



**Horticulture and Gardens of
West Bengal and Sikkim**
*Featuring the Gangtok Flower Festival
and the Yumthang Valley of Flowers*
16 Days/15 Nights

	Activities	Overnight
Day 1	Fly U.S. to Delhi.	Delhi
Day 2	Morning visit to Qutub Minar, the world's tallest brick minaret, built to mark the site of the first Muslim kingdom in North India. Next we will tour the Red Fort, which was built by Shah Jahan in the 1600s and served as the seat of Mughal power until 1857. After lunch, we will visit the serenely landscaped Raj Ghat, the site of Mahatma Gandhi's cremation, and Humayun's Tomb, the first Persian tomb garden in India. If time permits, we will also visit nearby Lodhi Garden, a popular green spot for locals.	Delhi
Day 3	Morning flight to Bagdogra in West Bengal. Upon arrival, drive to Darjeeling through tea plantations and forests of teak and Japanese cedar. Afternoon walking tour of Darjeeling, which overlooks many tea gardens and Mount Kanchendzonga, the third highest mountain in the world. This evening, enjoy a presentation on the history of tea in India.	Darjeeling (6,700 feet)
Day 4	Morning tour of a local tea plantation, followed by lunch at a tea plantation bungalow. This afternoon, visit the varied collection of Himalayan flora at Lloyds Botanical Garden. Optional ride on the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway "Toy Train" which offers fantastic views of the mountains and tea plantations below. Dinner at the colonial-era Planters' Club.	Darjeeling (6,700 feet)
Day 5	Drive to Gangtok, entering the district of Sikkim. Afternoon visit to the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, which features a collection of rare thangkas, bronzes and Buddhist scriptures, as well as its own collection of native orchids. Today we will also visit the 20 th century Enchey Monastery, whose prayer hall is covered with images of Mahayana Buddhist deities.	Gangtok (5,500 feet)
Day 6	Morning visit to the Rumtek Monastery, headquarters of the Kagyupa sect, one of the oldest sects of Tibetan Buddhism. This complex contains many rare artifacts brought directly from Tibet. Afternoon visit to the Saramsa Orchidarium, which displays many of the 450 species of orchids found in Sikkim. Trips taken in April or May will also enjoy Gangtok's International Flower Festival, which highlights Sikkim's numerous species of orchids and rhododendrons.	Gangtok (5,500 feet)

Day 7	Full day excursion to the Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary in East Sikkim (altitude: 10,000 to 13,000 feet). This sanctuary lies near the border of India, Bhutan and Tibet, and is known for its alpine flowers, magnolias, rhododendrons, orchids, tall junipers, silver firs and medicinal plants. The sanctuary is also home to a number of rare animals, including the red panda, the snow leopard, the musk deer and the Himalayan black bear.	Gangtok (5,500 feet)
Day 8	Today we depart Gangtok for the Yumthang Valley in North Sikkim. En route we will visit the Phodong monastery, which dates to 1740 and contains many beautiful Buddhist murals and woodcarvings. We will also visit the octagonally-shaped Labrang monastery, which overlooks the ruins of Tumlong Palace, the site of the third capital of Sikkim. Lunch in Mangan, the district headquarters of North Sikkim and a regional market center for apples, oranges and cardamom. Continue driving to Lachung, just nine miles from the Tibet border.	Lachung (8,800 feet)
Day 9	This morning you have the option of relaxing at your hotel or taking a short tour of the Bhutia (Tibetan) village of Lachung. Afternoon visit to the Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary (altitude: 10,000 to 13,000 feet), home to <i>Rhododendron neivium</i> , the state tree of Sikkim. Besides featuring numerous species of rhododendron, the sanctuary is filled with primulas, potentillas, gentians, saxifrages, poppies and aconites, among other flowers.	Lachung (8,800 feet)
Day 10	Fully day excursion to the Yumthang Valley of Flowers (12,000 feet). This magical landscape is surrounded by the Himalayan peaks of Pauhunri and Shundu Tsenpa, and is at its blooming best in April and May. On our trek today we will view endless fields of tiny alpine flowers (and the yaks that love to eat them), rhododendrons, orchids and primulas. After a picnic lunch, we will enjoy a dip in the sulphur-rich Yumthang Hot Springs, which are reputed to cure a variety of medical ailments.	Lachung (8,800 feet)
Day 11	Today we will drive back to Gangtok, arriving in the afternoon. The rest of the day is at your leisure.	Gangtok (5,500 feet)
Day 12	Morning drive to Kalimpong. Afternoon visit to several of the region's flower nurseries, which grow and export a variety of cacti, orchids, gladioli and amaryllis. We will also visit a cinchona plantation, the plant from which quinine is derived, and the Thongsa Monastery, which dates from 1692 and is the oldest monastery in Kalimpong.	Kalimpong (4,100 feet)
Day 13	Morning drive to Bagdogra to board flight to Kolkata. Late afternoon visit to the Pareshnath Jain Temple, a mosaic garden built in 1867 featuring extensive stone and mirror inlay work, stained glass, and European-style sculptures and fountains.	Kolkata
Day 14	Morning visit to the plant and pet markets of Galiff Street. Next we will visit the Indian Museum, the oldest and largest museum in India, which houses an array of ancient artifacts, sculptures, coins and paintings. Afternoon tour of the Agri-Horticultural Society of Calcutta, the oldest horticultural society in India, founded in 1820. We will end our day with a visit to the Victoria Memorial, one of the city's most celebrated landmarks.	Kolkata

Day 15 Morning visit to the bustling Malik Ghat flower market along the banks of the Hoogly River, followed by a visit to the 18th and 19th century colonial buildings of BBD Bagh. This will be followed by a walking tour through New Market, with its myriad of tiny shops selling everything from vegetables and meat to china, DVDs, perfume, jewelry and flowers. Afternoon boat trip across the Hoogly to visit the Calcutta Botanical Garden. Established in 1786, it was here that the tea plant was first introduced from China for commercial development in India. Farewell dinner at O'Calcutta.

Kolkata

Day 16 Fly Kolkata to U.S. or other destinations in India.

Suggested Extensions: Villages of West Bengal; Bhubaneswar and Konark

Trip Timing – This trip is best taken in April, May, September or October. The best (and driest) time for viewing flowers in the eastern Himalayas is April and May, prior to the arrival of the monsoons. *Note - The Gangtok Flower Festival occurs in April and May.* In all of our tours, we concentrate our sightseeing in the morning and afternoon hours, avoiding the hot mid-day sun as much as possible.

