

The North-East



ASSAM

Cloaked in natural vegetation, the North-East, or the six sisters and their one brother – Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim – present nature at its pristine best. Alluring landscapes, exotic flora and fauna, richly endowed national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, and a heavy dose of ethnic tribal culture and lifestyle, make destination Assam most tempting. The possibilities of adventure sports are unending, with mighty rivers, placid lakes and hilly terrain providing the perfect venues. And the best news is, entry restrictions are being eased!

GUWAHATI

Guwahati is the gateway to the north-east, India's most isolated and most beautiful region. Ringed by lush green hills, on the banks of the mighty Brahmaputra, Guwahati's people are friendly and warm, unmindful of the Indian army present everywhere. The region beyond Guwahati, is simply

fascinating: an exotic ecosystem, unique tribes and cultures, fantastic wildlife, all scattered in verdant green. Also the commercial capital of the region, Guwahati is a service centre for India's oil industry and its tea plantations; the world's largest tea auctions take place here. Silk and handloom textiles, cane furniture and rich farm produce, are the other hallmarks that underline Guwahati.

City Lights

The Kamakhya Temple (2540615) perched atop the Nilachal Hill, forms a major centre for Tantric Hinduism and the cult of Shakti. It is also one of the *shaktipiths*, consecrating Goddess



Kamakhya Temple

Sati. **The Navagraha Temple**, is located on Chitrachal Hill and the nine *lingas* inside represent the *navagrahas*, or the nine planets. These are worshipped to ward off evil. Once the haunt of a venerable sage, **Basistha Ashram** is now a popular picnic spot. **The Assam State Museum** (540651), situated near Dighali Pukhuri in the heart of the city, is a must-see for anybody interested in Assamese culture. **The Assam State Zoo and Botanical Gardens**, 5 km

east of the railway station, is also worth a visit.

City Culture

Bohag Bihu (mid-April) is the most widely celebrated festival in the state, marking the beginning of the Assamese New Year. It is also the time when local delicacies like *pithas*, *narus* and other mouth-watering sweets are ritually prepared. **Durga Puja** (October) is also celebrated with much gaiety and fanfare. **Ambubachi** (June-July) is unique to the region, as it celebrates the annual menstrual cycle of the Mother Goddess or Shakti at the Kamakhya Temple. A religious fair is held on the occasion. For viewing cultural shows, you can head for Kala Kshetra (2337382) or the Pushpanjalu Cultural Academy at Ulubari.



Bohag Bihu

Must Do

River cruises on the Brahmaputra. You can go for an hour long cruise every evening, or day long ones on Sundays. The day-long cruise takes one to Mayong and Pabitora sanctuary, weaving in the magic of rural insights with the wildlife magic of a sanctuary with the highest-density of the one-horned rhino. Call 2654442.

Gourmet's Delights

Assamese cuisine is chiefly made up of fish, rice and heavy mustard seasoning. Common fish varieties are *rahu*, *elish*, *puthi* and *chital*. Chinese food is also well represented in Guwahati, and some of the restaurants along Rajgarh road, near the Gandhi Memorial, are owned by Chinese immigrants. For local delicacies as well as the standard Mughlai-Chinese fare, try out **Paradise Restaurant** at Moniram Dewan road; **Ming Room**, under the flyover of GN Bordoloi road; **Woodlands**, on GS road for South Indian food and **Utsav**, **Hotel Nandan**, for North Indian cuisine.

Shopper's Paradise

The flea markets at **Paltan Bazaar**, **Fancy Bazaar** and **Pan Bazaar** are good for browsing, but to buy Assam's world-famous silks *muga*, *endi* and *pat*, and exotic local crafts visit the government showrooms on GN Bordoloi road. Other shops that you could visit are **Kalpataru** at Pan Bazaar; **Shankardeo Silk House**, at Fancy Bazaar and **Purbashree**, on GN Bordoloi road is the North Eastern Handicraft and Handloom Development Corporation-run shop that stocks silks, *laichampi* (quilts), Naga and Kuki shawls, cane and bamboo crafts. **Pragjyotika**, again on GN Bordoloi road, is the Assam State Emporium, and an ideal place to pick up local bamboo handicrafts.

Tea Trail

If 'the cup that cheers' is your cup of tea, then go for the famous Assam tea. The oldest and best tea shops are in **Paltan Bazaar** and **Pan Bazaar**.

Must Experience

The tea plantation lifestyle, is exclusive and innovative, in terms of luxuries, clubs, and entertainment. Some of these spatial bungalows have been converted into boutique hotels, where you can stay, to experience the lifestyle as well as explore the rustic countryside. Try **Sansua Burra Bungalow** (2385075) or **Thengal Manor** (2399519).

Excursions

Jorhat: The tea capital of Assam, the city is 315 km away, and lies amidst rolling hills. Rich tribal culture is a major draw here.

Bogolmari: A tourist village is coming up here that will project the tribal culture of Assam. Traditional folk dances, music and handicrafts of different types are represented here by villagers. Location is some 110 km west of Guwahati.

Pobitora: Wild Asiatic buffaloes, leopard, bear and many varieties of birds roam the 16 sq km sanctuary that is more famous for the highest population of the one-horned rhino. Located 60 km from Guwahati.

Sualkuchi: Located 32 km away, Sualkuchi is the silk capital of Assam.

Facts at a Glance

Access: By Air: Indian Airlines, Jet Airways, Air Sahara and helicopter services connect Guwahati with major metros. The Gopinath Bordoloi airport is 23 km away from the city centre.

