



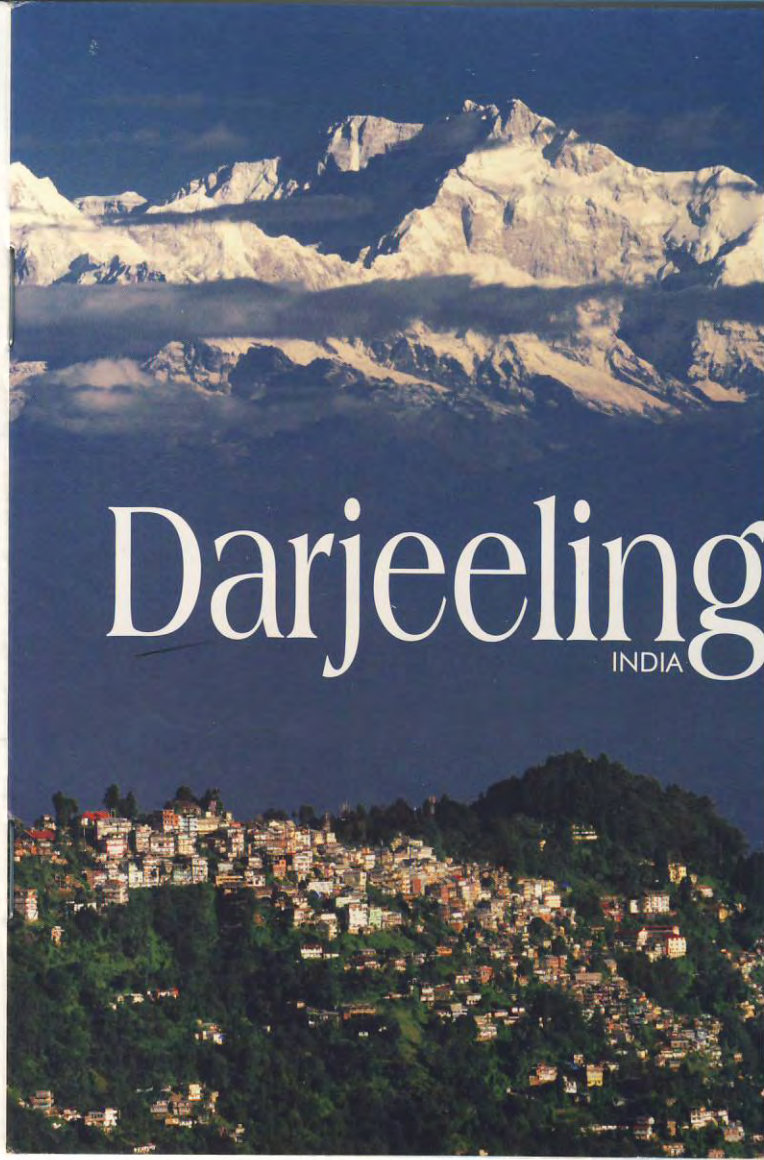
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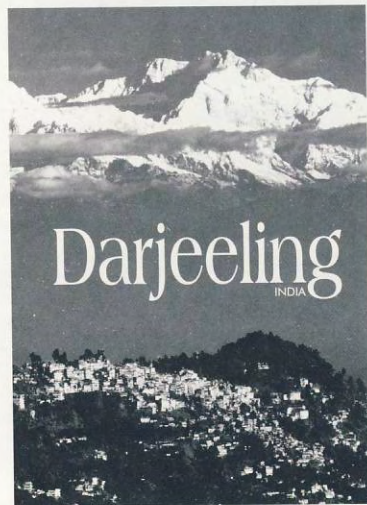


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Darjeeling

INDIA



Darjeeling
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Darjeeling

The Queen of the Hills

Known the world over as the 'Queen of the Hills', Darjeeling is as unique as it is diverse. For travellers arriving from the Indian plains, the cool climes of Darjeeling provide welcome relief and delightful experiences around every corner. Situated at an average height of 7000 feet (2130 metres) above sea level, this beautiful town with its colonial charm and contemporary culture shelters in the shadow of Kangchenjunga's snow-covered peaks. This magnificent mountain range, whose name means 'the Five Treasures of the Snows' in Tibetan on account of its five peaks, is also written as Khangchendzonga and Kanchenjunga.

Darjeeling is at once old and new. From its modest beginnings in 1835 as a hill station and tea distribution centre, this now cosmopolitan town offers modern amenities, first class hotels, cinema halls and comprehensive shopping centres. It is also home to some of India's most famous boarding schools. Yet, just a few miles from the crowded bazaar you can find villagers living a slower agricultural life in touch with the seasons: ploughing hillside terraces by hand, constructing colourful houses on steep cliffs, hollowing out bamboo pipes for irrigation and calling on faith healers in times of distress.



Confluence of River Teesta & Rangit



Kangchenjunga massif - Sandakphu

A brief history

The name 'Darjeeling' likely derives from the Tibetan words dorje, meaning 'thunderbolt', and ling, meaning 'place' or 'land': 'the land of the thunderbolt'. This was once the name of a Buddhist monastery situated on top of what is now Observatory Hill, a name which over time came to refer to the whole surrounding area.

Looking at Darjeeling's bustling streets today, it's hard to imagine that in 1839 there were not more than 20 families in the district. Darjeeling has Dr. Campbell, a British official who became the Station Superintendent, to thank for his 22 years of devotion to developing the region at that time. From these humble beginnings, Darjeeling has today grown into one of India's premier hill stations, visited by tourists from across India and from all over the world.

