



**INSIDER-TOURS**  
re-connecting people, places and culture

**Sample 14 days Village homestay Experience in Sikkim and Kalimpong:  
Bagdogra, Kalimpong, Samthar, Hi Barmoik, Darap village (near Pelling)  
with two night extension, either Darjeeling or Gangtok.**

Cost for village home stay tour, excluding international flights: £1366 per person for minimum of two people travelling. All our tours are private - you won't be part of a group.

The price quoted is for pick up from the local airport (or train station), full board, local English guides. There are additional charges for activities - ranging from around £30 for cooking for two people, to £3 for learning a local craft skill.

This is a sample Eastern Himalayan village holiday. We can mix and match according to the dates and places you would like to visit. Note that we don't arrange international air flights.

**Day one and two**

Is your arrival at Bagdogra Airport. We will meet you at the airport and take you to Kalimpong - four and half hours drive. Dinner and overnight stay at Gurudongma House, hosted by Catherine Lobo. On day two you can explore Kalimpong - Colonial buildings, Orchid and Cactii nurseries, Hindu Temple, Dr Grahams homes and more.

**Day three, four and five**

We'll make our way to Samthar – (only 2.30 hrs drive along new road if guests are not happy to trek/picnic route) four hours drive with a picnic lunch and we'll get you settled with the Lepcha homestay host for two nights and one night with the Nepali homestay. During your stay with your host family on day three and four the host family will take you to visit the Lepcha hamlets. Here you can choose the programs mentioned below and pay directly to the host family. On day five we'll take you on a guided Samthar Valley walking exploration. The guided day exploration is included in the cost. General Jimmy Singh will help you coordinate with your host families.

Options included in the cost:

- Sunrise watching: the panorama includes the Khangchenganga group of peaks
- Simvo, Siniolchu, Lama Anden, Chomoyomo and Paunhari - and the passes of Chola, Natula, and Jalepla, leading into Tibet



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- Guided and non guided walks through the village to meet people in their homes and fields - Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist. You can hear more about their work, beliefs and customs.

Options not included in the cost:

- Visit the homes of local artisans and craftsmen and watch (or join) them working with traditional skills, such as blacksmithing, basket making, and mat weaving
- Learn Indian cooking (including pickle making) - and cooking with a solar cooker
- Watch housewives show how they extract mustard oil using a press made of wood, bamboo and stone; husking of paddy using hand and foot pounding tool; and grinding of corn using stone grinder
- Learn cutting and stitching of Indian dresses. You can visit the village tailors for made to measure clothes for yourself
- Learn about traditional methods of bee keeping using hollow tree trunks and how to prepare Chang (millet beer)
- Participation in village chores - ploughing, sowing, harvesting, collection of firewood and fodder, care of the family livestock (cow and goat milking and herding)
- Learn about traditional frame and thatch houses and watch their construction
- Learn about the institution of Bomthang and Jhakri - nature doctors, shamans, and faith healers. A chance to meet these men and watch demonstrations
- Enjoy several day treks - walk amidst nature, with good views and opportunity for more interaction with village folks of the surrounding areas

### **Day six and seven**

From the Nepali homestay we'll visit the Awake and Shine school which is bringing quality education to Samthar Valley. Latter we will make our way to Samthar Farm house for two nights. This is an over hundred years old stone and Timber house, with newer cottage extensions. The house has a lovely terraced nature garden, with panoramic views of Mt Khangchendzonga. During your stay at the farm house we'll trek down to KholaGari hamlet. Explore the lower Samthar Valley and have lunch with a local family and also go on a day trek to the Lepcha Valley.

### **Day eight and nine**

We'll trek down to Teesta Valley Dam with guide and porter, then by car to Hi Barموik Village in West Sikkim. On day nine we'll go on a half a day exploration of a Sikkimese village.



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### **Day ten and eleven**

From Hi Barmoik village we'll make our way to Gurung Home stay at Pamayangtse. Over the next two days we'll explore the local village and take part in the activities at Gurung home stay. In the mornings enjoy direct sunrise views of Mt Khangchendzonga.

### **Day twelve, thirteen**

Wake up early to once again see the sunrise on the great peaks of the Khangchendzonga group. Later drive 50 Kms in 02 hrs to Kewzing, located amidst pristine forests at elevation of 1700 m. Take a easy nature trek to Doling Monastery, along a lovely forest trail Thereafter drive to Samduptse; famous for the largest statue of Guru Padmasambhava in the world, and the Namchi Rock Garden.

Continue for one hour to reach Turuk.- a small village at an altitude of 1400 m. A 160 years old heritage house and estate, surrounded by nine acres of flora, and lawns, at an off beat location.. Here time stands still and the air is filled with the fragrance of wild flowers and bird song. The tranquil surroundings offer quite walks, village explorations and bird watching. Check in at the atmospheric Heritage house for overnight. A day to relax and take quite walks to visit local homesteads, wonder at the diverse flora, learn some sikkimese recipes from your hostess and take a walk along the razor sharp edge of humongous cliff called TarayBhir – with panoramic views Overnight at Turuk heritage house.

