

# West Bengal



West Bengal is the only state that combines the triple travel thrills of the mountains, the plains and the coastline. Darjeeling, where the mist is like a tantalizing curtain to the beauty of the Kanchendzonga; Shanti Niketan, the home of the 'poet' Rabindra Nath Tagore; the Sunderbans, the largest estuarine forest in the world; and Digha, promising sun, sea, sand, surfing and seafood! Calcutta, now renamed Kolkata – the 'city of joy', has overtones of fish, Marx and literature in equal measures. This first city built by the British was the earlier capital of India, before shifting base to Delhi.

## KOLKATA

British architectural visages mingle with landmark institutional and

commercial complexes that are coming up; the gradual pace of the tram sits well with the starched dhoti-clad Bengali babu; the sweet-tooth food culture gels well with the pulsating bars and pubs like JJ's. Kolkata today has emerged as a fast-growing city that yet retains the mosaic created by cultural evenings and the running waters and moods of the Hooghly. The erstwhile capital of British India, Kolkata reigns as a major cultural centre.

## City Lights

History is etched everywhere in the city. **Victoria Memorial** heads the list of monuments that have become symbolic of Kolkata. Built as a memorial for Queen Victoria, this pure white marble museum recalls India's colonial past. Sound and light shows are held every day except Monday, the day the memorial is closed. The



*Victoria Memorial*

Dalhousie Square, renamed Benoy-Badal-Dinesh Bagh, **BBD Bagh**, after the three martyrs of Bengal, is located in the heart of the city. It has a small artificial lake, fed by natural springs. It is surrounded on all sides by historical

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buildings like the **Writers' Building**, **Raj Bhavan**, **State Legislative Assembly**, **Kolkata High Court**,



*Kolkata High Court*

**St John's Cathedral**, **GPO** and the **Reserve Bank of India**. The **Birla Planetarium** here is one of the largest of its kind in the world. **Science City** is the first institution of its kind in India.



*Birla Planetarium*

The pioneering effort of NCSM, the open air Science Parks have brought science out of doors and alive. **St Paul's Cathedral** built between 1839 and 1847, houses interesting memorials and stained glass, including the west window by Sir Edward Burne-Jones. **Eden Gardens** is home to Kolkata's cricket activity. One can stroll along the banks of the Hooghly around here. You can also take a short cruise down the Hooghly with the Vidyasagar Setu Bridge etched in the background. While in Kolkata, you

visit the **Botanical Gardens**, the green lung of the Western bank, home to a 200-year-old banyan tree with its enormous canopy, covering some 400 metres in circumference.

If you want some religious fervour, head for the **Dakshineswar Kali Temple** where Sri Ramakrishna was



*Dakshineswar Kali Temple*

the priest. This is a living temple inside a complex of some 12 subsidiary temples. Kolkata takes its name from **Kalighat**, where another Kali temple is located. **Paresnath Jain Temple** is dedicated to Sheetalnathji, the 10th of the 24 Jain tirthankars. **Belur Math**, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission, was founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1899. From different angles, this unique building resembles a church, a masjid and a temple.



*Temple of Sri Ramakrishna  
at Belur Math*

**China Town at Tangra** is the place for authentic Chinese food in India, thanks to the large Chinese population that has made Kolkata their home since the 19th century.

### City Culture

To see the best of Kolkata, be there during **Durga Puja**, or **Bijoya Dashmi**, when images of the ten-armed goddess and her four offspring, are worshipped in every street, and at every corner. Creatively designed *pandals* are erected, each competing with the other for awards. After the four-day ceremony, the images are immersed in the river. There is music, rhythm, lights, movement and the city wears an air of festive gaiety. During these nine days before Dussehra, in autumn, every Bengali tries to be in his native homeland!