The District of Darjeeling

The Darjeeling District of West Bengal has an approximate area of 12,000 square miles. According to the 2001 Census of India, the district's population is 1.6 million, with 67% of that number living in rural areas. The literacy rate is 81% for men and 64% for women.

The district extends from the tropical Tarai plains, at about 300 feet (91 metres) above sea level, to the cool heights of the Sandakphu-Phalut ridge at 12,000 feet (3658 metres). Darjeeling borders on Sikkim to the north, Bhutan to the east and Nepal to the west. In addition to its namesake town of Darjeeling, the district also includes the hill resorts of Kurseong and Kalimpong at 4864 (1482 metres) and 4100 feet (1249 metres) respectively.

The People of Darjeeling

The original inhabitants of the Darjeeling hills are the Lepcha. They speak a Tibeto-Burman language, which they call Rongaring, and were originally the indigenous people of both Darjeeling and Sikkim. The majority of Darjeeling's contemporary population are the culturally Nepali Gorkhas, who speak Nepali (also called Gorkhali), along with their own mother tongues, such as Gurung, Limbu, Mangar, Newar, Rai, Sherpa, Tamang and Thami. The Sherpa community are famous for their courage and stamina in mountaineering, most notably Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, who first summited Mount Everest along with Sir Edmund Hillary. Tenzing Norgay spent much of his life in Darjeeling and eventually died there. Throughout the hills you will also meet Bengalis, Bhutias, Biharis, Marwaris, Punjabis, Sindhis and Tibetans. People from all of these diverse communities come together in Darjeeling to create a lively cultural landscape full of festivals, rituals, songs and dances waiting to entertain you.



Mt. Kangchenjunga as seen from Tiger Hill



As seen from Mall road

Religion

Hindus and Buddhists form the religious majority, with notable Muslim and Christian minorities. Darjeeling is full of temples and monasteries where you can enjoy a peaceful moment in the company of deities, as well as churches, gurudwaras and mosques.

Languages

Bengali, Hindi, English, Nepali (Gorkhali) and Tibetan are spoken in different areas throughout the hills. Most people, including guides and hotel attendants, are multi-lingual, speaking English, Nepali and some Bengali and Hindi.

Climate and Tourist Seasons

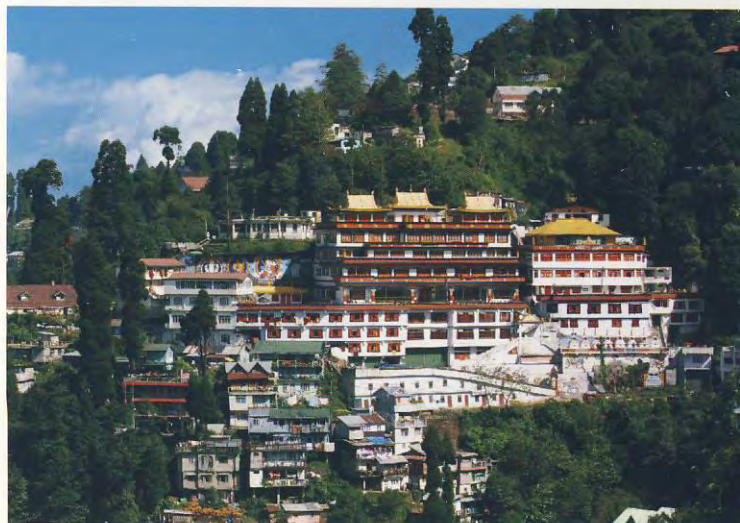
Darjeeling has four seasons: Winter, Spring, Monsoon (Summer) and Autumn.

After a short but cold winter, spring arrives as a welcome gift. Gentle mists mingle with occasional light rains to replace the heavy winter fog. Although dotted with clouds, the sky is still clear enough to create a succession of calm days. It is during these months April to June that Darjeeling enjoys its first tourist season. The whole town is ablaze with floral colour: in every garden, from small to large, rhododendrons, magnolias, gladioli, tiger lilies, hydrangeas, sweet peas, corn flowers, roses and dahlias unite to make Darjeeling bloom. Major mountaineering expeditions also set out at this time of year to conquer high peaks.

The Monsoon usually begins in late June and is mostly over by the end of August, with about 100 inches of rain in total during these months. July commonly sees the heaviest rainfall.

The cool evenings of Autumn start creeping in during September, bringing with them Darjeeling's second tourist season, which lasts until early November. The weather during these months is simply splendid. From valley floor to ridge top, green hills slope up to meet the blue sky on crisp, clear days, and the mighty Kangchenjunga range towers in the background. These are magical months for Darjeeling, with special events in abundance: carnivals, dog shows, dramatic performances and live music concerts.

The great Hindu festivals of Dasain (Dashera) and Tihar (Diwali) are also observed at this time of year. At Dasain, the temples are full of devotees making colourful offerings, and the bazaar swells with families dressed in their holiday best. Darjeeling has a unique way of celebrating Tihar, popularly known as the 'Festival of Lights'. At sunset, young people from all backgrounds gather with their friends and musical instruments, and venture from door to door singing songs and dancing through the night in exchange for small donations. Local shops are adorned with bright colours, and oil lamps are lit around their perimeters. This is a particularly exciting time to visit Darjeeling, but be aware that hotels are usually busy.



