TRAVEL LUST

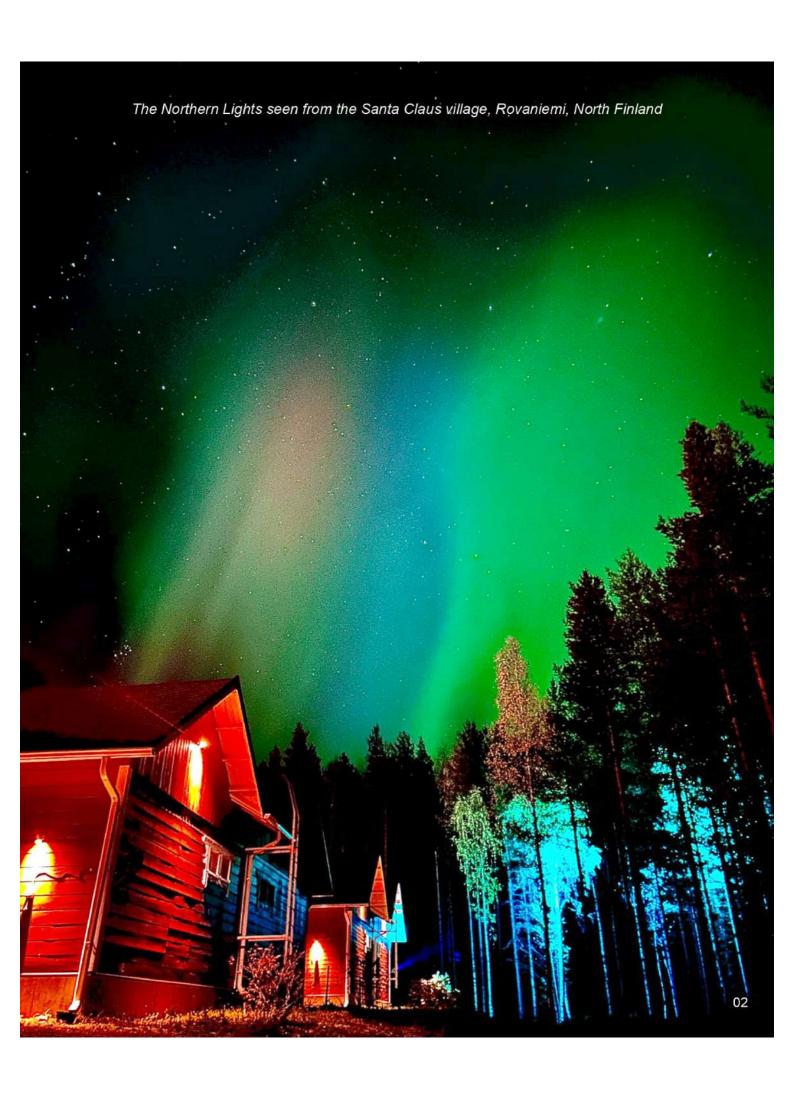
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6500 kms road trip through Scandinavia

Text and pics by Abbas Tyabji





The cottage belonging to my classmate Raoul Gomes about

140 kms from Helsinkiwhere i stayed for 3 days



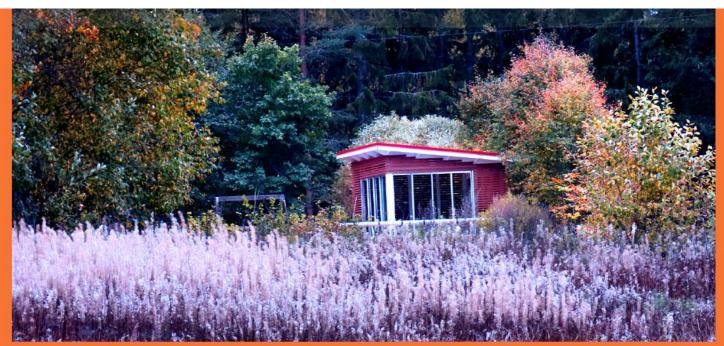
I had been dreaming of personalky admiring the shimmering forested, lakes of Finland, the northern lights, the deep blue fjords of Norway and the culture of Denmark and Sweden. For decades, I made many attempts to reach these marvels but they all turned out to be futile, either because they were too complicated or too expensive. Then, boom!!

