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News

Trail Runner Tina Lewis Arrested in India for Traveling With Satellite GPS Device

Carrying a satellite GPS device in India got this trail runner arrested. Here's what we can learn from this.

By **Justin Mock** on December 16, 2024 | 12 Comments

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"Detained at [a] police station most of yesterday til 2 AM. Out on bail (!!!!)," **Tina Lewis** messaged to me on December 6, 2024. "I'm too f\$%&ing tired to explain right now," she said, but she kept going.

I didn't know what she was accused of and was a little worried. She confirmed that she was okay.

"This is surreal," the messages and anger kept coming, that day and the next several.



In early December 2024, trail runner Tina Lewis was arrested in Goa, India, for carrying a satellite GPS device without permission. Here, she's pictured earlier in her visit to India at the Taj Mahal. All photos courtesy of Tina Lewis.

It took six days for Lewis to get her passport back. Her violation? Possessing a satellite GPS device without permission from Indian authorities.

A Canadian citizen, Lewis, aged 51, lives in Colorado and was the 2012 **Leadville 100 Mile** winner. An experienced adventurer, she'd been traveling alone through India for two months, and documenting her trip on social media.

At first she visited the Taj Mahal, proclaiming it with "the moment I've dreamed of for years! Another 7 Wonders of the World added to my list!" She then got off the beaten path and into the mountains of Northern India and later posts were positive too. "Feeling like a princess at the opulent City Palace, Jaipur, Rajasthan," she smiled on one post.

Then she went to Goa, a coastal state in Western India. Everything was great there too. She enjoyed the beaches, reggae vibes, and Portuguese influences. But while traveling between the cities of Goa and Kochi, she was detained at Goa Dabolim International Airport.

Lewis had a Garmin inReach Mini in her carry-on baggage.

The incident made the local news.

And a post on the local news channel's social media received over 2,000 likes. The comments were largely in support of Lewis.

Garmin describes its product as "your go-to connection for maintaining off-the-grid contact. It's our palm-sized satellite communicator for adventures where size and weight matter. Need assistance? Send interactive SOS alerts anytime, globally. No matter where you are, two-way messaging lets you connect to the ones who matter."

Lewis explained, "I had the Garmin for camping and trekking solo. And to use when no reception to check in with family to let them know I'm safe. As a solo female traveler, I think it's wise."

But the safety device landed Lewis in trouble. Satellite phones are illegal in India, banned as part of the Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1933, and the Garmin inReach Mini and other similar devices are commonly mistaken for satellite phones.

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Tina Lewis said her a

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other countries too, like China, Cuba, and North Korea. Iridium

satellite phones in particular are not permitted in India and can land

unwitting travelers in trouble.

Lewis isn't the only one to be unaware of the law. Arrests appear to

be a near-daily occurrence. A December 9, 2024 article shared that a

Czech national was arrested at an airport for carrying a Garmin

Edge 540 GPS. And on December 10, 2024, it was an American

citizen with an actual satellite phone. Since Lewis, it was reported

that several hikers have been arrested for carrying similar devices.

Lewis didn't involve the Canadian embassy, for fear that it would

slow the process, and she didn't actually go to jail. She benefited

from a local connection that rushed a lawyer to her aid, in addition

to the police-appointed lawyer.

"I was detained at the police station, being questioned and literally

about to go the hospital for a medical exam before jail when my

friend's lawyer showed up," she explained. "But I spent several full

days in court."

She says she spent thousands in court fines and lawyer fees, and of

course forfeited the Garmin device.

Having just gotten back her passport, Lewis reflected, "I've taken a

few days to process and I don't want this ruining my trip." But the

six-day event left Lewis frightened, discouraged, and feeling

violated. It's a bad spot in an otherwise great trip and a genuine

appreciation for India.

"This outdated law needs to be challenged at [a] higher court so

other travelers do not experience what I, and others, have," Lewis

shared on social media.

This situation also begs the question on what will happen as more

smartphones have satellite technology incorporated in them,

making it even more ubiquitous among locals and travelers.

In the meantime, perhaps an upside to Lewis's situation can be

education for those of us who are taking our running adventures to

new-to-us locations where the use of advanced communication

tools like these are not yet legal. The best current advice is to check

your home government's website for information and advisories on

traveling to your specific destination.

We're wishing Lewis safe travels ahead.

Tina Lewis says she spent days in court and paid thousands in fines and lawyer fees following her arrest in Goa, India, in December 2024.

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Justin Mock is the This Week In Running columnist for iRunFar. He's been writing about running for 10 years. Justin has run as fast as 2:29 for a road marathon, finished as high as fourth in the Pikes Peak Marathon, and won several Colorado burro races. He's now adventuring between the American West and Central Europe.

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G

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Name

Newest Oldest**Chris Lee**

a year ago

Yikes! Truly astounding that law exists from 1933! Good to know...

Reply [↗](#)

J

Jesse Riley

a year ago

India has become like china/north korea/cuba in lots of other ways recently, too.

Reply [↗](#)

P

Pete

a year ago

Don't all iPhones 14 and newer have two-way satellite communications capability, for emergencies? According to their law, Indian jails should be full now with foreign travelers, if this is the case. This happened in Goa, of all places which I used to think was very friendly and accommodating to tourists but not any more. The federal Indian government should step in, compensate for all legal costs and expenses associated with TL's forced extended stay, and issue an apology,

Reply [↗](#)**Meghan Hicks** Mod [→](#) Pete

a year ago

Pete, you make a critical point about smartphones beginning to incorporate more satellite tech in them. A sentence about this was actually in a draft version of this article and it somehow got lost. We've added it back in. Thanks for noting!

Reply [↗](#)

M

MP [→](#) Pete

a year ago

At the moment i believe the texting function for iPhone only applies to US and Canada. (a few european countries allow emergency SOS) I travelled thru a couple of countries in Asia recently that have the satellite device ban and the text nor the SOS function was available on my Iphone 15.

Reply [↗](#)**Ellie J G**

a year ago

Wow, I would have had no idea. Hope you are doing ok, Tina - I've been enjoying your IG posts for the past few months which show your evident love for India. I hope you're not to shaken and can enjoy the rest of your travels x

Reply [↗](#)

P

Phil

a year ago

In the meantime, perhaps an upside to Lewis's situation can be education for those of us who are taking our running adventures to new-to-us locations where the use of advanced communication tools like these are not yet legal.

C'mon this is sloppy reporting at its best, the inReach website lists all the countries where Garmin believes there are restrictions, and when you apply for a Visa for India it clearly mentions the ban on satellite phones, and specifically mentions the Iridium network.

Reply [↗](#)

M

Markus [→](#) Phil

a year ago

The list is here:
<https://support.garmin.com/en-US/?faq=Dq3CEPZjfRAhtToGD4Yrz9>

Reply [↗](#)

M

Markus

a year ago

I don't understand that she didn't contact her embassy. This was just a way to try to get some bribes from a foreigner.

Reply [↗](#)

R

Rod

a year ago

If she is travelling on a canadian passport she may have been targeted because canada and india are in a diplomatic bissing



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