

COMPLETE TRAVEL GUIDE

North Bengal

Mountains, Tea Gardens & Wildlife

North Bengal

By S. S. R. A. M. D. N.

PAPPA LAHIRI

ELLIOTT SOCIETY LTD.

ROHSEY

About the Author

Prithwiraj Lahiri is a proud resident of North Bengal and a passionate travel guide who has spent years exploring the hidden corners, wildlife sanctuaries, tea gardens, and vibrant cultures of the region. Growing up amidst the lush forests of Dooars and the misty hills of Darjeeling, he developed a deep love for nature, storytelling, and helping travellers experience the beauty of his homeland

With a background in digital marketing and a strong interest in writing, Prithwiraj combines local knowledge with practical travel insights to create engaging, beginner-friendly content for readers across India and beyond. From crafting detailed travel guides to sharing offbeat destinations, safari tips, and trekking experiences, his work aims to make every journey smooth, memorable, and authentic.

As the author behind ExpressWall99 and several niche travel blogs, he focuses on delivering SEO-optimized, human-written articles that reflect real experiences and add genuine value for travellers. Whether you're planning a first trip to Dooars, searching for Darjeeling's hidden gems, or looking for practical travel hacks, Prithwiraj's guides are designed to inspire exploration and smart planning.

Table Of Contents

1. Planning Your Journey
2. The Queen of Hills - Darjeeling
3. Peaceful Mountain Retreats
4. The Offbeat Paradise Circuit
5. Wildlife & Wilderness - The Dooars Region
6. Hidden Gems & Adventure
7. Where to Stay & What to Eat
8. Perfect Itineraries
9. Practical Travel Essentials
10. Experiences & Resources

Getting There: Transportation Options

By Air

Bagdogra Airport (IXB) is the primary gateway to North Bengal, well-connected to major Indian cities including Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, and Guwahati.

...

Here's a more concise version of the travel information:

- * **Siliguri:** 15 km, 20–30 minutes
- * **New Jalpaiguri (NJP):** 17 km, 30 minutes
 - * **Kalimpong:** 79 km, 2.5 hours
 - * **Darjeeling:** 95 km, 3 hours

Airport transfers: Pre-paid taxis available at airport counters (₹300-500 to NJP/Siliguri). Shared taxis and app-based cabs are also readily available.

Spring (March to May)

Excellent for flowers and comfortable weather

Weather: Mild to warm (18-28°C), occasional afternoon showers

Pros: Rhododendron blooms, tea gardens at their best, **fewer crowds in March**

Cons: Can get hot in the plains by May

Ideal for: Nature photographers, tea tourism, offbeat exploration

Monsoon (June to September)

Off-season with risks and rewards

Weather: Heavy rainfall, cooler temperatures (15-20°C)

Pros: Lush green landscapes, waterfalls at full flow, lowest prices, solitude

Cons: Landslide risks, limited mountain views, safari restrictions

Ideal for: Budget travelers, monsoon lovers (experienced travelers only)

Best monsoon destinations: Tabakoshi, Sittong, the lower Dooars areas

Avoid: July-August due to the heaviest rainfall and road disruption

Autumn (September to October)

Emerging favorite season

Weather: Post-monsoon freshness, clear skies (12-22°C)

Pros: Crystal-clear mountain views, lush post-rain greenery, moderate crowds

Ideal for: Photography, mountain views, comfortable exploration

Quick Season Summary

Best for First-Timers: October-February

Best for Flowers: March-May

Best for Budget: June-September

Best for Photography: September-October



Elevation: 2,050m | Best Duration: 2-3 days

Elevation: 2,590m - Sunrise over Kanchenjunga and Mount Everest

Timing: Depart at 4:00 AM to reach before sunrise

Entry: ₹50-100

Tip: Carry warm clothing; temperatures can drop to near-freezing

Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (Toy Train)

UNESCO World Heritage Site

- **Joy Ride: Darjeeling to Ghum (₹800-1,500 per person, 2 hours)**
- **Full journey: NJP to Darjeeling (7 hours, operates Tue/Thu/Sat)**
- **Highlights: Batasia Loop, Ghum Monastery, spectacular mountain views**

Happy Valley Tea Estate



Working tea garden with tastings

- **Entry: ₹100-300 including tour and tasting**
- **Duration: 1-2 hours**

Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park

Famous for: Red pandas, snow leopards, Himalayan wolves

Entry: ₹60 (Indians), ₹100 (foreigners)

Other Must-Visit Attractions

By Train 

New Jalpaiguri Railway Station (NJP) is the major rail hub, connected to Kolkata, Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and other major cities. Located 5 km from Siliguri, it serves as the jumping-off point for most North Bengal destinations.

