

Tourist Spots of West Bengal

Along the Hooghly

The beautiful Dakshineswar Kali Temple is 10km away. On the bank of the river is the beautiful navaratna temple (With nine towers) dedicated to Bhabatarini. (Goddess Kali). It was built by Rani Rashmoni.

Across the river is Belur Math, headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission. Join in with the devotees to watch the evening aarti (light ceremony). The main temple dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa is a magnificent one with remarkable architectural specialities. From different angles a mosque and a church.

5km further is the interesting waterfront of Serampore, originally a Danish colony. Across the river is the old British settlement of Barrackpore. The principal attraction is the Gandhighat. At the Gandhi Museum here, galleries depicting the life of Gandhiji and Barrackpore is also associated with the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857. Accommodation, there are quiet comfortable Tourist Cottages run by the West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation.

The strand at Chandannagore, 39km, is enchanting. You can also visit the Clock Tower, among many other heritage buildings. The Octagonal Dutch Church and settlement is at Chinsura, 45km away. This was a Dutch settlement. Among the remains of the bygone days are three barracks, a church, a cemetery and the Fort Gustavus.

The Portuguese settlement at Satgaon and Hooghly was founded in 1577 and stormed by Shah Jahan, the Mughal Emperor, in 1632. The Hooghly Imambara and the Portuguese monastery and church at Bandel, 48km away, are Places worth visiting.

The Hanseshwari temple with unusual carvings and unique structure and the Basudeva temple located at Bansberia, is 47km away.

South along the banks of the Hooghly, is the holiday resort at Raichak and 48km away is Diamond Harbour, where the Hooghly flows into the Bay of Bengal, a beautiful resort by the side of the river Hooghly, at its widest

before it turns to meet the sea. There is a Tourist Lodge at Diamond Harbour run by the West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation.

You can access all these places by rail and road, but a ferry ride will make it an unforgettable experience.

Bardhaman

In the 17th-18th century, Krishnaram Ray, belonging to a merchant family from Punjab, established the Zamindari of Bardhaman on a farman by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. The Rays went on to rule Bardhaman till 1955.

Scattered in and around Bardhaman are quite a few places of interest.

The majestic Curzon Gate, now know as Vijay Toran, was erected in 1903 in Lord Curzon's honour. One km from the Gate is the Royal Palace.

The tomb of Sher Afghan, the last of the Afghan jagirdars in Bardhaman, is located at Pir Beharam in Kanchannagar.

95km from Kolkata, Bardhaman is well connected by rail and road..

77km from Kolkata, 'Ambika Kana' was the summer residence of the Rajas of Bardhaman. The temples at Kalna are built of bricks with intricate terracotta designs.

Unique among the temples are the ornate Palki Krishna Chanraji Temple and the Pratapeswar Temple, a 108-temple complex dedicated to Lord Shiva. The temples are divided into two circles with black and white lingas. Not to be missed are the Lalji Temples with 25 spires, and the Ambika Temple.

Kalna is the confluence of the Shakta and the Vaishnava forms of worship, and is only 25 km from Nabadwip. Kalna is connected by rail and road service.

Darjeeling

Jewel in the crown

Facing the towering Himalayas and surrounded by high green hills covered with coniferous forests, Darjeeling is perched, literally, on the roof of the world. Situated at an altitude of 2134 metres, amidst the shadow of the mighty Kanchenjunga, the town of Darjeeling is a maze of steps and terraces. It is studded with exotic little bazars, lovely villas, forests and gardens. Some parts of the city air is filled with the aroma of the world famous Darjeeling tea, being processed there.

The mini train which chugs off from New Jalpaiguri provides an exciting journey through deep jungles, rice fields, tea gardens and pine forests. The view of the Kanchenjunga from Observatory Hill or the sun's play on the highest mountain of the world, Everest seen from nearby Tiger Hill are unforgettable experiences. A walk through gardens growing the finest tea in the world, a ride down to the valley in the small carriage of the ropeway or just relaxing on the Chowrasta are all exquisite experiences of the mountains.

