

TRYSTS & TRACESTM

SIKKIM



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SIKKIM

Author
Yishey Doma

Photographer
Parvin Singh



TRYSTS & TRACES™

Letter from the Publisher

Dear Reader,

It's not surprising to see this book largely portray Sikkim, albeit being the second smallest State of India and the smallest in the North East. Certainly, Sikkim is North East's benchmark for success in tourism.

Imbued with history and mysticism, concealed by verdant valleys and shielded by a cavalcade of holy peaks, the remote State is luring visitors by leaps and bounds. How did Sikkim do it?


Firstly, by understanding the fact that its most vital asset is its natural beauty coupled with tranquillity and its peace-loving people. Any visitor holidaying in Sikkim can without any hassle spend days in its picturesque villages. Its colourful festivals rightly remains its pride and so are its cuisine delectably prepared from organically grown vegetables or ferns freshly plucked from forests. What else, each village has trekking and biking trails leading to hidden lakes and ancient monasteries – the ideal routes to discovery for its wealth of rare flora and fauna. One could even visit monasteries, gaze at the ancient murals or watch monks perform mask dance to ward away evils.

All these and more have been included in this first in a series of Trysts and Traces Travel Companion.

So there will always be new reasons to visit this part of the world, many reasons as you will see in the following pages. You will agree even more when you experience it. So why not take that plunge!

To set it right, care has been taken to put in all details such as places to stay and eat or best time to come, things best suited for the travellers. And for these to happen, our advertisers – few, yet precious ones played a vital role and rightly deserves our gratitude. We would at the same time apologise if we have overlooked anything and promise to incorporate it in our next edition.

Parvin Singh



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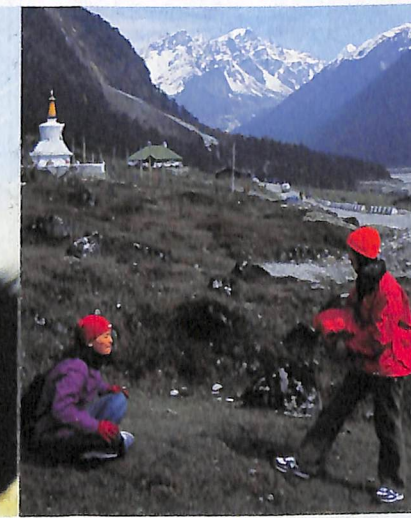
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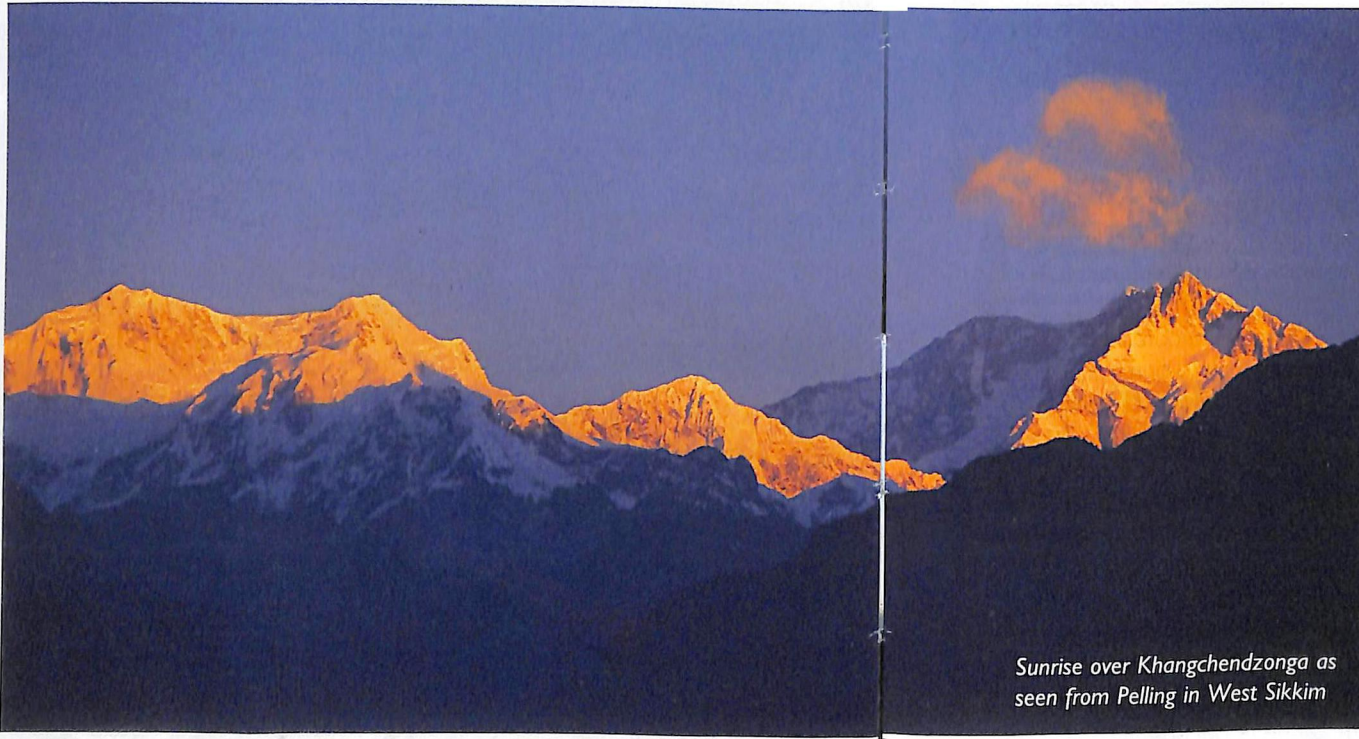


Overview

Be overwhelmed by the abundant variety of flora and fauna secure under the humongous peaks of Khangchendzonga and a peaceful people. Experience this perfect camaraderie of man and nature.



