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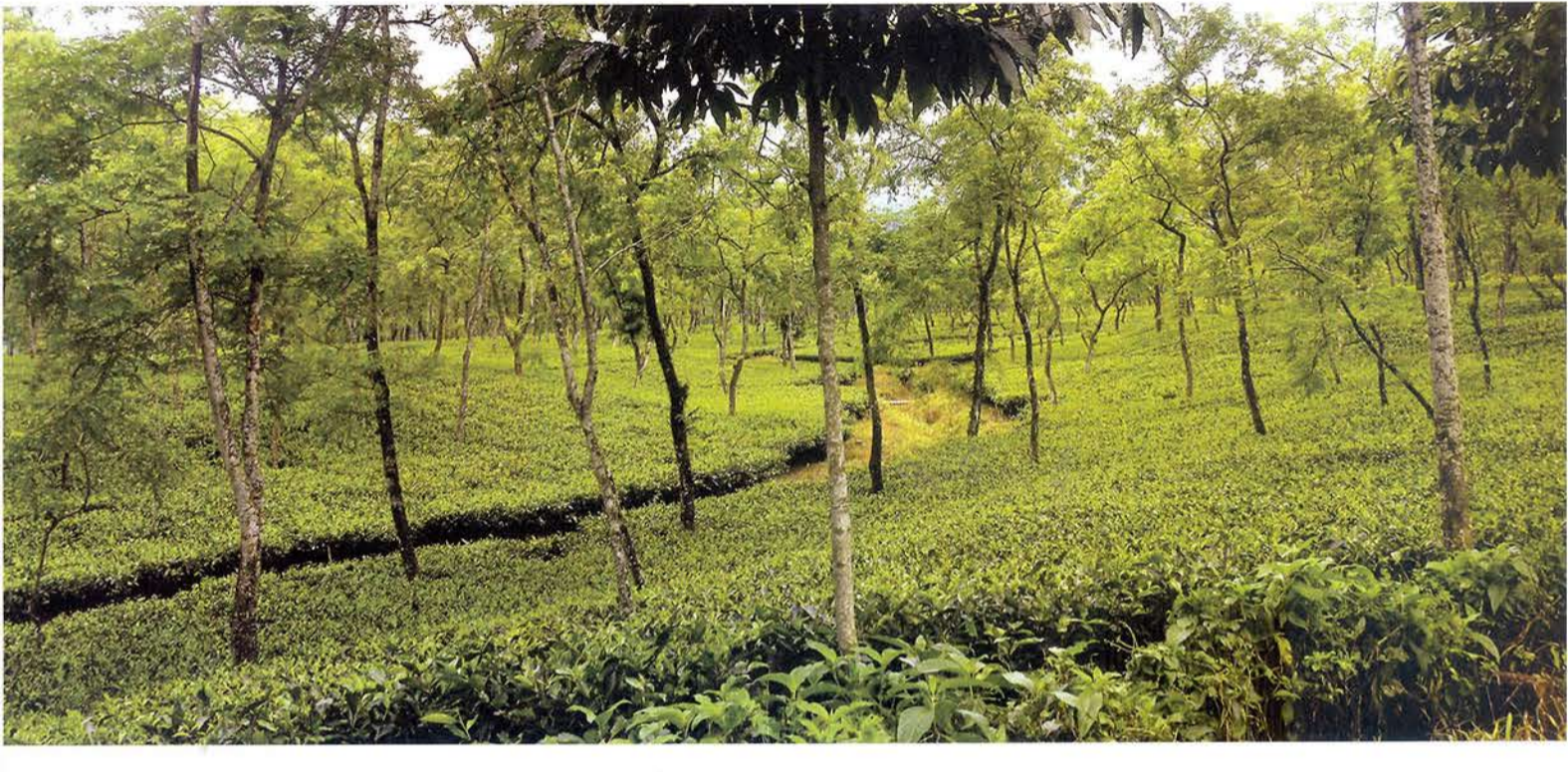
The inflight magazine of SpiceJet 



GO SHOPPING WITH SPICEJET

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Theme **holidays**



Tea territory

Chalsa in Jalpaiguri is a land of virgin beauty. If you are looking for an offbeat location, this is one place that will leave you mesmerized.

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Holding my cuppa of green tea, I stood in the balcony of my room in Chalsa, situated in the Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal. Sprawling blanket of fragrant tea gardens lay in front of my eyes. In flashback I recounted the journey.

Fresh monsoon shower had just greeted the region, making the setting look straight out of a storybook. This was my first visit in this part of the country. Google did help refreshing my

memory about this location. It mentioned the place is somewhere amidst thick rainforests, verdant tea gardens and paddy fields and is perfect for a laid back holiday. So when monsoon came knocking my doors in Delhi, I decided to chuck conventional destinations visit this land of never ending tea estates, one-horned rhinos, and Buxa tigers.

SLICE OF SERENITY

Upon my descend at the Bagdogra airport,

the mesmerizing one and a half hour drive took me to my place of stay, Sinclairs Retreat in Chalsa. Without any expectations in my mind, I absorbed whatever came my way. I can confidently say the drive from Bagdogra to Chalsa joined my list of favourite road trips. After Siliguri, my car sneaked through the dense forest of Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary.