I got a mail from Adventures Overland, an Indian company specializing in self drive road trips around the world, giving details of their impending 6500 km drive through Scandinavia. I immediately jumped at the proposal though it was very expensive for me, and started corresponding with them.

The tour was due to happen in October 24 and I had many hurdles to cross. My passport was valid till beginning April 25 which meant it was a few days less than the required 6 months validity, so with the help of my grand daughter, I filled my application and with great difficulty, managed a slot at an application centre, 80 kms from my home!! That done, I had worries about my Schengen visa as I had never travelled to Europe before. Anyway, AO (Adventures Overland) helped me with the application process and I got my Finland visa in 4 days!!!

Since my classmate from school, in our Senior Cambridge batch of 1961, Raoul Gomes, was living in Finland, I requested him to put me up and show me around Helsinki for a few days before the start of the tour.

He gladly(?) agreed, so on 2nd,October I landed at Helsinki, was picked up by him and whisked away to his home in Klaukalla, a suburb of Helsinki.



Other views of Raoul Gomes' summer home

The drive from the airport to his home gave me a preview of the beauties to expect and my excitement mounted even higher when we drove 150 kms to his summer home sited scenically on a large sized, forested lake which Raoul insisted was very small! I spent the next 3 days exploring the countryside with Raoul and even visited the historic 300 year old Hammelina fort and surprisingly, the littala glass factory, which was an unexpected addition and absolutely worthwhile, though I had thought it might be a waste of time. The meticulous way in which the raw material was moved from one stage to the next left me awestruck.

On the 5th, Raoul dropped me at the hotel where our group was staying and, since I had enough time before we gathered for dinner, I walked down to the Uspenski Cathedral, a superb example of Russian church architecture. The buildings lining the road were impressive, and I assumed they were mansions belonging to the royalty. However, they turned out to be hotels or apartment buildings!!! I also saw the Helsinki cathedral but unfortunately could not enter because it was under maintenance.

The temperature hovered just near zero and there was already frost on the ground, precursor of colder days to come as we travelled north.

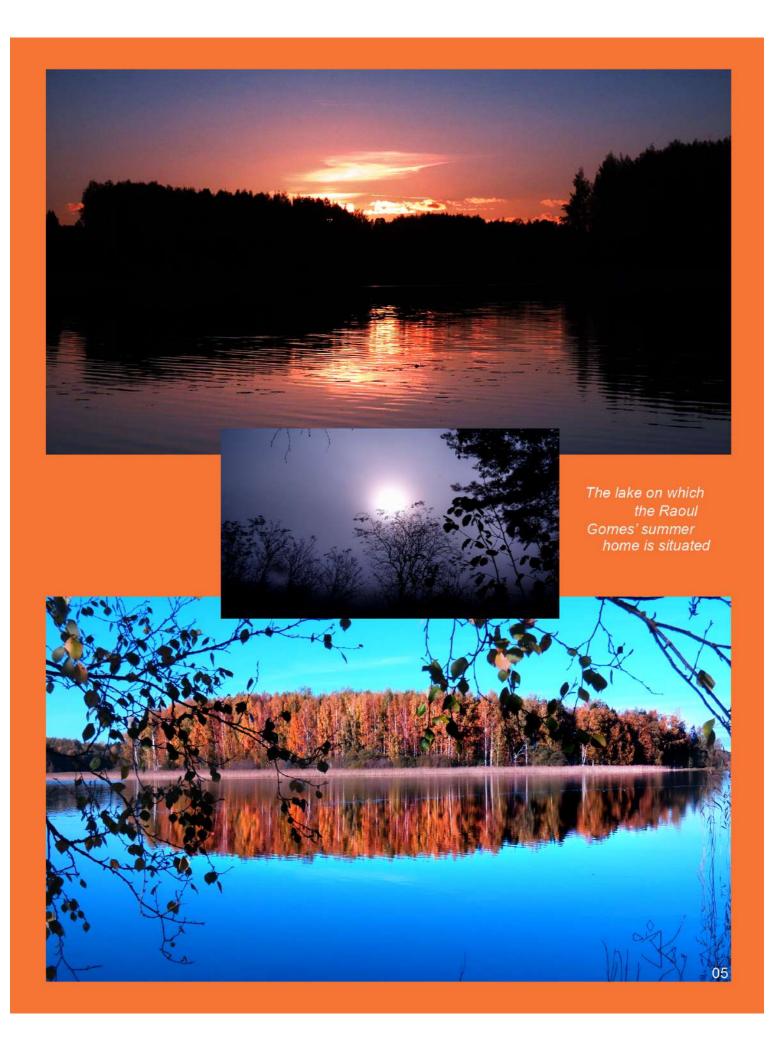
There were 13 people in our group which met for dinner that evening and we got introduced to each other. The next morning was a very drizzly and dull day, as we slowly wound our way towards Kajaani, North of Helsinki and our first stop. The drive was laced with forests and lakes of all sizes and Kajaani itself was a picturesque town lining a lake, as I discovered during my early morning walk

