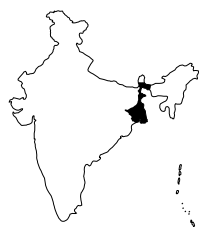


# West Bengal



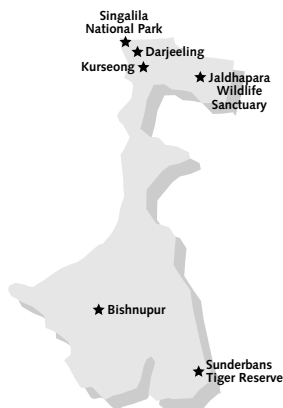
Emerging from the tempestuous Bay of Bengal in a maze of primeval mangroves, West Bengal stretches across the vast Ganges plain before abruptly rising towards the mighty ramparts of the Himalaya. This long, narrow state is India's most densely populated and straddles a breadth of society and geography unmatched in the country. As the cradle of the Indian Renaissance and national freedom movement, erstwhile Bengal has long been considered the country's cultural heartland, famous for its eminent writers, poets, artists, spiritualists and revolutionaries. Overshadowed perhaps by the reputation of its capital Kolkata (Calcutta), it is nonetheless surprising that this rich and diverse state receives so few foreign tourists.

In the World Heritage-listed Sunderbans, the Ganges delta hosts not only the world's most extensive mangrove forest, but also the greatest population of the elusive Royal Bengal tiger. On the Ganges plains a calm ocean of green paddies surrounds bustling trading towns, mud-and-thatch villages, and vestiges of Bengal's glorious and remarkable past: ornate, terracotta-tiled Hindu temples and monumental ruins of the Muslim nawabs (ruling princes).

As the ground starts to rise, the famous Darjeeling Himalayan Railway begins its ascent to the cooler climes of former British hill stations. The train switches back and loops its way to Darjeeling, still a summer retreat and a quintessential remnant of the Raj. Here, amid Himalayan giants and renowned tea estates, lies a network of mountain trails. Along with the quiet, orchid-growing haven of nearby Kalimpong, once part of Bhutan, these mountain retreats offer a glimpse into the Himalayan cultures of Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Rise early to witness morning's first light on the sacred peaks of Khangchendzonga from the colonial hill station of **Darjeeling** (p530)
- Step aboard the toy train on the **Darjeeling Himalayan Railway** (p535) as it steams to the tea town of Kurseong
- Trace the footsteps of traders along rhododendron-lined trails in **Singalila National Park** (p542)
- Capture a wild rhinoceros with your camera from the back of an elephant in the jungles of **Jaldhpara Wildlife Sanctuary** (p527)
- Savour the warmth and glow of the ancient terracotta temples in **Bishnupur** (p521) under a setting orange sun
- Take a river-boat journey through the mysterious **Sunderbans Tiger Reserve** (opposite), with the prospect of sighting royalty (in the form of a tiger)



## History

Referred to as Vanga in the Mahabharata, this region has a long history predating the Aryan invasions of India. It was part of the Mauryan empire in the 3rd century BC before being overrun by the Guptas. For three centuries from around the 9th century AD, the Pala dynasty controlled a large area based in Bengal and including parts of Orissa, Bihar and modern Bangladesh.

Bengal was brought under Muslim control by Qutb-ud-din, first of the sultans of Delhi, at the end of the 12th century. Following the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, Bengal became an independent Muslim state.

The British established a trading post in Kolkata in 1698, which quickly prospered. Sensing rich pickings, Siraj-ud-daula, the nawab of Bengal, came down from his capital at Murshidabad and easily took Kolkata in 1756. Robert Clive defeated him the following year at the Battle of Plassey, helped by the treachery of Siraj-ud-daula's uncle, Mir Jafar, who commanded the greater part of the nawab's army. He was rewarded by succeeding his nephew as nawab, but after the Battle of Buxar in 1764 the British took full control of Bengal.

In 1947 Indian independence from Britain and the subsequent partition of the country saw the state of Bengal divided on religious grounds, causing the upheaval of millions of Bengalis (see p50).

## Climate

The monsoon deluges West Bengal from mid-June until late September and the resulting flooding wreaks havoc with the roads and railways from the plains to the hills.

## Information

Useful websites include those of the **state government** ([www.wbgov.com](http://www.wbgov.com)) and the **tourist department** ([www.wbtourism.com](http://www.wbtourism.com)).

## Activities

### TREKKING

While pleasant walks along pine-scented trails are possible in all West Bengal's hill stations, the best multiday treks are organised from Kalimpong (see p546) and Darjeeling (see p542).

### RAFTING

Adrenaline-pumping white-water rafting trips are held on the mighty Teesta and Rangeet

## FAST FACTS

- Population: 80.2 million
- Area: 87,853 sq km
- Capital: Kolkata
- Main language: Bengali
- When to go: West Bengal Hills, October to December and March to May; Lower Plains, October to March

Rivers from the tiny riverside town of Teesta Bazaar (p548), and can be organised in Darjeeling (see p537).

## Getting There & Around

The vast majority who enter West Bengal arrive in Kolkata. Siliguri's Bagdogra airport has services to Kolkata, Delhi and Guwahati, as well as daily helicopter flights to Gangtok.

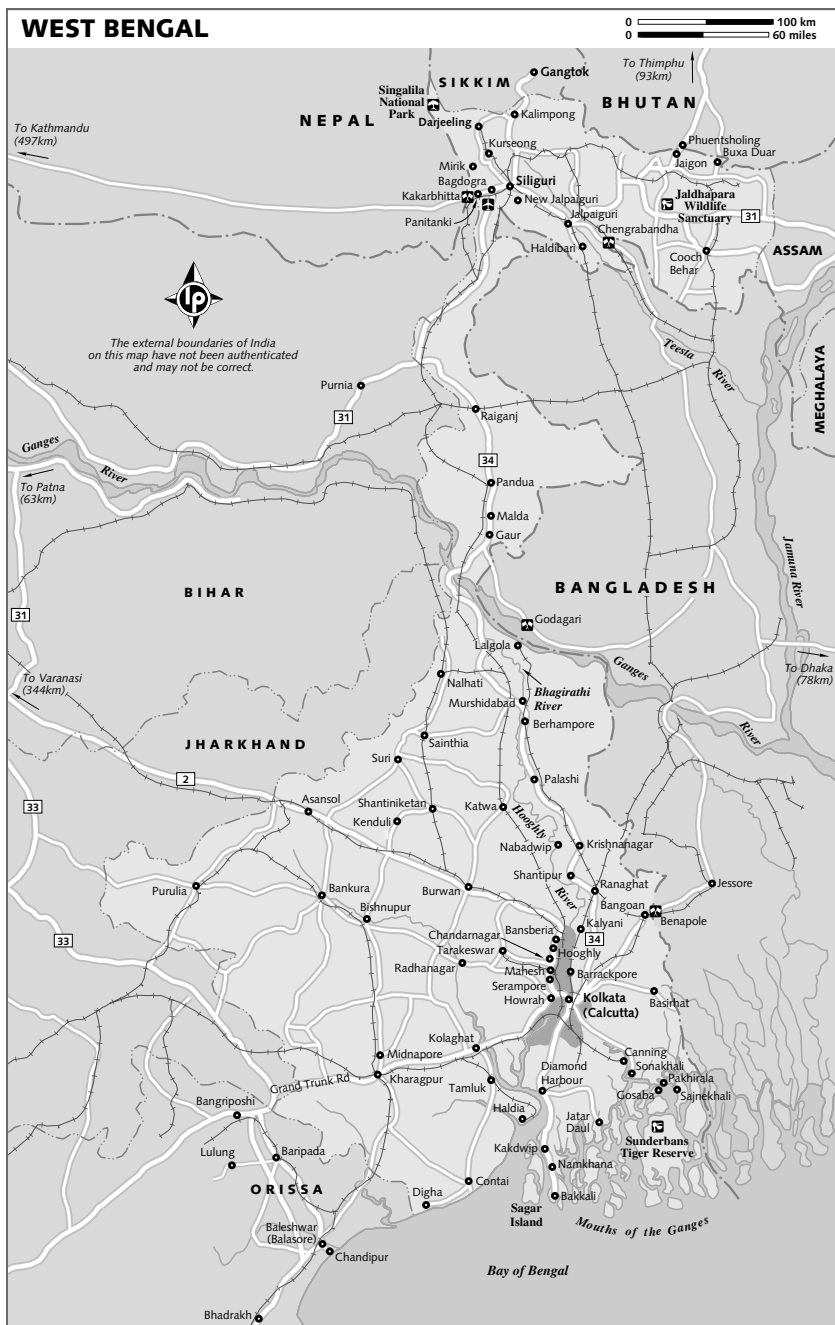
Most arriving by land do so on Indian Railways, which has main lines running south to Bhubaneswar and Chennai (Madras), and west to Gaya, Varanasi and Delhi. Other rail lines connect the state to Assam in the north-east and to Jharkhand in the southwest. There are also numerous long-distance buses that connect surrounding states.

Most cities and towns within West Bengal are connected by rail and bus, while overcrowded share jeeps ply the winding roads of the West Bengal Hills.

# SOUTH OF KOLKATA

## SUNDERBANS TIGER RESERVE

Home to one of the largest concentrations of tigers on the planet, this 2585-sq-km **reserve** (☎ 03218-55280; admission per day Rs 15) is a network of channels and semi-submerged mangroves that is part of the world's largest river delta. Royal Bengal tigers (officially estimated to number 274) not only lurk in the impenetrable depths of the mangrove forests, but also swim the delta's innumerable channels. Although they're known to have an appetite for humans (see the boxed text, p520), tigers are typically shy and sightings are a very rare exception. Nevertheless, a trip to this watery World Heritage site is rewarding with or without a glimpse of the big cats. Cruising the broad waterways through the world's biggest mangrove forest



## FESTIVALS IN WEST BENGAL

**Lepcha & Bhutia New Year** (Jan; West Bengal Hills, p523) Colourful fairs and traditional dances in and around Darjeeling.

**Gangasagar Mela** (mid-Jan; Sagar Island, p520) The most intense West Bengal festival; hundreds of thousands of Hindu pilgrims converge where the Ganges meets the sea, to bathe en masse.

**Magh Mela** (6-8 Feb; Shantiniketan, p522) Crafts take centre stage at this festival.

**Bengali New Year** (Naba Barsha; mid-Apr; statewide) A statewide holiday celebrates the first day in the Bangla Calendar.

**Rath Yatra** (Car Festival; Jun/Jul; Mahesh) Celebrated by pulling Lord Jagannath's chariot in Mahesh, 3km from Serampore (p521).

**Jhapan Festival** (mid-Aug; Bishnupur, p521) Draws snake charmers to honour the goddess Manasa, the central figure of snake worship.

**Fulpati** (Sep-Oct; Darjeeling, p530) Linked to Durga Puja, this predominantly Nepali festival is also celebrated by Lepchas and others with processions and dancing from Ghoom to Darjeeling.

**Durga Puja** (Oct; statewide, p521) Across the state, especially in Kolkata, temporary castles (*pandals*) are raised and intense celebrations take place to worship Durga. After four colourful days, beautiful images of the 10-armed goddess are immersed in the rivers.

**Darjeeling Carnival** (7-16 Nov; Darjeeling, p530) Celebrating the region's unity with cultural shows, activities, children's festivals, jazz music and even a *momo* (Tibetan dumpling) –eating contest.

**Jagaddhatri Puja** (Nov; Chandernagar, p521) Honours the goddess Jagaddhatri.

**Rash Mela** (Nov; Cooch Behar & the Sunderbans) Immortalises the union of Lord Krishna and Radha.

**Teesta Tea & Tourism Festival** (Nov; West Bengal Hills, p523) Features cultural events.

**Paush Mela** (Dec; Shantiniketan, p522) Folk music, dance, theatre and Baul songs radiate over town.

**Bishnupur Festival** (late Dec; Bishnupur, p521) Highlights handicrafts and local music.

and watching wildlife, whether it be a spotted deer, 2m-long water monitor or luminescent kingfisher, is sublime and a world away from Kolkata's chaos.

The best time to visit the tiger reserve is between October and March. Visiting independently is difficult, with permits and tricky transport connections to organise, and it's not cheap; you'll have to bear the cost of boat rentals alone. Organised tours (see right) are the easy and comfortable alternative.

At Sajnekhali, the official gateway into the reserve, you'll find the **Mangrove Interpretation Centre** (admission Rs 2; ☎ 8.30am-5pm), with a small turtle and crocodile hatchery, displays on local conservation issues and a collection of pickled wildlife.

Boats are available for hire at Sajnekhali, costing Rs 400 for a three-hour island trip to Rs 1200 for a full day. You'll also need a guide (fixed rate is Rs 200 per day) and a boat permit (Rs 50 per day).

## Permits

Foreigners need a permit to visit the Sunderbans Tiger Reserve. Free permits are issued at the **West Bengal Tourism Centre** (☎ 22488271; www.wbtourism.com; 3/2 BBD Bagh; ☎ 10.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, to

1pm Sat) in Kolkata. The process may take up to an hour and you'll need your passport.

## Tours

Tours vary widely in prices, so it is worth shopping around. Tours typically include return transport from Kolkata, as well as all the fees and necessary permits, but do check what is and isn't included in your deal.

The **West Bengal Tourism Centre** (☎ 22488271; www.wbtourism.com; 3/2 BBD Bagh, Kolkata; ☎ 10.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) organises weekly boat cruises during the high season (September to January), costing from Rs 1350 per person for one night and two half-days, including food and onboard accommodation. Trips with a worthwhile extra day start from Rs 2050.

A better option, especially if you want to sleep on dry land, is **Sunderban Tiger Camp** (☎ 033-32935749; www.sunderbantigercamp.com; ☎ year-round; ☎). It provides expert guides and quality accommodation, with good food and even a bar. Tiger-spotting excursions are onboard comfortable river boats with ample shade, and there are sufficient tiger stories and glasses of tea to keep you awake. Traditional entertainment and walks to a local village are arranged for the evenings. All-inclusive prices range

## LIVING AMONG TIGERS

For those who live and work in the Sunderbans, tigers are an everyday part of life. Muslims and Hindus alike revere the tiger-god Dakshin Roy and the forest saviour Bonobibi, who protects them from the man-eaters. Wives of men working in the Sunderbans have even taken to living their days as widows; only when their husbands return do they don their marital ornamentation.

Since tigers are less likely to attack if they suspect they're being watched, honey collectors and woodcutters wear masks painted with human faces on the backs of their heads. The tigers' extraordinary swimming prowess mean fishermen are not immune; at night tigers have been known to climb aboard fishing boats, which are anchored midstream, and abscond with not-so-happy prey.

Thanks to strategic perimeter fencing near villages, the numbers of human deaths attributed to tigers has dropped from an estimated 200 a year to about 30, despite an (official) increasing tiger population.

from Rs 2150/3440 per person for one-/two-night trips staying in comfortable tents to Rs 3400/6280 for more luxurious cottages.

## Sleeping & Eating

Choices for the independent traveller are either overpriced or inconveniently located.

**Kamal Kamini** (☎ 03128-236035; d with shared bathroom Rs 80-200) Located far away in Gosaba's bazaar, this dingy, bottom-end option is the only choice if you're determined to see the Sunderbans as an independent traveller.

**Sajnekhali Tourist Lodge** (☎ 03218-214960; dm/d incl 1 meal & breakfast Rs 220/550) While perfectly located in Sajnekhali, its rooms are dark and dank. Some private tour operators use this accommodation option, so bookings are essential. Dorms can't be booked in advance.

## Getting There & Away

From Kolkata (Babu Ghat) it's quickest to get a bus to Sonakhali (Rs 45, three hours); aim for the first departure at 6.30am. Then go by boat to Gosaba (Rs 11, 1½ hours, hourly), where there are shared cycle-rickshaws to Pakhirala (Rs 8, 45 minutes). From there, take another boat to Sajnekhali (Rs 4, 10 minutes). The last Kolkata bus leaves Sonakhali at 4.30pm.

## DIAMOND HARBOUR

☎ 03174 / pop 37,238

Diamond Harbour, once the main port of the East India Company, rests 51km south of Kolkata, where the Hooghly turns south and flows into open sea. While it's a popular picnic spot, there isn't much to see besides a ruined Portuguese fort. However, it's a good staging area for points in the south.

**Diamond Harbour Tourist Centre** (Sagarika Tourist Lodge; ☎ /fax 255246; dm Rs 80, d from Rs 300, with AC from Rs 700; 🍽️) is a satisfactory overnight stop. The better rooms have their back to the ocean.

Buses from Kolkata (Rs 24, 1½ hours) come and go every 30 minutes.

## SAGAR ISLAND

☎ 03210 / pop 185,301

According to legend, after the sage Kapil reduced King Sagar's 60,000 sons to ashes, it was at Sagar Island that the Ganges revived their souls by flowing over their dusty remains. Each year the **Gangasagar Mela** (p519) is held here, near the Kapil Muni Temple, honouring the legend.