*Goddess Durga immersed in the river*

**Saraswati Puja** is another important celebration of the state, held around February, to honour the goddess of learning and music. The **Bengali New Year** or **Poila Baisakh** is celebrated on 14th April when Lord Ganesh is worshipped. Another significant festival is the **Dover Lane Festival** when strains of Indian classical music, vocal and instrumental, rent the air. **The Sagar Mela** is held at Sagar

Island, off Diamond Harbour in January. The beginning of the year also kicks off the **Vintage Car Rally** that draws large crowds who come to see and admire the cars of yesteryears.

**Artscape:** Kolkata is the city of artists. **Birla Academy of Art & Culture** (24666802), **Alternative Art Gallery** (22260775), **Murarka's Art Gallery** (22290449), **Genesis** (22293886).

Bengali theatre rules even though Hindi and English theatre shows are staged from time to time. These could be at **Bijon Theatre** (25558413), **Academy of Fine Arts Auditorium** (22234302), **GD Birla Sabha Ghar** (24759717), **Rabindra Sadan** (22239917).

### Night Out

Pink Elephant at **The Oberoi** initiated Kolkatans into the night culture of discos and pubs, and how! You now have many hip, hop and happening discos-cum-pubs in Kolkata. **Tantra, Someplace Else** (22499000), **London Pub** (22883939), **Down Inn Street** (22280301), **Incognito** (22233939), **The Big Ben** (22823404), **Dublin** (23454545)

### Clubs

Old and new, clubs of all hues abound in Kolkata. **Bengal Club** (22266954), **The Calcutta Club** (22233209) and **The Saturday Club** are prominent.

**Bowling Alleys:** Megabowl: 22881311, Flight 10: 22472084, Sparks: 24481774.

### Gourmet's Delights

Kolkata offers a true gourmet experience. Beginning with the *mutton chaap* at **Dhaba** or the

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aromatic *biryani* from **Shiraz**, or the impromptu corner at **Karnani Mansions**, there are surprises in every nook and corner of the city. Try the *double egg double mutton combo* for the best burp! Mughlai food lovers can head for the old favourites — **Tandoor** and **Amber**.

Chinese food is at its best at **Chungwa** and **Waldorf**. Outer city limits offer the famous Tangra eateries of **China Haus** and **Kafulok**. At Taj Bengal, there is **Chinoiserie** for good Chinese food, **Ban Thai** at **The Oberoi** is great for Thai food while **Pan-Asian** at **ITC Hotel Sonar Bangla Sheraton** offers the whole gamut of Far East cuisine. For typical Bengali fare, **Aaheli** at the **Peerless Inn** and **Kewpie's Kitchen** dish out ladlefuls of *aloo-posto*, *shorshe maach* and *shukto*, to name a few.

**Peshawari** at **ITC Hotel Sonar Bangla Sheraton** (23454545), **Tandoor** on Park Street, **Amber** on Waterloo Street or **Saffron** at **The Park**, score a hit if looking for Indian and Mughlai cuisine. **Mocambo** on Free School Street serves excellent Continental fare, **Sheriff** on Lansdowne has Italian and Mexican cuisine. **Taaja** on Ballygunge Circular Road has Indian and Mediterranean cuisine. Visit **Jyothi Vihar** for South Indian fare. For vegetarians too, there is a choice of eateries: **Badsha Restaurant**, **Bower Bar & Restaurant**, **Drive Inn Restaurant**, **Elfin**, **Gangaur Snacks** and **Girnar**.

### Must Try

Bengali sweets are a must if in Kolkata. *Rosogulla* is not the end, it is neither the beginning. There are *sandesh*, *cham cham*, *rajbhog*, and so many more. **K.C. Das** is a must on

every itinerary while others like **Ganguram**, **Mithai** or **Mouchak** should also be tried. The *sandesh* freaks can head for **Bhimnag**; for the best *mishti doi*, stop over at **Sen Mohashoi's**. Kolkata's hallmark *phuchkas* are great for a snack. This Bong variation of the *golgappa* is best at **Metro Goli** and **Dhakuria Lake**.