The driving pattern was like this: there were five cars, two of which were booked by couples who wanted their own vehciles. The other 2 had 4 passengers each while the lead car, in which I was fortunate to be accommodated, had 3 because all the baggage to be used by the representatives of Adventures Overland was accommodated in our car. Each of the passengers could take turns at driving but I as the senior most member at 80 years, I opted out as I was not familiar driving on the right hand side. I could also take pictures even when we were travelling.

Every couple of hours we would stop for washroom or tea breaks or if we found some scenic viewpoint, hence we travelled at a leisurely pace.









Hammeellina town



Hammeellina Fort views (left and below)



My friend Raoul Gomes, with whom I stayed for a few days, seen with his wife Ritva at their summer home







Two more views of Hammeellina Fort (above and left)







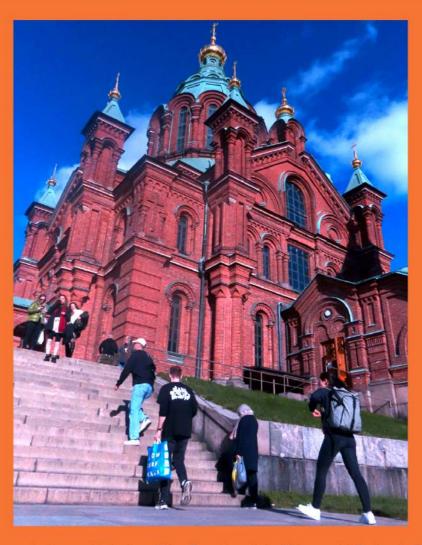












The striking exterior and interior of the Russian styled Uspenski Cathedral in Helsinki











Palatial mansions that house residences and hotels we saw in Helsinki and the Presidential palace (below)





A Viking style ship in the Helsinki harbour, a heritage church in Kajaani, and a church from Viking days between Helsinki and Kajaani







First encounter with snow in North Finland





Numerous animals can been found in Ronua National Park

Enroute we had an interesting break at the, Ronua National Park where we were able to sight such Arctic animals as the polar bear, wild dog, brown bear, lynx, and reindeer. We were booked to stay at the iconic Santa Claus village on the outskirts of Rovaniemi, where the Arctic circle passed through and we all stood on the line for pictures! We were also treated to a grandstand view of the Northern Lights right from our cottages.

