

ANNEXURE: Routes, logistics and other tidbits

Planning

1. Clothes, shoes, medicines, solar lights, headlamps and other such gear did not need too much time / mindspace because both of us had enough from treks, and Decathlon and Uniqlo filled the gaps.
2. We assumed we would not find place / time for laundry in the winters in remote places and packed enough and for three seasons we would encounter during the journey, all around the concept of layering.
3. With the go-with-the-flow mantra, homestays (and if none were available, highway hotels) would be booked on the fly based on where we reach at the end of a day and what was available with the cleanest loo. A tent was added, just in case.
4. Food is always easy for us: the best local food available wherever we feel hungry (I am a vegan by choice, which I let go off when I travel.)

Serious planning

What to take for the Thar? A few fellow Team BHPians have written about travel to Arunachal, which became a starting point. Specific information is distributed and good in bits and pieces for the more frequently visited / talked about areas like Tawang, though most are in hired cabs or on bikes. Recent travelogues on YouTube that involved Arunachal roads and/or the new Thar turned out to be helpful, as were the 4x4 instructionals on recovery by the Aussie vloggers (unmatched, I say! Check out Ronny Dahl, for example.) Travelling alone, as in, with no other vehicle along, and unsure about help and gear availability off the beaten track, we didn't want to assume the Army would spend their precious time rescuing unprepared tourists.

So I got:

1. A pair of snow chains for the R18s (shipped by Jagan Hardware, Chandigarh)
2. A pair of MaxTrax (found the originals with Blue Garage in Mysore / BLR)

3. A Michelin High Power Rapid Tyre Inflator
4. A reflective windshield sheet (for the overnight snow)
5. A puncture repair kit; and
6. A large Bushranger shovel.

Basically, prepared for Armageddon, or Escape from LA, for all you Kurt Russell fans out there (what, no one other than me?!)

Of course, above all else, because tea becomes a milk and sugar concoction with a hint of tea on the highways/hills, a bag with tea supplies was a must: a serious flask that can keep the water hot for 8 hours, assorted tea bags, sugar sachets, dairy whitener sachets, small cartons of soy milk, steel mugs and spoons. As it turned out, this bag was a lifesaver, for tea shops are few and far in between.

And jerrycans are not needed for the diesel Thar's range, even for valleys that have only one fuel station. Just keep topping up.

Key points that made our trip as comfortable and sustainable as possible

1. Carry cash. ATMs, where available, may have long lines.
2. Minimise plastic — carry water bottles.
3. Eat and buy local.
4. Arunachal has real homestays by lovely local families of different economic backgrounds, not the boutique-hotel-esque set-ups found in, say, Coorg.
Nobody spends a bomb on loos.
5. It gets cold in winters. But the temperature varies between day and night and mountain and plains. Pack layers.
6. Socks and crocs are the best combo at the end of a long day.
7. Buy small soaps and shampoos or carry them from home. Also towels.
8. Carry your version of bed linen. For me: a sleeping bag, Ikea Polarvide throw - cheap, made of felt, Ikea Faltnal, a cushion-cum-body-quilt.
9. Scented candles or room fresheners can lift your mood out of depressing odours.

10. If you want to be vegan on this trip, take plant-based milk along. Not available anywhere. Perhaps it was in Itanagar, where we didn't go.
11. Hot water for tea is everywhere.
12. Carry solar lamps. Electricity is not a given in many places.
13. Take wet wipes for dry body bath. For days when the bathrooms are suspect or there is only cold water.

Other information

1. All roads, or non-roads, are surrounded by stunning, wild beauty. If you decide to stop and ooh/aah and photograph, you may spend a year there. Get a driver or a co-driver and negotiate vantage point in the car hard.
2. Try not to have a schedule. Waiting for road to clear up is part of life. Some locals carry tents and pitch them on the roadside at the mere hint of trouble.
3. Alcohol and diesel are cheap.
4. Be on the road by 6am and finish driving by 4pm. Though, I must admit, we didn't do this at all. We stuck to the timings on the plains, broadly, but that worked for us because, you guessed it, we had no schedule.
5. If you take out the meat/fish/etc, the food is simple and vegan.
6. You will always find rice and vegetables. Except on Sela Pass, where, in winters, you should take a photo and a tea, and scoot.
7. Homestays have brilliant food, if you ask for their local food. Hotels by default have terrible food; I decided to stick to dal/bhaat/aloo or roti/bread/omelette when staying in one; even the worst chef cannot screw these up.
8. Women — get ready to pee behind trees and open car doors! That's cleaner than loos you will find on the road.
9. Buy when you like something. You will likely not see it again.
10. Most local people were round-eyed to hear our itinerary and speed. Some had not heard of far-off places we were going to in their state.
11. It gets dark by 4:45pm.
12. You don't need a burner/stove, unless you are going camping.

