**SAVOUR IN THE SERENE PLACES OF DARJEELING**

One of the most common names that comes to mind when we speak about hill stations in India is Darjeeling. It stands in the foremost line among those spectacular sites of the country with respect to its beauty, the beautiful hillocks, the mesmerizing mountain peaks and most importantly its Tea plantations. One of the most beautiful places located in the Himalayan range, the district Darjeeling is located in the state of West Bengal in the Eastern part of India.

**Geography of Darjeeling:**

**Darjeeling is a** city located in the lesser Himalayas at an elevation of 7,000 feet above sea level. It is 305 miles away from Calcutta. One can view Kanchenjunga, which is approximately 28,169 feet and Mount Everest from a closer point. The main attractions of Darjeeling are Botanical gardens, Himalayan flora, museum, zoo and railway tracks.

**Flora and Fauna:**

The varied Flora and Fauna is a must watch for a traveler in Darjeeling. With its magnificent climate all through the year, it boasts about 4,000 variety of flowering plants. To name a few, Magnotia, Orchids, Rhododendrons, which are otherwise a rare sight are extensively found here. There are also some rare Fern trees out of the 300 plus Fern varieties found in this area.

Animal life is also notable and memorable here. A land that consists of domestic to wild animals like Throated martens, red pandas, barking beers, variety of Leopards, Pangolins, gigantic elephants all living in their own natural habitat welcome you to an enchanting world of spectacular species.

**The name:**

There is lot of Tibetan influence in thus area. Many of the local people residing here are Tibetans apart from Nepalis and Lepchas. Hence the influence of Tibetan language can also be much felt here. Monsoon is a great visual treat here with heavy thunders, showers, slides, rock eruptions and beautiful flowers blossoming from the tiny plants. The word “Dorji” means “Thunderbolt” in Tibetan and “ling” means “place”. As Monsoon has lot of attractive thunders and lightning it is so named as Darjeeling.

**Places to visit in Darjeeling:**

**Tiger hill:**

Timings: 4am- 6pm

Entry fee: Parking- Rs. 20

Observatory tower: Rs. 20 for ground level

Rs.30 for first floor, Rs. 40 for seating

Darjeeling itself is a high-altitude place and imagine climbing over a hill in such an area. It would be no less than a Heaven. Tiger hill is once such destination where you can experience the peaks of Kanchenjunga, one of the most beautiful places of Darjeeling. The sun can be viewed at lower and deeper elevation from this place. Tourists come from all over the world to have the spectacular view of snow filled mountains amidst puffy white clouds.

If you start from the city of Darjeeling, it takes about 45 minutes to reach this place. The sun rises usually at 4.15 am and people start at 3.30 am to have the magnificent sunrise view. The sun rising time is expected to delay during winters at least by half an hour. So, if you plan your visit during winter you can start by 4.15 am in the city and reach Tiger hill by 5am which would be apt for sunrise. The roads are usually busy during peak season with cars and convoys. So, it is better to alter starting time depending on the traffic. You may need to climb a little to reach the spot and remember it should be by foot. Hence you need to park the vehicle down. The approximate cost to book a private vehicle is around INR 1200 to INR 1800.

**Basatia loop:**

Temperature: 19 degrees centigrade

Timings: 5am- 8pm

Time needed: 1 to 2 hours

Entry fee: Rs.15

Basatia loop is an enchanting train route which aims at minimizing the elevation of the Himalayan Railway. Th track is designed in such a way that it clings around itself through a tunnel under the hilltop. All through the way, the sight gives immense pleasure to watch the natural beauty of the hillocks, gardens, flowers, mountains all in their mesmerizing glory. It is in Ghoom, around 5 kilometers from Darjeeling. Starting from Emerald carpets of the snowy Himalayan vegetation, it covers everything from the misty morning flowers to snowy mountain peaks like Kanchenjunga. One can experience the sky and the land at a time with this magical journey, the white fluffy clouds, the blue sky and the green and refreshing mother earth.

**Darjeeling Himalayan Railway:**

Temperature: around 20 degrees centigrade

Timings: 8.00 am to 12.00 pm

Time needed :2 to 4 hours

Entry fee: For Steam engine rides Rs.1000 onwards

For Diesel engine rides: Rs. 600 onwards

What if you could view the whole of Darjeeling in a single glance? How to make it a swift yet splendid affair? This is exactly what the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway will provide you. The DHR is a two feet narrow train that was constructed in 1881. It is a long 88 kilometer railway line which runs between New Jalpaipuri and Darjeeling. A very typical village atmosphere with local farmers, small shops on the side of the roads, mountain peaks peeping down offering merry view, children waving happily at the tourists, just blossomed flowers, animals fluttering around the way, the train journey is a life- long experience that one can cherish.

