

India – Birding and Wildlife Safari EXPLORING SIKKIM & ASSAM BY RIVERBOAT

This is a journey of adventure -- encompassing the incomparable spectacle and natural history of the great Himalayan highlands with the tropical diversity and abundant wildlife of the Assamese lowlands. The birding in Sikkim will take us up, down and around this picturesque mountainous region in small, comfortable vehicles. The riverboat cruise along the mighty Brahmaputra will be a dramatic contrast. Our boat is very comfortable, with great long views, wonderful food, and delightful (remote) villages to explore.



Your Mass Audubon Naturalist: Jerry Bertrand has been active in environmental science and conservation for over 30 years. His primary interest has been the preservation of habitat and species in marine, coastal, freshwater, and terrestrial ecosystems. Jerry has field experience on every continent and in every ocean except the Arctic. He was president of the Massachusetts Audubon Society for eighteen years. Jerry has been active in international wildlife conservation since 1969 and has traveled to over fifty countries in an official government capacity and to forty-five additional countries for nonprofit consulting and conservation work. He is currently on the board of Birdlife International and the National Audubon Society.

DAY TO DAY ITINERARY

Tue, March 13: Depart Boston USA

Depart Boston Logan by BA 214 at 8:30 PM.

Wed, March 14: En Route London – Kolkata (Calcutta)

Arrive London at 7:55 AM, and connect with BA 147, departing at 9:55 AM.

Thu, March 15: Kolkata

Arrive Kolkata early morning at 1:05 AM. Transfer to The Oberoi Grand hotel. Located in the heart of the city, this is an elegant, old-world-charm hotel that offers luxurious guest rooms and a fine choice of restaurants. You will have to rest during the morning, then have a program briefing over lunch. After lunch, we will explore the “City of Joy”. This evening, come together for a welcome gathering with cocktails and dinner. *The Oberoi Grand hotel, Kolkata. (D)*

Fri, March 16: Kolkata – Gangtok

We leave this morning to fly to Bagdogra, 9W 617, 12:10-1:10 PM. Lunch at Bagdogra airport, and then take a pleasant four-hour drive uphill to Gangtok, stopping to bird along the rivers enroute. We will stay

at the Elgin's Nor-Khill hotel. Known for its traditions, unchanged characteristics and ethnic ambiance, this is a fine example of Sikkim's architecture, and is set in serene surroundings and greenery. The garden is full of bulbuls and other local bird species. *Nor-Khill hotel, Gantok (B,L,D), 2 nights.*

Sat, March 17: Gangtok

Gangtok, which means "hilltop", occupies the west side of a long ridge flanking the Tanipul River. The scenery is spectacular and there are excellent views of the entire Kanchenjunga range from many points in the city. Located at an altitude of 5,840 feet above sea level, Gangtok has many important monasteries and Buddhist sites too. Today, we will bird in the surrounding areas, including some of the higher mountain passes. We will also find that birding around Tashi viewpoint and Tsuk-La-Khang (Royal Chapel) is good. *Nor-Khill hotel, Gantok (B,L,D)*

Sun, March 18: Gangtok – Martam

This morning, we will depart Gangtok with picnic lunch, and take a one-hour drive to Rumtek. The late Gyalwa Karmapa, head of the Kagyu Sect, built this magnificent monastery. It is now one of the most important Buddhist monasteries in all of India. While visiting, we will have the opportunity to look for overhead for some raptors, including Oriental honey buzzard, Himalayan griffon, and Common buzzard.

Near Rumtek, we will stop to visit the Fambong Lo Wildlife Sanctuary. The main vegetation here is a mix of oak, rhododendron, bamboo and ferns and can be a good place to see several species of laughing thrush including White-crested, Chestnut-crowned, Striated and Blue-winged Laughingthrushes. Red-faced Liochicla, Black-faced and Grey-sided Laughingthrushes may also be found. Small birds like Golden-spectacled and Whistler's Warbler, Fulvettas, Coal Tit, Wren Babblers and Redstarts are usually abundant.

