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🖎 By Bhushan Kudali

Joyous Flows the Kapila

 ${f B}$ efore this trip, the only Kapila we knew about was the tributary of Kaveri also called as Kabini. The home stay that we booked into in Religion County (thanks to Dharmasthala and numerous other temples in the region) brought us face to face with this tributary of Nethravathi.

Two quick stops at Kukke Subramanya and Dharmasthala

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taught us how to wield the umbrellas expertly and ward off the rain much like the locals do. Returning from Dharmasthala in the same route, we alighted at Kokkada, took an auto and reached the home stay which

ada - This is one of

was about 10km away. We instantly liked this place remote, silent, clean air, gurgling waters, good food and service, Kapila flowing just beside the property, persistent downpours, a sociable host and many places

to see if we were in the mood.

We wolfed down our lunch and then we were off for some sightseeing despite the rain.

Continued on next page...

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cute little puddles. At this second point we were much closer to the stream as it fell down another gorge and we could see many rocks worn smooth along its path. On our way back our host told us about kayaking enthusiasts who almost regularly visit him 'in season', which was news to us.

At Southadka we found Lord Ganesha reigning in open splendor. Except for a raised platform there is no other structure to call it a temple hence the deity sits exposed to the elements. Visitors are greeted by two long rows of brass & gunmetal bells tied by the believers who came seeking favours from the Lord. The mood was electric as the congregation stood and watched the morning aarti.

The next bit of sightseeing was at a long suspension bridge across Gundya river on the other side of the National Highway about 4km away. We parked the car beside the Highway and walked up to the bridge. We

crossed the bridge and went around another Ganesha temple that was locked up after morning puja. This was set amidst lush fields in Adenja village, with the Bhoota deities in a separate enclosure at the rear. As we went around, a long snake rushed away into the fields. The place was deserted yet full of life and there was harmony everywhere.

We returned to the home stay for lunch and then it was time to go in search of insects and birds, camera in hand. For the first time we could photograph a cicada and later a yellow bulbul. We could hear drongo calls and the omnipresent mynah. There were many more birds whose names we did not know of. Then we just stayed around the cottage and soaked in the rains (not literally). It was marvelous to see many insects go about their lives in an uninterrupted fashion.

We boarded the bus for our return journey at Kokkada the next morning, with the familiar 'once-is-not-enough' feeling.





Kokkada is 287km from Bangalore, located between Gundya and Dharmasthala. It is accessible by road. Nearest railhead is Subramanya Road. Stream of Joy home stay is another 10km from here. Best way to travel is by own vehicle and best season is winter.

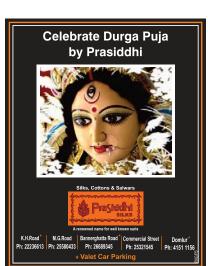
Soon we reached the picturesque Shishileshwara Temple of Lord Shiva and promptly got busy feeding the mahseer fish that have found sanctuary in Kapila at this place. We absorbed the quiet of this place and moved further to look at a Jain temple in ruins. It was overgrown with weeds and bushes, with very little remaining to suggest the existence of the temple. We were lost thinking about the intent of the original builder and mused about the machinations of faith

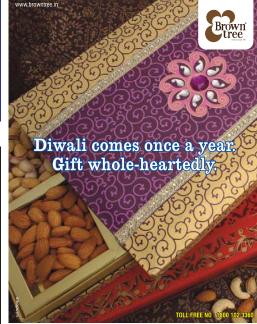
We returned to the home stay at nightfall. The next morning we headed out to another waterfall, again formed by river Kapila. Our host deftly led us to the place from where we could see Kapila roaring down from a rocky bed and onto more rocks, the speeding water having carved out its passage and sculpted the rocks with the force of nature over many a moon. The absence of crowds, the threat of rains, an over laden sky, the pervading roar - all set the stage for us to witness the energetic facet of Kapila with awe. The same reason for which KPCL once surveyed this place to explore generation of power!

