



The Land of the Headhunters

Mon, Nagaland

A small, tribal village. It's eerily quiet and there are no people in sight. Skulls. Skulls everywhere. Mostly buffalo and deer. But wait — did something move? — eyes peek out, all around, barely visible among the shadows.

Then a Naga Konyak tribesman cautiously steps out into the light. He bears full body tattoos, a spear in hand and a tribal outfit reminiscent more of tribes in Africa than in India. Ah, but this is the Other India.

Glimpses of the Other India

On his trusty motorbike, **Matt Dworzanczyk** heads to Northeast India, the strange monkey-like sliver of land sandwiched in between Myanmar, Bangladesh, China, Bhutan and Nepal. There he finds a country as similar as it is different to the rest of India

From the ethnically diverse tribes of Manipur and Nagaland, through to the religious devotion of Mizoram and up to the majestic snow-capped Himalayas in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, Northeast India is sure to touch your heart and make your eyes tear up with the divine.



Far Above the Clouds

Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh

In Tibetan healing practice, a monk transfers the sickness of a diseased person onto a simple doll and the doll is then disposed of, never to return. In the old days, instead of

dolls, the fate of being sent away fell on those from the lower caste. Many were sent south.

They travelled far, far above the Himalayan mountain tops, higher than

the clouds, past surreally colourful, moss-covered meadows, and they became the original founders of Tawang. This is the Other India's Little Tibet.



Where God Walks the Earth

Kelkang, Mizoram

Far away in the remote Mizo mountains, there's an ancient, sacred land. It's off the map, but worry not, it's safe. For it's the place where God himself walks the earth.

There people speak in tongues, cry, dance, sing and scream out to the skies. They roll in mud and weep in the rain — all claiming empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

And it's too much on the senses! Madness? Devotion? A faint difference indeed.

And between Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam — the well-known faiths of the region — it's clear that this is different! For this is the Other India.

A Simpler Life

Imphal, Manipur

Oh, the troubled land of Manipur! Only recently opened to outsiders, the state is kicking and fighting against Indian influence and control, with arguments ranging from valid land disputes to petty pride: *"We like polo, they like soccer! Give us independence! Now!"*

There's no rush here — often there's no electricity or internet either. The sun rises. The town is already awake. Its people — in front of their houses, with their dogs at their feet, each with a metal cup of hot tea and some boiled eggs for breakfast — look through the daily paper, delivered by a smiley older man on a beat up bicycle. News of protesters blocking the roads run alongside reports of Emma Watson's new haircut.

There's an outdoor shower. It's sat among mango trees, pineapple bushes, marijuana plants and tons of other vegetation that locals quickly identify as remedies for all kinds of different ailments. There are cows, goats and chickens roaming around a quiet stream nearby. And there are always groups of men — friendly 'chillum circles' — in the vicinity.

And despite central Imphal's dusty market madness, there is surely inner calm to be found here, in this Other India.

