



This could be

Every little bump in the road we swerve takes us a step further in our attempt to attain Godliness at Asia's cleanest village. In the process we also try to wash away our sins in the world's wettest region, Mawsynram

Pictures: Suresh Narayanan





CLEANEST DRIVE

heaven



The famous inventor Nikola Tesla had once said, “The spread of civilisation may be likened to a fire. First, a feeble spark, next a flickering flame, then a mighty blaze, ever increasing in speed and power.” True to the great man’s words civilisation has spread to all corners of the world like wild fire, with modernisation galvanising its way into our lives making us crave for simple things like nature. Day in, day out, being caged in the concrete prison called metropolitan city we decided to explore to “God’s own garden” in Meghalaya. This place is not just any destination situated in Mother Nature’s lap. Mawlynnong is Asia’s cleanest village and with our wanderlust DNA itching to traverse the East Khasi hills we set off to man’s Garden of Eden.

With almost 1,400km to cover, we

HAIL MONSOON: Bedazzled by the fresh green look of the plants by the road side.

We passed through the Tropic of Cancer, also known as Northern Tropic.

BENGAL BOMBARDMENT: What the eyes see and the ears hear the mind believes but in our case the SUVs too felt the crater filled roads that rocked our rides like a baby’s cradle.

They are in demand, and they smell like hell, we are talking about Jute



started our journey from Kolkata and before we could cover even a couple of kilometres, the heavens opened up with torrential rainfall welcoming us to eastern India’s monsoon. With cat-and-dog weather smacking the windscreens of both our rides – Mitsubishi Outlander and Skoda Yeti – the roads starting doing a David Copperfield as the tarmac disappeared gradually and all we could do to do was shadow dance with potholes.

Having driven just under 200km, we entered Berhampore, West Bengal, where the roads were like as if it had suffered carpet bombing which made our SUVs nervous. I was frantically searching for Chris Rea’s ‘The road to hell’ song to add more drama to our experience driving through craters and mud slush. Going at a snail’s pace, my colleague kept reminding me that



We love your vehicle, just like you do.



Atcha lagta hai



AT SELECT CLUB HP STATIONS

• ELECTRONIC BILLING • DIGITAL DISPENSER • WINDSCREEN WIPE • OIL CHECK • TYRE PRESSURE CHECK • CLEAN WASHROOMS • REFRESHMENT COUNTERS



the four-lane promised land awaited us after Dalkhola, which was another 31km away. But he forgot to mention that we would be stuck at Dalkhola train crossing for almost three hours. With the road finally widening and the NH34 finally looking like highway rather than a dingy lane, the Outlander and the Yeti powered their way to the highlands.

Almost perfect winding farm roads, lush thick green with trees as tall as skyscrapers welcomed us as we entered 'the Abode of Clouds' or Meghalaya. All roads led to the Scotland of the East but for us Shillong is the rock capital of India and we got into the thick of things by blaring classic rock numbers from Iron Maiden, Guns N' Roses as the awesome Rockford boom box in the Outlander made sure each note was crystal clear for the mass.

With our clean destination only 90-kilometres away from the state capital, we meandered our way through the curves not just cutting across mountains but driving through clouds. Unfortunately the Outlander's 2.4-litre petrol engine has such serious drinking problems that it made Charlie Sheen look like saint. So halfway to Mawlynnong we had to refuel and aye carumba to our surprise the pump station was manned by women! To make matters better it was an HPCL fuel pump, who are also the sponsors for this exotic drive. For once even we were glad to take a pitstop for the Mitsubishi.

Finally Hansel's (from the fairytale

Hansel and Gretel) bread crumb trail came to an end as we entered the realms of cleanliness.

Mawlynnong looked like a well-groomed garden. The houses have sloping roofs made of wood are thatched with Betel nut palms.



CLEANEST DRIVE

Make way for the Outlander and the Yeti. The mountain has been cut to make a road diversion on the way to Shillong.

TYRE-SOME WOES: Badlands used the tyres as a punching bag causing punctures.

Paddy, paddy everywhere in the rice belt of India. Rice is the staple diet here.

Straight forward route to the cleanest village in Asia, Mawlynnong, from Shillong. Direction boards make sure you can't get lost. Typical picture, perfect roadway in Meghalaya. Paradise is very much here



Mawlynnong has one main road for cars and other four-wheelers, which takes you straight at the heart of this rural borough. The village echoes simplicity in terms of nativeness and we wore our Indiana Jones hat to explore the land of tidiness. It was amazing to see how

FEATURE

the locals had mastered the basics like water supply and toilet facilities for all houses and the eco-friendly way of disposing waste by burying it in a pit and reusing it as manure. Cleanliness is not something they have been brainwashed into either. Rather it's their way of life, their tradition if you please. They take pride in keeping not only their dwellings clean but also their entire village. Much less can be said about our "modern" cities. Mesmerised and captivated with the Mawlynnong's magic we decided to stay a night here. At the moment there are only three guest houses here but lucky for us we got to stay at a three-room wooden cottage with a lot of wildlife accompanying us for the night. The sound of silence could be heard so audibly with the live performance of the cricket orchestra that I wondered when was the last time I was so close to nature. Maybe never!