Within sight of the temple, **Larica Sagar Vihar** (☎ 240226; dm Rs 100, d Rs 360-600) has large, clean rooms with mosquito nets and a decent restaurant (mains Rs 20 to 80). Other choices include a rather dark, dank youth hostel and various ashrams. Note that prices soar during the mela.

From Diamond Harbour, take a bus to Hardwood Point (Rs 20, one hour), where a ferry (Rs 6, 25 minutes) crosses the Hooghly to Sagar Island. Buses run the 30km from the ferry landing to the temple (Rs 25, 45 minutes).

## BAKKALI

☎ 03210

Bakkali is a beach town located 132km south of Kolkata. The white-sand **beach** is rather desolate and exposed, but OK for a stroll. An hour north is the colourful fishing village of **Namkhana**.

A few minutes' walk from Bakkali's beach is the **Bakkali Tourist Lodge** (☎ 225260; dm/d Rs 80/400). It's rather run-down, but comfortable for a night or two.

A government bus departs from Kolkata's Esplanade for Bakkali daily at 7am (Rs 69, four hours).

## DIGHA

☎ 03220

Digha, the 'Brighton of the East', is located on the Bay of Bengal, 185km southwest of Kolkata. While it's a nice escape from the city, this is not a spot for a surf. A less crowded seaside hideaway can be found 14km north at Shankarpur.

The bright, balconied **Digha Tourist Lodge** (☎ 266255; fax 266256; d from Rs 300, with AC Rs 700; ♿) offers the best value, but look at a few rooms as they vary widely.

Several buses run daily from Kolkata's Esplanade (Rs 75, five hours).

## NORTH OF KOLKATA

### UP THE HOOGHLY

On the Hooghly River, 25km north of Kolkata, Serampore was a Danish trading centre until Denmark's holdings in India were transferred to the East India Company in 1845. At **Serampore College** there are impressive colonial buildings and a remarkable cast-iron gate donated by the Danish king. Further upriver is the former French outpost of **Chandarnagar**, where you can visit the Eglise du Sacre Coeur and the 18th-century mansion now housing the **Cultural Institut de Chandarnagar** (admission free; ☎ 11am-5.30pm, closed Thu & Sat), with collections documenting this colonial outpost.

In 1537 the Portuguese set up a factory in **Hooghly**, 41km north of Kolkata, which became an important trading port long before Kolkata rose to prominence. After a lengthy siege, the Portuguese were expelled from Hooghly in 1632 by Shah Jahan, but were allowed to return a year later. Climb the lofty minarets of the **Imambara** (admission Rs 4; ☎ 8am-5.30pm), where the view will take your breath away. The building was constructed in 1836 to host the Shiite procession of Muharram. Only 1km south of Hooghly, **Chinsura** was exchanged by the Dutch for the British possessions on the (Indonesian) island of Sumatra in 1825. There is a fort and a Dutch cemetery, 1km to the west.

About 6km north of Hooghly, **Bansberia** has two interesting temples. The 13 *sikhara*s (spires) at **Hansewari** look like something you'd expect to see in St Petersburg, while the ornate

### DURGA'S BATH

Since Durga is the goddess of all things and beings, it shouldn't come as a surprise that the list of ingredients required for rituals during the Durga Puja (p519) is a long and strange one. For instance, the goddess' daily bath requires no less than 75 items. These range from extracts of bitter fruit and dew collected off lotus pollens to soil from beneath a prostitute's door. Yes, from beneath a prostitute's door! It's believed that men leave their virtues behind when entering such an establishment, thus making the doorstep's soil a potent one. It's also thought that this ingredient symbolises the festival's inclusion of all levels of Bengali society. Fascinatingly, instead of bathing Durga's clay image itself, the bath is given to a mirror holding her reflection.

terracotta tiles covering the **Vasudev Temple** resemble those seen in Bishnupur.

### BISHNUPUR

☎ 03244 / pop 61,943

Known for its beautiful terracotta temples, Bishnupur flourished as the capital of the Malla kings from the 16th to the early 19th centuries. The architecture of these intriguing **temples** (Indian/foreigner Rs 5/100; ☎ dawn to dusk) is a bold mix of Bengali, Islamic and Orissan styles. Intricately detailed façades of numerous temples play out scenes of the Hindu epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. The most striking temples are the Jor Bangla, Madan Mohan, the multi-arched Ras Mancha and the elaborate Shyam Rai. Cycle-rickshaw-wallahs offer tours (the best way to negotiate the labyrinth of lanes) for Rs 100. There's a small **museum** (admission Rs 10; ☎ 11am-7pm Tue-Sun) that's worth a look for its painted manuscript covers, stone friezes, musical instruments and folk-art gallery.

Bishnupur is in Bankura district, famous for its **pottery**, particularly the stylised Bankura horse, and Baluchari silk saris.

**Bishnupur Tourist Lodge** (☎ 252013; dm Rs 80, d from Rs 300, with AC Rs 650; ♿) is a typically sleepy government-run hotel with adequate, unremarkable rooms. It's close to the museum and a Rs 20 rickshaw ride from the train station.

Regular buses run to Kolkata (Rs 60, five hours) and to Shantiniketan (Rs 65, five hours). Three daily trains run to Kolkata (2nd



class/chair Rs 84/278, four hours); the quickest depart at 7.30am and 5.30pm.

## SHANTINIKETAN

☎ 03463

Shantiniketan is the epitome of its Bengali name, which means peaceful (*shanti*) abode (*niketan*). Rabindranath Tagore (see the boxed text, p75) founded a school here in 1901, which later developed into the Visva-Bharati University, with an emphasis on humanity's relationship with nature.

Spread through the leafy university grounds are eclectic statues, the celebrated **Shantiniketan Murals** and the **Tagore Prayer Hall**. Oddly, Tagore's car, a black Humber, sits silently behind a glass-walled garage, its fate sealed by the fact that it was used by him. The **museum and art gallery** (admission Rs 5; ☎ 10.30am-1pm & 2-4.30pm Thu-Mon, 10.30am-1pm Tue) in the Uttarayan complex are worth a peek if you're an aficionado of Tagore. The bookshop at the main gate has plenty of Tagore's titles (Rs 80 to Rs 250) in English.

## Sleeping & Eating

There are several options in the quiet leafy streets of Bhubandanga and Jamboni.

**Shantiniketan Tourist Lodge** (☎ 252699; fax 252398; Bhubandanga; dm/d/d with AC Rs 80/350/850; 🍴) This government-run hotel is central, simple and clean enough, though the staff are indifferent and the restaurant has a very limited range of lack lustre dishes (mains Rs 40 to 100).

**Hotel Santiniketan** (☎ 254434; Bhubandanga; s/d/d with AC Rs 250/300/700; 🍴) This bold and balconied hotel has the best and cleanest rooms around. The ground-floor rooms are pleasantly cool, and there's a garden for relaxing and wishing you could order a beer. The restaurant (mains Rs 35 to 80) dishes up tasty curries, including a few South Indian dishes.

**Chhuti Holiday Resort** (☎ 252692; Jamboni; d from Rs 800, with AC Rs 1400; 🍴) This cluster of cottages looks great from the outside but the stone-floored cottages are small and can be damp. Its restaurant (mains Rs 50 to 100) is a cut above the others though, with a good range of Indian, Chinese and continental dishes.

About the only place to get a cold beer is the dimly lit bar down the side of the **Hotel Embika** (Bhubandanga).

## Getting There & Away

Several trains ply between Bolpur station, 2km south of the university, and Kolkata daily. The

best are 2337/8 (2nd class/chair Rs 72/235, 2½ hours) departing at 10.10am from Howrah and 1.10pm from Bolpur. To New Jalpaiguri choose between 5657 (sleeper/3AC Rs 190/505, eight hours) departing at 9.30am or 2503 (2nd class/chair Rs 126/425) departing at 11.28am. Numerous buses go to Murshidabad (Rs 45, four hours) and Bishnupur (Rs 65, five hours).

## NABADWIP & MAYAPUR

☎ 03472 / pop 115,036

Nabadwip, 114km northwest of Kolkata, is an important Krishna pilgrimage centre, attracting throngs of devotees, and is an ancient centre of Sanskrit culture. The last Hindu king of Bengal, Lakshman Sen, moved his capital here from Gaur.

Across the river from Nabadwip, Mayapur is a centre for the Iskcon (Hare Krishna) movement. There's a large temple and the **Iskcon Guest House** (☎ 245620; d/q Rs 100/350), which runs a private bus to/from Kolkata (Rs 135, five hours; ring for details).

## MURSHIDABAD & BERHAMPURE

☎ 03482 / pop 36,894

In Murshidabad, rural Bengali life and 18th-century architecture meld on the verdant shores of the Bhagirathi River. When Siraj-ud-daula was nawab of Bengal, Murshidabad was his capital, and he was assassinated here after the defeat at Plassey (now Palashi). The Bhagirathi River flows south to the Hooghly and was once the major trading route between inland India and the port of Kolkata, 221km south.

**Hazarduari** (Indian/foreigner Rs 5/100; ☎ 10am-5pm Sat-Thu), a palace famous for its 1000 doors (real and false), was built here for the nawabs in 1837. It now houses an astonishing collection of antiquities from the 18th and 19th centuries, including historical paintings such as Marshall's celebrated *Burial of Sir John Moore*. Beneath the lofty dome of Durbar Hall hangs a vast chandelier, rumoured to have been a gift from Queen Victoria. In the Archive Gallery rests a lustrous Arabic manuscript from the 13th century. The dilapidated **Great Imambara** stands on the palace grounds; its renovated interior deserves a look.

Murshid Quli Khan, who moved the capital here in 1705, is buried in a different section of town, beneath the stairs at the impressive ruins of the **Katra Mosque**. Siraj-ud-daula was assassinated at the **Nimak Haram Deohri** (Traitor's Gate). Within the **Kathgola Gardens** (admis-

sion Rs 7; ☎ 6.30am-5.30pm) is an interesting Jain Parswanath Temple and a museum.

Berhampore is 11km south of Murshidabad and acts as its bus and railway hub.

### Sleeping & Eating

The few hotels here have private bathrooms with bucket hot water.

**Hotel Samrat** (☎ 251147; NH-34 Panchanantala; s/d from Rs 150/200, d with AC from Rs 600; ☞) This is the best place to stay in Berhampore, with a range of satisfactory rooms and a basic restaurant (mains Rs 20 to 120).

**Hotel Manjusha** (☎ 270321; d Rs 300-400) This hotel in Murshidabad sits gloriously on the bank of the Bhagirathi, behind the Great Imambara. Downstairs rooms are cheapest, while rooms 201 to 203 have river and Hazarduari views.

### Getting There & Around

There's a daily express train 3103/4 to/from Kolkata (2nd class/chair Rs 71/236, four hours), departing from Sealdah station (Kolkata) at 6.25pm and Berhampore at 6.24am. Regular buses leave for Kolkata (Rs 56, six hours) and Malda (Rs 45, five hours).

Shared autorickshaws (Rs 10) whizz between Murshidabad and Berhampore. Cycle-rickshaw-wallahs offer guided half-day tours to see the spread-out sites for Rs 100.

## MALDA

☎ 03512 / pop 161,448

Malda, 347km north of Kolkata, is a convenient base for visiting the ruins of Bengal's former capitals in nearby Gaur and Pandua. Malda is also famed for its Fajli mangoes ripening in spring.

Hotels are scattered along the highway and around the bus and train stations.

**Continental Lodge** (☎ 252388; fax 251505; 22 KJ Sanyal Rd; s/d Rs 150/250, d with AC from Rs 500; ☞) is a friendly lodge almost directly opposite the bus station; it offers bright, clean rooms for every budget.

**Hotel Pratapaditya** (☎ 268104; Station Rd; s/d from Rs 160/225, d with AC Rs 650-1200; ☞) is the quietest option and is just off the highway, only 500m from the train station (Rs 4 by rickshaw). It offers a wide variety of rooms, has helpful staff, and a good Indian and continental restaurant (mains Rs 35 to 75).

**Hotel Purbanchal** (☎ 266183; NH-34; s/d from Rs 250/300, with AC Rs 500/575; ☞) has standard rooms that are rather small, but you can pay extra for a TV and more space.

The best train from Kolkata (Sealdah station) is 2503 (2nd class/chair Rs 111/372, six hours), departing 9.05am Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. Train 2503 continues to New Jalpaiguri (Rs 91/301, four hours), departing at 3.05pm. If returning to Kolkata, take the 2066 to Howrah (Rs 122/390, seven hours), departing 6am Monday to Saturday. Buses depart regularly for Siliguri (Rs 110, six hours), Berhampore/Murshidabad (Rs 53, five hours) and Kolkata (from Rs 120, 10 hours).

## GAUR & PANDUA

Rising from the flooded paddy fields of Gaur (16km south of Malda) are mosques and other vestiges of the 13th- to 16th-century capital of the Muslim nawabs. Little remains from the 7th- to 12th-century pre-Muslim period, when Gaur was the capital of the successive Buddhist Pala and Hindu Sena dynasties.

Wander through the ruins of the impressive **Baradwari Mosque** and the intact arcaded aisle of its corridor, or beneath the fortress-like gateway of **Dakhil Darwaza** (1425). The **Qadam Rasul Mosque** enshrines the flat footprint of the Prophet Mohammed. The adjacent **tomb of Fath Khan** (1707) startlingly informs you that he 'vomited blood and died on this spot'. Lotus-flower motifs grace the terracotta façade of the **Tantipara Mosque** (1480), while remnants of colourful enamel cling to the **Lattan and Chamkati mosques**.

North of Pandua (18km north of Malda) are the vast ruins of the 14th-century **Adina Masjid**, once India's largest mosque. Within an intact section of arched and domed bays sits the tomb of Sikander Shah (1364-79), the builder of this mosque. About 2km away is the **Eklakhi mausoleum**, so-called because it cost Rs 1 lakh (Rs 100,000) to build.

The monuments are spread throughout Gaur and Pandua along some of the worst roads in India; it's worth hiring a taxi from Malda for half a day (Rs 500).

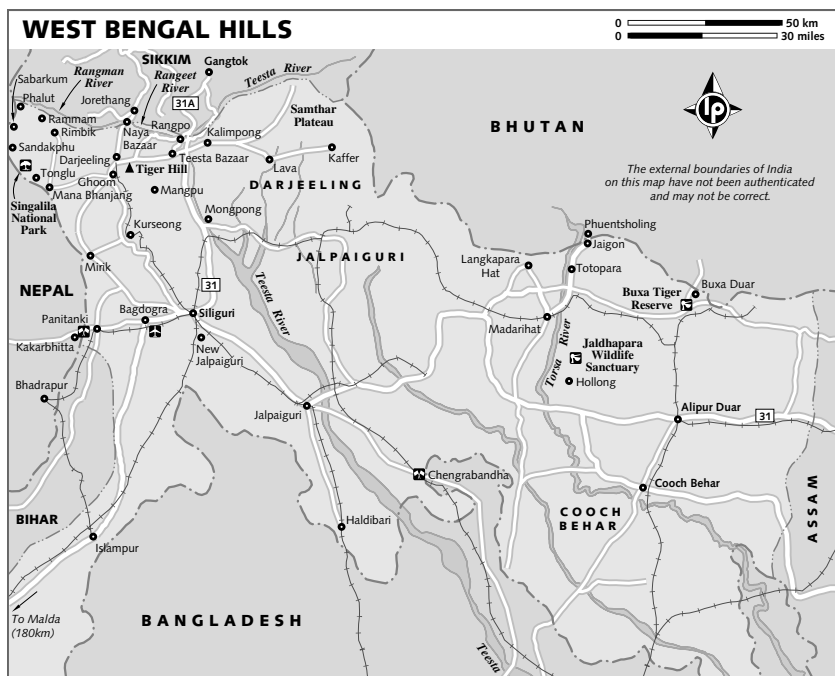
## WEST BENGAL HILLS

### SILIGURI & NEW JALPAIGURI

☎ 0353 / pop 655,935 / elev 119m

The vibrant, crowded trading hub encompassing the twin towns of Siliguri and New Jalpaiguri (NJP) is the jumping-off point for Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Sikkim, the northeast states, eastern Nepal and Bhutan. For most





travellers, Siliguri is an overnight transit point where there are good meals, great shopping and a glimpse of snowy peaks.

## Orientation

Most of Siliguri's hotels, restaurants and services are spread along Tenzing Norgay Rd, better known by its old moniker, Hill Cart Rd. NJP Station Rd leads southward to NJP station, while branching eastward off Hill Cart Rd are Siliguri's other main streets, Sevoke and Bidhan Rds, which bound the bustling Hong Kong Market area.

## Information

### INTERNET ACCESS

**Beauty Dot Com** (Hotel Empees, Bidhan Rd; per hr Rs 20; ☎ 9am-10pm) Cool and fast.

**Cyber Space** (Hotel Vinayak, Hill Cart Rd; per hr Rs 30; ☎ 10am-8.30pm) Digital-camera friendly.

**Net-India** (Sify iway; 22 Hill Cart Rd; per hr Rs 30; ☎ 9am-10pm)

**Net-N-Net** (Hill Cart Rd; per hr Rs 25; ☎ 9.30am-9.30pm)

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Sadar Hospital** (☎ 2436526, 2585224; Hospital Rd)

## MONEY

**Delhi Hotel** (☎ 2516918; Hill Cart Rd; ☎ 7am-9.30pm) Currency and travellers cheques exchanged.

**State Bank of India** (☎ 2431364; Hill Cart Rd; ☎ 10am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, till 1pm Sat) Currency and travellers cheques (only American Express and Thomas Cook) exchanged. ATMs on Bidhan and Hill Cart Rds (hidden just north of the bank).

