

Outlook

# TRAVELLER

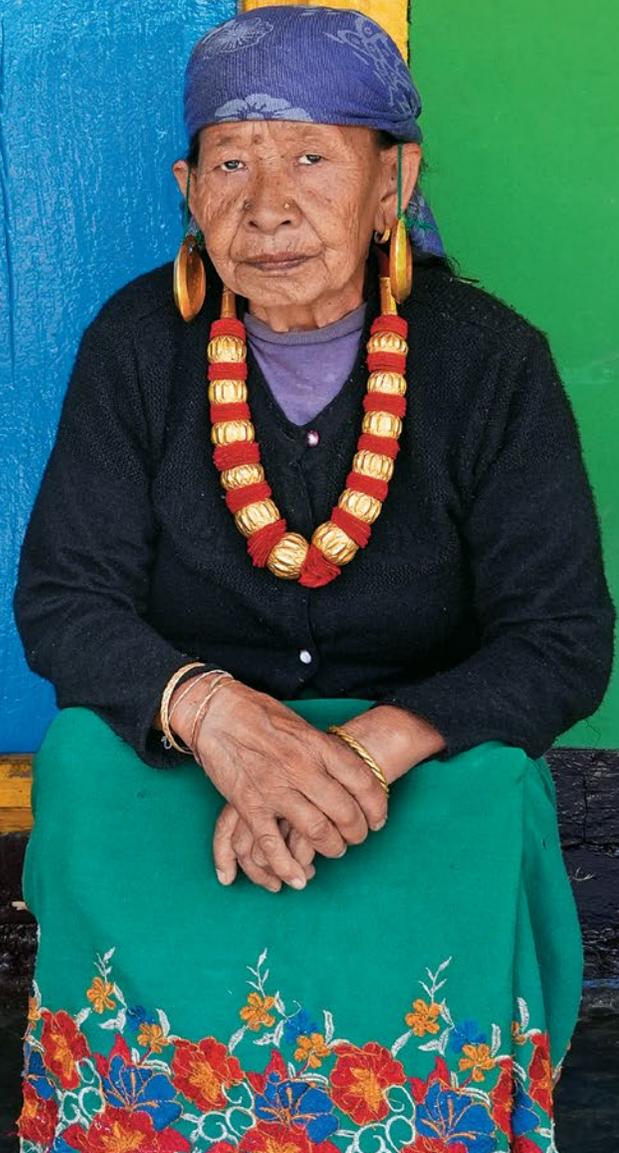


★  
SPECIAL  
SUPPLEMENT

A Limboo  
woman in  
Uttarey

## The New Horizon

CELEBRATING SIKKIM'S 50 YEARS OF  
STATEHOOD THROUGH PURPOSE, PROGRESS,  
AND PARTNERSHIP





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## Foreword



**SHRI PREM SINGH TAMANG (GOLAY)**  
 Hon'ble Chief Minister of Sikkim

**“Sikkim is a destination, an experience, and a revelation. But above all, it is a journey shared between humanity and nature”**

This year marks a golden milestone, the 50th year of Sikkim's Statehood. It is a moment of immense pride and joy for every Sikkimese as we celebrate our journey from a Himalayan kingdom to a vibrant and progressive state of the Indian Union. On this historic occasion, I am delighted to present this Special Sikkim Booklet of Outlook Traveller, which captures the beauty, diversity, and spirit of our beloved state.

Sikkim is a rare gem of the Eastern Himalayas, a living mosaic of natural splendour and cultural harmony. From tropical forests to the majestic summit of Mt. Khangchendzonga, Sikkim traverses every climatic zone—tropical, temperate, alpine, and cold desert. Within this compact landscape lies an extraordinary variety of ecosystems, traditions, and ways of life, all bound by a shared reverence for nature.

I cordially invite the world to experience Sikkim, to feel the heartbeat of the Himalayas, to breathe the freshness of our valleys, and to witness how people and nature coexist in graceful balance.

Here, every mountain, river, and forest carries a story of resilience and devotion. Our people's deep respect for nature continues to guide our path towards sustainable growth and mindful tourism.

We view tourism as a partnership between travellers and the land, between exploration and preservation. With more than a thousand homestays across the state, we are empowering local communities and offering visitors authentic, immersive experiences rooted in Sikkimese warmth. Our focus on eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and community-based initiatives ensures that the benefits of tourism are shared widely and responsibly.

At the same time, we are strengthening infrastructure, improving connectivity, and investing in skills to make Sikkim an all-season destination, welcoming nature lovers, adventurers, and spiritual seekers alike. Sikkim today stands proudly among India's cleanest and greenest states, steadfast in preserving its ecological integrity while embracing progress.

Sikkim is a destination, an experience, and a revelation, but above all, it is a journey shared between humanity and nature.

I extend my warmest commendations to the publishers, editors, and writers of Outlook Traveller for dedicating this special booklet to Sikkim at this historic juncture. May this edition inspire travellers everywhere to discover the magic, peace, and wonder that define our Himalayan home.

(Prem Singh Tamang)

Hon'ble Chief Minister of Sikkim

# Inspiring Change, Empowering Lives

EMPOWERED BY ‘SIKKIM INSPIRES’, RURAL PRODUCERS, GUIDES, AND HOMESTAY OWNERS ARE TRANSFORMING TOURISM INTO A FORCE FOR SHARED PROSPERITY

**H**igh in the Himalayas, Sikkim continues to evolve, not by losing its essence, but by deepening it. Here, progress moves at the pace of the mountains: deliberate, grounded, and inclusive. Villages once known for modest homestays and terraced farms are now at the heart of a state-wide transformation in tourism, driven by the belief that growth must sustain both people and place.

This vision lies at the core of Sikkim INSPIRES (Integrated Service Provision and Innovation for Reviving Economies), a flagship initiative of the Government of Sikkim, supported by the World Bank. More than a development program, it is a framework for how tourism, livelihood, and environment can grow together. The initiative aims to create resilient and inclusive economic opportunities, especially for women and youth, by empowering local communities to lead the state’s sustainable tourism future.

At the heart of this approach is a model the state calls “Whole-of-Community Tourism.” It’s simple in spirit but transformative in practice: every village, monastery, and meadow becomes a partner in progress. Through specialised training, infrastructure development, and digital tools, local residents are being equipped to manage their own tourism enterprises, from homestays and farm stays to trekking routes and birding circuits.

In Soreng, for instance, over 60 women entrepreneurs now operate registered rural homestays after receiving targeted training in hospitality and marketing. In Yangang, the Green Trail Initiative

has trained 40 young guides in trekking, first aid, and waste management, helping to reduce litter by 70 per cent along popular hiking routes. And in the Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary, local youth have embraced birding and nature-based recreation as full-time livelihoods. Together, these stories show how tourism, when anchored in community, can become a source of dignity, income, and stewardship.

Training and capacity building form the backbone of this movement. Centres of excellence, such as the Institute of Hotel Management (IHM), Sajong, and the Indian Himalayan Centre for Adventure and Eco-Tourism (IHCAE), Chemchey, are equipping over 2,500 Sikkimese youth and women with industry-ready skills. Their hybrid training models blend classroom learning with field experience, ensuring that students not only study tourism but also live it. Behind this progress is the Integrated Economic



**“Discover Sikkim—a land of timeless beauty and Himalayan calm. Here, snow-capped peaks meet emerald valleys, and prayer flags whisper harmony in the mountain breeze. Every visitor is welcomed with warmth, and our deep respect for nature fosters peace throughout the land. Sikkim offers travellers a rare balance of beauty, serenity, and care—where nature, culture, and humanity meet in harmony.”**

— R. Telang, IAS  
Chief Secretary, Government of Sikkim

Inclusion Action Plan (IEIAP), which brings together multiple departments (Tourism & Civil Aviation, Forest & Environment, Rural Development, and Skill Development) under a single framework. This coordination has enabled the holistic planning of village infrastructure, sanitation, waste management, and digital marketing, ensuring that growth remains balanced and well-managed.

