Essence of Durga Puja Festival in Kolkata, Darjeeling and Sikkim

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Day 1

DAY 01 || ARRIVE KOLKATA || INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT (MAHA ASHTAMI: 09:00 AM TO 05:00 PM)

Welcome to the “City of Joy” Kolkata, India. Upon arrival you will be met and assisted by our company representative at airport. After traditional welcome transfer to your hotel. Rest of the day free at leisure. After some fresh and rest ready for visits some traditional household puja sites of North Kolkata, witness rituals and interact with the organizers to understand the social significance of this festival. Afternoon short city tour including a drive around of Jain Temple, Indian Coffee house & Birla Temple. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 2

DAY 02 || KOLKATA (MAHA NAVAMI: 09:00 AM TO 05:00 PM)

Morning visits some famous North Kolkata puja sites with enjoy Bengali cultural festival. In, afternoon time visit some places, including Flower market, Howrah Bridge and Mother House. Afternoon short city tour including a drive around of Dalhousie Square covering Raj Bhavan, St. John’s church, High Court, GPO, Town Hall, Writer’s Building and other important colonial buildings followed by a visit to St. Paul’s Cathedral and Kalighat Kali Temple. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 3

DAY 03 || KOLKATA (VIJAY DASAMI: 09:00 AM TO 07:00 PM)

After breakfast proceed for an excursion to Belur Math (The Headquarters of Ramakrishna Mission Ashram) and Dakshineswar Kali Temple. Return back to the city and visit various Durga Puja pandals to witness "Sindur Khela" (Vermillion game). Sindur Khela is a major event of Dashami. First, the married women greet the Mahadevi for one last time, accompanied by rituals. They do aarti, put ready-to-chew paan-leaves in the hands of the goddess, and put sweets on the lips of the idol, wipe out eyes as one does to wipe off the tears when leaving a loving place. This event is called "Durga Baran". They apply vermilion to the Goddess's head and to each other and greet each other with sweets. The ritual of applying sindoor also takes place at home when Bijoya Dashami is celebrated with family members. From there you will be taken to the river side to see how idols are immersed in the river. The immersion brings end to the five days long festival full of happiness and enjoyment. After this traditional experience, you will return back to hotel. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 4

DAY 04 || KOLKATA - BAGDOGRA - DARJEELING || FLIGHT & 93 KMS/3 HRS 30 MINS

After breakfast, check-out and transfer to Kolkata airport to board your flight Air India Express IX-1256 (Dep: 1245/Arr: 1400 hrs) to Bagdogra. Upon arrival at Bagdogra airport, drive to Darjeeling, standing high in the Himalayas at an altitude of 2134m, 'Dorje Ling', or place of the Thunderbolt, offers breathtaking views of snow-capped mountain peaks, with the Kanchendzonga rising higher than all the others. Often referred to as the "Queen of the Hills", it remains just as alluring with its tiny waterfalls, little villages and a narrow gauge railway track. Surrounded by World Famous Tea Gardens and snow-capped mountains, Darjeeling remains one of the most exotic destinations. Graeme Westlake in his book 'An introduction to hill stations on India' refers to Darjeeling as having "A view Scarcely Unrivalled on Earth". On arrival, check-in at the hotel. Rest of the day free at leisure. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 5