Continue to Sang Martam birding enroute, we will overnight at Martam Village Resort, arriving here by late afternoon. The resort is set on a hillside with fine views overlooking a valley. Martam Village Resort, one of the 'five heritage houses of the Himalayas', "has a charming simplicity". *Martam Village Resort, (B,L,D)*

Mon, March 19: Martam – Ravangla

This morning, we'll drive up to the small town of Ravangla, perched on a saddle, continuing past a few miles, and stay at Mount Narsing Village resort. Situated on a hillside among scattered houses, this tented accommodation offers splendid views of the Ranjit valley and the snow-capped peaks of Mount Narsing and Kanchenjunga. This afternoon, we visit Damtang and Menam Wild Life Sanctuary. Verditer flycatchers, blue-fronted redstarts, grey bush chats, dark-throated thrush, blue-whistling thrush, green-backed tit and white-browed fantails are very common in this general area. The forests around Ravangla resound with the unmistakable calls of laughing thrushes, babblers, cuckoos and hill partridge. The rare Satyr Tragopan makes Menam a home, and the lucky can hear its breeding call from the higher reaches of Ravangla. *Mount Narsing Village resort*



Tue, March 20: Ravangla – Pemayangtse

Take a two-hour drive to Pemayangtse. Along the way we'll stop to see the only Bon Po monastery in Sikkim, the Yung Drung Kundruk Ling Bo monastery. Here you will see a small school where young monks chant their lessons. Continue to Pelling and stay at the Norbugang resort hotel. After an early lunch, we head for the sacred Khecheopari Lake at 6,000 feet. Undisturbed forests and reeds surround the lake. The path leading to the lake is good for tesias and wren-babblers, although both are heard more often than seen. Also seen here are mallard, goosander, bay woodpecker, golden-fronted leaf bird, slaty-backed flycatcher, Hodgson's redstart, chestnut-headed tesia, and little bunting.

The **Norbu Ghang Resort** is situated on the western face of a mountainside and is barely a minute's walk away from the quaint little hamlet of Pelling. The Resort commands a breath-taking view of Sikkim's protective mountain deity, Mt. Khangchendzonga and its lesser peaks. **Norbu Ghang Resort** offers modern rooms and aesthetically designed cottages set amidst landscaped greenery. All have private baths and a view of the mountains. **Norbugang Resort hotel (B,L,D), 2 nights**

Wed, March 21: Pemayangtse

Pemayangtse presents breathtaking views of the beautiful Singalila range. The important Pemayangtse monastery is a few miles from Pelling and is situated on a hilltop (7,000 feet) which is covered by moist temperate oak forests decorated with moss and lichens. The area is well wooded, and the moist forests hold maroon-backed and rufous-breasted accentors, green-tailed sunbirds, blue-fronted redstarts, brownish-flanked bush warblers, scarlet and long-tailed minivets, babblers, and laughing thrushes. Another good area to spot birds is on the ridge behind the nearby Sanga Choeling gumpa, which is the oldest gumpa in Sikkim. Here, you'll find the mountain hawk eagle, black eagle, Himalayan griffon, and barbets, woodpeckers, babblers, laughing thrush, warblers, blackbirds, robins and finch. **Norbugang Resort hotel. (B,L,D)**

Once situated on the main trade route between India and Tibet, Kalimpong, today, is a medley of diverse mountain people – the Nepalese, the Tibetans, the Bhutanese and Lepchas. The panoramic view of the Kanchenjunga Range from here is one of its significant highlights. Kalimpong is also famous for its monasteries, churches and a private library for the study of Tibetan and Himalayan languages and culture.

Thu, March 22: Pemayangtse – Kalimpong

This morning, we head southeast on a five-hour drive that takes us to Kalimpong, where we will stay at Silver Oaks hotel. Once the family home of a leading British jute magnate for over 40 years, it was later acquired by the Elgin Heritage Hotels group and restored over a five-year period to an elegant hotel with all modern comforts. Late afternoon, we will have the option of visiting the Lepcha museum, which exhibits manuscripts and the effects of the Lepchas who were the original people of Kalimpong. For those who prefer, the Raja Dorja Market is a special market for traditional items and makes for an interesting visit. **Silver Oaks hotel (B,L,D), 2 nights.**

Fri, March 23: Kalimpong

Today, we'll take a full day's excursion with picnic lunch to Lava, and also see birds in the neighboring Paktham forest and Loylegaon areas. Lava has been on the birding map for many years, and the mid-altitude forest near the village supports a number of eastern Himalayan specialties. Lava, at an altitude of 7,200 feet and 25 miles from Kalimpong, has extensive forest. We will bird along the road looking for white-browed bush robin, winter wren, and gold crest and maroon-backed accentor. **Silver Oaks hotel (B,L,D)**

