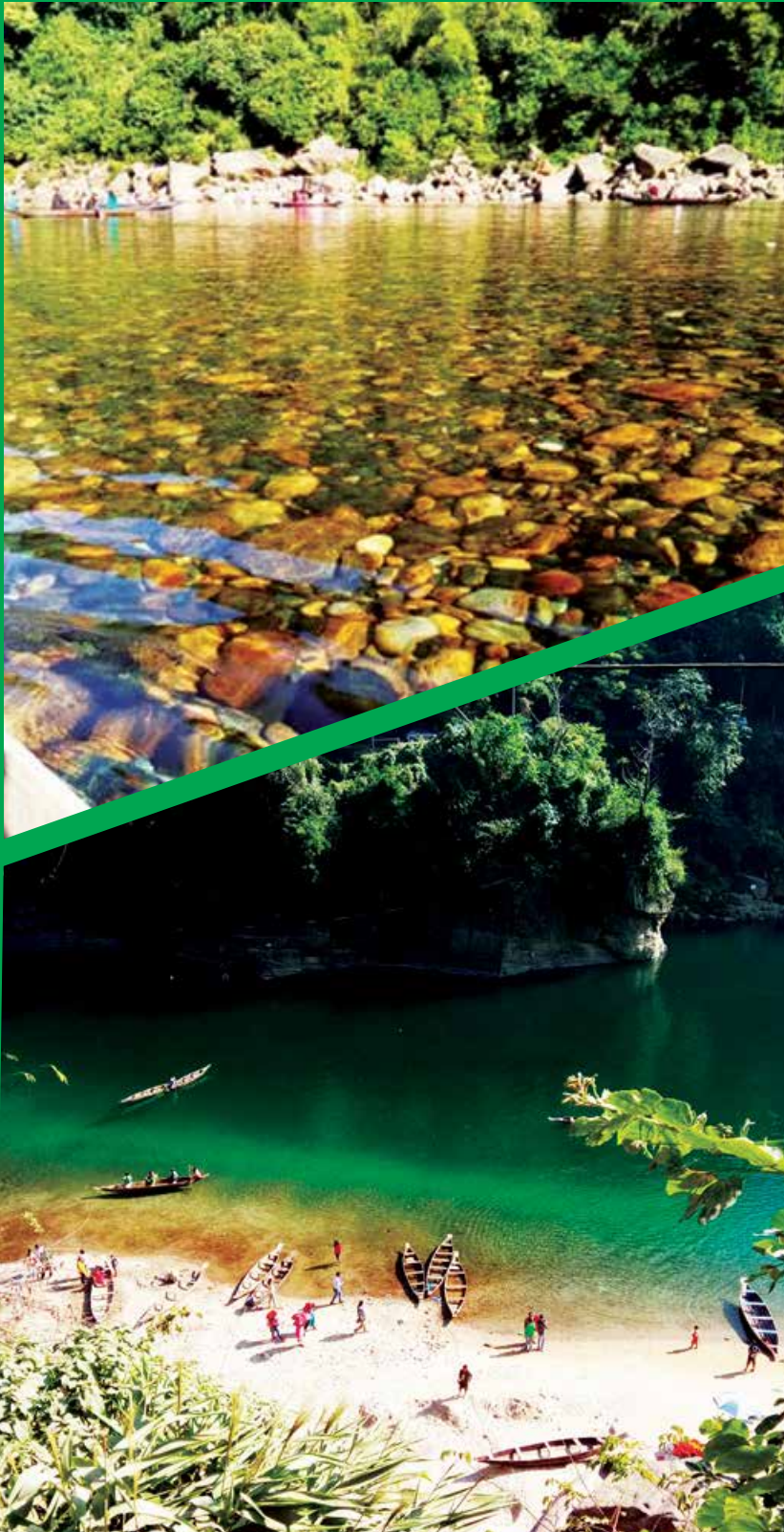




The Seven Sisters: Exploring the North-East

**Having recently visited three
of the seven sisters, Jeevan
Balasubramanian promises to go
back to see the other four**



Having heard much about the unspoilt beauty of the North-East, I have long wished to see the 'Seven Sisters'. Thanks to the 'Golden Week' that fell towards the end of last year, I was finally able to plan a 10-day trip to the region.