As the car chugged ahead the mighty Teesta River appeared and soon I reached the 1930 built Coronation Bridge. The massive structure

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is built at the confluence of Rangeet and Teesta rivers and is of immense importance. With muddy waters (from fresh monsoon), sinful greenery and foliage, Teesta snaked ahead with its horrendous flow. The route ahead was mesmerizing, a thick belt of tea gardens and green forests accompanied me via Oodlabari and Malbazaar to reach Chalsa.

Soon I was in the refreshing region of Jalpaiguri where thick blanket of tea estates and winding roads awaited my arrival. I reached Sinclairs Retreat Chalsa, which hosted me through the stay, just before dusk. With time in hand, I was able to do a little excursion in the village. After checking in, the resort staff told me the best way to explore the area is by doing it on a bicycle. Riding a bicycle after so long reminded my life to the good old childhood days. Meandering in the Aibheel tea estates, I discovered the life and style of tea workers and villagers who thrive in this beautiful location. Back at the resort, I was served refreshing Darjeeling tea sans milk and sugar in a glass tumbler. The moment I held the tumbler, all my fatigue evaporated. After an authentic Oriental dinner – Thai fried fish with pad Thai noodles, I called it a night.

CALL OF THE WILD

Next morning, I kept my plate full and my itinerary fixed. After a leisurely workout at the gym, swim at the heated pool, I headed for a sinful Ayurvedic massage at the resort spa. Stepping into the 20 acres resort is pure bliss. You are in the midst of verdant greenery interspersed with trees, flowers and



Left: Picturesque view of paddy fields near Sevoke; Middle: Situated amidst green surroundings, the area is an eco-friendly one



shrubs as it is built in complete harmony with nature. Here, if you have many things to keep yourselves busy here. Rejuvenated after the spa session, I was again on the road. On the way to Medla Watch Tower that falls under the boundaries of Gorumara National Park, I watched this deep forested territory coming alive with inhabitants and animals.

An hour drive through the thickly forested winding roads, a shy animal peeping every now and then filled the silence. The driver told me that Gorumara is situated on the banks of river Murti and is an ideal resort to sight one horned rhino in its natural habitat. Supposedly, it is here at Gorumara where you can trace above 70 one horned rhinos, quite a number I must say. Sneaking through the villagers dotted with paddy fields and tea gardens, I finally reached the tall watchtower, situated in the heart of Gorumara. Since the national park was closed during monsoon, I settled for the Rhino Point (the watchtower), which gives a bird's eye view of large portions of the national park. Standing atop the watchtower, I felt a sudden rush of fresh monsoon breeze and far somewhere a rainbow was also visible. The watchtower gives a beautiful of three rivers, including the main river – Murti. Rhinos and bisons huddled on the banks of Murti to lick salt. And just below the watchtower, within the periphery of fences, two elephants came wandering. It was an absolute delight to see elephants, bisons and of course one horned rhinos graze and meander within the national park. I enjoyed catching a glimpse of elephants and barking sambar deer, numerous migratory birds. Reptiles and amphibians like the Indian python gave company to the birds. The best way to watch the wildlife is from atop one of these watchtowers. I decided after getting



Left: Gorumara National Park is home to leopards, rhinos, bisons and numerous elephants

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Not to miss

Sunset at Murti River.

Relish delectable momos everywhere in Chalsa

Buy authentic Darjeeling tea and Makaibari green tea.

Walks on the hillside, nature walks, safaris, bird watching, cycle trips, fishing and village visits

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back to the city bustle, the next thing on my agenda is to invest in good binoculars. After satiating myself with sightings, we started our sojourn back to the hotel.

On the way back, we came back from a different route. The road was dotted with thick teak, simul, and sal forests and suddenly the driver informed me about a wild elephant crossing the road on our route. We stopped and watched him crossing the road with utter amazement.

GETTING AROUND

The resort people organise sight-seeing tours on request, they take the guests around their village or towns and share local insights, legends and anecdotes. Depending on the climatic conditions, the resort also organises adventure activities. In the Chalsa village, you can sample the local life as tribal people, clad in their traditional dresses, give cultural performances. At sundown, riveting tunes of dance and music fill the silence at this otherwise quiet place. You can hire bicycles and go cycling in the surrounding villages and the tracks in various tea gardens. Families can spend their times reading at the library, which stocks a decent collection of books on

culture, art, wildlife and history. And if you are game for some lessons on horticulture and eco friendly lifestyle that is followed here, you can get in the touch with the horticulturist here. I wanted a few lessons in growing sweet little cherry tomatoes and broccoli, red cabbage and other exotic vegetables that are grown here. Also, I couldn't stop my mind from wandering with the whiff of spices that are grown here. The region is the gateway to Bhutan and other northeastern states of India. Among its many attractions are rich wildlife,

flora and fauna. Avid birdwatchers will have many exciting birding encounters. You can also see the orange orchards at Samsing, another beautiful place in vicinity.

Choosing an offbeat location helped me discover new places (some unheard ones as well) relish authentic regional food, come across local natives and their traditions, besides giving me enriching memories to take back home. ♦♦



SpiceJet flies to Bagdogra. See schedule, page 168.