

Sikkim Village Walks

5 Days



Prepared for
Steppes Travel Clients

QUICK REFERENCE ITINERARY

Day 1	Bagdogra/Yangsum
Day 2	Yangsum/ Sangdyang Lee
Day 3	Sangdyang Lee - Radhu Khandu
Day 4	Radhu Khandu
Day 5	Radhu Khandu

VILLAGE WALKS

The concept of the Village Walks is to facilitate an authentic 'underfoot' experience and provide a 'snapshot' of rural life in the Himalayan Mountains of Uttaranchal and Sikkim. You will be led by an experienced guide and will not be part of a group.

The walks traverse the terraced foothills with overnight 'home stays' in various villages. As an honoured guest, the locals are keen to share their way of life with you so you can encounter life as it is. Accommodation is basic, although clean and comfortable, but does not detract from the authenticity of the experience. Any shortcomings are more than compensated for by the genuine warmth of your hosts.

INTRODUCTION TO SIKKIM

Located in the North East of the Indian sub continent, the Buddhist Kingdom of Sikkim shares borders with Bhutan, Tibet and Nepal and is nestled in the heart of India's Eastern Himalayan range. The thumb shaped state contains an environmental legacy of untouched but incredibly stunning and uniquely diverse landscapes and a cultural mosaic under the looming presence of the world's third highest mountain, Kanchenjunga (8598m).

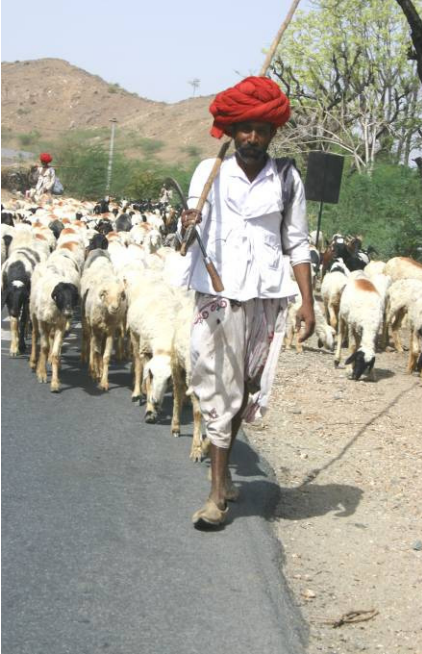
Sikkim was a British protectorate from 1890 and from 1950 became a protectorate of India. By 1973 demands (mostly from Nepali immigrants) calling for formal Sikkimese accession to the Indian Union, had become too loud to ignore and Sikkim became an associate state. The Gyalpos (Kings) lost their power as a result of the Sikkim's new democratic constitution and Sikkim became the 22nd state of India in 1975.

Sikkim owes its extraordinary beauty, not only to the mountains that form its topography, but also to the rains that make it so lush and fertile. Though the rainfall is mostly concentrated during the June to September monsoon, Sikkim is a damp region and the weather is not nearly as clear and reliable as Kumaon and Ladakh. As such, your chances of seeing the Kanchenjunga range (the world's third highest mountain) are around 70% - we liken it to seeing a tiger in the jungles of India! Seeing Kanchenjunga and the Great Himalayan range should be viewed as a bonus to the stunning and dramatic scenery of the Himalayan foothills that are always visible.

DETAILED TRIP ITINERARY

Day 1

Bagdogra - Yangsum



Depending on your schedule prior to the Village Walks, you will be collected and driven to Yangsum Village near Rinchenpong in South Sikkim.

At an altitude of 6400ft, Rinchenpong, whose name means 'meeting place' in the local dialect is a pretty and un-spoilt Himalayan town. Yangsum Farm is a small locally run 'home stay' that has stunning views of the Himalaya. Shakti has taken an old wooden Sikkimese house (one of the main buildings of Yangsum) and taken it back to its original glory. Though simple, the property is charming and comfortable with two bedrooms (one upstairs and one down), each with its own en-suite bathroom and a private dining area. Both the dining area and the upstairs room have stunning views of the Kanchenjunga massif.

In the early evening, you will be given an introductory briefing of your tour by your English speaking accompanying guide. This will be followed by drinks and snacks around the fire and under the stars and then a delicious dinner.

Overnight: Village House at Yangsum Farm - Double/twin Room (Fully Inclusive)

Altitude: 1500m (4920ft)

Day 2

Yangsum - Sangdyang Lee



If the weather is clear, your guide will wake you at dawn with a hot drink of your choice and some homemade biscuits. You will not regret getting out of bed for a view of the Kanchenjunga massif. This will be followed by breakfast and a tour of the property with Thendup, the owner.

