EXPLORE INDIA'S
ENCHANTING
NORTHEAS







#### DISCOVER INDIA'S UNKNOWN

## NORTHEAST

Tucked away between Bhutan, Tibet, Myanmar and Bangladesh lies one of Asia's last great natural and anthropological sanctuaries dotted with sacred forests, rugged mountains and beautiful lakes. Proclaimed as a major biodiversity hotspot, Northeast India comprising of 8 states (Assam, Arunachal, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim) is arguably one of the most beautiful and fascinating regions of India, yet it remains the least explored. It is home to unique tribes that still worship nature and appease the gods for the welfare of the cosmos. Their way of life and community celebrations with song, dance and folklore bears testimony to their rich ancient heritage that they still uphold to this day.

Arts and craft in the Northeast are not only practised as a skill or for commercial value but are one of the main threads woven into the tribal fibre itself. In your journeys to these faraway lands you will witness handmade crafts and magic weaves that have stories of the makers imbued in them. These sustainable crafts reflect a way of life that is conscious of the land and its resources.

The culinary culture of the seven states of Northeast India are a true display of the traditions and agricultural biodiversity of these regions. They have a wide assortment of culinary styles influenced greatly by topography, climate, geographic location, and neighbouring regions. While much of the world has woken not so long ago to the wonders of slow cooking, herbs, fresh produce and no-oil, no-sugar diet, in the Northeast that flavour is a time tested one. Their forest greens will make you dispel all myths that surround the Northeast cuisine as your senses get taken away by the therapeutic aromas of food that is so simple and steeped with earthy goodness.

Our responsibility towards the tribal communities and their natural habitat form the ethical root of all our activities.



## WHAT RESPONSIBLE TOURISM MEANS TO US:

- Slow Travel: We design tours that allow you to meet people, listen and discover its inhabitants, contemplate a place, discover an unusual spot and expect the unexpected.
- Small happy groups: We keep our group size intimate (max 10 travellers). Small groups also mean less impact on the social and natural environment.
- Inspiring locals to lead the way: Our local guides have a lifetime knowledge and experience of the Northeast region. Using effective communication tools, they help bridge boundaries and open up possibilities between you and what the Northeast has to offer.
- Green Partnership: Eastern Routes is donating a percentage of its income from tours to support Aaranyak's Conservation and Livelihood Division in Kaziranga National Park fringe areas. We welcome our guests to come view the benefits of this donation and interact with the locals (beneficiaries) during their visit.
- A voice for the voiceless: Eastern Routes is the first Travel Agency in Northeast India to ban Elephant Safaris from its tours.
- Stay with locals: Eastern Routes favors locally run accommodation. Wherever possible, we encourage our guests to experience local homestay for a deeper understanding of local culture and lifestyle. We believe this is a priceless opportunity for diverse cultures to interact and share experiences.
- Responsible towards tribal communities: We do not encourage human safari and advocate responsible travel by preserving the privacy of indigenous tribes and local people at all times.
- Promote eco-conscious travel: In all our nature walks, treks and camps, we ensure we have minimum impact on the land. We encourage our guests to carry their own water bottle, a set of reusable travel cutlery and a trash bag for responsible disposal of their waste.
- Eat like a local: In a bid to reduce the consumption of packaged and imported food, we encourage our guests to eat local. There are enough fruits and scrumptious meals that are healthier and help our guests to go zero waste in their consumption.





# WHAT RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL MEANS FOR YOU:

- Less distance. More experience
- Experience local but comfortable homestays
- Jungle walk, cycle and public boat when possible
- Sample local cuisine
- Bring home handicrafts
- Use services of local expert/guides/naturalists
- Meet heroes of the global conservation movement
- Zero waste consumption
- Responsible waste disposal
- Say No To Single Use Plastic
- Respect local traditions/customs/laws
- No disruption to local life
- Say No to Human Safari
- Say No to Animal Safari

#### DAY 1: ARRIVAL

# WELCOME TO GUWAHATI

THE GATEWAY TO NORTHEAST INDIA



You are welcomed with a handwoven traditional Assamese scarf (gamocha) that has motifs of the **endangered Greater Adjutant Stork**.

This scarf introduces them to their first destination –**Dadara**, a wildlife conservation model village.