Phedangmas, the Limboo priests at a ritual



Sunrise over Khangchendzonga as seen from Pelling in West Sikkim

Sikkim for all Seasons

There is beauty everywhere you look in Sikkim, whether it is spring, autumn, winter or the monsoons. You can stride on snows even in the mid of summer and within a matter of three to four hours descend to tropical forests with snow-feed streams to accompany you.

In the inhabited region of Sikkim, temperatures seldom exceed 28°C in summer or drop below 0°C in winter.

Monsoons have a different charm with waterfalls erupting in every bend of the roads and forests muffled in myriad colours. If you love the rains, mist and fog play hide and seek over hills and dales, visit Sikkim between June-September.

From mid September, you can have a clear view of the majestic peaks shimmer against the azure sky. Winter months from December to early March, though chilly is festive season – from the

esoteric monastic dances to the tribes celebrating New Year – Namsoong, Losoong, Sonam Lotsar, Teyongsi Sirijunga Tongnam, etc to the Hindu rituals of Ramnavami to Maghe Sankranti held in the confluence of Teesta and Rangeet.

And then spring gives way to the snowy peaks and a plethora of flowers, perfect for the annual orchid show and rhododendron festival.

Whether you want to visit Sikkim in spring, winter or monsoons, just make sure you carry warm clothes as evenings and mornings can be unusually chilly.

Permits

Foreigners should obtain Inner Line Permit, which is issued from all Indian Consulates abroad. Tourism offices listed below also issue ILPs if you provide photocopies of the Indian visa, details of your passport and two passport size photographs.

New Delhi: Sikkim House, Panchsheel Marg, Chanakyapuri; **Kolkata:** Sikkim House, 4/1 Middleton Street; **Siliguri:** Office of Sikkim Nationalised Transport, Sevoke Road; **Bagdogra Airport:** Sikkim Tourism Counter; **Rangpo:** Tourist Lodge

Protected Area Permit & Restricted Area Permit

PAP and RAP are required for trekking or movement in certain areas of the State. It is issued by Tourism Department in Gangtok for a group consisting of two or more.

Permit Extensions

Stay period has been extended for 60 days with an extension of 30 days each. Extensions can be made at Foreigners' Registration Office, Kazi Road, Gangtok or at the office of Sub Divisional Magistrates or Superintendent of Police in District Headquarters.

Sikkim, situated in the Eastern Himalayas with snow clad mountains, luxurious forests, sacred lakes, cascading rivers etc. is a destination for all seasons and for all kinds of budgets. It is for all ages: for children for the married and the old. Sikkim is a land of breathtakingly beautiful landscapes. The majestic mountains, spectacular views of snow clad peaks, terraced rice fields, picturesque villages, beautiful and colorful monasteries, plunging waterfalls and the meandering rivers make Sikkim the perfect destination for nature lovers and tourists. Sikkim's rich cultural heritage is an added attention.

The Government of Sikkim has accorded tourism the status of a priority sector so as to bring economic and social development. Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation (STDC), a Government of Sikkim undertaking established with the main object of developing tourism in Sikkim, promotes tourism by all desirable mechanism to attract tourists.

STDC undertakes a host of activities in order to promote Sikkim as a preferred tourist destination. STDC promotes, publicizes and markets various tourism products like Village Tourism, Heli-Tourism, Adventure Tourism, etc. STDC has been notified by the Government of Sikkim as the nodal agency for promotion and development of village tourism. STDC also conducts tour package programme within the state and has also entered into agreement with the Tourism Development Corporations of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Goa to tap tourism potential of the respective state, thereby enhancing the not only employment generation within tourism packages, services and product and make them accessible to the public through tourism publicity.

STDC presently manages more than 15 properties (guest houses) distributed throughout the state for the purpose of board and lodging. STDC also manages Sikkim House at Kolkata. STDC owns a fleet of luxury transport vehicles (Toyota Innova) and operates helicopter services in various sectors within Sikkim and neighboring areas. Tour package programme including LTC tours, trekking to various parts of the State is also organized by STDC.



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PILGRIMAGE TOURISM



Let peace and contentment reverberate through your soul as you walk through the corridors of some of the premier monasteries like Rumtek (East), Pemayangtse and Tashiding (West), Phudong and Phensang (North) and Ralong (South)

ECO TOURISM



Experience life away from the concrete jungle in the trails where nature leads you into the wilderness. Stay in places where your neighbours are sky scraping trees. Experience Dzongri, Gocheela, Singalla and other trails to recharge yourself.

VILLAGE TOURISM



No trip to Sikkim can be complete without a taste of authentic home stay experience. Sample Sikkimese hospitality, their culture and warmth right in their homes. Some places to experience are Hee- Bermiok (West), Lachen (North), Kewzing (South), Pasthanga (East) and many more.

HELI TOURISM



Spread your wings. See Sikkim like never before with Sikkim Tourism's regular chopper service within Sikkim and neighbouring areas. Enjoy bird's eye view of Yumthang Valley, Khangchendzonga mountain range, Gangtok valley, etc.

GUEST HOUSE

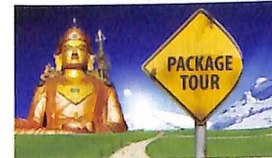


Discover the vacation that is easy on your pocket with STDC guest houses. STDC manages 14 guest houses, 2 tourist lodges and Sikkim House (in Kolkata).

