

# Splendid North-East ! Tourism Perspective & Prospects



Sarat C. Joshi

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- Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh
- Manipur and Tripura
- Mizoram and Nagaland.

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# **Splendid North-East!**

**Tourism Perspective and Prospects**

**Vol. II  
Sikkim & Arunachal Pradesh**

**Sarat C. Joshi**



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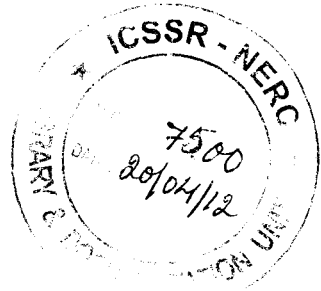
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# 1

## Sikkim: An Introduction

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An erstwhile Himalayan Kingdom, now a state of India, Sikkim is a paradise of tourism.

Here in this we wish to introduce you with history, culture, land and people, economy, natural resources and other necessary information of this tiny state situated in the lap of Mighty Himalayas.

A landlocked Indian state nestled in the Himalayas, it is the least populous state in India. This thumb-shaped state borders Nepal in the west, the Tibet Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China to the north and the east and Bhutan in the southeast. West Bengal borders Sikkim to its south. Despite its small area of 7,096 km<sup>2</sup>, Sikkim is geographically diverse due to its location in the Himalayas.

The climate ranges from subtropical to high alpine. Kangchenjunga, the world's third-highest peak, is located on the border of Sikkim with Nepal. Sikkim is a popular tourist destination owing to its culture, scenic beauty and abundant biodiversity.

An ancient place, legend has it that the Buddhist saint Guru Rinpoche visited Sikkim in the 9th century, introduced

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Buddhism and foretold the era of the monarchy. Indeed, the Namgyal dynasty was established in 1642. Over the next 150 years, the kingdom witnessed frequent raids and territorial losses to Nepalese invaders. It allied itself with the British rulers of India but was soon annexed by them. Later, Sikkim became a British protectorate and merged with India following a referendum in 1975.

It is remarkable that this tiny state, Sikkim has 11 official languages: Nepali (lingua franca), Bhutia, Lepcha (since 1977), Limbu (since 1981), Newari, Rai, Gurung, Mangar, Sherpa, Tamang (since 1995) and Sunwar (since 1996). English is taught at schools and used in government documents. It is the only state in India with an ethnic Nepalese majority. The predominant religions are Hinduism and Vajrayana Buddhism. Gangtok is the capital and the largest town. Sikkim has a booming economy dependent on agriculture and tourism, and has the only open border between India and China.

In fact, much is known about Sikkim's ancient history, except for the fact that the first inhabitants were the Lepchas or Rong (ravine folk). They were later encompassed and absorbed by other clans. Sikkim also finds its mention on many Hindu texts as *Indrakil* or garden of Lord Indra. The Buddhist saint Guru Rinpoche is said to have passed through the land in the 9th century. According to legend the Guru blessed the land, introduced Buddhism to Sikkim and also foretold the era of the monarchy in the state, which would arrive centuries later.

There are numerous stories regarding the migration of Tibetans into Sikkim and the establishment of the Sikkimese monarchy. The most popular states that in the 13th century, Guru Tashi, a prince from the Mi-nyak House in Kham in Eastern Tibet, had a divine revelation one night instructing

him to travel south to seek his fortunes. Guru Tashi settled down in the Chumbi Valley in Sikkim. In recent years a number of scholarly articles have been written on the history of Sikkim, which cast doubt over the validity of these stories.

In the history of Sikkim, in 1642, the fifth generation descendant of Guru Tashi, Phuntsog Namgyal was consecrated as the first Denjong Gyalpo or the Chogyal (king) of Sikkim by the three great Lamas who came from the north, west and south to Yuksom Norbugang in West Sikkim. The event, *Naljor Chezhi*, was as predicted by Guru Rinpoche some eight hundred years before. This historical gathering of the three virtuous lamas is called Yuksom, which in Lepcha means the 'Three Superior Ones'.

The chogyal, along with the three lamas proselytised the Lepcha tribes into Buddhism and annexed the Chumbi Valley, the present-day Darjeeling district and parts of today's eastern Nepal. In 1700 the Nepalese Gurkha Army invaded Sikkim, and took the former capital Rabdentse by storm.

