

Darjeeling & Sikkim plus Bumchu Festival – 10 days

Jeep tour with Bumchu Buddhist Festival

Tour JTT-SI-02: Delhi - Bagdogra – Kurseong – Darjeeling – Pelling – Kechopalri – Yuksom – Tashiding - Rumtek – Gangtok - Bagdogra – Delhi

Activities & sights: Buddhist monastery festival, Darjeeling's tea estates, Sikkim's subtropical and alpine forests, Bhutia ('Tibetan') and Lepcha culture, Buddhist monasteries, Himalayan views, village culture, walks.

Fixed **dates:** Feb 19 - 28, 2024



On this tour you'll start at the tea capital of India, Darjeeling, and then travel up into the mountains of Sikkim. You'll travel winding back roads that lead to quaint little villages, stay at homestays where you meet the Sikkimese up-close, but also at comfortable hotels and 'ecoresorts', and visit many Buddhist monasteries, including Pemayangtse, Rumtek and Tashiding. Highlight of the journey, no doubt, will be attending the Buddhist festival at Tashiding Gumpa where monks will perform their traditional mask dances, enacting the victory of Buddhism over animism and good over evil.

Itinerary

Day 01: Delhi → Bagdogra – Kurseong (41 km/ 1.5 hr)

Early morning you'll board the 2-hour flight from Delhi to Bagdogra (access is also possible from Kolkata). You will be met by our representative on arrival at Bagdogra airport and then driven to Kurseong, a drive of about 1.30 hrs. We check in at Cochrane Place, a hotel located on a ridge amidst lush tea gardens.

Day 02: Kurseong – Darjeeling (31 km/ 1.5 hr)

In the morning, we drive to Makaibari Tea Garden and visit the factory to see the manufacturing process of Darjeeling Tea. Later, we drive to Darjeeling. In the evening, we walk around the local bazaar in Darjeeling.

Day 03: At Darjeeling

Early morning, we drive to Tiger Hill to see the sunrise over the Himalaya. On the way back, we visit the Ghoom monastery – Yiga Choling. This is supposed to be the oldest monastery in Darjeeling built by a Mongolian monk in 1850. The monastery houses a big statue of Maitreya, the future Buddha along with some rare works of Buddhist art.

After breakfast, we take a joy ride on the toy train to Ghoom. The toy train is part of the World Heritage Site and the train still runs on steam engines that are over 100 years old. The ride to Ghoom station is about an hour. When we arrive at Ghoom station, we take the Aloori village route and walk towards Darjeeling town, which takes about 1.30 hrs.

Later, we drive to the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute and Tibetan Centre. The HMI mountaineering museum is quite an interesting place as it has on display the entire history of mountaineering in the Himalaya and Mt. Everest in particular. It was after the first summit of Everest by Tenzing and Hillary that this institute was established. There is also a Zoological Park near the HMI, which is quite interesting with the Snow Leopard, Red Panda, Himalayan Black bears and other Himalayan Species being kept there.



Day 04: Darjeeling – Pelling (109 km/ 4 - 5 hr)

We drive to Pelling via Jorethang Bazaar. We visit Pemayangtse Monastery in Pemayangtse. The Pemayangtse Monastery is one of the oldest and most famous monasteries of West Sikkim. Originally built by Lhatsun Chenpo in the 17th century, as a small Lhakhang, it was subsequently enlarged during the reign of the third Chogyal Chakdor Namgyal who was considered as Lhatsun Chenpo's third reincarnate, Jigme Pawo. The monastery follows the Nyingma Order of Tibetan Buddhism and controls all other monasteries of that Order in Sikkim. The monks of this monastery are normally chosen from the Bhutias of Sikkim. Of particular note is a seven-tiered painted wooden structure, portraying Guru Rimpoche's Heavenly Palace known as 'Sangthokpalri' also spelt 'Zandog-palri', on the top floor of the monastery. The painting has scenes of rainbows, angels with a whole panoply of Buddhas and Bodhistvas. This structure was constructed by Dungzin Rimpoche over a period of 5 years.

Day 05: Pelling- Kechopalri - Yuksom – Pelling (87 km/ 5 hr)

We do a day's excursion to Kechopalri lake and Yuksom, the ancient capital of Sikkim. The Kechopalri Lake is about an hours drive from Pelling. The lake is considered holy by both Hindus and Buddhists alike and is locally also known as the Wish Fulfilling lake.

Yuksom is a historical town in Geyzing subdivision of West Sikkim district in the Northeast Indian state of Sikkim. It was the first capital of Sikkim established in 1642 AD by Phuntsog Namgyal who was the first Chogyal (temporal and religious king) of Sikkim. In 1701, the Chogyal established the first monastery at Yuksom in Sikkim known as the Dubdi Monastery.

For the Bhutia tribal community of Sikkim, Yuksom has special religious and cultural significance. It has a number of famous Buddhist monasteries and historical monuments. Being at the head of the Khangchendzonga National Park and as the base camp for trekking to Mt. Khangchendzonga, it has a large influx of mountaineers from all parts of the world. The village people, as stakeholders in the biodiversity preservation project of the Rathong Chu valley, have played a significant role in promoting eco-tourism in the area. Yuksom is considered a model village for eco-tourism as the successful adoption of practices that promote eco-tourism by the village people here has helped ecotourism flourish in other places too.



