

Pages from the diary of Tejas – Orange County, Coorg, June 2010

Tejas visits our resorts in Coorg and Kabini and shares with you some of his uplifting experiences. Join him as he immerses himself in the activities at our two resorts, and enjoy them with him, virtually!



Tejas Joseph resides in Auroville near Pondicherry and is part of a consulting group engaged in creating viable models of decentralised lighting (using solar energy) for off-grid Indian villages. Tejas travels a lot in the course of his work and feels a deep connection with the history and ethos of the places he visits. He is a keen observer of the winds of change that are now blowing across the physical, cultural and social landscapes of India and seeks to capture its effects in his articles, ever believing that the journey is as important as the destination, the travel as rewarding as the arrival! Feel free to write to him at pjtejas@gmail.com if your interests or work coincide with his.

Activity Name	Visit to Bylakuppe Tibetan Settlement
Duration	Half Day
Timing	2.00 Pm to 6.30 Am
Guided	No
	If required: 1. Exclusive Tibetan guide available at nominal cost of Rs.1200 / Prior booking required 2. Escort from resort to location & back can be arranged at nominal cost of Rs.1200// Prior booking required
Cost	Not applicable / No Entree fee applicable
Transfers	In own car / Transfers can be arranged at an additional cost (Distance to location from resort 35 kms – 1 hour drive one way)
Prior Booking Required	Yes

Visiting Tibet!

The Bylakuppe Tibetan settlement is around 35 km from the resort and lies in Mysore district. It was started in 1960 and is the second largest settlement (after Dharamshala) of the exiled Tibetan diaspora on Indian soil.

As one takes the little road to Bylakuppe after Kushalanagara and drives down, one gets the feeling of entering the gates of some far eastern oriental wonderland. The road meanders through undulating well-kept fields that rise and fall with the geography of the land here. Prayer flags fluttering from tree tops and fences remind you that you are indeed amongst a different people and a unique culture.





The landscape is pleasant and vast. The Bylakuppe settlement is spread over some 20 odd sq km and is home to a native population of 30,000 Tibetan people. They occupy themselves with spiritual practices, agriculture and a variety of small enterprises. We soon see the gold painted roof of a Buddhist shrine a little away in the distance and assume it to be the heart and soul of the settlement.

Along the way, we pass monks, young and old, in

their maroon and gold vestments and lively Tibetan youth zipping past impatiently on their Indian made motorbikes. Soon we draw up at the gates of the imposing Namdroling monastery, a time capsule transported from the mountains of Tibet. We are met by Gomo, our native guide, and set off to explore its large grounds. We see the many facilities for resident monks and initiates and exhibits showing the famous Tibetan monasteries and ways of life before the exodus.

We see the temples, the grandest of them being the famous golden temple that houses the Buddhist trinity of Gautama Buddha, Guru Padmasambhava and Budha Amitayu. The inside of the temple is cavernous and the statues are monolithic, dwarfing devotees and visitors in their magnificent presence. The three seated statues – 20-30ft high – are burnished with copper and gold haloing them with an effulgent aura of unspoken wisdom and unspeakable peace. You can breathe in the tranquility here as much as you can the sweet incense wafting from the alters. The surrounding walls are adorned with frescoes and murals depicting key scenes from the life of the Buddha. Gomo tells us that these intricate paintings and embellishments upon the walls, tapestries and doors were executed by master Buddhist temple craftsmen who were brought in from Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan when the building of the temple began in the mid-1960s.

The Namdroling monastery and temples are dedicated to the Palyul lineage of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism. Though home to the Nyingmapa sect, it also draws adherents of other prominent Tibetan Buddhist sects as well. There are ritual prayers held at different times of the day at the temples here, attended mostly by monks, nuns and initiates.



The rituals become elaborate on important days of the Tibetan religious calendar, particularly their New Year. Visitors are permitted to watch so long as they do not disturb the proceedings. The mesmeric chanting of a

large number of monks echoes through the vast inner chamber of the big temple. It can transport you to unexplored regions of your self. Finding the silence in the sound of life is the grand ideal of the Buddhist masters!



On our way out we stop at the monastery's canteen for visitors to savor a plate of steaming momos and hear Gomo's musings of an exile's life – free yet rootless without a sense of belonging! Afterwards, we stroll around the small commercial heart of the settlement outside the monastery and visit the many shops selling trinkets and collectibles representing Tibetan art and craftsmanship.

The way of the Bamboo

As we took leave of Gomo and started back in the late afternoon, we noticed vast stretches of yellowing bamboo thickets in the surrounding countryside*. They were flowering and discharging vast amounts of seed that natives called 'bamboo rice'. In the old days, it was said that this rice sustained many in times of famine and want. We were actually witnessing an unusual phenomenon, the death (and rebirth) of an entire generation of Bamboos: 50 - 100 yrs old. A free cosmic lesson was on offer! The bamboo was an apt metaphor for Buddhist living. Death and life combined in one unified flow in its coming of age. How fitting, I wondered, that we should have been shown this rare spectacle on our return from a visit to a Tibetan Buddhist temple?