Technology, too, is being woven into the state’s tourism story. A Community-Based Tourism Portal now connects rural clusters, linking homestays, guides, tour operators, and local artisans directly to national and international markets. It also integrates online permits for trekking trails and protected areas, simplifying access while maintaining environmental safeguards.

The results are tangible. Visitors to Sikkim can now book stays in remote villages, explore guided eco-trails, and support local producers—all through a system designed to keep economic benefits within communities. For travellers, this means more authentic, immersive experiences. For residents, it means empowerment and continuity.

Sikkim INSPIRES bridges tradition with technology, community wisdom with institutional excellence, and local aspiration with global collaboration. Through partnerships with institutions like IITs, IIMs, and IHMs, and with private eco-travel partners, the state is also developing new training modules in digital marketing, business management, and e-payments, giving rural entrepreneurs the tools to reach the world. As a traveller, this transformation is visible in simple moments: a farmer offering homegrown tea at a homestay, a guide explaining forest conservation on a trek, an artisan weaving patterns that tell her people’s story. These experiences are part of a larger effort to make Sikkim’s growth inclusive, responsible, and lasting.

Sikkim INSPIRES is about reimagining how tourism can sustain culture, empower people, and preserve nature. This booklet celebrates that idea: that progress, when rooted in community, can truly inspire.



Mindfulness meets development in Sikkim INSPIRES’ vision for change

# Uttarey: Where Heritage Lives At Home



COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM IN UTTAREY  
BRIDGES HERITAGE, HOMESTAYS, AND  
SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS FOR VISITORS



Uttarey boasts a variety of flowering plants and animals



Doma Sherpa holds maize used to make falgi, a local dish

**A**t Sangdara, a Sherpa village in Uttarey, West Sikkim—five hours from Gangtok—wooden homes rest among terraced fields and prayer walls. I stayed at Doma Sherpa Homestay, one of the first in the village, established in 2010. Doma Sherpa and her sister turned their ancestral house into a space that welcomes travellers curious about Sherpa culture and everyday life. “When I began, no one here knew what a homestay was,” she said, preparing butter tea over a wood stove. “Now, many families have joined in. Tourism has given us confidence that our homes and our heritage have value.”

The Sherpa people, known for their exceptional mountaineering skills and deep-rooted Buddhist faith, get their name from a term that means “Eastern People.” In Sikkim, they follow Tibetan

Buddhism and celebrate festivals such as Losar and Mani Rimdu, which honour mountain deities. Life here follows the rhythm of the land: farming, yak rearing, and, increasingly, community-based tourism.

Meals at Sherpa’s homestay are simple and entirely local: falgi made from maize, organic boiled potatoes, and rildok, a pounded potato dish. Visitors can learn traditional butter-making, momo preparation, and bamboo craftwork. “I want guests to feel like family,” she said. “They come to rest, but they also learn how we live.” Her homestay now doubles as a learning space for students and travellers who come to study rural livelihoods and Sherpa heritage.

A short walk from Uttarey leads to Bandukey, a Limboo village situated on an east-facing slope about three

kilometres away. The trail passes through millet fields and bamboo groves before opening into a small cluster of red-mud homes with carved wooden windows. This village is home to the Limboo community, one of Sikkim’s oldest, whose traditions date back to the 1700s when famous scholar Teyongsi Sirijunga revived their script and cultural identity.

A village elder welcomed me inside and showed me the *muring-sitlam*, the sacred central pillar in every Limboo home where rituals and prayers are offered twice a year. “It connects us to our ancestors and to nature,” he said, gesturing toward the pillar decorated with butter lamps and bamboo ornaments. He explained that the pillar represents balance between the household, the land, and the spirits that guard both.



A woman from the Limboo community stands before her decades-old home

Bandukey is more than a village; it is a living museum of Limboo craftsmanship and belief. Families still weave traditional caps, mufflers, and carry bags, and work bamboo into household tools and decorative baskets. In the evenings, people gather outside to play the binayo and tongna, locally made musical instruments, whose sounds carry across the valley after dusk. Meals here reflect both simplicity and heritage: kinema, a fermented soybean dish; mandok kharen, a millet bread, and tongba, the warm millet beer shared at gatherings and festivals like Chasok Tongnam and Balihang Tongnam.

In both heritage villages, culture is not staged for visitors. It is lived, sustained, and shared. Staying in Uttarey is to understand how tourism here has become a bridge, connecting livelihoods with legacy, and homes with history.



## EXPLORING UTTAREY



Singshore Bridge

Located near the Nepal border in West Sikkim, the town of Uttarey sits at around 2,000 m and serves as the starting point for treks and community-based tourism in the region. Travellers often arrive via Dentam, crossing the **Singshore Bridge**, a 198-metre suspension bridge that hangs dramatically over a deep gorge. Once the bridge reopens, it will introduce Sikkim’s first bungee-jumping site, adding adventure tourism to Uttarey’s growing list of experiences.

Beyond the bridge, the valley opens into a cluster of small villages and forested ridges. The **Begha Sheep Farm** sits on the slope above the town, where visitors can observe herders at work and learn how traditional sheep rearing supports the local economy through wool and dairy.

The **Phoktey Dara trek**, beginning here, rises to 3,734 metres through the Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary. The route offers views of Everest, Makalu, Lhotse, and Khangchendzonga, and remains accessible for most trekkers. Along the trail, the sanctuary’s mixed forests of fir, birch, and rhododendron shelter red pandas, and Himalayan black bears.

A few kilometres uphill lies the **Chewabhanjyang Pass**, a historic Indo-Nepal border route meaning “Peeping Valley” in the Limboo language. The pass offers a rare vantage point over eastern and western Himalayan peaks and serves as a cultural link between communities on either side.



Pem Dorjee Sherpa

# Soreng: Where Growth Is Green

**SORENG'S FARMS SHOWCASE ORGANIC CULTIVATION, CONNECTING TRAVELLERS WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES, TRADITIONAL PRACTICES, AND THE RHYTHMS OF RURAL MOUNTAIN LIFE**



Freshly pulled carrots lie sorted

**T**he climb from Soreng, around 100 km away from Gangtok, to Upper Singling is short but slow. The road curls through bamboo groves and orange trees before opening into a plateau of green terraces at nearly 2,087 m. Clouds drift low enough to touch; the air smells faintly of rain and manure. It's peaceful here. Only the distant bells of cattle and the rhythm of spades striking soil.

I stopped at Gumba Dara Organic Farm, where Pem Dorjee Sherpa, 32, has been farming for two decades. His fields stretch in neat squares of radish, carrot, peas, and beans. He called organic



Gumba Dara Monastery offers panoramic views and insights into Buddhist culture



Bhir Dara Viewpoint offers a 360-degree view of Soreng's valleys

farming "the pure form," explaining how they use only compost and manure from their cattle. "Chemicals make the soil weak," he said, crouching to scoop a handful of dark, crumbly earth. "We feed the soil naturally so it keeps feeding us."

