

# Tea Gardens Ride, India

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## Itinerary

### Day 1

Fly from Delhi to Dibrugarh. The flight departs Delhi at c 10:00 and arrives Dibrugarh at c. 14.00, normally stopping en route at Guwahati before continuing onto Dibrugarh.

On arrival at Dibrugarh you will be transferred by vehicle (c. 30 minutes' drive) to your accommodation at either Mancotta or Chowkidinghee Heritage Chang Bungalow.

Settle into your room. In the afternoon meet the horses and your guide and have a short introductory ride around the tea estate.

(Riding time c. 1 hour)



Dinner and overnight at your bungalow.

Please note that the following itinerary is a proposed itinerary which is subject to change due to local conditions such as the weather. With sufficient notice it may also be possible to amend the itinerary when you are in India and you should discuss this with your hosts and guide.

The itinerary includes about 18 hours riding over 6 days.

### Day 2: Riding at Dibrugarh on Brahmaputra Trail

Today's ride takes you into a tea plantation and on through the countryside and paddy fields to the banks of the Brahmaputra. This is the best possible way to see the countryside. You ride along the river beaches, catching occasional glimpses of river folk going about

their daily routines. See massed flocks of water birds as they circle and land on the placid waters of the river. Watch as country boats ply the waterways in search of fish.



After a picnic lunch in a tree house you continue riding and later return to the Chang bungalow.

The rest of the afternoon is at leisure.

In the evening there is a display of Bihu dance on the lawns of the bungalow (*may not happen if just one person booked*).

(Riding time c. 4 hours)

Dinner and overnight at the Chang Bungalow.

*BIHU is the most popular folk dance of Assam. The people of Assam are very proud of its unique position among all other such dances of India. Except for Bhangra (the popular folk dance of Punjab), there is no other folk dance in India which can compete with the rhythmic exuberance of the Bihu dance.*

### Day 3: Riding at Dibrugarh with Rukmini Cruise

The ride today takes you through the tea gardens and along the banks of the Brahmaputra. You finish the ride on the riverfront and then embark on a private boat cruise to an island in the midst of the mighty Brahmaputra.



Have a picnic lunch in this peaceful spot.

It might be possible to do some kayaking on the river before returning late in the afternoon to the mainland.



On your way back to the bungalow you normally visit the Mukul Tea Estate where you can see how organic hand rolled green tea is made.

(Riding time c. 3 hours)

Dinner and overnight at the Chang Bungalow.

*Mukul Tea Estate is an area of 27 ha and is about 8kms (c. 30 minutes drive) from Mancotta Bungalow. The entire organic garden is set in pristine surroundings. Within its boundary the estate has a tea plantation, a rich bamboo stand and a wet land which attracts numerous bird species. Visitors can enjoy first hand the experience of plucking tea by hand and preparing roasted green tea.*

#### **Day 4: Riding at Dibrugarh on Ethelwood Trail; transferring to Tinsukia.**

Today your ride takes you through the lush green tea plantations of Ethelwood and Jalannagar Tea Estates.



Later you take a tour around a tea estate known for producing high quality CTC teas (CTC is short for crush/cut, tear, curl and is a method of processing tea).

During your tour you learn all about tea - its origin, how it is grown, about tea tasting and its quality.

*Please note: There is no tea plucking between December and mid-March and hence the actual manufacturing process of tea cannot be demonstrated when visiting the factory during this period. The factory is closed on Mondays.*

Return to the Chang Bungalow for lunch.

After lunch you drive to Tinsukia (about 1 hour's drive) and arrive at the Wathai Heritage Bungalow on Limbuguri Tea Estate.

(Riding time c. 3.5 hrs)

Dinner and overnight at Wathai Heritage Bungalow.

*A tea tour through a 160 years old heritage tea garden will give you an insight into the different activities that vary from season to season. It will teach you all about tea- its origin, how it is grown, tea tasting and its quality. The estates come alive with teams of colourfully dressed tea pluckers, predominantly ladies, who pluck the delicate buds and leaves. The harvest is taken every day to the factory where it undergoes an age old process of being turned into the finished product. All stages of the process are carefully controlled to ensure that the product which leaves the factory is only of the highest quality, a quality that has made Assam tea world famous.*

*CTC (Crush, Tear and Curl) tea is a method of processing tea. In this process the leaves instead of being rolled, are passed through a series of cylindrical rollers with hundreds of small sharp "teeth" that Crush, Tear, and Curl. This style of manufacture has the*

advantage that the finished product brews quickly, gives a dark infusion rapidly, is well suited for tea bags, and yields more cups per kg. In the Indian domestic market, this product has virtually taken over and over 80% of the tea produced is of the CTC type. It produces a rich red-brown colour when the tea leaves are boiled and so is best suited for tea made in the Indian style. This is done by boiling leaves in a mixture of milk, water and sugar and some spices (producing Masala Chai).

**Orthodox tea:** The manufacturing process of orthodox tea is quite different from CTC. Instead of the tea leaf been crushed, the leaves are rolled in a machine that twist and break the leaves to release the natural chemicals that later react with oxygen in the air and give the tea its characteristic aroma and taste. It is the leafy variety of tea.

#### **Day 5: At Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and Digboi**

This is a non-riding day.

Today you rise early to visit Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and Magori Bheel in the morning.



You take a boat trip on the Dibru River and go for jungle walks in your search for rare birds or mammals.

After lunch you drive to Digboi, the first Oil town of South Asia (80kms, driving time about 1 hour).



Visit the Oil Museum and the 2nd World War Allied Forces Cemetery where 200 graves are permanently maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

As an alternative to visiting Digboi you could drive to Naharketia (90 minutes) and visit Namphake Village and Buddhist monastery inhabited by the Tai-phakial tribe.

