

17 April -2 May 2019 (16 days) India's Sikkim & Bhutan

Trip Cost excluded flight fare Rm10,530 (8 pax group), Rm10,430 (10 pax group), RM10,330 (12 pax), RM10,230 (14 pax group and above)

(Note : Based on USD1 = RM4.00. We will make final adjustment on the cost based on the USD exchange rate in Feb-Mac 2019)

Update 17 Jun 2018- In 2009, we organized a sightseeing & trekking trip in Sikkim coupled with 8 days in Bhutan. Note that in Sikkim, we travel by jeeps because many roads are narrow and not suitable for buses. This trip requires early preparation for some documents e.g. Sikkim entry permit, Bhutan Visa etc. We fly with Air Asia to Kolkata and overland to Bhutan. From Bhutan, we fly back to Kolkata for our flight home. As such, trip cost above is excluding air tickets (international & two domestic). Kindly register and confirm your seat asap by writing in to rachelheng123@gmail.com. **(NOTE : we have revised our itinerary from past trips which included some light/easy treks in Sikkim)**

Air Asia (Flights checked as at 17 July 2018, air fare included taxes RM984)

Depart

17 April 2019 (FRI) AK 63 Kuala Lumpur (KUL) to Kolkata (CCU) **Depart 2235 Arrive 2359**

Return

2 May 2019 (Sat) AK 62 Kolkata (CCU) to Kuala Lumpur (KUL) **Depart 0045 Arrive 0710**

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This is meant to be a "free and easy" adventure trip. Participants should be relatively fit, with a good sense of humour, and above all, have the right attitude for close travel with others through possibly some trying times. Most definitely, this is not a trip for prudes, whiners, fuss-pots, and other similiarly assorted types! We had a couple of those before and it wasn't pleasant for us or them. Although every effort will be made to stick to the given itinerary, ground conditions may change and cause some disruption and/or deviation from the norm. Otherwise, have fun!



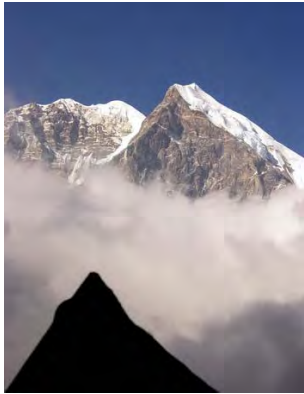
landscape View in Bhutan (Photo by KC Liu)

Small but beautiful, **Sikkim** is surrounded by three great countries of Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan. This Indian state is spread below **Mount Khanchendzonga** (8534 mts), the third highest mountain in the world, and revered by the Sikkimese as their protective deity. With an area of 7,300 sq km and measuring approx. 114 km from the north to south and 64 km from east to west, the elevation ranges from 300m to over 8,540m above sea level. Amidst the grandeur of hills and mountain peaks, lush valleys and fast flowing rivers, Sikkim offers visitors a rare and spectacular experience. Within a matter of hours, one move from the sub tropical heat of the lower valleys to the cold rugged mountain slopes with snow-covered peaks.

The modern history of Sikkim begins from 1642 A.D. with the coronation of Phuntsog Namgyal as the first Chogyal or king of Sikkim in a tranquil pine covered hill in Yuksom Norbugang, West Sikkim. The Namgyals were scions of the Mi-nyak House in Kham from Eastern Tibet. It is said that there were three brothers, chiefs of Kham Mi-nyak. A letter dropped from heaven directed the middle brother to go south towards Sikkim, where his descendents were fated to rule. It was in Sakya that his eldest son single-handedly raised the pillars of the Sakya monastery and earned himself the nickname of 'Khye Bumsa' (the strength of a lakh of me). Khye Bumsa also earned himself the hand of the daughter of the Sakya hierarchy and settled in Chumbi Valley, which remained for a long time, the epicenter of the later kingdom of Sikkim.

