community media NGO which facilitates local community media projects. For the trip I needed a PA who was easy to get on with and open-minded. With his relaxed manner, mutual compatibility and travel experience, Nic was ideal! For this demanding trip, it also helped that Nic is 6ft 4in and strong!"

Precision planning

Nic says, "Dave and I share a passion for travel and pushing personal boundaries and we got on well together when I worked as his regular PA. When Dave told me about his wish to do his research in India and his need for a PA to travel with him, it seemed a great thing to do. Our pre-planning was critical as we tried to devise ways round potential problems, but it was the challenge of managing the day-to-day personal care issues that as a PA I found most worrying."

Accessibility

Dave admits that even he was a little troubled by some of the complexities of travel and disability access in India that resulted in some pretty rough transfers. The one in the photo (below) of him



being carried down the stairs in the aeroplane wheelchair was a dream compared to the one onto the shuttle bus at Mumbai airport involving a sling (think sheet with four handles) and Nic and three other guys doing some tricky lifting.

"Everywhere we went people couldn't do enough to help. At Video Volunteers they built three ramps so I could get into the building even though at 45° these could be a little tricky to negotiate, particularly in the rain! But, I've a philosophy that disabled people can do the most amazing things if they really want to, but sometimes you have to be willing to accept help."

Daily routine

Nic explains, "It took us a couple of days to sort out new morning and evening routines without the usual home facilities but this soon became easier. Things like not having a height-adjustable bed just made some tasks more difficult than normal. We also had at least five transfers to and from the car each day. In the first few days it rained so much that it was hard to keep Dave dry."

Dave was conscious that he didn't want Nic to get over tired on this arduous trip, so together they worked

out a routine that, with help from office colleagues, meant they had time away from each other during the day and Nic had time off.

At the office from 9.30am until 7pm most days, Dave also travelled to meet people involved with community projects a couple of times a week. Unfortunately, it was after an extended trip to meet people living in a protected conservation park that Dave became ill and had to be treated in hospital for septicaemia.

“My strenuous schedule, plus the difficulties of controlling my temperature in 34° heat, pushed my body to the limits. My immune system was low and I got an infection in my ankle, resulting in bad spasms, headache and eventually a leg swollen from ankle to groin which ultimately required surgery. I was totally confident in the exceptional medical care I received, which included the very latest in wound technology and I was back at work in 10 days,” says Dave.

Dave was treated well in the Vision Hospital and, although the nursing staff were kind, caring and willing to help him, the language barrier made it very difficult for them to assist. Dave had to rely on PA Nic and a friend, Sophia, coming to the hospital every day to provide his personal care.

Be inspired

Nic sums up the trip, “This was my first trip to India and it was fascinating. I was fortunate to get a glimpse of how different people react and cope with disability. I met many delightful people, ate amazing food and have seen some awesome scenery. But, above all, I have enjoyed the day-to-day challenges that



have given me greater confidence in my role as a PA. I feel happy and privileged that I was able to help Dave achieve something he wanted to do.”

Undaunted by being unwell, Dave says, “To make a trip like this you have to believe you can do it. Prepare yourself, be confident in and trust your PA, understand the challenge and if there is a problem DON'T PANIC! Just make sure you have good healthcare and insurance in case you need it.”

Holiday facts

Dave travelled with Jet Airways. He stayed in Renes Guest House in Anjuna which was recommended by a friend. It was not specifically designed for wheelchair access but was ‘mostly’ accessible. Dave suggests SCI travellers book a couple of nights in an accessible room in an expensive hotel in Goa to

start with and use that as a stepping stone to find better accommodation in a better location at a better price. This usually involves going door-to-door and asking cab drivers. Cab drivers are a great source of information and as car hire would be far too dangerous to consider in India, travellers should find a good cab driver and stick with him. Loyalty pays!

Before he left Dave asked potential hotels, guest houses and landlords to email photos of bathrooms, bedrooms, doorways and steps, so he could make his own judgements about accommodation. Dave also recommends making sure your wheelchair is in top condition for the challenging terrain you will encounter and take plenty of spare parts with you; double up on your medication and continence supplies and remember that as a Westerner in India you are likely to be an economic target.

If you are planning a trip anywhere, from Australia to Zanzibar and you need a PA to accompany you, get in touch with Origin who can offer a great level of flexibility in providing PA services. Tel: 01524 34100 www.origincare.com



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