Dali Monastery



Batasia War Memorial

If you don't mind the cold and are seeking a quiet holiday, visiting Darjeeling in the Winter is an excellent choice. The temperature can drop to freezing, and heavy fogs often envelop the town, making the occasional sunny day even more exciting. Towards the end of December there are occasional rainstorms, while snow at the end of December can make for a traditional and beautiful 'White Christmas'.

Getting to Darjeeling

Darjeeling is easily accessible from all parts of India by air, rail or road. The closest railway station is at New Jalpaiguri, while the airport at Bagdogra is serviced by a range of domestic airlines, which quickly link the district to major Indian cities. Darjeeling is under four hours by road from Sikkim's capital at Gangtok, and can also be accessed directly from other parts of the state such as Pelling, Namchi and Jorethang.

Most travellers coming from the plains towns of Siliguri, Jalpaiguri and Bagdogra, or the Nepali border town of Kankaribitta, continue on to Darjeeling by road. Shared jeeps and private taxis make the uphill journey in around 4 hours, providing panoramic views of the rivers below and the hills above. Lush forests, tea plantations and small hamlets dot the winding road, making for a journey replete with photo opportunities.

For visitors with a little extra time, Darjeeling has a unique rail experience to offer. After arriving at New Jalpaiguri, you can complete your journey on the world famous Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. Recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, this 'Toy Train' offers the ride of a life time. The ascent is gradual, taking twice the time of travel by road. Starting from just a little above sea level, the track reaches a height of 7400 feet (2255 metres) at Ghoom Station, then descends to 6812 feet (2076 metres) at Darjeeling Station via a series of hairpin curves, loops and zigzags. Construction on this 53 mile-long (86 kilometre) railway began in 1879, and it is considered to be one of the greatest engineering feats of its kind in the world.

Places of Interest

Observatory Hill and Mahankal Temple

Rising steeply from the heart of Darjeeling town is Observatory Hill, and it is well worth climbing to the top to experience the magnificent view from the summit. You can see all the way to Sikkim and beyond as you look towards the sacred peak of Kangchenjunga, one of 12 peaks over 20,000 feet (6096 metres). The hill is rich in flora and fauna and offers great opportunities for bird watchers and photographers.

The Mahankal (also written as Mahakal) Temple straddles the summit where the Dorjeling Buddhist monastery once stood. A communal place of worship for all of Darjeeling's faiths, the central temple with three shiva linga is said to have self manifested in 1782. The gilded icons represent Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwor. As you wander through the



Botanical Garden



Catholic Church

temple complex, you will hear prayers are chanted by Hindu priests while Buddhist monks read from their holy scriptures. Devotees walk barefoot around the shrine three times, ringing bells hung from the walls by various families and organisations in honour of those who have passed away. Hundreds of prayer flags adorn the treetops above, creating an atmosphere of peace and multi-religious tranquillity.

Next to Mahankal is a white chorten (a Tibetan memorial shrine) containing the relics of Dorje Lama, the temple's caretaker in the 1880s. Scattered around the complex are also shrines to various Hindu deities, including Durga, Ganesh, Hanuman, Kali, Krishna, Radha, Saraswati and Shiva.

On your way down the hill, stop in for tea at the charming Windamere Hotel, one of Darjeeling's colonial masterpieces, which dates back to the 1930s. Famous for its Christmas dinners and entertainment, the hotel's furnishings are frozen in time, and its walls are covered with historical photographs and documents that give a rich insight into Darjeeling's past.

Chowrasta and the Mall

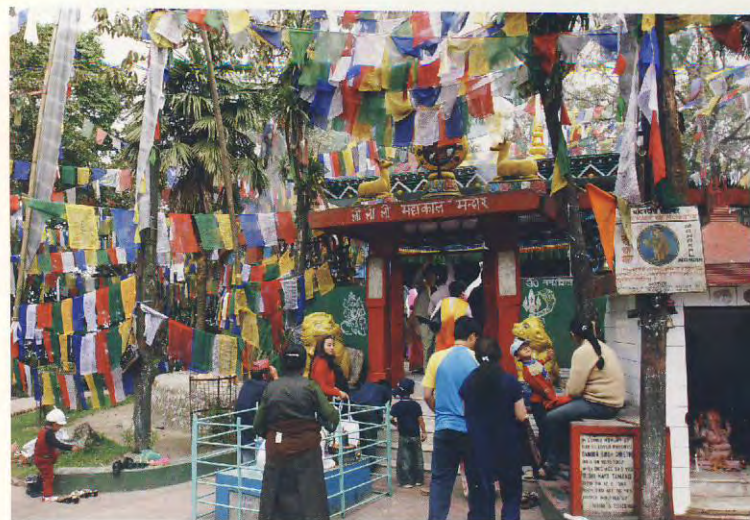
Chowrasta is the contemporary centre of Darjeeling. People gather along this wide promenade at the top of the ridge just below Observatory Hill to bask in the sun, gossip, do their shopping and eat in restaurants. Porters trudge up and down this important crossroads carrying all manner of goods, while ponies wait eagerly for riders. You can spend a delightful morning here sitting on a bench with a cup of steaming hot tea reading your newspaper while watching local society go about its business.

The Mall encircles Observatory Hill and is always full of locals taking their morning or evening constitutional walks. Along this mile-long stretch, joggers and athletes alternate with young couples strolling along arm in arm.