Imagine a small steam engine passing through curved Himalayan paths, steep valleys and gradients. It is nothing but a spectacular engineering skill that takes you to a complete imaginary like yet real world. It is for this reason that it was recognized as UNESCO world heritage site in the year 1999. So do not give this ride a miss when you visit Darjeeling this time and show little pride as you one of those few to have visited such a heritage site.

**Nightingale Park:**

**Weather:** 19 degrees c

Timings: 7am- 8 pm

Time needed: 2 hours

Entry fee: Rs. 10 per head

As the name indicates, every view of this spectacular park gives mesmerizing sight with one of the most magnificent being the Kangchenjunga ranges. After you have visited different places in the city, it would be an ideal destination to relax and recharge in the gentle breeze of the park. Chill out with the green lawns, different birds singing to various tunes and small eateries serving local food. This Park welcomes you with archway and then leads you to walkways filled with pebbles. The place is oval shaped and requires you to climb few steps up before you could reach to this gorgeous green place. Musical fountain playing tunes of various classical and modern songs is a good attraction of this place. You can also find a huge statue of Lord shiva which is also another noteworthy visits.

**Darjeeling Ropeway:**

Weather: 19 degrees c

Timings: Winter and Monsoon: 10 am – 4 pm

Summer and Autumn: 10 am- 2 pm

Time: 1- 2 hours

Entry fee: Adults INR 200; Children 3 to 8 years INR 100

The Darjeeling Ropeway is situated by the banks of Ramman river. It is India’s first cable car system with a prime motto of meeting the needs of Darjeeling’s Tea gardens as they did not have convenient access to transport their product. Later with the rise of its popularity as tea transporters and as Tourist travelling sources, it developed as attractive Tourism hotspot. There are over all 16 cable cars accommodating 6 people each. The starting point is Singamari and travels till Singla Bazaar. It travels at an altitude of 7000 feet. One can view vast Tea estates, mystic waterfalls and the peak of Kanchenjunga making this a very sweet experience. To give tourists the maximum view of every sight it travels at moderate speed. Take a click of every small thing that you like when you visit this place. It takes you back to the Singamari base station on return and halts for few minutes before leaving back letting tourists to relax for a while.

Other attractive places are Darjeeling rock garden, which is 10 km away from the main city, Singalila national park located on the Singalila Ridge, Sandakphu Trek, Sandhak peak, the highrest peak in West Bengal among others.

**Tea plantations:**

Tea plantations in Darjeeling are spread over nearly 18,000 hectares of land. There are almost 80 tea estates which are among the best in the world. The UNESCO world heritage site recognized as one of the major tourist attractions in the world. The history of tea plantations in Darjeeling dates back to 18th century. The British started growing tea plants here and over period it has become mammoth of tea plantations. Among the best tea plantations are Puttabong tea estate, Glenburn tea estate, Makaibari tea estate, Okayti tea estate and Gopaldhara tea estate.

**Best eateries in Darjeeling:**

It is a daunting work to mention few places about best eateries in Darjeeling. Though tea is famous here, eateries are also not to be ignored. What makes the Darjeeling food so special is the mixture of various cultures in its cuisine. As there are British, Nepali and Tibetans population long settled here one can find the same culture in its cuisine too.

We are going to mention about Pizza Hut, KFC s which are common in many places. Rather step into something unique to this very own place to experience the true flavor of Darjeeling.

**Keventers:**

It was founded by Edward Keventers in the year 1911. The typical food served here is a plate of ham, fried eggs, sausages and Bacon. There used to be a great view of the surrounding area. But with real estate booming up, the view is not so special, but a terrace chai is surely a must have.

**Revolver:**

Located in Gandhi Road, Union chapel, this is a must visit place if you want to have a taste of special Naga cuisine. This is a warm ambience with pleasant faces welcoming you. For a recreation, you also can ponder some good collection of books. Though there are other cuisines, a must try is their Naga cuisine.

**Glenarys:**

If you are a bakery food lover, Glenarys is the best place. They have all kinds of cakes, pastries, breads, loafs, cookies and pies. It serves in different floors in which first floor is indulged in Chinese food, Indian and continental food. Another worth mention are their liquor chocolates.

Other restaurants that you can try are Kunga restaurant, Getty’s café, Frank ross café, Shangri la restaurant among others.

**Best time to visit Darjeeling:**

The best time to visit Darjeeling is from April to June. But some people prefer to visit in winter months also. During monsoon, because of heavy rains there will be lot of road blockages. So you can skip visiting the place during Monsoon. However, if you want to have spectacular sight of the land slides, springs, water falls and valleys it is an ideal time.

Nature walk in to the mysterious yet marvelous spaces is a true experience one should have in life. If this is something that you also are looking for don’t miss an opportunity to visit this heaven on earth, Darjeeling.