

TRAVEL LUST

AUGUST

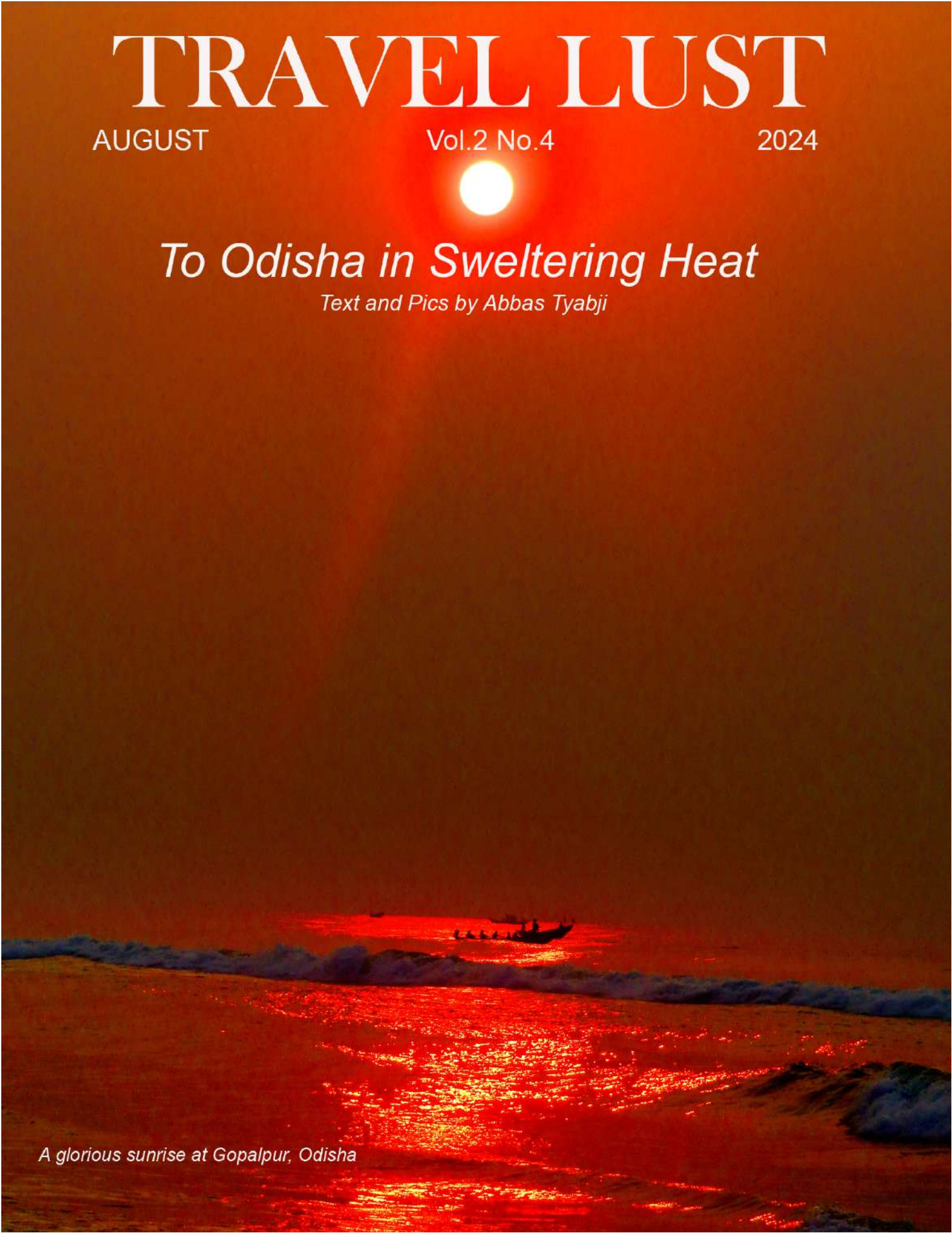
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2024

To Odisha in Sweltering Heat

Text and Pics by Abbas Tyabji

A glorious sunrise at Gopalpur, Odisha



A fishing boat starting its journey, braving incoming breakers



I hadn't met him for 63 years. My school and bus mate Achal Bedi, whose father and mine, worked in the same Tata Motors (then TELCO), manufacturers of steam locomotives, trucks and buses in those days, were meeting at last. He wanted to visit a beach resort and out of the list I sent him, he selected Gopalpur, a favourite of mine, in Odisha. The place was right, the weather was not. He decided to come in April and despite my pleas to change the dates, he insisted that we go for it, and so we started out in my car, with me as driver, on 13th April 2024.

With aircon running smoothly, we sped along the highway to Vijayawada with a breakfast stop halfway. Then we turned onto the Chennai Kolkata National highway on our way to Vishakapatnam and beyond. The total distance from Hyderabad to Gopalpur was 900 kms appx which we intended to do in two days. We passed Vishakapatnam around 4.30 pm and decided to call it a day when we found a reasonable place to stay a little further. After a faltering night's sleep, we took the road bright and early so we could cover the remaining 200 odd kms before lunch.

It was when we stepped out of our hotel in Gopalpur, to have lunch that the first wave of hot air hit us fair and square. Till then we had been ensconced in our air conditioned vehicle. It was a torture walking the kilometre or so to the smattering of food stalls lining the beach road, for a plate of noodles. We tried our best to get a cup of tea but were bluntly told, tea would only be available after 3.00 pm. It was too hot to have tea at that time!! So we grudgingly retreated to our digs to wait out the 2 remaining hours.

While we had watched the blue waves crashing onto the beach, we had no intention of going anywhere near till closer to sundown. Right at that moment, we decided to cut down our stay at Gopalpur from 3 nights to two and head to the hills for what we thought would be a cooler option.

Anyway, in the late afternoon, we ventured out towards the beach, which we found filling up with crowds since it was a Sunday. We had our tea and strolled onto the beach to get a feel of the soft sand which had become cooler by then. We sat on the benches overlooking the beach till quite late, enjoying the breezes, which got cooler by the hour, then searched out an aircooled joint to have a bite in comfort. Early the next morning, I walked onto the beach to capture the fishing boats coming in with their catch while others took to the waves in their hunt for the often elusive catch.