Beside our home stay Kapila flowed in quietly towards the property and as it forked into two over a bed of pebbles and boulders it made the first noises much like the gurgling of an infant learning to utter its first words. Then at Shishila it was livened by the mahseer as otherwise it flowed gracefully with a slow natural gush. Here at Parpigal, it flowed forcefully forward.

Soon our host motioned us to move further downstream over slippery rocks and







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By Deepak Amembal

Every city has its festive season. In Mysore, Karnataka, it is Dusserah! The whole city comes alive and it is full of celebrations, day in and out for ten days with the climax being the

Royal Parade that starts from the Mysore Palace and goes along a predetermined route of around five kilometres to 'Banimantap'.

The Mysore Dusserah festival completed 400 years a few years ago. It was actually started by the Vijayanagar Kings in the fifteenth century but was stopped after the fall of the Vijayanagar Kingdom. It was finally the Wodeyars who restarted it in 1610.

Traditionally the festivities begin with the Royal Wodeyar couple performing a special puja to Goddess Chamundeshwari at the Chamundi temple atop the Chamundi hill in Mysore after which the Mysore Palace is lit up for the ten days of festivities. It is a Festival celebrating victory of Truth over Evil. Legend has it that the Goddess Chamundeshwari or Durga slayed the demon Mahishasura on Vijayadashami day.

Hence, the main attraction of this procession is the idol of the Goddess Chamundeshwari which is placed on a golden mantapa on the top of a decorated elephant. This idol is worshipped first by the royal couple and then other special invitees before it is taken around in the procession.

Colourful tableaux, dance groups, music bands, decorated elephants, horses and camels form a part of the procession which starts from the Mysore Palace and culminates at a place called Banimantap where the banni tree (Prosopis spicigera) is worshipped. Before going to war, the Kings traditionally worshipped this tree to help them emerge victorious. The Dusserah night of Vijayadashami with a torch lit parade held on the grounds at Banimantap.

festival culminates on the

Visitors may purchase tickets to sit on chairs outside the Palace to view the proceedings but it would tie you down to one place for the entire performance. Moreover you are expected to occupy the ringside seats a few hours earlier than the start of the Parade!

All along the route there are barriers put to ensure that spectators do not spill over onto the road and obstruct the parade. Visitors come from far and wide to view this spectacle and occupy and reserve their places on the pavement lining the Parade route. Young boys perched on the trees too are a common sight! Hotels along the route do brisk business by offering rooms overlooking the road at special Festival rates. The Parade starts in the afternoon and till then there are a lot of side shows happening on the street. Once the Parade starts the

excitement is palpable and there are shouts and screams interspersed with whistles! This goes on till the end at the Banimantap grounds where the Festival is declared closed.

It is a must visit and has to be on the bucket list of all travellers and culture afficionados.



Getting there:

By Road: Mysore is just 150kms from Bengaluru

By Rail: Mysore is well connected by Rail from all major cities in India.

By Air: Mysore has a small domestic airport which is connected only to Bengaluru which is also the nearest international airport.





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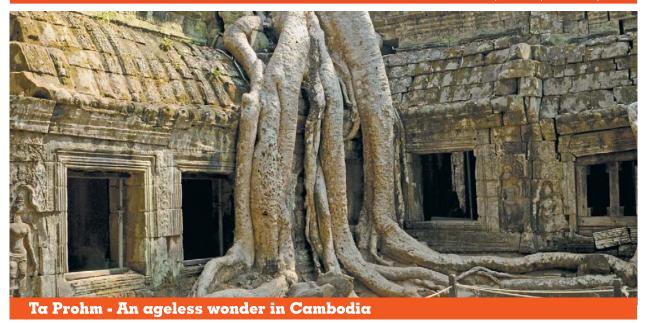
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04 Centre Spread

cavelle



By Lakshmi Sharath

 $\mathbf{I}_{ ext{t}}$ is a serene drive from Thailand to Cambodia as a group of international bloggers get on to two buses from the Thailand border at Aranyaprathet and head towards Siem Reap. Organised by Tourism Thailand, this is my first trip to Cambodia by road. Lush fields fill the landscape as

we slowly enter the Cambodian city. We do not go to Angkor Wat first but to Angkor Thom and then onwards to Ta Prohm, one of my favourite temples, built in the 12th century.

