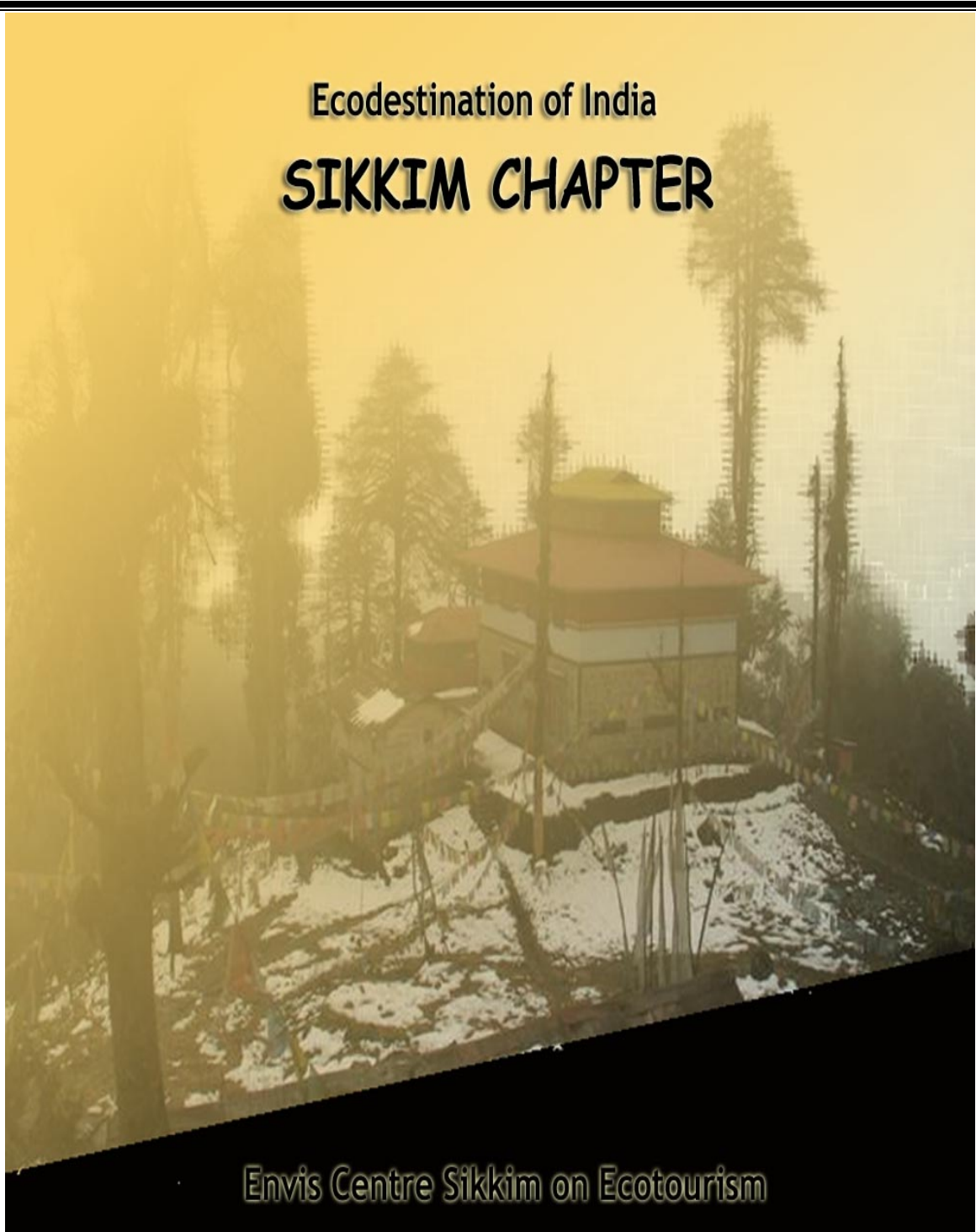


Ecodestination of India
SIKKIM CHAPTER



Envis Centre Sikkim on Ecotourism

Preface.

“The land of orchids”, “The land of tranquility”, these are the few ways in which Sikkim has been described. Infact in all its manisfestations Sikkim has been projected as a naturalists paradise. A tourist visiting Sikkim is all praises for the richness in nature which no doubt has been the basic ingredient of tourism in Sikkim. It is here that Khanchendzonga-the third highest mountain in the world stands tall. Blessed with snow capped mountains, lakes, rivers and varieties of flora and fauna Sikkim is in par with other ecological hotspots of the world .Eco-tourism is the buzzword and Government ,NGO’S and individuals have all geared up for contributing to it.

Eco-destinations of India “Sikkim Chapter” is an entire gamut of information about Sikkim- a humble attempt to showcase its rich bio-diversity .Through surveys and information through internet and books we have tried our best to bring-forth the rich natural wealth of Sikkim. We hope that this book will be found useful not only by those for whom it has been written-researchers and students but also proves to be highly beneficial for the tourists visiting Sikkim.

ENVIS TEAM

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ECO-TOURISM ETHICS BIBLIOGRAPHY

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SIKKIM-A Background

Small but beautiful, Sikkim is situated in the Eastern Himalayas. Spread below the Mount Khanchendzonga, (8598 mts.), the third highest Mountain in the world and revered by the Sikkimese as their protective Deity, this tiny state, bigger only than Goa and Delhi and India's least populated, lies tucked in between Nepal and Bhutan in India's eastern region.

Sikkim is picturesque and verdant with clean crisp air, deep blue mountain lakes, gorgeous Buddhist monasteries and hillsides ablaze with rhododendrons against a backdrop of snow-clad mountains. If you are looking for exciting trekking routes in unspoilt terrain, or a quiet communion with the mountains, there are few places in India that would match the Himalayan state of Sikkim.

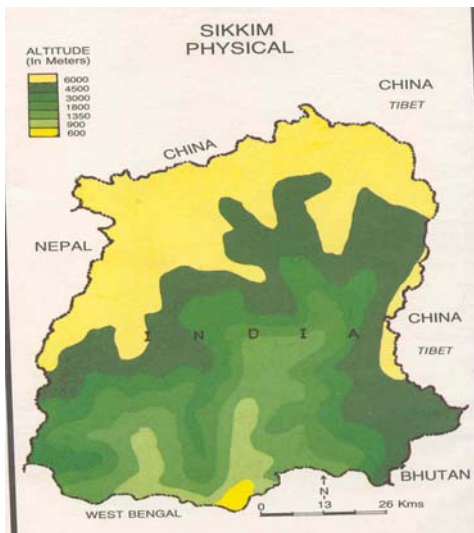
Just 110 kms from north to south and 60 kms across, Sikkim is entirely

mountainous with altitudes varying from 800 ft in the south to the 28,199 ft. Mt. Kanchenjunga, in the northwest (India's highest peak, and the third highest in the world). The awesome mountain is revered by the Sikkimese as their protecting deity. The capital of the state, Gangtok is an attractive and interesting town in eastern Sikkim, well developed and with absolutely amazing views of the snow clad Himalayan peaks including the Kanchenjunga.

Physical Setting

Sikkim, which is situated in the eastern Himalayas, from longitude 88 degree 03'40" to 88 degree 57'19" East and from latitude 27 degree 03'47" to 28 degree 07'34" North, became the twenty second state of

India on April 26, 1975.



It has a total area of 7,096 sq.km. 114 km from north to south and 64 km from east to west. The entire state is mountainous, with altitudes ranging from 300 to 8,586 metres. There are 440 villages, eight towns and four districts in Sikkim. The state has three major ethnic groups, namely Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis. The climate of the state varies from cold temperate and alpine in northeast to subtropical in the south. Agro climatically, the state is divided into four zones, viz., the subtropical zone (below 1,000 meters); the humid zone (1,000-1,600 meters); the mid-hill dry zone (again in altitudes ranging from 1,000-1,600 meters); and high hill

temperate zone (with an altitude of above 1,600 meters). The genetic diversity, of both forest vegetation and agricultural crops, is enormous. The state has about 600 plant species and more than 4,000 species of flowering plants

- **Climate**

Sikkim is the wettest part of the north eastern region; the climate varies from the Sub-tropical to the Alpine depending upon the altitude. (Sub-tropical up to 1500 meters: Temperate-1500-2000 meters; Alpine up to 4000 meters; snowline at 5000 meters and above). The relative humidity remains above 70 per cent throughout the year at most places. The temperature varies with altitude and the slope (generally 6 degree to 10 degree). The area experiences a heavy rainfall due to its proximity with the Bay of Bengal. The rainfall in North District is comparatively less than that of the other Districts. Pre- monsoon rain occurs in April-May and monsoon (South-West) operates normally from

the month of May and continues up to early October.

- **Temperature**

The mean temperature in the lower altitudinal zones varies from 4.5° C to 18.5° C, whereas at higher altitudinal zones, it varies from 1.5° C to 9.5° C. Temperature varies with altitude and slope. The maximum temperature is recorded usually during July - August, and minimum during December - January. Fog is a common feature in the entire state from May to September. Biting cold is experienced at high altitude places in the winter months and snowfall is also not uncommon during this period.

- **Rainfall**

An examination of available rainfall data shows that the mean annual rainfall is minimum at Thangu (82 mm.) and maximum at Gangtok (3494 mm.). An isohyetal analysis of these data reveals that there are two maximum rainfall areas (i) South-East quadrant, including Mangan,

Singhik, Dikchu, Gangtok, Rongli etc. (ii) South - West corner including Hilley. In between these two regions, there is a low rainfall region e.g. Namchi. Rainfall in this area is about half of that in the former areas. There is an area in the North- West Sikkim, which gets very little rainfall (even less than 4.9 mm.). This area has mainly snow-covered mountains. Rainfall is heavy and well distributed during the months from May to early October. July is the wettest month in most of the places. The intensity of rainfall during Southwest monsoon season decreases from South to North, while the distribution of winter rainfall is in the opposite order. The highest annual rainfall for the individual stations may exceed 5000 mm. and average number of rainy days (days with rain of 2.5 mm. or more) ranges from 100 at Thangu to 184 at Gangtok.

- **Demographic Features**

Sikkim is a multi-ethnic state. Broadly, the population can be divided into Tribal and Non-Tribal groups. Lepchas, Bhutias, Sherpas,

Tamang and Subba are categorized as scheduled Tribes. The Lepchas are the original inhabitants of the state. Compared to other ethnic groups, the Lepchas still maintain many of their traditional ways. Over 70% of the population consists of Nepalese. They are today the dominant ethnic group in the state.

The populations also constitute the business class from the plains. East district is the most populated whereas North Sikkim with a density of only 7 per sq. km is least populated. Sex ratio (Females per thousand Males) in 1981 was 835, whereas it has improved and now is 878. There are only eight urban towns and urban population is 0.37 of total population. Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population is 5.93% and 22.36% respectively. North district is a tribal district as it has about 55.38% tribal population. Literacy rate is 56.94% (19th position), higher than the all India average literacy rate of 52.11%.

.total population of the state is 4,06,457, whereas in 1981 it was 3,16,385 only. Decennial growth has come down, as in 1971-81 it was 50.77%, whereas for 1981-91 it is 28.47% onl

groups, the Lepchas still maintain many of their traditional ways.

NUMBER OF DISTRICTS	4	
AREA	7,096 Sq.Km.	
POPULATION		
Persons	5,40,493	
Males	288,217	
Females	252,276	
DENSITY OF POPULATION	76 per sq.Km.4	
SEX RATIO	875 Females per 1000 Males	
POPULATION IN AGE-GROUPS 0-6	Absolute	Percentage to total Population
Persons	77.170	14.28
Males	38,856	13.48
Females	38,314	15.19
LITERACY	Absolute	Rate
Persons	322,828	69.68
Males	191,326	76.73
Females	131,502	61.46

Note: The statistics are with 1991 census and the figures are approximate

Macro-ecological Features

Sikkim encompasses the lesser Himalaya, Central Himalaya, and the Tethys Himalaya. It is essentially a mountainous state without flat piece of land of any extent anywhere. The mountains rise in elevation northward. The northern portion of the state is deeply cut into steep escarpments, and except in the Lachen and Lachung valleys, is not populated. Southern Sikkim is lower, more open, and fairly well cultivated. This configuration of the state is partly due to the direction of the main drainage, which is southern. The physical configuration of Sikkim is also partly due to geological structure. Major portion of state is covered by Pre-Cambrian rock and is much younger in age. The Northern, Eastern and Western portion of the State are constituted of hard massive gneissose rocks

capable of resisting denudation. The central and Southern portion is formed of comparatively soft, thin, salty and half-schistose rocks, which denudes very easily. The trend of the mountain system is in a general east-west direction. However, chief ridges run in a more or less North South direction. The Rangeet and the Teesta, which form the main channels of drainage, run nearly North-South. The valleys cut by these rivers and their chief feeders are very deep.

The valleys are rather open towards the top, but usually attain a steep gorge like structure as we approach the bed of the rivers. There are 180 perennial lakes of different altitudes. The many hot water springs i.e. Phur-cha-chu, Ralang cha-chu, Yumthang, Yumesamdong are also found in the State. The perpetual snow line in Sikkim may be approximately at 5500 m.

Parameters	Features
Rivers	Two major river systems originating from glaciers, Rangit (West Sikkim), and Teesta (North Sikkim)
Ecological Zones	Alpine (>4,000 m), sub-alpine (3,000-4,000 m), cool temperate (2,200-3,000 m), warm temperate (1,400-2,200 m), and subtropical (300-1,400 m).
Terrain	Mostly sloping land only with scarce flat lands in valley. These are marginal lands
Forest	Lush green board-leaved mixed forests in subtropical and temperate zones. Silver fir and rhododendron forests in the sub-alpine zone.
Plants of Special interest	Rhododendrons, orchid, medicinal plants, and a large variety of wild edible plants apart from plants of academic interest.
Issue of concern	Specific habitat degradation and loss have caused a threat to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wildlife such as Red Panda, <i>Thar(s)</i>, and Musk Deer, etc. 2. Plant diversity such as medicinal plants (<i>Aconitum sp</i>, <i>Nardostachys jatamansi</i>, <i>Picrorhiza kurrooa</i>, <i>Swertia chirata</i>, <i>Podophyllum hexandrum</i>), wild edibles (<i>Machilus edulis</i>, <i>Bassia buteracea</i>, <i>Elaeocarpus sikkimensis</i>, <i>Elaegnus latifolia</i>, etc.), wild orchids, and some species of rhododendron.
Policy initiatives	Creation of natural conservation areas such as the Kanchanjunga National Park, Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary, Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary

- **People & Religion**

The people of Sikkim are warm, simple and friendly. The customs and rituals of Sikkim are as diverse as the ethnic groups that inhabit the land; the Lepchas, the Bhutias, and the Nepalese are peace and fun loving people. The population also includes the business community from the plains. The people of Sikkim love to get together and celebrate. The colourful lifestyle of the hill people finds expression in the splendour of their festivals and dances. The Hindu Nepalese observe Dusshera to worship Goddess Durga. For the Buddhist there are two important festivals- one dedicated to the mountain deity Kangchendzonga and other in celebration of the New Year. The warrior dances are performed during the celebration of the Snowy Range and is a dance peculiar to Sikkim only.

Though the major religions of the State are Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity, it is not uncommon to see a Hindu bowing before a monastery or a Buddhist joining hands at the temple. Perhaps this

force of acceptance has binded all the communities to live in peace here.

Sikkimese People with their rare tradition and rich culture, add more fragrance to the diverse and composite culture of India. These three ethnic communities display a remarkable feature of Sikkimese society with its cultural harmony and peaceful coexistence.

Festivals of Sikkim

Life in Sikkim is an endless celebration, for there are vibrant festivities throughout the year. They are the reflections of the rich cultural heritage of the state. A rich blend of beliefs, legends and rituals find expression in the most colourful celebrations and traditional dances.

Folk Dances and songs are an ingrained part of Sikkimese culture. Many of the musical instruments that accompany the dances are unique to Sikkim.

Some of the s festivals of the state are:

>> **Dasain** (10 days. - Hindu month of Ashwin)

It is the most important festival of the Nepalese Hindu and begins on the first day of the lunar month of Aswain (approximately October). The Nepalese decorate their houses doors and pillars with banana leaves and string of marigold flowers and pray for goddess Durga. On the eight day, or Ashtami, many families sacrifice goats or buffaloes and on the tenth day or Vijaydashami, they visit the elder family members seeking their blessing. During the festival, all Nepalese, both young and old smear each others foreheads with a mixture of rice and curd and string marigold garlands around their necks.

>>**Tihar or Tyohar/Diwali**

This festival of lights also known as the Deepavali means "a row of lights". This festival is celebrated to mark the return of Lord Rama, his consort Sita and brother Lakshmana,

to their kingdom after 14 years of exile. To celebrate their return, the people of Ayodhya are believed to have lit up their houses and streets with lamps and this tradition is followed till date. People also conduct Lakshmi Puja to please the Goddess of Wealth.

It falls on the last two days of the dark half of Kartik (October-November). For some it is a three-day festival.

In Sikkim the festival honours certain animals on successive days. The first day known as "Kak(crow) Tihar" is dedicated to crows and they are offered rice and some if caught are even garlanded. On the second day, which is known as "Kukkur(dog) Tihar", dogs are garlanded. On the third day the cows are honored with garlands and their horns are painted in bright colors. It is the turn of the bullocks on the fourth day. The fifth day is also known as Bhai Tika in which brothers visits the homes of their sisters who apply tikas on their foreheads. It is also an occasion for exchanging gifts. During Tihar, traditional carols called Bhailo or Deusi are sung.

>> **Enchey Chaam** (11th Tibetan month)

Ritual dances at Enchey Monastery, with elaborate costumes and masks.

>> **Guthor Cham** (2 days prior to Losar)

Dances at Rumtek and Pemyangtse monasteries welcome the Tibetan New Year.

>> **Pang Lhabsol** (15th day. - 7th Tibetan Month)

Ravangla (Situated at a height of 6,800 ft) is well known for the Pang Lhabsol festival, celebrated annually by the locals with great pride and enthusiasm. Its popularity has, in fact, turned it into a major event in the region's social and cultural calendar.

In a place whose very name means a "wet goat", it's only natural that it should rain even on the 15th day of the seventh month of the Buddhist Lunar Calendar when Mt

Kanchenjunga (the guardian deity of Sikkim) is evoked and worshipped on the occasion of Pang Lhabsol.

The day also signifies the signing of the blood-brother-hood pact between Khye Bumso, a descendant of the Kham Minyak dynasty in east Tibet and the great ancestor of the Namgyal dynasty of Sikkim and Thekong Tek, a Lepcha chieftain with divine powers in the 12th Century A.D. This bond of brotherhood marked the emergence of a new era in Sikkim.

The uniqueness of Pang Lhabsol is that the Pang toed dance as it is the only religious dance performed by Zigtempas or laymen, while all other dances are performed by monks. The Chaam begins with the 13 Pang toed warriors, stepping one by one into the square, swaying to the rhythmic beats of the drums and cymbals. They are clad in full ceremonial battle regalia, helmets festooned with silk flags and carrying swords, shields and daggers, dramatic in their flamboyant costumes.

After the completion of the first dance sequence, the figures

representing Dzonga and Mahakala (the one sequence of the pangtoed Chaam performed only by the monks) comes out of the Lakhang. as the Champey or the lead dancer rounds off the recital with a solo performance, Pang Lhabsol was traditionally held at Tsuklakhang, the royal chapel in Gangtok where it was a very solemn occasion, an event patronized by the royal family. Since its discontinuation at Tsuklakhang, Pang Lhabsol has moved out of the sate capital to the interiors. In Gangtok it is celebrated at the Statue of Unity Park as the “Unity Day.”

Ravangla, in less than five years, has become the epicenter of Pang Lhabsol celebrations in the state. Not only has the locals, through their undaunted spirit and hard work, kept this important aspect of the Sikkimese culture alive, but has also added to the local economy by ways of tourism promotions. The Ravangla Pang Lhabsol turning into a three-day event, which draws huge crowds from all over Sikkim and outside. It’s a fine blend of ancient cultural heritage and modern-day entertainment dictums. Perhaps,

Ravangla is the only place in the state that sees the Pang toed Chaam share the same stage with community events such as volleyball tournaments, rural sports and Boogie Woogie dance competitions during the Pang Lhabsol celebrations! Going by the popularity of the festival in Ravangla, no one seems to be complaining even a bit. After all, its all about unity, friendship and brotherhood.

>> Lhabab Dhuechen (End of May or Early June)

This festival symbolizes the descent of Lord Buddha from the heaven. According to legend, Queen Maha Maya, the mother of Lord Buddha, did not live long, took rebirth in Trayastrimsa or the heaven of the thirty gods. After attaining enlightenment, Lord Buddha through spiritual powers came to know about the whereabouts of his mother and at the age of forty one ascended to heaven along with thousands of his followers. Lord Buddha stayed in heaven for three months during which he devoured sermon to his

mother and other celestial beings Lord Buddha had left behind on earth one of his disciples, Maugalyayana, as his representative. This disciple and other devotees of the Lord could not bear the long separation and longed to hear his preaching's. Maugalyayana, who possessed miraculous powers, was exhorted to go up to the heaven to request the Lord to return back to the earth. The gods were not willing to let Lord Buddha return to earth but Maugalyayana suggested that as the earthly beings did not have the powers to visit heaven, the celestial beings could come to the earth to attend his preaching. Lord Buddha finally relented and descended to the earth at a place called Sankasya along a triple ladder that was prepared especially for the occasion by Viswakarma, the god of Machines.

>> Losar (Tibetan New Year's Day).

The Tibetan New Year, celebrated in inimitable Himalayan fashion with feasting and merrymaking

throughout Sikkim. It generally falls around first week of February.

Celebrated for several days, at home and in monasteries. Government offices are closed

>> Tashiding Bhumchu (15th day. - 1st Tibetan month)

This festival takes place in Tashiding Mo-nastery in west Sikkim, in the month of January-February. During this festival, the pot containing the holy water is opened by the lamas of the monastery. The level of water in the pot foretells the future for the forth coming year. If the water is to the brim, it prophesizes disturbances. If the pot is almost dry it indicates famine and a half full pot foretells a year in which peace and prosperity will prevail. A part of the holy water is distributed among the participants and then the pot is replenished with river water and sealed at the end of the festival to be opened only in next Bumchu festival. This sacred water festival is a religious tradition unique to Tashiding Monastery only. Devotees come from far and near to get the blessings of the holy water.

>> **Sagadawa** (15th day full moon - 4th Tibetan month)

Buddha was born, attained Buddhahood and achieved nirvana on Saga Dawa which is celebrated on the full moon day of the fourth month of the Tibetan calendar, a very holy month for the Sikkimese Buddhist. A long procession of monks, local people accompanied with holy books winds its way through the main thoroughfares of Gangtok. Devotees gather to touch their heads on the holy books. Also prayers are held in various monasteries throughout this month.

>> **Tse Chu Chaam** (10th day - 5th Tibetan month)

Spectacular 'Black hat' dances at Rumtek Monastery.

>> **Maghe Sankranti** (1st day. Nepali month Magha)

To celebrate the onset of spring this festival is marked by tarul(tapioca)and the celebration of a

grand maghe mela where games, displays and cultural events are the main attractions.

>> **Losoong**

This Bhutia festival marks the end of the harvest season and also the end of the Tibetan year. Chaams (religious dances) symbolizing the victory of good over evil is performed at the Tsug Lakhang, Phodong and Rumtek monasteries. Archery competitions are held amidst much feasting and merry making.

>> **Tendong Lho Rum Faat**

Tendong Lho Rum Faat has always been one of the oldest religious festivals of the Lepchas. The Lepchas being the indigenous people of this part of Himalaya has named each & every mountains, hills, rivers, valleys and ravines of Sikkim. Some of these mountains and rivers carry very beautiful & romantic folklores as well as their historical importance since the ancient ages.

Touching upon the history of this particular celebration, our folklore describes about the time when the Himalayas was in its infancy and the rivers Teesta & Rangit were yet to start their respective journeys downward from their sources i.e. Naho and Nahor lakes.

* **Historical Significance**

In the wake of a heavy earthquake which damaged the said lakes the legend tells us the PARILBU (King Serpant) and TUTFO guided the two new rivers upto their confluence at POZOK (New Peshok) unfortunately they (Teesta & Rangit) flooded the entire Mayellyang (the then Sikkim). The Lepchas residing near Mt. Tendong to save their lives climbed upto its peak and prayed to IT-BU-RUM (the Almighty God). The legend further tells us that a KOHOMFO (Partridge bird) appeared there and offered its prayer with MONGCHEEBEP (the brewed millet) and another earthquake shook the whole earth creating several high mountains around the northern zone of MAYEL-YANG which forced the flooded water to flow southwards

thus saving the Lepchas from great deluge.

Hence the Lepchas began to observe the 'Tendong Lho Rum Faat' (Worship of the Mt. Tendong) since that time.

• **Costumes**

Traditionally the Lepcha men wear tego, tomo (gyado) thokro, tingip nyiamrik, ban, thektu, while the women wear dungdem, tego thetuk, nyiamrik, and ngajo (sickle). The ornaments include chyap-chyap shambrang bur, kukip alyak, naykong, and akager. The women maintain their hair in two braids.

The traditional attire of Bhutia men consists of hentachi kho tied by kera gyaado jaja, thuri shyambo and shampo (shoes). Women wear hanju, kho (sleeveless) tied by kera, ceiling, shyambo, tapsu (hair band) and shampo. Married women wear pangden below waist in the front. The traditional ornaments comprise khow, kesung, nyandap, and diu. The women keep their hair in two braids. Nepalese males wear daura, suruwal, topi patuka (waist coat) and

a khukri, while the women wear chowbandi choli, gunew tied by patuka, hembari (shawl tied round the chest) majetro. The ornaments include chyapte sun, gadavari (ear rings) tilhari kantha (hanging from the neck) chura, dungri, mundri (nose ring), kallis (ankle ornaments), sirbandi charrani har and tikmala are female ornaments. The sindur (vermilion) and the potey (bottle green) are the signs of married women

Cultural and Historical background

Sikkim was inhabited in pre-historic times by three tribes namely Naong Chang and the Mon. The Lepcha who entered Sikkim sometimes later absorbed them completely. The origin of Lepchas is shrouded in mystery but it seems that they belonged to the clan of the Nagas of the Mikir, Garo and Khasia hills which lie to the south of the Brahmaputra valley. Some believe they came from somewhere on the borders of Tibet and Burma.

According to their own tradition they came to Sikkim from the east in company with Jindaxs, who went to Nepal and shared their tradition. The Lepchas were a very peace loving people, deeply religious and shy, which characteristics they still have retained. They were in fact the children of nature, and worshipped nature or spirits of nature. These Lepcha lived quite close to the nature by way of leading sustenance. Some of them practiced shifting cultivation and raised grains like maize and millets. They led a tribal life at the beck and call of their tribal leader.

The credit of organizing them into some sort of a society goes to a person called Tur ve pa no. He was eventually elected leader of king called "Punu" sometimes in A. D. 1400. He was killed in a battle and was succeeded by three Kings - Tur Song Pa No, Tur Aeng Pa No and Tur Alu Pa No. The monarchy came to an end with the death of the last king. The Lepchas now resorted to

the practice of electing a leader whose advice and counsel was sought on crucial matters and followed. The Tibetan migration in early 17th century led the Rongs to shift their habitats so as to avoid conflict. Meanwhile the struggle and conflicts among the followers of the "Yellow hats" and the "Red hats" in Tibet forced the latter to seek refuge in Sikkim, where they attained the status of aristocracy. Being aggressive they occupied lands, which were not registered by the docile Lepchas. These Tibetan migrants (the Bhutias as they came to be known) who were followers of the sect of 'Red Hats' now tried to convert these Sikkimese "Worshippers of nature" to Buddhism. They succeeded to some extent, though the Lepchas tried to keep themselves aloof as far as possible. In order to avoid any possible opposition from the Lepchas, these immigrants now chose one venerable person Phuntsok Namgyal as the temporal and spiritual leader of Sikkim, whose ancestry they traced from a legendary prince, who founded the

Kingdom of Minvang in eastern Tibet in 9th century A.D. This dynasty ruled in the Chumbi and Teesta valley for a long time.

Somewhere in the Thirteenth century a prince named Guru Tashi of Minyang dynasty in Tibet had a divine vision that he should go south to seek his fortune in "Denzong- the valley of rice". As directed by the divine vision he along with his family, which included five sons, headed in the southern direction. The family during their wandering came across the Sakya Kingdom in which a monastery was being built at that time. The workers had not been successful in erecting pillars for the monastery. The elder son of Guru Tashi raised the pillar single handedly and thereby came to be known as "Kheye Bumsa" meaning the superior of ten thousand heroes. The Sakya King offered his daughter in marriage to Kheye Bumsa. Guru Tashi subsequently died and Kheye Bumsa settled in Chumbi Valley and it was here that he established contacts with the Lepcha Chieftain Thekong Tek in Gangtok. Kheye Bumsa being issueless went to

Sikkim in the 13th century to seek the blessing of Thekong Tek who was also a religious leader. Khye Bumsa was not only blessed with three sons by the Rong chief but he also prophesied that his successors would be the rulers of Sikkim. Out of gratitude Khye Bumsa visited Thekong Tek a number of times. In due course of times the relationship ultimately culminated in a treaty of brotherhood between the two Chieftains at a place called Kabi Longtsok. This treaty brought about new ties of brotherhood between the Lepchas and the Bhutias.

Mipon Rab the third son of Khye Bumsa assumed the Chief-Ship after the death of his father. He had sons and the four principal clans of Sikkim are said to have sprung from these four sons. The fourth son Guru Tashi succeeded Mipon Rab and shifted to Gangtok. On the other hand after the death of Thekong Tek the Lepchas broke into minor clans. They also gradually turned to Guru Tashi for protection and leadership. Guru Tashi appointed a Lepcha, Sambre as his chief adviser and lieutenant. Guru Tashi's rule marked the

absorption of the foreign ruling house into the native soil and also paved a way for a regular monarchy. This way Guru Tashi became the first ruler of Sikkim and was crowned as such. He was followed by Jowo Nagpo, Jowo Apha and Guru Tenzing who pursued the policy creating progressively amicable relation with Lepchas.

Phuntsok (or Penchu) Namgyal was the next ruler. He was Guru Tenzing's son (great grandson of Guru Tashi) and was born in 1604. Phuntsok Namgyal's crowning was charged with all the vivid fantasy and miraculous phenomenon that is befitting to so important an occasion. Three venerable lamas are said to have entered Sikkim from three different directions at the same time. They met at Yoksam (meaning three wise men) and began a debate on the desirability of having a temporal and religious head to rule over pagan Sikkim. Two of the lamas furthered their own claims but the third lama reminded them of the prophecy of Guru Padamsambhava that a man coming from east and Phuntsok by name would rule

Sikkim. It was also told that none of them came from east hence the real man must be looked for. Messengers were sent to seek Phuntsok. Near Gangtok the desired Youngman was found and lamas lost no time in crowning him the king. They seated him on a nearby rock slab and sprinkled water on him from the sacred urn. He was given one of Lhatsun Chenpo's (the lama told about prophecy) names, Namgyal, and the title of Chogyal or religious king. It happened in the year 1642. The Namgyal dynasty ruled over Sikkim as hereditary kings for about 332 years.

Phuntsok Namgyal, the first consecrated ruler ruled over a vast territory, many times the size of present Sikkim. His kingdom touched Thang La in the Tibet in the north, Tagong La near Paro in Bhutan in the east and the Titalia on the borders of West Bengal and Bihar in the south. The western border Timar Chorten on the Timar River in Nepal. Phuntsok though a distant descendant of Indrabodhi was now a Bhutia by his domicile. He was persuaded by the lamas enthroning

him as Chogyal (Heavenly king or king who rules with righteousness) to seek recognition from Dalai Lama of Tibet. The Dalai Lama recognized Phuntsok Namgyal as the ruler of the southern slopes of the Himalayas (Sikkim) and is also credited to have sent ceremonial present such as the silken scarf bearing Dalai Lama's seal, the mitre(hat) of the Guru Rimpoche, the devil dagger (Phurpa) and the most precious sand image of the Guru. Consequently, the newly established Bhutia principality of Namgyal Dynasty was tied to Tibetan theocracy. Since then up to 19th century, the Bhutia rulers of Sikkim looked up to Tibet for protection against political foes. Phuntsok Namgyal proved to be an efficient and capable administrator. He divided his kingdom into twelve Dzongs i.e. districts and appointed Dzungpana i.e. governor for each. He also declared Mahayana Buddhism as the state religion, which continued to be the state religion under all the Namgyal rulers. He very tactfully kept the Lepchas, Bhutias and Limbus together. The Governors were appointed from the

lepchas who were then in majority. Since Yatung the greatest commercial Tibetan center being nearer to Gangtok posed some danger, he shifted his capital to Yuksom.

Phunstok Namgyal and the three saints immediately got to the task of successfully bringing the Lepcha tribes under the Buddhist fold. Politically, Sikkim expanded its borders, which include Chumbi valley, the present Darjeeling district and a part of present-day Nepal and Bhutan. The capital of Sikkim was established in Yoksam itself.