We spent a full day exploring the activities at the village and saw people taking reindeer cart rides, while I went to the Santa Claus village post office to post covers, to my son and daughter, with a special post mark of the village. We also braved the low temperature and wind gusts to visit "Santa Claus" in his office just opposite the dining hall. Since the daytime temperature had dropped to -6 Centigrade, most of us huddled in our cottages after a morning round of the village. Getting out for lunch and dinner were also rather tedious.

With such a low temperature there was anticipation and apprehension about snow on the roads and yes, we got plenty of it on the way to the northernmost town in Finland, Inaari. Since all of us were Indians and some were totally unused to driving on snowy roads, we had to be cautious but everyone was extremely excited by the sight of snow on the road and surroundings for miles.







A Reindeer and an animal which is a mixture of bison and yak in the Ronua National Park





Cottages (above) and dining hall (below), at the Santa Claus village, Rovaniemi







The next morning after driving a couple of hours, we ended our tryst with Finland and entered Northern Norway, towards the town of Honniswag ,with the prospect of visiting the North Cape, northernmost point of Europe, the next day.

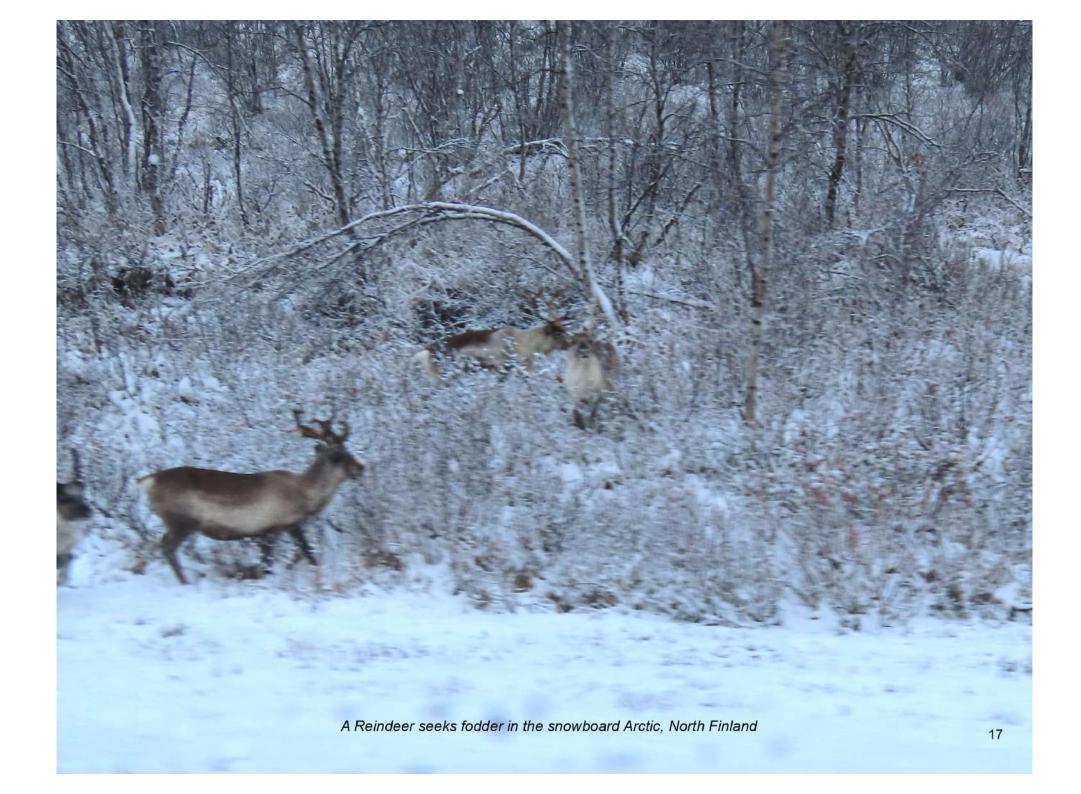








Reindeer rides at the Santa Claus village,our group in the Scandinavia Overland road trip, our excellent and knowledgeable guide Damien Fa and my roommate Shailesh Poddar, and our igloos like cottages at Inaari with snow on the ground