Phuntsog Namgyal was succeeded by his son, Tensung Namgyal in 1670. The reign of the chogyal was peaceful and saw the capital being shifted from Yuksom to Rabdentse. Chadok Namgyal, the king's second wife's son, took over the throne from him in 1700. This outraged his elder half-sister Pendiongmü, who ousted him with the help of the Bhutanese. Chadok fled to Tibet where he remained in exile for ten years before returning and reclaiming his lost territory with the help of the Tibetans. His son Gurmed Namgyal succeeded him in 1717. Gurmed's reign saw many skirmishes between the Nepalese and Sikkimese. Phunstok Namgyal, the illegitimate child of Gurmed, succeeded his father in 1733. His reign was tumultuous as he was faced

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with attacks by the Bhutanese and the Nepalese who managed to capture the capital Rabdentse. Tenzing Namgyal, the next ruler of Sikkim, was a weak ruler, and his sovereignty saw most of Sikkim being appropriated by Nepal. The chogyal was forced to flee to Lhasa where he died in 1780. Tshudpud Namgyal, his son returned to Sikkim in 1793 to reclaim the throne with the help of China. Finding Rabdentse too close to the Nepalese border, he shifted the capital to Tumlong.

Remarkably, with the arrival of the British in neighbouring India, Sikkim allied itself with them as they had a common enemy – Nepal. The infuriated Nepalese attacked Sikkim with vengeance, overrunning most of the region including the Terai. This prompted the British East India Company to attack Nepal resulting in the Gurkha War in 1814. Treaties signed between Sikkim and Nepal – the Sugauli Treaty and Sikkim and British India – Titalia Treaty, returned the territory annexed by the Nepalese to Sikkim in 1817. Meanwhile the British were looking for a route to establish trading links with Tibet.

An offshoot of the ancient Silk Road through Sikkim meant that the kingdom was ideal as a transit route. A secondary reason for the establishment of links was to quell the growing Russian influence in Tibet. However ties between Sikkim and India grew sour with the taxation of the area of Morang by the British. In 1835, Sikkim was forced to cede the town of Darjeeling to the British on the condition that a compensation of Rs 35,000 be paid to him.

As a significant development, in 1849, two British doctors, Campbell and Hooker, ventured into the mountains of Sikkim unannounced and unauthorised by the Chogyal of Sikkim. The doctors were detained by the Sikkim government, which led to a punitive British expedition

against the Himalayan kingdom, in which the whole of Darjeeling district and Morang were annexed in 1861, although the kingdom continued to exist as an independent rump state centred around the capital at Gangtok.

The old Chogyal was forced to abdicate in favour of his son, Sidekong Namgyal in 1863. The Chogyals of Sikkim endeavoured to modernise their state in the succeeding decades, along with their army. A state visit to Darjeeling by Sidekong's half brother, Chogyal Thutob Namgyal in 1873 failed to yield such results, and he returned to Tumlong disappointed. In 1886, the British, interested in trade with Tibet, launched a brief expedition into Sikkim. The Tibetans occupied several of Sikkim's northern border forts, and the Chogyal and his wife were held prisoner by the British when they came to negotiate at Calcutta. In 1888, the Tibetans were defeated and northern Sikkim came under the rule of British India.

The British established new landholdings in Sikkim, but released the Chogyal only to have him captured again in 1891. In 1894, the capital was shifted to Gangtok. In 1895, the Chogyal was released, but the British governors in India reneged on an agreement – the Ten Clauses Agreement – which returned sovereignty to Sikkim. The governor of British India, Claude White, refused to return any sovereignty, and only let the Chogyal retain the judiciary of Sikkim.

In 1905, the Prince of Wales – the future King George V – arrived in Calcutta on a state visit during which he met the Chogyal. The two made an excellent acquaintance and the Crown Prince of Sikkim, Sidkeong Tulku was sent to study at Oxford University. When Sidkeong came to power, he arranged widened sovereignty for Sikkim from King George's government and endorsed sweeping reforms in

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his short rule as Chogyal, which ended in 1914. In 1918, Sikkim's independence in all domestic affairs was restored, and in the next decade she embarked on a policy to end social ills, outlawing gambling, child labour, and indentured service.