13. Google Map reviews help filter out the worst and the unacceptable, if you have a choice, ie. Do your bit to post reviews as well.

Route and stay

Note: Timings include time spent waiting for road closures for laying tarmac, known as road cutting colloquially; it's a part of life and therefore retained in the estimates.

Day	From - to	Distance	Time taken (Includes road blocks, breaks)	Comments	Stay
		In km, approx.	In hours, approx.		
1	Bangalore to Vijayawada	670	11		Hotel Park Elite The six-month old hotel for the night halt in Vijayawada proved adequate, apart from a mysteriously slow drainage in the shower.
2	Vijayawada to Lake Chilika	660	12	On the way up, the Godavri Fourth Bridge had not revealed itself on the map and hours was wasted sticking to the NH16 through Rajahmundry	OTDC Barkul The restaurant is not much to write about but if you are in the vicinity, try the fish endemic to the lake and ignore the sudden bursts of arguments among the staff.
3	Lake Chilika to Bardhwan	650	14	An hour and a half were lost staying lost in the Bengali countryside	Bless Inn
4	Bardhwan to Siliguri	500	11		Hotel Saffron Crest
5	Siliguri to Guwahati	450	11		At Ray's friend
6	Rest day				At Ray's friend
7	Guwahati to Kaziranga	180	3.5	Leisurely driving	Forest IB
8	Kaziranga to Lathao	380	9		Khemsaa Homestay

Day	From - to	Distance	Time taken (Includes road blocks, breaks)	Comments	Stay
		In km, approx.	In hours, approx.		
9	Lathao to Namdapha National Park, via Miao	125	3	Leisurely driving The road beyond Miao on Google Maps is incorrectly shown to end before the forest gate	Forest Lodge
10	Namdapha National Park to Wakro, via Mia	185	4.5		Ninashi Homestay
11	Wakro to Khupa	88	4		IB
12	Khopa to Kibithu, via Walong	140	4.5		Dong Resort The rooms are large and clean, and the geyser worked in the room adjacent to ours.
13	Dong Resort to Roing	273	9.5	~174km, ~ 8 hours to the intersection of Hayuliang Road with NH13; ~99km, ~1.5 hours to Roing Yatri Niwas	Yatri Niwas
14	<i>Roing to Mayudia Pass and back</i>	100	3		
14	Roing to Pasighat	100	2.5	Google Maps showed a detour and still does, perhaps for repair work, but there's no break now	Tojo Gojo Homestay
15	Pasighat to Yinkiong	130	4	With an hour's detour to the river bed	Hotel California It's more like a hostel. Not for more than a night halt.
16	Yinkiong to Tuting, via Byorong Bridge	160	8.5	Includes an hour of retracing back from the wrong bridge, incorrectly shown as the Gandhi Bridge (local name) on Google Maps	Tarding Karyeng Absolutely the worst, but there is no other place to stay if the IB is booked
17	Tuting to Pasighat, via Yinkiong	290	11		Hotel Serene Abode

Day	From - to	Distance	Time taken (Includes road blocks, breaks)	Comments	Stay
		In km, approx.	In hours, approx.		
18	Pasighat to Aalo	107	5.5		Reyi Homestay Perhaps the only property that feels luxurious; however, we were surprised when our booking was curtly cancelled. Runs more like a guesthouse than a homestay, which is not an issue, just different from others.
19	Aalo to Mechuka	190	6		Yargyap-Chu Homestay
20	Mechuka to Aalo	190	6		Hotel Min-ta
21	Rest day				Hotel Min-ta
22	Aalo to Potin	308	10	Best to go via Assam	Hotel Potin Avoid unless exhausted or reaching this point at night
23	Potin to Ziro	55	2	Avoid after dark	Ziro Valley Home Stay
24	Ziro to Sangti Valley	430	11		Tsejor Homestay
25	Sangti Valley to Tawang, via Sela Pass	146	7	Many stoppages due to people putting on ropes, minor accidents, lunch	Pal Mo Homestay
26	Rest day				
27	Tawang to Shergaon	220	7	Smooth going	Nature's Nest These are tents. Red Berry Riverview Homestay is the sister concern.
28	Shergaon to Mainaguri, via Bhairabkunda	527	12		Hotel Aiyashana
29	Mainaguri to Kolkata	630	15		Hotel Astor
30	Rest day				Hotel Astor
31	Rest day				Hotel Astor

Day	From - to	Distance	Time taken (Includes road blocks, breaks)	Comments	Stay
		In km, approx.	In hours, approx.		
32	Kolkata to Puri	495	10	Route had been chosen to see the temple, which was unfortunately shut for NY	AirBnB
33	Puri to Vizag	430	9	City chosen to meet a friend	Hotel Open Vista Bay
34	Vizag to Bangalore	1000	16	Very eager to get back home	