

NETUK HOUSE

Ideal for those who want to experience the posh of the past, this aristocratic homestay will give travellers a taste of local life with the added comfort of luxury. Decorated in local style with bright cheery interiors and local Sikkimese textiles, the house is a charming old-fashioned retreat. The family-run 'hotel' offers local hospitality along with lovely local spreads for discerning foodies. Festooned with Buddhist prayer flags and a warm and friendly vibe, Netuk House comes with an added charm; expect enriching evenings listening to local lore over many cups of chai. There are also gorgeous uninterrupted views of the snowclad mountains.

● Tibet Road, Gangtok; tel: (03592) 222 374



PASTANGA VILLAGE

To get the real local feel, you must experience living with a Sikkimese family in a typical village. Stop by Pastanga village, in Assam Lingzay just outside Gangtok, a truly beautiful spot right in the lap of nature. This little village is flush in rhododendron and magnolia flowers and a wide variety of bamboo species. It is truly a fascinating destination for nature lovers as it provides spectacular walks and breathtaking views of the surrounding mountain ranges. Pastanga is also the starting point for the exciting Khedi trek, rich in biodiversity, popular with adventure enthusiasts. You can enjoy local traditions, dances and music during your stay here. There are nearly ten government approved homestays which are all very reasonable and accessible.

● 28 km from Gangtok; www.keeppastangasikkim.org

THE TEEN JHUREY TREK

Starting from a place called Golitar, this is a wonderful nature trek for all those who seek adventure. The richly forested area is known to be the home for various species of wild animals and birds. For those who like the peaceful sport of angling, the hike to River Bhusak is perfect. This is a one day hike but the scenery and the fish at the end of the line are worth the journey. The hike starts from Syari, four km from Gangtok. One can get equipment on hire from local travel agents and you take a local guide along.

● 25 km from Gangtok

Gangtok



LILY
TSHERING
BHUTIA

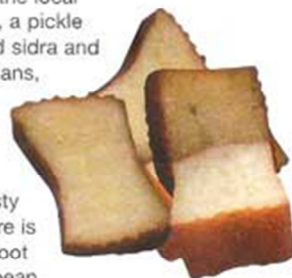
An avid trekker,
Lily is director of
a specialised travel

company that organises high altitude treks. She lives in Gangtok but feels most at home in the great outdoors, especially the rhododendron forests in her home state. Lily is also a foodie and her two loves can be seen here!

LOCAL PICKLES

Sikkim has three major communities—the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalese—and each of them contribute to the state's varied cuisine and culture. Apart from the regular *momos* and *thukpas*, available at nearly every corner store and restaurant, the foodie should not return from Sikkim without trying some of the local pickles. A must try is *sidra ko achar*, a pickle made out of a small dried fish called *sidra* and eaten with rice and *dal*. For vegetarians, there is the exotic *chhurpi ko achar*. *Chhurpi* is a local fermented cottage cheese and is widely used in Sikkimese cuisine; the pickle in mustard oil and spices is quite a tasty accompaniment with plain rice. There is also *mesu* or fermented bamboo shoot pickle, *shimi ko achar* or the string bean pickle and the extremely delicious hot *dalle* and bamboo shoot pickle.

● Pick up a bottle at Gupta Tea House or Rainbow, on M.G. Marg. Also check Sikkim Supreme Factory near Singtam



LESS KNOWN BREWS

A butter salt tea churned inside a bamboo container is a popular drink that helps keeping you warm, and thus is consumed in large quantities in the winter. While *chaang* or the local beer is the most popular drink, other variants of it are also worth a try. These include *simal tarul ko jaanr*, which is a fermented cassava root alcoholic drink and *raksi*, a clear rice wine with a strong aroma. Homemade rhododendron and ginger wine can be found in local villages. Kanchan berry juice, a recent favourite, is also rather delicious and comes with medicinal values.

● A local homestay would be the best place to find these unusual brews