The farm sits just below a ridge lined with prayer flags and the old monastery of Upper Singling. Tourists and students often stop by, Dorjee told me, curious to learn how Sikkim grows food without the use of fertilisers. Some help him weed or turn compost; others stay in village homestays where the day ends with a plate of fresh vegetables cooked in mustard oil and salt.

His pride was quiet but certain. "When my crops grow well, I feel happy," he said. "Visitors see what we do, and they understand. Organic farming is not just about food, it's about health."

As I walked through his fields, the valley below shimmered in post-monsoon light. The air was cool, and the soil, still damp, gave off a rich, earthy scent. Standing there, I could sense why Sikkim's idea of tourism feels different: it isn't built around resorts or rush, but around people who live gently with their land. Farms like Dorjee's make Soreng more than a stop on a map; they make it a lesson in balance.

## EXPLORING SORENG

Located at around 1,300 m, Soreng is emerging as an accessible and visitor-friendly district. The town connects easily to Jorethang, Kaluk, and Rinchenpong, and is now part of the state's growing eco-circuit network. Within a compact radius, Soreng brings together diverse viewpoints, monasteries, waterfalls, and farmlands that reflect the district's unique blend of natural beauty and community life.

A short drive uphill leads to **Bhir Dara Viewpoint**, which offers a 360-degree view of Soreng's valleys and the distant Singa Devi Mandir ridge. On clear mornings, it's one of the best places to see the landscape unfold without a strenuous trek. Nearby lies **Gumba Dara Monastery**, renowned for its serene setting and traditional Buddhist architecture, while **Ambey Taar** spreads out below with its paddy terraces; a reminder that agriculture remains a cornerstone of local livelihoods and seasonal tourism.

Further along the road, visitors can explore **Rani Falls**, reached by a short forest walk, or stop at **Chagey Waterfall**, which sits conveniently near the highway. Both are being promoted as part of Soreng's eco-tourism initiative, offering safe, low-impact nature experiences. After a spiritual pause at the newly renovated **Ugen Lhudupe Che Monastery**, often included in local sightseeing circuits, adventure seekers can continue exploring Soreng's forests on **ATVs** and **mountain bikes**.

Every November, Soreng's rhythm shifts with **The Yaa Festival** in nearby Tharpu, a two-day event blending music, cycling, and community-led art. The festival reflects the district's evolving identity, where culture, youth, and sustainable tourism meet on shared ground.

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VISIT [EXPLORESORENG.COM](http://EXPLORESORENG.COM)

# Sribadam: Where Water Sustains Life



IN SRIBADAM, TROUT FARMS OFFER HANDS-ON LEARNING, FRESH PRODUCE, AND A GLIMPSE INTO SUSTAINABLE VILLAGE LIFE

**W**atching a stream run through the cement channels of his hatchery, 55-year-old

Samdup Bhutia said, “Clean water is everything. If the water stays pure, the fish and the people both do well.”

In Sribadam, 100 km from Gangtok, that idea feels literal. The village, about eight kilometres uphill from Soreng, sits at nearly 2,286 m and is fed by spring water that seeps through the forest. The cold temperature and steady flow make it one of Sikkim’s most successful trout-farming belts. Rows of small ponds glint in the sun, and beside them stands Bhutia’s Rainbow Trout Hatchery, the first private one in the state.

He began in 2010 with just 500 fingerlings and a borrowed stream channel. Fourteen years later, he supplies fingerlings across Sikkim, Kalimpong, and Darjeeling. During the breeding months of November to February, his farm turns into a learning site. Farmers, students, and visitors gather to watch egg harvesting and observe how trout are raised in the running spring water. “People come to learn, not just to look,” he said. “They realise how clean



A freshly caught trout in Bhutia’s hands

farming works.”

The hatchery has expanded with government support under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana and the Mukhya Mantri Matsya Utpadan Yojana, which has helped triple its production. A small processing unit now produces trout pickles and sausages, which are sold to local markets. Bhutia also operates a farmstay adjacent to the hatchery, where guests can enjoy freshly caught trout and take leisurely walks along the streams that sustain the village. The hatchery employs local youth and operates in conjunction with a cooperative that manages feed, transportation, and sales. For Bhutia, it is proof that small enterprises can anchor both community and visitor interest. Standing beside the clear pools, he smiled at the ripple of fish breaking the surface. “Tourists come for the view,” he said, “but they leave understanding how we live.”



Phuntsok Choeling Monastery is renowned for its meditation centre

## EXPLORING SRIBADAM

Sribadam’s rhythm slows as you walk beyond the hatchery. The village, renowned for its monasteries and heritage homes, has become a significant stop on Soreng’s spiritual and cultural circuit. Each site is close enough to visit within a day, making Sribadam ideal for travellers who want to experience both livelihood and faith in one journey.

At the heart of the village stands the **Phuntsok Choeling Monastery**, a centre of meditation and learning that draws devotees from across Sikkim and neighbouring countries. The monastery is renowned for its annual meditation sessions, during which monks and visitors engage in learning Buddhist philosophy and mindfulness practices. The sound of prayer wheels turning fills the courtyard,

each spin believed to carry the same merit as chanting the *mantras* aloud.

A short distance away, the **Palyul Dechen Gawaling Monastery** offers a different kind of energy. Every December, during Losoong (which marks the end of harvest season), its courtyard comes alive with the Cham Dance, a traditional mask performance that celebrates the triumph of wisdom and compassion. The monastery’s prayer wheels and murals preserve centuries of Tibetan Buddhist art, making it one of Sribadam’s most culturally significant landmarks.

For those seeking quiet nature trails, **Sribadam Lake** lies a short walk from the village. Locals come here in the evenings, and travellers often pause to watch the reflections on the still



The 200-year-old Bhutia Heritage House

water. Nearby, a short forest path leads to the **Sribadam Waterfall**, hidden within tall pines and cardamom fields. The route doubles as a light trek through the forest, where birds and the sound of rushing water replace conversation. Another must-visit lake is Chamko Pokhari, ideal for nature walks, small picnics.

Rounding off the circuit is the **200-year-old Bhutia**

**Heritage House**, known locally as a *khim*. Built with mud, stone, and wood—without a single nail—it remains a living example of sustainable Himalayan architecture. Visiting the house feels like stepping into a timeline of the Bhutia community’s craftsmanship and connection to the land.

► **FOR MORE INFORMATION**  
VISIT [EXPLORESORENG.COM](http://EXPLORESORENG.COM)

# Rinchenpong: Where History Lives On

LEGENDS OF BRAVERY AND COLONIAL HISTORY LINGER AT RINCHENPONG'S POISON LAKE



A statue of Buddha inside the Reesum Monastery

Locals call it *bikh pokhri*, the Poison Lake. At first glance, it looks like any other pond, a patch of water bordered by ferns and trees. But beneath its calm surface lies one of Sikkim's most enduring legends. Near this lake, a battle once took place between the forces of the Chogyal of Sikkim and the advancing British. With no weapons to match the colonial army, the Lepcha tribesmen turned to their knowledge of the land. They mixed a concoction of herbs into the lake, the only water source for the British camp, poisoning it overnight. By morning, much of the British force had perished. The British advance stopped, and peace returned to the valley.

"The lake reminds us that our ancestors defended their land with courage, not arms," said Sulabh Raj Gurung, founding member of the Rinchenpong Tourism Development Committee. "It's a story we grew up with, part of who we are." He pointed to the water, now shallower than in his childhood. The lake, once larger, has shrunk over time. "There is talk of restoring it," he added, "perhaps creating a walking trail and small bazaar nearby to support local families."

