

## Assam, India Tea Adventure 2022 Heritage Tea Company - Dibrugarh



Two of our most fun activities of the trip happened right at the beginning when we were visiting Rajen and June Baruah at the Heritage Tea Company. I had mentioned that I wanted to dress up in traditional Indian clothes for photos. This is something Gary and I always try to do when we travel. Evidently this is not a trend in India. But Rajen and June had an idea. June purchased a saree and some traditional Indian men's clothing for Gary and me. One morning we drove out to Saikia Tea Farm. (Rajen buys fresh tea leaves from this garden.) We forged through the tea bushes until we came to a shed next to where the tea pluckers were working. One of the tea plucking ladies came over to



help dress me in the saree. It was just as I remembered from so long ago at church in Pasadena, Texas. In GAs we studied Baptists missionaries working in other countries. With India Mama had brought a sheet that we used as a saree. I remember making three pleats in the front as I wrapped the cloth around my waist.



That's exactly what the young lady did when she put the saree on me. The folded cloth on my head is to cushion the rope of the tea basket. Yes, they carry the tea leaves from a rope across the top of the heads. They had to empty half the leaves out so it wouldn't snap my neck! The guys helped Gary get into a dhoti, a traditional attire for male villagers – perfect for a tea field photo. What a once in a lifetime opportunity. As if that wasn't enough, Mr. Arun Saikia, owner of the tea gardens presented Gary and me with gamusas. The woven scarves, particular to Assam, are gifted in friendship and respect. Mine is silk and Arun told us his wife makes the gamusas. Special memories to cherish forever and I still have the saree.





But the Baruah family had another surprise for us. We made our own loose leaf black tea. They withered a large woven tray of tea leaves for each of us. The leaves were from that same Saikia Tea Garden. One of the tea workers, Sabina, showed us what to do. Then we had to work. We gathered the leaves in the center of the tray and began to roll them together. It was hard work and I was soon sweating, (actually I was sweaty and sticky the whole time I was in India. It was hotter than H... there and even more humid than H... - HOUSTON. Anyway I would mound the increasingly damp leaves in the center of the tray then press them hard against the bottom of the tray and roll them toward the edge Repeat Repeat. Repeat. Until Sabina took pity on me and said mine was ready. Gary had a headstart and he rolled the leaves the longest and the hardest. His rolled leaves did look thin and wiry while



mine looked more like tiny fat worms. Sabina took each basket and arranged the leaves into individual stacks on a board for oxidation. Ishan, Rajean's son, marked the finish time by each stack so he would know when to dry the leaves. While we were away the stacks were fired individually in the small dryer and set up for a tasting.



This tea tasting was very special. We had enjoyed a lot of tea with the family, but this tasting was of our own handmade tea leaves. I felt like Goldilocks. My tea had a beautiful aroma but a bitter taste. Amy's and Amanda's teas were similar to each other and were ok. But Gary's tea was different. It was aromatic, bright and had a lovely flavorful and a beautiful clear color. It was Just Right!!!! Everyone agreed it was a lively tea especially for a first attempt. Ishan bagged and labeled our teas so we could take them home with us. But the next morning we had to say goodbye to the Baruah family and head out to another tea factory in our 10-day tea adventure, but not before I bought 2 bags of Masala Chai at their shop on the street. I took one last photo of Rajen in front of his Heritage Tea Company Factory. We hated to leave new friends that had made us feel so welcome.