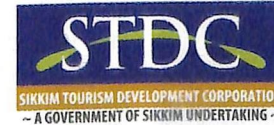
ADVENTURE TOURISM



Jump out of the monotony of urban life. Discover new routes to newer destinations as you trek through the beautiful landscapes of Dzongri, Barsey etc. Rush your adrenalin some more as you go rafting on the mighty Teesta and the Greater Rangit.



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INNOVA SERVICE

STDC provides chauffeur driven luxury Innova services to enjoy the pristine landscapes of Sikkim.



STDC offers LTC tour packages for Government employees. Come and enjoy the beauty of the state and avail full benefits.

NEW DELHI: Sikkim Tourism, New Sikkim House, 14 Panchsheel Marg, Chanaykapuri, New Delhi 110021, Phone: 011 2611 5346 / 5171. **WEST BENGAL:** Kolkata, Sikkim House, 4/1 Middletown Street, Kolkata 700017 Phone: 033 22815328, Fax: 033 22102278. **BAGDOGRA:** Sikkim Tourism Counter, Airport Terminal, Bagdogra (Siliguri) West Bengal, Phone 0353 2698 030 / 036. **GANGTOK:** Travel Division, Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation, M. G. Road, Gangtok 737101, Tele Fax: 03592 203960

History

Sikkim's history dates back to fourteenth century when Khye Bumsa, a prince from Tibet, following a divine command travelled to Sikkim and came in contact with the Lepchas. This contact led Thekong Tek, the Lepcha Patriarch, his wife Nekung Nyal and Khye Bumsa enter a blood brotherhood treaty at Kabi Longtsok in North Sikkim.

In 1646 AD, three Nyingmapa Lamas from Tibet – Gyalwa Lhabtsun Chenpo, Kathog Rigzin Chenpo and Ngadak Sempa Chenpo, came to Yuksam and consecrated Phuntsog, Khye Bumsa's descendent as the 'Chogyal' or king of righteousness. Lhabtsun Chenpo also gave his family title 'Namgyal' to the king. Thus the Namgyal dynasty ruled

Offerings made in front of one of the few stones at Kabi Longtsok, which mark the swearing of Blood Brotherhood between the Lepchas and Bhutias



Sikkim for around 333 years starting with the first Capital at Norbugang in Yuksam. The Capital was later shifted to Rabdentse followed by Tumlong and Gangtok.

However, Sikkim faced frequent invasions from Bhutan and Nepal, especially in the 18th century during which much of Sikkim's territories were lost.

In 1835, Britishers seeking a hill station as a rest and recreation centre for their troops and officials persuaded the Chogyal to cede Darjeeling area in return for an annual stipend.

In 1890, Sikkim became a British protectorate and was granted sovereignty over the next three decades. In 1947, a popular vote rejected Sikkim's joining the Indian Union and special protectorate status was given. A State Council was established in 1955 to allow for constitutional government under the Chogyal.

The last king, Palden Thondup Namgyal came to the throne in 1963 and ruled until his kingdom became the 22nd State of India on May 16, 1975.

Lhendup Dorje Khangsarpa of Sikkim Congress became the first Chief Minister. He was followed by Nar Bahadur Bhandari of Sikkim Sangram Parishad in 1979 till 1994. Since then Dr. Pawan Chamling of Sikkim Democratic Front has been the Chief Minister.

Sikkim Today

Sikkim, the 22nd State of India is led by Sikkim Democratic Front with Dr. Pawan Chamling as the Chief Minister for record fourth term. The State has one member each to the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha and 32 seats in the State Legislative Assembly including a seat for the Sikkimese Sangha.

As per the 2011 census, Sikkim has a population of 6,07,688 including 3,21,661 males and 2,86,027 females. Although English and Hindi are widely spoken, nine languages have been officially recognised by the State Government, which include Nepali, the lingua franca, Lepcha, Bhutia, Sherpa, Limboo, Tamang, Gurung, Rai, Mangar, Newari and Sunuwar. The State's unique Ecclesiastical Department caters to the functioning of monasteries, temples, churches, mosques and gurudwaras. In the offing is the opening of an Art and Music School under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary – this to promote and preserve Sikkim's rich music and cultural legacy.

Sikkim's economy is varied. It has the highest production and largest cultivated area of large cardamom in India. Tea, mandarin orange and cherry pepper are among the few cash crops exported overseas. Breweries, distilleries, horticulture and



Chief Minister of Sikkim, Dr. Pawan Chamling

floriculture have also emerged as another economic activity.

If tourism is the backbone of Sikkim's growing economy, its proximity to Nathu-La connecting India with China and hydroelectric power projects that are underway are major economic resources. No doubt Sikkim has recorded a four-fold increase in its per capita income from a mere Rs. 8,457 in 1993-94 to Rs. 34,821 in 2006-07, making it the fifth highest in the growth rate in per capita income among the Indian States.

Education wise, the recent data puts Sikkim's literacy rate at an impressive 82.20% as against 68.81% in 2001. There are 765 government-run schools and 385 private schools, 46 new schools under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, 12 colleges and other institutions

including Sikkim Manipal University and Sikkim Central University.

More recently, Chief Minister's Special Merit Scholarship has been started in which a 100 primary students from government schools across the State are selected for the scholarship and the government will bear the educational expenses of the children till Class XII. While 21 top scorers will be studying in reputable institutions like Scindia School in Gwalior, Pinegrove School in Himachal Pradesh and Lawrence School at Ooty, the rest will be admitted to well-known private institutions in Sikkim. Livelihood Schools have also been started as part of

the government's initiative to convert Sikkim's literacy rate to 100% by 2015.