Tensung Namgyal succeeded his father Phuntsok Namgyal in 1670 and moved his capital to Rabdentse. He had three wives - a Tibetan, a Bhutanese and Limbu girl. The latter was the daughter of the Limbu chief Yo Yo-Hang. The chief's daughter brought with her seven girls who were later on married into important families of Sikkim. Many of them rose to the rank of councilors to the King. These councilors later on came to be known as Kazis who enjoyed immense power and privileges.

Chakdor Namgyal a minor son from Tensung's second wife succeeded on the death of his father. Pedi, the daughter from the first wife who came from Bhutan challenged the succession and invited Bhutanese intervention. Having come to know about this secret move Yungthing Yeshe a loyal minister took the minor king to Lhasa. During his asylum in Lhasa, Chador Namgyal Distinguished himself in Buddhist learning and Tibetan literature. By dint of his acumen and scholarship he rose to the position of state astrologer to the Sixth Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama was so much pleased with the erudition of this young scholar that he bestowed high honors and titles on the young king. The young king also received an estate in central Tibet with sovereign rights. On the other hand Bhutanese forces had captured the Rabdentse palace and imprisoned the son of Yugthing Yeshe. But on the intervention of Tibet, King Deb of Bhutan withdrew Chador Namgyal came back and drove out the rest of Bhutanese forces. The south-eastern tract was, however, lost to Sikkim as

it had been heavily colonized by then. The Bhutanese after a short while made a second attempt to capture Sikkim territory. Chador Namgyal gave a tough resistance but areas now called as Kalimpong and Rhenock were lost forever. Chador was himself religious and took steps for the propagation of Buddhist religion in his territory. He commanded that the second of every three sons of Bhutia family must be ordained a monk of the Pemayangtse Monastery, which was also open to the Tsongs. He not only built the Guru Lhakhang in Tashiding (1715) and patronized the sacred places but also adapted the religious dances (mystery plays) to keep alive the martial and native traditions and invented an alphabet for the Lepchas. However, Pedi, the half sister of the ruler did not reconcile. She conspired with a Tibetan man of medicine and caused Chakdor Namgyal's death by way of blood letting from a main artery while the king was holidaying at Ralang hot water spring in 1716. A force was sent to Namchi, the doctor was

executed and Pediwas strangled to death by a silk scarf.

Gyurmed Namgyal succeeded his father Chakdor. Consequently upon a Mongol (Dzungar) invasion on Tibet to persecute Nyingma sect, the Mindoling Abbot's sister. In his times the people were forced to work on the fortification of Rabdentse in the fear of Gurkhas and Bhutanese raids. Many Tsongs who were not prepared to yield to forced labor fled to Limbuana, which became a rebel district and broke away from Sikkim even earlier to Gurkha expansion. A boundary dispute with Bhutan also arose. The Magar Chieftain Tashi Bidur also revolted, though he was subdued. Limbuana was, however, lost to Nepal. Gyurmed had no issue but while on his death bed at the age of 26 (1733) gave out that a nun in Sanga Choling was carrying his child. But some people do not believe it. It is said; he was impotent and generally shunned his wife.

Therefore, the story goes that in order to keep the Namgyal Dynasty going, the lama priest of Sikkim concocted a story that a nun was carrying the child of the King.

Fortunately the nun delivered a male child and he was accepted as heir to Gyurmed. He was named as Phuntsok after the first temporal and the spiritual head of Sikkim.

Phuntsok Namgyal II was opposed by many people including some Bhutias on the plea of illegitimacy. Tamdang a close confidant and treasurer of Gyurmed not only opposed the succession but assured the powers of the ruler and continued to rule Sikkim for three years in spite of the opposition by pro-king faction. The Lepchas backed the baby king and fought the pretender under the leadership of Chandzod Karwang. Tamding was defeated and fled to Tibet to seek guidance and help. But to keep Sikkim under their Tutelage the Tibetan authorities favoured the minority of the king. A convention representing all shades of Sikkimese population was held which defined the functions, powers and responsibilities of the Government. The system of annual taxation was also introduced to augment the state treasury. The Magar tribe lost its chieftain during this time and asked

the regent to appoint the deceased's son as chieftain. But the regent expressed his inability to comply with their demand. This act enraged the Magars who sought the help and protection from Bhutan. This way Sikkim lost Magars allegiance forever. In the year 1752 the Tsongs rose in arms, but were subdued and won over by tactfully by Chandzod Karwang. The rise of Gurkhas also posed a threat for Sikkim. The later years of Phuntsok II witnessed Gurkhas inroads in Sikkim under the leadership of Raja Prithvi Narayan Shah of Nepal. Bhutan also invaded Sikkim and captured all area east of Teesta, but withdrew to present frontiers after negotiation at Rhenock. A peace treaty with Nepal was signed in 1775, and Gurkhas promised to abstain from further attacks and collaboration with Bhutanese. But the Gurkhas at a later stage occupied the land in western Sikkim. Phuntsok II had three queens but had a son Tenzing Namgyal from his second queen in 1769.

Tenzing Namgyal succeeded Phuntsok Namgyal in 1780. During

the reign of Tenzing Namgyal, Nepali forces occupied large chunks of Sikkim territory. They attacked Rabdantse and the Chogyal had to flee to Tibet. The Nepalis excursions emboldened them to penetrate even into Tibet. This led to the Chinese intervention and Nepal was defeated. In the Sino-Nepal treaty, Sikkim lost some of its land to Nepal, but monarchy was allowed to be restored in the country. Tenzing Namgyal died in Lhasa and his son Tsudphud Namgyal was sent to Sikkim in 1793 to succeed him as the monarch. Rabdantse was now, considered too insecure because of its proximity to the Nepal border and Tshudphund Namgyal shifted the capital to a place called Tumlong.

The defeat of Nepal by the Chinese did little to weaken the expansionist designs of the Nepalese. They continued to make attacks into the neighboring British territories and Sikkim. British India successfully befriended Sikkim. They felt that by doing so the expanding powers of the Gorkhas would be curtailed. British also looked forward to establishing trade link with Tibet

and it was felt that the route through Sikkim was the most feasible one. War between Nepal and British India broke out in 1814 and came to an end in 1816 with the defeat of the Nepalis and the subsequent signing of the Treaty of Sugauli. As a direct spin-off, British India signed another treaty with Sikkim in 1817 known as the Treaty of Titalia in which former territories, which the Nepalis captured, were restored to Sikkim. H. H. Risley writes in the Gazette of Sikkim, 1894, that by the Treaty of Titalia British India has assumed the position of Lord's paramount of Sikkim and a title to exercise a predominant influence in that State has remained undisputed.

The British became interested in Darjeeling both as a hill resort and an outpost from where Tibet and Sikkim would be easily accessible. Following a lot of pressure from the British, Sikkim finally gifted Darjeeling to British India on the understanding that a certain amount would be paid as annual subsidy to Sikkim. The gift deed was signed by the Chogyal Tsudphud Namgyal in 1835. The British appointed a

superintendent in the ceded territory. The British however did not pay the compensation as had been stipulated and this led to a quick deterioration of relation between the two countries. There was also difference between the British Government and Sikkim over the status of people of Sikkim. Because of the increased importance of Darjeeling, many citizens of Sikkim mostly of the labor class started to settle there as British subjects. The migration disturbed the feudal lords in Sikkim who resorted to forcibly getting the migrants back to Sikkim. This annoyed the British Government, which considered these as acts of kidnapping of British citizens. The relations deteriorated to such an extent that when Dr. Campbell, the Superintendent of Darjeeling and Dr. Hooker visited Sikkim in connection with the latter's botanical research; they were captured and imprisoned in 1849. The British issued an ultimatum and the two captives were released after a month of detention. In February 1850, an expedition was sent to Sikkim, which resulted in the

stoppage of the annual grant of Rs. 6000/- to the Maharaja of Sikkim and also the annexation of Darjeeling and a great portion of Sikkim to British India.

Sikkim resorted to making attacks into British territories and it was in November 1860 that the British sent an expeditionary force to Sikkim. This force was driven back from Rinchenpong in Sikkim. A stronger force was sent in 1861 that resulted in the capture of the capital Tumlong and the signing of a Treaty between the British and Sikkimese the same year.

His son Sidekeong Namgyal succeeded Tsugphud Namgyal in 1863. The British Government started the payment of annual subsidy of Rs. 6000/- in 1850 for Darjeeling. In an attempt to keep good relation with Sikkim, the British enhanced the subsidy to Rs. 12000/- per annum.

Chogyal Sidekong Namgyal defied in 1874 issueless and was succeeded by his half brother Thutob Namgyal. There were serious difference between the Nepalese settlers and the inhabitants of Sikkim and this led

to British intervention. The settlement went in favour of the Nepali settlers and made Thutob Namgyal have ill feeling for the British. He retreated to Chumbi and became more aligned towards the Tibetans.

The British meanwhile were making concerted efforts to establish a trade links with Tibet and also imposed their influence. A delegation led by Colman Macaulay, Financial Secretary to the Bengal Government of British India was sent to Sikkim in 1884 to explore the possibility of establishing a trade route with Tibet through the Lachen Valley. This delegation visited Tumlong the capital where it met the Maharaja.

The Britishers started building of roads in Sikkim. This was viewed with suspicion by Tibet and in 1886, some Tibetan militia occupied Lingtu in Sikkim near Jelepla pass. In May 1888, the Tibetans attacked Gnathang below Jelepla but were driven away. In September of the same year the British called for reinforcements and the Tibetans were pushed back from Lingtu. A memorial was built at Gnathang for

the few British soldiers who died in the engagement.

The Britishers appointed Claude White as the first political officer in Sikkim in 1889 and Chogyal Thutob Namgyal was virtually under his supervision. Thutob Namgyal shifted the capital from Tumlong to Gangtok in 1894. The Sir Thutob Namgyal Memorial (STNM) Hospital built in 1917 is named in the memory of Thutob Namgyal who died in 1914.

Alarmed by the growing Russian influence in Tibet and also to assert itself, the British sent an expedition led by Col. Young husband to Lhasa via Jelepla in 1904. The expedition met with resistance from the Tibetan army, which was defeated, and a treaty was dictated by Young husband on Tibet. The Treaty secured monopoly-trading privileges in Tibet for the British. Thutob Namgyal was succeeded by his son Sidekong Tulku in 1914. Unfortunately he did not live long and died in the same year. He was succeeded by his half brother Tashi Namgyal who promulgated many reforms in the state.

In 1947 when India became independent, Tashi Namgyal was successful in getting a special status of protectorate for Sikkim. This was in face of stiff resistance from local parties like Sikkim State Congress who wanted a democratic setup and accession of Sikkim to the Union of India between India and Sikkim ratified the status of Sikkim as a protectorate with Chogyal as the Monarch. Tashi Namgyal died in 1963 and was succeeded by his son Palden Thondup Namgyal. By the beginning of 1970 there were rumbling in the political ranks and file of the State, which demanded the removal of Monarchy and the establishment of a democratic setup. This finally culminated in wide spread agitation against Sikkim Durbar in 1973. There was a complete collapse in the administration. The Indian Government tried to bring about semblance of order in the state by appointing a Chief administrator Mr. B. S. Das. Further events and election led to Sikkim becoming transformed from a protectorate to an associate State. On 4th

September 1947, the leader of Sikkim Congress, Kazi Lendup Dorji was elected as the Chief Minister of the state. The Chogyal however still remained as the constitutional figure head monarch in the new setup. Mr. B. B. Lal was the first Governor of Sikkim.

Events leading to the confrontation between the Chogyal and the popular Government caused Sikkim to become a full-fledged 22nd state of the Indian Union on 16th May 1975. The institution of Chogyal was subsequently abolished.

Since then Sikkim has been a state of the Indian Union like any other state. The 1979 assembly election saw Mr. Nar Bahadur Bhandari being elected as the Chief Minister of Sikkim. He has been returned to office in the election held in 1984 and 1989. In 1994 assembly election Mr. Pawan Kumar Chamling became the fifth Chief Minister of Sikkim.

ECOTOURISM – A Concept

Only a few years back, the word ‘Eco-tourism’ didn’t exist in the dictionary. There have been some natural travelers for quite a long time in the history. But their experiences were not meager to produce any significant socio-economic benefits to the places they visited, nor do their activities seem to be intended as a tool for conserving natural area, native culture or endangered species. But with the advent of the technology, the popularity of nature and travel documentaries on television, and the interest in the conservation and environmental matters, eco-tourism is becoming a phenomenon characteristic of the beginning of the 21st century.

The root of eco-tourism lies in nature and outdoor tourism. It is an amalgamation of interest arising out of environmental, economic and social concern. Tourism has now become one of the largest global economic activities;

conservation and increasing the value of land left natural. And now it has been realized that one cannot save nature at the expense of local people and they should be given a fair share. Eco-tourism, therefore, incorporates both a strong commitment to nature and a sense of social responsibility.

Eco-tourism is not only the fastest growing branch of the travel industry; it has also been hailed as a hopeful new approach to both preserving fragile and threatened wild areas. It is about creating and satisfying a hunger for nature, about exploiting tourism’s potential for conservation and development and about averting its negative impact on ecology, culture and aesthetics. The enormous opportunities and awesome risks of nature tourism lie at the heart of the Eco-tourism mission.

Eco-tourism is a complex and multi-disciplinary phenomenon. As

a logical component of sustainable development, it requires a multidisciplinary approach, careful planning and strict guidelines and regulations that will guarantee sustainable operation. Governments, private enterprises, local communities and non-governmental organizations all have an important role to play.

"Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people."

The International Ecotourism Society

"Ecotourism is tourism and recreation that is both nature based and sustainable."

K. Lindberg, B.McKercher

"Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to appreciate nature (and any cultural features - both past and present) that promote conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially

active socio-economic involvement of local population."

Hector Ceballos Lascurian

"Tourism that involves traveling to relatively undisturbed areas with the specified object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural aspects (both of the past or the present) found in the areas."

World Tourism Organisation

In short, ecotourism can be conceptualised as:

Any tourism programme that is-

- (a) nature based,
 - (b) ecologically sustainable,
 - (c) where education and interpretation is
- a major component and
- (d) where local people are benefited



Fundamentally, ecotourism means making as little environmental impact as possible and at the same time

helping to sustain the indigenous populace, thereby encouraging the preservation of wildlife and habitats when visiting a place. This is responsible form of tourism and tourism development, which encourages going back to natural products in every aspect of life. It is also the key to sustainable ecological development.

Brief Profile of Eco Tourism Status in Sikkim

Tourism is one of the mainstays of the mountain and hill economy and Sikkim is second to none in this regard. The mighty Khangchendzonga offer brilliant mountain scenery, healthier and invigorating climate. The snowy winter and cooler summer serve to invite many tourists to this tiny hilly state. Sikkim is a place where fusion of culture is distinctly visible. Sikkim has great beauty ranging from the mountains and multitude of rivers and lakes, which are considered as the sine-qua-non of Ecotourism. Sandwiched in the hills and mountain, Sikkim has now

started gaining importance as a major ecotourist destination. It has everything which a tourist can dream of as a land of fairs and festivals, snow-clad mountains, holy lakes and peaks, religious centers, hot springs, trekking, water-rafting, pleasant valleys flora and fauna and so on.

Sikkim, one of the smallest state in the northeast India and the second smallest state in the country lies between 27.5⁰ and 28.1⁰ N and 88.4⁰ and 88.58⁰ east longitude. Spread across an area of just 7,096 sq. km, this state has a varied terrain climate and altitude resulting in a wide range of bio-diversity. Three foreign countries surround it – Nepal in the West, Bhutan in the East and Tibet and China in the North and West Bengal in the South. Till the middle of 70's Sikkim was under the monarchy government when the 35th Amendment Act made it an associate State of Indian Union and finally on 16th of May 1975 (38th Amendment Act), it was made a

full-fledged state of India. Since then there has been a constant flow of tourist in Sikkim, which has played, great roles in boosting up the economy of the state.

Sikkim is a hilly state traversed by rivers and mountains that define its boundaries. Two principle mountain ranges- Singalila on the western border that marks its boundaries with Nepal and the Chola on the eastern border with Tibet. A low altitude range Panglakha marks the boundary between Sikkim and Bhutan. Most of the peaks above (20,000-ft) are on the western border of Sikkim (Khangchendzonga-28, 168 ft; Kabru-20, 000 ft; Sinolchu, Pandim, Simvo). Paunhri peak (22,000 ft) is the highest point on the eastern border of the State. Another mountain ridge separate Teesta and Rangit valley, which include the peaks like Tendong (8660 ft), and Maenam (10,612 ft).

Glaciers are too many in Sikkim, important of which are the Zemu

glaciers (largest in state), Rathong and Lonak glaciers. Mountain ranges are incomplete without passes, so numerous passes are found in the huge mountain range of Sikkim, the most important of which are- Nathu La (La meaning Pass) (14,140 ft), Jelep La (14,350 ft), Chiwabhanjang (10,300 ft).

Sikkim is gifted with a number of lakes, which are unexpected on such a rugged terrain. The serene lake Tsomgo Lake (12,320 ft), Bidan Tso, Memencho, Kheceopalri Lake are the few to name. Gurudogmar Lake is the largest lake in the State located in the northern part of the state. Teesta and Rangit are two important rivers of Sikkim, which gives off numerous tributaries along its course. Starting from a height of 18,000 ft, Teesta travels down in 100 km to a height of just 3000-ft. These rivers never dry out, even in the winter as they are fed both by snowmelt as well as rains. There are numerous hot springs in Sikkim, which have medicinal as well as therapeutic

value. Phurchachu, Yumthang, Yumey Samdong, Ralang are the important hot springs of Sikkim which are rich in Sulphur content and have an average temperature of 50⁰ C.

The climate of Sikkim ranges from the tropical to alpine. Places with an altitude of 19,900 ft and above are snowbound and places as low as 9,850 ft come within the snowline in the winter. The temperature in the lower altitudes fluctuates between 4⁰-35⁰C and places with moderate height like Gangtok faces temperature between 1⁰-25⁰C. In the high altitude area (above 13,100 ft), the mercury never rise above 15⁰C and slides down below the freezing point in winter. Because of its close proximity to Bay of Bengal and the obstruction of the path of monsoon clouds by mountains, most of the part of the state receives heavy rainfall throughout the year. It is only during the month of October – March that the State remains drier.

Sikkim is one of the hottest tourist destinations in India. What oil is to Arab, tourism is for Sikkim. Ecotourism as we know from the definition given by TIES is responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and sustain the well being of local people.

Sikkim has an excellent setting for Ecotourism. This state is purely rural in nature with about 40% of the total land comprises of fixed land and another 30% land is under snowcapped mountain, glaciers and rivers. Here one can travel from a level of 300 m to 8598 m in a span of just 110 km. This variation in altitude has given rise to a rich biodiversity in Sikkim. So, this region is one of the most sought ecotourist destinations. The demand of tourist to see the culture of local people helped in the revival of the interest of local people in their culture. The people of Sikkim make it a natural tourist destination because of their friendly and hospitable nature, peace and tranquility. Most of the areas are

virtually virgin and unspoiled thus creating an area of mystery around it.

Most of the tourism resources in the area could be utilized to develop Ecotourism. There are numerous Ecotourism products available in this region. "Wildlife in natural setting" is the most important product while the nature based recreational activities like camping; rafting, hiking and trekking are also found to contribute towards promotion of Ecotourism.

(A) Adventure Tourism

Adventure tourism is one of the most neglected forms of tourism, which has an enormous potential of growth and development in Sikkim. Today's generations are more fond of adventure and Sikkim has everything to contribute to the adventure tourism of the state. Adventure tourism in Sikkim includes mountaineering, trekking, mountain biking and water rafting.

(B) Trekking

Trekking in Sikkim can be a wonderful experience- an antidote to the stress of daily life and a memory to cherish rest of life. While trekking, are relish the pure air and the silence of wilderness and feels the awakening of senses dolled by urban living. Though each and every nook and corner of the state is worth trekking, following trek routes are worth will to be discussed here.

- Gangtok – Penlong – Tinjure - Rumtek
- Lachung -- Yumthang – Yumey Samdong.
- Damthang – Tendong – Ravangla – Maenam - Sirwani
- Ravangla - Maenam - Borong - Tashiding
- Yuksom - Dzungri
- Hilley - via Sombarey - Varsey – Soreng
- Hilley -Varsey – Dentam – Singalila – Chiwabhangang.
- Mangan – Lingzin –Sakyong - Royot Patam – Dzungri -Yoksum

(C) Mountaineering

The first European to explore Khangchendzonga area was Douglas W. Freshfield in 1899. Famous Sikkimese Everester Sonam Gyatso climbed the summit of Siniolchu. Though mountaineering activities now a days is not frequent yet the activities is usually taken by Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute.

(D) Rafting in Sikkim

Under the category of water sports, White River rafting is the latest adventure sport in Sikkim. Teesta and Rangit are the ideal rivers for rafting. The following two routes are the most desired by the rafters.

(i) On River Teesta:
Chungthang – Dikchu – Singtam – Melli

(ii) On River Rangit:
Legship – Jorethang – Melli

(E) Mountain Biking

This class of adventure tourism is recently introduced in this hilly state of Sikkim. Since most of the roads of Sikkim are accessible by

motorbikes, this sport can gain momentum in the near future.

Following routes are advisable.

- Gangtok – Rumtek – Sang - Sirwani-Temi
- Damthang – Rabongla – Kewzing –Tashiding-Yuksam- Khecheopalri
- Jorethang-Sikip-Reshi- Rinchenpong-Bermiok-Dentam.
- Jorethang – Melli-Rangpo- Singtam-Gangtok
- Gangtok- Phodong – Rangrang - Dikchu -Makha – Sirwani –Temi- Singtam-Gangtok

(F) Wildlife Tourism

Due to the variation of altitude from sea level to the mountain tops, Sikkim possess a wide and varied spectrum of flora and fauna. It has one of the richest assemblages of habitat in the world. The zoological and botanical richness and diversity is excellent ,boasting of more than 4000 species of plants, 300 species of fern and its allies, 11 species of Oaks, 8 species of tree fern 30-40 species of primula, 20 species of

bamboos, 144 species of mammals, 500-600 species of birds (30% of all birds found in Indian sub continent), over 400 species of butterflies and moths, together with many reptiles, medicinal herbs and shrubs. The state can be broadly classified into three zones: -

- (a) Tropical (Sea Level –1500 m)
- (b) Temperate (from 1500m to 3500 m)
- (c) Alpine (above 3500m)

The jungle of lower altitude harbor Jungle cuts, Mongoose, sparrow and has abundance of bamboos, trees firm, walnut and oak. More than 600 species of orchids are found in Sikkim, which are indeed the jewels in the crown. The most important of them are – *Cymbidiums*, *Vanda Cuttaley*, *Haberina*, and *Paphiopedilum*. Nobile orchid (*Dendrobium nobile*) is declared as the State flower. The fauna of Temperate Zone comprises of common Langur, Leopard cats, Red Panda, Musk deer, Himalayan black bear and the flying squirrel. The arid cold alpine

region of Sikkim harbors snow leopard and wild ass roaming amongst rhododendron, the state hosts around 30 species of Rhododendron. The Rhododendron Nevium is delivered as the state tree of Sikkim. Parks and Sanctuaries play an important role in promoting ecotourism.

3

Eco-destinations of Sikkim

East District

With Gangtok, the city capital situated here, East District is the hub of all administrative activity in Sikkim. It is situated at latitude ranging from 27:08:08 N – 27:25:03 N and longitude ranging from 88:26:25 E – 88:55:24 E. Besides the usual shopping for mementos and artifacts in Gangtok, the East District offers many interesting places to visit. With the highest density of population East district covers an area of about 954 km. square. The approximate population of this district is about 2, 44,790.

GANGTOK

• *Physical Setting*

Gangtok is a hilly town and spreads down the western side of a long ridge flanking the Ranipul River. Famous for its many important monasteries, and for the picturesque views of the Himalayas, Gangtok is one of the important hill stations of the country. With a population of about 50,000, it is situated at a height of about 1,870 metres above sea level. The town experiences a lot of rainfall throughout the year and temperatures are mild. Sometime the people living in Gangtok do experience snowfall during winter seasons, which lowers the temperature of places around. Soil type of places in and around Gangtok is deep, moderately shallow and somewhat excessively drained

with loamy skeletal soils on steep slope (30 -50%) and gravelly loamy surface. This type of soil is prone to severe erosion and moderate stoniness. The scenic view of Kanchenjunga, the guardian deity for the locals is something that cannot be surpassed by a visiting tourist.

• *Natural Resources*

In spite of Gangtok being the capital of state with the highest density of population, the



EAST DISTRICT

places in an around Gangtok is rich in biodiversity. A wide variety of birds, trees, orchids, medicinal plants, animals are found here. Gangtok has Sub Tropical mixed

Broad-Leaved Hill Forest, dominated mainly by *Alnus nepalensis* (Uttis), *Macaranga* (Malata), *Castanopsis* (Kattus), *Engelhardtia spicata* (Mahua), *Michelia* (Champ), *Toona ciliata* (Tooni), *Machilus* (Kawla), *Symplocos* (Kharane), *Cinnamomum* (Sinkoli), Pine (Dhupi) etc. interspersed with shrubs like *Rubus* (Aiselu), *Daphne* (Algeri), *Leucosceptum* (Ghurpis), Banmara, Nigaley etc. There are also dense bushes of bamboos at the lower altitudes, mostly belonging to the genus *Arundinaria* which forms an ideal habitat for animals like the Red Panda, *Ailurus fulgens* that thrive on their shoots. Trees like Mahua, Kattus, Tooni, Champ and many more are hardly found nowadays in and around Gangtok.

Bird life in Gangtok area, is good for a variety of Laughing thrushes with frequent sightings of White-crested, Chestnut-crowned, Striated and Blue-winged Laughing thrushes. Red-faced Liochicla, Black-faced and Grey-sided Laughing thrushes are also seen. Small birds like Golden-spectacled and Whistler's Warbler, Fulvettas, Coal Tit, Wren Babblers and Redstarts are abundant as are Leiothrixs, Sibias and Slaty-backed Forktails. Raptors include Common Kestrel, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Himalayan Griffon, Steppe Eagle and Oriental Honey Buzzards.

Gangtok has butterfly fauna typical of hilly region butterflies. Butterflies like Spangle (*Princeps protenor protenor*), Paris peacock (*Princeps paris paris*), Great orange tip (*Hebomoia glaucippe glaucippe*), Hill jezebel (*Delias bellanona ithiela*), Lesser punch, (*Dodena dipaea*)

Mixed punch (*Dodena ovida ovida*) Common evening brown (*Melanitis leda isimene*), Dark evening brown (*Melantia pheduma bela*), Common forester (*Lethe isana dinarbas*), Moeller's silver fork (*Zoophoessa moelleri*), Lilac fork (*Zoophoessa Sura*), Lilane bush brown (*Mycalis fransisca Santana*), Bright eye bush brown (*Mycalis nicata*) etc are found in this region

Eco-spots in the vicinity:

- **Ganesh Tok & Pinetum**

Up in the top of the ridge, near Himalayan Zoological Park (Bulbulley) is Ganesh Tok which is 7 kms from Gangtok. A small temple of Lord Ganesh rests on this beautiful hilltop with a size that can hold only a person who has to crawl to get inside it. A sip of coffee on a chill hilltop available in a cafeteria nearby adds warmth to your visit on a cold winter day.

Pinetum garden rests nearby giving one a memorable experience of a walk amidst the smell of pine trees.

A bird's eye view:

From this spot, one gets a bird's eye view of sprawling Gangtok, a sight you can never miss from here at night when the city comes alive with lights as if stars twinkling in the distant sky while Mt. Kanchendzonga and Mt. Sinolchu gazes over the horizon. One can also get the spectacular view of other parts of Sikkim like Pakyong, Rumtek, Ranipool, Tinjurey, Ranka and Luing.

- **Hanuman Tok.**

Hanuman Tok, a name derived from a small temple of Ganesha situated here is at an altitude of about 6200 feet and is about 11 Kms from Gangtok town. Everyday lots of devotees come and offer prayer. Also frequented by young lovers the silence here is naturally romantic. Besides it also has a zoological park managed by the forest department which is now a home to the rare endangered species of the state.

A bird's eye view:

Because of its locational advantage, the view of the mountain along the horizon is just magnificent, especially on a clear sunny day. Just a few minutes of walk takes one to the graveyard of Chogyals of the kingdom of Sikkim. One can also have a view of the army cantonments settled there.

- **Tashi View Point:**

Situated along the North Sikkim Highway, it is only 8 kms from Gangtok.

A bird's eye view:

From this point you get a breathtaking view of Mount Khangchendzonga and Mt. Sinolchu, one of the most graceful peaks in the world.

- **Himalayan Zoological Park:**

Himalayan Zoological Park also known as Bulbuley is about 8 Kms away from Gangtok. Established and maintained by the Department of Forest and spreading across an area

of 205 hectares this park has a collection of rare rhododendrons. There is a paved cement path that passes by fenced open air enclosure housing the Red Pandas, barking Deer, spotted deer, bears in a semi natural habitat.

A bird's eye view:

Inside the park one gets to see rare and endangered species of butterflies. The Park echo to the sound of the Barking Deer which share its habitat with the adorable little Red Panda (also the State animal"), the Musk Deer, Leopard cats and flying squirrels, Himalayan Black Bear, Fox, Jackal and many more.

- **Flower Show Centre:**

Fifteen minutes walk from the town this centre has exhibits of flowers. Flower exhibitions are organized around the year at the Flower Show Venue near the White Memorial Hall Complex, Gangtok. Orchid Shows held during the spring tourist season is one of the most popular shows organized in the state.

- The Sikkim Flower Show Complex is a showcase of the world famous Sikkim Orchids. Displayed here are the rare and exotic varieties, also available in a convenient retail outlet within the complex where visitors may take bulbs and saplings at nominal rates.

- **Gangtok Ropeway:**

- With the lower terminal station at Deorali, the intermediate terminal at Nam-Nang and the upper

terminal station below Secretariat the cabin has a capacity of 24 passengers .One can truly enjoy the panoramic view and a thrilling ride as the ropeway traverses the city from Nam-Nang to Deorali ,a distance of a kilometer in only 1 minute.

- **Hur-Huray Dara:(Nam-Nang)**

Famous for a view point ,this place is ideal to sit and relax.The sight of lush green dense forest and streams meandering through the valleys, one can imagine of a farmer singing to his cattle in the distant village.

- **Do- Drul Chorten:**

One of the most important Stupas of Sikkim built by Trulsi Rimponche, head of the Nyingma order containing rare Mandalas of Dorjee Phurpa(Bara Kilaya),holy books, mantras and encircled by 108 prayer wheels is at distance of a kilometer from the heart of the capital. For the adventure lovers there is a cable car that leads to the chorten thus giving one an opportunity of flying over the hills.

- **Research Institute of Tibetology:**

Worldwide centre for study of Buddhists philosophy and religion ,a treasure house of rare Thankas, statues, over 200 Buddhists icons and prizes and other objects of art.

- **Unique Selling Proposition**

Gangtok –a city one has to see to believe. Amongst the mist -laden prayer flags that whip in the breeze and wheels that spin in the hands of Lamas mumbling invocations to God and the distant snows not so far from the streets of brightly painted pagoda roofed houses and lined with friendly smiling people are silver, silk and spice and jewellery to gladden a maiden's heart . From across the seven seas are gadget and goods to delight the collector of "imported goods", while directly overlooking the city is the hill Lukshyma, the 'Mother of Pearl' citadel of the magic mountain, Khang-Chen-Dzod-Nga. An air of enchantment hangs over the city, indeed the whole valley; the mysticism, the stupas, the monasteries reach out as soon as one has crossed the border and across the hills and valleys comes the sounds of the long trumpets by the robed lamas that mesmerize a visitor for months.

- **Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders**

Gangtok being the focal point of Sikkim attracts a large number of tourists. Because of high inflow of tourist the place tends to get overcrowded leading to congestion and use of resources in an unsustainable way. Keeping this in view, M.G market in the heart of the capital is kept traffic free after five in the evening so that the tourists can move along freely for shopping and take a healthy stroll along the street

which is a spit free zone now. Government, NGO's and Stakeholders have now awakened to growing menace of irresponsible tourism and devised certain code of conduct for visitors and stakeholders alike for conserving the fragile environment.

The government has taken lots of initiatives like maintaining parks in and around the vicinity of Gangtok, regulation of carrying capacity to eco fragile zones and outlining certain guidelines to visitors and stakeholders for environment friendly tourism. It also encourages the travel agency and tour operators to organize eco friendly travel. Most importantly the government has banned the use of non bio-degradable substances like polythene bags which can pose an environmental hazard.

Beside the Government initiatives many NGO's have realized the importance of sustaining the natural environment and have started working head on with the government machinery towards preserving and protecting the natural environment.

Some of the NGO's like Concern Sikkim, Green Circle, ECOSS (Eco Tourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim), have conducted cleanliness drives and awareness programmes to educate the masses about the environment. They have come out with books and publication to propagate the ethics of ecotourism. A Plantation drive has also been carried out by various NGO's and Stakeholders.