Day 1 KLIA2: Meet up at KLIA2 for night flight **AK63** departing 2235PM for Kolkata. O/N Plane

Day 2 Kolkata-Bagdogra- Gangtok (125km 4-5 hrs drive) : Arrived Kolkata 00:00, transfer to hotel. After breakfast, transfer to airport for domestic flight to Bagdogra. Once we reach Bagdogra, we travel by jeeps to Gangtok, capital of Sikkim. Gangtok is spread out on a ridge 1520m above sea level, and looks something out of a fairy tale with houses balanced precariously on the slopes of steep hills. Enjoy gorgeous views of deep valleys, waterfalls and snow-capped mountain ranges which separates Sikkim from neighbouring Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal. O/N Gangtok



View of Kangchenjunga from Goechala/Darjeeling "tea" town/ Tea lady

Day 3 Tsomgo Lake Excursion (4-5 hrs drive): After breakfast, we drive to Tsomgo Lake, also known as The Source of the Lake (3,780m). Warm clothes are needed for this place. Tsomgo lake is one of the famous sacred lakes in Sikkim and derives its water from melting snows of the surrounding mountains near the borders of Tibet. After arriving at Tsomgo lake, we start our short trek to the Tsomgo range around 4230metre. We return to Tsomgo lake for lunch. After that, we return to Gangtok for a visit to Sikkim Flower Exhibition Centre which houses a wide range of rare species of orchids (Seasonal). Evening walk around the local market. 2nd night at Gangtok. *(Optional one can up to cable car to have an overview of the mountainscape (Cable car own expenses Rupee 295).*

Day 4 Gangtok - Lachung (6-7 hrs drive): Today, we leave for the North district of Sikkim to a small village called Lachung (2,400m). This spectacular drive will take about 6-7 hrs. Along the way, we visit Kabi-Lungchok, famous for its historical and cultural importance as well as rich in biodiversity. This place is a symbol of reverence to the guardian deity of Mt Khangchendzonga. Besides that, this place also ushered in a new era of communal harmony in the annals of Sikkim as the venue where the blood brotherhood treaty was solemnized in 13th century between the Lepcha chieftains Thekong Thek and the Bhutia King Khey bumsa.

Photo stop at Seven sister waterfalls and a visit to Phodong Monastery, which is one of the oldest monastery in north Sikkim. We have lunch en-route and more stops at Naga & Bima waterfalls. If weather is clear, you will see the magnificent range of the third highest mountain in the world, Kanchengzonga and some wild orchids blooming (during spring) on the way. Arrive Lachung by late afternoon and check in at a lodge. **(Reminder - accommoation facilities here are very basic)**. O/N Lachung.

Day 5 Lachung- Yumthang excursion- Gangtok: After breakfast, we leave for Yumthang (3,500m) excursion. This panoramic drive brings visitors to the Valley of Flowers where one can find up to 36 species of rhododendrons, primulas and other spectacular alpine wild flowers. Yaks and dzos can be seen grazing on the meadows. On the way back, walk across the Lachung Chu and have a dip in a hot spring (swimming costumes recommended). If not, just enjoy the surrounding scenery. Back to Lachung for lunch and return to Gangtok for our overnight stay. ON Gangtok.



Sikkimese people/ Rhododendrons

Day 6 Gangtok-Rumtek- Rawwangla- Namchi (140km, 3-4 hrs drive)_ Today our drive brings us south west towards Namchi with several stops along the way. Our first stop is Rumtek Monastery. Rumtek served as the main seat of the Karma Kagyu Lineage in Sikkim for a period of time. But when Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, 16th Karmapa arrived in Sikkim in 1959 after fleeing Tibet, the monastery was in ruins. Despite offers at other sites, the 16th Karmapa decided to rebuild Rumtek. We then drive to Singtam for lunch. After lunch, we proceed to Rawangla to visit Tathagata Tsal, also known as Buddha Park. It was constructed between 2006 to 2013 and features a 130 feet high statue of Buddha as its centerpiece. The site was chosen within the larger religious complex of the Rabong Gompa (Monastery), which has served as a place of pilgrimage for centuries. We finish day with a drive to our hotel at Namchi. Namchi commands panoramic view of snow-capped mountains and vast stretches of valley. It is also headquarters of South Sikkim district. O/N Namchi.