Being Monday, the crowds which normally descended from nearby Berhampur, had vanished and so had most of the eateries. We hardly had any options so we decided the tried and tested Indo Chinese noodles. We again made our way to the beach in the evening, watched the thin crowds and the inviting waves flowing in. Again the next morning I had my customary walk to the beach, saw the gorgeous sunrise, took pictures of the goings on and had a quick breakfast before departing towards the Eastern Ghats, where we wanted to go into some of the tribal villages and then proceed towards Deomali peak, highest in Odisha.

My friend Achal Bedi cools off in a stream in the tribal area of Odisha, with temperatures touching 50C



After passing Berhampur we started climbing into the hills and soon stopped at a tribal village, which I had visited earlier, to have a look around. To our astonishment, the typical thatched roofed houses had all become cement houses!!

Advancement!!! A little further, we took a turn off the main road to visit a Buddhist monastery where refugees from Tibet had been settled. Though it was beastly hot, we decided to have a look around the very colourful traditional monastery, with a few lamas braving the heat to collect food from the kitchen. Imagine their plight when we plainsmen were in such a sad state. Unfortunately the monastery was closed for lunch so we could not view the interiors (I had been there some years ago and seen the exquisite paintings and images).

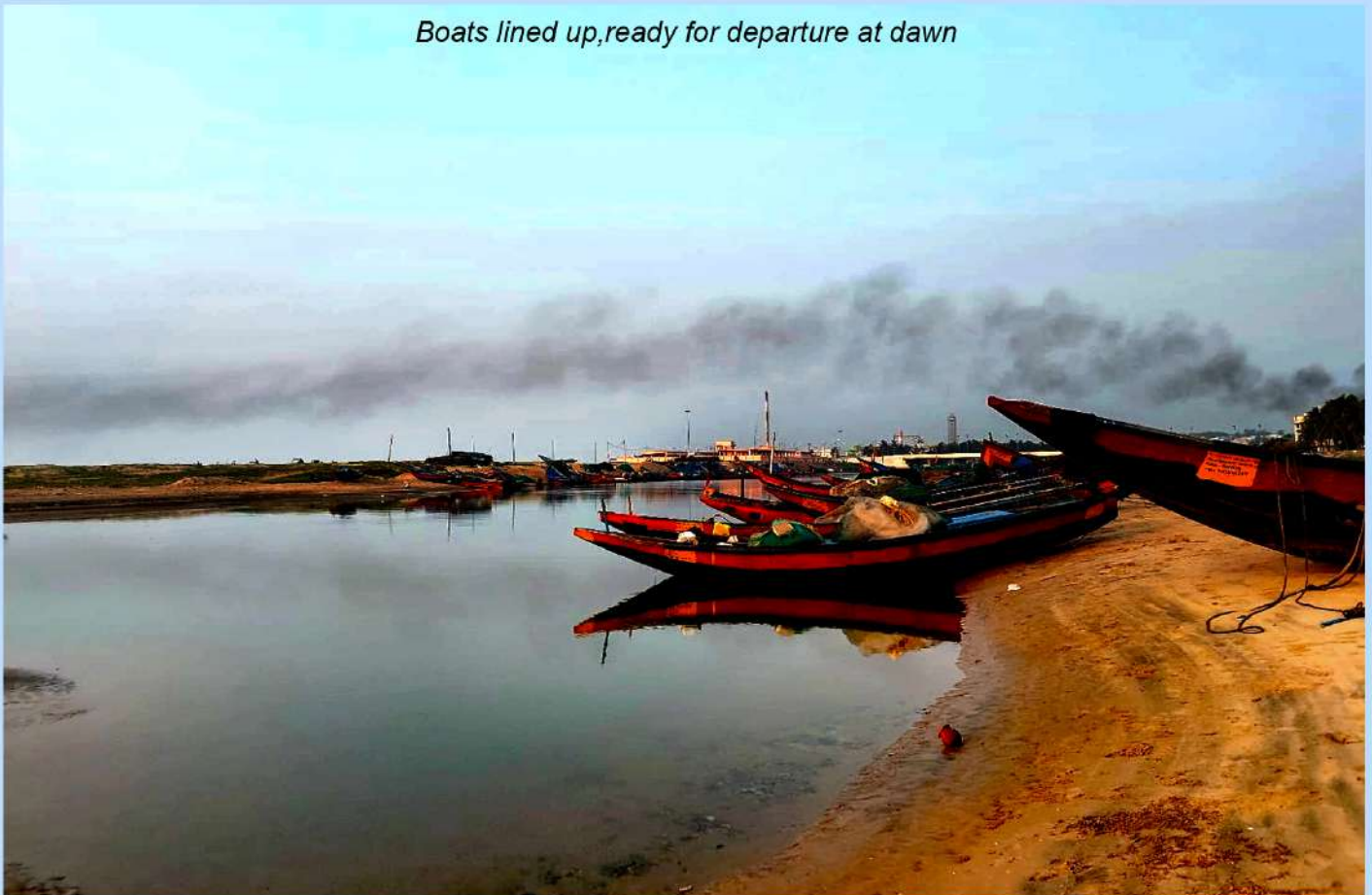
We again met the highway and proceeded towards a small town to bed down for the night. Even with the fans whirring at full speed, it was impossible to sleep so at daybreak, we packed our belongings and proceeded towards a village where we had been told, a tribal market would be held. On the way, we stopped at a tea shop belonging to a local, had some snacks and tea and were surprised to hear that the owner and his wife were also going to the same market to make weekly purchases. So we took exact directions and soon reached a grove of tall deciduous trees under which small covered stalls had been set up to accommodate the sellers.

It was an interesting place to view the tribals, some of them in their original attire (however, most were wearing dresses worn by townsfolk). There were separate areas for fresh vegetables, dried items like onions, turmeric, garlic as also clothes of all types. We had quite an extensive round before departing towards Deomali which we would attempt to drive up to, the next morning. The heat was stupefying, hovering around 50C as we drove across the hilly but hot terrain towards Kunduli, the market town from where we would make our "summit" drive the next morning. After lunch and a nap, I took off in my car to reconnoitre the area around and was rewarded with a gorgeous sunset behind the hills.