Likewise, the Travel Agents Association of Sikkim (TAAS) and other stakeholders such as the

Sikkim Hotel and Restaurant Association (SHRA) and the Transport Association have been doing their bit in promoting ecotourism. They organize cleanliness drives, awareness programmes for their guides, and publish pamphlets enlisting dos and don'ts for tourist and the stakeholders. These organizations often conduct workshops and summer trainings for capacity building. Besides when it comes to tourism every individuals are ready to make their contribution thus giving a visitor a clean and green Sikkim.

TSOMGO

• ***Physical Setting***

It literally means "Source of the Lake" in Bhutia language. Just about 40 kms away from Gangtok; the capital of the State, this serene lake is situated at an altitude of 3780 meters. The lake is about 1 km long, Oval in shape, 15 meters deep and is considered sacred by the local people. This placid lake remains frozen during the winter months up to mid-May during which visitors get an opportunity to experience snowfall.

Tsomgo has moderately shallow, somewhat excessively drained, coarse-loamy soils on steep slope (30-50%) with gravelly loamy surface; moderate erosion and moderate stoniness.

• ***Historical and Cultural Background:***

The literal meaning of TSOMGO is the source of the lake in Bhutia language. TSO means lake and MGO means head. Around the

picturesque Tsomgo Lake is woven a rich legend. Folklore tells the story of how Tsomgo initially at Laten, several kilometers away from the present Tsomgo (lake), came to take present position. An old woman, one night dreamt that the lake at Laten was shifted to Tsomgo and she and her two other herder friends were warned, to leave the place as soon as possible. The old lady hastened to inform her friends but they paid no heed. Sensing danger, the old woman hurriedly milked her dri (female Yak) and poured the milk on the ground to seek good luck and decamped for a place called Lhachungkar near Thegu. As she was leaving, she saw an old lady with strikingly white hair and of fair complexion enter Tsomgo where immediately the place turned into water and formed this Tsomgo (lake). The two yak herders are believed to be sub-merged in the lake along with their herd of yaks. The lake is held sacred by the local inhabitants. On the lakeside is a small temple of Lord Shiva. Although the lake abounds in trout, nobody goes fishing here. In times gone by, lamas (Buddhist monks) are said to have foretold the future by observing the color of lake's water. If the water had a dark tinge, it foreshadowed a year of trouble and unrest in the state.

- **Natural Resources**

Tsomgo (3780 mts) abounds in alpine flowers like Poppies, Primulas and Rhododendron. It gives clear picture of the Dry Alpine Forest, The Vegetation in this zone is practically of scattered shrubs, often barren and

snow covered at higher elevations. This place has a breath-taking variety of flowers between May and August.

The earliest to flower are the different species of Rhododendron, though they each have slightly varied timings of peak flowering. In the open areas, you can see a flowering succession of variously colored *primulas*, blue poppies, and *Clematis* in June; purple irises, pale yellow poppies (*Maconopsis paniculata*) and *Friti1laria* together with the little local strawberry *Fragaria* dotting the ground in July. The season ends in August in a blaze of golden scenarios and bright purplish-pink *Pedicularis siphonantha*. The last to flower is *Polygonum* which covers the landscape, after which the area awaits its first snowfall.

Many rare and highly endangered plants, some of great medicinal value is found here such as *Podophyllum emodii*, *Aconitum spp.* and *Nardostachys grandiflora*. The orchid *Cypripedium elegans* in particular is endemic to this area. Some solemn, majestic silver firs, *Abies densa*, stand sentinel over the area towering above the thickets of rhododendron and fields of tiny flowering plants. There are also dense bushes of bamboos at the lower altitudes, mostly belonging to the genus *Arundinaria* which forms an ideal habitat for animals like the Red Panda, *Ailurus fulgens* that thrive on their shoots.

Bird life is represented by different types of laughing thrushes in shrubs and on the forest floor; the ubiquitous blue whistling thrush, redstarts and fork tails near waterfalls and hill-streams; mixed

hunting parties comprising small species such as warblers, tit-babblers, tree-creepers, white-eyes, wrens, rose finches, yellow-bellied fantail flycatchers, raptors such as black eagle, black winged kite and kestrel patrolling the skies and pheasants such as monals and blood pheasant, now becoming rare. It is a home of Brahminy ducks besides many migratory birds also use Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary (around Tsomgo) as a stopover before going down to the Indian plains or back to Siberia.

Animals, though present are very difficult to spot during a casual visit; but one may expect to see signs of musk deer, serow, goral, common langur and the red panda here in the higher ranges of Tsomgo. There are records of leopard and black bear too.

- ***Unique Selling Proposition:***

Tsomgo boasts of a lake which is considered as one of the holiest of lakes found in Sikkim. In addition to this, the landscape dotted with rhododendron trees in full bloom in the vicinity is breathtakingly beautiful. During winter season the lake remains entirely frozen

- ***Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders***

Tsomgo has been identified as one of the most eco fragile region in the state. Therefore the government has taken ample steps to protect and conserve the environs of Tsomgo and its adjoining places. Plans are afoot to relocate the inhabitants to

the outskirts, thereby freeing the area near the lake of congested hamlets serving as cafeterias and restaurants. The government also regulates the tourist traffic keeping in mind the carrying capacity of this region. NGO's like Concern Sikkim and other stakeholders like TAAS, SHRA have also played a crucial role in preserving and maintaining the sanctity of this holy lake. It conducts cleanliness drives and plantation programmes in and around the vicinity of the lake. Further, it also encourages the tourist to be eco friendly through its leaflets and pamphlets. The local populace also helps in preserving and protecting the environment by using eco friendly methods for their daily chores.

NATHULA

- ***Physical Setting***

The Indo-China border at Jawahar Lal Nehru Road at 54 kms from Gangtok lies Nathula whereby Indian troops and the Red army stand face to face. At an altitude of 14790 ft, it's the closest an Indian Tourist can travel and pose a photo or two with the Red Army. Nathula means the whistling pass. Tourist visit is restricted and one needs to be applied at least 24 hrs in advance for permit. The days permitted to visit Nathula are Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sundays and permissible for Indian Tourists only. Nathula has moderately shallow, somewhat excessively drained, coarse-loamy soils on steep slope (30-50%) with gravelly loamy surface; moderate erosion and moderate stoniness:

- **Natural Resources**

Nathula gives a clear picture of the Dry Alpine Forest, The Vegetation in this zone is practically of scattered shrubs, often barren and snow covered at higher elevations. Some dominant species are, Dwarf Rhododendrons i.e. *Rhododendron anthopogon*, *R.setosum*, *Juniperus*, etc. while the meadows consist primarily of the genera *Poa*, *Aemone*, *Meconopsis*, *Pedicularis*, *Potentilla*, *Primula*, *Aconitum*, *Delphinium*, *Caltha*, *Bergenia*, *Heracleum*, *Iris*, *Hedychium*, *Myricaria bistorta* etc.

The region has a short four-month growing season during which grasses, sedges and medicinal herbs grow abundantly supporting a host of insect fauna as well as the wild and domestic herbivores, larks and finches. There are no permanent settlements. Human population consists of a small number of nomadic Tibetan graziers or 'Dokpas' (who herd yak, sheep and pasmina-type goats) and large number of Defence personnel as the area forms the international border with Tibet (China). Closure of the border to trans-humans over the last three+ decades has led to intense grazing pressure by both the domestic and wild herbivores on the land. The area also suffers from the presence of landmines causing casualties among yak, Nayan, Kiang and Tibetan wolf. Existence of feral dogs is a major hazard in this region. This ecoregion is the most threatened as it contains mostly endangered species. Dominant among these are Kiang, Nayan,

Tibetan Gazelle, Snow Leopard, Tibetan Wolf, Tibetan Snowcock, Lammergeier, Raven, Golden Eagle and Ruddy Shelduck.

Bird life is represented by different types of laughing thrushes in shrubs and on the forest floor; the ubiquitous blue whistling thrush, redstarts and forktails near waterfalls and hill-streams; mixed hunting parties comprising small species such as warblers, tit-babblers, tree-creepers, white-eyes, wrens, rose finches, yellow-bellied fantail flycatchers; raptors such as black eagle, black winged kite and kestrel patrolling the skies and pheasants such as monals and blood pheasant, now becoming rare.

- **Eco-spots in the vicinity**

Memecho Lake:

It is a beautiful lake located 20 Kms. ahead of Changu Lake. It lies cradled between the mountains below the Jelepla Pass and is source of river Rangpo-chu. It derives its water from melting snows around. The lake is famous for its trout and a farm to cultivate these fish also exists nearby.

- **Unique Selling Proposition**

This destination has been recently opened for the tourist and has been attracting visitors from all over the country. The very fact that the tourists can be standing next to the Chinese soil stimulates a visit to this place. This is also the place where the fabled Silk Route passes through to China. With the Government

planning to open the route again, this place is bound to get tourist from all over the world, a boost towards business tourism. Nearby, is the “**Baba Mandir**” which also attracts a large number of followers from all over .Mystery surrounds the mandir where it is believed that a sepoy who died a long time ago still gets the army privileges where he is said to visit his home accompanied by a guard and all reservations made for his travel. An offering in the form of a pair of slippers for the Holy Spirit is made and it is believed that if worn it heals the aching foot. ‘Langar’ a free meal is served here once in every week.

- **Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders**

After opening up of the Nathula Pass for the general public lots of initiatives has been taken to preserve the fragile environment. The Government regulates the flow of tourist at a bare minimum keeping in mind the carrying capacity of the region. Any tourist wishing to visit this place has to get the necessary permission from the concerned authorities, as this place happens to share its borders with China.

The Army deployed along these areas also plays a vital role in preserving and conserving the fragile eco system of this place.

IPECAC GARDEN (Saramsa)

- **Physical Setting**

d broad-leaved hill Forest. *Alnus nepalensis* (Uttis), *Macaranga*

Established and maintained by the Department of Forest, Ipecac Garden is about 14 kms from Gangtok and 2 km from Ranipul. This garden has an altitude of 932 mts.

Epicac garden also called as Saramsa Garden has an area of 6 acres. Deep, well drained, Fine loamy soils on moderately steep slope (15-30%) with Loamy surface, moderate erosion and slight stoniness are found in places in and around garden. Saramsa garden is the home of Sikkim’s many exotic orchids and other rare tropical and temperate plants. Beside the Garden, One can also view the smooth flow of river Rani Khola which is the main contributor to river Teesta.

- **Historical and Cultural Background**

Beside a Garden, this place is also famous for the Maghe Sangkranti mela, which is held from 13th - 15th of January every year. Hundreds of people from different places especially children’s visit during this time to have glamorous experience of different games, plays and many more in mela. Ladies come here especially to buy decorative items, clothes etc in cheap rates. Lots of people coming to mela visit the garden too.

- **Natural Resources**

Ipecac Garden and around, has Sub Tropical mixe

(Malata), *Engelhardtia spicata*
(Mahua), *Machilus* (Kawla),

Symplocos (Kharane), *Cinnamomum* (Sinkoli), Pine (Dhupi) etc are found here. Shrubs like *Rubus* (Aiselu), *Daphne* (Algeri), *Leucoscepterum* (Ghurpis), *Arundinaria hookeriana* (Pareng) etc are also found here. Inside Ipecac garden, plant Ipecac (after which garden is named) is grown here. One can experience the fragrance of night queen along the path leading inside the garden. Flowering plants like bougainvillea, petunia, orchids, camellia, roses etc can be seen here. In addition to that it contains a wide variety of other flora including numerous types of medicinal plants and varieties of bamboos. It is an excellent recreation and picnic spot and a leisure spot.

These lowland forests of Sikkim are home to several endangered species of birds like the Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*, Great Indian Hornbill *Buceros bicornis homrai* locally called 'Hongraio', Chestnut-breasted Partridge, Black-breasted Parrotbill, Grey-crowned Prinia and Ward's Trogon. Other lowland fauna includes the introduced Peafowl, Python, Geckos, Porcupine, Assamese Macaque and Barking Deer; a host of butterflies and other invertebrates, riverine fish, frogs and toads. Several species of migratory water birds use the river systems during transit. Lantana is a major weed in this region. This eco region has not yet been included in the protected area network of the state

- **Unique Selling Proposition.**

The Unique Selling Proposition of this garden is the yearly held Maghe

Mela which attracts a large number of local artisans selling their unique indigenously built wares. In addition to this, the picturesque landscape dotted with exotic plants and trees makes this place a hit with the tourist. The sprawling compound of this garden with the swimming pool also acts as a picnic spot.

- **Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders**

Ipecac garden is maintained by the forest department of Sikkim State. It has deployed an employee to collect the entry fee, which goes to maintenance of the garden eventually. Local NGO's, Travel and Tour Operators and other voluntary organization also take part in cleanliness drives and plantation programme.

WATER GARDEN (32 no):

- **Physical Setting**

Sikkim Water Garden situated at an altitude of 589 mts beside Martam Khola is on 31(A) National Highway, 16 kms South of Gangtok. With the small swimming pool for children this place has a wide variety of flowers blooming throughout the season which makes this place an ideal spot for picnic. Places in an around this garden has deep, somewhat excessively drained, fine loamy soils on steep slope (30-50%) with gravelly loamy surface, severe erosion and slight stoniness. Lots of people from in and around Sikkim visit this place to enjoys the pinch of luster provided by the undisturbed

environment in their life. The Martam Khola beside this garden is ideal spot for the people who come here for fishing.

- **Natural Resources**

Water Garden (589 mts) fall under the Tropical zone with steep sided valleys and gorges with well-drained flanking slopes. Various species of orchids, Rhaphidophora, wild banana, Pandanus, Nettles and giant bamboo are found in this region. Forests around the garden are home to several endangered species of birds like the Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*, Great Indian Hornbill *Buceros bicornis homrai* locally called 'Hongraio', Chestnut-breasted Partridge, Black-breasted Parrotbill, Grey-crowned Prinia and Ward's Trogon. Other lowland fauna includes the introduced Peafowl, Python, Geckos, Porcupine, Assamese Macaque and Barking Deer; a host of butterflies and other invertebrates, riverine fish, frogs and toads. Several species of migratory water birds use the river systems during transit. Lantana is a major weed in this region.

- **Unique Selling Proposition**

This place usually serves as a resting place for tired and weary travelers visiting Sikkim. A dip in the swimming pool and wandering among the bushes nearby relaxes the tired muscles and minds of the visitors. The clean ambience and the cool breeze blowing across the majestic Martam Khola rejuvenates the jetlagged visitors flocking from across the length and breadth of the globe.

- **Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders**

This garden is beautifully maintained by the Forest Department of Sikkim. During spring the garden sees a riot of colours with seasonal flowers sprouting from every nook and corner of the garden. The local people living near the vicinity of garden play a very important role in maintaining the garden. Likewise lots of social organizations, NGO's helps in maintaining the garden by undertaking cleanliness drives, plantation programmes etc.

MARTAM:

- **Physical Setting**

At an altitude of around 1400 mts. Martam Village is located 5 kms ahead of Rumtek (Well known for famous Rumtek Monastery). The charming simplicity and beauty of this place enchants each and everyone who flock this place. In Martam Village one can find, one of the 'five heritage houses of the Himalayas'. From far, one will not be able to make out that there are resorts, as the 11 cottages in the resort, from a distance, mingle with the huts in the village, amidst the green. Areas in and around Martam has deep, somewhat excessively drained loamy skeletal soils on steep slope (30-50%) with gravelly loamy surface, severe erosion and

moderate stoniness. There are paddy fields all over in terraced gardens and small houses in between them. There is a narrow road meandering through the village in a gentle slope.

- **Natural Resources**

The trek is a very pleasant one along a ridge and up through forest, with views over the river valleys below and of the mountains. The forest here consists of trees like *Castanopsis* (Kattus), *Macaranga* (Malata), *Engelhardtia spicata* (Mahua), *Michelia* (Champ), *Toona ciliata* (Tooni), *Machilus* (Kawla), *Symplocos* (Kharane), *Cinnamomum* (Sinkoli), *Alnus nepalensis* (Uttis), etc interspersed with shrubs like *Rubus* (Aiselu), *Daphne* (Algeri), *Leucosceptum* (Ghurpis) etc. Martam forest has Sub Tropical mixed Board-Leaved Hill Forest.

Wildlife and birds may be spotted along this ridge. For birdwatchers; Martam has about 53 varieties of birds so it is possible to visit areas where birds abound. Variety of laughing thrushes with frequent sightings of White-crested, Chestnut-crowned, Striated and Blue-winged Laughing thrushes. Red-faced Liochicla, Black-faced and Grey-sided Laughing thrushes can be seen here. Small birds like Golden-spectacled and Whistler's Warbler, Fulvettas, Coal Tit, Wren Babblers and Redstarts are abundant as are Leiothrixs, Sibias and Slaty-backed Fork tails. Raptors included Common Kestrel, Eurasian Sparrow hawk,

Himalayan Griffon, Steppe Eagle and Oriental Honey Buzzards. Reptiles like Japalura lizards, Cobra, Krait and Himalayan Pit Viper; Himalayan Bullfrog; butterflies and leeches.

- **Eco-spots in the vicinity:**

Rumtek Monastery:

About a 45-minute drive away on the hill from Gangtok is the Rumtek Monastery, the headquarter of the Dharma Chakra Centre, and the seat of His Holiness, the Gyalwa Karmapa, Head of the Kagyurpa order of Tibetan Buddhism sect. Said to be the replica of the monastery of Tsurpu, Tibet with its traditional architecture, exquisite paintings and intricate woodwork and housing treasures of manuscript and icons- this is a splendid example of Tibetan monastic art. Behind the main monastery is the lavishly decorated Karma Nalanda Institute of Buddhist Studies, which attracts students from the world over. Opposite the entrance to the Institute is a small hall featuring a beautiful jewel studded chorten the Golden Stupa, which contains the ashes and remains of His Holiness, the XVI Gyalwa Karmapa.

Jawaharlal Nehru Botanical Garden (Rumtek):

Jawaharlal Nehru Botanical Garden is situated at an altitude ranging between 1800 mtrs to 2200 mtrs in east district of Sikkim near Rumtek Dharma Chakra Centre. It was established in the year 1987, it comprises of virgin temperate forest

of oaks and as many as 50 different kinds of trees species.

The garden is situated at a place which is not only a scenic beauty for the tourists but also adjoins Rumtek Monastery and Fambongla Wildlife Sanctuary. It is open for the visitors from 1000 hrs to 1600 hrs.

Lingdum Monastery:

A spectacular monastery on the Gangtok-Ranka route is the seat of Zurmang Charwang Rinpoche. The present Gharwang Rinpoche is the XII successive incarnation in this lineage.

- ***Unique Selling Proposition***

The serenity of this place and the lush green paddy fields just within the outskirts of Rumtek is a tourist's delight. Besides, a number of eco friendly Village Resorts, the simple village folk and little hamlets scattered all over the landscape makes this place a unique tourist destination.

- ***A bird's eye view***

One can walk to a small monastery called Mani Lhakhang, a 10min hike up the hill just above the resort. The view from here is beautiful and you can see the Tinjure hills looming right behind you and in front is sprawled the charming paddy fields that make up Martam. Way to Martam gently drive up the narrow meandering road. It is a lovely drive to Rumtek and Martam as the road snakes through typical Sikkimese villages and a great many paddy fields. The sight of so many paddy fields and greenery all around is

breathhtaking. The sweet smell of wet mud and vegetation after rain gives the feel of the rural. Entire area resembles a green carpet from July to Sep. Later, during Oct-Nov, which is the harvest season, the entire place is a sight to behold with golden paddy swaying in the breeze. From Dec onwards, the paddy is harvested and the hill takes on a brown hue. In the resort also, one can visit the resort's decently stocked library, with some books on Sikkim as well. From most of the resort's One can also have a picturesque view of Rumtek Monastery across the paddy fields on the other side of the small valley

- ***Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders***

This area has been chosen by the Government of Sikkim to develop the concept of homestays, where a tourist stays with the villagers, eats food cooked by them and basically experiences the lifestyle of their host.

To promote this kind of tourism the government, often conducts orientation programmes to train the villagers, on subjects like cleanliness, proper disposal of waste, environmental pollution, negative impacts of non biodegradable substances, proper sanitation etc.

Likewise, various NGO's and stakeholders have conducted similar kind of orientation programmes to make the villagers aware of this recent trend in tourism.

ARITAR (Rhenock):

- ***Physical Setting***

Situated at an altitude 891 mts, Aritar is an ideal location for those interested in spending a night or two in the peaceful environment. The Aritar Lake also known as “Lam Pokhari” is about 4 hours from Gangtok and about 30 min from Rhenock located at East District of Sikkim which is worth visiting. Boating has been started here to give a boost to the tourism in the area and is maintained by the department of Tourism, Government of Sikkim. An old British-built bungalow of 1895 located half km below the lake could be an enthralling experience for the people coming here to spend a night. A few trekkers’ hut, few lodges and a private resort is available at Aritar. This place is also an ideal location for picnic.

Aritar has moderately deep, somewhat excessively drained coarse-loamy soils on moderately steep slope (15-30%) with loamy surface, moderate erosion and slight stoniness. It is also associated with deep, well drained fine loamy soils with gravelly loamy surface, moderate erosion and moderate stoniness.

Other attractions include visiting and exploring lifestyle of the villagers and also visit to monasteries like Lingsay Monastery etc. A short trek in and around Aritar is also possible.

- **Natural Resources**

Aritar has Sub Tropical mixed Broad-Leaved Hill Forest with steep sided valleys and gorges with well-drained flanking slopes. Various species of orchids, Rhabdophora, wild

banana, Pandanus, Nettles and Giant bamboo are characteristics. Plants like *Juglans regia* (Okhar), *Spondias axillaries* (Lapsi), *Pyrularia edulis* (Amphi), *Rhus semialata* (Bhakimlo), *Alnus nepalensis* (Uttis), *Castanopsis* (Kattus), *Macaranga* (Malata), *Engelhardtia spicata* (Mahua), *Michelia* (Champ), *Toona ciliata* (Tooni), *Machilus* (Kawla), *Symplocos* (Kharane), *Cinnamomum* (Sinkoli), Pine (dhupi) etc. interspersed with various other medicinal plants like *Artemisia Vulgaris* (Titepate), *Bergenia ligulata* (Phakhan bet) etc. are also found here.

It is home to several endangered species of birds like the Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*, Great Indian Hornbill *Buceros bicornis homrai* locally called ‘Hongraio’, Chestnut-breasted Partridge, Black-breasted Parrotbill, Grey-crowned Prinia and Ward’s Trogon. Other lowland fauna includes the introduced Peafowl, Python, Geckos, Porcupine, Assamese Macaque and Barking Deer; a host of butterflies and other invertebrates, riverine fish, frogs and toads. Several species of migratory water birds use the river systems during transit. Lantana is a major weed in this region. This ecoregion has not yet been included in the protected area network of the state.

- **Unique Selling Proposition.**

The very fact that this beautiful place has not been exploited by the tourist makes it an ideal tourist destination. A beautiful boating lake nearby and an old bungalow built by the British, where one can spend the night, adds

to its charm. The place is not only famous for its Lam Pokhari, but is also surrounded by a viewpoint called Manghim Dara from where one can view the Khanchendzonga range in all its glory. If one wishes for a trek, there is a trekking route upto Rachela, a village in the Indo-Tibetan border. Mingling with the simple, fun loving village folk, is another experience which will be etched in the memory of anyone who visits this enchanting place.

A bird's eye view

This beautiful place located majestically at hill top has a magnificent view of some place of West Bengal like Lava, Pedong and Budubarey. The view of Mountains around the meandering River Rangit is breathtaking.

- ***Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders***

This quaint township has been adopted by the Government of Sikkim to promote it as a tourist destination. For this purpose, many initiatives have been undertaken like renovating the infrastructure in and around Aritar. This place also has been started to be promoted as a tourist destination.

To complement these initiatives by the State Government various NGO's and local organization have also taken initiatives to beautify this place. Plantation drives, awareness programmes, cleanliness drives have been carried out keeping in view the importance of this place as a tourist destination. At present, Tourism Development Society, a non

governmental organization has been deployed as the caretaker of this tourist spot located about 5 kms away from Rhenock bazaar.

KHEDI

- ***Physical Setting***

Khedi, situated at an altitude of around 2786 mts is one of virgin paradise of Sikkim. This place dotted with huge collection of flora and fauna is around seven to eight hours trek from Pakyong via Assam Lingzey. The places around here has a moderately shallow, some what excessively drained, coarse –loamy over fragmental soils on steep slopes (30-50%) with loamy surface, slight surface stoniness and moderate erosion. Enroute Khedi, Pastanga at an altitude of 1425 mts is an enchanting village that provides magnificent view of the mountain ranges. One can wander along the lush green mountain trails where one comes across beautiful waterfalls along the path. There are rare species of bamboos in dense rhododendron and magnolia forest

Natural Resources

The place here has Sub Alpine forest. As one climbs up the way to Khedi along the midst of forest one can see that the forest is mainly dominated by *Lithocarpus* (Bantey), *Quercus* (Buk, Bajrant), *Tsuga dumosa* (Hemlock) mixed with Rhododendrons (*Guransh*, *Chimal*) Magnolia (Ghoge Champ) etc. Undergrowth consists of Dwarf Bomboo-*Arundinaria* (*Malingo*), *Viburnum* (Lekh Asare), *Eurya* (Bara

Jhingani). As one approaches the higher elevations Hemlock is replaced with silver Fir (Gobre Salla).

- ***Unique Selling Proposition:***

The locational advantage with its proximity to the capital makes it easily accessible to the tourists coming to the capital. Enroute to Khedi one comes across two small lakes referred to as 'bhale' and 'pothi' in local terms meaning male and female. Khedi is festooned with rhododendrons and orchids and the dzo's grazing all the way with spectacular view of the scenic mountains gives one an 'altogether a picture of a different world'. The destination makes ideal for camps with tented accommodation.

.At Pastanga the tourists are provided with home stay facilities with organized cultural programme and local handicrafts show. It is also worthwhile to visit traditional houses of ethnic communities which are one hundred and fifty years old. Pastanga is also the take off point for Khedi trekking route.

Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders

It has been proposed to take a trail upto Khedi and build tourism infrastructures at the destination. KEEP- A local NGO has taken an initiative to develop a traditional village of Pastanga with the overall motive of development of village people with the local participation and utilizing the village produces adding to the village economy. A travel agency with the name Jungle

Travels has tied up with KEEP to give the clients to the houses here who also buys the produces at a higher price and sells it to the clients from the locals thereby bringing benefits to them.

JHANDI DARA

Quite popular with local tourists especially during Ramnavami, Jhandi dara at a three hour walk from Pakyong is famous for its share of Rhododendrons and particularly Orchids that grow in the wild. Nowhere can one find such varieties of orchids as here. Come April and Jhandi dara is bedded with orchids of every colour thereby satisfying the thirst of a nature enthusiast. A small lake by the name Budang pokhari exists at a short distance from here which is significant as it is the only source of water in the whole area. This place can be an ideal spot for short treks or perhaps develop into a picnic spot.

West District

With an area of about 1,166 km. square and population of 1, 23,174 and latitude ranging from 27:06:35 N – 27:36:58 N and longitude ranging from 88:12:47 E – 88:21:36 E, west district lives up to its proverbial name as being wild and free.

Though economically and agriculturally unsound as compared to the other three districts of Sikkim, west no doubt is an adventurer's

delight with its undaunted trekking routes and frothing rapids. It is here that Pelling, Yuksom, Kheceopalri, Pemayangtse, and Tashiding the brand names in Sikkim tourism is located



PELLING:

- **Physical Setting**

A breathtaking view of Mt. Khanchendzonga is what makes Pelling so popular to the tourist..Ask a tourist for his choice of Pelling to other destinations in Sikkim and you will hear them say 'rest and relaxation' Situated at an altitude of

2,070 m shoulder to shoulder with the other mountains around, Pelling is just 10 km from Gayzing, the district headquarters. Pelling and places around has moderately shallow, somewhat excessively drained course-loamy soils on steep sloop (30-50%) with moderate erosion and stoniness.

- **Natural Resources**

Pelling's forest is dominated by *Quercus* (Oak), *Castanopsis* (Kattus), *Acer* (Kapasi), *Juglans* (Okhar), *Machilus* (Kawla), *Michelia* (Champ), *Cinnamomum* (Sinkoli) associated with shrubs *Rosa* (Rose), *Rubus* (Aiselu), *Berberis* (Chutro), and *Viburnum* (Asare). This type of forest can be categorized as Himalayan Wet Temperate Forests. There are a few patches of pure oak (*Quercus lamellose*) stands with undestroyed species such as *Eurya*, *Viburnum* and *Symplocos* and an abundance of mosses and epiphytes. Most of these forests are well stratified and rich. *Q. lamellose* and *C. tribuloides* constitute the top or canopy layer with *Machilus sp*, *Acer* and *Symplocos* species forming the second layer. Below this is a shrub layer dominated by *Viburnum*, *Rosa* and *Eurya*. A Pelling forest is home for many endangered species like Red Panda, Common Langur, Lesser cats, Goral, Serow, Monal Pheasant, Firetailed Sunbird, Blue Magpie etc. In the flanking slopes of Pelling surrounding village, villagers grow potato and cabbage as cash crops. Subsistence farming of wheat, barley and maize is carried out while beans, peas, peach and pear are grown on homesteads. Some

amounts of cattle rearing are practiced with stall fed hybrid milky cows and the rest grazed in forest areas.

Pelling is well wooded and the moist forests hold Maroon-backed and Rufous-breasted Accentors, Green-tailed Sunbirds, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatchers, Blue-fronted Redstarts, Brownish-flanked Bush Warblers, Scarlet and Long-tailed Minivets, Coal, Green-backed and Black-throated Tits, various Yuhinas, Fulvettas, Shrike Babblers, Scimitar Babblers, Laughing thrushes and Babblers. Overhead, migrating Steppe Eagles, Greater Spotted Eagles and Oriental Honey Buzzards add colour in cold November

- **Prominent Eco-spots**

Pemayangtse:

Standing at the height of 2085 m and framed on two sides by snowcapped mountains, Pemayangtse (perfect Sublime lotus) is a premier monastery in the state. All the religious function of the erstwhile monarchs (Chogyals) of Sikkim used to be performed here .It was founded in 1705 by Lhatsun Chempo, one of the lamas to have performed the consecration ceremony of the first king of Sikkim., but was badly damaged in the earthquakes of 1913 and 1960. It has been reconstructed several times and belongs to the Nyigmapa sect, which was established by Padmasambava in 8th century. The Sangtokpalri, which means Guru Rimpoche's heavenly place, was built inside the monastery by the late Dungzine Rimpoche and is a masterpiece creation.

A bird's eye view

One can see the three-storey structure filled with wall paintings and sculptures. On the third floor you'll find Santok-palri, a seven-tiered painted wooden model of the abode of Guru Rimpochee. Complete with rainbows, angles and whole panoply of Buddha's and Bodhisattvas on the third floor. The model was built single-handedly by the late Dungzin Rimpochee in five years. The Monastery located on a hilltop at an altitude of 6840 ft commands a magnificent panoramic view of the Himalayan ranges and the surrounding hills and countryside.

Sang Gnak Choling monastery

Situated on a hilltop on the other side of Pelling it is the second oldest monastery in Sikkim .The monastery is situated in the higher altitude than Pemayangtse and takes 40 minutes to reach it .The view of the snowy peak in the north and of the mountains and valleys in the south are panoramic and simply beautiful

Rabdentse

On the lower hillock, south east of Pemayangtse monastery, lies the ruin of the old Rabdentse palace. Rabdentse was the second capital of Sikkim established by the second Chogyal in the latter half of the 17th century. It was the capital of the erstwhile kingdom till 1814 A.D. The old palace and monastery complex are in ruins, and the Archaeological

Survey of India is carrying out repair and restoration works. The place is surrounded by dense forest and there also is a small lake.

A bird's eye view

The scenic view from the top of the ruins scanning across deep valley to the mystic heights of Kanchendzonga ranges is something to be cherished and etched in memory. Here one can visualize the remains of a once flourishing colony around the palace which was constructed after the consecration of Chogyal Phuntsok Namgyal in the 1641 AD. On walking through the chestnut trees with the mosses dripping down, one can come across a stone throne with three standing stones known as Namphogang from where the judge used to give his final judgment in those days. One can also see Taphap Chorten, from where the visitors had to take off their hats to enter the palace. After crossing the fourth and the final courtyard wall we can see the palace ruins in the centre. It is situated in a most commanding place from where we can clearly see the entire southwestern region of Sikkim. Adjacent to the place is "Dab Lhagang" Where the royal family used to offer incense to the deities. Here we can find a white marble slab as big as 7 ft. by 5 ft. on which stood the "Risum Gompa" the Three defectors 'Fidei. It is believed that this slab was brought from the river and installed by a single person. This was a palace till 1814 AD after which it was transferred to Tumlong in North Sikkim.