By Rail: Guwahati being the headquarters of the Northeast Frontier Railway, most trains, both on metre and broad-gauge, pass through the city, connecting it with the rest of the country. While the Rajdhani runs to

and from Delhi, Kamrup connects Guwahati with Kolkata and Dadar Express with Mumbai. Apart from Kolkata, New Jalpaiguri in northern Bengal is the most convenient railhead for Guwahati. **By Road:** Guwahati is a main point for road connectivity inside the region. The Kacheri bus stand is right behind the railway station; Assam State Transport (544709) and Meghalaya State Transport (223129) buses leave from here. Reservation booths open daily from 6 am to 6.30 pm. There are buses to and from Agartala, Dimapur, Tezpur, Imphal (583 km), Kaziranga (217 km), Silchar (340 km), Itanagar (429 km), Tinsukhia (198 km) and Tura (191 km). Private buses depart from Paltan Bazaar; tickets for these can be booked at Blue Hill Travels or Network Travels. **Temperatures:** Hot and humid summers with temperatures ranging from 34°C to 20°C and cool winters varying from 20°C to 8°C. The monsoon months: June to September. **Heavy rainfall:** 182 cm. **Best time to visit:** November to February.

City Code: 0361

Railway Enquiry: 131

Indian Airlines: 2266266

Jet Airways: City Office: 2662202,
Airport Office: 2840130/0600

Air Sahara: 2548676

Tourist Office: Assam Tourism:
2544475

Government of India Tourism:
2547407

Manipur Tourist Office: 2540707

Banks: State Bank of India: 2544264,
The Central Telegraph Office: 2540209

Hospitals/Chemists: Guwahati
Medical College Hospital: 2569161-
2562521

Home Away From Home

Dynasty: 2510496, Brahmaputra Ashok: 2602281, Rajmahal: 2511602, Nandan: 2540855.

MAJULI

Assam's cultural capital – Its *satras* (Vaishnavite monasteries) still have thousands of followers – **Majuli** is like an island in the stream, sequestered from the rest of Assam, in a cocoon that is rapidly unravelling. There were once 65 *satras* here; the historic Manikanchan Sanjog was the first, but now only 22 remain. The main *satras* are at Kamalabari, Natun Kamalabari, Auniati, Bongaori, Dakhinpat and Bangenati. Through these *satras*, traditional art forms started by Sankardeb such as the Borgeet, Matiakhara and Jumora dance, etc., Chali dance, Noyua dance, Nande Vringee, Sutradhar, Ozapali, Apsara dance, Satria Krishna dance and Dasavatar dance have stayed alive. The **Shamaguri** *satra* is known for its fetching masks.

Shopper's Paradise

Handicrafts, cane and bamboo work, pottery can all be found in Majuli. Mirizim and Kingkhap Baluchori are some of the famed products of the island's looms. The *satras* specialise in the manufacture of ornate masks. The pottery of the island is unique: it is made by hand.

Facts at a Glance

Access: **By Ferry** from Nimati Ghat, 12 km north of Jorhat. Jorhat is well connected by **Air**, with flights from Guwahati and Kolkata. There are at least two ferry rides to Majuli every

day, one around 10 am, and the other around 3 pm. **By Road:** Jorhat is a seven-hour journey from Guwahati. You can also hire a taxi at Jorhat, which can be ferried across to the island. **Temperatures:** Summer: Min 30°C, Max 42°C; Winter: Min 20°C, Max 30°C. **Best time to visit:** December.

City Code: 03775

Home Away From Home

Circuit House: 274439, Woodlands and Uttar Kamalabari Satra.

MEGHALAYA

The name translates as the land of clouds, and that's what Misty Meghalaya is. Known as the Scotland of the East, with a championship Golf course. It has numerous Victorian style bungalows and churches. The tribes of Meghalaya are the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo, each with a unique lifestyle. Coupled with hills and valleys, exotic flora and fauna, lakes and being the wettest area, make Meghalaya special and worth seeing. There are no travel restrictions to Meghalaya.

SHILLONG

The state capital is like a hillstation and the climate is pleasant round the



Cherrapunji

year. Most places in Meghalaya are motorable. Visitors can go to **Elephanta Falls**, 12 km away, or to the wettest place on earth **Cherrapunji**, 54 km away. One can take day sightseeing tours of the Meghalaya Tourism Development Corporation, or take the exclusive sightseeing trip by helicopter.

Shopper's Paradise

Shillong is famous for oranges, honey, handicrafts, baskets, cane and bamboo products. At **Sohra Market** or **Bara Bazaar**, you can find handwoven



Sohra Market

shawls, black mushrooms, Khasi outfits and other fruit-based products.

Gourmet's Delights

Khasis are fond of vegetables, pork and rice. Spicy chutneys act as the seasoning for otherwise bland dishes. **Khew Ja** is a good place to try out this unique cuisine.

Facts at a Glance

Access: By Air: The nearest airport is at Guwahati which is 128 km away. There are helicopter services from Guwahati too, taking about half an hour. **By Rail:** Guwahati again provides the nearest railhead, the good part is that Meghalaya Transport Corp. coordinates its bus services with the arrival timings of trains at Guwahati.

By Road: NH40 connects Shillong with Guwahati. Taxis too can be hired, besides, buses run by transport corporations and private operators are also convenient. The bus and taxi stands are located in the heart of the city. **Getting Around:** Unmetered taxis are available, rates negotiable. **Temperatures:** Summer: Min 20°C, Max 28°C; Winter: Min 8°C, Max 20°C.