**UBI Bank ATM** (Hill Cart Rd)

## PHOTOGRAPHY

Photo labs are abundant on Hill Cart Rd.

**Cyber Space** (Hotel Vinayak, Hill Cart Rd; ☎ 10am-8.30pm) USB connection and CD burning (Rs 50).

## POST

**General post office** (☎ 2538850; Hospital Rd; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun)

## TOURIST INFORMATION

**Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council Tourist Office** (DGHC; ☎ 2518680; Hill Cart Rd; ☎ 10am-4.15pm Mon-Fri) A friendly office with useful (if dated) brochures on Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong and Mirik.

**Government of Assam Tourist Office** (Pradhan Nagar Rd; ☎ 10am-4.15pm Mon-Fri) A desk, no phone, two men, three chairs and five pamphlets.

**Sikkim Tourist Office** (☎ 2512646; SNT Terminal, Hill Cart Rd; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) Issues permits for Sikkim (see p541). If you apply in the morning, your permit will typically be ready by the afternoon; bring your passport and one passport-sized photo.

**West Bengal Tourist Office** (☎ 2511979; slg\_omntdc@sancharnet.in; Hill Cart Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) Helpful staff (if prodded), who can also book accommodation for the Jaldhapa Wildlife Sanctuary (p527) between 11am and 4pm. Less helpful information desks are also at the airport and NJP train station.

## Sleeping

Dozens of budget and midrange hotels are along Hill Cart Rd, with most congregated near the Tenzing Norgay central bus terminal.

## BUDGET

Most budget options have rooms with attached bathrooms and a choice of toilet design. Hot water usually comes in buckets, though several hotels have geysers (hot-water heaters).

**Hotel Chancellor** (☎ 2432372; cnr Sevoke & Hill Cart Rds; s/d from Rs 125/250, new block s/d 370/400) This is a no-frills but friendly Tibetan-run place. Ask for a room in the newer section, with its brighter, quieter rooms. The older section cops a fair bit of traffic noise. A TV costs Rs 50 per night.

**Hotel Apsara** (☎ 2514252; 18 Patel Rd; s/d Rs 150/200) A block behind busy Hill Cart Rd is this clean, simple, inexpensive and quiet option (most bathrooms have squat toilets).

**Hotel Hill View** (☎ 2519951; Hill Cart Rd; s/d from Rs 150/250) A rarity in Siliguri – a budget hotel with some charm. This vintage 1951 accommodation comes complete with a friendly and helpful manager, and the handful of basic rooms (one has a private bathroom) are spacious and clean.

**Hotel Breeze** (☎ 2691136; NJP Station Rd; d from Rs 180) Less than a 10-minute walk (Rs 7 rickshaw ride) north from NJP station, this hotel has a range of rooms from the simple, bare-bones type to those with a little more comfort. All rooms are doubles, but solo travellers should ask for a discount.

**Conclave Lodge** (☎ 2514102; Hill Cart Rd; s/d from Rs 200/350) Tucked away behind the more visible Hotel Conclave, this lodge has spotless, quiet rooms with private bathrooms.

**SILIGURI**

0 500 m  
0 0.3 miles  
Approximate Scale

To Bagdogra Airport (12km); Panitanki (30km); Kolkata (600km)

To Darjeeling (80km)

To Kalimpong (70km)

To Hotel Breeze (1km); New Jalpaiguri Train Station (1.5km)

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**MIDRANGE & TOP END**

All rooms boast a TV and a private bathroom with a geyser.

**Hotel Skylark** (☎ 2535388; fax 2537641; 1 Tilak Rd; s/d Rs 400/500, with AC Rs 700/800; ♿) Just off Bidhan Rd, Hotel Skylark is a clean and tidy, firm-bedded option that sports some bright rooms and leafy balconies overlooking Siliguri Stadium.

**Hotel Vinayak** (☎ 2431130; fax 2531067; Hill Cart Rd; d Rs 400-700, with AC Rs 900-3200; ♿) A friendly hotel with spotless rooms and a pretty good restaurant. The comfortable, fan-cooled non-AC rooms are particularly good value.

**Hotel Conclave** (☎ 2516144; www.hotelconclave.com; Hill Cart Rd; s/d from Rs 500/600, with AC from Rs 750/900; ♿) This sparkling, contemporary hotel boasts fine woodwork, quality mattresses and an unexpected external glass elevator. The rooms are spotless and downstairs is the excellent Eminent Restaurant (see below).

**Hotel Sindairs** (☎ 2517674; www.sindairshotels.com; off NH31; s/d from Rs 1870/2310; ♿) This comfortable three-star hotel languishes far from the noise of Hill Cart Rd, about 2km north of the bus terminal. The rooms are spacious, if a little tired, but there's an excellent restaurant-cum-bar and the chance to dive into a cool pool.

**Eating**

Siliguri has plenty of good restaurants, though if you want a cold beer with your curry, the choice is more limited.

**New Ranjit Hotel** (☎ 2431785; Hill Cart Rd, mains Rs 25-70) Beneath Sartaj (see below), this busy vegetarian restaurant is the place to find wonderful dosas and other South Indian delicacies. North Indian and Chinese veg dishes are also available.

**Khana Khazana** (☎ 2517516; Hill Cart Rd; mains Rs 35-85) This relaxed restaurant's secluded patio is a nice lunch spot. The extensive menu of pizzas and Chinese and South Indian specials includes plenty of vegetarian options.

**Eminent Restaurant** (Hotel Conclave, Hill Cart Rd, mains Rs 45-110; ☎ 7am-11pm; ♿) This stylish eatery pumps out great tandoori delicacies and pizzas, though the AC can make it a little too chilly.

**Sartaj** (☎ 2431759; Hill Cart Rd, mains Rs 75-140; ♿) A cool and sophisticated restaurant with first-rate North Indian tandooris and curries and top-notch service. There's a bar, and alcohol is served to your table.

**Shopping**

There are numerous markets here, from the bright and traditional hawkers' market near NJP station to the high-rise Hong Kong Market in Siliguri where you will find imported goods at smugglers' prices. Siliguri is also known for its cane-ware, and you will find everything from letter racks to lounge suites spread along Hill Cart Rd.

**Getting There & Away****AIR**

Bagdogra airport is 12km west of Siliguri. **Indian Airlines** (☎ 2511495; www.indianairlines.in; Hill Cart Rd; ✈ 10am-1pm & 1.45-4.30pm Mon-Sat) has three flights a week to Kolkata (US\$138, one hour), five to Delhi (US\$268, four hours) and three to Guwahati (US\$103, 50 minutes). **Jet Airways** (☎ 2538001; www.jetairways.com; Hill Cart Rd; ✈ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) has similar fares to Kolkata (daily), Delhi (daily) and Guwahati (four per week). **Air Deccan** (☎ 39008888; www.airdeccan.net) has daily flights to Kolkata (Rs 1974) and Delhi (Rs 3974), and three flights a week to Guwahati (Rs 1474).

Daily helicopter flights (Rs 2000, 30 minutes, 10kg luggage limit) go from Bagdogra to Gangtok at 1.30pm (Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, Sunday) and 2pm (Monday, Friday, Wednesday). You can buy tickets from **Tourist Service Agency** (TSA; ☎ 2531959; tsaslg@sancharnet.in; Pradhan Nagar Rd), close to the Delhi Hotel.

**BUS**

Most North Bengal State Transport Corporation (NBSTC) buses leave from **Tenzing Norgay central bus terminal** (Hill Cart Rd), as do many private buses plying the same routes. NBSTC bus services include those listed opposite.

Sikkim Nationalised Transport (SNT) buses to Gangtok (Rs 70, 4½ hours) leave at 8.30am, 10am and 1.30pm from the **SNT terminal** (Hill Cart Rd). There are also deluxe buses (Rs 90) departing here at 7am and 12.30pm. If travelling to Sikkim, you'll require a permit available in Siliguri at the adjacent Sikkim Tourist Information Centre (p525).

**JEEP**

A faster and more comfortable way of getting around the hills is by share jeep. There are a number of jeep stands: for Darjeeling (Rs 80, 2½ hours) and Kurseong (Rs 50, 1½ hours), look around and opposite the bus terminal; for Kalimpong (Rs 70, 2½ hours) there's a

**NBSTC BUSES FROM SILIGURI**

Destination	Fare (Rs)	Duration (hr)	Frequency
Berhampore	167	9	6.45am, 8pm & 9pm
Darjeeling	60	3½	every 30min
Guwahati	277	12	5pm
Kalimpong	50	3	hourly
Kolkata	220-250	12-16	6-8pm
Kurseong	40	2	every 30min
Madarihat	60	3	hourly
Malda	112	6½	hourly
Mirik	45	2½	hourly
Patna	245	14	5pm

stand on Sevoke Rd; and for Gangtok (Rs 120, four hours) jeeps leave from next to the SNT terminal.

Chartering a jeep privately costs roughly 10 times that of a shared ticket. An option for XL-sized Westerners is to pay for and occupy all the front three seats next to the driver.

**TRAIN**

The fastest of the four daily services to Kolkata is the *Darjeeling Mail* 2344 (sleeper/3AC Rs 263/684, 11 hours, departs 8pm), which stops in Malda (Rs 154/375, four hours). A better option for Malda is the *New Jalpaiguri Sealdah Express* 2504 (2nd class/chair Rs 111/372, four hours, departing 9.45am Monday, Wednesday and Saturday). The *North East Express* 2505 is the fastest to Delhi (sleeper/3AC Rs 441/1185, 27 hours, departs 4.35pm), travelling via Patna (Rs 235/604, 11 hours). Eastward, train 2506 reaches Guwahati (sleeper/3AC Rs 214/544, eight hours, departs 9am).

There's a **train booking office** (☎ 2537333; nr Hospital & Bidhan Rds; ☎ 8-11.30am & noon-8pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun).

**Toy Train**

The diesel toy train (p535) climbs the 80km from New Jalpaiguri to Darjeeling in nine long hours (2nd/1st class Rs 42/247, departs 9am). It's wise to make reservations (booking fee 2nd/1st class Rs 15/30) two to three days in advance at NJP station or the train booking office. If steam is your passion, you can catch the steam version to Darjeeling from Kurseong (p530).

**Getting Around**

From the bus terminal to NJP train station a taxi/autorickshaw costs Rs 200/90, while cycle-rickshaws charge Rs 50 for the 35-minute trip. Taxis between Bagdogra airport and Siliguri cost Rs 300.

**JALDHAPARA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY**

☎ 03563 / elev 61m

This rarely visited **sanctuary** (☎ 262239; Indian/foreigner Rs 25/100; ☎ mid-Sep-mid-Jul) protects 114 sq km of forests and grasslands along the Torsa River and is a refuge for over 50 Indian one-horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*).

The best time to visit is mid-October to May, particularly in March and April when wild elephants, deer and tigers (rarely seen) are attracted by new grass growth. Your best chance of spotting a rhino is aboard an elephant (Indian/foreigner Rs 120/200 per hour); these safaris are booked by the tourist lodges (see below). If staying elsewhere, you'll be last in line for elephant rides.

The West Bengal Tourist Office in Siliguri (p525) organises overnight **tour**s (per person Rs 2050; ☎ departs 10am Sat) to Jaldhpara, which include an elephant ride, transport, accommodation and all meals.

**Sleeping & Eating**

Lodges should be booked well in advance through the West Bengal Tourist Office in Siliguri, Darjeeling or Kolkata.

**Hotel Relax** (☎ 262304; d Rs 300) A very basic option opposite the Jaldhpara Tourist Lodge, with OK beds, cement floors and squat toilets.

**Jaldhpara Tourist Lodge** (☎ 262230; dm Rs 300, cottage Rs 650, d Rs 1000) This West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation (WBTD) hotel is outside the park precincts near Madarihat. All meals are included in the room rates. Rooms in the characterless newer wing are the better option. The old wing has musty, dark rooms.

**Hollong Forest Tourist Lodge** (☎ 262228; d Rs 1000, plus compulsory Rs 180 per person for breakfast & dinner) This is the most comfortable option and is located within the park itself. Lunch is available for an additional Rs 75.

**Getting There & Away**

Jaldhpara is 124km east of Siliguri. Buses frequent the route from Siliguri to Madarihat (Rs 60, three hours, hourly 6am to 4pm), 9km from Jaldhpara. A taxi from Madarihat to Hollong inside the park is Rs 150.

## CROSSING INTO BANGLADESH, BHUTAN & NEPAL

### To/From Bangladesh

At the time of research there was no direct bus from Siliguri to the border at Chengrabandha. Take a private bus from outside the Tenzing Norgay central bus terminal to Jalpaiguri (Rs 40) and change there for Chengrabandha. The border post is open from 8am to 6pm daily. From near the border post you can catch buses on to Rangpur, Bogra and Dhaka. Visas for Bangladesh can be obtained in Kolkata and New Delhi (see p1167).

### To/From Bhutan

Bhutan Transport Services has a counter inside Tenzing Norgay central bus terminal. Four buses leave daily for Phuentsholling (Rs 65, departures 7.30am, noon, 2pm, 3pm). Indian immigration is in Jaigon, next to **Hotel Kasturi** (☎ 03566-363035; fax 263254; NS Rd; s Rs 300, d Rs 375-1000). Non-Indian nationals need a valid visa authority from a Bhutanese tour operator to enter Bhutan. See www.tourism.gov.bt and Lonely Planet's *Bhutan* for details.

### To/From Nepal

For Nepal, local buses pass the Tenzing Norgay central bus terminal every 15 minutes for the border town of Panitanki (Rs 20, one hour). More comfortable buses (Rs 35) leave from outside the bus terminal. Share Jeeps to Kakarbhitta (Rs 50) are readily available in Siliguri. The Indian border post in Panitanki is officially open 24 hours and the Nepal post in Kakarbhitta is open from 6am to 7pm. See p542 for information on buses from Darjeeling to Kathmandu. Foreign exchange is available at a **Nepal Bank counter** (🕒 7am-5pm) close to the border. Onward from Kakarbhitta there are numerous buses to Kathmandu (NRs 530) and other destinations. Bhadrapur airport, 23km southwest of Kakarbhitta, has regular flights to Kathmandu. For onward air transport and connection to Bhadrapur contact **Jhapa Travel Agency** (☎ 98320221020; jhapatravels@hotmail.com) in Kakarbhitta. Visas for Nepal can be obtained at the border, or in Kolkata or New Delhi (see p1168).

## MIRIK

☎ 0354 / pop 9179 / elev 1767m

Nestled near the Nepal border, halfway between Siliguri and Darjeeling, is this low-profile hill station and honeymoon destination. Mirik is surrounded by an undulating carpet of tea estates, orange orchards, cardamom plantations and forests of tall, dark Japanese cedars. It is a quiet retreat that remains off most visitors' radars. Some of Mirik's higher hilltops offer wonderful views of morning's first light striking Khangchendzonga (8598m).

Check email at **Krishnanagar Cyber Café** (Main Rd, Krishnanagar; per hr Rs 30). There are no money-changing facilities in Mirik.

### Sights & Activities

Mirik is centred on the artificial **Sumendu Lake** and there's a walk around its 3.5km circumference. On the west side of the lake, climb the steps to the diminutive **Hindu Devi Sthan temple complex**, set among moss-covered evergreens, banana trees and stands of bamboo. Perched

high above Mirik, the richly painted **Bokar Gumpa** gazes over the town.

**Pedal boats** (per 30min Rs 60) can be hired near the bridge and **pony rides** (half/full round-the-lake trips Rs 80/160) are offered for various trips around Mirik.

### Sleeping & Eating

Most hotels crowd the main road of Krishnanagar, the compact area to the south of the lake. All rooms mentioned have a private bathroom. Prices stated are for the high season (October to November and March to May); these drop by up to 50% in the low season.

**Lodge Ashirvad** (☎ 2243272; dm Rs 75, s/d Rs 150/250, d with geyser Rs 350) A very friendly and clean budget hotel down a small lane opposite Samden Restaurant. The rooms are spotless and there's a great rooftop terrace. Hot-water buckets cost Rs 10.

**Hotel Ratnagiri** (☎ 2243243; s/d with geyser Rs 400/600) Ratnagiri has some warm, wood-panelled doubles upstairs plus larger family suites. Some rooms have balconies and views of Su-

menu Lake; all have TV and geyser. There's a garden restaurant out the back (mains Rs 30 to 90).

**Hotel Jagjeet** (☎ 2243231; www.jagjeethotel.com; d from Rs 750, mains Rs 30-115; 📺) This is the best hotel in Krishnanagar with a variety of rooms, most with balconies, and attentive service. The streetfront restaurant is deservedly popular, serving excellent Indian, Chinese and continental dishes.