Unique Selling Proposition

Perched on a ridge between Pemayangtse and Sang Gnak Choling monasteries in Sikkim's west district, Pelling is fast growing to be an urban settlement due to tourist influx. Situated at an altitude of 2070 m. it offers a good view of the entire mountain ranges and due to its locational advantages, many hotels and lodges have mushroomed in and around Pelling offering various categories of accommodation facilities. There is a bus service, which links Pelling with Siliguri the window to the north-east and Bhutan and Nepal as well thus giving it an advantage of getting tourists from these parts of the world. The focal point of Pelling is the junction of the four roads that converge at a ridge- a gateway to all the major destinations in the west like Pemayangtse, Yuksom, Khercheopalri, Uttarey etc. Above all the quiet environment

Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders

Pelling stands majestically in hilltop with magnificent surroundings and is the hub of tourism activities in the western part of Sikkim. Considering Pelling as an eco-fragile zone due to the heavy influx of tourists, various communities based N.G.O's, Stakeholders, Sikkim Tourism Department and other local organizations are gearing up towards conserving the environment

The Sikkim Conservation and Enterprise Project operating in and around Pelling is a collaborative initiative designed to help conserve

Sikkim's natural resources and to develop economic livelihood opportunities, including ecotourism. It envisages an innovative participatory approach to strengthen the capacities of local residents and organizations to link enterprise operation with actions leading to conservation of Sikkim's unique natural and cultural heritage. The project is a joint effort of The Mountain Institute and the G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development. Project collaborators include the Travel Agents Association of Sikkim (TAAS), and local organizations, and communities at the sites.

Some of activities under this project include:

- Community based ecotourism plans covering site-enhancement, trail and site maintenance, natural resource management and monitoring, and conservation education;
- Supporting fuel wood reduction measures by trek operators and local lodges; and
- Supporting local NGOs working in ecotourism and conservation. Increase economic returns from community-level and private sector enterprises.

Activities also include:

- Training in ecotourism services, e.g., for guides, lodge-owners, cooks, porters;
- Supporting new community ecotourism enterprises - vegetable growing, indigenous foods, fuel wood-saving equipment hire for treks, short guided treks;

- Developing marketing strategies for community-based ecotourism activities and travel agent operation.
- Conducting market research and developing new ecotourism products, e.g., off-season activities.

Policy-making in conservation and ecotourism include:

Scientific and participatory monitoring of project activities and impacts;

- Applied research in conservation and ecotourism;
- Sharing of research and monitoring findings among policy-makers, communities and the private sector; and
- Promoting public-private sector dialogue through workshops, exchanges and policy review

KHECHEOPALRI LAKE:

• ***Physical Setting***

Situated at a distance of 43 km from Pemayangtse amongst the dense forest cover is the Khecheopalri lake, a must visit destination for a pilgrim tourist to Sikkim . Also known as the 'wishing lake' it rests at an altitude of about 1979 M above the sea level. Places in and around this lake have moderately deep well-drained, fine-loamy soil on very steep slope (>50%) with severe erosion and slight stoniness.

• ***Historical and Cultural background***

Tso-shok-tso as it is called is one of the sacred lakes of this state both to the Hindus and the Buddhists. It is believed that even birds contribute to its cleanliness by picking up the leaves falling in it. A 'wishing lake' to many, this is a lake to fulfill the prayers.

Natural Resources

Forest around the Khecheopalri Lake can be classified as Himalayan Wet Temperate Forests dominated by *Quercus* (Oak), *Castanopsis* (Kattus), *Acer* (Kapasi), *Juglans* (Okhar), *Machilus* (Kawla), *Michelia* (Champ), *Cinnamomum* (Sinkoli) associated with *Rosa* (Rose), *Rubus* (Aiselu), *Berberis* (Chutro), *Viburnum* (Asare) etc. Moss, Ferns, Lichens and other epiphytes are found abundantly here. Red Panda, Common Langur, Lesser cats, Goral, Serow, Monal Pheasant, Firetailed Sunbird, Blue Magpie and few species of reptiles and amphibians are characteristic. Potato and cabbage are grown as cash crops. Subsistence farming of wheat, barley and maize is carried out while beans, peas, peach and pear are grown on homesteads. Some amounts of cattle rearing are practiced with stall fed hybrid milky cows and the rest grazed in forest areas.

Bird life here in well wooded and the moist forests hold Maroon-backed and Rufous-breasted Accentors, Green-tailed Sunbirds, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatchers, Blue-fronted Redstarts, Brownish-flanked Bush Warblers, Scarlet and Long-tailed Minivets, Coal, Green-backed and Black-throated Tits, various Yuhinas, Fulvettas, Shrike Babblers,

Scimitar Babblers, Laughing thrushes and Babblers. Overhead, migrating Steppe Eagles, Greater Spotted Eagles and Oriental Honey Buzzards add colour in cold November.

- **Unique Selling Proposition**

Among the flutter of the prayer flags and a monastery for lighting prayer lamps nearby, Khecheopalri Lake is considered to be one of the most sacred and pristine lake in Sikkim. It is believed that one's wishes can be fulfilled if one pays a pilgrimage to this holy lake. The most striking features of this lake is its pristine and crystal clear water which is kept clean by the swans wading by believed to pick up even a leaf falling on it.

A bird's eye view

If one looks down from the copy of the ridge, the entire ridge complex around the lake looks exactly like the shape of goddess Tara Jetsum Dolma with her right leg stretched and left leg bent with this sacred lake as her lap.

- **Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders**

Realizing the importance of this lake to the tourism of the state, the government, the local people and the other N.G.O's have joined hands for its maintenance. Local population is engaged in cleaning the lake through preservative and preventive measures. Revenue in the form of entry fees is utilized for the maintenance of the lake. The

footpath that leads one from the gate to the lake is kept clean with signboards delivering a message to avoid polluting the environment around. For those interested in spending a night or two in the peaceful environment a trekker's hut has been provided by the tourism department which provides a comfortable stay with a taste of local cuisine which may include 'chaang'-a brew made of fermented millet. For pilgrim tourists there is also a pilgrim's hut managed by the tourism department.

Sikkim conservation and enterprise project operating in this region is a joint effort of the Mountain Institute and the G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development Project in collaboration with the Travel Agent Association of Sikkim (TAAS) and local organization and communities at the sites. Various code of conduct for ecotourism has been developed which includes informing the visitors in maintaining the sanctity of the lake, avoiding smoking or indulging in activities which may disturb the serenity of this sacred lake. Initiative also has been taken to develop the infrastructures like lodging to the pilgrim visitors.

GOECHALA:

- ***Physical Setting***

Goechala is the ultimate trekking destination of your dream, situated at an altitude of 4941 meters. Goechala also has a pass known as lock pass which is a depression between

Mount Pandim, and a spur of the Kabru Peak that form the pass. Goechala because of its altitude has shallow somewhat excessively drained, loamy-skeletal soil on high relief glaciated land (>50%) with loamy surface, moderate erosion and stoniness.

- ***Natural Resources***

The Vegetation in this zone is practically of scattered shrubs, often barren and snow covered at higher elevations. The vegetation of this place mostly comprises of xerophytic alpine shrubs interspersed with meadows like *Aemone*, *Meconopsis*, *Pedicularis*, *Potentilla*, *Primula*, *Aconitum*, *Delphinium*, *Caltha*, *Bergenia*, *Heracleum*, *Iris*, *Hedysarum*, *Myricaria*, *Bistorta* etc. Tree growth is completely arrested due to low temperature. There are some alpine meadow with scattered scrubs and often barren at higher elevation. Most of the species are shunted and thorny scrub. Some dominant species in this area are *Pedicularis*, *Primula* and short forms of rhododendrons.

This eco region has not yet been included in the protected area network of the state and is perhaps the most threatened as it contains mostly endangered species. Dominant among these are Kiang, Nayan, Tibetan Gazelle, Snow Leopard, Tibetan Wolf, Tibetan Snowcock, Lammergeier, Raven, Golden Eagle and Ruddy Shelduck. The region has a short four-month growing season during which grasses, hedges and medicinal herbs grow abundantly supporting a host of insect fauna as well as the

wild and domestic herbivores, larks and finches. There is also a small Gocha lake which is revered by the passing visitors. It also holds a cave in the proximity which is said of being visited by the king to offer prayers and even today people from every corner of the state visit this place during Pang Lhabsol

- **Unique Selling Proposition**

Goechala offers one a unique experience of standing in the lap of great Himalayas. The fascinating wall of massive cluster of peaks of Kanchendzonga leaves you breathless. The magnificent views of the peaks of Pandim, Kanchendzonga, North and South Kabru, Talung Ration, Kokthang, Gocha Peak tends to create an illusion of storehouse of tons and tons of ice cream.

The sound of falling boulders and ice due to the small avalanches from the massive walls into the small lakes creates a reverberating splash! into the silence and stillness of the whole environment.

A birds eye view

The Goechala Trek offers a superb alternative. The route traverses through forests and alpine meadows, to reach the 4941 Meters high view point, at Goechala. Looking down the Talung Valley one can see the mighty Talung Glacier, winding its way down below the lock pass. Surrounded by great white peaks- Khangchendzonga, 8596 M, Simvo, 6812 M, Sinolchu, 6888 M, Pandim, 6691, Kabru, 7338 M, and Rathang, 6087 M one is left wandering at god's creation. The awe inspiring

sight instills a feeling of standing in the very lap of Khangchendzonga, and gazing up at its face.

- **Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders**

Most of the activities here is managed by the representatives of the travel agents and one can find tents springing like mushrooms all over. Khanchendzonga Conservation Committee (KCC) a local NGO has been playing a significant role in the promotion and management of tourism in the area and even has established various guidelines for the trekkers to follow.

DZONGRI:

- **Physical Setting**

Dzongri is a lovely undulating plateau, used as a yak pasture, lying at the foot of Kabru peak and extending nearly to the Kabru and Pandim glaciers on either side.

Dzongri perhaps one of the most beautiful areas in this belt in the entire Sikkim is situated at an altitude of 4,320 m and is among the best trekking destinations in India. The sights of the milky white peaks all around Dzongri are bound to keep you gazing awfully. Snowfall is common around Dzongri especially during the winter months. The temperature may go below freezing point any time around the year. Dzongri has shallow somewhat excessively drained, loamy-skeletal soils on high relief glaciated land (>50%) with loamy surface, moderate erosion and stoniness.

- **Historical & Cultural background:**

The four stupas at Dabla Khang in Dzongri used to be a place from where the king used to offer his prayers during Pang-Lhabsol to Mt. Khanchendzonga. There also exists a holy lake nearby where the trekkers stop and pray.

- **Natural Resources**

Dzongri (4000m) gives a clear picture of a Dry Alpine Forest. The vegetation of Dzongri mostly comprises of xerophytic alpine shrubs, interspersed with grasslands or meadows. The meadows consist primarily of the genera *Poa*, *Aemone*, *Meconopsis*, *Pedicularis*, *Potentilla*, *Primula*, *Aconitum*, *Delphinium*, *Caltha*, *Bergenia*, *Heracleum*, *Iris*, *Hedysarum*, *Myricaria*, *Bistorta* etc. Tree growth is completely arrested due to low temperature, and instead one finds xerophytic, prostrate shrubs like rhododendron, *Juniperus recurva* and *Berberis*. There are some alpine meadow with scattered scrubs and often barren at higher elevation. Most of the species are stunted and thorny scrub. Some dominant species in this area are *Pedicularis*, *Primula* and short forms of rhododendrons.

Dominant wild fauna found in **Dzongri forest** includes Musk Deer, Himalayan Tahr, Blue Sheep, Blood Pheasant, Ibisbill and toad. River systems harbour some (introduced) trout. Most of the flora of this region attracts interest for medicinal purposes. Dwarf rhododendron

leaves are used for burning as incense. This region has very little resident human population, mainly Bhutias and mostly pastoral herding livestock like yak, dzo (cow-yak hybrid) and domestic cattle. Many wild edibles are collected from the forest floors like *Arisaema* sp. Tubers, 'Khendu' and mushrooms.

- **Prominent Eco-spots**

Nub-Dechen Phug:

Nub-Dechen Phug, also known as the 'Cave of Great Happiness', is located near Dzongri, a blissful welkin deemed as one of the eminent trekking destinations of Sikkim. This holy abode of Guru Padmasambhava is believed to be associated with the 'God of Infinite Light'.

It is believed that this cave, which is as big as a three storied building, contains sacred images representing the body, speech and mind, ritual objects, and complete sutras and tantras translated in Tibet. Legend has it that treasured stores that could feed almost half the population of the world are also hidden here. Just by going to this cave one can acquire 'Supreme Higher Attainment'.

At the main cave are two lesser caves of 'Supreme Higher Attainments' and three lesser caves of 'Common Attainments'. Besides these there are numerous large and small caves where enlightenment was attained. On the right side of the cave grows a fragrant medicinal tree which bears many kinds of flowers and fruits believed to cure diseases.

- **Unique Selling Proposition**

Remote yet beautiful, this area is an ideal trekking destination. A walk along the quiet valleys with dzo, yak and Tibetan sheep grazing along the green pastures instills a singsong note in your hearts.

- **A bird's eye view**

The first view as you step on to the meadows is indeed breathtaking, as you suddenly come face to face with the great peaks. The view from this place has too much to be recommended: a patchwork of green and gold streaked with blue - reminiscent of an abstract etching, framed by the majestic snowcapped peaks shining not very far away. The awesome presence of the great mountains thrusting their snowy peaks deciphers the strength of the Tethys Sea bulging its muscles to reach this towering height. No less than 14 of them soar majestically to 20,000 ft. plus. The centers of attraction of course remain the Kanchenjunga. One gets to see, meadows of grazing yaks, wild flowers, and rhododendrons, with spectacular views of Mount Pandim. The river comes cascading down from the Snow Mountains

- **Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders**

There is a trekkers hut managed by the department of Tourism, Government of Sikkim. Khanchendzonga Conservation

Committee (KCC) a local NGO has been playing a significant role in promotion and management of tourism in the area

TSHOKA:

- **Physical Setting**

Tshoka situated at an altitude of around 3400 mts is one of the ideal places to watch the sunrise over Mt. Pandim. Settlement is sparse but cultivation of various crops in summer is a common practice. Tshoka has moderately deep, somewhat excessively drained, loamy, skeletal soil on very steep slope (>50%) with loamy surface, moderate erosion and slight Stoniness.

- **Natural Resources**

Tshoka (3,040m) has Sub Alpine forest, where Himalayan Hemlock (*Tsuga dumosa*) mixed with *Rhododendron* spp and *Betula* spp occur at lower altitudes and as the elevation rises, the Hemlock is replaced by Silver fir (*Abies densa*). The forest type has a dense canopy layer of rhododendrons with *Viburnum*, *Daphne* and *Eurya*. Most of the forested area is dominated by *Abies densa*, which attain heights of 40-50 m and are densely distributed, and associated with compact rhododendron undergrowth. There are some areas with small patches of bamboo (*Arundinaria* spp). Further above, at Gomchen (3,400 m), there is a mixed forest of *Abies*

densa, *Rhododendron Decipiens*, *R. barbatum*, *Betula Alnoides* and species of *Sorbus*. The dominant shrubs are prostrate form of rhododendrons, *Viburnum* and *Rosa*. Dominant wild fauna includes Musk Deer, Himalayan Tahr, Blue Sheep, Blood Pheasant, Ibisbill and a toad. This region has very little resident human population, mainly Bhutias and mostly pastoral, herding livestock like yak, dzo (cow-yak hybrid) and domestic cattle.

- **Unique Selling Proposition**

The low lying hills with herds of yaks ,dzos and domestic cattle that change into black ,blue and yellow during sunrise over Mt Pandim is a sight to long for .Not much houses are built here and for those who want to be lost in the wilderness Tshoka makes a perfect destination .

- **Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders**

A stopover destination for the trekkers the Department of Tourism has constructed a trekkers hut and the locals have also paved the way for accommodation providing only the basics –a concept of homestays.

YUKSOM/YOKSUM:

- **Physical Setting**

Yuksam (1630 mts) (also spelt Yoksum), 32 Kms, by road from Pemayangtse, is the farthest north you can get by road in western Sikkim, and the trailhead for those intending to the trek to Dzongu.

Yuksam was the first capital of Sikkim and houses the oldest monastery. Yuksam literally means 'three lamas' in Lepcha, named after the meeting of the three lamas here.

Yuksam has moderately shallow, somewhat excessively drained course – loamy soils on steep slope (30-50%) with loamy surface, moderate erosion and stoniness.

- **Historical and Cultural background**

In the 8th century AD, Guru Padmasambhava went to Tibet via Sikkim .During that time he is believed to have hidden many treasures or Ters. Therefore the whole region surrounding the Khanchendzonga is regarded as a guardian deity of Sikkim by the local people. Yuksam is considered to be a 'Lhakhang' or altar for offerings to the Khanchendzonga deities. Every landscape of highland, middle and lowland and every stream, cave, big trees are believed to have presiding deities (*yullha*, *Zibda*) of their own and therefore no one is to pollute or litter as this is believed to bring natural disaster in this area.

The Dubdi Monastery, an hour's walk uphill from Yuksam is the place where the first Chogyal of Sikkim was consecrated in 1641 AD by three learned lamas viz... Lhabtsun Namkha Jigme Kunxang Namgyal, Nadak Sampah Chempo and Kathok Ringzin Chenpo. The evidence of consecration ceremony is still alive at Norbugang Chorten in the form of stone seats and foot-prints of the Head Lama on a stone. Since the history of the state began here, this

area is still considered sacred by the people of Sikkim. What is so special about this coronation is that he did not become a king by conquest or force but he was selected for this task.

- **Natural Resources**

Yuksom has Sub Tropical mixed Board-Leaved Hill Forest. The forest around Yuksom is dense with tall evergreen trees, mainly dominated by oaks, *Alnus nepalensis* (Uttis), *Castanopsis* (Kattus), *Macaranga* (Malata), *Engelhardtia spicata* (Mahua), *Michelia* (Champ), *Toona ciliata* (Tooni), *Machilus* (Kawla), *Symplocos* (Kharane), *Cinnamomum* (Sinkoli) etc. Undergrowth in this area includes shrubs like *Rubus* (Aiselu), *Daphne* (Algeri), *Leucosceptrum* (Ghurpis), *Edgeworthia*, *Arundinaria maling*, dwarf Rhododendron, ferns, epiphytic mosses and orchids etc. under planted cardamom cultivation is quite common in this region. This area is also rich in birds including the Rusty-bellied and Lesser Shortwings, Kalij and Satyr Tragopan; reptiles like Japalura lizards, Cobra, Krait and Himalayan Pit Viper; Himalayan Bullfrog; butterflies and leeches. *Eupatorium* is a major weed competing out *Artemesia* and other secondary growth

- **Prominent Eco-spots**

Norbugang:

Fifteen min walk from Yuksom. True to the prophecy of Tibet's founder of Buddhism, Guru Rimpoche, some nine centuries

prior, three learned Lamas, Gyalwa Lhabtsun Chempo, Karthok Rikzin Chenpo, Gnadak Sempa Chenpo, gathered at Yuksam in 1642 from various directions and enthroned Chogyal Phuntsok Namgyal as the first religious king of Sikkim.

A stone throne shaded by a 300 year old fir still stands here today. A foot print in stone in front of the throne is said to belong to Lhabtsun Namkha Jigme, and a nearby chorten (stupa) contains soil and water from all over Sikkim. Thus Yuksam occupies an important place in Sikkimese history as the first capital, and Norbugang as an important cultural site maintained by the Archeological Survey of India. Norbugang is easily reached on a 15 minute walk from Yuksam.

- **Unique Selling Proposition**

A visit to Yuksam gives a picture of a once old capital and leaves wondering of how busy the place would have been then Perhaps horses frequented on this silent land, perhaps it was the administrative centre of all the official activities. Dubdi monastery, the oldest of Sikkimese monasteries which is marked with the establishment of Nyingmapa order of Buddhism is the pilgrimage centre for many. However the most important aspect of Yuksam is that it is the starting point of one of the major trekking destination of Sikkim ,a division of a civilization with the wild. The region also boasts of Khanchendzonga National Park lying

between the lowland of Yuksam and the Mt. Khanchendzonga which today has been identified as a biosphere reserve.

A bird's eye view

The Norbugang Chorten, commanding the whole area is where Lhatsun Chenpo had buried all his belongings offered by the people. There is also a lake known as Karthok Lake. Although small in size, it also has the serenity and calmness which corresponds to the Tso-Shok-Tso (lake) at Khechopalri. The ruins of Karthok Monastery can still be seen beside the two pine trees at the bank of this lake.

- ***Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders***

The local NGO, KCC (Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee) runs a visitor information centre to provide additional information and attend to any queries on local environmental initiatives. It also has a collection of books, which is useful to the tourists. An initiative from the KCC has led to the development of the concept of home stays thus providing a unique opportunity for the visitor to know and experience local culture and tradition, taste local cuisine giving an experience of a home away from home, a one in the family. The home stays help local economy through sharing benefits from tourism among many families. Besides the NGO in collaboration with TMI (The Mountain Institute) also has been organizing

training for guides, cooks, porters and yak-man with an objective of promoting quality services and to make them aware on conservation and responsible tourism practices. Hotels, ranging from budget to luxury have come up in the area besides there are also trekkers hut for the visitor's stay managed by the department of Tourism, Government of Sikkim

TASHIDING:

- ***Physical Setting***

Tashiding known for Bhumchu festival is around 16 km away from Yuksam and about 40 Kms from Gyalshing, via Legship is located at an altitude of 1465 mts. above sea level. It is here that an important monastery belonging to the Nyingmapa order is built. This monastery was built on top of a heart shaped hill with the back drop of the sacred Mt. Khangchendzonga by Ngadak Sempa Chembo in 1717. According to Buddhist scriptures, Guru Padma Sambhava (Guru Rimpoche) blessed the sacred land of Sikkim in the 8th century AD from this spot. All around the monastery lies skillfully carved holy Chortens known as 'Thong-Wa-Rang-Dol' which literally means 'Saviors by mere sight'. Places in and around Tashiding is somewhat rocky with moderately deep well drained, fine-loamy soils on very steep slope (>50%) with loamy surface, severe erosion and slight stoniness.

- **Historical and Cultural background**

At first only a small Lhakhang was built by Ngadak Sempa Chempo in the 17th Century. The main monastery was built by Pedi Wangmo during the reign of Chakdor Namgyal and some of the statues built then still exist. The sacred objects of worship in Tashiding are the Chorten Thongwa Rangdol and Bumchu (holy water). The Chorten was built by the Lhatsun Chenpo and it is believed that merely to view the Chorten is enough to cleanse one of all sins. Carved skillfully on flagstones surrounding the monastery are holy Buddhist mantras like 'Om Mane Padme Hum' by the master craftsman Yanchong Lodil. The heart of Sikkimese Buddhism as Guru Padmasambhava considered houses the Tashiding Monastery along with Sacred Thongwa Chorten. Rich environment flooded with oranges and cardamom with a perfect sikkimese village on the setting makes it ideal for soft treks

- **Natural Resources**

Tashiding has Sub Tropical mixed Board-Leaved Hill Forest. Dense tall evergreen forests dominated by trees like *Alnus nepalensis* (Uttis), *Castanopsis* (Kattus), *Macaranga* (Malata), *Engelhardtia spicata* (Mahua), *Michelia* (Champ), *Toona ciliata* (Tooni), *Machilus* (Kawla), *Symplocos* (Kharane), *Cinnamomum* (Sinkoli), oaks etc. The undergrowth consists of *Arundinaria maling*, dwarf Rhododendron, ferns, epiphytic mosses and orchids. This area is

also rich in birds including the Rusty-bellied and Lesser Shortwings, Kalij and Satyr Tragopan; reptiles like Japalura lizards, Cobra, Krait and Himalayan Pit Viper; Himalayan Bullfrog; butterflies and leeches. *Eupatorium* is a major weed competing out *Artemesia* and other secondary growth. Various species of Cardamom underplanted in forest patches.

- **Prominent Eco-spots**

Kongri-Labdang:

Besides Tashiding Monastery there are other attractions in and around Tashiding like Sinon Monastery, Tso-Nim-Dawa (Pokhri dara), Hungri Monastery and Pao Hungri. The Paha Khola falls on the way to Kongri is worth visiting. The wild-beehive on the side of the falls adds interest to the visit. It is also a point for the trekkers visiting Kastura Orar adjoining the Dzongri trail.

Byang Lhari- rinchen- nying Phug:

This cave considered to be the holiest of all the sacred caverns is situated in the western part of Sikkim. Associated with the 'God of Wrath', Byang Lhari- rinchen- nying Phug is reached after taking a three days trek from the holy town of Tashiding.

This cave is associated with wrathful activities. It has three caves facing eastwards. The cave in the south has the self-arisen figures surrounded by a pantheon of longevity deities. The cave in the north houses wrathful deities in their fearsome costumes. The eastern

cave has figures of eight fabulous horses of wealth. It is believed that going there will produce signs favorable to the growth and spiritual realization. To the west of this is located the goddess of wealth along with three goddesses of bountiful harvests. Further, to the west, is located the lord of death along with the assembled messengers of death. Below this is a triangular pit. It is believed that if the names of the powerful demonic clans are written down and thrown in the pit during the annual casting off of evil, the messengers of death will flee to their own abode. Nearby, are three stone charm boxes containing seven paper scrolls inscribed with the names of the ten wrathful deities. Legend has it that if the wrathful mantras are recited three times when the powerful life threatening enemies of the earlier and later periods have assembled, your prayer shall be answered with in seven days.

- ***Unique Selling Proposition***

A Buddhist hymn on a rock as one enters the town gives a picture of an old Buddhist town and true to this feeling Tashiding houses an important monastery for the Buddhists. Bum-Chu, the festival associated with holy water is an important event where the level of water forecasts what lay in store for another year.

- ***Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders***

The Bhum-Chu organizing Committee comprising members

from the Legislature, administration and of the monastery looks after the management of affairs during the Bhum-Chu festival and maintenance and cleaning of the monastery. The Government has constructed a well built cc footpath which winds up along the hills up to the monastery. The Government is also keen to develop smaller destinations in and around Tashiding like Pokhrey Dara where building infrastructures like proper roads and lodges have been given a due consideration.

LEGSHIP:

- ***Physical Setting***

This gateway to western Sikkim has a holy Hindu Shrine of Lord Shiva on the banks of river Rangit. Situated at an altitude of 600 meters above sea level Legship is widely known for Hot Spring due to its healing power and Holy Hindu Shrine of Lord Shiva. Legship also houses the first ever built dam in the state for hydro electricity purpose. The water accumulated in the dam is used for Rangit Water World and local folks come here for picnics and rafting. Legship lying beside the River Rangit has moderately deep, excessively drained, fine-loamy soil on escarpments with granually loamy surface and moderate erosion.

- ***Historical and Cultural background***

Legship temple of Lord Shiva is widely known for the festival Bala Chaturdesi, which takes place in the

month of December. Devotees from all around India and from Nepal come here during this festival to offer prayers. This month long festival is also accompanied by a Mela which is also a main tourist attraction.

- **Natural Resources**

Legship valley falls under the Tropical zone, with well-drained flanking slopes. Dominant flora in this region include various species of giant bamboo, *Rhaphidophora*, wild banana, *Pandanus*, Nettles, *Alnus nepalensis* (Uttis), *Symplocos* (Kharane), Gagun, Chilauney, etc. Forests around Legship home to several endangered species of birds like the Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*, Great Indian Hornbill *Buceros bicornis homrai* locally called 'Hongraio', Chestnut-breasted Partridge, Black-breasted Parrotbill, Grey-crowned Prinia and Ward's Trogon. Other lowland fauna includes the introduced Peafowl, Python, Geckos, Porcupine, Assamese Macaque and Barking Deer; a host of butterflies and other invertebrates, riverine fish, frogs and toads. Several species of migratory water birds use the river systems during transit. Lantana is a major weed in this region.

On the forest skirts, parasitical orchids and ferns bounded, the Chaulmoogra, whose fruit is used to intoxicate fish, are very common; as is an immense mulberry tree that yields a milky juice and produces a long green sweet fruit. Large fish, chiefly Cyprinoid, are abundant in the beautifully clear water of the river. But by far the most striking feature consisted in the amazing

quantity of superb butterflies, large tropical swallowtails black, with scarlet or yellow eyes on their wings. They are seen everywhere, sailing majestically through the still hot air, or fluttering from one scorching rock to another, and especially loving to settle on the damp sand of the river edge; where they sit by thousands, with erect wings, balancing themselves with a rocking motion, as their heavy sails incline them to one side or other; resembling a crowded fleet of yachts on a calm day. Such an entomological display cannot be surpassed.

- **Prominent Eco-spots**

Rangit water world:

A handful of locals with a nose for business and initiative to boost have transformed the 60-mw Rangit hydroelectric power corporation reservoir in Legship to a water kingdom complete with picnic spots, boating and rafting facilities. Paddleboats, flotillas and rock climbing facilities are also in the pipeline.. The water world holds so much promise that it can be a major destination in the tourist's brochure to west Sikkim

Phur-cha-chu(Reshi hot Spring):

Enroute Reshi at a distance of about 5 kms this hot spring is located on the banks of River Rangit. One has to walk about ten minutes from the highway across the river Rangit by a 'phadke'- a temporary bamboo bridge to reach the hot spring. The water of these springs has a medicinal value as it contains

sulphur and can cure skin diseases. People from all over the state and neighboring Darjeeling, Bhutan and Nepal come here during the winter months and spend days together lying submerged in the soothing water of the hot spring. There are a couple of pilgrim huts for the convenience of the visitors. This spring is also considered very holy as it is here that Lho-Khandro-Sang Phug, one of the four holy caves of Sikkim is located

Lho Khandro- Sang Phug:

Also known as the cave of occult fairies. Lho Khandro- Sang Phug is said to be associated with the 'God of Increasing Knowledge'. It is believed that Guru Padmasambhava had lived and meditated here sometime in the seventh century. It flaunts of a hot spring nearby, believed to hold medicinal powers, and footprint inscribed rocks which are attributed to that of the fairies..

Lho Khandro- Sang Phug is believed to be the cave of longevity and increased knowledge. Here, all wishes for longevity, Virtues and abundance is believed to be fulfilled. Upon entering the cave, one can see on the ceiling, the lungs and heart of a demoness emitting the nectar of longevity, and below, is the vase of longevity surrounded by about seven ritual offerings. Under the vase lie the remains of the demoness, including head, arms and other parts. On their right are the figures of animals. As one moves forward, one comes to twelve narrow obstacles. Passing over the first, one reaches the shrine hall of Guru Padmasambava, containing his

whole body, its imprints, his headgear, and the imprints of this hand, which can be seen clearly. Then proceeding downwards, one comes upon a secret passage. It is believed that making a pilgrimage to this sacred place and going round it with reverence will cleanse the sins committed during lifetime.

Reshi baudha:

Merely 5 kms from Reshi on the way to Mangalbaria, Reshi baudha is a must visit destination for the pilgrims to Lho-Khandro-Sang-Phug. It is believed that pilgrimage is incomplete if one of the three centers i.e. Tashiding, Lho-Khandro-Sang-Phug or this baudha is left out. This baudha is a sacred cave where prayers are held and offerings made. It is believed that a small tunnel from this cave leads to Lho-Khandro-Sang-Phug thus joining the two caves,a story supported by the fact the even today a cat left at the opening in this tunnel can reach the other end,a truth lost in the darkness of the cave.

Bisthang:

Very close to Mangalbaria ,Bisthang is a virgin tourist destination. A picturesque view of Mt. Khanchenjunga is what it offers. A promising destination on a make, Bisthang already has a resort coming up and a project of developing village tourism has been proposed.

Sikip

Located on the banks of river Rangit, Sikip, an upcoming destination falls partially in west and partially in south only to be separated by a suspension bridge and is an angler's paradise and also has a charming natural surrounding. It is also a starting point for other water sports like rafting and kayaking. Vast banks of sand makes it a popular picnic destination The drive from Gangtok to Sikip takes about five hours via Legship and is also accessible from Siliguri and Darjeeling via Jorethang .Efforts are underway to start tourism projects in the area

- **Unique selling proposition**

This Sikip-Mangalbaria –Legship circuit if taken as a single destination can be a promising tourist destination thus offering water sports, pilgrimage and relaxation -a variety in a single package. The gushing rapids of river Rangit make it ideal for adventure sports like rafting and kayaking at the same time the other face of the same river –the quiet still water made by the dam has favoured boating .For the pilgrim goes, where can be an ideal place than Phur-cha-chu holding a hot spring and a holy cave nearby, the healer for skin diseases and sins as well. An adventure filled day followed by a pilgrimage and a relaxed evening in the quiet Bishthang hilltop to end the tour would be a magnificent experience to crave for . Above all the well carpeted roads gives a jolly ride to the visitors.

- **Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders**

To give a boost to tourism in Legship, government has built a tourist information centre with a cafeteria .Manav seva samiti a local N.G.O has taken the responsibility of maintaining the rangit water world and the Kirateswar temple as well. At Phur-cha-chu the locals come up with building huts and the bridge for the pilgrims during the hot spring season. The monastery here is looked after by the ecclesiastical department, government of sikkim. Consciousness has crept in among the locals of Bishthang who are on a lookout for finding ways to get their share of tourists.

