



The realm of the Red Panda

This trip combines the best Darjeeling has to offer with the treasures of Sikkim. Calcutta provides an interesting highlight of the trip. We visit several colonial treasures and also visit the home run by the sisters of the missionaries of charity and get a glimpse of the great humanitarian work they have been involved in over the years and the difference they are making to thousands of people. The next couple of days we visit the major sites of Darjeeling and also immerse ourselves in the rich colonial heritage of the city. We enjoy the veritable Darjeeling tea and rejuvenate our minds by trekking into the realm of the Pandas. The breath of fresh mountain air, the beautiful scenery and the apprehension of coming across rare birds and animals adds to the excitement. We spend some days during the trek to search, learn and understand the Red Pandas that roam the forests in these parts. The people from the Panda initiative, a local association involved in the preservation of these elusive creatures will be on hand to help us know more about these beautiful hairy creatures. Awe inspiring views of the Kanchenjunga, Everest, Makalu and Lhotse and the rich flora of birch, fir, rhododendron, magnolia and primulas make it worthwhile. We then visit a few of the oldest monasteries in Sikkim and learn about the history of the state. Religion holds sway in almost all aspects of life in the state and it is evident from the monasteries and the prayer flags fluttering in the breeze. West Sikkim is truly blessed and it was here that the first king of Sikkim was enthroned. We visit the Rabdantse ruins, the remains of the second capital of Sikkim. Then we visit the quaint villages Martam located in the countryside that gives us an opportunity to understand the people and unique culture of this tiny Himalayan state. The seat of the Karmapa is the religious pulse of the state. We visit several tourist sites and enjoy the interesting sites of the area. In Kalimpong we see the world renowned flower nurseries and enjoy the serenity and sublime beauty of this sleepy hill station.

Day 1 Late night arrival in Calcutta.

Upon arrival at Dum Dum International Airport our representative will receive us and transfer us to our hotel and help us check in.

Overnight Fairlawn Hotel

Meals: None

Day 2 Full day guided sightseeing in Calcutta: Visit Dalhousie Square/ St. Paul's Cathedral/ Nirmal Hriday/ Indian Museum/ Victoria Memorial

Since the English landed in Calcutta, this small fishing village went on to become one of the most vibrant cities in India. Today we take a walk down memory lane and take a guide tour through the various sites that define the city. After breakfast we visit **The Dalhousie Square**, the nerve centre of English colonial power and trade during the two centuries that is was

the capital of India under British rule. Originally named in honor of James, Marquise of Dalhousie, Governor General of India from 1847 to 1856 the two-square-kilometer area operated as the political, financial, social centre of the Indian Empire until the removal of the capital to New Delhi in 1911. British architects filled this epicenter of their power with neoclassical buildings, riverside promenades, and manicured parks, as well as office buildings and apartment houses, all built in Victorian style. Today, Dalhousie Square has retained many of its original colonial buildings and is one of a few remaining city centers of its kind in this part of the world. It has now been declared as one of the 100 endangered cultural heritage sites by the World Monuments Fund. We then continue to St. Paul's Cathedral. This huge edifice stands close to the main nerve centres of Calcutta within walking distance from Victoria Memorial and a host of other attractions of the

Calcutta: The documented history of Calcutta begins with the arrival of the British East India Company in 1690, when the Company was consolidating its trade business in Bengal. Job Charnock is credited to have laid the foundation to the city. It has grown from humble beginnings to be one of the most vibrant and important cities of India. From Fort William built to station its troops and as a regional base Calcutta went on to be the headquarters of the Bengal Presidency. The city for a short while fell into the hands of the Nawab of Bengal and was retaken by Robert Clive in the battle of Plassey that really laid the foundations for the British Empire in India. It was later named the capital of British India in 1772. Lord Richard Wellesley, the Governor General between 1797 - 1805 was largely responsible for the growth of the city and its public architecture which led to the description of Calcutta as "The City of Palaces". The city underwent rapid industrial growth from the 1850s, especially in the textile and jute sectors; this caused a massive investment in infrastructure projects like rail roads and telegraph by British government. A socio-cultural reform followed often referred to as the Bengal Renaissance. Within a couple of year Calcutta, a sleep hamlet along the Gangetic plains was transformed into a bustling metropolis, as much a Victorian city as any. During the Second World War the location of Calcutta prompted the British to move the capital to New Delhi in 1911. Today it is a vibrant modern city yet it clings to its past with edifices that date back centuries and give us a glimpse of yesteryears.



city. Built in 1847 it's with its spire in the likeness of Norwich Cathedral its gothic style with stained glass windows and frescoes make it a sight to see. St. Paul's was sanctified in 1874. We visit **Nirmal Hriday or the Home of the Pure Heart** started by Mother Teresa in 1952. It was the first Home for the Dying in the city of Calcutta. With the help of the local administrators she started her home in an abandoned Hindu temple in Kalighat. Today we can see hundreds of old and destitute people being tended to by the sisters of the Missionaries of Charity, an order she founded. We then visit the **Indian museum**. It is one of the oldest museums in the world. The museum was founded by Dr Nathaniel Wallich a Danish botanist at Serampore in 1814. Today it is located in the heart of Calcutta and is the oldest institution of its kind in Asia Pacific region with the largest repository of artifacts in the orient belonging to different eras. The present building was opened in 1875 and has different sections dedicated to geology, zoology, industry, archaeology, art, and ethnology. It exhibits among others: an Egyptian mummy, the Buddhist stupa from Bharhut, the Buddha's ashes, the Ashoka pillar, the official emblem of India, fossil skeletons of prehistoric animals and a rare collection of arts objects and antiques. We wrap up our visit of Calcutta with a visit to the **Victoria Memorial**. Originally built as a memorial of Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom who also considered the Empress of India, it today serves as a museum and a tourist attraction. Sir William Emerson designed the building in a classical fusion of European and Mughal elements. During the evenings light shows can be seen which add another dimension to this beautiful architectural masterpiece.

