

#ORAL-HYGIENE

Beat The Stank



#ADVENTURE



Vikram Joshi
Textile Technologist & Historian

My first visit to Lahaul and Spiti Valley was in the summer of 2014. This part of our country was difficult to access as there wasn't a motorable road to Kaza and beyond. I wasn't comfortable driving on this terrain so we hired a local taxi to take us there. It took us three days to reach Kaza from Kotgarh near Shimla. So this year, I thought of driving there myself with a couple of friends in our trusted SUVs. So we stocked up our cars with provisions, gas stoves and cooking vessels in case we got stuck somewhere. My idea was also to collect stories as we travel; luckily I met some interesting people and learnt about their extraordinary life.

We started our journey from Jaipur and headed off to Chandigarh. From there it took us eight hours to reach Thaneedar, our first halt at the picturesque foothills of the Himalayas.

Barjara Orchards, Thaneedar
Our first stop was in the middle of a misty apple orchard. Since we were so tired from the drive we woke up early and took a walk through the orchard and it was such a treat after the scorching heat of Rajasthan.

If you haven't been to this part of the mountains then you might not know that Thaneedar is known as the Apple Capital of Himachal. Before 1916, Thaneedar was just a pine tree forest and now it is full of apple, plums and cherry orchards. How apples reached this place is an interesting story. During the winter of 1916, an American businessman called Samuel Evans Stokes, who came to India to work with Lepers-leprosy impacted patients near Shimla - and fell in love with the place and a local Rajput girl. He married her and adapted Arya Samaj and re-named himself Satyanand Stokes. He not only settled in Thaneedar Kotgarh but also planted the first apple trees which were called 'Red Delicous' from a nursery owned by Stark Brothers in Louisiana, USA. The first lot of apples were ready by the year 1925.

These apple trees became popular among the locals and today Thaneedar, Kotgarh is full of fruit bearing orchards and produces the largest amount of apples for export. It's interesting how few saplings which came from America have changed the socio economic conditions of this region. The residents now live a well-served and relaxed life which you will notice when walking around the quaint villages. After a relaxed sleep, we got ready for our next drive to Kalpa.

Nako
When we reached Nako, there was a small dhaba covered with stickers and names of travellers who had taken a stop there to eat Rajma Chawal, the only thing on the menu. A comforting and humbling meal prepared by a local lady who serves this hot and fresh at 12 thousand feet, Nako is close to the Indo-China border and in the backdrop of this village, you will see the magnificent Reo Purgyal which is at 22,362 feet which is the highest mountain in Himachal Pradesh. The village also has a small lake on the opposite bank of the Nako River. This lake changed course from its original place because of the tectonic upliftment. The effect of tectonic upliftment can be seen clearly as one starts driving towards Tabo and Kaza. The mountain range has vertical plates which almost look like books stacked from a distance. After lunch we started descending towards Tabo.

Tabo
Tabo is a small town before Kaza situated at 10,760 feet. It is surrounded by one of the oldest monasteries called Chos-Khor. In 1996, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama conducted the Kalachakra initiation ceremony here which witnessed many buddhist monks from all over the world. The Dalai Lama finds this monastery the holiest and wanted to stay here after his retirement. The monastery has the most beautiful and intricate wall paintings and mud statues which need to be protected and preserved for generations to come. After staying for a night, just to get our muscles some rest, we again started driving towards Kaza.

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Once we reached Kaza, we were exhausted from the strenuous drive and of course low oxygen levels at this altitude make your body lethargic. However, we were carrying our oximeters to monitor our levels but luckily we were all in the range of 85-90. So we took it easy and rested it out for awhile and managed to get lunch at a Spitian inspired cafe called Taste of Spiti, which is run by Ishita Khanna. We ordered Thukpa which is a brothy noodle soup with seasonal green and herbs - you could also add a meat of your choice. Momos or steamed dumplings are another great option. We also tried a local preparation called Baley made from barley or millet like a loaf of sourdough bread along with the juice made of Sea Buckthorn berries, as locals suggest that it builds your resistance against reduced air pressure and lower levels of oxygen which can cause AMS - Acute Mountain sickness.

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which can cause bacteria build-up and stench. Whenever we brush our teeth we are trying to remove bacteria that accumulates on tooth surfaces. This bacteria or 'plaque' is that white stuff that can make your teeth feel fuzzy or dirty after a long day of not brushing.

Similarly, poor hygiene can lead to your tongue trapping bad smells because both bacteria and foods' odour particles get trapped in the tongue. Bad breath is typically caused by not brushing one's tongue'. Having a dry mouth can also increase the risk of a stinky smell and is the main culprit behind morning breath.