Today's walk begins with a gentle climb along a lush jungle trail passing a few isolated houses and hamlets (mostly belonging to Nepali immigrants) along the way. Passing the Rangeet river in the valley below you will continue onto the Magi Darra, a stunning viewpoint of the entire valley and the newly constructed Gurung monastery.

After this you will follow the trail up to Poison Lake passing neatly cultivated fields and village houses along the way. This trail affords stunning Himalayan views and will give you an insight into the lives of the local villagers. You will then arrive at Sangdyang Lee House, which also offers fantastic views of the Kanchenjunga massif.

Sandyang Lee is a modern structure belonging to a local



politician. We chose this particular house because there are only a few old structures around (in a region that bears the full brunt of the monsoon between June and September), but also because it has a stunning location, is very comfortable (with three ensuite bedrooms) and first and foremost has a wonderfully welcoming and interactive family.

Overnight: Sangdyang Lee Village House - Double/twin Room (Fully Inclusive)

Altitude: 1800m (5904ft) Distance: 9 km Time: 6 hours

Day 3

Sangdyang Lee - Radhu Khandu



Again if the weather is clear this morning, your guide will wake you at dawn for a short (five minute climb) up to the viewpoint above Sandyang Lee House. The sight of the sun rising through the fluttering prayer flags with Kanchenjunga in the background is truly unforgettable. You will then be taken to Rinchenpong Monastery where you may be able to participate in the early morning prayers before driving back to Sandyang Lee for breakfast.

After this morning's breakfast, you will follow the trail down via Rinchenpong monastery and along a ridge with stunning mountain views continuing through the charming village of Bhasmay. You will then arrive at Kaluk village where our vehicles will be waiting to take you onto the approach road to the 'stairway to heaven', a one kilometre uphill climb! You will be rewarded for your efforts with mind-blowing views over Pemayangste hill and on to the Great Himalayan range.



After lunch on the ridge of Durpin Darra, you will hike along the newly laid trail that leads to Chyaan Darra and then continue uphill to the charming village of Hee where you will have afternoon tea enjoying an almost 180 degree view of the Himalaya (if the weather is clear). Continue walking gently downhill for around thirty minutes until you reach a stunning waterfall. From the waterfall, the trail continues gently upwards for around forty minutes until you reach Radhu Khandu village.

The house at Radhu Kandu is the most special of the three, a charming traditional Sikkimese house with two bedrooms and outside toilets and showers (built by Shakti), the family are fantastic (the owner being a particular character), the location is sublime and after a long walk, there is nothing better than having tea in the living room which has 270° views of the area.

Overnight: Radhu Kandu Village House - Double/twin Room (Fully Inclusive)

Altitude: 2200m (7216ft) Distance: 11.5 km Time: 7 hours

Day 4

Radhu Khandu

After breakfast, you will go on a walk around the village with the charismatic owner of the village house, Krishna Lal. After this, you will continue uphill (through a wildlife sanctuary) to the

enchanted lakes, a series of three beautiful lakes one after the other up the mountain side.

After a picnic lunch, you will then walk along a flat path to visit the local cave which the locals consider to be a home for holy spirits. Continue back to Radhu Kandu village, where you will arrive back mid afternoon.

