

SIKKIM

October 25- November 3, 2012

For those of you who have visited Nepal and Bhutan, Sikkim will be the last of the three original Himalayan Kingdoms for you to visit. If you have not visited any of the Kingdoms you are in for a wonderful experience. Though annexed by India in 1975 Sikkim still retains its unique culture and religion. Sikkim is situated in an area of spectacular beauty, situated between Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and West Bengal. With its 4000 varieties of wildflowers including 600 varieties of orchids, snow fed lakes, high altitude mountain forests and hidden Buddhist monasteries, Sikkim may be the best kept secret in the Himalayas. With its elevation ranging from 600 meters to 8000 meters, Sikkim ranges from subtropical to the alpine, containing a glorious variety of landscapes, from lush terraced hillsides to yak grazed meadows, enclosed on three sides by glaciers and the permanent snow of the Himalayan ranges. Mt. Khangchendzonga at 8345 meters is the third highest mountain in the world. Countless species of birds and animals also live in this majestic mountainous area. The people remain some of the most peaceful in the world with Buddhism being the most visible religion in Sikkim, its history dating back to the 7th century AD.

We have not done a tour to Sikkim since 2005 so we hope that some of you are able to take the opportunity to experience this wonderful part of the Himalaya. For those of you who cannot take Saturday, November 3 off, there is the possibility of flying back to the Middle East Friday evening.

ITINERARY

Thursday, October 25: Arrival

After clearing customs and immigration you will be met and transferred to the Hotel Himalaya. Rest of the day free.

Overnight Hotel Himalaya

Friday, October 26: Kathmandu-Bhadrapur-Gangtok

After breakfast, transfer to domestic airport for our Kathmandu-Bhadrapur flight. The flight should offer us spectacular mountain and landscape views. On arrival, following immigration formalities at the Nepal/Indian border we will drive through the beautiful Teesta Valley to the colourful hilltop town of Gangtok, (1780 meters) the capital of Sikkim. In clear weather the Himalayan views from Netuk House are spectacular as the town of Gangtok sits on a ridge overlooking the mountains.

Overnight Netuk House

Saturday, October 27: Gangtok

Following breakfast we will visit the Enchey Monastery, located about 2 km from Gangtok. This monastery was built 200 years ago on the site blessed by Lama Druptob Karpo, a Tantric master known for his power of flying. It follows the Nyingmapa tradition and has pagoda style architecture unique to Sikkimese monasteries. We will visit the Do-Drul Chorten, one of the most important Stupas of Sikkim built by the late venerable Trulsi Rinpoche in 1945-46. Nearby is the Research Institute of Tibetology, a repository of the largest collection of Tibetan artifacts outside Tibet. Also renowned worldwide for the study of Buddhist philosophy and religion, it is a treasure house of rare Lepcha, Tibetan and Sanskrit manuscripts, Thangka, Buddhist icons and art. In the afternoon we will visit the Dharma Chakra Center at Rumtek. Located on a hill opposite Gangtok, this magnificent monastery and a college of Buddhist learning was built by the late Gyalwa Karmapa, the head of the Kagyupa sect in the early 1960's as an exact replica of the original Kagyu monastery in Tibet.

Overnight Netuk House

Sunday, October 28: Gangtok-Temi-Ravangla (1950 meters)

We enter South Sikkim today, its lichen covered forests home to an amazing array of orchids. The great forested peak of Maenam towers high over the region. En route we visit the only Tea Garden in Sikkim at Temi to see the processing of the internationally famed brew. Also we visit Samdruptse, the site of the 113-foot tall statue of Guru Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche, the patron saint of Sikkim and the Buddhist scholar who restored Buddhism in Tibet in the 7th Century AD. The location offers a breathtaking view of the Sikkim Himalayas and the Darjeeling Hills. We continue on to Borong, The Borong Mountain Resort is a country resort located amidst cardamom plantations and farmlands in the upper reaches of Borong Village, in South Sikkim. The resort overlooks the lush Rangeet and Relli valleys and the villages of West Sikkim with Mt Narsing and Mt Jopuno in the background. The Borong Retreat has been developed in a 12-acre farm with a cardamom plantation and farmed land. A short walk through the property provides a great experience of the rich and diverse flora and fauna. You can try the cardamom trail, a 4 km hike into the cardamom plantations interspersed with spectacular views of

the mountains valleys and villages. A visit to the local handmade paper unit is an interesting example of a community-based project benefiting the local people. Buying the handmade paper products will directly benefit the community.