### Shopper's Paradise

The **New Market**, which was founded in 1874, is the oldest shopping establishment in the city. It is also known as the 'Hogg Market'. You can purchase everything from sarees and jewellery to vegetables and poultry under the same roof. Other markets such as the **Air-Conditioned Market** and **Vardaan Market** have lots of shops where you can buy clothes, shoes and sundry. Kolkata is famous for its Tangail sarees and these can be found in abundance at **Kundahar**, 10, Sarat Banerjee Road and **Ananda**, Russell Street. For handicrafts and textiles visit **Dakshinapan**, which houses several emporia such as Gurjari or the **Bengal Home Industries**, off Lord Sinha Road. Some more recommendations: **Park Street**, for furnishings, ceramics, boutiques, and branded wear; **Treasure Island**, for clothes and other goods. **Lindsay Street**, **Elgin Road**, **Chowranghee**, **Mirza Ghalib Street** and **Camac Street** are the new and upmarket shopping havens of Kolkata with shopping malls, bookstores, jewellery stores, electronic goods, music stores, and branded wear shops. Among the old and traditional markets, **B.B. Ganguli Street** is the headquarters of the jewellery shops in Kolkata. Book-lovers can head for the **College Street**.

**Gariaghat** is the nerve centre of the old market. Salt Lake too, offers great shopping opportunities at its airconditioned shopping complex, **Charnock City**, next to the huge stadium.

#### Excursions

**Digha:** 185 km away, a popular beach on the east coast.

**Diamond Harbour:** 48 km away, it's a scenic spot by the side of the Hooghly. You can go by train from Sealdah, or a bus from Esplanade.

**Mayapur:** 134 km away, the headquarters of ISKCON is located



*Diamond Harbour*

here, and an impressive temple complex is the centre of attraction. Boarding and lodging available at the same. For an ISKCON tour, call 22473757.



*Mayapur ISKCON Temple*

**Bishnupur:** Exquisite 17th and 18th century terracotta temples are to be found here. The seat of Dhrupad style of classical music, this is where the 'Bankura horse', an icon of rural handicrafts, originated.



*Terracotta Temples of Bishnupur*

**Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary:** Spread over 100 km, it lies in the north of the state.

**Sunderbans Tiger Resort:** 166 km away, besides the tiger, the estuaries are rich in marine life. You can stay at the Forest Lodge at Sajankhali. For a tourism department-conducted cruise, call 22485917.

**Malda:** 365 km north of Kolkata, and the former English Bazaar, Malda is the base for visiting Gaur and Pandua, sites of archaeological finds.

**Ganga Sagar:** Is an island in the Sunderbans, it's a completely unspoilt beach on the estuary of the Ganges. Buses are available from Kolkata.

**Krishna Nagar:** 100 km away, the town is famous for its toys and clay models. A palace and the Roman Catholic Church are other attractions.

#### Facts at a Glance

**Access: By Air:** Kolkata is an important air link to North-East India. Indian Airlines, Alliance Air, Jet Airways and Air Sahara all fly to Kolkata. There are many international

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flights too, from countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Singapore, Thailand, Myanmar and destinations in East, Southeast Asia and Europe.

**By Rail:** The Headquarters of Eastern Railways and South eastern Railways are in Kolkata. Some important connections are the Poorva Express, Kalka Mail and Rajdhani Express from Delhi, the Madras Mail and Coromandel Express from Chennai and the Gitanjali Express and Mumbai Mail from Mumbai. Additionally, the Darjeeling Mail plies to New Jalpaiguri from the Sealdah Railway Station. Two railway stations Howrah and Sealdah serve different parts of the metro. **By Road:** KSTC (Kolkata State Transport Corporation – 22481916), NBSTC (North Bengal State Transport Corporation – 22371806) and SBSTC (South Bengal State Transport Corporation – 25645360) run buses connecting Kolkata to various destinations in West Bengal and other states. There is also a bus to Phuntshiling (Bhutan) via Siliguri. **Bus Terminus:** The State Transport Bus Stand is in Esplanade.

