



# My Journey with Odisha

Dreams | Hardwork |  
Determination & Success

Travel Link  
A joy of discovery

[travellink-india.com](http://travellink-india.com)



# The 70's DREAM

It was today 45 years ago...

Looking back to my childhood in a vibrant fishing hamlet in Quilon, Kerala I scored high when it came to my passion for football. Those were the days when “Air India-Maharaja” dominated the skies and our ties with the Gulf was almost like a travel template for generations to come. For me the Gulf dream was fading away and I chartered my voyage to the east. Odisha was my calling...

My Uncle Issac & John ,a mining expert and a mechanical engineer were working in Odisha in the 1960's and later in the 1970's few of my friends and family were also part of the first marine export endeavours in Puri. I came to visit and I stayed. It was basically the start of my journey into the wonderful world of travel and tourism industry in Odisha.

In the mid 1970's I kickstarted my adventures into Odisha with Travel Center, followed by couple of other collaborations and finally formed Travel Link- a family owned company specializing in special interest tours to Odisha,Chattisgarh and Coastal Andhra Pradesh.

This beautiful peace loving land and people welcomed me with open heart, offered an opportunity of a whole new world to explore and connect with new friends and finally as destiny holds met my spouse Lily and establish myself.

It's with great humility and deep gratitude, I want to convey my sincere thanks to all my friends and well- wishers who stood with me in this long journey that had many ups and downs, yet fulfilling.



- Benjamin Simon



# A Never Ending Journey

inspired by


## The Beauty of Odisha

Odisha, formerly called Orissa is endowed with nature's abundant beauty. The state has a very opulent natural and cultural heritage, one of the richest in India. Its beauty, charm and tranquility appeals to every kind of visitor. From hamlets full of handicrafts and sanctuaries for the wild , to incredible temples and textiles, folk art, classical dance and royal heritage , it was just simply unexplored as tourism was not considered a priority profession and even unheard - off to many.

I had the enthusiasm and passion and I knew from the very beginning itself that this is the land of new opportunities and to succeed I must differentiate myself in the market, create new demands with innovative itineraries, deliver unparalleled high level of quality services.

I trusted my local contacts and they guided me to travel by local bus, trucks, jeeps, and bullock carts!! Many times I had no other options but to walk long distances through deep dense forest, valleys and mountains, crossed streams and rivers, encounter wildlife, as I recall it was really very scary and frightful as there was total life risk involved.

However as it turned out the risk was worth while exploring off- the beaten path destination- the hidden treasures of Odisha pioneering tribal tours, trekking, textiles , arts and crafts , local festival tours, royal heritage home stay experiences in Odisha,Chattisgarh formerly Madhya Pradesh and Coastal Andhra Pradesh, that could be offered to discerning travelers for memorable experience of lifetime.



I realised that I need to get the word out, so I created maps, brochures, photographs and gathered contacts by sending air mails to Foreign Tour Operators to create awareness and demand and later met with Indian Principal Tour Operators and gave them insight on to the programs to promote this unique unexplored destination. Our itineraries were curated with lot of research and attention to detail. From arrival till departure, every aspect of a traveler's journey was crucial to me as they were my valued guests and future ambassadors.

It was my absolute responsibility to ensure that they cherish their visit to Odisha and go back with beautiful memories to be shared amongst families and friends.



Italy became our source market as I got to introduce programs to some leading tour operators and met with Mr. Vittorio Kulczycki, President, Avventure nel Mondo, who personally took the tribal and trekking tour in the 1970's, Mr. Vittorio Ducrot, Managing Director, Viaggi Del Elfante, Mr. Willy Fassio, Managing Director - IL Tucano, Turisanda to name a few and gradually the demand for special interest tours from other European Countries as well from US, Australia and Japan. The tribal tours picked up very fast followed by textile, arts and crafts, trekking and camping, eventually all these were featured in their brochure program series which still continues today. There were repetition of clients visit to Odisha- that was the curiosity generated for tourist with certain tours planned exclusively for almost 14 to 21 days in our sector.