### **Day fourteen:**

We'll make our way to Bagdogra for your return journey back home.

Optional extensions

We recommend optional extensions - either two nights in Darjeeling, or two nights in Gangtok. Please ask us for these schedules.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT**

### **The homestays**

You have the option of being hosted by two Nepali families, Gairigaon hamlet, a Lepcha family and Kabi West hamlet

- GaireGaon host hamlet

GaireGaon - meaning village in deep valley is reached by a 10 minute steep "tumble down" trail from the Samthar Farm House. You can reach it by car in



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fair weather by a newly cut jeep trail. Once there you will see a cluster of 36 homes creeping down to the lower valley through a series of fairly wide and flat terraces. It is a sunny location with cool breezes during the summers, and a full view of the snow ranges.

You will be hosted by Krishna Kumar Bhujel, aged 69, the head of the family. His wife Pavitra Bhujel is 58 years old. They own 6 acres of farm land and grow a mixed crop of paddy, millet, maize, ginger, pulses and vegetables. They own oxen, cows, goats, pigs and poultry. Pavitra has brought up a family of 9 children. Of these one is still dependent on the parents.

Three of the elder daughters are married outside the village. Tara Bhujel, the eldest daughter, is 35 years old. She has been working at the Samthar Farm House as a chef for the last 15 years. She is married with one baby son. Her husband Anand Rai looks after the awake and shine Guest Room.

Pushpa the younger daughter is married and lives in a separate cottage nearby with her husband and young son. She teaches at the Awake and Shine pre-school, works as a local tourist guide, and hosts guests at her cottage homestay.

The elder son of the family Hik Bahadur, lives in a separate house close by, with his wife, Krishna. They farm their own two-acre plot. They have two boys - Anil (27) and Deo Kumar (20) - Both are unmarried. Anil works as a gardener at Awake & Shine School. Anita the only daughter is 22 years old and has finished her schooling. She helps her mother at home and in farming chores.

Tilak, the middle son is married and has a young son. His family lives with his parents. He works as caretaker and gardener at Awake and Shine School. The youngest son, Deepak is now working as a carpenter.

The Awake & Shine Guest room is located on the top floor of the school house. It is owned by Tara and Anand. The first floor guest room is built of natural stone and bricks, with wooden floor and ceiling. The bed room is spacious with attached tiled toilet and bath. The toilet is a western style. The bed room opens to a 6 feet wide verandah with direct view of the snow ranges. The room is fully furnished and comfortable. It is currently leased by Mrs Maureen Blake the school's English Volunteer principal. It is available for use by guests for 6-9 months when she goes back to the UK.



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### **HikBahadur's Homestay**

Is located close to the Awake and shine school. It is a two roomed ground floor (sitting room and a bed room) cottage with direct views of the snow ranges. There is an attached tiled western style toilet.

A dining – Kitchen and lounge annexe is available for common use by guests staying at all three of the above homestays.

- West Kabi Host hamlet

The West Kabi host hamlet is spread on a large terraced spur extending from the top of the valley, steeply down towards the lower valley overlooking the SamtharKhola. Its upper end rests on the main road as it enters the Samthar area. It is a sunny location, with its 48 homes spreading down to the lower valley. The people are primarily Lepcha -Christian and Buddhist. Also there are 19 Nepali Bhujel Hindu Houses.

You will be hosted by 33 years old Charles Lepcha and his 28 years old wife, Judith, in their Chalet style village homestay . The couple have two young children.

Charles is head teacher at the awake and shine pre school ad also works as a local tour guide. He farms his own land and also helps his father with farming chores, and works occasionally for social organizations. Charles father MangalLepcha( 64) lives close by.

The home is set amongst agriculture fields with direct views of the snow ranges.The guest room is on the first floor. It is built of natural stone and bricks, with wooden floor and ceiling. The bed room is spacious. There is a tiled toilet and bath. The toilet is a western style WC. The bed room opens into a balcony with direct view of the snow ranges. The room is fully furnished and equipped for comfortable living.

- Chhettri Family Homestay at Hi Barmoik

Hi - Barmoik are two villages lying at the foot of the Vershay Rhododendron Sanctuary at an elevation of 1400 m. The village stands on a series of ledges continuing up hill to 2400 m, with a massive spur of the Vershay Ridge rearing its head in the background. Covered with lush vegetation, terraced cultivation, and homesteads.