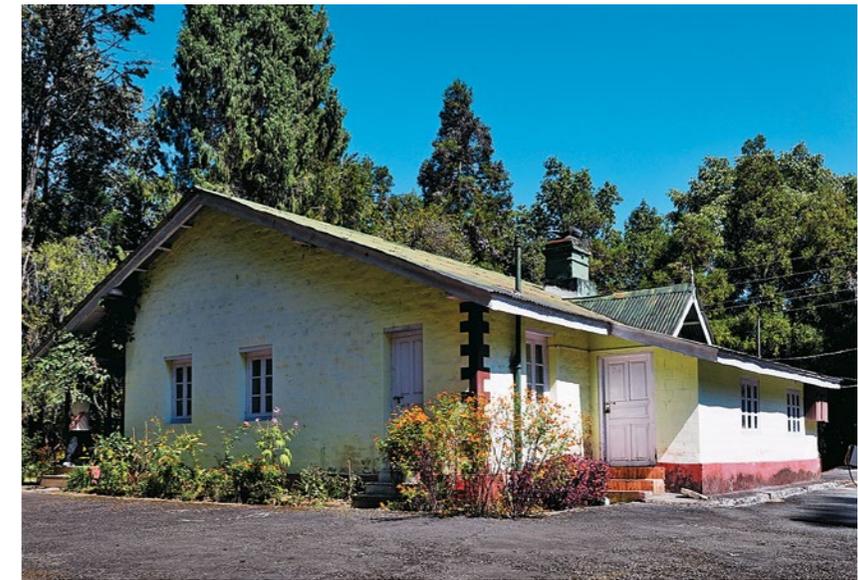
A short uphill walk from the lake leads to the British Dak Bungalow, a heritage wooden structure surrounded by old trees and forest trails. The bungalow dates back to the colonial period and has been carefully renovated



Reesum Monastery remains one of the oldest monasteries in West Sikkim

in recent years. Its wide verandah overlooks the valley, while a small garden frames the path to its wooden entrance. Inside, two spacious rooms and a warm sitting area with a fireplace offer glimpses of a slower age. It is said that Rabindranath Tagore stayed here and wrote some verses of "Gitanjali," inspired by the stillness of the surrounding hills.

Further ahead, the trail climbs toward Reesum Monastery in Upper Hathidhunga. Established centuries ago, it remains one of the oldest monasteries in West Sikkim. The structure features a wooden roof and stone walls. From its courtyard, the view of Khangchendzonga stretches wide, a reminder of how faith and history continue to converge in the hills of Rinchenpong.



British Dak Bungalow, where Rabindranath Tagore wrote some verses of "Gitanjali"

## EXPLORING RINCHENPONG

Rinchenpong is situated at an altitude of 1,700 m in the Gyalshing district of Sikkim, approximately 123 km from Gangtok. The town lies close to Kaluk, another small settlement known for its wide views of the Himalayas. From here, the ridges of the Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary stretch into the horizon, where rhododendrons bloom each spring and snow peaks rise behind them.

A few minutes uphill from town stands the **Rinchen Choeling Monastery** at Meghi Dara, inaugurated in December 2024 by Hon'ble Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang. Built as part of a new cultural complex, the monastery includes a library and a guesthouse. It has become a centre for prayer and study, drawing monks and visitors who come to learn about Buddhist philosophy and Sikkim's heritage.

Further along the ridge lies the **Rinchenpong Monastery**, established in 1730 by Ngadakpa Lama. It is the third-oldest monastery in Sikkim and houses a rare statue of the Ati Buddha in the Yab-Yum position.

In this form, the Buddha is depicted meditating while embracing a female deity, symbolising the union of compassion and wisdom, a central



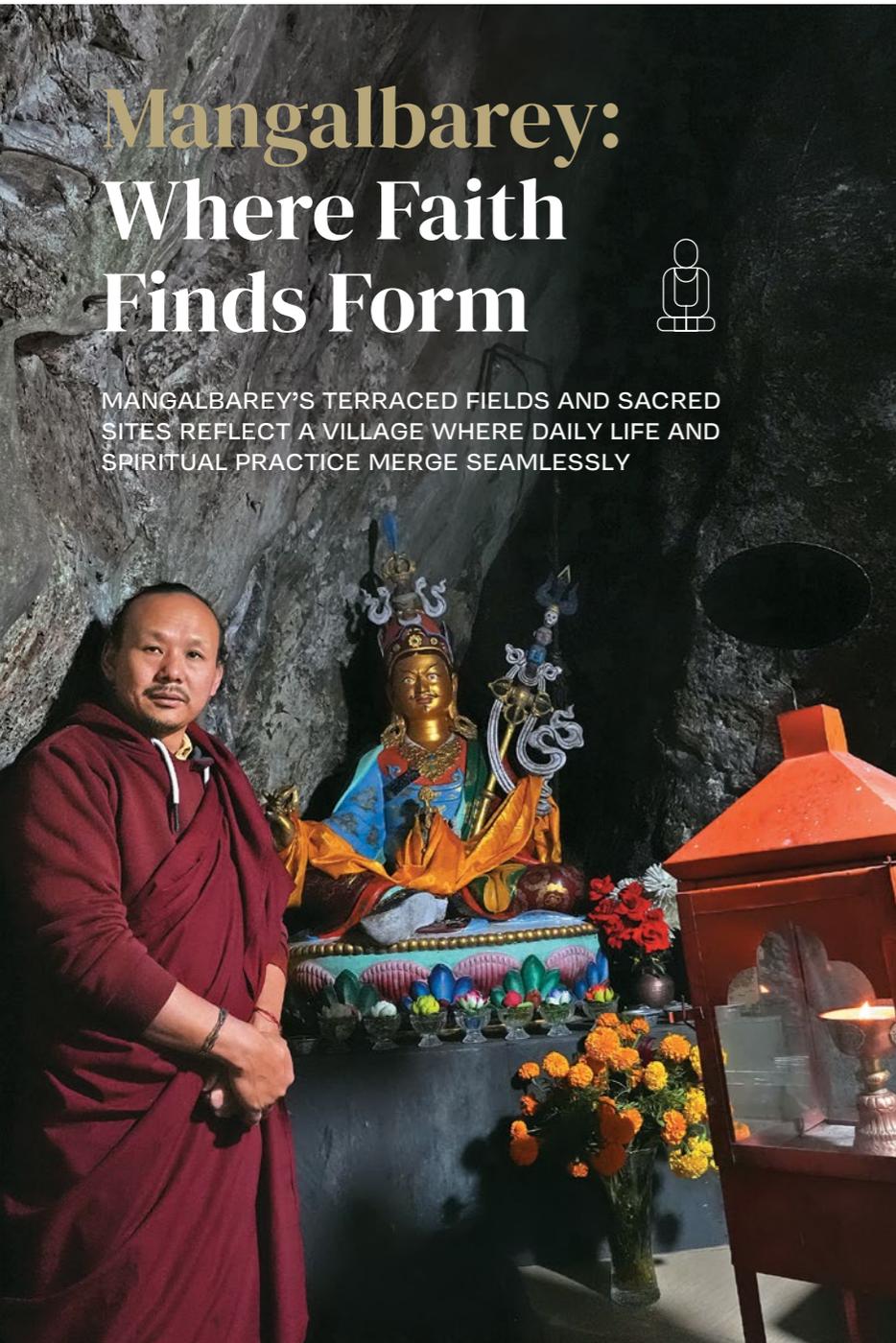
Poison Lake, locally known as *bikh pokhri*

concept in Buddhist thought. The monastery still functions as a living centre of learning, its walls lined with murals and prayer flags fluttering over the valley below.

