

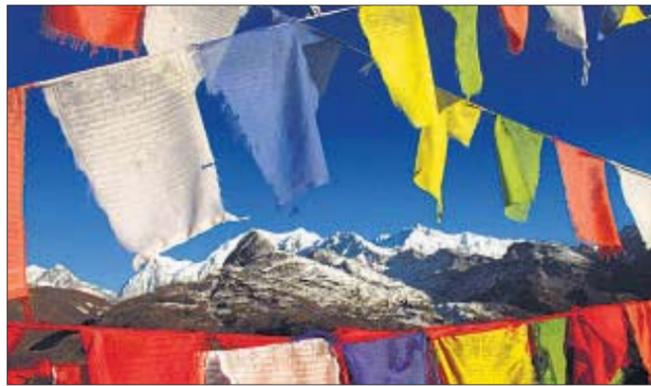
think!

FOOTLOOSE

STORIES FROM THE WORLD AROUND YOU

AN ENCOUNTER WITH KANCHENJUNGA

FROM SIKKIM This Puja, go on the Dzungri-Goecha La trek to see the world's third highest peak from close quarters. Trek through jungles, snow and bridges over gorges for breathtaking views



(Clockwise from top) Mt Kangchenjunga and other peaks as seen from Dzungri top; zoomed view of Kangchenjunga from first view point, Goecha La; breakfast at Thangsing; trekking past the beautiful Samiti Lake. (Below) Negotiating mud and snow on the way from Kokchuran to Phedang.

PHOTOS: AMITABH GUPTA

NORTHERN COASTLINE

Festivals, flea markets, water sports. Beaches in Goa have it all

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Sun-kissed beaches, blue waters, lush greens, picturesque churches, narrow lanes, flea markets and a rich culture... Goa, the land of the beaches, is a huge draw for tourists from around the world.

My trip to Goa was the most awaited trip of my life as my college had participated in India Fest, a national inter-college cultural festival. We had put up at a resort in south Goa, at a 10 minutes drive from Colva beach.

One of the landmarks of Goa is Baga, the venue for India fest. Located in north Goa its shore was the fest site. A makeshift ramp for fashion show and a big stage for band and dance performances were built. One part of the beach was open for the tourists. On our first two days of the trip, we attended the fest.

But the third day began with a visit to the nearby Colva beach, popular for water sports. Goa offers a host of water sports that invites adventure seekers from all over the world. One can enjoy water scooter, parasailing, wind surfing, water skiing, scuba diving, banana boat ride and jet skiing here. Thus, adventure seekers in Goa are directed towards Colva beach.

After enjoying some of these, we moved on to another popular seaside: Anjuna beach. It is an hour's journey from south Goa. It is ideal to hire a bike for the long journey. While a bike can cost



Beaches are Goa's prime attraction. (Top) The flea market on Anjuna Beach.

about R400-R500 a day, a scooter is cheaper, starting from R200 a day. Interestingly, petrol pumps are tough to find in Goa. Fuel is sold in one litre plastic bottles on the roadside. Driving through well-maintained roads, adorned with tall palm trees on either sides is a great experience.

Every Wednesday, a flea market is held on Anjuna beach. Since we were lucky to be there on a Wednesday, we headed straight to it. This is one of the most popular markets of Goa and spread over the entire stretch of Anjuna beach, selling almost anything and everything under the sun.

The crystal clear water and the white sand act like a magnet for holidaymakers here. To feel this, on the last day of our trip, we decided to spend time relaxing on the beach. There was a certain sense of fulfillment as I stood in front of the Goa resort for one last time before boarding the bus to Mumbai, from where a train journey back home awaited us.

readers' corner

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Among several trekking routes in Sikkim, the most popular is the Dzungri-Goecha La Trek. Mt Kangchenjunga (8,585 mts) can be seen at such an unbelievable close range, that the heart skips a beat here.

