

5 EASY TRIPS

WHERE TO STAY

Hidden Forest Retreat:

This cosy hotel is basic and pretty. An extension of a flower nursery, the stone-paved walkway leading in feels quite like strolling through a garden bursting with colourful, fragrant blossoms. The best part about it is the deck area that overlooks the city, which is lovely for watching sunsets (00-91-3592-205197, 00-91-9474981367; hiddenforestretreat.org, enquiry@hiddenforestretreat.org; Middle Sichey; doubles ₹ 2,000 onwards with breakfast).

Netuk House: This adorable property is an old Sikkimese family home-turned-hotel, run by its original owners. Perched on an elevated walkway, it feels sequestered though it is walking distance from the centre. The rooms are small but cosy and the balconies offer views of bustling Gangtok against the mountainous background (00-91-3592-206778/204766; netukhouse.com, netukhouse@gmail.com; Tibet Road; doubles ₹ 3,200 onwards with breakfast).

The Nor-Khill: Formerly a palace built by the King of Sikkim in 1932, Hotel Nor-Khill is now a luxury heritage hotel. Its ethnic Sikkimese grandeur has been maintained in its jewel-hued, ornate furnishings and vintage bar. The hotel's best qualities are the great views and the authentic Sikkimese meal it serves weekly (00-91-3592-205637/200170; elginhotels.com/thenorkhill.html, norkhill@elginhotels.com; Stadium Road; doubles ₹ 7,200 onwards with all meals).

WHERE TO EAT

On MG Road alone, you're spoilt for good eating choices. For some good traditional Sikkimese fare and groovy Japanese-style lounge ambience, try **Tangerine** (00-91-3592-226618/226619; *Chumbi Residency, Tibet Road*). **Parivar** (Yama house: 00-91-3592-227409/224088) is a very popular South Indian veg joint, and **Roll House** (8am-8pm), just off the road, is a tiny eatery known for its *kathi* rolls and



FACT SHEET

GETTING THERE

Closest metro: Kolkata (695km) makes for a long drive, so it's best to fly to Bagdogra.

Kingfisher, SpiceJet and Jet Connect all fly to and from Bagdogra Airport; return economy fares start at approximately ₹ 4,000.

Closest cities: Siliguri (114km), Darjeeling (94km) and Kalimpong (80km) are all connected to Gangtok. All-day state-run SNT buses services are available from all. An SNT bus leaves Siliguri at 7am (₹ 90 for a deluxe bus); a bus leaves Kalimpong at 1pm (₹ 80). Metered taxi services are also available.

Closest airport: Bagdogra Airport near Siliguri (112km), a four-hour drive away, is well-

connected to major Indian cities. A taxi from the airport costs about ₹ 2,000. Subject to the weather, the Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation (00-91-3592-281372/281316;

sticsikkim@yahoo.com) operates a 20-minute helicopter flight that runs between Bagdogra and Gangtok daily.

Closest railhead: New Jalpaiguri (NJP), (114 km) near Siliguri, is directly connected to all major Indian cities. Taxis and buses are available from NJP station to Gangtok. Try the 13147 **Uttar Banga Express** from Kolkata (leaves Sealdah 7.35pm, reaches New Jalpaiguri 7am; ₹ 643 3AC). For the return journey, the 12378 **Padatik Express** is a good option (leaves New Jalpaiguri 9pm, reaches Sealdah 6.45am; ₹ 673 3AC).

GETTING AROUND

Private and share-taxis are the main mode of transportation within Gangtok. Fixed-rate service taxis can be found on MG Road.



parathas. Baker's Café serves cappuccinos and fresh pastries (8.30am-8.30pm). Locally-brewed millet beer is available at most hotels, if not all restaurants. Also try the popular local beer, Hit (manufactured by actor Danny Denzongpa's brewery).

WHAT TO PACK

Mornings and nights can get quite chilly, so carry light woollens. You might get light rain showers so pack an umbrella. Also, comfortable shoes fit for light hiking and walking, and a torch for night walks.

SHOPPING

Gangtok is great for traditional artefacts like Lepcha weave bags, silk *Thangka* paintings and scrolls, Tibetan *dhurries* and carpets, masks and ornate *Choktse* chests. To take home some local flavour, buy *chhurpi* (yak cheese) or if you have the stomach for it, sinus-clearing bamboo and chilli pickle. There are lots of shops along MG Road, but for better prices, **Kanchanjunga Shopping Plaza** and the government-run emporia are best.

CLEAN LOO GUIDE

Loos are easy to find but unless they're in better restaurants and hotels, they're not always up to scratch. Carry toilet paper and hand sanitiser.

SAFETY

Gangtok is safe, clean and secure for tourists.

MEDICAL AID

Gangtok has plenty of chemists, and **STNM Hospital** (Tibet Road) in case of medical emergencies.

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Visits to the zoological park and Banjhakri falls should work great for kids. There's lots of running space, great weather and enough tourist amenities in the city centre to keep them enthused.

GOOD TO KNOW

• Visit sikkimtourism.travel for more information.