



India's North East

paradise unexplored

TRAVELLER'S COMPANION





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Passage to the North East

Embarking on a journey of India's remote eight states of the North East is a tumultuous but rewarding one. Though the Partition in 1947 was greatly responsible for the region's separation from India, recent years have seen a deep interest in its tourist potential. The infinite variety of its geographic setting, its topography, its varied flora and fauna and avian life, the history of its people and the variety of its ethnic communities and their rich heritage of ancient traditions and lifestyles, its festivals and crafts make it a holiday wonderland that's just begging to be discovered afresh. Discovering the North East states, including the partially opened up Sikkim, in the Eastern Himalayas, is a challenge - yet a romantic adventure in the best traditions of travel and discovery.....

Connected by an infinite chain of pearly threads, intricate as a spider's web, the North Eastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura offer visitors a rare feast - a kaleidoscopic fiesta that lures you with its magical richness and stunning variety. The raw natural beauty, rare orchids and butterflies, brightly painted monasteries, challenging rivers, intricately woven tribal shawls,



indigenous sports..... each one has its own special message to the traveller as he passes from one state to another - mesmerized by its dazzling variety and compelling appeal.

Spread over an approximate expanse of 2,65,000 sq km, the region's ecology and the lives of the people here have been shaped by the major rivers of the region, the Brahmaputra and the Barak, the serried ranges of its ancient mountains and the thick tracts of impenetrable jungle and, of course, those months of incessant rain. The population here remains predominantly tribal. But the region was not always so remote.

For centuries, the passes and valleys of the North Eastern region were the great crossroad of the movement of people, commerce and culture that linked India overland to east and southeast Asia. This great ethno-cultural frontier is a rich complex transition point of racial, religious and linguistic streams.

It is a unique bio-geographic frontier - the meeting point of Indic, Sinic and Malayasian-Burmese strains which have created a fabulous treasure house of faunal, floral and avian bio-diversity.



On the eastern border of Assam, north of the Brahmaputra lie the rich lands of **Arunachal Pradesh** and its vast network of ancient rivers and streams. It can be accessed from Tezpur and Dibrugarh in Assam. With its lush tea gardens and oil fields, **Assam** lies flush in the Brahmaputra valley, from the narrow strip of North Bengal. Nowgong is an excellent entry point for **Nagaland** (on to Kohima via Dimapur), but so is Jorhat. **Manipur** can be accessed from Dimapur while the hill station of Shillong is a convenient base for exploring **Meghalaya**. **Sikkim** can be accessed through the Teesta gorge from Siliguri in West Bengal's Dooars corridor which is integrally linked to the Greater North East.

The North East's amazing diversity makes it a holiday-destination for all seasons. But because of the torrential monsoon it's best to avoid the period between June-September. October to March are the finest months to explore this diversity at leisure. During peak winter you may have problems crossing the Sela Pass to Tawang, so opt to travel there around mid September-November and March-April. For accommodation, there are plenty of hotels in the big towns to choose from, but you will also find forest resthouses in most places.

ARUNACHAL PRADESH - MYSTERIOUS MAGICAL MYSTICAL

Early riser, Arunachal, the land of the rising sun, is the remotest and one of the loveliest regions, yet most scantily populated states in the entire North East. All this has added to the allure of this mysterious land.

Its very isolation has been a blessing in many ways, having protected it from the ills of over-development and its consequent problems. And it is for this very reason that Arunachal is such a unique holiday destination. Its haunting beauty has a magical charm that lures the visitor to imbibe of its natural beauty, tribal culture, craft traditions and splendid wildlife.

Arunachal shares borderlines with China (Tibet) in the north, Myanmar (Burma) in the east, Bhutan in the west and the states of Nagaland and Assam in the south. Its fertile lands are watered by 5 major rivers, primary amongst them being the River Siang, the mighty Brahmaputra of Assam.

Largest of all the North Eastern states (83,743 sq km), Arunachal is blessed by a delightfully variegated climate - perfect for holidays any time of the year. Almost 80 per cent of the state is under forest cover, which varies from the sub-tropical to the alpine in the upper regions of the northwest, where it is bordered by the Himalayan ranges. This vast canopy of rain-forest with its dynamic blend of an amazing plethora of flora and fauna is one of the world's 17 bio-diveristy heritage sites. Its serried peaks, running from north to south, are interspersed with rich valleys in whose hidden folds live her ancient tribes in their picturesque villages.

The first to be kissed by the morning sun, Arunachal is all set to blaze ahead on the tourist trail...





ASSAM - HOME OF THE BRAHMAPUTRA

Dominated by the mighty Brahmaputra River, which has carved out the deep cradle of its birth, Assam is one of the most advanced states in the North East. She is blessed with vast alluvial plains rich in forests and rolling tracts of paddy and tea, and oil from the vast depths of the earth. And though this wayward son of Mother Nature brings havoc in his wake during the monsoons, the Brahmaputra is much revered for the prosperity she brings to the land.

Cocooned between dramatic Himalayan foothills in north and the plateau and hilly terrain of Meghalaya in the south, Assam is one of the highest timber producers of the country. Her tea estates established by the British, produce over half of India's tea. Digboi has India's oldest and Asia's first oil refinery.

The most accessible of the North Eastern states, Assam was ruled for six centuries by the brave Ahoms (of the Shan tribe of Burma) from the 13th century, who successfully repulsed the Mughal invasions. They were also great patrons of the arts. You can still see some of their places, tanks and temples around Sibsagar. International visitors pour into her world-renowned **Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary**, one of the last frontiers for the pre-historic, one-horned rhino. The Project Tiger Reserve **Manas Wildlife Sanctuary** is a World Heritage Site. Assam is also home to the world's largest inhabited riverine island, **Majuli**.

MANIPUR - GRACEFUL CONTOURS

One of the loveliest, but lesser known holiday destinations in the North East is Manipur. This erstwhile royal state is slowly slipping into mainstream tourism from its sheltered environs amongst the blue-hued hills and is set to be one of the hottest tourist finds in India.

One of the oldest states in the North East, Manipur enjoys its own individual identity with vigorous enthusiasm. This is reflected in the martial arts of **Thang-ta** and **Sarit-Sarak**. Its artistic leanings are visible in its graceful **Ras Leela** dance form and intricate hand-woven shawls. The Meiteis (of Tibeto-Burman provenance) Manipur's primary populace, inhabit the fertile Imphal valley whose eastern periphery lies in the Chindwin-Irrawaddy basin. In the surrounding hills reside the Nagas in the north and its Kuki-Mizo populace to the south.

This Shangrila of the North East has a galaxy of natural wonders and cultural traditions to be enjoyed at leisure. Home of colourful people and dazzling rituals, myth and legends, lively festivals and an evocative classical dance form, martial arts and indigenous games, Manipur offers visitors a comprehensive diversity of tourist delights. The stunning environs of the **Loktak Lake** are a wonderful natural and cultural experience. Sundry wars in which the Manipuris played a role are commemorated in the INA museum and war memorials.

