

*This information should answer some of your questions about the trip and give you a better idea of what we do day-to-day. It doesn't hope to answer everything. If you have any questions please get in touch.*



## DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

This itinerary is flexible and should be seen as a guide only. Local conditions, weather or fitness could lead to changes in our daily plans. All times and distances are approximate. 'B,L,D' refers to meals included in the trip cost, i.e. Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner.

This trip is 22 days ex Delhi. The first and last days refer to the days of arrival and departure to/from Delhi and are not necessarily the days you depart from or arrive back home. It is also possible to join this trip in Kolkata (Calcutta).

### Day 1

Arrive Delhi. Hotel.

### Day 2

A flight across north India to Bagdogra to be met by our Sikkim friends. We drive to Gangtok and leave behind the plains of W Bengal to climb up the wooded Teesta valley into Sikkim (110km). Our hotel with its ornate monastic frontage is a reminder that we are now in an historic Buddhist kingdom very close to Tibet. (B)

### Day 3

Wake up to a dramatic early morning view from the hotel windows of Kanchenjunga and the skyline of the eastern Himalayas. Gangtok at 1500m, will be cooler than Delhi and there is plenty of interest in the town, with its markets, monasteries and gardens. (B)

#### Day 4

To Yuksom. An early departure by Jeeps for the trekking area in West Sikkim, 6 exciting hours along winding, wooded valleys and over hills clad with cardamom plantations. We swoop down to cross the wild Rangit River before climbing steeply up to Yuksom. Guesthouse. (B,L,D)



#### Day 5

We begin our trek with a gradual climb to Sajan, we'll go at an easy pace into the forests for our first overnight in camp. (B,L,D)

#### DAY 6

We continue to Tsokha passing through Rhododendron forests and other beautiful meadows and flowers. (B,L,D)

#### DAY 7

To Dzongri. A steady morning ascent to the Dzongri La (4400m) where we join the track to the Himalayan Mountaineering Centre founded by the Everest pioneer Tenzing Norgay. At Dzongri we also meet the regular trekking trail for the first time up to the Goeche La and may share the summer pastures of Dzongri with other groups. Another high camp (4030m) but we should be well acclimatised by now, possibly in contrast to some of the trekkers we meet who could be at 'the headache zone' on day 3 of their holiday! 6 hours. (B,L,D)

#### DAY 8

A rest day at Dzongri usually begins with and another dawn foray this time to see the sunrise from the nearby prayer flagged hilltop where the King of Sikkim used to come to pay his respects to the Holy Mountains. In clear weather the views here are magnificent. Ahead the elusive peaks of Kabru, Tichenkhang and Pandim, temporarily hide Kanchenjunga (8598m). (B,L,D)



**DAY 9** To Lamuney. Down the hill to Kokchulang where we will meet trekkers returning from their own journeys and we will really begin to appreciate the peace and solitude of our last few days walking. Well acclimatised, we move easily up the valley passing the busy trekkers' campsite of Thangsing to our own riverside camp a short distance below the sacred Samiti Lake. 6 hours. Camp. 4200m. (B,L,D)

#### DAY 10

We aim for the Goeche La (The Locked Gate) at almost 4940m and are away well before sunrise in the clear cold morning air. Around us an awe-inspiring Himalayan landscape of tumbling glaciers, great pinnacled ridges and soaring peaks, the giant snow cliffs of Kabru and Pandim dominated by the mighty bulk of Kanchenjunga towering 3500m above us, although the view from our own 'summit' will be extraordinary. The sight of the sun

rising on the mighty South face of Kanchenjunga, the world's third highest mountain will remain with us for years to come, and it will surely be humbling to remember that this summit was first climbed by British climbers Joe Brown and George Band way back in 1955. We return to camp with a huge sense of achievement and satisfaction. 8-10 hours. (B,L,D)



#### DAY 11

To Tsokha. After crossing the river we avoid the climb back up to Dzongri by a long but easy contour around the valley side through rhododendron and fir forest to the village of Tsokha (white lake), an enchanting high Tibetan settlement perched on a mountain spur. It will be our first encounter with permanent village life and the novelty of having a roof over our heads at a trekking lodge will add a new dimension to the journey. Tsokha remains barely altered despite the trekker incursion and retains an aura of tranquillity. There are some small local souvenir shops and we can also visit the small local monastery whose Lama was with the Dalai Lama in Tibet. 7 hours. Trekking lodge, 3000m. (B,L,D)