I started successfully the first luxury all inclusive Swiss tented camping to the tribal areas - Mudulipara in Bonda Hills, Bastar and Narayanpur in Abujmarh forest region of Chhattisgarh. As demand started on queries strived working on program and logistics to bring in luxury cruise ships to Paradip Port and Vishakhapatnam. In the early 1980's I succeeded in getting the first port of call for cruise ships although very difficult task those days as it was a coal handling port not suitable for passenger vessel. I had a big challenge to have the coal berth almost covered with marigold flowers at the disembarkation area and erect a Mukteswar Temple Torano alike welcoming the guests with traditional blow of conch shell and attire.

For the passengers arrangement was made for immigration and money changing on board the coaches while travelling from Paradip to Bhubaneswar Hotel Konarak- the entire hotel was booked for the group stay. This is one of a kind reality and not at all possible anywhere to have immigration and money exchange on board while travelling in coaches.

In the mid 1990's brought the first German Caravan Rotel Coach tours operating since 1945 and 2012 witnessed the historic landing of the Private Boeing Jet 757 - **known among professional pilots as "the Ferrari of commercial jets,"** with high profile guests, followed by other private charter flights again with high end tourists. The company had the privilege to handle ground arrangements for some important guests like the Gianni Agnelli Family - Owners of Fiat Italy, owners of Vivendi TV France, BBC TV team, USA- Dow Jones Business Delegation, Owners of Rolling Stone Publications, Howard Museum, Smithsonian Museum, Vassar College, USIS and United States Information Communication Agency, Danish Embassy Danida Project.

And recently the present UN Secretary General and former Prime Minister of Portugal and the Board Members of Real Madrid, the elite football club of Spain.



There were many travel writers and authors whom we have assisted viz- Mrs. Vidhya Dehejia Professor who wrote on early stone temples of Orissa in 1978, Dr Stephen P Huyler an art historian, from UK- Mr. Norman Lewis who covered in their books on Odisha's cultural heritage.

I had the privilege to represent Odisha in the Incredible India Queens Baton Relay Commonwealth 2010 in Sri Lanka, China-Shanghai International Festival, Dubai Mega Fam Trip by Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Market - DTCM in 2014, Italian Trade and Commerce Tourism Meet in Venice, Italy in 2016 besides attending many domestic and international industry related events.