**Getting Around:** Local trains can be taken to go to places like Barrackpore, Serampore, etc. But it is the first place to have got the **Metro Rail** running between Tollygunge and Dum Dum, touching most of the important parts en route. Visitors could take the metered yellow-top taxis too. Man-pulled rickshaws are unique to Kolkata, and so are **trams**, which move a bit slowly, but yet can give a joyride too. **Temperatures:** Summer: March-October; Min 24°C, Max 38°C; Winter: November-February; Min 12°C, Max 27°C. **Annual rainfall:** 160 cms. **Best time to visit:** August to February.

Durga Puja (October) and Christmas (December) are ideal.

**City Code:** 033

**Indian Airlines:** 25119633/8564

**Jet Airways:** 22292227/25119894

**Air Sahara:** 25118442

**Travel House:** 22884910, 22886683

**Shipping Corporation of India** (For Port Blair): 22482354,

**Howrah Railway Station:** 26602581,

**Sealdah Station:** 23503535

**Banks:** One will find branches of all major banks in Kolkata since it is a metro. Be it a nationalised bank like the State Bank of India or a private bank like the American Express or ABN Amro, you will find their branches in different parts of Kolkata.

**Post Office:** New Market Post Office at New Market and General Post Office at BBD Bagh.

**India Tourism:** 22821402, 22821475

**West Bengal Tourism:** 22488271

**Howrah Station Tourist**

**Information:** 26602518

**Dum Dum Airport Domestic Lounge:** 25118299, 25116026

**Hospital/Chemist:** Woodlands Nursing Home in Alipore, the Bellevue Nursing Home on London Street, Kolkata Hospital, near the Kidderpore Tram Line, SSKM Hospital: 22239692/6180 or

Medical College Hospital: 22413992

Dey's Medical Stores: 22499810

### Home Away From Home

ITC Hotel Sonar Bangla Sheraton & Towers: 23454545, Hyatt Regency Kolkata: 23351234, Oberoi Grand: 22492323, Taj Bengal: 22233939, The Park: 22493121, Hotel Hindustan International: 22472394, MBD Airport Hotel: 25119111, The

Kennilworth: 22823939, Peerless Inn: 033-22280301 upto 07 (FHRAI), Lytton Hotel: 22491872, Radisson: 22800044, 22800046, The Fort Radisson Resort: (03174)-275444.

### SHANTI NIKETAN

This is the seat of the International University founded by Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. Vishwa Bharati – where the cultures of the East and the West meet and mingle. The university showcases the best of Indian traditions and integrates the cherished values of other cultures in its core.

An interesting feature of Shanti Niketan are the splendid sculptures, frescoes, murals and paintings of Rabindranath, Nandlal Bose, Ramkinkar, Bindobehari Mukhopadhyaya and others that adorn the campus.

The small town has nothing much else, save the **Uttarayan Gardens**, in the Uttarayan Complex where the poet used to live. It has several buildings, like Udayan, Konark, Shyamali, Punascha and Udichi. This town has a museum and art galleries too, in the Kala Bhavan, Bichitra, and Rabindra Bhavan. Nearly 3 km from Shanti Niketan is the deer park, a large wooded area with herds of deer and a natural bird sanctuary.



Shanti Niketan

### Gourmet's Delights

You could opt for the simple fare dished out at many of its local *dhabas*, or eat at the hotel or lodge where you choose to stay. If on a day-trip to Shanti Niketan, carry your lunch and eat under the shade of one of the many trees lining the roads.

### Excursions

**Massanjore** (78 km), **Kendubilwa** (42 km), **Nanoor** (23 km) – the birthplace of the Vaisnava poet, Chandidas and **Tarapith** (80 km).