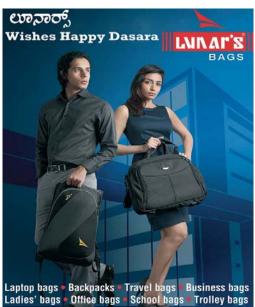
For a lot of us, Khmer civilisation and the state of Angkor begins and ends with the Angkor Wat, but there are several temples in the region that catch the tourist's attention. Be it the Rolous group of monuments, at ancient Harihalaya where king Jayavarman II built his early capital or the city of Angkor Thom, which became the later capital of Jayavarman VII, the temples here speak of a civilisation that flourished for several centuries. Ta Prohm is one of the monuments that live

to tell a tale. Deep inside the forests, it is hard to believe that the outer area around it was once an inhabited city with more than 3000 settlements.

The guide book says that you would need an hour to look around, but I can spend an eternity here. The roots of the silk cotton trees which have an ageless sense around them

entwine around the ruins, giving them a sense of mystery. The temple itself may be around 1000 years old, but the trees with their trunks entrenched deep inside the walls take you to a different era. The brown and the green merge with the fallen leaves as the breeze comes calling.

You do not just look at the structures or the sculptures





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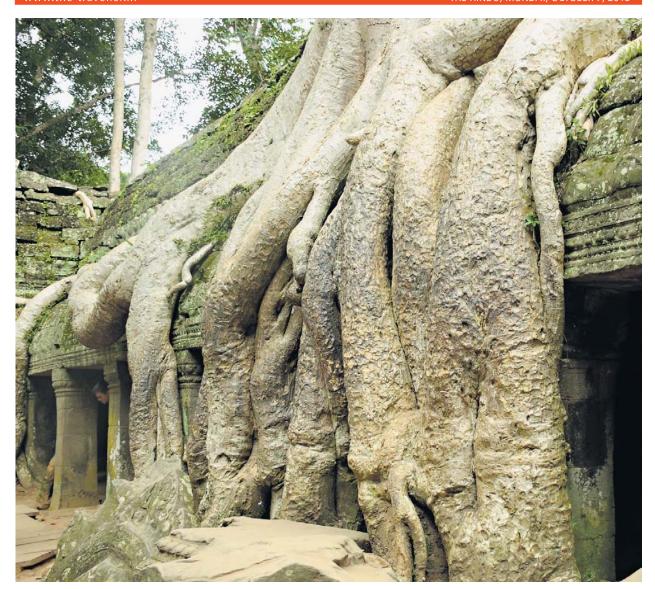
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05 Centre Spread

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carved on the walls. Instead your eyes gaze upon the branches of the ficus trees that curve around the carvings, some of them sturdy enough to hold the entire structure in place, while the others have collapsed, taking in the stony edifices with them. The leafy branches dangle casually as the birds find a perch. This is a temple left in its natural state, although carefully restored with the help of Indian archaeologists and historians.

A temple made famous by the Angelina Jolie film, The Tomb Raider, Ta Prohm today is often referred to as the Angelina Jolie Temple and guides take you to the site where the roots and the branches of the trees create a vivid impression of the wild, even as tourists pose for cameras. The temple was called Rajavihara or the royal monastery, also referred to as Old Brahma built with concentric galleries, corner stones, gopuras and courtyards.