RINCHENPONG:

- **Physical Setting**

Situated at an altitude of 1700 meters in the western part of Sikkim is this small picturesque village named Rinchenpong. The drive from Gangtok to **Rinchenpong** takes about four hours via Jorethang. It is about two hours drive from Pelling and an hour drive from Jorethang. Places in and around has a moderately shallow, somewhat excessively drained course – loamy soils a steep slope (30-50%) with loamy surface, moderate erosion and moderate stoniness.

- **Natural Resources**

Kaluk/Rinchenpong has Sub Tropical mixed Broad-Leaved Hill Forest. Forest here is Dense, dominated

mainly by *Alnus Nepalensis* (Uttis), *Castanopsis* (Kattus), *Macaranga* (Malata), *Engelhardtia spicata* (Mahua), *Michelia* (Champ), *Toona ciliata* (Tooni), *Machilus* (Kawla), *Symplocos* (Kharane), *Cinnamomum* (Sinkoli) etc. The undergrowth consists of *Arundinaria maling*, dwarf Rhododendron, ferns, epiphytic mosses and orchids.

This area is also rich in birds including the Rusty-bellied and Lesser Shortwings, Kalij and Satyr Tragopan; reptiles like Japalura lizards, Cobra, Krait and Himalayan Pit Viper; Himalayan Bullfrog; butterflies and leeches. *Eupatorium* is a major weed competing out *Artemesia* and other secondary growth. Large Cardamom underplanted in forest patches, are dominant features of the landscape as much as the naturalized exotic *Cryptomeria japonica* patches

- **Prominent Eco-spots**

Kaluk:

Kaluk at a distance of 3 kms from Rinchenpong is perhaps the stoppage for the tourists on a tour to this area.. A night spent at an old British bungalow could be an enthralling experience of linking the past to the present.

Hee Bermiok:

Hee Bermiok at about 8kms from Rinchenpong is famous for mountain biking, nature walk, Boom Falls, Yuma Manghim and Sri Junga cave belonging to the Subba community. The adventure lovers can

also enjoy a two and a half hour trek to Varsey.

Dentam:

Dentam is famous for its Alpine cheese –a product of Indo-Swiss collaboration. Ma Durga mandir in the heart of the town is an important pilgrim centre for the visitors. Two important gompas the Reshum and Gurung gompa is located here.

Singshore Bridge

Towards Uttarey one comes across Singshore Bridge supposedly the highest suspension bridge in Asia. It is said that a stone dropped from the bridge can be seen for 5 minutes till it plunges to a small stream below. Enroute to Pelling one can see the famous Changey falls. Besides Mangmo Gurung gaon and Radu-Khandu-Sanku gaon provides one an insight to ethnic Nepali customs. It is also believed that the water from Guransay dara nearby cures gastric problems.

- **Unique Selling Proposition**

A picturesque village, Rinchenpong with beautiful landscape, view of mountain range and visit to Ringsum Monastery makes one or two days interesting for the visitors. One can also trek to Jhandi Dara/Menlapso which is the richly forested area known to be home for various species of wild animals and birds

The silence in the hills only to be broken by the sounds of birds and cowherds calling their grazing herds, far from the hustle and bustle of the

city life makes it ideal for village tourism. Ethnic remote villages clustered in the sloppy hills untouched by the evils of civilization and yet so rich in culture is something a visitor from the maddening crowd would long for. The nicely pitched roads make it ideal for mountain biking too. Above all a view of the guardian mountain Khanchendzonga is a sight that cannot be surpassed by a visitor.

- **Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders**

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The Government of Sikkim has given a special emphasis in the development of tourism in the area with projects being planned for the promotion. The guest houses at Rinchenpong and Dentam has been playing a significant role in the accommodation sector. The need to safeguard the fast vanishing culture has led the Government to initiate measures for the preservation through building Srijunga temple of the Subba community at Hee Bermiok and Sadhu Dham belonging to the Rai community at Pareng gaon where rituals and ethnic dances are performed during festivities. Besides NGO'S like Himali Vikash Sansthan, Gyanodaya Sansthan has been actively engaged in cleanliness and plantation drives contributing to the environment ultimately to the tourism of these areas.

UTTAREY:

- **Physical setting**

At an altitude of 6700 ft Uttarey is surrounded by hills and small lakes. Vegetation mainly comprises of Michelia sps, Prunus sps and Orchid sps. It is from this place that one can view the entire ranges of Mt Everest and Mt. Khanchendzonga at the same time it is an important tourist destination and the starting point of the world famous Singalila Trekking route in the Khanchendzonga Biosphere reserve. Right next to the town is a flat land where there used to be a beautiful lake once which has today dried and lined with *Acorus calamus*(Bojo) which is an important medicinal plant. The stream discharging from this lake usually flowed north (or Uttar) towards the snow capped Khanchendzonga range and that's how the town derives its name, its identity.

- **Historical and Cultural background**

A temple of Bhagwati Devi holds a significant place in the history of Uttarey. The water that flows north from the temple is the source of the name Uttarey. The water from the temple flowed to a lake which was named as Niya Pokhari-the Lake of Justice. It is believed that the lake served as Dharma Kacheri wherein a coin wrapped in a cloth and suspended from the string to the water did not get wet if the man was innocent and soaked if guilty. This lake today has transformed into a herbal garden with growths of *Acorus Calamus*(Bojo), *Swertia*

chirayta (*chirayto*), *Bergenia spp*(*Pakhanbet*) and others holding a medicinal value. It is still believed that the water from the temple is warm till 4am and as the daybreaks the water becomes freezing cold. Besides the village is surrounded by Pherek Singtam-a Lepcha typical village, Gumpa dara Sherpa village and Sopakha Limbu village, rich with cultures of the corresponding communities.

- **Unique Selling Proposition**

Uttarey is an entry point to the Chewabhanjyang pass (a boarder between Nepal and India). This also has been the base camp of multi treks that prolongs for 15 to 16 days covering more than 30 to 40 small lakes on the way .A walk to Gumpa dara which holds a Kagyu monastery and a small lake nearby is a place a tourist cannot surpass for its isolation. A very unique thing about the place is the whistling of Sim Kukhra (local term for a bird) that can be heard from the herbal lake especially during rains.

- **Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders**

Although it has been proposed by the Government to build an artificial boating lake in the area the villagers are trying to preserve and promote the already existing herbal lake giving the tourist a unique opportunity to enjoy this natural treasure. In order to ensure that the community benefits from this tourism the villagers have organized themselves into the UETDA (Uttarey

Eco Tourism Development Association) and Sopakha Samaj Kalyan Sangh (SSKS).At present about 150 porters ,10 naturalist guides,16 animal pack operators are registered with the association. They also have framed operational guidelines to ensure that everyone gets an equal opportunity and the tourists get a quality service. A rotation system is in place to ensure that the porters get their opportunity in time and there is no competition among them leading to undercutting of the wage rate .The association also provides basic facilities like good footwear (gumboot) for its members .This has resulted in a total of Rs 9 lakhs income for villagers in 2003 from 400 tourists. Besides TMI (The Mountaineering Institute), TAAS (Travel Agents Association of Sikkim), ECOSS (Ecological Society of Sikkim) KCC (Khanchendzonga Conservation Committee) and ENVIS Centre for Ecotourism has been playing a significant role in assisting the UETDA to manage and promote Tourism in the Area.

BARSEY/HILLAY:

- **Physical Setting**

It lies at an elevation of 10,000 ft and has motorable road access upto Hiley. An easy 4 kms trek from there takes one up to the Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary. Spread over a total area of 104 sq.kms it forms a vital corridor in the larger Khanchendzonga Biosphere Reserve with the Shingalila National Park of the West Bengal. One can also reach here on a trek from

Soreng and Uttarey. The place provides magnificent view of the mountains; visitors can halt at 'Guras Kunj' trekkers' hut. Located in the extreme west Barsey is noted for rhododendrons. It's a huge Rhododendron forest, is a must visit experience trip during the flowering season from mid march to April end. The whole forest is aflame with riot of Rhododendron Flowers with hues raging from blood red to pure white and against the back drop of the mountains a truly unforgettable experience. Barsey and around has a moderately shallow, somewhat excessively drained course – loamy soils a steep sloop (30-50%) with loamy surface, moderate erosion and moderate stoniness. The climate is wet and cold favoring the spread of the dominant genus Rhododendron. July is the wettest month, with the average annual precipitation being in excess of 250 cm. This reaches above 2500m and receives regular snowfall in winter. Clear skies can be experienced only from November to May.

- **Natural Resources**

The altitudinal range of 2200m to 4100 m supports a wide variety biodiversity values ranging from the Sub-Tropical Forests, Mixed Broadleaf Forests, Conifer Forests and finally Alpine Meadows. Hundreds of bird species are found in this sanctuary including three species of spectacular pheasants namely ,Satyr Tragopan, Impeyan Monal and Kaleej Pheasant .Notable large mammals include Leopard, Leopard-Cat, Yellow –Throated Marten, Palm Civet, Wild Dog, Goral,

Barking Deer ,Himalayan Black Bear, Wild Boar, Red Panda, Flying Squirrel, Crestless Porcupine ,Himalayan Mouse-Hare,etc

- **Prominent Eco Spots**

Chakung(Durpindara) and Soreng:

The newly developed Durpin dara at Chakung is an adventure tourist destination on a make. Successful paragliding has already been tested from here. Tanky dara, the last motorable point has the potentiality to develop as a picnic destination in itself with a rested land amidst pine trees and a hut shed nearby. A trail from here amidst thick jungle leads one to Durpiney. This infact used to be a place from where the Lepcha's defended from their enemies by a warfare made up of tying stone on a rope and pelting them upon their enemies

Durpindara, the name derived from the fact that the place offers a binocular vision of hills in and around and a beautiful sunrise has demanded prospects for it to develop as an important destination in the near future .It has been proposed to develop the spot as an ecotourism destination with wayside amenities, cafeteria, a watchtower, a ropeway and a children's park at Bhotey Ground. A gate has been constructed at Chakung,an opening to Durpindara and the CTDC(Chakung Tourism Development Corporation)is gearing up towards building up village tourism in the area and organize events like culture and food festival. Besides the Government has constantly supported and

encouraged the local stakeholders to promote tourism in the area. **Soreng** is the other destination that is finding its place on the tourist brochure to Sikkim. Jhandi dara is a prominent trekking destination of this area. Local NGO'S are gearing up towards developing village tourism and Ecotours and Homestays are constantly coming up as important tourism activities in the area.

- ***Unique Selling Proposition***

A beautiful Tourist Trekker's hut exists in Barsey, amidst the Rhododendron forests at 10,000 feet, commanding a glorious view of the Singalila Range. A 4 km trek from Hilley to Barsey is a wonderful experience especially during the flowering season from mid March to April end when the whole forest is aflame with riot of Rhododendron flowers with hues raging from blood red to pure white and against the back drop of the mountains

- ***Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders***

A forest bungalow that rests at Barsey amidst the backdrop of the Mt. Khanchendzonga adds to the delight of the surroundings. An artificial boating lake is on its way of completion. A joyride on a boat after about a couple of hours walk from Hilley-the last motorable point would be relaxing as well.

TREKKING CIRCUITS AROUND:

Khecheopalri Lake & Yuksam-Dzongri Trekking Trails

The Khecheopalri and Yuksam – Dzongri Trekking Trails are windows to wonders of natural beauty, biodiversity, sacred lakes and snow capped-mountains. The trails are located in Sikkim's West District covering an elevation of 1785m to 4000m alms. Khecheopalri (1800) – the holy lake is situated in between Pelling and Yuksam, and is famous for its sacredness and clear water. The Yuksam- Dzongri trail takes the visitor into Khangchendzonga National Park (KNP), Samiti and Goecha La. It is a rare opportunity to enjoy the wide biodiversity. Alpine non-forested areas- such as cliff, high alpine meadows, cascading streams and lakes-all provide places for birds to feed, rest and raise their young. A wide variety of residential and non – residential birds can be seen along the trail at different elevations and in different seasons. The trail lies within the Khangchendzonga National Park (KNP) and has high tourism value and gives one and opportunity to enjoy bird watching. The Sikkim Biodiversity and Ecotourism Project – a collaboration of the Mountain Institute, G B Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development, Travel Agents Association of Sikkim (TAAS), The Green Circle and local NGO's is taking special efforts to conserve the biodiversity of the area and to protect and provide necessary habitats for birds, butterflies and other wildlife of the area through appropriate conservation management and ecotourism development.

North Sikkim

To fully appreciate the term “NEY MAYAL LYANG”, it is imperative that the northern region of Sikkim be visited. NEY MAYAL LYANG is what the Lepchas the original inhabitants of Sikkim named their motherland. The term connotes heaven and the Lepchas perhaps one of the few hill tribe to boast a highly developed linguistic history were not being extravagant with words when they named Sikkim so. It takes but a visit to North Sikkim and its abundant beauty quickly dispels any doubts one might have of the etymological skills of the Lepchas. Few places can equal North Sikkim’s natural and scenic grandeur. North Sikkim is the home of high passes, glaciers, lakes and off course Mount Siniolchu, perhaps the prettiest of all Himalayan peaks. The view of Mount Khangchendzonga that the District offer is also one of the best. It would not be a contradiction to say that this region of Sikkim is “Home” for those smitten by wanderlust. Indeed North Sikkim is the places that arouse one’s insatiability for exploration – both internal and external. North Sikkim was only recently opened to tourism and the tremendous rate at which it has grown as a destination over the last couple of years, stands proof of its inherent appeal with travelers. Its people still unaffected by the cold commercialization that tourism often brings, make North Sikkim a must visit destination. The land is full of legends; folklore, myths and the stories start the moment one heads out of Gangtok and hit the North Sikkim highway.

It is situated at latitude ranging from 27:22:32 N –28:07:43 N and longitude ranging from 88:7:47 E – 988:53:26 E. Yumthang alone is enough to satiate the most demanding, with its panoramic Valley of Flowers. During springtime the lush meadows abound with delicate wildflowers that carpet the valley floor in a rich riot of colors. A must-see here is the Hot Springs and the vibrant Sikkimese tribal culture and customs. North district has an area of about 4,226 km. square and has population of about **41,023**



NORTH DISTRICT

DZONGU:

- **Physical Setting**

Located in the North West of Sikkim, Dzongu established in early 1960s, is the territory reserved for the Lepcha community and borders the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve. Dzongu’s elevation ranges

between 800m and 6,000m above sea level. The area has panoramic views of Mount Khangchendzonga (8585 m), the third highest mountain in the world, and has a particularly rich fauna and flora that is endemic to the area. Dzongu has deep well drained, fine loamy soils and steep slopes (30-50%) with loamy surface, moderate erosion and slight stoniness.

- **Historical and Cultural background**

The Lepchas are the only residents of Dzongu and are considered to be the indigenous people of Sikkim. Their traditions and culture have their roots in the Buddhist culture but with variations of their own in practice and belief. The Lepchas of Dzongu have generally lived in a relative isolation and are primarily dependent on subsistence agriculture and the cultivation of native cardamom. Unfortunately, hard times, mostly in the form of falling cardamom prices, have plagued this community which has led to the migration of the Lepcha youth to urban areas (Including the capital Gangtok) looking for other ways of subsistence, leaving an increasingly elderly population in Dzongu.

As the Dasai is for Hindus, Namsoong a religious festival is a grand celebration for the Lepchas held during the month of December. During this festival, Mela held at Nampricdang is a gala event, the prime attractions of which are Archery Competition, Traditional dances and the showcasing of the culture of the Lepchas – the ethnic tribe of Sikkim.

Legends hold that this festival is a celebration for the killing of Laso Moong, the demon who was said to trouble the Lepchas of these areas.

- **Natural Resources**

Together with the Khanchendzonga Biosphere Reserve to the west, the combined area encloses a gargantuan number of species, including around 144 mammals. 300 plus birds, and 400 and more butterflies recorded in Sikkim alone. Dzongu's elevation ranges between 800m and 6,000m, therefore regions in Dzongu belong to different ecological zone. The floristic wealth of the Dzongu and its surrounding area is rich and diverse, both in composition and value. Forests represent a variety of plant communities that include diverse vegetation types corresponding to variation in climate and edaphic factors.

Dzongu contains steep sided valleys and gorges with well-drained flanking slopes. A wide variety of woody tree species, shrubs, lichens, epiphytes and mosses have enriched the valley. Among the woody trees, *Quercus* (Oak) and *Castanopsis* (Chestnut) are few among the dominant species of temperate region whereas *Abies densa* (Silver Fir) and Rhododendrons are the dominant species in the sub-alpine zones. There are some pure patches of *Castanopsis* at temperate region and *Magnolia* (Ghoge Champ) at sub-alpine areas. The area is equally rich in Rhododendrons in their shape, size and colour. The variety include *Rhododendron arboretum*

(Guransh) at temperate conditions to small *Rhododendron setosum* (Sunpati) and *Rhododendron anthopogon* (Sunpati) Apart from these, the area is equally rich in other flowering plants such as variety of *Primula*, *Meconopsis*, *Aconitum* (Bikh, Bikhma), *Potentialla*, *Bistorta* and *GJentiana* which provide an additional charm to the alpine meadows.

Many species of Bamboos (*Dendrocalamus* spp and *Arundanaria* spp) are used by the communities for house construction and local handicrafts. A number of wild plants such as *Rhus semialata* (Bhalayo), *Litsae citrate*, *Juglans regia* (Okhar), *Machilus edulis* (Kaula), *M. odoratissima*, *Bassia butyraea* (Chiuari), *Girardinia palmate* (Allo Sisnu), *Laportea terminalis* (Patle Sisnu) and *Tupistra nutans* are eaten in different ways by the villagers. Apart from these about seven edible varieties of Mushrooms, numerous *Diplazium* spp (Ningro) and *Dioscorea* (Ban Tarul) are also found recorded from in the area.

Medicinal plants recorded from the area include *Artmesia vulgaris* (Titepate), *Eupatorium adenophorum* (Banmara), *Hydrocotyle asiatica* are widely used for different purposes and are not marketed. On the other hand, *Aconitum* spp (Bikh, Bikhma), *Berginia liglata* (Pakhan-bhed), *Heracleum nepalense* (Chimphing), *Litsae citrate* (Siltimbur), *Oroxylum indicum* (Totala) are openly extensively marketed in the local markets. Some of these species are also used by the local practitioners (Bijuwa and Baidya) as herbal medicines.

Dzongu's forests of North Sikkim are home to several endangered species of birds like the Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*, Great Indian Hornbill *Buceros bicornis homrai* locally called 'Hongraio', Chestnut-breasted Partridge, Black-breasted Parrotbill, Grey-crowned Prinia and Ward's Trogon. Other lowland fauna includes the introduced Peafowl, Python, Geckos, Porcupine, Assamese Macaque and Barking Deer; a host of butterflies and other invertebrates, riverine fish, frogs and toads. Several species of migratory water birds use the river systems during transit. Lantana is a major weed in this region. This eco region has not yet been included in the protected area network of the state.

- **Prominent Eco-spots**

Rong Lungten Lee:

This Lepcha traditional house at Namprickdang, Dzongu comprises of three rooms. The ceiling called 'Phahong' an attic is used to store valuable items. This house is open to tourists both foreign and domestic throughout the year.

Namprickdang botanical garden:

Namprickdang botanical garden situated near the meeting place of two rivers Teesta and Kanaka is established and maintained by the Department of Forest. Namprickdang garden is situated at an altitude of around 1000m and is the home of Sikkim's many exotic orchids and other rare tropical and temperate plants. Beside the Garden, this place

is famous for Namsoong festival, held at every New Year. People from all over the Sikkim come here to offer prayer.

- ***Unique Selling Proposition***

Dzongu in North Sikkim, which also boasts of tropical mountain forests with views of snow-capped peaks, which can altogether make up a memorable and unique experience. Dzongu has been declared as a protected zone for the indigenous Lepcha tribes. Any influence from the outside world has been barred, thereby, preserving the local culture, tradition, and other social manifestations. One can enjoy unadulterated local culture and customs in and around this place which is considered as the abode of the original inhabitant of Sikkim.

- ***Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders***

Dzongu was established in the early 1960s, and its elevation ranges between 800m and 6000m above sea level. Dzongu provides the perfect backdrop to learn about the fast-vanishing Lepcha culture and lifestyles, the immense diversity of plants and wildlife and enjoy the rich lush tropical mountain scenery. Keeping in view the above mentioned fact, the idea of the ecotourism project was born from the desire of group of Lepcha youth who has concerns for the up coming younger generation of Dzongu. They were keen in looking for alternative opportunities for the

educated youth which would provide avenues for self employment within Dzongu and in the process help the Lepcha community to preserve their vanishing identify. The idea of ecotourism as a means of conservation and economic development was further developed and supported by ECOSS.

To begin the work in Dzongu partnerships were forged with NGOs like Dzongu Ecotourism committee (DETC), local authorities and representatives of Dzongu. Several community consultations and awareness and training programs were conducted for the local residents. The extensive community mobilization process has brought about some changes in the thinking of the local people and positioned them to conduct tourism that is local and benefits that accrue tall levels of the community. Some of the initiatives led by NGO's include

- Training of local tourist Guides.
- Orientation to the local driver about tourism and their role in hospitality.
- Cooks Training.
- Lodge-Home Stay Management Training.
- English Speaking Training.
- Tourism sensitization to the monks and lamas of the monastery
- Porters Training
- Trail development around villages.
- Interpretation signs along trails and sites/viewpoints.
- Handicraft and Handloom promotion for tourists.
- Information brochure
- Cultural Programme promotion.

- Viewpoint beautification
- Marketing activities.
- Development of a Code of Conduct.
- Evaluation of project progress.

GURUDONGMAR:

- ***Physical Setting***

Situated at an attitude of over 17000 ft and encircled all around by snow-covered mountains, the sacred lake has a great religious significance as well. This snow-fed milky water of the lake is one of the major sources of Teesta, the most important river in Sikkim and North Bengal. The road to Gurudongmar from Thangu passes through the high alpine pastures carpeted with thick rhododendron bushes. One can get a prized view of rare Bramhakamal peeping through the bushes in inaccessible terrain or of a herd of mountain sheep grazing in the distant valley.

Gurudongmar and the places around have moderately shallow, somewhat excessively drained coarse-loamy soil on steep slope (30-50%) with gravelly loamy surface; moderate erosion and moderate stoniness:

- ***Natural Resources***

Gurudongmar has Dry Alpine Forest, The Vegetation in this zone is practically of scattered shrubs, often barren and snow covered at higher elevations. The vegetation of this place mostly comprises of xerophytic alpine shrubs, interspersed with meadows, like *Aemone*, *Meconopsis*, *Pedicularis*, *Potentilla*,

Primula, *Aconitum*, *Delphinium*, *Caltha*, *Bergenia*, *Heracleum*, *Iris*, *Hedysarum*, *Myricaria*, *Bistorta* etc. Tree growth is completely arrested due to low temperature, and instead one finds xerophytic, prostrate shrubs like rhododendron, *Juniperus recurva* and *Berberis*. There are some alpine meadow with scattered scrubs and often barren at higher elevation. Most of the species are shunted and thorny scrub. Some dominant species in this area are *Pedicularis*, *Primula* and short forms of rhododendrons.

This eco region has the most threatened as it contains mostly endangered species. Dominant among these are Kiang, Nayan, Tibetan Gazelle, Snow Leopard, Tibetan Wolf, Tibetan Snowcock, Lammergeier, Raven, Golden Eagle and Ruddy Shelduck.

- ***Unique Selling Proposition***

Gurudongmar gets its name from a Gurudwara established by a Sikh Regiment which exists even today and is maintained by the Army. The Lake is probably the highest and largest lake in Sikkim. This pristine lake with high medicinal significance is believed reverentially by the Hindus and by the local Buddhists. A sight, which makes one sigh in disbelief – “a paradise on earth”, the lake is a makeup mirror for the mountain, which holds its mirage so clear, as if trying to bind the majestic mountains in it. A veritable Mecca for the nature lovers Gurudongmar has a prized possession of Yaks, Blue Sheep’s and other high altitude animals. This lake freezes during the winters except at one spot, which the

devout believe to have been specially blessed and the blessed water of this lake is believed to possess the miraculous power of granting children to issueless couples.

- ***Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders***

The Government has joined hands with the local NGO's and the Stakeholders and with an immense support from the local people dwelling in the vicinity of this region are able to promote eco tourism in this region. Tourists are made aware of the preventive measures to be taken during their travel to this fragile eco region in advance thereby lessening the negative impact as much as possible. For security reasons foreign tourists are not permitted to visit Gurudongmar Lake and even domestic tourist need permission from Government of Sikkim to travel to this region. During the peak tourist Season various measures are taken, thereby maintaining the carrying capacity of this area. Government has even employed people for cleaning and maintaining this holistic lake.

LACHEN:

- ***Physical Setting***

Lachung's sister village, Lachen is only a recent introduction to tourism. Situated at an altitude of 2,694m, Lachen stands on a grassy and flat bush from the periphery of which rise with the pine clad mountains with their snowy peaks and black cliffs.

The village comprises of barely 150 houses, earlier inhabited only during winters by their owners who spend the summers on the alpine pastures along the Tibet boarder tending to their yaks.

Lachen has moderately shallow, some-what excessively drained, coarse loamy soils on moderate steep slope (15-30%) with gravelly loamy surface, moderate erosion and slight stoniness

- ***Historical and Cultural background***

Lachen – a Bhutia term means a wide pass, a name derived from the fact that it was a wide passage to Tibet .Lachen has its own culture different from the rest. The habitation in majority is seasonal when the populace migrates to Thangu for cultivation, mainly potatoes during May to end of October. A unique event on its own, few days before the festival of Losoong which falls on December a mass slaughtering of Yaks and Sheep is held when Lachen looks like a battle field draped in blood. "Cham" a mask dances is a colourful event held in the Lachen Monastery during the first week of January. Lachen too like Lachung has a highly centralized law with Zhumsa taking all the major decisions.

- ***Natural Resources***

Lachen forest can be categorized as Himalayan Wet Temperate Forests. The mountain slope of Lachen is almost covered by the Silver fir. One could find some trace of *Quercus spp.*, *Castanopsis triuloides*, *Acer*

spp, *Machilus spp* and *Cinnamomum spp* associated with shrubs *Rosa*, *Rubus*, *Berberis* and *Viburnum*. There are a few patches of pure oak (*Quercus lamellose*) which stands with other species such as *Eurya*, *Viburnum* and *Symplocos* and an abundance of mosses and epiphytes. Some species of Rhododendrons are also found in this region.

The region preserves an astonishing diversity of wildlife. Yak and Horse are commonly used for transportation of goods in these areas. Blue Sheep's, Sapi (Domestic Sheep) Kiang, Nayan, Tibetan Gazelle, Snow Leopard, Tibetan Wolf, Tibetan Snowcock, Lammergeier, Raven, Golden Eagle, Ruddy Shelduck and some species of Deer are also often observed here. A flock of birds which look like cranes are often seen here. These birds are migratory probably coming from the northern latitudes.

- **Prominent Eco-spots**

Thangu:

The Ultimate destination for a foreign tourist to North Sikkim, Thangu at a altitude of 3,960m is 30 km beyond Lachen . The months of May June sees this valley carpeted with colorful alpine flowers which are replaced by snow from October through March. A stop over destination for a visitor to Gurudongmar, Thangu has a forest Dak Bungalow for accommodation. Enroute Thangu to Gurudongmar one comes across a herbal Garden and Kalep Cave.

Chopta Valley:

Wonder never ceases in North Sikkim with each turn, each valley, and each rivulet trying to outdo the other in the scenic beauty that it offers. Few places come close to the virgin appeal of Chopta Valley (4,020 m). Just a 20 – minute drive from Thangu, this valley provides one of the few accessible places in Sikkim where visitors can actually walk over frozen rivers during winter. The riot of colors during spring belies this aspect though.

- **Unique Selling Proposition**

The 'On its own' type of lifestyle of people keeps the visitor on a thirst for wanting to know more about them. Lachen is perhaps one area where the 'ills' of urban has not crept in. The silence is as musing to the urban visitor as is the surrounding. Above all the regulation set by the Zhumsa gives the area a perfect clean tourism. The smell of incense (Saang) burning during early hours of the day warms one up and mesmerizes for months and months.

- **Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders**

Lachen, a recent introduction to tourism has few hotels which are fully packed during the tourist seasons. Sinolchu Society a local NGO has taken initiative for managing tourism activities like trekking, tours, plantation, cleanliness drives, and other tourism related activities to put Lachen on a tourist brochure to North Sikkim. A

tourist information centre is an effort of the Department of Tourism, Govt. of Sikkim to regulate tourism in the area. A well built cc-footpath makes an ideal walk upto the monastery. It has been proposed to start the work of carpeting the road and lighting the hamlet with lamppost, altogether a picture of a well developed Lachen.

YUMTHANG

- ***Physical Setting***

Yumthang the “*valley of flowers*” is at an elevation of 11,800 feet and about 140kms from Gangtok, Yumthang is a paradise for nature lovers with a fascinating blend of flora and fauna and breathtaking scenic grandeur. The valley is also the home for Singbha Rhododendron Sanctuary with around 24 species of Rhododendrons. Yumthang Hot spring, popularly known as ‘Tsa-chu’, on the left bank of Lachung Chu is immensely popular for its curative properties and healing power.

Yumthang has moderately deep, excessively drained, loamy skeletal soils on moderately steep slope (15-30%) with Loamy surface, severe erosion and moderate stoniness.

Natural Resources

In April/May/June this Lush green valleys is struck by the riots of colors with Rhododendron, Alpine & Primula flowers. Yumthang is known for its unique abundance of Rhododendron trees and shrubs, about 40 species/varieties of which are recorded from Sikkim are alone found here. When in blossom the

rhododendrons provide a riot of color to this small park. The rare and endemic *Rhododendron neivum*, the State Tree occurs only in this region which is also rich in ground flora such as primulas, potentillas, gentians, saxifrages, poppies and aconites. In Nov/Dec/Jan one can enjoy the scenic and the panoramic views of the valleys and surrounding mountain ranges with snow-capped peaks.

The fauna here consists of the Serow, Goral, Blood Pheasant , and Common Hill Partridge. The beautiful and highly endangered Spotted Linsang or Tiger-Civet (*Prionodon pardicolor*) has been reported from here. Grazing by yaks, dzos and sheep are widely practiced by grazers here.

- ***Unique Selling Proposition***

Very close to Tibetan border, Yumthang is that unique place where the tree- line ends, but rhododendrons still bloom covering the whole area in a surreal hue. It can be called a paradise for nature lovers with a fascinating blend of flora and fauna and breathtaking scenic grandeur. The valley is also the home for Singbha Rhododendron Sanctuary with around 24 species of Rhododendrons. Yumthang Hot spring, popularly known as ‘Tsa-chu’, on the left bank of Lachung Chu is immensely popular for its curative properties and healing power.

A bird’s eye view

Surrounded by mountains the place seems to touch the heaven as one has to face vertically upwards to see the mountain top. The scenic view is

brehtaking. With the rhododendron and blooming primula covering the whole area in a surreal shade Yumthang offers the view of a stunning array of peaks with Pauhunri and Shundu Tsenpa. A number of hot springs are scattered in the valley providing an unexpected opportunity to feel the warmth of the water even in freezing temperature. Rich in sulphur these springs are believed to have miraculous healing power.

- ***Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders***

Yumthang valley known for its alpine meadow and hot spring is also the home for Singbha Rhododendron Sanctuary. This region has been declared as protected area years back in order to keep the eco-fragile region protected. Government has built up Forest Guest house in Yumthang and various officials from departments have been employed to ensure law and order in the region. Government along with various NGOs, Stakeholders has been regulating carrying capacity of this region even.

TAAS, Department of Tourism, Govt. of Sikkim and the various local NGOs have already initiated measures to provide trainings to the local people, Lodge Operators, Taxi Drivers, Potters, Cooks and Yak/Horse Owners for the better promotion of sustainable tourism in the area. Infrastructural development in this region has been promoted with due consideration given to the concept of eco-tourism.

LACHUNG:

- ***Physical Setting***

Resting silently on the foot of massive rocky mountain and spread on either side of the roaring Lachung Chu, one of the tributaries of river Teesta, Lachung reminds one of an old cowboy town. At almost 2684mts in North Sikkim, a drive to Lachung is a passage through villages memorable as time, picturesque spots for stoppage, waterfalls, great views. Lachung has emerged as a tourist destination with the soaring popularity of Yumthang Valley, which is just 25kms away from Lachung. The village, spread out on either side of Lachung Chu, has managed to retain its unique culture and tradition. The Lachung Monastery on the slope opposite to the highway is a focal point of all religious functions of the local inhabitants. Sikkim with its proximity to Kangchendzonga and the fact that it lies in the direct path of the monsoon is much the wettest portion of the whole area, and has a heavy rainfall, about 50 inches even in the dry upper valley of Lachung and Lachen, increasing to 140 inches in other districts.

Lachung has moderately shallow, somewhat excessively drained, coarse loamy soils on moderately steep slope (15-30%) with gravelly loamy surface, moderate erosion and slight stoniness.