At 5.00 am the next morning, we started our drive to Deomali and had some superb views of the sunrise as we meandered and climbed towards the peak. After about 45 minutes, we reached the ridge from where we had a superlative view of the sun rising over the hills and valleys of the Eastern Ghats. From here the summit was close by and we climbed the last few hundred yards, to say we had conquered Deomali. On our return, we decided to do a diversion to get a feel of the area and had plenty of photo ops, of hillsides, valleys, rivulets, small ponds and villages where we were met with stares as if we had landed from Mars!!

Contented, despite the heat, we returned to Kunduli, had lunch and planned to halt at Araku valley, a supposed hill station in Andhra Pradesh. However, when we found this also parched and boiling hot, we decided to by pass it and proceed towards Hyderabad. Passing Vizianagaram and Visakhapatnam enroute, we reached Rajahmundry by sundown where we stayed the night. Taking an early morning start, to beat the heat, we drove via Khammam to reach Hyderabad by lunch time, a little under the weather but otherwise satisfied with our "achievements".

Boats lined up, ready for departure at dawn





The Thupten Mindoling monastery, Jiranga, near Berhampur (above) and the colourful interior





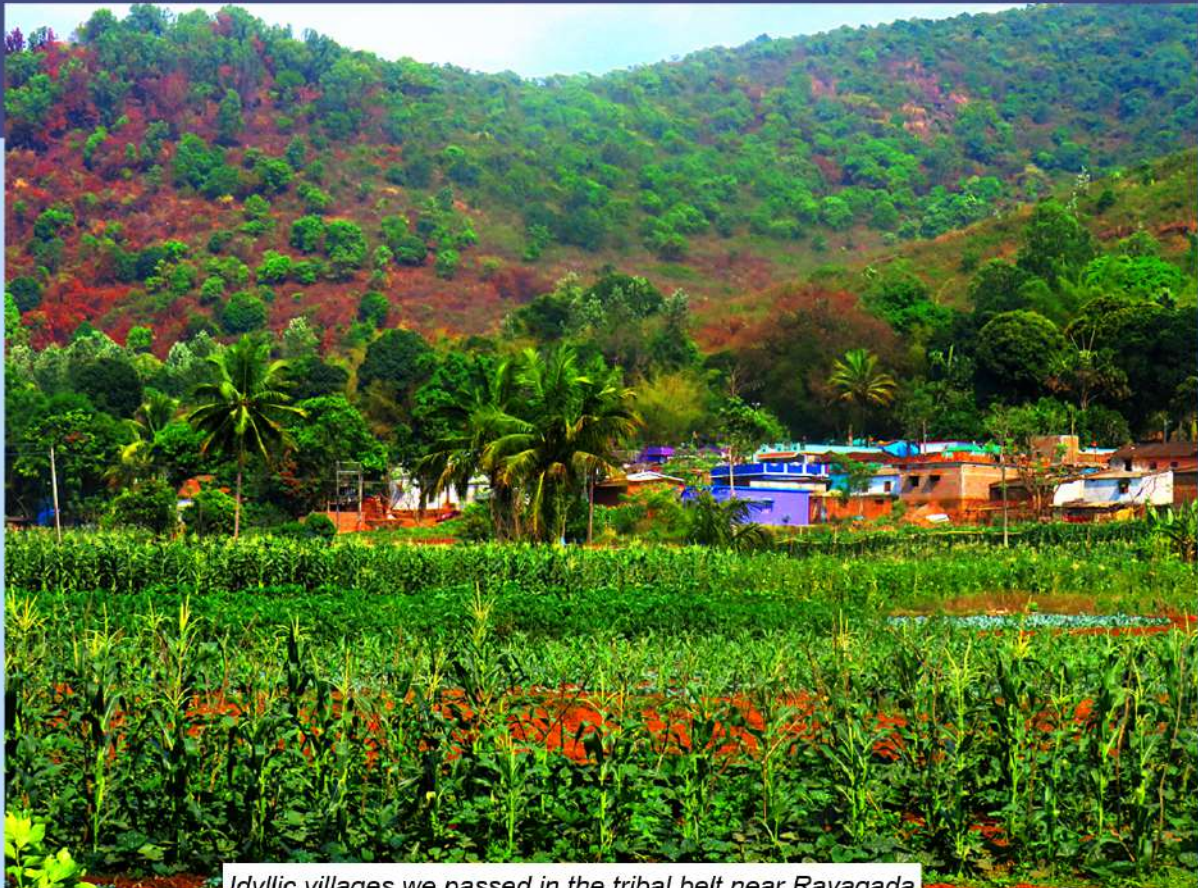
*The deity of Padmasambhava in the colourful interior of the monastery (above)
and a typical village enroute to Rayagada*