Overnight Borong Mountain Resort

Monday, October 29: Day excursions

Situated 13 kilometers away, against the spectacular backdrop of the peaks of Narsing, Journo and Kabul are the two monasteries at Riling. The old Ralang Monastery was built in 1730 on a site blessed by an earlier incarnation of Karmapa where the grains of rice thrown by him from Tibet had landed. The monastery is one of the most sacred and important monasteries following the Kagyupa tradition. The New Ralang Monastery, Palchen Choeling Institute, was built by the XIIth Gyaltsab Rinpoche, one of the four regents of the Kagyupa sect and completed in 1995. This is the biggest monastery in Sikkim and its architecture and paintings have been painstakingly undertaken to maintain the authenticity of the Kagyupa monasteries. Cultural show with local food and drinks.

Overnight Borong Mountain Resort

Tuesday, October 30: Borong to Pelling

After breakfast we drive to Pelling in West Sikkim. Huge tracts of virgin forest and deep river valleys characterize this area. Enroute we visit the Pemayangtse Monastery. Built in 1705 on the site of an older temple, this monastery follows the Nyingmapa sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Pemayangtse, "Perfect Sublime Lotus," also houses the famed "Zangdopalri," a fascinating model of the celestial abode of Guru Padma Sambhava, crafted single-handedly out of wood by the late Dungzim Rimpoche. Pelling, situated 2085 m above sea level, has expansive views north towards the glaciers and peaks of Kanchenjunga, the world's highest peak.

Overnight Norbughang Resort

Wednesday, October 31: Pelling-Khecheodpalri Lake-Pelling

The day starts with an early morning walk to Sangachholing Monastery located on a hillock above Pelling. Built in the 17th Century by Gyalwa Lhatsum Chenpo, the patron saint of Sikkim, it is considered to be the second oldest monastery in Sikkim. This spot commands a breathtaking view of the snowcapped mountains and the hills, valleys and villages of West Sikkim. We also visit Khecheodpalri Lake, known as the Wishing Lake. This unusually calm lake located in the midst of a dense forest is considered very sacred and no water sport or other activities beside prayer or worship are allowed around it.

Overnight Norbughang Resort

Thursday, November 1: Pelling to Kalimpong

After breakfast we will drive to Kalimpong along the Rangit River and check into our hotel. Kalimpong is a small town famous for its flower nurseries, quaint European styled cottages and was a bustling commercial center when the Indo-Tibet border was open. The vestiges of the era can still be felt in its market places.

In the afternoon we will drive to visit the Durpin Monastery, atop Durpin Hill, which commands a spectacular view of the surrounding areas and a panoramic view of the mountains. Also we visit the Gompchen Drukpa Monastery and time permitting we will visit some of the flower nurseries specializing in orchids, atalaya, anthuriums, and gladioli among others.

Evening stroll around the market place for some unique handicrafts and souvenirs.

Overnight Hotel Silver Oaks

Friday, November 2: Kalimpong to Bhadrapur

After breakfast drive to Bhadrapur to connect with our flight to Kathmandu. On arrival at Kathmandu Domestic Airport, transfer to hotel.

Overnight Hotel Himalaya

Saturday, November 3: Departure

Following breakfast at the hotel, transfer to the airport for your international flight.

COST

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| Twin Sharing: | US\$2125 |
| Single: | US\$2850 |

COST INCLUDES

Economy airfare Kathmandu/Bhadrapur/Kathmandu
All transfers in Nepal and Sikkim
2 nights with breakfast at the 5* Hotel Himalaya in Kathmandu
7 nights/8 days in Sikkim inclusive of all meals and hotels
Sightseeing tours, transportation, travel permits, entrance fees
English speaking guide.

All tips for porters, drivers, guide and waiters at included meals

NOT INCLUDED IN COST

Visas for India and Nepal

India requires a visa in advance of travel. **We will be applying for Indian visas as though travelling to New Delhi. Our special Sikkim permits will be processed as we enter Sikkim. It is more complicated to apply for these permits outside of India.**

Meals not specified in itinerary

Personal items such as laundry, drinks at meals, excess baggage, housekeeping tips

Extra costs due to road blockages, strikes and events beyond our control

Medical and travel insurance

DEPOSIT/FINAL PAYMENT

The deposit is US\$ 500 per person and your space will not be confirmed until I have received the deposit. Payment by cheque or bank draft is preferable. If you wish to pay by electronic transfer please add \$25.

FINAL PAYMENT

Final payment is due June 25, 2012

CANCELLATION

There will be a cancellation fee of \$US 200 if you cancel before the final payment is due. Any cancellations after final payment will result in the \$200 administrative fee as well as any charges the travel agent imposes. Also cancellations after that date could result in higher costs for all group members.

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