

INDO ASIA DIARIES

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INDO ASIA TOURS

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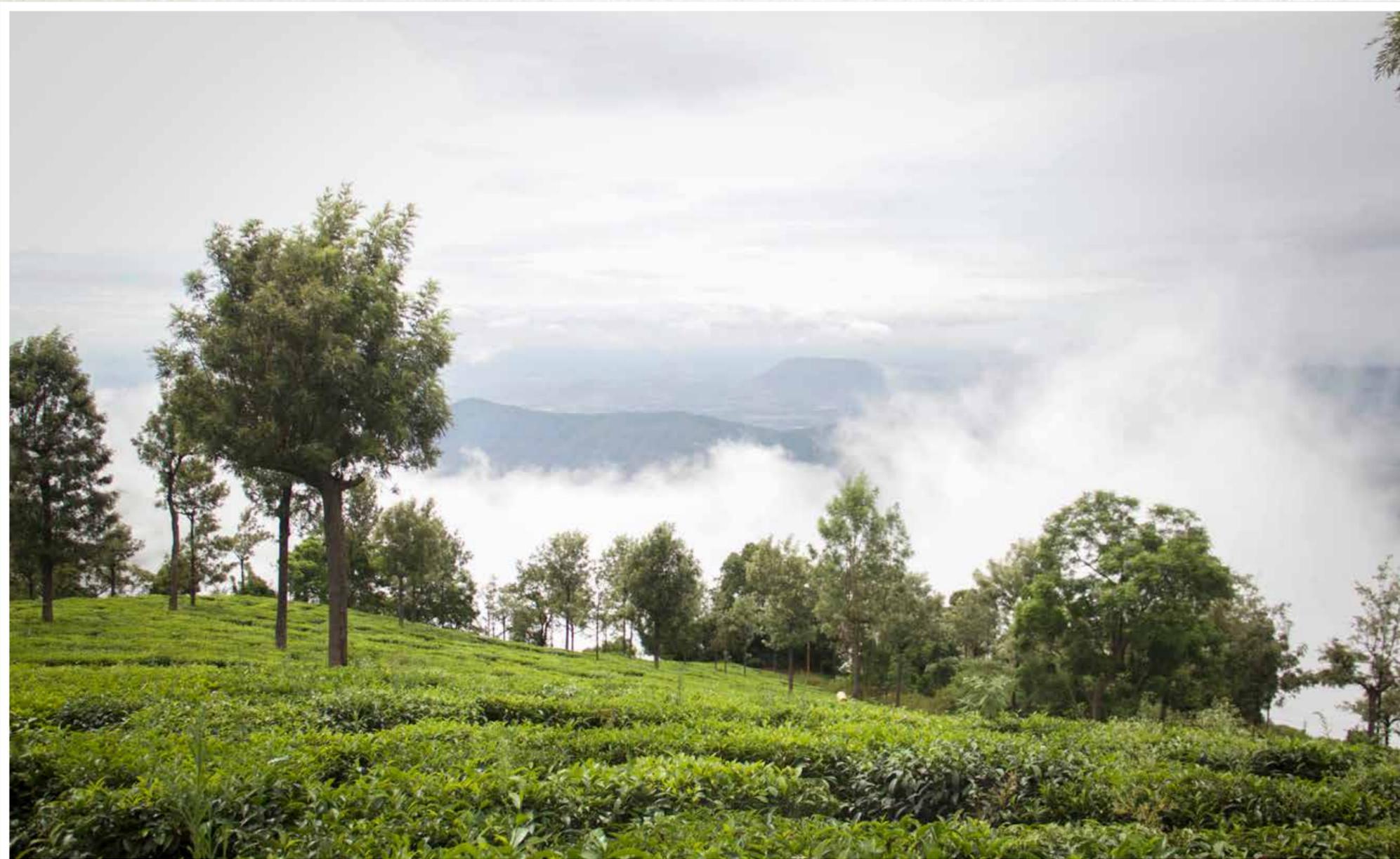
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Photo Credit : S. Thiru



James McGuire

James McGuire remembers the northeast of India by its tea gardens. Not only did he roam the flat estates of Assam, but also found the whiff of fresh green leaves in parts of Nagaland. ***After hearing tall praised of the Assamese tea, not only did this throw up a pleasant surprise, it prepared him for the wonderful novelties that he would come across the rest of his trip over a month in the seven sisters of northeast India.*** He particularly loved how the valleys clung onto the clouds and released them off their green clutches only by afternoon. The experience was 'cathartic' by his own admission. "The memory of a warm cup of warm tea in my hands and a view like this is forever etched in my mind", he says.



