

Assam, India Tea Adventure 2022

Guwahati Tea Auction Center – Guwahati



During the 17th century, British East India Company had a monopoly on buying and selling tea and in 1837 the first tea auction for Chinese tea was held in London for brokers, their clients and London merchants. In 1839 the first auction sale of Indian tea from Assam was held in London. In 1861 the First Indian tea auction center was opened in Kolkata. The Guwahati Tea Auction Centre opened on September 25th, 1970 (my 20th birthday) and became the 5th of the current nine centers. Ironically the very first batch of tea sold at auction in Guwahati came from Haroocharai Tea Estate – the

one we visited at the Purni Bheti Resort owned by Rajib Barooah. Rajib's uncle, Hemendra Prasad Barooah, a successful tea entrepreneur, was influential in the development of the GTAC in the late 1960s and served on the Tea Board for 10 years. The GTAC is the busiest and most well-known of the auction centers. Auctions are held on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and this was our first stop when we got to Guwahati on the next to the last day of our tour. Our Tea Guide, Jayanta (Jakes) Kakati, enjoyed showing us around. He basically knows everyone, and we had access to everything since he was the Secretary of the Guwahati Tea Auction Centre for 31 years, retiring in 2015. Although the auction room seats several hundred, only a few bidders were present because auction bidders can now participate remotely. When electronic bidding first took off in 2008, bidders still had to be present in the auction hall. Currently Assam accounts for nearly 52 per cent of India's total tea production and about 50 per cent of the country's export. The Tea Board of India regulates the producers, manufacturers, exporters, tea brokers, auction organizers and warehouse keepers as defined by the Tea Act. of 1953. The Tea Board recently mandated that 50% of tea sold must be through the auction system. The main participants of the current auction system (with our examples following in Italics) are: (www.teaboard.gov.in/pdf/Auction_Process_pdf3550.pdf)



- **Auction Organizers** are responsible for coordinating and conducting their respective auction centers (*Guwahati TAC*)
- **Sellers** are the factories who manufacture tea. Sellers' teas are currently sold directly into the auctions. (*Heritage Tea Company, Hookmol Tea*)
- **Buyers** are the purchasers of teas sold into the auction. (*Dugar Consumer Products*)
- **Brokers** are 'auctioneers' of teas who sell tea on behalf of sellers at the auction centers. (*J Thomas & Company*)
- **Warehouses** are stored. Warehouses are the places where teas to be sold in the auction are stored.

A tremendous amount of planning goes into the tea auction and that does not even take into consideration the actual growing and manufacturing the tea. Before the auction, the sellers must deliver their packaged bulk tea to one of the auction center's warehouses (Guwahati TAC has about 30.) In constant awareness of these deliveries, the brokers plan teas for the purpose of tasting and valuing them. They also distribute

samples to prospective buyers. On auction days (Tuesdays and Wednesdays at Guwahati TAC) the lots are sold off with live online bidding. Invoices are delivered to the winners electronically and payment is due immediately. Afterward, the buyers are issued delivery orders and are responsible for retrieving their tea in a timely manner. And the process begins again.



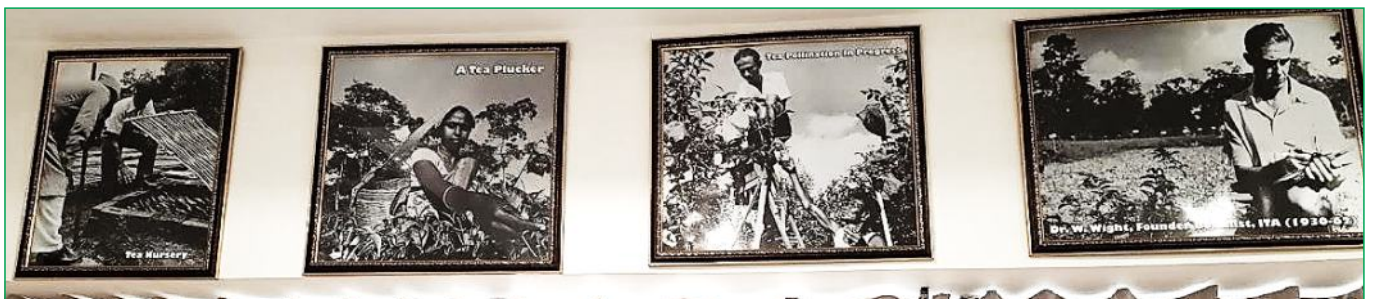


Assam, India Tea Adventure 2022 GTAC Tea Lounge – Guwahati

In 2019, a 7-year-old idea came to fruition at the Guwahati Tea Auction Centre in India. The Tea Lounge, also called the Tea Bar, opened to serve authentic Assam tea to professionals, locals, and tourists. Only Assam single estate teas from the *Camellia Sinensis* plant are sold - no herbal blends. Of course, there is one wall displaying offerings of more than 40 choices of only the best packaged Assam tea. We noticed that Bhaskar Hazarika's tea from the Hookmol Estate was included. We had visited his factory and home earlier on the tour. The founders of the Tea Lounge were concerned with the quality of the tea available to consumers. This was actually a mutual concern among many people we spoke to in the tea business. One of the goals of the tea lounge is to provide only quality tea. They feel that everyone deserves a "great cup of tea." A visit to the tea lounge will enlighten people to the variety of blends of teas. In addition, other shelves are stocked with books and other tea merchandise for purchase.



The ambience of the tea lounge is bright yet soothing. There is a lot of "white" reflecting the sunlight from the glass entryway. Large wooden upholstered chairs are comfy. I had a feeling of sitting in an open terrace with the addition of the refreshing air conditioning. There is a café seating 40 guests along with the tea bar where cups or pots of various teas may be enjoyed. Savory sandwiches and samosas can be purchased along with pastries and cakes to compliment your tea. On the walls are many informational posters about tea and I really liked the black & white vintage photo poster sowing moments in the history of tea.



We were greeted by Bidyananda Borkakoty of NETA, a frequent visitor, and enjoyed a visit with him and tea and wafers. Amy and Jakes shared some memories, and he talked about the Tea Lounge. At almost every stop we made we were treated to tea and cookies. It is a custom especially in Assam. The tea Lounge has a huge colored photo mural of a tea garden that coincidentally belongs to Bidyananda. It seems to be mandatory to get a picture in front of this mural. So before we left to see the tea auction building, we all lined up for the photo.

The tea lounge is endorsed by the Guwahati Tea Auction Centre, along with Tea Board of India, Assam Tourism, North Eastern Council and the Assam Industries & Commerce Department.

The Tea Auction Centre Tea Lounge Trust runs the facility and there are eight members in the Trust. It is managed by 6-7 young women and is open daily from 5:30 am to 8:30 pm.

