

The Discerning Traveler

by Philip Wagenaar, MD

'Round the world in 72 days

India (Part seven of a series)

In the February 2010 issue, I recounted the Indian tribal villages that my wife, Flory, and I visited as part of our 'round-the-world tour. In this issue, I continue with a story about the intriguing tribal markets.

As these markets often are far away from towns and each takes place on a specific day of the week, we stayed overnight in three different locations. **In order to have enough time at each market, careful planning is necessary. It is best to let an experienced travel agency handle the logistics.**

(The India, Oman and United Arab Emirates parts of our 'round-the world tour were superbly organized by Barbara Sansone of Original World [Mill Valley, CA; 888/367-6147, www.originalworld.com]. The costs for our private tours were \$8,036, India; \$7,270, Oman, and \$1,970, UAE, including

vehicles, guides, drivers, hotels and breakfasts.)

Although the tour operator had warned us that the lodgings in this part of Orissa would not be luxurious, we were quite enchanted with our accommodations, which were large, quite comfortable and, for the most part, air-conditioned.

Our first base was Rayagada, where we stayed for three nights at the **Sai International Hotel** (Pune-Bangalore Highway, Dist. Sangli. Pin - 415 411, Rayagada, Orissa, India; phone 011 91 6856 223396, fax 225554).

Saora Monday market

It was a long drive to the Monday morning market, where the Saora tribe held sway. Its members are devoutly religious and believe that every natural phenomenon is the work of deities.

It was delightful to watch people in their colorful indigenous

costumes while we explored the market, where many activities were taking place. A barber had set up shop on a ground cloth. Waving his scissors, he quickly secured his first client.

Six tailors, perched on stools with their treadle sewing machines in front of them, frantically worked on pieces of cloth that people had brought. Close by, women hand-molded clumps of rice into balls, which they threw into frying pans standing on top of a low wood fire. Two covered cooking tents nearby offered more extensive meals.

Other women were selling fabric, jewelry and toothpaste. While most vendors were sitting quietly on the ground, a boy waiting for a customer was sitting on the back of a motorcycle while holding, of all things, a large goat.

Kutia Kondh Tuesday market

On Tuesday we drove 110 miles to the Kutia Kondh market in Kotgarh.

Historically, this tribe practiced human sacrifice. The women traditionally have tattoos on their faces and hands to ensure they will recognize each other in the spirit world. Several women each sported a cigar behind one ear.

Dongria Kondh Wednesday market

To be closer to the Dongria Kondh villages and market, we transferred to **Hotel Hello** in Jeypore (NH-43, Jeypore, Dist. Korapat, India; phone 011 91 6854 230905 or 231127, www.hotelhellojeypore.com), where we stayed for two nights.

The Dongria Kondh, who practice horticulture, live on the plateaus of the Niyamgiri hills. They are polygamists and must marry a person outside their clan. Both sexes have long, well-oiled hair, kept in place with combs.

It was fascinating to watch the tribal members coming down from the hills on their market day, the women covered with an assortment of hairpins, earrings and nose rings, dressed in white garments and car-

rying enormous loads of produce on their heads and babies in their arms.

Bonda Thursday market

The primitive Bonda live in isolated mountain forests and can be seen only when they come to their weekly market, which is on the hilly main street in Onukudelli.

Their descent on foot from the mountains takes from 4:30 a.m. until 9 a.m. They each usually carry 30 to 60 pounds of fruit and vegetables with them. To fortify themselves for the trip back up the mountain, they drink copious amounts of stupefying liquor.

What distinguishes Bonda women from those of other Indian tribes is their distinctive traditional dress. Each wears layers of strands of beads covering their upper bodies, plus a tiny woven skirt. They shave their heads and decorate them with plaits of palmyra leaves.

Interestingly, they prefer to marry younger men, in the hope they will have someone to care for them in their old age.

The men carry bows and arrows and can be aggressive.

The market exploration was full of surprises: two Gadaba women wearing multiple heavy, metal neck rings, which are removed only after death; a woman nursing her baby while holding a sacrificial chicken in her unoccupied arm, and two motorcycles, one of which held about 20 live chickens and the other one, two live goats.

Maria Gonds Friday market

Since it was Friday, we went to the colorful Kunduli market to see the attractive, bison-horned Maria Gonds, named for their dancing headdress. The men usually wear loin cloths and the women coarse saris.

After stopping at the market, it was on to Jagdalpur for a two-night stay at the **Royal Bastar Farm** (*The Palace Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh, India, PIN-494001*), the resort of the Bastar royal family. (For reservations, contact *Nivalink* (phone +91 22 6150 6363, www.nivalink.com/reservations.html.)

On Saturday, our guide took us to the gorgeous forests, caves and waterfalls of Kanger Valley National Park. The spectacular Tirathgarh Falls, where water drops 100 meters down steep ravines through three sets of cascades, is best seen during the rainy season or after the monsoon.

Sunday market

Sunday was the day to explore the weekly market in Narayanpur, which is famous for the fine Bastar handicraft, such as bell metal statuettes, woodcraft and wrought-iron and bamboo artifacts.

We stayed two nights at the **Kanker Palace Hotel** (*Kanker, Chhattisgarh, 494233, India; phone 91 7868 222005 or e-mail kankerpalaceheritage@gmail.com*), the residence of the ruling family of the former state of Kanker. It has been developed as a retreat, offering five suites with Western-style baths and toilets.

Upon arrival, the Maharaja's (Indian prince's) family greeted us as if we were royalty. Three people, standing on the steps of the palace, put leis around our necks, lit candles and incense and repeatedly bowed to us in welcome. This was accompanied by the loud beating of drums.

Our accommodation was in a huge suite with 25 electrical switches, every one of which, upon our retiring, had to be flipped to turn off the lights. As I couldn't find the last-to-be-flipped switch, I had to summon somebody from reception after we both were undressed.

Raipur

After we explored the countryside on Monday, we traveled on Tuesday to Raipur, a city of six million, where traffic was more chaotic than we had ever experienced. Motorcycles slithered like lizards between thousands of bicycles, rickshaws, auto-rickshaws and cars. I was sure our driver was going to hit somebody; it was a miracle that we arrived safely at our night's hotel, **Hotel Celebration** (*Shri Gurugovind Singh Square, Jail Road, Raipur [CG], India. For reservations, contact Nivalink [see above]*).

In the afternoon, it took one hour's driving and "assaults" on six different ATMs in the city before we located one that would dispense the money needed to tip the guide and driver.

The next day, our Indian travels ended as we flew from Raipur to Oman via Mumbai. In a subsequent issue, I will relate our adventures in that country. ITN

Dr. Wagenaar welcomes questions but may not be able to answer them individually. Write to him at 6556 50th Ave. NE, Seattle, WA 98115, or e-mail pwagenaar2002@gmail.com.

The Geografile Venezuela means "Little Venice" in Spanish. It was named by Spaniards who arrived to find Indians living on canals similar to those in Venice. — BH

