



INSIDER-TOURS
re-connecting people, places and culture

Sample Darjeeling and Sikkim tour: 23 days/22 nights Bagdogra, Kurseong, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Samthar, Richenpong and Turuk.

Cost: This is a sample tour to Darjeeling and Sikkim. We can mix and match according to the dates and places you would like to visit. Email me your thoughts and I'll email a detailed plan with cost. Note that we don't arrange air flights.

The price quoted is for full board at all places except in Delhi and Darjeeling where it is B&B, an English understanding Indian driver, local hosts/guides, other travel costs.

Day one and two

Is your arrival in Delhi. Delhi, India's political and business hub: huge, congested and richly diverse. We'll pick you up from the airport and take you to the Home stay-Delhi bed and breakfast.

Old and New Delhi is worth exploring - by car and/or by rickshaw. You'll find monuments, shrines, plazas, parks and gardens, markets, museums and Government buildings. There's the wonderfully manic bazaar called Chandi Chowk, India's largest mosque - the Jama Masjid which along with the Red Fort dominates Old Delhi (25,000 people can fit in the courtyard of the mosque), and excellent shopping at the Dilli Haat, an open market where you can buy crafts and food directly from the producers. The handicraft stalls are allotted on a rotational basis to craftsmen from all states of India, usually for fifteen days.

Overnight: (2 nights) Delhi bed and breakfast, Delhi bed and breakfast is hosted by Lubna Pervez & Sheikh Pervez Hameed

Day three, four and five:

We'll make our way to Delhi airport for our journey to Bagdogra. At Bagdogra you will be received by the Chauffeur and driven to Kurseong. This drive will be around 3 to 4 hours.

Kurseong is a peaceful hill town set amid forests. The town has a lively market (the toy train actually goes through the market), good local clothes shops and a monastery. Things to do when you are in Kurseong: visit Ambotia Tea Estate and the temple nearby. Visit Forest museum, Kunsamnamdoling Monastery, St. Mary's walking trail, and Deer Park.



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Overnight: (3 nights) Cochrane Place, on the outskirts of the town. Once home to Percy John Cochrane, MBE, the house has been restored and recreated into a small hotel with 12 rooms.

Day six, seven and eight:

We'll make our way to Kurseong railway station to board the toy train to Darjeeling. The train leaves Kurseong at 1500 hrs. Darjeeling is a hill station set against the incredible panorama of the Himalayan peaks. It combines a hectic bazaar with lofty wisps of the Raj. Terraced construction gives way to tea estates that plunge into deep subtropical valleys, Kanchenjunga (India's highest peak) crowns the skyline. The town has a population of 200, 000, and an ethnic mix of Nepali, Bhutia, Lepcha and some Bengalis. The common language is Nepali.

Until the nineteenth century, it was a part of the kingdom of Sikkim but was overrun by the Nepalese. The British intervened to broker peace and in return pressurized the Sikkim raja, to gift Darjeeling to the British for an annual sum of Rs 3000, in 1835. In the early 1840's, tea plantations were developed and Nepalis worked on the plantation. It still produces some of the world's finest tea.

Once you've settled into your hotel, you can visit the town, exploring interconnecting roads and steep steps that lead to bazaars, shops and monasteries, Tiger Hill, with a magnificent view of sunrise over Mt Kanchendzonga, visit the zoo, monasteries and the Tibetan Self-help centre.

Overnight: (3 nights) Windermere hotel or New Elgin – Which one is good?

Day nine and ten:

We will retrace our steps and drive to the hill station of Kalimpong, market town set within the Himalaya. Kalimpong is flatter, and the climate warmer than Darjeeling - making it easier to explore.

The mix of cultures - Lepcha, Bhutia, Nepalese - brings with it a rich religious mix of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. The area produces 80% of India's gladioli and is also an important orchid growing area. Several Buddhist monasteries hold a number of rare Tibetan Buddhist scriptures. The bazaar was once the wholesale market for all raw wool coming from Tibet. On Wednesdays and Saturdays the 'hat' market brings together a wealth of people, cultures and goods.



INSIDER-TOURS
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Overnight: (2 nights) Gurudongma House, The homestay is 3km from the town and has four guest rooms. Food is a mixture of Indian, Nepali, Chinese, Sikkimese, and western recipes. The garden is gorgeous.