DAY 05 || DARJEELING

After breakfast enjoy toy train ride up to Ghoom then visit Ghoom Monastery (Subject to operation of this train & availability of the seats). The spectacular landscape unfolds as the 2-foot gauge Darjeeling Himalayan railway, opened in 1881, labours at about 10 mph criss-crossing the road. It has tiny 4-wheel locomotives (some over 100 years old) like living legends. One can experience the sound, smell and romance of a bygone era. DHR is a work of genius and technological achievement of 1881. Ghoom Monastery, the oldest Monastery in the area which was built in 1875 and one can see the image of Mythey Buddha 15ft. height. Afternoon proceed for city tour visiting Happy Valley Tea Estate is one of the oldest tea estates in the region and has garnered a reputation for producing high-quality tea. The estate spans over 437 acres and is located at an altitude of 6,800 feet above sea level. The tea is grown using sustainable agricultural practices and is renowned for its unique flavours and aroma. Apart from tea production, the estate also offers visitors a chance to witness the tea-making process and explore the lush green tea gardens. There is a museum on the estate that showcases the history and evolution of tea production in the region. Note: Tea Garden/Estate on Sunday is the weekly holidays as such on Monday at Factory there will be no processing. Factory will remain closed during winter i.e. middle of Nov till Mar, also closed on Government holiday, National holiday and State holiday. Factory will remain closed for 7-8 days during festival period also i.e. Durga Puja/Diwali festival period. The road condition nearby of Happy Valley Tea Factory is extremely in poor condition & Innova vehicle cannot reach up to the garden or v.v. One has to walk to reach the Factory. From main road while going it is down-hill walk & it will take approx. 10-15 minute & while coming it is uphill walk & will take 20-25 minutes.). Tibetan Self- Help Centre Or Refugee Centre (Closed on Sundays). This institute is run by Tibetan Refugees to preserve their handicrafts and one can see making of Tibetan Carpets, Leather work, Paintings and Wooden work etc. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 6

DAY 06 || DARJEELING

Early morning visit Tiger Hill for sunrise and back, is 13 kms from Darjeeling and one can see beautiful sunrise and Himalayan Range like Kanchendzonga, Mount Everest etc. one can see the horizon changing colours just before sunrise and then the entire Himalayan range turn golden. It is truly a majestic sight. Afternoon proceed for city tour Himalayan Mountaineering Institute/Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological and Japanese Temple & Peace Pagoda. Himalayan Mountaineering Institute/Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park (Closed on Thursdays) The Himalayan Mountaineering Institute was started in Darjeeling when Tenzing Norgay climbed Everest to give training to learn Mountaineering and other adventure sports

related to mountaineering and in that Institute one can see equipment etc. used by Mr. Tenzing Norgay and Everest Museum having complete details on Everest attached to institute one can visit Himalayan Zoological Park where one can see Himalayan animals like Snow Leopard, Tibetan Wolf, Tibetan Yak, Himalayan Black Bear and several varieties of birds. Japanese Temple & Peace Pagoda, also known as Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist Temple, the shrine was built in 1972 and is located 10 minutes away from the Darjeeling town centre, on the hill of Jalapahar. Showcasing classic Japanese style of architecture, this resplendent white building offers visitors a serene and quiet sanctum where they can meditate and seek inner peace. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 7

DAY 07 || DARJEELING - PELLING || 123 KMS /6-7 HRS

After breakfast, drive to Pelling, a small town that is situated in the West Sikkim region. Pelling is located near the foothills of Kanchenjunga and one can witness an outstanding view of the mountain from here. The main attractions in the place are the monasteries that dot the countryside. Once enter Pelling visit Pemayangtse Monastery and Rabdantse Ruins. Pemayangtse Monastery is one of the oldest monasteries in the State. Originally established by Lhatsun Chempo, one of the revered Lamas to have performed the consecration ceremony of the first Chogyal (Religious Monarch) of Sikkim. This ancient monastery belongs to the Nyingma Buddhism and has been considered as one of the premier monasteries in the State, having been entrusted with the task to perform all religious functions of the erstwhile monarch. The Monastery, located on a hill top at an altitude of 6840 ft. commands a magnificent panoramic view of the Himalayan ranges and the surrounding hills and country-side. Later visit Rabdantse Ruins, the ruins of Rabdantse are worth exploring. The winding track through the forest brings you to a small set of ruins of the early town and eventually on the ruins of the palace with Chorten (stupa) nearby. Farther afield are the Changay Falls. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 8