- ***Historical and Cultural background***

A Bhutia village with a unique local self-governing body called the Zumsa which substitutes the

Panchayat is a stop over destination to the tourists to Yumthang.

A perfect blend of ancient with the modern, the mass flow of tourist has not polluted the culture and tradition of the area. At least one member of the house hold are out of Lachung either as Government Officials or as students. However, once they are back to Lachung they a perfect Lachungpa following those age old customs and traditions.

- **Natural Resources**

Lachung forest is dominated by *Quercus spp.*, *Castanopsis tribuloides*, *Acer spp*, *Machilus spp* and *Cinnamomum spp* associated with shrubs *Rosa*, *Rubus*, *Berberis* and *Viburnum*. The forest can be categorized as Himalayan Wet Temperate Forests. There are a few patches of pure oak (*Quercus lamellose*) stands with understorey species such as *Eurya*, *Viburnum* and *Symplocos* and an abundance of mosses and epiphytes. Some species of Rhododendrons are also found in this region. Most of these forests are well stratified and rich. in *Q. lamellose* and *C. tribuloides* constitute the top or canopy layer with *Machilus sp*, *Acer* and *Symplocos* species forming the second layer. Below this is a shrub layer dominated by *Viburnum*, *Rosa* and *Eurya*.

The region preserves an astonishing diversity of wildlife. Yak and Horse are commonly used for transportation of goods in these areas. Blue Sheep's, Sapi (Domestic Sheep) Kiang, Nayan, Tibetan Gazelle, Snow Leopard, Tibetan Wolf, Tibetan Snowcock,

Lammergeier, Raven, Golden Eagle, Ruddy Shelduck and some species of Deer are also often observed here. A flock of birds which look like cranes are often seen here. These birds are migratory, probably coming from the northern latitudes.

- **Unique Selling Proposition**

Lachung, one of the most exquisite valleys resting amidst the snowcapped mountain crown, breathtaking waterfalls and sparkling streams. Situated at a height of 2684m, Lachung has been described as the "most picturesque village in Sikkim". This place is an ideal nature spot of Sikkim and has been recently opened to foreign travelers in an organised manner. This visit gives a rare chance to the visitor to understand Sikkim at its best and the traditions of the local people and culture. If one is looking for Shangrila-then its here.

- **Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders**

The Zhumsa, has signed an agreement with travel agents association with Sikkim (TAAS) entrusting the latter with the sole authority and responsibility of handling tourist inflow into North Sikkim. Agreement signed on May 04, 2001 lifts all restriction on movements of tourist vehicles in Lachung – Yumthang sector and also does away with the fees levied on vehicles plying on this route. The move it is learnt was forced to be made as unbridled tourist traffic generated by agents not registered

with TAAS was causing social problems in the area. TAAS has reported stepped in when tourist were meted out shoddy treatment by unscrupulous travel agents who were also causing problems with the local populace.

The association in consultation with Sikkim Department of Tourism supports advice and provides training to the local people Lodge Operators, Taxi Drivers, Potters, Cooks and Yak/Horse Owners for the better promotion of sustainable tourism in the area. There is an agreement between TAAS and the Taxi Drivers of Lachung that the vehicles would be constantly maintained and kept in good condition to meet the safety measures as per the motor vehicles regulation.

CHUNGTHANG:

- ***Physical Setting***

A major sub-divisional settlement in North Sikkim, Chungthang straddles along the confluence of Lachen Chu and Lachung Chu. It is the nodal junction for the two passes Lachen and Lachung . It lies about 95kms from the state capital and lies about 23kms and 29kms from Lachung and Lachen, respectively. Chungthang with an altitude of 1560 mts above sea level is the starting point of River Teesta.

Chungthang has moderately shallow, some-what excessively drained, coarse loamy soils on Moderately Steep slope (15-30%) with gravelly

loamy surface, moderate erosion and slight stoniness.

- ***Historical and Cultural background***

This small town is full of legends. One such legend identifies this to be the place from where the word Demazong (the Hidden Valley of Rice as Sikkim is known) first originated. The valley is believed to be blessed by Guru Rimpoche and one can visit the Holy Guru Lhedo to see the foot and the palm prints left behind by the patron saint as he rested on the rock while flying across to Tibet.

It displays a foot imprint to drive the point home. The rock also has imprints of various animals and birds. A groove in the rock is always filled with spring water and a small patch of land nearby grows paddy every year. The natures defying miracle is believed by locals to be the blessing of Guru Padmasambhav who sprinkled a handful of grain on the spot which has sprouted paddy ever since.

- ***Natural Resources***

Chungthang has Sub Tropical mixed Broad-Leaved Hill Forest. The forest is represented by *Alnus nepalensis* (Uttis), *Castanopsis* (Kattus), *Macaranga* (Malata), *Engelhardtia spicata* (Mahua), *Michelia* (Champ), *Toona ciliata* (Tooni), *Machilus* (Kawla), *Symplocos* (Kharane), *Cinnamomum* (Sinkoli) etc. Shrubs include *Rubus* (Aiselu), *Daphne* (Algeri), *Leucosceptrum* (Ghurpis) etc

These forests region of Sikkim are home to several endangered species of birds like the Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*, Great Indian Hornbill *Buceros bicornis homrai* locally called 'Hongraio', Chestnut-breasted Partridge, Black-breasted Parrotbill, Grey-crowned Prinia and Ward's Trogon.

Fauna includes Peafowl, Python, Geckos, Porcupine, Assamese Macaque and Barking Deer; a host of butterflies and other invertebrates, riverine fish, frogs and toads.

- **Unique Selling Proposition**

The unique feature of this place is the existence of a monastery and the Gurudwara at the same place with a name so unique and so rich with a message – 'Nanak Lama Gurudwara'. Revered as Gurunanak by the Sikhs and Guru Padmasambhava by the Buddhist the footprint of the rock is worshipped by the Buddhist and Sikhs as well.

- **Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders**

The focal point for the roads separating Lachung and Lachen, Chungthang has the entire basic infrastructure. A Suvidha Complex dedicated to Tourist visiting North Sikkim is maintained by 86 RCC wives welfare association which also holds a Tea/ Coffee stall, Xerox, STD/ISD/FAX and Toilets. Government has built two Bungalows maintained by the Government of Sikkim for the welfare

of visitors. A keeper has been appointed to look after the Gurudwara Complex thus maintaining its sanctity.

MANGAN :

- **Physical Setting**

Mangan, the north district headquarters is a primary business centre for the large cardamom trade. Tourism also has picked up in the town which offers a panoramic view of the eastern face of Mt. Khanchenjunga. Trekking routes have been opened recently with Mangan as a base for eastbound treks towards the beautiful Tosar Lake at the base of Chola range and northwest towards the fort of the Khanchenjunga.

Mangan has deep, somewhat excessively drained fine loamy soils on steep slope (30-50%) with moderate erosion and slight stoniness.

- **Historical and cultural background**

Mangan was founded in the year 1903 by local landlord and explorer Rinzing Namgyal as a ration outpost for British troops during Colonel Young husband's incursion into Tibet through Lachen in North Sikkim. The town has since grown to become the headquarters of North district and a primary business centre for the large cardamom trade.

- **Natural Resources**

Mangan has Sub Tropical mixed Board-Leaved Hill Forest. It contains steep sided valleys and gorges with well-drained flanking slopes. Various species of orchids, *Rhaphidophora*, wild banana, *Pandanus*, Nettles and giant bamboo are characteristic. Also, in this region it is possible to see *Alnus nepalensis* (Uttis), *Castanopsis* (Kattus), *Macaranga* (Malata), *Engelhardtia spicata* (Mahua), ***Michelia*** (Champ), *Toona ciliata* (Tooni), *Machilus* (Kawla), *Symplocos* (Kharane), *Cinnamomum* (Sinkoli) etc.

These forests region of Sikkim are home to several endangered species of birds like the Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*, Great Indian Hornbill *Buceros bicornis homrai* locally called 'Hongraio', Chestnut-breasted Partridge, Black-breasted Parrotbill, Grey-crowned Prinia and Ward's Trogon.

Fauna includes Peafowl, Python, Geckos, Porcupine, Assamese Macaque and Barking Deer; a host of butterflies and other invertebrates, riverine fish, frogs and toads.

- **Prominent Eco-spots**

Singhik:

The place offers one of the most spectacular and closest views of Mt. Khangchen-Dzonga and its ranges. For those with time a half an hour uphill takes one to the ancient Labrang Monastery suspended in time with beautiful moral paintings adorning the walls and manned by monks who look just about as old as the monastery itself. Its name literally means "The lamas dwelling". A well located Tourist Lodge provides

accommodation for visitors. The area also has a number of interesting short nature trails for 1 to 3 days along the higher ridges of the surrounding hills. One can also savour the most graceful peak in the world – Mt. Siniolchu.

- **Unique Selling Proposition**

A spectacular view from Singhik giving the most of Khanchendzonga is a view that cannot be surpassed, indeed it is a photographer's delight. Mangan is the most developed of all the places in the north and vehicles plying to other places can be easily available. Come December and you can witness the greatest of rock concerts in the state with bands coming from as far as Darjeeling and Nagaland.

- **Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders**

With tourism given the major priority in the state, Mangan is also gearing up for the development of Tourism. Trekking routes have been opened with Mangan as a base. The Mangan music festival started in 2003 is the modest effort of popularizing the town and placing it on the tourist itinerary. Music and dance is the core activity but food and game stalls add spice to the proceedings.

KABI LUNGCHOK:

- **Physical Setting**

This historical place is 17 kms from Gangtok on the North Sikkim

Highway. This is where the historic treaty of blood brotherhood between the Lepcha Chief Te-Kung-Tek and the Bhutia Chief Khey-Bum-Sa was signed ritually. The spot where the ceremony took place is marked by a memorial stone pillar amidst the cover of dense forest. The statue of Unity erected near the Thakur Bari Temple in Gangtok is in memory of this event.

Kabi Lungchok has deep, somewhat excessively drained fine loamy soils on steep slope (30-50%) with moderate erosion and slight stoniness.

- **Natural Resources**

As one meanders along the way to North Sikkim via Kabi Lungtshok, one can find *Alnus nepalensis* (Uttis), *Castanopsis* (Kattus), *Macaranga* (Malata), *Engelhardtia spicata* (Mahua), *Michelia* (Champ), *Toona ciliata* (Tooni), *Machilus* (Kawla), *Symplocos* (Kharane), *Cinnamomum* (Sinkoli) etc as the dominant species of the forest cover, characteristic of Sub Tropical mixed Broad-Leaved Hill Forest. The vibrant splashes of water fall in Kabi Lungtshok region with the whistling of various species of Birds like the Pariahkite, Crested Serpent eagle, shahin falcon, Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*, Chestnut-breasted Partridge, Black-breasted Parrotbill, Grey-crowned Prinia, Ward's Trogon and a host of butterflies and other invertebrates, riverine fish, frogs and toads fascinate the nature lovers.

- **Prominent Eco-spots**

Seven Sister Water Falls:

A prominent spot for a tourist visiting Gangtok and on the way to north Sikkim is the Seven Sister waterfalls. Seven identical falls that gushes down the rock as if from heavens, a replica of each is in fact a single stream of waterfall that finally lands near the road with a single splash. The Department of Tourism, Government of Sikkim has built a viewpoint with a cc footpath leading to a watch tower from where the fall can be captured in the camera.

- **Unique Selling Proposition**

The site has a historic significance marked by the signing of a blood brotherhood treaty between the Lepcha's and the Bhutia's, 'a symbol of unity' for the two major communities of Sikkim. One important feature is that it is easily accessible from Gangtok and therefore can be easily visited.

- **Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders**

The memorial stone pillar amidst the cover of dense forest signifying the historic treaty of blood brotherhood is preserved and maintained with ritual prayers held once a year. Trekking destinations have been identified and the Department of Tourism, Government of Sikkim is formulating measures to promote them. The Seven Sister waterfalls on the way to Gangtok is promoted as a viewpoint by the Department of Tourism with footpaths leading to a shade from where a better glimpse of the falls can be obtained.

TREKKING AROUND:

CIRCUITS

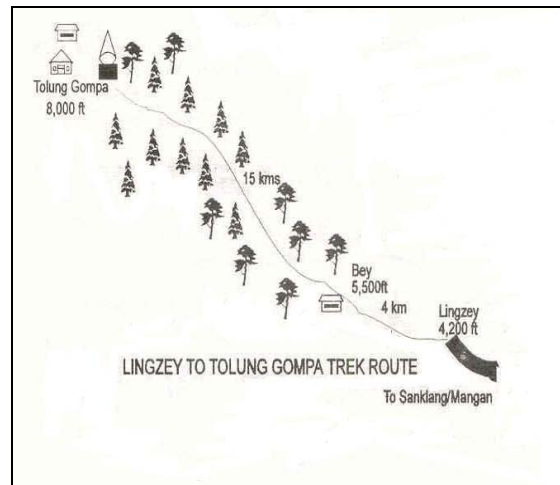
Tolung Monastery trek:

The Tolung Monastery was first built in the reign of Chogyal Chakdor Namgyal in the early part of the eighteenth century. It contains rare and valuable scriptures and artifacts of other Monasteries that were brought here for safety during the late seventeenth century and the early nineteenth century. A brass chorten within the monastery contains the ashes of one of the incarnates of Lama Latsun Chembo, the patron saint of Sikkim. All the relics are kept sealed in thirteen boxes under the supervision of the Government of Sikkim. Every three years in the month of April the relics are shown to the public in the monastery complex. The old monastery has been demolished because its structure becoming weak and a new one has been built in its place which was completed in April 1991.

Tolung at an altitude of 8,000 ft lies in the sparsely Lepcha populated Dzongu area of North Sikkim and a permit is required from the District Collectorate at Mangan to visit it. To reach Tolung monastery, one has to travel by road upto Linzey. There is a daily bus service from Gangtok to a place slightly short of Linzey. From Linzey to Tolung is a 20 kms walk and takes approximately five hours along the thundering Tolung River, which has boiling torrents at

many places, through thick forests and cardamom fields. The track itself is easy but is surrounded by precipitous cliffs from which waterfalls travel in white plumes hundreds of feet into the narrow gorges to the valley floor. Birds tweet louder to make themselves heard over the sound of the waterfalls and the rivers. Perched precariously on these cliffs here and there are the huts of the Lepchas. As one walks towards Tolung, the surrounding mountains on the top of which ice clings tenaciously even during the summer seem to close in. On reaching Tolung one can understand why the Sikkimese chose this place to keep the relics. It is so secluded and perhaps because of its high altitude it was easy to guard.

At Tolung there is a Pilgrims Hut. A further walk of about an hour along the Tolung River takes one to a religious spot called Devta Pani.



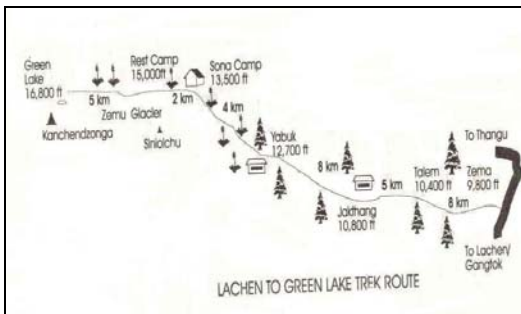
Lachen-Green Lake Trek:

The Green Lake area is fast developing into a take off point for mountaineering expeditions to the

peaks of this area. Green Lake may in the minds of many conjure up an image of a beautiful, exotic water body, but sadly this is not true. Instead of a lake there is just a small shallow pond. It seems that the lake did exist here a sometime ago: one can still see the hollow clearly but the water got drained away into the adjacent Zemu glacier that is gradually eroding the base of the landmass on which the Green Lake is situated. In fact, even in 1899 the lake had disappeared and according to Douglas W. Fresh field who writes: "The hollow enclosed between the converging moraines of the Zemu and Green Lake Glaciers has been very lately a lake, and was now a lake basin," But the absence of a lake is sufficiently compensated by the splendid view around. Just a few kilometers away, the huge mass of Kanchendzonga towers above. The peaks of Simvo are just a short distance away on the left. At the base of the Kanchendzonga is the Zemu Glacier full of a sea moraines - rocks and boulder and debris created by moving ice scrapping the mountainside - a veritable natural pulveriser. Once in a while the distant thunder of avalanches can be heard resounding in the emptiness.

From the Green Lake, the Kanchendzonga ceases to be an object of restful meditation. The apparently smooth ridges resemble the blade of a knife, and here and there harsh granite shows through the snow. The slopes are broken and jagged. Winds roar, avalanches thunder and glaciers groan. Powerful forces here create and destroy natural features just in a manner a sculptor shapes a statue and destroys it if it does not catch his fancy ,to build it afresh. The terrain here itself is in a state of flux - mountains are moulded into different shapes, streams frequently change course and lakes appear and disappear. Here man is humbled and nature reigns supreme.

The nearest vehicle point for Green Lake lies on the Lachen- Thangu road. From Lachen 6 kms by vehicle on the road to Thangu and across the river Zema takes you to point called Zema. Here you get down and start the trek taking about three days to reach Green Lake. Mules and Yaks cannot negotiate on this track, because of treacherous landslips enroute so you have to hire porters from Lachen to carry your provisions. From Zema (9,800 ft) to Talem (10,400 ft), which is a walk of about 4 hours, the route is trailless, rocky and strewn with boulders. Shattered tree trunks are piled in an inextricable confusion. You have to also cross many landslips and ford across a stream that sounds very pleasing. While wading across the stream, you cannot help thinking that *if* it were not for the rocks in its bed, it would have no song. Watch out for



shooting boulders and never attempt to cross this stretch if it is raining as shooting stones from above are inevitable. The Zemu river thunders below you and at places you have to cross almost a vertical hillside with no track at all and one wrong step can take you tumbling down into the river. At Talem which is on a flat stretch of land there are a few abandoned army bunkers. After a refreshing cup of tea you are ready to move further. From here onwards, the track becomes slushy at places - sometimes even a foot deep. So do not forget to bring along a pair of full length gum-boots. From here Jakthang takes about 3 hours to reach after crossing the Lonak La River. At Jakthang (10,800 ft), there is a 2 roomed wooden shed on stilts constructed by the Forest Department. You spend the night here.

Next day morning again sees you on the track. The walk from Jakthang to Yabuk at 12,700 ft takes about 4 hours. You have to literally wade through bushes at many places. At other places the branches of trees on both sides of the track entwine to form a cage giving you an eerie feeling that you are inside the skeletal remains of a huge prehistoric animal. The track gets muddier. The last stretch of the route to Yabuk is steep. Yabuk has a two storied 4 roomed wooden shed on a stone foundation. After resting here over a cup of tea you are ready to move again.

From Yabuk to Sona Camp the next halt is a grueling walk of about 2 hours on a boulder strewn trailless area. These boulders and stones have spilled over from the Zemu glacier. One can easily lose the way

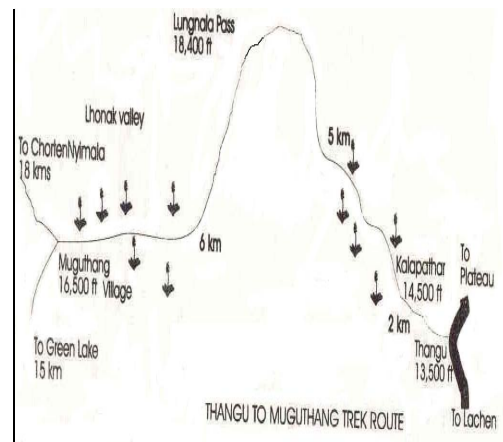
but some good souls have setup cairns, which are a few-stones stacked over one another, prominently placed over boulders to indicate the way. These cairns have many times helped save lives of travelers who have lost their way when the area is snowbound. Sona camp has a small stone hut. You rest for the night here and the sound of the river flowing just a few feet away lulls you to sleep. On the third day, you start walking early in the morning. It is still dark but the stars shine bright in the sky and cast a ghostly light on the landscape. Soon dawn starts breaking on the eastern sky. The peak of Siniolchu, just a few kilometres away across the Zemu glacier, becomes crimson as the first rays of sun strike it. It seems that God took special care when making Siniolchu. It is perfectly symmetrical and conical in shape and a sharp contrast to the shapeless masses of mountains around - a triumph of mountain architecture. Its summit a mere needle seems to pierce the fabric of the blue sky. After walking for about 2 hours from Sona Camp you are on a flat stretch of land called the Rest Camp or the Marco Polo Camp at 15,000 ft- so called because it is believed that the great adventurer Marco Polo once halted here. After catching your breath here in the rarefied air and marveling at the snowy peaks around, you start trudging again. The few small trees look almost luxurious given the harsh landscape around. The stillness is tangible- holy. To walk here is to feel the very pulse of creation. The only sounds that you hear are those of your breathing and the pounding of your heart. Instinctively, you tend to

talk in whispers lest you disturb the silence of the wilderness, About three hours of walk in this untrampled remoteness on a slight gradient track and you are at Green Lake at 16,800 ft. The walk from Sona Camp to Green lake is in fact along a moderately wide valley and the climb is only slight. You sight a couple of herds of wild Blue Sheep on the way. The Sheep are in fact greyish in colour and you think that their name is definitely a misnomer. It is said that when these sheep walk on the snow the reflection of the sky tends to give them a blue tinge. Surprisingly you may also see many birds that look like crows at Green Lake.

Thangu-Muguthang-Chorten-Nyimala-GreenLake trek:

This is an arduous trek that begins from Thangu that is 28 kms away from Lachen on the highway. It involves altitudes ranging from 14,000 ft to almost 19,000 ft. From Thangu at 13,800 ft a vehicular side road of about 5 kms takes you to Kalapathar at 14,500 ft. From this point, the steep climb begins. If you feel that you cannot walk the high altitudes, you can take a yak from Thangu. These sure footed animals are well adapted on walking on this route. Yaks meant for riding are of a cool temperament but even they can be unpredictable.. Within the next three hours, a murderous uphill walk reaches you to Lungna-la at slightly less than 19,000 ft. Panting and drained of energy, you take a long well-deserved rest. Nothing moves except the few wisps of clouds overhead. The terrain is strewn with boulders and bereft of any vegetation

except for a few enterprising Rhubarbs; plants on the almost inaccessible cliffs and crags here and there. With the moving sun, surrealistic colours; play on the rocks. It is a harsh landscape of forbidding grandeur. The Lungna-la pass itself is narrow and festooned with prayer flags. From here the view of the Lonak valley is marvelous and spellbinding. The valley is wide and flat and slightly undulating and green. The Nak-chu stream lazily meanders through it glistening white in the sun-light.



A knee wobbling downhill walk of about an hour and you are at the valley at about 17,000 ft. above you the mountains rise sharply. It is these mountains that do not permit moisture laden clouds to reach the Lonak valley which thus gets very low rainfall. However, anointed by the sparse summer rain, the valley exudes the green breath of life. You walk along the narrow Naku River stopping once in a while to drink its mineral rich water. The Alpine plants, around give a strong scent, which at this high altitude tends to give the traveller a headache. Aconites, which are said to be very poisonous ironically blossom in different colors. Jatamasi

plant which is renowned for its medicinal value and also used as an incense grows wildly here and the locals do good business selling it although it means sometimes climbing dangerous precipitous slopes. One also comes across a lot of Rhubarbs which adorn the mountainsides.

Muguthang at 16,500 ft consists of a few huts built in typical Tibetan style. It is remote and undisturbed and preserves the murmurs of an ancient life. Surprisingly, there is a lot of greenery around although this consists mainly of small scrubs. The Government has even opened a school here although there are just two students in its roll and one teacher. Herds of yaks and sheep are seen all around. It is amazing to see how these beasts sit on the snow and doze off to sleep as though the snow was a mattress of cotton. The mainstay of the livelihood of this place are in fact these animals-the yaks for their milk, cheese, butter, meat and skin and the sheep for their wool- making life almost self supporting here. These products are highly in demand and the profits are good. Even the dropping of the yaks finds good use as fuel. The yak dung is patted into cakes and stuck to the stone walls of the huts and let to dry - in the same manner as cow dung is dried in the villages in the plains.

. A peculiar feature of the people, who are semi-nomadic, is that during winters when Muguthang becomes snowbound, they move their herds to higher altitudes instead coming down. There is a rationale behind this - at most of high altitude areas the winds blow stronger and this prevents the snow from settling

down at one place thus leaving exposed the ground and vegetation which the yaks feed on.

An event which everybody looks forward to in Muguthang is the annual Yak race which takes place during the festival of Drukpa Tseshi. A further five hours walk on the Lonak valley from Muguthang takes you to wind-beaten Janak at 18, 000ft where the herders move their yaks during winter. From Janak a few hours walk ahead and you are at Chorten Nyimala- a pass that opens into Tibet. From Muguthang, it is also possible to reach the Green Lake Base Camp. It involves a journey of five hours to reach Thechala and then a further five hours to Green Lake. As yaks can ply on this route, mountaineering expeditions using the Green Lake Base Camp, to attempt peaks in this area prefer to send their equipment this way.

On the map this land may belong to the Government but this rolling wilderness seems an inheritance of the nomads who stay here. They can pitch their tents anywhere, graze their yaks anywhere - there are no restrictions at all.

Zadong-Donkiala pass-Cholamu Trek:

From Yumthang the road goes a further 30 kilometres via Yumey Samdong to a place called Zadong where the road ends. Zadong is at an altitude of about 15,500ft. From here to Cholamu Lake via the Donkiala pass takes about 4 hours for the average walker. You start walking along the narrow Donkiachu. river. The climb is moderate but the progress is relatively slow because of

rarefied air. After walking about 2 hours, the Donkiala pass becomes visible. It looks quite near but takes a full hour to reach. You come across two small muddy lakes from which the river Donkiachu originates and flows into the Lachung valley. The last stretch of 100 metres to Donkiala pass is very steep and involves, almost a vertical climb. Your body suddenly seems to weigh more than a ton and the legs almost crumble as the stress caused by rarefied air begins to take effect. Gasping and panting for air and feeling like a fish out of water, you finally reach the pass. But all your tiredness vanishes at the sight of the spectacular scenery around. Donkiala pass at an altitude of 18,500 ft separates the Lachen valley from the Lachung valley and Hooker in his book *The Himalayan Journal* has rated it the most treacherous passes he ever traversed. Above the Donkiala pass spires of peaks rise their gloomy granite brightened by snow. The peak of Paunhri is silhouetted against the eastern sky. From the Donkiala pass the view of the Tibetan plateau - the Roof of the World- below you is marvellous. The plateau is flat as far as the eye can see but is broken here and there by small hillocks. Through powerful binoculars one can see the Tarksing Monastery and the town of Geru in the Tibetan side. About 1,000 ft below is the lake of Cholamu and many other smaller lakes that look like emeralds -relics of the last ice age. Slightly towards the west Teesta meanders and breaks into many channels enclosing small oases of green vegetation. Although it is late autumn, many of the streams already lie frozen awaiting spring.

A knee wobbling downhill walk of another one hour takes you to the Cholamu lake which is on the plateau that juts into Sikkim from Tibet. From this moderately sized lake, the Teesta river takes birth as a trickle, hardly a foot wide - the feeble beginning notes of which would transform to a thunder few kilometers downstream. The water in the lake flirts with ice before getting frozen in winter. The reflection of the surrounding mountains doubles its beauty. Everything looks so prehistoric that you almost expect to see a dinosaur amble by. Khangchung Tso Lake at the base of the glacier Tista Khanste which also feeds the river Teesta is considered as the source of the River Teesta by many.

The plateau preserves an astonishing diversity of wildlife. A flock of birds which look like cranes swim on the placid ice-cold water of Cholamu. These birds are migratory probably coming from the northern latitudes. A herd of Tibetan wild asses or kiangs as they are locally called graze on the other end of the lake.

As there is a dearth of water on the Tibetan side, many animals cross over the border towards the Cholarnu Lake. Some of them get killed in the minefields. The army personnel have to push back the yaks from the other side that attempt to enter Sikkim for water. The plateau is teeming with mannots (bigmice), woolly hares and foxes. Once in a while a flock of snow finches (birds) fly overhead. Although deprived of any vegetation except sparsely growing scrubs, the plateau offers stark beauty unparalleled perhaps anywhere in the world. The

landscape here is similar to the fiery desert while the climate is that of the Tundras. Violent winds rage their force broken by neither trees nor scrubs. Howling with such ferocity, these winds also sweep snow from the grass uncovering it for the yaks. The air is so rarefied and clear that the stars shine bright enough in the moonless sky to cast faint shadows and cause the Snowclad Mountains around to glisten eerily.

Herds of yaks graze on the sparse vegetation and the few herders here make their livelihood by selling yak products. These herders follow lifestyles unchanged through the centuries. For hardwork and acceptance of nature's sway, this moody and elemental place offers the herders in return the splendor of scenery. For a man from the city, staying in such a hostile environment would be unthinkable. But wouldn't a yak herder also find the city hostile, with its high decibel ear splitting noises and pollution that makes the air almost unbreathable ? Such contemporary troubles like nuclear explosions and the depletion of the ozone layer seem deceptively far away. But these herdsmen are affected apparently in terms of increased Ultra-violet radiation and acid rain because of the avarice of their urban brothers. The average altitude of the plateau is 17,500 ft but winds which instantly blow here day and night thwart ice from completely covering the around thus leaving the vegetation exposed. It is because of this reason that yaks do not require to be moved down to lower altitudes during winters.



SOUTH District

South district has an area of about 750 km. square with latitude ranging from 27:04:46 N – 27:32:04 N and longitude ranging from 88 :26:25 E – 88:55:24 E. Buddhism is widely practiced in the area and the district is dotted with monasteries that propagate Buddhist art, culture and religion. Hindus, Muslims, Christians are other religions which are practiced. Some of the oldest monasteries of Sikkim are located here and a 108 ft high image of Guru Padmashambhava the patron saint of Sikkim, is near the district headquarters at Namchi. Adventure Trekking is being promoted in a big way here with a base camp being set up at Ravangla for treks up to Maenam and Tendong Hill, the root of Lepcha folklore. One can also indulge in mountain biking and Nature Trails here. Be it handicrafts or profusion of orchids, primulas and rhododendrons or snow-capped mountain view all are there for the tourists to savour in South District. Be it a trekker, nature's admirer, bird watcher or a peace seeker, South District will provide you all. South district has a population of about 1, 31,506.



SOUTH SIKKIM

NAMCHI:

- **Physical Setting**

Namchi, meaning Sky-High, nestled among the hills at an elevation of 5500ft. commands panoramic view of the snow-capped mountains and cast stretches of valley. It is also the Head Quarter of the South district. Anyone visiting West Sikkim has to traverse through the South District before entering the West. The area is fast developing into a tourist destination with its immense potential for all round tourist activities. It is about 78 kms form Gangtok and 100 kms from Siliguri. Namchi has moderately shallow, somewhat excessively drained course – loamy soils a steep sloop (30-50%) with loamy surface, moderate erosion and moderate stoniness.

- **Natural Resources**

Namchi (1723m) forest is dominated by *Michelia* (Champ), *Toona ciliata* (Tooni), *Alnus nepalensis* (Uttis), *Engelhardtia spicata* (Mahua), *Machilus* (Kawla), *Castanopsis* (Kattus), *Macaranga* (Malata), *Symplocos* (Kharane), *Cinnamomum* (Sinkoli) etc. There are a few patches of pure oak (*Quercus lamellosa*) stands with understorey species such as *Eurya*, *Viburnum* and *Symplocos* and an abundance of mosses and epiphytes. The region here has Sub Tropical mixed Broad-Leaved Hill Forest.

This area is also rich in birds including the Rusty-bellied and Lesser Shortwings, Kalij and Satyr Tragopan; reptiles like Japalura lizards, Cobra, Krait and Himalayan Pit Viper; Himalayan Bullfrog; butterflies and leeches. *Eupatorium* is a major weed competing out *Artemesia* and other secondary growth. Large Cardamom planted in forest patches, are dominant features of the landscape as much as the naturalized exotic *Cryptomeria japonica* patches

This region is occupied by the typical hilly region butterflies. The *Lycaenidae* and *Hesperiidae* are highly diversified. Many of the type specimens of *Hesperiids* have been collected from Sikkim. The *Nymphalids* and *Danaids* are abundant in this region. They include butterflies like the Barons, Pansies, Sailers, Sergeants, Tigers, Crows etc. These butterflies have affinity to Oriental fauna. The Swallowtails also abound this region. *Pieridae* is

represented by Gulls, Puffms, Jezebels and Orangetips.

- **Prominent Eco-spots**

Tshamgang Park (Rock garden):

Situated at around 4 km above Namchi, just below the towering structure of Guru Padmasambhava on the Namchi-Gangtok State Highway lies this beautiful garden. This place usually serves as a picnic spot for the tourist. One can also get a panoramic view of Mount Khanchendzonga, Pelling, Pemayangtse, Gyalshing and Darjeeling. This place is specially a hit with the children because of its recreational amenities.