**Mirik Orange County Retreat** (☎ 2243612; cottages incl tax Rs 1300-1800) These luxury, two-storey cottages afford glorious views of the township and surrounding countryside, including Khangchendzonga. To ensure a room it is advisable to book through **Glenary's** (☎ 0354-2257556; fax 2257556) in Darjeeling. Prices are based on double occupancy; additional guests cost Rs 300.

**Samdien Restaurant** (☎ 2243295; mains Rs 10-16; 🕒 5.30am-9pm) A great 'local', next to the Jagjeet, drawing monks and those in love with *momos* and noodle soups (*thukpas* and *thanthuks*).

## Getting There & Away

Buses leave for Darjeeling (Rs 45, three hours) and Siliguri (Rs 45, three hours). Share jeeps depart regularly to Darjeeling and Siliguri (Rs 50, 2½ hours) and Kurseong (Rs 60, three hours). Tickets can be purchased from the lakeside shack at the base of the main road.

## KURSEONG

☎ 0354 / pop 40,067 / elev 1458m

Kurseong, 32km south of Darjeeling, is the little sister of the Queen of the Hills further up the track. It is a great stopover for those looking for a quiet alternative to the jostling crowds of Darjeeling. Kurseong – its name derived from the Lepcha word *kurson-rip*, a reference to the small white orchid prolific in this area – is also home to several churches and is surrounded by renowned tea estates. It is the southern terminus for the steam-powered toy trains of the **Darjeeling Himalayan Railway**.

Hill Cart Rd (Tenzing Norgay Rd) – the main thoroughfare from Siliguri to Darjeeling – and its close shadow, the railway line, wind through town passing tea and paneer sellers and tiny cubicles where 'suitings and shirtings' are sewn on chattering machines. Here you will struggle to find a souvenir shop.

There are numerous good walks in the area, including one to **Eagle's Crag** (2km return) that

affords splendid views down the Teesta and the plains to the south. Along Pankhabari Rd, the graveyard at St Andrews has poignant reminders of the tea-planter era, while the organic **Makaibari Tea Estates** (☎ 2330181; 🕒 Tue-Sat) welcomes visitors to its aromatic factory. Old colonial buildings abound on the ridge above town, and the **Forestry Museum, St Mary's Grotto**, and the **Kunsamnamdoling Gompa** run by *ani* (Buddhist nuns) are well worth visiting.

You can check your email at **Kashyup Computers & Systems** (Hill Cart Rd; per hr Rs 30) and **Cyberzone** (Hotel Delhi Darbar, Hill Cart Rd; per hr Rs 25).

## Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Delhi Darbar** (☎ 2345862; Hill Cart Rd; d Rs 300, mains Rs 25-50; 📺) This budget option is found just uphill from the train station. It's friendly and passably clean (if only they would ditch the carpet), hot water comes by the bucket and some bathrooms have sit-down, flush loos.

**Kurseong Tourist Lodge** (☎ 2344409; d Rs 800, with balcony Rs 900, mains Rs 30-80) This lodge exudes character with warm, wood-lined rooms that smell of polish and feature stunning views. The toy train whistles past the café where you can snack on *momos*, or you can enjoy a cold beer, a refreshing cuppa and a fine Indian, Chinese or continental meal at its scenic restaurant.

**our pick** **Cochrane Place** (☎ 2330703; www.imperi.alchai.com; 132 Pankhabari Rd; s/d from Rs 1750/2000, mains Rs 40-120) This exceptional boutique hotel surrounded by tea plantations and overlooking the twinkling lights of Siliguri is a destination in its own right. This much-extended colonial chalet is full of antique furniture and individually decorated rooms. Trainspotters will be beside themselves in Pandim (each room is named after a Himalayan peak). The owners are rightly proud of their kitchen, which re-creates tastes of the Raj and all meals are available either as set menus, part of the tariff or à la carte. The hotel is wheelchair friendly, provides airport (Bagdogra) and train station pick-up, and has a wealth of local knowledge to point you towards trails and sights in the region.

**Glenary's Junction** (Kurseong Train Station; snacks Rs 10-25; 🕒 8am-7pm) Tucked into the cute station is a branch of Darjeeling's favourite cake shop. Sit down for biscuits, brownies, cakes, tea, coffee and assorted hot snacks, or browse the great photos of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway's glory days.



## Getting There & Away

Numerous share jeeps run to Darjeeling (Rs 40, 1½ hours), Siliguri (Rs 50, 1½ hours), Kalimpong (Rs 100, 3½ to four hours) and Mirik (Rs 60, 2½ hours). Buses leave from near the train station for Darjeeling (Rs 25, two hours) and Siliguri (Rs 40, 2½ hours).

The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway's steam toy train (p535) for Darjeeling (2nd/1st class Rs 25/144, four hours) leaves at 6am, weather permitting, while the diesel version (originating at New Jalpaiguri) departs around 1.17pm. A diesel train (originating in Darjeeling) to Siliguri (2nd/1st class Rs 30/166, four hours) departs at 11.55pm.

## DARJEELING

☎ 0354 / pop 109,160 / elev 2134m

Draped over a steep mountain ridge, surrounded by tea plantations and backed by a splendid Himalayan panorama, the archetypal hill station of Darjeeling is rightly West Bengal's premier drawcard. When you aren't gazing at Khangchendzonga (8598m), you can explore colonial mansions and churches, Buddhist and Hindu temples, botanical gardens and a zoo for Himalayan fauna. The steep narrow streets are crowded with colourful souvenir and handicraft shops, and a good steaming brew and excellent Indian and Tibetan fare are never far away. For the adventurous there are superb treks which trace ancient trade routes and provide magnificent viewpoints.

Most tourists visit after the monsoon (October and November) and during spring (mid-March to the end of May) when skies are dry, panoramas are clear and temperatures are pleasant.

## History

This area belonged to the Buddhist chogyals (kings) of Sikkim until 1780, when it was annexed by the invading Gurkhas from Nepal. The Gurkhas' aggressive territorial expansion led to growing conflicts with the British and, after several battles, the East India Company gained control of the region in 1816. The company then returned most of the lands back to Sikkim in exchange for British control over any future border disputes.

During one such dispute in 1828, two British officers stumbled across the Dorje Ling monastery, on a tranquil forested ridge, and passed word to Calcutta that it would be a perfect site for a sanatorium; they were sure

to have also mentioned its strategic military importance in the region. The Chogyal of Sikkim (still grateful for the return of his kingdom) happily leased the uninhabited land to the East India Company in 1835 and a hill station was born.

Forest gradually made way for colonial houses and tea plantations, and by 1857 the population of Darjeeling reached 10,000, mainly because of a massive influx of Gurkha labourers from Nepal.

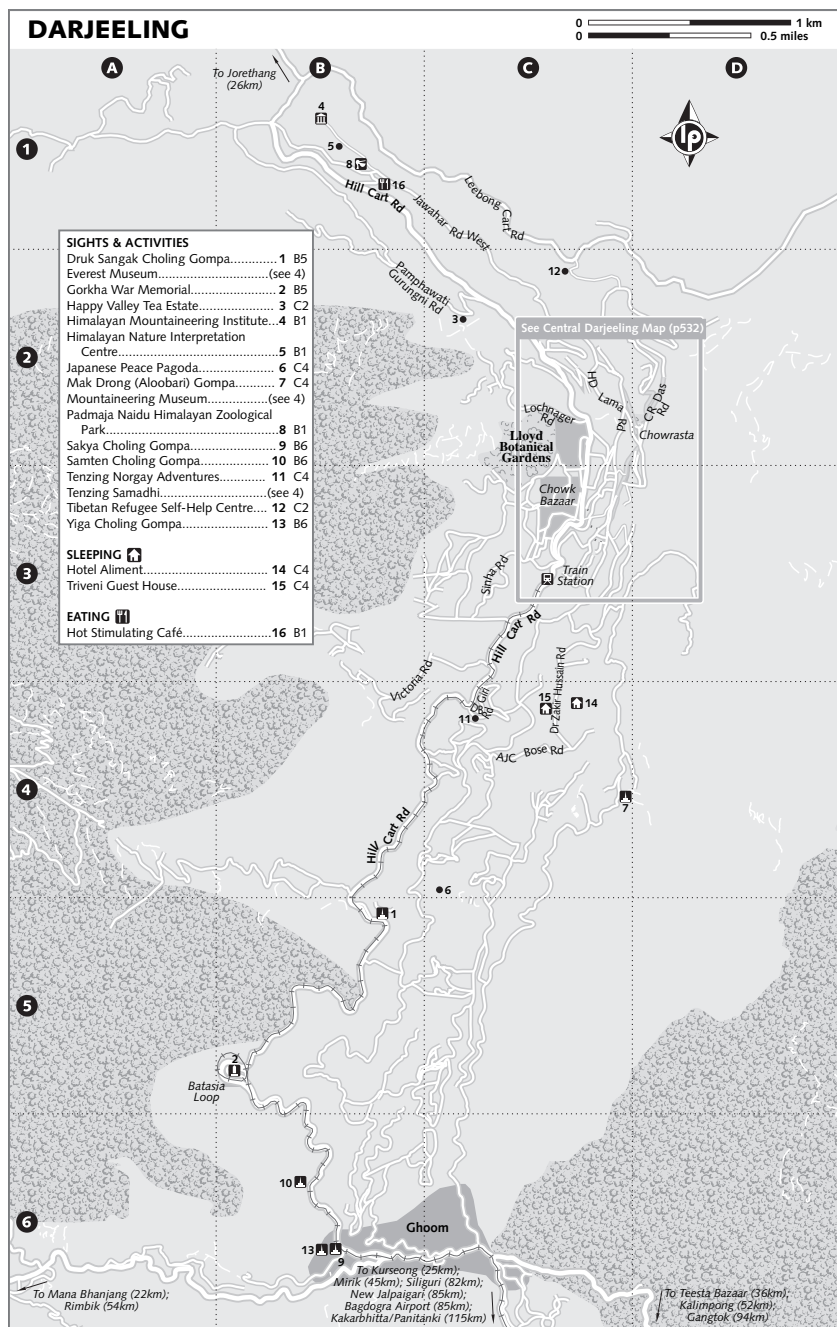
After Independence, the Gurkhas became the main political force in Darjeeling and friction with the state government led to calls for a separate state of Gorkhaland in the 1980s. In 1986, violence and riots orchestrated by the Gurkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) brought Darjeeling to a standstill. A compromise was hammered out in late 1988, which granted the newly formed Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) a large measure of autonomy from the state government.

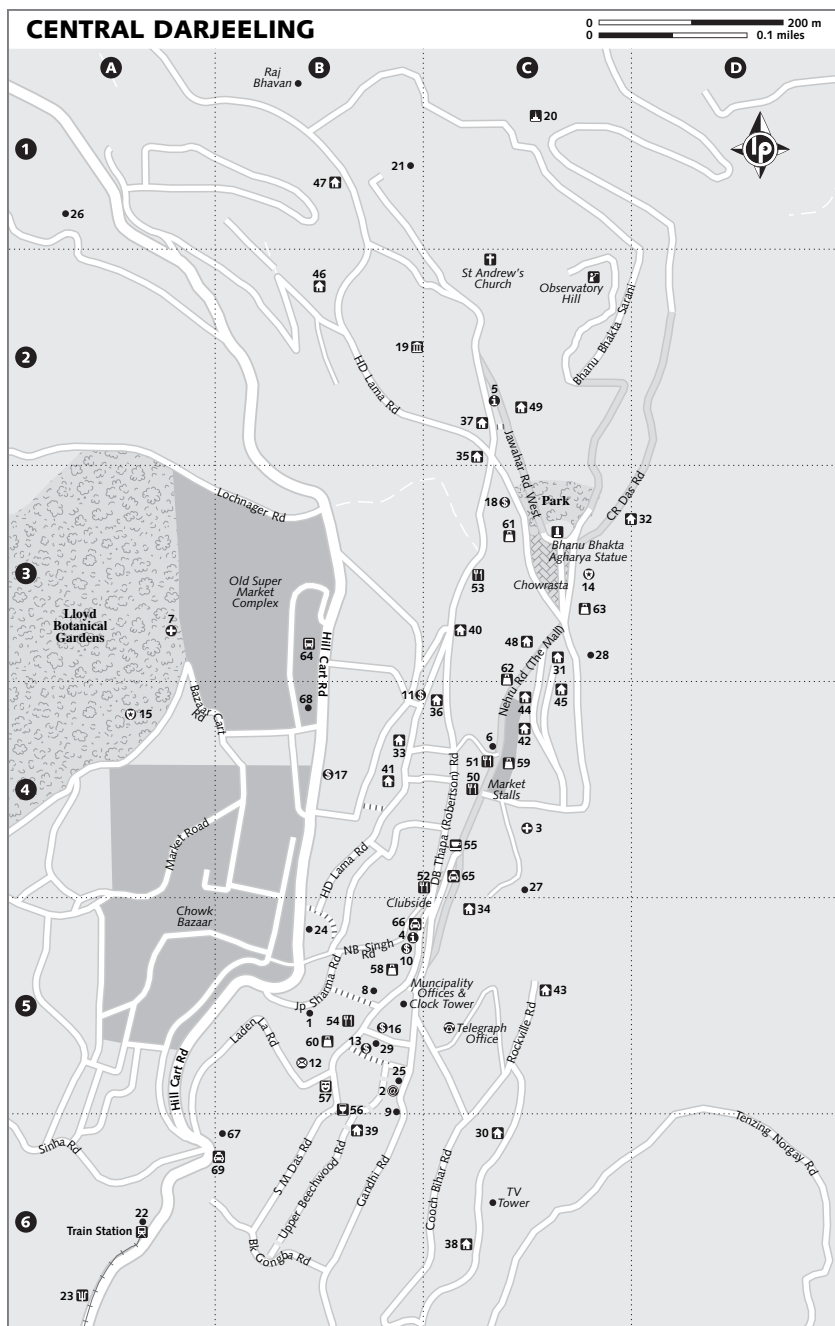
Although this appeased some Gurkhas, the breakaway Gorkhaland Liberation Organisation (GLO) and its armed wing, the Gorkha Volunteers' Cell (GVC), have continued to call for full secession. Since 2001 both the GVC and DGHC have been accused of political killings. Meanwhile the DGHC's internal wranglings over its relationship with Kolkata and Delhi have seen the introduction and dropping of 'Autonomous' in its name (and an 'A' in its acronym), and the proposal of a new council: Gorkha Hill Council, Darjeeling (GHCD).

## Orientation

Darjeeling sprawls over a west-facing slope in a web of interconnecting roads and steep flights of steps. Near the top of town is the atmospheric and open square known as Chowrasta, the focal point of Victorian Darjeeling. North of Chowrasta is the forested Observatory Hill and skirting the hill is Bhanu Bhakta Sarani, from where there are stupendous views of Khangchendzonga. The zoo lies to the northwest, reached from Chowrasta on foot via HD Lama Rd.

Hill Cart Rd (aka Tenzing Norgay Rd), which runs the length of town, is Darjeeling's major vehicle thoroughfare. From the chaotic Chowk Bazaar it leads north towards the zoo and Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, and heads south past the train station en route to Ghoom. Nehru Rd (aka the Mall), the main shopping street, heads south from





<b>INFORMATION</b>		Hill Cart Rd Jeep Stand.....24 B5	Hotel Lunar.....(see 34)
Bellevue Cyber Café.....(see 31)	Manjushree Centre of Tibetan Culture.....25 B5	Kunga Restuarant.....(see 34)	La Casse Croute.....53 C3
Clubsidie Tours & Travels.....1 B5	Office of the District Magistrate (ODM).....26 A1	Park Restaurant.....54 B5	
Compuset Centre.....2 B5	Planters' Club Darjeeling.....27 C4		<b>DRINKING</b> ☑
D&DMA Nursing Home.....3 C4	Pony Stables.....28 C3	Buzz.....(see 51)	Elgin.....(see 35)
Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) Booth.....4 B5	Samsara Tours, Travels & Treks.....29 B5	Glenary's.....(see 51)	Goodricke, the House of Tea.....55 C4
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District Hospital Darjeeling.....7 A3	Andy's.....30 C6		
Foreigners' Regional Registration Office.....8 B5	Bellevue Hotel.....31 C3		
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Hotel Seven Seventeen.....(see 41)	Crystal Palace Hotel.....33 B4		Inox Theatre.....57 B5
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Oxford Book & Stationery Company.....(see 61)	Hotel Alice Villa.....37 C2		Hayden Hall.....58 B5
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Poddar's.....13 B5	Hotel Pagoda.....39 B6		Nathmull's Tea Rooms.....60 B5
Police Assistance Booth.....14 C3	Hotel Polynia.....40 C3		Souvenir Shops.....61 C3
Sadar Police Station.....15 A4	Hotel Seven Seventeen.....41 B4		Souvenir Shops.....62 C3
State Bank of India.....16 B5	Hotel Shangrila.....42 C4		Souvenir Shops.....63 C3
State Bank of India ATM.....17 B4	Hotel Valentino.....43 C5		Trekking Shop.....(see 55)
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<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>	Windamere Hotel.....49 C2		Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (Toy Train).....(see 22)
Bengal Natural History Museum.....19 B2	<b>EATING</b> ☑		Darjeeling Transport Corporation.....67 B6
Bhutia Busty Compa.....20 C1	Deveke Restaurant.....(see 34)		Diamond Tours & Travels.....68 B4
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Dhirdham Mandir.....23 A6	Glenary's.....51 C4		Taxi Stand.....69 B6
	Hotel Chanakya.....52 C4		

Chowrasta, meeting Laden La Rd (which leads to Hill Cart Rd) and Gandhi Rd (which accesses many cheap hotels) at a junction called Clubsidie.