Sikkim had retained guarantees of independence from Britain when she became independent, and such guarantees were transferred to the Indian government when it gained independence in 1947. A popular vote for Sikkim to join the Indian Union failed and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru agreed to a special protectorate status for Sikkim. Sikkim was to be a tributary of India, in which India controlled its external defence, diplomacy and communication. A state council was established in 1955 to allow for constitutional government for the Chogyal, which was sustained until 1973.

Sino-India war took place in 1962. Although Sikkim was an independent country, skirmishes occurred at the Nathula Pass between Indian border guards and the Chinese soldiers. After the war, the ancient pass was shut down which was it reopened July 6, 2006.

In fact, the old ruler Tashi Namgyal died in 1963 after suffering from cancer. The last hereditary ruler, the Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal, ascended to the throne in 1965. Trouble began to brew for the crown even before the Chogyal assumed the throne, as Indian Prime Minister Nehru, who had carefully preserved Sikkim's status as an independent protectorate, died in 1964. Indira Gandhi, who became Prime Minister in 1966, would have little patience for maintaining an independent Sikkim or its monarchy. The chogyal, who responded to the increased pressure by drinking, was viewed by India as politically dangerous, especially after his wife, the American socialite

Hope Cooke, published a journal article advocating a return of certain former Sikkimese properties.

Remarkably, in early 1970 the anti-monarchy Sikkim National Congress Party demanded fresh elections and greater representation for the Nepalese. In 1973, anti-royalty riots in front of the palace led to a formal request for protection from India. India worried that an unstable Sikkim would invite Chinese to act on its claims that Sikkim was part of Tibet, and therefore part of China. The Indian government appointed a Chief administrator, B.S. Das, who effectively wrested control of the country away from the Chogyal. Frosty relations between the Chogyal and the elected Kazi (Prime Minister) Lhendup Dorji resulted in an attempt to block the meeting of the legislature. The Kazi was elected by the Council of Ministers which was unanimous in its opposition to the retention of the Monarchy. Matters came to a head in 1975 when the Kazi appealed to the Indian Parliament for representation and change of status to statehood. On April 14, 1975, a referendum was held, in which Sikkim voted to merge with the union of India. Sikkim became the 22nd Indian State on April 26, 1975.

On May 16, 1975, Sikkim officially became a state of the Indian Union and Lhendup Dorji became head of State (chief minister). This was promptly recognised by the United Nations and all countries except China. The position of Chogyal was thus abolished, ending the monarchy. In 1982, Palden Thondup succumbed to cancer in the United States.

### **Sikkim: A State**

The 1979 assembly election saw Nar Bahadur Bhandari elected Chief Minister of Sikkim. Bhandhari held on to win again in 1984 and 1989. In 1994, Assembly politician

Pawan Kumar Chamling became the Chief Minister of Sikkim. In 1999 and 2004, Chamling consolidated his position to sweep the polls. Sino-Indian relations were somewhat bruised in 2000 by an event in Sikkim which challenged China's longstanding claim of Sikkim as an independent country. The unusual event was the escape of Ogyen Trinley Dorje from Tibet to Dharamsala, India. Ogyen Trinley Dorje is one of the two rival claimants who seeks recognition as the 17th Karmapa, the head of the Black Hat branch of Tibetan Buddhism. The two claimants did battle in the Indian court system for control of the considerable funds collected by the 16th Karmapa for the restoration and maintenance of Rumtek Monastery, located in Gangtok, Sikkim.

The Chinese, who recognize Ogyen Trinley Dorje as the true Karmapa, were unhappy about the court outcome which awarded the monastery funds to the other rival. However, the Chinese government was in a quandary as to what to do about it, as any protest to India would mean an explicit endorsement that the high court of India holds jurisdiction over Sikkim. In 2003, with the thawing of ties between the two nations, Sikkim was finally recognised to be a part of India by China. The two governments also proposed to open the Nathula and Jelep Passes in 2005.

### **The People**

Native Sikkimese are the indigenous peoples of Sikkim, including Limbu, Lepchas and Bhutias, in contrast to Nepali people and Tibetan people in Sikkim.

Native Sikkimese have their own languages and scripts. Lepchas speak Lepcha and use Lepcha script; Bhutias speak Sikkimese, which is also referred to as Dranjongke.