DAY 1 GUWAHATI (Assam) – DADARA (Assam) 45 minutes – 23 kms by private transport



MEET ASSAM'S HARGILA ARMY

These women are conserving 75% of the worlds endangered Greater Adjutant Stork.

#### DAY 1

Local lunch followed by an interaction with the Hargila Army, sighting of the birds and their nests and a cultural program organized by the women of the village.

Dadara is a village located on the Northern banks of the mighty Brahmaputra. The village hosts several tall trees allowing the Greater Adjutant Stork to nest. In Assam, the scavenger is called the 'hargila', meaning 'bone swallower' which is why their protectors are called the "Hargila Army".

Dr Purnima Devi Barman dedicated her life to the preservation of the bird and succeeded to enrol hundreds of women villagers in her Hargila Army. The army focuses on preserving the big trees from being cut as the Greater Adjutant needs big trees to nest. As part of the conservation programme these women are also employed on the loom, depicting the endangered birds as motifs on scarves and saris they weave. They also protect the nests, tie nets under nesting trees to save the young ones from falling. Visiting Dadara is an excellent way to encourage the efforts of the villagers and to champion such conservation acts of the locals.

STAY: PRABHAKAR HOMESTAY, GUWAHATI DADARA TO GUWAHATI: 1 hour – 25 kms by private transport



DAY 2 GUWAHATI (Assam) – UMDEN (Meghalaya) 2hrs – 65 kms UMDEN - UMSAW (Meghalaya) 1hr – 30 kms by private transport



MEET THE MATRILINEAL KHASI TRIBE & THEIR PEACE (ERI) SILK

Their age old tradition of producing silk has made their village an epicenter of traditional sericulture.

#### DAY 2

Get a glimpse into the life of the Eri silk weavers who keep their silk worms at home and protect and feed them like an invaluable pet. Watch them work the loom and their traditional organic dyeing techniques. The women also host a lunch and a cultural programme for their visitors.

Sericulture and Eri Silk weaving is rooted in the life and culture of the women of Umden. Eri Silk is particularly fascinating, as it is processed without killing the silkworm. Commonly silk cocoons are boiled with the worm inside to maintain one continuous filament, which results in a smooth and shiny fabric. Interestingly the eri silkworm spins short segments of a filament and creates a cocoon that is open at one end which enables the moth to emerge. This is why it is called the peace which makes it a very popular fibre among vegans and Buddhists.

The humid climate of Northeast India is very favorable for the eri culture. The women of Umden traditionally carry out the processing, spinning and weaving as part of their daily life. They gladly introduce you to all the steps in the Eri Silk production chain- starting from rearing of silk worms to spinning and reeling of silk to yarn production and dying and finally to weaving. They also conduct weaving classes for those who want to try a hand on the loom.

STAY: ROSIE HOMESTAY, UMSAW NONGKHARAI, MEGHALAYA

DAY 3: UMSAW NONGKHARAI - NONGPOH - UMSAW NONGKHARAI (Visit local market by auto rickshaw or shared taxi)



## DISCOVER LOCAL PRODUCE & COOK WITH A LOCAL

Warm up to the hospitality of a local home-chef as she shares her traditional recipes with you.

#### DAY 3

In the morning, head to the local market and pick up few organic vegetables to cook lunch with your homestay host who will also be your local cuisine guide as she shares her kitchen and traditional recipes in a cooking session with you.

Rosie takes pride in her traditional cuisine and her improvisation on it as she adapts to the palate of the guests she hosts in her homestay. You will find her subtly using spices and introducing you to local greens in the scrumptious dishes she cooks with you.

Spend your afternoon to meet Kriya (Rosie's daughter), a bamboo designer who passionately designs organic and sustainable home accents with bamboo.

Enjoy a visit of an organic bamboo workshop that adopts a "Material Driven Design" methodology. Witness fresh bamboo ware crafted in front of you and interact with the designer and her artisans to know more their craft and the organic processes behind it. Leave with your "Reusable Bamboo Cutlery Set".