## Information

### BOOKSHOPS

**Oxford Book & Stationery Company** (Map p532; ☎ 2254325; Chowrasta; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm, closed Sun in low season) Unquestionably the best bookshop in Darjeeling, selling a vast selection of books and maps on Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and the Himalaya.

### EMERGENCY

**Police assistance booth** (Map p532; Chowrasta)  
**Sadar Police Station** (Map p532; ☎ 2254422; Market Rd)

### INTERNET ACCESS

**Bellevue Cyber Café** (Map p532; Chowrasta Rd; per hr Rs 30; ☎ 9am-8pm)  
**Compuset Centre** (Map p532; Gandhi Rd; per hr Rs 30; ☎ 8am-8pm) Digital-camera friendly.

**Digital Doughnuts** (Map p532; Nehru Rd; per hr Rs 30; ☎ 7.30am-8pm) Found within Glenary's (p540).

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**D&DMA Nursing Home** (Map p532; ☎ 2254327; Nehru Rd) For serious medical problems, this is the best private hospital.  
**District Hospital Darjeeling** (Map p532; ☎ 2254218; Bazaar Cart Rd; ☎ 24hr) Public hospital and emergency department.  
**Tibetan Medical & Astro Institute** (Map p532; ☎ 2256035; HD Lama Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Traditional medicine - located within Hotel Seven Seventeen.

### MONEY

**Hotel Seven Seventeen** (Map p532; ☎ 2255099; 26 HD Lama Rd) Exchanges most currencies and travellers cheques (Amex and Thomas Cook).  
**ICICI Bank ATM** (Map p532; Laden La Rd) Accepts most international bank and credit cards. There's another ATM on HD Lama Rd (Map p532).

**Poddar's** (Map p532; Laden La Rd; ☎ 9am-9pm)

Matches the State Bank's rate and changes most currencies and travellers cheques. It accepts credit cards and is a Western Union money transfer agent.

**State Bank of India** (Map p532; Laden La Rd; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 2.30pm Sat) Changes only US dollars and pounds sterling, and travellers cheques issued by Amex (in US dollars) and Thomas Cook (in US dollars and pounds sterling). The commission rate is Rs 100 per transaction. It has an adjacent ATM and another in Chowrasta (Map p532) that accept Visa cards.

**PHOTOGRAPHY**

**Compuset Centre** (Map p532; Gandhi Rd; ☎ 8am-8pm) Memory card reader and CD burning for Rs 50.

**Das Studios** (Map p532; ☎ 2254004; Nehru Rd; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) Film and printing.

**POST**

**Main post office** (Map p532; ☎ 2252076; Laden La Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm) Reliable parcel service and poste restante.

**TOURIST INFORMATION**

**Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council Tourist Reception Centre** (DGHC; Map p532; ☎ 2255351; Jawahar Rd West; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun high season, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat low season) The staff are friendly, well-organised and the best source of information in Darjeeling. The centre also has counters at the train station and the Mall.

**West Bengal Tourist Bureau** (Map p532; ☎ 2254102; Chowrasta; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Little useful information but sells a basic map of town (Rs 3) and can book accommodation at government lodges, including those at Jaldhaphara Wildlife Sanctuary (p527).

**TRAVEL AGENCIES**

Most travel agencies here can arrange local tours (and some can also arrange treks, rafting trips and other activities). Reliable agencies and their specialities include the following:

**Clubside Tours & Travels** (Map p532; ☎ 2254646; www.clubside.in; JP Sharma Rd; ☎ 8.30am-6pm) Arranges treks and tours in West Bengal, Sikkim and Assam, and wildlife tours in Kaziranga, Manas and Jaldhaphara National Parks. It's also a Jet Airways agent.

**DGHC Tourist Reception Centre** (see Tourist Information above) Offers various organised tours and rafting trips at Teesta Bazaar near Kalimpong.

**Diamond Tours & Travels** (Map p532; ☎ 9832094275; Old Super Market Complex; ☎ 8am-7pm) Books buses to various destinations from Siliguri.

**Himalayan Travels** (Map p532; ☎ 2256956; kkgurung@cal.vsnl.net.in; 18 Gandhi Rd; ☎ 8.30am-7pm) Experienced company arranging treks and mountaineering expeditions in Darjeeling and Sikkim.

**Kasturi Tours & Travels** (Map p532; ☎ 2254430; Old Super Market Complex; ☎ 8am-7pm) Sells bus tickets to various destinations from Siliguri.

**Samsara Tours, Travels & Treks** (Map p532; ☎ 2252874; samsara1@sancharnet.in; Laden La Rd) Helpful and knowledgeable agency offering rafting and trekking trips.

**Sights & Activities**

See p542 for information on trekking around Darjeeling.

**MOUNTAIN VIEWS**

As with other hill stations, Himalayan views are a big attraction in Darjeeling. The skyline is dominated by Khangchendzonga, India's highest peak and the world's third-highest mountain. The name 'Khangchendzonga' is derived from the Tibetan words for 'big five-peaked snow fortress'. Views from **lookouts** along Bhanu Bhakta Sarani, which runs from Chowrasta around the north side of Observatory Hill, can be stunning in clear weather.

**TIGER HILL**

To set your eyes on a spectacular 250km stretch of Himalayan horizon, including Everest (8848m), Lhotse (8501m), Makalu (8475m), Khangchendzonga, Kabru (6691m) and Janu (7710m), rise early and get to **Tiger Hill** (Map p531; 2590m), 11km south of Darjeeling, above Ghoom.

The sunrise over the Himalaya from here is truly spectacular and has become a major tourist attraction, with convoys of jeeps leaving Darjeeling for Tiger Hill every morning during the high season around 4.30am. At the summit, you can either pay Rs 5 to stand in the pavilion grounds, or buy a ticket for one of the heated lounges in the pavilion (Rs 20 to 40, including a cup of chai).

Organised sunrise trips (usually with a detour to Batasia Loop on the way back) can be booked through a travel agency (left) or directly with jeep drivers at the Clubside taxi stand. It's also possible to jump on a jeep going to Tiger Hill from along Gandhi or Laden La Rds between 4am and 4.30am, allowing you to check whether skies are clear before you go. Return trips cost around Rs 65/450 per person/jeep.

Some people take the jeep one way to Tiger Hill and then spend their day wandering back to Darjeeling, visiting the gompas in Ghoom along the way.

## TOY TRAIN

The **Darjeeling Himalayan Railway** (Map p532), known affectionately as the Toy Train, made its first journey along its precipice-topping, 2ft-wide tracks in September 1881 and is one of the few hill railways still operating in India. It's even listed as a World Heritage site. Besides its regular diesel service to/from New Jalpaiguri and steam service to/from Kurseong (p542), there are joy rides (Rs 240) during the high season that leave Darjeeling at 10am and 12.50pm for a two-hour steam-powered return trip to Ghoom. It's wise to book at least a day ahead at the **train station** (Hill Cart Rd).

## TEA PLANTATIONS

**Happy Valley Tea Estate** (Map p531; Pamphawati Gurungni Rd; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat), below Hill Cart Rd, is worth visiting when the plucking and processing are in progress. March to May is the busiest time, but occasional plucking also occurs from June to November. An employee will whisk you through the aromatic factory and its various processes before politely demanding a tip – Rs 20 from each visitor is appropriate. Take the turn-off 500m northwest of the Office of the District Magistrate, or take Lochnager Rd from Chowk Bazaar.

See the boxed text, below, for more about Darjeeling tea.

## OBSERVATORY HILL

Sacred to both Buddhists and Hindus, this hill was the site of the Dorje Ling monastery, the gumpa that gave the city its name. Today, devotees of both religions come to a **temple** (Map p531) in a small cave, below the crest of the hill, to honour Mahakala, a Buddhist deity and an angry form of the Hindu god Shiva. The summit is marked by several shrines, a flurry of colourful prayer flags and the notes from numerous devotional bells. A path leading up to the hill through giant Japanese cedars starts about 300m along Bhanu Bhakta Sarani from Chowrasta. Be careful of the marauding monkeys.

## GOMPAS & PAGODAS

Together, Darjeeling and Ghoom are home to a number of fascinating Buddhist monasteries. Probably the most scenic is **Bhutia Busty Gumpa** (Map p532), with Khangchendzonga providing a spectacular backdrop. The shrine originally stood on Observatory Hill, but was rebuilt in its present location by the chogyals of Sikkim in the 19th century. The gumpa houses a fine gold-accented mural and the original copy of the Tibetan Book of the Dead, but permission is required to see it. To get here, follow CR Das Rd downhill for 400m from Chowrasta and take the right fork where the road branches.

### ANYONE FOR TEA?

The tea bush was first brought to Darjeeling from Assam by British planters looking for a way to break China's monopoly over the tea trade. Credit for the discovery of tea as it's drunk in the Western world should really go to the Khamti and Singpho tribes of Assam, who first introduced British explorers to the healing powers of fermented tea leaves brewed in hot water.

Darjeeling produces around 25% of India's tea, including some of the world's finest brews, but there's more to tea than just plucking and drying. After picking, the leaves are placed in a 'withering trough', where high-speed fans reduce the moisture content to around 30%, before they're rolled with heavy rollers to force the remaining water onto the surface. The rolled leaves are then fermented in a high-humidity chamber to produce their distinctive flavour; this is a fine art and too little or too much fermentation can spoil the entire batch. Fermentation is stopped by passing the leaves through a dry air chamber, which reduces the moisture to just 3%. With all this hot air flowing around, the smell of tea permeates every corner of the tea factory.

The finished tea is sorted into grades – unbroken leaves are set aside for Golden Flowery Orange Pekoe teas, while broken leaves end up as Golden Broken Orange Pekoe, Orange Fannings and Dust – and then graded by expert tasters, who march up and down long lines of teacups, sampling every crop and grading it according to colour, taste and fragrance. Low-grade leaves are blended into household teas, while the best leaves are sold to international tea traders. Teas from estates around Darjeeling and Kurseong (also marketed as Darjeeling tea) regularly and justifiably achieve the world's highest prices. To buy a brew, see p541.



**Yiga Choling Gompa** (Map p531; camera per photo Rs 10), the region's most famous monastery, exudes a feeling of warmth that is not lost on most who visit here. First built in 1850, it enshrines a 5m-high statue of the Maitreya Buddha (Future Buddha) along with 300 of the most beautifully bound Tibetan texts. It's just west of Ghoom, about a 10-minute walk off Hill Cart Rd. Other gompas of interest in this area include the fortresslike **Sakya Choling Gompa** (Map p531) and the **Samten Choling Gompa** (Map p531), with the protector Garuda atop its ornate Buddha backdrop. These gompas are both on Hill Cart Rd and can be reached by share jeep from Darjeeling (Rs 10).

About halfway between Ghoom and Darjeeling is the vast **Druk Sangak Choling Gompa** (Map p531), inaugurated by the Dalai Lama in 1993. Known for its vibrant frescoes, it houses 300 Himalayan monks who study philosophy, literature, astronomy, meditation, dance and music.

On the opposite side of the ridge is the welcoming **Mak Drong Gompa** (Map p531). It's also known as Aloobari Gompa and is a pleasant walk (45 minutes) from town.

Perched on a hillside at the end of AJC Bose Rd is the gleaming white **Japanese Peace Pagoda** (Map p531; ☎ pujas 4.30-6am & 4.30-6.30pm), one of more than 70 pagodas built by the Japanese Buddhist Nipponzan Myohoji organisation around the world. Drumming resonates through the forested grounds during their daily *pujas* (prayers). It's about a 35-minute walk from Clubside along Gandhi and AJC Bose Rds.

### PADMAJA NAIDU HIMALAYAN ZOOLOGICAL PARK

This **zoo** (Map p531; admission incl Himalayan Mountaineering Institute Indian/foreigner Rs 20/100; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Fri-Wed, ticket counter closes 4pm) was established in 1958 to study, conserve and preserve Himalayan fauna. This is one of India's better zoos and the animals are cared for by dedicated keepers. Housed within the rocky and forested environment is India's only collection of Siberian tigers, as well as Himalayan black bears, red pandas, snow leopards and Tibetan wolves. The **Himalayan Nature Interpretation Centre** (admission Rs 5; ☎ 2.30-4pm) in the middle of the zoo has tacky wildlife dioramas featuring the snow leopard and clouded leopard.

The zoo is a pleasant 30-minute walk down from Chowrasta along Jawahar Rd West; alternatively, take a share jeep from the Chowk Bazaar bus/jeep station (Rs 10, about 10 minutes) or a private taxi (Rs 50).

### HIMALAYAN MOUNTAINEERING INSTITUTE

Tucked away within the grounds of the zoological park, this prestigious **mountaineering institute** (Map p531; HMI; ☎ 2254087; www.exploredarjeeling.com/hmidarj.htm; admission incl zoo Indian/foreigner Rs 20/100; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Fri-Wed) was founded in 1954 and has provided training for some of India's leading mountaineers. Within the complex is the fascinating **Everest Museum**, which traces the history of attempts on the world's highest peak. Next door is the **Mountaineering Museum**, with a relief model of the Himalaya, dusty specimens of Himalayan fauna and more historic mountaineering equipment.

On a nearby hilltop, where Tenzing Norgay was cremated, stands the **Tenzing Samadhi statue**. The intrepid mountaineer lived in Darjeeling for most of his life and was the director of the institute for many years.

Various mountaineering courses are offered here (see p538).

### TIBETAN REFUGEE SELF-HELP CENTRE

Established in 1959, this **refugee centre** (Map p531; Lebung Cart Rd; ☎ dawn-dusk Mon-Sat) comprises a home for the aged, school, orphanage, clinic, **gompa** and **craft workshops** that produce carpets, woodcarvings, leatherwork and woollen items. There's also an interesting **photographic exhibition** portraying the establishment and workings of the centre.

The refugees are welcoming, so wander through the workshops; the spinning wheels are a testament to their improvisational genius. The handicrafts are for sale in the **showroom** (☎ 2252552), which doesn't have as many knick-knacks as the souvenir shops in town, but the proceeds go straight back into the Tibetan community. See p541 for details regarding Tibetan rugs, and p1160 if you're interested in volunteering.

Share jeeps from the Chowk Bazaar bus/jeep station run along Lebung Cart Rd and pass the turn-off to the centre (Rs 10, about 20 minutes). You can also walk here from Chowrasta along CR Das Rd. It's easy to get lost, so ask for directions along the way. A chartered taxi costs around Rs 200 return.

### LLOYD BOTANICAL GARDENS

These pleasant **gardens** (Map p532; ☎ 2252358; admission free; 🕒 8am-4.30pm) contain an impressive collection of Himalayan plants, most famously orchids and rhododendrons, as well as temperate trees from around the world. It's a lovely respite from the bustle of central Darjeeling. Look for the magnificent wisterias planted in 1878, now escaping from their glasshouse. Follow the signs along Lochnager Rd from the Chowk Bazaar bus/jeep station. A map and guide (Rs 5) is available from the park office.

### OTHER ATTRACTIONS

The most conspicuous Hindu temple in Darjeeling, **Dhirdham Mandir** (Map p532), is a replica of the famous Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu. It's easy to find – just below the Darjeeling train station. There's a great view over Darjeeling from its grounds.

If you're travelling on the Toy Train, or walking back from Tiger Hill, look out for the scenic and sobering **Gorkha war memorial** (Map p531; admission Rs 5; 🕒 dawn-dusk) where the train makes its famous **Batasia Loop**.

The **Bengal Natural History Museum** (Map p532; Bishop Eric Benjamin Rd; adult/child Rs 5/2; 🕒 10am-4pm), established in 1903, houses a mildewed and moth-eaten collection of Himalayan and Ben-

gali species – try not to laugh at the stuffed crocodile. The museum is hidden away in a compound just off Bishop Eric Benjamin Rd.

### WHITE-WATER RAFTING

Darjeeling is the easiest place to organise white-water rafting trips along the Rangeet and Teesta Rivers. Rafting trips leave from Teesta Bazaar (p548), along the road to Kalimpong. The rapids are graded from Grade II to Grade IV, and the best times for rafting are September to November and March to June.

The **DGHC** (Map p532; ☎ 2255351; Jawahar Rd West; 🕒 9am-7pm daily high season, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun low season; moderate rapids 11/18/25km trip Rs 350/450/700, challenging rapids Rs 500/600/800) runs trips for minimums of four to six people and can also arrange transport to Teesta Bazaar (Rs 350) and accommodation at its Chitrey Wayside Inn (p548). Private companies, such as **Samsara Tours, Travels & Treks** (Map p532; ☎ 2252874; samsara1@sancharnet.in; Laden La Rd; tours Rs 1200-1700), offer similar routes, for a minimum of four people, and its prices include lunch and transport.