Day 7 Namchi - Darjeeling (83km, 3.30 hrs): We have some sightseeing around Namchi before heading further south to Darjeeling. First stop at Samdruptse - world's largest statue at 118 feet of the Buddhist Padmasambhava, also known as Guru Rinpoche and patron saint of Sikkim. It is located on Samdruptse hill (The Wish Fulfilling well) opposite Namchi and was completed in February 2004. Locals believe Samdruptse hill is actually a dormant volcano. Legends record that buddhist monks have been going to the top of the hill to keep the volcano calm by offering prayers. We then drive to Siddhesvara Dhaam to visit the 87ft statue of Lord Shiva and replicas of Four Dhaams of the country at one place on top of Solophok hill in Namchi. The four most revered Dhams of the Hindus are Jagannath, Dwarika, Rameshawaram and Badrinath. We proceed to Sai Temple and back to Namchi for lunch.

After lunch, we drive through picturesque tea gardens towards the world renowned hill station of Darjeeling. After dinner, free & easy at local bazaar. O/N Darjeeling for next two nights.



Sikkimese kids/Bhutanese

Day 8 Darjeeling: Depart hotel early at about 4am for Tiger Hill (2,585m) to catch the sun rise and panoramic views of the spectacular snow-clad mountain peaks of the Himalayan Range. On our return to Darjeeling, we stop at Ghoom Monastery, built in 1850 by Lama Sharb, which enshrines at 15ft. statue of Maitreya Buddha. After breakfast, we begin a short **easy trek** to Lebong village via Bhotey busty, one of the very famous village in Darjeeling. After that, we visit Happy Valley tea garden and the Himalayan Zoological Park. The zoo serves as a breeding center for snow leopards and red pandas, as well as a home for mountain yaks, Himalayan black bears and Siberian Tigers. We continue to the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, located within this zoo, which was founded in 1954 to commemorate history's first successful conquest of Mt. Everest in 1953 by 'Darjeeling's son', Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary. We finish day at the Tibetan Refugee Center. 2nd night Darjeeling.

Day 9 Darjeeling - Phuentsholing (Bhutan) (175km, 6hrs drive): Today, it is a long drive eastwards towards Phuentsholing to meet our Bhutan representative. After clearing immigration formalities, check in to Hotel. We then

visit Zangtho Pelri, a small temple representing the heaven of Guru Rinpoche. On the ground floor there are statues of the eight manifestations of Guru Rinpoche and paintings on Buddha's life. The next floor contains eight Bodhisattavas and statues of Avalokiteshvara and Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. Top floor houses a main statue of Amitabha. Evening free & easy to explore the local market. O/N Phuentsholing.



Tiger Nest / Monks / Little Monk Football match

Day 10 Phuentsholing - Thimphu (180km, 6 hrs drive) : After breakfast, we drive to Thimphu located 4km north of Phuentsholing. Along the way, we stop at Kharbandi Gomba, a beautiful monastery within a garden of tropical plants and flowers. The monastery contains paintings depicting scenes from the life of Buddha and statues of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and Guru Rinpoche. From the monastery garden, there is a splendid view of Phuentsholing and plains of West Bengal and its tea gardens

Proceed further north towards Thimphu. This drive is very pleasant with numerous scenic spots along the way. Lunch would be served at Bunakha cafeteria. Just 5 miles before arriving Thimphu, we stop at Simtokha Dzong, the oldest fortress of the Kingdom which now houses the School for religious and cultural studies.