Overnight Fairlawn Hotel
Meals: B

Day 3 Fly Calcutta to Bagdogra, transfer to Darjeeling

After breakfast we will be transferred to the airport for your flight to **Bagdogra**. Upon arrival in Bagdogra meet our awaiting guide and transfer to Darjeeling. The drive from Bagdogra to Darjeeling is very interesting. The road snakes through dense jungles, a thick foliage of Sal, Toon and teak trees dotted with purple bougainvillea, scarlet poinsettia and exotic mauve of the orchids, and tea plantations that cling to steep hillsides and small clusters of villages and small towns that dot hills. The lush green undulating tea gardens and the marvelous mountain views make the drive an experience in itself. We stop en route to see the loops and 'z' crossings on the railway tracks that stand as testimony to the sheer engineering prowess of the pioneers who helped bring this area a little closer to other people about 150 years ago. Upon arrival in Darjeeling we check into our hotel. Rest of the evening we are free to explore the town on our own. In the evening the guide will meet and orient you regarding the next day's program.

Overnight Hotel New Elgin (Deluxe) or Hotel Dekeling (Standard) or Travellers Inn (Budget)
Meals: B/L/D

Day 4 Early morning Tiger Hill for Sunrise, visit Ghoom Monastery and take train back to Darjeeling, Afternoon visit HMI, Zoological Park, Tibetan Refugee Center

We rise early in the morning and head Tiger hill and see the visit the major sites the town has to offer. Perched on a ridge above Ghoom - Jorebunglow, 11 kms from Darjeeling town at an elevation of 2590 m, **Tiger Hill** offers mesmerizing sunrise as well as an astounding view of the imposing Kanchenjunga massif

as well as a host of Himalayan giants like the Chomolhari, Makalu and Mount Everest. Tiger Hill is very popular with tourists and we can see hordes of people making their way to this vantage point to enjoy the sights that it has on offer. We have breakfast on the hilltop and then drive back to Ghoom and visit the Monastery there. Constructed in 1875 by Lama Sherab Gyatso, the **Ghoom Monastery** is one of the largest monasteries in Darjeeling. Also known as the Ghoom Monastery it houses a 15 ft statue of the Maitreya Buddha and contains images of Chenrezi and Tsongkapa. The monastery belongs to the Gelugpa order. We take a ride by the fabled Toy train back to Darjeeling. After lunch at the hotel we head to **Himalayan Mountaineering Institute**. The Institute is one of the premier mountaineering training facilities in India supported by Indian Government to promote mountain climbing and adventure activities related to this sport. Since its inception decades ago hundreds of students have graduated from this institute and gone on to create history for themselves and achieve personal milestones. Darjeeling until the early 1950s was the hub of mountaineering activity in India. Nepal had not yet opened its doors to the west for tourism and most the expeditions in Nepal began in Darjeeling but no climbing institute existed then. However the ascent of Everest by Late Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary on 29th May 1953 gave an impetus to mountaineering in the country. On the 4th of November 1954 Darjeeling saw the opening of the Himalayan Institute by personal initiative of Late Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru the first Prime Minister of India and Dr.B.C.Roy the then Chief Minister of West Bengal to promote mountaineering activities in the country. The museum housed in its premises showcases the equipments and personal gear used by Tenzing Norgay during his ascent of Mt. Everest. From the institute we walk through a forested enclave to the **Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park**. Established in 1958 under the Department of Education of the State for study and conservation of the Himalayan Fauna, it is the only Zoo in the world to breed Tibetan Wolf in captivity and the first South Asian Zoo to breed Snow Leopard, the Siberian Tiger and Red Panda. We visit the **Tibetan Refugee Center** and head back to the hotel to wind the day.

Overnight Hotel New Elgin (Deluxe) or Hotel Dekeling (Standard) or Travellers Inn (Budget)
Meals: B/L/D

Day 5 Transfer to Manebhanjyang, trek to Tumling(5 hours, 3070 m)

Today we get up early in the morning and after breakfast prepare for our day ahead. We drive 26 kilometers which takes about 45 minutes to the small 'bazaar' of Manebhanjyang, the gateway to Singalila National Park. Here we meet our advance team of porters and other support staff and commence our trek into the realm of the Red Panda. The trek from Manebhanjyang to Chitre is perhaps the most difficult part of the whole trek as we slowly negotiate the

Darjeeling: " The one land that all men desire to see, and having seen once- by even a glimpse- would not give that glimpse for the shows of the rest of the world combined", is how Mark Twain described Darjeeling. Quite true as a visit to Darjeeling will surely remain etched in our memories forever. Often referred to as the "queen of the hills", this small picturesque town still retains its colonial flavour and old world charm. It is steeped in history and the glorious past this small hill station enjoyed is visible in every nook and corner of the small town. The Mall, the gardens and a host of landmarks like the St. Andrews Church, the Gymkhana, the Townhalls and a host of schools housed in buildings that date back to the late 1800s make a visit to Darjeeling a travel back into time. A walk in the mall and a ride on the celebrated 'toy train' against the backdrop of one of the most stupendous views of Kanchenjunga is indeed a journey back into a bygone era. Spread over in a natural amphitheatre with Kanchenjunga as its backdrop Darjeeling offers beautiful imagery often described in superlatives. Today it is the land of the beautiful rhododendrons, the sparkling white magnolias, never ending rolling hills covered with a sea of tea bushes, the evergreen forests of silver fir-all under the blanket of a brilliant azure sky dappled with specks of clouds. Darjeeling with its soothing climate and its beautiful landscape draws thousands of tourists from all around the globe. The laidback atmosphere, the ever smiling people, the unique culture and the magnificent scenery and provides a respite to all weary minds. It is a great escape and a perfect place to unwind and enjoy the bounties of nature.



steep climb. Chitre is a small hamlet spread over a ridge and has a small monastery that serves as a retreat for monks who want to meditate. From here we pass through green meadows, forest with most laden trees and reach the small settlement of Meghma which is the highest organic tea plantation in the world. From here Tumling is quite close. We check into a local home and have the rest of the evening to enjoy the amazing vistas to ourselves. We also enjoy true Himalayan hospitality.

