

## METRO

on Sunday



Next weekend you can be at ...

# Tumling

## Going

There are several trains and buses to New Jalpaiguri from Calcutta. But it is better to book a jeep in advance for the drive to Maneybhanjan or Dhotre, especially in peak tourist season.

## Staying

There are few places to stay at Tumling. We stayed at Shikhar Lodge. Many travel agencies arrange for advance booking at these lodges.

**W**hen the Calcutta summer begins in right earnest and the sun is without mercy, it's probably a good idea to spend a weekend trekking through forests of rhododendron, with a chill wind rustling through the trees and a gorgeous view of Mount Kanchenjunga in the distance.

Such is the experience of Tumling, a small settlement on the India-Nepal border on the Sandakphu trek route.

There are numerous ways of reaching Tumling. You could drive up to Maneybhanjan from New Jalpaiguri, which takes four-five hours. It is an other 90 minutes to Tumling, on a road that only the 1964-built Land Rovers can negotiate. Another way is to trek the 9km from Maneybhanjan to Tumling on a metalled road till Chitre, and then on a stone-paved path via Lamaydhura and Meghma. If you want to trek through forest roads, you could drive up to Dhotrey, a village of 70 huts, situated at a height of 8,500ft, from where Tumling is a 6km trek through forests of flaming rhododendron.

We chose the trek from Dhotrey. The drive is fascinating, with hairpin bends on roads snaking through tea gardens. In April-May, the forests on the way from Dhotre to Tumling abound in rhododendron flowers in full bloom. On a clear day, you get to see Kanchenjunga on your right all the way to Tumling.

As we neared Tumling after nearly four hours, we came across a signpost of the West Bengal government, welcoming us to the Singalila National Park. A little further, there is another post on the right, which says: "Welcome to Nepal". If you walk straight down, you actually are in Nepal. We turned left and reached the gates of the Shikhar Lodge, our stopover for the night.

Early next morning, we went back to the first signpost. And it was difficult to choose between the stunning sights on our left and right. On our right a spectacular sunrise was about to begin; on our left was the Kanchenjunga. As the sun crept up, its rays fell on the snow-clad mountains shining like molten gold. We were busy clicking the majestic sight. The gold stayed for 15 minutes, after which it changed to a sparkling white.

(Metro on Sunday thanks reader AMITABHA GUPTA for this contribution. Pictures by author)