Lloyd Botanical Garden

Located on an open slope just below the Eden Sanatorium (Saheed Durga Mall District Hospital), this garden covers 40 acres and is divided into three main sections. The upper section contains indigenous Himalayan species, the middle is home to a range of conifers, and the lower section boasts exotic plants from a range of different countries. Here you can rest in the peaceful sanctuary created by old Himalayan cherry trees, or gaze at the water garden with a weeping willow arching over a rocky cascade.

Lloyd Botanical Garden is open seven days a week and entry is free of charge. Visitors are required to observe the rules of the garden and may not disturb or pick the vegetation. For lovers of nature, reserve a couple of hours to experience all that the gardens have to offer, and don't forget your camera and notebook.



Mahakaal Mandir



Dhirdham Temple

Sidrapong Hydel Power Station

Near the bottom of the Arya Tea Estate at 3200 feet (975 metres) lies the Sidrapong Hydel Power Station. Only 11 km from the town, the Station was commissioned in 1897, making it the first hydro-electric plant anywhere in Asia. Today, the giant turbines are quiet, and the site has been designated as a heritage institution with a museum paying tribute to its illustrious past.

There are a number of ways to reach Sidrapong. The approach through the Arya Tea Estate includes a 3 kilometre walk, along which you can also view the tea pluckers at work. Those preferring to drive all the way can do so on a new road that passes the factory of the Bloomfield Tea Estate. Book your jeep for return travel, since it is difficult to pick up transportation from the Station itself.

There are no entrance fees at Sidrapong, although you may be requested to make a donation for the privilege of photographing inside the power house. Roadside restaurants offer local fare, and small shops display souvenirs.

Raj Bhawan

Raj Bhawan is the summer residence of the Governor of West Bengal. This beautiful mansion with its manicured lawns, lush gardens, surrounding forests and colonial bungalows overlooks the DarjeelingLebong spur and commands a close-up view of the entire Kangchenjunga range. For security reasons, visitors are no longer permitted to enter the complex. A walk around its perimeter through the dense forest is nevertheless highly recommended.

Himalayan Mountaineering Institute

At the top of Birch Hill (locally known as Jawahar Parbat), you will find the world famous Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI). Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, laid the institute's foundation stone in November 1954, and the legendary Tenzing Norgay Sherpa was HMI's first Director of Field Training. Tenzing Norgay's grave is located on the hill's summit, making a visit to the institute and its surroundings a pilgrimage for all climbing enthusiasts.

The Institute is comprised of a museum on mountain lore, a well-equipped school for mountaineers, a hostel for students and Swiss-style houses for the Sherpa trainers. The mountaineering museum itself boasts a collection of historic climbing equipment, specimens of Himalayan flora and fauna, and a relief model of the Himalayas showing the principal peaks. A separate Everest Museum tells the story of expeditions to the world's highest peak.

Entry to HMI is through the Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park (see below), on Jawahar Road (West), and it can be accessed by foot or on horseback. The Institute is open



Ghoom Monastery



Steam engine of the Toy Train

from 9 am to 1 pm, and 3 pm to 5 pm.

Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park

One of India's most highly regarded zoological parks, the Darjeeling zoo is home to wildlife rarely seen elsewhere. Spread across the hillside of Jawahar Parbat below the HMI, the park was established in 1958 to study and conserve Himalayan fauna.

Today, the zoo houses India's only Siberian tigers, as well as other rare species, such as the red panda and Tibetan wolf. There is also a Snow Leopard Breeding Centre, which is definitely worth a visit.

Natural History Museum

The Natural History Museum was founded in 1915 at the suggestion of Lord Carmichael, an enthusiastic botanist and entomologist. Airy and well-lit, it contains a comprehensive collection of the fauna of Darjeeling and the Eastern Himalayas. Particularly impressive are the butterfly and beetle collections. The museum's specimens are displayed in life-like poses, feeding, hunting and playing. The prize exhibit is a tiger set in a fierce crouch against the vivid background of the Indian plains.

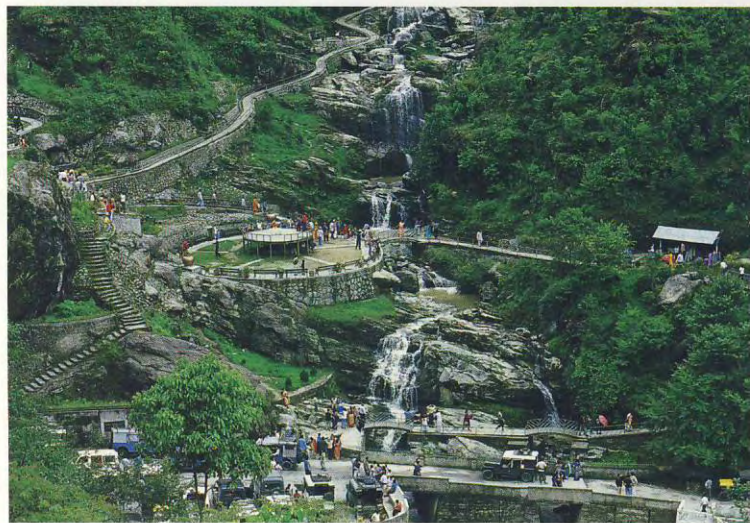
Entrance is free for students, and a nominal fee is charged for indoor photographs. The museum is five minutes walk from Chowrasta, located just below the Gorkha Ranga Manch.