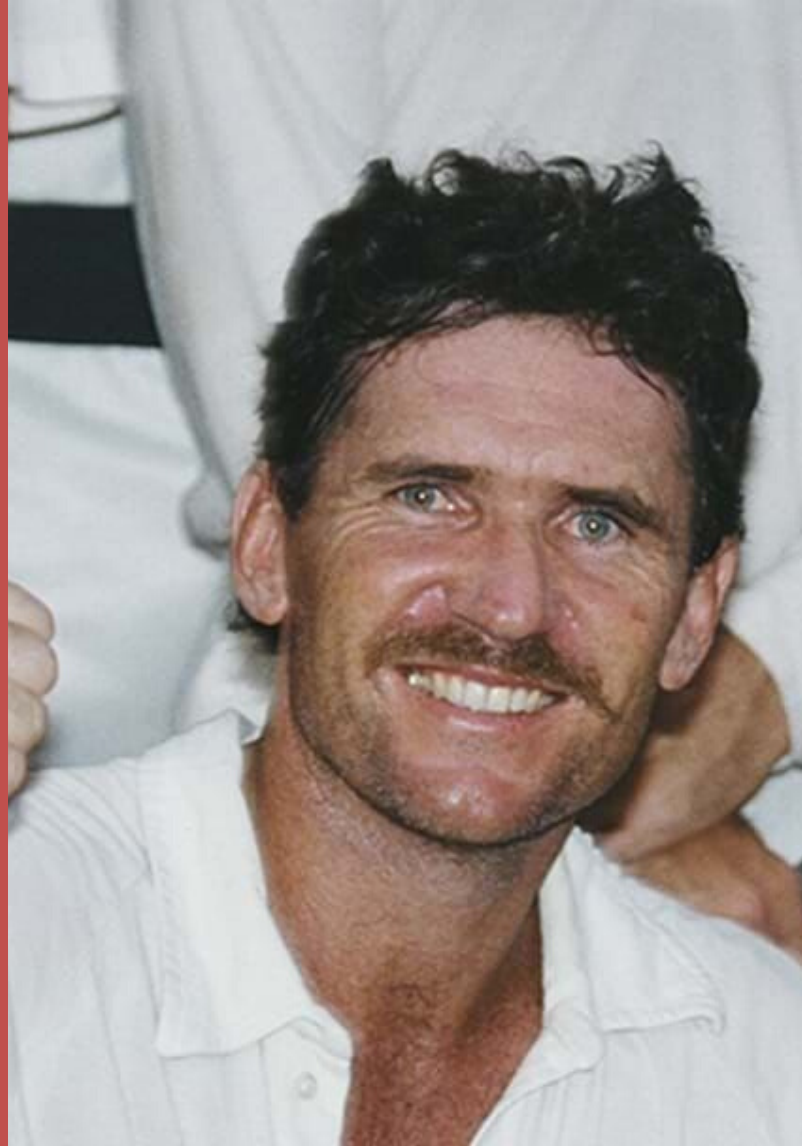


The company was the official agent for Odisha Cricket Association Cuttack and handled all the cricket matches , international media teams, umpires for almost 15 years till 1995. The company had many corporate and individual clients availing domestic and international tickets , package tours and successfully handled tours to many parts of the world – large groups with even over 350 persons . The company had its own small fleet of transport exclusively for serving own guests.

In 1999 started the first private city tour "Utkal Sarathi" and Shri A U Singhdeo, the then Tourism Minister Odisha inaugurated the program held at The Oberoi ( now Trident ) The company received recognitions and many awards from Airlines locally and in Nepal. The New Indian Express in their 2012 National coverage on "Titans of Travel" , had got me featured along with leading industry stalwarts – Mr. Madhavan Menon, MD Thomas Cook, Mr. Sandeep Kalra, Founder MakeMyTrip, Mr. Arjun Sharma, MD LPTI, Mr. Vikram Madhok, MD Abercrombie & Kent.

Leading the industry association TAAO, I worked tirelessly with the support of members and left no stone unturned in keeping members united as a family, deliberating with the Government our genuine demand ,to implement attractive tourism policy for development of tourism in the State.