Sat, March 24: Kalimpong – Board Sukapha River Boat

This morning, we take a pleasant three-hour drive downhill to Bagdogra, and fly to Guwahati on Jet Airways flight 9W 602, 12:40-1:30 PM. We'll be met at Guwahati airport and taken on a short sightseeing tour of the city to see Nilachal Hill and the Kamakhya temple (famous for its tantric rites)

The "Sukapha" is a brand new twin-engine steel-hulled passenger boat. She has been converted to provide 12 generous-sized double/twin-bedded air-conditioned cabins, with en suite shower and WC. All cabin accommodation is on the upper deck, as is a bar and sitting area. A dining room is on the lower deck, while a top sundeck offers additional open-air seating and sun loungers. Food on board is a mixture of Assamese (milder than most Indian foods) and continental cuisine. Wines, beer and spirits are available.

We will visit the poignant Commonwealth War Graves cemetery. Finally, walk through a local market before embarking on your cruise vessel. We set sail and cruise for about an hour and a half upstream to Kurua on the north bank, where we berth for the night. **Sukapha River Boat (B,L,D)**

Sun, March 25: On board Sukapha River Boat

The day is spent cruising upstream, with hills rising on either side. Battling against strong currents, we reach an idyllic stop at Ganesh Pahar, where we can explore a delightfully serene hinterland lying under jungle-covered slopes.

Mon, March 26: On board Sukapha River Boat

Leaving the hills behind, we enjoy our first taste of the wilderness experience, where sand banks like icebergs line either side of the mighty River Brahmaputra. We may make a short stop to visit a village on the banks. We moor for the night in a lunar landscape of sand islands, with hopefully the Himalayas in view and providing a contrasting backdrop in the distance.

Tue, March 27: On board Sukapha River Boat (Orang National Park)

Rising early, we take to our country boat for a cruise up a side stream, this time into the Orang National Park. Here in this rarely visited park we mount elephants and ride through forest and grassland looking for rhino, deer and other wildlife. Orang National Park is rich in avifauna, and is an important habitat of the Bengal florican in Assam. The estimated population is about 30-40. Other birds seen here are the spot-billed pelican, black-necked stork, greater adjutant stork, lesser adjutant, woolly-necked stork, ruddy shelduck, gadwall, mallard, pintail, Pallas's fishing eagle, and a number of others including forest and grassland birds. Returning to Sukapha, we cruise upstream to a little trading settlement at Singri Ghat, its main street running alongside a tea garden.

Wed, March 28: On board Sukapha River Boat (Nameri National Park)

We cruise on this morning past Tezpur, and take our country boat on a day's excursion to cruise upstream to Nameri National Park. The park sprawls across wild dense forests on the foothills of the eastern Himalayas. Its hilly backdrop and thick evergreen trees and rivers make for a beautiful landscape. The park is well protected by the Bhorelli River on one side and Balipara Forest Reserve on the other. Along with abundant wildlife, the park is a haven for birdwatchers harboring the endangered white winged duck, four species of hornbill and the scarlet minivet, to name a few.

Thu, March 29: On board Sukapha River Boat (Kaziranga National Park)

We continue upstream, passing below a seemingly endless new bridge across the vast width of the riverbed, to moor at Steamer Ghat, a lovely beach backed by jungle-covered hills. In the afternoon, we drive to Kaziranga's western range for a jeep safari and to scan the wilderness from an observation tower. Kaziranga is a world heritage site, and with a population of well over 1,000 rhinos it is the best place in the world to see these beasts. There are also good populations of tiger, wild elephant, sambar, swamp deer, hog deer, wild pig and many other species.

Fri, March 30: On board Sukapha River Boat (Kaziranga National Park)

Disembark pre-dawn and drive to Kaziranga's central range for an early morning elephant ride - the best way to get really close to the rhino and other animals. After breakfast at a lodge, we walk through terraced tea gardens and past a Karbi tribal village, and then drive to a Mising tribal village, with their distinctive houses raised on piles.

