

Tour de India A Bohemian Story

by Monoj Mon Kalita

1st September, 2011, 11:50 am: the exact time when my Thai Airways Flight, TG-634 had landed at Taoyuan Airport and a few minutes later, after passing through the immigration check, I put my first step on the soil of this country of fast growing yet very gracious and intelligent civilization. During my entire journey, I was imagining how beautiful Taiwan will be! And I was not disappointed, I was enthralled by the natural beauty and the development of Taiwan. Now, I feel a special kind of bonding in between me and Taiwan.



black tea and one horned Rhino. I was born and raised in Assam, an Indian state in the North-Eastern (NE) region comprises of the 'Seven Sister States' namely Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura plus the Himalayan state of Sikkim. Geographically the seven sister states are connected to the rest of India via a strip of land in West Bengal called the Siliguri Corridor or "Chicken's Neck".

I am an Indian by birth. My journey from India to Taiwan was originated from Assam which is most popular in India or worldwide for its

● My family members enjoying amidst tea gardens in Assam. (Photo Credit: Jitu Kalita)





• Another beautiful landscape at Yazali, Lower Subansiri district, Arunachal Pradesh. (Photo Credit: Arpan Kalita)



• Beautiful landscape at Ziro, Lower Subansiri district, Arunachal Pradesh. (Photo Credit: Arpan Kalita)



• The beautiful Dzukou Valley, Kohima district, Nagaland. (Photo Credit: Arpan Kalita)

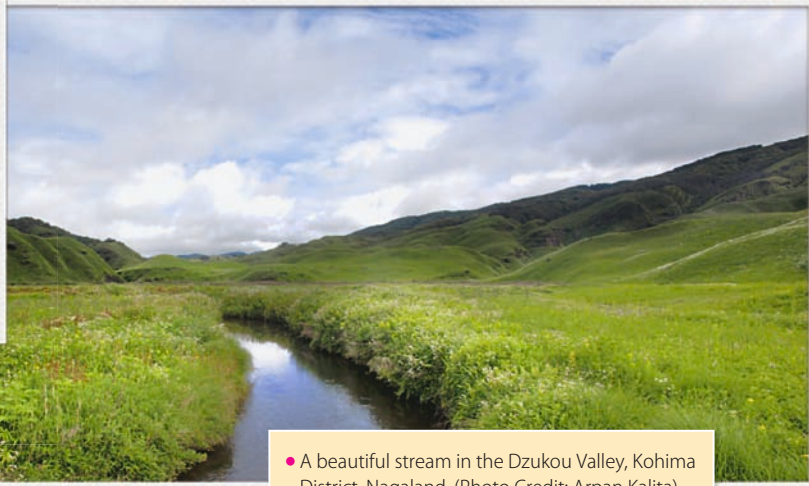
Besides tea, Assam is contributing to the growth of the Indian economy by its enormous amount of petroleum and silk. It is famous among backpackers for the wildlife; yearly Assam receives several thousands of travelers, including Indian Citizens from other states and foreign nationals. Dispur is the capital of Assam, a locality of Guwahati City.

The Brahmaputra River is the major river in Assam and it almost equally divides Assam in two parts. It is a trans-boundary river connecting China, India and Bangladesh and is originated in the glacier located on the northern side of the Himalayas in Burang County of Tibet. In Assam, it is an important river for irrigation and transportation. River-based

tourism is a major part now in Indian economy. Towards the eastern part of Assam, or commonly known as Upper-Assam, there is a beautiful place named Majuli, which is almost entirely surrounded by river Brahmaputra. It is a hotspot for flora and fauna, harboring many rare and endangered avifauna species including migratory birds that arrive in the winter season, such as Pelican, Siberian Crane and Whistling Teal. It is accessible by ferries from the city of Jorhat and is predominantly inhabited by different tribes such as the Misings, the Sonowal Kacharis, and the Deoris. It has been the hub of Assamese neo-Vaishnavite culture initiated around the 15th century by the revered Assamese saint Srimanta Sankardeva and his disciple



• The beautiful Naga girls in Nagaland in their ethnic attire. (Photo Credit: Dipankar Bordoloi)



• A beautiful stream in the Dzukou Valley, Kohima District, Nagaland. (Photo Credit: Arpan Kalita)

Madhavdeva. They built the monasteries which are called as the 'Satras' and it is still representing the glorious Assamese culture. The mask making art there in Majuli is also worthwhile to mention.