Day 06: Pelling – BUMCHU Festival (Tashiding) – Kewzing (81 km/ 3.5 hr)

We drive to Kewzing to visit the Tashiding monastery, where we'll attend the Bumchu festival.

Tashiding means 'the devoted central glory' and the monastery by this name was founded in 1641 by *Ngadak Sempa Chempo Phunshok Rigzing* who belonged to the Nyingma sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Ngadak was one of the three wise men who held the consecration ceremony crowning the first King of Sikkim at Yuksom. The Tashiding monastery was extended and renovated in 1717 during the reign of the third Chogyal Chakdor Namgyal.

The annual Bumchu Festival is one of the most interesting ones of Sikkim's monastic festivals. Although it is a true Buddhist festival with *cham* (mask) dances, it has the added mystical flavour of a water-filled barrel predicting the future. The barrel is never filled but the water level fluctuates. Every year at the festival the vessel is opened, and from the water level filled with holy water that is opened to read what's in store for the year ahead from its water level.

After visiting the festival, we continue to Kewzing, where we check in at the Bon Farmhouse or in a local home in Kewzing, a small Bhutia village.

Day 07: At Kewzing

Day for village walks and monastary visits in Kewzing and nearby Bon Monastary.

Day 08: Kewzing - Ravangla – Rumtek (77 km/ 3 hr)

Drive to Rumtek visiting the Buddha park in Ravangla.

The Buddha Park of Ravangla, also known as Tathagata Tsal, is situated near Ravangla in South Sikkim district, Sikkim, India. It was constructed in 2006-13 and features a 130-foot high statue of Lord Buddha as its centerpiece. The site was chosen within the larger religious complex of the Rabong Monastery, itself a centuries-old place of pilgrimage. Also nearby is Ralang Monastery, a key monastery in Tibetan Buddhism.

The statue was consecrated on 25 March 2013 by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and has become a key stop on the 'Himalayan Buddhist Circuit'. The statue of Lord Buddha marks the occasion of the 2550th birth anniversary of Gautama Buddha. This statue was built and installed in the place through the joint efforts of the Sikkim government and its people. The Buddhist circuit of this park was built here under a State government project, for boosting pilgrimage and tourism in the region. The Cho Djo lake is located within the complex, surrounded by forest.



On arrival at

Rumtek, check in at Teen Taley Eco Resort, a family run accommodation overlooking the city of Gangtok.



Day 09: Rumtek – Gangtok – Rumtek (44 km, 1 hr)

We visit Rumtek monastery and drive to Gangtok for a day visit. The Rumtek

monastery was built by the 16th Gyalwang Karmapa in the 1960's as a replica of the Tshurphu monastery, the original home of the Karmapas in Tibet. The monastery is also the headquarters for the Dharma Chakra Centres, world over, housing rare antique pieces of Buddhist art. There is also an Institute of Higher Buddhist Learning in the monastery complex.

In Gangtok, there are a number of places that can be visited, such as the Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, the foundation stone of which was laid in 1957 by the 14th Dalai Lama. It houses a huge collection of rare Sanskrit, Lepcha and Tibetan manuscripts, sculptures, many treasured artifacts and Buddhist icons. Besides being the centre of Buddhist religion and philosophy, it is also known for its beautiful architecture.

Another significant sight in Gangtok would be the Do Drul Chorten, the biggest stupa in Sikkim, located on the hillock adjacent to the Tibetology Institute.

Other sights that can be visited if time permits are the Cottage Industries Centre, the Flower Show and the Enchey Monastery. We return to Rumtek in the evening.

Day 10: Rumtek - Bagdogra → Delhi (driving 126 km/ 4 – 5 hr)

After breakfast we drive back to Bagdogra, which takes 4 – 5 hours to take the flight to Delhi.

Entry formalities

Please note that all foreign nationals need Restricted Area Permit (RAP) to visit Sikkim. Validity is normally for 2 weeks, but can be extended upto 45 days in Gangtok. This permit will be issued at the interstate border at Rangpo when entering Sikkim. Two passport size photographs and a copy of the passport and visa for India are required. The visa is offered free of cost.

Hotels used:

Kurseong: Cochrane Palace or similar

<https://cochraneplacehotel.com/>

Darjeeling: Hotel Dekeling or similar (02 nights) <http://www.dekeling.com>

Pelling: Norbu Ghang Resort (2 nights) <http://sonamgyaltsen.wix.com/norbughang>

Yuksom: The Red Palace or Tashi Gang resort (1 night)
<http://www.hotelredpalace.com>, <http://thetashighangresort.com>

Kewzing: Bon Farmhouse (1 night)

Rumtek: Teen Taley Eco Resort www.sikkimresort.com

Gangtok: The Hidden Forest Retreat (2 nights) <http://www.hiddenforestretreat.org>

Kalimpong: Holumba Haven Resort (1 night) <http://www.holumba.com>