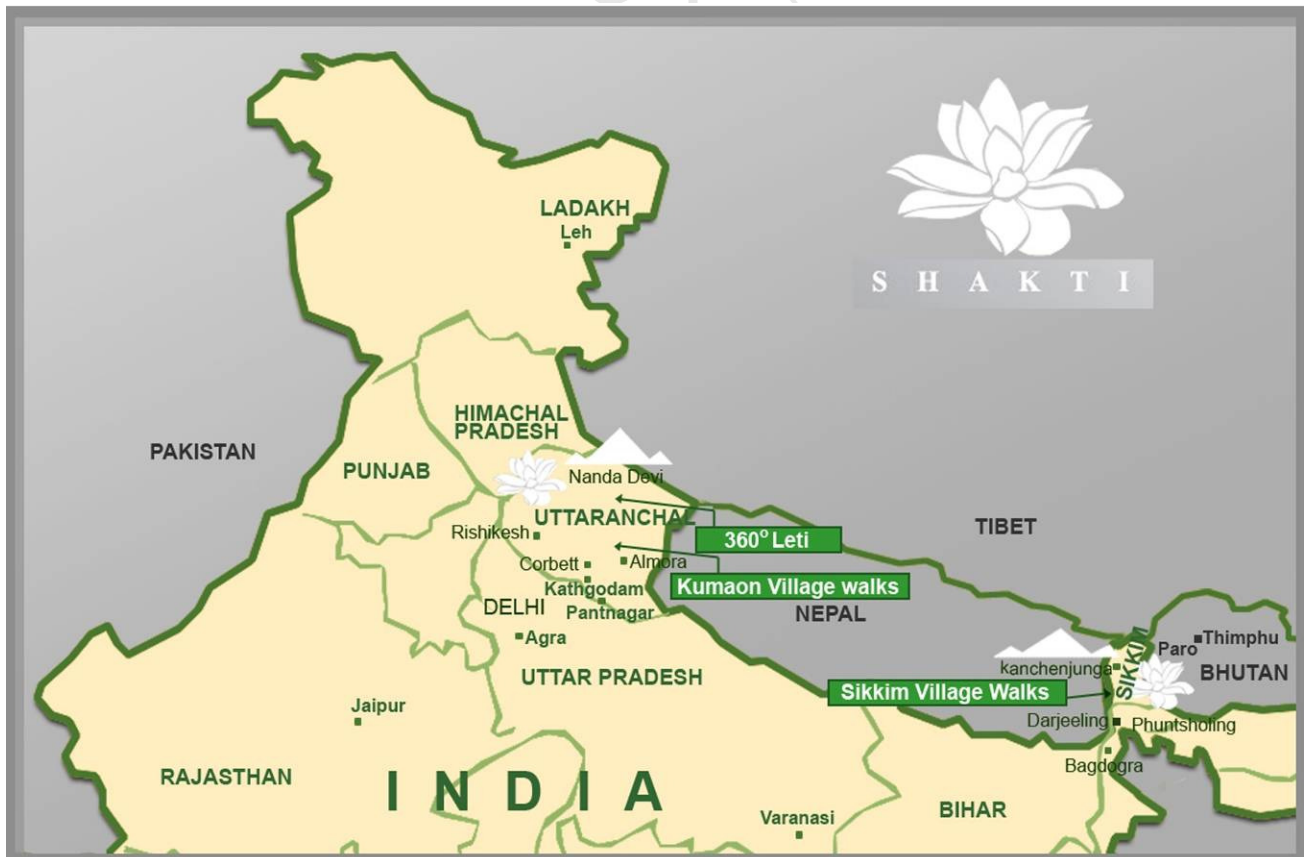
Overnight: Radhu Kandu Village House - Double/twin Room (Fully Inclusive)

Altitude: 2200m (7216ft) Distance: 8 km Time: 4-5 hours

Day 5

Radhu Khandu

After breakfast, you will walk back down to the road head (around twenty minutes). From here you will proceed to your onward destination.



NOTES

Suggestions for pre/post Sikkim Village Walks

For those that may wish to explore other areas of Sikkim and/or West Bengal, we can suggest the following:

Pemayangtse



Pemayangtse is a quaint Buddhist town, which lies home to the second oldest monastery in Sikkim. It is well located between Rinchengpong and Darjeeling. Approximately 4 hours from Rinchengpong. The monastery was built in the early 17th Century and is one of the most famous Buddhist monasteries, as well as being the 2nd oldest in Sikkim. It is the headquarters of the Nyingma sect and houses many priceless antique idols. The 108 monks are mostly from the leading Bhutia families of Sikkim.

Darjeeling



Darjeeling is the most important hill station in Eastern India due to its backdrop of the mighty snow clad Himalayan peaks, and proximity to the mighty Kanchenjunga peak (India's highest mountain) as well as home to one of the most famous teas in the world.

You can enjoy a visit to a tea estate as well as visiting the Museums in the town and taking the toy train. Approximately 3hrs drive from Rinchengpong.

Gangtok



Gangtok is the capital of Sikkim. Once a sleepy little town and considered 'very remote', Gangtok is fast expanding from a bustling town towards the status of a city. However, the bustle of busy market areas and busy thoroughfares contrast sharply with the quiet and serene spots.

In and around Gangtok there are places of special interest, such as the Handicrafts and Handloom Industries, the Research Institute of Tibetology and the Orchid Sanctuary.

ACCESS

From/to Delhi

A two hour flight from Delhi to Bagdogra, followed by a five hour (123 km) drive to the Rinchenpong region.

From/to Calcutta

A one hour flight from Calcutta to Bagdogra, followed by a five hour drive to the Rinchenpong region.

From/to Darjeeling

Drive (3 ½ hours approx) from Darjeeling to Rinchenpong

From/to Pelling (Pemeyangste)

Drive (2 hours approx) from Pelling to Rinchenpong

From/to Gangtok

Drive (6 hours approx) from Gangtok to Rinchenpong

ACCOMMODATION

The three Village Houses have been renovated to make them cosy and comfortable yet to keep their simple charm and maintain the experience of living in a Himalayan village house.

