

MIDWEST
TRAVEL**Never mind world,
what about eight
wonders of Kansas?**

Wichita, Kan. — Forget the seven wonders of the ancient world. Let's talk about the eight wonders of Kansas.

A nonprofit group called the Kansas Sampler Foundation is asking the public to submit nominations using eight elements of rural culture: architecture, art, commerce, cuisine, customs, geography, history and people.

State officials hope the effort will boost tourism and draw attention to attractions, such as:

- Big Brutus in Cherokee County, a 16-story coal-mining shovel.

- The giant ball of twine in Cawker City.

- The Garden of Eden in Lucas, a folk-art site that includes Biblical figures.

"The best places you can find are in those small towns, in some of those family-owned restaurants that fix fried chicken and fresh-baked pies," said Caleb Asher of the Kansas Department of Commerce.

The campaign is accepting nominations for the wonders until May 15 through its Web site, www.kansassampler.org.

IN THE AIR

**Flying troubles
many travelers**

Flying causes the most trouble when people travel, according to the Orbitz Travel Survey.

Asked to cite their "most problematic" trip experiences, 40 percent of those surveyed cited flight delays and 21 percent cited airport security. Fifteen percent said hotel amenities and cleanliness, while 9 percent cited rental cars.

The survey, conducted for Orbitz by the Ipsos Public Affairs Project, found only 21 percent of those who fly said their travel time has not increased as a result of new security measures such as removing shoes and restrictions on liquids and gels.

However, the new security measures have left 42 percent feeling satisfied or more secure than before the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, while another 46 percent said they feel somewhat safer but still think security could be improved.

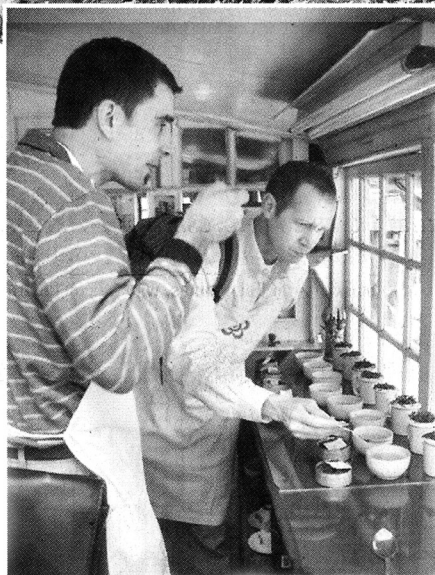
Shangri-La brews
a nice spot of tea

Surrounded by
the lush Himalayas,
Iowans sip a cup
of high adventure.

Along the slopes
and valleys of
Darjeeling, India,
workers pluck
leaves at Poobong,
known to grow the
"champagne
of teas."



GONG FU TEA / PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER



Mike Feller, left, and Rusty Bishop, Gong Fu Tea shop owners from Des Moines, analyze teas at Makaibari Tea Factory in Kurseong, the Land of the White Orchid, in Darjeeling.

By MIKE FELLER
SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

Each year, my business partner, Rusty Bishop, and I travel to some destination within the tea-lands to learn about new products to serve in our tea shop, Gong Fu Tea in Des Moines.

We also develop relationships with the owners of tea gardens so we can directly import the best loose-leaf teas.

So in mid-March, we headed for northern India's Darjeeling district with a side trip to neighboring Nepal (not far from the legendary fictional utopia of James Hilton's Shangri-La).

Darjeeling is a remote portion of West Bengal. It's nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas and has been home to Indian tea production for more than 150 years.

We timed our trip to coincide with the height of Darjeeling's "First Flush" harvest — we wanted to be

there while the very first leaves of the year were being picked.

Our trip began in mid-March with a 15-hour flight from Chicago to New Delhi. From there we took a domestic flight to Bagdogra Airfield.

From this point on, our travels were either by foot or in 8-passenger mountain jeeps — the roads were actually that rough and narrow within the mountainous terrain that is Darjeeling.