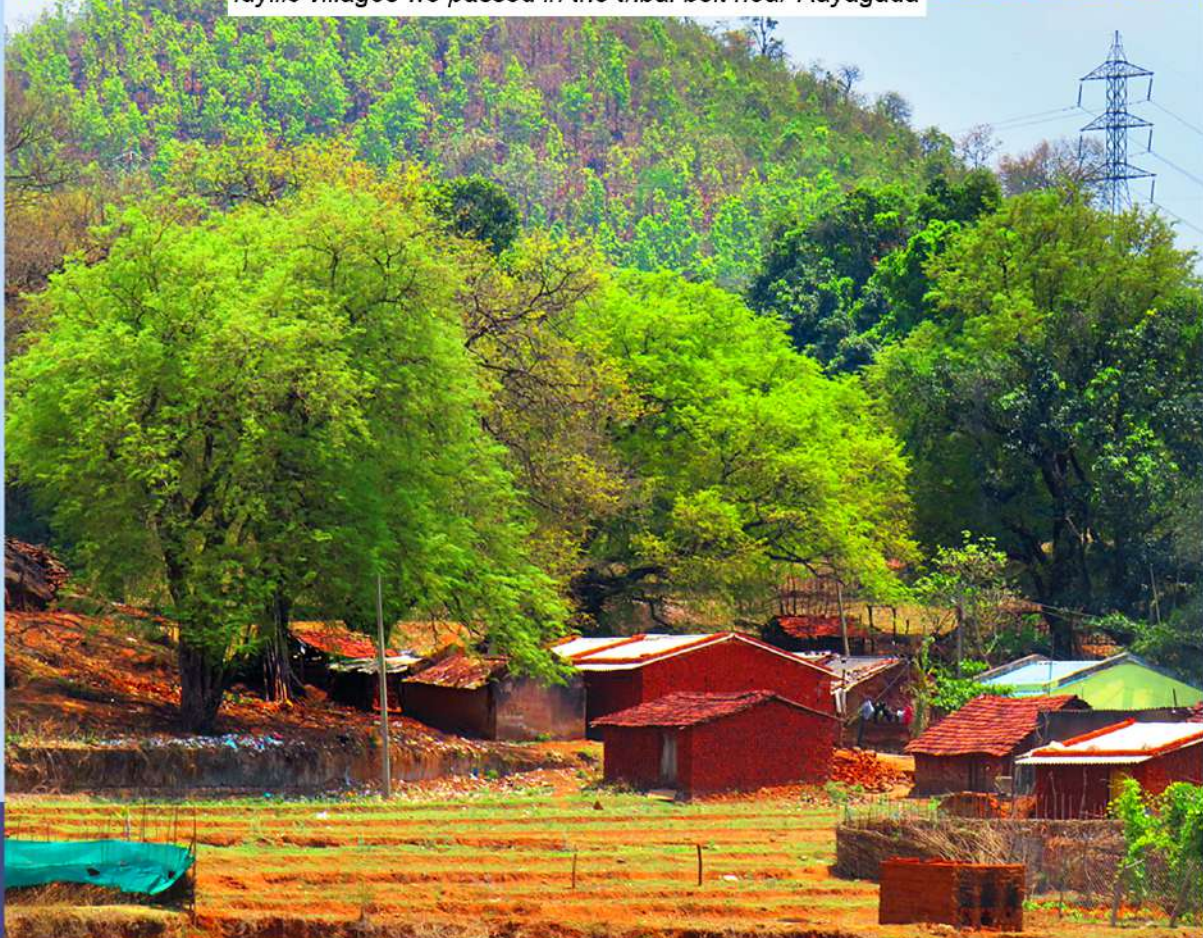


A typical tribal market near Rayagada. Photo at bottom left shows a tea stall where we asked directions for the market





Idyllic villages we passed in the tribal belt near Rayagada





A tribal festival in progress along the way



These people put up road blocks to collect money to celebrate their festival

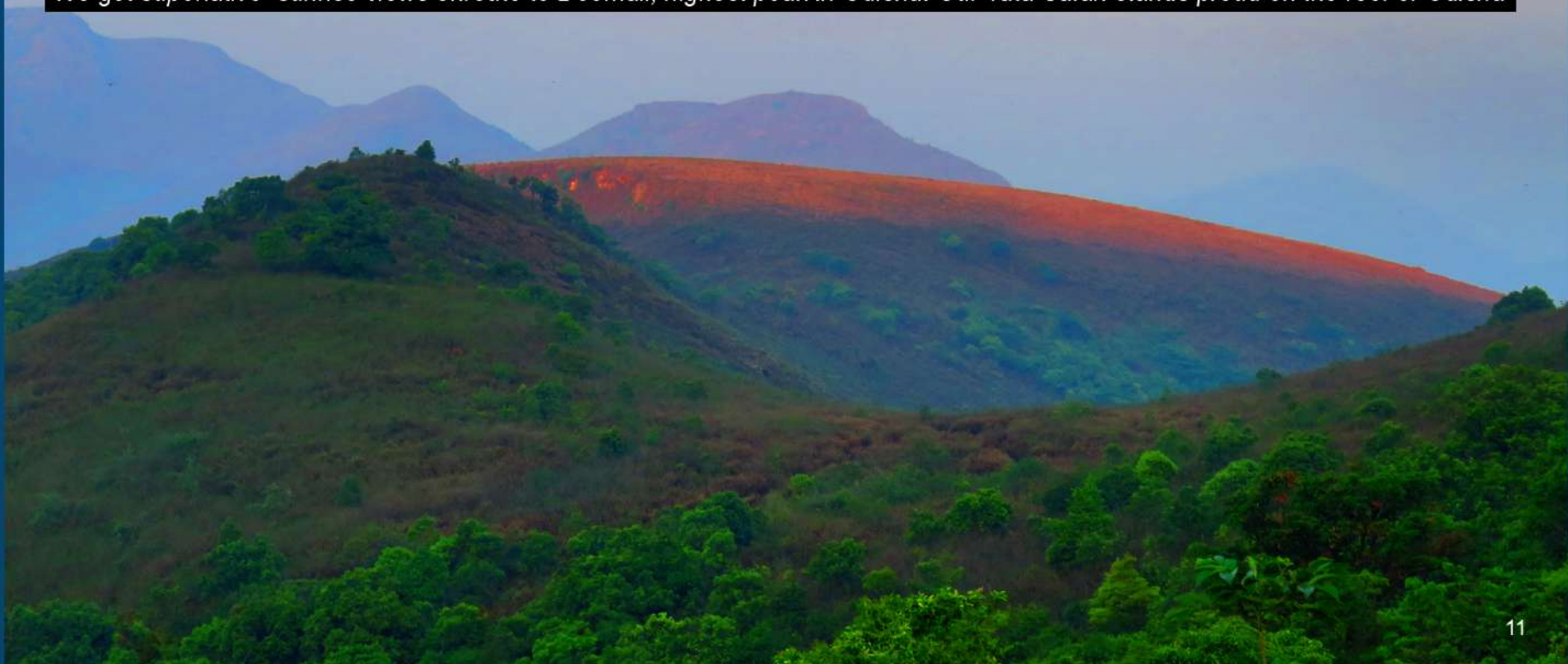




A glowing sunset I saw from near Kundali, where we stayed the night before driving to Deomali



We got superlative sunrise views enroute to Deomali, highest peak in Odisha. Our Tata Safari stands proud on the roof of Odisha