City Code: 0364

Meghalaya Tourist Office: 2226220

Meghalaya Tourist Development Corporation Information Centre: 2222129

Director of Tourism: 2226054

India Tourism: 2225632

Banks: Almost all banks have ATMs and operate between 10 am and 2 pm Monday to Friday, Saturdays from 10 am to 12 noon.

Home Away From Home

Polo Towers: 2222341, Pinewood: 2223146, Orchid Lake Resort (MTDC): 2570258, Alpine Continental: 2220991.

MANIPUR

Set in an oval valley amongst verdant hills, Manipur, an erstwhile royal state is home to the Meitei tribe, a homogenous mixture of Naga, Kuki and Mizo groups and others, living together in serene harmony through the centuries.

Almost 70 per cent of the land in this beautiful state is forested, sustaining a large number of rare plants and animal life. This is where some of the world's rarest orchids are found and the equally rare snow leopard, slow loris and the dancing deer, which is facing

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near extinction.

Manipur is known for its arts. Weaving, classical Manipuri dance form, based on the story of Radha and Krishna and a number of indigenous sports including polo, wrestling and hockey.

City Lights

Imphal, Manipur's capital is the heart of the official, commercial and cultural hub of the state. The **Shri Govindaji Temple** is located close to the royal palace. A gracious structure with twin domes, besides the presiding deity, also has images of Krishna, Balaram and Jagannath. This is a very



Shri Govindaji Temple

popular venue for the Ras Leela dance performances.

The huge **Khwairamband Bazaar** (also known as the IMA market) has women shopkeepers and over 3000 stalls, selling everything from groceries and household necessities to handloom ware. Manipur believes in honouring its brave. The **Shaheed Minar** at the Bir Tikendrajit Park is a memorial to tribal martyrs who died in 1891. The well-maintained **War Cemeteries** honour British and Indian

soldiers who died in the second World War.

City Culture

Besides the world famous Manipuri Dance style, the state is also known for its games and martial arts, which are an intrinsic part of its cultural ethos. Sagol Kangjei, dating back to 1300 AD, is said to be the mother of modern polo. Manipur's Pana-style polo is played with Manipuri ponies (not more than 4.5' tall) and involves 7 players. The Manipuri style of hockey, Khong Kangjei is played with 7 players on each side. Yubi-Lakpi is like rugby and played with an oil-smearred coconut and has its roots in Hindu mythology. Then there is the indoor game of Kang played by men and women in two teams of 7 each. Ritualistic martial arts, the Thang-ta and Sarit-Sarak, which need a great deal of dexterity are performed with spears, swords and shields.

Trekking and adventure sports are also gaining in importance and there are nodal agencies to promote what was earlier a national pastime.

Shopper's Paradise

Manipur's main attractions are the traditional Manipuri handwoven textiles. Popular shopping outlets are **Handloom House, Paona Bazaar, Manipur Handlooms & Handicrafts, Manipur Development Society** and **Uripok**.

Excursions

The Central Khonghampat Orchidarium, just 7 km from Imphal, has at least 500 different varieties of orchids. Spread over 200 acres – you can find some of the rarest orchids in

the world. Most of them bloom in the months of March and April. **The Manipur Zoological Gardens** located 6 km away from Imphal, is where you can see the graceful Sangei, or brow antlered deer. **Langthabal**, 8 km down from Imphal is dotted with relics of an old historic palace, temples and ceremonial buildings. **Kangchup**, 16 km from Imphal is a health resort perched at a height of 921 m. Waithou, located close to a lake by the same name is famous for pineapples. **Kaina Hills**, 29 km from Imphal is where at a legendary temple, the Ras Leela is performed on special days. **Moirang**, the focal point of Meitei culture lies 45 km from Imphal. The town has an ancient temple of pre-Hindu deity, Lord Thangjing and every May, men and women perform the ritual Lai Haraoba dance in honour of the deity. **Loktak Lake and Sendra Island** one of the largest freshwater lakes in the North-East with floating weed shallow



Loktak Lake

bowl like islands. From the Sendra Island Tourist Home and Café one can view the rich avian life of the region. **Keibul Lamjao National Park** is the world's only floating National Park and the unique habitat of the rare Sangai, brow-antlered dancing deer. **Bishnupur**, 27 km from Imphal is known for its stoneware and 15th century brick temple. **Ukhrul**, 83 km from Imphal is Manipur's highest hill station, famous for Siroi Lilies, which

grow here in abundance. Close by are the limestone caves of Kanghui.

Facts at a Glance

Access: **By Air:** Indian Airlines, Alliance Air and Jet Airways connect Imphal airport with Delhi, Kolkata, Guwahati, Aizawl, Jorhat and Silchar. Tourist taxis cost about Rs.150 while autorickshaws are much cheaper, both easily available for airport to city transfers. **By Rail:** Nearest railhead is Dimapur on Manipur road. And Jiribam, a small town on the Manipur Assam border. **By Road:** Imphal is connected by road to all the important cities in the North East. Regular bus services to Imphal are available from Dimapur. The journey takes about 8 hours. Other distances from Imphal: Kohima 145 km, Agartala 535 km, Guwahati *via* Dimapur 495 km, Aizawl 345 km, Kaziranga 346 km, Shillong *via* Guwahati 595 km, Itanagar 413 km. **Temperatures:** Summer: Min 28°C, Max 41°C; Winter: Min 23°C; Max 16°C. **Best time to visit:** March and April.

