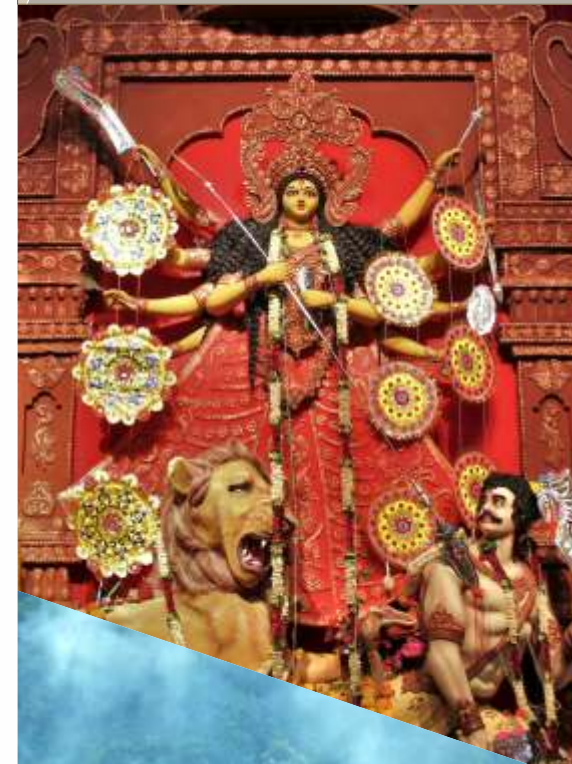




EST1 > 13 DAY TOUR

ESSENTIAL EAST

This itinerary is a great introduction to India's east, starting from Kolkata, an erstwhile trading post of colonial India, now the largest city of the east. Busy, chaotic, yet irresistibly charming, the Bengalis of Kolkata love their fish and their *addas* (informal chats) where just about everything under the sun is open to animated debate. At the height of colonial trade, goods were loaded onto boats on the Hooghly that flows through Kolkata and offloaded in warehouses by the Thames in London. Let's not forget the gentlemen's clubs. Kolkata has many – The Royal Calcutta Golf Club established in 1829, is the oldest outside the British Isles. From Kolkata, fly to the cooler climes of the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas. With its incredible mountain views, monasteries, rolling tea gardens and orchids, for the British Raj, this region was once a refuge from the sweltering heat of Kolkata during summer. On a clear day, the views of the Himalayan peaks are simply majestic, and the prayer ceremonies in the monasteries are a moving occasion and a time for peace. Get to know more about the local communities of Nepalese origin here and their favourite lair. End the tour in a tea estate by immersing in the story of Darjeeling – the champagne of teas.



Insider Tips:

- Best time for this itinerary: October to April. October in particular is very crowded with domestic holiday-makers flocking to the region.
- Kolkata celebrates Durga Puja during the month of October. It is one of the best times to be in the city; expect crowds throughout the visit.
- Best time for mountain views: December to April
- Best time for Rhododendrons and Orchids: March to April
- Best time for a Tea Experience: March to November when both the plantation and the factory are humming with activity. December, January and February are quiet, though you can still enjoy the verdant plantation. Watch pruning and other activities, and while the workers prepare for season, you can still visit the factory for some tea-tasting sessions.
- The Rumtek and Pemayangste Monasteries celebrate Losar (Tibetan New Year) during February/March. It is a great time to be here to witness the celebrations. The Cham Dance (Mask Dance), which is nearly 1400 years old, is a highlight of Losar.
- Gurkha veterans, who served in the British army and are members of the ex-British Gurkha Welfare Centre, meet every Wednesday and Saturday at the *Haat Bazaar* in Kalimpong.
- Every Wednesday and Saturday the *Haat Bazaar* in Kalimpong is buzzing with activity. Farmers with their produce and traders with their knick-knacks come and set up shop here. Soak in the sights, smell and sounds, as people negotiate, buy and sell.
- Add extra nights in Kolkata at the end to soak in more Bengali culture.
- Add Odisha as an extension to see the sun temple.



HILSA

A Bengali meal is incomplete without fish. The Hilsa, in particular, is not just a favourite but almost an obsession. The fish, which swims upstream from the Bay of Bengal to breed in fresh water, is a must serve in eastern India.

TOUR ITINERARY | EST 1

DAY 01 ARRIVAL KOLKATA

Warm welcome at the airport by our representative and transfer to the hotel.