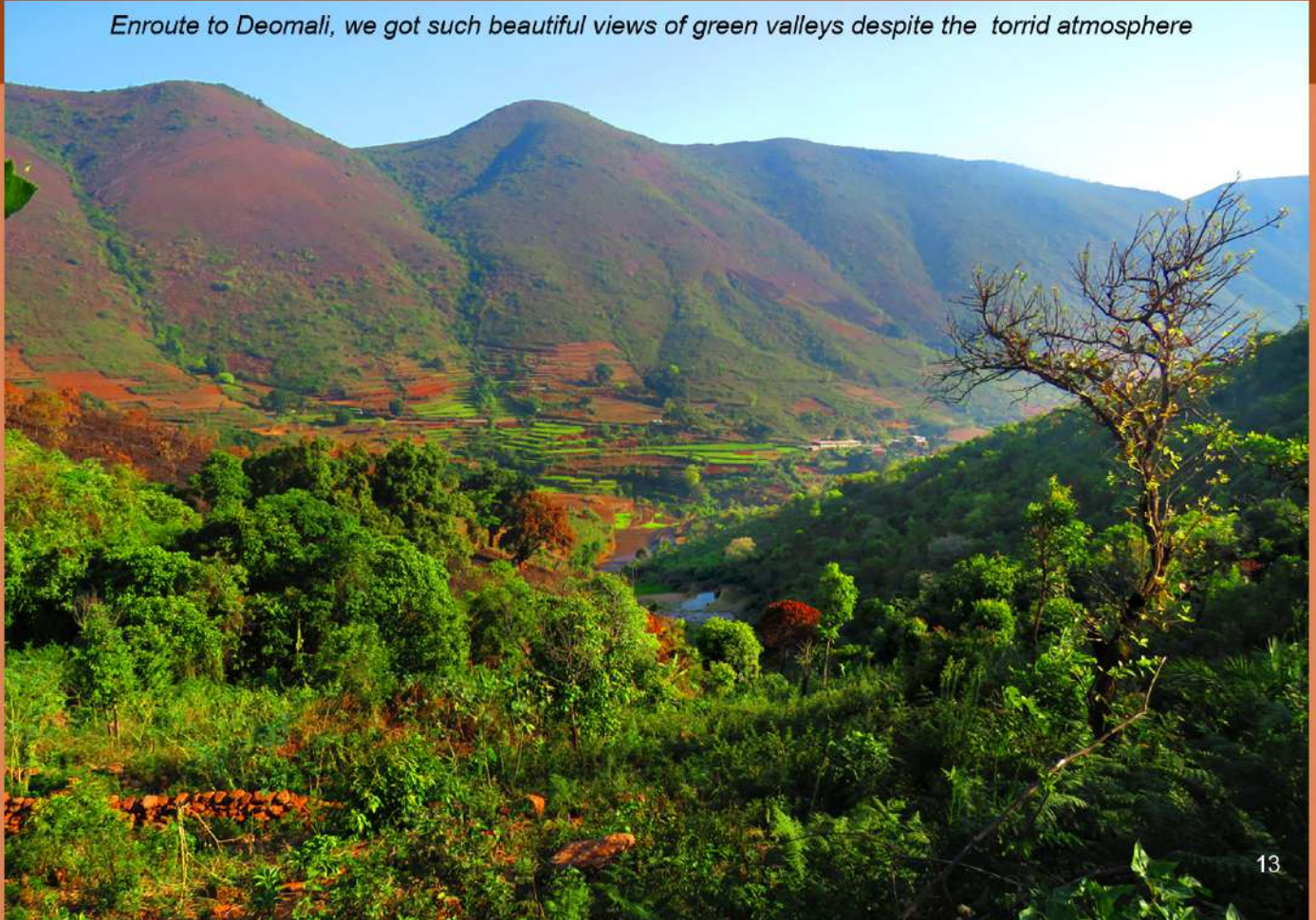


An unforgettable sunrise seen from Deomali

A view of Deomali peak



Enroute to Deomali, we got such beautiful views of green valleys despite the torrid atmosphere





Lush green fields and colourful valleys in the Deomali area





*A typical Odisha style temple we passed
and rural scenes near Deomali*



Another delectable scene of green fields amidst parched areas





Ten Years ago
in
Odisha



A tribal dance programme my friend Han Blaakman from Netherlands,
and I, were lucky to see during our tour of Odisha ten years ago





A tribal hut (top left), toys made by tribals on display (top right), at centre left, Han Blaakman signs an autograph in a tribal household where we were offered tea and snacks by the residents. The girl standing is Kalyani who graduated from Hyderabad, is now married and working in an NGO in northern Odisha. At centre right is a woman from the Banda tribe who still tattoo their faces and wear attractive jewellery. Photo at bottom shows a typical shop selling tribal handicrafts





*Typical tribal faces we saw in the markets around Rayagada.
Below, a line of women carry firewood to market*

Bullock carts can still be seen in the rural areas. Below is my Tata Sumo Grande, which was a faithful companion during my very rough tour of tribal areas of Odisha





A pretty face adorned with colourful clothes and attractive jewellery we saw in one of the markets

Sawasdee Thailand!

Photos and text by Jyoti Singhal



Aerial view of the dramatic Islands near Krabi

Thailand is a popular tourist destination around the world and it was always on my bucket list. When talked about beaches in Thailand, Phuket beaches with white sands are the ones that have mostly been over-sold. However, Krabi is as beautiful as Phuket and calmer and more peaceful and has its own charm to attract. Our stay in Krabi was at 'Holiday Inn resort' near to Ao Nang beach which was a perfect space to start our journey with the utmost relaxation.

On our first after reaching our hotel at Krabi, we had a great time near the pool and relaxed to see out some of the heat of this Thailand weather. After brushing off the stress of early morning travel we thought of hitting the nearby beach Ao Nang. What a view! Of course, you would be reminded of nail rocks you must have seen in the movie Avatar that gives the sea a pinch of color. One can sit down have a beer, eat street munchies, be it the fresh fruits salad or chicken sticks. Wrapping up the day post roaming around in the local market we just wanted to lie down in our cosy bed. Zzzzzzzz.

Next day afresh, we knew what was coming, the famous 4 Island trip (Railey beach, Chicken Island, Tup Island, Poda Island) on a speedboat where our lunch was also planned.