The State has also become the first in the country to institute a separate Directorate of Capacity Building to train youth in different trades and disciplines and the idea is to create a pool of human resource so that all opportunities created in the State are adequately harnessed by the people. The vision was to substantially reduce the number of unemployed youth from the ages 15-34.

Interestingly, women in Sikkim are at par with their male counterparts with the present government framing laws that gives daughters equal rights with sons to

Dr. Chamling plants a sapling during '10 minutes to earth' programme



IPR



Sikkim CM receiving 'Nirmal Gram Award' from the President of India Pratibha Devi Singh Patil on December 8, 2008 in Pune

their parents' properties, 40 percent reservation to women in Panchayat and Municipal bodies, 30 percent reservation in government jobs, etc.

The State Government has also initiated an ambitious project, 'Mission: Poverty Free Sikkim-2013', to make Sikkim the first poverty-free State in the country by 2013. As per official records, the government has been allocating 70% of the annual budget for rural upliftment for the past 16 years.

Greenest Chief Minister of India

With just 7,096 sq kms as its total area, Sikkim has 46.28% forest cover. Its Chief Minister

Dr. Pawan Chamling was honoured with the 'Greenest Chief Minister of India' Award by the Centre for Sciences and Environment, New Delhi in 1998 in recognition of his outstanding contribution towards preservation and protection of ecology. For this to sustain, Dr. Chamling has initiated 'green mission' programme under which, every year, every individual, agency and the forest department contributes towards the planting of trees across the State. The State has also banned plastic bags for many years now, constituted Glacier and Climate Change Commission and has set a target to convert Sikkim into a

IPR



The enchanting woods of Sikkim

fully organic State by 2015 – the first State in India to do so.

Dreams Unlimited

Sikkim has over the years received more than 15 national awards in tourism. Inner Line Permit/RAP have been made easier as stay period has been extended to tourists for 60 days with an extension of 30 days each. There has also been a substantial enhancement in transport facilities and other infrastructure including road and accommodation.

The airport is under development at Pakyong, about 25-km from Sikkim's Capital,

Gangtok, besides approval for railway line to Sikkim. Double laning of existing NH-31A and construction of alternate National Highway for Sikkim is under process. Besides heliservices, a network of ropeways has also been planned, while Gangtok ropeway has already been operational.

And with peace and tranquillity as its USP, Sikkim, derived from a Limboo word 'Su-him', which means happy house, is undoubtedly a paradise as the Lepchas refer to. Bhutias call it Denjong or valley of rice, while Nepalis call it 'Indrakhil' or the abode of the gods.



Incredible Sikkim!

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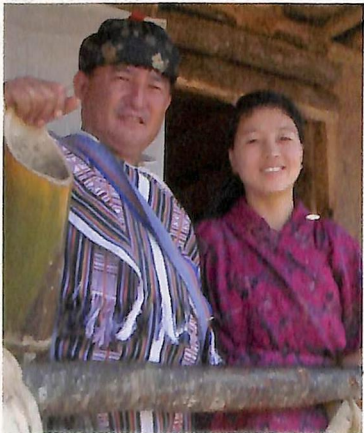
People, Culture & Lifestyle

All communities in Sikkim live in harmony sharing each other's culture, ethos, and traditions. Buddhist Monasteries coexist with Hindu Temples, Churches, Mosques and Gurudwaras. The predominant communities are Lepcha, Bhutia, Limboo, Tamang, Sherpa, Rai, Gurung, Magar, Sunuwar, Newari, Bahun, Chettri, Kami and Damai, although other communities and business communities form a chunk of the State's population.

Lepcha

Lepchas have their own script and language. They are expert weavers and craftsmen. They were formally agriculturists though some have shifted to

A Lepcha couple strikes a pose outside their house



towns for business and government jobs. Their quake-proof houses are made entirely of wood, with a complex system of hinges and sockets.

Although some of the Lepchas follow Buddhism and Christianity, the tribe still practice animism.

The male Lepcha wears a stripped cotton dress called **Thokro**, **Yenthatsé** (shirt), **Tomu**, the lower garment and **Shambo** (cap). Women wear a dress called **Dumbun** with **Tago**, loose blouse supported by a **Nyamrek** (belt). Their ornaments are **Namchok** (ear-ring), **Lyak** (necklace) and **Gyar** (bracelet). Lepcha men usually carry a multi-purpose knife called **Kom Bhankup** and women a sickle, both attached onto their belt. Men wear their traditional hat (**Sumo Thakdip**) and women wear **Kagi Tora** (scarf).

Lepchas have a song for every occasion – birth, planting season or harvest. **Zo-Mal-Lok** is a folk dance where couples in their colourful dress portray sowing and subsequent harvesting of paddy, while **Kinchum-Chu-Bomsa** describes the natural beauty of Sikkim.

Bhutia

Monasteries and monks play a dominant role in the socio-



Bhutia girls in their traditional attire

cultural life of the Bhutias. Most Bhutia families have a male member joining the monastery as a monk. Their chief deity is tutelary galaxy of Buddha and Bodhisattvas, the guardian deities, local and family deities.

Bhutias are divided into two groups, **Tong-du-ruzhi** with four clans and **Beb tsen gyed** with eight clans although there are other sub castes. They speak and write in Bhutia language also called **Lhokey**. Though they were agriculturists, Bhutia men are excellent craftsmen, while women are expert carpet weavers.

Bhutia men wear **Kho**, a long-sleeved coat with **Yenthatsé** (shirt), **Jya Jya** (waistcoat), **Kera**

(cloth belt) and **Shambo** (cap). Women's attire includes **Kho** with **Teygo**, a blouse with long sleeves, **Kushen** (jacket), **Shambo** (cap) and **Shabcha** (shoes). Married women tie **Pangden**, a striped apron around their waist.