### Facts at a Glance

**Access:** **By Air:** The nearest airport is Kolkata, 213 km. **By Rail:** The nearest railhead is Bolpur, 3 km from the town centre. Shanti Niketan Express or Vishwa Bharati fast passenger train are some of the options, taking about three to four hours. **By Road:** You could drive down, though not during monsoons. The journey may take between three-and-a-half to four hours. The route is Burdwan-Panagad-Illambazaar-Bolpur. Buses from Kolkata take you till the city-centre bus stop. **Temperatures:** Summer: Around 34.3°C and 39.4°C in daytime; Winter: Around 15.7°C and 12.1°C. **Annual Rainfall:** 125 cms. **Best time to visit:** Throughout the year; but better to visit during the *Poush Mela*, between December 22 and 25 or in March for the *Basant Utsab*, two festivals celebrated here.

**City Code:** 03463

**Banks:** Allahabad Bank: 252853,  
UBI: 252657, United Bank: 252726,  
SBI: 252253

**Hospitals/Chemists:** Vishwa Bharati

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Hospital: 252751. There are over 15 chemist shops lining the Station Road. Mukherjee Medical Store: 253031, Janata Pharmacy: 252321, Mahamaya Medical.

### Home Away From Home

There are many budget hotels in Shanti Niketan, like Chhuti Holiday Resort, Hotel Camellia, Mark & Meadows, Bonpulok.

### SILIGURI & NEW JALPAIGURI

The gateways to Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Sikkim and the North-Eastern states, Siliguri is the major trade centre for the northeast and eastern Nepal and New Jalpaiguri (known as NJP), the main railway junction. Though eight km separates the two towns, there is no effective break in the urban sprawl touching them.

### Shopping

The best buy is loose tea, available almost everywhere. With the Nepal and Bhutan borders being near, smuggled goods too abound. **Hill Cart Road** or **Sevoke Road** are the main markets. Another great buy could be Cane furniture.

### Excursions

**Jaldapara**, 124 km away, savour the wildlife sanctuary experience. There are rhinos, bisons, barking deer and wild elephants.

**Jaldhaka**: 87 km away, by the side of Jaldhaka river and on the Bhutan border, is a scenic picnic spot.

**Gourmara**: 87 km away, is a wildlife sanctuary. One can stay at the Forest Rest House here.

**Cooch-Bihar**: 104 km away, is the capital of the erstwhile state of the same name. There are parks, temples and a newly-restored palace.

**Mahananda Weir**: 18 km away, is a picnic spot inside the Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary.

**Kalijhora**: 27 km away, is a picnic spot by the side of the Teesta river. ideal for fishing.

### Facts at a Glance

**Access: By Air:** Bagdogra airport is the nearest airport, 12 km west of Siliguri. **By Rail:** The Darjeeling Mail is available from Sealdah (Kolkata) and the North East Express from Delhi. To reach Bangladesh, you can take a train from New Jalpaiguri to Haldibari. **By Road:** Shared jeeps are the most convenient mode. Taxi stands on Sevoke Road and outside Tenzing Norgay Terminal. **Distances:** Darjeeling (80 km), Gangtok (110 km), Pelling (133 km), Kalimpong (70 km), Mirik (52 km).

**City Code:** 0353

**West Bengal Tourist Office:** 2511974

### Home Away From Home

Cindrella, Sinclairs, Mainak Tourist Lodge (WBTD), Vinayak, Viramma Resorts, Skylark.

### DARJEELING

The only description of Darjeeling could be as one of the best hill stations of India. Also known as the Queen of the Hills, its popularity has remained high since the time of the Raj. The wonderfully cool climate, clear brisk air and the breathtaking views of the snow-clad peaks of the Himalayas

drew the British here to escape the stifling heat of Kolkata. These spectacular views and the climate have stayed the same, drawing honeymooners, trekkers and others seeking to escape the heat and humidity of the plains, more so in summer.