Island Stop 1: Phra Nang Cave beach (Railay beach)

So our first stop was Railay beach which is having a gorgeous view with some beautiful caves and cliffs. We were given about 30 mins on this beautiful place to explore. Here people were doing rock climbing to the cliff and caves and we did it too. The Caves are too beautiful to go for a hike.

Island Stop 2: Chicken Island

We were excited about the next stop which was Chicken island but here the people are not advised to get down hence we just saw island from the boat and clicked a few pics and then after this boat was stopped near a snorkeling zone for obvious reasons. As my husband is fond of swimming he was interested in snorkeling at this very beautiful coral island. Later we were served with some fresh cut fruits and cold drinks as snacks and proceeded to the next stop..

You will be thrilled by the different shades of water





Phra Nang Cave, a caver's delight (above) and an exciting passage between two karst mountains (below)



Island Stop 3: Tup Island

Tup Island is small in comparison to other Island but it has its own beauty as this is a beach where tourist come to witness the amazing parting of the seas having gorgeous views. The island offers a common beach line for two seashores. This island is picturesque with stunning panoramic views of the Krabi coastline in the background.

Island Stop 4: Poda Island

Since this was the last stop, Poda Island, we got the maximum time to spend here and our lunch was also served there. There is a national park on Poda Island which was also included in our trip and so we had the lunch in the shades of trees in this park. The Beach is really pretty with white sand and stunning background.

The place is also one of the most famous spots for movies shooting in Thailand.

Monkeys can be seen everywhere during your Four Island Tour



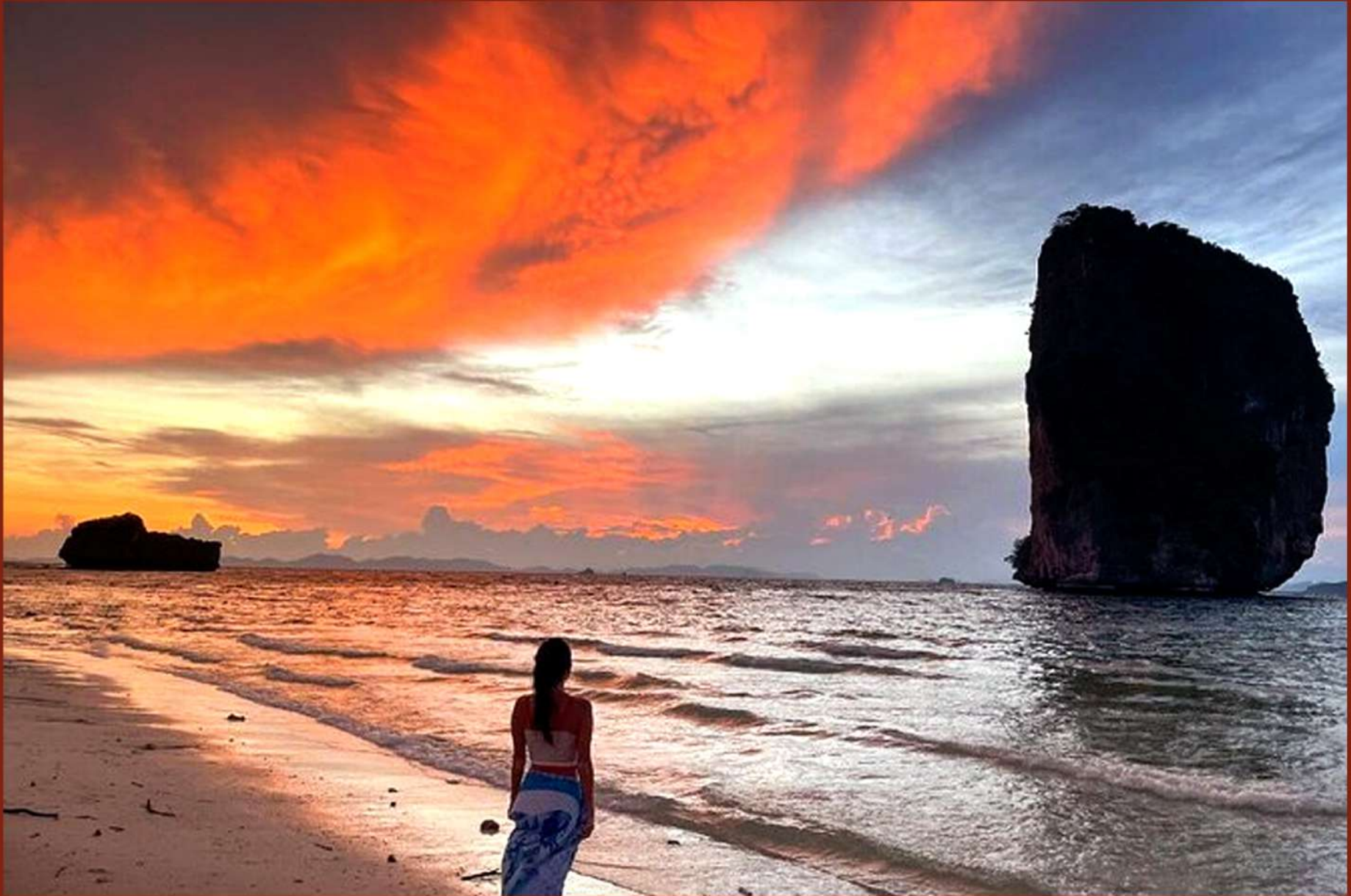
The 4 island tour was completed before 3 O'clock and we reached our hotel at 4 O'clock. So the rest of our day was at leisure and as usual, we went on to explore the area while going for dinner. Next day before leaving for Phuket, we tried the very famous Thai massage at a nearby spa center in the morning which was obviously awesome and in a reasonable price. Thai massages are usually better in Krabi than Phuket or Bangkok.