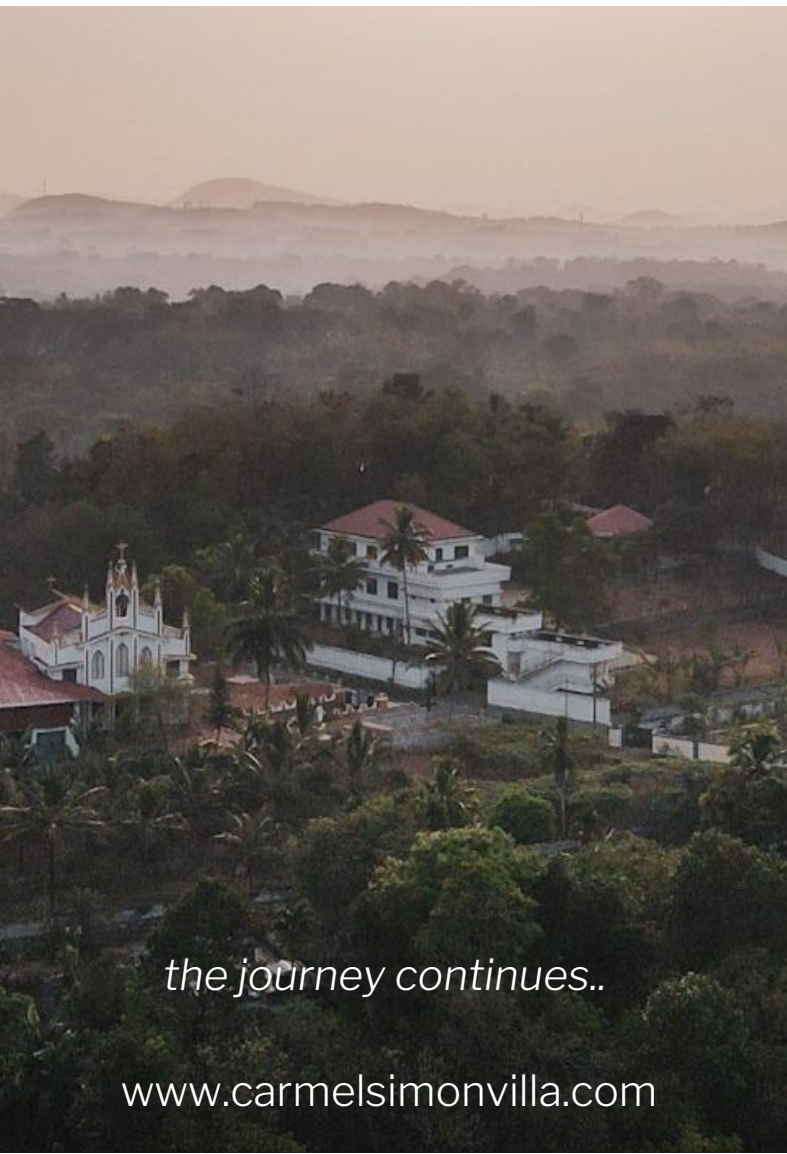
For the members I had the opportunity to negotiate with Indian Airlines and Jet Airways to have Business class complimentary air tickets to travel from Bhubaneswar to Bangalore & Hyderabad to attend the Travel Mart and with our presentation won the #1 State Award from Hon'ble Tourism Minister ,Govt of India followed by an invitation from GMR headquarters for an orientation trip to the new GMR Rajiv Gandhi International Airport.





I got nominated as an advisory board member to the Odisha Tourism and Eco Tourism Board. I was unanimously elected by IATO Central Committee New Delhi as the Odisha Chapter Chairman. However, due to some unavoidable circumstances, I did not continue and stepped down.

I was the guest faculty for various travel and tourism management institutes including Ravenshaw College and Utkal University. I am a Past President of TAAO, Rotary Club of Toshali, Kerala Society, YMCA Board Member, Chapter Chairman World Malayalee Council, life member Indian Red Cross, also actively involved in working for the underprivileged.



I am very happy to see that many young enthusiastic entrepreneurs have forayed into the travel industry and contributing to the growth of the development of tourism in our state along with the support of the government and HRAO & it's members working tirelessly in the front. The pandemic has binded us and we can accomplish anything together as we move forward.

My wife Lily, son Sanyo and daughters Sini and Sophia stands as a strong pillar and a great source of inspiration along with my close friends working as a dedicated team to the success of one of the most trusted brand in the industry - Travel Link. My son Sanyo now heads the company and Sophia diversified with Detour Odisha ; both also involved in our homestay Carmel Simon Villa.

*the journey continues..*

[www.carmelsimonvilla.com](http://www.carmelsimonvilla.com)



## Exploring the Vibrant Tribes of Odisha:

### Sint-Franciscus-Xaveriusinstituut's Memorable Journey

July 2023

Traveling to new places is always an exciting and enriching experience, especially when it involves immersing oneself in the vibrant cultures and traditions of indigenous communities.

Recently, Sint-Franciscus-Xaveriusinstituut (SFX) - a group of 20 students and two teachers from Belgium - embarked on a remarkable journey to Odisha, India, to witness the captivating tribes of the region, with a special focus on the renowned Bonda tribes. Accompanied by local tour operator Travel Link, they were in for an extraordinary adventure that left a lasting impression on their hearts and minds. For the students of SFX, this trip was an opportunity to witness the cultural tapestry of these tribes up close and gain insights into their rich heritage.