Step Aside

A few minutes walk downhill from Chowrasta, on the way to Bhutia Busty along C. R. Das Road, is Step Aside. This is the house in which the great Indian patriot Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das passed away on 16 June, 1925. A few of his personal articles are preserved on the first floor, while the ground floor has become a maternity clinic for the poor named after Das. While no entrance fees are charged, visitors are not permitted to enter the inner sanctum of the house.

Market Square (Judge Bazaar)

The Market Square, popularly known as Judge Bazaar, is situated at the bottom of Darjeeling's main hill, just behind the jeep stand. Its semi-covered narrow lanes are full of small shops selling spices, tea, vegetables, fresh butter, cheese, cloth, umbrellas, clothes and a dizzying array of domestic products. You can also find restaurants, tea stands and a Hindu Temple within its confines. At festival times, the already busy Bazaar fills to the brim with villagers and tea workers coming to trade their wares and stock up on holiday supplies. Full of noise and colour, hustle and bustle, the Bazaar is a wonderful place to spend a few hours immersing yourself in local culture.



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Rock Garden



Darjeeling Town

Buddhist Monasteries

Darjeeling has three active Buddhist monasteries that welcome tourists: Bhutia Busty Monastery, the Yolmowa Buddhist Makdhog Monastery, also popularly known as Alubari (Aloobari) Monastery, and Yiga Choling Monastery. All of these monasteries hold Tibetan religious and folk dances during Losar, the Tibetan New Year, which falls between mid-February and mid-March.

Bhutia Busty Monastery

Located about 1.5 kilometres downhill from Chowrasta, past Step Aside (see above), this monastery was founded in 1879, and has links to both the Kagyu and Nyingma orders of Tibetan Buddhism. The monastery was ravaged by the 1934 earthquake that struck the whole region, but was rebuilt under the patronage of the Late Chogyal (Dharmaraja) of Sikkim. Built in a traditional Tibetan style with a notable Sikkimese influence, the monastery is a prime example of Darjeeling's vibrant Buddhist tradition.

Yolmowa Buddhist Makdhog Monastery (Alubari Monastery)

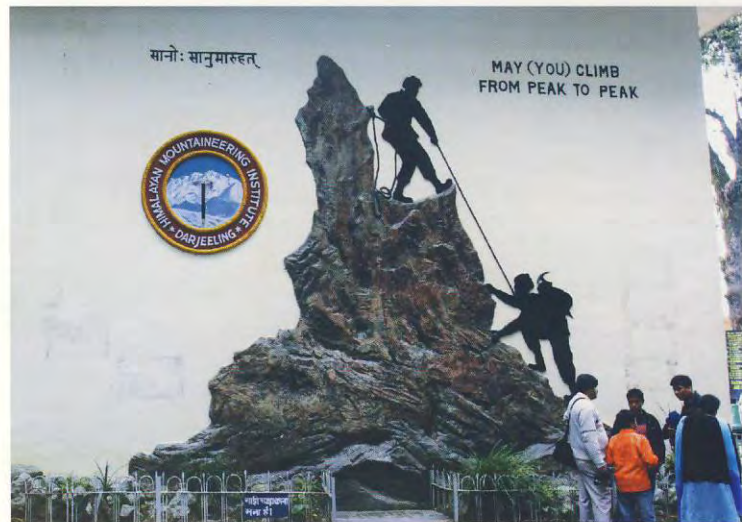
Situated a little over 2 kilometres from the town on Tenzing Norgay Road, this beautiful place of worship is popularly known as Alubari Monastery, after the tiny village in which it is situated. Yolmowa Makdhog Monastery was built around 1914 by Sangay Lama, a highly revered religious head of the Yolmowas, a small ethnically Tibetan group from northeast Nepal, some of whom settled in Darjeeling.

Yiga Choling Monastery (Ghoom Monastery)

Just below Ghoom railway station, about 8 kilometres away from Darjeeling town, Yiga Choling is the largest of Darjeeling's three monasteries. Built in 1875 by Lama Sherab Gyatso, it contains images of Buddhist deities and lamas, such as Chenrezig (Avalokitesvara), the Buddha of compassion, and Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelugpa sect. The monastery also contains a huge 15-foot image of Jampeyang (Maitreya), the Buddha of the future. A large collection of liturgical texts includes the 108-volume Kangyur, the Tibetan Buddhist canon.

Senchal Lakes

A favourite picnic area is the Senchal Lakes, located about 3 kilometres from Ghoom. You can take the train from Darjeeling to Ghoom, and then pick up onward transportation to the lakes. These bodies of water are actually reservoirs which supply filtered water to the entire town.



Himalayan Mountaineering Institute

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Tenzing Rock

Tiger Hill

Tiger Hill is the highest point in the Darjeeling area. An early morning trip to witness the sunrise is a must. Watching the rising sun strike the colossal Kangchenjunga range of snow-capped peaks in a blaze of rapidly changing colours is truly spectacular. Tiger Hill is now part of a nature preserve, the meadows of which are suitable for picnics.

Situated above Ghoom, Tiger Hill can be reached by taxi or bus from the town. For those visitors in search of a little exertion, the trek up to Tiger Hill from Ghoom is a very rewarding experience. There are no fees of any kind at Tiger Hill.

Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre

The Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre lies at an altitude of 7000 feet (3657 metres) near Lebong. Established in 1959 to house refugees from Tibet, these days it provides shelter to the aged in addition to housing an orphanage, a school, a hospital and a monastery. Various craft workshops produce Tibetan carpets of Ladakhi wool, wood carvings and leather products. There is also a showroom where antique Tibetan coins, banknotes and jewellery are sold. Visitors may hire a taxi to reach the Centre or walk along the Chowrasta/Hermitage Road. No entrance fees are charged.

Japanese Peace Pagoda

The Japanese Peace Pagoda was established by followers of the Nipponzan Myohoji, a Japanese Buddhist order. The pagoda is the highest free-standing structure in town, and showcases the four avatars of the Buddha. Situated on the slopes of Jalapahar Hill, the pagoda can be reached on foot or by taxi.

Near the pagoda is the Nipponzan Myohoji Temple, which is built in a traditional Japanese style and offers visitors a place for peace and introspection. Visitors may meditate and interact with the resident Japanese monks, and photography is permitted inside the Temple.

Dhirdham Temple

Situated below the Darjeeling railway station, this temple was built in 1939 by Rai Saheb Purna Bahadur Pradhan. It was designed by the Gorkhali architect Beg Raj Sakya to replicate the Pashupatinath temple complex of Kathmandu, Nepal. A statue of Lord Shiva stands outside the main temple, representing his five different facial expressions with the universal Third Eye. Visitors can take photographs outside the temple, but cameras are not allowed inside the sanctum.

Darjeeling-Rangit Valley Passenger Cable Car

Popularly known as 'the Ropeway', the Darjeeling-Rangit Valley Passenger Cable Car is



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Samten Choling Monastery



Kids trying out Nepalese costumes

located about 3 kilometres north of town at North Point. It is India's oldest passenger ropeway and connects Darjeeling with Singla Bazaar at the bottom of the valley.

Another great engineering achievement, the ropeway was the only means of transport from North Point to the Rangit Valley during the British era. The Ropeway has now been totally modernised, and visitors can safely enjoy an aerial view of the lush green tea gardens below. There is no time limit set for travellers on the Ropeway, so you may choose to break your journey to visit tea factories, shop for souvenirs or simply trek through the tea estates.

Batasia Loop and the War Memorial

The heritage train makes a 360 degree turn at this gigantic railway loop almost 5 kilometres from town. Built to help the steam train negotiate the steep terrain, Batasia Loop is strategically located to offer a panoramic view of the mountains beyond.

Within the loop lies a war memorial that commemorates the brave souls who sacrificed their lives in India's various wars since 1947. Adjacent to the memorial is a local market where visitors can buy purses, bags and other decorative items.

Rock Garden and Ganga Maya Park

Situated 10 kilometres from town, the Rock Garden and Ganga Maya Park offer attractive picnic spots with natural waterfalls and boating facilities. Small restaurants and shops abound, but visitors should be aware that return transportation is difficult to organise from the park.

Shrubbery Nightingale Park

Once the private courtyard of Sir Thomas Tartan's bungalow which was referred to simply as 'The Shrubbery', this unique property was developed as a public park after its complete destruction in the earthquake of 1934. First a popular resort for British women who would come to drink tea and chat, in the 1950s and '60s the park became a sought-after location for Bollywood films. Sadly neglected during the 1980s, the Shrubbery Nightingale Park has been re-developed once again and is now home to a giant statue of Lord Shiva, an associated temple and a live music stage. A musical fountain is one of the park's contemporary attractions. Evening is the best time to visit the park, as it is romantic and serene. A modest fee is charged for entry and photography.

Tea Gardens

Darjeeling is of course famous for its tea gardens, the larger of which are known as 'estates', encircling the town on all sides. During your sojourn in 'Darj', you really must visit a tea garden and a factory where the leaves are processed. The experience will be as educational as it will be novel.



Evenings in Chowrasta

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Sukna railway station

The Happy Valley Tea Estate lies within the boundary of the town itself and is easily accessible to visitors. One of the oldest and most renowned tea estates of the area, Happy Valley lies in the Darjeeling East Valley at an altitude of 9022 feet (2750 metres) and has a plantation area of over 100 hectares. Visitors can observe tea picking, processing and packaging, and can purchase some delicious tea from the factory itself. More adventurous visitors may want to pay a visit to tea plantations a little further away, such as Tumsong (Tamsang), the area's first organic tea plantation, which can be reached by jeep from Darjeeling bazaar. The wooden houses and close community of a tea garden are an experience second to none.

Arts and Crafts

Darjeeling's markets are full of traditional Gorkhali and Tibetan ornaments and curios. Elaborate earrings and jewelled brooches are particularly popular, along with Tibetan masks, assorted knives and khukuris (curved Gorkhali knives), traditional boots and thankas (religious paintings). It is well worth finding a salesman who can explain the details of the painting before you make a purchase, since each thanka is different.

Situated about 4 kilometres from Darjeeling's main market right on the National Highway lies Ava Art Gallery, established in 1965 by the Late Bhopal Rao Sett and Ava Devi. It is still one of the few art galleries of its kind in the Darjeeling hills, and displays a permanent collection of 60 works in water, oil and thread. Visitors can walk to the Gallery or, since the main road is a little dusty, simply hire a taxi. No entrance fees are charged.