Kaziranga National Park is a birding paradise. In a landscape dominated by noisy red-breasted parakeets, what strikes you about Kaziranga is the large size of the birds and beasts. The grassland raptors that can be seen on a safari make a remarkable experience. These include the oriental honey buzzard, black-shouldered kite, black kite, Brahminy kite, Pallas's fishing eagle, white tailed eagle, grey-headed fishing eagle, Himalayan griffon, etc. Large numbers of migratory birds descend on the lakes and marshy areas during winters, including graylag geese, bar-headed geese, ruddy shelduck, gadwall, falcated duck, red-crested pochard and northern shoveller.

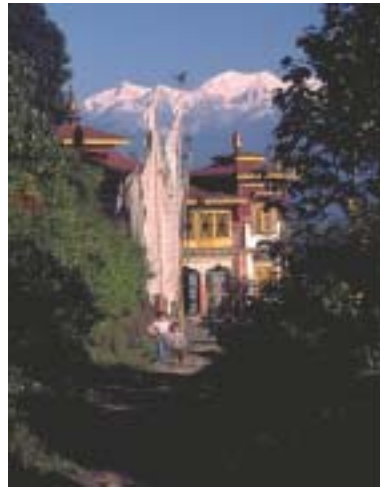
After lunch, either take a jeep safari in the little visited eastern range before returning to the boat or return directly to Steamer Ghat, visiting a delightful Assamese village en route, or walk along a path alive with butterflies to a solitary temple on the riverbank.

Sat, March 31: Disembark Sukapha River Boat - Kolkata

Take the morning at leisure. We'll disembark the Sukapha river boat at about 11:00 AM, and drive to Tezpur airport. Fly to Kolkata, IC 7215, 12:30-2:50 PM. Stay at the **Oberoi Grand Hotel**. The afternoon is at leisure. Tonight, we'll gather for a grand farewell cocktail get-together and dinner. **Oberoi Grand Hotel. (B,L,D)**

Sun, April 1: Kolkata –Boston

Depart Calcutta by BA146 at 7:35 AM. Arrive Boston via BA215 at 6:30 PM.



PROGRAM PRICE : Doubles, per person: **\$5,490**

Single room supplement: \$1800

This program must have at least 13 paying participants to operate.

Program price includes:

- Accommodations at hotels given in the itinerary.
- All meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner) during the program dates, from arrival India till departure. Meals are served with bottled mineral water/sodas and coffee/tea.
- Transfers and meeting services right through the program dates provided by IVAT staff. Porter charges are also included.
- Overland transportation in very comfortable air-conditioned coaches in Kolkata, and Qualis SUV-type cars for 3 to 4 persons each in the Bagdogra-Sikkim region and during land excursions from the Sukapha river boat.
- Seven nights cruise on River Brahmaputra on board *RV Sukapha*.
- Visits to places of interest, wildlife and nature parks, birding excursions, and sites as given in the itinerary, conducted by qualified English speaking naturalists and guides.
- Excursions by jeep, boat and elephant back during wildlife safaris operated by *RV Sukapha*.
- Three domestic flights in economy class: Kolkata to Bagdogra, Bagdogra to Guwahati, and Tezpur/Guwahati to Kolkata.
- Entrance fees to parks and monuments, including still camera fees.

- Exclusive group welcome and farewell cocktail get-togethers served with dinner.
- Service fees for a full time accompanying IVAT travel director
- Dr. G. Bertrand, as the representative from the Massachusetts Audubon Society.
- Gratuities to all service provider staff.
- All taxes, tolls, parking fees and service tax.
- Pre-program Book: Information on the program, accommodations, *RV Sukapha*, facilities and meals, group and independent travel instructions, packing recommendations, baggage, and requirements regarding passports, visas, health and safety considerations. It will also have information on India and parks, birding and wildlife, and a suggested reading list.

Program price does not include:

- International airfare. However, we will offer participants a group fare from Boston. This rate will be contracted 10 months before the date of the program. Both economy and business class options will be offered.
- Passport and visa fees.
- Travel insurance costs. Although medical evacuation coverage is included.
- All personal expenses such as laundry, drinks, telephone and fax services, and all other services not specifically mentioned as included in the itinerary.
- Video camera fees.
- Medical expenses.

Program Registration: To reserve space on this program, participants should complete a Program Registration Form, and enclose a check for \$1,000 per person, payable to *Mass Audubon Society* The balance amount payable by check is due November 13, 2006.