Until then... Happy Travelling :)



Karst mountains in unimaginable shapes can be seen during your trip

A grand sunset can possibly be seen during your tour, with dramatic islands as foregrounds





Two more delectable views seen during the tour





A fantastic sunset seen over the islands



Many water activities can be done during the tour

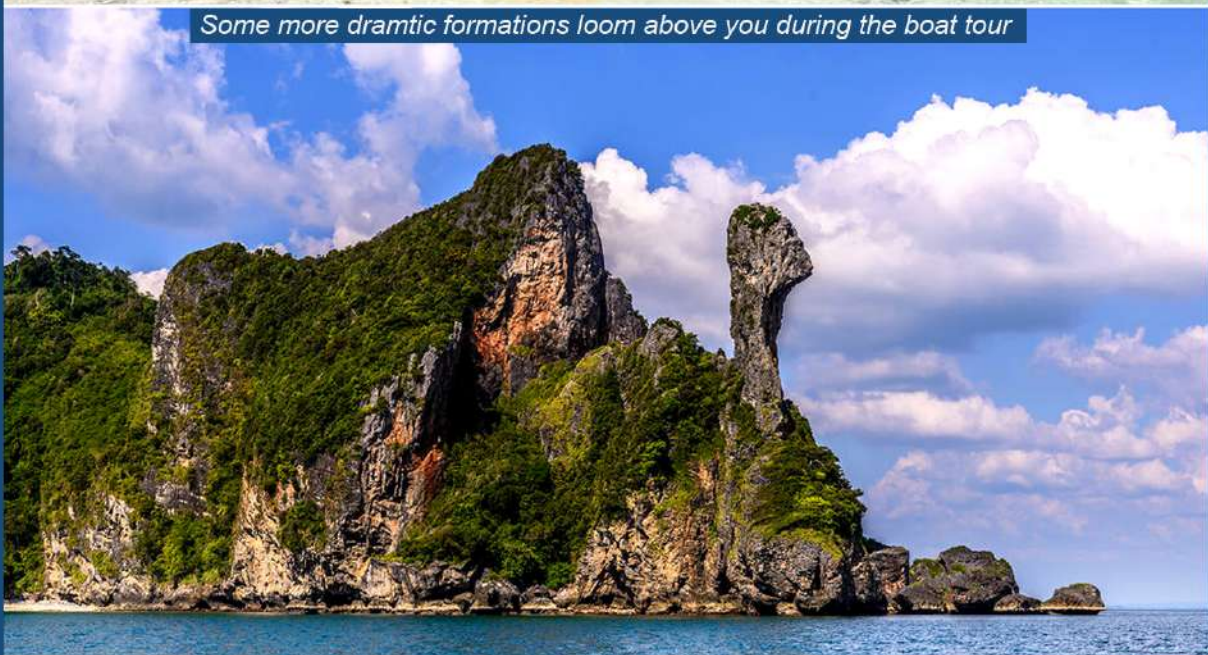
Karst mountains can be seen all around during your tour



The author and her husband enjoying themselves during the tour



Some more dramatic formations loom above you during the boat tour



Beautiful Drive to the Summit Of Mt.Diablo

Text and some photos by Divakar Murthi

A view of the mountains and sea from the summit



Looking towards the snow mountains



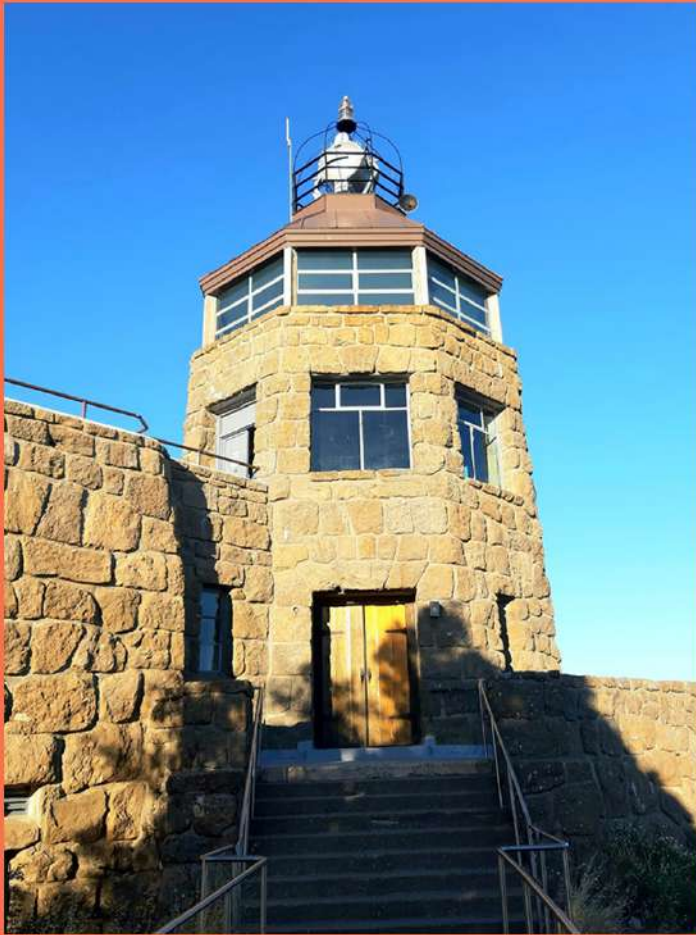
Mount Diablo at an elevation of 3900 ft is a short drive away from the city of San Ramon, California. The area is sacred to native Americans who lived and worshipped here for over 5000 years. A now defunct lighthouse used to be a navigation system prior to the present modern navigational aids.

we made our first trip to Mt. Diablo from our home in San Ramon . Part of the experience is the drive up to the top, which is very winding. Drive slowly and carefully, as there are a number of bicyclists who enjoy sharing the road with cars up and down. Fortunately, there are several bike pull-out areas so cars can pass. Be patient!

We took a picnic lunch and ate at the Rock City area of the park. There are many picnic areas with shaded picnic tables on the drive up to the top. Also, several restrooms are available. We then continued up to the Summit. Upon parking, we headed for the trails. We enjoyed seeing the different varieties of butterflies and even some wildflowers. We headed to the Mary Bowerman Trail, which is a short loop trail partially paved on the north side. It was a bit hazy, but we were able to see all around to the Benicia Bridge, the Carquinez Straits, down to Antioch and Walnut Creek.