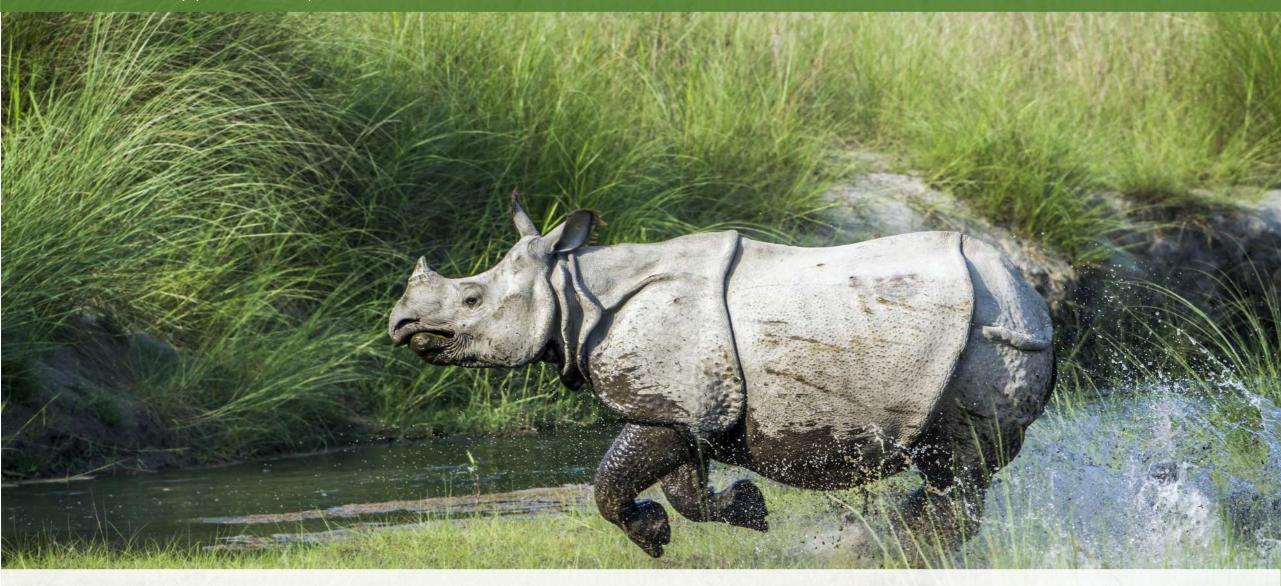
STAY: ROSIE HOMESTAY, UMSAW NONGKHARAI, MEGHALAYA

#### DAY 4

After breakfast, leave for Kaziranga National Park. Lunch on arrival and afternoon at leisure to enjoy the beautiful Diplu River Lodge and its surrounding.



DAY 4: UMSAW NONGKHARAI (Meghalaya) – KAZIRANGA (Assam) 5 hrs – 250 kms by private transport



## WELCOME TO THE LAND OF THE ONE-HORNED RHINO

Become a conservation supporter of the rich biodiversity and wildlife of Kaziranga National Park.

#### DAY 5

In the morning, indulge yourself with a bicycle ride along Kaziranga National Park through countryside roads. Surrender to the fresh scent of the tea garden and the sensorial delights of nature as you pass through the beautiful roads meandering through dazzling tea estates.

Acquaint yourselves with the indigenous natives comprising of Karbi, Mishing, Dum and Adivasi tribes living in the Park infringed areas. Soak in the beauty of their land and their way of life that is dependent and in unison with their natural habitat.

In the afternoon, you will embark on a thrilling jeep safari to explore Kaziranga National Park, a world heritage site, home to nearly two-thirds of the world's Great One-horned Rhinoceros.

The park has the highest density of tigers among the protected areas in the world and was declared a Tiger Reserve in 2006. You may also see large breeding populations of elephants, wild water buffalo, swamp deer and numerous migratory birds.

STAY: DIPHLU RIVER LODGE, KAZIRANGA, ASSAM

DAY 6 KAZIRANGA (Assam) – JORHAT (Assam) 3 hrs – 90 kms by private transport



SIP FULL-BODIED TEA IN A SPRAWLING TEA GARDEN

Get a glimpse into the unique world of the tea planters and the indigenous tea pickers.

### JOUR 6 (Full day)

We arrive in Jorhat to visit the Tocklai Tea Research Institute, where research on all aspects of tea cultivation and processing is carried out. We then head to Puroni Bheti, a heritage bungalow to unwind and experience tea tasting in a lush tea garden estate. This is also our heritage home for the night.

