

# Last minute encounter in the jungles of India

*THE WEEKLY* is proud to present the latest travel column by Murwillumbah travel writer and globetrotter Nick Condon.

This time Nick has travelled to the remote jungles of North East India where he experienced an encounter of a lifetime.

By Nick Condon

TING, TING, ting. We heard the now familiar sound of the spotter hitting the roll bar of the jeep with a rock to signal to the driver that he'd spotted something.

The driver slowed to a stop. We held our breathe with anticipation. Was it a tiger? A leopard? A rhino?

The spotter signalled with his arm to the driver to move forward slowly. The jeep inched forward.

Kaziranga National Park in North East India is not only a tiger stronghold, it is one of the last great refuges of the Indian One-horned Rhino.

While its territory once stretched across the Indo-Gangetic Plain, encroachment from farming and excessive hunting have taken its toll and the rhinos now live across 11 disparate territories.

Kaziranga is home to 70 per cent of these rhinos.

Even with the strong numbers, seeing one close up is never a guarantee.

Towards the end of the game drive, the weather had changed and it was hot and quite humid.

After a four-hour game drive we were on our way toward the exit gate, disappointed that we hadn't seen a rhino up close.

An hour earlier the guide had assured us that that the blob on the horizon we



*The beautiful and rare Indian Rhinos. Photos by Chris Wilson*

could see through binoculars was in fact a rhino, but we were left unsatisfied.

Now, as we waited eagerly to hear what the spotter had seen, spirits were again high.

The spotter shushed us, putting his index finger to his mouth before pointing out the right-hand side of the car.

There it was, in amongst the scrub easily missed by the untrained eye, an amazing sight.

A female rhino with her young calf was lying in the mud.

Not in the distance this time, not a blob on the horizon but right next to the track which was less than 20 metres away from our jeep.

We were in awe. For what seemed like minutes, we didn't move.

We didn't take a photo. We just watched.

This was one of those special experiences in nature.

Satisfied with our sighting, we made our way back to the lodge.

Who knows, maybe next time I visit we'll see a tiger.

I'm escorting a trip to North East India in February in conjunction with Tripaway Travel, where we will visit Kaziranga and do up to three game drives.

**If you'd like to join us, we have a few places left, please contact Helloworld Main Street, Murwillumbah on (02) 6672 1031 to find out more.**