

Darjeeling, Journal entry #1, November 21, 2015

Saturday 21 November 2015 Himalayan time

Dear fellow traveler:

You didn't ask if it's worth it - 36 hours "in transit" - but yes, it is. The view and not only the view - of Kanchenjunga and all the little jungas - but the looming presence and the power of form, at all levels of creation. Even the constantly honking drivers and often-barking dogs partake. Residing in Darjeeling, even for a short time, makes me realize that all hill stations are not equal.



Darjeeling, however, is not for old men. Here even the hills have hills. There is one notable flat area, the mall named Chowrasta, where old folks congregate, greet each other, and schmooze. Perhaps there's senior housing nearby. I'm looking.

I visited three Buddhist monasteries this morning, Old Ghoom, new Ghoom, and what my taxi driver, Aziz, called "dolly monastery". Entry to new Ghoom was a long downhill asphalt path through rows of fabric merchants. They ignored me on the way down but greeted me avidly as I climbed to the main road.



Now, it's noon, and I'm sitting at Keventer's, a fast food cafe with a coffee-chocolate-sugar combo that almost compensates for their not having any solid sweets. It also helps that I can look down on their patio from my room at the Hotel Dekeling and see if any tables are free. I ordered a chicken burger that was piled high with slices of cucumber, tomato, and onion. I enjoyed the chicken with its Indian sauce and for the sake of safety resisted the rest.



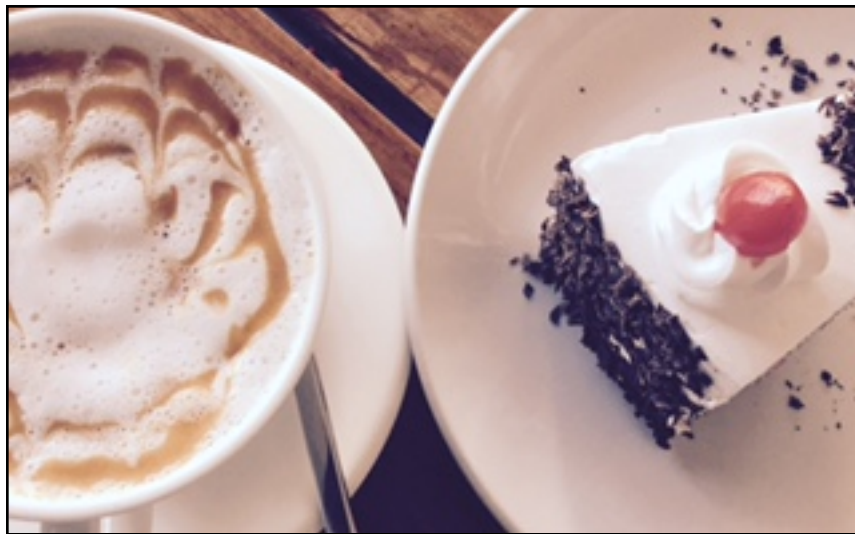
I arrived Wednesday evening and it's now Saturday. My first full day I walked for eight hours. Since yesterday, though, I'm down to one activity a day.

Let's say it's the influence of the Kanchenjunga massif and ignore the other options. My one activity yesterday was to walk downhill past the steam-train railway station and visit the Dhirddham temple. It's a small, elegant, colorful temple with ample seating (or meditating) areas and diverse flower plantings. Needless to say it's a peaceful enclave.



Taking photographs northward is a special pleasure with the glacier covered mountains (just 40 miles away as the Garuda flies) resonant in residence (you can see them almost due center left).

It is said in certain circles here that, to a Darjeelingite, being without the presence of the mountain is equivalent to living without knowing there's such a thing as moksha, liberation. What would be the equivalence, then, I wonder, if one lives in the presence of Kanchenjunga but never sees it? Perhaps to know there is such a thing as liberation - just not for me? I had a piece of Black Forest cake topping off my curry dinner - what kind of philosophy would you expect?



Darjeeling, Journal entry #2, November 26, 2015

Vagabond puffs of cloud occasionally obscured the heights of Kanchenjunga yesterday. Today the dual whites graze indiscriminately. The accuweather forecast is storm for Wednesday. Kanchie and I have had our moment. If the weather hadn't turned I might have stayed; of course, the weather always turns.



I keep saying to myself: "Enough with the climbing, Self". But, of course, there's no one to hear and, even if there were, I'd have to stay in my room all day to avoid a hike. So I walked up to Chowrasta Mall and hung out with the old folks and kids.



Darjeeling is unsurprisingly insular - although it takes a few days to realize there's a limit on things to do - the presence of the mountain goes only so far and, anyway, I'm sure its essence goes with me.



Passing Keventer's, I heard the local minstrels playing what could have been a farewell melody, a swan song so to speak. So glad I returned to Darjeeling. Tomorrow the long transit to Katmandu, stay tuned.