The Tocklai Tea Research Institute is the oldest and the largest research station of its kind in the world. Research on tissue culture of modern tea and its medicinal benefits are also being carried out here.

NUIT: PURONI BHETI, JORHAT, ASSAM

## JOUR 7 (Morning)

At dawn, head to the Hoolongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary with a packed breakfast. Here walk through the forest in the company of a local forest guard in search of Hoolock Gibbons, India's only species of ape, as well as a wealth of birdlife.

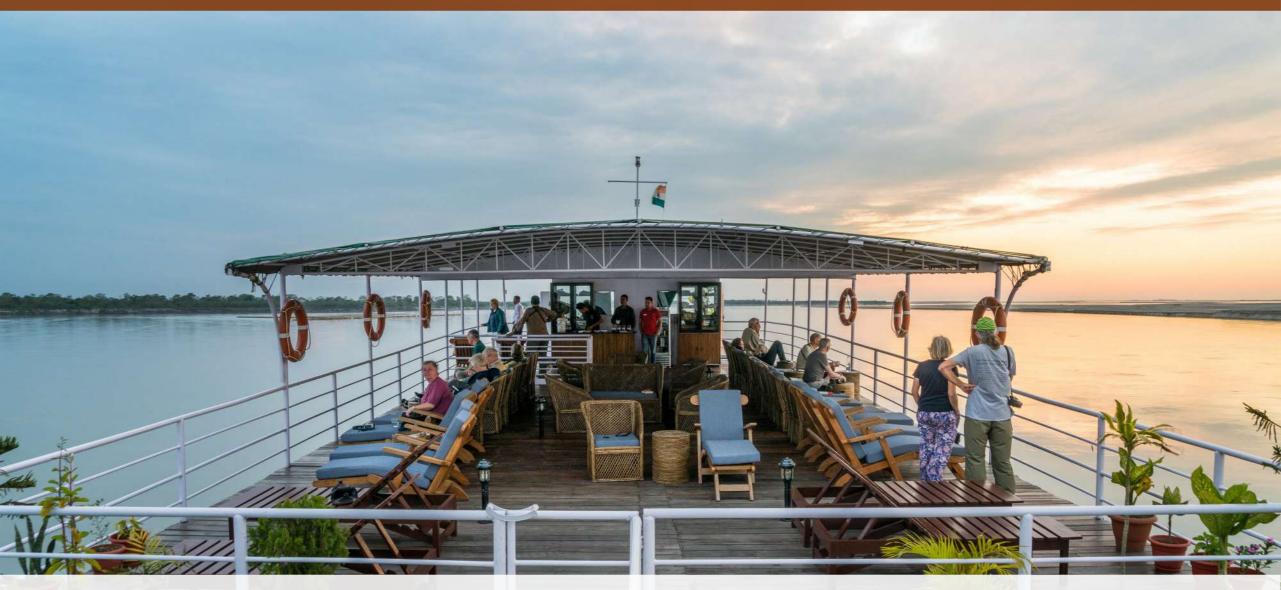
The sanctuary is the home to seven types of apes – Western hoolock gibbon, Bengal slow loris, Stump-tailed macaque, Northern pig-tailed macaque, Eastern Assamese macaque, Rhesus macaque, and Capped langur.

Drive to Nimati Ghat (to board a Ferry for Majuli Island). Enroute there is a possibility of sighting flocks of migratory water birds and the Gangetic River Dolphin.



JOUR 7: JORHAT (Assam) – MAJULI ISLAND(Assam)

1 hour by private boat or local ferry



## SLOW DOWN TO THE PACE OF THE MIGHTY BRAHMAPUTRA

Enjoy the sights of migratory river birds and dolphins from the comfort of a floating hotel.

## DAY 8 (Morning)

Start your first day on the island by exploring the satras, its dancing monks and Mishing villages. The visit of Majuli can be arranged by bicycle.

Majuli is one of the largest inhabited river islands in the world (60 km long and 20 km wide). It is a gigantic sandbank flooded three months a year which is when the natives say they live on "gifts from the river". When the water recedes, rice cultivation gives way to fishing. But over the years, the increasing floods of Brahmaputra have largely reduced the area of cultivable land on the island.