From 1700 to 1706, when Chakdor Namgyal, the third

monarch of Sikkim ruled the Kingdom of Sikkim, most parts of Sikkim were under the invasion of Deb Naku Zidar, the king of Bhutan. The king of Sikkim went in exile into Tibet. The Tibetan people expelled the Bhutanese army, and called Chakdor Namgyal back to Sikkim. The invasion did not widely change the Sikkimese population.

In 1788, the Nepali Gurkha Army invaded Sikkim, and took Limbuana and the former capital Rabdentse by storm. The king of Sikkim went into exile in Tibet for a second time. In 1780, the 8th Dalai Lama stationed him in Chumbi Valley in Rènà/Rèrì zong/dzongkhag, today's Yadong County, to stay.

Currently, Lepchas are suffering from a feeling of inferiority, they won't concede they're Lepchas, on the contrary, Nepalis want to integrate them and tell you that they're Bhutias. The Lepcha language is hardly spoken except by older generations, too. The last Lepcha preserved village Dzongu is being damaged due to building dam.

### **The Land and Climate**

It is pertinent to note that thumb-shaped state is characterized by wholly mountainous terrain. Almost the entire state is hilly, with an elevation ranging from 280 metres (920 ft) to 8,585 metres (28,000 ft). The summit of the Kangchenjunga is the highest point which falls on the border between Sikkim and Nepal. For the most part, the land is unfit for agriculture because of the precipitous and rocky slopes. However, certain hill slopes have been converted into farm lands using terrace farming techniques.

Numerous snow-fed streams in Sikkim have carved out river valleys in the west and south of the state. These streams combine into the Teesta and its tributary, the Rangeet. The Teesta, described as the "lifeline of Sikkim",

flows through the state from north to south. About a third of the land is heavily forested.

In fact, the Himalayan ranges surround the northern, eastern and western borders of Sikkim in a crescent. The Lower Himalayas in the southern reaches of the state are the most densely populated. The state has 28 mountain peaks, more than 80 glaciers, 227 high-altitude lakes including the Tsongmo Lake, Gurudongmar and Khecheopalri Lake, 5 hot springs, and more than 100 rivers and streams. Eight mountain passes connect the state to Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal.

It is significant to note that Sikkim's hot springs are known for medicinal and therapeutic values. The most important hot springs are at Phurchachu (Reshi), Yumthang, Borang, Ralang, Taram-chu and Yumey Samdong. They have high sulphur content and are located near river banks. Some also emit hydrogen. The average temperature of the water in these hot springs is 50 °C, a fairly high.

From geological point of view, hills of Sikkim mainly consist of gneissose and half-schistose rocks, making their soil brown clay, and generally poor and shallow. The soil is coarse, with large amounts of iron oxide concentrations, ranging from neutral to acidic and has poor organic and mineral nutrients. This type of soil tends to support evergreen and deciduous forests. Most of Sikkim is covered by Precambrian rock and is much younger in age than the hills.

The rock consists of phyllites and schists and therefore the slopes are highly susceptible to weathering and prone to erosion. This, combined with the intense rain, causes extensive soil erosion and heavy loss of soil nutrients through

leaching. As a result, landslides are frequent, isolating the towns and villages from the major urban centres.

Now we come to climate of Sikkim

In fact, the climate ranges from sub-tropical in the south to tundra in the northern parts. The tundra-type region in the north is clad by snow for four months a year though the temperature drops below 0 °C (32 °F) almost every night. The peaks of north-western Sikkim are perpetually frozen. Most of the inhabited regions of Sikkim, however, witness a temperate climate, with the temperatures seldom exceeding 28 °C in summer or dropping below 0 °C in winter. The mean monthly temperature in summer is 15 °C. The state has five seasons: winter, summer, spring, and autumn, and a monsoon season between June and September. The average annual temperature for most of Sikkim is around 18 °C. Sikkim is one of the few states in India to receive regular snowfall. The snow line ranges from 20,000 feet in the north to 16,000 feet in the south. During the monsoon, heavy rains increase the possibility of landslides. The record for the longest period of continuous rain is 11 days. In the northern region, because of high altitude, temperatures drop below “40 °C (“40 °F) in winter. Fog also affects many parts of the state during winter and the monsoons, making transportation perilous.

