

April 2009

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# TravelTorch

## Sikkim

Peace is the way

## Haridwar

Where a pilgrim find the abod of God

## Lucknow Imambada

More than a splendid architecture

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# TravelTorch

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The wheel of time moved on and we are here with the next issue of our travel sojourn - Travel Torch. An effort to document India's beauty, culture, art and everything at its best, Taking you on a virtual journey to the known and unknown corners of India,

## About MapXL Inc.

One of the best web solution providers across the globe, MapXL has names such as Maps of India and Maps of World, India Map Store and World Map Store associated with it. With map and travel as their core domain, these are the most preferred sites of geographers, students, travellers and businessmen alike. A proud member (under the name of holding company) of NASSCOM, IMTA and CII, MapXL gets more than 20 million page views per month.





## Sikkim

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Top Ten Destinations

**What is the best time to visit Sikkim?**

The ideal time to visit Sikkim is during the summer season that prevails from April to June. Besides being an ideal time for trekking, you can see bright rhododendrons and orchids. Even autumn is also a perfect time with the atmosphere remaining conducive to tour Sikkim. You find clear skies and pleasant climate to enjoy the beauties of this state.

**How long does it take to reach Shillong from Guwahati? How can I travel from Guwahati to Shillong apart from air?**

The total distance from Guwahati to Shillong is around 104 kilometers. After you arrive at Gopinath Bordoloi Airport in Guwahati you need to avail the buses run by Meghalaya Transport Corporation, which operate from 6 am to 5 pm. It is just over 3 hour's journey to Shillong by road. You also have the option to avail shared taxis from the Guwahati Railway Station charging somewhere around Rs. 250.

**I am planning for a trip to Conoor to Ooty. Since I stay in Bangalore, can you tell me the distance from Bangalore to Conoor and Ooty?**

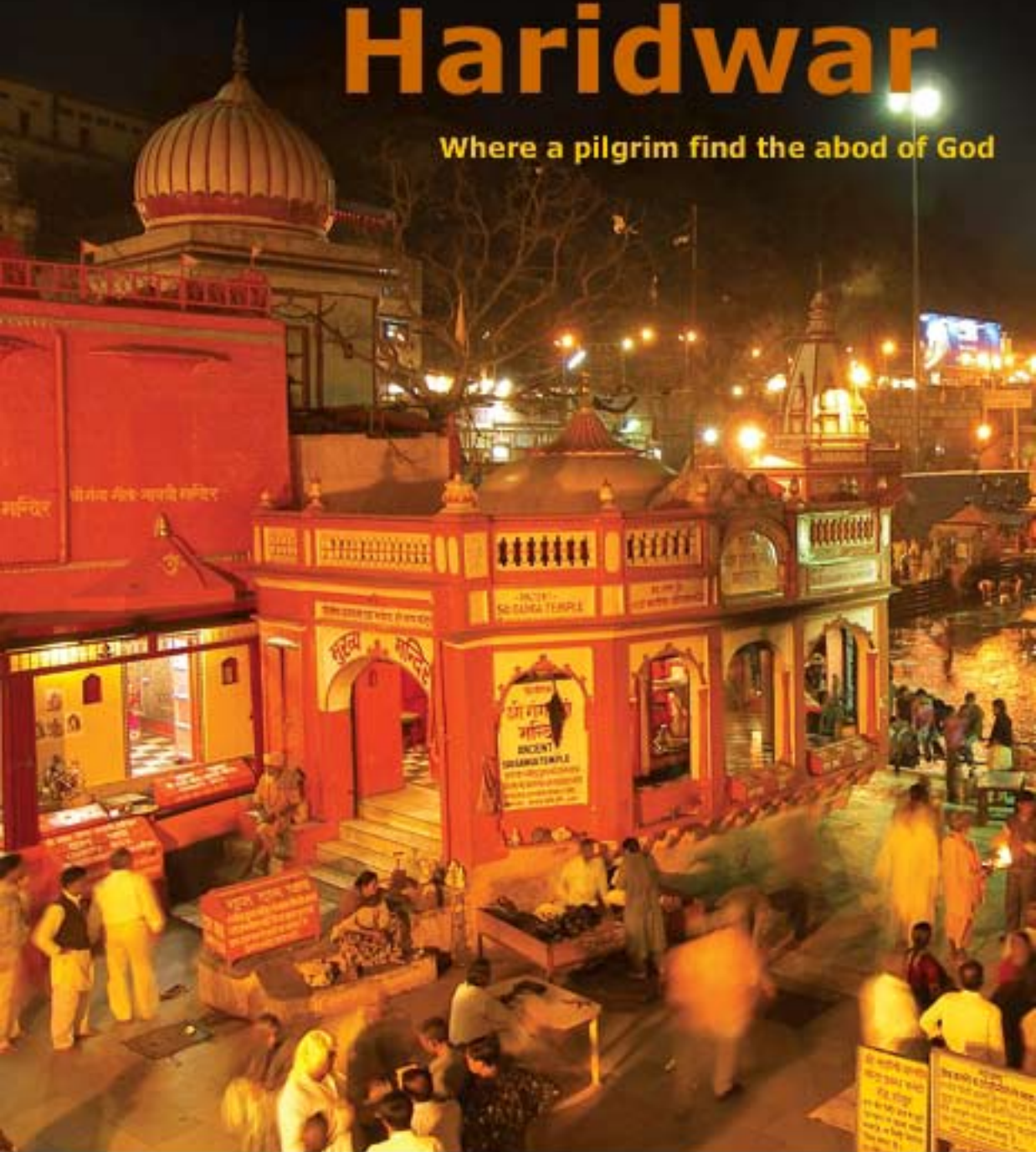
If you are coming from Bangalore, you need to travel a distance of around 300 km to reach Conoor. This famous hill station is just 17 km from Ooty. Coimbatore is the nearest airport located around 110 kms from Conoor taking two hours to reach there by driving.