A snow bound river on the Norway Finland border (above) and a snowplough clears snow

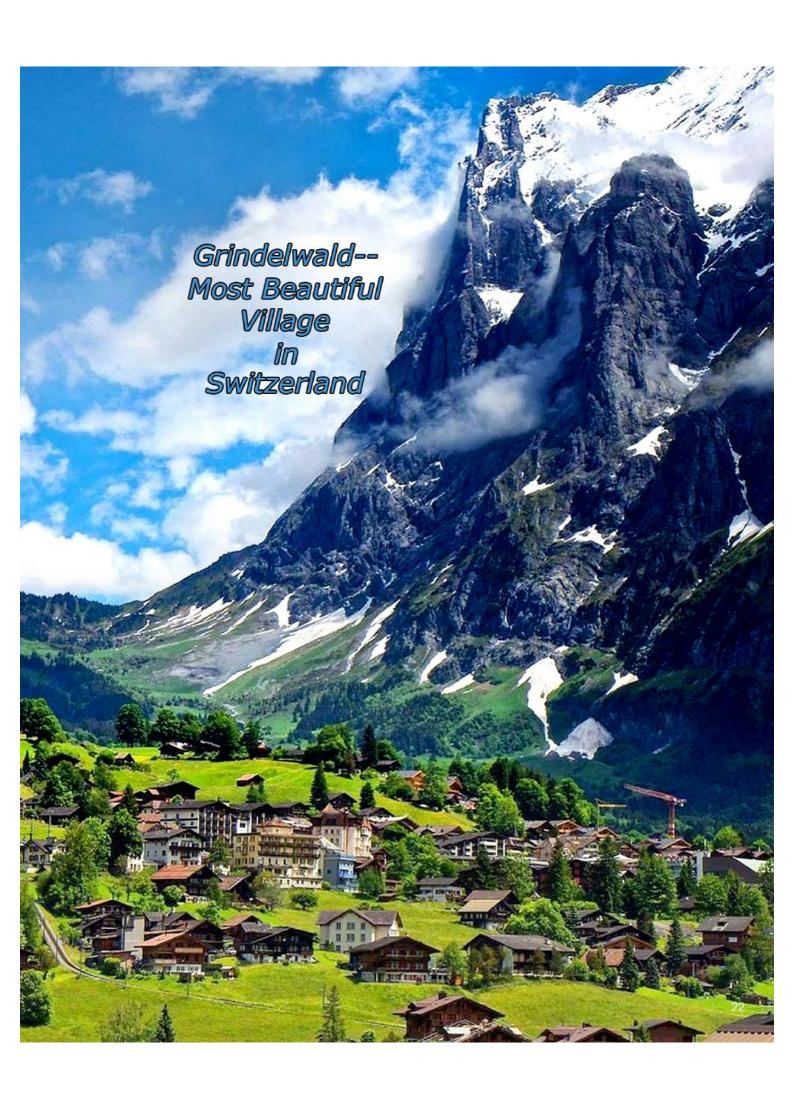






Waves of snow on a river in North Finland and a river with a snowbank enroute Norway







Swiss trains wind their way through supberb countryside on their way to Grindelwald





Grindelwald at a glance

Grindelwald can be found in the German-speaking part of Switzerland,in the Jungfrau region of the Bernese Oberland.

Its location at the foot of the Eiger, its proximity to the glaciers and the varied excursions and experiences available all make Grindelwald a top travel destination.

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Discover Grindelwald

While strolling through this village with its traditional wooden houses, you'll feel the presence of the Eiger wherever you go: as many of the village's hotels, restaurants and cafés are named after the famous mountain. And this should come as no surprise, since the backdrop of the Swiss Alps really is quite spectacular here. Discover the wild glacier canyon and its "spiderweb" – a walkable net stretched across the width of the canyon that offers visitors a unique perspective. Or enjoy the mountain air on the beautiful Bussalp. The «Big Pintenfritz», one of the longest toboggan runs in Europe, passes through here.