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CLOUDS TRAPPED IN A VALLEY OF TEA GARDENS

Photo Location : Nagaland, India

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Tribal dancers at the Nagaland Hornbill festival

If offbeat travel is your choice of exploration, the northeast region of India should be on your list. **Not only is it relatively untreaded, but offers an enchanting unknown image of the country that one is not exposed to on regular brochures and websites.** Vibrant festivals, exotic cuisine and topography that is unique, are the few highlights of the region. Amongst these, the festivals should definitely be part of the itinerary. Here are some of the top festivals of the region that should be included in your plan.

Hornbill Festival, Nagaland – Decidedly one of the most popular festivals of the region, Nagaland's Hornbill Festival promises an orientation into tribal dances of the state, their music, food and even a rock concert. 16 major tribes of Nagaland converge at Kohima in December to showcase their vibrant culture and tenacity to hold onto their roots. The seven days are truly fabulous – especially that bonfire on the last day.

Bihu Festival, Assam – The gentle rhythm of steps tapping to a low beat and elegant movements are what come to your mind when thinking of Bihu. This is the dance that the Assamese ladies perform during the agricultural festival. An invocation to spring is reason enough to dance, eat and make merry for the Assamese people. There are three Bihus that are held in the state.

Torgya Monastery Festival, Arunachal Pradesh – The people of Arunachal Pradesh welcome the new year with a three-day monastery festival known as Torgya. This is observed by the Monpa tribe of the state. Sacred dances by brightly costumed monks in



A Bihu dance performance is being watched by locals

the monastery's courtyard are performed to ward off evil spirits and bring prosperity to the tribe. Many close by villages converge during this time to participate in the extravaganza.

Nongkrem Dance Festival, Meghalaya – A five day harvest thanksgiving festival, the Nongkrem Dance festival is unique to the Khasi tribe of the state of Meghalaya. The traditional dance is performed by the youngsters of the region. This is held in the village of Smit, 15km from Shillong in the month of November. A crispy chill surrounds the village but the dance and music are enough to distract the crowds from the weather and concentrate on the festivity.

Chapchar Kut, Mizoram – Another harvest festival, this is named after bamboo. A traditional bamboo dance is performed by the women and is the highlight of the festival. It is known as 'cheraw'. Food, handicrafts and music are the other central themes of the festival. This is best seen in the capital city of Aizawl.

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NORTHEAST INDIA: UNRAVEL THE MYSTERY

