



Trip Notes

DARJEELING, SIKKIM & THE SINGALILA RIDGE

Trip Code: TBS
Country: India
Amended: October 2014
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ADULT GROUP



HIGHLIGHTS

- Enjoy a beautiful drive from Bagdogra, through jungles and tea plantations to Darjeeling
- Embark upon this classic trek along the Singalila Ridge
- See four of the five highest peaks on earth; Everest, Kanchenjunga, Lhotse and Makalu
- Visit Rumtek Monastery
- Stay at Himalaya Hotel in Kalimpong, where Mallory, Irvine, Hillary and Tenzing all stayed before their expeditions to Everest.
- Explore the city of Calcutta

SUMMARY

The Eastern end of the great Himalayan chain, and its lush foothills, are one of the least visited parts of this magnificent mountain range and retain much Himalayan cultural identity. The Singalila Ridge is a classic Himalayan trek, which officers of the British Raj would often take to escape the summer heat of the plains. Following the

border between India and Nepal, the trail has magnificent views of Kanchenjunga (8,586m), the world's third highest mountain and the broader Himalayan chain including Everest, Lhotse and Makalu. Along the way you'll have the chance to experience the culture and everyday life of the local people. The itinerary visits some of the most interesting parts of West Bengal and takes you on foot to the point where Nepal, Sikkim and West Bengal meet.

The trip starts in Delhi, from where we fly across India and journey into the cool climes of the Himalaya to the colonial hill station of Darjeeling, surrounded by tea plantations and served by the famous 'toy train'. To the north the mighty Himalaya are clearly visible on a clear day. From Darjeeling we move on to the dramatic landscapes of the Singalila Ridge, one of the region's classic trekking routes, taking us high above the valleys through forests of rhododendron and magnolia to gaze on spectacular Himalayan panoramas. We spend six days trekking up to and along the Singalila Ridge, which lies on the border of Nepal and India. Weather permitting we will have spectacular views of the huge bulk of Kanchenjunga (8,586m) ahead of us and we can also see three more of the world's five highest mountains; Everest (8,848m), Lhotse (8,512m) and Makalu (8,462m). We pass through friendly villages and follow ancient paths on this beautiful circular trek.

The second part of our journey takes us to the once independent kingdom of Sikkim. Annexed by India in 1975 it still retains a distinct cultural identity. The people come from several ethnic groups and as in Nepal, the two religions of Hinduism and Buddhist co-exist peacefully. Our journey takes us to the famous Buddhist monastery at Rumtek and the lively hill towns of Gangtok and Kalimpong, with its bustling bazaar, where we stay in the legendary Himalaya Hotel, which has played host to Hillary and Tenzing, Heinrich Harrer, Alexandra David Neel and many other Himalayan explorers. An overnight train journey brings us to the end of the trip in Calcutta (Kolkata), the Bengali capital, where we have a day to uncover the city's colonial past.



IS THIS TRIP FOR YOU?

This is a Moderate (Activity Level 3) trek with 3-7 hours walking per day and 6 days fully supported camping. Some previous experience of hill walking is beneficial although walks should be within the capabilities of those who lead a normal active life. The maximum altitude will be 3,660m, with an average of 3,300m.



LAND ONLY ITINERARY

The entries in bold at the end of each day indicate the type of accommodation normally used (if different standards of accommodation are used - see accommodation section below for key to codes), and meals included (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner).

Day 1 (Day 2 Ex London) Start Delhi.

The group flight will arrive into Delhi in the morning and we will transfer to our hotel. Those who have made their own flight arrangements will join us at the hotel during the day. You are free today to explore Delhi or rest after your flight; rooms may not be available until noon but it is often earlier than this. **SH**

Day 2 (Day 3 Ex London) Fly to Bagdogra, drive to Darjeeling.

Transfer to the domestic airport terminal for the flight to Bagdogra. On arrival at Bagdogra we join our vehicles, and take a beautiful 4 hour drive from the heat of the plains through jungle, tea estates and pleasant hillside villages to the coolness of Darjeeling. The road winds its way up into the hills through Kurseong. At 1,458m it is the little sister of Darjeeling. The word Kurseong comes from the Lepcha word for a small white orchid which grows prolifically in this area. Surrounded by tea estates it is the southern terminus for the steam powered trains of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway and the last 32km follows the route of the famous Toy Train, once the normal mode of transport to the famous hill station. We should arrive by late afternoon and there may be time for a wander round Chowrasta, the main square of Darjeeling. (Approx 4 hours drive). **SH (B)**



Day 3 (Day 4 Ex London) Toy train ride, drive to Dhodrey, trek to Tonglu.

On a clear day its worth getting up early for the beautiful sunrise views of Kanchenjunga from the roof of the hotel. At 2,134m and spread over a steep mountain ridge surrounded by tea plantations with a backdrop of the jagged white Himalayan peaks, Darjeeling is the archetypal hill station. Originally the site of a small monastery called Dorje Ling it was discovered by the British and established as a sanatorium for the troops in the mid 1800's. The British soon recognised the potential of the place and built their colonial bungalows and planted tea. These days people come here to escape the heat of the north Indian plains and you will find yourself surrounded by mountain people from all over the eastern Himalaya who have come to work and trade - Mother Theresa spent her early years here as a nun.

After breakfast we drive to the railway station and have a 40 minute train ride on the famous Toy Train to Ghoom (as long as the railway is working). The train chugs its way out of Darjeeling, stopping on the way to take on water and to allow passengers to take photos at the famous Batasia Loop. Here we meet our cars and drive for about 2 - 3 hours to Dhodrey, the trailhead of our trek. The traditional place from which the trek to the Singalila ridge starts from is the border town of Manaybhanjyang. However, this involves an unrelenting steep climb of 3000ft- not a great way to start a trek! Instead we drive further to Dhodrey, a picturesque village from where we follow a gentler path uphill through magnificent rhododendron forests (a blaze of reds in spring), passing meadows and meeting villagers along the trail.