The island is famous for its unique monasteries and hermitages, called Satras run by a community of monks called the Neo- Vaisnav. They are a one-of-a-kind male religious community (Neo Vaisnavite), who give art and dance an important place in everyday life. The boys enrol as children and are raised by a master who will take care of them until adulthood. This community was founded in the 16th century by Shankar Deva, a great reformer who stayed for several months in Majuli and promulgated a form of Hinduism, follower of Vishnu, Vaishnavism. Even today these Satras carefully preserve ancient objects, such as weapons, everyday utensils, jewellery and other objects of cultural importance. The Satras of Majuli play a vital role in giving this river island a rich heritage and art forms that are unique and living till this day.





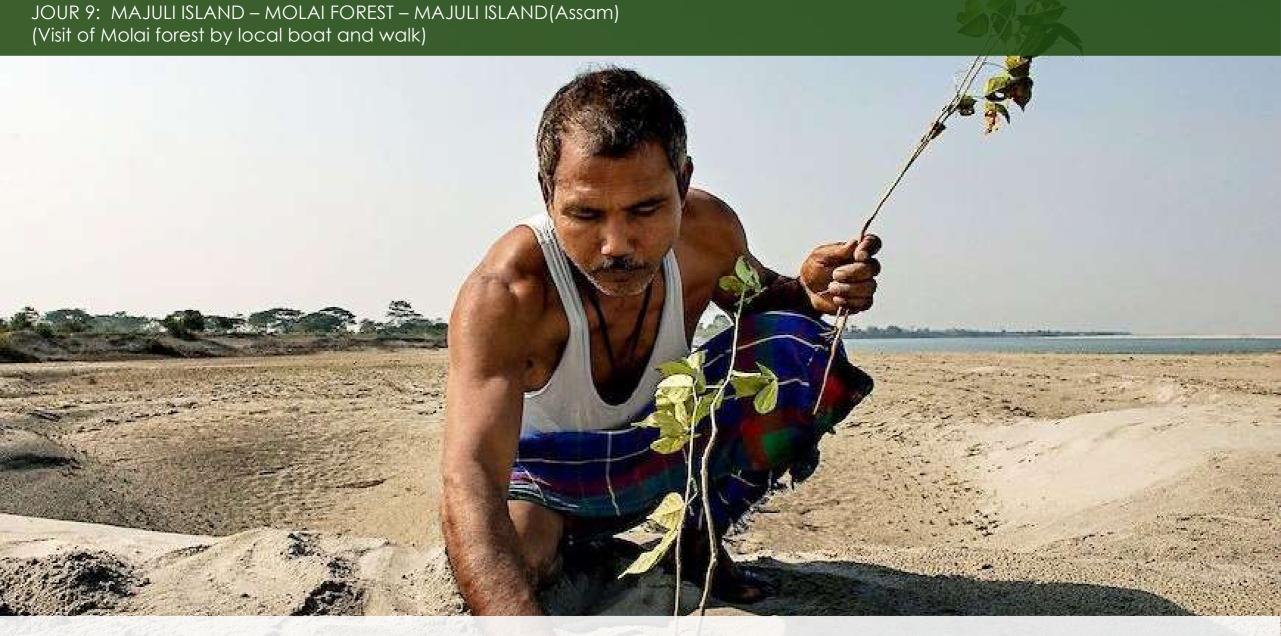
## DAY 8 (Afternoon)

Spend the afternoon is visiting the monks who make masks of mythological characters and also stroll through the pottery village of the Island.

The Neo- Vaishnav monks of Majuli have been practising the tradition of mask-making since the mid-17th century. They make headgear for the Raas Leela festival and for Bhaona, a style of vibrant street theatre from Assam. Interact with these artists who adhere to sacred rituals while making their masks. Watch bamboo and clay turn into fierce mythological characters that come to life when painted with vibrant colours.

Continue to Salmora, a potters' village. Pottery is made by hand and beaten into shapes with wooden tools (not on potters' wheels) and burnt in driftwood-fired kilns. This pottery method is said to have been used by the people of the ancient Harrappan Civilisation.

