

Assam, India Tea Adventure 2022

Assam Agricultural University - Jorhat



We could not leave Jorhat without a visit to Assam Agricultural University that claims to be the first institute in the world to have a department of Tea Husbandry & Technology which offers formal education on tea.



Founded in 1968, their goal is to provide a researched-based academic foundation for the future development of India's tea industry. Coincidentally, Jayanta (Jakes) Kakati, our "tea guide" for the tour, is a distinguished alumnus of AAU. It was like homecoming week for him as we visited with the current director. I am sure there have been many changes in the program since Jakes graduated in 1974. (That was the same year I graduated from college the first time.)

Jakes is a bit of a jokester now, but he assured us he was a very serious student back in the day. In addition to his degree in Science (Agriculture) with a specialization in Tea Husbandry and Technology, Jakes has more than 40 years of experience in the tea industry, He is the former Secretary of the Guwahati Tea Auction Centre and spent 31 years in that position. Jakes really knows tea, and everybody involved in the business. With his connections he was able to provide us with experiences that would not have been available with another guide.



The university also supports the Experimental Garden for Plantation Crops which comprises almost 55 acres of land. In addition to the tea garden and other tea related gardens, there are rubber, pepper vine and coffee fields. A small tea processing factory is also available where the students process, blend and package the tea. They sell the tea at various university and local events and the proceeds go back to the department. Due to the imminent need for trained personnel in

tea production for India, a sixth month long Certification program, Tea Production Technology & Management was approved in 2012. This effort goes beyond the academics of tea to teach students the science involved in cultivation as well as the realities of tea garden management and profitability. It is directed toward rural educated students and small tea growers, and it is hoped that the graduates will spread their knowledge among other growers thus sustaining the future of the tea business in Assam. Now that is a truly viable goal of college studies!!



Moving on from the administrative offices, we had a leisurely tour of the gardens including a demonstration of the machete pruning of the plants done in the off season, December through February. We were lucky to see some tea pluckers with their traditional Jaapi, bamboo hats (and bags full of tea leaves) lined up along

the path, ready and waiting to provide protection from the sun or rain. In addition to the shade trees there were other varieties of trees like the betel nut trees with pepper vines winding around their trunks. They had clutches of tiny peppercorns with a lingering spicy taste. Back at the school we were able to enjoy a cup of tea and brief presentations by the nervous students. Both tea and students were refreshing.