Overnight Homestay
Meals: BLD

Day 6 Trek to Gairibas (4 hours, 2621 m)

Today is a very easy day as it is mostly downhill. We walk leisurely and pass through forests that abound with rhododendron and magnolia. The clean air laden with fresh smell of the moss laden trees is simply invigorating as we negotiate the undulating ridges to reach our next stop Gairibas located further 9 kilometers away.



clouds'. We can see the cloud cover the low lying areas like a thick white blanket. On a clear day we can enjoy the constant view of the Kanchenjunga Massif as we make the steep. Situated on the fringe of Singilala ridge right on the border between India and Nepal Sandakphu offers amazing views of Mt. Everest and the Kanchenjunga range. Sandakphu today is a cluster of houses that serve as guesthouses and lodges to tourists visiting this region.

Overnight Lodge
Meals: BLD

Day 11 Trek to Moley via Phalut (7 hours, 3536 m)

The trek to Moley is comparatively easy going as it is a straight trek without many climbs and descents.

The trail follows the Singalila ridge covered with green meadows and scattered vegetation of magnolia, silver fir, chestnut oak and rhododendron. During spring the ridge is a riot of multihued magnolias, primulas, wild daisies and rhododendron. The splash of colours against the looming background of the mountains is a sight to remember. We trek literally on ridge that serves as the international border between Nepal and India. Towards the left we can see rolling hill and river valleys on the Nepalese side; straight ahead the Kanchenjunga massif and the Everest are constant companions. On the right we see the hills of Sikkim. Phalut sits on the edge of Sikkim, Nepal and West Bengal. Kanchenjunga seems within touching distance from here. Picnic lunch en route against the backdrop of the Himalayas. The last stretch up to Sabargram is a little climb. The trail forks here and we take the path on the right going downhill to Molley.

Overnight Lodge
Meals: BLD

Overnight Homestay
Meals: BLD

Day 7/8/9 The search for the Red Panda

We have three interesting days ahead of us. People from "The Panda Initiative", who are people who have grown up in these parts in places like Manebhanjyang, Tumling will be on hand to share their "hands on" knowledge regarding this animal. "The Panda Initiative" is a local effort by the people to save these rare animals by educating the local people and the conservation of the habitat. Our animal trackers who are familiar with the surrounding forests will be on hand to help us look for these elusive creatures. A visit into the forest is a The forest is quite dense and most of the places do not have any trails so we have to be prepared mentally to really have the "wild" experience in the real sense. If we are lucky we might get a glimpse of some rare animals like the Himalayan Black Bear, the Clouded Leopard, the Snow Leopard, the Red Panda and a host of other animals and exotic birds like the rare Spiny Babbler a bird that is nearly extinct.

Overnight Homestay
Meals: BLD

Day 10 Trek to Sandakphu (6 hours, 3636 m)

Today is quite a tiring day. After an early breakfast we begin our ascent. From Gairibas the forests give way to green meadows and small shrubs and bushes as we gain altitude. The rhododendron trees also grow smaller as we go higher up. Our next stop is Kalapokhri which is a continuous climb through rhododendron forests. The small village derives its name from a small black pond that is considered holy by the locals. It is believed that even the water of the pond never freezes. We continue our climb and as we go higher up we truly begin to understand the meaning of the phrase 'above the



Day 12 Trek to Ramam (5 hours, 2560 m)

We make quite dramatic descent and pass the small settlements of Rais, Tamangs and Sherpas at Gorkhey and Samaden on the Sikkimese border. We then make our way through sub-tropical forest that abounds with diverse trees and plants. During spring the woods explode with bright colourful flowers.

Overnight Homestay

Meals: BLD

Day 13 Trek to Rimbick (5 hours, 2286 m)

Today we walk downhill past forests to the small town of Rimbick spread over a hill. We make our way passing through a rich landscape of forested hills and meadows. The forest boasts of a diverse variety of sub-tropical trees, pines, spruce and rhododendrons. Rimbick is an unassuming town right at the border with Sikkim. Down below you can see the Ramam river and across is the state of Sikkim.

Overnight Homestay

Meals: BLD

Day 14 Drive to Darjeeling

The drive from Rimbick to Darjeeling is also quite interesting across forested areas and small settlements. We take our time and enjoy the beautiful landscape.

Overnight Hotel New Elgin (Deluxe) or Hotel Dekeling (Standard) or Travellers Inn (Budget)

Meals: B/L/D

Day 15 Drive to Pelling. Visit Tukvar Tea Estate Enroute, evening walk in the surrounding hills

After breakfast we drive towards Jorethang via Singla. We drive through undulating hills covered with a sea of green tea bushes. We make a brief stopover at **Tukvar Tea Estate**. To complete the Darjeeling experience we learn about the fascinating process of tea making from bush to factory - and into your tea cup and discover what goes into making a fine Darjeeling tea. At Jorethang we fulfill the necessary entry formalities and make our way into Sikkim. Upon arrival at Pelling we check into the hotel and enjoy leisurely walks around.

Situated 140 kms from Gangtok in West Sikkim, Pelling is one of the most interesting places in the state. The quiet, laidback village not only emanates with the rustic charm of the countryside but also offers an insight into the glorious history, nature and culture of the region. This rapidly swelling hamlet boasts of heavenly views of the snow-capped Khangchendzonga massif. It is an ideal getaway for tourists offering amazing sites and soothing atmosphere for all discerning.