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Dhongey House the family home of the Cheetri family is a large refurbished family homestead surrounded by terraced fields, and homes of extended family members. The family has converted two rooms into guest rooms with modern toilets, and refurbished a lounge and a "chang " (Local beer made out of millet grain and yeast) bar. Interiors are decorated to showcase heritage household articles used by the family for generations. The Family kitchen retains its heritage roots with old style wood burning mud plastered stove, and provides both table and floor seating arrangements. Guests are offered home cooked simple Nepali meals served in family heirloom brass utensils. The house retains its farming roots - cowshed, goat house, herb garden, and hollow tree trunk honey comb.

You will be hosted by Ran Bahadur Chhetri and his wife Deo Maya. English speaking son Ganesh and his wife will be there to enable conversation with the elders and interpretation of customs, rituals, food and drink.

### **Gurung Home Stay - Dara Gaon Village Retreat**

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. RadhaGurung 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.

**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. All of our local guides and us are English speaking

**When to travel:** Available year round. To select your time of visit see the seasonal cycle below:

### **SEASONAL CALENDAR IN SMATHAR**

#### **June and July**

In June- July, life in the community revolves around the monsoons and the sowing of the paddy crop – the life giver. The monsoons start during early June



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and continue till end of September. The heavy down pour is utilized for flooding the terraced paddy fields. Lush greenery all rounds and banks of cloud formations moving across the valleys, rising and drifting, are sights to remember., The transplanting of seedlings is done in Jul. Sowing is a big occasion entire families participate on a cooperative basis to overcome the manpower shortage.

Maize and the mother plants of the Ginger crop are harvested and Kodo – the black millet used primarily to make chang beer and some types of pulses and beans for domestic consumption are planted.

**August** It is time for weeding of paddy and Kodo crop – a back breaking job. The maize crop is harvested

## **September**

Weeding of crops continues

## **October and November**

Oct- Nov: By the end of September the monsoons come to a stop. October has days of mellow weather with some showers.

October is also the festival season. Durga Puja followed by Tihar (Diwali) are the two main festivals of the Hindu Nepalese. In preparation for Dashain every home is cleansed and beautifully decorated, painted as an invitation to Goddess Durga and Laxmi, so that they may visit and bless the house with good fortune. During this time family members assemble from far & near to be together. Gifts of new clothing, and supplies of temple offering for the gods, as well as foodstuffs for the family feasting, are purchased. Sheep, goats, ducks, chicken and even water buffalo are prepared for the sacrifice.

Dashain (Durga puja)

Dashain comprises fifteen days of celebration during the lunar fortnight ending on the day of the full moon. Goddess Durga in all her manifestations is worshiped with innumerable pujas, abundant offerings and animal sacrifices. Dashain commemorates a great victory of the gods over the wicked demons. One of the victory stories told is the Ramayan, where the lord Ram after a big struggle slaughtered Ravana, the king of demons. It is said that lord Ram was successful in the battle only when goddess Durga was evoked. The main celebration glorifies the triumph of good over evil and is symbolized by goddess Durga slaying the terrible demon Mahisasur, who terrorized the earth in the guise of a brutal water buffalo. The first nine days signify the nine days of



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battle between goddess Durga and the demon Mahisasur. The tenth day is the day when Mahisasur was slain and the last five days symbolize the celebration of the victory with the blessing of the goddess. In Nov the paddy and Kodo millet is harvested

December – January: This is the cold spell with generally clear weather and blue skies with occasional periods of foggy conditions due to snow in the higher regions

**Dec X-mas** is celebrated by the Lepcha Christian community with the usual rituals and festivities to celebrate the birth day of Lord Jesus. The Lepcha New Year called Namsong is celebrated by the Lepchas. with prayers, feasting, archery competitions and more.

December is also time to sow Potatoes, spinach and some other vegetables. In Jan People go out on picnics, and outings. It is also time to collect the firewood for the year.

**February – March:** Winter still lingers on. Usually the weather is clear but visibility remains a bit hazy due to dust from the plains. Snow fall in the higher regions brings cold spells in its wake. There are occasional short spells of rain and hail in Feb- Mar.

Spring flowers start blooming. Evergreen forests get new leaves. There is bird song in the air

Water springs start drying up and there is an acute shortage of water.

In Feb the Buddhist New year called Losar is celebrated by Buddhist Lepchas and Bhutias with prayers, song , dance and feasting.

In Feb the mustard and potatoe crop is harvested

In March Maize & Ginger crop is planted

**April- May:** In April the pre -monsoon weather prevails. Thunder shower occur in the evenings with spectacular display of lightning across the sky accompanied by furious thunder, heralding the arrival of summer. The weeding of Maize and ginger crop takes place.

May has warm days, followed by short bursts of rain the evenings Preparations for planting paddy start in May, with ploughing and planting of seedlings. Paddy fields are rebuilt by refilling soil and repairing water dykes and channels. The farmers and oxen toil hard in the hot sun and pray for timely rains.





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