DAY 02 IN KOLKATA

Start the day with a breakfast at Flurys, founded in the year 1927. Modelled on an English Tea-house, Flurys is an institution in Kolkata. Spend the day exploring this city of amiable contrasts, taking in sites such as the Victoria Memorial, Dalhousie Square, the Writer's Building and getting to know more about their colonial history.

DAY 03 KOLKATA – BAGDOGRA – DARJEELING

Fly to Bagdogra and continue to Darjeeling by road. In the evening, spend time soaking in the old world charm of the Glenary's Bakery and Café, established in 1935.

DAY 04 IN DARJEELING

Explore Darjeeling on foot and stop for tea or breakfast at Keventer's, an old Darjeeling institution. Continue to the Bhotia Basti Monastery, and later, to the Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre. In the afternoon, take a trip to Ghoom on board the Toy Train, which has been accorded the UNESCO World Heritage status. End the day at Dali Monastery by attending the evening prayers.

DAY 05 DARJEELING – PELLING

Drive to Pelling. Visit the ruins of Rabten, once the capital of the kingdom of Sikkim. From the top of the ruins on a clear day, you can enjoy scenic views of the deep valley to the mystical heights of Kanchenjunga ranges. Continue to the Pemayangste Monastery to watch the sunset.

DAY 06 PELLING – DARAP – PELLING

Spend the day exploring the village of Darap. Get to know

about the Limboo, Bhutia, Gurung and Rai communities who reside here. Enjoy a traditional lunch in the village.

DAY 07 PELLING – GANGTOK

Drive to Gangtok, the capital city of Sikkim. In the evening, head to Ganesh Tok for a bird's eye view of the city. Enjoy a walk on MG Road, a favourite with locals and tourists alike.

DAY 08 IN GANGTOK

Visit Rumtek, one of the grandest monasteries in the eastern Himalayas. Perched atop a hill, with beautiful views of the surrounding valleys, it is one of Sikkim's most colourful, and one of India's richest Buddhist monasteries. Take time to admire the intricate murals, thangka paintings and statues inside.

DAY 09 GANGTOK – KALIMPONG

Drive to Kalimpong. Spend the rest of the day relaxing in a

homestay and interacting with members of the joint family of Nepalese origin. They have been around in Kalimpong for six generations now. In the evening, enjoy a lesson on Nepalese cuisine. The option of staying in a hotel is possible.

DAY 10 IN KALIMPONG

Watch the fascinating views of the Kanchenjunga from the Deolo Hills at sunrise, over a cup of tea. Post breakfast, visit Dr Graham's home (subject to permission), renowned for its relentless effort to teach underprivileged children. Walk around the *Haat Bazaar*, the soul of Kalimpong. Make a quick stop at the Men-Tse-Khang to say hello to the *Amchi* (Tibetan healer) and also visit the St. Teresa Church to see paintings of Christ with a heavy Buddhist influence. Lunch at Gompus, a 100-year-old institution. Head out to an Orchid nursery to learn about the Himalayan flora of the region. End the day enjoying the sunset from the Durpin Monastery.

DAY 11 KALIMPONG – MIRIK VALLEY

Drive to the picturesque Mirik Valley, not too far from the Indo-Nepal border, to immerse yourself in an all-tea experience. Stay in an eight-bedroom, comfortable property located in a 100-year-old tea estate that produces organic tea.

DAY 12 IN MIRIK VALLEY

Acquaint yourself with the life of the tea pluckers, interacting with them; visit the tea factory, go on leisurely walks in the estate, enjoy picnic lunches and endless cups of Darjeeling – the Champagne of Teas.

DAY 13 MIRIK VALLEY – BAGDOGRA – KOLKATA DEPARTURE

Drive to Bagdogra for the afternoon flight to Kolkata. Day-use rooms are available until it is time to transfer for the international flight.



Tea! Any kind of tea is a must in the east. Experience the refreshing taste of milk tea when sipping it from a kulhad (a traditional terracotta cup with no handle), the local way to go.



Kolkata is humid and sultry. Sikkim is pleasant in summers and cold in winters.



All our Guides are fluent in the local language - Bengali. While most locals understand Hindi, English may not be understood by all.

Most commonly used phrase is: 'Aapni keymon achen?', which means 'how are you' in Bengali.