DAY 08 || PELLING

After breakfast visit Sangnacholing monastery, Chenzerig statue, Skywalk, Khecheopalri Lake. Located at the top of a ridge in the town of Pelling, Sikkim, Sangnacholing Monastery was established in the 17th century by Lama Gyalwa Lhatsun Chempo. The literal meaning of the word Sanga Choeling is ‘Idea of Guhya Mantra Teachings’ that relates to the faith of Buddhism. In order to reach this place, one has to walk for at least 40 minutes through the forest on a steep hill slope but the end result is absolutely worth it. Stepping inside the Sangnacholing Monastery, you notice various ancient wall paintings, statues, unique clay structures and scriptures that date back to the 17th century. They are extremely beautiful and are well-preserved. From Sangnacholing Monastery one also gets an opportunity to witness a spectacular view of the snow clad mountains and lush greenery around it, providing a feeling of calmness. The fact that the building was restored to its former beauty after catching fire has become the major highlight of the monastery. The CHENREZIG STATUE is one of the world’s tallest statues of Buddha which is considered to be a manifestation of Buddha’s compassion. It is located about 1.7 km away from Pelling skywalk and stands at a height of a whopping 135 feet. The statue can be reached via stairs and once atop, one can feast their eyes on the scenic views of the valley. The meditative chants of the monks, the bustling skywalk and the serene weather makes for a blissful experience. Skywalk, the Glass Skywalk is India’s first ever skywalk, set in the picturesque town of Pelling in Northeast Sikkim. The Pelling skywalk is a transparent foot-over bridge made out of glass that is suspended hundreds of feet in the air. Khecheopalri Lake is considered to be one of the sacred lakes of Sikkim both by the Buddhist and the Hindus. The lake remains hidden in the rich forest cover. It is believed that birds do not permit even a single leaf to float on the lake surface. There is a motorable road

from Pemayangtse right up to the lake area. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 9

DAY 09 || PELLING - GANGTOK || 127 KMS /4 HRS

Today checkout and drive to Gangtok enroute visit to The Buddha Park of Ravangla, also known as Tathagata Tsal, is situated near Rabong (Ravangla) in South Sikkim. It was constructed between 2006 and 2013 and features a 130-foot high statue of the Buddha as its centerpiece. The site was chosen within the larger religious complex of the Rabong Gompa (Monastery), itself a centuries-old place of pilgrimage. Also nearby is Ralangng Monastery, a key monastery in Tibetan Buddhism. The statue was consecrated on 25 March 2013 by the 14th Dalai Lama, and became a stop on the 'Himalayan Buddhist Circuit'. The statue of the Buddha marks the occasion of the 2550th birth anniversary of Gautama Buddha. This statue was built and installed in the place through the joint efforts of the Sikkim government and its people. The Buddhist circuit of this park was built here under a State government project, for boosting pilgrimage and tourism in the region. Continue drive to Gangtok, at an altitude of 1750m, Gangtok became the state capital in the mid-19th century and has undergone rapid development since then. The downtown area is dominated by huge government buildings decorated with traditional Buddhist symbols. Upon arrival, check-in at the hotel. Overnight at the Hotel.

