

Assam Despatch 3: River Island Cruise

BRAHMAPUTRA UPSTREAM | 7 NIGHTS/8 DAYS | KAZIRANGA TO JORHAT

DAY 1

Arrive at Guwahati airport and drive 4 hrs to Silghat, a picturesque mooring site on a river bank below jungle-covered hills and close to the Kaziranga National Park. Alternatively, arrive at Jorhat airport and drive 3½ hrs to Silghat. Meet your local crew as you are welcomed on-board your 7-night Brahmaputra River Voyage.

Enjoy your first evening getting to know the lay of the land, the mighty Himalayan river, the culture, the people and your abode for this special time in Assam.

DAY 2

Today, you'll be driven to Kaziranga's Central Range for a morning jeep safari.

Covering an area of approximately 1090 sq. kms, the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Kaziranga National Park is home to the world's largest population of the Indian One-Horned Rhinoceros as well as the Indian Wild Water Buffalo. It has also earned the distinction of having the highest density of Royal Bengal Tigers (one in every five sq. km.) making this park an incredibly rich biodiversity hotspot. With its marshy swamps and vast swathes of elephant grass, this park supports large populations of Indian elephants, Indian bison, swamp deer, Hoolock Gibbons and Capped Langurs.

Kaziranga National Park frequently draws comparisons to the Serengeti in Africa due to the park's abundance of water bodies and grasslands full of wildlife, big and small and a birding paradise. Bird species found here include the Oriental Honey Buzzard, Black-shouldered Kite, White-tailed Eagle, Himalayan Griffon and many more.

Enjoy a delightful river-side lunch at our very own Diphlu River Lodge where you will encounter the local community members of Kaziranga who are the fabric of this award-winning eco-lodge. In the afternoon, you'll explore more of the Kaziranga National Park on another jeep safari in the Western Range.

Day 3

Today you will visit a picturesque Assam tea plantation before we cruise upstream sailing past Kaziranga National Park. This unique experience combines adventure and tranquillity, making it an unforgettable part of your journey through Assam. Whether you're a nature enthusiast, a wildlife photographer, or simply seeking a peaceful escape, cruising through Kaziranga National Park offers a captivating encounter with one of the world's finest wildlife habitats.

You will also witness the ecological balance of the area. The annual floods caused by the Brahmaputra when we do not cruise this mighty river play a crucial role in rejuvenating the park's landscape, ensuring the growth of nutrient-rich soil that supports the diverse flora and fauna.

We will anchor for the night near Biswanath village.

DAY 4

This morning you'll visit Biswanath, known for its Ahom-period Shiva temples. Walk through this quaint Assamese riverside town before embarking aboard and setting off again, with Kaziranga still on the far bank. Keep an eye out for wild elephants which have been spotted while sailing past the National Park, and once or twice, memorably, a tiger.

A leisurely afternoon of gently cruising up the river offers a good chance of spotting the endangered Gangetic dolphin.

DAY 5

Today brings another opportunity to watch life unfold on the riverbanks as you cruise upstream. The languid pace of life on-board the boat offers a rare opportunity to sit and watch the world slip by, chat with fellow guests, or catch up on your reading. You'll have time to stretch your legs with a walk through a river side village or on a sandbank island, whilst gaining an insight into life in rural northeast India.

DAY 6

You should reach Majuli Island around breakfast time. One of the world's largest river islands and a microcosm of Assamese culture, Majuli is much-photographed but little-visited. It is a stronghold of the peaceful religion of neo-Vaishnavism and the elegant island satra's (or known as monasteries) dating back to the 15th century. These satra's have played a crucial role in preserving and promoting Assamese art, culture, and traditions. The celibate monks showcase a unique way of life where the faithful live simply, offering worship through gayan-bayan (songs and musical instruments), dance-drama and recitation of scriptures.

You'll visit a monastery at Auniati with its eclectic museum, then attend a dance performance at Kamalabari monastery before we cruise up to Salmara Ghat. In the afternoon, you'll have the opportunity to visit a nearby village known for its traditional handicrafts.

DAY 7

Today, we will experience the once royal kingdom of Assam along the Brahmaputra that is Sibsagar, which also served as the capital of the Ahom kings. Sibsagar serves as a testament to the Ahoms' enduring legacy and the unique blend of Indian and Southeast Asian influences that shaped their culture. Shan by origin but later converted to Hinduism, the Ahoms ruled Assam for some 600 years until the mid-1820s. One of their many architectural feats was recently awarded the UNESCO World Heritage tag.

You'll see temples with stupa-like profiles and palaces of distinctive form. The temple tank here is believed to be the world's largest hand-excavated reservoir and quite the feat of engineering, as you'll see. Return to your ship, which will have cruised down to Neamati Ghat, close to Jorhat.

Bid adieu with a warm farewell dinner hosted by your crew.

DAY 8

This morning, you'll be driven to Jorhat Airport (with direct flight connectivity to Kolkata), about an hour's drive from Neamati Ghat. Alternatively, there's the option of driving to Dibrugarh airport (with direct flight connectivity to Kolkata, Delhi, Bagdogra and Guwahati), a journey of around 4 hours, passing through the provincial town of Dibrugarh and major American base in WWII.

This itinerary, including the cruise and approximate driving durations, is subject to river and weather conditions. Kaziranga National Park comprises low-lying grassland, which may not be possible to visit when the river is at or near flood level.