



Biking the Meghalaya hills – 14 days/ 9 days cycling & walking

Assam & Meghalaya, *mountain bike tour with day walks*

Tour JTT-ASME-BW01 (bicycling & walking): Guwahati – Jagiroad – Umtyrthang – Umsning – Barapani – Shillong – Cherrapunjee – Nartiang – Pobitora Wild Life Sanctuary – Guwahati

Activities & sights: *bicycling & walking, visiting local villages, wildlife park and living bridges of Meghalaya*

Meghalaya is one of India's greenest states, thanks a to an abundance of rainfall. Cherrapunjee, on the border with Bangladesh, is probably the wettest place on earth. But no worries: the rain falls in the monsoon season only. During the winter months you can expect very pleasant weather with only the occasional shower.



On this tour you start from a place near the Assamese border and then ride up through small Khasi settlements to the area near Meghalaya's capital Shillong. Then you'll explore the Cherrapunjee Plateau in a series of day trips, and walk through the lush green gorges of Cherrapunjee to see the rare phenomena of *natural bridges*. These bridges are constructed out of live roots of a tree related to the rubber tree. After coming back to Assam you spend two days at and around the Phobitora Wildlife Sanctuary where you can see wild elephants and Indian one-horned rhinos.

This itinerary is set up as a bicycling tour with day walks. There is a follow car that carries the luggage and that can be used whenever you don't feel like biking. As the roads used see only very light traffic the whole itinerary can be done on foot as well. In that case the follow car will be used to shorten the daily distances as far as necessary.

Itinerary

Day 01: Arrive Guwahati and transfer to hotel

Greenwood Resort on the outskirts of the city. Evening visit Kalakshetra, a sprawling enclosure depicting history and culture of Northeast India with a museum. Overnight.

Day 02: Guwahati – Samodan (50 km/ 1,5 hr); cycle Samodan – Umtyrthang (XXX km)

We drive 50 km and before reaching the town of Jagiroad we turn to the right off the highway. This is a sparsely used road, sometimes with no traffic for miles, that climbs steadily up to 750 mtrs and levels out before reaching the Khasi village of Samodan, distance is 50 kms. We walk/cycle with our vehicle (s) following at a discreet distance. We alternate walking and driving till we reach the village of Umtyrthang, a little distance away from Samodan. Umtyrthang is a small Khasi village where you can see Eri or Endi silk weaving and simple village life. We cycle back to Samodan and continue on to Umsning on the highway connecting Shillong and Guwahati. Here our vehicles pick us up and take us to Orchid Lake Resort overlooking a large lake outside Shillong for dinner and overnight.

Day 03: Shillong – Umiam (15 km/ 1/2 hr); cycle Umiam – Mawphlang (60 km)

Today we start cycling from Umiam taking the village road that skirts away from the highway, leading to the village of Mawphlang. A short distance away is a sacred grove which the local Khasi tribe protects from being deforested. Distance covered is appx 60 km. At Mawpphlang the vehicle picks up again for the drive to Shillong, 35 km away, where we stay at Tripura castle.

Day 04: Shillong – Kyllang (60 km/2 hr); cycle Kyllang – Cherrapunjee (12 km)

Drive 60 km to Kyllang village with a huge rounded rock formation going up several mtrs; walk/cycle around this scenic area with the small Kyllang village nearby. Cycle back towards Mawphlang and take the old David Scot trail to emerge near the highway to Cherrapunjee. Pick up by vehicles and drive 25 km to Lytkynsiew village. This is a whole day activity. Overnight at the Cherra Resort.

Day 05: Walking near Cherrapunjee (4 - 6 hr depending on route taken)

We take a short drive from our resort and start walking down a pathway through thick foliage. The descent takes about 2 hours going through a quaint Khasi village to the amazing Living Root bridge.

Living Root Bridges

The lower reaches of the southern slopes of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills are humid and warm and are streaked by swift flowing rivers and mountain streams. A species of rubber tree flourishes alongside these rivers and streams. The tree usually perches on rocks and reaching out to soil for nourishment. Thus, they have adapted themselves well to high soil erosion, caused by these fast flowing rivers and streams. The exposed roots grow strong and reach out over long distance from the tree trunk.

The early War-Khasis had noticed these qualities of these trees and had adapted it to serve their need for bridges to cross-rivers and streams. In order to direct the roots in the desired direction, they use hollowed out areca nut tree trunks. The thin and long tender roots are then passed through the hollowed out areca nut tree trunks, which are positioned as per the requirement of the proposed bridge. The roots start growing towards the directed end. When they reach the other end of the stream or river they are allowed to take root in the soil. Where required, the roots are redirected back to the side of the river or streams where the tree stands. The bridges usually have base spans numbering more than two. There are also two protective railing spans. Stones are used to fill any gaps in the base span roots. Some of these bridges have roots brought down from the tree branches joining the middle of the bridge from the top as support spans. These root bridges are so strong that some of them can carry 50 or more people at a time. These bridges probably take 20 to 25 years to become fully functional. They keep growing in strength by the day. Perhaps their life span is 200 to 300 years after the bridges are well formed.