**I will be visiting Jaipur in the coming month for an official purpose but since there are time constraints I cannot spend much time and visit the whole of Rajasthan. Can you tell me some specific places which I can visit in short time?**

Since you will be visiting Jaipur, paying a trip to Amber Fort and Jal Mahal should be your priority. Going southward to Sawai Madhopur district will let you visit the famous Ranthambhore National Park. Bundi Fort in Bundi is not very far so that will not take much time. From Jaipur you can move to west and visit Mehrangarh Fort and Umaid Bhawan in Jodhpur. While returning to Jaipur you can halt at Ajmer and visit the Ajmer Fort.

# Haridwar

Where a pilgrim find the abod of God





India's reputation as an ideal destination for pilgrimage can be understood to its truest extent once you visit Haridwar. Literally known as the Gateway to God, Haridwar is one of the sacred places on earth where modern crudity has not been able to taint it. Located in the state of Uttarakhand, Haridwar is the place where the river descends from the hills to the North Indian plains. Long revered as the hub of Hindu religion and mysticism, the place has been attracting tourists and pilgrims from every corner of the world. There are loads to do and witness when you are in Haridwar, the earthly representation of a heavenly abode. The pre-dominance of serenity and natural grandeur are the essential ingredients of Haridwar.

## Pilgrims



There is no dearth of notable destinations in Haridwar with Hari-ki-Pairi being the central hub of the place. According to the Hindu mythology, Hari-ki-Pairi has a historical importance since a drop of nectar fell in the place from the churning of the oceans when the world was created. The place becomes more beautiful in the evening when thousands of devotees assemble by the river Ganga to put floating lamps in the river as their show of reverence. Mansa Devi Mandir, perched on a hill near the town center, gives you a wonderful view. Bharat Mata Mandir, located 5 km north of the center is a unique structure representing half temple and half nation. It is dedicated to Mother India.

Chandidevi Mandir and Daksh mandir are the other two destinations in Haridwar located around 7-8 km from railway station.

Festivals in Haridwar are almost a regular routine with the place remaining vibrant with pilgrims for most part of the year. This is the main hub of Kumbh mela, one of the most noted religious festivals of the Hindus, which happen once every twelve years. The festival is a major crowd puller along with the Ardh Mela, or "half fair", which is held every six years. Both these fairs will be held in Haridwar in 2010. The list of annual festival is quite long with Baisakhi taking place in April and Kanwar Mela and Somwati Amavasya being held in the month of July every year. Kartik Purnima is another major occasion held 15 days after Diwali on the first full moon night.