Almost as soon as you reach the crest of the ridge you'll find yourself at the small settlement of Tonglu (3,100m), where we spend the first night under canvas. Approx 3-4 hrs walking. **FC (B,L,D)**

Day 4 (Day 5 Ex London) Trek to Kalapokhari.

If the weather is clear we are greeted by wonderful views of Kanchenjunga. At 8,586m Kanchenjunga is the third highest mountain in the world. It is made up of five peaks, four of them over 8,450m and its name means Five Treasures of Snow. First climbed in 1955 by Joe Brown and George Band its impressive south face is with us for most of our trek. After breakfast we leave Tonglu on an easy, broad track down to Tumling. Here we cross into Nepal to the small border village of Jaubari, a Nepali settlement. We are following the ridgeline and the views across both India and Nepal are astounding. We continue descending to the village of Gairibas at 2,538m. From here we start to climb gently to Kanyakatta and further on to Kalapokhari. Approx 5-6 hours walking. **FC (B,L,D)**

Day 5 (Day 6 Ex London) Trek to Sandakhphu.

A short day today to help with acclimatisation. As we leave camp we can see the whole of today's walk ahead of us. We start with a gradual ascent to Bikhebanjyang. We are walking through forests of rhododendron and magnolia - particularly spectacular in spring. Sandakhphu is the high point of our trek at 3,636m and is the end of an old jeep track that serves some of the villages in this area. Our camp is 30 minutes beyond the tea houses at Sandakhphu. The views from here are truly amazing - the towering slopes of Kanchenjunga lie ahead and Everest, Lhotse and Makalu now come into view. Approx 5-6 hours walking. **FC (B,L,D)**

Day 6 (Day 7 Ex London) Trek to Sabargam.

A short day to enjoy the views. We are now on the Singalila Ridge, the border between Nepal and India. At times we are walking in Nepal and at others in India. The trail undulates following the ridge through chestnut, oak and silver fir with commanding panoramic views of the Himalaya all day. Dwarf rhododendrons and primulas colour the landscape in spring. Tonight we have a spectacular wild camp at Sabargam. The views from here are stupendous and we should see a magnificent sunset and sunrise over Kanchenjunga, Everest, Lhotse and Makalu and a whole host of other Himalayan peaks. Today there is plenty of time to enjoy the views and take in the scenery. Approx 4-5 hours walking. **FC (B,L,D)**

Day 7 (Day 8 Ex London) Trek to Samaden via Phalut.

A longer day today as we trek to the end of the ridge at Phalut and then descend to Samaden. The trail to Phalut undulates further along the Singalila Ridge. The breathtaking mountain vistas of the Everest and Kanchenjunga ranges are laid out before us in all their glory. Phalut is at 3,600m and just behind the single lodge there is a ten minute walk up to a viewpoint where we are surrounded by Himalayan giants. From here we descend to Samaden. The trail is glorious and takes us through forests of oak, conifers, pine and rhododendrons, an explosion of colour in spring. We camp tonight in the village of Samaden (2,480m), a beautiful spot in a small settlement with excellent views. Approx 7-8 hours walking. **FC (B,L,D)**



Day 8 (Day 9 Ex London) Trek to Rimbik.

Our trail today winds through a collection of small settlements inhabited by Rais, Sherpas and Tamangs to Ramman, where terraced fields and villages dot the landscape. We descend along a jeep track to the Sirikhola for lunch after which we cross a suspension bridge and continue for another 2.5 hours along a road, passing through more villages en route to Rimbik (2,286m), a large Sherpa village set amongst the forest landscapes of the Singalila National Park. We stay in a basic lodge with great views across the valley. Approx 6 hours walking. **BH (B,L)**

Day 9 (Day 10 Ex London) Drive to Darjeeling.

It's quite a long drive to Darjeeling (4-5 hours) but with an early start we should arrive by lunchtime. The road winds up and down ridges climbing finally to Darjeeling. The rest of the day is free to explore one of the most famous hill stations of British India. It originally belonged to the Chogyals (Kings) of Sikkim until the late 1700's, when it was annexed by the Gurkhas. In the early 1800's the British East India Company gained control of the region and gave the land back to Sikkim. In 1828 two British officers stumbled across Dorje Ling Monastery, situated on a quiet, forested ridge. They thought it would make a nice place for a sanatorium. The King of Sikkim happily leased the uninhabited land to the East India Company and a hill station was born. The population increased and forests made way for colonial houses and tea plantations. It has always possessed one incomparable asset: the stunning view of Kanchenjunga, surely one of the finest mountain views in the world. Today, more than fifty years after independence, the town still has a late Victorian air. One change which has taken place, however, is the arrival of large numbers of Tibetan refugees, considerably strengthening the Buddhist influence in the town.

Darjeeling has a busy bustling market and there are plenty of good restaurants and little eating stalls to tempt you. To end the day a pre-dinner pink gin at the Windamere Hotel is highly recommended. **SH (B)**

Day 10 (Day 11 Ex London) Drive to Gangtok.

Before we leave Darjeeling we visit the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute founded by Tenzing Norgay and where many of the famous Sherpa climbers have been trained in mountaineering skills. We then drive to Gangtok (5-6 hours), the capital of Sikkim and the second part of our journey. Spectacularly situated on a ridge that flanks the Ranipool River, the town has magnificent views across the entire Kanchenjunga Range. In Gangtok we stay at the Netuk House Hotel, a traditional Sikkimese family house, now run as a small hotel with splendid food and traditional service. **CH (B,D)**

Day 11 (Day 12 Ex London) In Gangtok, visit Rumtek.

