Assam Despatch 4: Brahmaputra Maximum

BRAHMAPUTRA DOWNSTREAM | 10 NIGHTS/11 DAYS | JORHAT TO GUWAHATI

DAY 1
Arrive at Jorhat airport for a 1 hr drive to the embarkation point of Neamati Ghat. Alternatively, arrive at Dibrugarh, a typical provincial town and major American base in WWII, then be driven for approx. 4 hrs to embark your ship at Neamati Ghat. Meet your local crew as you are welcomed on-board your 10-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
Your first excursion and experience of the rich variety of cultural life along the Brahmaputra 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 the ship and cruise downstream to Majuli island, one of the world's largest river islands. PM, visit a river side village of Majuli Island.

DAY 3
A microcosm of Assamese culture, Majuli island is much-photographed but little-visited. It is a stronghold of the peaceful religion of neo-Vaishnavism and the elegant island satra's (or 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. Later, return to the ship and cruise downstream.

DAY 4
A day spent mostly sailing languidly along the Brahmaputra taking in the charming rural vistas, though you'll stop for a short visit to a village by the river. By afternoon, Kaziranga National Park will be on your left – wild elephants are sometimes visible from the boat and once or twice, memorably, a tiger, so keep an eye out for movement on the banks.

DAY 5
This morning, you'll arrive at the delightful temple town of Biswanath, known for its fine Ahom-period temple. Take a walk ashore to explore the architecture and village life with weekly markets before continuing the voyage down to a quaint mooring at Silghat, where butterflies abound in the surrounding jungle.

Go on your first safari in Kaziranga National Park, a jeep ride through the woodlands, grasslands and wetlands of the Burapahar Range.

DAY 6
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 7
Today, we will visit a picturesque Assam Tea plantation before cruising downstream under the seemingly endless bridge to dock at Tezpur.

After lunch on board, we will be exploring on local battery- operated rickshaws to thrill you through the bustling bazaars of this riverside Assamese town as we make our way to a well-manicured Cole Park garden for an afternoon stroll to marvel at a beautiful collection of medieval stone carvings and visit the remnants of a 6th century Da Parbatia temple with its exquisitely carved portal.

DAY 8
After an early breakfast, we will embark on a drive of approximately one hour to Nameri National Park, nestled at the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas. This remarkable destination serves as a national park, tiger reserve, elephant reserve, and an important bird area. Nameri is contiguous with the Pakke Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh, forming a vast expanse of semi-evergreen and evergreen forests in Northeast India.

Once we arrive, you'll have the opportunity to enjoy a two-hour float trip down the Jia-Bhoreli River, meandering through the park's stunning landscapes. This tranquil journey offers excellent bird-watching opportunities, where you might spot the magnificent Great Hornbills, and possibly even encounter wild elephants in their natural habitat.

We will return to the ship in time for lunch before continuing our cruise downstream, enriched by the beauty and biodiversity of Nameri National Park.

DAY 9
The day is spent on the river, gently traversing a magical lunar landscape of sand islands before closing in on the range of hills beyond which lies Guwahati. Visit a picturesque river side village and moor for the night near Sualkuchi.

DAY 10
Take a captivating walk through Sualkuchi, a bustling little silk town that serves as the epicenter of Assam's rich silk heritage and production. As Mahatma Gandhi once famously said, "Assamese women weave dreams on looms." Your visit to the weaving workshops offers a rare opportunity to witness the entire process of silk manufacture, from cocoon to spinning and hand-weaving into exquisite mekhela chadars (a two-piece sari, the traditional attire of an Assamese woman).

Every house in this urban village has a loom, and you'll be amazed to see the skilled weavers, both men and women, effortlessly transforming silk threads into magnificent fabrics.

After immersing yourself in the silk-weaving magic of Sualkuchi, you'll sail up to dock close to the grand Saraighat bridge. From there, you'll embark on a tour of Guwahati, driving up the Nilachal Hill to the Kamakhya temple.

This ancient Hindu temple is dedicated to the Mother Goddess and is known for its unique architecture and cultural significance. Join us for a leisurely stroll around the temple's exteriors and soak in the rich history and spirituality that define this sacred place. Your journey through Sualkuchi and Guwahati offers a captivating blend of Assam's rich silk heritage, vibrant culture, and stunning natural beauty.

DAY 11
Disembark this morning and transfer to Guwahati airport for your departure.

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.