City Code: 0385

Tourist Information Centre: 2224603, 2220802

Indian Airlines: 2208868

Jet Airways: City: 2441546, Airport: 2455054, 2455121

Banks: These operate, Monday to Friday 10 am to 2 pm and 10 am to 12 noon on Saturdays. ATMs at most banks.

Hospitals: There are good hospitals and chemists; but take along prescription drugs.

Home Away From Home

Hotel Imphal: 2220459, Hotel Prince: 2220587, Hotel Excellency: 2230906,

Hotel Anand Continental: 2223422,
Hotel Pintu: 2222743.

MIZORAM

Aflush with a variety of orchids, a mild climate and a rich tradition of tribals, pretty Mizoram is the tiny state at the southern extreme of the North-East. The folk culture is unique, resplendent with colourful festivals and handicrafts.

AIZAWL

Standing on top of a 4,000 feet high ridge, offset by the verdant valleys of the rivers Tuirial on the east and Tlawng on the west, Aizawl is an



Aizawl

important cultural, commercial and recreational centre.

City Culture

To see the tribal heritage of Mizoram, be there when one of the **Kut** festivals is being celebrated with folk and community dances and music. Kut is celebrated in March, August and December.

Shopping

Handloom shawls, bags and bamboo handicrafts can be picked up from state government emporia. **Bara Bazaar** is the main market here.

Travel Advice

* **Entry Formalities:** Foreigners need the Restricted Area Permit and Indians need Inner Line Permit to travel to Mizoram. These permits are issued for four or more persons by Liaison offices based in New Delhi (23010595), Kolkata (2247734), Guwahati (2224087).

Excursions

Dampa sanctuary, 135 km away, is home to tiger, bison, elephants and bears. It is on the junction of Mizoram, Tripura and Bangladesh.

Champhai: Located on the border with Myanmar, the scenic beauty of this town, 192 km from Aizawl, is impressive.

Facts at a Glance

Access: By Air: Indian Airlines links it with Kolkata and Imphal. **By Rail:** Silchar, in Assam, is the nearest railhead and is 180 km away.

By Road: National Highway 54 connects Aizawl to the rest of the country through Silchar. Buses, including night service, and taxis are available. **Distances:** Guwahati 506 km, Imphal 374 km, Kohima 497 km, Shillong 450 km and Agartala 443 km.

City Code: 0389

Indian Airlines: 2341260, Airport: 2344733

Mizoram Tourism: 2312475

Banks: Banking hours 10 am to 2 pm Monday to Friday. 10 am to 12 noon on Saturdays.

Hospitals: There are good hospitals in Aizawl, but prescribed drugs should be carried.

TRIPURA

There is a common belief that the

name of this princely state originated from "*Tripura Sundari*" – the presiding deity of the land. Tripura is a rare combination of natural beauty and man-made wonders, a unique blend of the old order and new, and a fusion of cultures and architectural styles. Many tribes and communities who have made their home in Tripura have lent an incredible mix of culture and customs to this small state. Much of the state is forested and hilly, with natural wonders ranging from lakes to wildlife sanctuaries.

City Lights

Agartala: The State capital **Agartala** is set amidst vast expanses of tranquil beauty, making it an ideal base for exploring the palaces, temples, lakes and wildlife sanctuaries.

The magnificent **Ujjayanta Palace** is now floodlit at night. Set in sprawling Mughal style gardens, it was built by



Ujjayanta Palace

Maharaja Radha Kishore Manikya Bahadur in 1901. One km away is the "**Kunjaban Palace**", built in 1917 by Birendra Krishna Manikya, is now the Governor's residence. The Maharaja had personally designed the palace where Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, was an occasional guest. Also worth seeing are the ethnological

displays in the **State Museum** on HGB road.

City Culture

The main festivals of Tripura are the Durga Puja (or Dussehra), Karchi Puja, Diwali, Dol Jatra (Holi), Pous Sankranti, Ashokashtmi and Buddha Jayanti, Id, Christmas and New Year. The Garia, Ker Ganga and Gajan festivals are important tribal festivities. During Ashokashtmi there are special celebrations at Unnakoti Temple. The Fourteen Goddess Temple in Old Agartala attracts a lot of visitors for its Karchi Puja, and so does Tirthamukh on the occasion of the Pous Sankranti Mela. Other festivals are the Rabindra/Nazrul Festival in May, the Boat Race at Melaghar in August, and the Orange and Tourism festivals on the Jampui Hill range in November.

Eating Out

There is little choice as far as eating out is concerned. Hotels have restaurants attached to them and primarily serve Indian food. There are no bars or pubs, drinking is restricted to one's home or exclusive clubs.

Shopper's Paradise

Tripura is renowned for its excellent handwoven cotton fabrics. Shop at **Tantumita** for traditional tribal fabrics. Other worthwhile products are cane and bamboo furniture available at **Purbasha** in Agartala. Also check out the private shops on Akhaura road for woodcarvings and decorative handicrafts such as lampshades, toys and tribal jewellery.

Monuments / Excursions

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The **Tripura Sundari** temple is 57km from Agartala in the ancient capital of the state, Udaipur. The temple was built on Dhanisagar hill in mid-16th century. It is dedicated to the Mother Goddess and served by red robed priests. The pond behind the temple has huge turtles that love to be fed.

27 km from Agartala lies **Kamalasagar Lake**, where Maharaja Kalyan Manikya initiated excavations. There is a popular 16th century Kali Temple here.