#### DAY 12

Our freewheeling final day, downhill almost all of the time. We descend through rainforest rich with birdlife and flowers, across spectacular bridges spanning cascading rivers whose sources are high in the mountains we have so recently left behind. Tired and elated we arrive in Yuksom and our traditional hilltop hotel. In the evening we can celebrate our achievements with locally made 'chang' and traditional Tibetan food. 7 hours. (B,L,D)



#### DAY 13-14

Away from Sikkim now and a 5-6 hour ride to Darjeeling. A memorable hotel and almost 2 days to relax and get down to the serious business of markets, shopping, or seeing the town. Today Darjeeling is overpopulated, under resourced and creaking around the edges but amid the hustle and bustle it still exudes a vitality and excitement and there remain many fascinating reminders of the lavish lifestyles and days of the British Raj. After our isolation in the mountains it will provide a stimulating contrast - quite overwhelming. A visit here particularly at the end of our Sikkim trek will always be memorable experience. Accommodation is in an attractive and comfortable Tibetan run guesthouse. (B)

#### DAY 15

To Bagdogra and a flight back to Delhi or Kolkata. (B)

## DAY 16

Depart Delhi (B)

### Sikkim

The former kingdom of Sikkim lies on the steep, densely forested slopes of the Himalayas, nestled in between Nepal and the Kingdom of Bhutan. The holy mountain Kanchenjunga, with its 8,598 m is the third highest mountain in the world, dominates the country majestically forth from the West. Enjoy sunrise views of Kanchenjunga and other ice giants of the Himalayas with a cup of fine, world famous Darjeeling tea!

### Trip Summary

Sikkim is a special place. A high mountain kingdom, tiny in the Himalayan scale of things and barely 120 km across. It remained independent until 1975 when it became the 22nd Indian State, in mutual recognition of its vulnerability and closeness to Tibet and Chinese ambitions. Dominated from every corner by the great mass of Kanchenjunga, Sikkim retains much of the qualities of its isolation. It is historically Buddhist and was the haven for many Tibetan refugees escaping over high passes in the 1950's. The landscape is indisputably beautiful - ferns and flowers, birds and butterflies, orchids and bamboo, forests of cherry, oak and pine set among fast-flowing rivers, terraced paddy and barley fields and, in April & May, blazing rhododendrons. It is also a land of monasteries and gompas, where monks and teachers, more Tibetan than Indian, practice the ancient rituals of Tantric Buddhism in peace and purity. From the tent door at Dzongri, the hotel window in Gangtok or the monastery steps at Pemayangtse, there can be seen a startling Himalayan skyline of some of the highest mountains on earth.

### The trip

This trip is not the standard 'up and back' trek to the Goeche La. Through our good contacts in Sikkim we pioneered a new approach route to produce a longer, more challenging high circuit, with magnificent views of the Kanchenjunga range and the Himalayan skyline of eastern Nepal. Other groups (not many) now trek this route, but it still feels remote. The daily trekking is never excessive and remains steady throughout although we have graded it 'steady plus' because of the altitude element. For twelve days we trek and camp above 3000m, and on half of these days are close to or exceed 4000m. Altitude and cold nights may make greater demands.

### On trek

In Sikkim we are supported by a team of yaks or dzos, a cooking and camp team. Tents, food and baggage accompany us. We carry only what we need for the day: camera, water bottle, spare clothing etc. A typical day starts at 6.30 am with a steaming mug of tea brought to our tents. Packing is followed by breakfast in the mess tent and away by 8.30 am in order to catch the best weather. A picnic lunch stop at around 12 noon when a stove is lit and tea is made. Arrival in camp is usually mid-afternoon in time for tea and a tasty snack of pakhora, or 'finger' chips or similar. After sorting camp out, we can relax pleasantly and build up to the main meal of the day at about 6pm. 'Trekking bedtime' is seldom later than 9pm.

### Accommodation

In the main towns we stay in comfortable hotels with en-suite rooms. Our hotel in Gangtok is run by Buddhists and with an office for the Dalai Lama on the upper floor, is simple but with charm, friendly and full character. Whilst on trek we camp, using 2/3 person tents. In the latter stages of the trek we stay in a trekking lodge in the high village of Tshoka with basic mountain hut-type facilities - mattresses, cold water, outdoor toilets etc. There are a number of other huts on the popular part of the trail but they are often busy and increasingly run down. We prefer to camp along the trail.

