

Up-close with the Big Guys - 16 days/ 12-day trek

Trekking tour

Tour JTT-SIT-03 (trekking): Delhi - Bagdogra – Gangtok – Rumtek – Kewzing - Tashiding – Pelling/Pemayangtse – Bagdogra – Delhi

Activities & sights: Vist Gangtok & Pemayangtse, 12-day trek along Shingalilla Ridge *in Sikkim* and upto Goecha La, 'Bhutia ('Tibetan'), Nepali and Lepcha village culture, Buddhist monasteries, superb Himalayan views.

Best time: End of March – beginning of May, end of Sept – end of Nov.



On this tour, you'll be trekking along the border between Sikkim (India) and Nepal. The border follows a north-south running mountain ridge known as the Shingalila Ridge. The well-known Shingalila Ridge Trek runs along and over this ridge in West-Bengal till the border between West-Bengal and Sikkim. Our trek is different. It starts where the other one ends: on the Sikkimese side of the Shingalilla Ridge. It takes you higher and much closer to the highest peaks of the world, affording you magnificent views of these natural skyscrapers. Then it crosses over to yet another high altitude trek: the Kangchenjunga trek, leading up to the Goecha La pass. Here, you will get breathtaking views of Mt. Kangchenjunga, the world's third highest peak (8586 m).

Itinerary

Day 01: Delhi ➔ Bagdogra – Gangtok (124 km/ 4 – 5 hr)

Early morning you'll board the 2-hour flight from Delhi to Bagdogra (access is also possible from Kolkata). Assistance will be provided on arrival at Bagdogra airport from where you will be transferred to Gangtok, which covers a distance of 124 kms that will take about 4 hrs. We

cross the border of Sikkim at Rangpo where the permit formalities are done. On arrival in Gangtok, we check in to a hotel for overnight stay.

Day 02: Gangtok

Early morning, we wake up to witness a spectacular sunrise over the Kanchenjunga massif from Tashi view point, which is located 16 kms from Gangtok. We return to the hotel for breakfast. Later, we visit the Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology. In 1957, the 14th Dalai Lama laid the foundation stone of this architectural wonder that houses a huge collection of rare Sanskrit, Lepcha and Tibetan manuscripts, sculptures, treasured artifacts and Buddhist icons.

Next point will be the Do Drul Chorten, the biggest stupa in Sikkim, located on the hill hock, adjacent to the Tibetology Institute. Popularly known as Phurba, this stupa was built in 1945. We will also visit the Cottage Industries Centre to see the local handicrafts of Sikkim and the Flower Show. Last, we will visit the Enchey Monastery, a Nyingma Monastery believed to have been built by a monk with flying powers. In the evening, we walk around M.G. Marg, the heart of Gangtok city.

Day 03: Gangtok - Pelling / Pemayangtse Monastery (109 km/ 3 hr)

In the morning, we will drive westwards towards the small town of Pelling. On the way XXX

Pelling's most important claim to fame is a 300 year-old Pemayangtse Gompa (Buddhist monastery). The Pemayangtse Monastery is one of the oldest and most famous monasteries of west Sikkim. Originally built by Lhatsun Chenpo in the 17th century as a small Lhakhang, it was subsequently enlarged during the reign of the third Chogyal Chakdor Namgyal who was considered as Lhatsun Chenpo's third reincarnate, Jigme Pawo. The monastery follows the Nyingma Order of Tibetan Buddhism and controls all other monasteries of that Order in Sikkim. The monks of this monastery are normally chosen from the Bhutias of Sikkim. Of particular note is a seven-tiered painted wooden structure, portraying Guru Rimpoche's Heavenly Palace known as 'Sangthokpalri' also spelt 'Zandog-palri', on the top floor of the monastery. The painting has scenes of rainbows, angels with a whole panoply of Buddhas and Bodhistvas. This structure was constructed by Dungzin Rimpoche over a period of 5 years. After the visit, we walk to the Sanga Choling monastery. The literal meaning of Sanga Choeling is the 'island of esoteric teaching'. The monastery is located on a ridge top above Pelling at a distance of 7 kilometres from Pemayangtse Monastery and can be accessed by walking the steep hilly track of 4 kilometres (2.5 miles), which traverses through the rich forest cover.