In addition, if you are interested, Majuli Island is a bird watchers' paradise. It is home to nearly one hundred species of birds, including many rare and endangered species, such as the greater adjutant stork, pelican and the whistling teal. One can easily sight numerous avian species when walking through the villages of Majuli.



MEET JADAV PAYENG, THE FOREST MAN OF INDIA He single-handedly created 550 hectares of forest land.

#### DAY 9

What a better way to offset your travel carbon footprint than planting trees with Forest man of India. We arrange for a meeting with Jadav Payeng for you to contribute sapling and plant a few with him in his forest.

To get to the Molai forest, we do a short trek along the riverbanks followed by a boat ride across another stream. We cross a small village taking in the sights of rural life before we arrive at the forest to meet with Jadav Molai.

Jadav "Molai" Payeng is an environmental activist and forestry worker belonging to the Mishing tribe of Majuli Island. He is hailed as the Forest Man of India. Over the course of several decades, he has planted and tended trees on the sandbanks of the river Brahmaputra turning it into a forest reserve. The forest, called Molai forest after him encompasses an area of about 1,360 acres / 550 hectares. In 2015, he was honoured with Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian award in India.

The forest, which came to be known as Molai forest, now houses Bengal tigers, Indian rhinoceros, and over 100 deer and rabbits. It is also home to monkeys and several avian species. The forest has a rich biodiversity and several species of trees and plants that support its eco-system.

STAY: ABN CHARAIDEW, MAJULI, ASSAM

#### **DAY 10**

Transfer to Jorhat Airport (1 hrs Ferry + 30 minutes drive - 50 Km). End of our services.





## OUR ACCOMMODATION PICK FOR THE TOUR

2 Local homestays, 1 Heritage property, 1 TOFT Tiger eco-rated property, 1 Floating Hotel.





**Prabhakar Homestay (comfort)** Set in the hills above the busy town of Guwahati, Prabhakar Homestay is a charming place owned by Shiela and Mahesh Bora, who have converted their home into a cosy and comfortable bed and breakfast with four beautifully furnished en suite bedrooms that contain elegant and pleasing fittings. The owners, Shiela and Mahesh, live downstairs and are available at any time, unless they are travelling. They take great pleasure in making each visitor feel like a personal guest, and are always happy to provide fantastic information and advice on the culture, sights and activities not just of Guwahati, but of the entire North East. The dining room is entered upon from the main living room, and it is here that appetizing home cooked meals are served, including several Assamese dishes.



Rosie Homestay (comfort) This charming homestay is tucked away in an alcove of a dense forest rich in plant, insect and avian life. It's easy accessibility, and hidden serenity is what makes it one of our most sort after homestays in Meghalaya. The land that was once a swampy paddy field is today a lush haven with fruit trees, pineapple and tea plantations, and a pond that runs right through the middle of the land. They also organize birdwatching walks in the adjoining forest. For those interested in getting to know more about the flavours of Khasi cuisine, they invite you for an introductory cooking session in their kitchen.

This homestay also has an in-house bamboo studio that conducts (by appointment only) bamboo workshops for those interested in spending a few days in crafting their own bamboo cutlery or bamboo bowls. During your stay, you can visit the studio and interact with the designer and her artisans to learn more about their craft. They also have a small curated craft shop that is open to guests only.

The homestay is also ideally situated on the national highway (Guwahati-Shillong Road) with proximity to the Nongkhyllem Wildlife Sanctuary.



**Puroni Bheti (Heritage):** In English, Puroni Bheti translates into "Old Foundation". This pre independence property was acquired by the family in 1904 from the British. Today, it proves to be a luxurious haven set in the midst of lush green tea gardens, a variety of aromatic medicinal and fruit trees along with many varieties of birds and intermittent stray wildlife. The house counts 5 well decorated rooms in a building adjacent to the family property. Delicious homemade continental or Indian cuisine served by friendly staff. It is a standing example of colonial architecture embellished with local aesthetics.