Women are fond of wearing jewellerys made of gold and studded with gems like **Yencho** (earring), **Khao** (necklace), **Phiru** (pearl ornament), **Diu** (gold bangle) and **Joko** (ring).

Tashi Shabdo performed by men and women facing each other each holding khadas (traditional scarves) explain the custom of offering khadas. **Denzong-Neh-Na** describes sacred places of Sikkim.

Sherpa

Sherpas are distributed in the high hill slopes of West, South and East District. They speak in Sherpa and use Tibetan script. Rice and maize are their staple food as they were traditionally agriculturists. They are divided into two endogamous groups – Sherpas and Yukpas, the former enjoying higher status than the latter. They are skilled in woodcrafts and perform folk songs and dances, including the **Yongdoshiba**, a folk dance with singing in the bride's home during a marriage.

Limboo

Limboos, considered an offshoot of Kiranta or Kirati speak in Limboo dialect and have their own script 'Sirijunga'. They are divided into a number of exogamous patrilineal clans.

Limboo females wear various ornaments – **Nesse** (large flat designed gold earrings), **Dhungri** (stud nose ornament), gold **Mundri** as a nose ring, silver **Kalli**

as anklets, **Phangse** (necklace made of nine gold beads), **Labaphung** (crescent shaped gold ornament used as a hair clip), **Namloi** or **Yogakpa** (large silver necklace), **Sisiphung** or **Nekhopfung** (flower shaped gold stud earrings), **Reji** (ancient silver coin necklace) and **Swagep** (gold ring).

They have a rich oral tradition. **Chyab-Brung Dance (Ke Lang)** is performed by beating a drum called Chyabrung slung across a dancer's neck. They also perform **Yialangma (Dhaan Naach)** during planting and harvesting of paddy.

Limboos do not have any deity or image of god but worship supreme spirit called Yumasum through a shamanistic priest called *phedangma*, who propitiates the higher grades of priests of a benevolent nature and also officiates at birth, marriage and death rituals. The service of the *yeba*, a wandering mendicant is called for to act as exorcists and to negotiate with the spirits of the lower order.

When Lion & Yak dance

In **Shinji Chaam**, two snow lions dance under the guidance of a herdsman. The lions dance to the beat of musical instruments, without any songs. These mythical animals often occupy central characters in Bhutia folktales. **Yak Chaam** is performed in honour of the animal on which man has been completely dependent in high altitude areas. A yak-herd playing his flute and tending the yaks is also portrayed. Both the dances, which begin in slow steps with the beat of cymbals, tend to be fast-paced at the climax.



Tamang boys and girls perform Tamang Selo to the tune of Damphu, the tribe's traditional drum.; A Rai boy and girl performs a scintillating dance

Tamang

According to a Tibetan version, Tamangs were originally a group of Tibetan cavalry. They speak in Tamang dialect and use Tibetan script. Tamangs are an endogamous group and are divided into 18 clans called *Rui Choprat*.

They have major rituals associated with child birth, marriage, death and rituals associated with the assumption of priesthood or monk-hood. Most Tamangs follow Buddhism, though some are Hindus. **Tamang Selo** performed by a group of men and women with foot tapping and display of Damphu (drum) highlights vigour and vitality of the community.

Rai

Also known as Kirant/Kirantis, Rais are one of the major ethnic communities among the Nepalis in Sikkim. They have a number of clans, further sub-divided into pachhas or subtitles. Rai Kura is their dialect, but the Bantawa dialect too is popular. They have their own script.

Maize, millet, wheat and rice have been their staple food. Pranami, Joshmani and Kabir Panthi religious groups are purely vegetarian and do not take alcohol and meat and take food prepared by themselves.

Traditionally, Rais were hunters and cultivators engaged mainly in shifting cultivation. They worship many local deities. Most

Rai households worship a spirit called Khamang who lies in an earthen pot in a corner of the house. Bhoomi Puja, prayer for good harvest is performed in September and May. Bijuwa-Dhami, their religious leader is believed to heal people by propitiating gods and spirits during an illness.

Rais have a rich oral tradition. **Jeurum Silly** is performed by one man and four women where feelings of family members and friends are expressed on the occasion of a girl's marriage.

Gurung

Known to be jovial and fun loving, Gurungs have the reputation of being one of the best fighting communities. They speak in Gurung dialect. They are divided into two main groups – Char Jaat (four clans)

and Sola Jaat (16 clans). Traditionally, Gurungs were agriculturists and rear sheep, though some have served in the infantry. Their important performance is **Dohori**, a kind of question and answer song related to love.

Magars

One of the three dominant and militant communities along with Chettris and Gurungs, Magars are highly esteemed for their military prowess. Magar villages are situated in the sparse forest slopes, mainly in South and East Districts. They speak in their own Mangari dialect.

They have a rich tradition of folk songs, lore and folk tales. Madal is their popular musical instrument. The community is divided into a number of exogamous and patrilineal clans all having equal status.

What's in a Scarf?

Ka-dhar or Khada is a scarf used as a medium for exchanging good wishes. It conveys reverence to elders, love and blessings to juniors, wishes for happiness, solemn condolences for grief, felicitations and memoirs of events, offering of prayers and so on. It is usually white in colour, particularly to indicate purity of mind and intention. Plain Khadas are offered on all occasions where as the printed ones with good luck emblems are offered only on happy occasions. For elders and revered ones, Khadas are offered in hands or at the feet but never over the neck. In the case of equals, friends, relatives and dignitaries, it is either exchanged or used as a garland. Coloured Khadas come in five colours – blue, white, red, green and yellow representing sky, air, fire, water and earth. Prices vary from Rs. 10 to Rs. 500 depending on the type of material used.



