

# itinerary

## India: Sikkim & Darjeeling

### Days 1, 2

Our caravan of insight and adventure begins as we depart for **India**.

### Day 3

Arrive in **Kolkata** and transfer to hotel. Rest from international flight. In the evening dinner and introduction to our program. Overnight - Kolkata.

### Day 4

After lunch we explore Kolkata, the true cultural capital of India that possesses a distinct Bengali soul. It is considered India's friendliest city and was once the capital of British India. Our program begins with a visit to the **Pareshnath Jain Temple** in the north-east section of the city where we will receive our first lecture on Jainism. The Jain religion is one of India's three most important spiritual traditions that originated in India besides Hinduism and Buddhism. Founded in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC by Mahavira, a contemporary of the Buddha, Jainism is dedicated and focused on Ahimsa – non-violence with a profound respect for nature. After our lecture we will explore this magnificent temple with its riot of sculptural ornamentation. Overnight – Kolkata.

### Day 5

Our day begins with a visit to Kolkata's most sacred Hindu temple, the **Dakshineswar Kali Temple** founded in 1847. Here we will receive a lecture on Hinduism, the major religion in India, and learn why Hinduism permeates every aspect of life in both the sacred and the profane worlds in India. After our lecture we will explore this fantastic temple while we observe Hindus coming to perform their daily rituals and practices. After lunch, we will explore another Hindu Temple dedicated Kali, the wife of Shiva, who is one of the fieriest female deities in the Hindu pantheon. In the evening we will experience a live performance of Bengali music and dance. Overnight – Kolkata.

### Day 6

We depart Kolkata on a short one hour flight to Bagdogra where we transfer to our private vehicles. Our **Himalayan Tour** begins as we drive into the picturesque foothills to **Darjeeling**, a popular hill station established by the British in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Darjeeling is one of the most charming towns in the eastern Himalaya that sits upon a 7000 foot ridge and surrounded by tea plantations. In the afternoon we explore **Bhutia Busty Gompa**, our first Tibetan Buddhist monastery that offers a fantastic view of **Kanchenjunga**, the world's third highest mountain. Overnight – Darjeeling.

### Day 7

Early morning rise and visit to **Tiger Hill**, the highest spot in the area at 8,495 feet. Here we have the most spectacular view of Kanchenjunga (28,201 feet) and a remarkable panorama of the massive Himalayan range including **Mount Everest**. In the afternoon, we then visit **Yiga Choeling Gompa**, the most famous monastery in the area that enshrines a beautiful image of the future Buddha Maitreya. Late afternoon is free to explore Darjeeling's wonderful market where we find people from all over the eastern Himalaya who come to work and trade. Overnight – Darjeeling.



**Day 8**

Early morning departure for **Sikkim**, a former Tibetan Buddhist Himalayan Kingdom. Sikkim was once regarded as one of the last Himalayan ‘Shangri-las’ because of its ancient Buddhist monasteries, pristine lakes, superb mountain terrain, and remoteness. On our spectacular mountain drive through Sikkim’s terraced landscape, we are greeted by stupas, prayer flags, and majestic mountain scenery into this “living botanical garden”. We arrive in **Gangtok**, the capital of Sikkim, and transfer to hotel. Overnight – Gangtok.

**Day 9**

After breakfast we have a full day to explore Gangtok – which literally means ‘hilltop.’ Set on a high ridge, Gangtok offers excellent views of the entire Kanchenjunga range. Our morning begins as we explore **Enchey Gompa**, home to about 100 monks of the Nyingmapa school. This monastery has a beautiful prayer hall with exquisite paintings and sculptures representing many of the most popular Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the vast Tibetan Buddhist pantheon. After lunch we will receive a lecture from one of the most renowned Buddhist Lamas in Sikkim who will share his many years of experience and in-depth knowledge of Buddhist philosophy and meditation. Overnight – Gangtok.

**Day 10**

Morning drive to the village of **Rumtek** located on the other side of the valley from Gangtok. Rumtek is the seat of the Gyalwa Karmapa, the head of the Kagyupa school of Tibetan Buddhism and one of the most important spiritual teachers in Tibetan Buddhism. He is believed to be an incarnation of the Bodhisattva of compassion – Avalokitesvara. Here we will explore the **Rumtek Dharma Chakra Center**. In the afternoon we will visit the painting studio of one of Sikkim’s most famous scroll painters. Here we will learn the timeless traditions of creating sacred art and why Buddhist art plays such an integral part in Tibetan Buddhism. Overnight – Gangtok.

**Day 11**

After breakfast we depart for **Pemayangtse Gompa** (Perfect Sublime Lotus). We are treated to a spectacular mountain drive through some of most inspiring natural scenery in the world - lush vibrant hills, leaping waterfalls, thundering rivers, tiny villages, and all beneath the gorgeous backdrop of the mighty Himalayan peaks. After lunch we explore Pemayangtse Gompa one of the most important monasteries in Sikkim. This Nyingmapa monastery was founded in 1705 and is a three story structure filled with magnificent frescos and sculptures. Here we will receive a lecture from a prominent Tibetan lama who will share his many years of experience and in-depth knowledge of Buddhist philosophy and meditation. Overnight – Pelling.

**Day 12**

After breakfast we explore **Sangachoeling Gompa**, the second oldest monastery in Sikkim built in 1697. This monastery is majestically positioned offering great mountain-views and belongs to the Nyingmapa order. At Sangachoeling, we meet both monks and nuns who invite us into their world’s to show us how they live and study in a monastery. In the afternoon we drive to Sikkim’s most sacred monastery, **Tashiding Gompa**, founded in 1716. This Nyingmapa monastery is majestically perched atop a hill, surrounded by a magical courtyard of stupas, prayer wheels and colorful prayer flags. Tashiding houses a superb collection of Buddhist sacred art - wall paintings and sculptures. Overnight – Pelling.

**Day 13**

Early morning departure for **Kalimpong**, a small town set among the rolling foothills and deep valleys of the Himalayas. Kalimpong was once part of the lands belonging to the rajas of Sikkim. It was once one of the most important commerce centers between India and Tibet. We arrive at the charming Himalayan Hotel, a Victorian landmark that once housed the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama! Late afternoon stroll through Kalimpong’s bustling market. Overnight - Kalimpong.



**Day 14**

Our full day of exploration begins with a visit to Kalimpong's oldest monastery in the area – **Thongsa Gompa**. Here we will receive a lecture from the resident abbot on the tenets of Buddhist philosophy. In the afternoon we will visit Kalimpong's largest and most beautiful monastery – **Zong Dog Palri Gompa** built on the top of the spectacular Durpin Hill. Late afternoon is free time for shopping in Kalimpong's market. Overnight – Kalimpong.

**Day 15**

Our Himalayan adventure comes to its end as we depart Kalimpong in the morning on our last drive through the scenic countryside back to Bagdogra where we fly back to Kolkata. Overnight – Kolkata.

**Day 16**

Full free day to explore, shop, rest, and prepare for our next day departure back to the States! Overnight – Kolkata.

**Day 17**

Depart Kolkata on our return flight back to the States.