Key trains: Darjeeling Mail, Kanchenjunga Express, North East Express

From NJP: Shared taxis (₹15 per seat to Siliguri), reserved taxis (₹300), or shared SUVs are available for onward journeys

By Road

From Kolkata: 560 km (10-12 hours via NH12)

From Guwahati: 400 km (8-9 hours)

Regular bus services operate from Siliguri to all destinations across North Bengal

Best Time to Visit: Seasonal Guide

Winter (October to February) - Peak Season ★

Best overall time for most travelers

Weather: Pleasant days (15-25°C), cool nights (5-10°C)

Pros: Clear mountain views, perfect for sightseeing, wildlife safaris, and trekking

Cons: Crowded during December-January, higher accommodation prices

Ideal for: First-time visitors, wildlife enthusiasts, families

Peace Pagoda

Chowrasta (Town Square)

Rock Garden

Himalayan Mountaineering Institute

Darjeeling Quick Facts

- **Best Time:** October–February, March–May
- **Language:** Nepali, Bengali, Hindi, English
- **Currency:** Indian Rupee (₹)
- **Getting Around:** Walking, taxis, shared jeeps
- **Weather Tip:** Carry layers; weather changes quickly
- **Booking Tip:** Book toy train tickets in advance online
- **Exploration Tip:** Walking is the best way to explore the town center



Kalimpong - Quieter Mountain Retreat

Elevation: 1,250m | Best Duration: 1-2 days

A quieter alternative to Darjeeling with stunning valley views, Buddhist monasteries, and vibrant flower nurseries.

Key Attractions:

- **Durpin Dara Hill** - Panoramic views with **Zangdog Palri Monastery**
- **Deolo Hill** - Highest point with cafeteria and activities
- **Flower nurseries** - Famous for orchids and cacti
- **Thongsa Gompa & Zang Dhok Palri Phodang** - Ancient monasteries
- **River rafting in Teesta River** (October-May)

From Darjeeling: 52 km (2.5 hours)

Mirik - Lakeside Serenity

Elevation: 1,495m | Best Duration: 1-2 days

A peaceful hill station centered around the beautiful Sumendu Lake.

Highlights:

- Sumendu Lake: Boating, horse riding, lakeside walks
- Bokar Monastery: Peaceful Tibetan monastery
- Tea gardens: Sprawling estates with walking trails

Timing: 2-3 days is sufficient for relaxed exploration

Travel Connections Between Destinations

Darjeeling → Kalimpong

Distance:** 52 km

Time:** 2.5 hours

Transport Options:** Shared taxis, private vehicles

Kalimpong → Mirik

-Distance:** 45 km

Time:** 2 hours

Transport Options:** Shared taxis, private vehicles

Mirik → Siliguri

Distance:** 52 km

Time:** 2 hours

Transport Options:** Regular bus service, taxis

Lava (2,350m)

Gateway to Neora Valley National Park

Attractions:

Lava Monastery

Changey Waterfalls

Forest trails

Activities:

Birdwatching (250+ species)

Nature walks

Lolegaon (1,675m)

Famous for: Canopy walk through pine forest (₹20)

- **Jhandi viewpoint:** Spectacular Kanchenjunga sunrise views
- **Atmosphere:** Quiet village with homestay experiences

Rishop (2,700m)

Highlight: Unobstructed Kanchenjunga views

- **Tiffindara viewpoint:** Panoramic mountain vistas
- **Experience:** Remote, peaceful, ideal for digital detox

Circuit Route Map & Itinerary

Recommended Route: NJP → Kalimpong → Rishop → Lava → Lolegaon → back to Siliguri/NJP

Route Segment Details:

- Kalimpong → Rishop: 25 km, 1.5 hours, mountain road
 - Rishop → Lava: 18 km, 1 hour, good condition
 - Lava → Lolegaon: 10 km, 45 minutes, forest road
- Lolegaon → Kalimpong: 32 km, 2 hours, winding descent

Travel Tip: This circuit requires 3-4 days minimum. Book homestays in advance, especially during peak season

Gorumara National Park

Best Duration: 3-5 days

The gateway to North Bengal's premier wildlife destinations, with vast tea estates and pristine forests.