Sanga Cheoling Monastery, built in 1697, is also known as the place of secret spells. It has clay statues dating back to the 17th century. The monastery was affected by fire several times and hence rebuilt. The Monastery's location provides very scenic and panoramic views all around. Later, we walk around the village of Pelling.

Day 04: Pelling – Uttarey – Chitra (driving 29 km/ 2 hr; walking 4 -5 hr)

After breakfast, we go on the picturesque 2 hours drive to Uttare, which is the starting point of the trek. Following the permits check at the control post, our first day of walking begins on a good trail that will entail about 4 to 5 hours trekking through a gorgeous rhododendron forest to a campsite clearing near the forest guards hut at Chitra (2680 m). Overnight stay is in cozy and comfortable tents.

Day 05: Chitra – Chiwabhangyang – Gairi (walking 5 hr)

A 2 hr climb leads through the forest to Chiwabhanjang (3130 m). After being enfolded by the forest, the walk opens up along the ridge giving tantalising views of the gaint himalayan peaks to the north. We walk for about 3 more hours before calling it a day at a place called Gairi (3300m) where we pitch our tents for a comfortable night stay.

Day 06: Gairi – Dhor (walking 7 – 8 hr)

Today is the first of two longer days. From our camp just below the low-point of the ridge we begin a steep climb to a high point of 3500 metres. Although steep, the trail is excellent and has obviously been used for centuries by herders moving their yaks from one grazing ground to another across the ridge. Descending once again to 3300 metres, the path switches between Nepal and Sikkim with spectacular views down both sides of the ridge. It is obvious why the trail clings to the ridge top, as there is simply no way down on either side, so dense is the rhododendron forest. In spring, this part of the walk is spectacularly colourful. A level and slightly wider section of the ridge offers a perfect resting point for lunch, before another small climb and a more airy ridge-top trekking that leads to our camp just past a yak herders camp, known as Dhor (3720 m). Water is often scarce at this and the next campsite, which means that the kitchen staff have to descend a long way to find water. We camp on the Nepal side of the ridge and get splendid views, across a succession of ridges, besides a beautiful sunset panorama of the high peaks of Nepal, including Makalu and Everest. Total walking time is 7 to 8 hours. Overnight stay is in tents.

Day 07: Dhor - Sikkim Megu (walking 5 – 6 hr)

Just before the camp, there is a particularly fine viewpoint for Kangchenjunga and it is worth getting up early to watch the sunrise on the world's 3rd highest mountain. The highpoint, however, of the day's trekking is at a collection of prayer flags at 3920 metres, which is reached, sometime mid-morning. After lunch, the trail remains high, between 3600 and 3900 metres, to our camp on the open grazing slopes known as Sikkim Megu. Walking time is 5 to 6 hours. Altitude at the campsite is 3900 metres.

Day 08: Sikkim Megu – Yanseb (walking 8 – 9 hr)

Today is a very long day as we cross 2 passes, so it is important that we set off early. Also, because if we cross the first pass known as the Daphebir Pass at 4500 metres late afternoon, it may get cloudy with the dismal result that some of the best views of the trip could be missed. Therefore, in order to cross this pass when the light is at its best and the weather clear, we start walking early on the west side of the ridge. The terrain becomes more open and the scale of the

mountain scenery is much larger as we follow a wide valley, turning east, in the direction of a large waterfall and a break in the ridge, which leads to the Daphebir Pass. We cross 2 lakes on the way before the Daphebir pass that offer spectacular views of the north, of the high mountains of Sikkim, including Kangchenjunga (8585 m), Kabru (7317 m) and Pandim (6691 m). The pass is marked by 4 cairns and we soon reach the start of the steep zig-zag path that climbs to the col. The walk is charmingly atmospheric as you walk alongside the yaks and yak men with the sound of jingling yak bells and whistles from the yak men urging on their charges, ringing in your ears. After short celebrations (the next pass is slightly higher), we drop down and then contour across the hillside for a further 30 minutes to reach the main pass (4500 m), which is marked by hundreds of prayer flags. The views to the north are once again stunning and we relax for a while to take in the magnificent scenery. The walk down to the valley floor is most enjoyable, following a good trail across the open slopes at first and then down through the pine and juniper forest to Gamothang where we have lunch by the river – a beautiful spot. After lunch, we have a two-hour climb to our campsite by the river at Yanseb.