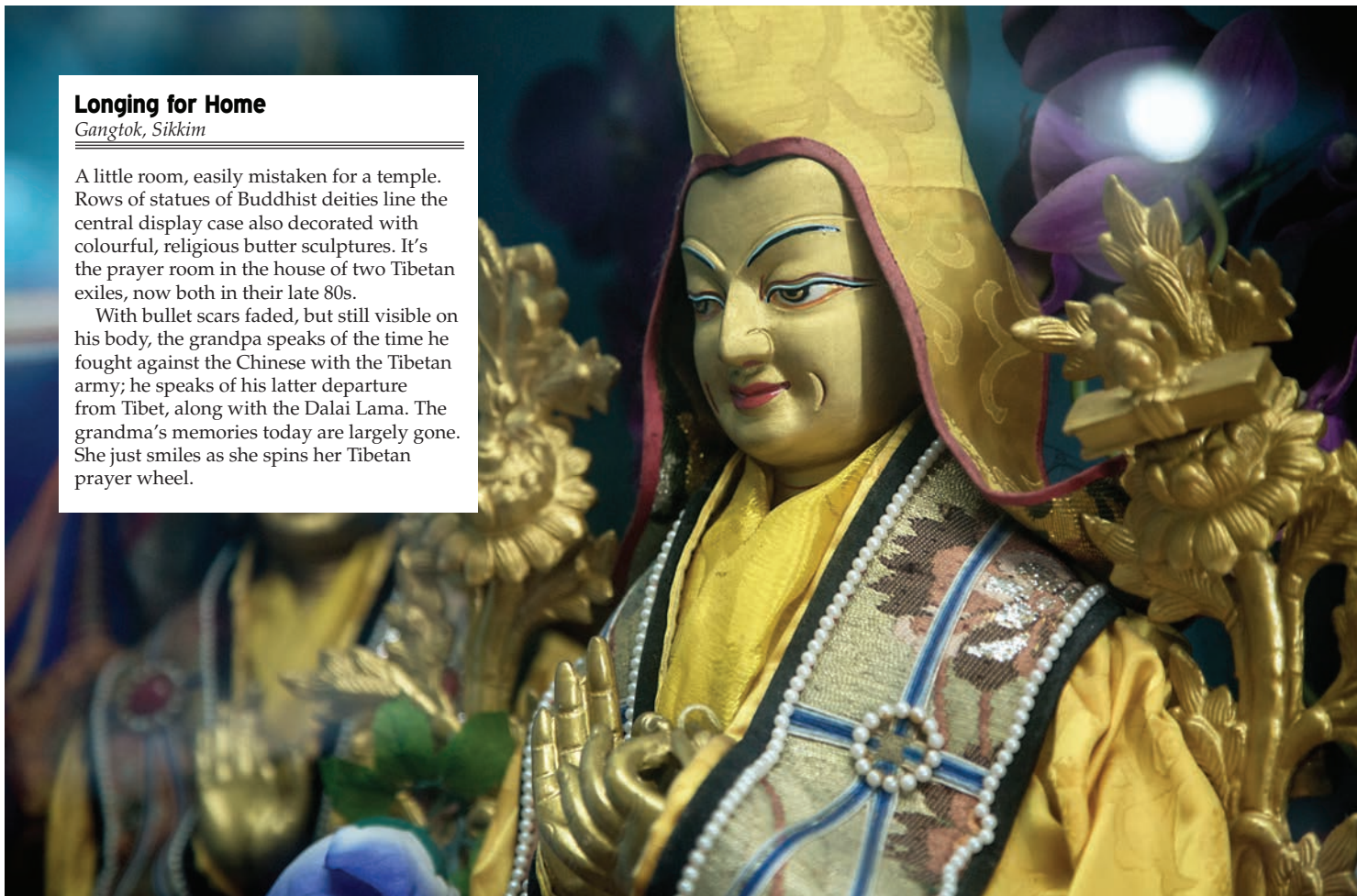


Longing for Home

Gangtok, Sikkim

A little room, easily mistaken for a temple. Rows of statues of Buddhist deities line the central display case also decorated with colourful, religious butter sculptures. It's the prayer room in the house of two Tibetan exiles, now both in their late 80s.

With bullet scars faded, but still visible on his body, the grandpa speaks of the time he fought against the Chinese with the Tibetan army; he speaks of his latter departure from Tibet, along with the Dalai Lama. The grandma's memories today are largely gone. She just smiles as she spins her Tibetan prayer wheel.



Mizoram's Taj Mahal

KV Paradise, Aizawl, Mizoram

It's hard to find — the place is hidden beyond the clouds. Once they clear, though, the whole mausoleum glows peacefully in fresh mist. The monument stands as a symbol of eternal love between Varte, a schoolteacher who died in a 2001 accident, and Khawlhring, her husband who has since invested all his funds and efforts into the construction of this memorial.

And there's a calm, quiet, spiritual magic to this place of quiet contemplation, here in this Other India.



Wedding Preparations

Sibsagar, Assam

Streaks of warm sunlight sneak through the cracks in a bamboo wall. It's sunrise. There's a monkey on the roof. And the Assam Mama is getting ready. Her daughter's wedding is a mere few weeks away now, and there are still nearly 2,000 invitations — elegant, blue envelopes — to hand out.

A couple of hours later, the car is packed and the whole family is ready for a field trip to the countryside, with compulsory prayer-stops at every shrine along the way.

By early afternoon they arrive. It's been some time since Mama's been back to her hometown. With a low bow to touch the aging grandma's feet, each family member pays their respects. And after a chat and some chai, in ceremonial fashion, Assam Mama presents her mother a wedding invitation — on a silver platter, along with an offering of betel nut and fruit.

And soon, the family's back on the road, for there are many others still left to invite for this upcoming grand celebration, in this Other India.



Sands of Patience

Bomdi La Monastery, Bomdi La, Arunachal Pradesh

3` impressive old monasteryž8our monks crouch around a massive sand mosaic, applying the finishing touches.

Despite its size, it only takes them a few days to finish. And it's not as profoundly 'mysterious' as Hollywood may have one think. They crack jokes as they work and during break time they welcome the rare visitor for vegan lunch and some very buttery salt tea in their simple, monastic rooms, in this Other India.

Matt Dworzanczyk is a filmmaker, writer and a long time Hanoi expat. He is currently on a motorbike journey from Hanoi towards Nepal. For more on Matt's films and travels, visit EtheriumSky.com, and follow his monthly trip diary in this publication or online at wordvietnam.com 