After checking into hotel, short rest before we visit the National Memorial Chorten. The building of this landmark was originally envisaged by Bhutan's third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuk ("the father of modern Bhutan") who wished to erect a monument for world peace and prosperity. Completed in 1974 after his untimely death, it serves both as a memorial to the Late King and as well as a monument for peace. After office hours, we visit the beautiful medieval fortress of Trashichho Dzong which now houses most of the Government's offices and the King's Throne room. It is also the summer residence of Je Khenpo, the Chief Abbot. O/N Thimpu for next 2 nights

Day 11 Thimphu: Wake up early for morning market which open Thurs-Sun also can visit opposite local produce market for good reasonable priced souvenirs. After that we will visit National Library which houses an extensive collection of Buddhist literature, with some works dating back several hundred years. Next visit to the nearby Institute for Zorig Chusum (commonly known as the Painting School), where a six year training course is given in the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan. We then proceed to the Textile and Folk Heritage Museum: These museums, both of which opened in 2001, provide fascinating insights into Bhutanese material culture and way of life. We continue on to the Handicrafts Emporium which displays a wide assortment of beautifully handwoven and crafted products. 2nd night Thimpu.



Day 12 Thimphu - Punakha (75km, 3hrs+ drive): After breakfast, we drive up to visit Dochula Pass (3,088m) . The top of the pass is decorated with prayer flags and a chorten. We continue towards the majestic Wangdue Phodrang Dzong, which was built to guard the approach into Central Bhutan. We then turn off towards Punakha, a former capital of Bhutan and current winter seat of Je Khnep (the chief abbot).

Upon arrival at Punakha, we visit Punakha Dzong, built at the junction of Pho Chhu and Mo Chhu rivers in 1637. One of the most picturesque fortresses that dot the landscape of Bhutan, Punakha Dzong is also one of the most historically-important fortresses – it is the former seat of the royal family and the current winter residence of the national monastic body. O/N Punakha.



The Bhutanese monk / Yongo traveler with local people

Day 13 Punakha-Paro (125km, 4hrs+ drive): Morning excursion to Chimi Lhakhang. About 400 years old, the monastery is maintained by a monk with 42 trainees, and is linked to Lama Drukpa Kinley, The Divine Madman. We spend the afternoon driving towards Paro for our next 2 nights stay. En route, we will visit Ta Dzong (National Museum) and Rinpung Dzong. O/N Paro.

Day 14 Tiger Nest Monastery Excursion : In the morning, day excursion to Taksang Monastery viewpoint (approximately 5 hrs walk). Probably the most famous of Bhutan's monasteries, this landmark seems to defy gravity as it clings to the sheer cliff face 900-metres above the Paro valley floor. Legend has it that Guru Rinpoche arrived at this point on the back of a tigress, hence the common name "Tiger's Nest". O/N Paro

Day 15 Paro- Kalkota-Home (28 April 2017): Morning check-out and transfer to Paro airport for Druk Air flight KB212 departing at 0720 hours for Kolkata, arriving 8AM. Day tour in Kolkata and final shopping before transferring to Kolkata Airport at night for the past midnight (12 May 2018) AirAsia flight. O/N Plane

Day 16 Home: Take **AK62** at 0045AM to reach KL 0710AM early morning on **THU 2 May 2019**



National Archery in Bhutan

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

1. Cost cover budget accommodation, Sikkim's (Lachung) permit fees and transport.
2. Not covered are airfares 1) KL-Kolkata-KL, 2) One Way Kolkata-Bagdogra & 3) One way Paro-Kalkota flight estimated Rm2k-2.5k for all sectors, India Visa fees Rm190, Bhutan Visa fees USD40, Bhutan Tourism Development Fees USD10, airport taxes (international & domestic), entrances ticket (approximately Rm100) and meals(Sikkim) except Bhutan (FULL BOARD). Allocate about Rm250-300 for 8 days meals.
3. Guides/driver accompanying group do expect tips. Yongo encourages group members to be generous but should of course, commensurate with their level of service rendered.
4. A deposit of **Rm2060** is payable to confirm your place.
5. Cost is subject to change if there's significant changes in foreign exchange rates and/or airfares.

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