very time one travels to Mizoram, one does not just get visually overwhelmed by the enchanting power of the alluring mountains but learns to listen to the mystique range of the eastern Arakan mountains. Listening transforms and helps one understand the quiet force of the Blue Mountain. Aizawl city perches itself across a series of very steep hills, and its geographic location may be considered more arboreal than terrestrial. The view from the airplane and the one-hour drive from the airport to the city are equally enchanting. The roads from the airport, which could be a nightmare during monsoons and landslides, are now pretty much perfectly laid and it was such a pleasure as we drove down to the city.

Over the last hundred years, the city has grown from being a small colonial garrison village known as Aijal to becoming a bustling commercial, administrative, and cultural centre. It is spotlessly clean and we heard from the Deputy Mayor that Aizawl aims to be the cleanest city in the country in the near future. Shared taxis are affordable for moving from one end of the
city to another. But then, if you like walking, Aizawl is a walker’s paradise. Once we were done with our two-day academic engagement, Aizawl opened up to us through our walks. The early morning sun that engulfed the hills and the city in orange is a must-see for anyone who wants to experience the charm of Aizawl. From Chaltlang, where we stayed in the government tourist lodge, all the way up to Chanmari market area to Bara Bazaar to the centre of the city where the Indian Army’s Assam Rifles is housed, we covered quite a lot of Aizawl on foot. The narrow winding roads that take your breath, the view as you walk up and down, the jolly locals, the numerous small shops and the occasional big ones, the warmth of the people, everything makes one feel that another visit to Aizawl is a must. If one is looking for conventional tourist places, clichéd ideas of historical monuments and such, Aizawl is not the place. It is for those who would love to be, even if it is difficult, one with Aizawl and its people.

In the Chanmari market area, life bristles with hawkers selling cheap imported merchandise. Bara Bazaar is even livelier. From knives, dried fish, and dried chillis to clothes, trinklets, and winter wear, and from pirated CDs to colourful and fashionable shoes and sports shoes—you name it and it is there, all in one place. And, we heard absolutely no complaints against the government’s sudden demonetisation drive. In fact, there was hardly any queue to withdraw money from banks. What should also be mentioned is the traffic etiquette of the people. Perhaps because of the winding and steep roads, everyone is mindful of rules. We, as pedestrians, were pleasantly surprised more than once when we were literally treated as the kings of the road. The many winding roads get connected to each other through staircases in Chanmari and elsewhere.

**AIZAWL IS A HUB FOR transnational Mizo music. Music greets you whenever you enter a shop or a house or any locality.**
Christmas around the corner made Aizawl almost magical. The various lights that adorned the city in the nights, localities that were decorated with themes from the Bible, the Christmas songs and music once heard all through the day made Aizawl almost ethereal.

What better way to savour a place other than through its food! Sticky rice, watery soup with lentils, green leaves, some meat (fish, pork, chicken, beef), lot of boiled-cooked vegetables and greens form the staple culinary diet of an average Mizo. Most of our food came from the roadside eateries that are housed in 8 sq ft rooms throughout the city. It is here that one gets to know the face of the city. From local Mizos to occasional tourists like us to the migrant population from Bihar, Assam, and Sylhet, people walk into these eateries for their early morning snack and meals thereafter. If you want to try traditional Mizo food, try Red Pepper in the Chanmari area and Zo Foods in the Army cantonment area, near Vanapa Hall. From the rice beer at Red Pepper to the beef stew at Zo Foods, food in Aizawl has to be savoured for its subtle flavour. If you are looking for places to stay, there are a few hotels and also quite a few decent government tourist lodges.

Like most areas of the North-East, Aizawl too is sports crazy. Every locality has an indoor stadium for playing badminton. The community in each locality...
maintains these facilities. Football is the most prominent sport and it is played on the streets, inside homes and wherever possible. For sports lovers, it is a treat to watch kids and adults alike kicking the ball all through the day, and see several shops selling sports gear. To find a plain ground is such a luxury in this part of the world. Colonial officers had a tough time mapping this rebellious geography.

Aizawl is a hub for transnational Mizo music. Music greets you whenever you enter a shop or a house or any locality. Young men and women from each locality compete with their counterparts from other localities in producing music. One cannot escape the sweet cadence of Mizo Christmas carols sung in the most lyrical of Indian languages. The Mizo choir is nationally and internationally well known, and Western music of Mizoram is also popular and heard all over Northeast India, and also across the border. Among the locally produced TV genres, music video has remained the most popular one for many years. For Mizos, music is a way of life.

Among the very few ‘touristy’ things we did was visiting the grand Solomon’s Temple on our way back from Mizoram University. A project that is going on for the last twenty years, the church is imposing in its structure and architecture. The other must-visit for tourists is Reiek, a great spot for adventurous tourism. It is an hour’s drive from Aizawl and offers an incredible trekking experience. It takes more than two hours to reach the peak and one encounters incredible flora, especially orchids hanging from the moss-covered surfaces of the mountain range. To witness the cliffs from such heights is at once a challenge and a breathless experience for people from India and other parts of the world.

What better way to wrap our memories of Aizawl other than in a puan! Buying the traditional Mizo skirt, that is artfully woven in vibrant colours and designs, made our Aizawl trip almost complete, not to mention a whole bunch of our Mizo friends.