



Adventure Tourism—Sikkim's Jackpot

Be it trekking, rafting, mountain biking, mountaineering, or paragliding, adventure tourism is booming in Sikkim, says Nita Nirash

Sikkim, nestled in the lap of the lofty Himalayas, has always been the perennial favourite of the traveller. Of late, adventure tourism has been growing at a steady pace with both domestic and international tourists looking for exciting holidays that offer an escape out-of-the-ordinary. The State Government has also been making efforts to turn Sikkim into an all-season tourist destination through adventure sports. C Zangpo, Secretary, Tourism & Civil Aviation, says, 'Adventure tourism has boosted the already thriving tourism sector of the State. It is expected to grow even more in the coming year'. And, if you go by the number of tourists, the effort seems to be paying off very well.

Options Galore

Adventurers have a variety of choices while in Sikkim, they can opt for: trekking, rafting, mountain biking, mountaineering, and, of course, the most popular of

all—paragliding. The best season for adventure sports is from April to May, followed by October, November and December as one is showered with bountiful doses of sunshine and lovely mountain breeze during these months. The river water level also flows below the danger level, but rafters are expected to find out the level before embarking on an adventure.

Hitting the Trail

The trekking routes have been laid out and a backpacker has to just contact a travel agency for guidance. Tourists trek uphill to witness the unique flora and fauna of Sikkim and the Teesta River proffers company on their quest. The trekking officer of Sikkim Tourism, Chewang Nedup, says, 'The best and most enjoyable trekking route is from Panding to Dzongri in West Sikkim at an altitude of almost 4020 meters. The path is strewn with beautiful Rhododendrons'.

Another trekker's destina-

tion is the beautiful Green Lake. Trekkers start off from Gangtok and halt at Lachung in North Sikkim. The trek to Green Lake is resumed the next morning; it is only a four km trek from Lachung to Green Lake. Foreigners are expected to apply for permission two months in advance from the Indian Embassy.

Tenzing who have been escorting trekkers to different destinations since 1994, says, 'Once the tourists express their desire to trek and specify the destination, we start off with our team. To facilitate trekking, we take along a cook and a helper. If it is a small group of up to three tourists, I guide them myself. But for a larger group, an additional number of guides are taken along. While trekking to Dzongri, horses are included in the entourage for carrying luggage, tents and other necessities. Adequate arrangements ensure that trekkers relish the trip'. Most adventure tourists prefer to book a trekking package



All set for the flight

while booking their tickets; on arrival, they simply contact the concerned travel agent for details.

Of Rivers and Mountains

River rafting is another sport which is becoming increasingly popular among tourists. Sikkim offers white water rafting opportunities on the Teesta River. A rafter needs to be prepared with a helmet and jacket as well as information on the river water level before setting out. One could go rafting from Makha (East) to Rangpo, via Sirwani and Bardang. The neat sandy river banks on both side and the towering mountains in the distance offers a captivating view to rafters. Another smooth stretch is offered by the river Rangeet. This route starts from Sikip to Melli, via Jorethang and Majhitar. Camping is permitted and facilities have been accordingly developed.

Another recently developed adventure sport is mountain biking. Bikes can be borrowed from the Department of Tourism. Biking through the villages and halting for breaks at monasteries and restaurants is a wonderful experience. From Gangtok, the capital bikers can start for North Sikkim and visit places like Kabi Lungtsok and reach Phodong via Phensang.

Bird's Eye View

Paragliding in Sikkim on a lovely sunny day is something ad-



Flying high

How to reach Gangtok

By road: Buses ply to and fro Bagdogra, Siliguri and NJP. One can reach by taxis also within four hours.

By air: The nearest airport is at Bagdogra; there are regular flights from Delhi, Kolkata and Guwahati. A helicopter service is also available from Bagdogra and back. It has regular scheduled flights.

By train: The journey upto New Jalpaiguri can be made by train, from there, taxi service is available upto Gangtok.

venturists long for. The different spots developed for paragliding in Sikkim are: Bulbuley, Ani Gumpa, and Taktse in East Sikkim. In West Sikkim, Chakhung and Soreng are the spots to look out for. The sport is being promoted by Sikkim Paragliding Adventure Sports Co-operative Society Ltd. and Fly Sikkim Adventure.

At Bulbuley and Ani Gumpa, the adventurers have a lovely spot to take off from, and one can fly with the silvery clouds up to Reshithang landing ground, taking in the excellent bird's eye view of Gangtok Township. Again, the fun of gliding in the fresh Himalayan breeze is unique.

Paragliders are helped by trained Sikkimese pilots. Arun Gurung, who is part of Fly Sikkim Adventure, Reshithang, talking of safety, says, 'We have all the required safety equipment along with trained pilots. The paragliders enjoy gliding here without any reservations'.

Mountaineering is something which also warrants permission at least six months in advance. Sikkim Mountaineering Association

members are deputed to go with the climbers. The Alpine peaks which the adventurers are permitted to scale by the State Government include Frey's Peak, 5830 m, Chaurigaun, West Sikkim; Lhamo Wangden, 5868 m, Lachen, North Sikkim; and Brunkhangsa, 5635 meters, Yumthang, North Sikkim. And, only after getting permits from the Home Department can one proceed. Permission can be obtained for a group of two or more.

Tourist Haven

According to government figures, 5,77,991 domestic tourists visited Sikkim in 2013-14, including 40,213 foreign tourists. On the whole, the footfall of tourists in the State from 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014 stands at 6,18,204. The figures are indicative of the positive outcome of adventure tourism on the State. The other Northeastern states could do very well to emulate Sikkim's innovative example. 🌀

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Photo Courtesy: Nita Nirash