A bustling friendly hill station perched at between 1,400m and 1,700m on a ridge Gangtok is the capital of Sikkim. The name means 'hilltop' and the town is steeply tiered along a precipitous mountain ridge. If clear the views are inspiring with Kanchenjunga soaring above the horizon. Now part of India, Sikkim was once an independent kingdom inhabited by Lepchas. Over the years Tibetans migrated over the border for trade but it was not until 1642 that Sikkim became an independent kingdom with its own Chogyal (King). Over the centuries Sikkim was invaded by Nepalais, Bhutanese and Tibetans but it always managed to preserve its independence. The



British East India Company saw Sikkim as a gateway to trade with Tibet and in 1888 it came under British rule and the capital was shifted to Gangtok. Sovereignty was returned in 1895 and in 1947 after Indian independence the Prime Minister, Nehru agreed to a special protectorate status for Sikkim. However after Nehru's death his daughter Indira Gandhi had little patience for maintaining Sikkim and its monarchy (the Raja had married an American who was now queen of Sikkim) and in 1975 Sikkim became the 22nd state of India. Populated by Lepchas, Nepalais and Bhutias, most who follow Tibetan Buddhism the culture here is more akin to Tibet than India.



We spend today exploring Gangtok and its surroundings. In the morning we visit Rumtek, 24km from Gangtok and the largest and most famous monastery in Sikkim. Founded in the 16th century, Rumtek served as the main seat of the Karma Kargyu lineage in Sikkim. The Karma Kargyu is one of the sects of Tibetan Buddhism and the Karmapa Lama is the head of this sect. When the 16th Karmapa arrived in Sikkim in 1959 after fleeing from Tibet, he found the monastery in ruins. As the place is auspicious he had the monastery rebuilt and it became the main seat in exile of the Karmapa Lamas. When the 16th Karmapa died a new reincarnation was found in Rumtek. However, in 1999 the Tibetan Karmapa escaped from Tsurpu in Tibet and fled over the Himalaya to Dharamsala. Since then Rumtek has become embroiled in controversy as to who is the 'real' 17th Karmapa and armed guards now patrol the monastery. It has some excellent Buddhist paintings and relics, and a good view towards Gangtok.

We return to Gangtok for lunch and the afternoon is free for individual exploration. You could visit the 200 year old Enchey Monastery, which sits above the town. From Ganesh Tok and Hanuman you get a bird's eye view of Gangtok and on a clear day views of the Himalaya in the distance. The Flower Show (or Flower Exhibition Centre) is famous for its floral exhibitions, especially in spring. Its orchid show from mid March to April is said to be one of the finest in South Asia. Also worth visiting is the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, which specialises in research into Tibetan Buddhism and the language of Tibet. The institute houses an excellent collection of Tibetan Buddhist artefacts. There should also be time to explore the bazaars and markets and well recommended is the Cottage Industries Institute where local handicrafts are made. (Please note that opening days and times of the various sights in Gangtok change frequently; your leader will have up to date opening times.) **CH (B,D)**

Day 12 (Day 13 Ex London) Drive to Kalimpong.

After breakfast we set off for the drive to Kalimpong. We leave Sikkim at Rangpo and drive through the wild Teesta Valley. If it is possible we leave the main road and take a quiet but spectacular side road through vast forest plantations and small villages to the ridge overlooking Kalimpong. En route to the hotel we usually visit the most important Hindu temple in Kalimpong, and the Dr Graham's home and school (occasionally we may visit the Hindu temple the following day instead). Dr Graham was a Scottish missionary and he founded the home in the early part of the century. We spend some time exploring the bustling bazaar before driving to the Himalayan Hotel, where we stay tonight. In the early days of the last century the hotel was the family home of David MacDonald, who was the British trade agent in Gyantse for 20 years. After he retired he turned the family home into an hotel and it has remained in the family ever since. Although a bit faded at the edges now, it still retains its charm and character. It has been home to Everest expeditions from the days of Mallory and Irvine

and Hillary and Tenzing were frequent visitors. Alexandra David Neel and Heinrich Harrer are just some of the famous travellers who have stayed here. Today's driving time is around 4 hours. **SH (B,D)**

Day 13 (Day 14 Ex London) Drive to Siliguri; overnight train to Calcutta.

We have the morning free in Kalimpong which allows time to explore the town, visit a cactus show (optional), or relax in the hotel gardens. After lunch we drive for around 3 hours to Siliguru where we board the overnight train to Calcutta (Kolkata). Train times in India change regularly, although it usually departs at around 8pm or 9pm. Overnight train. **(B)**

Day 14 (Day 15 Ex London) Arrive Calcutta; free to explore.

We arrive in Calcutta (Kolkata) in the early hours of the morning and have the day to explore this fascinating city. Once the capital of British India, Calcutta has had a turbulent past. It was central to the struggle for Indian independence and thousands of Bengalis refugees came here at the start of the 1900's. It is a city of striking contrasts and the unusual sights, pungent smells and the cacophony of sounds of the country's second largest city are an experience unique to India.

If you would rather not navigate Calcutta alone, your leader can usually arrange a short (1/2hr) guided city tour for you (pay locally). **SH (B)**

Day 15 (Day 16 Ex London) End Calcutta.

Those on the flight inclusive package will depart for London this morning for the daytime flight back to London; Land Only arrangements will finish after check-out from the hotel. **(B)**

For those on group flights, these depart in the morning and will arrive in the UK the same day.

EXTENSIONS

Please call our Sales team for current prices.

GOLDEN TRIANGLE EXTENSION

The following five-day extension including Agra and Jaipur can be added to the start of the main itinerary.

A visit to the incredible Taj Mahal and other great Moghul cities close to Delhi is an excellent way to end a visit to Northern India.

