

DIPHLU RIVER LODGE

KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK, ASSAM, INDIA





RETREAT INTO THE WILDERNESS OF KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK

Spectacularly situated on the periphery of UNESCO World Heritage Site Kaziranga National Park, Diphlu River Lodge offers guests a never-before intimacy with the natural world. It is separated from the park by its namesake river, where sights like wild buffalos and elephants bathing, and fishermen on rudimentary rafts casting their nets are common from the Lodge.

Diphlu River Lodge was established in 2008 by husband-wife duo, Ashish and Jahnabi Phookan. A reincarnation of Kamrup Komplex – the pioneering ecotourism lodge of the 1970s that Ashish's father built up with his own two hands – the present avatar as Diphlu River Lodge shares the same roots and values that drew guests to Kamrup Komplex decades ago.



Committed to responsible tourism, Diphlu River Lodge is purposefully built to blend into the surrounding foliage and terrain. Its thatch-and-bamboo cottages on stilts are inspired by the simple architecture of Mishing tribal homes, and the unique weaves and artefacts that adorn the Lodge are all handmade by artisans from the region.

We take great care to ensure that nature, the wild, and the communities that we share this land with always come first. This means recycling our greywater; handpicking young men and women from neighbouring villages and upskilling them with hospitality and English language training; starting an in-house weaving unit and helping to sustain Assam's heritage in handloom production; subscribing to a low-light and low-noise policy within the Lodge premises; and using only the freshest produce that's either locally sourced or available from our own kitchen garden.

In recognition of our high standards of service and comfort of stay, Diphlu River Lodge was ranked as the #2 Wildlife Resort in the country by Lonely Planet (India) magazine, sandwiched between multi-national hotel giants like the Taj and Oberoi. In April 2016, Diphlu River Lodge was further honoured by being chosen to host the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, HRH Prince William and Catherine Middleton, during their royal visit to India. For a family-owned and -run company like Assam Bengal Navigation (the parent company of Diphlu River Lodge), to be blessed with such accolades simply means that we are more eager than ever to introduce guests to our corner of the world.



INSIDE THE LODGE

Machaan

The main area where guests dine and socialise is called the *Machaan* (meaning 'watch tower' in Hindi). The *Machaan* has lounge areas across two floors with balconies that overlook Kaziranga National Park. Guests can relax on comfortable planter's chairs while being treated to panoramic views of the wild – rhinos, buffaloes, deer, and elephants are a common sight.



The first floor of the *Machaan* has a small room with a TV that is mainly used to screen wildlife documentaries – although, on many an occasion, it has been overtaken by ardent cricket fans! There is also a boutique that displays a curated selection of handlooms and handicrafts from the region for sale, with many of the weaves being created by the skilled artisans that the Lodge supports at our in-house weaving unit. Guests can go for a visit to the weaving unit (a short walk from Reception), and learn about the techniques, patterns, and heritage of Assamese handloom textiles firsthand from our weavers.



Set at the top level of the *Machaan*, the dining area and bar features high ceilings, tall glass windows, and open verandahs. Our chef is a homegrown talent from a nearby village who's known for his innovative preparation of Assamese, Indian, and Continental cuisines, creating delicious meals out of locally available produce from the markets or our own kitchen garden. Meals are typically buffet-style with great care taken to address dietary requirements. The bar is well-stocked with the choicest Indian spirits, beer, and wine.



Cottages

With only twelve twin-bedded cottages – eight of which are individual and four semi-detached – Diphlu River Lodge is intimate in size. Each cottage is spacious with comfortable beds, a pleasant sit-out with cane lounge chairs, a writing desk, mini-bar, and small fridge. A complimentary selection of tea and coffee, and an electric kettle is available in each cottage for when you want to start your mornings with a strong cuppa – freshly made cookies are also a regular feature. The bathroom and dressing room area is airy with lots of natural light flowing through, and kitted out with a rain shower and fitted wardrobe.

Other areas

The Lodge sometimes provides lunch on the riverbank with an opportunity to bathe a domesticated elephant. A 'hilltop' area near Reception serves as the perfect venue for an occasional barbecue and dinner around a bonfire, with folk dance and music. The Lodge arranges these on special occasions and for large groups.

As part of our commitment to blend in with nature, we have purposely decided to forgo any fencing between the national park and the Lodge, choosing to not interfere with the animal corridor. Do exercise a little caution when roaming the premises after dark – we are, after all, simply the privileged guests of the wild. Additionally, our naturalists have counted over 57 species of birds that visit the Lodge and its immediate surrounds, so keep an eye out during the day!

THINGS TO DO AROUND DIPHLU RIVER LODGE



Jeep safari

The Lodge uses open, windowless vehicles with front-facing seats for jeep safaris into the park. Our in-house naturalist will accompany you on all safaris. As per official government rules, jeep safaris are only allowed in the mornings and afternoons on fixed routes advised by the Forest Department.

Jungle treks

Jungle treks are strictly controlled by the Forest Department but special permission to trek a single route may be granted upon request.