The route includes unending steep gradients in dense forests with astounding view of several snow-clad peaks. There is no ready provision on the road and you have to camp in the wild in many places. It is thus advisable to take help of an experienced tour operator to negotiate this route. They will coordinate everything while you walk. The season to go on this trek is from April to mid-May and between October and late-November. But in recent times, due to relatively less snowfall in the area, trekkers venture in as late as Christmas.

The trek starts from Yuksom (1,785 mt). After submitting the required identity proofs and filling up a form which declared us to be fit enough, we got the permission for the trek. At Yuksom, the first capital of Sikkim was established in 1642 AD by Phuntsog Namgyal—the first Chogyal (king) of Sikkim. The Chogyal established the Dubdi Monastery in 1701 here.

DAY 1: YUKSOM TO SACHEN (4 hours)
After a walk through uphill jungle route, we crossed three bridges to reach Sachen. Our tents were already pitched and a table with few chairs was being placed beside the kitchen hut. We had a delicious lunch followed by an equally tasty dinner consisting pizza and apple tart!

DAY 2: SACHEN TO TSOKA (5 hours)
We crossed the huge fourth bridge below which the Prek Chu River was gushing through a deep gorge. The Forest Rest House at Bakkhim was shut due to damages left by an earthquake. Another one hour uphill walk took us to Tsoka (3000

mts) where the peaks of Pandim, Tinchin Khang and Japuno were visible. Tsoka is the last village on this route. There are few huts here and a small monastery you can see before leaving the next day.

DAY 3: TOSKA TO DZONGRI VIA PHEDANG AND DEORALI (8 hours)
The route from Tsoka to Phedang is very strenuous. At Phedang, numerous snow-clad peaks were visible. We reached Deorali Top before 3 pm to enjoy a wide-angle view of several peaks. It is advisable to sit at Deorali top for 30 minutes. It took us another one hour to reach Dzungri (4030 mts) through a downhill path, after which we called it a day.

DAY 4: DZONGRI TO THANGSING VIA KOKCHURAN (7 hours)
Next morning we braved up to the Dzungri

TREK GUIDE

How to reach

Yuksom can be reached by a 9 hour drive from New Jalpaiguri Station via Jorethang and Pelling. Several trains go from Howrah to New Jalpaiguri.

Where to stay & eat

There are many hotels at Yuksom including the luxurious Tashigang Hotel owned by filmstar Danny Denzongpa. Gupta's Restaurant serves all kind of food.

Tips for trekkers

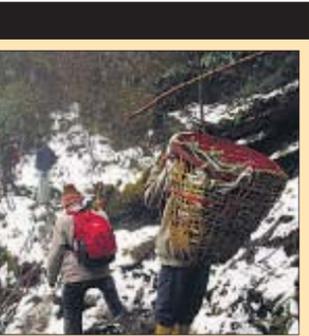
- Eat good food on this trek to replenish energy. Garlic soup is essential along with high protein intake.
- Chose an experienced tour operator.
- Wear warm clothes in several layers. Hollowfill or feather jackets are essential. Avoid cotton clothes.
- Chose sleeping bags which can cope sub zero temperature. Use high-ankle trekking shoes with good grip. Two pairs of gloves are recommend-

ed. Cover your head while walking.

- Carry enough wet tissue papers as at many of the camping sites you have to go to loo in the open.
- Walk with small steps and take breaks.
- Remember you are not in a race. It is very important to acclimatize in high altitude treks to prevent acute mountain sickness (AMS).
- It is advisable not to consume alcohol to cope with the cold. It could kill you.

Post breakfast, we walked through Dzungri meadows and encountered a steep one hour downhill climb to reach the wooden hut of Kokchuran (3750 mts). We reached Thangsing (3800 mt) at 4.30 pm after crossing a wooden bridge over Prek Chu River and negotiating a jungle. Mt Pandim looked awesome here.

DAY 5: THANGSING TO LAMUNE (An hour)
The tree line disappears at Lamune. Earlier



trekkers used to camp at Samiti Lake. But now everyone pitches their tents at Lamune. We experienced a bit of snowfall and retired to our tents by 7 pm; the temperature outside was sub-zero.