Famous for: One-horned rhinoceros, Asian elephants, bison

Safari options: Jeep safari (₹1,500-2,000), elephant safari (₹100)

Best time: November to April

Location: Lataguri area

Jaldapara National Park

- **Famous for: Largest rhino population after Kaziranga**
- **Wildlife: Rhinos, elephants, Bengal tigers (rare sightings)**
- **Safari: Jeep and elephant safaris available**
- **Booking: Advance online booking recommended**

Offbeat Dooars Destinations

Bindu, Jhalong, Rocky Island: Riverside beauty, less crowded

Samsing & Suntalekhola: Orange orchards, river streams
Jaldhaka: River rafting opportunities

Bhutanghat & Paren: Remote forest areas

Safari Timings and Costs Comparison

Gorumara National Park:

Jeep Safari: ₹1,500-2,000, Morning: 6:00-9:00 AM, Afternoon: 2:30-5:30 PM**
Elephant Safari: ₹100, Morning: 7:00-8:00 AM, Afternoon: 3:00-4:00 PM**

Jaldapara National Park:

Jeep Safari: ₹1,800-2,200, Morning: 6:30-9:30 AM, Afternoon: 2:00-5:00 PM**
Elephant Safari: ₹120, Morning: 7:30-8:30 AM, Afternoon: 3:30-4:30 PM

Additional Offbeat Gems

Sittong

Orange orchards, cardamom plantations, and village tourism

Tinchuley

Peaceful village with tea garden views

Lamahatta: Eco park with pine forest walks

Kurseong: Charming colonial town between Siliguri and Darjeeling

Takdah: Orchid center and tea estates

Adventure Activities

Trekking

- **Sandakphu Trek:** India-Nepal border, highest point in West Bengal (3,636m)
- **Singalila National Park Trek:** Red panda habitat, stunning Himalayan views
- Duration: 4-7 days depending on route

Water Sports

River Rafting: Teesta and Rangeet rivers (October-May)

Grades: Grade II-IV rapids available

Cost: ₹800-2,000 per person

Paragliding

Location: Kalimpong

Season: October-May

Cost: ₹2,000-3,500 for tandem flights

Wildlife Safaris

Available in Gorumara, Jaldapara, Chapramari, and Buxa Tiger Reserve

Morning and afternoon slots

Tea Garden Tours

Available in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Dooars

Activities: Factory visits, tea tasting, guided walks

Cost: ₹100-500 per person

Accommodation Options

Accommodation Categories and Pricing

Price Range (Per Night)

Budget

₹800-2,000

Homestays, budget hotels, dormitories

Best for: Backpackers, budget travelers, solo explorers

Mid-Range

₹2,000-5,000

Heritage hotels, boutique guesthouses, tea estate bungalows

Best for: Comfortable travelers, couples, families

Luxury

₹5,000+

Heritage resorts, premium properties, and eco-luxury resorts

Best for: Luxury seekers, special occasions

Local Cuisine

Traditional Bengali & Tibetan Specialties:

Momo - Tibetan dumplings (steamed/fried) - ₹50-100

Thukpa - Hearty Tibetan noodle soup - ₹80-150

Gughni - Spiced chickpea curry, popular street food - ₹30-50

Fish Curry - Made with freshwater fish and mustard

Khichuri - Comforting rice and lentil dish

Churpi - Hardened cheese snack (acquired taste)

Sel Roti - Sweet rice flour bread

Beverages:

Darjeeling Tea: From the source - garden fresh (₹100-500 per kg)

Butter Tea (Suja): Tibetan specialty

Tongba: Fermented millet drink (local alcoholic beverage)

Street Food:

Phuchka/Pani Puri - ₹20-30

Chowmein - Local style noodles - ₹40-80

Egg rolls - Popular snack - ₹40-60

Where to Eat

Darjeeling: Glenary's (bakery & restaurant), Keventer's (breakfast), Sonam's Kitchen (Tibetan)

Kalimpong: Gompu's Hotel (local food), Art Café (ambiance)

Siliguri: Hong Kong Market area (diverse options), SNT Road restaurants

Must-Try Food Checklist

- **Momos (steamed and fried)**
 - **Thukpa (noodle soup)**
 - **Fresh Darjeeling tea**
- **Gughni (chickpea curry)**
 - **Bengali fish curry**
 - **Churpi (yak cheese)**
 - **Tongba (millet beer)**
 - **Local honey**
- **Sel roti (traditional bread)**
 - **Butter tea**