The Taj Mahal was built by the Moghul Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal, who died in 1631, and is one of the most beautiful sights on earth. Its shining white marble walls, inlaid with semi precious stones, never fails to amaze a first time visitor. Located at Agra, it is only a short train journey from Delhi and is best visited twice to fully appreciate its magnificence. Close to the Taj is the imposing Red Fort of Akbar, third of the Moghul Emperors, whose mighty sandstone walls enclose the beautiful white marble Pearl Mosque and the palaces, halls, courtyards and fountains of his sons and successors, Jehangir and Shah Jahan. It is here that the latter spent his last years, imprisoned by his own son Aurangzeb.

A short drive from Agra is the deserted royal city of Fatehpur Sikri. This is an impressive and well-preserved citadel and served as Akbar's capital from 1571. The mosque, designed to hold ten thousand worshippers, the palaces, residences and halls of audience are all of decorative red sandstone. The magnificence, however, only lasted 14 years, as in 1584 Akbar left Fatehpur Sikri to secure his outlying territories, leaving this city much as we see it today.

The Pink City of Jaipur, capital of Rajasthan, is one of the most attractive and colourful cities in India only a few hours on from Agra. This planned Moghul city of broad avenues is built of sandstone and was painted pink at a later stage. In the centre of Jaipur is the City Palace, formerly the residence of the Maharaja and now a fine museum containing rare manuscripts, paintings, royal garments and weapons. Close to the palace is one of the most intriguing sights of India, the observatory of Jai Singh. This is an assembly of immense astronomical instruments made of marble and brass set in a pleasant garden. We will also see Jaipur's impressive landmark, the Hawa Mahal, or Palace of the Winds. A few miles from the main city is the splendid Amber Palace, rising above a lake. The imposing hilltop fort contains large courtyards and interiors with fine decorations,

including inlaid alabaster panels and a Chamber of Mirrors. We can walk or ride an elephant (optional) up the hill and through the massive gateway to the courtyard. Jaipur is a centre of many handicrafts, such as durries (woven rugs), carpets, printed cloth, semi-precious stones, leatherware etc; it will be difficult to leave a workshop without buying anything!

Please note that the flights from Delhi to London are popular and if you wish to do the extension you should book early.

Day 1 Arrive Delhi SH

Day 2 Drive to Agra (usually arriving by noon). The day is spent visiting the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort. CH (B)

Day 3 Travelling by car you take the one-hour journey to Fatehpur Sikri, a magnificent abandoned Moghul city. In the late morning you will continue by road to the 'Pink City' of Jaipur. CH (B)

Day 4 A full day sightseeing in and around Jaipur; you will see the Palace of the Winds, the City Palace and the Amber Palace. CH (B)

Day 5 (Day 1 LO, Day 2 Ex London of main trip itinerary) An early start, taking a packed breakfast with you for the return journey to Delhi either by road or on the train, the journey taking about 5 hours. Upon arrival in Delhi you will be taken to meet the group. SH (B)

We use good tourist class hotels in Delhi, Agra and Jaipur on bed and breakfast basis. These have en suite rooms, generally comfortable facilities and a reliable electricity and water supplies. You will travel between the cities and sites using a mixture of trains and private vehicles (car or minibus, depending on how many people take part in the extension) and accompanied by an English-speaking local guide. In the evenings, you will be free to enjoy the towns.



KASHMIR EXTENSION

The following five-day extension to Kashmir can be added to the start of the main itinerary.

The Vale of Kashmir is one of the most enchanting places on earth and a great way to spend a few days relaxing before or after your main trip. Surrounded by the snow-capped peaks of the Indian Himalaya, dotted with emerald green valleys and beautiful lakes it has attracted visitors since the time of the Moghul Emperors. 'Kashmir, only Kashmir' gasped Emperor Jehangir in the 17th century as he lay on his death bed. Srinagar (meaning 'beautiful city'), is the capital of Kashmir and was founded in the 3rd century BC by Ashoka. The city sprawls round the Jhelum River and Dal and Nagin Lakes. The Moghul Emperors laid out beautiful gardens and then the British colonials discovered the wonderful climate of Kashmir and it was the perfect escape from the heat of the plains. Prevented from building on land, the British built sumptuous houseboats on the lake. Today these beautifully carved floating hotels have become synonymous with a visit to Kashmir. What better way to relax than to sit on the veranda, sipping the delicately flavoured Kashmiri green tea as you watch the world float by.

All the houseboats have a living and dining room furnished in traditional British style with meticulously carved walnut furniture. All bedrooms have attached bathrooms with running hot and cold water, and each boat is looked after by a 'houseboy' who will see to

your every need. The best way to explore the lakes is by shikara, a comfortable gondola type boat.

Kashmir of course is famous for its handicrafts and you will see magnificent walnut wood carving, acquisitively painted papier maché, delicately embroidered shawls and of course the hand knotted silk carpets.

Please note that the flights from Delhi to London are often heavily booked and if you wish to do the extension you should book early.

Day 1 Arrive Delhi SH

Day 2 Fly from Delhi to Kashmir. Transfer to the houseboat. In the afternoon there will be an introductory shikara ride round the lake.
CH - houseboat (B,D)

Day 3 Today we will visit the famous Moghul Gardens. To get there we will have a relaxing shikara ride. First we will visit Nishat Bagh ('Garden of Pleasure'). This garden was laid out by Asaf Khan, the brother of Empress Nur Jahan in 1636. Ten terraces rise out from Dal Lake and are bedecked with flowers and mighty Chinar trees. We continue on to Shalimar Gardens ('Abode of Love'), which were laid out by one of Emperor Jehangir's nobles. After lunch we have a relaxing boat ride back to our houseboat. **CH - houseboat (B,D)**

Day 4 In the early morning (about 5am) we will visit the early morning vegetable market where the men meet to buy and sell vegetables on the lake. A cacophony of noise and haggling ensues as each tries to out bargain the other. After breakfast the rest of the day is free for optional activities. You may want to visit the other two Moghul Gardens - Cheshmashahi and Peri Mahal or you can visit some of the craft workshops - including wood and papier maché makers. If you fancy a hike there is the chance to walk up to Shankaracharya Hill. Known as the 'Takht-e-eSuleiman', the temple, believed to have been first constructed in 371BC, stands above Dal Lake and you get great views of the whole of Srinagar from the top. **CH - houseboat (B,D)**

Day 5 (Day 1 LO, Day 2 Ex London of main trip itinerary) We transfer to the airport for the short flight back to Delhi. Upon arrival in Delhi you will be taken to meet the group. **SH (B)**

The weather in Kashmir in June, July, Aug and September is usually hot and sunny. In July and August the daytime temperatures are between 24°C and 30°C. Mornings and evenings are cool and pleasant. It's a little cooler in June and September but still should be hot and sunny in the daytime.

