

One of the most challenging, but rewarding trekking destinations present in India lies in the strikingly beautiful land of Sikkim en-route to the Goecha-La Pass which is situated at an altitude of 16000 feet. The trail starts at a small and quiet town of Yuksom, once the capital of Sikkim and is a refreshing change from the hustle and bustle traveler's encounter in Darjeeling.

The route to Goecha-La passes through the Kanchenjunga National Park which is spread over an area of 850 sq.km. Yet untouched by the effects of extensive exploration, The Kanchenjunga national park is home to some of the most exquisite animals in the world such as the Snow Leopard, Himalayan Black Bear, Tibetan Antelope, Flying Squirrel and Red Panda. Generously endowed with one of the richest floral and faunal biodiversity, the park has a beautiful mix of magnolias, rhododendrons and alpine forests that surround the trail as one treks through it. Also containing the splendid Zemu Glacier, the Kanchenjunga National Park is one of the major attractions of this trek.

The western boundary of the Kanchenjunga National Park gives way to the foothills of the majestic Kanchenjunga peak. On reaching this point one can see the trail getting steeper and ascending all the way to the beautiful, snow-crested peak of mount Kanchenjunga. The trail starts to get more adventurous at this point as with each successive step one can see the mountains getting closer and closer. The trail passes along a beautiful lake and through a bed of sand and snow until trekkers finally reach Goecha-La where a breath-taking view of the grandeur of nature awaits them. The Goecha-La trek is guaranteed to leave one with memories to cherish and keep for the rest of their lives.

Day 1: Arrival at New Jalpaiguri Station (NJP) / Bagdogra Airport (IXB) and transfer to Yoksum

The trek starts from the villages of Yuksom which once used to be the capital of Sikkim. A small and quiet village full of the richness and culture of the yesteryears. This is also the destination to buy all the supplies will be required for the long trek ahead.

Day 2: Yoksum to Sachen

The Goecha-La trek start from the just behind the Yoksum village after the forest check post. The journey begins with green fields for some meters after which one reaches the Rathong valley. The trail from here leads into a verdant alpine forest. The first bridge we encounter is the Phaw-kola and on observing the surroundings, you will notice that you are completely surrounded by trees and the lush foliage barely allows the sun rays through. It is preferable to carry a torch for such cases. The trail from the bridge enters the Kanchenjunga National Park which in itself is a treat for nature lovers. Moving along the trail, you will reach another bridge called the Tshushay across a series of waterfalls that meet the Rathong River. Another trek for 3 hours will get you to Sachen which has a small camping area where you will camp for the night. The silence accompanied by the soft gushing sound of the Perk waterfall will soothe your senses as you drift away to sleep after a long day.

Day 3: Sachen to Tshoka

The trail from Sachen is even and you have to walk for about 3km until you reach Prekchu Bridge. After this starts the real climb of the Goecha-La trek. As you begin to climb, the trail leads you to Bakhim in another 1.5 hours. Bakhim has a forest rest hut and a tea stall where you can relax and refresh yourself for a while. There is again a climb for an hour before you reach Tshoka at over 9700 feet. Rhododendron trees completely surround the area which adds to the Himalayan charm. There is a trekker's hut which is built by wood. There is also a monastery present which is slightly up hill. Early in the morning you can see Mount Pandim, Tenzing Khang, and Black Kabru from the camp site.

Day 4: Tshoka to Dzungri via Phedang

For most trekkers this is the main part of the Goecha-La trail. The first part of the trek is alongside the Rhododendron forest which is full of red Rhododendron trees that are a visual treat during the spring. Throughout the trek you feel the trail rise steeply and the log path gives way to a regular stony trail that climbs to Phedang in 30 minutes. Phedang is situated at an altitude of 12000 feet. There is a small hut where you stop for lunch as well as rest. You have to face another steep climb to Dzungri at a height of 12980 feet. Rhododendron trees can still be spotted along this trail though they become less dense and are interspersed with vibrant green meadows with a spectacular view of snow covered mountains in the backdrop. Dzungri is a welcome sight for the trekkers after the hard climb up to 12980 feet to Dzungri meadows.

Day 5: Dzungri to Dzungri Top

Dzungri top is the highest point from where you get a clear and panoramic view of the snow-covered peaks of the Singalila and Kanchenjunga range. The view of the sun rise from this point is surreal. The trekkers start early in the morning at the 4am with the Torah light to reach the top at 5am. Trekkers spend time watching the mountain changing colour from dark grey to a red hue as the sun rises. The rest of the day is kept for rest so that you can rejuvenate and recoup.

Day 6: Dzungri to Thansing via Kockchurang

Thansing is a meadow at the same altitude as a Dzungri and the trail from Dzungri to Thansing descends around 1000 feet to Kockchurang and then rises about 1000feet to Thansing.

Day 7: Thansing to Lamuney

The trek from Thansing to Lamuney starts early as you walk through meadows. The trek keeps getting more exciting as the majestic Himalayan Mountains keep coming closer.

Day 8: Lamuney to Goecha-La and back to Kockchurang

This is the longest day of the trek as you start early at 3am with the Torah light. As you keep

climbing higher the view of the Kanchenjunga keeps getting better. The trail to Goecha-La continues beside the Samiti Lake and beyond Mount Pandim. From this point you take a right and climb a little bit more to reach the view point from where you can see the sun rising above the mighty Himalayas. Take this time to leave your worries behind you and witness the mountain slopes glow as the first rays of the sun fall on them. Now you start your descent towards Zamathang. Zamathang is covered by sand with snow on top. From Zamathang, the climb to Goecha-La is about 2 hours. The dazzling view of snow-covered mountains, as you reach Goecha-La, shimmering in the morning light is bound to leave you speechless.

Day 9: Kockchurang to Tshoka

The trek back to Tshoka is a pleasant and even one at an altitude of 12000 feet. The trail passes across mountains and you will get a fantastic view of mount Pandim as you keep going. The trail passes through a forest filled with Rhododendrons before it reaches Phedang. The entire trek takes about 4 hours to complete and from Phedang it takes another 2 hours to descend to Tshoka.

Day 10: Tshoka to Yoksum via Bakhim and Sachen

This part of the trek is the least strenuous as you descend from Tshoka to Sachen. The last part of the route has a few hillock climbs before you reach Yuksom.

Day 11: Yoksum to New Jalpaiguri Station (NJP) / Bagdogra Airport (IXB)

The last part of this memorable trek will be the return to NJP station or to Bagdogra airport as the case may be. Take an early ride out of Yuksom to reach NJP by 5 or 6 in the evening.