Day 10

DAY 10 || GANGTOK

After breakfast proceed for sightseeing tur of Gangtok visiting Rumtek Monastery/Do Drul Chorten, Tibetology (Closed on Saturday/Sunday & Govt. Holidays), Enchey Monastery & Cottage Industry (Closed on Saturday/Sunday & Govt. Holidays). Rumtek Monastery, 24 Kms. from Gangtok is the awe -inspiring, the world Dharma chakra Centre and the seat of His Holiness, the Gyalwa Karmapa, who is the head of the Kagyupa order of Tibetan Buddhism. Behind the main monastery is the lavishly decorated Karmae Nalanda Institute of Buddhist Studies, which attracts students from the world over. Opposite the entrance to the Institute is a small hall featuring a beautiful jewel studded Chorten the Golden Stupa, which contains the ashes and remains of His Holiness the xvi Gyalwa Karmapa. The Do Drul Chorten, built to commemorate the victory of good over evil and the Jhang Chub Chorten, built in the memory of Thrukshik Rinpoche, an ardent devotee, a great spiritualist and interpreter of Buddhism. Near the Chorten are housed two giant statues of Lord Buddha and Guru Padmasambhava, also known as Guru Rimpoche, the patron saint of Sikkim. Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, amidst a serene surrounding of oak, birch and ash lies the unique organization established in1958. Built in traditional style, the namgyal Institute of Tibetology promotes research in Mahayana Buddhism and the language and tradition of Tibet. It has one of the world’s largest collections of rare books and manuscripts on Mahayana Buddhism. The Enchey Monastery, perched on a ridge above Gangtok, the Enchey Monastery is nestled within lush woods with a spectacular view of Gangtok town. Built in 1910 on the site of the hermitage of the great tantric saint, Lama Drutob Karpo, who was renowned for his powers of levitation, this monastery houses the monks of the Nyingmapa Order of Tibetan Buddhism. Directorate of Handloom and Handicrafts, was set up to promote traditional Sikkimese art and handicrafts. Exquisitely carved wooden friezes, intricate bamboo work, along with beautiful hand woven carpets and handlooms are on exhibit here. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 11

DAY 11 || GANGTOK - KALIMPONG || 85 KMS / 3 HRS

Today check-out and drive to Kalimpong, at an altitude of 1250m, Kalimpong location is ideal for a pleasant, relaxed getaway. Its clement weather has made Kalimpong's orchids and gladiole well renowned. Up to the early 1700s, the Kalimpong area was part of the Sikkim raja's domain. In the early 18th century, the Bhutan king also took it over. In 1865, after the Anglo-Bhutan War, it was annexed to Darjeeling. Scottish Missionaries came here in the late 1800s. The town thrived as a wool trading center with Tibet till 1950s. Today it's a quiet hill resort and a haven for retired people. Upon arrival, check-in at the hotel. Evening free to stroll around the local market. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 12

DAY 12 || KALIMPONG

After breakfast, proceed for full day city tour of Kalimpong visiting flower Nurseries, the climate of Kalimpong is ideal for the cultivation of flowers and plants. Kalimpong is famous for its nurseries which export exotice flowers like Amaryllis lilies, Anthuriums, Roses gerberas, Dahilias, Gladiolias as well as Orchids and Cacti. Then procced to Deolo Hills are located at an elevation of around 2000 m and thus, provide a great panoramic view of Kalimpong. Durpin Hill, also known as Durpin Dara, is a hilltop in Kalimpong, West Bengal that offers panoramic views of the town, the Himalayan ranges, and the Teesta River. It is home to the Zang Dhok Palri Monastery, which was consecrated by the Dalai Lama. Zang Dog Palri Fo-Brang Monastery, this is a fairly new monastery located in Durpin Dara, from here one can get an exclusive panoramic view of the town and surroundings. The prayer room inside the monastery is adorned with wall paintings and there is a rare three-dimensional mandala upstairs. Tharpa Choling Monastery at Tirpai hill on route to Dr. Graham's Home belongs to the Yellow Hat sect of Lamas to which the present Dalai Lama belongs and lastly Thongsa Gumpa, this monastery is of Bhutanese origin and built around 1692. It is the oldest in Kalimpong. The original structure was destroyed in the inter-clan wars before the British arrived. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 13

DAY 13 || KALIMPONG - BAGDOGRA - KOLKATA || 85 KMS / 3 HRS & FLIGHT

After breakfast check-out and drive to Bagdogra airport to board your flight to Kolkata. Upon arrival in Kolkata, check-in at the hotel. Rest of the day free at leisure. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 14

DAY 14 || KOKATA DEPARTURE || INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT

After breakfast, check out and transfer to airport to board your flight to onward destination.