### **Subdivisions**

Sikkim has four districts, each overseen by a Central Government appointee, the district collector, who is in charge of the administration of the civilian areas of the districts. The Indian army has control of a large territory, as the state is a sensitive border area. Many areas are restricted and permits are needed to visit them. There are eight towns and nine subdivisions in Sikkim.

The four districts are East Sikkim, West Sikkim, North Sikkim and South Sikkim. The district capitals are Gangtok, Geyzing, Mangan and Namchi respectively. These Four Districts are further divided into Subdivisions. "Pakyong" and "Rongli" are the subdivisions of the East District. "Soreng" is the subdivision of the West District. "Chungthang" is the subdivision of the North District. "Ravongla" is the subdivision of the South District.

### **Biodiversity**

It is significant to note that Sikkim is situated in an ecological hotspot of the lower Himalayas, one of only three among the Ecoregions of India. The forested regions of the state exhibit a diverse range of fauna and flora. Owing to its altitudinal gradation, the state has a wide variety of plants, from tropical to temperate to alpine and tundra, and is perhaps one of the few regions to exhibit such a diversity within such a small area. Nearly 81% of the area of Sikkim is under the administration of its forest department.

### **The Flora**

The flora of Sikkim include the rhododendron, the state tree, with a wide range of species occurring from subtropical to alpine regions.

Remarkably, Orchids, figs, laurel, bananas, sal trees and bamboo grow in the Himalayan subtropical broadleaf forests of the lower altitudes of Sikkim, which enjoy a subtropical-type climate. In the temperate elevations above 1,500 metres (4,900 ft) are Eastern Himalayan broadleaf forests, where oaks, chestnuts, maples, birches, alders, and magnolias grow in large numbers, as well as Himalayan subtropical pine forests, dominated by Chir pine. The alpine-type vegetation is typically found between an altitude of

3,500 to 5,000 metres (11,500 to 16,000 ft). In lower elevations are found juniper, pine, firs, cypresses and rhododendrons from the Eastern Himalayan subalpine conifer forests.

Higher up are Eastern Himalayan alpine shrub and meadows, home to a broad variety of rhododendrons and wildflowers. Sikkim has around 5,000 flowering plants, 515 rare orchids, 60 primula species, 36 rhododendron species, 11 oak varieties, 23 bamboo varieties, 16 conifer species, 362 types of ferns and ferns allies, 8 tree ferns, and over 424 medicinal plants. A variant of the Poinsettia, locally known as "Christmas Flower", can be found in abundance in the mountainous state. The orchid *Dendrobium nobile* is the official flower of Sikkim.

### **The Fauna**

It is pertinent to note that the rich fauna include the snow leopard, the musk deer, the Himalayan Tahr, the red panda, the Himalayan marmot, the serow, the goral, the barking deer, the common langur, the Himalayan Black Bear, the clouded leopard, the Marbled Cat, the leopard cat, the wild dog, the Tibetan wolf, the hog badger, the binturong, the jungle cat and the civet cat. Among the animals more commonly found in the alpine zone are yaks, mainly reared for their milk, meat, and as a beast of burden.

The avifauna i.e. birds of Sikkim consist of the Impeyan pheasant, the crimson horned pheasant, the snow partridge, the snow cock, the lammergeyer and griffon vultures, as well as golden eagles, quail, plovers, woodcock, sandpipers, pigeons, Old World flycatchers, babblers and robins. Sikkim has more than 550 species of birds, some of which have been declared endangered.

Sikkim also has a rich diversity of arthropods, many of which remain unstudied even today. As with the rest of India, the most studied group is that of the butterflies. Of approximately 1438 butterfly species found in the Indian subcontinent, 695 have been recorded from Sikkim. These include the endangered Kaiser-i-hind, Yellow Gorgon and the Bhutan Glory.

Now a look at the economy of the state.

Sikkim's gross state domestic product for 2004 is estimated at \$478 million in current prices. Sikkim's economy is largely agrarian. The British introduced terraced farming of rice, in addition to crops such as maize, millet, wheat, barley, oranges, tea and cardamom. Sikkim has the highest production and largest cultivated area of cardamom in India. Because of the hilly terrain, and lack of reliable transportation infrastructure, there are no large-scale industries. Breweries, distilleries, tanning and watchmaking are the main industries. These are located in the southern reaches of the state, primarily in the towns of Melli and Jorethang. The state has a high growth rate of 8.3%, which is the second highest in the country after Delhi.

