

INDIA'S NORTH EAST

(Calcutta, Darjeeling, and Assam)



ITINERARY:

Trip starts and ends in Kolkata (Calcutta); 14 days/13 nights



Day 1

AM Land in Kolkata and transfer to The Oberoi Grand ('Best' hotel in town) in the heart of colonial Calcutta for **1 night**.

PM After lunch city sightseeing. Dinner at our hotel.

Day 2

Early afternoon flight from Calcutta to Bagdogra then a spectacular drive (3h) to Darjeeling town and the New Elgin Hotel for **2 nights**. At a height of 2,200m (7,200 ft) on a West-facing ridge, the site of Darjeeling ('The abode of the thunderbolt') was leased in 1835 by the East India Company from the Raja of Sikkim. A sanatorium first it quickly developed as the summer retreat from Calcutta's pestilential heat. The ridge's upper reaches housed the Europeans while the Indian city developed on the slopes below.

Day 3

We spend the day exploring bustling Darjeeling town. From our hotel we walk to the nearby Mall, by St Andrew's Church, and along the ridge crest, past

many colonial buildings, to the Indian Himalayan Institute. Tengzin Norgay (Conquered Everest with Hillary) was the first Director. Visit the permanent mountaineering exhibition and then stroll through the forest parkland of Darjeeling zoo, where examples of rare Himalayan wildlife are housed in extensive enclosures. After lunch we stroll through the busy Main Bazaar. Dinner at our hotel.

Day 4

After a short drive we are dropped off to start our 'day walk' to Glenburn Tea Estate. The walk takes 5 hours, on a jeep track, is mostly downhill, and crosses tea estates, patches of forest, villages and a Buddhist shrine. Lunch will be set up along the way. The wonderful Glenburn estate is at 950m above sea level with views of distant snow-capped mountains, and valleys below. It dates from the mid C19th and produces some of the world's finest and most exclusive organic leaf teas, as well as being one of the region's finest 'boutique hotels'. We stay **3 nights**.



Day 5

After visiting Glenburn's tea factory to learn about the processes and varieties of Darjeeling leaf teas, we walk downhill through its tea gardens, villages, and forest (2h) to the estate's riverside fishing lodge, where we have a bbq lunch. Return to Glenburn mid afternoon.

Day 6

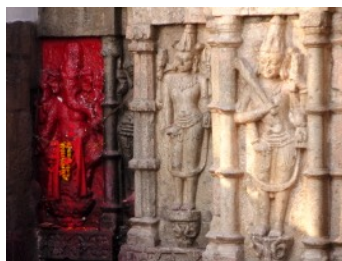
A 4h circular walk, this time starting uphill though the estate's tea gardens, hamlets and past one of their schools, takes us to Ramitay Daara. The spot offers wonderful views of Kanchenjunga, the world's third highest peak. Lunch back at Glenburn and afternoon at leisure to enjoy the gardens, the spa (The signature tea oil massage) or to purchase speciality teas at source.

Day 7

Another spectacular drive (3h; different route) takes us back to Bagdogra to catch an early afternoon flight eastward to Guwahati, the capital of Assam, on the mighty Brahmaputra River. We stay **2 nights** in town at the new, and 'best', Radisson Blue.

Day 8

Day spent exploring Guwahati and its temples. The Kamakhya Temple is one of India's most important pilgrimage centres for Tantric Hinduism and Shakti worship. The hilltop location affords wonderful views of the city and river below. The Navagrah (Nine Planets) Temple, also on a hill, is an ancient centre of astronomy and astrology. While the Umananda (Shiva) Temple is located on Peacock Island, in the Brahmaputra, where there is a colony of rare Golden Langur monkeys.



Day 9

Morning drive (215 km; 4h) through Assam's lowland tea gardens (1/3 of global tea production), retracing the Brahmaputra upstream, to the riverside Kaziranga National Park and **3 nights** at Infinity Lodge. Afternoon safari in

the park. Kaziranga was first declared a game sanctuary in 1916 to save the Indian Greater One-Horned Rhino and became a National Park in 1974. It is simply the best place on earth to see rhino (It has over 3,000; more than 2/3 of the world's population). Its 430 sq km (166 sq miles) of grasslands, swamp and patches of semi-evergreen forest are also home to large populations of wild Asian Elephant, Asiatic Wild Buffalo, and many other large mammal species, including tigers (100 at last count; but very elusive in this habitat!). Over 300 bird species have been recorded in the park, making it a birdwatchers' paradise. Because of its extremely rich biodiversity Kaziranga is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Days 10 & 11

We spend two full days exploring this beautiful Park's different 'ranges', with a choice of morning and afternoon jeep and/or elephant safaris both days. Apart from wildlife activities there is also opportunity to visit the very interesting local tribal villages, do a riverside walk, and possibly even go for a cruise onto the river.

Day 12

After a morning activity we drive (2h) to Jorhat for flight back to Kolkata. Stay at The Oberoi Grand for **2 nights**. Dinner at hotel.

Day 13

Today we stroll through Kolkata's colourful lanes and bustling markets: the flower market (the largest in the world), the vegetable & fruit market, and the fish market, where the Bay of Bengal's rich and exotic bounty is on display. Fish being such a significant element of Bengali cuisine our last dinner is at a specialist fish restaurant.



Day 14

Transfer to Kolkata International Airport for flight back home.