Overnight Elgin Mount Pandim (Deluxe) or Norbughang Resort (Standard) or Hotel Phamrong (Budget)

Meals: B/L/D

Day 16 Visit Pema Yangtse Monastery, Khecheopalri lake and Rabdantse ruins

Today rising early is recommended. The morning visas are enchanting and provide you with an experience



that will remain etched in your mind forever. The view of the sunrays slowly engulfing Kanchenjunga and other lesser known peaks simply absorbs you. After breakfast we head towards **Pemayangtse Monastery**. It is special because it is meant only for 'ta-sang' lamas or pure monks. Pemayangtse meaning 'sublime perfect lotus' is believed to have been conceptualized and designed by Gyalwa Lhatsun Chenpo, the patron saint of Sikkim, in the early 17th century. What was built as a small Lhakhang is today considered as one of the most important monasteries of the Nyingmapa tradition. Later during the rule of the third Chogyal Chakdor Namgyal, Lhatsun Chenpo's third reincarnate Jigme Pawo extended the monastery and rebuilt the structure. The monks of this monastery are revered throughout the state; even the coronation of the royal family was entrusted to the monks of this institution. The monastery shelters several ancient and valuable religious images and objects of worship. It houses the "Zangdopalri", a fascinating wooden sculpture depicting the celestial abode of Guru Padmasambhava. This master piece crafted by the late Dungzin Rimpoche took five years to complete. Pemayangtse Monastery commands an impressive view of Mt. Kanchendzonga. The main festival of the monastery is on the 28th & 29th day of the 12th month of the Tibetan calendar, normally corresponding to the month of February. During these two days religious dances are performed and pilgrims come from all over Sikkim to watch them. We then continue to **Khecheopalri Lake**. Hidden in a tranquil forest enclave the Khecheopalri Lake is considered as one of the sacred lakes of Sikkim by both the Hindus and Buddhists. Nestled among pristine surroundings at 2000 m, the lake boasts of an extraordinary legend. Legend has it that guardian birds do not permit even a single leaf to float on the lake surface. It is believed that a wish made on this sacred lake is fulfilled. We stop for lunch. After lunch we continue to the Rabdantse ruins. Rabdantse was the second Capital of Sikkim and was established in the late seventeenth century by the second Chogyal (King) of Sikkim. With frequent threats from Nepal in the eighteenth century, the King was compelled to shift the capital to Tumlong. Now the palace is in ruins and one has to trek about 2 kms from the main road through a thick forest to reach it. It is

Sikkim: One of the youngest and smallest states of India, Sikkim is a jewel in India's crown. Nestled between the two Himalayan kingdoms of Bhutan and Nepal, this Himalayan paradise is almost hidden and is certainly one of the last Shangri - Las. Home to Mount Kanchenjunga, the third highest mountain of the world, Sikkim is a vibrant realm of colors and breathtaking beauty. Religion forms an integral part of the daily lives of the people. Colorful prayer flags fluttering from atop ridges beckoning the gods are familiar sights. The indigenous people of this area, the Lepchas are a vanishing tribe and a visit to this state gives a peek into their unique and multihued lifestyle. The state, though small in area is diverse in terms of climate and flora and fauna. With the elevation changing dramatically from 350 meters to the third highest point on earth Sikkim is a paradise that boasts of over 400 different kinds of orchids, over 600 species of butterflies, 500 species of birds not to mention the rare and elusive red pandas, snow leopards and other mammals. With different cultures and religion existing in perfect harmony, Sikkim is fascinating with inviting people, majestic mountain peaks and immense natural diversity.



preserved by the Archeological Survey of India and has been declared a historical monument.

Overnight Elgin Mount Pandim (Deluxe) or Norbughang Resort (Standard) or Hotel Phamrong (Budget)
Meals: B/L/D

Day 17 Drive to Martam, afternoon walks around the village

After an early breakfast we drive to Martam. The drive is quite interesting through the heart of the state. The road snakes through a number of unassuming settlements until we reach the quaint and tranquil village of Martam. Upon arrival at the hotel we have lunch after we check in.

In the afternoon we walk around the village, visiting homes and interacting with the locals which give us a glimpse of the ethnic lifestyle of the Sikkimese. This is the perfect location for visitors who love nature or adventure and for those seeking peace and relaxation. The surrounding is splashed with rich and unique Himalayan flora and fauna which makes walking in these parts worthwhile.

Overnight Martam Village Resort
Meals: B/L/D

Day 18 Early morning drive to Gangtok, Visit Rumtek Monastery en route, visit Dru Drul Chorten, Tibetology, Enchey Monastery, handicraft center and local market

After an early breakfast we head to the world famous Rumtek Monastery, the main seat of the Karmapa outside Tibet. Today it is the one of the most important Kagyurpa monasteries in the world and also a seat of His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa Rinpoche, head of the Kagyurpa Order of Tibetan Buddhism