Samdruptse:

Sikkim's homage to its patron saint Guru Padmasambhava is at Samdruptse 8 kms from Namchi and it is already attracting visitors by hundreds. The 135 ft. tall statue of Guru Rimpoche, which can be seen from west and south Sikkim and even as far as from Darjeeling is a marvel of architecture. It also offers a panoramic view of Mt. Kanchendzonga, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and the eastern border of Nepal. And it is from these places, along with West Bengal and Bhutan that hordes of religious tourists come here everyday. The statue, a lavish thanks giving to Sikkim's patrons saint who blessed the land, stands tall over the Samdruptse hill and sparkles in the winter sun attracting everyone's attention. The project was brought to its present stage at the cost of Rs. 6.76 cores. The

foundation stone of the Rs 8 cores projects was laid in 1997 by the Dalai Lama, who took a pony ride upto the site. Now a road leads to the site.

The Namchi Mahotsav:

A 5 day long tourism and cultural festival held at Namchi is a recently started phenomenon yet already popular with the tourists. The main attractions are traditional food stalls, traditional fashion shows, cultural shows and folk night where one gets to see the fast vanishing ethnic dance forms like dohori, sangini, balan and maruni etc. Indeed it is a modest effort to preserve the Sikkimese culture and showcase them through varieties of danceforms, cuisine, artifacts etc.

Flower festival at Namchi:

Flower exhibitions are organized as an annual feature at Namchi during the month of February. The venue is at Children's park, Namchi (South Sikkim). Rare species of orchids in a riot of colours is indeed something to witness.

- ***Unique Selling Proposition***

Namchi happens to be a virgin paradise which has ample places that can be explored. The fact that this low profile welkin is not frequented by mass tourist makes it an ideal destination for visitors who seek solitude and serenity from the constant hustle and bustle of their daily lives in their polluted metros. Furthermore, the strategic location commanded by this place makes it

convenient for the visitors to visit other places of tourist interest much easier. Places like Pelling, Barsey, Gangtok, Kalimpong and Darjeeling lies in close proximity. In addition to this, the infrastructure available is second to none.

- ***Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders***

The government has identified the potential of this place as a religious tourism destination, more so after the installation of the towering statue of Guru Rimpochee (Guru Padmasambhava) at Samdruptse near Namchi. Eco parks like Tendong Biodiversity Park and Rock Garden have been created to preserve the flora and fauna in the locality. Awareness programmes are conducted at regular intervals to sensitize the local populace about environmental issues. Similarly various NGO's and local bodies actively participate in plantation drives and cleanliness drives. DRISHTI, a Namchi based Non Governmental Organization has taken up projects such as 'Green Namchi', where elaborate plantation drives are conducted throughout the locality. Other initiatives include proper garbage disposal, environment education through quiz competition, debates, seminars etc.

RAVANGLA:

- ***Physical Setting***

This picturesque town in the backdrop of Mt.Khanchendzonga with horses grazing on the grassy

stretches reminds one of a western countryside. At the base of Menam Hill Ravangla is a transit to various tourist destinations in South and West Sikkim. It is also and upcoming tourist spot and transit point for trekkers to Menam Hill and Borong. There are accommodation facilities and numerous short nature trails. A trek down to the sacred cave "Shar Chok Bephu", one of the holiest caves in Sikkim, would be a memorable experience. Ravangla has deep somewhat excessively drained loamy skeletal soils on steep slope (30-50%) with gravelly loamy surface, severe erosion and moderate stoniness;

- **Natural Resources**

Ravangla has Himalayan Wet Temperate Forests, which is dominated by *Quercus* (Oak), *Castanopsis* (Kattus), *Acer* (Kapasi), *Juglans* (Okhar), *Machilus* (Kawla), *Michelia* (Champ), *Cinnamomum* (Sinkoli) associated with shrubs *Rosa* (Rose), *Rubus* (Aiselu), *Berberis* (Chutro), and *Viburnum*(Asare). There are a few patches of pure oak (*Quercus lamellose*) stands with undestroyed species such as *Eurya*, *Viburnum* and *Symplocos* and an abundance of mosses and epiphytes. Most of these forests are well stratified and rich. *Q. lamellose* and *C. tribuloides* constitute the top or canopy layer with *Machilus sp*, *Acer* and *Symplocos* species forming the second layer. Below this is a shrub layer dominated by *Viburnum*, *Rosa* and *Eurya*

Maenam Wildlife Sanctuary is located above the town of Ravangla

and covers an area of about 36.34 sq km with its highest point being at Maenam. This sanctuary located at an altitude of about 10,600 ft above sea level shelters Red Panda, Goral, Serow, Barking Deer, Marbled-Cat, Leopard-Cat, Civet-Cats, Blood Pheasant, Common Hill Partridge, Magpies, Black Eagle, Blue necked Pitta, Sunbirds and many other animals of the temperate forest.

Ravangla itself has scrub forest which attracts a rich variety of Himalayan birds. Verditer Flycatchers, Blue-fronted Redstarts, Grey Bush chats, Dark-throated Thrush, Blue-whistling Thrush, Green-backed Tit and White-browed Fantails are very common and cannot be missed. The forests around Ravangla resound with the unmistakable calls of Laughing thrushes, Babblers, Cuckoos and Hill Partridge. The rare Satyr Tragopan makes Maenam a home and the lucky can hear its breeding call from the higher reaches of Ravangla.

- **Prominent Eco-spots**

Maenam Hill

Maenam, 12 km Uphill trek from Ravangla is a traditional meditation site for the monks. It is also a vantage location for a spectacular view of the mountains at sunrise. Maenam hilltop is at 10,600 ft is 3 km through the Maenam wildlife Sanctuary teeming with *Magnolia* *Rhododendron* and small bamboos. The forest is a riot of colors during spring (March – April). A Natural habitat of the Red Panda, Himalayan

Black Bear and many species of deer. This wild life Sanctuary lives on the motto of leaving only footprint and taking back only *photographs and Sweet memories*. Flowers clamor over trees while mosses, fern and creepers more reckless, and ambitions climb the soaring trunks. A small hermitage containing the image of Guru Padmasambhava nestles here.

A bird's eye view

The view from the Maenam summit is the picturesque town of Ravangla that lies sleeping far below and through the mountains one can see the rolling plains of west –Bengal lazily stretching out with clouds resting on them. As the sun rises, these screen of clouds is pulled away to show the Khangchendzonga range.

Bhaledunga

Another half an hour walk on the same ridge takes you to Bhaledunga a peculiar looking cliff that resembles the head of a cock (Bhale in local language). This distinctive looking feature can be seen from miles away and during the olden days it was used as a guiding landmark for travelers.

A bird's eye view

From the top of this cliff, there is a vertical fall of five to six thousand feet and one needs a strong heart to be able to look down from here. Far down, one can see river Teesta gurgling through the valley.

Shar- chok Bé Phug:

Believed to be the first cave to be blessed by the revered Guru Padmasambhava, Shar-chok Bé Phug, lies between the hillocks of Tendong and Maenam, 5 kms away from the southern town of Ravangla. It is a vast cavern, about a quarter of a mile in length, with a height varying from five feet to two hundred feet. The dark channels have to be lighted with torches as people come here to worship the spirits of the cave, which is said to be associated with the 'God of Purification'.

Shar- chok Bé Phug is also known as the abode of the 'Peaceful White Deity'. It has an infinite number of self-arisen figures. Above the entrance of the cave, inscriptions in a codified language can be seen. Upon entering the cave, one can see, on the right, the figures of 42 peaceful deities, and on the left, the figures of 69 wrathful deities. In the threshold, lies the seat occupied by Guru Padmasambhava. After walking for a few meters one can see a figure of a demon emitting elixir of life from her heart. As you move ahead, there is a shrine where the deities are said to reside.

On the right side of the cave, one sees self-arisen figure of Garuda (a winged deity), which when seen by local spirits, will disappear and depart to their own abode. Above it resides Guru Padmasambhava.

• *Unique Selling Proposition*

Ravangla town and the surrounding villages is an ideal destination to experience the rich cultural & natural heritage of Sikkim. This place is placed in the cradle of nature's unblemished beauty where every

detail of the topography exudes heavenly charm and magnificence. A unique natural spa, the first of its kind ever, for those who are not pampered still, rejuvenates your senses, and feels the arcave beauty of nature working on you.

- ***Ecotourism initiatives taken up by theGovernment, NGO, Stakeholders***

The concept of home stay for tourists wherein a tourist gets a community based initiative has been started by the Ravangla Tourism Development Committee (RTDC) a local NGO formed by the people of Ravangla to develop and promote responsible tourism in the area. The Village Home Stays are located in villages around Ravangla in South Sikkim. The initiative is in conjunction with Sikkim Development Foundation with support from AUSAID, AFAP and KEEP.

Sikkim Development Foundation and NGO's like ECOSS often conduct training program for the local guides of Ravangla. The main objective of the training program is to improve the skills of the guides, and impart basic knowledge on interpretation of flora and fauna, monasteries and bird watching and develop responsible tourism practices. It involves intensive classes and field based activities like trekking, bird watching etc.

TENDONG HILL:

- ***Physical Setting***

Above Damthang, overlooking South District headquarter town Namchi, there is a small flat stretch of land at an altitude of 8,530 ft surrounded by lush green ancient forest which is popularly known as the Tendong Hill. From other parts of Sikkim Tendong Hill looks like a volcano - and legend has it that it was in fact once an active volcano which is now dormant.

- ***Historical and Cultural background***

“Tendong Lho Rum Faat” or the worship of Mount Tendong is one of the oldest festivals of the Lepchas. Legends hold that in the wake of a heavy earthquake which damaged the said lakes, Parilbu (king serpent) and Tutfo guided the two new rivers up to their confluence at Pozok(New Peshok) unfortunately they (Teesta and Rangit)flooded the entire Mayel Lyang (the then Sikkim)The Lepcha's residing near Mt. Tendong to save their lives climbed up to its peak and prayed to It-Bu-Rum(The almighty god).The legend further tells that a Kohomfo (Partridge bird)appeared there and offered its prayer with Mongcheebep (the brewed millet)and another earthquake shook the whole earth creating several high mountains around the northern zone of Mayel Lyang which forced the flooded water to flow southwards thus saving the Lepcha's from great deluge. Hence the Lepcha's began to observe the 'Tendong Lho Rum Faat'(worship of Mt Tendong from that time. During this day the

Bongthings (Lepcha priest) offers their prayers at the summit of Mount Tendong for peace, protection from natural calamities and long life of all beings.

In spring when the Rhododendrons and Magnolias are in full bloom the locals celebrate Ramnavami (Chaitey Dasai). On this day villagers of all faiths congregate at the summit of Mount Tendong to offer their prayers at the Tendong Monastery.

- **Natural Resources**

The Tendong Forests are classified under the Middle Hill Forest (Champion's type 7B/C1). The main species in the upper storey are: Kattus, Bulk, Champ, Ghoge Champ, Kaulo, Guransh, Chimal, Kapase, Angeri, Phunche, Mahuwa, Sinkauli, Tarsingh, Saur, Uttis, Khanakpa, Ambake, Pipli etc. In the middle storey Lali, Jhingni, Malata, Kharane, Kholme etc with an undergrowth of Lise, Ghurpis, Malingo, Ainselu and Asare are present.

Leopard is the top carnivore; others include Himalayan Yellow Throated Marten, Common Otter, Himalayan Palm Civet, Leopard Cat, Himalayan Black Bear, Wild Boar, Red Panda, Barking Deer, Goral, Assamese Macaque etc.

Crestless Porcupine, Rufose Tailed Hare, Chinese Pangolin, Parti-Coloured Flying Squirrel, Hoary-bellied Squirrel, Orange-Bellied Squirrel and Shrew are also present.

- **State Bio-diversity park:**

At Tendong, on the way to Gangtok is the State bio-diversity park known

for its collection of various species of plants. Added to it, the ambience can itself be a major attraction. A log house comprises the main office and there are hut sheds on a grassy stretch. The gate built up of piling pieces of small stones is a craftsmen's excellence. An ideal destination to relax enroute Gangtok.

- **Unique Selling Proposition**

The verdant hill of Tendong commands a spectacular bird's eye view of rivers Teesta and Rangit criss-crossing, the eastern and western part of Sikkim and confluencing at Triveni near the township of Teesta. The other areas which can be seen from this hillock include the Kalimpong Subdivision, the Darjeeling Hills, as well as the plains of Siliguri and Dooars.

- **A bird's eye view**

Tendong at an altitude of 8,500 ft is situated on a small plateau on top of the mountain. Perhaps no other place in Sikkim offers a better view of the mountain ranges in the state than Tendong- it is like sitting in the centre of a huge amphitheatre. On the east one can see the full Chola Range, on the west the Singalila range and the towering Kanchendzonga. In the north-east can be seen the Gurudongmar peak with other mountains. Darjeeling, Gyalshing, Nathula, a part of Gangtok and the rolling plains of Siliguri can be seen from here. Both the sunrise and sunset are breathtaking from Tendong. From other parts of Sikkim Tendong looks like a volcano- and legend has it that

it was in fact once an active volcano which is now dormant. Two small one-room monasteries exist here-one quite old and in almost ruins and the other a newly constructed one. A three storied observation tower on the pattern of Tiger Hill, Darjeeling has been constructed for the convenience of tourists.

- ***Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders***

In the past the local community did not have a sense of ownership with the Tendong Nature Reserve, most of which is a Reserve Forest. This led to a unsustainable utilization of natural resources. Consequently the vegetation composition in the Tendong Nature Reserve was also altered with the valuable timber trees namely *Michelia excelsa* (Rani Champ) and *Cinnamomum cecidodaphne* (Malagiri) almost becoming locally extinct. Also the important climax vegetation of Chestnut and Oak, which are the water reservoirs have been increasingly, replaced by colonizers like *Symplocos theifolia* (Kharane) and *Viburnum spp* (Asare). Consequently the hydrological balance was also adversely affected. Streams that were earlier perennial started slowly becoming seasonal. Consequently in the year 2000 the Forest Department in order to reverse this trend initiated institution building under the Joint Forest Management Programme by forming the Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMC) around the Tendong Nature Reserve. In 2001 the cattle sheds (Goth) were also

phased out in a participatory manner from within the Tendong Nature Reserve. Then in 2002, SPSS launched the Pani Panchayat Programme for the conservation of the water sources in Tendong. Joint awareness programmes were organized during Ramnavami celebrations and the Guru Padmasambhava Smriti van was created by the Forest Department. Some initiatives led by SPSS (Sikkim Parayavaran Samrakshan Sangh) for the conservation of the Tendong Forest are:-

1. Awareness programs at grassroot level to convince the villagers regarding long term benefits of conservation of the Tendong Forest.
2. Environmental Education program for the school children.
3. Formation and strengthening of the Pani-panchayats in the villages adjoining to Tendong. Branches of SPSS have also been opened in the adjoining villages also strengthening the local NGO's, clubs and active youth.
4. Conservation of the water sources and lakes by carrying out plantation activities and soil and moisture conservation works
5. Lobbying to ban illicit felling of trees, forest encroachment and grazing.
6. Transfer of low cost rural technology livelihoods and hence reduce dependence on forests.

RALANG/BORONG:

- ***Physical Setting***

Facing the snow-capped mountains is Borong, motorable from Ravangla

or a trek via Maenam. A picturesque village with beautiful landscape and magnificent view is also host to the hot spring "Borong Tsa-Chu". The trek trail, originating from Namchi or Damthang to Tendong-Ravangla-Maenam-Borong (5 to 6 days) is one of the most interesting trails scaling the hill tops along the route. Ralang/Borong has deep well drained, fine-loamy soils on steep slope (30-50%) with loamy surface, moderate erosion and slight stoniness.

- **Historical and Cultural Background**

Ralang and Borong are also famous for its old monasteries which were built in 1768 AD and legend has it that the 9th Karmapa Head of Kagyupa sect blessed the site of the monasteries with grains of rice thrown from Tibet. Pang Lhabsol, that is the worship of Mount. Khangchendzonga and Kagyat that is mask dances are held here. Palchen choeling Monastic Institute, one of the biggest of monasteries in Sikkim was built by the 12th Gyaltsab Rimpochee and completed in 1995. The sacred Maha kala dance is held every year in November.

- **Natural Resources**

This region boast for its rich biodiversity, the forest can be classified as Sub Tropical mixed Board-Leaved Hill Forest. Wandering along the midst of forest one can see *Alnus nepalensis* (Uttis), *Castanopsis* (Kattus), *Macaranga* (Malata), *Engelhardtia spicata* (Mahua), *Michelia* (Champ), *Toona*

ciliata (Tooni), *Machilus* (Kawla), *Symplocos* (Kharane), *Cinnamomum* (Sinkoli) etc. interspersed with shrubs like *Rubus* (Aiselu), *Daphne* (Algeri), *Leucosceptum* (Ghurpis) etc. Ralang and Borong forest is further beautified with colorful Butterflies like Hill jezebel (*Delias bellanona ithiela*), Lesser punch, (*Dodena dipaea*) Mixed punch (*Dodena ovida ovida*) Common evening brown (*Melanitis leda isimene*), Dark evening brown (*Melantis pheduma bela*), Common forester (*Lethe isana dinarbas*), Moeller's silver fork (*Zoophoessa moelleri*), Lilac fork (*Zoophoessa Sura*), Lilane bush brown (*Mycalsis fransisca Santana*), Bright eye bush brown (*Mycalsis nicata*) etc.

These areas is also heaven for Ornithologist with good varieties of Laughingthrushes and frequent sightings of White-crested, Chestnut-crowned, Striated and Blue-winged Laughingthrushes. Red-faced Liochicla etc. Small birds like Golden-spectacled and Whistler's Warbler, Fulvettas, Coal Tit, Wren Babblers etc are also found here.

- **Prominent Eco-spots**

Ralang / Borong Cha-chu:

Tsa-Chu or hot sulphur springs at Ralang & Borong are traditional winter spas visited by the locals as well as by people from far away Bhutan and Nepal. Visitors spend a week or more dipped in these springs that have medicinal properties believed to cure many skin & other ailments of joints, bones & muscles. Ralang Cha-chu can be

reached after a 1 hr. downhill walk to the Rangit valley from the Ralang monastery. Borong Cha-chu is a 7 km drive from Ralang and a further 45 min walk down hill. Both these hot springs are located along the banks of the Rangit River and can be visited from December to February. For overnight stays temporary huts are available at nominal rates but all bedding and cooking utensils have to be carried along. During the hot spring season small shops selling basic vegetables & provisions are setup and the local villagers sell dairy products.

- ***Unique Selling Proposition***

This picturesque village with beautiful landscape and magnificent view of landmarks around is also host to the hot spring "Borong Tsa-Chu" and "Ralang Tsa-Chu". This Hot springs with its great medicinal significance has been the tremendous draw for the local visitors as well as those coming from Nepal and Bhutan. Of all the Hot Springs that exist in Sikkim "Borong Tsa – Chu" is believed to be the hottest.

- ***Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders***

Various local communities, NGO's, Stakeholders participate towards conserving this hostile place through consideration to cleanliness and other regulatory measures to maintain the sanctity of the Tsa – Chu. As the seasons commences, various organisation take part in cleanliness drives and builds up huts

for the convenience of visitors which are given on a rental basis at nominal rates but all bedding and cooking utensils have to be carried along. During the hot spring seasons small shops selling basic vegetable and provision are set up and the local villager's dairy products. People also see to it that the hot water coming out of spring gets collected, enough to soak oneself covering the body to cure skin diseases. Apart from its medicinal value the place also has a religious significance which has been maintained by the government through issuing penalty measures for any faulty action taken thereby trying to keep the negative impact as low as possible.

KEWZING

- ***Physical Setting***

A typical quiet Bhutia village, Kewzing or Kheozing is located 8 km from Ravangla against the backdrop of a magnificent view of the mountains - an ideal place to experience rural life in Sikkim. Kewzing has an altitude of around 2076 m above sea level. Kewzing has deep somewhat excessively drained loamy skeletal soils on steep slope (30-50%) with gravelly loamy surface, severe erosion and moderate stoniness.

- ***Natural Resources***

Kewzing forest can be classified as Himalayan Wet Temperate Forests which is dominated by Quercus (Oak), Castanopsis (Kattus), Acer (Kapasi), Juglans (Okhar), Machilus (Kawla), Michelia (Champ),

Cinnamomum (Sinkoli) associated with Rosa (Rose), Rubus (Aiselu), Berberis (Chutro), Viburnum (Asare) etc. Moss, Ferns, Lichens and other epiphytes are found abundantly here. There are a few patches of pure oak (Quercus lamellosa) stands with undestroyed species such as Eurya, Viburnum and Symplocos and an abundance of mosses and epiphytes.

The dense forests of Kewzing are the habitat for a number of mammals; among the more commonly found animals are red goral, Red Panda, musk deer, house sparrow, jungle cat, mongoose, squirrels and kites. The variation in climate and abrupt telescoping of terrain is responsible for the great variety and numerical abundance of a resident bird life. Some of the important birds found in this region are the red jungle fowl, the kalij pheasant, the hill partridge and quails of various qualities. Birds and Butterflies of exceptional beauty and variety are a great attraction for visitors and bird watchers. Among the most commonly found are cuckoo, wood pecker, horn bill and pittas.

This region has butterfly fauna typical of temperate zones and has affinity to the Palaearctic fauna. The nymphalids which are found in this region are the Admirals, Tortoiseshells, Silverstripes and Silverspots. Hardly any danaiids except for the Chestnut Tiger occur in this region. Lycaenids mostly consist of the subfamilies Lycaeninae, Theclinae and Polyommatainae- Hairstreaks,

Sapphires, Hedge Blues etc. Lybithinae occurs mostly in this zone. Punches and Judies are also seen. But the most diversified is the subfamily Satyrinae, particularly the tribes Lethini and Satyrini. Foresters, Walls, Golden and Silver Forks are numerous. As many as 36 species of tribe Lethini are found in Sikkim. Of the Swallowtails very few larger butterflies occur in this region and include the Krishna and Blue Peacocks.

- ***Unique Selling Proposition***

The silence as if in a quiet slumber far from the hustle and bustle of the city life, the place is an ideal escapade from the urban clusters. Participating in the daily or seasonal chores of the family or pursuing special interests in birds, plants, flowers etc or even just to spend a few days of relaxation and feel what it is like to live the life of a Sikkimese villager is what Kewzing village is.

- ***Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders***

The Kewzing Home Stay is a community based initiative by the Kewzing Tourism Development Committee (KTDC), a local NGO formed by the people of Kewzing to develop and promote responsible tourism in the area. The initiative is in conjunction with Sikkim Development Foundation with support from Ausaid, AFAP and KEEP. KTDC conducts packaged visit to Kewzing which include accommodation, meals, Guide, Cultural activities. Kewzing Village

Home Stay invites you to be a guest of a local family and experience the warmth of Sikkimese hospitality. The accommodation is simple but neat and comfortable and wholesome local food is served from the family kitchen giving the feeling of what it is like to live the life of a Sikkimese Villager.

A training center has been setup by the government to keep alive the tradition of Sikkimese Handicraft and handloom.

TEMI TEA GARDEN:

- ***Physical Setting***

Established only in 1965, Temi Tea Estate is built over the remains of a forestry and nursery. Its landmark, an old British bungalow, was built by Scottish missionaries in the early 1900's and used to serve as a leprosy hospital but was later acquired by the state. The produce from this garden has a rare combination of liquor and flavor and fetches some of the highest rates offered in the international markets. Tea Garden has moderately shallow, somewhat excessively drained course – loamy soils a steep sloop (30-50%) with loamy surface, moderate erosion and moderate stoniness..

- ***Natural Resources***

Temi tea Garden has Sub Tropical mixed Broad-Leaved Hill Forest, dominated by *Alnus nepalensis* (Uttis), *Castanopsis* (Kattus), *Macaranga* (Malata), *Engelhardtia spicata* (Mahua), *Michelia* (Champ), *Toona ciliata* (Tooni), *Machilus*

(Kawla), *Symplocos* (Kharane), *Cinnamomum* (Sinkoli) etc. Shrubs include *Rubus* (Aiselu), *Daphne* (Algeri), *Leucosceptrum* (Ghurpis) etc.

This area is also rich in birds including the Rusty-bellied and Lesser Shortwings, Kalij and Satyr Tragopan; reptiles like Japalura lizards, Cobra, Krait and Himalayan Pit Viper; Himalayan Bullfrog; butterflies and leeches. *Eupatorium* is a major weed competing out *Artemisia* and other secondary growth. Large Cardamom planted in forest patches and a tea estate, are dominant features of the landscape as much as the naturalized exotic *Cryptomeria japonica* patches.

- ***Unique Selling Proposition***

The tea garden is spread out on a gently hill slope originating from the Tendong Hill and provides a magnificent view of the surrounding villages. The Temi tea garden is the house of 'Temi-Tea' a popular brand known for its rich aroma and taste-a must to visit place for the tea lovers. Temi's tender tea bushes are in their prime today fetching record prices in the London tea market and considered by many to be one of the best in the world. It is also the one and only tea estate existing in the State produces one of the top quality teas in the international market. The visit to Temi offers one an opportunity to see the plucking of the tea leaves in the garden also to observe the processing of tea in the factory. The meandering journey amidst the greenery of tea plantation and the night in an old British built

bungalow located just below the tea garden could be an enthralling experience of linking the past to the present

A visit to the garden, enroute Tendong Hill could be a rewarding +experience for those who want to combine nature and culture. The romantic view of the valleys which change colour with the passing day keeps a lover wandering of her beloved in the distant village.

- ***Ecotourism initiatives taken up by the Government, NGO, Stakeholders***

An Old British Bungalow is often renovated, pertaining its architectural values. And today serves as a guest house for tourist. Plantation works are carried out through cooperative effort of government and local NGO's an initiation towards beautifying the Garden. Planting of Pine (Dhupi) and Prunes (Cherry) alternatively besides the road ways adds to the delight of joy riders.

JORETHANG:

The business hub of the South, Jorethang is famous for Maghe Mela and magnificently styled Akar bridge. This also forms the border between Sikkim and West Bengal. Jorethang has yet to make a mark in the tourism scenario of the state however it is an important stopping point for the passengers to Pelling, Darjeeling, Namchi, Siliguri and Gangtok. To serve the purpose of a overnight stay a night in the newly constructed P.W.D Guesthouse at Karfectar is a memorable

experience. It has also been projected to build a swimming pool and a golf course in the vicinity. No doubt will then be Jorethang a winter retreat. Moreover the river can be utilized for rafting and angling especially during winters. An Eco-tourism park at Chirbirey, few kilometers from Jorethang with collection of varied species of plants is fast turning into a picnic spot for the nearby villages and Rolu mandir enroute Gangtok is an important pilgrim destination.

TREKKING CIRCUITS AROUND:

Ravangla to Meanam Bhaledunga Trek

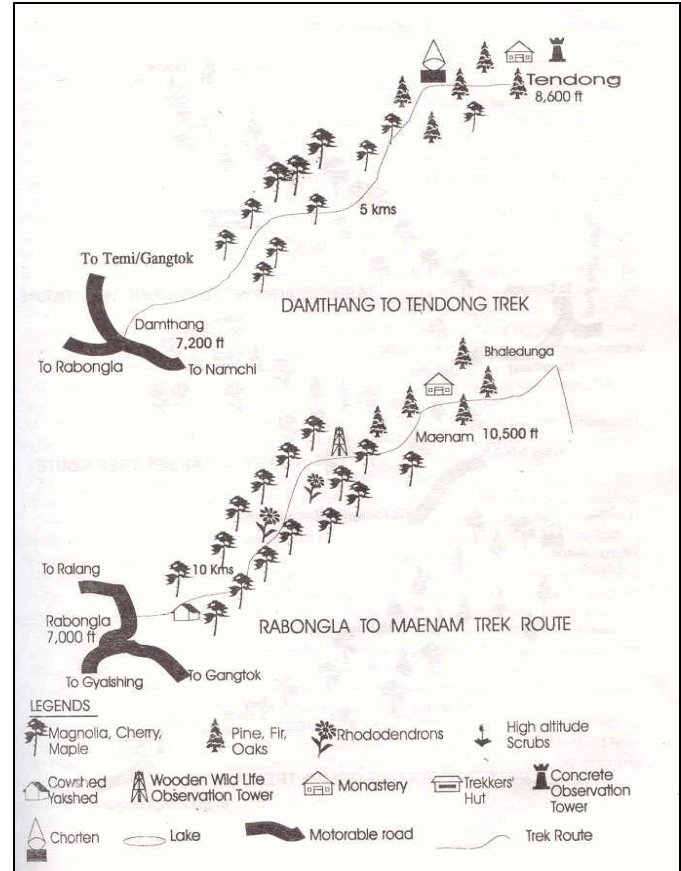
Meanam hill towers over Tendong Hill on the other side overlooking the Ravangla bazaar. The trek from Ravangla to Meanam takes about four hours and from Meanam hill-top one has the option to take the gentle trek to Borong village or follow the more treacherous trails down to Yangyang village.

Situated at an altitude of 10,300ft, the scenic view from this height is perhaps, unmatched in this part of the world. Mount Khanchandzonga and its surrounding ranges loom above to dwarf the richly forested and rugged hills. On a clear sunny day, it is possible to see the plains of Bengal spanning across Kalimpong and Darjeeling hills in the south, right across to the Indo-China border towards the north. A short walk from here takes one to Bhaledunga - a peculiar looking cliff that protrudes

out and resembles the head of a bird.

The diversity in the plant world is complemented by an equally rich variety and abundance in the animal kingdom. The dense forests of Sikkim are the habitat for a number of mammals, some of which are today threatened with extinction because of ecological changes and indiscriminate poaching. Among the more commonly found animals in the region are yaks, blue sheep, snow leopard, red goral, Red Panda, musk deer, Himalayan black bear and shapi. Muntjak or the 'barking deer' is a commonly found animal in the tropical region. Among the less commonly found animals in the region are house sparrow, jungle cat, mongoose, squirrels and kites.

The variation in climate and abrupt telescoping of terrain is responsible for the great variety and numerical abundance of a resident bird life. Some of the important birds found at an altitude of about 2,000 mts are the red jungle fowl, the kalij pheasant, the hill partridge and quails of various qualities. Birds and Butterflies of exceptional beauty and variety are a great attraction for visitors and bird watchers. Among the most commonly found are fairy blue bird, kingfisher, cuckoo, wood pecker, horn bill and pittas.



Damthang - Tendong Trek

Damthang, a small village lurking sleepily on chill hilltop is around 14 kms from Namchi on the Gangtok -Namchi (via Temi) motorable road. Trek to Tendong hill takes about two hours on a footpath through the thick forest of the Tendong Forest Sanctuary. As one enters the region different species of vegetation is seen struggling with each other to obtain a foothold in this thick forest. The silence is broken by the trill and rasp of insects and whistling of birds as if singing a welcome note to a visitor.

View from Tendong hill situated at an altitude of about 8,500ft, leaves the trekker spellbound. Perhaps no other

place in Sikkim offers a better panoramic view of the mountain ranges in the state than Tendong - it is like sitting in the centre of a huge amphitheatre. The view from the hill is something to be cherished and enjoyed as it spans across the plains of Bengal to the majestic heights of Himalayan ranges. One can see the full Chola Range in the east, in the west the Singalila range and the towering Kanchendzonga. In the North East can be seen the Paunhri peak with the surrounding mountains. Also Darjeeling, Gyalshing, Nathula, a part of Gangtok and the rolling plains of Siliguri can all be seen from here.

Historically, this place has been a place of recluse for Buddhist lamas who spend years in meditation amidst the silent scenic grandeur. Legend says that tendong Hill saved the Lepcha tribe from the ravages of deluge when the whole world was flooded- legend similar to Noah's Ark of the Bible. Even today, Lepchas performs pujas (Tendong Lho Rhum Faat) to pay reverence to the tendong Hill.

4

National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries

CONSERVATION INITIATIVES:

The Sikkim Himalaya, one of the hot spots of bio-diversity, has rhododendrons forming a major dominating group. The conservation initiatives of the government are highly commendable, where large areas have been set aside as protected areas. There is one biosphere reserve, two national parks and six wildlife sanctuaries.

PROMINENT NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE SANCTUARIES



KHANGCHENDZONGA NATIONAL PARK:

Khangchendzonga National Park (KNP) named after Mt. Khangchendzonga, the third highest peak in the world was notified in the year 1977 with an area of 850 sq. km. Owing to its rich bio-diversity, this area was later extended to 1784 sq km in 1997 on account of its intact continuous tract of mountain land reserved for conservation of native wildlife with many rare and endangered species. On 7th February 2000, the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India notified KNP as a Biosphere Reserve with a total area of 2192 sq km in accordance with the concepts of UNESCO/MAB programme. This BR falls in the North, West and South districts covering 36.92% of the Sikkim state. KBR has been named after the world's third highest as well as one of the 14 mountain peaks above 8000 mts, namely Mt. Khangchendzonga (8598 m asl). Yuksam-Dzongri trekking corridor passing through south-western part of the KNP is very popular among tourists and needs maximum attention to reduce adverse impacts on BR. So far, this BR area is virtually undisturbed, rich in natural resources and diversity and falls in

one of the globally recognized biodiversity “hot spots” in India namely the Eastern Himalaya. Khanchendzonga is a unique mountain ecosystem falling within three different International boundaries of India, Nepal and China (Tibetan Autonomous Region) housing a large variety of flora and fauna. There is a great variation in elevation, micro-climate, landscape, habitat and vegetation types together with rich ethno-cultural diversity and the socio-economic attributes of the people living in and around this unique mountain ecosystem.