Jadav Molai Payeng is a famous environmental activist in Assam who single-handedly planted and tended trees for more than 30 years on a barren sandbar of the river Brahmaputra turning it into a forest reserve which is now named after him as 'Molai Forest'. This forest is located near Kokilamukh of Jorhat City. Molai Forest now houses Bengal tigers, Indian Rhinoceros, more than 100 deer and rabbit along with apes and several varieties of birds, including a large number of vultures. A herd of elephants is also a regular sight every year. To

recognize his dedication and hard work towards the environmental conservation, Indian government has honored him with Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian award in India. He has been featured in many national and international media platforms till date. Few documentaries are also made starring him; namely 'The Molai Forest (2012)' by Jitu Kalita, 'Foresting life (2013)' by Aarti Shrivastava and 'Forrest Man (2013)' by Douglas McMaster. The latter was screened in a number of film festivals and was awarded the Best Documentary prize at the Emerging Filmmaker Showcase in the American Pavilion at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival.

From Guwahati if you travel towards Upper-Assam, you can enjoy the beauty of Kaziranga National Park



• The former wettest place on Earth with an average yearly rainfall of 467.4 inch, Cherrapunji, Meghalaya. (Photo Credit: Dipankar Bordoloi)

and hundreds of beautiful Tea gardens alongside the national highway. Kaziranga National Park has been recognized by UNESCO as 'World Heritage Site'. Fortunate one may witness wild animal such as deer, tigers crossing the national highway. Rhinos are very common animal to be seen from the national highway grazing in the grasslands of Kaziranga. There is a very well maintained transportation system to enter into the wildlife park. You can rent 'cars without hood' and you will be provided with an armed wildlife security guard. If there is a group of cars, then the leading car will get the security. The attack of wild animals on the tourist is very rare to occur; however the drivers are really skilled to drive through the jungles during an emergency. If you do not want to agitate the wild animals with the car noise, you can hire domestic elephants along with 'mahout'. Riding an elephant you can go deeper into the jungle and can watch wild animals from very close.

Likewise Kaziranga, there are Dibru-Saikhowa National Park in Upper-Assam, Nameri National Park and Orang National in Middle-Assam and Manas National Park in Lower-Assam. There is a list of forest reserves to be named in Assam, such as Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary in the Morigaon district of Assam.

The winter season and the early spring season are the best time to travel in NE states for its climate.

Tawang district in Arunachal Pradesh is mostly popular among tourist for its monastery and the snow covered mountains and lakes during winter. There is a narrow pass in the mountainous regions in Tawang district named Sela Pass. It is at an elevation of 13700 ft. above sea level.

There is a legend about rifleman Jaswant Singh Rawat of the 4th Battalion of Garhwal Rifles Infantry Regiment, who fought a lone battle against the invading Chinese Army during the 1962 war at Jaswantgarh (later named after him) located few kilometers away from the Sela Pass. He fought his last battle for 72 hours all alone before succumbing to an enemy bullet during that bloody winter war. It is believed that his spirit still protects this place. The temple-like Jaswantgarh memorial has a garlanded bronze bust of Jaswant Singh, a portrait of the war hero and his belongings, including the Army uniform, cap, watch and belt. The regiment keeps at least half a dozen personnel there to take care of the war hero as if he were alive. He is served bed tea at 4:30 am, breakfast at 9 am and dinner at 7 pm. Five army soldiers are appointed at his service round the clock. Another tale represents the courage of a tribal woman who helped Jaswant Singh by bringing him supplies and used to tend his wounds, and she killed herself in an act of loyalty when the war hero was slain. The narrow pass and the lake are named after that woman in honor of her courage and patriotism.

For backpackers early spring is the best time to visit Tawang. Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur etc. are famous for their food and natural beauty.

Every state in India has their own culture and languages, but still all live happily under the same roof and this makes India as one of the most unique countries in the world. According to the most recent census of 2001, there are 1365 rationalised mother-tongues, 234 identifiable mother-tongues and 122 major languages. Of these, 29 languages have more than a million native speakers, 60 have more than 100,000 and 122 have more than 10,000 native speakers.