Located just 6 kms from Martam Rumtek Dharma Chakra was built in 1960 by His Holiness the late 16th Gyalwa Karmapa as a replica of the original Kagyurpa Monastery in Tsurphu, Tibet. It is also the Headquarters of the Dharma Chakra Religious Centre. An interesting feature of the monastery is the memorial stupa of the XVI Gyalwa Karmapa inlaid with gold plate and semi precious stones within its precinct. The complex also houses the Shri Nalanda Institute for Higher Buddhist Studies and the Jamyang Khang Primary School and has some of the world's most unique religious scriptures, manuscripts and religious art objects. The old Rumtek monastery originally built in 1730 by the ninth Karmapa is fifteen minute walk downhill from Dharma Chakra Center. We then head towards Gangtok. En route we visit the Dru Drul Chorten and Tibetology. **Do-Drul Chorten is one of the most important and biggest stupas found in Sikkim.** Built in 1945 by the venerable Trulshi Rimpoche, head of the Nyingma order of Tibetan Buddhism, the stupa is encircled by 108 prayer wheels. Inside this stupa there are complete mandala sets of Dorjee Phurba (Bajra Kilaya), a set of Kan-gyur relics (Holy Books), complete 'Zung' (mantras) and other religious objects. The Chorten is surrounded by Chorten Lakhang, which houses two huge statues of Guru Padmasambhava. We then head to Tibetology. Previously known as the Namgyal institute of Tibetology, after the late Chogyal of Sikkim, the **Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology** is internationally acclaimed for its huge and magnificent collection of rare Tibetan literature, rare manuscripts, paintings, thangkas, statues and religious objects and other works of art and history. It is one of the few institutes in the world that conducts research in the language and culture of Tibet. Upon arrival in Gangtok we check into the hotel and have lunch. After lunch we visit the **Government institute of cottage industries.** This institute was

started by the Chogyals of Sikkim to preserve, protect and propagate Sikkimese arts, handicrafts and skills of local and village artisans. Today the center sees a lot of visitors. People can buy souvenirs like carpets, hand carved tables (choktses), traditional handcrafts, furniture, handlooms carpets and other products that are produced & exhibited for sale. We continue to **Enchey Monastery** perched in a hilltop. Located 3 kms from Gangtok town and is a very important seat of the Nyingmapa order. The monastery was built during the reign of Sikyong Tulku in the shape of a Chinese Pagoda. It is believed that the location was blessed by Lama Druptob Karpo, a tantric master known for his flying powers. This 200 year old monastery houses many images of Gods, Goddesses and other religious objects within its complex. It is a riot of colours and buzzes with activity every January when religious masked dances are performed with great fanfare. We then visit the market to see the local way of life. It is interesting sight to see people from various parts of the state converge in the local market to sell their wares.



Overnight Hotel Norkhill (Deluxe) or Chumbi Residency (Standard) or Mintokling guest House (Budget)
Meals: B/L/D

Day 19 Early morning to Tashi View Point and then drive Kalimpong after breakfast, afternoon visit Durpin dara, Old houses of the Raj period, Zang Dog Palri Monastery, walk back to the hotel

We get up early in the morning and head towards Tashi View Point to see the early sunrise as it hits the Himalayan giants. Situated about six kilometres away

from Gangtok on the North Sikkim Highway the view point was built by the late King of Sikkim Sri. Tashi Namgyal, hence the lookout point bears his name. The viewpoint offers an astounding view of the mighty Kanchenjunga range and a glorious view of the surrounding hills on a clear day. We have breakfast at the hotel and then drive one and half hours to Kalimpong. We check into the hotel and prepare ourselves for the beautiful day ahead of us.

After lunch we visit the **Durpin Dara**. Located at an altitude of 1402 meters Durpin Dara commands an impressive view of the surroundings. The 5 kms drive from town is very interesting past serene woods dotted by British Villas surrounded by a riot of colourful flowers. This observatory point is celebrated for its breathtaking views of the Himalayas including the whole Chola range of Sikkim and the Jelepala pass. On the northwest we can see the panoramic views of the majestic Kanchenjunga range. We also visit the **Zong Dhog Palri Fo Brang monastery** situated near Durpin Dara, another attraction of the area. We then walk back to the hotel through forested enclaves past remnants of the British Raj to the hotel. The European style buildings built during the British era and still

Kalimpong

Kalimpong was ruled now and then by Sikkimese and Bhutanese Kings until the mid-19th century. After the Duar War in 1864 Bhutan had to cede the territory east of the Teesta River to the British East India Company as per the Treaty of Sinchula. The ideal climate of this charming town led the British to develop it as an alternative hill station to Darjeeling to escape the scorching summer heat in the plains. Soon the town became an important trading outpost due to its proximity to the Nathula and Jelepala passes. Trade of furs, wools and food grains between India and Tibet grew. The economic prospects that the area promised prompted a huge influx of migrants from neighboring regions. Following India's independence in 1947, Kalimpong became part of the state of West Bengal. The town enjoys the best climate in the region. Weekly markets on Wednesday and Saturdays offer a unique look into the local lifestyle. It is an interesting sight to see the locals haggle over the price of some goods with smiling shopkeepers. The life is laidback and the surroundings provide a perfect getaway from the trappings of modern life. The dense forests of golden oak trees offset by the rich undergrowth of moss and lichen provide an ideal setting for balmy walks on the thick cushions of russet-brown leaves. The vast rolling hills covered with a riot of wild flowers, the sparkling brooks and rivulets meandering lazily by the terraced fields are a feast for one's eyes.



stand today give us an indication of the town's importance during the British Raj. **Morgan House** situated en route is a classic example of colonial architecture in Kalimpong.

Overnight Silver Oaks Hotel Hotel (Deluxe) or Kalimpong Park (Standard) or Hulumba Haven (Budget)

Meals: B/L/D

Day 20 Visit Deolo, Dr. Grahams Homes and nurseries and transfer to Bagdogra and fly to Delhi, international departure in the evening

We get up early in the morning and visit **Deolo Hill**. It is one of the numerous view points in Darjeeling region that warrants a visit. The view of the sun rising in the distant horizon and the golden rays hitting against the Kanchenjunga massif creates a magical feeling. We then head downhill and visit **Dr. Graham's Home** spread over Deolo Hill. Founded in 1880 by Dr. John A. Graham for destitute Anglo-Indian students, it is a sprawling educational institution that gives a glimpse to Kalimpong's European influence. It has its own dairy, bakery, poultry farm and vegetable gardens. It is a fitting example of community life. We then visit the famed **nurseries** of Kalimpong. Kalimpong is a blaze of colours throughout the year owing to the richness of its stunning flora. The town is famous for their infinite variety of orchids and a host of exotic flowers that it produces and exports to other parts of the world. For those with an interest in floriculture, a trip to a few of these nurseries is worthwhile. We then head to the hotel for breakfast. After breakfast we drive for two hours across beautiful hilly terrain and reach the Gangetic plains. We take our flight from Bagdogra to Delhi. In Delhi you will be met by our representative upon arrival. We can either head directly to the airport or check into a hotel (where wash and change rooms will be arranged, please note that prior information will be needed) and await your flight for the evening.