Around Rinchenpong, travellers can spend the day walking through Lepcha villages, visiting orange orchards in Pareng Gaon, or following forest trails that lead to natural clearings for bird watching. Camping and short treks remain popular during the colder months when the peaks of Khangchendzonga appear sharp against the winter sky.

About three kilometres from

Rinchenpong, Kaluk offers modest stays near the fringes of the Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary, surrounded by forests and terraced slopes. A short drive uphill leads to **Ramidham**, a hilltop pilgrimage site above Bara Samdong known for its sweeping views of Mt. Khangchendzonga. The name "Rami" means "holy," and the *dham* draws devotees during the biannual Saptami Puja. From its ridge, western Sikkim stretches into view, while the sacred Sakundhara pond and nearby forest trails make it a serene spot for reflection and short walks.



# Mangalbarey: Where Faith Finds Form



MANGALBAREY'S TERRACED FIELDS AND SACRED SITES REFLECT A VILLAGE WHERE DAILY LIFE AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICE MERGE SEAMLESSLY

Rahuney Bhada, where Guru Rinpoche is believed to have meditated in the 8th century

**T**he path to Rahuney Bhada winds through a forest of ferns and prayer flags. Inside a shallow cave, the air is cool and heavy with the scent of butter-

lamp smoke. A young monk seated by the entrance told me, "Locals come here often. However, they don't pray for anything big. Just peace, for their homes, their land." He pointed towards

the rock wall darkened by centuries of soot. "We believe Guru Rinpoche [regarded as the founder of the Nyingma tradition, the oldest of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism] sat here. When you close your eyes, you can still feel the stillness he left behind." The site, believed to date back to the 8th century, remains one of Sikkim's oldest meditation caves, visited by pilgrims who leave coins, *khadas*, and simple prayers on stone ledges.

From here, the road curves toward Mangalbarey, a small village in Soreng District that moves at its own quiet rhythm. Set between forested slopes and terraced fields, it is a place where faith, community, and daily life merge seamlessly. The Mangkhim temple, sacred to the Kirat Rai community (a mountainous agricultural people who worship nature, and their culture includes unique festivals like Sakewa), stands on a rise nearby, surrounded by flowering trees. It remains a living symbol of Kirati heritage, where harvest rituals and ancestral songs are still performed in gratitude to the natural world.

A short distance away lies Gadi Dham, another spiritual site where devotees gather for prayer and meditation. The chants drift across fields, blending with the sounds of cardamom dryers and cattle bells. Further uphill, Lhuntse Monastery, built in 1850 at an altitude of 1,800 m, watches over the valley. A branch of Pemayangtse Monastery, it adheres to the Nyingmapa tradition and remains a school for young monks.

Down by the river, the Phur Cha Chu sulphur springs bubble gently amid dense forest. Rich in minerals and long believed to have medicinal properties, these natural pools are used by visitors and locals alike to ease fatigue and skin ailments.

Nearby, Lho Khando Sang Pho, also known as the "Secret Cave of the Dakini," is another site associated with Guru Rinpoche's meditation, where pilgrims gather to pray.

Before leaving, most travellers stop by Reshi Khola, where calm waters run past forested banks. A place to rest, listen, and end the day in stillness.



Aganey Dara offers stunning sunrise views of Khangchendzonga



The mountain-biking trails of Chakung

# Chakung: Where The Hills Invite Adventure



IN CHAKUNG, FOREST TRAILS, TERRACED FIELDS, AND OUTDOOR ADVENTURE CREATE UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCES

**A**bout seven kilometres from Soreng and 52 km from Gyalshing, Chakung is situated on a forested ridge above the Rangit Valley. Once known mainly for its farms and pine groves, it has emerged as one of Soreng District's centres for eco-adventure, where peaceful village life meets outdoor exploration.

The day here often begins with a short walk to Aganey Dara, a natural rock ledge that overlooks the valley. As the sun rises between October and March, the sky turns pale orange over the hills, while evenings draw stargazers to its open deck. A little further uphill, the Watch Tower Viewpoint

offers a 360-degree panorama of the surrounding ranges, with Mt. Khangchendzonga catching the first light of dawn. From here, the layered ridges of Soreng District unfold in every direction, offering one of the most striking vantage points in the region. The trail winds through pine and oak forests, carrying the scent of damp earth and the sound of birds, before opening to sweeping views of the valley.

Further down, the same slopes form part of Chakung's mountain-biking network, where forest paths link small hamlets and terraced fields. Bikes are available for rent locally, and riders often stop at village homes for tongba, a warm millet drink, or to sample

simple local meals. The ridgelines also attract rock climbers and boulderers. Scattered granite formations across the forest make ideal climbing sites, with professionals having mapped new routes over the years. The nearby Rock Garden, home to an 80-foot granite wall, is used for sport climbing, rappelling, and guided training sessions.

For those drawn to the skies, Chakung's paragliding take-off point is among the best in Sikkim. Flights lasting 30 to 45 minutes glide over homesteads, forest ridges, and terraced slopes before landing along the Rangit River. In the same valley, visitors can camp by the water, picnic under the pines, or join guided bird-watching walks. Hiking trails from Chakung lead through forests rich in butterflies and songbirds, connecting the adventure circuit to local monasteries and sacred sites.

Among these stands the Chakung Monastery, first built in 1874 and rebuilt in 2009 after earthquake damage. Following the Nyingmapa tradition, it anchors the landscape in calm. In Chakung, adventure ends where reflection begins—on a ridge where forest, faith, and open sky meet.

► FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT [EXPLORESORENG.COM](http://EXPLORESORENG.COM)



A Lepcha weaver at the Gagyong Handloom Training Centre

# Yangang: Where Threads Tell Stories

AMONG SOUTH SIKKIM'S RIDGES, WOMEN WEAVE STORIES OF HERITAGE, RESILIENCE, AND RENEWAL AT YANGANG



Yangang sits in South Sikkim's hills, where the pace of life is slow and the mountains seem to hold every sound. Small clusters of homes line the ridges, surrounded by millet fields and bamboo groves. It is one of the few places where the Lepcha community, the original inhabitants of Sikkim, still practice their crafts in everyday life. Known for their deep respect for nature, the Lepchas have long expressed their connection to the land through weaving, music, and oral stories.

I visited the Gagyong Handloom Training Centre, a government-supported initiative set up to preserve and promote Lepcha weaving while creating new livelihood opportunities for women. Inside the hall, around 20 women sat at wooden looms, each guiding colourful threads through the warp. The rhythmic sound of weaving filled the air, steady and unhurried.

Phurki Lepcha, 28, a trainee at the centre, told me she joined the three-month workshop earlier this year. "Before this, I only knew a little," she said, tightening a pattern with her comb.

"Now I can make full products on my own." She and the others are learning to weave traditional Lepcha textiles—bags, towels, and shawls—using designs passed down through generations.

Every motif here has meaning. The lines and colours represent rivers, hills, and symbols from Lepcha folklore. The trainers explain how weaving once took place at home, taught by mothers and grandmothers. The centre revives this tradition in a formal setting, where culture and skill turn into income.

Tourists often stop by to see the process, take photographs, or buy handwoven pieces directly from the trainees. All the work is done by hand using cotton or woollen yarn, sometimes dyed with natural pigments. "Visitors say they have never seen such patterns before," Phurki said.

Sitting among the looms, I realised the centre is more than a training space. It is a meeting point of culture, livelihood, and tourism. A brilliant example of how Sikkim's future is being built from the strength of its traditions.