## Pilgrims



Getting in to Haridwar is easy as the place is located just about 200 kms from Delhi, the capital city of India. Dehradun's Jolly Grant airport is the closest airport from Haridwar located 20 km away. Air Deccan offers twice a day flight service to Haridwar from Delhi. This pilgrimage destination in Uttarakhand is well connected by rail network as trains from almost all parts of the country connect Haridwar Junction, located on the southern side of the town. Traveling on foot is always better in Haridwar, while you can also avail rickshaws.

Dining and accommodation options in Haridwar match your preference as you can choose from a wide range. Owing to the reputation of Haridwar as a vegetarian town, you will find a good number of veg eateries including, Hoshiyarpuriwala, Chotiwalas, and Hotel Alpana. You will find the combo meals on an average of Rs70 and 80. The budget accommodations in Haridwar include Rahi Motel, Hotel Bhagwati Niwas and Hotel Ganga Azure. You can check-in to some of the luxurious hotels like Haveli Hari Ganga, Country Inn & Suites, and Ginger Haridwar. It is always feasible to make an advance booking of these hotels if you plan to visit this religious place during any festival.



# Lucknow Imambada:

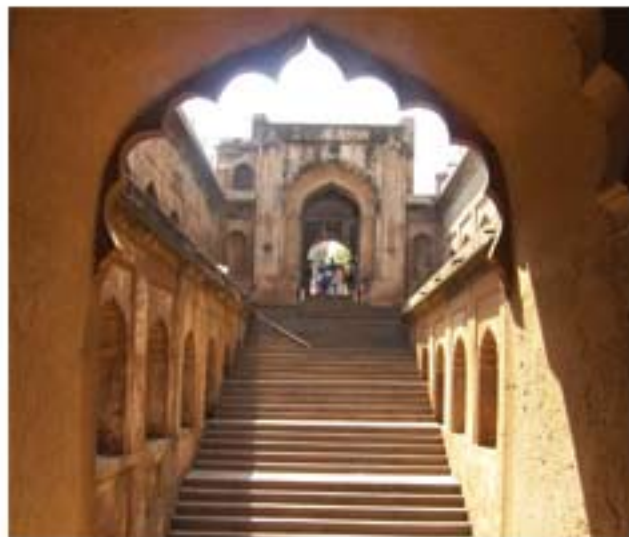
More than a splendid architecture





## Tourist Place

Architectural marvels are India's cultural assets for more than a millennium. The Bada Imambada in Lucknow is a glorious specimen of how India went on a prosperous journey of architectural excellence in every phase of history. Built In 1784, this majestic building is one of the sought after tourist attractions of Lucknow. Nawab of Lucknow, Asaf-ud-daula came up with the idea of building a colossal edifice to provide assistance to the people affected by the deadly famine, which struck the whole of Uttar Pradesh in 1784. Although it was



built with an intention of charity, Imambada ended up being a massive project with large halls, arched galleries and interconnected passages.



## The real story behind Bada Imambada



Asaf-ud-daula wanted to surpass the splendor of Mughal architecture and led by this urge, he spent lavishly to create this huge building which cannot be categorized into a single class like mosque, mausoleum and others. When the natives were finding it difficult to survive the famine, the nawab decided to build the great