Dinner and overnight at Wathai Heritage Bungalow.

*DIBRU-SAIKHOWA National Park is known for its pristine beauty. The forest in this park ranges from semi-evergreen to deciduous to littoral to swampy marshes with patches of wet evergreen jungles. About 36 species of mammals have so far been recorded – Royal Bengal Tiger, Leopard, Clouded Leopard, Jungle Cat, Sloth Bear, Malayan Giant Squirrel, Slow Loris, to name a few.*

*You may also see the endangered Gangetic Dolphin. This rare mammal can only live in freshwater and is essentially blind. They hunt by emitting ultrasonic sounds, which bounces off of fish and other prey, enabling them to “see” an image in their mind. They are frequently found alone or in small groups, and generally a mother and calf travel together.*

*Dibru-Saikhowa is also a safe haven to many rare and endangered species of over 350 birds which includes an incredible number of waders, ducks, raptors and speciality grassland birds.*

*The “big four” are Jerdon’s Bushchat, Black-breasted Parrotbill, Marsh Babbler and Jerdon’s Bushchat.*

*Several other rarely observed species can be found in the extensive grasslands, wetlands, and riverine forests. These include Baer’s Pochard, Bengal Florican,*

*Pale-capped Pigeon, Falcated duck, Baikal Teal, Chinese spotbilled duck and Rufous vented prinia.*

*DIGBOI is a small town in the Tinsukia district of the north-eastern part of the state of Assam. Petroleum oil was discovered here in late 19th century and the Digboi oilfield is one of the oldest oil fields. With a significant number of British professionals working for the Assam Oil Company as late as until the decade following the independence of India, Digboi has a legacy of a well-developed infrastructure and a number of bungalows unique to the town as well as a world class 18 hole golf course.*

*Digboi Museum is closed on Mondays.*

*NAMPHAKE is a beautiful "Tai" village situated on the banks of the river Buridihing in Upper Assam. At Namphake you will see traditional houses built on stilts made of bamboo. Their roofs are made of "tokou pata" (fan palm leaves). The Tai-Phakes are Buddhists, who have maintained their traditions and customs, and wear hand woven clothes. They weave beautiful mekhlis and bags of various designs. The Buddhist monastery at Namphake is well maintained and is worth a visit.*

#### **Day 6: Riding at Tinsukia**

Today your ride takes you around the tea plantations of Limbuguri Tea Estate. Have lunch at the bungalow and later enjoy another ride in the area.



Overnight at the Wathai Heritage Bungalow.

(Riding time c. 4 hrs)

#### **Day 7: Riding at Tinsukia; transferring back to Dibrugarh**

This morning you have an early morning visit to Barekuri Village (driving time about 20 mins) to see a small group of Hoolock Gibbons.



*BAREKURI is an Assamese village situated next to the famous Dibru Saikhowa National Park. The village is famous for the presence of some Hoolock Gibbons, an endangered ape species found in India. Here the Hoolock Gibbons have been protected and cared for by the villagers on account of their age old religious beliefs. Every day the villagers feed them so they always stay in and around the village. The people of the village never cut the tall trees, because the gibbons live on them and they believe that it's a bad sign if anybody sees a gibbon walking on the ground.*

After breakfast, you ride through the countryside and around the Limbuguri Tea Estate.



After lunch you drive back to Dibrugarh (55kms; 1.5 hrs).

(Riding time c. 2.5 hrs)

Dinner and overnight at a Chang Bungalow.

#### **Day 8:**

Morning at leisure.

Transfer to the airport for your onward flight.

The flight to Delhi (via Guwahati) normally departs at 13:55.

## Accommodation

When the British established their tea plantations in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century they quickly built comfortable bungalows designed to make life as pleasant as possible in what was, to them, a hostile and strange land. One of the main features of these buildings has given rise to their name – Chang Bungalows. Chang in the local language means “raised on stilts” and the design served multi-purposes – to keep the house cool by allowing the breeze to blow underneath and to keep both water and animals out.

**At Dibrugarh** you stay in a restored Chang bungalow, once home to the estate manager. There are two bungalows used for guests – Mancotta and Chowkidinghee. Both are set in beautiful and well kept tea gardens. They are spacious, elegant and comfortable and are staffed by competent and friendly local Indian personnel.



Mancotta bungalow

Mancotta bungalow has six bedrooms, each with en suite shower and loo. There are two spacious rooms on the first floor. Each has a large king sized bed.



Mancotta bedroom

On the ground floor there are two standard rooms each with twin beds.

There are also two smaller rooms in an annex in the garden.

In the main bungalow there is a large sitting room with open fire place and large verandas with mosquito protection.

Chowkidingee (formerly known as South Jalanagar) has a total of three bedrooms, each with en suite shower/loo.

There are two spacious rooms on the first floor. One has a double bed and the other twin beds.

On the ground floor there is a standard room with twin beds. This room does not have air conditioning.

Chowkidingee has a comfortable sitting room and a lovely veranda.



Veranda at Chowkidingee

When visiting the **Dibru-Saikhowa National Park** you stay at the Wathai Heritage Bungalow on Limbuguri Tea Estate, which is just 5kms from the National Park. The “Manager’s Bungalow” has recently been

renovated and has three bedrooms. Minla is a family room (with a double room and a twin room sharing a bathroom); Sibia has a double bed (which can also be made up as a twin) and Yuhina has two beds.

Fresh tea can be enjoyed in the 'jali room" which overlooks the gardens to the front of the bungalow, while meals are served in the spacious dining room.



Wathai Heritage Bungalow