Left and right: The base of Bhaleydhunga Ropeway; Neya Waterfalls



The 52-Doored House, built during the Kazi era by a royal scribe



PHOTOGRAPH: DEEO KUMAR, TAWANG

View from the top of Bhaley Dhunga, a massive rock formation on Maenam Hill

## EXPLORING YANGANG

Yangang, around 65 km from Gangtok, is a small town that reveals itself slowly. I began my visit at **Bhaley Dhunga**, a massive rock formation on Maenam Hill at nearly 3,048 m. Locals consider it sacred, a place where faith and landscape converge. The upcoming **Bhaley Dhunga Ropeway**, currently closed, will reopen alongside South Sikkim's first glass-floored **Skywalk**, connecting Dhapper to the summit. Engineers call it a model of eco-sensitive design; guides call it a bridge between worship and wonder.

From there, I joined a short heritage walk through Yangang's old settlement. The path winds past chortens and prayer wheels to the **52-Doored House**, built during the Kazi era by a royal scribe. Locals say its 52 doors once symbolised power and honour. The structure has survived earthquakes and decades of change, standing as a reminder of early Sikkimese architecture and the community's craftsmanship.

Further uphill lies the **Gyen Tashi Palding Monastery**, founded in 1787. It belongs to the Nyingmapa sect and is one of the oldest religious institutions in South Sikkim. Nearby, the **Tigdey Tsho Lake** is considered sacred and has become a site for birdwatching. Local guide Bijay Limboo told me that over 130 bird species have been recorded here, nearly half of all found in Sikkim.

On my last day, I visited **Neya Waterfalls** (the highest waterfall in the region), two kilometres from town, and **Mahadev Than**, a forest shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva. Both spots are included in new eco-tourism routes that combine nature trails with homestay circuits. For travellers seeking more activity, local operators now offer rock climbing, paragliding, and biking trails through the forests of Sangmoo.

► FIND OUT MORE AT VISITYANGANG.COM



Daramdin, where faith and folklore are intertwined



Daramdin Sai Temple is multi religion centre

# Daramdin: Where Faith and Folklore Meet



IN DARAMDIN, ANCIENT LEPCHA MYTHS AND FORESTED TRAILS CONVERGE, CREATING A VILLAGE WHERE MEMORY, FAITH, AND LANDSCAPE COEXIST SEAMLESSLY

**O**n my last morning in Sikkim, I met an old man sitting by the roadside in Daramdin, watching the mist drift over the hills. When I asked about the flatlands below, he smiled and said, “That’s where our people once tried to build a stairway to heaven.” He spoke

of the Lepchas, who stacked clay pots one over another until the tower almost touched the sky, only for a misheard word to bring it crashing down. Some say the fallen pots formed the three ridges now called Maney Bhanzyang, Kaizalay Bhanzyang, and Reling Bhanzyang.

Even today, fragments of pottery still surface in the soil after rain, proof that folklore here has roots in the earth. The same site, known locally as Swarga Janae Seeri, or “Stairway to Heaven,” is now being rebuilt as a symbolic structure—a modern effort to revive the legend of a people who once dreamed of touching the sky.

Daramdin, whose name comes from the Lepcha word Dalom, meaning “a place of rest,” sits peacefully in the Soreng district of West Sikkim, surrounded by Soreng, Sombaria, and the Kaluk–Rinchenpong belt. It is known for its rare stretch of level land and its deep connection to Lepcha heritage. The community’s stories, songs, and sacred sites all reflect their ancient belief that land and spirit are inseparable.

The Anden Olong Monastery, founded in 1913 by Lama Pema and rebuilt in 1995, stands as a reminder of that continuity. Following the Nyingmapa tradition, it remains a place of reflection where chants rise each morning through

pine and orange groves. The sound carries across the valley, blending with birdsong and the hush of prayer flags in the wind.

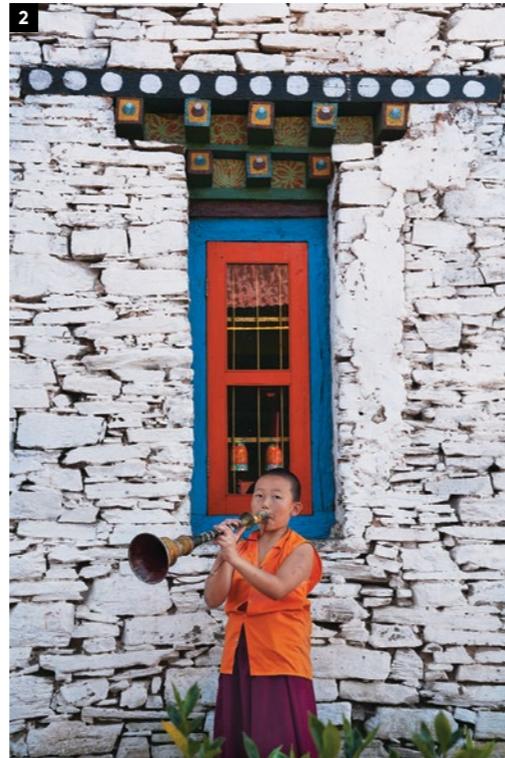
At the centre of the village, the Sri Sathya Sai Sarva Dharma Kendra, completed in 2007, gathers people of all faiths under one roof. Built on land donated by the Rizal and Pradhan families, the temple symbolises harmony in diversity. During Sai Baba’s birth anniversary, hundreds gather here to light diyas, sing hymns, and celebrate unity in spirit.

Beyond these places of worship, Daramdin’s landscape invites unhurried exploration. Forest trails lead to the Gathang and Devi Waterfalls, where moss and ferns line the stone paths. The Jureli Dara Viewpoint, situated between Daramdin and Hilley, offers sweeping Himalayan views. A short drive ahead, Buriakhop offers soft treks through green ridges, while Okhrey marks the gateway to the Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary, where the hills turn crimson in bloom.

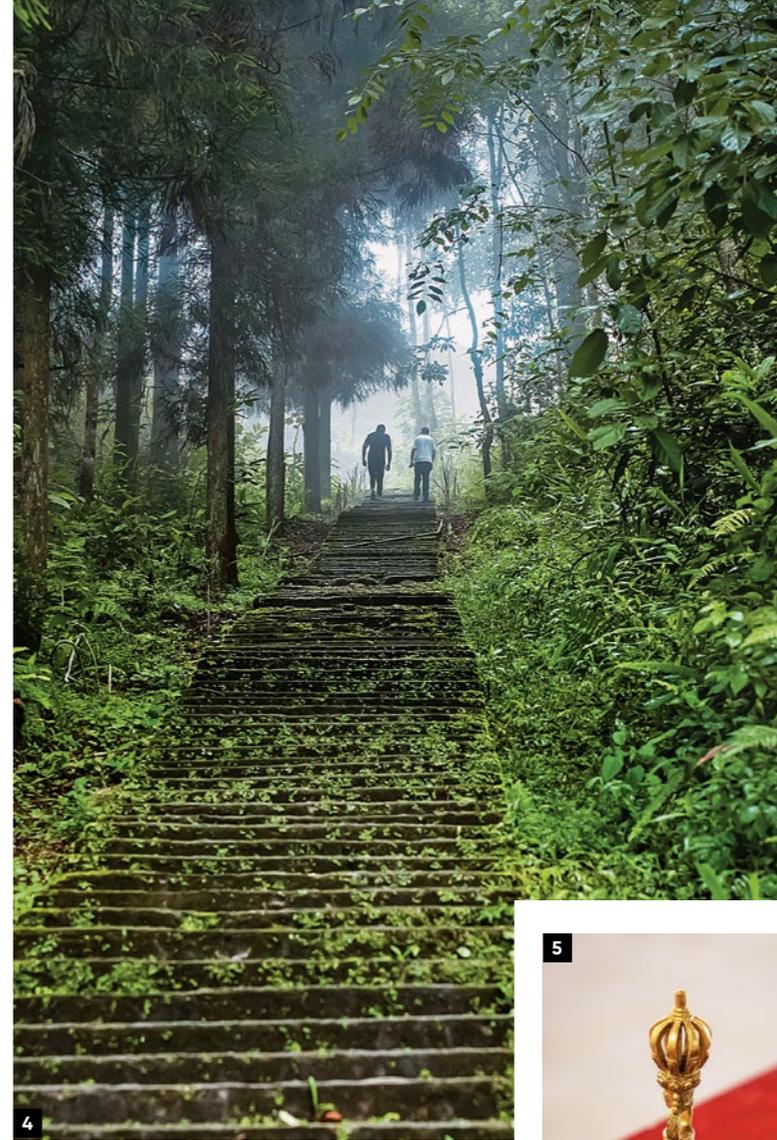
Faith and folklore are intertwined in Daramdin. The Sai temple’s white dome gleams beside pine forests, and the monastery’s chants echo through the valley. Between them lies a village that holds its past close. A place where stories, prayers, and landscapes are still spoken in the same breath.