Jungfraujoch

The Jungfraujoch, at 3,454 metres up, is the most spectacular mountain railway station in the Alps. From up here, you'll be able to enjoy direct views of the UNESCO World Heritage site, the monumental Aletsch Glacier. Marvel at the far-reaching views from the glacier platform, experience the Ice Palace, and immerse yourself in the gripping history of the Jungfrau Railway. The best photo spot: the Eismeer station. Start your unforgettable mountain adventure by taking the Eiger Express from Grindelwald Terminal.





Around Grindelwald

A popular destination for a day out here is a gondola ride on the Männlichen. The Royal Walk really does live up to its name, offering the best views of the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau, as well as Grindelwald and the Lauterbrunnen Valley . From the Männlichen, hiking trails and winter sports slopes lead to the Kleine Scheidegg. The ideal starting point for hikes to the Grindelwald glaciers is Alp Pfingstegg with its summer toboggan run.



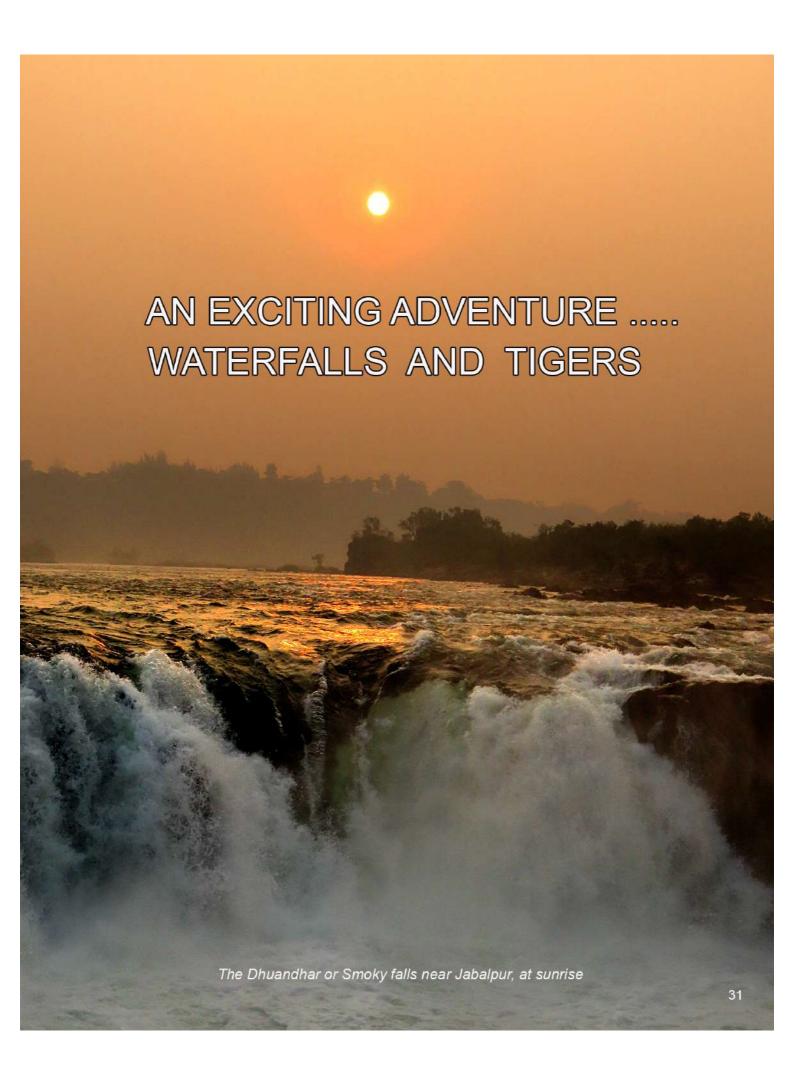


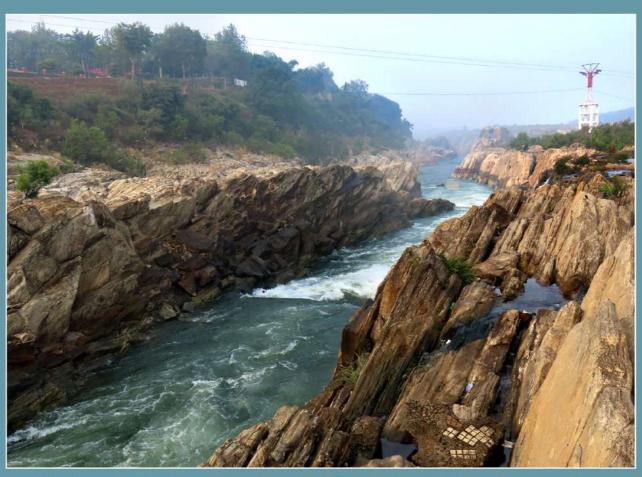
The exquisite village of Lauterbrunnen considered a twin of Grindelwald

Experience Switzerland for less

I have done a considerable amount of research on travel to Switzerland as it is considered probably the most expensive country to travel to. Taxis cost over Rs 50,000 for a 2 hour journey but the same journey can be covered FREE if you buy a Swiss Travel Pass which has a minimum cost of Rs 24,000 appx for 3 days travel. For a 15 days pass, the