Day 09: Yanseb – Pangding (walking 6 – 7 hr)

Leaving the beautiful campsite is a wrench, but there is the promise of more of the same still to come. We can now look across to Dzungri, a small settlement on the main trekking route to Kangchenjunga, our destination in three days time. We continue contouring across the hillside, climbing at times, until we cross a small river beyond which a final climb leads to yet another small pass (4310 m), adorned by prayer flags, with wonderful views looking back across our route of the last two days. A short distance below the pass, the trail climbs steeply once again on the hillside for an hour and then turns a corner to reveal a spectacular view across a wide ridge, to Kabru and Pandim. We now feel that we are getting really close to the big mountain as the landscape opens up in front of us. We camp in a clearing known as Panding (4275 m).

Day 10: Pangding – Dzungri (walking 5 hr)

Just as the sunset was stunningly impressive the night before, so is the sunrise. It is certainly worth getting up early to witness this (even if you have to go back to bed). Today's walk goes down hill very near from the camp all the way to the Bikbari valley floor. It is not a long day's walk so we can have a leisurely breakfast before we break camp. Once we have descended to a photogenic plank bridge in the valley floor, we start the climb to Dzungri. After 2 hours we reach a set of prayer flags on a ridge, which we follow for an hour to the meadows of Dzungri (4050m, where we camp in a natural bowl on the ridge). The peaks of Pandim, Narsingh and Joponu now appear to be distinctly closer. A short walk above Dzungri is a superb viewpoint for sunset and sunrise on Kangchenjunga, well worth the effort for an early evening stroll. For the best approach to the viewpoint, we follow the trail up the ridge from the lowest hut – the viewpoint is easily visible due to the large number of prayer flags. Along with Kangchenjunga, there are superb views of the neighbouring peaks as well including Rathong (6683 m), Kokthang (6150 m), Karbu Dome (6640 m) and Forked Peak (6116 m).

Day 11: Rest Day in Dzungri

Early morning we get up to the Dzongri view point to witness the dawn over the Kangchenjunga range, one of the highlights of the trek. The climb to the highest view point is very cold in the morning but worthwhile offering the most beautiful sight when the first rays of the sun hit these Himalayan peaks that change colors as the sun gets brighter. We then return to the camp for a hot cup of tea or coffee. After breakfast we explore this beautiful area. A walk to the Himalayan mountaineering institute base camp is well worth a visit.

Day 12: Dzongri - Thangsing – Lamune (walking 6 – 7 hr)

From Dzongri, we follow the original Kangchenjunga trek to the Goecha La with camps on the way at Thangsing and Samity Lake. We are likely to encounter more trekkers from this point on. Today walk starts with a short climb to a ridge, which affords open views across Sikkim. We follow this scenic ridge for about 5 kilometres, before descending a steep spur to our lunch spot on the banks of the glacial Prek Chu. A short stretch of boulder hopping and then we cross the stream to begin the climb to Thangshing, a large open campsite on a grassy pasture. The southern Ridge of Kangchenjunga and the moraines of the Oglathang Glacier are visible directly ahead and there are close-up views of Pandim. We stop here for lunch. A further pleasant couple of hours walk beneath the west side of Pandim, on a path that leads through dwarf azaleas and rhododendron, takes us to the first of the terminal moraines of the Oglathang Glacier. We climb to the crest of a moraine ridge and find ourselves on the shores of the lovely and sacred Samity Lake. Ringed by prayer flags and reflecting a number of snow-capped peaks, including Pandim. We may walk up to the Lake Samiti but are no longer allowed to camp there due to environmental reasons. So we walk down back to Lamune for the night. Altitude at camp - 4100 metres.