### OTHER ACTIVITIES

The **Darjeeling Gymkhana Club** (Map p531; ☎ 2254341; Jawahar Rd West; membership per day/week Rs 50/250)

## DARJEELING, EVEREST & TENZING

There's a statue in Siliguri and one in Darjeeling, and the road linking the two is named after him. Tenzing Norgay looms large in Darjeeling, where his son, Jamling, himself an Everest summittee, lives in the family house from where he leads mountaineering and trekking expeditions.

Tenzing Norgay was just 18 years old in 1932 when he left his village of Thame, in the Khumbu region of Nepal, to seek adventure and income with the new trend: European-led mountaineering expeditions. Lining up for work with other hopeful sherpas at the Planters' Club in Darjeeling each season, Tenzing would eventually get his first tilt at Everest with Eric Shipton in 1935. These early expeditions approached Everest from the north (Tibet), after weeks of walking from Darjeeling via Kalimpong, Jeleppla and Tibet's Chumbi Valley.

After several attempts on Everest and numerous successful climbs on other peaks over the next two decades, Tenzing Norgay joined John Hunt's British Everest expedition of 1953 and made history with the rangy bee keeper from New Zealand, Edmund Hillary. Tenzing became a world figure much in demand, but remained in Darjeeling to be with his family and to develop the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute.

British, Nepali and Indian nationalism ensured a spectacular and occasionally contentious celebration of the great climb. The 'who reached there first?' question was quickly elevated from innocent curiosity to nationalist politics by a sensationalist media. It is still the question at the top of the list when Jamling gives motivational speeches in the West. As detailed in *Touching My Father's Soul*, Jamling admits also asking this of his father, mentor and inspiration, 12 months prior to Tenzing's death. As for Jamling's own response to this impertinent question under a typically wet and grey Darjeeling sky: 'It doesn't matter, the peak is a dome that can support several climbers simultaneously.'

offers tennis, squash, badminton, roller-skating and table tennis; call to check the schedules.

Be an aristocrat for the day and join the **Planters' Club Darjeeling** (Map p532; ☎ 2254348; per day Rs 100). Lounge in style or rack them up in the billiards room (Rs 100 per person per hour) and pray the power doesn't cut out.

From Chowrasta, children can take a **pony ride** around Observatory Hill for Rs 40, or through tea estates to visit a monastery for Rs 80 per hour.

## Courses

### LANGUAGE

Beginner and advanced lessons in written and spoken Tibetan are offered at the **Manjushree Centre of Tibetan Culture** (Map p532; ☎ 2256714; www.manjushree-culture.org; 12 Ghandi Rd; 3-/6-/9-month courses Rs 9030/13,760/18,490 plus Rs 1350 registration; ☒ Mar-Dec). It also supplies discounted guesthouse accommodation for students.

### MOUNTAINEERING

The **Himalayan Mountaineering Institute** (p536) runs 15-day adventure courses (US\$325), including climbing, jungle survival and canoeing, and 28-day basic and advanced mountaineering courses (US\$650), between March and December. Foreigners should apply directly to the centre at least three months in advance.

**Tenzing Norgay Climbing Club** (Map p531; ☎ 2258045; DB Giri Rd; per day Rs 300) runs indoor/outdoor climbing courses using modern equipment and techniques.

### COOKING

The owner at **Hot Stimulating Café** (Map p531; Jawahar Rd West; lessons Rs 600) offers informal *momo*-making lessons.

### Tours

During the high season the DGHC and other travel agencies offer a variety of tours around Darjeeling. The half-day 'seven-point tour' (Rs 75 per person) includes the zoo, Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Tibetan Refugee Self-Help Centre and several viewpoints. See p534 for Tiger Hill sunrise-tour information.

Taxis can be hired for custom tours for around Rs 600 per half-day.

### Sleeping

Darjeeling has an ever-increasing number of hotels crowding the ridge and only a small selection is mentioned here. Prices given are for

the high season (October to early December and mid-March to June), when it is wise to book ahead. In the low season prices can drop by 50%; however, feel free to negotiate at any time. Most midrange hotels occupy the centre of town, while the top-end choices opt for the leafy havens north of Chowrasta. The nicest budget options stand atop the ridge, and reward travellers with vistas and exercise.

### BUDGET

All choices below have private bathrooms and free hot water (either geyser or bucket), unless stated otherwise. Most hotels have both squat and sit-down flush toilets available.

**Triveni Guest House** (Map p531; ☎ 2253878; Dr Zakir Hussain Rd; s Rs 60, s with shared bathroom Rs 80, d Rs 160-200) This is a simple lodge – the dorm has only three beds – but it's popular and very friendly. Rooms are spartan but clean and some have nice views, as does the inexpensive restaurant. Bucket hot water is Rs 10.

**Hotel Long Island** (Map p532; ☎ 2252043; Dr Zakir Hussain Rd; s Rs 150, d Rs 200-250) A basic option with simple rooms that have views. Toilets are attached but hot-water showers are shared.

**Hotel Alimint** (Map p531; ☎ 2255068; alimintweb@sify.com; Dr Zakir Hussain Rd; d Rs 250-400; ☐) A travellers favourite with good food (and cold beer), a library, rooftop patio, helpful owners and cosy wood-lined rooms. The upstairs rooms have a TV and valley views. All rooms have geysers, but they only operate for 1½ hours in the evening.

**Andy's** (Map p532; ☎ 2253125; Dr Zakir Hussain Rd; s/d from Rs 250/300) This simple, spotless, stone-walled place is a friendly option that has airy, carpeted rooms and a rooftop terrace with a great view. It asks for a 50% payment upfront.

**Hotel Pagoda** (Map p532; ☎ 2253498; Upper Beechwood Rd; d Rs 250, with shared bathroom Rs 200) Though lacking views, this is a conveniently located budget option offering small, clean rooms. It's tucked away on an alley off some steps above the post office on Laden La Rd.

**Maple Tourist Lodge** (Map p532; ☎ 2252813; Old Kuchery Rd; s/d Rs 360/475, with shared bathroom Rs 240/315) This option is housed in an old colonial house below Observatory Hill. Ground-floor rooms are a bit damp, though others are better. Room and meal packages are available.

### MIDRANGE

The following all have TV and private bathrooms with geysers, unless stated otherwise.

**Hotel Alice Villa** (Map p532; ☎ 2254181; hotelalicevilla@yahoo.com; 41 HD Lama Rd; d from Rs 700) This small hotel occupies a charming old bungalow close to Chowrasta and provides inexpensive heritage accommodation. The rooms are spacious and well cared for with plenty of character and cosy open fireplaces.

**Pineridge Hotel** (Map p532; ☎ 2254074; pineridgehotel@yahoo.com; Nehru Rd; s/d from Rs 750/850) Pity the Pineridge. So much restoration potential and a great location, but the reality is drafty, dilapidated standard rooms and only slightly better deluxe rooms. There's still some Raj charm, and with a bucket of coal (Rs 150) glowing in the fireplace maybe you can forget the broken window.

**Dekeling Hotel** (Map p532; ☎ 2254159; www.dekeling.com; Clubside; d Rs 850-1050) A warm, friendly welcome is guaranteed at this spotless, Tibetan-run hotel. Most of the comfortable rooms have views (and are priced accordingly) and there are great, cosy, common areas and a scenic loft. Breakfast (Rs 250) is served upstairs, while the hotel's excellent restaurant, Dekevas (p540), is on the ground floor. For those looking for a quiet getaway, talk to the owners about their out-of-town Hawk's Nest Resort.

**Belvue Hotel** (Map p532; ☎ 2254075; www.darjeeling-belvuehotel.com; Chowrasta; d Rs 900-1500) This rambling complex comprises a variety of wood-pannelled rooms. Most are spacious with grass-mat floors, a wood-burning *bukhari* (heater) and a conspicuously absent TV. The affable staff, communal breakfast/lounge area and the outlook over Chowrasta towards Khangchendzonga all make this a popular choice.

**Main Olde Belvue Hotel** (Map p532; ☎ 2254178; www.darjeelinghotel.com; Nehru Rd; d Rs 1000-1500) This welcoming hotel comprises two buildings, the lower one more modern, with a huge lounge and terrace, but ordinary rooms, and the other a Raj place too derelict to be called charming and too rustic to be comfortable, but apparently due for renovation.

**Hotel Seven Seventeen** (Map p532; ☎ 2252017; www.hotel717.com; 26 HD Lama Rd; s/d/tr Rs 1000/1300/1600) An inviting Tibetan-themed place with exceptionally friendly service and clean, though small, rooms. Don't confuse it with the other, older Hotel Seven Seventeen, which is up the street and closer to the Chowk Bazaar bus/jeep station.

**Classic Guesthouse** (Map p532; ☎ 2257025; rajn\_classic@hotmail.com; CR Das Rd; d Rs 1200) This small hotel, just below Chowrasta, has just five rooms all boasting valley views and vertigo-inducing bal-

conies. The hosts are friendly and an electric heater (in winter) makes for a cosy stay.

**Hotel Shangrila** (Map p532; ☎ 2254149; 5 Nehru Rd; d Rs 1500) Cute, clean and full of charm describes this very appealing boutique hotel and restaurant on the Mall. There are only four double rooms, each with bay windows, double beds, fireplaces and views.

Other recommendations:

**Crystal Palace Hotel** (Map p532; ☎ 2253317; 29/30 HD Lama Rd; s/d Rs 500/600) Clean, almost budget category, and convenient to bus station.

**Hotel Valentino** (Map p532; ☎ 2252228; Rockville Rd; d incl breakfast Rs 800-1000) Has a restaurant and bar downstairs.

**Hotel Polynia** (Map p532; ☎ 2254127; fax 2254129; 12/1 DB Thapa Rd; d from Rs 1500) Some large rooms with views over town.

## TOP END

These hotels offer rooms on the so-called 'American Plan', with breakfast, lunch and dinner included; taxes and service charges usually add 15% to 20% to the bill.

**our pick Elgin** (Map p532; ☎ 2257226; elgin@elginhotels.com; HD Lama Rd; s/d Rs 4100/4400) This delightful, grand yet friendly heritage hotel is brimming with colonial ambience. The spacious bedrooms combine enough originality to keep them interesting and enough renovation to ensure comfort. Most of the elegantly furnished rooms have separate sitting areas, open fireplaces and marble bathrooms. The restaurant is *pukka* and the lovely gardens are the perfect place to relax and enjoy high tea.

**Mayfair Hill Resort** (Map p532; ☎ 2256376; www.mayfairhotels.com; Jawahar Rd West; s/d from Rs 5000/6000) Originally a maharaja's summer palace, and soon to be renamed Mayfair Darjeeling, this plush and genteel choice sits among lovingly manicured gardens and sculptures near the Raj Bhavan. Soft carpets, sumptuous leather, coal fires and fine art add to the warm welcome. When you have finished watching DVDs in your palatial room, head to the Library Bar or take a brisk shuffle around Observatory Hill.

**Windamere Hotel** (Map p532; ☎ 2254041; www.windamerehotel.com; Jawahar Rd West; s/d from Rs 5200/6600) This rambling relic of the Raj on Observatory Hill attracts an eclectic crowd, and though its rooms are getting a little tired, they are comfortable, clean and spacious. One for the true Raj aficionado – the gins are pink, the liveried staff are genuinely friendly and you won't leave hungry.

Other recommendations:

**Fortune Resort Central** (Map p532; ☎ 2258721; www.fortuneparkhotels.com; 12/1 DB Thapa Rd; s/d incl taxes Rs 4628/5550) Comprising the erstwhile Hotel Central. Century-old polished wood, thick rugs, open fires and room to swing two cats.

## Eating

Darjeeling has a great choice of restaurants dishing up Indian, Chinese, Tibetan and some good international fare, but the availability of ingredients is much more seasonal than found on the plains. Note that most restaurants close their doors by 8pm or 9pm.

**Hot Stimulating Café** (Map p531; Jawahar Rd West; meals Rs 20-40) This tiny café, on the road to the zoo, offers beautiful views and serves up simple, cheap meals and chai.

**Frank Ross Café** (Map p532; ☎ 2258194; Nehru Rd; mains Rs 20-105) This option is strictly vegetarian and offers a global menu, including pizzas, burgers, South Indian snacks, and even enchiladas, tacos and nachos.

**Hotel Lunar** (Map p532; Ghandi Rd, mains Rs 25-75) Lunar is one of the best vegetarian restaurants in Darjeeling where you also can enjoy a great view and wonderful service. It's squeezed beneath Hotel Dekeling and above Dekevas.

**Hotel Chanakya** (Map p532; ☎ 2257495; DB Thapa Rd; mains Rs 30-70) An authentic Bengali diner where you can fill up with veg and nonveg thalis and be confident the chilli isn't toned down for Western tastes.

**Kunga Restaurant** (Map p532; ☎ 2253971; 51 Ghandi Rd, mains Rs 35-70) Kunga's Tibetan cuisine is tasteful simplicity. Its steamed *momos* are legendary as are its *thugpas* (noodle soups; *gyathuk*, *thenthuk* and *bhagthuk*). For a filling breakfast, try its muesli and fruit curd.

**Park Restaurant** (Map p532; ☎ 2255270; Laden La Rd; mains Rs 30-140) The Park is popular with local tourists and fills up quickly. Savour North Indian curries or select from the fish- and chicken-dominated Thai Lemon Grass menu – all satisfactorily executed. There's no alcohol licence but it's worth asking for a beer.

**La Casse Croute** (Map p532; ☎ 2257594; HD Lama Rd; mains Rs 35-120) A one-table pizza joint that satisfies those looking for a change of taste: excellent pizzas, paninis, salads and sandwiches. Also serves breakfast, pancakes and good coffee.

**Dekevas Restaurant** (Map p532; ☎ 2254159; mains Rs 40-80) Cosy Dekevas is known for great Tibetan fare of *momos* and noodle soups, and pizzas, but not legroom.

**our pick Glenary's** (Map p532; Nehru Rd; dishes Rs 50-120; ☎ 11.30am-9pm) This elegant restaurant atop the famous bakery and café (see below) delights patrons with good food, grand views, cold beer and superior service. The continental sizzlers (veg and nonveg), Chinese dishes, curries and tandoori specials are excellent, though we'd like to see a greater selection of Indian cuisine. The chicken *rashmi kebab* (chicken marinated in spiced yogurt before being baked tandoori style) is divine.

## SELF-CATERING

**Frank Ross Pharmacy** (Map p532; ☎ 2258194; Nehru Rd) As well as pharmaceuticals you can stock up on general groceries and imported foods, such as excellent Druk marmalade from Bhutan to replace the fluorescent substance that your hotel provides.

## Drinking

Where in the world is a better place to sip a cup of Darjeeling tea? If a cool pint is your idea of drinking, there are a couple of good choices.

## TEA

**Glenary's** (Map p532; Nehru Rd; small pot Rs 22; ☎ 7.30am-8pm, till 9pm in high season) Below the restaurant, this café is home to massive windows and grand views – order your tea, select a cake, grab your book and sink into some wicker.

**Goodricke, the House of Tea** (Map p532; Nehru Rd) Sit and sip up to nine varieties of brewed tea from local estates – cup and cookies Rs 20 – before purchasing packaged tea.

**Elgin** (Map p532; ☎ 2257226; HD Lama Rd; high tea Rs 150; ☎ 4.30-5pm) Take high tea with cakes, sandwiches and shortbread in the sunroom or out in the gardens.

**Windamere Hotel** (Map p532; ☎ 2254041; Jawahar Rd West; high tea Rs 240; ☎ 4.30-6pm) High tea with biscuits and all.

## BARS

**Joey's Pub** (Map p532; SM Das Rd; beer Rs 80; ☎ 1-10pm) This friendly pub, near the post office, is the most atmospheric choice and it's also a great place to meet other travellers. It has European footy on TV, warm rum and cold beer.

**Buzz** (Map p532; ☎ 6-10.30pm) This kitsch Hollywood bar is in the basement at Glenary's. It has live bands Saturday and Sunday at 6.30pm.

Also recommended:

**Windamere Hotel** (Map p532; ☎ 2254041; Jawahar Rd West; ☎ 1-8pm) Sofas, slippers, pink gin and cold beer.



## Entertainment

**Inox Theatre** (Map p532; ☎ 2257226; www.inoxmovies.com; Rink Mall, cnr Laden La & SM Das Rds; tickets Rs 60-130) Three cinemas and several classes of seating.

## Shopping

### DARJEELING TEA

This is some of the finest tea in the world and is a very popular and portable souvenir. The best supplier here, with over 50 varieties, is **Nathmull's Tea Rooms** (Map p532; www.nathmulltea.com; Laden La Rd). Expect to pay Rs 50 per 100g for a decent tea and up to Rs 1000 per 100g for the finest brews. Try before you buy at **Goodricke, The House of Tea** (Map p532; Nehru Rd).