DAY 6: LAMUNE TO GOECHA LA FIRST VIEW POINT AND BACK TO KOKCHURAN (10 hours)

The first viewpoint (4940 mts) is near Zemathang plateau. Few go to the second viewpoint and only a handful go to the third one where you actually land at Goecha Pass alias Goecha La (5020 mts) overlooking the Talung Valley. A huge lake falls on the way to the pass, which is not visible from the first viewpoint.

Starting at 3 in the morning, we walked on the rock and snow infested banks of beautiful Samiti Lake. After a steep uphill walk from the lake, we reached the first viewpoint at around 5.20 am. On the left there was a deep ravine. At the edge of the ravine was the Onglakhang Glacier. Beside the glacier, walls of the mountain range stood like a huge amphitheatre reaching out to the horizon.

This was an extremely close panoramic view; to first time visitors, it looked like an impossible sight. From left to right, I could see Mt Kabru South, Mt Kabru North, Mt Kabru Dome, Mt Talung, Forked Peak and finally the South Face of the mighty Mt Kangchenjunga. We stayed for one hour at this heavenly place and then came to down to Lamune. Post breakfast we marched to Kokchuran via Thangsing and settled in the trekkers hut. Kokchuran is a beautiful place to camp.

DAY 7: KOKCHURAN TO TSOKA VIA PHEDANG (7 HOURS)

This route, mostly downhill, bypasses Dzungri and is through a dense jungle.

DAY 8: TOSKA TO YUKSOM (8 hours)
We reached Yuksom at 4 pm. After an emotional farewell to the guide, porters, cook and yak-man, we settled in our rooms and had our first bath in six days! Sitting on the balcony of the hotel, I was already planning for a return trip and trek at least up to the second viewpoint.

TRADITIONAL MEAL



Try South's chicken curry with a soft yet crisp rice roti

MUST EAT IN MANGALORE Koli roti

If it's in south-India, there has to be the coconut element in it, irrespective of whether it is chicken, mutton or fish. And, the dish is tasty when had with rice chapatis, says Sarafat Ali, corporate chef, Lazeez Express. "Koli means chicken, and roti refers to rice flour chapatis in Karnataka. I had the chance to eat koli roti at my

friend's home when I was visiting the area," says Ali. The curry is spicy and the rotis a little crispy at the centre and a little soft at the corners.

SPICY AFFAIR

Marinated chicken, cut in small cubes is sautéed in coconut oil and curry leaves before other ingredients, like ginger-garlic paste, dhania, chilli, tomato puree, garam masala, crushed black pepper and coconut milk are added to it. "The region is home to some of the spiciest chillies and it reflects in the curry! They also prepare

fish, mutton and beef in similar ways," says Ali.

But the roti is prepared in dosa-like style and is little thicker than it. "It is served with coconut chutney, tomato chutney and south-Indian green salad," he adds. The item, he says, is more of a Mangalore item than Karnataka and is available at select authentic south-Indian restaurants only.

AT THE ROADSIDE

Sivai parantha, a variant of koli roti is available popularly in the port city and should be tried. "They make it by steaming; sivai is put together in the shape of a parantha. The parantha is served with both

veg and non-veg curries," says Ali.

THE TRADITIONAL KHICHRI

Called bisi-bele bhaath in Karnataka, this home-cooked item is made from four dals and rice. "They add the region's special masala, gun powder, to it along with dry coconut and curry leaves. It tastes great, especially with the pickle it is served with," says Ali. The best place to try this is

in a village around Mangalore. "If not, then try a Udipi restaurant. There, they call it khichri, and the preparation is not very traditional always."

BRING BACK...

When returning from the region, bring back items like cardamom, chilli powder, cashew nuts, and other spices. Ali travelled a lot around Mangalore and suggests one to do the same by road. "While at it, you can pick up different items from different regions. Some of the best picks are Mysore sarees and bangles and Kanjivaram sarees," says Ali. *Suruchi Tulsyan*

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