The views from the top of Mount Diablo are breath-taking being able to see San Francisco the sea one way and the snow capped mountains the other way it was just spectacular. The staff at the gift shop and the rangers were all incredibly friendly and helpful and really seemed to love their park.

We drove to the top. It is much, much colder at the summit of the mountain. You gain about 3,500 feet from street to top. We had to purchase sweatshirts in the gift shop as we were freezing.



The Visitor Centre at the summit(left), a view while climbing the last steps to the top (right) and one of the majestic views of green hills backed by rugged mountains (below)

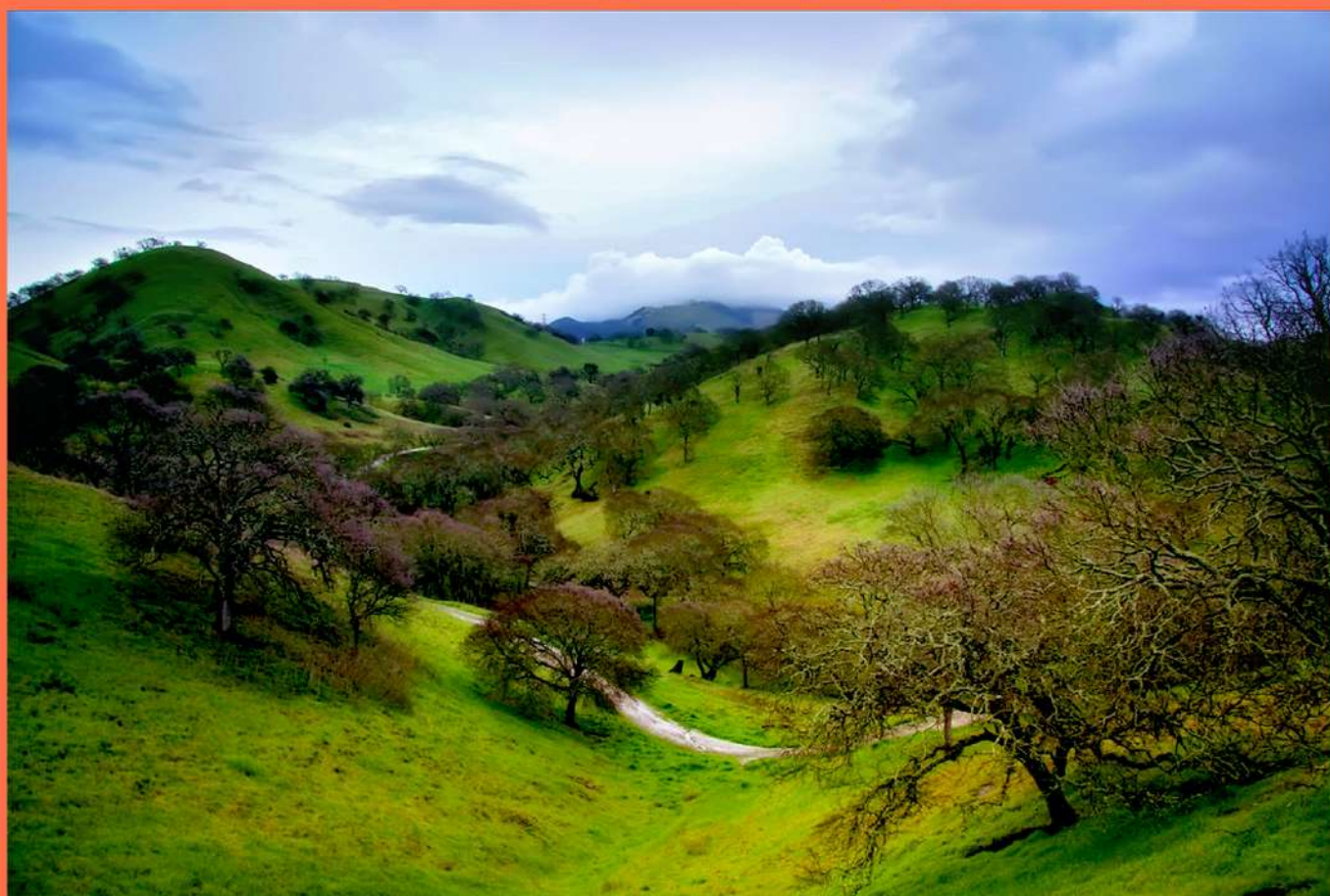




Oh! What a stunning sunset view you are rewarded with, if you make it to the summit in time



The browns and greens seen during your ride will captivate you (above and below)





*A striking sunset over the hills around Mt Diablo (above) and
green hills and valleys seen enroute to the summit*



ABOUT THE EDITOR

Abbas A. Tyabji is a Hyderabad, India, based photo journalist, who left Tata Motors, one of the largest auto makers in India after heading the Publications Division of the Company over a career spanning nearly 3 decades.

During his tenure he travelled all over India and to neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Mauritius and the Middle East on photo journalistic assignments. His articles, pictures and photo features appeared not only in the Company publications but in national and international magazines.

He was invited by the then People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (S Yemen) to photograph the natural and man made wonders of that ancient land and prepare publicity material for their govt. The effort was appreciated by Govt officials and even India's Ambassador to S Yemen wrote an appreciation letter to Tatas on his efforts.

He is the recipient of over 50 national and international awards including:

The President of India's Award for Excellence in Designing and Printing on TWO OCCASIONS

Best Feature Writer Award from the Association of Business Communicators of India 4 times

Best Photo Feature Award from the Association of Business Communicators of India 5 times

The internationally circulated magazine "Bus Ride" from the US found his pictures so exceptional that they selected 2 for the First Place Award in their 1989 Worldwide photo competition, the only time in their history that two pictures were given this honour.

Almost half a dozen of his pictures appeared in Japanese calendars and dozens have graced Indian calendars.

He has also published a book on Hyderabad, for which the text, photography and design was done by him.

For his photo journalistic achievements he has found mention in "Who's Who of India", and "Reference Asia".

He also operates guided, customised tours from Hyderabad and is listed in LONELY PLANET as a Tour Guide.

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Abbas Tyabji receiving the President of India Award for Excellence in Designing and Printing from then President of India Dr. N. Sanjeeva Reddy