Dolphin boat safari

Our Dolphin Boat Safari offers guests a chance to explore the mighty Brahmaputra river by country boat and an opportunity to spot endangered Gangetic Dolphins. Guests can choose to enjoy this boat safari either after breakfast or lunch for up to two hours.

Brahmaputra day cruise

Experience the scenic beauty of the Brahmaputra river, keep an eye out for avian species that thrive along its course, and enjoy a picnic lunch on a secluded sandbank. Cruise for up to five hours.

Rubber plantation walk

Guests can enjoy a two-hour leisurely escorted walk through a neighbouring small-scale rubber plantation and production unit.

Village visit

Close to Diphlu River Lodge lies the village of the Mishing, a riverine plain tribe of Assam. Set out on foot to observe their stilted houses – rising about five feet from the ground – and their crude handlooms that are capable of producing exquisite garments.

Tea plantations

Assam is the world's largest tea-growing region and there are numerous tea plantations near Kaziranga. The Lodge Manager can arrange a visit to one of these plantations after consultation with the authorities. Do note that these plantations undergo pruning of tea bushes and an overhaul of factory machinery during certain times in the winter season.

Cycling tour

Cycle through rural hamlets located on the fringes of the park – a perfect way to enjoy the countryside and interact with smiling villagers. A traditional Assamese lunch at a village homestead can also be arranged with prior notice.

Orchid park visit

An Orchid Park in Durgapur village houses 500 species of orchids, and many varieties of paddy, medicinal plants, and local flowers and fruits. An entrance fee is required for a visit.





KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK AND TIGER RESERVE

Bordered on the north by the Brahmaputra river and on the south by the Karbi Anglong hills, the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Kaziranga National Park is arguably one of the best parks in the country. It covers over a total of 884 sq kms and is characterised by large wetlands as well as areas of mixed deciduous and subtropical semi-evergreen forest. Its extensive grasslands with tall elephant grass may remind one of the African savannah, but it still remains distinctly Kaziranga.

Kaziranga is home to the world's largest populations of the Indian One-horned Rhinoceros and the Wild Water Buffalo, as well as the world's highest density of Royal Bengal Tiger (one per five sq km). Additionally, the park supports over 500 resident and migratory bird species, and many reptiles.

The park is divided into four tourist zones: Agaratoli (Eastern), Kohora (Central), Bagori (Western), and Burapahar (Far West).

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR VISITORS

Kaziranga National Park is managed by the Government of Assam. Park timings, fees, access, and facilities are dependent on rules set by Park Management, and subject to change without prior notice.

Kaziranga National Park is only open to visitors between November to April, though it sometimes opens in October.

While visiting the park, clothing in subdued colours – especially greens and browns – help you to blend in with the forest, causing minimum disturbance to wildlife. Do refrain from wearing colognes and perfumes within the park – an animal's sense of smell is far superior to that of humans.

Winter mornings and evenings can get quite cold, and the chill is especially felt when travelling in open vehicles. We recommend that you carry warm clothing while visiting the park.

Do bring your binoculars especially if you are interested in bird-watching.

Please be sure to remain silent when observing wildlife, and do not attempt to feed, harass or scare them.

Flashlight photography is not permitted inside the park.

Park visits are carried out in safari jeeps where you will be accompanied by our in-house naturalist and a forest guard. Please follow their instructions at all times when on safari. Alighting from the jeep inside the park is *strictly* prohibited, except at specific points and towers.

NATURALISTS AT DIPHLU RIVER LODGE



Bumoni Phukon

Born near the Central Range of Kaziranga, Bu (as he is endearingly called) has been with the Lodge since our inception in 2008. Passionately concerned with conservation, he is actively involved with the Kaziranga NGO *Naturalists for Rehabilitation of Snakes & Birds*, and regularly participates in rescue operations.



Bhaikon Koch

Bhaikon was born in Dharikati village near Nameri National Park. He began his career as a naturalist at Nameri in 2007 on jungle treks and rafting tours, and joined Diphlu River Lodge in 2011. He is gentle and soft-spoken, and an extremely sharp spotter.



Bablu Hussain

Bablu is another one of Kaziranga's children. He started out as a driver of jeep safaris and joined Diphlu River Lodge when it first opened. His frequent visits into the park invoked a desire to know more about wildlife and, thus, he became an incredible spotter, able to spot birds and animals from the furthest distances.



Hrishi Barukial

Hrishi was born in Geleki, Kaziranga. He joined Diphlu River Lodge after attending a wildlife guide traineeship program organised by Jungle Travels India (our sister company). He is interested in conservation, wildlife rescues, and social work. He is an ever-smiling chap who is always ready to help our guests.



Anuj Deb

Anuj is one of our youngest staff members, and was born in Kohora, Kaziranga National Park. He was working at the Jeep Safari counter outside the park where he developed a keen interest in wildlife and conservation. His naturalist training was sponsored by a local NGO, and he's now become an asset to the Lodge.