OFFBEAT IDEAS TO STEP INTO 2016



Diphlu River Lodge *In the lap of nature*

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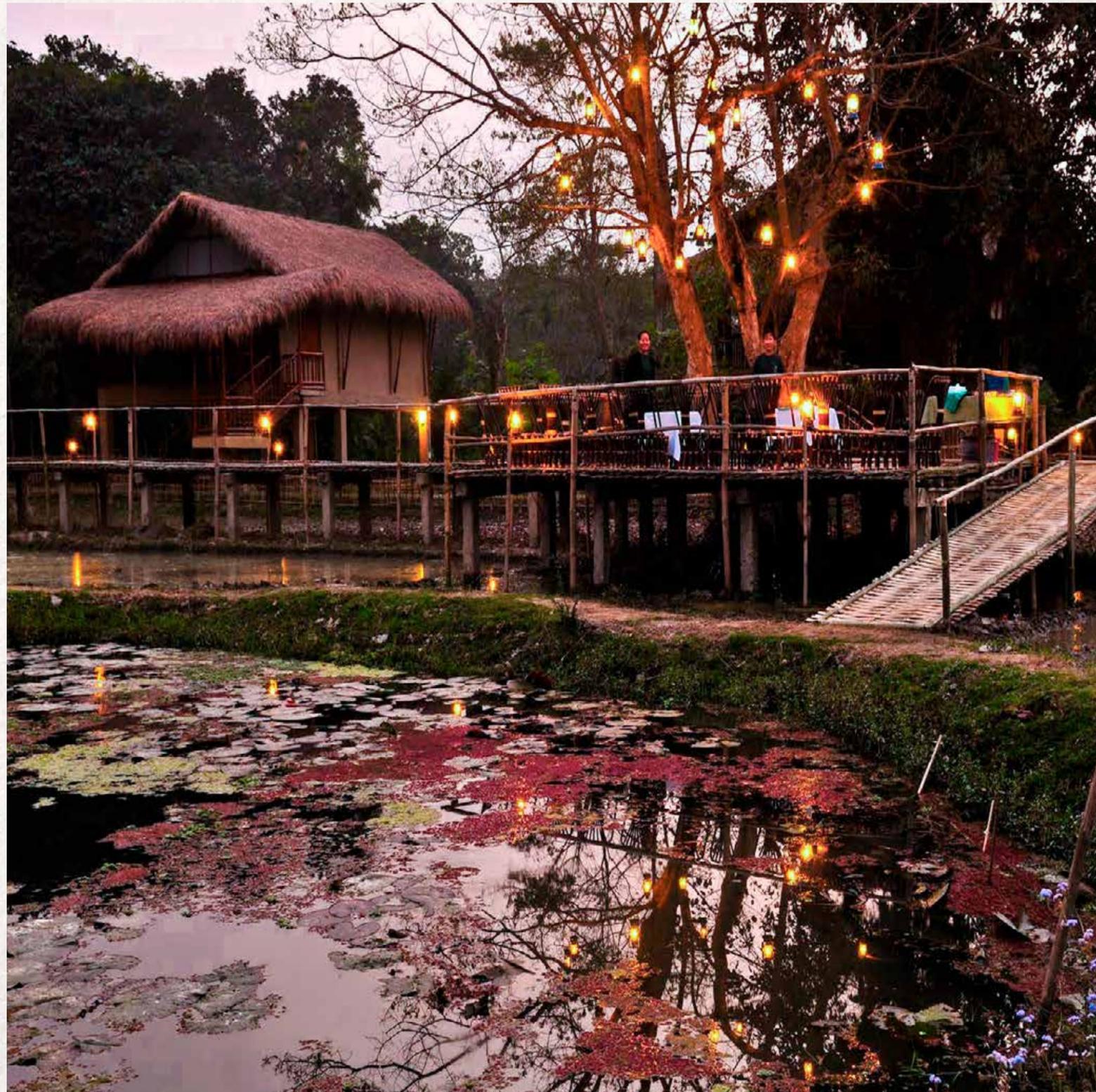


Diphlu River Lodge
K a z i r a n g a

The vantage location of Diphlu River Lodge at the edge of a river that skirts the Kaziranga National Park is the highlight for guests. The proximity to the jungle and the serene environs makes it one of the top properties to stay near the wildlife haven. Here, be immersed in nature and surround yourself with the wisdom of the forest – birdsong, intense greenery and warm hospitality give you company during your stay.

Highlights include:

- *Local essence in the architecture of the rooms*
- *Proximity to the jungle; balconies overlook the forest*
- *Personalized attention to guests*
- *Organic vegetable garden*
- *Quiet spots like the machan, to unplug*
- *Responsible tourism*
- *Activities like elephant bathing can be experienced*
- *Excellent local and international cuisine*
- *Overall immersive experience of Assam*



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SUPRIYA SEHGAL

Footloose in Assam

Essential encounters in the state

If you think that Assam is dominated by tea gardens and the mighty Brahmaputra, think again. What lies in store are experiences that straddle both cultural and natural themes. For this, our editor, Supriya vouches. She has travelled to the region several times and has come back more enthralled than the last time. Supriya has picked five essential encounters that one must experience in the state to get the rite of passage to say that you have travelled to the northeast. These experiences also give you a brief insight into the different dimensions of this vibrant state.

Majuli River Island – The largest river island in the country, this is located in the Brahmaputra and was originally formed due to a change in course of the river. *This is home to the Missing Tribe from the Arunachal, who are the creators of the beautiful local muga silk and cotton.* Visit the islands to see the unique island life. *This is also a leading centre of Vaishnavism, a religious sect in India.* Here, you can see a number of ashrams and shrines, where followers come regularly to immerse themselves in the spiritual vibe.