Darjeeling

#### City Lights

**Tiger Hill**, at 2,555 m, is the highest point in this area, and about 14 km away from Darjeeling, near the **Ghoom Monastery**. Witness the sunrise over the Kanchendzonga from here and the memory is sure to stay with you. On a clear day, even Mount Everest is visible. About 13 km from the town, **Senchal Lake**, near Tiger Hill is full of scenic splendour. There is a 9-hole golf course with a clubhouse and a tourist lodge. Tea plantations are all around Darjeeling, but the **Happy Valley** tea estate is the closest, only 2 km from the town. The **Darjeeling-Rangpet Valley passenger ropeway**, 3 km from the town, is 8 km long and offers scenic views. **Lloyds Botanical Gardens**, **Bhutia Busty Gumpa**, **Dhirdham Temple**, resembling the famous Pashupatinath temple of Kathmandu, **Lebong Race Course**, are some of the sights worth seeing in Darjeeling. Then there is the Natural



Bhutia Busty Gumpa

History Museum and the **Himalayan Mountaineering Institute** and its **Everest Museum**, displaying memorabilia of the 1953 Everest expedition.

#### Fairs & Festivals

The **Beni Mela** is held on the banks of the river Teesta in January, also the time when the Bhutias and Lepchas celebrate their New Year. In February falls the **Tibetan New Year**, which is marked by great festivities, religious ceremonies and colourful folk dances in monasteries. **Durga Puja** is celebrated in a big way in October. The **Teesta Tea & Tourism Festival** is another important winter festival that is held at Darjeeling, Sikkim and Dooars.

#### Must Do

Take the Toy Train from Siliguri to Darjeeling. The trip takes about 8 hours, but the experience on the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways is worth the extra time you spend on it. This is also one of the two trains to be honoured with the UNESCO World Heritage status, given its legacy of making journeys for over a century now!

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### Gourmet's Delights

Though a wide array of Chinese, Continental, Bengali, Nepali and Tibetan cuisines exists here, one item you must try is the *momo*. **Kunga** and **Nimto Snacks** serve a veritable variety, including many vegetarian. Otherwise, go straight to **Keventer's** famous for bacon sandwiches. Toasted sandwiches and samosas, sausages, cheese, ham and other delicious foods are highly rated. **Glenary's** Chinese, Continental and Tandoori food too is worth the price they charge. **New Dish** (Chinese), **Jain Jaika** (pure vegetarian) Park (for good food and view of Darjeeling), **Golden Dragon Restaurant and Bar** (1920's ambience), **Hasty Tasty** (vegetarian *thalis* and Indian snacks) are other reliable options. **Taaja** at Planter's Club also for excellent Continental and Indian cuisine.

### Shopper's Paradise

Tea should head your list, as should local handicrafts, bronze statues, woodcarvings and carpets. Souvenirs of your train ride, models of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway engines. Among tea varieties, *Flush Super Fine Tippy Golden Flowery Orange Pekoe One* is recommended. Tibetan handicrafts can be brought at



Chowrasta

the Tibetan refugee self-help centre and at shops in Darjeeling. Most curio shops are on the **Chowrasta**. For carpets, look out for the Women's co-operative at **Hayden Road**, and the **Third Eye**, an all-women enterprise that also sells handicrafts.

### Facts at a Glance

**Access:** **By Air:** Bagdogra is the nearest airport, 90 km from Darjeeling. Jet and IA flights from Kolkata and Delhi are daily. **By Rail:** Nearest railhead at New Jalpaiguri/Siliguri junction, connected with Kolkata, Mumbai, Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Lucknow, Chennai and Delhi. **By Road:** From Bagdogra or New Jalpaiguri: Take a taxi/scooter/rickshaw to Siliguri, 10 and 5 km respectively. From Siliguri: State-run buses and coaches, taxis and cars for hire are available from the Siliguri Bus Terminal to cover the 80 km journey to Darjeeling. **Getting Around:** Walking is the best way. Cars, taxis and ponie are other modes of transport within the city, depending upon where you want to go. **Temperatures:** Summer: 8.5°C to 15°C; Winter: 1°C to 6°C. **Best time to visit:** Mid-March to mid-June and mid-September to mid-December.