What Causes Bad Breath Throughout The Day?
Even if you're brushing well, pungent foods can cause bad breath in the short term although how they do so depends on the particular food. Coffee and alcohol cause dry mouth which can in turn cause bad breath. But garlic and onions, for example, release sulphur compounds in

the mouth that can stick around for hours and they contain smelly chemicals that are absorbed into the bloodstream that flow to the lungs and are released when you breathe. Mixing strong-smelling foods with saliva and bacteria in the mouth only accentuates their reek.

And food that gets stuck in teeth can allow bacteria to grow until the next time you brush. Meat and other foods high in protein are likely to give you bad breath because plaque bacteria thrive off them. Smoking can cause bad breath too. The smell is generated when stale smoke particles linger in the mouth and throat, mixing with saliva and bacteria in the mouth and causing 'smoker's breath'.

If you have good dental hygiene your bad breath is persistent and might indicate it could be the cause. Last but not least, other health conditions such as stomach reflux, sinus infections, postnasal drip and metabolic issues can result in bad breath because of particles and bacteria to hang out in your mouth for much longer than recommended.

The Causes of Morning Breath
The number one cause of bad breath in the morning or otherwise is poor dental hygiene. If you don't brush your teeth well, you leave a lot of food particles and bacteria to hang out in your mouth for much longer than recommended.

How To Get Rid Of Morning Breath
Bad breath remedies are relatively straightforward. On the spot, try a mint, mouth freshener spray, or sugarless gum to combat the odour. Specifically, consider products with xylitol, a chemical compound that helps prevent the formation of plaque.

The main advice for combating bad breath however is to maintain good dental hygiene. The first place to start is with a visit to your dentist as they can guide you on proper care tips.

A great tip to remember is the acronym 'FBI' meaning to floss first, brush and then irrigate with a mouth rinse or a water pick. When flossing, take your time rather than snapping the floss up and down quickly.

On top of that try eating more hard fruits and vegetables such as apples and celery, which can act as a natural mouth rinse. Fibre is because they're full of fibre and they brush food residue away from your teeth. They also incentivize the production of saliva which rinses your mouth out. Be sure to stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water because that will increase saliva production too.

If you're worried your bad breath might be a sign of something serious especially if you're experiencing pain or bleeding in your mouth, see a dentist.



The Road Less Travelled

Kunzum Pass
or drag their bikes out of water.

Discovering Discovery
I was driving the Land Rover Discovery at 15,500 feet and while crossing the Kunzum Pass it suddenly lost power and refused to move even an inch. It might be uncommon knowledge but vehicles require oxygen to burn the fuel to create torque. Since there was less oxygen at this height my car's fuel sensors could not detect the fuel-oxygen ratio. So I decided to change from automatic to manual mode but this didn't help either. I was feeling frustrated and nervous all at the same time. After struggling for 15 minutes I managed to get the car moving at a slow speed to reach the pass. From this point onwards the road starts descending towards Batal Valley where we were supposed to lunch.

Chacha Chachi Ka Dhaba
Both Dorjee and his lovely wife Hishe Chhomo known as Chacha-Chachi run this dhaba to feed the travellers crossing the Batal Valley. They come every year in the beginning of summer just as the roads open for the Kaza-Manali traffic and are probably the last to leave before the chilly winter. The humbling couple have also been awarded the prestigious Godfrey Philip Bravery award for their relentless support and rescue to innumerable people visiting this region.

The dhaba was jam-packed when we reached and waited to get a space and got served Rajma Chawal with seasonal vegetable curries, for a reasonable price of 200 rupees a Thali.

After lunch we headed towards Khoksar. The drive becomes a bit tough at this point as one has to drive through running streams and heavy boulders. The valley along the river Cherao offers the most spectacular scenes as we drive slowly and carefully through that rough road. The local drivers driving Sumo and the Tempo Travellers often overlook us wherever they found a little allowance and it's amazing to see how they manage to drive on that narrow road. One certainly needs a 4x4 drive and preferably automatic in this terrain as it's difficult for drivers who are not used to mountain driving.

Once we reached Gramphu village we discovered motorable roads in parts till Khoksar which was partly covered with snow. We finally reached the recently built Leh-Manali highway, which is a four-lane highway guarded with side collars. At this point we were pretty exhausted after 9 hours of driving and stopped by a Dhaba to drink some warm tea and catch the last rays of the sun. After our break it had started to get a little dark. Some might feel they shouldn't drive in the mountains post sunset but I feel the darker it gets the better it becomes for driving as you can see the incoming traffic lights on blind curves.