Terms and Conditions

RESPONSIBILITIES AND INDEMNIFICATIONS

International Ventures and Travel Inc., Massachusetts Audubon Society, and/or their affiliated agents (hereinafter called the Program Provider) are only responsible for making arrangements for all transportation, hotels and matters of tour operations stated in the itinerary connected with this program (hereinafter called the Program, which includes the main program, pre and post tours) and does not represent or act as agent for transportation carriers, hotels and suppliers of services.

The Program Provider assumes no responsibility for loss, damage, injury, accident, delay or other irregularity, expense or liability caused by the defect of any vehicle or negligence or default of independent contractors, their employees, agents, or representatives engaged in providing services in connection with the Program or for losses, expenses or delays arising from sickness, pilferage, labor disputes, machinery breakdown, quarantine, government restraints, war, acts of terrorism, weather conditions or such other causes. All such losses or expenses shall be borne by the participant.

Baggage and personal effects are the sole responsibility of the owners at all times. It is understood that air, boat, ship or train charters and tickets when issued shall constitute the sole contract between the passenger and carrier concerned. The liability for excess baggage as enforced by air, boat, ship or train travel providers is the sole responsibility of the traveler.

All services and arbitrations are subject to the laws of the country in which they are rendered.

As a condition to acceptance, it is understood that the participant has read the itinerary for the Program and recognizes and accepts any risks thereof and hereby agrees for and on behalf of himself or herself and his or her heirs, executors and administrators to abide by the conditions set forth above, and to release and hold harmless the Program Provider, or any of them, and their directors, governing board members, officers, agents, licensees, representatives, heirs, executors, administrators, successors and assigns from any and all liability, claims and demands, however caused, for delays, damage, loss, injury or death, in relation to the Program, and for loss of or damage to his or her property, however occurring, during any portion of, or in relation to the Program.

Cancellation by Participant: We hope participants do not have to cancel. But if for any reason they do, they should inform us immediately in writing and return any tickets they received from us. The following cancellation charges shall apply: Cancellation made by November 13, 2006 results in a full refund less an administrative fee of \$200 per person. Cancellation made between November 14 and January 13, 2007 results in a cancellation fee of \$500 per person. Cancellation made after January 14, 2007 results in a cancellation fee of \$1,000 per person, plus any losses incurred by IVAT on resale of reservations, and cancellation fees imposed by suppliers and airlines, etc. These losses vary with days remaining, and can be very high just prior to departure.

Health: In order to fully enjoy the Program, participants should be in reasonably good health. Participants will be required to walk on uneven ground and uphill at elevations up to 8,000 feet, climb stairs at some monuments/sites and stand/walk while visiting sites. Participants should consult CDC notifications and take the advice of their physician.

Documents Required: A passport, valid for at least six months after the Program, and a tourist visa for India with an endorsement to visit Sikkim is required.



Registration

Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____ Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____
Passenger Name (1) Passenger Name (2)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone: Day _____ Evening _____ E-mail _____

- Please reserve space for _____ person (s) on the program -- sharing one room/cabin configured with ONE DOUBLE/KING BED or TWO TWIN BEDS.
- I would like single room/cabin accommodations. I will pay the single room supplement price.

OR

- I would like to share a room/cabin. I understand that if a room companion cannot be found, I will be offered a single room and, if accepted, I will be charged the single room supplement price.
- I am a SMOKER/NON-SMOKER.

International Flight Arrangements:

- I/WE wish you to make round trip international flight bookings in Economy Class/Business Class on MAS program group flights departing from Boston.
- I/WE wish you to make separate return air bookings from _____ to Kolkata (CCU) India in Economy Class/Business Class. Please call me to discuss schedules and travel rates.
- I/WE wish to make our own international flight arrangements. I/WE will call you to confirm that international flights booked arrive and depart India on the correct dates and times.

Enclosed is a check for \$_____ (\$1,000 per person) made payable to *Mass Audubon*, to reserve _____ space(s) on this program. I/WE understand that to secure this reservation, the balance is payable by November 13, 2006.

Signature _____ Date _____ Signature _____ Date _____

Signature _____ Date _____ Signature _____ Date _____

Thank you! To reserve your space, send your check with this form, to:
Mass Audubon Travel, 208 South Great Road, Lincoln, MA 01773