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# Between Mountains And Monasteries



EXPLORING THE LANDSCAPES,  
COMMUNITIES, AND RICH  
CULTURAL HERITAGE OF  
SIKKIM THROUGH THE LENS



3



5

- 1. Rinchenpong's Rinchen Choeling Monastery
- 2. A young monk playing an instrument at the Rinchenpong Monastery
- 3. Ambey Taar, home to lush paddy fields in Soreng
- 4. The path to Aganey Dhunga, perched on a cliffside
- 5. An intricately carved Buddhist bell at a monastery
- 6. A man performing the Cham dance
- 7. Gorkha-Nepali men observe Bhai Tika festivities
- 8. A Limboo woman posing for camera



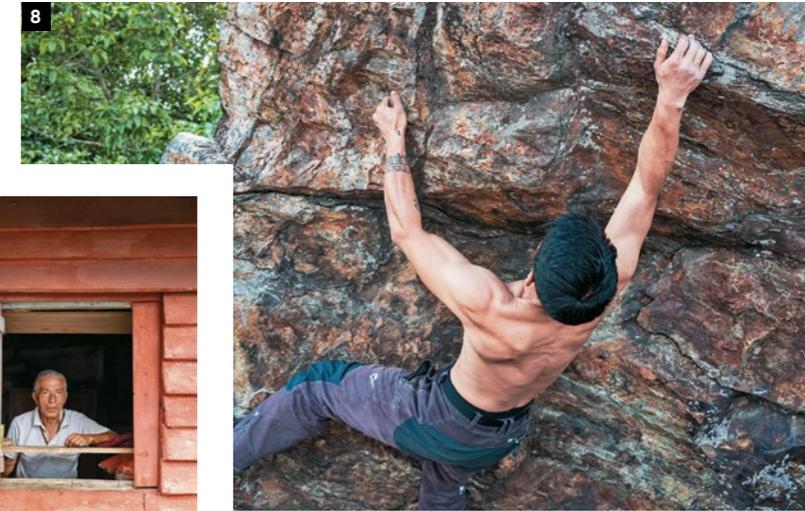
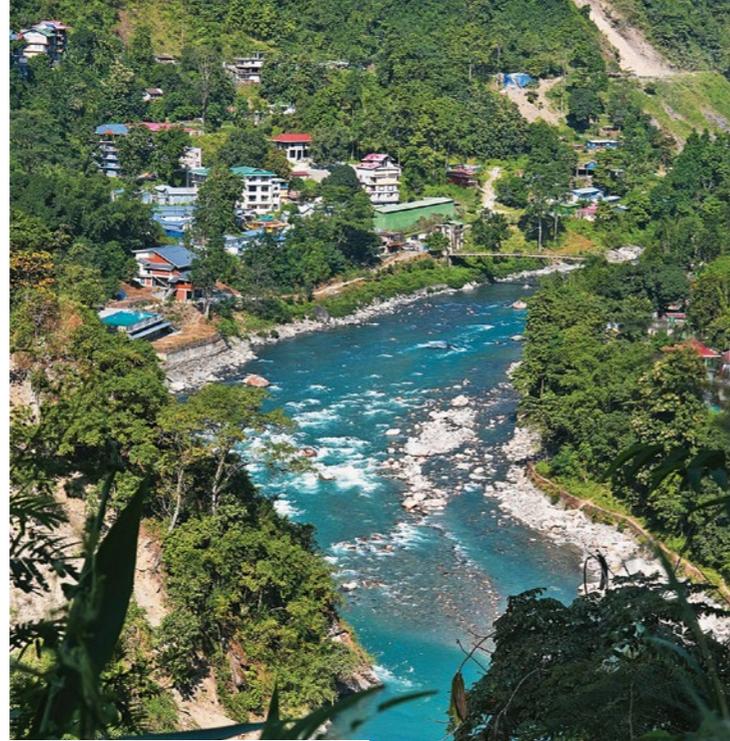
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- 1. A woman at the Bhutia Heritage House, Sribadam
- 2. Iskus, a staple vegetable of Sikkim
- 3. Hills, river, and village life in the mountains
- 4. ATV riding through Soreng's rugged trails
- 5. A kid smiles and poses for the camera at Uttarey



- 6. A woman sells fresh produce at a stall
- 7. Freshly steamed momo at Doma Sherpa Homestay, Uttarey
- 8. Go rock climbing at one of Sikkim's many locations
- 9. An elderly man looks out from a colourful window
- 10. Early morning view of the Kanchendzonga



# Sikkim Forward: The Road Ahead

STRENGTHENED RURAL TOURISM, SUSTAINABLE GROWTH, AND DIGITAL INNOVATION ARE SHAPING SIKKIM'S EVOLVING VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Sikkim's next chapter in tourism is being shaped by a clear vision of balance between growth, inclusion, and sustainability. The Tourism and Civil Aviation Department is focusing on strengthening rural infrastructure, deepening community participation, and positioning Sikkim as a leading responsible Himalayan destination.

## EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH TOURISM

At the centre of this effort is the Mega Homestay Scheme, under which 1000 new homestays have been sanctioned across the state. Each homestay is managed by a local family, ensuring

that tourism income remains within the community. The Sikkim INSPIRES Programme, supported by the World Bank, complements this effort by training women and youth in hospitality, entrepreneurship, and digital skills. Together, these initiatives form the foundation for inclusive rural tourism, creating livelihood opportunities in every district.

To build professional capacity, the Department works with the Institute of Hotel Management in Gangtok and the Indian Himalayan Centre for Adventure and Eco-Tourism at Chemchey. Training programmes for adventure guides, cooks, and homestay hosts ensure that Sikkim's growing

tourism industry meets national and international standards while remaining community-driven.

## BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE WITH PURPOSE

Infrastructure development is another key focus. Sikkim has been chosen by the Government of India as part of its national initiative to develop 50 iconic tourist destinations. This project envisions holistic development with world-class amenities, sustainable design, and digital integration. Alongside it, interconnected tourism circuits are being developed across all six districts to promote balanced growth through pilgrimage, cultural, eco-heritage, adventure, and rural experiences.

