



BUDDHISM TOUR OF SIKKIM

Introduction

Guru Padmasambhava, the great Buddhist saint and the restorer of Buddhism in Tibet, had prophesied during his travel to Tibet in the 7th Century that amongst the holy hidden lands or 'Bey- Ney'; personally consecrated by hi, 'Bey-Yul Demazong' Sikkim was the holiest. Here he had hidden a vast treasure of holy scriptures, icons, etc. to be discovered and interpreted in the future. It was the fulfilment of the prophesy when Lhatsum Chenpo, Rizen Chenpo and Nagadak Sempo Chenpo, coronaed the first Chogyal- the religious King.

These events have given shape to a rich heritage of Buddhism in Sikkim manifesting in over 200 monasteries, chortens, holy caves and influencing the society in general. This itinerary has been drawn up to provide you a lasting experience of the 'Buddha Dharma' as practiced in Sikkim.

Itinerary

Day 01: Fly from Kathmandu to **Bhadrapur** (1 hour) and board the waiting vehicle for the drive to Darjeeling (5 hours). Upon arrival check into the hotel.

Rest of the evening is free to rest or visit the town.

Overnight at the hotel.

Day 02: Sightseeing in Darjeeling. (2,100 m)

AM: Early morning go for the famous sightseeing of Sunrise from **Tiger –Hill**. Standing at a height of 2590 m (8482 ft.), Tiger Hill is 11 km from Darjeeling. An early morning trip to the Tiger Hill promises an unique experience. A view of the sunrise amidst the Himalayan range has earned it an international fame. From here you can get a glimpse of Mount Everest, the highest mountain and and Kanchenzonga. On the way back visit the **Ghoom Monastery**. This is the oldest monastery and is called the Yiga Cholling Monastery. It is situated about 8 km from the town at Ghoom and enshrines an image of 'the Coming Buddha' or the Maitriya Buddha. It was constructed in 1875 and belongs to the Gelugpa Sect.

PM: Visit the **Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park (Zoo)** Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park is the only Zoo in the world to breed Tibetan Wolf in Captivity and the first South Asian Zoo to breed Snow Leopard and Siberian Tiger and Red Panda. It is situated at an elevation of 2133.5 meters against the glorious background of the mighty Kanchenjunga. It was established on the 14th August 1958 under the



Department of Education of the State for study and conservation of the Himalayan Fauna. On 21st November 1975, the zoo was dedicated by Shrimati Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, to the memory of Shrimati Padmaja Naidu, former Governor of West Bengal. Since then the zoo is known as "Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park".

Later visit the famous **Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI)** - *"The lure of the Himalayas is spreading now all over India among our young people, and that is a sign and symbol of the new life and the new spirit that is coursing through India's veins"* - **Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru (Founder President HMI)**

Tenzing Norgay's ascent of Mt. Everest (8848m /29,028 ft) along with Sir Edmund Hillary, in 1953 provided the impetus to mountaineering as an organised sport in India, and it was to commemorate this singular success that the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI) was founded in Darjeeling with the personal initiative of Late Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. The Institute was established on 4th November 1954, which was then the hub centre of all mountaineering activity in India. Late Maj N.D. Jayal was the first Principal of the Institute whereas Late Tenzing Norgay was Director of Field Training. The Institute is located at an altitude of 6800 feet above sea level. The Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research was approached to prepare a scheme for the HMI and Arnold Glatthard, Principal of Swiss Mountaineering School, Rosenloui, visited Darjeeling for this purpose and made the necessary recommendations. The Institute has 3 main wings; a) Training Wing B) Museum C) Administrative Wing. One can see the equipments and personal items used by Tenzing Norgay for his ascent to Mt. Everest.

Later visit the **Tibet self help centre**. Darjeeling has some interesting places to watch the local handicrafts being made as well as a various range of choice handicraft souvenirs. The Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre is a self-supporting Centre for Tibetan refugees which manufacture some intriguing Tibetan handicrafts. Established for the rehabilitation of Tibetan refugees who had followed the Dalai Lama to India in early 1959. It offers a wide choice of Tibetan handicrafts and Tibetan woollen carpet. Hayden Hall, a Roman Catholic social service centre also has a handicraft section with the purpose of helping the local poor people.

Overnight at the hotel.

Day 03: Drive from Darjeeling to **Pemayangste** (Sikkim)(2,085m/102 km/ 4½ hrs)

Upon arrival do the sightseeing of Pemayangste Monastery. This is a second oldest monastery of Sikkim built in the 17th Century. Pemayangtse is also the nearest motorable point from Mt. Kanchenjunga, world's third highest peak. Later one can enjoy the



spectacular Eastern Himalayan range (weather permitting) from **Sangachholing Monastery** which is about 45 minutes walking from the Pemayangste Monastery.

Overnight at the hotel.

Day 04: Drive to Gangtok (1600 m / 117 km / 4 ½ hours)

After breakfast board the waiting vehicle and drive to Gangtok. The drive is through semi tropical forest, cardamom plantation and small villages. Gangtok was once the Capital of the kingdom of Sikkim. On the way visit the **Temi tea Estate**. It is located in South Sikkim and is the only tea garden of the State & owned by the Government. The garden produces about 1,05,000 kgs of Orthodox tea annually it enjoys excellent reputation and goodwill among the top quality markets worldwide

PM: Free to rest or walk around the Gangtok town.
Overnight at the hotel.