Day eleven, twelve and thirteen:

Driving along the old trade route to Tibet, we will enter the vast stretch of virgin forests, which extend from the Bhutan border to the plains of North Bengal.

We will pass through forests to Lava, a small village. Trade caravans on their way to Bhutan, used to stop at Lava. We'll have a chance to view the Rachel Pass, which opens into Bhutan, and visit the nearby monastery. We can break our journey with a picnic lunch and short walk to Tamang village (a 2-hour walk), crossing a mountain stream to meet our jeep for the last 6kms to the Samthar Farm House.

Scenic and remote, the Samthar Plateau is 1500m high, isolated by river valleys and forests. The inhabitants are a blend of Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepali. Getting up early morning at the farmhouse, you can sit on a rock at the top of the terraced gardens, drinking tea while you watch the sun rise. You can walk around the plateau, met the locals in their homesteads, and visit the 100 year old Lepcha temple. In the evening, the lamps will be lit and local Millet beer - "chang" - served in traditional bamboo containers, for song and dance with the locals. There will also be the chance to learn Indian cooking.

Overnight: (3 nights) The Samthar Farmhouse is a mountain retreat - a former Lepcha house built of stone and timber and converted by General Singh. The views are spectacular - especially at sunset and sunrise.

Day fourteen, fifteen and sixteen

After breakfast we'll trek down to Teesta Valley Ropeway with guide and porter and then by car on a 4 hour journey through the Himalayas (through market towns and up steep mountainsides) to the tiny village of Rinchenpong in Sikkim.

Remote and peaceful, Sikkim is dominated by the spectacular mountain terrain, including Mt Kangchendzonga. Its population is made up primarily of Nepalis and Lepchas (the indigenous people of the area). China does not recognize India's claim to the area - hence the need for permits. Sikkim is governed by the Sikkim Democratic Front, known as the most environmentally conscious government in India.



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Over the next few days, we'll be able to explore the area - monasteries, the monastic school, nearby villages, and the surrounding countryside. There is the chance to learn Sikkimese cooking and the option of overnight camping (first traveling by jeep, then trekking).

Overnight: (3 nights) Yangsum Farm. The farm is 2km from the village and home to Tashi Thendup and his wife manage the homestay. The family manages a 44 acre mountain farm of open mixed forests, fruits and spices (cardamom, avocados, oranges, banana, pears, apricots and mango), staples and vegetables.

Day seventeen, eighteen and nineteen:

After breakfast at Yangsum farm we'll transfer to Dara Gaon Retreat via Pamayangtse. Enroute visit Pamayangtse Monastery and Sangacholing Monastery

Gurung Home Stay - Eight km (Ten minute drive) away from 'Pelling' towards Yuksam - Khecheperi road, lies Daragaon Village Retreat. Shiva Gurung, is a civil servant and his wife RadhaGurung, owns the Daragaon Village Retreat. Radha Gurung cooks the most delicious local food. Nesang (daughter) Prabal (Son), the two school going children liven up the home atmosphere and one sister who helps to run the homestay complete the family picture at Daragaon Village Retreat. There are six rooms in two traditional huts and annex sister homestay for accommodation and have all modern facilities. Here you can go for village walks, join the host family in cooking, high and low altitude treks with guides and go fishing.

Overnight (3 nights): Gurung Home Stay.

Day twenty, twenty one and twenty two:

From Yangsum Farm we'll make our way to Turuk. Located in South Sikkim, at an altitude of 1200m. It is a grand old mountain estate established in 1848, offers superb family hospitality in splendid isolation, amidst diverse flora, citrus fruits, ornamental plants and a small coffee plantation. You can do village walk and bird watching.

Overnight: (3 nights) at Turuk Kothi



INSIDER-TOURS

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Day twenty three

After a farewell meal, we'll drive you Bagdogra for journey to Delhi or Calcutta for your return journey back home.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT DARJEELING AND SIKKIM

When to visit

Available year round, except for the monsoons in July-August. The ideal period is January to May and September to December. Special monsoon packages are available for the paddy season.

Languages spoken

Nepali is the main language of the people. Large sections speak Lepcha and Tibetan. In the towns most people can communicate in English