The living root bridge that we are going to today is a double decker !! We return to our resort in the late afternoon; relax for the rest of the day.

Day 06: Cycling Cherrapunjee – Seven Sisters Falls (12 km)

Drive back to Cherrapunjee town and cycle towards the Nohsngithiang or Seven Sisters Falls. From here we drive to Thankarang Park for great views of the Bangladesh flood plains. You can do more cycling in the nearby areas before we drive to the Mawsmal limestone caves (illuminated). After visiting the caves we drive to the Nokalikai Falls, the highest falls in India.



Overnight at Polo Orchid or Sai Mika resort in Cherrapunjee.

Day 07: Cycle Cherrapunjee – Mawlinnong (max. 90 km)

From here we start to cycle towards Mawlinnong, voted the cleanest village in India, 90 km away. The road leading towards Mawlynnong is particularly scenic. It passes through beautiful landscape with forests, gorges, cliffs, valleys and waterfalls. After reaching we

explore the village paths. Just a short distance away is another ancient living root bridge made by villagers. From here we cycle down a little further south to Dawki, the India-Bangladesh border post and a scenic spot. Overnight at Mawlinnong.

Day 08: Mawlinnong – exploration (cycling)

Today you can cycle around this area with undulating hills and virtually no traffic at all. We visit small Khasi villages, see their way of life as this area is removed from the usual modern ways of life which villages closer to Shillong have adopted.

Day 09: Mawlinnong – Jowai (83 km/ 2 hr); cycling Jowai – Nartiang (40 km)

Drive back towards Shillong and before reaching the hill station turn right and go over the Shillong Peak and beyond toward Jowai. From here we cycle for about 40 km till we come upon Nartiang, the place with the stone monoliths. This is the land of the Jaintias, another tribe of Meghalaya.

The Jaintias used to erect stone monoliths to commemorate important events like coronation of kings, births and deaths of important people, wars won, peace treaties etc.

We cycle around this area, again no traffic at all and good roads. We come upon villages and, surprisingly, a Durga temple. This throws light to the fact that the Jaintias had trading terms with Assam. Overnight is at the Tourist lodge some 10 km from the Jowai town and overlooking a small lake.



Day 10: Jowai - Shillong

We return to Shillong. In the afternoon you can visit the interesting Don Bosco Museum, the busy Bara Bazar or big market where you can see Khasi villagers selling everything from vegetables, meat, betel nuts and leaves, herbs, fruits and various other local products.

Day 11: Shillong – Guwahati (120 km/ 3 hr)

We drive down to Guwahati, where we check into a city hotel. Afternoon at the local market.

Day 12: Guwahati – Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary

Today we drive out of town heading east taking the back road to Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary. As soon as we cross the city limits we climb on to our bicycles. This road is not much used and goes through interesting terrain – by the side of the Brahmaputra River for some distance and then through busy villages and through a forested area before reaching Pobitora. Here we check into the local Tourist Lodge or the newly set up comfortable tented accommodation.

Day 13: Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary

Early morning we do an elephant ride in the sanctuary. There are very good chances of seeing rhinos and then drive back to Guwahati.

Day 14: Pobitora – Guwahati; flight Guwahati – Delhi

Drive down to Guwahati airport for out-going flight.

Tour Price

For 2, 3 persons: INR 113.000 pp., using 1 Mahindra Bolero 4WD pick-up

For 4, 5 persons: INR 99.750 pp., using 1 Mahindra Bolero pick-up (2 cars for 5 persons)

For 6, 7 persons: INR 96.250 pp., using 1 Mahindra Bolero pick-up and 1 Tata Sumo Victa (SUV)

For 8, 9 persons: INR 94.250 pp., using 1 Mahindra Bolero pick-up 2 Tata Sumo Victa (SUV)

For 10 persons: INR 88.000 pp., using 1 Mahindra Bolero pick-up plus 2 Tata Sumo Victa (SUV)

Single supplement: INR 42000 pp.

Above tour price is on current rates only. Properties have not yet decided and declared their new tariff. Tour price may rise in case of fuel price hike too.

Price includes: English speaking escort throughout, mountain bikes plus helmets (no elbow, knee etc. protectors), follow car for luggage and client transport whenever necessary (Mahindra Bolero pick-up, for larger parties additional Tata Sumo SUVs), all accommodation on twin-sharing basis, all meals (day 01 lunch till day 14 lunch), fuel and driver allowance, at Pobitora W.S.: park entry fee, one jeep safari and one elephant safari, village visits, local guide whenever necessary, daily bottle of mineral water, government tax.

Price excludes: Train/ Air fare, tips, laundry, alcoholic beverages, insurance and any other expenses of personal nature.