Pretty Gurung girls look prettier in their traditional ornaments

Sunuwar

Originally, Sunuwar were hunters, scattered in West, East and South Districts. They have three subgroups – Barathares, Dasthares and Jirels. **Koicha** is their dialect and script, though most speak in Nepali. Barathares use this dialect and script especially during their rituals.

Though they are Hindus, Sunuwar worship the deities of forests and rivers in summers. Sunuwar have no images. They conceive their god in the forest. Their major pujas are Bhimsen Puja and Buri Boju, the former is

performed during Dasain while the latter is performed each month when there is sickness in the family. Dance and music is their favourite pastime.

Newari

This high caste group after Bahuns and Chettris are trading community and live in urban areas. They are artisans and also shopkeepers. In Sikkim, Newaris are concentrated at Namthang, Duga and Pakyong. They speak in Newari dialect belonging to the Tibeto-Burman group.



Nepali Brahmins conduct a Hawan puja

Buffalo meat, which is taboo for most of the hill community, is a favourite delicacy for the Newaris. Rice, wheat and maize is their staple food. Shiva or Mahadeo occupies the highest place in Newari homes in Sikkim. The community performs **Lakhey (Mask) Dance** to ward off evil spirits and to bring peace and prosperity.

Bahun

The Sikkimese Brahman is known as Bahun, also called Bajey. They are distributed throughout Sikkim except in North District. They speak in Nepali and use Devnagari script.

Bahuns are identified by the tika, holy marking on the forehead. They are mostly habituated to a vegetarian diet. They have two endogamous divisions – Upadhyay and Jaishee, the former higher in status than the latter. Upadhyays are mainly responsible for conducting rituals or for providing religious teachings. The priest's services are required by all other Hindu communities. The sacred thread (janai) ceremony is accorded to a male child aged 7-13.

Although Bahuns were traditionally entrusted with priesthood, land is their major resource.

Chettri

Chettri is a corrupt form of Kshatriya. The second highest caste after Bahuns, Chettris are highly esteemed for their military and fighting qualities. They are divided into a number of patrilineal clans having equal status.

Chettris worship various gods and goddesses like Pashupatinath, Shiva, Kali and Durga. Satyanarayan is worshipped as the family deity.

The *janai* is given to a male child aged 7-13 by a Bahun priest through an elaborate ritual known as *Bratamantra*.

Bahun and Chettri males like other Nepali communities wear dresses comprising of a shirt called **Daura**, while their **Churidar Pyjama** is known as **Shurval**; the waist coat is known as **Aaaskot** and their belt as **Patuki**. Saris worn by women are called **Pharia**, worn with long, loose blouse **Chaubandi Cholo**. A piece of printed cloth covering the upper portion of the body is known as **Hembari**, whereas a colourful piece hanging from the head to waist during a dance performance is known as **Pachauri**.

Kami

Kamis, also known as Viswakarma, Lohars or Sunars are distributed in South, East and West Districts. They speak Nepali language and use Devnagari script. Rice, wheat and maize are their staple food.

Making articles of iron, aluminium, silver and gold and selling them serve as their major source of income, though some are agriculturists. They follow Hinduism and worship Vishwakarma, Lakshmi and Saraswati as family deities.

Jhankris, belonging to their community are known to cure diseases and drive away evil spirits.

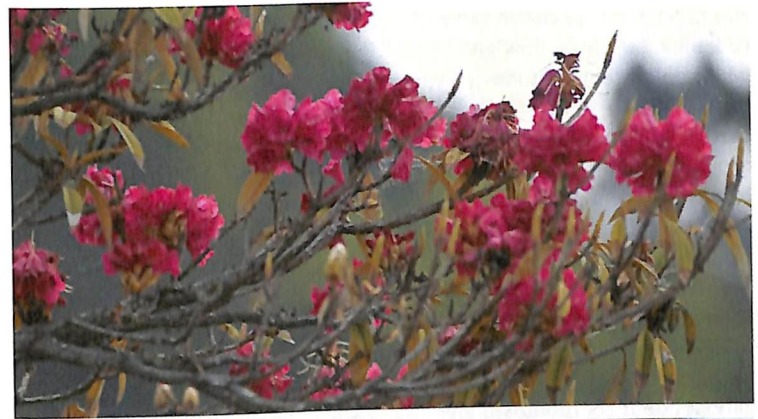
They have folk songs related to marriage, particularly **Juari**, held after the harvest. They perform **Madale Naach** at the time of Tihar and Dasain.

Damai

Derived from the word *Damaha* (drum), which they play, Damais are identified as Darji or 'Masters' as most of them have taken to the profession of tailoring. Damais have different clans and are scattered throughout the State having greater concentration nearer the market places. They speak in Nepali and use Devnagari script.

They follow Hinduism and worship family deities like Kali, Durga, Vishnu and Shiva. Their major rituals are performed at the time of birth, marriage and death. All rituals are done by Damai priest called Damai Sharma. Diwali is their biggest festival.

Their traditional profession of the ancestors was playing the **Naumati Baja**, an art and culture still retained by few families.



Clockwise from top: Rhododendrons in full bloom (top); Cymbidium orchids (left) and Red Panda, the State animal of Sikkim (right)

Flora & Fauna

Flora

With a total area of just 7,096 sq km, nowhere in the world can you find such a wealth of flora and fauna than Sikkim. This 'garden of bounty' is host to 424 species of medicinal herbs, amazing wealth of bamboos, oaks, conifers and ferns.