An exciting new development on the Darjeeling art scene is Mahendra Thami's M2 Gallery, located on the left side of the pedestrian road leading away from Chowrasta towards Toongsoong and the TV Tower. This delightful gallery is home to an impressive collection of Mahendra's own work as well as pieces by other local artists. The collection is always rotating and most paintings are for sale. A nominal entrance fee is charged.

Treks in and around Darjeeling

Trekking in the Darjeeling-Sikkim region is guaranteed to be a memorable experience. The combination of some of the world's best mountain scenery together with easy access make trekking possible and pleasurable, even for the inexperienced.

The villages and hills around Darjeeling are replete with well-maintained bridle paths and tastefully-furnished dak bungalows placed at regular intervals along the route. Treks can be arranged for just a few days or for up to two weeks, the more ambitious of which bring the adventurer to the foot of the towering Himalayas.

For amateur botanists and entomologists, trekking in the Darjeeling area will be of particular interest thanks to the incredible diversity of flora and fauna. Artists and photographers will also be well rewarded with picturesque vistas and stunning views. Even a one day trek to stretch one's legs and breathe some mountain air will do wonders for



Shrubbery Nightingale Park



Cultural show at Gangamaya Park

your constitution, particularly when finished off with a cup of warm Darjeeling tea.

Visitors intending to trek should plan carefully in advance, as permits may be required (if you intend to visit Sikkim), and trekkers' huts and dak bungalows are in high demand, as are the best guides. The best times of the year for trekking in and around Darjeeling are between October and January, and from April to May.

Rafting, Kayaking and Canoeing

Water transport is a great way to explore the uniqueness of Darjeeling's natural and cultural diversity, and the famous Teesta and Rangit rivers offer first-class rafting and canoeing adventures. According to your experience and interest, you can either glide along calm blue waters with magnificent scenery rising out of the banks, or rush through roaring white rapids. You will always be in the capable hands of accomplished river-men employed by government authorised rafting agencies.

Rock Climbing

For the confirmed cliff hangers out there, Darjeeling offers a series of stone walls that make for terrific rock climbing. Gombu Rock, Tenzing Rock and Rock Face II are some of the most popular, and your hotel staff or guides will be able to help you make arrangements.

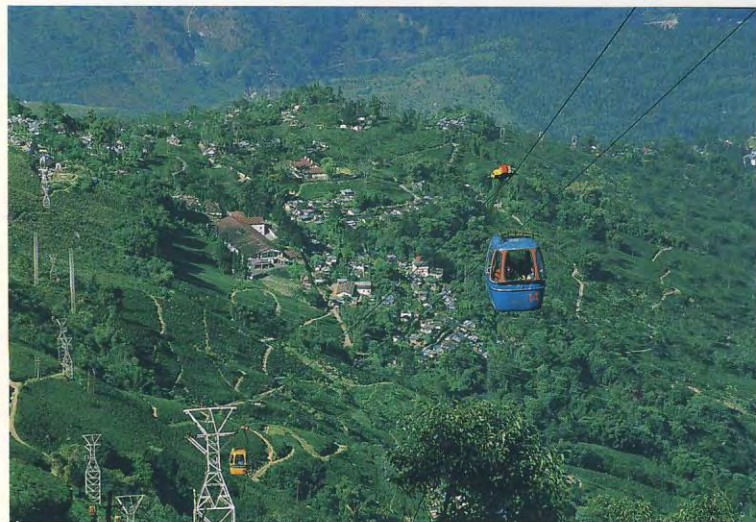
Local Food

The diversity of Darjeeling's plant life and its inhabitants come together once again to make for a unique local cuisine. Darjeeling is perhaps most famous for its alu dam (hot potato curry), a popular snack available at every roadside eatery. Tibetan refugee families have left an indelible mark on the culinary landscape, with dishes ranging from steaming-hot noodle soups known as thenthuk or thukpa, filled with vegetables or meat as desired, to their world-famous steamed dumplings, or momos. Locally-made cheese known as churpi, sold both soft in fresh leaf packets and dried in hard chunks, is worth tracking down in the markets. For the adventurous, make sure to ask your guide or hotel staff where you can eat gundruk (preserved spinach greens), sisnu (stinging nettle soup), and tama (bamboo shoots), three healthy local foodstuffs which traditionally kept hill farmers warm and fit during the long winters. You may want to finish your meal with a round of local homebrew, such as chang (local beer made of fermented rice), thungba (hot water poured over fermented millet) or raksi (distilled grain alcohol).

For visitors requiring vegetarian fare, or more used to rotis and other breads, Darjeeling will not disappoint. Excellent Indian restaurants compete with Nepali and Tibetan snack bars along all the main roads. Finally, one can find delicious cakes, muffins and breads at Glenary's Cafe, just below Chowrasta.



Japanese Peace Pagoda



Darjeeling- Ranjit Valley Passenger Cable Car



KURSEONG

On the way from Bagdogra or Siliguri, your car will likely stop at Kurseong to let you stretch your legs. The name of this little town means the 'Land of the White Orchids' in the indigenous Lepcha tongue. From here you get an expansive view of the plains nearly 5000 feet (1524 metres) below. In the other direction, Kurseong also offers a spectacular view of the road, rail track and market as you gaze towards Darjeeling. The town is surrounded by famous tea gardens, producing some of Darjeeling's finest tea, and at one time it was fashionable for India's rich and famous to have a summer residence here. Some of the most well-known residents of Kurseong include Mark Twain, Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore, Abanindra Nath Tagore, Sister Nivedita and Subhash Chandra Bose.