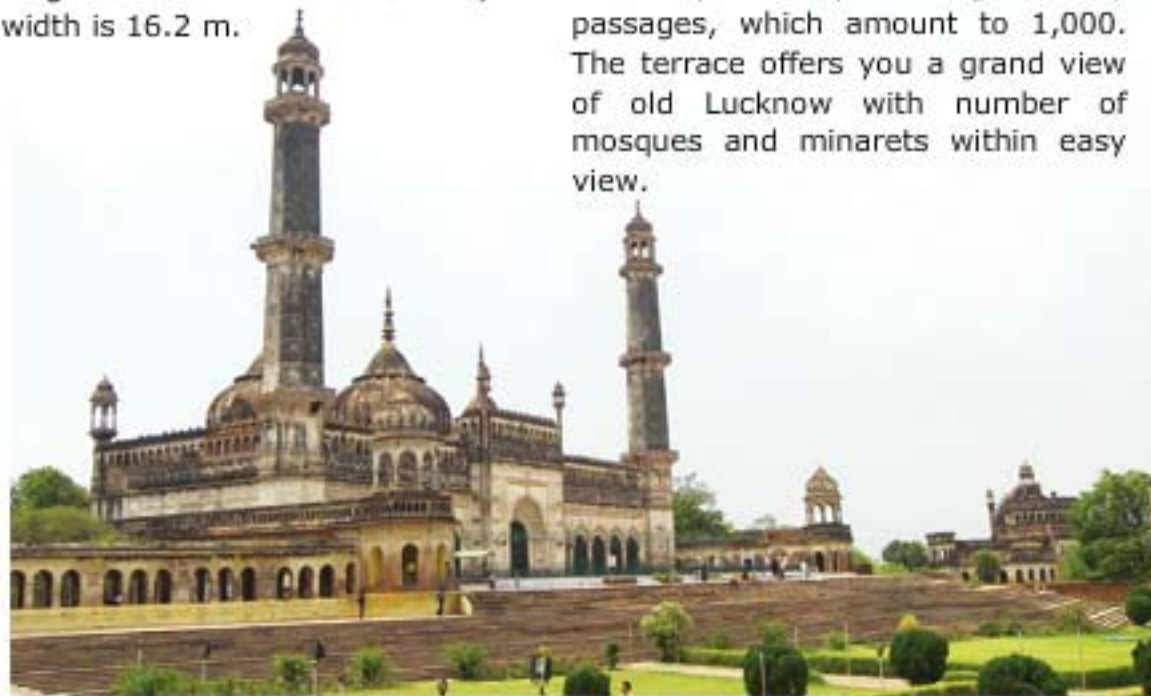
Imambada, which generated employment for some 22,000 people. In order to create enough work, one fourth of the day's work was demolished at night against payment. It was only during the nights that the nobles and were offered the payments so that they can escape the humiliation in front of the masses.

## Tourist Place

### What you can discover inside the Lucknow Imambada?

Lucknow Imambada is an interesting architecture with a clear impression of Islamic influence. Representing Lucknow's architectural heritage, the Bada Imambada is a great hall built at the end of a beautiful courtyard. This columnless hall is perhaps Asia's largest hall, which does not have any external support of wood, stone beams or iron. While the length of the interior is 49.4 m, its width is 16.2 m.

The height of the ceiling stands at more than 15 m high with no beams to uphold such a huge size. As a visitor, you will find it very astonishing to take a close look at the roof, which is said to be 16 feet thick weighing around 20,000 tons. As you enter the Bada Imambada you will encounter three halls namely the Persian Hall, the India Hall and the China Hall. The empty halls echo even a mild whisper and other slight sounds. Designed with ingenuity, the top terrace of the architecture is an interesting creation. You need to make your way through mazy passages, which amount to 1,000. The terrace offers you a grand view of old Lucknow with number of mosques and minarets within easy view.

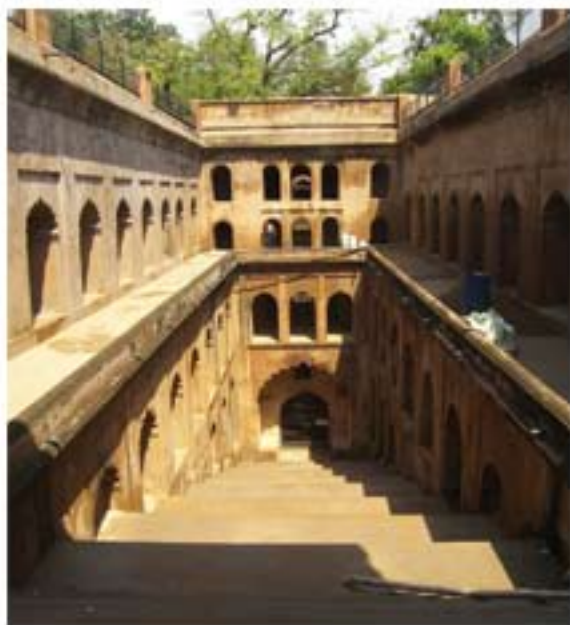


## The monuments

### surrounding Lucknow Imambada



There is an elegant mosque within the Imambada courtyard, which has stately flight of steps reflecting the pomp of the Nawabs of Lucknow. A real architectural mystery is the five-storied step well that is there at Imambada prior to the Nawabi era. Connected with the river Gomti, 3 stories of the well remain under the water throughout the year with only the first two stories above water. It is also called the Shahi-Hammam or the royal bath.