ACCOMMODATION

We use good tourist class hotels in Delhi, Darjeeling, Gangtok, Kalimpong and Kolkata. In Rimbik we stay in a simple but clean Lodge with common bathroom and toilets.

During the trek we camp; the camping is full service and we provide two man tents, dining tent and toilet tent. We have a full trekking crew whilst on trek.

Overnight Train Journeys - The overnight train will be booked in 2-Tier or 3-Tier sleeper A/C. Although there are many excellent trains in India, the standard of seating and sleeping is not in line with European standards. All seats are pre-allocated at the time the tickets are issued, meaning that we are not able to guarantee the whole group are together on the train, your leader will manage this as best as possible and will always check on you during the journey. Indian trains are safe to travel on however we would recommend that you keep any valuables with you at all times. Snacks are often offered on board (at an additional cost) but you may wish to purchase your own food prior to the journey. Whilst some trains have western-style facilities, the majority of services are equipped with squat toilets. Please note trains sometimes get delayed for numerous reasons, which is obviously beyond our control, however we endeavour to minimise the impact of these delays on the overall itinerary.

Single Accommodation:

Single rooms and tents are available for a supplement from £235 (approx. US\$420): the price will depend on the season you are travelling. Please advise the sales team at the time of booking if you wish to add this to your booking and they will confirm the price for you. Please note this does not include the overnight sleeper train journey.

Extra Accommodation:

We can arrange additional accommodation for you prior to, or after your trip, in Delhi and Calcutta. The hotels we use in these cities change for each departure, and the start hotel is only confirmed 4 weeks prior to departure, due to operational reasons. Therefore, if you would like us to book additional accommodation for you, please contact our sales department who will be able to give you further information.

KEY TO ACCOMMODATION: We indicate in the itinerary what type of accommodation is provided on each day. The descriptions are guidelines only and are used to give an idea of the accommodation offered, rather than an exact description.

CH Comfortable Hotel, Lodge or Gite - twin rooms with en suite facilities, reliable electricity and water supply, good service and some added amenities.

SH Standard Hotel, Lodge or Gite - no-frills hotel, usually with twin rooms and en suite facilities. Service and amenities are generally adequate.

BH Basic Hotel, Lodge or Gite, Mountain Hut, Village House - can be communal, often consisting of just a bed and shared facilities. Bed linen not normally provided. Running water, toilets and electricity may be inconsistent or non-existent. Cleanliness is not always assured.

FC Full-service Camping - two person tents sometimes in a private or public campsite that contains a communal ablutions block and other amenities and sometimes in a wild camp with toilet tents and mess tent or dining equipment provided. All camp chores are done for you from erecting / dismantling of your tent, to cooking & washing up.

FOOD & TRANSPORT

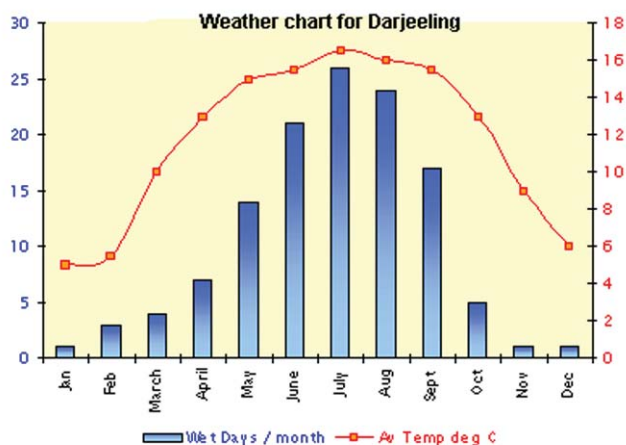
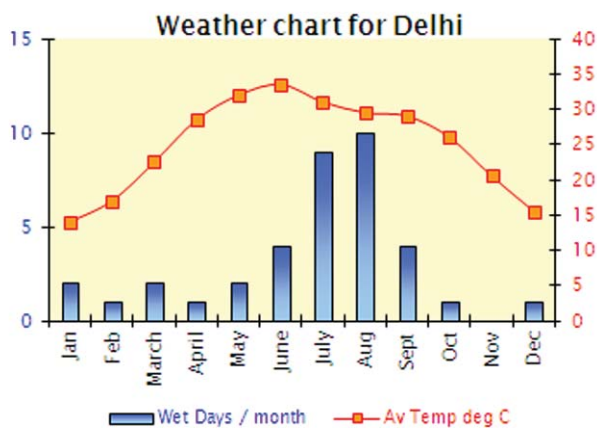
Food

Breakfast is included throughout plus 6 lunches and 8 dinners. You should allow around £60 (approx. US\$96) for the additional meals and drinks. Mineral water, soft and alcoholic drinks are not included and are widely available. Soft drinks are generally cheap, but beers can approach Western prices.

Transport

In Delhi and Calcutta transfers will be by bus or minibus depending on the size of the group. In Darjeeling and Sikkim transport will be in jeeps.