33 km from Agartala is **Sipahijala**, a botanical garden with a beautifully kept small zoo. The lake here attracts migratory birds and the enclosures have animals like tigers, cheetahs, lions, bears, monkeys and rhinos. Elephant rides and boating in the lake are added attractions.

53 km to the south of Agartala is



Neermahal

Udaipur, eastern India's only water-palace, **Neermahal**. Built in 1930 in the middle of Rudrasagar Lake, the palace took 9 years to build. It is a blend of Hindu and Muslim architecture, stretching 400 metres across with towers, open pavilions, summerhouses and little bridges, making it a great place to explore. Presently being restored, it is particularly beautiful when floodlit at

night. Take a boat across the lake to reach the palace.

Access: By Air: Agartala is well connected with Kolkata and Guwahati. Flight from Guwahati or Kolkata takes less than 45 minutes to reach Agartala. The state has three more small airports at Khowai, Kamalpur and Kailashahar, where small chartered planes can land after prior information. **By Rail:** Tripura is connected by rail via Guwahati and the nearest rail head is at Kumarghat which is 140 km. away from Agartala.

By Road: Agartala is connected to Guwahati (24 hrs) via Shillong, by National Highway No.44. Travelling is possible by private vehicles, luxury coaches and public buses.

Temperatures: Summer: Min 24°C, Max 35°C; Winter: Min 13°C, Max 27°C. **Monsoons:** June to August.

Average Annual Rainfall: 2100mm.

Best time to visit: September to March.

City Code: 0381

Indian Airlines: 2342393

Railway Enquiries: 2221609

Tourist Information Office (city): 2425703-3836

Tourist Information Office (airport): 2342393

Banks: Most banks have ATMs but are unlikely to change currency other than dollars and pound sterling. Banking hours: 10 am to 2 pm Monday to Friday and 10 am to 12 noon on Saturdays.

Hospitals/Chemists: Agartala has good hospitals, private nursing homes, chemists and diagnostic centres. Though chemist shops are well

stocked, it is always a good idea to take along prescription drugs.

Home Away From Home

Hotel Star: 2383611, Rajarshi Yatri Niwas: 2201034, Hotel Radha International: 2382615, Welcome Palace: 2383380, Royal Guest House: 2225539. Hotels in Tripura offer basic amenities and few have air-conditioned rooms. Always insist on a mosquito net, as protection against malaria.

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Right at the top of north-eastern India, crowning its five clustered sisters like a protective helmet, is Arunachal Pradesh, the 'Land of the Dawn-lit-Mountains.' This is the first Indian soil to greet the morning sun. Dawn first illuminates Arunachal's border with China: a long border which stretches all the way from its east, over to its northern boundaries and down to its north-western edge where it merges with Tibet. To its west is Bhutan and on its southern end it touches Assam, Nagaland and Burma before sweeping up to China. Arunachal is home to 26 major indigenous tribes and the state is a treasure trove of ethnic diversity and ancient traditions, moulded by its geographic setting.

City Lights

Itanagar, the capital city of Arunachal Pradesh, is famous for the excavated ruins of the historical **Ita Fort** and the **Ganga Sekhi Lake**. The Ita fort was made of bricks and parts of it still stand to this day. The **Ganga Sekhi Lake**, 6km from Itanagar, is a picturesque picnic spot at the base of a red clay hill

accessible by a curious bamboo bridge spanning a small culvert. **Tezpur** lies on the banks of the Brahmaputra and is linked to Guwahati Airport. Nearby **Tipi** is famed for its orchidarium, with its 7500 varieties of native orchids. **Bhalukpong**, 58 km north east of Tezpur is famous for its hot springs. **Ziro** is 200 km from Itanagar, on the Apatani Plateau and surrounded by pine trees. The Apatanis are one of the most advanced and intriguing tribes of the region and a visit to an Apatani tribal home is a must. Pasighat is Arunachal's oldest town watered by the turbulent Siang river. The region is the home of the Adi tribe, while the region is being developed for adventure sports.

City Culture

Festivals are an essential part of the socio-cultural life of the people. Some of the important festivals are **Mopin** and **Solung** of the Adis, **Lossor** of the Monpas, **Sherdukpens** and **Boori-Boot** of the Hill Miris, **Dree** of the Apatanis, **Si-donyi** of the Tagins, **Nyokum** of the Nishis, **Reh** of the Idu Mishimis and many more. Animal sacrifice to appease the Gods is a common ritual in most festivals. The tribals express their happiness in many dance festivals. Prominent among them are **Dhol Cholom**, which is performed to welcome the advent of spring. The steps of the dancers imitate the movements of animals and birds. The costumes of the dancers are elaborately worked on and they use elaborate masks during the performance. Teams of young girls in perfect rhythmic unison perform the 'Ponung' dance of the Adis. The **Nishis** and **Tagins** of Upper and Lower

Subansiri perform similar group dances in colourful costumes.

Must Buy

Bamboo cane work, 'thankas' (Buddhist religious paintings on cloth with vegetable dyes and/or gold), woodcarvings, masks, carpets, woven shawls and sarongs can be bought at the handicrafts centres at all tourist destinations.

The Handicrafts Centres at Bomdila and Tawang offer a good range of shawls, carpets, carved caskets and the beautiful cane and bamboo work in which the north-east excels.

Excursions

Polo Park: An interesting little botanical garden atop a ridge overlooking the town. Visitors should notice the cane thicket that looks a bit like a palm, with spines on its stems, but growing as a bush. There is also a small zoo.