Kamakhya Temple – *One of the most important Goddess temples for Hindus, visit Kamakhya to understand the formidable sense of faith amongst those who visit here.* You don't have to enter the



A ferry wades through the Brahmaputra towards Majuli Islands.

sanctum to see and understand the importance of faith in the country. It is perched on top of a hill and offers a bird's eye view of the topography around. As a centre of Tantra worship, this temple



An elephant safari scouts the grasslands for rhinos.

hosts thousands of devotees in an annual festival known as the Ambubachi Mela. The temple is a great place to sit and observe the local rituals and understand the tenacity of the faith that keeps the people grounded. It's truly a fascinating place in Assam.

Kaziranga National Park – *Watch the one-horned rhinos peep from among tall elephant grass as you take a safari in one of the most celebrated national parks of the country. Also spot deer, tigers and hundreds of species of birds here.* The park is a world heritage site and also home to wild buffaloes and swamp deer. The park is sprawled over 378sqkm and has different zones that can be explored on elephant back or 4WD jeeps. With its rich bio-diversity, it is no wonder that the park has been declared as a world heritage site by UNESCO.

Brahmaputra Beach Festival – *Think of the large river Brahmaputra and not a sea, when talking*

of beach. The annual festival on the edge of the river is a three day celebration that involves traditional games like cock fighting, kite flying, elephant race and egg breaking. It is a great way to orient yourself to local life and enjoy the banter with them as spectators cheer the teams with zeal.

Tea Estates – *Your trip to Assam is no good if you don't curl up with a good book on a comfortable chair in the balcony of an old plantation estate, looking onto the thick carpet of tea bushes. Add to that a cup of freshly brewed local tea and the picture is complete.* There are a number of



A tea worker plucking tea leaves in a tea garden of Assam. Photo credit- Akarsh Simha

tea plantations that have accommodations from the British era. Add this atmospheric experience to your list. A walk in the estates offers views of people picking tea and gently tossing them in their baskets. A magnificent smile follows if you point your camera towards them.

TOP SPOT

Leela and Al Sawari Holdings Join Hands



Al Sawari Holding will be joining hands with Leela to establish a 100-room property near the Taj Mahal. Another management

agreement has been signed with AIANA Hotels and Resorts, a global hotel management company, to operate a 150-room Aiana Hotel on the same plot of six acres. "We are delighted to partner with Al Sawari Holdings, and view this agreement as a forerunner to several other developments in India and overseas. The proposed Palace hotel will combine unparalleled views of the Taj Mahal with a truly luxurious hospiritualality experience in Agra. We are also looking forward to further strengthening our presence within the golden triangle by adding a Palace hotel in Jaipur and will continue our efforts to expand in Jodhpur and Jaisalmer," confirmed Vivek Nair, Chairman and Managing Director, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts. Luxury travellers can look forward to yet another exciting hotel to stay at.

Night Flights to Srinagar by GoAir



Srinagar has become more accessible to travellers, effective June 15, 2016. GoAir announced that flights G8-228 and G8-229

took off from Srinagar at 18:40 pm to Mumbai and Delhi, respectively. The newly introduced evening flights help keep up with the demand from tourists, and the increase in flights will aid in keeping the prices competitive and ensure that Srinagar remains accessible to both business and leisure travellers. One-way fare for this journey costs Rs 9000 + taxes.

The Fern has an address in Bhimtal



The Fern Hotels & Resorts announced the opening of The Fern Hillside Resort at Bhimtal. This is

pegged as a premium resort located in the hills of Bhimtal and overlooking the central lake of the town. The resort offers 30 spacious rooms with a contemporary aesthetic. The room rates start from Rs 2250 plus taxes. All rooms are spacious and offer a beautiful view of the surrounding hills, and are equipped with all modern amenities required for

a comfortable stay. One can expect a multi-cuisine restaurant, a meeting room, and in-door activity options such as pool table, table tennis, and board games. Adventure sport activities such as rappelling, river crossing, rock climbing, kayaking, paragliding, trekking and boating will also be organised. Other close by destinations such a Naukuchiya Taal and Nainital will also be a central attraction for people, so that they can combine the trip to cover these as well.