Since there is an extreme

deviation in altitudes within very short distances resulting in distinct climatic zones – tropical, sub-tropical, temperate and alpine – the flora-fauna diversity may overwhelm you.

Sikkim records 35 species of rhododendrons, of which Rhododendron neivium is its State tree. The majority of

rhododendron species in hues of red, pink, purple, yellow and white colonize in altitudes varying from 9,000 to 14,000-ft, although certain species even grow at around 16,000-ft. From April to May, rhododendrons bloom in a riot of colours along the route to Dzongri and Yumthang Valley.

In its natural habitat orchids of Sikkim grow right from the base of hills up to 15,000-ft. In higher elevation orchids remain dormant almost about six months under the snow cover and blooms during summer. From among the 515 species of orchids found in Sikkim, *Dendrobium nobile*, the State flower grows at around 5,500-ft and flowers in April-May.

In July-August, alpine flowers such as blue poppy, golden saxifrage, primrose, wild rose,

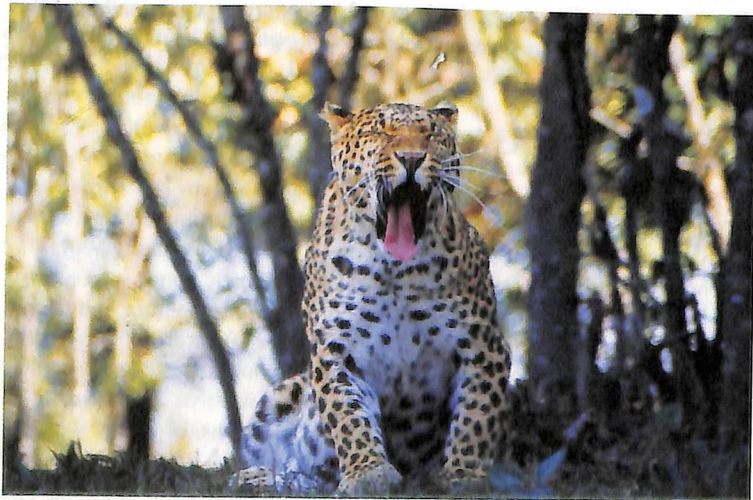
anemone, aster, corydalis etc adorn the lower valleys of Gurudongmar Lake, Yumthang, Yumey Samdong, Chopta Valley, Lashar Valley, Muguthang and Dzongri areas.

Sikkim has also the highest production and largest cultivated area of large cardamom or bari elaichi in India while tea, mandarin oranges and cherry pepper are among the few cash crops grown besides food crops like rice, maize, millet and wheat.

Fauna

Catching glimpses of yaks while admiring wild flowers or listening to melodious birdsongs, can be a rewarding experience. Yaks, the beast of burden, which belongs to the cattle family, thrive at 10,000-ft and above and have been domesticated for carrying load,

Leopard, Sikkim's most loved animal



NATIONAL PARKS & WILDLIFE SANCTUARIES*

Name	Location	Features	Best time to visit
Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve	North & West Sikkim	2,913 sq km; Local communities inhabiting within the biosphere	Mar-May & Sept-Nov
Khangchendzonga National Park	North-western part of Sikkim	Area of 1,784 sq km; Snowy peaks of Mt. Khangchendzonga; flora & fauna	Mar-May & Sep-Nov
Fambong Lho Wildlife Sanctuary	20-km from Gangtok	52 sq km; Birds and butterflies, red panda, civet cats	Mar-May & Sep-Dec
Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary	31-km east of Gangtok	31 sq km; Serrow, pheasants, lakes, scenic view	Apr-Aug & Oct-Nov
Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary	Yumthang, North Sikkim	43 sq km; Rhododendrons, primulas, gentians, scenic view	Mar-May & Sept-Nov
Maenam Wildlife Sanctuary	Rabongla, South Sikkim	35 sq km; Maenam Peak at 3,263 m, medicinal plants, leopard, red panda	Mar-May & Sep-Dec
Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary	Hillee, West Sikkim	104 sq km; Rhododendrons in full bloom	Mar-May
Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary	Rhenock, East Sikkim	128 sq km; Trans-boundary protected area bordering with Bhutan, Tibet & North Bengal	Mar-May & Oct-Dec
Kitam Bird Sanctuary	Melli, South Sikkim	6 sq km; Easily accessible by Melli-Jorethang highway as it passes through the Sanctuary	Mar-May & Oct-Dec

*Visitors should avail permit to visit all these places, including KNP

milk for making hardened cheese called 'churpi', hide and hair for making tents for the herders and for meat. Yaks seen at lower altitudes are called 'Dzo', a cross between yak and cow.

There are about 150 species of mammals in Sikkim belonging to 26 families, among which bharal or blue sheep (*Ovis nahura*), binturong (*Arctictis binturong*), Himalayan thar (*Hemitragus*

jemlahicus), red panda (*Ailurus fulgens*), musk deer (*Moschus chrysogaster*), takin (*Budorcas taxicolor*) etc., are listed in the Wildlife Protection Act. Snow Leopard, also one of the endangered species is the most beautiful animal found in Sikkim's higher altitude (9,800-14,800-ft.). The snowy peaks act as a camouflage to their exquisite smoky-gray fur patterned with

dark-gray to black rosettes.

Sikkim shelters about 33 species of reptiles and 48 species of fishes, especially along Teesta and Rangeet river system.

For bird lovers, Sikkim is a paradise; what with the recorded 552 species including the magnificent Himalayan griffon or the bearded vulture with its incredible wingspan of over 10-ft and the elegant Impeyan pheasant with its flamboyant electric-blue plumage.