Pachin River: This rivulet providing a fine fishing spot passes by Naharlagun.

Zoo: 18 kms from Naharlagun and near Banderdewa police check post. Providing glimpses of uncommon Himalayan fauna.

The Buddhist Temple: Tawang has a 400-year-old Buddhist monastery, with an 8ft statue of the Buddha and



Tawang Buddhist Monastery

ancient Buddhist scriptures inscribed in gold.

Ganga Sekhi Lake: The 6 km drive to the lake from Itanagar, takes visitors on a rugged road through some superbly primeval jungles: bamboo, orchids massed on tall trees, tree-ferns are some of the vegetation which can be identified by the interested traveller. Stopping at the base of a hill, one has to cross a bamboo bridge floored with a bamboo mat spanning a culvert. This leads to a flight of steps cut into the red clay of the hill. At the top of the ridge one looks down at a beautiful picnic spot – a serene green forest lake, which one can cross in a row boat. If mountains beckon you, it is **Bomdila** and **Tawang** you must head for. At an altitude of 8500 ft, the Himalayan landscape of **Bomdila** is snowclad for most of the year. The apple orchards and the Buddhist "Gompas" are an added attraction. It is possible to charter a plane from Lilabari to Bomdila as there is a small airstrip there. Or one could use the road route. Be sure to carry woolens. From Bomdila, take the mountainous road up to **Tawang** at 12000 ft. On the way, you will drive past **Sela Pass**, the second highest pass in the world.

Facts at a Glance

Access: By Air: The nearest airport is Lilabari (North Lakhimpur) in Assam, 57 kms from Naharlagun and 67 kms from Itanagar, served by Alliance Air. Indian Airlines operates direct flights from Kolkata to Tezpur (216 kms from Itanagar). **By Rail:** The nearest railway station is Harmuty (near Banderdewa check gate) only 23 km from Naharlagun & 33 km from Itanagar. However, the nearest convenient

railhead is North Lakhimpur in Assam, 50 km from Naharlagun & 60 km from Itanagar. **By Road:** Distance between Itanagar and Naharlagun is only 10 km. Itanagar is connected by road to: Guwahati 381 km, Shillong 481 km, Agartala 980 km, Aizawl 901 km, Kohima 350 km, Jorhat 69, Dimapur 134, Imphal 495 km and Itanagar is 1,539 kms from Kolkata. **Climate:** Cooler than the rest of the North-eastern states on account of its altitude, evenings and mornings are cold. **Temperatures:** In Summer: Max 35°C while in Winter: Min 14°C. **Average Rainfall** between April and September, around 80 inches. **Best time to visit:** October to April.

City Code: 0360

Tourist Officer: 2214450, Sector-C, Naharlagun, Tel.: 371

Director of Tourism: 2214745

Banks: In Arunachal Pradesh, banking options will be far less than in the other states of India. Government banks that do not offer ATM facilities and are unlikely to change currency other than dollars and pound sterling. Banking hours usually are 10 am to 2 pm Monday to Friday and 10 am to 12 noon on Saturdays.

Hospitals/Chemists: Itanagar has adequate medical facilities, clinics, hospitals, chemists, trained medical professionals but for intensive care, treatment and diagnosis, evacuation to Assam or Kolkata becomes necessary.

Home Away From Home

A luxury hotel and plenty of medium range and budget accommodation is available at the capital city, Itanagar. The other towns in the state offer basic accommodation. All tourist spots have

semi-luxury and budget accommodation. The hotels and circuit houses have restaurants and Indian cuisine is yours for the asking. Chinese food is available on request.

Hotel Donyi Polo Ashok: 2212626,

Hotel Bomdila: 2212664, 2214802.

SIKKIM

Tufts of clouds floating over verdant greens, the guardian deity of Kanchendzonga, sacred lakes, the mighty Teesta, monasteries, adrenalin-pumping sports, the colour-laden lifestyles of the tribes of Lepchas and Bhutias — Sikkim is a small paradise indeed. Apart from being the capital of Gangtok, other areas that have recently opened to visitors are the Tsomgo Lake and the Nathu La Pass.



Sikkim

Foreigners require an Inner Line Permit to enter Sikkim.

GANGTOK

Perched atop a 1,600 m-high ridge and snuggling against the Kanchendzonga, Gangtok reflects a strong Buddhist culture in its pagoda roofed-houses that dot the mountains. Red-robed lamas are a common sight, and a major attraction is the fabulous Tsuk-La-Khang, the Royal Palace. The Institute of Tibetology, which houses ancient

Buddhist texts and scripts, too is worth a visit.

City Lights

The two hundred year old **Enchey Monastery**, is an important seat of the Nyingma Order. Every January 'Chaam' or the masked dance is performed for two days. The **Do-Drul Chorten** or Stupa was built by Trulshi Rimpoche, head of the Nyingma Order in 1945. Inside are the complete mandala sets of Dorjee Phurba, relics and other religious exhibits. There are 108 **Prayer Wheels** around the *stupa*,



Prayer Wheels at Monastery

and two statues of Guru Rimpoche. **Saramsa Garden** is home to Sikkim's many exotic orchids while **Fambong La Wildlife Sanctuary** (25 km away) is home to rare flora and fauna. Another orchid sanctuary, **Deorali**, displays 200 species from March onwards. Watch the sun rise over the Kanchenzonga from **Tashi View Point** or **Hanuman Tok**.