It wasn't time for curtain call as our adventure got more exciting as we headed to the Riwai village, roughly 3km away from our new found land. This is where the Living Roots Bridge



Mawlynnong has a literacy rate of 90 per cent. The total population of the village is around 500 people and roughly 90 houses. It is a 100 per cent Christian kibbutz. The church is 108 years old, formerly under the Church of England.

Everyone understands English and the children speak so fluently that kids in cities will get an inferiority complex.

Every corner has a bamboo basket which works as a dust bin

Mawlynnong village





CLEANEST DRIVE



situated. The uniqueness of this bridge is that roots of the rubber tree would grow across the trunk over the stream. The root is then placed at the other side of the stream in the soil and in time it becomes sturdy, and

voila! You have a bridge. It makes a crisscross pattern so stones are placed in the gaps making it look like a stone-covered pathway. Another masterstroke by nature, which man has used to his advantage. So instead

Living Roots Bridge

One has to see them to believe that a rubber tree's roots can actually form a bridge (above & right) over the stream (below right).



A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE: The Mawlynnong wooden guest house cottage, where we stayed, (left) had 24-hour electricity and life saving plug points for us gadget driven urban slaves



We love your vehicle, just like you do.



AT SELECTED CLUBS HP STATIONS

ELECTRONIC BILLING • DIGITAL DISPENSER • WINDSCREEN WIPE • OIL CHECK • TYRE PRESSURE CHECK • CLEAN WASHROOMS • REFRESHMENT COUNTERS

FEATURE



Mawsynram



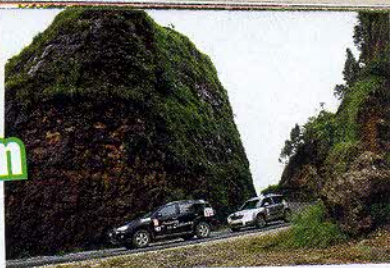
The sleepy town of Mawsynram is also known for the Mawjymbuin Cave, which has a massive stalagmite shaped like a Shivalinga. Legends

of building bridges the Khasis, traditionally, grew bridges. With humidity levels hitting a new high for us non-locals, my colleague Pushan, aka Aquaman, couldn't help but do a Salman and dived into the cold stream shirtless. Apart from refreshing him it must also have gotten Aquaman's sense cells working for he desisted from venturing downstream in the strong current.

Coming all the way to Meghalaya and not going to the world's wettest

say that there is a path from this cave that leads you straight to the Kamakhya temple in Guwahati, which was constructed in 1565 by Chilarai of the Koch dynasty. That's over 150km!

Sorry guys, I forgot my trekking gear otherwise nothing would have stopped me from creating some sort of history, at least in my dreams. I'll let you all decide

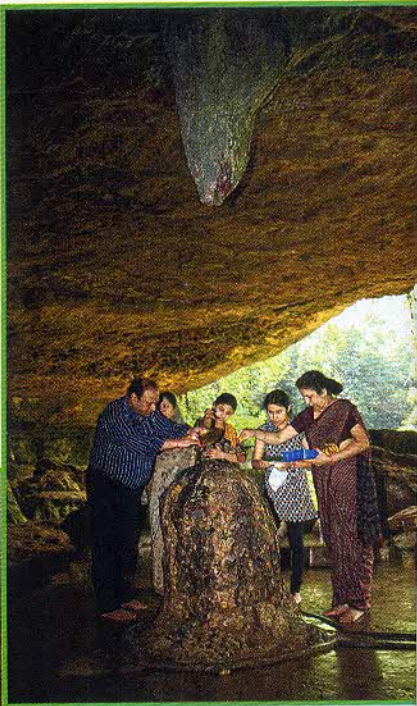


place, Mawsynram, would be blasphemous. Located 56km away from Shillong, the dark grey clouds and heavy fog, at times, threatened to drench us but to our disappointment these were all just false alarms. What can I say. Perhaps the rain god is camera shy? Time for us to head back home where the civil world remains, a mere illusion.

Arup Das



CLEANEST DRIVE



We love your vehicle, just like you do.



AT SELECT CLUB HP STATIONS

• ELECTRONIC BILLING • DIGITAL DISPENSER • WINDSCREEN WIPE • OIL CHECK • TYRE PRESSURE CHECK • CLEAN WASHROOMS • REFRESHMENT COUNTERS