Ghemoor - a small village in Jispa
The elevation of Ghemoor is about 11,000 feet and our bodies were tired but climatized to this altitude. We checked in a small little homestay called Ghemoor Khar which is part of an estate founded by Thakur Mangot Rais who was the Wazir of Lahaul. The walls of the homestay are decorated with old pictures and paintings. The dining area is cozy and is adorned with hand carved cooking vessels that the family has collected over the years. There's a flowing river right across the property called Bhaga with a majestic view of the mountain on the backdrop. The rooms were small yet comfortable but sitting outside the rooms overlooking the valley was a treat.

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British beauty - Discovery which had not acclimated to this altitude and became dull and refused to pick up speed. However, the drive from Jispa to Shinkula was a visual treat. Once we reached the pass we experienced the most breathtaking view of the Lugnak Valley in Zaskar. We were advised not to stay there for more than 20 minutes as there were chances of us getting AMS. The Border roads organisation popularly known as BRO is making a double-lane road for all-weather connectivity between Manali and Leh via Dharcha. The roads up to the Shinkula pass are almost complete except for the last couple of kilometres which are still motorable.

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fort-monastery. It is the biggest centre of Buddhist learning in Spiti Valley, which is over 1000-year-old and is the oldest training centre for Lamas. It is located at a height of 13,568 feet. Founded by Dromton, a famous disciple of teacher Atisha in the 11th century.

Another place of interest in Kaza is a village called Hikkim, which is at a height of 14,567 feet. There is a very special post-office here as it's the highest in the world. Apparently, it is also the most Instagrammed view in Kaza. Tourists also end up sending out postcards from the post-office as souvenirs. So don't forget to send out one.

Kaza to Khoksar
Just as you get out of Kaza you will cross the Chicham Bridge which is the highest bridge in Asia. Driving from Kaza to Khoksar is an adventurous experience to say the least. The road was never metalled or tarred as for half the year this road is covered in snow. During the summers when Kunzum Pass is open to the public, it's impossible to make any repairs as only one vehicle can pass at a given time. While arriving on this state highway 30, we had to cross many streams flowing across the road and these could easily be a couple of feet deep. We came across many enthusiastic bikers who often would get down in knee-deep water

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Serendipity Day

Serendipity is the term for a 'happy accident' or a 'pleasant surprise'. Thus, Serendipity Day encourages people to look for and notice those unexpected good things that are always out there if people would just have the eyes to see them. In fact, the creators of this lovely day believe that serendipity is no accident at all, but an attitude or a lifestyle in which people are always reaching for those unexpected things and expecting happy surprises to occur.



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Both Dorjee and his lovely wife Hishe Chhomo.

Leh was through the Gramphu-Rohtang pass which used to take about 5 to 6 hours and always had a risk of landslide blockages and traffic jams. Interestingly, the proposal for the construction of the tunnel across Rohtang Pass was first conceived in 1942 by a Britisher Dr John Bicknell Auden, who was working on the Geological Survey of India. In 2000, when Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee became the Prime Minister he visited Lahaul after receiving a request from the local residents. As this area was partly cut off from the country during winters, he declared that the Rohtang Tunnel would be constructed. On 26th May 2002, the approach road to the entrance of the tunnel was inaugurated by Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee. However, the project did not move further until

we asked Naresh if he could help arrange a setup for me to cook and he happily agreed. He managed to source the right quality of meat from the local market and deputed his cook to prepare the meat as per my instructions. Luckily, the meat turned out palatable and even the other house guests enjoyed the spicy mutton with freshly made Tawa Rotis.

I was very curious to find out more about the property so I asked Naresh to connect me with Vivek, the owner of Sonaugi Homestead. We got talking and he told me about his life and travels, and how he got to Himachal from New Delhi. In 1996, he was accompanying a television crew to document the Kalachakra ceremony by HH Dalai Lama in Tabo monastery. Here, he met an Austrian filmmaker who

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The next day we started our journey from Ghemoor to Manali via the newly built Atal Tunnel. This tunnel is 9 km long which is the longest single tube tunnel at the height of 10,000 feet in the world. Earlier the route from Manali to

lived near Naggar and they both started working on a film based on the Ladakhi Amchis (medicine men). On one of the trips to Naggar, he met an Italian girl called Francesca who ran a Dhaba in Tabo during the Kalchakra. Francesca invited him over to her cottage which was far from the road in a jungle. It is in the coming years that her husband Eris and Vivek became friends and it is because of this friendship that Vivek started to visit often and decided to set up a home in Sonaugi. Since Eric and Francesca also wanted to move from their cottage, the friends collectively decided to buy land together. Eric wanted to use recycled wood, stone and slates ripped off from old redundant village houses. The piece of land they chose was a 15-minute walk from the road but it seemed like a distant Shangri-la. Looking at the difficulty of access to the property they decided to build a motorable road with the help of locals. It is during the building of this road that Eris ran into

renamed Satyanand Stokes, who changed the socio economics of Himachal by introducing apple cultivation to the state.