Meals: B

Necessary Information

Trekking

Though many credit Colonel Jimmy Roberts of pioneering trekking in the Himalayas it is said that a priest is supposed to have encouraged it in Darjeeling. Jesuit Rev. Fr Macdonald is attributed to have initiated trekking in the Darjeeling Hills almost 80 years ago when he trekked the along beautiful ridges to enjoy the bounties of nature. The trek we offer enables us to discover the passion of the Himalayan region some of which is unmarred by humans. They are a journey to self discovery - a passage to the personal Shangri-la. The stunning views, the exotic flora and fauna and the culture make trekking a rewarding holiday. This trek does not require any previous experience. Anyone with sound health and mind, and love for nature can go on this trek. Though

treks require negotiating steep climbs and descents you can set up your own pace and need not wear yourself out. This program has been tailor made taking into consideration all these aspects.

Easy

This is a soft trek that introduces you to what trekking is all about. This trek is designed for beginners and is for people who have never trekked before. We explore villages not very far away from road head. It involves average walking of 5-6 days at a steady pace. Normally you visit low lying area and do not go beyond 4000 m. The terrain is usually straight forward and does not require negotiating steep climbs and descents. Anyone who is healthy and enjoys the outdoors can easily take part in this trek.

Responsible Tourism

We offer different treks and tours which provide an insight at the treasures that the region has to offer. The **Realm of the Red Panda** is a wildlife program customized to raise awareness on environment conservation and deeply understand the social and ecological value of our natural surroundings and how it affects our lives. The tour, a part of our Panda Initiative, provides you to be directly involved (though small) in the conservation of wildlife by interacting with the local people and encouraging them to preserve their surroundings. This program provides you the option to positively make an impact on the lives of other people giving the trip a whole new meaning. You can spend some days in a place and be among the "real" local people and enjoy a genuine cross cultural experience rather than "on the surface experience". It is also a part of our homestay program that provides you the chance to stay with local households. This relatively new way of traveling encourages and supports conservation as well as provides employment and a source of income to the household ensuring that the money is not just concentrated with the people who operate the trip. This program is also open to volunteers and students who are interested to come and work with the local people regarding the red panda. It will give you an opportunity to change the way you view yourselves and also leave a lasting memory on the beneficiaries. No classroom can match



the knowledge gained through firsthand experience. It is a rich opportunity for learning to grow personally and develop leadership qualities that are essential to cope with this ever demanding environment that we are exposed to everyday.

Protecting the environment

The ecology of the Himalayas is very fragile. Responsible and sustainable tourism has always been our main thrust and mantra so that the environment and its resources - natural or cultural - always remain intact for the future generations to savor. We strongly advise that all non-biodegradable items such as can, bottles, batteries, plastics etc to be brought back to **Darjeeling** for proper disposition. We discourage the use of bottled mineral water to control the plastic waste. Since water is essential while traveling at such high altitudes we advise our clients to carry sturdy water bottles so that they can fill them up with hot water that is treated with water purifiers. As a part of our responsible tourism drive we use local guides and locally owned hotels (wherever possible)/ lodges or homes so that the people can earn income from direct employment or through the distribution of work responsibility. We have set some environmental codes that it adheres to strictly to ensure the preservation of our fragile ecology. We burn or bury all biodegradable rubbish properly and clients are discouraged to buy mineral water to control the plastic bottle waste. Instead we provide boiled and filtered water to our clients throughout the trek. We discourage the clients to buy any animal products. We make an effort to use hotels/ lodges that pursue good environmental practices. We strive to provide our clients with key information like dress codes, local language and customs regarding the destinations. Orientation programs to educate our trekking support crew on environmental conservation and its importance are undertaken periodically. This trip has been designed in a way that it can be done by any age group without any prior experience in adventure.

Group size

The size of the group could vary from 2 - 16 people. Though we can manage larger groups due to group dynamics we only operate groups up to 16 people. We have limited number of people in all our departures to ensure personalized service. We try and make sure that the need of each and every client is attended to and he/she feels comfortable and can enjoy the amazing culture, landscape and people better and have a great holiday.

Access

Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim is connected to the rest of the country by air, train and road.
BY AIR - Major airlines operate direct flights from Calcutta and Delhi to Bagdogra airport which is 2 hours drive from Darjeeling and Kalimpong and 3 and half hours from Gangtok.

A regular helicopter service operated between Sikkim and Bagdogra.

BY TRAIN - New Jalpaiguri, 2 hours from Darjeeling and Kalimpong and 3 and half hours from Gangtok, is connected to the major cities of India. Several trains operate between the major cities of India and New Jalpaiguri.

BY ROAD - Siliguri, the major hub in the plains is well connected to the rest of India by road. It is a 2 hour scenic drive through tea gardens and forests to Darjeeling and Kalimpong and 3 and half hours to Gangtok.

Documentation

An Indian Visa is required to visit Darjeeling. It can be obtained in the Indian Embassy or in the consulates. For this trek we need a permit for Singalila National Park. We will acquire this upon arrival in Manebhanjyang. To

What to Take

Clothing and Footwear

Warm down jacket for the cold

Warm clothes

Spare clothing - several thinner layers are better than one thick layer

The weather in Darjeeling can vary significantly, and the best advice is to take clothing that will layer to cover all eventualities. It may easily be cold in the evenings and when walking at higher altitudes.

