

INTIMATE INDIA

(dates to be confirmed)

ASSAM - BRAHMAPUTRA



DEPARTURE

Depart the UK from London Heathrow on an overnight flight, probably to New Delhi.

DAY ONE

Arrive into New Delhi International airport and transfer to nearby domestic airport for Jet Airways flight to Guwahati. There, we will be met at the airport and driven into Guwahati town to our hotel, the Brahmaputra Ashok, situated on the banks of the Brahmaputra River. Guwahati is in no way a tourist town, and the hotel is the best in town. It is comfortable, welcoming and efficient but rather plain. However, room service is good, the view is interesting and the beds are comfortable... and you will need your sleep!



DAY TWO

Today we begin gently with breakfast in the hotel, then some relaxed sightseeing in Guwahati. We will visit the quaint but interesting local museum and the World War II war grave, (we are very near Burma) before visiting the fascinating Kamakhya temple, a sixteenth century Hindu Shakti temple to the west of the town. Back to the hotel for some rest, or a stroll in the nearby streets before dinner together.



DAY THREE

Today we drive out of Guwahati to the small town of Sualkuchi, known for its silk production and weaving. The village took shape when occupied by the Shams who defeated the Moghuls in the 17th century. Today, the Indian government is supporting it as a rural self-help project. We will visit tiny workshops, every inch filled with working looms. We will then drive on to Hajo, a sacred temple town where Hindu's, Muslims and Buddhists meet. We visit the Hayagriva Madhava temple, and a bell metal workshop, for which Hajo is also well known, before returning to our hotel.



DAY FOUR

We depart Guwahati after breakfast by road, and drive to Steamer Ghat on the Brahmaputra River near the town of Tezpur. Board our boat, Charaidew, and settle into our comfortable cabins. Enjoy sundowners on board before dinner as night falls on this mighty river.

DAY FIVE

We are woken for an early morning pre-dawn drive into Kaziranga National Park for an atmospheric early morning elephant ride to see the white rhino and other animals. Back on board we enjoy our breakfast as we begin cruising upstream with Kaziranga on the right bank as we go. We stop to visit Vishnath with its Ahom period Shiva temple and walk through the village before cruising further upstream to moor overnight.

DAY SIX

Today is spent cruising. Charaidew is a comfortable craft with welcoming sunloungers, tea and coffee available, and dedicated staff who provide delicious meals in the dining room as we go. Villagers wave as we pass, running to the edges of the sand to see us. We cruise between extraordinary pale sandbanks formed by the fast flowing water. We see the occasional fisherman or even Gangetic dolphins if we are lucky, but sometimes the landscape is entirely empty. We moor as the sun sets on the river at remote Dhansiri Mukh.

DAY SEVEN

Today we disembark to travel, this time by jeep, through grasslands into a different part of Kaziranga National Park, before returning to Charaidew and cruising further upstream.

DAY EIGHT

Our cruise continues. We moor to walk through Jamuguri village, offering us a glimpse of life in rural Assam then continue on our way.

DAY NINE

The day starts with a short cruise, then we arrive at Majuli Island, the largest riverine island in the world, currently short-listed for UNESCO World Heritage status. Here there are unique Hindu monasteries famed for their dance performances. We visit Auniati, one of the monasteries and its museum, then visit a Mising tribal village and enjoy lunch in a stilted bamboo hut there. Afterwards we attend a dance performance at Kamalbari monastery, before rejoining Charaidew to cross to Neamati Ghat on the opposite riverbank





DAY TEN

After breakfast, we disembark to visit Gatoonga tea estate then drive on to Sibsagar, the one-time capital of the kings of Assam. Shan by origin (Assam and Siam share the same derivation) but converted to Hinduism they ruled Assam for some 700 years until the 1820s, and their culture and architecture is a strange and delightful amalgam of Indian and S.E. Asian with temples with stupa-like profiles, and distinctive palaces. We rejoin Charaidew at nearby Dikhou Mukh and spend our last night on board.



DAY ELEVEN

Today after breakfast we disembark and drive to Jorhat, the last capital of the Ahom kingdom, lying in the midst of the Assam tea plantations. We arrive for lunch at Thengal Manor, a comfortable, Assamese owned property with colonial architecture and numerous photographs and remnants of a bygone era. We drive into the tea gardens to Burra Sahib's bungalow, an old planters house, for high tea then return to Thengal Manor and our last evening in gentle Assam.

DAY TWELVE

There is time for breakfast before our short drive to Jorhat airport for the flight to New Delhi via Kolkata* (Calcutta) connecting with our international flight back to the UK.

*I am thinking of adding an optional short city break in Kolkata, one of India's most fascinating cities, after this tour and before returning to the UK,



ASSAM

This short, quiet, intense tour through Assam will reveal the gentle landscape, towns and villages of this northeastern part of India and its unique culture. This part of India is not much visited by tourists, and although the hotels are well appointed and comfortable you will be travelling off the normal tourist trail.

This itinerary offers you a quiet, charming journey by boat up India's only male river, dedicated to the Hindu god, Vishnu. The landscape is dramatic, peaceful and unforgettable. This trip is organised in conjunction with the Assam Bengal Navigation Company whose boats are the only tourist craft on the Brahmaputra River. They are well fitted, reliable and excellently staffed.

Assam is a very special part of India. I hope that it appeals to you. It stole my heart completely.



India beckons...