City Culture

Sikkim is a land of festivals. **Saga Dawa** around May or June, **Drupka Tseshi** in August, **Losoong** (the Sikkimese New Year) in December, the **Losar Tibetan New Year** in February and **Maghe Sankranti** in January are some of the prominent festivals. The tourism department also

celebrates the **Teesta Tea & Tourism Festival** in winter. For adventure lovers, **trekking, water sports, mountain biking, hang-gliding** and **special interest tours** for studying orchids and wildlife are some of the options available. They can hire equipment from Sikkim Tourism or tour operators and choose from well mapped trekking circuits, like the Monastic Trek, the **Rhododendron Trek**, the **Kanchenjunga Trek** and the **Coronation Trek**.

Must Visit

Tsomgo Lake-Nathu La: 40 km away, one requires permit to come here. The lake remains frozen till mid-



Tsomgo Lake

May. En route falls the **Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary**.

Must Do

The mountain flights, on five-seater helicopters run by Sikkim Helicopter Service (SHS). There are the **West Sikkim flights** covering the Rumtek Monastery, tea estates, hills, waterfalls and parts of Kanchenjunga; **Yumthang Flights** along the Teesta river, and covering other monasteries and the Yamthang valley, **Kanchenjunga Flights** and **Gangtok Flights**.

Gourmet's Delights

You can get a variety of food in Gangtok, but specialities like the Tibetan *Thupka* and *Momos* are very popular here. Sikkim has its own typical cuisine too. The main thoroughfare, MG road is thick with restaurants, like **The Blue Sheep, Metro Fast Food, Wild Orchid Restaurant, House of Bamboo** and **Khoochi**. A beverage to be sampled is the local 'Tchang', a beer made of millet and served in a bamboo mug.

Shopper's Paradise

Traditional handicrafts include handwoven carpets, thangkas, jewellery, Sikkimese dresses, leatherware, purses, wood carvings and Sikkimese spirits and liquors. Visit **Old Bazaar**, which is closed on Tuesdays and **Lall Bazaar**, which is most lively on Sundays and closed on Thursdays. Recommended shops are **Handicrafts Centre, Government Institute of Cottage Industries** for local handicrafts, toys, blankets, wooden furniture and handmade paper. **Charitruist Tibetan Handicraft Emporium** is a Tibetan Government in Exile initiative, where a good selection of thangkas, brass statues and other artefacts can be found.

Travel Advice

* Foreigners need Inner Line Permit to enter Sikkim.

Facts at a Glance

Access: By Air: The closest airport is Bagdogra, in West Bengal, offering regular flights to Delhi and Kolkata. From Bagdogra you can take a bus, taxi or share a jeep to Gangtok. **By Rail:** No railhead at Gangtok but part

of the journey can be undertaken by rail. Connections available from Kolkata, Lucknow, Delhi and other cities. The two closest railheads are Siliguri (114 km) and New Jalpaiguri (125 km). **By Road:** From Kalimpong it is a 3 hour drive, from Siliguri 5 hours, Darjeeling 7 hours, and Bagdogra 4½ hours. The main operator here is Sikkim Nationalised Transport (SNT) services which runs from and to Gangtok. These buses terminate at the Paljor stadium road stand while private buses stop short of the Main Bazaar. Private taxi can be hired for Gangtok. **Temperatures:** Summer: Min 13.1°C, Max 20.7°C; Winter: Min 7.7°C, Max 14.9°C. **Rainfall:** Between June and September. **Best time to visit:** March to May and from October to November.

City Code: 03592

Indian Airlines: 223099

Sikkim Tourism: (Apply here for permits too): 222064, 223425.

At Siliguri: 2432646.

Foreigners Regional Registration

Office: Situated at Tibet road. Open from Mondays to Fridays from 9 am to 1 pm.

Hospitals/Chemist: STNM Hospital: 222059, Chiranjilal Lalchand, MG road, opposite the Green Hotel.

Home Away From Home

Netuk House: 222374, Nor-Khill: 220064, Tashi Delek: 222991, Tibet: 222523, Central: 222105.

RUMTEK

In Rumtek, 26 km from Gangtok, is the **Rumtek Dharma Chakra Centre**, seat of the **Gyalwa Karmapa**, the head of the Kagyu Order of Tibetan Buddhism, founded in the 11th

The North-East



Rumtek Dharma Chakra Centre

century. Rumtek co-hosts along with Gangtok the Teesta-Tea-Tourism Festival in late December. Behind the main monastery is the lavishly decorated **Karma Shri Nalanda Institute** of Buddhist studies. In the building opposite the entrance to the institute is a small hall featuring the jewel-studded **Chorten**, which contains the ashes and bones of the **16th Gyalwa Karmapa**.

Access: Jeeps or taxis are convenient. You can also go for shared jeeps. SNT buses also serve Rumtek.

Sungay Guest House, Sungay Hotel, Hotel Kunga Delek, Martam Village Resort (222314), Shambhala Mountain Resort (252240).

The north-western road stops here, and is the trailhead for anyone trekking to Dzungri or Goecha La. Legend has it that the three lamas of the Nyingma Order arrived here first, to establish Buddhism in Sikkim. The coronation of the first chogyal of Sikkim also took place at Yuksom. Visit **Dubdi Gompa**, the first capital of Sikkim and its oldest Gompa. For trekkers and hikers, **Khangchendzonga Conservation**

Committee, next to Hotel Wild Orchid, is an essential stop.

Hotel Wild Orchid, Hotel Dzungri La, Hotel Demazong, Hotel Tashi Gang provide decent accommodation.