WEATHER AND SEASONALITY



As Sikkim has a pretty wet climate, even by Himalayan standards, our departures are carefully timed to take advantage of the likely best weather conditions. Delhi will be hot in the daytime, especially on spring departures, and reasonably warm at night (cool on the October departure). Darjeeling and Gangtok will be warm during the day with cool to cold night time temperatures. Weather on trek will vary with the altitude, but will in general be comfortable for walking during the day (it can be really quite hot when the sun is out, particularly on the spring departure). At night on trek it can get very cold with temperatures down to as low as -5° Celcius. In late October please bring warm clothes for the evenings. Frost must be expected at night above about 3,000m on the spring departure, and above about 2,000m on the October departure.

Although the departures are timed to coincide when the weather is normally good, you should remember that in any mountain area the weather is never wholly predictable and you should be prepared and equipped to deal with any differences in weather beyond the conditions described above.

JOINING THE TRIP IN THE UK

16 days, normally depart London Sat, return Sun

Itinerary Start

The group flight from London is an overnight flight departing the day before Day 1 of the itinerary.

Flights from London

We normally use the scheduled services of Jet Airways (depending on availability). As flight timings and schedules change regularly we recommend you call one of our specialist sales staff or your agent to confirm up-to-date timings. Please note timings may change at a later date and cannot be confirmed until approximately two weeks before departure.

Internal flights during the trip are with a local airline.

Please note if you are arranging your own flights that the trip starts in Delhi and ends in Calcutta (Kolkata).

UK Regional Flights

The Flight Inclusive price is based on a London departure, but we are happy to tailor this to your local or regional airport. Please visit www.exodus.co.uk/regionaldepartures for a useful overview of the options available, and contact our sales team for expert advice.

If booking regional flights other than with Exodus, you must allow a minimum connecting time (in addition to the international check in time) of 1 hour at Gatwick, and 1½ hours at Heathrow; this is longer than the official minimum, but baggage handling is known to be subject to delays.

Airport Transfers

Airport transfers are included for those on the group flights. Please note that transfers are not included for clients arriving on any other flight, even if Exodus has booked it. Those arriving from London on non-group flights should read the airport transfer section below for information on reaching the start point. Please check with the Exodus office.

JOINING THE TRIP IN DELHI

15 days, normally start Delhi Sun, end Calcutta Sun

Itinerary Start

Your trip normally starts at our hotel in Delhi in the morning of Day 1 of the itinerary. Details of how to reach the start point are provided in the Final Joining Instructions - sent approximately two weeks before departure. Hotel check-in times are normally from around 12 Noon.

Airport Transfers

If you require airport transfers, you may (by prior arrangement only) be able to join the group transfer. Transfers are arranged to coincide with the arrival time of the group flight - please check the group flight details 2 weeks before departure. If you do not take this transfer, or miss it, you must make your own way to the joining point at your own expense.

If you would like us to organise a private transfer, please ask your sales consultant for a quote. Please ensure that you provide us with all relevant information at least 2 weeks before departure.

The cost of a taxi is likely to be about £10 (US\$15) should you decide to make your way independently.

Full joining instructions including local emergency numbers will be sent to you as part of our Final Joining Instructions. If you do not receive these at least a week before departure, or require them earlier please contact our office or your travel agent.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Tourism can be a real help to local communities, providing income, positive cultural exchanges and a financial incentive to protect their natural environment. Ours is a 'total approach' to responsible tourism, covering everything from the way we plan and operate our trips to the practices of Exodus as a company.

We have an excellent long-term relationship with the local operator who employ and train all leaders. We provide refresher training with a focus on Responsible Tourism, so our local leaders can educate our clients locally on helping to preserve the way of life in their area. Many local restaurants and shops are also used to purchase items throughout this trip which benefits the local community.

We ask that you use environmentally sound practices whilst in India:

Please try not to buy mineral water. You will be provided with boiled drinking water on trek but it is advisable to bring purification tablets/liquid such as Biox Aqua to treat water. Burnable rubbish will be burnt on trek. We ask that each trekker keep a rubbish bag for non-burnable rubbish and that you take it back to Calcutta or UK. Please leave all unnecessary packaging at home and do not bring it to India.

Please note that many Indians are still traditional in the way they dress. Out of respect for the country we ask you to dress conservatively - no sleeveless tops. Although shorts are acceptable on trek only they

should be very modest and reach the knees and for women a skirt or trousers are preferable.

Please bring bio degradable soaps and shampoos and when washing near a river use a washing bowl provided by the camp staff and do not pollute the rivers.

Monasteries and temples are places of worship, please be respectful when visiting and whilst taking photographs. Your leader will brief you on appropriate local behaviour.

For full details of our Responsible Tourism Policy please visit:

www.exodus.co.uk/responsible-travel

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Passports and Visas

All nationalities require a full passport that must be valid beyond the intended length of stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, if one is necessary, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information offered below is to help you with that process. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

Visas are required if you are British and for most other nationalities. To apply for the Indian visa yourself you will need to go through the Indian High Commission's VF service (<http://in.vfsglobal.co.uk>). The current visa fee for British passport holders is £82 (plus a service charge and consular fee amounting to £10.20), and if using Travcours there will be an additional £30 service charge plus £9 postage (Royal Mail Special Delivery within UK). The visa fee for most other passport holders is much lower. We suggest that you carry a photocopy of your passport information page, your visa and your insurance document.

If your trip visits Ladakh, in the very north of India, do not mention this on your Indian visa application. This can sometimes slow down or even cause the embassy to reject your visa.

Visa regulations can change without notice: please check the current regulations in good time to obtain a visa if one is required.

**** Please do not mention Sikkim on your application form. If you do so your application will be rejected. ****

Sikkim Permit

A permit is required to enter Sikkim. As per the current regulations we can obtain this upon entry into Sikkim or in Darjeeling.

Please take a standard passport-sized photo with you.