**City Code:** 0354

**Indian Airlines:** 2254230

**West Bengal Tourist Office:** 2254050

**Banks:** SBI: 2256318, BOB: 2254644, ANZ Grindlays: 2254681, Central Bank of India: 2256410

**Hospitals/Chemists:** Planters' Hospital: 2254327, Sub-Divisional Hospital: 2254218, Frank Ross & Co: 2254029, Puri & Co: 2254182, Darjeeling Pharmacy: 2254146

### Home Away From Home

Fortune Resorts Central: 2258721; WelcomHeritage Windamere: 2254041; New Elgin: 2254114; Sinclairs Darjeeling: 2256431; Cedar Inn: 254446; North Star: 2253938; Mayfair Hill Resort: 2256476, Dakeling, Fairmount, Shangrila, Valentino, Bellevue, Paguda, Prestige and Shamrock.

### KALIMPONG

Nestling in Himalayan West Bengal, Kalimpong is a gracious hill station sans hustle-bustle. Raft down the Teesta river or bird-watch all day long, in the land of the Lepcha and the Bhutia tribes; of orchids and gladioli; of the meandering river valleys of Git, Rishi, Rilli and the mighty Teesta. Time your visit with Kalimpong's annual flower festival.

### City Lights

Kalimpong is the land of monasteries: **Thongsa Gompa**, or the Bhutanese Monastery, is the oldest one here. The **Pedong Bhutanese Monastery** stands near the old Bhutanese **Damsang Fort** where ceremonial dances are held every February. The **Brang Monastery** is situated at **Durpin Dara**, the highest point in Kalimpong. **Tharpa Choeling Monastery** belongs to the Gelugpa (Yellow Hat) sect of Tibetan Buddhism, the one the Dalai Lama also belongs to.

Kalimpong also provides the most panoramic snow views of the peaks of Mt Kanchendzonga, Siniolchu, Paunhari, Lama Anden, Chola, Nathu La, Jalep La and Gyмоchen peaks. These can be viewed from **Durpin**

**Dara and Deolo Hill**. Besides unique nurseries, you can also go to **Lava**, 34 km from Kalimpong, that has a monastery of Bhutanese origin and lots of treks and trails. It is also the starting point for trekking to the Neora **National Park**.

### Must Do

**Samco Ropeway**, 20 km from Kalimpong, on the highway to Siliguri, is another delightful detour. Spanning the Teesta and Relli rivers over 1½ km, the chair lift offers a gripping ride, with the rivers gurgling a 100 feet below. It also connects the Samthar Plateau.

### Gourmet's Delights

Sikkimese and Tibetan cuisine, particularly momos are most popular though Western, Indian and Mughlai cuisine is also available. Try **Mandarin** (fish and chicken dishes), **Kalsang** (Tibetan), **Annapurna**, **Gompu's** (bar cum restaurant), **Kohinoor** (snacks).

### Shopper's Paradise

The **Main Road**, the **10th Mile Market** and the **Raja Dorje Market** are good places to shop. The must-buys of Kalimpong include fresh ginger and honey, Tibetan noodles, jewellery, artefacts, seeds and flower bulbs. Along **Dambar Chowk**, you can shop for Lepcha daggers, masks, Buddhist thangkhas, hand beaten silver, Bhutanese weaves, Chinese lanterns and hand-stitched clothing. The **Bhutia Shop** has woodcarvings and pastel paintings. The **Kalimpong Arts & Crafts Centre** is the best place for authentic Lepcha, Bhutanese and

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Sikkimese embroidered work on purses and dresses. Also try its famous cheese.

### Facts at a Glance

**Access: By Air:** The nearest airport is Bagdogra (80 km), 3 hours drive from Kalimpong. Indian Airlines and Jet Airways connect Bagdogra to New Delhi, Guwahati and Kolkata.

**By Rail:** The two closest railheads are Siliguri (66 km, metre gauge) and New Jalpaiguri (80 km, broad gauge).

**By Road:** Kalimpong can be reached by bus/taxi/jeep from New Jalpaiguri/Siliguri in approximately three hours.

**Distances:** Gangtok (77 km), Darjeeling (52 km). **Bus Terminus:** All buses leave from the Motor Stand in the Central Bazaar area.

