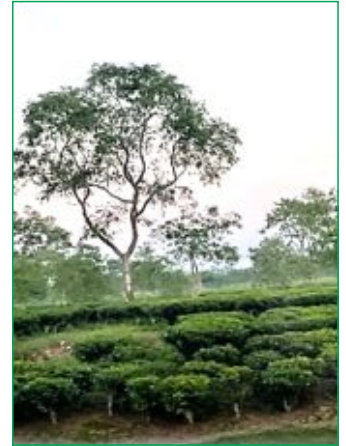


## Assam, India Tea Adventure 2022

### Heritage Tea Company - Dibrugarh



We arrived on the first day of our Tea Tour in the Dibrugarh Airport and our ride was not there. But a lady came up and said that she was June and was meeting us for Amy. We wondered how she recognized us and then realized we had the only white faces in the crowd! On the drive from the airport, we began to see the tea fields. They go on forever on both sides of the road. Of Assam's 7.8 million hectares, 304, 999 are planted in tea in more than 800 tea gardens and 20% of the people there are involved in the tea biz. I immediately noticed large trees growing among the tea bushes. Turns out this is found in all the tea gardens in Assam. The trees with their airy canopies are planted to provide some shade for the tea workers and plants and to provide moisture in the ground around the tea bushes. It is very hot and humid in India which is perfect for growing tea but can be uncomfortable for people. I have not seen this shading practice in other tea fields in Asia.



After we checked in to the Camellia Guest House, we were driven next door to the Heritage Tea Company Factory and June and Rajen's Baruah's home. After a wonderful lunch of (lightly spiced) Indian food prepared by their cook, Rajen was anxious to take us to the factory. He started the family run factory 12 years ago and his son, Ishan, is heavily involved in the factory business now. But Rajen was in the tea biz working for other tea gardens for 29 years before that. June told me that, "he knows his teas and has developed a refined sense of taste. I sensed this because there have been times when I intentionally chuck in some old teas or mix of teas into his pot of morning tea. With one sip you can see the frown and then the questions follow." He has tea fields of his own but is dedicated to working with the local tea farmers to improve the quality of their gardens with more natural processes. Their leaves are processed in his factory – it's a partnership. Both specialty teas and commodity teas are produced in the factory and Rajen was processing leaves for orthodox long leaf tea (Which we call





loose leaf tea). He showed us his tea rolling machine (This was invented by Scotsman William Jackson in the 1870s. Many British tea planters were from Scotland.) The loud green & chrome monster was grinding away on withered tea leaves to make black specialty tea. The leaves would be laid out for oxidizing then put into the huge gas fired dryer. He showed us the final batch of tea which was kind of wild looking with really big leaves and stems. He uses a sieve to get the leaves to a size that customers expect of loose-leaf tea. We were able to compare the brews in a tasting later that day.

Rajen sells many blends made with loose-leaf tea. According to June the blends are made in the factory. The herbs are all the local variety - Tulsi, mint, Moringa, ginger. Dried flowers like rose petals, blue pea flower, marigold and lemon. The spices are procured from the hills of Arunachal. A special dryer is used to dry these before blending with the teas. He uses the best grades and quality teas for the blends. No compromise there. The masala chai is well received by customers. Their packaged tea is sold in their shop down by the road. I bought two different masala chai blends and some oolong. We had tasted the oolong with the group, and I really liked it because it was not so much on the green end of the processing. Oolong requires a lengthy process. It is first lightly steamed, then hand rolled and partially oxidized. The process is repeated for the second time. Then finally dried in the small dryer.



Ishan at the front gate

Heritage Tea Company also produces commodity tea. In India this is CTC processed black tea which is consumed with milk and sugar by most Indians. Rajen was able to show us how much the leaves are broken down as they pass through various cutting rollers. Once it is passed through the last machine which rolls it into tiny pellets full of flavor ready for more oxidation before hitting the heater which turns it into dried pellets of various sizes as well as fannings and dust.