Cheaper tea is available in Chowk Bazaar, but the packaging isn't particularly sturdy. Avoid the tea in fancy boxes, because it's usually blended and packaged in Kolkata.

### TIBETAN CARPETS

**Tibetan Refugee Self-Help Centre** (Map p531; Leborg Cart Rd; ☎ dawn-dusk Mon-Sat) Gorgeous carpets made to order and shipped to your home address.

**Hayden Hall** (Map p532; ☎ 2253228; Laden La Rd; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) Closer to Chowrasta, this place sells carpets as part of its charitable work (Rs 3600 to 4000 for a 3ft x 6ft carpet).

### TREKKING GEAR

The **Trekking Shop** (Map p531; Singalila Market, Nehru Rd) sells satisfactory Nepali counterfeit clothing, and waterproofs and jackets, as well as Chinese- and Russian-made boots (larger sizes are rare).

### OTHER SOUVENIRS

There are numerous souvenir shops at Chowrasta and along Gandhi and Nehru Rds sell-

ing Nepali woodcarvings (including masks), *thangkas* (Tibetan cloth paintings), religious objects and jewellery.

**Das Studios** (Map p532; ☎ 2254004; Nehru Rd; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) Sells photographic prints of Khangchendzonga and other places around Darjeeling.

Chowk Bazaar is a crowded, noisy and fascinating place to buy tea, spices and incense. There are several so-called Buddha shops at Chowk Bazaar and on NB Singh Rd, selling prayer flags, *thangkas* and prayer wheels.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

The nearest airport is 90km away at Bagdogra, about 12km from Siliguri. See p526 for details about flights to/from Bagdogra.

**Indian Airlines** (Map p532; ☎ 2254230; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) is at Chowrasta. **Clubsides Tours & Travels** (Map p532; ☎ 2254646; clubside@satyam.net.in; JP Sharma Rd; ☎ 8.30am-6pm) and **Pineridge Travels** (Map p532; ☎ 2253912; pineridge@dte.vsnl.net.in; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) are Jet Airways agents.

### BUS

From the Chowk Bazaar bus/jeep station (Map p532), regular buses depart for Mirik (Rs 40, three hours) and Siliguri (Rs 60, three hours). Tickets can be bought from the ground-floor counter at the Old Super Market Complex (Map p532) that backs on to the station.

**Kasturi Tours & Travels** (Map p532; ☎ 2254430; Old Super Market Complex; ☎ 8am-7pm) and **Diamond Treks, Tours & Travels** (Map p532; ☎ 2258961; Old Super Market Complex; ☎ 8am-7pm) can book 'luxury' buses from Siliguri to destinations such as Kolkata (Rs 380, 12 hours). **Samsara Tours, Travels & Treks** (Map p532; ☎ 2257194; samsara1@sancharnet.in; Laden La Rd) offers similar services. These tickets don't include transfers to Siliguri.

### JEEP & TAXI

Numerous share jeeps and taxis leave the crowded south end of the Chowk Bazaar bus/jeep station for Siliguri (Rs 80, 2½ hours) and Kurseong (Rs 40, 1½ hours). Jeeps leave for Mirik (Rs 50, 2½ hours) about every 1½ hours. Ticket offices on the ground floor of the Old Super Market Complex sell advance tickets for the frequent jeeps to Kalimpong (Rs 90, two hours) and Gangtok (Rs 130, four hours).

At the northern end of the station, three to four jeeps a day leave for Jorethang (Rs 80, two hours), where it's easy to get a connection

### PERMITS FOR SIKKIM

Forms for Sikkim permits (p570) are available at the **Office of the District Magistrate** (Map p532; ☎ 2254233; Hill Cart Rd; ☎ 11am-1pm & 2.30-4pm Mon-Fri), downhill from the Chowk Bazaar bus/jeep station. They must be filled out and stamped here, and then taken to the **Foreigners' Regional Registration Office** (Map p532; ☎ 2254278; Laden La Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5pm), which also stamps your form. Then go back to the magistrate's office, which issues the permit while you wait. The whole process takes about 1½ hours and there's no fee – bring your passport.



to anywhere in northern or West Sikkim. You must already have a permit to enter Sikkim (see p541) via this route.

**Darjeeling Transport Corporation** (Map p532; ☎ 9832081338, 2258967; Laden La Rd) has jeeps to Gangtok (share/charter Rs 130/1300, four hours, share jeeps depart 8.30am and 1pm) and Siliguri (share/charter Rs 80/800, 2½ hours, hourly).

To New Jalpaiguri or Bagdogra, get a connection in Siliguri, or charter a jeep or taxi from Darjeeling (Rs 1000).

### TRAIN

The nearest major train station is at New Jalpaiguri (NJP), near Siliguri. Tickets can be bought for major services out of NJP at the Darjeeling train station's **computerised reservations counter** (Map p532; ☎ 2252555; ☘ 8am-2pm).

### Darjeeling Himalayan Railway

The diesel toy train leaves Darjeeling at 9.15am for NJP (2nd/1st class Rs 45/247, seven hours), stopping at Ghoom (Rs 20/96, 50 minutes), Kurseong (Rs 26/144, three hours) and Siliguri (Rs 38/217, 6½ hours). It's an exhausting haul to NJP, so if you simply want to experience the train, take the steam train to/from Kurseong or the joy ride (p535).

### TO/FROM NEPAL

Foreigners can only cross the border into Nepal at Kakarbhitta/Panitanki (not at Pasupati).

**Diamond Treks, Tours & Travels** (Map p532; ☎ 2258961; Old Super Market Complex) and **Kasturi Tours & Travels** (Map p532; ☎ 2254430; Old Super Market Complex) sell tickets for buses from Darjeeling to Kathmandu (Rs 600). These are not direct buses and involve transfers in Siliguri and at the border – leaving room for problems. However, it's not difficult to do this yourself and you'll save some money. See p528 for Siliguri–Panitanki transport, as well as border and Nepali bus details.

### Getting Around

Share jeeps to anywhere north of the city centre, eg North Point (Rs 5), leave from the northern end of the Chowk Bazaar bus/jeep station. To Ghoom, get a share jeep (Rs 12) from the Hill Cart Rd jeep stand at Chowk Bazaar (Map p532).

There are several taxi stands around town, but rates are absurd for short hops. You can hire a porter to carry your bags up to Chowrasta from Chowk Bazaar for around Rs 50.

## TREKKING AROUND DARJEELING

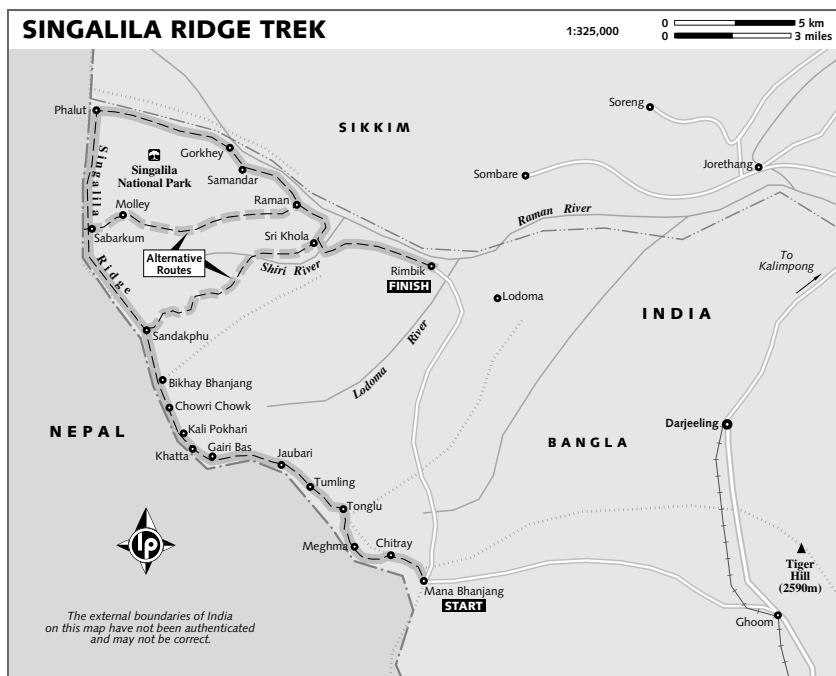
A number of rewarding and picturesque treks are accessible from Darjeeling. October and November's clear skies and warm temperatures make it an ideal time to trek, as do the long days and rhododendron blooms of May and early June. The **DGHC** (Map p532; ☎ 2255351; Jawahar Rd West; ☘ 9am-7pm daily high season, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun low season) produces the excellent *Himalayan Treks* leaflet, which includes a map and descriptions of major trekking routes.

Most popular is the **Singalila Ridge Trek** from Sandakphu to Phalut; it passes through scenic **Singalila National Park** (admission Rs 100, camera fee Rs 50) and offers Himalayan views. Guides (about Rs 350 per day) are mandatory and can be hired privately through travel agencies or at the trek's starting point in Mana Bhanjang, 26km from Darjeeling. Mana Bhanjang is served by morning buses from Darjeeling's Chowk Bazaar bus/jeep station (Rs 20, two hours). The usual trekking itinerary is described on below.

From Rimbik, there are connecting morning buses to Darjeeling (Rs 80, five hours). If you don't have five days, there are short cuts available at Sandakphu and Sabarkum. There are basic **trekkers' huts** (dm/d/tr Rs 100/400/500) at Mana Bhanjang, Tonglu, Garibas, Sandakphu, Phalut, Rammam, Srikhola and Rimbik – book through **Glenary's** (Map p532; Nehru Rd; ☘ 11.30am-9pm). You can organise meals at the huts for Rs 20 to 45. Other (better maintained) private accommodation options are available for similar prices along the route. All-inclusive guided treks on this route, including porters, meals and accommodation, are offered by Darjeeling travel agencies (p534) for Rs 1200 to 2000 per day depending on the level of service.

### SINGALILA RIDGE TREK

Day	Route	Distance (km)
1	Mana Bhanjang (2130m) to Tonglu (3100m) via Meghma Gompa	14
2	Tonglu to Sandakphu (3636m) via Kalipokhri & Garibas	17
3	Sandakphu to Phalut (3600m) via Sabarkum	17
4	Phalut to Rammam (2530m) via Gorkey	16
5	Rammam to Rimbik (2290m) via Srikhola	19



Nearer to Kalimpong is the great **Rochela Trek**, which gives you a taste of the stunning Samthar Plateau (p548). You can trek for four to eight days through dense forests, visiting remote villages and crossing a pass at 3000m. Note that it takes four days, with camping, to reach the highpoint of Rochela from Kalimpong.

Recommended trekking agencies:

**DGHC Tourist Reception Centre** (Darjeeling, p534; Kalimpong, p544) Charges about Rs 2000 per day (all-inclusive) for Singalila Ridge and organises guides/porters (Rs 350 per day) for Rochela.

**Gurudongma Tours & Travels** (☎ 255204; www.gurudongma.com; Hilltop, Rinkingpong Rd, Kalimpong) Offering customised all-inclusive treks in this region, with knowledgeable guides and accommodation.

**Samsara Tours, Travels & Treks** (☎ 2252874; samsara1@sancharnet.in; Laden La Rd) Experienced agency offering reasonably priced rafting and trekking trips.

**Tenzing Norgay Adventures** (Map p531; ☎ 2253718; www.tenzing-norgay.com; DB Giri Rd) Professional outfit offering treks in Darjeeling, Sikkim, Tibet and Bhutan.

**Trek Mate** (Map p532; ☎ 2256611; chagpori@satyam.net.in; Nehru Rd) Readers have recommended the treks (Rs 1400 per person per day), while the rental gear is clean and well maintained.

If you need clothing or gear (and you should carry your own sleeping bag even if relying on huts), it can be rented from Trek Mate (sleeping bag Rs 30, down jacket Rs 20, boots Rs 30, rain gear Rs 15 per day). The Trekking Shop (p541) stocks clothing and boots. The DGHC in Kalimpong has a few tents for rent.

## KALIMPONG

☎ 03552 / pop 42,980 / elev 1250m

This bustling bazaar town sprawls along a ridge overlooking the roaring Teesta River and within sight of Khangchendzonga. Kalimpong lacks Darjeeling's crowds and commercialism, yet it boasts Himalayan views, tranquil retreats, Buddha shops, temples and churches, and a fascinating nursery industry.

Kalimpong's early development as a trading centre focused on the wool trade with Tibet, across the Jelepala Pass. Like Darjeeling, Kalimpong once belonged to the chogyals of Sikkim, but it fell into the hands of the Bhutanese in the 18th century and later passed to the British, before becoming part of India at Independence. Scottish missionaries, particularly the Jesuits, made great efforts to

win over the local Buddhists in the late 19th century and Dr Graham's famous orphanage and school is still running today.

The Gorkhaland movement is active in Kalimpong, so it's worth checking the security situation before you arrive. The Gurkha leader CK Pradhan was assassinated here in October 2002 after being implicated in an assassination attempt on the head of the GNLF, and is commemorated by a small shrine on the spot where he was gunned down.

## Orientation & Information

Kalimpong is centred on its chaotic Motor Stand, where people mill and transport options come and go. Nearby are restaurants, cheap hotels and shopping, while most sights and quality accommodation are a few kilometres from town, accessed via DB Giri and Rinkingpong Rds.

The staff at the **DGHC Tourist Reception Centre** (☎ 257992; DB Giri Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) are very helpful, as is the private website [www.kalimpong.org](http://www.kalimpong.org). The **post office** (☎ 255990; Rinkingpong Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, till 4pm Sat) is next to the town hall.

The **Central Bank** (SDB Giri Rd; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, till noon Sat) and **Soni Emporium** (☎ 255030; DB Giri Rd; ☎ 8am-8pm) exchange various currencies and travellers cheques for a small commission. **Net Hut** (per hr Rs 35; ☎ 9am-8pm), near the Motor Stand, is a tight squeeze but the best internet option.

There is nowhere in Kalimpong to obtain permits for Sikkim, but free 15-day permits are available at the border at Rangpo (see p570). You need to present three passport photos.

## Sights

### GOMPAS

Built in 1926, the **Tharpa Choling Gompa**, off KD Pradhan Rd, contains statues of the Bhaisajya, Sakyamuni and Maitreya Buddhas (past, present and future, respectively). Garuda protects each Buddha from above, his mouth devouring hatred and anger (the snake), while his feet hold down symbols of ignorance and worldly attachment. Interestingly, the controversial Dorje Shugden and other wrathful deities are kept in a locked room adjacent to the gompa. The small room is painted with images of flayed animals and humans. The controversy over the Dalai Lama's edict to not worship Shugden has split the local Tibetan community. It's a 30-minute walk (up-hill) from town, past the top of Tripai Rd.

Near the top of RC Mintri Rd, past JP Lodge, is the ancient **Thongsa Gompa** (Bhutanese Mon-

astery). The monastery was founded in 1692, but the present building, surrounded by 219 small prayer wheels, was built in the 19th century after the Gurkhas rampaged across Sikkim. Its old murals downstairs are fading, and upstairs you will find bright new frescoes.

Kalimpong's largest monastery, **Zong Dog Palri Fo-Brang Gompa**, aka **Durpin Gompa**, sits atop spectacular Durpin Hill (1372m) and was consecrated after its opening by the Dalai Lama in 1976. There are impressive wall and ceiling paintings in the main prayer room downstairs (photography is permitted), and interesting 3-D mandalas on the 2nd floor. Primarily Nyingpa, the monastery is a compilation of the many different sects of refugees who cooperated in its construction. From the highest storey you can see Siliguri on the plains and the top of Khangchendzonga. The monastery is located about 5km south of the town centre, and is best reached by chartered jeep (Rs 80 return). The **Jelepla Viewpoint**, about 300m below the gompa, looks out to the Himalaya and over the Relli and Teesta Rivers.