Walking around, I see the dwarapalakas and the devtaas carved on the walls, even as the trees frame them. I am told that the temple was built for more than 250 deities and the principal deity, Prajnaparamita, referred to the Perfection of Wisdom was carved in the likeness of the king, Jayavarman VII's mother. The

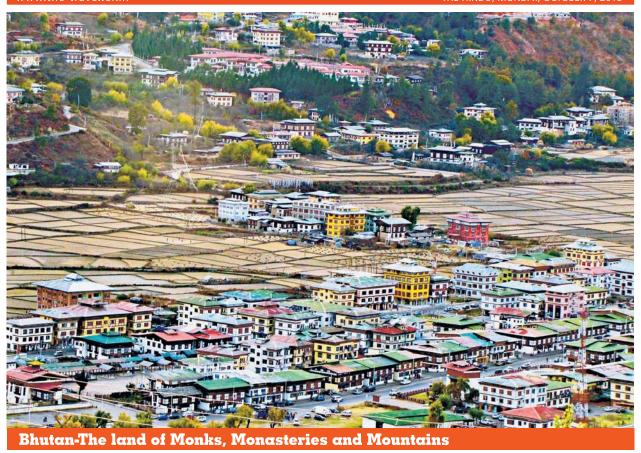
sun's rays light the dangled roots that lend an eerie air to the temple.

Walking along the east, we make our way along a path lined with trees to a structure built in sandstone across the moat. Some of the bas reliefs in the shrines can be seen amidst all the ruins around. The roofless structure of the hall of the dancers with the tree trunks winding around it beckon you as you watch in awe at nature's design over man's art. And then you realize why Ta Prohm leaves you breathless with wonder. It is nature and man's hand at its best and you wouldn't like to change it for anything.



Getting there: Siem Reap which is the closest town to Angkor Wat and temples around it is accessible by air from Bangkok, Singapore and Malaysia. If you are going by road from Thailand border, you would need to get a visa and the journey would take you around four hours by bus. www.the-traveller.in

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🖎 By Mamta Naidu

Traveling from Bhagdogra, India to Phuentsholing, Bhutan by land is a feast for mind, body and soul. You can have a quality "me" time; while the bountiful supply of: sprightly forests, mighty mountains and sparkly rivers under the all-pervading sky, rise and fall along the way.

As we arrived in Phuentsholing-the gateway to Bhutan, it felt like a Narnia style time warp transition. Monotonous concrete buildings transformed into wooden structures with sloping roofs. You can't read the names on the shops or so much as pronounce someone's name without asking for an encore anymore. As you

reach the Bhutan gate, the clock indicates you are 30 min ahead of your compatriots back home. The fact that you're in a foreign land will start to sink in when you see the posters of queen and king towering you in all the directions as opposed to movie posters.

Bhutan's dress code is unique and it's called Driglam Namzha. If you thought wearing a saree was a complex process, think again. To dress like a traditional Bhutanese man or a woman, first you need a lot of apparels and then a mind to understand a complex technique and above all a lot of patience I gather.

According to our guide, Bhutanese chose monarchy over democracy. In case your jaw dropped to the floor, like mine did, you'll be delighted to know Bhutan is rated happiest country in Asia and eighth happiest country in the world. After all, it's a country bursting with red robed monks busy chanting prayers and those who are not monks busy serving the monks or visiting monasteries. It's very apparent that Bhutan chose to stay as far away as possible from

TRAVEL GADGETS

🖎 By Aarti Krishnakumar



to one person might not to the other. This happens a lot when there are children around. The monuments, ruins, forts and palaces would interest them to a certain extent beyond which they go bored. The only way to keep them curious and interested is to give them something that would keep them occupied. Books are difficult to read while on the move, so the best alternative is

the PSP. This nifty device is the perfect gaming device, can hold upto 300 games and is good for kids across ages. You could play NFL 06 or Need for speed or watch movies and TV shows on this as well. The battery lasts for up to 5 hours for games and 6 hours for video playback.

Even if there are no children around, you can carry this PSP and use this as a phone backup as well. Sony added wi-fi based Skype service to the new range of PSPs. Adding to its features, you can attach the GPS device to the PSP's USB port and get around a new destination. But this feature is available only within US as of now.

Time flies when you are having fun

Next time you plan a trip, remember to pack this PSP along!

07 Bhutan

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problematic globalization.