In recent years, the government of Sikkim has extensively promoted tourism. As a result, the state revenue has increased 14 times since the mid-1990s.

A fledgling industry the state has recently invested in is gambling, including online gambling. A casino was opened in March 2009, the Casino Sikkim, and seven further casino licences are being considered by the state government. The Playwin lottery has been a commercial success and operates all over the country. In October 2009 the government of Sikkim announced plans to offer three online sports betting licences. Among the minerals mined in Sikkim are

copper, dolomite, talc, graphite, quartzite, coal, zinc and lead.

Remarkably, the opening of the Nathula Pass on 6 July 2006 connecting Lhasa, Tibet to India is expected to give a boost to the local economy, though the financial benefits will be slow to arrive. The pass, closed since the 1962 Sino-Indian War, was an offshoot of the ancient Silk Road, which was essential to the wool, fur and spice trade.

### **Transport and Communication**

*Rail:* The closest railway stations are Siliguri and New Jalpaiguri.

New Sikkim Railway Project has been launched to connect Rangpo town of Sikkim with Sevoke which is expected to complete in 2015.

*Air:* Sikkim does not have any airports or railheads because of its rough terrain, however, the first airport of the state is expected to be ready by 2011 in Pakyong, 30 km (19 mi) away from Gangtok. The closest airport, Bagdogra Airport, is near the town of Siliguri, West Bengal. The airport is about 124 km away from Gangtok. A regular helicopter service run by the Sikkim Helicopter Service connects Gangtok to Bagdogra; the flight is thirty minutes long, operates only once a day, and can carry 4 people. The Gangtok helipad is the only civilian helipad in the state.

*Road:* National Highway 31A and National Highway 31 together link Siliguri to Gangtok. The Sikkim National Transport plays bus and truck services. Privately run bus, tourist taxi and jeep services ply throughout Sikkim and also connect it to Siliguri. A branch of the highway from Melli connects western Sikkim. Towns in southern and western Sikkim are connected to the northern West Bengal

hill stations of Kalimpong and Darjeeling. The state is connected to China by Nathu La.

Now a look at population structure.

In fact, the majority of Sikkim's residents are of Nepali ethnic-national origin who arrived in the 19th century. The native Sikkimese consist of the Bhutias, who migrated from the Kham district of Tibet in the 14th century, and the Lepchas who are believed to have migrated from the Far East. Tibetans reside mostly in the northern and eastern reaches of the state.

Immigrant resident communities include the Biharis, Bengalis and Marwaris who own most of the shops in South Sikkim and Gangtok. Hinduism is the major religion in the state, followed by Buddhism. Sikkim has 75 monasteries, the oldest dating back to the 1700s. The Christians are mostly Lepcha people who were converted by British missionaries since the late 19th century. Among other minorities are Muslims of Bihari ethnicity and Jains. Though tensions between the Lepchas and the Nepalese escalated during the merger of Sikkim with India, there has never been any communal violence, unlike most other states.

Nepali is the lingua franca of Sikkim. Bhutia and Lepcha are also common. English and Hindi are also spoken and understood in most of Sikkim. Other languages include Dzongkha, Groma, Gurung, Limbu, Magar, Majhi, Majhwar, Nepal Bhasa, Rai, Sikkimese, Sherpa, Sunuwar, Tamang, Thulung, Tibetan, and Yakha.

It is pertinent to note that Sikkim is India's least populous state. In 2001 it had 540,851 inhabitants, with 288,484 males and 252,367 females. It is also one of the least densely populated states with only 76 persons per square

kilometre. Its growth rate is 32.98% (1991–2001). The sex ratio is 875 females per 1000 males. With 50,000 inhabitants, Gangtok is the state's only significant town. The urban population in Sikkim is 11.06%. The per capita income stands at 11,356, which is one of the highest in the country.