price is Rs 50,000. You can travel anywhere in Switzerland with this, countless times to the same place if you wish. Inly a few mountain railways are not covered but it allows for 50% discount. In addition, those on a budget can opt for Youth Hostels available in most important tourist centres. These cost upto Rs 5000 for a bed per night, the cheapest accommodation available in the country. If you wish, you can contact Mr,Srijan Santra of Duniya safari for advice. He was very helpful to me contact No 9073343973







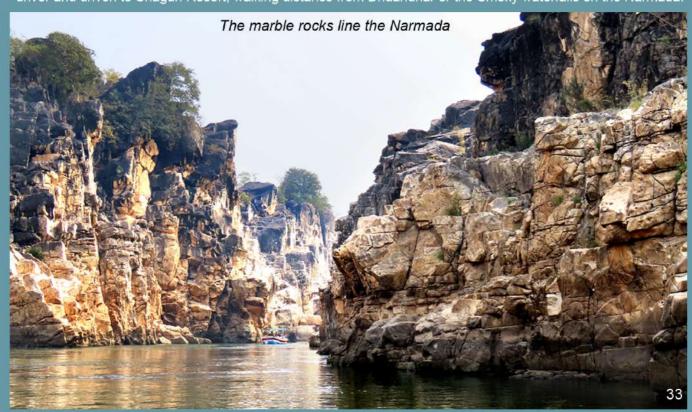
The Narmada winds it way through marble cliffs (above), and shimmering at sunset





My children and grandchildren had planned an exciting visit to Madhya Pradesh, India's central state, specifically Jabalpur and Bandhavgarh, to celebrate my son's Wedding Silver Jubilee and my 80th birthday. Jabalpur for the Narmada river waterfalls and Bandhavgarh wildlife reservet o try and sight the elusive tigers (and other animals of course). The planning was left to me and I started in April 24 for the trip planned for December. Since the trip coincided with the Christmas holidays, heavy rush was expected at all the tourist spots, hence long term planning was essential. So we booked the accommodation, train and 16 seater bus as we were 10 people in our group.

Starting from Ahmedabad, we took the rather tedious 22 hour train journey ,were received at Jabalpur by the bus driver and driven to Shagun Resort, walking distance from Dhuandhar or the Smoky waterfalls on the Narmada.







