

# Traveller visits the last of the headhunters

**MURWILLUMBAH** Adventure traveller Nick Condon has returned from his latest trip, meeting headhunters of northern India.

He said it was such a surreal feeling walking into a room knowing everyone in there has cut someone's head off.

"It was one of the possibilities on my recent north-east India unplanned 'wing-it' trip," he said.

"Running a trip like that with nothing planned - you never know what is going to happen.

"Of all the things we did though - the rhino safaris, exploring the world's second largest river island and visiting one of the beautiful tea estates of Assam, the time we spent with the headhunters was the highlight.

"Once notorious for their headhunting and famous for their facial tattoos, the Konyak tribe live in a remote corner of north-east India. "The largest of the 17 tribes in the state of Nagaland, they once fought for control over the land, instilling fear into their enemies by taking their heads and proudly displaying them on the walls and doorways of their homes as a reminder of their strength and power.

"Today though, as a group of men in their 80s and 90s and with only about 30 remaining, they're part of a disappearing world.

"Ducking under the doorway, we stepped into the dark, smoke filled morung, a village hall of sorts and we were instantly transported back in time.

"On the wall were the various tribal weapons used long ago.

"In the middle of the room was a small fire around which four figures sat, each with traditional headdress, over-sized ear lobes and the famous tattooed face.

"They greeted us warmly, offered small stools and invited us to join them by the fire.

"After the small talk was out of the way, with our guide translating, they asked us if we had any questions. I asked them about their faces.

"One of the men then described how he had to lay on his back for an entire day with the queen of the tribe using a thorn from a local tree and a blue pigment to adorn his face.

"He spoke of the excruciating pain he suffered during the tattooing process - a ritual reserved for those warriors after they returned with their first head.

"All too soon, we were on our way again with a long drive in front of us to reach Majuli - the river island. It's an experience I'll never forget. Next time we'll stay for the tea and biscuits!

"For those who are interested, I'm off there again in January.

"Please contact me on 0422 930 458 or [journeys@somepacetobreathe.com](mailto:journeys@somepacetobreathe.com) for details."



*ABOVE: Two members of the Konyak tribe of north-east India with their tattoos and exotic headwear. The last of their tribe, they are the last remnants of a dying race.*

*LEFT: Adventure traveller Nick Condon, of Murwillumbah, enjoys some of the hospitality of the Konyak people. The visit was a highlight of Nick's trip*