The northern limit follows the boundary of the notified Khanchendzonga National Park up to the confluence of Goma Chu and the Naku Chu and includes Lungnak La and the area west of Thangu. The western limit of this BR follows the Indo-China boundary in the Lhonak valley in North Sikkim and Indo-Nepal boundary in West Sikkim. In the east it is bound by the western banks of Teesta river from Thangu to Toong and in the south, it includes the reserved forests above Toong, Tholung valley, Hee, Taryang, Karchi, Yuksam, L. abdang, Monmu, Kayam, Relli, Prek, Rimbi and Kajel streams. This BR encompasses 19 mountain peaks which include Mt. Khanchendzonga as the highest peak. There are numerous glaciers and high altitude lakes within the Khanchendzonga range.

Floristic wealth of the KNP and its surrounding area is rich and diverse, both in composition and

value. Forests represent a variety of plant communities that include diverse vegetation types corresponding to variation in climate and edaphic factors. A wide variety of woody tree species, shrubs, lichens, epiphytes and mosses have enriched the valley. Among the woody trees, *Quercus* (Oak) and *Castanopsis* (Chestnut) are few among the dominant species of temperate region whereas *Abies densa* (Silver Fir) and Rhododendrons are the dominant species in the sub-alpine zones. There are some pure patches of *Castanopsis* at temperate region and *Magnolia* (*Ghoge Champ*) at sub-alpine areas. The area is equally rich in Rhododendrons in their shape, size and colour. It shelters the *Rhododendron arboretum* (Guransh) at temperate conditions to small *Rhododendron setosum* (Sunpati) and *Rhododendron anthopogon* (Sunpati). Apart from these, the area is equally rich in other flowering plants such as a wide variety of *Primula*, *Meconopsis*, *Aconitum* (*Bikh*, *Bikhma*), *Potentilla*, *Bistorta* and *Gjentiana* which provide an additional charm to the alpine meadows.

About 10 species of Bamboos (*Dendrocalamus spp* and *Arundanaria spp*) are used by the communities for house construction and local handicrafts. A number of wild plants such as *Rhus semialata* (Bhalayo), *Litsae citrate*, *Juglans regia* (Okhar), *Machilus edulis* (Kaula), *M. odoratissima*, *Bassia butyraea* (Chiuari), *Girardinia palmate* (Allo Sisnu), *Laportea terminalis* (Patle Sisnu) and *Tupistra nutans* are eaten in different ways by

the villagers. Apart from these about seven edible varieties of Mushrooms, numerous *Diplazium spp* (Ningro) and *Dioscorea* (Ban Tarul) are also found recorded from in the area.

About 29 species of widely used medicinal plants are recorded from the area. *Artemisia vulgaris* (Titepate), *Eupatorium adenophorum* (Banmara), *Hydrocotyle asiatica* are widely used for different purposes and are not marketed. On the other hand, *Aconitum spp* (Bikh, Bikhma), *Berginia liglata* (Pakhan-bhed), *Heracleum nepalense* (Chimphing), *Litsae citrate* (Siltimbur), *Oroxylum indicum* (Totala) are openly extensively marketed in the local markets. *Picrorhiza kurrooa* (Kutki), *Piper longum* (Pipla), *Orchis latifolia* (Panch-amli), *Rubia cordifolia* (Manjito) are even exported to the local agents. Most of these species are also used by the local practitioners (Bijuwa and Baidya) as herbal medicines.

It is also a source of varieties of natural attractive materials in the form of decoratives. Roots of plants, dry flower, capsules, dry mushrooms, cones of conifers, leaves of fern, fern shoots and seeds of different plant form decoratives of all designs and types. More than eight types of such decoratives are recorded from the area, which are mostly used for local purposes. Dried *Anophalis contorta*, *A. Triplinervis* and *Lycopodium clavatum* are widely used as decoratives in different occasions where as *Pollinium mollis* and *Raphidophora sp* are used as decoratives in houses. Cones and *Pinus longifolia* (Aule Salla), *Abies*

Densa (Gobre Salla) and *Tsuga dumosa* (Thengre Salla) are also found to be in use as decorative in different form.

Edgeworthia gardeneri (Argeli) and *Daphne cannabina* (Lokta) are widely used by locals for making fiber materials and tying cattle, etc. These plants, especially Argeli grow abundantly in the low hands of Khangchendzonga whereas Lokta are distributed at sub-alpine zone. Within the buffer zone of KNP, many species of plants and animals are facing threats from various activities. Selective felling of trees for fuelwood and timber has brought about decrease in abundance of preferred species such as Rani Chanp (*Michelia exelsa*), Lapsi (*Spondias axillaries*), Mehel (*Eriolobus indica*) and Mandane (*Acrocarpus fraxinifolius*). Over exploitation of high altitude medicinal plants also resulted in rarity for species such as Kutki (*Picrorhiza kurrooa*), Jatamansi (*Nardostachys jatamansi*), Bikhma (*Aconitum ferox*), Khokim (*Bergenia purpurascens*) and Chimphing (*Heracleum nepalense*). Indiscriminate poaching in the past have led to a marked decline in the population of the Snow leopard (*uncial uncial*), Red panda (*Ailurus fulgens*), Musk Deer (*Moschus moschiferus*), Blue Sheep (*Pseudois nayaur*) and some Pheasants such as Trgopan (*Satyr tragopan*) and Himalayan Monal (*Lophophorus impejanus*).

The prominent lakes in this region which also serve as a stopover point for migratory birds are Khecheopalri Pokhri, Laxmi Pokhri, Lam Pokhri, Dudh Pokhri, Jor Pokhri and Daley Pokhri.

KYONGNOSLA ALPINE SANCTUARY (EAST SIKKIM)

Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary is situated around the area adjoining the Tsomgo (Changu) lake along the Nathula Road. Situated at a distance of about 31km east of Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, this sanctuary covers an area of about 31 sq km. Kyongnosia Alpine Sanctuary extends from '15th Mile' Police check post up to and along the ridges bordering RongChu and Tsomgo Lake. This Sanctuary is rich in both flora and fauna. Rare, endangered ground orchids and rhododendrons interspersed among tall junipers and taller silver firs are among the important plants present. *Rhododendron Nevium*-The State Tree of Sikkim and *Cypripedium tibeticum*-the ground slipper orchid in the verge of extinction have been introduced here. Ground flora include different species of primulas, wild strawberries, irises, poppies and rarely seen *Panax pseudo-ginseng*. Medicinal plants such as Kutki (*Picorhiza scrophulariflora*), Jatamansi (*Nardostachya grandiflora*), Niloti (*Aconitum ferox*), *Podophyllum emodi* and even the wild onion are not hard to see here. The lower levels of the sanctuary are occupied by the soil binding bamboo *Arundinaria spp.*

The area is snow covered often upto May when Primulas pop up through the snow and rhododendrons

come into bud .By June-July they are in full bloom. Flowering succession by the many species continues right through to October when *Polygonum sp.*, the last to flower dries up .First snowfall is normally by December-January.

Faunal diversity include Goral, Serow, Red Panda, Himalayan Black Bear, Musk Deer, Common Langur, Leopard, Tibetan Fox, Yellowthroated Martens and Weasel .Himalayan Marmot has been reintroduced here. Birds found are Blood Pheasant (the state bird of Sikkim), Monal, Laughing Thruses, Rose Finches,, Redbilled Choughs, Forktails, Redstarts, Blackwinged kite, Kestrel, Lammergier, Griffon Vulture, Firetailed Sunbirds and various species of migratory birds.

Fambong Lho Wildlife Sanctuary (East Sikkim)

Fambong Lho Wildlife Sanctuary is located about 25 kilometers from Gangtok town. The famous Rumtek Monastery is located at the southeastern boundary. This sanctuary covers an area of about 5,200 hectares above the road between Singtam and Dikchu with the highest point at a place called Tinjure at 2749m. where a wooden

observation tower of the Forest Department exists. The snowy ranges of Khangchendzonga are clearly visible from Golitar, the buffer area of the sanctuary towards northwest. This Sanctuary's elevation starts from 1524m and the highest peak Tinjurey, a triangular hilltop is at 2749 m. The ridge connects Fambong Lho peak and Ragorathai peak. There are bridle paths constructed along the ridges upto Rumtek peak. The main vegetation is Oak(*Quercus sp.*), Katus(*Castanopsis sp.*), Champ (*Michelia sp.*), Kawlo(*Machilus sp.*), Kimbu(*Morus sp.*), thick bamboo forests, ferns and a lone fir *Tsug dumosa* at Tinjurey.

In the lower reaches of the Sanctuary there are tree ferns *Cyathea sp.*, *Rhododendron arboretum* interspersed with Angeri(*Lyonia ovalifolia*) is seen gregariously on high hills and saddles. The sanctuary is also home to a large number of wild orchids, mosses and *Lycopodium sp.* This sanctuary is the home of Himalayan Black Bear, Red Panda, Civet cat and many varieties of butterflies. The Binturong or Bear-Cat is a rare civet reported from here.

Many varieties of Birds found in this region includes Satyr Tragopan, Kalij Pheasant, Hill Partridges, Brown Wood Owl, Collared Scops Owl, Yellowbilled Blue Magpie, Black Eagle, Green Pigeon, Slatyeaded Parakeet, Yellowbacked Sunbird, Collared Broadbill, Maroon Oriole Orangebellied Chloropsis, Redtailed Minla, Nepal Tree Creeper, Bulbuls, Laughing Thrushes, Titmice etc.

Entry to Sanctuary is permitted by the Chief Wildlife Warden, Government of Sikkim, Gangtok.

Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary (North Sikkim)

Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary at a distance of about 137 km from Gangtok covering an area of 43 sq km. is located near Yumthang in North Sikkim and contains a vast variety of rhododendrons. The sanctuary is bounded on its southern periphery by the Yakchey La and on the northern periphery by the Yumthang Valley known for its alpine meadow and hot springs. Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary is hemmed on the east by the high rugged Chuba-Sagochen mountain ranges and on the west by part of Chomzomei Tso extending up to Lava pass. The picturesque Yumthang Chu (river) flows through the Sanctuary, which is known for its unique abundance of Rhododendron trees and shrubs, 40 species/varieties of which are recorded from Sikkim alone. *Rhododendron neivium*-the State Tree occurs only in this sanctuary which is also rich in ground flora such as primulas ,potentillas, gentians, saxifrages ,poppies and aconites. When in blossom the rhododendrons provide a riot of color to this small park. One can also find silver fir ,spruce ,larch ,juniper, maple and rhododendron shrubs and trees festooned with trailing lichens.

The fauna here consists of the Serow, Goral, Red Panda,Himalayan

Black Bear, Weasels, Martens and Common Langur. There seem to be two races of Musk Deer: one grey with white specks in the alpine region and one with a dark ashy coat in the fir and rhododendron forest. Blood Pheasant, and Common Hill Partridge etc. also found here. The beautiful and highly endangered Spotted Linsang or Tiger-Civet (*Prionodon pardicolor*) has been reported from here.. Brown Trout were introduced into Yumthang Chhu at Phunyi in 1978 and have been flourishing since. Lachung is the last frontier village before reaching the sanctuary. There is a Forest Rest House here, as well as one at Yumthang.

Maenam Wildlife Sanctuary (South Sikkim)

Maenam Wildlife Sanctuary is located in South Sikkim above the town of Ravangla which is 26 km by road from Namchi and 65 km from Gangtok via Singtam and covers an area of about 36.34 sq km with its highest point being at Maenam. This sanctuary located at an altitude of about 10,600 ft above sea level shelters Red Panda, Goral, Serow, Barking Deer, Marbled-Cat, Leopard-Cat, Civet-Cats, Blood Pheasant, Common Hill Partridge, Magpies, Black Eagle, Blue necked Pitta, Sunbirds and many other animals of the temperate forest. Some of the birds seen here are Kalij Pheasant, Ashy Woody pigeon, Broad billed Warbler, Pygmy Wren Babbler, Hoary throated Barwing,

Firetailed Myzornis, Rufous breasted and Maroon backed Accentors, dark breasted and pink browed Rosefinches. Flowers clamor over trees while mosses, fern and creepers more reckless and ambitious climb the soaring trunks. A small hermitage containing the image of Guru Padmasambhava nestles here.

Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary

The Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary lies in the south west corner of the West Sikkim district. Spreading over 104 sq. km, across the razor sharp Singalila Range, which forms the natural international border with Nepal. In the South the Rambong Khola separates it from West Bengal. There are three points of entry, Hilley, Dentam and Soreng. Tourists generally prefer Hilley since it is approachable by road. The bridle path from Hilley to Barsey already exists and is a favorite amongst tourists especially during the Rhododendron flowering season. The faunal value of Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary includes Leopard cat, Marbled Cat Himalayan Yellow Throated Marten, Common Otter, Himalayan Palm Civet, Canidae Wild dog, Indian fox, Jackal, Himalayan Langur, Crimson Horned Pheasant, Monal Pheasant, Kaleej Pheasant, Crestless Porcupine, Rufous Tailed Hare, Chinese Pangolin, Flying squirrel, Giant squirrel, Himalayan Mouse Hare.

The Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary spans over the razor sharp Singalila Range. The climate is wet and cold favoring the spread of the dominant genus Rhododendron. July is the wettest month, with the average annual precipitation being in excess of 250 cm. The reaches above 2500m receive regular snowfall in winter. Clear skies can be experienced only from November to May.

A beautiful Tourist Trekker's hut exists in Barsey, amidst the Rhododendron forests at 10,000 feet, commanding a glorious view of the Singalila Range. Boarding and Lodging facilities are available.

Panglakha Wildlife Sanctuary *(East Sikkim):*

The Panglakha Wildlife Sanctuary is the newly added to the Sikkim's wealth of National Parks and Sanctuaries. A two days trek from Rongli across a steep gradient leads one to this. Their is also another route from Aritar which is

comparatively easier. This Range separates Sikkim from Bhutan to the southeast. The sight of massive Khanchendzonga at par with its height and the sunrise is something one will crave fro even months after the visit .The roar of the Himalayan black bear is something that will keep you waking . Red panda, gaur, and Tibetan Wolf also are found here . The Sikkim stag was last reported from this Range. Maintaining this area which is largely forest, will create a contiguous habitat with those forests of Bhutan.

DO'S AND DON'TS AT PARKS AND SANCTUARIES

Certain code of conduct has been framed to maintain the sustainability of these parks and sanctuaries. Visitors are requested to follow the following Code for Conservation.

- ❖ Leave only footprints, take only photographs High altitude vegetation is frail;
- ❖ Avoid trampling, follow trails, and do not pick plants or flowers Do not disturb wildlife or its habitat;
- ❖ Do not buy endangered animal or plant products.
- ❖ Use kerosene or bottled gas for cooking, heating and lighting; avoid using firewood. Ensure that you and your staff are properly equipped with warm clothes and fuel. Carrying plastics within the sanctuary is banned.
- ❖ Avoid littering;
- ❖ Bring all your garbage back;
- ❖ Carry out all batteries.
- ❖ Keep all pollutants away from streams and lakes.
- ❖ Do not give treats to village children; It only encourages begging.
- ❖ Respect the sanctity of holy rivers and historical sites: No smoking, drinking or loud talks.
- ❖ Educate yourself about the ecology, customs, manners, and culture of Sikkim, specially the adjoining villages.
- ❖ Support local conservation programs, and local community level organizations

NGO'S and Stakeholders committed to Ecotourism in Sikkim

THE MOUNTAIN INSTITUTE (TMI)

**Advancing mountains Cultures-
Preserving Mountain
Environment.**

Introduction:

The Mountain Institute's goal is to conserve mountain environments and cultural heritage while improving the livelihoods of mountain people. TMI is a non-profit conservation and education organization, qualifying for charitable contributions.

Organization Capabilities and Accomplishments

Since 1972, The Mountain Institute has worked to conserve the world's high priority mountain ecosystems, improve the livelihoods of mountain people, and increase awareness for mountain issues through advocacy, education, and outreach. TMI has field programs and regional offices in the Himalayas (Nepal, China, India), Andes (Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia), and the Appalachians (West Virginia, Virginia). TMI has designed and implemented 11 major community-based biodiversity conservational and protected area projects in the Himalayas and Andes since 1988. TMI's Asia Program helped establish two new mountain protected areas in

Nepal and the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) China, with a combined area of 34,000 km² in the Mt Everest ecosystem. Each protected area uses principles of core nature preserves, national park zones, and inhabited buffer zones, strengthening local people's capacity to conserve biodiversity protection while improving their livelihoods. Since 1995, TMI has worked in key biodiversity areas including Sikkim's Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve, building local capacity for conservation, and supporting conservation-linked livelihoods. In Nepal, the Makalu Barun National Park and Buffer zone project integrates conservation, community development, and income generation and has served as a model for community-based conservation programs worldwide. In the Tibet Autonomous Region, TMI helped establish the Qomolangma Nature Preserve (QNP) in 1988, the first preserve in China to include people, cultural heritage, and international agencies in planning and managing a protected area and continues to work there. In Nepal, TMI has conducted reconnaissance work in the Jaljale Corridor area, which is outside the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area, completing forest inventories in the Meiwa and Maiwa Khola watersheds, and identifying eight

critical forest areas linking threatened habitats that are priorities for further work.

In Sikkim, TMI has strong experience and working relationships with the local communities in the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve, with local organizations such as the Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee (KCC), ECOSS, GBPIHED and the Government of Sikkim line agencies and has conducted project activities in the project area since 1995.

In Nepal, TMI has 18 years' experience establishing core and buffer zones in the Eastern Himalaya region and considerable experience working with local communities to establish and manage community-based projects in remote villages and landscapes. TMI's Nepal experience also includes extensive experience in community forest management, income-generating programs, village-based training and establishing conservation-linked community development projects. Since 1995 with MacArthur Foundation support TMI* has promoted transboundary conservation exchanges across the Mt Everest ecosystem between Nepal and China.

MacArthur Project: "Countries, Communities and Conservation in Khangchendzonga",
Project Area

The Project will focus on the Khangchendzonga landscape complex, linking the Nepal-India border regions. It includes the protected areas of Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve (KBR), especially the core

zone in Sikkim (1784 km²), and the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA) in Nepal (approximately 2000 km²), where population is very low, with 3000 persons in Nepal and only 90 persons in Sikkim. The project will also work in key and threatened adjacent habitats in the more heavily populated buffer zones of Sikkim's Khangchendsonga Biosphere Reserve (KBR) (800 KM²), and areas administered by four village Development Committees (VDCs) to the boundaries (approximately 950 km²). These areas have populations of 6,000-10,000 persons in Sikkim and 3,000 persons in Nepal. These are areas outside and beyond the present WWF-Nepal Kanchenjunga conservation Area Project (KCSP) working area.

Goals

Goals of the project is to promote effective conservation management of the area in and around Khangchendzonga using TMI's well-tried and proven community-based conservation approach.

Objectives

1. First objective is to promote community-based conservation in areas outside each of the protected area boundaries. In Nepal, the project will work in village development committees that touch the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve, but fall outside the Kanchendjunaga Conservation Area boundaries. In Sikkim, the project will focus on the communities located in the areas designated as buffer zones within the existing Biosphere Reserve.

2. The project seeks to diversify livelihood options, with a pronounced

shift from unsustainable activities to more sustainable activities to more suitable ones.

3. The Project seeks to establish transboundary cooperation mechanisms and promote conservation between Nepal's Kanchenjunga Conservation Area, plus surrounding areas and the adjacent Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve in Sikkim, working with authorities and communities and within protected area boundaries.

Activities:

Models of community-based management with biodiversity elements and conflict resolution (building upon community forestry and joint forest management frameworks);

Regional exchange and cooperation at national and community levels: and support for sustainable livelihoods, with an underlying commitment to capacity growth.

The Project will also support community level programs including developing alternative livelihood strategies, promoting complementary veterinary programs to reduce livestock disease transmission, trans-boundary eco-tourism planning, and developing community-based incentive systems to control poaching and illegal trade of non-timber forest products. Important outcomes will include tested models of community-based conservation that have replication potential across the Eastern Himalayan range in India, Nepal and Bhutan, and a network of practitioners.

Contact Addresses:

Sikkim Office

“Abhilasha’, Jewan Theeng Marg
Near Nepali Sahitya Parishad,
Development Area
Gangtok-737101, Sikkim, India.
Tel: (91)-03592-201012; 227942

Asian Regional Office

P.O. Box 2785
Baluwatar, Kthmandu, Nepal
Tel: (977)-1-4414237, 4419356
Fax: (977)-1-4410073
Email:tmi@regional.wlink.com.np.

Headquarters

1828L Street, NW Suite 725
Washington, DC 20036
Tel: (202) 452-1636; Fax: (202) 452-1635
www.mountain.org.

**KHANCHENDZONGA
CONSERVATION
COMMITTEE(KCC)**

KCC is a community based Non Governmental Organization, based in Yuksam, West Sikkim. The Organization Comprises of representatives of community members and stakeholders in tourism enterprises working for conservation of Natural and cultural resources to mitigate negative impacts with skill development programmes, micro planning, awareness campaigns, monitoring of natural resources along with advocacy for appropriate policy changes.

THRUST AREAS

1. **Conservation Education:** Awareness campaign among the rural masses through workshops, fairs, street plays and model demonstrations; involving students actively in conservation activities; Conducting seminars and quiz in schools and also training school teachers on how to impart conservation education to school children.
2. **Training:** Different Skill development training at a very basic level for porters, cooks, pack animal operators and local guides.
3. **Microplanning:** In order to ensure a more holistic approach to development, we carry out microplanning at the grass-root level exercise jointly with the various government departments, specially the Forest Department.
4. **Advocacy with Government agencies:** Advocating and lobbying with various agencies for appropriate policies for sustainable development, which would benefit the community and also conserve the natural resources.
5. **Monitoring:** Monitoring the use of natural resources in and around the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve. Monitoring the tourism enterprise that is operating in the area to control illegal extraction of herbs, incense and other medicinal plants as well as proper disposal and

management of waste. Strengthen the monitoring of wildlife status and poaching with the help of porters, cooks, tourist and guides.

6. **Concept Development:** Evolving the concept of homestays in areas like Yuksam and maintaining the fair distribution of customers in each.

Formation of Eco-Tourism Service Provider Association of Yuksam(ESPAY).

Member of ESPAY:-
Porter, Cook, Guide, Pack animal operator, Local Travel Agent, Hoteliers etc.

Porter	120
Yak/Horse Operator	48(240 No's)
Guide	12
Cook	10
Travel Agent	1

Ecotourism Conservation Society of Sikkim(ECOSS)

Introduction:

ECOSS is the result of a group of like-minded people getting together to accomplish a mission. A mission that seeks to see that there is a thorough and correct understanding of the concept of '**ECOTOURISM**' and that this cannot be viewed without realizing the very nature of '**CONSERVATION**'. These go hand in hand.

ECOSS is indeed a Sikkimese's dream for the destiny and future of the Sikkimese children –a responsibility of doing something for the future.

ECOSS was born for the development of the state of Sikkim, not by default. ECOSS sees an opportunity to actually shape it which they think is fundamental to their mission through the support of stakeholders and partners.

Vision:

ECOSS is dedicated to promoting ecotourism and conservation for the benefit of people at all levels of Sikkimese society..They seek to combine the strengths of rural communities with the experiences of national and international groups who are leaders in the field of ecotourism.

ECOSS believes that community self determination and targeted assistance is the only formula that can lead to sustainable development. The mission of ECOSS is to define the concept of ecotourism in the context of the state of Sikkim. We firmly believe that ecotourism and conservation cannot exist without each other.

Aims and Objectives:

- To develop and promote Sikkim as an ecotourism destination on the national and international ecotourism map.
- To ensure that ecotourism development has positive and

beneficial linkages for marginalized mountain communities.

- To help the people of Sikkim become aware of the value of the state's biodiversity through education, the dissemination of information, and awareness building.
- To promote research in the areas of ecotourism, conservation, and the environmental impacts of development. Research will be undertaken with a view to the formulation and implementation of policies that promote sustainable development.
- To establish ties with ecotourism and conservation-oriented national and international organizations to further our mutual goals.

Activities :

The activities of ECOSS involves planning meetings for the development of Ecotourism sites in Sikkim, training for the guides, organizing workshops and seminars on Eco-tourism at the District and village levels, Entrepreneurship development programmes, Motivational workshop and Skill development training etc.

Contact Address:

Eco-tourism & Conservation Society of Sikkim,

Development Area,
Gangtok-737101, Sikkim, India
ecoss@sikkiminfo.net

Sikkim Paryavaran Samrakshan Sangh

Save Tree Save Life

Introduction

Sikkim Paryavaran Samrakshan Sangh (SPSS) is a community based organization located in Bikmat, South Sikkim, Comprising of energetic, active and dedicated members who help to conserve natural resources and provide training to community stakeholders, other NGO's, monitor resources and advocate for appropriate policy changes.

Background

This organization was the outcome of sustained efforts since early 1990's for conservation of the Tendong Nature Reserve. Sensitized by the growing degradation, we began working for the protection and conservation of this unique ecosystem over the past ten years, and formally organized ourselves only in 1997.

SPSS is an action oriented NGO lobbying for conservation of the Tendong forests which provide food and water security for sustainable rural livelihoods. This can be achieved by reducing instances of illicit felling, encroachment and grazing within Tendong.

For sustainable rural livelihoods SPSS has been promoting appropriate low cost technology in agriculture, horticulture, floriculture and animal husbandry to reduce the dependence on forest resources.

Initiatives:

7. Awareness programs at grassroot level to convince the villagers regarding long term benefits of conservation the Tendong Forest.
8. Environment Education program for the school children.
9. Formation and strengthening of the Pani-panchayats in the villagers adjoining to Tendong. Branches of SPSS have also been opened in the adjoining villagers also by strengthening the local NGO's, clubs and active youth.
10. Conservation of the water sources and lakes by carrying out plantation activities and soil and moisture conservation works
11. Lobbying to ban illicit felling of trees, forest encroachment and grazing.
12. Transfer of low cost rural technology livelihoods and hence reduce dependence on forests.

:

Contact Address:

Sikkim Paryavaran Samrakshan
Sangh
Bikmat, South Sikkim, Sikkim
737126, India
Phone:+91-94341-27154(mobile)
Web:spss_sikkim@lycos.com
Spss_sikkim@rediffmail.com.

**ALLIANCE FOR BETTER
TOURISM(ABT)**

ABT is an effort by a team of bonafide tourism postgraduates and graduates of Sikkim towards taking the tourism of Sikkim to higher dimensions. An NGO started with a cause to work on such areas where the state is lagging behind in need of professionalism and expertise this is a platform to offer something for the benefit of the State. The main objective of ABT being sustainable development, the NGO also aims at spreading awareness about tourism among the various stakeholders, Government undertakings and grassroot entrepreneurs. The members of the NGO has geared up to share their expertise by organizing various training programs for guides, travel agents and stakeholders linked with tourism. Through co-ordinated efforts with the other regional tourism development corporations ABT would help fostering tourism in these areas for proper planning and implementation of projects and the post operation factors responsible for accruing benefits to these areas.

Contact Address:

Alliance for Better Tourism
Tempoling Hotel Building,
Daragaon, Tadong,

EAST SIKKIM.

**Yambong Ecotourism
Committee:**

Objectives:

- *Promote community based ecofriendly tourism along Yambong Singalila.
- *To protect the forest, environment and wildlife.
- *To protect and preserve the natural and cultural values.
- *To provide sustainable livelihood as an alternative to unsustainable pastoralism.
- *Ensure equal opportunity to all local communities.
- *Support the trekking parties for a successful trek.

Members:

*YEC executive consists of representatives from three village based NGO'S ,Panchayats and area MLA and local communities from all adjoining villages.

- *Registered Porters 85
- *Pack animal owners 20
- *Pack animals 120
- *Home Stays 15

Long Term Goal:

- *Protect Yambong Singalila from all illegal activities
- *Provide better service and promote high quality tourism
- *Conserve natural biodiversity
- *Ensure ecofriendly tourism.

*Provide assistance to porters (kerosene stove, mattress and sleeping bags.)

*Secure the life of its members (provide insurance)

Short Term Goal:

*Provide registered service providers

*Develop community campsite

*Promote Homestays

*Prepare feedback mechanism.

*Local capacity building (cook, guide,

nature guide, homestay managers)

*Construct porter's hut at Yambong.

Contact Address:

www.yambong.com

Sikkim Ecotourism and Conservation Federation:

Background:

Some of the village based institutions that had been managing ecotourism and conservation came together in Yuksam from 19th to 21st Jan,2006 to organize themselves into a federation.This federation was named the "Sikkim Ecotourism and Conservation Federation".This institution building initiative was facilitated by The Mountain Institute.

Mission:

To work with and through a range of village based institutions and collaborate with government and non government agencies to promote initiatives that are ecologically sustainable and equitable in the sphere of ecotourism, conservation and livelihoods in Sikkim.

Aims and Objectives:

1.Provide quality service to the travel agents

2.Facilitate effective coordination and conflict resolution during trekking

3.Facilitate better unity and cooperation amongst the member organizations.

4.Provide effective advocacy in policy related issues.

5.Provide technical support for upcoming new members.

6.Work for the welfare of village based ecotourism service providers.

7.Build linkages with schemes of various government departments.

8.Provide uniform and standard operating procedures to the members.

9.Take initiatives for joint marketing of products.

10.Works towards providing financial assistance and support for member organizations.

Members:

AreylunchokEcotourism Committee (AEC)-Labdang, Narsing Ecotourism Committee(NEC)-Pokhri,Yambong Ecotourism Committee(YEC)-Nambu, Ecotourism Service Providers Association of Yuksam(ESPAY).

KhanchendongaConservationCommittee (KCC)-Yuksam,Eco development Committee(EDC),Joint Forest Management Committee(JFMC).

Contact Address:

www.tmi-india.org

e-mail:info@yambong.com

Hee Bermiok Tourism Development and Heritage Conservation Society:

Established on 14th Nov 2005, it has 50% of the herders in it.

Objective:

Born for the conservation of Hee Reserve Forest. After this was declared a sanctuary the local people were displaced and therefore tourism was started as a source of sustenance for them.

Kewzing Tourism Development Corporation:

Established in the year 2002 with the main aim to develop Kewzing as a Tourist destination thereby preserving the culture and discouraging the villagers to migrate from villages to other areas in search of sustenance.

Initiatives:

- Deforestation stopped with a focus on tourism.
- Cleanliness drives-dustbin in every household
- Introduction of home stays on a rotation basis.

Besides awareness on sustainability and ecotourism has evolved in every nook and corner of the State and NGO'S like **Dzongu Eco-Tourism Committee, Chakung Tourism Development Corporation, Ravangla Tourism Development Corporation, DRISHTI etc** have come up at local levels to give a boost to the ecotourism potentials of the respective areas which are constantly working on the following guidelines

- Conserve the natural and cultural resources of the area.

- Provide alternative opportunities for the local people
- Generate additional income for local people
- Community development through participatory approaches.

Activities include.

- Training of local tourist Guides.
- Orientation to the local driver about tourism and their role in hospitality.
- Cooks Training.
- Lodge-Home stay Management Training.
- English Speaking Training.
- Tourism sensitization to the monks and lamas of the monastery
- Porters Training
- Trail development around villages.
- Interpretation signs along trails and sites/viewpoints.
- Handicraft and Handloom promotion for tourists.
- Information brochure
- Cultural Programme promotion.
- Viewpoint beautification
- Marketing activities.
- Development of a Code of Conduct.
- Evaluation of project progress.

Eco-Tourism Ethics:

Do's

- Carry back all non-degradable litter such as empty bottles, tins, plastic bags etc. These must not litter the environment or be buried. They must be disposed in municipal dustbins only.
- Observe the sanctity of holy sites, temples and local cultures.
- Cut noise pollution. Do not blare aloud radios, tape recorders or other electronic entertainment , equipment in nature resorts, sanctuaries and wildlife parks.
- In case temporary toilets are set-up near campsites, after defecation, cover with mud or sand. Make sure that the spot is at least 30 meters away from the water source.
- Respect people's privacy while taking photographs. Ask for prior permission before taking a photograph.

Don'ts

- Do not take away flora and fauna in the forms of cuttings, seeds or roots or for souvenirs. It is illegal, especially in the Himalayas. The environment is really delicate in this region and the bio-diversity of the region has to be protected at all costs.
- Do not use pollutants such as detergent, in streams or springs while washing and bathing.
- Do not use wood as fuel to cook food at the campsite.
- Do not leave cigarette butts or make open fires in the forests.
- Do not consume aerated drinks, alcohol, drugs or any other intoxicant and throw bottles in the wild.
- Do not tempt the locals, especially children by offering them foodstuff or sweets. Respect local traditions.
- Polythene and plastics are non bio-degradable and unhealthy for the environment and must not be used and littered.

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Websites:www.sikkiminfo.com