Vaccinations and Health

Travel health can often be something people forget about before going away, but a little preparation and knowledge can go a long way to help you stay fit and healthy while abroad.

There are no mandatory vaccination requirements for this trip.

Recommended vaccinations for this trip are: Polio, Tetanus, Diphtheria, Typhoid, Hepatitis A.

The risk of malaria on this trip is slight, but you may wish to consult your GP or travel health clinic for further advice.

Dengue fever and/or Chikungunya are known risks in places visited on this trip. Both are tropical viral diseases spread by daytime biting mosquitoes. There is currently no vaccine or prophylaxis available for either, and therefore the best form of prevention is to avoid being bitten. We recommend you take the usual precautions to avoid mosquito bites.

The above information can change at short notice; as we are not qualified to answer all your questions about travel health we strongly recommend you contact your Medical Professional or a Travel Health Clinic at least 8 weeks prior to departure for up-to-date information.

Altitude Warning

This trip includes one or more nights over 3500m above sea level, where there is a genuine risk of being affected by Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS). If left untreated AMS can be life-threatening. We

expect most clients to experience some mild symptoms of altitude sickness, such as headaches and shortness of breath while walking or sleeplessness. Our leaders are trained to identify symptoms of severe AMS and if a client requires extra care, arrangements such as rapid descent will be made immediately.

On some days this trek climbs faster than commonly published ascent rate recommendations. Based upon an assessment by our external safety and medical advisors and our risk assessment process, we consider the ascent rate is acceptable due to the additional safety measures that are in place for our customers. All our trips operating at high altitude meet our internal altitude safety standards that minimise the risk of serious incidents occurring whilst travelling at altitude.

A number of medical conditions or medications can reduce your body's ability to acclimatise. This may affect your performance and make you more susceptible to AMS. If you are worried about any pre-existing conditions, such as heart conditions, or your overall physical ability, you must seek medical advice prior to booking. The drug Diamox (also known as acetazolamide and normally only available on prescription) has been shown to aid acclimatisation in some individuals, and therefore may reduce the risk of AMS. Clients considering using Diamox should speak to their doctor about the drug, its side-effects and a prescription

Please note that while we endeavour to assist all our clients in achieving their goals, there may be times when your leader decides to delay or stop your ascent based on your overall condition, or the onset of AMS.

If you are not taking out Exodus Travel Insurance, make sure that your policy covers you up to the maximum altitude on this trip, and includes helicopter evacuation. Please take proof of this with you on the trip, as you will need to show it to the leader.

Insurance - are you adequately covered?

You must have adequate travel insurance, and if you are joining a trip which goes to high altitude, you must check that you are covered up to the maximum altitude of the trip. If you are resident in the UK we strongly recommend Exodus travel insurance, which is specifically designed to cover all activities on your trip.

Local Time

GMT +5hours 30mins.

Electricity

230/240 volts AC, 50 Hz. There are recharging facilities at all the hotels, the electricity supply is not 100% reliable but it is usually only off for short periods of time. There are various types of plugs used in India so a worldwide adaptor is useful if intending to recharge phones and cameras.

Group, Staff and Support

The group will generally be between 3 and 16 people. There will be a local leader and drivers and local guides where needed.

The trip is lead by a qualified, English speaking, local leader. On trek there will be a cook, assistants and mules to carry the baggage.

Our Indian team has proved very popular with clients with their incredible knowledge, passion and hospitality adding greatly to the experience. There is no better way to experience Indian culture than letting an Indian guide show you around their country.

The minimum age of clients on this trip is 16 years. Please note that anyone aged under 18 must be accompanied by (and share accommodation with) a parent or legal guardian.

MONEY MATTERS

Currency Information

The national currency of India is the Indian Rupee (INR), with an exchange rate of 95 to the UK£ and 60 to the US\$.

Exchange rates are correct at the time of publication.

It is illegal to import or export rupees. Do not accept torn or (very) dirty Indian banknotes from banks or in change as they will almost certainly not be accepted as legal tender in India. Please ask for low

denomination notes of 100 and 500 Rupees, as 1000 Rupee notes will be difficult to use out of Delhi. You can change money back from Rupees into Pounds or Dollars at Delhi airport, but you must produce an exchange receipt showing that you changed money in India.

Money change facilities are available on arrival at Delhi's international airport (you may not get the best rates in the airport), the hotel in Delhi and in Calcutta.

Although changing money outside of Delhi and Calcutta is not advised, it is possible to change US\$ and £ in cash in both Darjeeling, Gangtok and Kalimpong, but please note the exchange rates may be lower than in Delhi.

ATM availability/Credit Card Acceptance/Travellers cheques

ATM machines are now available in the big cities in India and are generally reliable (Visa and MasterCard are best); you should not rely on these 100% of the time though so please take some cash with you as well. Please inform your bank before departure that you are travelling to India and carry the relevant telephone number with you in case they put a block on your card.

You can pay with credit cards in bigger shops all over India.

Extra Expenses and Spending Money

Apart from the extra food, you should allow about £3 (approx. US\$4.80) a day for drinks and incidentals perhaps a little more if you enjoy a few beers, as these are comparatively expensive in India. Whilst on trek there is not very much to spend your money on, but in Delhi, Gangtok, Darjeeling and Calcutta there is a wealth of souvenirs and trinkets etc.

India has very good opportunities for shopping, especially for locally made goods, and during your trip it is highly likely that your local guides will take you to emporiums as well as workshops where these goods are made. Many people find this a great opportunity to buy local handicrafts, silk, jewellery and carpets. Guides will often assume that visitors will want to go shopping, it is very much part of the culture, but if you do not wish to go please make this clear to your local guide at the time.

Tipping (leader and local staff)

Tipping is of course entirely at your discretion, but is customary in India. Please allow about £45 (approx. US\$72) for tips for the whole trip. Your leader in India will offer to run a tip kitty for tips in hotel and for guides and drivers. The tip will not cover the Indian leader, tipping of whom is at your discretion.