Bhutan's only international airport is in Paro, a town situated in a valley, 149km from Phuentsholing. One has to enter Paro to visit other parts of Bhutan. For a nomadic spirit like me, Paro is like Disneyland. River passing right through the whole town, wooden



Getting There: The route we essentially traversed during our eight-day trip with deviation here and there was:

Phuentsholing to Paro -> Paro to Thimphu ->Thimphu to Phobjikha -> Phobjikha to Paro -> Paro to Phuentsholing.

Indians don't require a visa to travel in Bhutan. However an Indian identity proof should be produced after arrival at the Bhutan gate to acquire permits for a certain period.

Indian rupee as well as Bhutanese ngultrum is accepted in Bhutan. There are good and inexpensive hotels across Bhutan. People speak Hindi and Bhutanese version of Indian food is available.

bridge, Dzongs, colorful and decked facades of the buildings, expansive and vacant airport, and the weather, almost everything about this town was distinctive. And the best drink you'll ever enjoy in chilly Paro is a glass of really hot water.

Taktsang aka The Tiger's nest monastery in Paro was built in 8th Century and needless to say that it is one of the most visited and renowned monasteries in Bhutan. Legend has it that Guru Padmasambhava who introduced Buddhism in Bhutan had meditated for three years, three months, three weeks, three days and three hours in this cave. Perhaps he had a fetish for number three. So he flew to this location from Tibet on the back of a tigress from Khenpajong to tame the Tiger demon. There are several variations to the legend, with Tiger as a constant.

From a distance this monastery has an air of eeriness to it. For one it involves a tiger and for another, it hangs precariously onto a cliff. As you get closer, the splendor and serenity of the monastery gradually dawn on you. This is by far one of the best monasteries you'll visit in Bhutan.

Things that'll mystify you about Paro are: It's sparsely populated. There are absolutely no apartments. There

is enough space between buildings to erect a mall. Our driver did not so much as apply brakes, let alone honk.

Thimphu is 65km from Paro and it is the capital of Bhutan. It's a quintessential, frown evoking, noisy, dirty, busy and congested city. Traffic, rude people, malls, showrooms is a usual sight.

However, unlike the other cities, it is surrounded by the glorious Himalayas and you can see the grandeur of these mountains from anywhere in Thimphu. So this is the only consolation if you had no choice but to stay in Thimphu.

Phobjikha is 135km from Thimphu. It is a remote village in a glacial valley, speckled with only a handful of houses surrounded by endless bright grassy pastures. And the temperature goes down to -4 °C during winter, we were told. It is frequented mostly by bird enthusiast as the endangered Black Necked Cranes migrate from Tibet during the month of October.

Standing in the patio under the starry night sky with peace and quiet for company and Black Necked Cranes calling occasionally in the distance for music, the night spent at Phobjikha was the best time I spent in Bhutan. It was a transcendental experience.

Bhutan's national dish is the ubiquitous Ema Datshi (Chili and Cheese stew) and you get to eat this dish at every meal. You don't have to fret about all the calories you are downing in the form of cheese, for there



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are one too many monasteries to visit. And you will burn all the calories taking your shoes off and putting them back on at every monastery. Besides, turning the prayer wheels in all the monasteries will also take care your upper body workout. In these few days I've visited monasteries enough for one life time.

Punaka was the capital of Bhutan till 1955 before Thimphu. It is 72km from Thimphu. Chimi Lakhang Temples also famously known a Fertility temple is situated in Punaka. Locals believe that if a childless couple seeks the blessings of Lama Drukpa Kuenley, the couple will soon bear children.

A brief conversation with the locals will make you believe science itself is just a myth. Interesting thing here is, facades of the houses across the village

are painted and adorned with fertility symbols.

Also wooden carvings of these symbols are sold in all the shops. Initially I was scandalized; however, gradually I warmed up to the unique tradition.

Bhutanese generally are laidback, simple and peace loving people. They don't know arranged marriages exist in some parts of the world. It reflects in their attitude that money is not really a big deal. People from the other parts of the world definitely have a thing or two to learn from them.



Next Issue on October 18, 2013



