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TREKKING SRI LANKAN TEA COUNTRY

Two days of soaring vistas and sore feet



Our next stop was mountainous central highlands of Sri Lanka. In contrast to the stifling heat and humidity at sea level, the hills are delightfully cool - high 70s during the day, 50s at night. It's a perfect area for growing cooler-weather fruits, vegetables, and most of all, tea. We traveled by rail, with trains and stations looking like they hadn't changed since the British left. The train was old & slow, but the view from the window was to die for (above picture).

We then set off on a two-day trek through the tea plantations and forests of the hill country. It was quite arduous for two relatively-sedentary middle-agers; by the end of the first day (about 6 hours hiking, mostly uphill) we were pretty much exhausted, and our feet felt ready to fall off. The trek took us down railroad tracks, up mountainsides, through conservation lands, jungle areas, across tea plantations and through small villages of rural tea workers (more on the tea industry in the next postcard). The vistas are incredible: we found ourselves taking dozens of pictures each more captivating than the previous -- but it is hard for them to do justice to what we actually saw "in the whole".

When we were about 30 minutes from our evening destination, a remote

and simple inn, we got our guide Bruno to phone ahead, to ensure that our promised beer supply was cold. You've got to picture this: four parched trekkers standing in a tea plantation, anxiously surrounding a Sri Lankan guide (who is 10 years younger and 20 years more fit than either of us). He's trying to make a cell phone call in the middle of nowhere, the connection isn't good: "*THE BEER? DO YOU HAVE THE BEER?*". "*Is the beer cold?*" "*Please ask Mr So-and-So to please put the beer in the frig*". He was shouting at the phone, repeating the phrase a dozen times, in English and Singhala (just for good measure). Ah, the power of modern telecommunications.

In reality, the beer had not yet arrived -- but when it did... we drank a lot of it -- all that they had bought, in fact. Between the beer, the exercise, and the crisp weather, we all slept very well that night.

The second day we took lunch at a stunning waterfall -- of course we had to hike through jungle to get to it. They only told us afterwards that this was the place they'd alluded to -- where travelers tend to pick up leeches -- but that they were prepared with material to get them to fall off. We managed, leech-free.



