



Sikkim - In the shadow of Kanchenjunga

TOUR INFORMATION

Activity: Trekking & Walking

Tour Duration: 15 Days

Min Age For Trips: 16+



STEADY PLUS

INCLUSIONS

- 6 Nights Hotel, 8 Nights Camping
- All Meals during treks
- Fully Supported Trekking
- Flight Delhi To Bagdogra Return

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.

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 massif 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.

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 15 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

Arrive in Delhi. Rest of the day free to recover from jet lag. There are optional sightseeing programs to explore the old quarter of the city.

Day 2: Flight Delhi - Bagdogra, drive to Gangtok (1650 m), the capital of Sikkim

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 (110 km). Our hotel, with its ornate monastic frontage, is a reminder that we are now in a historic Buddhist kingdom very close to Tibet. Overnight stay in a hotel.

Day 3: View from the hotel windows of Kanchenjunga

Wake up to a dramatic early morning view from the hotel windows of Kanchenjunga and the skyline of the eastern Himalayas. Gangtok will be cooler than Delhi and there is plenty of interest in the town, with its markets, monasteries, gardens & Cottage Institute. Overnight stay in a hotel.



Day 4: To Yuksom (1770 m)

An early departure by Jeeps for the trekking area in West Sikkim en-route to Rumtek Monastery, 5-6 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.

Overnight stay in a tent.

Journey: 120 km, 5-6 hours

Day 5: To Sajan (2250 m)

We begin our trek with a gradual climb to Sajan, we'll go at an easy pace into the forests for our

Overnight in a camp.

Walking time: 3-4 hours, 8 km ↑850 m ↓400 m

Day 6: To Tsokha (2950 m)

We continue to Tsokha passing through Rhododendron forests and other beautiful meadows and flowers.

Walking time 3-4 hours, 5 km, ↑850 m ↓100 m

**Day 7: To Pethang (3750 m)**

A steady morning ascent in the direction of Dzongri La (4400m) where we join the track founded by the Everest pioneer Tenzing Norgay.

Walking time 3-4 hours, 3 km, ↑800 m elevation gain

Day 8: To Dzongri (3950 m)

A rest day at Dzongri usually begins with the chance 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).

Walking time 3 hours, 3 km, ↑300 m ↓100 m

Day 9: via Thangshing (3950 m) to Lamuney (4200 m)

The trail from Dzongri climbs steadily to another ridge 4250m passing herds of yak between scrub juniper and dendrons, which are mixed and burnt as incense by the local Buddhist. The trail then drops down through seas of rhododendrons until we reach the bridge over the Prek Chu River. It's an hour climb from the bridge to Thangshing located on the slopes of Mt Pandim (6600m). The trail from Thangshing climbs gently north and follows a stream and alpine meadows. About an hour above Thangshing we reach Onglathang from where there is the superb view of the South face of Kanchenjunga.

Walking time 6 hours, 10 km, ↑950 m ↓700 m

**Day 10: To Goecha La (4950 m) and back to Thangshing (3950 m)**

In the early hours of the morning we aim towards Goeche La (The Locked Gate) at almost 4740m, we will ensure to be there well before sunrise. In the clear cold morning air, we will be rewarded with awe-inspiring views of the Himalayan landscape. The trail then follows the glacial moraine North-East and then drops to a dry lake at Zemathang. The pass is formed due to the depression between Pandim and the Kabru. The sight of 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. With a huge sense of achievement and satisfaction we return to camp Thangshing.

Walking time 8-9 hours, 18 km, ↑1100 m ↓1350 m

To Tsokha (2950 m)

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. Tsokha remains barely altered despite the trekker incursion and retains an aura of tranquility.

Walking time 7 hours, 12 km, ↑300 m ↓1300 m

Day 12: To Yuksom (1770 m)

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. In the evening we can celebrate our achievements.

Walking time 5-6 hours, 13 km, ↑500 m ↓1700 m

**Day 13: To Darjeeling**

Drive to Darjeeling (2200 m). Visit to the "Himalayan Mountaineering Institute" and if time allows we can have a ride on the narrow-gauge railway known as the "Toy train".

Journey time: approx. 6 hours

Day 14: In 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 a memorable experience.

Day 15: Depart Delhi

Drive to Bagdogra, return flight to Delhi. Transfer to the airport around midnight.

Accommodation

In the main towns we stay in comfortable hotels with en-suite rooms. 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 Yuksom 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.

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.

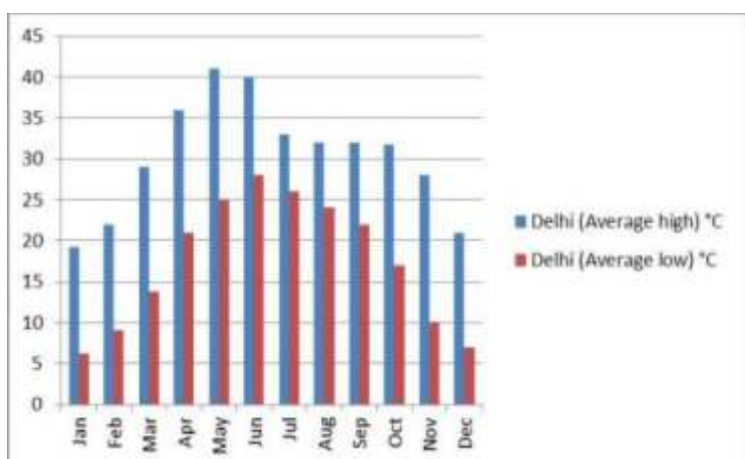
Transport

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

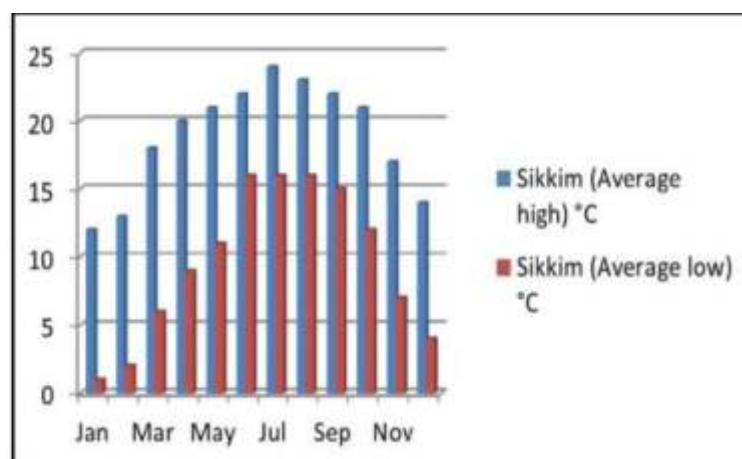
Climate

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



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. A simplified facility of applying for an eVisa is now available to British passport holders, this will entitle the applicants to a 60 day tourist visa, for more details please log on to the official website of Indian Government <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/>. Alternatively 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