How to go

90km from Bagdogra airport. 80km from Siliguri. Accessible by road from Bagdogra Siliguri/New Jalpaiguri and by the 'toy train' from New Jalpaiguri/Siliguri.

Where to stay

Darjeeling Tourist Lodge, Maple Tourist Lodge, Lowis Jubilee Sanatorium, Darjeeling Youth Hostel, Tiger Hill Tourist Lodge.

Single, Double accommodation available. Some places have units with attached kitchens.

Excursions

Kalimpong (51km) is a quiet hill resort. Another retreat is Kurseong (36km). A newly developed hill resort with a lake is Mirik. Sandakphu (58km) and nearby Phalut for high altitude treks.

How to go

From Siliguri to Kalimpong by bus, to Kurseong by bus or the toy train, to Mirik by bus. Also from Darjeeling to all these places by bus and to Kurseong by train. From Darjeeling to Sandakphu and phalut on foot.

Trekking in Darjiling is a unique experience, which no lover of nature should miss.

Sandakphu is 59 km from Darjiling. With 8 hours walk a day, it can be reached in 2 days from Manaybhanjang.

On a clear day, the view from Sandakphu is unforgettable. From this rare vantage point one can see 4 of the world's 5 highest peaks—Everest, Kanchenjunga, Makalu and Lhotse at a glance. Mount Everest is 144 km and Kanchenjunga is 38 km as the crow flies.

The region abounds in magnolias, rhododendrons, primulas and other alpine flowers.

Another spot is Phalut, 3600 mts. The view from Phalut is similar to that from Sandakphu. Phalut is a trijunction of Sikkim, Nepal and West Bengal.

The best months to trek in this region are April-May and October – November.

Digha

Land of Sand, Sea and Seagulls

187km south-east of Kolkata on the coast of the Bay of Bengal, Digha is a popular beach resort with a 6km long and hard beach. It is the only seaside resort supported by a wide variety of hotels and private lodges. For a couple of days you can rest on its exotic sea shore shaded by casuarina trees accompanied by friendly fishermen.

How to go

Digha is connected by road with Kolkata.

Where to stay

Digha Tourist Lodge, Saikatabas, single and double bedrooms and suites available. Tourist cottages with attached kitchens also available. Digha also has a number of private hotels.

Excursions

Chandaneswar, an old Shiva temple, 8km. Dariapur, 45km, famous for an ancient temple associated with Bankimchandra's novel Kapal Kundala. Junput fish farm 40km. Junput has a beautiful sea beach also.

DOOARS

Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary

A lovely natural wilderness strewn with a number of perennial streams and flanked by the rivers Malangi and Torsa from the east to west. 65 km of lush panorama of mighty trees interspersed in a sea of tall grasslands. This is Jaldapara, 121 km from Siliguri, the permanent abode of wildlife and that of the one-horned Indian rhino. Here also roam the Indian bison, elephant, tiger, birds and reptiles.

The sanctuaries at Gorumara and Chapramari also have forest bungalows. Six m from Nainaguri is the Jalpesh temple housing in its sanctum a Sivalingam called 'Anadi' (without a beginning and hence the original). The temple, with a dome like a mosque, was built in 1665.

There is a big Shivratri fair near the Jalpesh temple early in the year, and there is a Gopastami fair at Patakata, Jalpaiguri in October-November.

How to go

From Kolkata to Bagdora by air or to New Jalpaiguri / Siliguri by train. From Siliguri to Madarihat by rail or road. From there Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary is quite near.

Where to stay

Madarihat Tourist lodge, Hollong Forest Lodge within the sanctuary. Entry Fee for day visit at Hollong Forest : Foreign Tourist Rs.100/-, Domestic Tourist Rs. 25/-, other charges extra.

Malda

340 km from Kolkata, Malda formerly called English Bazaar, a foreign settlement dating from 1680 is known for its delectable mangoes and the museum which houses the archaeological finds at Gour and Pandua. It provides the base for tourists visiting the historic ruins.