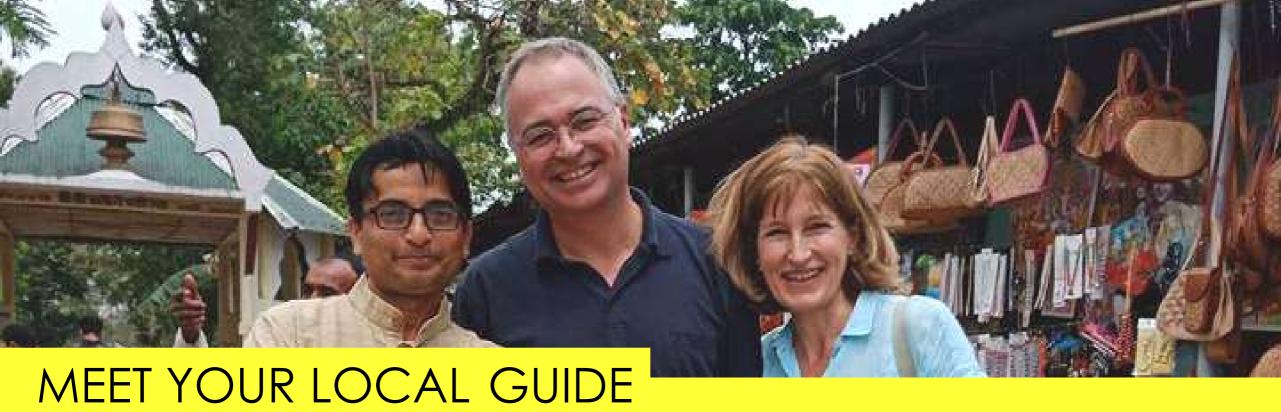


Diphlu River Lodge (comfort) Situated on the banks of the river, Diphlu River Lodge has been carefully planned to preserve the natural environment with railed bamboo walkways over the paddy fields and crops, linking the cottages and machan together without disturbing the agriculture. The cottages and common areas are built with natural materials like bamboo and wood. The Lodge has no fencing and has been purposefully designed to blend seamlessly into its green surroundings. The in-house team of women and men weavers from neighbouring villages are responsible for all the woven objects of the Lodge. Most of the staff at Diphlu River Lodge are from villages in and around Kaziranga National Park and the remaining few are from other parts of Northeast India. Staff were offered skills training in hospitality by Diphlu River Lodge and their friendly, gentle natures are undoubtedly the Lodge's biggest asset. They grow organic rice, vegetables and mustard. Guests will be able to see the crops growing within the Lodge premises. The Lodge recycles grey water that drains into the central pond and is used for irrigation. Organic waste is converted to compost. The resident naturalists are extremely knowledgeable and will accompany you on safaris into the national park, in a dugout canoe or on a riverside walk looking for otters, buffalo, deer or rhino. Walks to local villages or nearby tea plantations and Brahmaputra boat ride can also be arranged.



**ABN Charaidew (comfort)** is a 38m-long, twin-engined, steel hulled passenger boat. She was completely stripped down and rebuilt by Assam Bengal Navigation in 2003 to provide 10 twin-bedded and 2 double-bedded cabins with en-suite bathroom.

The grand old lady of the fleet, she makes up in character what she lacks in twenty-first century glitz. The polished brass engine room telegraph and enormous ship's wheel bear witness to her heritage. All cabin accommodation is on the upper deck, as is a bar and saloon opening onto a front deck. A dining room with full-length opening glass doors on each side is on the lower deck, while a large top sundeck offers additional comfortable open-air seating in shade or sun. Local handloom fabrics specially woven for us and comfortable cane sofas and chairs contribute to the attractive decor.



Jyoti Narayan Sarma, a native of Majuli Island, started working as a professional guide in 2001. He is passionate about his job and does it with immense joy and pride. He possesses a unique sense of humor, a healthy sense of adventure, and special abilities to adapt to the unusual circumstances of every journey.

He has partnered and worked alongside many local groups to protect and preserve Assam's biodiversity and its rare and endangered wildlife. A green warrior, he continues to educate locals and travelers on the fragility of the ecosystem of these wondrous lands and the need to preserve them. He has been awarded the prestigious "State Tourism Promotion Award-2014" for his innovative and hard work for promoting Majuli Island.

Jyoti exudes an infectious passion for people from all walks of life. Using effective communication, he helps bridge boundaries to open up possibilities between you and what the Northeast has to offer. A journey with him will make for a memory of a lifetime.