## Tourist Place

### Getting to Lucknow Imambada

The Bada Imambada, situated on the northwestern part of Lucknow, is easily accessible by flight from most of the important cities. All the flights fly down at Amausi Airport in Lucknow. Moreover, Lucknow is a major railway junction well connected by trains linking other states. You can also count on the bus service and board on to the buses from three important stations situated at Charbagh, Alambagh, and Kaiser Bagh. Local buses, taxi and autos are frequently available from every part of the city.

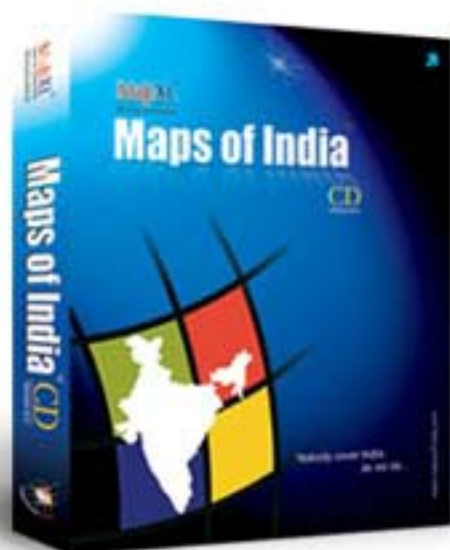


Your trip to Lucknow Imambada will make you feel nostalgic as you seem to see for yourself the elegance of the bygone epochs.



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# Sikkim

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## Bits of history



Sikkim has always been an independent kingdom ruled by the Chogyals (Kings) for 300 years before it gained entry in the Indian Union in 1975 and became the 22nd state. The reign of Chogyals goes back to the 17th century. It is commonly accepted that the name Sikkim is formed by combining two words Limbu Su and Khyim meaning "new" and "palace". The Tibetan name for Sikkim is Denjong meaning the "valley of rice". While the Lepchas, original natives of Sikkim call it Nye-mae-el (paradise), the Bhutias call it Beymul Demazong meaning the hidden valley of rice.

## Cover Story

## How climate behaves in Sikkim?

You will find Sikkim to be one of the healthiest places to live with its climate supporting its natural grandeur to the fullest. Sikkim mainly has a temperate climate, with the temperatures hardly going beyond 28 °C (82 °F) in summer or dipping below 0 °C (32 °F) in winter. All the five seasons like winter, summer, spring, autumn, and monsoon are distinctly felt in this virgin state. Monsoon season descends in the state in June and continue till September. It is prudent to avoid Sikkim during these three months as the state experience incessant downpour leading to rising cases of landslides. Sikkim receives regular snowfall with the snow line is around 6,000 metres (19,600 feet).



