



The Natural Wonders of India, Journey to Jasidhi, Part 3

In the weeks leading up to World Vegan Day, travel writer, author, and consultant chronicles his journey across different cities of India in part 2 of a travelogue ridden with herbivorous cuisine and picturesque scenery.



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By Murli Menon

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During the long bus journeys, fresh fruit was always at hand. Be it apples, bananas, chikkoos, guavas or grapes. Peanuts, both roasted and boiled, was also available. A variety of local food including liti (roasted sattu balls), aloo dum (spiced, boiled baby potatoes) could also be found at the bus stations. As I avoid eating citrus fruits as they are acidic, I gave the pineapples and oranges a miss.



The most interesting part of travelling in a train from Benares to Jasidih is the ability to get down from the train at the numerous unofficial halts, where one can go to the village well and fill your bottle with fresh water and return to the safety of the train. As the halt is unscheduled, the train waits for at least 20 to 30 minutes. Though the weather was cold and foggy and the train was running late by 24 hours, I enjoyed this part of the journey through Eastern UP and Bihar.

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One reached Jasidih station in the wee hours of the morning. The station was shrouded in mist but one managed to reach Deoghar which is the nearest town and serves as the base camp for the trek to Chitrakoot Hills. Deoghar is a quaint little town serving the most delicious puris (fried in locally made groundnut oil) and sabji (potatoes flavoured with cumin and ginger). An ideal piping hot breakfast to keep the effects of the chilly winds at bay.

The road journey from Deoghar to Chitrakoot takes 180 minutes. It takes nearly four hours to trek to the top of the hill. The tribals of Jharkhand consider the Chitrakoot Hills as sacred and venerate it as a deity. Lots of long-tailed macaques can be found hidden behind rocks and swinging from the tree-tops during the slow and painful ascent to the top. However, one is in for a pleasant surprise after reaching the peak! Lots of makeshift stalls selling roasted peanuts, lightly spiced sprouts and green gram. The view from the peak of the hill is picturesque! One can get a birds' eye view of Deogarh and the thick sal forests that surround it — interspaced with the yellow carpet of mustard flowers swaying in the breeze, on the numerous fields found at the foot of the hills.





Delectable puris in Deogarh

Meditating in the small caves along the way to the peak and at the summit was a powerfully relaxing experience. Enjoying the panoramic views from the summit, reminded me of my trek to Om Parvat in Kumaon.

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The descent from the hill is through various shades of green. The sound of birds chirping and the shrill cries of the macaques break the stillness in the air. There are a few tribal huts along the way where one can catch his/her breath, quench thirst by drinking the crystal-clear mineral water of the several tiny streams that criss-cross the bridle path.

The giant cliff face of the hill can be clearly seen during the long and winding trek through the thick groves. The return trip to Deogarh is a pleasant drive

through lakes, mustard fields, forest, and countryside.

The vegan food at Deogarh and Jasidih was extremely economical. The vegetables were fresh and extremely tasty. The accommodation was clean and offered value for money.

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From Jasidih, I planned to travel to Kolkata for spending a week inside the Sunderbans Tiger Reserve, where the Holy Ganges meets the Bay of Bengal. The journey from Jasidih to Howrah took nearly six hours. At Kolkata, I had the pleasure of boating on the Holy Ganges at Kalighat. I had followed the route of the Holy Ganges from its source in Gaumukh to the Sunderbans, where it merged into the ocean!

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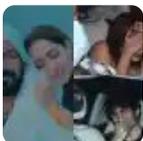
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