Walking boots - well worn-in, with good ankle support and strong ridged soles with good tread
Trekking boots

Windproof/waterproof trousers and jacket with hood, good rain gear

Sun protection: sunglasses with UV protection

Loop-pile socks - one thick and one thin pair reduces the risk of blisters

Long trousers and long-sleeved shirts

Sun hat

Comfortable clothes - for evenings and comfortable shoes for sightseeing

A small rucksack - a bin liner will keep contents dry

Balaclava/ warm Cap

Scarf/ mask

Windbreakers/ Jacket

Down Sleeping bag

Flashlight

Sturdy water bottle

Moisturizing lotion

Full length Thermarest pad

Large duffel bag

Lip balm

Sunscreen

Hydration bladder with drinking tube

Pocket knife. Small Swiss-army type

Water purification tablets

Toiletry kit

Nylon stuff sacks. For food and gear storage large

Ziplocs are useful also

Towel

Hand wipes

Favorite snack food

Paperback books, cards, Walkman, etc.

Camera

Fanny pack or wallet for travel documents, money & passport



visit Sikkim a special permit called the Inner Line Permit (ILP) is required. The Inner Line Permit can be obtained while acquiring the Indian Visa at the Indian Embassy or Consulate or upon arrival at Siliguri, Darjeeling and Rangpo. Two passport size photos are needed for acquiring the ILP.

Currency

The currency in **India** is the Indian Rupee (Rs), which is divided into 100 paise (p). Bills are available in 10, 20, 50, 100 and 500 denominations. Travellers' Cheques can be changed at banks in the cities but not necessarily elsewhere, although some hotels and travel agents are licensed to change money. US dollars in cash are not widely accepted so it is prudent to change your money into rupees before embarking on a trip. Your guide will be able to advise on where to change money. You will need your passport when you change money. Credit cards are accepted in hotels and shops catering to tourists. Credit cards are also useful as an emergency source of cash as there are a lot of automated teller machines in the major cities and towns and the major cities from where money can be withdrawn. You may well be approached by people offering black market currency exchange - this is of course illegal, and hard currency gained in this way often contributes to criminal activities.

Medical Kit

We provide a first aid kit with medication for altitude sickness, nausea, dehydration, pain killers, and medication for dysentery, diarrhea, bandages, water purifier, antiseptic creams, throat lozenges, eye drops, antibiotics, nasal sprays, and pain relievers in tubes or spray but it is advisable to carry some medication on you without taking too much room in your baggage.

However we recommend the clients to carry the following items:

Asprin or Panadol - for pain or fever

Antihistamine - useful as a decongestant for colds, allergies, to ease the itch from insect bites and stings or to help prevent motion sickness

Antibiotics-useful if you are traveling well off the beaten track but they must be prescribed
Kaolin preparation (Pepto-Bismol), Imodium or Lomotil - for stomach upsets and to stop diarrhea and dehydration

Rehydration mixture - for treatment of severe diarrhea and dehydration

Antiseptic, Mercurochrome and Antibiotic powder or similar 'dry' spray-for cuts and grazes

Calamine lotion-to ease irritation from bites and stings

Bandages and band-aids- for minor injuries and wounds

Scissors, Tweezers and a Thermometer

Throat Lozenges

Acetaminophen (paracetamol)

Antacid tablets

Health

Prevention is always the best cure. So taking care in what you eat or drink is the best bet. Travelling in India does not involve major health risks providing simple precautions are observed. Drink only bottled water or boiled, filtered and treated water. Reputable brands of bottled water or soft drinks are generally fine. Take care with fruit juice, particularly if water may have been added. Do not take ice; be wary of uncooked food including salads, fruit juice and ice-cream; remember that milk is usually unpasteurised; do not bathe in freshwater rivers and lakes, and maintain a high standard of personal hygiene - wash your hands frequently and clean your teeth with bottled water. Please remember to pay attention to sensible hygiene at all times and to follow any advice given by your guide - it is essential in avoiding illness. Despite these precautions, the change of climate, water and diet may still cause some minor stomach upset, and you should obtain a suitable drug such as Imodium or Lomotil from your pharmacist to take with you. If you can,

obtain suppositories, as they are obviously easier to use if you are feeling or being sick. Remember however that these drugs provide relief from the symptoms but don't cure the problem and should not be used if you are dehydrated - the main treatment is to drink plenty of fluids: weak black tea with a little sugar and diluted fizzy drinks left to go flat are recommended. You should also take a rehydration solution such as Dioralyte in case of severe problems, and don't eat rich or spicy food as you recover. Previous guests have recommended taking a hot water bottle (an aluminium water bottle can serve a dual purpose such as this), which can be a great comfort to an upset stomach.



Thoroughly cooked food is the safest bet but not if it has been left to cool. Stomach upsets are the most likely travel health problem but the majority of these upsets are relatively minor. Wash your hands frequently as it's quite easy to contaminate your own food. You should clean your teeth with purified water rather than straight from the tap. Avoid climatic extremes. Keep out of the sun when it is hot, dress warmly when it is cold. Avoid potential diseases by dressing sensibly. You can get worm infections through bare feet. Try to avoid insect bites by covering bare skin when insects are around, by screening windows or by using insect repellents.