Under the expert guidance of Travel Link, the group set out on their journey, eager to explore the tribal heartlands. The journey took them through picturesque landscapes, dense forests, and remote villages, offering them a glimpse into the lives of these fascinating communities. Throughout their trip, they were accompanied by experienced local community guides who provided valuable knowledge and context, enhancing their understanding of the tribes' customs and traditions. The SFX students were welcomed warmly by the tribes, who were eager to share their stories and traditions. The young learners were particularly enthralled by the tribe's emphasis on communal living, close-knit relationships, and their harmonious connection with nature. During their stay, the students were keen on understanding the challenges faced by these indigenous communities and their efforts to preserve their cultural heritage in a rapidly changing world.

They learned about the tribe's agricultural practices, craftsmanship, and their spiritual beliefs, gaining valuable insights into the Bondas' deep-rooted connection with their land and ancestors.

SFX's visit to Odisha left a profound impact not only on the students and teachers but also on the local community. Recognizing the significance of their experience, the young learners were invited to share their encounters with the tribes on a local news channel. They spoke eloquently about the unique traditions, resilience, and rich cultural heritage of the Bonda tribes, highlighting the need for preservation and appreciation of indigenous cultures worldwide. You can watch the news channel's coverage of Sint-Franciscus-Xaveriusinstituut's experience by clicking on the following link:

[News Channel Video]

**<https://youtu.be/zdKxsnmCOoA>**

This captivating video provides a visual insight into their journey and showcases the students' interactions with the tribes. Sint-Franciscus-Xaveriusinstituut's visit to Odisha was a transformative experience that opened their eyes to the beauty and diversity of the world's indigenous communities.

With the assistance of Travel Link, their journey was seamlessly organized, making it possible for them to forge deep connections and create memories that will last a lifetime. This remarkable adventure serves as a testament to the power of travel in broadening our horizons and fostering a global perspective.





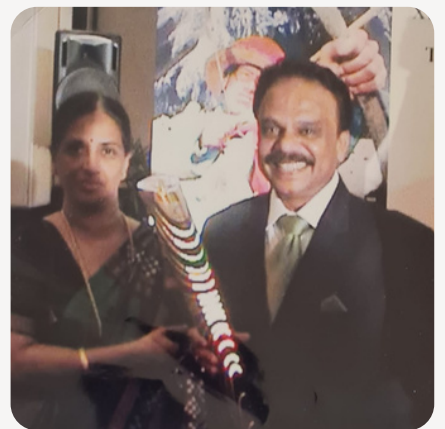
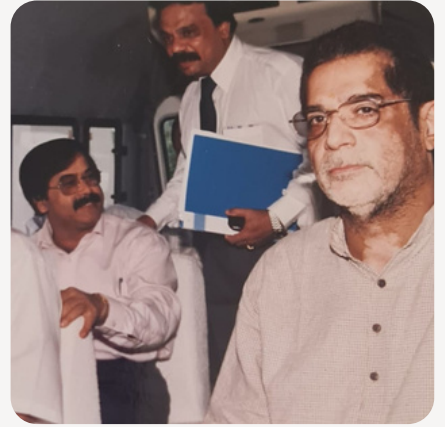
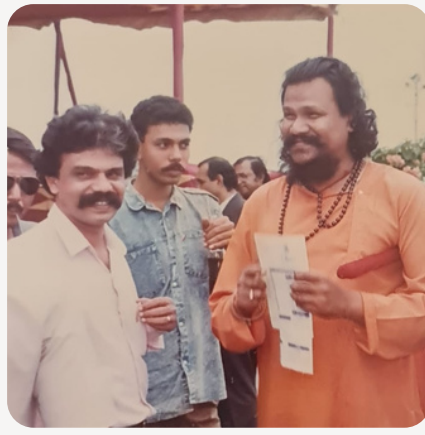
Special moments :-





Special moments :-





Special moments :-





Special moments :-