### ST TERESA'S CHURCH

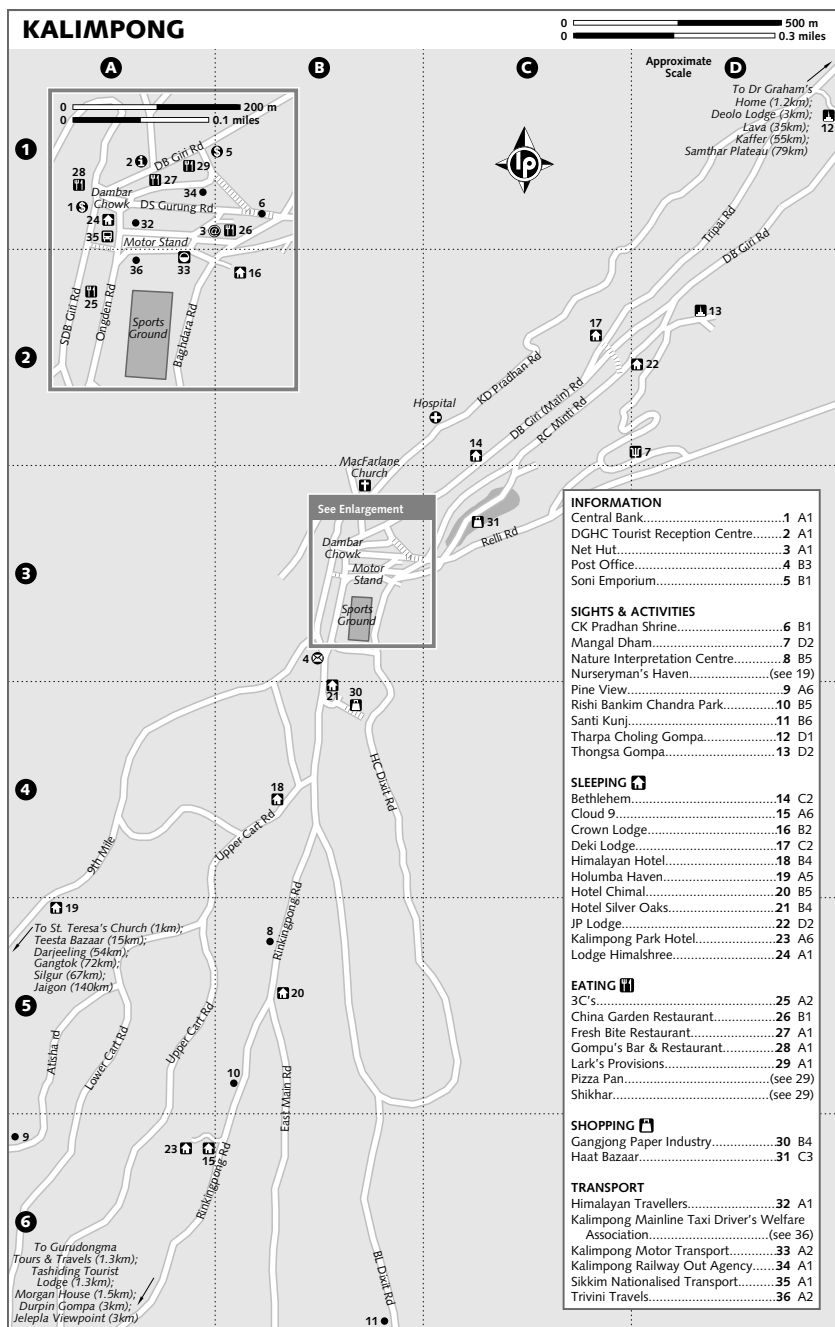
A fascinating missionary church built in 1929 by Swiss Jesuits and designed to gain acceptance from the locals, St Teresa's construction mimics a Bhutanese gompa. The carved apostles look like Buddhist monks, and the carvings on the doors resemble *tashi tagye*, the eight auspicious symbols of Himalayan Buddhism. The church is found off 9th Mile Rd, about 2km from town. Take a taxi or walk and ask for directions.

### MANGAL DHAM

This ungainly modern **temple** (Relli Rd; ☎ 6am-7pm) is sacred to Krishna. In its ballroomlike prayer hall there are eight vibrant, life-size dioramas from the Krishna Leela. The temple is dedicated to Guruji Shri Mangaldasji, who's commemorated in a shrine below the prayer hall. The temple is about 500m downhill from Thongsa Gompa, or you can walk from the centre along Relli Rd and turn left by the Roman Catholic church.

### DR GRAHAM'S HOME

This working **orphanage and school** was built in 1900 by Dr JA Graham, a Scottish missionary, to educate the children of tea-estate workers, and now has more than 1300 students. There's a small **museum** (admission free; ☎ 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri)



that commemorates the founder and his wife Katherine. The 1925 **chapel** above the school features fine stained-glass windows. The gate is 4km up the steep KD Pradhan Rd and the buildings are 650m from there. Many people charter a taxi to get here (Rs 80) and then walk back to town.

### NURSERIES

Kalimpong is a major flower exporter and produces about 80% of India's gladioli, as well as many orchid varieties. Visit **Nurseryman's Haven** (☎ 256936; 9th Mile) to have a look at orchids; **Santi Kunj** (BL Dixit Rd; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 1.30-4pm Sun-Fri) to see anthuriums and the bird of paradise flower; and **Pine View** (www.pineviewcactus.com; Atisha Rd; admission Rs 5) to gaze at its eminently photographable cactus collection.

### OTHER ATTRACTIONS

The **Nature Interpretation Centre** (Rinkingpong Rd; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-4pm Fri-Wed) has what must be the world's most educational badminton court. Around the court are a number of well-organised dioramas depicting the effects of human activity on the environment. It's an easy walk from the town centre. About 450m further up the hill is the small but serene **Rishi Bankim Chandra Park** (also known as Kalimpong Park).

### Activities

The **DGHC Tourist Reception Centre** (☎ 257992; DB Giri Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) can arrange treks (see p542) and the same rafting trips as the Darjeeling DGHC (see p537).

**Gurudongma Tours & Travels** (☎ 255204; www.gurudongma.com; Hilltop, Rinkingpong Rd) organises interesting tours, including trekking, rafting, mountain biking, bird-watching and fishing, around Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Sikkim.

### Sleeping

The most memorable (and expensive) places to stay are well outside Kalimpong's busy core. You'll find cheaper options within walking distance of the Motor Stand. High-season rates (October to early December and mid-March to early June) are given below; prices can drop by 50% in the low season.

### BUDGET

All hotels have private bathrooms and free bucket hot water, unless specified otherwise. Most give you the option of sit-down flush or squat toilets.

**Lodge Himalshree** (☎ 255070; Ongden Rd; s/d with shared bathroom Rs 100/150) This is a friendly but very basic little place on the top floor of a tall building right in the busiest part of town. The stairs are steep and the rooms are plain and clean. Hot-water buckets cost Rs 10.

**Hotel Chimal** (☎ 255776; Rinkingpong Rd; s/d from Rs 200/350) Hotel Chimal is set in lovely terraced gardens about 1km south of the Motor Stand. The rooms with private bathroom are basic affairs, but very clean, and the hosts are friendly and helpful.

**Deki Lodge** (☎ 255095; www.geocities.com/dekilodge; Tripai Rd; s/d/tr Rs 250/550/900) This older-style, Tibetan-owned lodge is close to the Thongsa and Tharpa Choling monasteries and still handy to town. It's a friendly place, with a pleasant café and rooftop viewing area.

**Crown Lodge** (☎ 255846; off Baghdara Rd; s/d Rs 350/600) The large rooms with TV, private bathrooms with geyser, and some comfortable furnishings with character make the Crown Lodge a good choice.

**JP Lodge** (☎ 257457; www.jplodge.com; RC Mintri Rd; d Rs 650, with shared bathroom Rs 450) The hosts here are very friendly and the smallish rooms are clean and bright, and most have views. There's an interesting wood-lined attic with views to lounge about in.

### MIDRANGE & TOP END

All places listed here have private bathrooms and running hot water; most also have TVs.

**Tashiding Tourist Lodge** (☎ 255929; Rinkingpong Rd; s Rs 400-750, d Rs 800-1000) Set in overgrown gardens, with the feel of an abandoned Raj summer cottage, this rustic stone lodge looks charming from the outside but is very neglected inside. Furnishings are rudimentary and the bathrooms are of questionable functionality. For this price it is advised to check your room first.

**Morgan House** (☎ 255384; Rinkingpong Rd; s Rs 500-1500, d Rs 1100-2000) This is the upscale version of the nearby Tashiding Tourist Lodge – both government-managed heritage properties – and doesn't it show. Boasting a glorious setting and outward appearance, the uninterested staff and dog-eared rooms nevertheless disappoint.

**Cloud 9** (☎ 259554; cloud9kpg@yahoo.com; Rinkingpong Rd; d Rs 700-800) A very friendly place, with wood-panelled rooms, a cosy TV lounge and a good restaurant and bar, serving Bhutanese, Tibetan and Chinese food, downstairs.

**our pick Holumba Haven** (☎ 256936; www.holumba.com; 9th Mile; s/d from Rs 850/1050) This welcoming

guesthouse is situated in a splendid orchid nursery, Nurseryman's Haven, just 1km out of town. The spotless rooms are arranged in cottages secreted around the lush landscaped garden and springwater is piped directly into the rooms. Some cottages have attached kitchens, but excellent home-style meals are available in the dining room. The owners are an open encyclopaedia on Kalimpong's history and attractions.

**Kalimpong Park Hotel** (☎ 255304; www.indiamart.com/kalimpongparkhotel; s/d from Rs 1300/1800) This hotel, off Rinkingpong Rd, was the former home of the maharaja of Dinajpur and has oodles of Raj-era charm. Wicker chairs and flowers line the veranda, and there's a delightful bar and restaurant. The rooms in the new wing lack the charm of the old house.

**Deolo Lodge** (☎ 274452; Deolo Hill; d Rs 1500) Commanding outstanding views (when not lost in the cloud), this DGHC hotel sits atop Deolo Hill, high above and several kilometres from town. The spacious rooms are clean and the staff friendly; there's a multicuisine restaurant and ample clean mountain air.

**Himalayan Hotel** (☎ 254043; www.himalayanhotel.co.in; Upper Cart Rd; s/d Rs 1600/2500, with 3 meals Rs 2400/4100) This hotel was opened by the revered David MacDonald, an interpreter from Francis Younghusband's mission to Lhasa in 1904 and one of those who helped the 13th Dalai Lama escape Tibet in 1910. Now run by his grandson, the original rooms have loads of Raj appeal beneath high Himalayan-oak ceilings and the balcony is a great place to socialise or curl up with a book. The new suites mesh old-world charm with modern comfort; their terraces gaze upon Khangchendzonga.

**Hotel Silver Oaks** (☎ 255296; silveroaks@elginhotels.com; Rinkingpong Rd; s/d Rs 3800/4100) This Raj-era homestead has been delightfully renovated into a modern and very comfortable hotel. The rooms are spacious, beautifully furnished and offer grand views down the valley. The tariff includes all meals in the excellent restaurant and there's a sociable bar.

## Eating

### RESTAURANTS

Besides the options below, most midrange and top-end hotels have quality restaurants.

**Shikhar** (☎ 255966; DB Giri Rd; mains Rs 8-20) This hugely popular vegetarian restaurant with Tibetan and Indian snacks and meals is tucked under the Pizza Pan restaurant. Ultra-cheap

*momos* and filling chow mein are the most popular orders.

**Fresh Bite Restaurant** (☎ 274042; DB Giri Rd; mains Rs 30-60) A menu covering everything from miso soup to buff steak spaghetti draws in locals and travellers. The food is quite good and the owner has a country retreat, which he will no doubt mention. The restaurant is upstairs, across from the DGHC.

**China Garden Restaurant** (☎ 257456; Lal Gulli; mains Rs 35-90) In the China Garden Hotel near the Motor Stand, this is Kalimpong's best Chinese restaurant. The authentic soups, noodles and the spicy ginger chicken attract aficionados, though several Indian curries have snuck onto the menu.

**Gompu's Bar & Restaurant** (☎ 257456; off SDB Giri Rd; mains Rs 40-90) Gompu's is famous for its massive *momos* (pork, chicken and veg), and has been pleasing locals and travellers with Tibetan, Bhutanese, Indian, Chinese and continental fare for ages. It's found within the hotel of the same name.

**Pizza Pan** (☎ 258650; DB Giri Rd; mains Rs 80-120) The 'acceptable pizzas for Kalimpong', as one local quipped, come in two sizes with a variety of veg and non-veg toppings, and are indeed acceptable, as is the coffee.

### QUICK EATS

Kalimpong cheese has been produced in Kalimpong since the Jesuits established a dairy here in the 19th century. Kalimpong lollipops share a history with the cheese; they are made at the dairy from milk, sugar and butter.

**Lark's Provisions** (DB Giri Rd) The best place to pick up Kalimpong cheese (per kg Rs 150) and a packet of Kalimpong lollipops (Rs 25). Also sells groceries and crackers.

**3C's** (SDB Giri Rd; cakes & snacks Rs 5-30) A popular bakery and restaurant offering various pastries and cakes.

### Shopping

As you wander around you will notice lots of Buddha shops. These are wholesale shops selling to retailers and distributors from all over India and worth a look for a bargain. Along RC Mintri Rd there's a profusion of fabric shops selling Tibetan cloth and Indian or Chinese silk brocade – both higher in quality and lower in cost than that seen in Darjeeling.

**Gangjong Paper Industry** (Primtam Rd; ☎ 10am-6pm) This small place, hiding below Hotel Silver Oaks, is a bit whiffy: apparently the fibre



from the bark of the daphne tree that goes into this paper is resistant to all sorts of attack and decay. There's a small showroom selling attractive notebooks, greeting cards, lanterns etc coloured with natural dyes.

**Haat Bazaar** (btwn Relli & RC Mintri Rds) On Wednesday and Saturday, this normally quiet bazaar roars to life, attracting nearby villagers who can buy anything from flip-flops to aromatic spices.

### Getting There & Away

All the bus and jeep options, and their offices mentioned here, are found at the chaotic Motor Stand.

#### BUS & JEEP

Bengal government buses run regularly to Siliguri (Rs 50, 2½ hours), and there's also a single Sikkim Nationalised Transport (SNT; Rs 70, 3½ hours) bus to Gangtok at 1pm.

**Trivini Travels** (☎ 257311) and **Himalayan Travellers** (☎ 9434166498) run minibuses or share jeeps to Gangtok (Rs 80, three hours, departs 7.30am and 1.30pm), Lava (Rs 50, 1½ hours, departs 8am and 1.45pm) and Kaffer (Rs 80, three hours, departs 8am and 1.45pm).

**Kalimpong Mainline Taxi Driver's Welfare Association** (KMTDWA; ☎ 257979) has regular share jeeps to Siliguri (Rs 70, 2½ hours), Gangtok (Rs 80, 2½ hours), Lava (Rs 40, 1½ hours), Kaffer (Rs 60, 2½ hours) and Jorethang (Rs 60, two hours, departs 7.15am). **KS & AH Taxi Driver's Welfare Association** (☎ 259544) has a jeep to Ravangla in Sikkim (Rs 100, 3½ hours, departs 2pm). **Kalimpong Motor Transport** (☎ 255719) has a regular share-jeep service to Darjeeling (Rs 70, 2½ hours).

Jeeps can also be chartered for Darjeeling (Rs 800), Siliguri (Rs 800) and Gangtok (Rs 850).

#### TRAIN

The **Kalimpong Railway Out Agency** (☎ 259954; Mani Rd; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, till 1pm Sun) sells a small quota (mostly sleeper class) of tickets from New Jalpaiguri train station.

#### TO/FROM BHUTAN & NEPAL

**Trivini Travels** (☎ 257311) has one bus to the Bhutanese border, Jaigon (Rs 100, 5½ hours, departs 2.15pm). The government bus makes the same trip (Rs 95) at 8.40am. Border information can be found on p528.

**Kalimpong Mainline Taxi Driver's Welfare Association** (KMTDWA; ☎ 257979) has regular jeeps to

the Nepal border at Panitanki (Rs 90, three hours). See p528 for crossing details.

### Getting Around

Taxis can be chartered for local trips from along SDB Giri Rd. A half-day rental to see most of the sights should cost Rs 600.

## AROUND KALIMPONG

### Teesta Bazaar

About 16km west of Kalimpong, Teesta Bazaar is an important centre for white-water rafting. Most people book in Darjeeling (see p537 for details) or at the DGHC office in Kalimpong, but you can also book here with the **DGHC** (☎ 03552-268261; Chitrey Wayside Inn, NH-31A), about 1.5km from Teesta Bazaar along the road to Kalimpong.

The friendly **Chitrey Wayside Inn** (dm Rs 100, d with private bathroom & geyser Rs 450) boasts a bar, restaurant and balcony overlooking the jungle banks of the Teesta River. The spacious rooms are clean, if spartan, and meals are good.

Teesta Bazaar is about 30 minutes by road from Kalimpong; take any bus or share jeep (Rs 25) in the direction of Darjeeling.

### Lava & Kaffer

About 35km east of Kalimpong, Lava (2353m) is a small village with a Kagyupa **gumpa** and a bustling **market** on Tuesday. The summit of Khangchendzonga can be seen from **Kaffer** (1555m), also known as Lodaygaon, about 30km further east. Both villages see few tourists and make peaceful and scenic getaways. The picturesque drive from Kalimpong passes through mist and moss-laden old-growth forests.

**Daffey Munal Tourist Lodge** (☎ 03552-277218; dm Rs 100, d with private bathroom & geyser Rs 600) has huge, clean rooms with fireplaces. It's a rambling old place in Kaffer run by the DGHC.

Jeeps and a daily bus serve Kalimpong from both Lava (Rs 40, 1½ hours) and Kaffer (Rs 60, 2½ hours).

### Samthar Plateau

This remote and beautiful plateau offers awesome views of Bhutan's Himalayan range and a chance to visit traditional villages. For trekking information, see p542. **Gurudongma Tours & Travels** (☎ 255204; www.gurudongma.com; Hilltop, Rinkingpong Rd, Kalimpong; s/d from Rs 2115/2820) runs the cosy Farm House at Samthar, which has accommodation in cottages, rooms or tents. It'll arrange transport for its customers from Kalimpong.

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