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INDIA NEPAL BHUTAN

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Beautiful Darjeeling

A hundred divine epochs would not suffice to describe all the marvels of the Himalaya, a Sanskrit proverb says. The Himalayan range lays claim to being one of the most fascinating and spectacular natural wonders on earth. Human settlers from the plains, hermits in search of isolation, pilgrims, discoverers, explorers and mountaineers cannot deny the call of the mighty mountains.

At about 3pm we started for Darjeeling (7,100 feet above the sea level), the most famous hill station of the eastern Himalayas, from Shiliguri by jeep. The first part of the trip was deceptively easygoing through the gentle slopes of the tea gardens. But after half of an hour or so we began to climb an awe-inspiring gorge leading to the heart of the mountains. The road rose, at first gently, and then at an alarming angle.

Our driver, an experienced young Bhutia, drove well on this hazardous road. His only fault, I noticed, was that he rushed at full throttle up the particularly bad slopes, regardless of the sharp hairpin bends.

To distract myself from the impending crash, I concentrated on the panorama around. In this area, vegetation changes after every thousand feet of altitude. Plants like the teak, Sal, ficus, bamboo and undergrowth of tropical forest give way to the variety of pines, silver fir, juniper, oak, cedar, rhododendron and poppies of the temperate coniferous forests. After a brief break at Karsiang we reached Darjeeling safely at dusk.

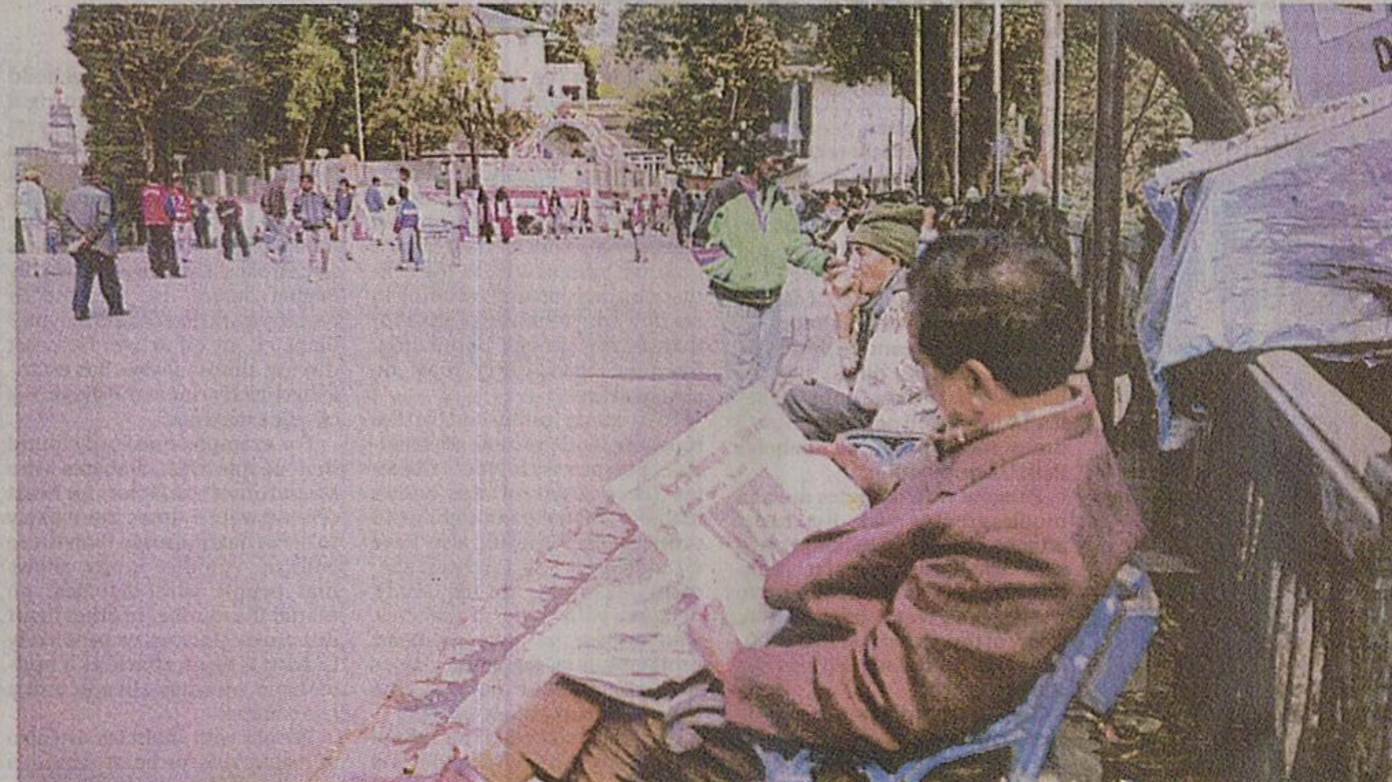
Since the British took over in 1835, Darjeeling became the summer refuge to the imperial authority. The hill station ultimately turned into a hot tourist destination.

Like many other hill stations, Darjeeling has little plain space for pedestrians to walk around without straining their legs. The Mall area appears to be the most attractive and comfortable place where people can sit and enjoy the splendour of the Himalayas while sipping the much-famed Darjeeling tea. Within 20-km around Darjeeling, there are 11 points considered as attractive places for the tourists. We visited Tenjing Norgey Mountaineering Institute, named after the legendary mountaineer Tenjing who along with Edmond Hillary stepped on top of the world for the first time, the Everest, in 1953. At this institute one can learn the tit-bits of climbing. Another interesting place is the Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Garden where some rare and interesting animals like snow leopard, red panda, Siberian tiger and Himalayan wolf can be seen.

The most interesting activity for tourists is to see the sun reflected from the highest Himalayan peak of Kanchanjanga from the Tiger Hill.

I developed a mixed feeling about travelling Darjeeling. No doubt it is a fantastic place to feel the essence of the Himalayas, but the area is now too cluttered up and unclean.

Photo & Story: KHASRU CHOWDHURY



TIPS FOR THE DARJEELING GOERS

After obtaining your Indian visa you can buy bus tickets for Dhaka-Shiliguri operated by BRTC-Samoly Paribahan. From Shiliguri, you can take bus, jeep or the Toy Train to Darjeeling. Try to travel as light as possible. Essential medicines, films and camera accessories must be taken from Bangladesh. Your exposed films must be developed in India. A tourist map is always helpful. You have to bargain for everything in India. For economy travel, you can take a bus to Burimary border check post. In India, you can travel by bus or by jeep. It is advisable to make the trip in a group of four.