Altitude Sickness

Sometimes travelers face health hazards mainly due to the high altitude. Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) is a frequent problem in the Himalayan region and can affect a traveler in various ways irrespective of their age, gender or health fitness. Even if you are in perfect health and peak fitness, you can still develop AMS. Previous experience of high places, pre-ascent training and good physical shape do not prevent the onset of altitude sickness - it can strike anyone of any age. Our body normally takes time to be acclimated to the high altitude. The body undergoes a number of physiological changes some of which are increased pulse and respiratory rate. Others appear slowly over a period of weeks like the change in acid base balance and production of extra red blood cells. These changes and the effect of intense sunlight, strenuous walks and dehydration may cause some mild or vague symptoms such as loss of appetite, fatigue, headache, nausea, dizziness, palpitations, sleeplessness, breathlessness. The condition is caused by lower than normal levels of oxygen being absorbed. If the sickness is acute, you can become confused, irrational and mentally unbalanced. The best way to counter it is prevention. You should not exert yourself or walk too fast. Drinking All the clients are strongly advised to have personal travel insurance covering trip cancellations or interruptions due to natural disasters or medical reasons, insurance against emergency evacuation, medical and accident insurance.

Safety

We have been successfully organizing treks since the inception of the company. Safety is number one priority for us. This itinerary has been meticulously planned and designed with years of experience and know-how. Thorough planning, good logistical coordination and support of experienced staff ensure that our clients enjoy the trip to the utmost. Our support staff is also well equipped with communication devices so that they can get help should a situation an emergency situation arise.

Immunisations

Immunisations currently recommended for India are those for Hepatitis A and Typhoid. Typhoid may be given in two separate injections so you will need to consult your doctor in plenty of time. A vaccination is available for cholera but most doctors no longer consider this worth giving as it has a low success rate and tourists are unlikely to become infected if basic hygiene is observed. Ensure also that you apply insect repellent liberally and do not expose bare skin to mosquitoes after dusk. Meningitis is a risk in certain areas of Nepal at certain times of year and you should consult your doctor as to whether immunisation is necessary. You should also ensure that your Tetanus and Polio injections are up-to-date. The situation with regard to vaccinations and health precautions is subject to change, and you should consult your doctor for advice as early as possible.

Physical Fitness

Since the above trip entails traveling at high altitude it is necessary that the client is in good health. Before you embark on any one of these trips it is advisable to be physically and mentally fit and prepared. Prepare your self by jogging or walking at least one hour daily for a minimum period of one month. A thorough health check up is strongly recommended before the trip.

Medical Facilities

There are many pharmacies which sell medicines and some have a doctor's clinic. Prescription is not a

requirement for purchase of harmless drugs in India.

Insurance

All the clients are strongly advised to have personal travel insurance covering trip cancellations or interruptions due to natural disasters or medical reasons, insurance against emergency evacuation, medical and accident insurance.

Time Zones

India is 5 hours 30 minutes ahead of GMT.

Drinking Water

While on trek we serve boiled and filtered clean bacteria free water everyday.

Food on the trek

Food on this trek is based on the best available food in the lodges/ homes. Our support crew will also carry some extra food with them to serve you on the trip.

Support Crew

The support comprises of a qualified tour leader, sirdar, sherpas and porters. All our staff are locals who are experts in their field. They are well trained and experienced to handle clients' individual needs. Their knowledge on local culture and customs makes your trip an extra exciting. All our Tour Leaders have undergone leadership training and have had intensive courses on mountain medicine, first aid and are capable of handling emergency situations. They are deep understanding and knowledge of the mountain culture and are familiar with high altitude survival skills. Our support crew (except the porters) are usually sherpas who have been the backbone of the tourism industry in these parts and the team usually has years of experience between them and so our team is prepared for all eventualities in the mountains. The preservation of the fragile Eco system is of utmost importance to us and our support staff is made well aware of the significance of preserving the environment. We conduct regular orientation programs to educate our support crew regarding the importance of conservation of our environment. We take pride in the high quality of service we render - personalized, professional and above all enjoyable. Our crew with a

keen sense of hospitality will make your holiday worthwhile. You will make friends with our tour leader during the trip and find adventure that you will re-live the rest of your life.

Best Season

It is best to visit this region in **spring** and **autumn**.

Spring generally begins in **March** and ends in **May**.

Though there is a slight haze the forests covered with a riot of scarlet coloured rhododendrons, primulas, daisies, white magnolias and a host of other beautiful plants making a trek an exhilarating experience.

Mid September heralds the beginning of the **autumn** season. Mid **September** to mid **November** enjoys excellent climate coupled with deep blue sky and clear days making this period the best trekking period of the year.

Accommodation

We use different categories of accommodation (budget, standard and deluxe) in the towns depending upon the requirement of the clients. Meals plans are on BB, MAP and AP basis depending upon the requirement of the clients. Please see the list of hotels that we use.

During the trek the accommodation is totally based on homes of the local people so that we can experience the local culture and savour local cuisines and lodges. The homes are clean and often also double as a restaurant and lodges for the tourists during the tourist season. We will provide the best possible accommodation en route. However please note that the accommodation in this area are not as good as one would expect in Nepal as tourism has not yet developed into a full fledged economic activity in this region.

Transportation

Driving is on the left in India but your vehicle may be a left-hand drive, meaning you alight into the traffic - please take care. Comfortable jeeps, vans or tourist coaches will be provided for all transportation depending on the size of the group. For groups up to 8 people we use Tata Sumo and Mahindra Maxx Jeeps for Budget groups and Scorpio, Tavera, Toyota Qualis, Ford Endeavour and Toyota Innova for Deluxe groups. For bigger groups we use, Tata Tempo, regular and deluxe coaches depending upon the category of the group.

Risk and Liability

Our trips mean safety, reliability and the professional personnel to ensure your convenience at all times. However sometimes unforeseen circumstances like landslides, floods, bad weather, bad road condition, vehicle breakdown, delay in flights due to bad weather, local political situation could contribute to the change in the program. No claim of refund will be entertained including early return from the trip, or change in itinerary due to unavoidable situations like the above. All extra expenses (apart from the services offered as per the program) that occur in such cases would have to borne directly by the clients themselves.