Average meal costs:

Street food: ₹30-80

Budget restaurants: ₹150-300 per person

Mid-range: ₹400-800 per person

Fine dining: ₹1,000+ per person

5-Day Classic North Bengal Circuit

Day 1: Arrive NJP/Bagdogra → Darjeeling (3 hours)

Evening: Explore Chowrasta, Mall Road

Day 2: Darjeeling

Early morning: Tiger Hill sunrise

Day 2: Toy train joy ride, Batasia Loop, tea estate visit

Evening: Peace Pagoda

Day 3: Darjeeling → Kalimpong (2.5 hours)

Visit Padmaja Naidu Zoo en route

Afternoon: Explore Durpin Dara, Deolo Hill

Evening: Flower nurseries

Day 4: Kalimpong → Mirik (2 hours) → Siliguri

Morning: Sumendu Lake boating

Afternoon: Return to Siliguri/NJP

Day 5: Departure

7-Day Offbeat Explorer



Day 1: Arrive NJP → Sittong (3 hours)

Village walks, orange orchards

Day 2: Sittong → Lava (2.5 hours)

Neora Valley exploration, monastery visit

Day 3: Lava → Lolegaon

Canopy walk, Jhandi viewpoint

Day 4: Lolegaon → Rishop → Kalimpong

Rishop viewpoint, move to Kalimpong

Day 5: Kalimpong exploration

Monasteries, Durpin Dara, local markets

Day 6: Kalimpong → Darjeeling

Quick sightseeing, shopping

Day 7: Darjeeling → NJP departure

Tiger Hill sunrise, return journey

7-Day Dooars Wildlife Circuit

Day 1: NJP → Lataguri/Gorumara (3 hours)

Evening safari or forest walk

Day 2: Gorumara National Park

Morning jeep safari

Afternoon: Chapramari visit

Day 3: Lataguri → Jhalong/Bindu

Riverside locations, Rocky Island

Day 4: Jhalong → Samsing/Suntalekhola

Forest walks, river streams

Day 5: Samsing → Jaldapara

Elephant safari at Jaldapara

Day 6: Jaldapara → Buxa/Jayanti

Buxa Tiger Reserve, Jayanti river

Day 7: Return to NJP

Travel Time and Cost Estimates

Itinerary Overview

Budget Range

5-Day Classic

Cost: ₹15,000-35,000

Transport Cost: ₹8,000-12,000

Best For: First-time visitors

7-Day Offbeat

Cost: ₹18,000-40,000

Transport Cost: ₹10,000-15,000**

Best For: Adventure seekers**

7-Day Wildlife

Cost: ₹20,000-45,000

Transport Cost: ₹12,000-18,000

Best For: Wildlife enthusiasts

Travel Costs & Budget

Budget: ₹800–1,500

Mid-Range: ₹2,500–4,000

Luxury: ₹5,000–12,000

Food

Budget: ₹300–600

Mid-Range: ₹800–1,500

Luxury: ₹2,000–3,000

Transport

Budget: ₹200–500

Mid-Range: ₹800–1,500

Luxury: ₹2,000–5,000

Activities

Budget: ₹200–400

Mid-Range: ₹500–1,000

Luxury: ₹1,000–3,000

Total Per Day

Budget: ₹1,500–3,000

Mid-Range: ₹3,500–7,000

Luxury: ₹8,000–15,000+

Transportation Costs

- Reserved taxi for local sightseeing: ₹2,500-4,000 per day
- NJP to Darjeeling: ₹2,500-3,500 (private taxi)
- Shared SUV rates: ₹200-400 per seat for most routes
- Multi-day package with vehicle: ₹8,000-15,000 for 5-7 days

Activity Costs

- Safari (Gorumara/Jaldapara): ₹1,500-2,000
- Toy train joy ride: ₹800-1,500
- Paragliding: ₹2,000-3,500
- River rafting: ₹800-2,000
- Tea garden tour: ₹100-500
- Monastery visits: Free-₹50 (donations)

What to Pack

-  **Layered clothing:** Weather can change rapidly
-  **Warm jacket:** Essential for early mornings and winter
-  **Comfortable walking shoes:** Lots of uphill walking
-  **Rain gear:** Even in dry season, sudden showers possible
-  **Sunscreen & sunglasses:** Mountain sun is strong
-  **Personal medicines:** Limited pharmacy options in remote areas
-  **Power bank:** Frequent power cuts in offbeat areas