Yangsum Farm, is a local family's homestay with six rooms, and you will stay in a traditional wooden Sikkimese building with two rooms. Each room has an en-suite bathroom, wooden floors and can be configured to be either a double or a twin. Larger groups can be accommodated in one of the other four en-suite rooms available at Yangsum, however, whilst comfortable, they are not renovated to the same standard. There is also a dining room/living room which we share with the rest of the homestay.

Sandyang Lee is a more modern construction. There are three en-suite rooms available, all of which are twins and have a further two rooms, with shared indoor bathroom for larger groups. There is also a dining room/living room.

At Radhu Kandu, there is another traditional wooden Sikkimese house that has two bedrooms (each of which can be doubles or twins) with outdoor toilets and showers. There is also a living/dining room with wrap around windows and 270° views of the stunning location.

These houses should be seen as nothing more than a local and authentic alternative to camping. It is also important to remember that the local people are hosting you as their guest and to therefore respect this in one's behaviour and comments.

CLIMATE - BEST TIME TO VISIT

Sikkim is very wet and although the majority of the rain falls June to September, your chances of seeing the Kanchenjunga range (the world's third highest mountain) are around 70% - we liken it to seeing a tiger! Seeing Kanchenjunga and the Great Himalaya range should be viewed as a bonus to the stunning and dramatic scenery of the Himalayan foothills that is always visible.

Sikkim is best visited just after the monsoon, between early October and early December, when the vegetation is lush, the days are crisp and clear and one has the best chance of seeing the mountains. January is cold, damp and prone to cloudy days, so the village walk experience is closed and not available for this month. Early February to late April are warmer and dryer, with the weather and visibility being almost as good as October to early December.

TRIP PRICE

Price £1,320.00 per person based on two travelling*

Price £2,105.00 single traveller

The rates quoted are subject to the availability of all services, written confirmation and Steppes Travels terms and conditions. Prices are valid from 1 October 2010 - 30 April 2011. Please note that the village walks experience is closed for the month of January, due to weather conditions.

The price includes local transport, airport transfers, private accommodation in Village Houses on a fully inclusive (twin/double share) basis for 4 nights, including all meals, all drinks (soft and alcoholic), all activities, an accompanying English speaking guide, cook, support guide and porters, car at disposal (Mahindra Scorpio, Toyota Innova, or similar), *for groups of 3 or 5, there are no single supplements on the village walks.

The price excludes international flights, travel insurance, visas, and items of a personal nature, such as laundry, drinks, etc.

Please note that the above is only a suggested journey, allowing in-depth visits to the highlights of the country and the chance to explore the wide range of possibilities this fascinating country has to offer. We have a separate list of escorted tours and specialise in tailoring individual itineraries to your particular interests and requirements. This journey idea serves more as a general guide on what there is to see and do, as well as a guide on price.

Why Travel with Steppes?

Steppes Travel was founded in 1989 with the objective of creating a travel company where service and knowledge are of the highest priority. We aim to design itineraries and include the highlights of any country, whilst taking travellers off the beaten track to see lesser known, interesting places not frequented by large numbers of tourists. We offer individuals the ability to travel safely in remote areas, with the knowledge that we have travelled there before.

Financial Protection

Steppes Travel is a fully bonded tour operator that complies with the Civil Aviation Authority bonding conditions of the UK. This fully guarantees your money in the unlikely event of us going out of business before you start your holiday. Our ATOL number is 6945 and we have full insurance to cover the financial failure of an airline. In addition, all accommodation-only bookings (such as hotels, lodges and boats) which are not covered by the ATOL regulations are financially protected with all payments being held in a separate trust account until the date of departure. This is in accordance with the Package Travel Regulations Act 1992.

Specialist Knowledge

We demand and employ only a very high calibre of staff. All of our specialists have a wealth of travel experience and have travelled, and continue to travel, extensively throughout their regions of specialisation. You can therefore rely on their first hand knowledge and expertise. Some have been with us for more than ten years. They will tell you about those intimate, friendly hotels and introduce you to our charismatic guides - those little extra qualities that make your holiday both unique and special.

A Tailor-made Journey

After an initial discussion with you, one of our specialists will create a unique itinerary for your trip, designed around your own interests, preferred style of accommodation and the pace at which you like to travel. This will be fine tuned until you are completely satisfied with it.

Throughout this whole process, you will be dealt with by the same specialist and you are welcome to call them at any time.

24 hour Emergency Service

We have an emergency service so that we can be contacted 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Recognition

More than 65% of our business is achieved through recommendations, referrals and repeat bookings. This, for us, is the highest endorsement we could have. In addition, our 20 years of experience in this specialist travel sector confirms our expertise.

Please contact the Steppes East team on 01285 651010 or visit our website www.steppestravel.co.uk for further information.

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