Places to Visit in and around Kurseong

Ambotia Shiva Mandir

Around 5 kilometres from Kurseong town, the Shiva Temple situated at Ambotia Tea Estate is well worth a detour. The Ambotia landslide drops 1,000 metres and is 1.5 kilometres wide, offering beautiful views and scenery on all sides.

Eagle's Craig

Situated around 1 kilometre from Kurseong's railway station, Eagle's Craig is an ideal spot for a romantic view of the surrounding hills and plains, and is especially famous for its sunsets.

Giddhapahar Mandir

At only 2 kilometres from Kurseong bazaar, the Giddhapahar Mandir is dedicated to Lord Shiva and is one of the most revered temples in the Darjeeling hills. A festival is held here on Shiva Ratri, the Night of the Lord Shiva, usually in February.

Makaibari Tea Estate

Located 4 kilometres from the town, the Makaibari Tea Estate is open to visitors who are interested to experience firsthand the manufacturing of this plantation's famous tea.

Deer Park

The Deer Park on Dow Hill, 4 kilometres from town, houses an amusement park, a forest museum and a school. It's a great place to take kids.

Transportation to Kurseong is readily available from Darjeeling, Gangtok or Siliguri. Taxi and jeep services are frequent, and no prior bookings are needed.



Batasia War Memorial, Darjeeling



St. Paul's School, Darjeeling

MIRIK

A small sleepy town lying at 5800 feet (1767 metres), Mirik has gained prominence on the tourist circuit since the 1980s. Built around the 1.25 kilometre long Sumendu Lake, the town resembles a fishermen's colony. The pristine lake is surrounded by high forested hills, tea gardens, orange orchards and cardamom plantations. Boating on the lake is a wonderful way to see the town, as you cruise past a floating fountain and an 80 foot-long arching footbridge. Overnight accommodation is available at hotels around the lake.

Places to Visit in and around Mirik

Kawlay Dara (Kaule Danda) offers fabulous views of the plains and mountains. Sunrise and sunset are particularly good times to visit.

Deosi Dara is another observatory point offering splendid landscape views.

Rai-dhap is an ideal picnic spot.

There are eight tea gardens in Mirik. Located only 2 kilometres away from the lake, Thurbo is one of the best in the area. The factory may be visited after obtaining the manager's permission.

Visit Mirik's orange orchards, as the area is the largest supplier of oranges in West Bengal. Only 2 kilometres away from the town, you can see abundant orange groves and observe the surrounding village life.

Transportation to Mirik is available from either Darjeeling, Gangtok or Siliguri and takes just a few hours. Taxi and jeep services are frequent, and no prior bookings are needed.

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Snow Leopard at the Zoological Park, Darjeeling



Red panda

KALIMPONG

A charming town with great historical importance, Kalimpong is the headquarters of a subdivision of the same name within West Bengal's Darjeeling district. Lying at an average elevation of 4100 feet (1250 metres), Kalimpong is home to a number of world famous schools and colleges which attract students from all over India. The warmer weather and laid-back feeling combine to make the town a popular place for visitors. While the origin of the place name remains unclear, until the middle of the 19th century, both Sikkim and Bhutan laid claim to this settlement on the hillcrest. Although native Lepchas of the region claim Kalimpong as their own, today the town is cosmopolitan and diverse, in part thanks to the positioning of a large army base on its outskirts. First-rate hotels and great local restaurants make Kalimpong a perfect choice for a night or two.

Places to Visit in and around Kalimpong

Kalimpong is situated on a ridge connecting the hills of Durpin and Deolo. At 5590 feet (1704 metres) at the north east end of the town, Deolo Hill houses two water reservoirs and Dr Graham's Homes, a celebrated school established by a Scottish missionary in 1900. Originally for Anglo-Indian children, the school has long educated Bhutanese, Sikkimese and Tibetan nobility. Excellent views and a park at the summit popular with picnickers make a trip to Deolo worthwhile. Durpin Hill, standing a little lower at 4501 feet (1372 metres) offers a great view of the town below and is home to a golf course as well as Zang Dhok Palri Phodang, a Tibetan Buddhist monastery consecrated by the Dalai Lama in 1976.

Transportation to Kalimpong can be easily arranged from either Bagdogra, Darjeeling, Gangtok or Siliguri and takes just a few hours. Taxi and jeep services are frequent, there is no need to book in advance.



Tea garden worker picking tea leaves



Local band playing in a popular pub in Darjeeling

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1. Tiger Hill
2. Ghoom Railway Station
3. Ghoom Monastery
4. Batasia Loop
5. Dali Monastery
6. Rock Garden
7. Gangamaya Park
8. Japanese Peace Pagoda
9. Ava Art Gallery
10. Burdawan Maharaja's Palace
11. Tenzing Norgay's House
12. Railway Station
13. Dhirdham Temple
14. Post Office
15. The Rink Mall
16. Foreigner's Registration Office
17. Town Hall
18. Clubside Taxi Stand
19. Lloyd's Botanical Garden
20. Natural History Museum
21. Chowrasta
22. Tourist Information Office
23. Observatory Hill / Mahakal Temple
24. Bhutia Busty Monastery
25. Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre
26. Shrubbery Nightingale park
27. Himalayan Zoological Park
28. Tenzing Rock
29. Himalayan Mountaineering Institute
30. Ropeway Station

To Badamtam

Lebong

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To Singla