Gaur, capital to three dynasties of ancient Bengal—the Buddhists Palas, the Hindu Senas and the Muslim Nawabs has seen three distinct eras of glory.

Historical relics of the 14th and 15th century Bengal particularly worth seeing are the Bara Sona Mosque, Dakhil Darwajah, Qadam Rasul Mosque, Lattan Mosque and the ruins of the extensive fortification. There are colorful enameled tiles on Gumti Gate and Firoz Minar.

Pandua, 18 km from Malda is known for the third largest concentration of Muslim monuments of Bengal. Adina Masjid, built in 1369 by Sikandar Shah is one of the largest mosques in India. Nearby is the Eklakhi Mausoleum, built at a princely cost of Rs one lakh.

How to go

Connected directly by rail and road with Kolkata and Siliguri, 340 km from Kolkata.

Where to stay

Malda Tourist Lodge—double bedrooms, (A/C) available.

Murshidabad

The Lost Empire

Once, an important trading town between inland India and the port of Kolkata, this was also the capital of Bengal Nawabs and, according to Clive, rivalled London.

Situated 209km north of Kolkata. It has a tradition of handicrafts in silk, ivory carvings and bell metal-ware.

Standing right beside Bhagirathi is Nizamatkila-an Italian style palace built by the Britishers for their pet Nawab Mirjafar.

Across the river among places to visit are Khusbag, the garden where Nawabs were buried. Opposite to it is the Moti Jhil or Pearl Lake.

And there is Hazarduari-the mansion of thousand doors. It's now a museum of the Nawab dynasty's belongings.

Great Imambara, Moti Jhil (pearl lake) and the impressive ruins of Katra Mosque, built in 1723, and Medina mosque. The Jain Parasnath Temple is at Kathgola. Another interesting palace is Wasif Manzil with its unique collection of curios, paintings, arms and costumes.

Around Murshidabad

The Char Bangla Temple in Baranagar is quite famous. It was built in the 18th century by Rani Bhavani and is the finest specimen of Bengal's terracotta temples. The Bhavaniswar Temple, too, is one of the finest examples of terracotta sculpture in West Bengal

Besides the crumbling mansions and cemeteries of the English and Dutch settlements, Behrampore is famous for raw silk (tussar) production. The Government Silk Research Centre is located here.

How to go

Connected directly by rail and road with Kolkata.

Where to stay

Behrampore Tourist Lodge. Double bedrooms, (A/C) available.

Nadia

Connected by bus service from Krishnanagar and Kolkata and a ferry ride across the Bhagirathi river from Nabadwip, Mayapur is the headquarters of ISKCON.

The Chandroday Temple, set amidst a garden, is a picturesque sight. There are quite a few big and small temples also.

Details are available from ISKCON, 3C Albert Road, Kolkata 700017.

Ph: 2247-6075.

139km from Kolkata. There is also a rail service from Kolkata.

Nabadwip, 19km from Krishnanagar and 120km north from Kolkata, stands on the banks of the Bhagirathi river.

The great social reformer and saint Sri Chaitanya was born here in 1486. Nabadwip is the seat of the Vaishnava culture in Bengal and an ancient centre of Sanskrit studies.

Sonargouranga, the temple with the golden statue of Sri Chaitanya, is the most important shrine here.

There is a profusion of temples, each one worth a visit. Nabadwip remains an important pilgrimage centre in Bengal. Nabadwip is connected by bus and rail service from Kolkata.

118km north from Kolkata, Krishnanagar on the banks of Jalangi river was the residence of Maharaja Krishnachandra, a great patron of art and culture.

Places worth visiting are the Rajbari (Royal Palace) with a beautiful Durga temple in the courtyard. Every year, the famous Jhulan Mela is celebrated around the Rajbari in the July/August months and Baro Do/in March/April.

The Roman Catholic Church is famous for its architectural and sculptural splendour. There are 27 oil paintings describing the life of Jesus Christ. Of special mention are the wooden sculptures by Italian artists.