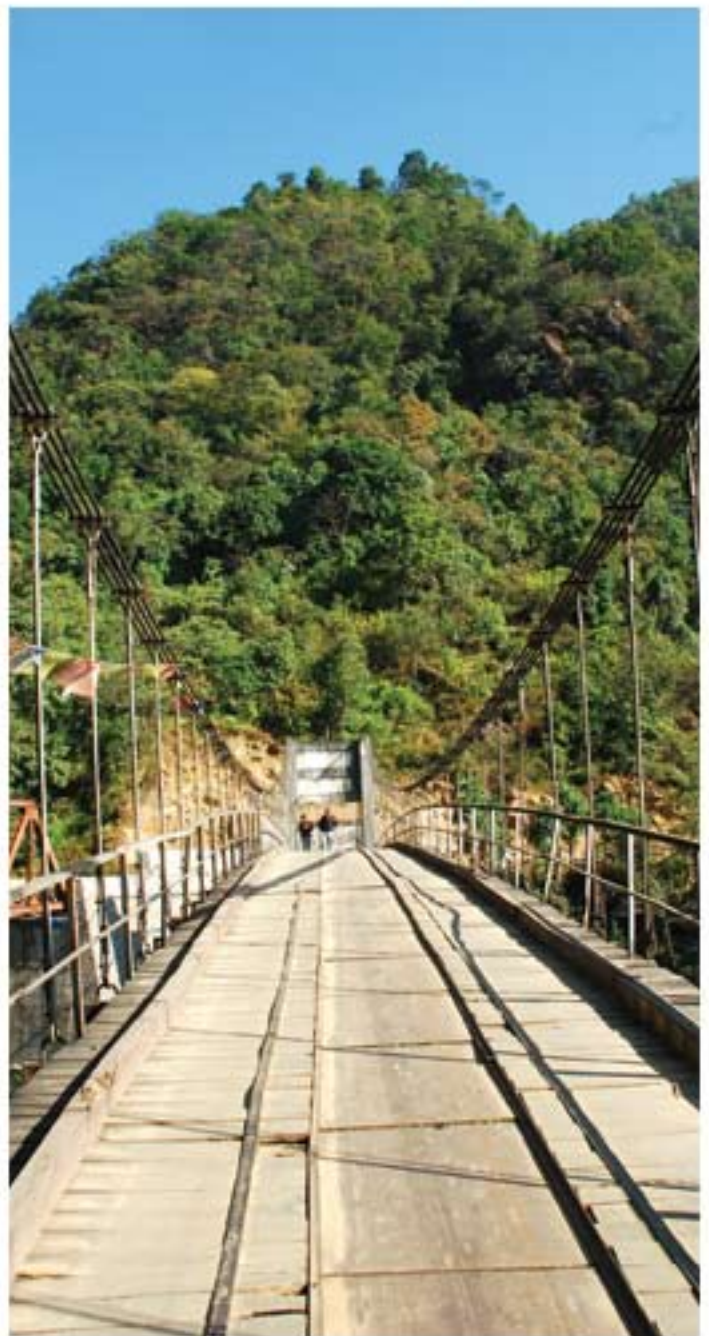
## Revelry time in Sikkim

It is a sight to watch when whole of Sikkim indulges in state-wide revelry. Festivals in Sikkim are a regular phenomenon as people indulge in multiple types of festivals throughout the year. With Buddhist population dominating the state, it is common to see people celebrating the Buddhist New Year. The birth, enlightenment and nirvana anniversaries of the Buddha also form major festivals in this exotic state. The popularity of mask-dance is immensely popular and it is reflected in a series of such events throughout Sikkim. While the Buddhist festival of Bumchu is held in the Tashiding Gompa during January,



Chaam festival is held in Enchey Gompa during January–February.

Kagyat Dance is a highly popular mask dance held every month at Gangtok, Pemayangtse and Phodong. Losar is the Tibetan New Year that takes place between February and March at Pemayangtse and Rumtek. If you come to Sikkim during the summer you can be a part of the Tse Chu Buddhist dance held at Rumtek and Saga Dawa in Gangtok during May. Phang Lhapsol is another noted mask dance festival celebrated throughout Sikkim during August. The biggest Hindu festival is perhaps Dasain. Celebrated during October, the festival is commemorated by exchanging gifts and sacrificing animals. Christmas has also recently been promoted in Gangtok to attract tourists during the off-season.



## Cover Story

### Trekking Routes in Sikkim

Sikkim is an ideal place for the lovers of trekking and rightly so because this small state has got so much to offer to the avid trekking fans. Trekkers come here with an aim to explore the beautiful and scenic trekking routes in Sikkim. Kanchenjunga trek is a fascinating experience as you discover bright rhododendrons, pines, and huge magnolias forests. It is a unique experience to climb up to Gocha La pass leading to west Sikkim. Going for Dzongri Trek also give you a different flavor of Sikkim as you traverse through moss-laden forests rich with oak, chestnut, maple, and rhododendron. Spectacular mountain views will be your constant companion.



Singalila Trek route has opened recently that covers southwest of Dzongri. This trekking route passes through the Singalila Range rising from the northern hills of Darjeeling District. For tasting adventure from close corner, trekking in North Sikkim is a good option. This trekking will lead you through green forests of various tones and you keep on exploring unending list of wild flowers.