Quick Packing List

Essentials:



- Warm jacket/fleece
- Layered clothing
- Waterproof shoes
- Rain jacket/poncho
- Sunscreen (SPF 30+)
- Insect repellent
- First aid kit
- Power bank
- Camera with extra battery
- Reusable water bottle

Permits & Documentation

- **Indian citizens:** No special permits for North Bengal
- **Foreign nationals:** Check if an Inner Line Permit is needed for bordering areas
- **Protected areas:** Entry permits issued at park gates
- **Carry ID proof:** Always keep identification documents

Money Matters

- **ATMs:** Available in major towns; scarce in offbeat areas
- **Cash:** Carry sufficient cash for remote locations
- **Digital payments:** Limited acceptance in villages
- **Currency:** Withdraw in Siliguri, Darjeeling, or Kalimpong before heading to remote areas

Connectivity

- **Mobile networks:** BSNL and Jio work best in hills
- **Internet:** Patchy in remote areas
- **Backup:** Download offline maps before traveling

Health & Safety

- **Altitude:** Acclimatize gradually, stay hydrated
- **Water:** Drink bottled or filtered water only
- **Insurance:** Travel insurance recommended
- **Landslides:** Monitor weather during monsoon
- **Wildlife:** Follow guide instructions during safaris

Cultural Etiquette

- **Monasteries:** Remove shoes, ask before photographing, dress modestly
- **Local homes:** Respect customs, remove shoes when entering
- **Photography:** Ask permission before photographing people
- **Bargaining:** Acceptable in markets, not in fixed-price shops
- **Tipping:** ₹50-100 for guides, 10% in restaurants (if not included)
- **Plastic:** Many areas have bans; carry reusable bags

Language

- Primary languages: Nepali, Bengali, Hindi
- English: Widely understood in tourist areas

Useful Phrases

- Hello: Namaste
- Thank you: Dhanyabad
- How much: Kati parcha? (Nepali)

Best Photography Spots

- Tiger Hill, Darjeeling - Sunrise over Kanchenjunga
- Batasia Loop - Toy train with mountain backdrop
- Tiffindara, Rishop - Panoramic Himalayan views
- Sumendu Lake, Mirik - Reflections and boating scenes
- Tea gardens - Rolling green landscapes
- Gorumara/Jaldapara - Wildlife photography
- Lolegaon canopy walk - Forest perspectives

Seasonal Events & Festivals

- Darjeeling Carnival (December/January) - Week-long celebration
- Losar (February/March) - Tibetan New Year
- Durga Puja (October) - Major Bengali festival
- Buddha Jayanti (May) - Buddhist celebrations
- Tea Festival (Various dates) - Garden celebrations

Final Recommendations

For First-Time Visitors:

Focus on the classic circuit: Darjeeling (2 nights) → Kalimpong (1 night) → Mirik (1 night). This provides a good introduction to North Bengal's highlights without overwhelming travel.

For Offbeat Seekers:

Explore the Lava-Lolegaon-Rishop circuit, Sittong, Tinchuley, and lesser-known Dooars destinations.

Allocate more time and embrace slower travel.

For Wildlife Enthusiasts:

Dedicate 4-5 days to the Dooars region, covering multiple national parks and sanctuaries.

November-March offers the best sightings.

For Tea Lovers:

Stay at tea estate bungalows, visit multiple gardens, and participate in plucking and processing demonstrations. Spring (March-May) is ideal.

For Adventure Seekers:

Combine trekking (Sandakphu/Singalila), river rafting (Teesta), and paragliding (Kalimpong).

Responsible Tourism

- ✓ Support local homestays and businesses
 - ✓ Avoid single-use plastic
 - ✓ Don't disturb wildlife or feed animals
 - ✓ Stay on marked trails
 - ✓ Respect local cultures and traditions
- ✓ Take your trash with you from remote areas
- ✓ Choose eco-certified accommodations when possible

"North Bengal rewards travelers who take time to explore beyond the obvious. Whether you're watching sunrise paint Kanchenjunga golden from Tiger Hill, spotting a one-horned rhino in Gorumara's grasslands, or sipping fresh Darjeeling tea while gazing at valley views from a quiet homestay, this region offers experiences that linger long after you've returned home."

Happy Exploring!

Plan well, travel responsibly, and embrace
the unhurried pace of the mountains.

Best wishes from

Prithwiraj LAHIRI



Safe travels!