Keys Hotels expands



Three new hotels mark the expansion plan for Keys Hotels – Keys Hotels in Vishakhapatnam, Keys Hotels Malabar Gate in Calicut and Keys Lite Om Niwas in Jaipur will be

the three new addresses. The company also plans to open 8-10 new management contract hotels in the next 12-18 months by adopting assets light strategy. Speaking about the expansion strategy, Anshu Sarin, CEO, Berggruen Hotels Pvt. Ltd. said, "Keys Hotels is committed to expand its footprint across smart cities and we will adopt assets light strategy to support this growth. We are pleased to launch three new hotels as a part of this expansion plan. Calicut, Vizag and Jaipur are very important markets for us as all three cities attracting a large volume of tourists and business travelers. Apart from these cities we are looking to be present in major smart cities and we have aligned our

growth plans accordingly." Situated close to the beach, Keys Hotel Malabar Gate, Calicut is ideal for nature lovers. All the hotels have great access to the sightseeing spots of their respective cities.

Proposed fee hike for ASI monuments curbed to 50%



There has been a proposed fee hike for all the Archeological Survey of India managed monuments in the last few months. The decision has been made

on this and the hike has been curbed. **The Ministry of Tourism (MOT) has decided that the increase in ASI monument fees will only be 50 per cent of the proposed hike of 300 per cent.** This means that for Category B monuments, there will be an increase from Rs. 100 to Rs. 200 only instead of Rs. 300. However, a premium ticket will be introduced of Rs. 300/- with some value additions. Similarly for Category A monuments, there will be an increase from Rs. 250 to Rs. 500 only instead of Rs. 750. Premium ticket will cost Rs. 750 with similar value additions. The above new rates will be effective from April 1, 2016. Also, there will be a separate counter and queue to enter at all the ASI monuments for those having ticket in category A of Rs. 500 and above and in Category B of Rs. 200 and above.

NEWS & VIEWS



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Indo Asia Tours will have its presence in the below mentioned upcoming fairs in 2016. You can schedule an appointment at marketing@indoasiatours.com to meet us in person at these shows :

- Bird Fair, U. K, 19th-21st Aug, 2016
- FITA, Mexico City, 10th-13th sept. 2016

IA SAYS



As an ever-evolving nation and industry, India seems to be at the peak of new ideas and innovative solutions in the tourism world. From fresh itineraries, eco tourism focus and rural initiatives, there are a number of new and interesting ideas to explore. Be it the silk weaving villages around Chanderi or cycling holidays in the low mountains of Kerala. You can be assured that Indo Asia is ahead of the curve in bringing you the best of India. This time, we touch upon the bio-diversity hotspots in the northeast and why a trip to India minus this would fall pale.

The untreaded parts of northeast hold within them a rich base of wildlife and flora. This is true especially for the three stalwarts: the Kaziranga National Park, Namdapa Sanctuary and Eagle's Nest in Arunachal Pradesh.

Kaziranga can well be called 'India's Serengeti'. Here you can see the one-horned rhinoceros, swamp deer, tiger, Indian gaur and the elephant – the Indian Big Five if you please. In fact, the national park is a world heritage site (UNESCO) and one of the few places on earth where one can see the one horned rhino. The tall elephant grass allows for a great cover for the animals and is also perfect for avian life, which you can find in abundance.

Similar wildlife can be seen in the other two parks, which are ideal for wildlife enthusiasts – both amateurs and experts. These national parks give you an insight into the rich biodiversity of the region. Add to that, the access to these parks is easy and comfortable, making them an 'essential' on your list.

Hoping that you have been finding the Indo Asia Diaries helpful in planning your trips and keeping up to date with the news from the subcontinent. Do write to us if you would like to see any changes or need additional information.

Sunirmol Ghosh

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH!



Elesh Chaudhary | Manager - Operations

Elesh has been a formidable force at the Indo Asia office, behind many successful trips. After 10 years of working in the travel & tourism industry, he is the go-to man for problem solving and creating the best itineraries. An energetic and motivated person, it is an absolute pleasure to see Elesh disperse the same energy to people around him