## What you should not miss in Sikkim?

### Monasteries

While you are in Sikkim you just cannot ignore the beautiful and placid presence of the beautiful Buddhist monasteries. These monasteries are the harbingers of peace and solace with most of them perched on top of hills and valleys. It is interesting to note that monasteries are referred as Gompa meaning a solitary place. Since isolation is considered perfect for meditation, monasteries in Sikkim are spotted at remote locations. According to the Sikkimese tradition, a monastery should look out towards the east to receive the first rays of the rising sun and preferably have a clear view of a lake. Dubdi is the oldest monastery of Sikkim, where Lhatsun Chempo used to live. Sanga Choling Monastery is said to be the second oldest monastery.



The Pemayangtse and Tashiding monastery soon followed the earlier two. While foundation of Pemayangtse monastery was associated with the Royal family, The Tashiding monastery was considered the pilgrimage place for Tibetans. These remote monasteries in Sikkim house several hand written religious books and manuscripts that preach morals. Some of the other renowned monasteries worth visiting include Rumtek, Rinchinpong, Tholung, Lingtam, Gangtok and Namchi. If you chance to visit the Palace Monastery of Tsuklakhang you find it to be located in the grounds of the palace. The monastery exhibits interesting murals and images of Buddhist Pantheon. The unique feature of these monasteries is their dual role of a chapel and school.

## Cover Story

## Lakes and valleys



Travellers, who have come to Sikkim, cannot but appreciate the beauty of its lakes and valleys. Tsomgo Lake, also known as the Changu Lake, is literally known as 'source of the lake' in Bhutia language. Located 40 kilometre away from Gangtok, this tranquil lake is situated 12,000 ft on the Gangtok Nathu La highway. Memencho Lake is another asset of Sikkim, located 20 kilometre ahead of Changu Lake. This crystal clear lake is well known for its trout. You can spot a farm nearby for cultivate these fish. You cannot miss out on Chola Mu Lake lying on the plateau. Teesta River

takes birth from this moderately sized lake. During the winter, the lake is completely frozen. Beauty of the lake gets a huge impetus with a flock of birds flying all around and the cranes swimming on the placid ice water. These migratory birds come from Russia, China and other parts of India. Yumthang Valley is another must-visit place in Sikkim situated at an altitude of about 11,800 feet. The valley is a home to rhododendron shrubs hot springs. Encompassed by mountains, the lake offers a breathtaking view of the surrounding.

## Hot springs and glaciers

Much of the splendor of Sikkim rests on the presence of some eye-catching hot springs throughout the state. Hot springs reflect on the healthier side of Sikkim since these springs are known to have medicinal and therapeutic values. The hot springs at Phurchachu and Yumthang are quite popular. Following them closely are the hot springs at Borang, Ralang, Taram-chu and Yumey Samdong. All these hot springs located near river banks have high sulphur content with the average temperature of water remaining around 50°C.

Glaciers are the very life of Sikkim and as a traveler you will feel the urge to get close to these small mountains of ice. The state is blessed with the presence of Zemu glacier, the largest and the most famous glacier of the eastern Himalayas. This 26 kilometre long glacier is situated in a large U-shaped valley. Apart from Zemu, North Sikkim will let you encounter Rathong Glacier and the Lonak Glacier.



## Flora and Fauna of Sikkim



Sikkim is incomplete without a dash of flora and dash of fauna. Around one-third of this India state is covered by lush green forest full of Sal trees, chestnut, maple, and bamboos. You will find forests at different heights with their nature changing accordingly. Rising above 13000 feet will let you explore the alpine zone where juniper, cypresses and rhododendrons grow in abundance. Besides being a home to over 600 species of orchids, Sikkim is also an abode of more than 4000 species of plant. Various species of Rhododendrons covering the hillsides is a colourful sight and real delight for the photographers.

If there is such a rich variety in flora of Sikkim how can the fauna be behind? More than 400 varieties of butterflies and moths add colour to the surrounding. Birds like vultures, eagles, whistling thrush, and Pheasants are commonly spotted among the 550 species of birds. Yak and musk deer are the commonly found animals in Sikkim. It is not uncommon to spot Red Panda on treetops at altitudes ranging from 6,000 to 12,000 feet. If these animals don't impress you then you can look out for blue sheep, flying squirrels, binturong, and marmots. Visiting Khangchendzonga National Park will be an experience to cherish.