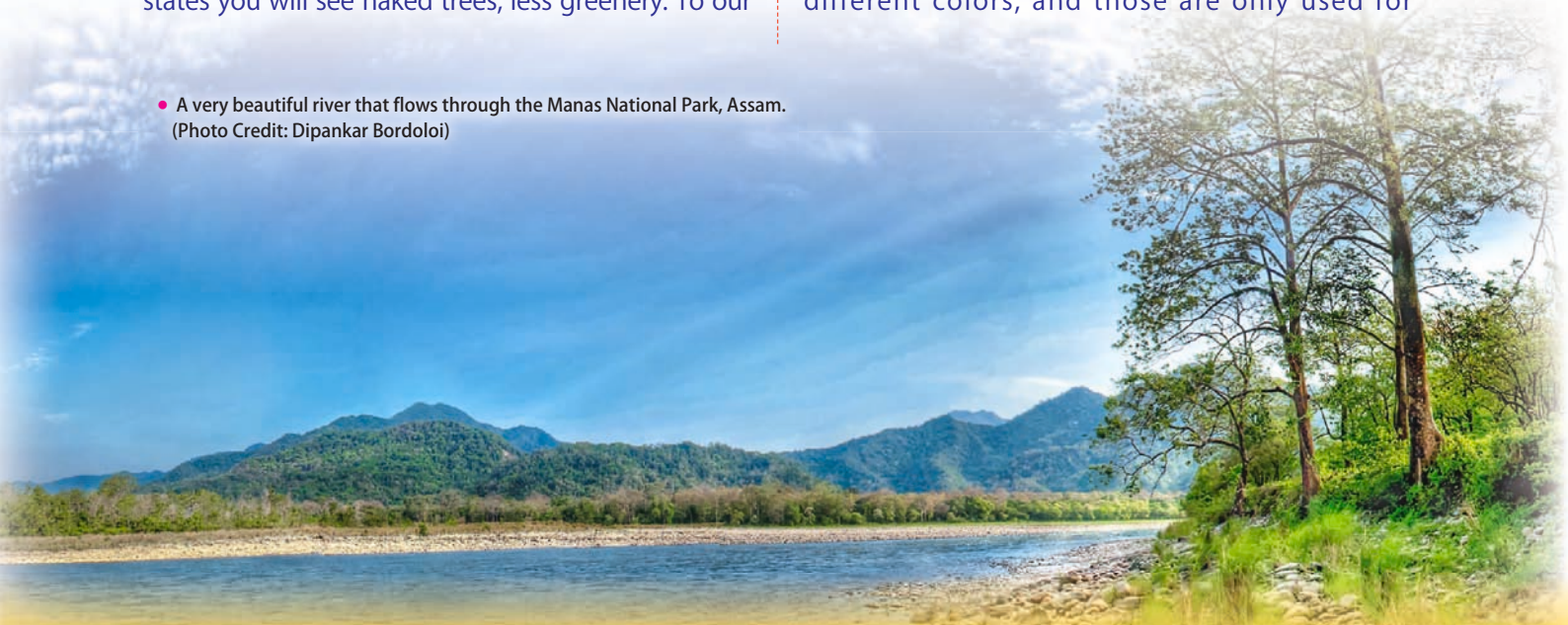
As India has a rich agricultural habit since ancient time, we celebrate the New Year during the month of April as it is the spring time. Assam and Assamese people get a new life during the spring from the very dry late winter season. Normally, it does not rain during the winter season in most part of India and that is why towards the end of the season it becomes very dry. If you visit India during that time, then in most of the states you will see naked trees, less greenery. To our

rescue from the dry and windy season, the rain comes usually at the end of March or beginning of April and it will bring new leaves on the trees.

The New Year in Assam is celebrated as 'Bohag Bihu'. The first day of Bihu is celebrated as 'Goru Bihu' to honor the cows. It is mainly because, since past, cows and cow dung are being used in agriculture and on that special day of Bihu, we want to show our respect towards them for their contribution. There are few similarities between 'Bohag Bihu' and 'Chinese New Year'; on the second day of Bihu there is family reunion tradition and the younger family members receives blessings and 'Gamosa' as a gift from the elderly family members. Gamosa is an article of great significance for the people of Assam. Mostly it is a white rectangular piece of cloth with primarily a red border on the two parallel longer sides and red woven motifs on the two parallel shorter sides.

Although red on white is mostly popular among Assamese people, there are other Gamosa with different colors; and those are only used for

- A very beautiful river that flows through the Manas National Park, Assam. (Photo Credit: Dipankar Bordoloi)



daily purpose, during a shower or to wear etc. Traditionally, girl prepares Gamosa to gift their loved one and in return the boy gives 'Kopou Phool' (scientific name *Rhynchosyilis retusa*), also known as Foxtail Orchid to the girl as a symbol of his love. Later the couples gather in the open field near the big trees to practice 'Bihu dance' and to appreciate the beauty of the nature.

This was about my country, but that's not all. I have much more to say, maybe next time! During festive seasons, I supposed to miss my home, but the hospitality that I have received here in Taiwan from Taiwanese as well as other international friends, does not let me feel lonely. We celebrate many festivals here in Taiwan, including Indian, Taiwanese and other nation's festivals. The experience that I have earned from Taiwan and its people, have helped me a lot to write many articles in national as well as international platforms. Not only about Taiwan but also about other countries that I have visited and experienced. At the end, I am thankful to Arpan Kalita for the pictures of Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland; Dipankar Bordoloi for the pictures of Meghalaya, Naga Girls in their ethnic attire, Pobitora, Manas and the river Brahmaputra; and my brother Jitu Kailta for our family pictures. 



● My niece in traditional Assamese attire holding a Gamosa during Bohag Bihu. (Photo Credit: Jitu Kalita)



● Birds are going back to their nests during sunset in Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam. (Photo Credit: Dipankar Bordoloi)