

BACK TO INDIA



First sights of Siliguri – Bangla yes, but a different Bangla to what I've grown up hearing

I have travelled to over 36 countries and counting in my thirty years, extensively hopped over and lived in the heart of Europe, enjoyed the hospitality of the American waters, touched the Alps back down in New Zealand but everywhere I have been - I have carried an ache in my heart. An ache for the Paris of the Indian subcontinent - Kolkata, an ache for Tagore's enchanting tunes carried by the breeze far away from his borders, an ache for that perfect gol-gappe that they only sell in that park outside India gate. An ache for a country that never really lets go of me and where I shall always return for the multiplicity of seasons, religions and aromas.



Take the ropeway...I insist!



And then enter Darjeeling!



Coronation bridge built in 1941, 20 kms away from Siliguri



Find a quiet lodge; breathtaking views are just about everywhere

When I met my husband for the first time, inevitably the conversation landed on travels. The odds were high as it was but trebled when I asked him, "Where in India have you been to" and the quiet response was, "nowhere near". I say challenge accepted and come to you with an overview of the travel plan I have drawn up to show this incredible country to a person I love and who has never been. And in our story somewhere, I hope that you too find reasons to visit or revisit this place that will never cease to surprise and challenge every sensibility I carry.

JOLPAIGURI-SHILIGURI-DARJEELING

First of all, I would strongly suggest you to make this trip only when you want your senses awakened and not competing with your neighbours against multiple touchdowns to new cities. Basically, not recommended for glory hunters. Rather, this route is a pure bliss to adventurers, nature lovers, the inquisitive folks that want to know more about the strikingly different culture that our neighbours across the borders share. If you have the zest for life checked - you may begin. **Siliguri:** My parents and I had made our first trip

here long before, when the Dinajpur borders were still open. Exiting by road through this lesser populated border somehow added to the uncertainties of the trip that I, as a kid, remember so vividly. And Siliguri was a scene that I have never experienced before. The houses looked vastly different, yet so close to our own, the accent of Bangla spoken was a pleasant first taste of exotic to the teenager in me. All the must-sees are pictorially depicted as follows.

By Naaz Fahmida

Photo courtesy: Naaz Fahmida