## Delicacies you savor in Sikkim

Sikkimese cuisines may not be one of the best in the world but it certainly offers a wide range of delicacies for your satisfaction. Thukpa, chowmein, and wonton are commonly preferred dishes in Sikkim. Momos are extremely popular not only among the natives but the tourists also love them. Momos are steamed dumplings with vegetable, buffalo meat or pork stuffed inside. It is served with a hot soup. Tama one of the most relished local delicacies of Sikkim prepared of bamboo shoots. You can also try Kinema, a traditional fermented soybean food taken mainly as side-dish. Tasting Pakku is also a good experience for the meat lovers as this mutton curry is served with cooked rice. You will find Sikkimese diet to be rich in beef, pork and other meats.



## Cover Story



## Flora and Fauna of Sikkim

This hilly state will give you the type of accommodation you ask for. If you are looking for a cosy retreat in Paljor Stadium Road you can check-in at the Tibet Hotel and Shilton Lodge. For those intending to stay close to the town of Gangtok, hotels like The Himalayan Retreat cum Resort and Hotel Mount Simvo Tadong are ideal. They are only few minutes of walking distance from the town. MG Marg has a collection of exclusive accommodations in Sikkim. Apart from Golden Heights, which is an executive class hotel, you can also choose from Hotel Golden Pagoda and Hotel Bayul. Most of these hotels have on-site multi-cuisine restaurants.

Besides the above mentioned accommodation options in Sikkim, you have the option to select from a handful of quality hotels. Hotel Rendezvous in Gangtok is one of the noted deluxe hotels in Sikkim located at the heart of the town. Hotel Nor Khill in Gangtok has an old heritage status attached with it, reflecting its royal traditions. Hotel Central is centrally located in Gangtok and it is considered among the top class hotels in Sikkim. Hotel Sonam Delek perhaps offers the best spectacular views of the capital town of Gangtok.

## Getting to Sikkim



The capital city of Gangtok is well connected with Siliguri through National Highway 31A. Siliguri is the main gateway of Sikkim as the nearest accessible railway station is New Jalpaiguri, located near Siliguri Town. After arriving at the New Jalpaiguri railway station you can hire a car and drive 117 kilometre before you reach Gangtok. You can also avail buses from Siliguri to reach Gangtok. The Sikkim National Transport buses frequently ply from Tenzing Norgay Bus Terminus in Gangtok. Taxis are available from New Jalpaiguri Station, which charge Rs 100 per person. Traveling to Sikkim is also convenient by air as flights from the major cities in India which fly down at Bagdogra Airport near Siliguri. The airport is located 117 kilometre from Gangtok.

**If ever you plan to visit Sikkim, make sure you plan it well so that you need not have to sacrifice the niceties of this virgin Indian state.**



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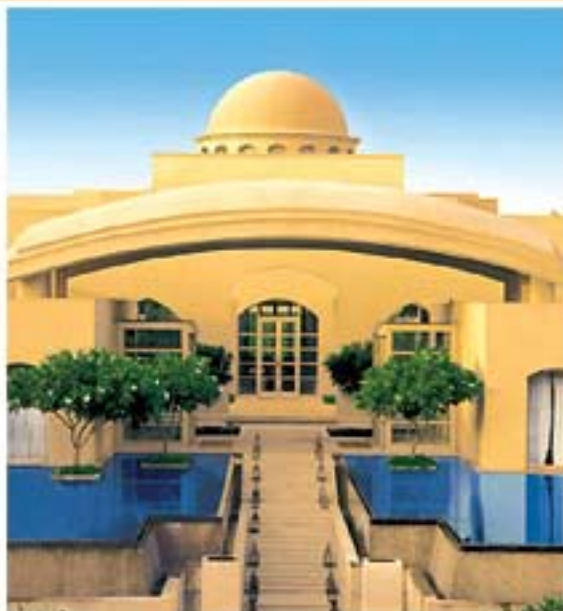
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- Rambagh Palace Hotel, Jaipur
- The Oberoi Amarvilas
- Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur
- Amanbagh - Ajabgarh, Rajasthan,
- Jaypee Palace Hotel Agra
- Park Sheraton, Chennai
- Taj West End, Bangalore



## Top Ten Destinations

- Andaman and Nicobar islands
- Coorg
- Manali
- Jodhpur & Jaisalmer
- Corbett National Park
- Ladakh & Leh
- Bandhavgarh
- Varanasi
- Arunachal Pradesh
- Goa

## Top Ten Websites

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