



Sikkim

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Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Elgin Mount Pandim (p558)
- ➔ Bamboo Retreat (p551)
- ➔ Biksthang (p561)

Best Monasteries

- ➔ Tashiding Gompa (p562)
- ➔ Pemayangtse Gompa (p558)
- ➔ Rumtek Gompa (p549)

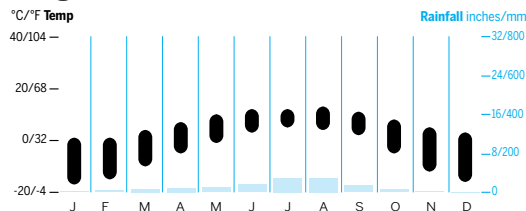
Why Go?

Hailed as one of the world's last utopias by legendary Buddhist guru Padmasambhava, Sikkim is arguably among the loveliest destinations in India. And what variety in such a small state: plunging rhododendron-clad mountain valleys in the north; West Sikkim's atmospheric Buddhist monasteries; monumental religious statues in South Sikkim; and friendly and cheerful urban centres in the east. Then there are stunning views of Khangchendzonga, the world's third-highest mountain (8598m), visible from almost any viewpoint in the state. Little wonder that this tiny former Himalayan kingdom is such a haven for travellers.

A strong preserve of Tibetan Buddhism, Sikkim's public aesthetics are executed in shades of ritualistic vermilion, gold, blue and green, which make striking photo ops. Throw in yummy local food, exotic Himalayan wildlife, picture-postcard landscapes and some great hikes, and you have a superb mountain escape on the cards.

When to Go

Gangtok



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

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

Mid-Jun–Sep Monsoon plays spoilsport, but there are great discounts on offer.



Sikkim Highlights

1 Enjoying a roller-coaster journey over mountain ridges and through abysslike valleys on a road trip to **Yumthang Valley** (p553)

2 Being enthralled by a colourful *chaam* (masked dance) ceremony at **Rumtek Gumpa** (p549)

3 Waking up to dazzling Khangchendzonga views in **Pelling** (p556), and visiting **Pemayangtse Gumpa** (p558)

4 Wandering among prayer flags and ancient chortens (stupas) within the magical **Tashiding Gumpa** (p562)

5 Walking on high ground and getting close to sublime

Himalayan peaks on the **Goecha La** (p561) trek

6 Sipping garden-fresh tea while taking in sweeping mountain vistas in **Temi** (p556)

7 Courting solitude and luxury at a stylish farmhouse in **Rinchenpong** (p561)