WHAT TO TAKE

Essential Equipment and Clothing

3/4 seasons sleeping bag
Sleeping mattress/thermarest
3 season jacket
Waterproof synthetic or leather walking boots (worn in)
Waterproof jacket and trousers
Sandals/Trainers
Warm hat
Gloves
Several pairs of walking socks
Tracksuit or thermals for the evening
Warm mid layer (fleece)
Shirts/t-shirts/base layers
Light - mid weight trousers
Long shorts or skirt for women
Sunhat, sunglasses, sunscreen and lip salve with sun protection
Daypack
Towel
Head torch
Water bottle (minimum 2 litres)
Plastic bags (bin liners) to line daypack and for packing clothing in the kitbag
Toilet paper
Small personal first aid kit
Passport photo for your Sikkim permit
You will be restricted to 15 kgs of luggage whilst on trek. Any baggage not needed on trek can be left in the hotel in Darjeeling.

Optional items:

Trekking pole(s)
Hand washing gel
Water purification
Biodegradable soap/shampoo

Duvet jackets and sleeping bags are available for hire from Trek Hire UK (<http://www.trekhireuk.com/>). Trek Hire UK can also provide a range of trekking essentials and accessories, from rucksacks to trekking poles. Please note that supplies are limited, and it is advisable to reserve any equipment as early as possible. For trips to Kilimanjaro, Nepal and Peru, certain items such as duvet jackets, sleeping bags and thick mattresses (mattresses not available in Nepal) can be hired through our local agents. These must be pre-booked through the Exodus office to ensure availability. Please call for details.

Baggage and Baggage Allowance

If you live in the UK or Ireland we provide an Exodus kitbag to pack your luggage in whilst on trek. Please note that if you book close to the departure date we cannot guarantee that your kitbag will arrive before your trip starts. If this is the case please use a suitable alternative. We regret it is not possible for us to supply kitbags for those who book from outside of the UK or Ireland.

At time of writing the standard weight limit for hold baggage on the recommended international carrier for this trip is 20kg. We recommend packing only one piece of checked baggage.

Internal flights in the destination country are subject to a weight limit of 15kg.

As advice about luggage allowances for both hand and hold luggage is subject to change, we suggest you check www.baa.com and/or the airline's website for the latest information prior to your departure.

Reading List:

Northeast India Lonely Planet Guidebook
Northeast India (Footprint Travel Guide)
The Age of Kali by William Darymple
The Raj Quartet by Paul Scott
The Wonder that was India by A L Basham
Concise Flowers of the Himalaya by Oleg Polunin and Adam Stainton
The Dance of 17 Lives: The True story of Tibet's 17th Karmapa By Mick Brown
Plain Tales from the Raj by Charles Allen
Calcutta by Geoffrey Moorhouse

Maps:

Himalaya Nelles Map incl Tibet/Kashmir/Nepal/ Sikkim and Bhutan

The Oxford Bookshop in Darjeeling has an excellent collection of books.

JOIN THE EXODUS ONLINE COMMUNITY

Don't forget to visit the Community area on our website. You can view the range of Exodus videos and podcasts, read trip write-ups which have featured in the national media and take advantage of some special deals on travel gear and equipment.

In the Community Travel Forum you'll find the Departure Lounge where you can discuss your trip with fellow travellers before you depart. When you get back from your holiday remember to upload your images to the relevant trip page on our website. This helps other people see what our holidays are really like and you'll be entered automatically into our monthly photo competition.

To make full use of the Community you'll need to join My Exodus. It's free, registration is simple and easy, so what are you waiting for?

<http://www.exodus.co.uk/community>

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR ALL CLIENTS

Exodus operates a 24 hour duty office for emergencies, which can be contacted on 0044 (0)1582 640 045.

Every time that you travel abroad you should take the time to read the warnings in the essential information in the brochure or at www.exodus.co.uk/about-exodus/essential-information?

Full joining instructions including local emergency numbers, and details of how to reach the start point, will be sent to you approximately 2 to 3 weeks prior to departure. If you do not receive these at least a week before departure, or require them earlier please contact our office or your travel agent.

The information in these Trip Notes is given in good faith. Where differences exist between the Trip Notes and our current brochure or website, the Trip Notes supersede the brochure and website. All holidays can be subject to unexpected changes; in order to enjoy them you should be prepared to be flexible where necessary. Occasionally, as stated in our brochure, it may not be possible to follow the itinerary as planned. This may be for a variety of reasons - climatic, political, physical or other. In these circumstances we will make the best possible alternative arrangements that maintain the integrity of the original itinerary.

As fuel prices, airport taxes and exchange rates fluctuate, and airlines manage their rates to match demand, it is proving harder than ever to guarantee our Flight Inclusive prices. Although we endeavour to keep our website as accurate as possible, daily fluctuations mean that our Flight Inclusive price may be out of date. For accurate prices we recommend that you contact one of our Travel Experts, or your Travel Agent.

Prices and exchange rates were correct at the time of publication. The most up-to-date prices can be found on the Exodus website.

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HOW TO BOOK YOUR TRIP

1. Check availability

Go online to check availability, or contact us by phone or email.

2. Secure your place

You can provisionally hold a place on this trip, usually for between three and seven days.

3. Complete your booking and payment

When you're ready to book, go to www.exodus.co.uk for online booking, book over the phone or you can complete a booking form (available online or on request by calling us). We accept all major credit and debit cards, or you can pay by cheque.

Book with confidence: Exodus is fully licensed and bonded as a tour operator. We hold Air Traffic Organisers Licence (ATOL) number 2582 issued and bonded with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). We are also bonded to the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and we are members of the Federation of Tour Operators (FTO) and ABTA - The Travel Association. This means you can book your Exodus holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected.



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