## Food

Whilst 'on trek' all meals are included. In towns we provide breakfast only. This allows you the option of trying a wide range of local restaurants which is very much part of the adventure. In Gangtok and Darjeeling food is inexpensive and a meal would seldom exceed £6/NZ\$14 excluding drinks. See day to day itinerary for which meals are included. We always try to advise on eating in towns and the group often decides to eat together. On trek we eat Indian and Tibetan food prepared to a surprisingly high standard. There is always a choice of dishes, dhals, vegetables and sometimes meat when fresh yak or lamb is available. Breakfasts and lunches are varied and appetising.

## Health and hygiene

We have an excellent record of staying fit and well in India. The key seems to be our enthusiasm for Indian vegetarian food, (most of India is vegetarian). Avoiding meat in towns before the trek starts is a good tactic and care with water, avoiding salads, peeling fruit etc pays dividends. Serious illness or accident is extremely uncommon. Laundry facilities will be available in Darjeeling and if you are smart your bag of dirty and crumpled trekking 'rags' can be transformed into a pile of pristine, folded and ironed 'new' clothes on the same day!

## Altitude

Above 3000m, the air is thinner, the pressure is lower and there is less oxygen available in the atmosphere. Acclimatisation is the process by which the body adapts to these conditions. The key to acclimatisation is a good itinerary with a gradual initial height gain, walking at a slow and steady pace, and increasing fluid intake – drinking at least 4 litres a day is advisable above 3000m. Many people have some minor side effects from altitude, such as headache, nausea or general lassitude. The optional use of 'Diamox' has proved useful for some people, as this drug can reduce these symptoms. You will be given more information on 'Diamox' with your Final Information, between 8 and 10 weeks before departure.

## Transport

Whilst in Sikkim we normally travel by mountain jeeps suitable for the conditions of the mountain roads.

## Tipping

It is custom and practice to tip in India. You should perhaps allow the equivalent of around £60/US\$100/NZ\$125 or so for the whole holiday – tips are usually presented to the crew by the group at the end of the trek if they have done a good job. You may also have some outdoor gear that you are willing to donate at the end of the trek. Try to avoid giving sweets, biscuits, pens or cash to children or anyone who has not rendered a service.

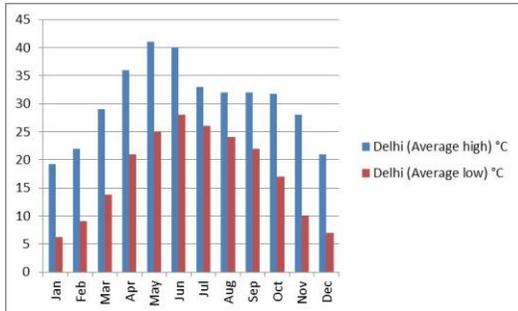
## Indian Visas

A full passport is required to apply for the Indian visa, with a validity of at least 6 months beyond the intended duration of stay in the country. It is the client's responsibility to complete all the application procedures and obtain their visas before the intended date of departure. We have no say in the immigration and consular processes and are not responsible for their actions. UK passport holders can apply themselves for Indian Visa through India High Commissions Visa service VFS by logging on to <http://in.vfsglobal.co.uk/> . Current visa fee for British passport holders is £ 80 (there is an additional consular fee and a service charge of £ 12.20 on top of this amount). Visa fee for other nationalities will differ; it is advised to contact your nearest Indian High Commission or Consular office for further details. Avoid mentioning travel to Sikkim on your visa application, as it may sometimes delay the visa process or cause rejection of visa.

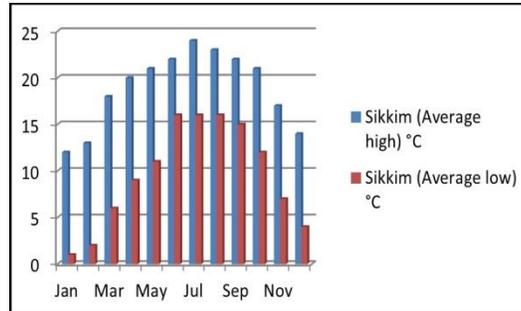
## Climate

Escaping from the sticky heat of the plains to the cool hills is particularly welcome in March and April when temperatures in Delhi and Calcutta often exceed 35°C. Temperatures at Gangtok and the foothills are pleasantly tempered by altitude to around 22-24°C and hotter in the sunshine. Cloud tends to build up early in the day and rain, occasionally heavy, often falls in the afternoon. Mornings and evenings are often fine and clear. Above 3500m, nights are cold with frost and perhaps snow. October and November are noted for clearer visibility and more settled weather but will be colder than the pre-monsoon period. There are usually a few leeches around on the spring trip but only in the lower valleys.

### Delhi's temperatures



### Sikkim's temperatures



SW11/14