Eager to begin my journey, I booked a 5:45 am flight from Bangalore to Guwahati. However, my meticulous planning faced a setback in the first leg itself, with fog delaying my flight by over 4 hours. It was past 1 pm when I finally landed in Guwahati, and without further ado, I immediately commenced my onward journey to Shillong, 4 hours away on a good road. Along the way, there were small stalls selling the local delicacy, bamboo pickle, and it was dark by the time I got into Shillong. Thus ended the first day of my journey.

Starting out early the next day, I visited Cherrapunji and the various waterfalls along the way. I came to know that the waterfalls are at their best just after the rainy season, and most of the ones I saw had been reduced to a trickle of water. Although a little disheartened, I cheered myself up by buying the local wooden knick-knacks, and by capturing the scenic beauty of the mountains.

The third day also began early, with a 3-hour journey to the Umangot River, which lies on the border with Bangladesh. It had the clearest water of any river I have ever seen, and a small island in between. After a relaxing, two-hour boat ride with some friendly boatmen, we moved on to another site of great natural beauty – the so-called 'root



bridge'. A harmony of man and nature, the roots of trees are intertwined by the locals to form a bridge. Over a period of 20-50 years, these roots grow sturdy enough to bear human weight, yielding a bridge that is entirely free of brick and mortar!

Our next stop was Mawlynnong, which in 2003 was recognised as being Asia's cleanest village. Each house has a well-maintained garden, and the entire village is solar powered. The residents were both courteous and polite in their interactions with us. All in all, this third day proved to be the most fulfilling one thus far, and after snacking on tea and homemade dark-chocolate cakes at a local shop, we headed back.

Day 4 was spent at the Don Bosco Museum, spread over six floors of space that offer an overview of the culture and various tribes of the North-East. For anyone wanting to know more about the region, this is a must-visit. The skywalk on top of the museum is an added bonus.

On day 5, we made an early-morning start for Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, which is about 100 km from Guwahati. With its high density of rhinos, the park is a good option for people who may not be able to visit Kaziranga. The excitement rose as I headed out for safari, and I was lucky to spot a few rhinos during the two-hour drive. The driver and guide helped us spot the wild animals, and did not mind stopping the vehicle for us to take pictures.

In the afternoon, we headed back to Guwahati. After taking a nap, the evening was spent on a sunset cruise on the mighty Brahmaputra. Accompanied by music and



dance, it was a beautiful boat ride, and I could see the Umananda Temple on an island in the middle of the river. (If you want to capture the temple in photographs, late afternoon is the best time to take the cruise.) Another eventful day came to an end.

A view from the cruise

The next morning, we started out for Arunachal Pradesh. After capturing the scenic beauty of Assam and Meghalaya, we wanted to see the Tenga Valley – a 10-hour drive from Guwahati that is made more adventurous by the difficult terrain. Crossing a convoy of army trucks, I felt my gratitude and respect rise even more for the Army-men who guard our nation even in such difficult conditions. The journey was remarkable, too, in that it allowed me some of the best ‘clicks’ I have made in recent times – and ones that I will treasure in the years to come.

I stayed for three days in the Tenga Valley, enjoying the beauty of the mountains, streams and peaceful Buddhist monasteries.

Looking back, it was a perfect vacation, with splashes of natural beauty, culture and religion – all in peaceful surroundings. My 10 days were finally up, and the trip had come to an end. Having met three of the sisters, though, I will soon be planning a visit to the other four! Here’s counting down to the next Golden Week... ■



Jeevan
Balasubramanian
is Controller -
Finance and
Strategy for Meritor
Commercial

Vehicle Systems India