140 km north of Gangtok at 3,564 m, this pristine valley has now opened to foreigners too. One can go as far as Singhik with an endorsement of the basic permit, but to travel between Singhik and Yumthang village you technically need to join an organised tour. There is budget accommodation in Singhik, Chungthang and Lachung. An SNT bus usually leaves Gangtok for Singhik (Rs. 75, four hours). Otherwise, take a shared jeep to



Yumthang Valley

Mangan and another to Singhik or beyond.

A land of folklore passed down through generations by word of mouth. Here, music is an integral part of life; folk songs eulogizing ancestors, brave deeds of warriors and traditional heroes; poetic love songs immortalizing ancient tragic love stories; Gospel songs that touch your soul and modern tunes rendered exquisitely, to set your feet a-tapping. The state is home to 16 major and

numerous sub-tribes, primary among these being the Angamis, the Sema, Konyak, Aos and the Rengmas, each with their own distinct culture and lifestyle.

Kohima, the state capital is located at a height of 1495 m. Tranquil and unspoilt, the **Commonwealth War Cemetery** in **Kohima** is an immaculate garden that is a reminder of the Japanese invasion during World



Commonwealth War Cemetery

War II. It is estimated that about 10,000 Allied soldiers lost their lives in the Battle of Kohima that lasted for three months. The **Bara Basti** is balanced on a high hill over looking Kohima. The village maintains its traditional Naga look and feel. The **State Museum** is a small but fascinating ethnological collection of the Naga tribes. **Dimapur** is the only other city in Nagaland besides Kohima. It is the hub of commercial and industrial activity. It means the 'City of River people'. Situated in a valley, there are interesting menhirs (stone megaliths) that have been erected by the tribes to honour fame and generosity. Dimapur has mid range and budget accommodation.

Sekrenyie is a 10-day festival held at the end of February. The Angami Nagas celebrate this festival to invoke the gods to bring them good fortune and it involves feasting and dancing. **Tuluni** is celebrated by the Sema Nagas from the 8th of July. It is a harvest festival and carries on for 5 days with feasts, dances and prayers. **Tsungrem Mong** is also a harvest festival. It is celebrated by the Ao Nagas in August. A demonstration of skill in sports and physical prowess is included in the festivities. **Tokhu Emong** held on the 7th November is the Lotha Naga harvest festival that is celebrated with singing and dancing.

Most hotels have restaurants attached to them and serve Chinese and Indian cuisine. There are small eating-places in the Main Bazaar area of Kohima that have good Chinese and Tibetan cuisine. Near the Secretariat building of the capital city, some restaurants offer Naga food, with advance notice.

Warm and colourful Naga shawls, hand woven shoulder bags, decorative spears, tablemats, woodcarvings and bamboo works make interesting souvenirs. In Kohima, the government handicraft outlet and the shops at the super market sell excellent shawls and other artefacts.

Khonoma Village is 20 km to the west of Kohima. This was once a Naga stronghold and is replete with tales of the heroic deeds of its warriors against the British army in the 19th century.



Khonoma Village

Japfu Peak is trekking terrain some 15 km from Kohima. It has a beautiful view of the city and the snow clad Himalayas. **Dzukou Valley** is at 2,462 m above sea level, 25 km from Kohima. Between November and March the valley is dotted with red and white rhododendron, lilies and wild flowers. Treks in the valley could be the highpoint of your travel. **Phek** is famous for its orchids and rare birds. It is 134 km from Kohima. **Intaki Wildlife Sanctuary** is a home to the rare Hoolok gibbon, elephant, wild buffalo ('Mithun'), sambhar, barking deer, flying squirrel, wild dog, tiger, sloth bear, pheasant, hornbill and black stork. It is 111 km from Kohima and 37 km from Dimapur.

Access: By Air: The airport is in Dimapur, 74 kms away from Kohima, the capital city of Nagaland. There are flights from Guwahati (Assam) and Calcutta (West Bengal) to Dimapur. Tourist buses, taxis and local buses are available to Kohima from Dimapur airport – the journey takes about 3 hours. **By Rail:** The nearest railhead is Dimapur, 74 km from Kohima. Trains connect Guwahati to Dimapur. Guwahati, in turn, is very well

connected to the rest of India. **By Road:** Kohima is connected to Imphal in Manipur (123 km) and Guwahati in Assam (400 km) by road. However, driving up to Kohima from Guwahati can be very tiring due to the distance and the state of the roads; It can be dangerous because of the insurgency problems in the state. Facilities are not so readily available, if your car or bus breaks down. Flying in to Dimapur is the best option.

Temperatures: Summer: Min 16°C, Max 31°C; Winter: Min 4°C, Max 24°C. **Climate:** It is one of the 13 'Hot Spots' in the world enjoying both sub-tropical and sub-alpine climate.

Average Rainfall is between 180 cm and 250 cm. Nagaland has torrential rain between June and September when communication can be severely disrupted. **Best time to visit:** Between October and May.

City Code: 0370

Tourism Department: 2243124, 2270107

P.R.O.: 011-23017878 (Delhi)

Banks: No ATM facilities. Banking hours usually are 10 am to 2 pm Monday to Friday and 10 am to 12 noon on Saturdays.

Hospitals/Cheemists: Dimapur and Kohima have fairly good hospitals and private nursing homes.

The capital, Kohima, has few choices ranging from mid-level to budget, but on the whole, accommodation is tolerably comfortable and hygiene levels are fairly high. Dimapur has plenty of accommodation options in the same range as Kohima.

Hotel Japfu Ashok, Hotel