Day 05: Gangtok- Full day sightseeing

AM: Visit **Enchey Monastery** - It is situated adjoining the Siniolchu Tourist Lodge, 3 kms from Gangtok town. This monastery is an important seat of the Nyingma order, the Enchey Monastery is built on the site blessed by Lama Druptob Karpo, a tantric master known for his power of flying. This 200 years old monastery has in its premises images of Gods, Goddesses and other religious objects. Every year, around January, 'Chaam' or religious masked dance is performed with great fanfare for two days.

Later visit the **Government Institute of Cottage Industry**. This institute is located at zero point, few km uphill from the main Gangtok town. It was established, in 1957 with the purpose of promoting the manufacture and sale of local handicrafts, carpets and furniture. An emporium at the institute sells handicrafts; thangkas (scrolls with paintings) hand carved foldable wooden tables known as 'Choktsees' and exquisitely woven woollen carpets, mask and dolls. Hand made paper is another unique novelty of the Institute and is made from the bark of a tree Algeri. The paper is used extensively for invitation cards and letter-pads.

Continue the tour towards **Dodrul Chorten**. The Dodrul Chorten is one of the largest stupas in Sikkim and a very sacred icon to the Buddhists. The Venerable Trulsi Rimpoche built it in 1945 to ward off foreign invasion.

Later visit the **Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology (SRIT)** - Situated at Deorali, the SRIT is within walk-able distance from the main town of Gangtok. It was formerly known as the Namgyal institute of Tibetology, after the late Chogyal of Sikkim, Palden Thondup Namgyal whose brainchild it was, the Sikkim Institute of Technology(SRIT), has



since become one of the most prestigious depository of Tibetan literature, rare manuscripts, paintings, thangkas, statues and religious objects and other works of art and history.

This institute was established to promote research on the language and traditions of Tibet as well as the Mahayana sect of Buddhism. There are about 30 thousand volumes, mostly xylographs, (xylographs are documents that are printed using wooden slabs that have the matter embossed on them in the reverse) translations of the original teachings of the Lord Buddha, and treatises by distinguished Buddhist scholars from different parts of the world. The museum at the Institute consists of rare collection of antiques like statues, coins and thangkas. This institute is a premier institute in the world that conducts research in the language and culture of Tibet. It has on its faculty eminent scholars. The foundation stone of the Institute was laid in February 1957 by the Dalai Lama and it was inaugurated by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in October 1958.

Noon: break for Lunch

PM: After lunch visit the famous **Rumtek Monastery** also known as Dharma Chakra Centre. This monastery is one of the most important seats of the Kagyu lineage outside Tibet. In the early 1960's, His Holiness the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa founded this seat near the 300 year old Kagyu monastery built in the sixteenth century by the Fourth King of Sikkim under the guidance of the ninth Karmapa. The new Rumtek monastery was built about two kilometers away from this old monastery.

Rumtek became the International Kagyu Headquarters during the life of His Holiness, from where lineage activities manifested throughout the world. It also became the residence of a new generation of Kagyu masters, who are being trained in a tradition of study and meditation practice which began 800 years ago.

Overnight at the hotel.

Day 06: Gangtok- Half day sightseeing.

Visit **Phodong Monastery** in the North Sikkim highway and enroute also visit **the Labrang Monastery** and **Tumlong**. Phodong Monastery belongs to the Kargupa Sed (Karmapa). It was built by the Chogyal Gyurmed Namgyal in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The main annual puja is performed on the 28th and 29th day of the tenth month of the Tibetan calendar when the religious Chaams or dances are also performed.

Another kilometre uphill from Phodong Monastery is the Labrang Monastery which was built one hundred years later but belongs to the Nyingma-pa sect. Just below the road between Phodong Monastery and Labrang Monastery are the ruins of the third capital of Sikkim, Tumlong.



In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the capital of Sikkim was shifted from Rabdanste to Tumlong which remained the capital of Sikkim for almost ninety years.

The Palace is now in ruins covered with a thick canopy of bushes but we can conjure up an image of what it looked like from Dr. Hooker's account during his visit and imprisonment here in 1849. The chortens surrounding the Palace have however withstood the vagaries of nature and many of them can still be seen.

He wrote in the Himalayan Journal: "*It was an irregular low stone building of Tibetan architecture, with slanting walls and small windows high up under the broad thatched roof, above which, in the middle, was a Chinese looking square copper gilt canopy, with projecting eaves and bells at the comers, surmounted by a ball and a square spire. On either gable of the roof was round topped cylinder of gilded copper, something like a closed umbrella.*"

PM: free for Shopping

Overnight at the hotel.

Day 07: Drive from Gangtok to Kalimpong (1588 m / 85 kms / 2 ½ hrs)

Nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, the town of Kalimpong is situated at an altitude of 1,250 m. The name, Kalimpong, has three different origins. One, it means the place where the local tribesmen gathered to organize field sports, second, it takes its name from the Bhutanese Kings Ministers stronghold and thirdly, it is named after "Kaulim", a fibrous plant found in abundance in this region

The town offers a breathtaking view of the snowy peaks of the Himalayan range that lies not far beyond it. The lush green valleys are a soothing sight.

Enroute, visit the famous flower nurseries of Kalimpong. The region produces 80% of Indias gladioli and is a significant orchid-growing area. Entire hillsides are blaze with colour during the season.

Continue on to the main town and check into the Hotel.

PM : . After Lunch we leave from hotel to see the magnificent towering monastery of Durpin which has an commanding view of Kalimpong town and the surrounding regions. If the day is clear we will be able to see the ranges of Kanchenjunga and also some of the Bhutan peaks.

EVE: free to visit the bustling bazaar of Kalimpong.

Overnight at the hotel.



Day 08: Early morning drive to Bhadrapur and catch the flight back to Kathmandu.

*****End of the Arrangement*****