Day 13: Lamune - Goechala – Thangsing (walking 14 km/ 6 - 7 hr)

Today we will make the hard, three to four hour climb up to the 4940 metre-high Goecha La. A pre-dawn start is a must, to ensure that we reach the pass when the visibility is excellent. Afternoon cloud build-up can sometimes obscure the view. The trail skirts the lake, before ascending a series of moraine ridge on the eastern edge of the Oglathang Glacier. As we climb, we have increasingly spectacular views of the mountains and valleys to the south and east, but these are overshadowed by the panorama that unfolds ahead of us when we reach the prayer-flagged Goecha La. Rising more than 4000 metres above the Talung Glacier, at a distance of only 5 kilometres from our viewpoint, is the stunning eastern wall of Kangchenjunga, which includes the five principal summits of the massif and also the very impressive Kabru and Rathong peaks. We return to Lamune by early afternoon and have lunch before continuing downhill for two hours to Thangsing, where we camp for the night.

Day 14: Thangsing – Bakhim (walking 6 – 7 hr)

Descending the valley from Thangsing, we take a direct route, missing out Dzongri, following a lower trail through dense rhododendron forests. After a long descent (almost 1500 metres), we camp in the forest at the small hamlet of Bakhim, half an hour below the small village of Tsokha (3060 m). It is a pleasant change to be back in a warm climate. From our camp, we look out on ridge after ridge of temperate forests and to the river far below. There are one or

two small lodges at our campsite, a good opportunity for you to try the local millet “beer” (hereabouts called thumba) which is served in drinking vessels made out of bamboo.

Day 15: Bakhim – Yuksom (walking 4 hr)

More downhill from our camp, all the way to the river. Then the trail runs up the narrow Rathong Valley, through thick, semi-tropical forest, contouring the east bank of the river with several undulations and tributary rivers to cross. The consolation is that now we are back in the warmer lower valley, there is plenty of opportunity for bathing under one of a number of suitable wayside waterfalls. After 4 hours, we reach Yuksom, where we check in to a hotel for the night.

Day 16: Yuksom – Bagdogra ✈️ Delhi (driving 169 km/ 5 hr)

Today you’ll be driven back to Bagdogra Airport, where you’ll board the afternoon flight to Delhi.

Entry formalities

Please note that all foreign nationals need Restricted Area Permit (RAP) to visit Sikkim. Validity is normally for 2 weeks, but can be extended upto 45 days in Gangtok. This permit will be issued at the interstate border at Rangpo when entering Sikkim. Two passport size photographs and a copy of the passport and visum for India are required. The visa is offered free of cost.

Tour Price

For 2 persons: INR 113.900 per person, using 1 Toyota Innova (or similar)

For 3, 4 persons: INR 107.300 per person, using 1 Toyota Innova (or similar)

For 5 - 7 persons: INR 102.000 per person, using 2 Toyota Innova (or similar)

For 8 – 10 persons: INR 96.000 per person, using 3 Toyota Innova (or similar)

Single supplement: INR 5.200 per person.

Above tour price is on current rates only, valid till May 2016. Tour price may rise, however, in case of increase of flight prices or price of car fuel.

Price includes: Flights Delhi – Bagdogra and Bagdogra - Delhi, English speaking escort throughout, all transfers by private vehicle (Toyota Innova or similar), all accommodation on twin-sharing basis, trekking services including guide, cook, helpers, porters or mules for portorage, all meals, A- shaped mountain tents with sleeping mats, dining tent with table and chairs, toilet tent, toilet paper, trek permit and other sightseeing entrance fees, MAP on none-trekking days (breakfast and lunch included, starting with dinner on day 01, ending with breakfast on day 16) fuel and driver allowance, all entrance fees at sights.

Price excludes: International airfare, overnight stay at Delhi if required, tips, laundry, alcoholic beverages, insurance and any other expenses of personal nature.

Hotels used:

Kurseong: Cochrane Place or similar.

Darjeeling: Hotel Dekeling (www.dekeling.com) or similar.

Rumtek: Teen Taley Eco Resort (www.sikkimresort.com).

Pelling: Norbu Ghang Resort.

Kewzing: Bon Farmhouse or local homestay.