**Temperatures:** Summer: 17.2°C to 27°C; Winter: 7.2°C to 15°C. **Best time to visit:** March to mid-June and September to December.

**City Code:** 03552

**Indian Airlines** (local agent): 255697

**Tourist Reception Centre:** 257992

**Banks:** SBI: 255310, UBI: 255246, Central Bank: 255256

**Hospitals/Chemists:** Sub-Divisional Hospital: 255245, Jethmulji Bhojraj Agencies: 255308, Medicos: 256164, Tibet Stores: 255459

### Home Away From Home

Himalayan Hotel: 255248, Silver Oak: 255296, Kalimpong Park: 255304, Kalimpong Tourist Lodge (WBTD): 255384.

### MIRIK

The charm of Mirik lies in the lush tea and cardamom plantations, topped



Mirik

with orange orchards, with the mighty Kanchendzonga providing the backdrop.

The ideal activity is to trek or walk through surrounding areas. These could be around the 1.25 km long **Summand Lake**. There is a promenade around the lake with an 80-foot-long arched overbridge. There are good picnic spots in the forest on the western bank. Fishing and boating are allowed. For the spiritually inclined, there is the Buddhist monastery, seat of the venerable **Bokar Rinpoche**. There are eight tea estates surrounding Mirik. **Thurbo T.E.**, 2 km away, is the best known. One can also buy tea from many of the gardens.

### Facts at a Glance

**Access: By Air:** The nearest airport is Bagdogra, 55 km away. **By Rail:** The broad-gauge railhead is New Jalpaiguri (60 km), Siliguri (meter gauge, 52 km). The toy-train stations nearest to Mirik are Ghoom (41 km), Kurseong (46 km) and Darjeeling (49 km). **By Road:** Connected by road with Siliguri, Kurseong and Darjeeling. Many tea estates lie on these routes. Government and private bus services link Mirik with Siliguri and Darjeeling.

**City Code:** 0354

#### Home Away From Home

Lodge Ashirvad: 243272, Lodge Panchashil: 243284, Hotel Mhelung: 243300, Samendu Complex, Jagdeet: 243359, Mirik Tourist Lodge: 242237.

#### SUNDERBANS

Sunderbans is a vast unbroken swamp, crisscrossed by many rivers, channels and creeks at the mouth of the Ganga and the Brahmaputra rivers. Sunderbans derives its name from the graceful *sundari* (*Heriteora fomes*) trees that grow here. Its yellow-green leaves are the perfect camouflage for the Royal Bengal Tiger that has made Sunderbans its home. This protected reserve of 2,525 sq km area boasts 35 species of mammals, 250-odd tigers and the freshwater fish that breed and spawn in the estuaries. Crustaceans like shrimps, prawns, and crabs. Hilsa, pomfret, pama and polyhemus are the marine species of fish that navigate the estuary to reach their spawning areas upstream. The Hooghly-Matla estuary harbours a profusion of mollusks, even

as nearly 260 different species of birds make it a bird-watcher's paradise.

#### Facts at a Glance

**Access:** **By Air:** Kolkata (131 km) is the ideal base. **By Rail:** Port Canning is the nearest station, 48 km southeast of Kolkata. **By Road:** The nearest town is Goshaba (50 km). From Kolkata, take a bus or car to Basunti or Sonakhali or Port Canning. Entry points are from Port Canning, Thosiave, Namkhana, Sonakhali, Raidighi, Basanti, Dhamakali and Najat. From here motor launches can enter the park. **Temperatures:** Summer: 37°C to 42°C; very sultry. Winter: 9°C minimum. **Best time to visit:** June to December; extend till April if you intend to plunge into the heart of the Sunderbans.

#### Home Away From Home

Either aboard MV Chitrarekha/ MV Madhukar launch, or Sajnekhali Lodge. Jungle lodges at Bakkhali and Piyali.



*Sunderbans Tiger Reserve*







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