## **Culture**

The Sikkimese celebrate all major Hindu festivals such as Diwali and Dussera. Nepali festivals like Tihar and Bhimsen Puja are common. Losar, Loosong, Saga Dawa, Lhabab Duechen, Drupka Teshi and Bhumchu are Buddhist festivals. During the Losar (Tibetan New Year) most offices and educational institutions are closed for a week. Muslims celebrate Id-ul-fitr and Muharram. Christmas has also been promoted in Gangtok to attract tourists during the off-season.

Western rock music and Hindi songs have gained wide acceptance among the Sikkimese. Indigenous Nepali rock and Lepcha music are also popular. Common sports in Sikkim are Football and cricket. Hang gliding and river rafting have also been introduced in order to promote tourism.

Noodle-based dishes such as the thukpa, chowmein, thanthuk, fakthu, gyathuk and wonton are common in Sikkim. Momos, steamed dumplings filled with vegetable, buff (buffalo meat) or pork and served with a soup, are a popular snack. Beer, whiskey, rum and brandy are widely consumed. Sikkim has the third highest per capita alcoholism rate amongst all Indian states, behind Punjab and Haryana.

Like all states of India, the head of the state government is a governor appointed by the Central Indian Government. His/her appointment is largely ceremonial, and his/her

main role is to oversee the swearing in of the Chief Minister. The Chief Minister, who holds the real executive powers, is the head of the party or coalition garnering the largest majority in the state elections. The governor also appoints the cabinet ministers on the advice of the Chief Minister. Sikkim has a unicameral legislature like most other Indian states. Sikkim is allocated one seat in each of both chambers of India's national bicameral legislature, the Lok Sabha, and the Rajya Sabha. There are a total of 32 state assembly seats including one reserved for the Sangha. The Sikkim High Court is the smallest high court in the country.

### **Infrastructure**

Although roads in Sikkim are often exposed to landslides and flooding by nearby streams, the roads are significantly better than the equivalent roads of other Indian states. The roads are maintained by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), an offshoot of the Indian army. The roads in South Sikkim and NH-31A are in good condition, landslides being less frequent in these areas. The state government maintains 1857.35 km of roadways that do not fall in the BRO jurisdiction.

Sikkim receives most of its electricity from 19 hydroelectric power stations. It has achieved 100% rural electrification. Power also obtained from the National Thermal Power Corporation and Power Grid Corporation of India. However the voltage is unstable and voltage stabilisers are needed. Per capita consumption of electricity in Sikkim is 182 kWh. The state government has promoted biogas and solar power for cooking but these have received a poor response and are used mostly for lighting purposes. 73.2% of the total households have access to safe drinking water, and the large number of streams assures sufficient water supply.

Literacy in Sikkim is 69.68%, which breaks down into 76.73% for males and 61.46% for females. There are a total of 1157 schools, including 765 schools run by the State government, 7 central government schools and 385 private schools. Twelve colleges and other institutions in Sikkim offer higher education. The largest institution is the Sikkim Manipal University of Technological Sciences, which offers higher education in engineering, medicine and management. It also runs a host of distance education programs in diverse fields. There are two state-run polytechnical schools, Advanced Technical Training Centre (ATTC) and Centre for Computers and Communication Technology (CCCT) in Sikkim which offer diploma courses in various branches of engineering.

ATTC is situated at Bardang, Singtam and CCCT at Chisopani, Namchi. Sikkim University a central university, began operating in 2008 at Yangang, which is situated about 28 km from Singtam.

The southern urban areas have English, Nepali and Hindi dailies. Nepali language newspapers as well as some English newspapers are locally printed, whereas Hindi and English newspapers are printed in Siliguri. Important local dailies are the *Samay Dainik*, *Sikkim Express* (English), *Sikkim Now* (English), and *Himalibela*. The regional editions of English newspapers include *The Statesman* and *The Telegraph*, which are printed in Siliguri and available in the same day, as well as *The Hindu* and *The Times of India*, printed in Kolkata, which are received with a day's delay in the towns of Gangtok, Jorethang, Melli and Geyzing. *Himalaya Darpan*, a Nepali daily being published from Siliguri is one of the leading Nepali dailies in the region. The *Sikkim Herald* is an official weekly publication of the government.

Internet cafés are well established in the district capitals, but broadband connectivity is not widely available. Satellite television channels through dish antennae are available in most homes in the state. Channels served are the same available throughout India along with Nepali language channels. The main service providers are Dish TV, Doordarshan and Nayuma.

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