Among the major upcoming projects is Vrindavan Dham at Dodak, now under construction. The site draws inspiration from the sacred town of Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh, associated with Lord Krishna. Once completed, it will feature landscaped gardens, prayer halls, and meditation spaces, becoming a key centre for pilgrimage and spiritual learning. The project aims to position Dodak as a new destination for spiritual



Among the major upcoming projects in Sikkim is Vrindavan Dham at Dodak

tourism while generating employment and improving infrastructure.

Other initiatives include the construction of ropeways connecting remote valleys, the restoration of heritage monasteries and colonial bungalows, and the development of eco-circuits that link natural and cultural landmarks. These efforts reflect a vision of progress that honours identity, ensuring that every new route adds to the story of the state.

## SUSTAINABILITY AND THE DIGITAL FUTURE

Environmental stewardship continues to guide Sikkim's tourism policy. Through the Homestay Development and Registration Programme, families are encouraged to adapt existing homes for visitors instead of building new

structures, helping to reduce ecological pressure. Regular training on waste segregation, water conservation, and plastic-free operations ensures that growth remains environmentally sound.

The Sikkim Rural Tourism Meet, held annually, has become a platform for sharing ideas and showcasing lesser-known destinations. The 2025 edition in Uttarey saw strong participation from homestay owners and artisans, resulting in increased tourist flow to rural areas and reduced pressure on popular destinations such as Tsomgo and Nathula. Technology is also transforming the visitor experience. The Sikkim Darshan digital platform now integrates permits, payments, and certification systems, making travel seamless. Online portals, QR-based services, and social-media campaigns are expanding Sikkim's reach to both domestic and international travellers.

Adventure and wellness tourism are part of the future roadmap. New trekking routes such as the Signok to Talung Glacier Trail and the Dzongu to Yuksom Circuit are being mapped to international safety standards. These initiatives, supported by training in field safety and rescue operations, are helping Sikkim emerge as a premier adventure destination.

The road ahead is one of continuity and care, where development uplifts communities, protects nature, and preserves the essence of Sikkim for generations to come.



**“Tourism remains one of Sikkim's strongest pillars of growth. Through its inclusive and sustainable approach, Sikkim INSPIRES is empowering communities while protecting fragile ecosystems. The energy and leadership of women and youth will continue to shape this vision, ensuring a resilient and responsible future for tourism.”**

— Rohini Pradhan,  
SCS, Additional Secretary-cum-  
Programme Director, Sikkim INSPIRES

## DIGITAL VILLAGE YAKTEN'S NOMAD HUB

As Sikkim reimagines tourism for the future, Yakten in Pakyong district stands out as a model for how technology and community can power rural development. Under the Nomad Sikkim initiative, launched in July 2025, the village has become India's first digital nomad hub in the Himalayas.

### WHAT IT OFFERS

- Seamless internet connectivity, backup power, and a dedicated co-working space
- Eighteen upgraded rooms across eight homestays with organic local food
- Mentorship exchange where visiting professionals guide local entrepreneurs
- Easy access to pine forests and fresh mountain air
- A safe, welcoming environment suitable for solo travellers

### IMPACT SO FAR

- Over 100 Indian and international digital nomads hosted since launch
- Average occupancy above 80 per cent, even during monsoon months
- Incomes of homestay owners rising three- to five-fold through year-round stays

### TARIFFS

- Short stays (<7 days): ₹1,500 per day + 5% GST
- Medium stays (7–30 days): ₹1,100 per day + 5% GST
- Long stays (31+ days): ₹800 per day + 5% GST

### THE ROAD AHEAD

Plans are underway to expand to 50 rooms and build supporting amenities such as cafés, pop-up shops, and rental services, shaping Yakten into a sustainable, tech-enabled village economy.

► FOR MORE INFORMATION  
VISIT [NOMADSIKKIM.ORG](http://NOMADSIKKIM.ORG)





# Know Before You Go

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR TRAVELLERS EXPLORING SIKKIM: ENTRY RULES, TRAVEL ROUTES, BEST SEASONS, AND HOW TO JOURNEY SUSTAINABLY THROUGH THE HILLS



Tourists at a waterfall near Rinchenpong

## PERMITS AND ENTRY

Most parts of Sikkim, including the south and west, are open to Indian tourists without special permits. However, several high-altitude and border areas are designated as Protected Areas and require permits for entry.

### • FOR INDIAN TOURISTS

A Protected Area Permit (PAP) is required for visiting sites such as Tsomgo Lake, Nathula, Yumthang, Yumesamdong, Thangu, Gurudongmar, Zuluk, and designated trekking routes like Dzungri, Singalila, and Mainam. These permits are issued through Tourism Information Centres (TICs), the Police Check Post, or the Tourism Department.

### • FOR FOREIGN TOURISTS

Foreigners can visit Tsomgo Lake in East Sikkim and Lachen–Lachung–Yumthang–Thangu Valley in North Sikkim with a PAP issued by the Tourism and Civil Aviation Department. They must apply through a registered

travel agency and travel in groups of at least two. Access to Nathula and Gurudongmar Lake is restricted for foreign nationals.

### • TREKKING AND EXPEDITION PERMITS

Trekking routes such as Dzungri, Singalila, and Green Lake require prior clearance from the Forest, Home, and Army Departments. The Adventure Cell, Tourism Department issues these permits. Mountaineering expeditions for peaks such as Tinchengkhang, Jopuno, Frey's Peak, Lama Angden, and Brum Khangse require separate permissions from multiple authorities.

### • DOCUMENTS REQUIRED

- Voter ID or Driving Licence (for Indians)
- Passport and Indian Visa (for foreigners)
- Two passport-size photographs
- Vehicle registration, driving licence, insurance, and pollution certificates

(for motorbike permits)

- Note: Aadhaar Card is not accepted for border or protected area permits.

## CONNECTIVITY AND TRANSPORT

Major entry points include Bagdogra Airport (about 125 km from Gangtok) and New Jalpaiguri Railway Station (NJP) in West Bengal. Shared jeeps and public buses connect most district headquarters, but service frequency is limited. For greater comfort and flexibility, it is advisable to hire a private taxi for the entire trip, which costs approximately ₹5,000-6,000 per day, depending on the route and vehicle type.

## BEST TIME TO VISIT

The ideal months for travel are March to June and October to December, when skies are clear and trekking routes open. The monsoon season (July–September) brings lush greenery, but occasional landslides and travel delays accompany it. In contrast, winter (January–February) offers stunning snow views in North and West Sikkim.

## RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Sikkim is India's first fully organic state. Support local communities by staying in homestays, buying local produce, and avoiding single-use plastics. Respect the decorum of the monastery and dress modestly in religious or sacred spaces. Dispose of waste responsibly or carry it back. Avoid loud music, feeding wildlife, or flying drones in restricted areas.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

Carry valid identification, essential medicines, and altitude sickness remedies if travelling to high elevations. Drink filtered or bottled water and stay hydrated during treks.

## QUICK TIPS

- Check weather and road conditions before travelling long distances.
- Carry sufficient cash, as ATMs are limited in rural areas.
- Photography of army installations or border zones is prohibited.
- Using local SIM cards is advisable for improved connectivity.



Sikkim, where silence speaks and nature listens

# Outlook

# TRAVELLER

Mount  
Khangchendzonga



Scan Here To  
Know More About  
Sikkim Tourism



Tourism and Civil Aviation  
Department, Paryatan Bhawan,  
Tadong, Metro, Gangtok, Sikkim



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