Boating past the marble cliffs is an extraordinary experience. An owl captured on camera by my grandson, Raihan, sitting in a secluded spot high up on the cliffs(right), The balancing rock, one of the attractions of Jabalpur and a typical village between Jabalpur and Bandhavgarh (below)

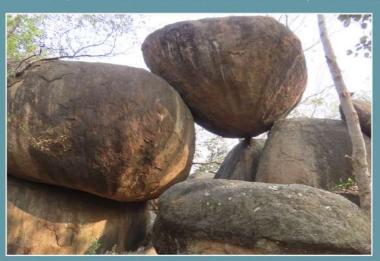
After settling in and enjoying a hearty dinner, we slept early as we had planned to visit the falls at dawn. At the crack of dawn, we gulped down piping hot tea and trudged past the shops selling marble statues and other souvenirs before reaching the smoking falls and meandering through the cliffs lining the Narmada, one of the largest rivers of Central India. We were lucky to view the falls as the sun rose on the horizon and its rays added lustre to the scene.

After breakfast, we had an interesting and invigorating boat ride on the river lined by white and coloured cliffs. In the evening we participated in another unique experience, snacks in the sky!! A Gondola lifted off close to the river just as the sun was setting and we got a bird's eye view of the river and surroundings. Unfortunately the "snacks" were quite disappointing. The next morning we had a quick look at the balancing rock, one of the star attractions of Jabalpur, before driving about 180 kms to the tiger reserve and had a rather disappointing jeep Safari though we were able to view a bison and some spotted deer. We were fortunate to get rooms at the Tiger Den Resort, expertly mange by Mr. Gyanendra Tiwari, and where we were able to enjoy the excellent ambience and very taste food.

Again, the early morning Safari was not as expected though we did manage a peek at a tiger hidden amongst the foliage. However, the afternoon Safari, our last, was quite rewarding, with a couple of tiger sightings at close quarters. Besides, we also saw a herd of deer, bison, sambhar and a barking deer.

In the evening, my cousin Hashim and his partner Shobha, who have a cottage on the outskirts of Bandhavgarh, joined us for a dinner and cake cutting to celebrate my son's wedding silver jubilee as also my 80th birthday (in advance!)

So,quite satisfied with our excursions, we boarded our bus the next morning, drove directly to the Jabalpur railway station and took the train for our return journey to Ahmedabdad, from where my son's family departed for Canada and we returned to Hyderabad. An enjoyable and memorable group trip indeed.

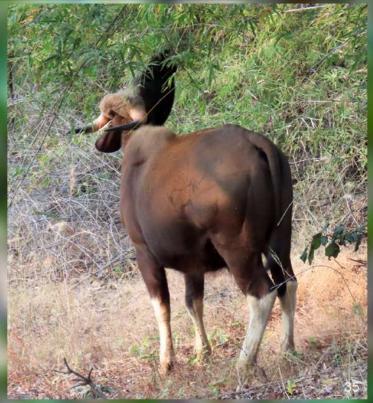






The much sought after and elusive tiger, a wild boar and bison in the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve









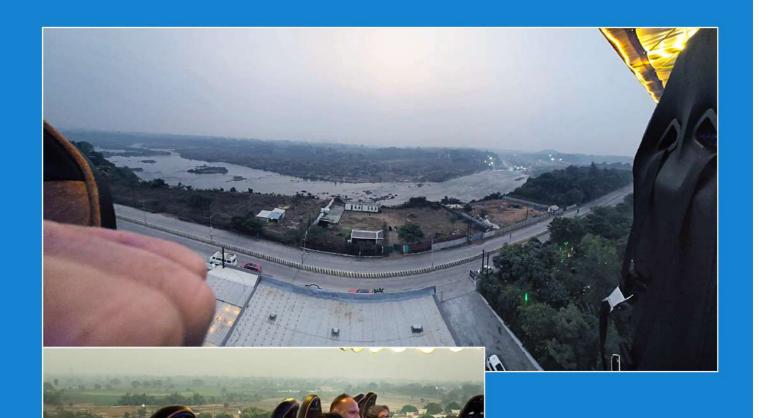




Numerous animals and birds including Sambhar, spotted deer, kingfisher, eagles, hornbills etc can be spotted at Bandhavgarh







Dining and viewing in the sky

Photos by Sohail Tyabji



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.



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

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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