



Sikkim

Includes ➔

East Sikkim	538
Gangtok	538
Towards Tibet.....	545
North Sikkim.....	546
Gangtok to Singhik....	546
South Sikkim	548
Namchi.....	548
Ravangla (Rabongla).....	549
West Sikkim	550
Geyzing & Tikjuk.....	550
Pelling	551
The Monastery Loop	553

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Elgin Mount Pandim (p552)
- ➔ Mt Narsing Resort (p549)
- ➔ Mintokling Guest House (p541)

Best Monasteries

- ➔ Tashiding Gompa (p556)
- ➔ Pemayangtse Gompa (p552)
- ➔ Rumtek Gompa (p544)

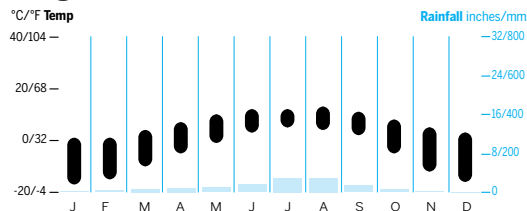
Why Go?

Legend has it that the great Buddhist guru Padmasambhava regarded Sikkim as one of the last utopias on earth. Arguably one of the prettiest destinations in India, this tiny former Himalayan kingdom is a haven for travellers. From North Sikkim's plunging mountain valleys and emerald alpine forests to West Sikkim's picturesque patchwork of terraced paddy fields and flowering rhododendrons, there's plenty to feast your eyes on here – not least of which are stunning views of Khangchendzonga, the world's third-highest mountain (8598m), visible from almost anywhere in the state.

A strong preserve of Mahayana Buddhism, Sikkim's superb public buildings are lined with ritualistic vermilion, gold, blue and green. To top it all off, the resident population here is gracious, happy and hospitable, and your trip through the state is bound to leave you richer by a few friends.

When to Go

Gangtok



Oct–mid-Nov
Clearest weather for views, but high-season crowds and prices.

Apr–May Spring blooms and warmth make up for cloudier skies.

Mid-Jun–Sep Good for rain-shadow areas of northern Sikkim but the monsoon plays spoilsport elsewhere.

Food & Drink

Sikkim's cuisine is a melange of robust Tibetan flavours and local tribal recipes, garnished with hints of Nepali and Bengali cuisine. The one 'don't-miss' beverage here is *tongba*, an alcoholic millet beer enjoyed across the entire eastern Himalaya. The beer (also known as *chhang*) is sipped through a bamboo straw and the wooden container (the *tongba*) is topped up periodically with boiling water to let the brew gain strength. Traditional Sikkimese dishes include *sisnoo/sochhya* (nettle soup), *ningro* (fried fiddlehead ferns), Tibetan-style *churpi* (dried yak cheese) and the Nepali speciality *gundruk ko jhol* (fermented mustard-leaf soup).

DON'T MISS

Sikkim's monastic **chaam masked dances** are when the hills come alive with unmatched ritualistic splendour. Part morality play, part country fair and part exorcism, the dances feature masked monks acting out Buddhist parables, stories from the life of Guru Padma-sambhava and the victory of good over evil. Performances are supported by a crew of clowns, demons and dancing snowlions, all entertaining a crowd of spell-bound locals dressed in their festive best.

Top State Festivals

- ➔ **Losar** (☀️ Feb/Mar; Pemayangtse, Rumtek, Enchey)
Sikkim's biggest *chaam* dance takes place just before Tibetan New Year.
- ➔ **Bumchu** (☀️ Feb/Mar; Tashiding Gompa, p557) Lamas (Tibetan Buddhist priests or monks) open a pot (*bum*) containing holy water (*chu*) to foretell the year's fortunes.
- ➔ **Saga Dawa** (☀️ May/Jun; all monastery towns) Religious ceremonies and parades commemorate Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death.
- ➔ **Pang Lhabso** (☀️ Aug; Ravangla, p549) Prayers and religious dances are performed in honour of Sikkim's guardian deity Khagchendzonga.
- ➔ **Losoong** (☀️ Dec/Jan; Old Rumtek, p544) Sikkimese New Year, preceded by *chaam* dances in many locations including Lingdum, Phodong, Phensang and Ralang.

MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

Rangpo, on NH31A (connecting Siliguri to Gangtok) is the main entry point. Permits are available at the Rangpo border checkpoint. For entry via Jorethang, permits must be arranged in advance.

Fast Facts

- ➔ **Population:** 607,700
- ➔ **Area:** 7096 sq km
- ➔ **Capital:** Gangtok
- ➔ **Main language:** Nepali
- ➔ **Sleeping prices:**
\$ below ₹1000, \$\$ ₹1000 to ₹3000, \$\$\$ above ₹3000

Top Tip

Shared jeeps are the best way to get around the hills. Jeeps between smaller towns depart early in the morning, and no connections may be available for the rest of the day. Book a front seat in advance, to save yourself from the physical torture of the journey that's typically felt in the side-facing rear seats.

Resources

- ➔ **Cultural Affairs & Heritage Department** (www.sikkim-culture.gov.in) Offers cultural background.
- ➔ **Sikkim Tourism** (www.sikkimtourism.travel) Lists sights, homestays and entry formalities.
- ➔ **Sikkim Government portal** (www.sikkim.nic.in) Provides a comprehensive overview.