The naturalists are veritable encyclopaedias of the park; they possess an incredible wealth of knowledge about all wildlife and it's clear that they're very passionate about protecting it.

- William H., Australia

NEARBY PLACES OF INTEREST



Nameri National Park & Tiger Reserve

Supporting more than 300 species of birds, Nameri permits visitors to trek through its terrain and raft in the Jia-Bhorelli river. The park is famous for the majestic Royal Bengal Tiger, and the rare and endangered White-winged Wood Duck. Nameri is approximately a 100 km/3 hour drive away from our Lodge; the park is good for a full day's outing and guests can return to the Lodge in the evening.

Gibbon Sanctuary

The Gibbon Sanctuary is the only sanctuary where seven out of the 15 primate species found in India can be sighted. It covers an area of about 30 sq km and visitors are permitted to walk inside the park. There is a good possibility of spotting Hoolock Gibbons,

Capped Langurs, Malayan Giant Squirrels, and birdlife. A 125 km/2.5 hour drive from the Lodge, the sanctuary is best visited in the morning.

Sivasagar

Sivasagar (or "The Ocean of Shiva") was the capital of the Ahom dynasty that ruled Assam from 1228 AD until the arrival of the British. The historical importance of Sivasagar is clearly indicated by Kareng Ghar, Rang Ghar, and Talatal Ghar, three of the best-preserved remnants of the Ahom dynasty. Sivasagar is located around 168 km/3.5 hours away from the Lodge.

Tezpur

A visit to Tezpur is recommended for those who want a dose of history and some shopping for local silks and handicrafts. It is a 60km/1.5 hour drive away from the Lodge.

A LITTLE FURTHER AFIELD...

Manas National Park

The UNESCO World Heritage Site of Manas National Park is situated in the foothills of the Himalayas and a part of it extends to Bhutan. The sanctuary is home to a great variety of wildlife including the Royal Bengal Tiger, Golden Langur, Hispid Hare, Indian one-horned Rhinoceros, and Pygmy Hog. Discover the unique wildlife of Manas by jeep safari. There will also be an opportunity to visit nearby tribal villages and tea gardens.

Assam Bengal Navigation has a simple but comfortable lodge at Manas. The Bansbari Lodge, situated at the entrance to the park, organises safaris for guests, as well as boat rides, village visits, and nature walks and treks with resident naturalists.

The park is located approximately 4 hours away by road from Guwahati and 8 hours from the Lodge. This tour necessitates overnight stay and can be arranged by our sister company, Jungle Travels India.

Majuli Island

One of the world's largest river islands, Majuli has now gained recognition for its unique culture and bucolic landscape. A microcosm of Assamese culture, the island is a centre of neo-Vaishnavism, a peaceful religion characterised by song and dance. The elegant island *satras* – some for celibate monks, some for families – showcase a unique way of life where the faithful live simply, offering worship through *gayan-bayan* (songs and musical instruments) and readings. Majuli is also home to the Mishing weaver tribes. Take a walk through their little villages of stilted huts and chance upon their beautiful handlooms.

A minimum stay of two nights to fully absorb the rural ambience and culture of Majuli is recommended. The island is located around 4.5 hours away by road and ferry from the Lodge.

This tour necessitates overnight stay and can be arranged by our sister company, Jungle Travels India.



RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

ABN Foundation

Assam Bengal Navigation – Diphlu River Lodge's parent company – has always prided itself on adhering strongly to the principles of responsible tourism. We believe that as our company grows, so too should the local communities that we visit. Since our inception, we have invested heavily in many local community development initiatives; one such example is the training and employment of young men and women from villages in hospitality and English language skills.



With the aim to support education, environment protection efforts, and local community development, ABN Foundation was set up as a way to formalise our efforts in philanthropy. Guests can be assured that any time they book a room or cabin with us on any of Assam Bengal Navigation's ships or lodges, a total of 5% of the booking will be contributed to ABN Foundation to fund these causes.

Some of the good work that guests' patronage of Assam Bengal Navigation has helped support:

- A four-day nature guide training workshop (in collaboration with WWF), which helped upskill over 40 young people from the local community;
- Distribution of back packs, learning materials, ceiling fans and other equipment; and operation of an environment education program that culminated with saplings being planted by children of a nearby school;
- Skills training in handloom production at in-house weaving unit.





ASSAM BENGAL NAVIGATION

Assam Bengal Navigation (ABN) was a lifelong dream that came into fruition when two family-owned and -operated companies joined hands to pioneer the first long-distance river cruise in India, in 2003. From river cruises, the company branched out to jungle lodges. Today, ABN owns and operates three cruise ships, two lodges, and a houseboat. Over the next two years, the company is set to launch another cruise ship and jungle resort in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Manas National Park.

Guided by our corporate philosophy of *Authenticity, Reliability and Empowerment*, we remain committed to delivering the highest standards of service, and uplifting local communities and those we work with.

ABN is an Indo-British venture with the main headquarters in Guwahati, Assam.

www.assambengalnavigation.com



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