About 180 big and small lakes in Sikkim are the habitat of an umpteen number of resident and migratory waterfowl, especially a permanent breeding place for Brahminy ducks. Recent study

reveals 47 species of waterfowl ranging from black-necked grebe and large coromorant to egret and brown-headed gull. Also found to occur in the wetlands are the herons, lapwing, crake, moorhen and snipes. Lake Khechoedpalri hosts migrant ducks and occasionally rare species like black-necked grebe.

Astounding variety of butterflies – around 690 species – from the nymphalids and danaids to yellow swallowtails that include the Krishna and Blue Peacocks are found in Sikkim. It is best to spot the butterflies between August-September, just after the rains and between March-April when forests are vibrant and colourful.

Saving the Panda

Himalayan Zoological Park harbours about a dozen red panda, the State animal of Sikkim. At 5,840-ft and spread over 230 hectares, the park at Bulbuley, 10-km from Gangtok has been doing captive breeding of the animal since 1999. The captive breeding was started with a pair in 1999 and later, two more red pandas, rescued from the wild, joined the zoo. HZP also exchanged red pandas with Padmaja Naidu Zoological Park in Darjeeling to prevent in-breeding. Slightly larger than a domestic cat, an adult red panda in the forest weighs around 4-kg.

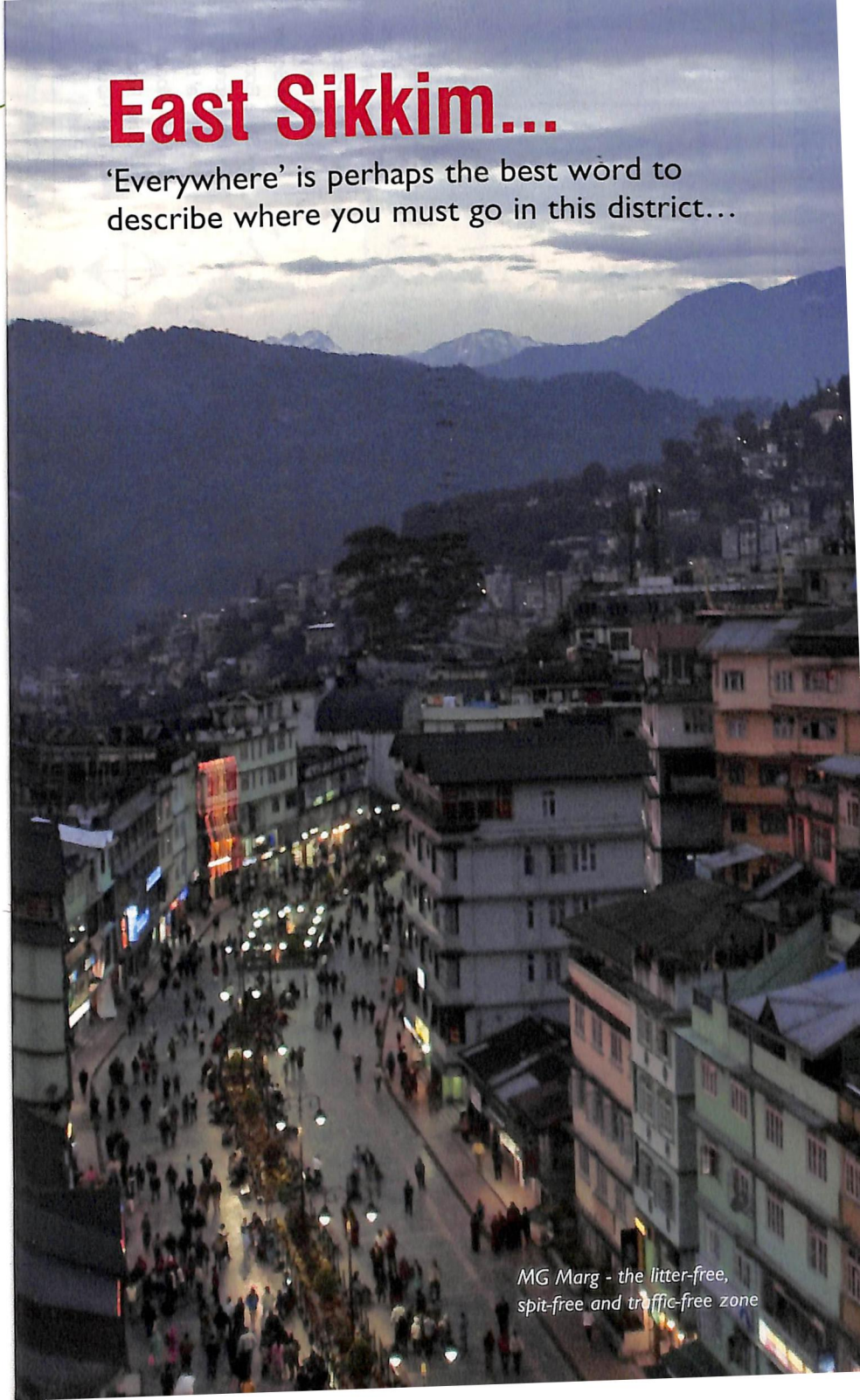
Today three male and one female red panda are now kept at the park's display centre, while others are housed at two temporary enclosures.

This adorably cute animal, also known as cat bear and lesser panda, largely herbivore and an endangered species are declining over much of their range due to habitat loss and fragmentation.

WWF-India is currently enumerating the status and distribution of red panda in the Khangchendzonga landscape, involving Sikkim and northern West Bengal.

East Sikkim...

'Everywhere' is perhaps the best word to describe where you must go in this district...



MG Marg - the litter-free, spit-free and traffic-free zone