Others include the College Bhavan (1846), The Public Library (1856), the Krishnanagar Academy and the Protestant Church.

The clay models/figurines crafted here are collectors' items. Connected by rail and road from Kolkata.

Sagar

This is the place where Gangasagar Mela, the largest fair in West Bengal, is held on the occasion of Makar Sankranti (mid January). The fair draws lakhs of pilgrims from all over India.

How to go

From Kolkata to Namkhana by bus (105km). Namkhana to Chemaguri by launch across the Muriganga. From Chemaguri to Gangasagar by bus (10km). also Kolkata to Kakdwip (85km) by bus, Kakdwip to Kachuberia by launch, Kachuberia to Gangasagar by bus (30km).

Where to stay

A50-bed Youth Hostel.

Santiniketan

The Abode of Peace

136km from Kolkata, Santiniketan is the brainchild of India's most illustrious poet, philosopher, painter, philanthropist, Rabindranath Tagore. With an emphasis on man's relation with nature, Tagore introduced the open-air classrooms. Santiniketan has emerged as the universal centre of excellence. The various complexes on the campus offer Tagore memorabilia, sculpture, frescoes, murals by great masters as Nandalal Bose, Jamini Roy, Ramkinkar and Benod Behari.

The Visva Bharati University there is now a center of international studies and culture.

Uttarayan, a complex where Rabindranath lived, has a museum and art gallery. The University is also open to visitors. The charm of Santiniketan lies in its very special ethos.

Excursions

Only 3km away from Santiniketan is Sriniketan, the rural reconstruction centre, founded by the poet. Fine batik prints on textiles and leather bags are famous products of Sriniketan. Excursions to Bakreswar Hot Spring complex (58km); a number of pilgrim centres like Kankalitala (8km); Tarapith (80km); Nalhati (104km); Nanoor (23km) and Kenduli (42km), the birthplaces of poets Chandidas and Jaidev; Massanjore (78km) is famous for a massive dam over the Mayurakshi.

How to go

Connected by rail and with Kolkata. 210km by road from Kolkata.

Where to stay

Santiniketan Tourist Lodge. Single and double bedrooms with A/C available.

Sunderbans

The Paradise of Born Free

Sunderbans is a marshy mangrove jungle south of Bengal and is the largest estuarine forest in the world. This dense tropical forest, inhabited by wild animals, is the home of the legendary Royal Bengal Tiger. The wildlife in the Sunderbans includes boars, spotted deer, rhesus monkeys, fishing cats, otters, civets, Salvador lizards, estuarine crocodiles and olive ridley turtles.

There are various embarkation points for the Sunderbans area. Waterways are the only medium of transportation in the area. Some of the attractions are-Bhagabatpur Crocodile Project, Sajnekhali Bird Sanctuary, Lothian Island and Holiday Island, Kalash, Sagar Island and Jambudwip. There are watchtowers for viewing wildlife at Sajnekhali, Sudhanyakhali and Netidhopani and Buridhabri.

How to go

From Kolkata to Sonakhali or Canning by road. From these points to the interior of Sunderbans by waterways.

Where to stay

Sajnekhali Tourist Lodge. Double bedrooms available.

Vishnupur

Located in Bankura district, 152km north-west from Kolkata.

Vishnupur was found by king Raghunath 1, of the Malla dynasty. It flourished as the capital of the Mallas till the early 19th century. Since there is no stone in the area, the traditional building material was brick. The exquisite craftsmanship of the terracotta artisans is evident in the terracotta temples of Vishnupur. The potters here derive their inspiration from the glorious history of kings, soldiers and wars.

A music school, root of the Vishnupur Gharana, was established here in 1370A.D.

Vishnupur is also known for silk (tussar), particularly the Baluchari Sarees. Woven on unusual 'punch-card' looms, these sarees have episodes from the Mahabharata woven into the border and pallu.

Bellmetalware, conch-shell jewellery and pottery (the famous Bankura Horse) are available here.

Vishnupur may be reached by both train and bus. There is a snake festival in August and the Vishnupur fair in December.