We stayed with an independent tea buyer based in Siliguri, India, during the first part of our trip.

Thanks to his hospitality we were able to taste a variety of different styles of tea from a wide range of tea estates dotting the hillsides of both Darjeeling and Nepal — often on the very site of the factories themselves.

We were able to speak to estate owners and managers about this year's harvest in comparison to past years.

See TEA, Page 4E.

IOWANS
ON THE
GO

Register readers write
about their travels

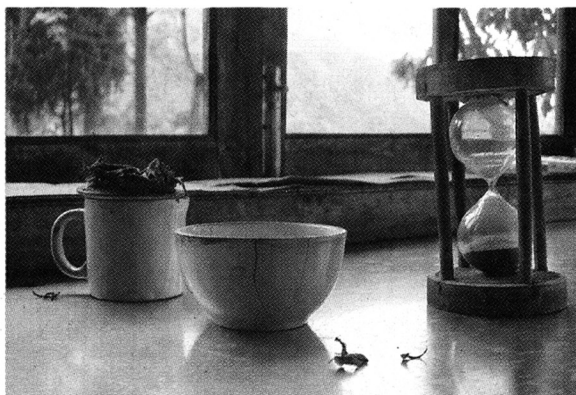
DETAILS

WHO: Mike Feller and Rusty Bishop

DESTINATION: India's Darjeeling district and Nepal

TRIP DATES: Mid-March

Darjeeling, Nepal excursion suits shop owners to a tea



Teas are tested at the Poobong Tea Estate in Darjeeling.

TEA, from Page 3E

We were also able to evaluate many styles of this year's first-flush teas with their very creators.

After bidding farewell to our hosts, we met up with the managing director of Poobong Tea Estate and began a five-hour jeep ride to his 1,000-acre tea estate northwest of Ghoom in Darjeeling.

He invited us to stay with him in the 100-year-old bungalow built by the British at the conception of the estate. We would rise at 5:30 a.m. to sample tea on the lawn while awaiting the sunrise over the hills that surrounded the tea garden.

We would then spend the rest of the day hiking over the estate's three gardens, filming the workers as they deftly plucked the top two leaves and the bud of the tea bushes, then following them to the factory to watch the actual creation of the tea.



THE REGISTER

We would typically spend the rest of the day drinking tea — both out of traditional cupping sets as we evaluated the individual invoices with the owner and his managers, and for enjoyment as the fresh tea was paired with local foods for our various meals.

We left our host with an order for 40 kilos of our very favorite invoice of First Flush tea and we arrived home on March 25 to find it awaiting us in our shop.



GONG FU TEA / PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

A Nepalese tea garden (above) sprouts rows and rows of "First Flush" bushes. At the Poobong Tea Factory (below), workers, as ancestors did for generations before them, sort leaves for packaging to fill tea cups around the world.



Learn more about the trip

Gong Fu Tea owners Rusty Bishop and Mike Feller will share experiences from their tea-sourcing trip to India's Darjeeling district as well as the tea gardens of eastern Nepal from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Friday at their shop, 414 E. Sixth St., Des Moines.

They will serve Indian black teas produced this year in both the Darjeeling and Nilgiri regions, a Nepalese oolong and traditional Indian snacks.

Bishop and Feller will show a video that depicts the land and the people that create some of the world's finest teas. They will also visit with guests about the trip.

Tell us about your travels

- Write a story for us about your recent trip — **500 words or less.**
- Write about the places visited, which were most enjoyable and why.
- Include your name, your phone number, where you live and a sentence explaining why you took the trip.
- Supply brief answers to these questions: What were the trip dates? Is it a good family destination or better for couples, singles or groups? What are typical expenses for a trip like this?
- Send us four or five photos. Please include captions.
- Submit the story and photos **by e-mail** to travel editor Doug Peterson at dopeterson@dmreg.com. Include the word "travel" in the subject line.