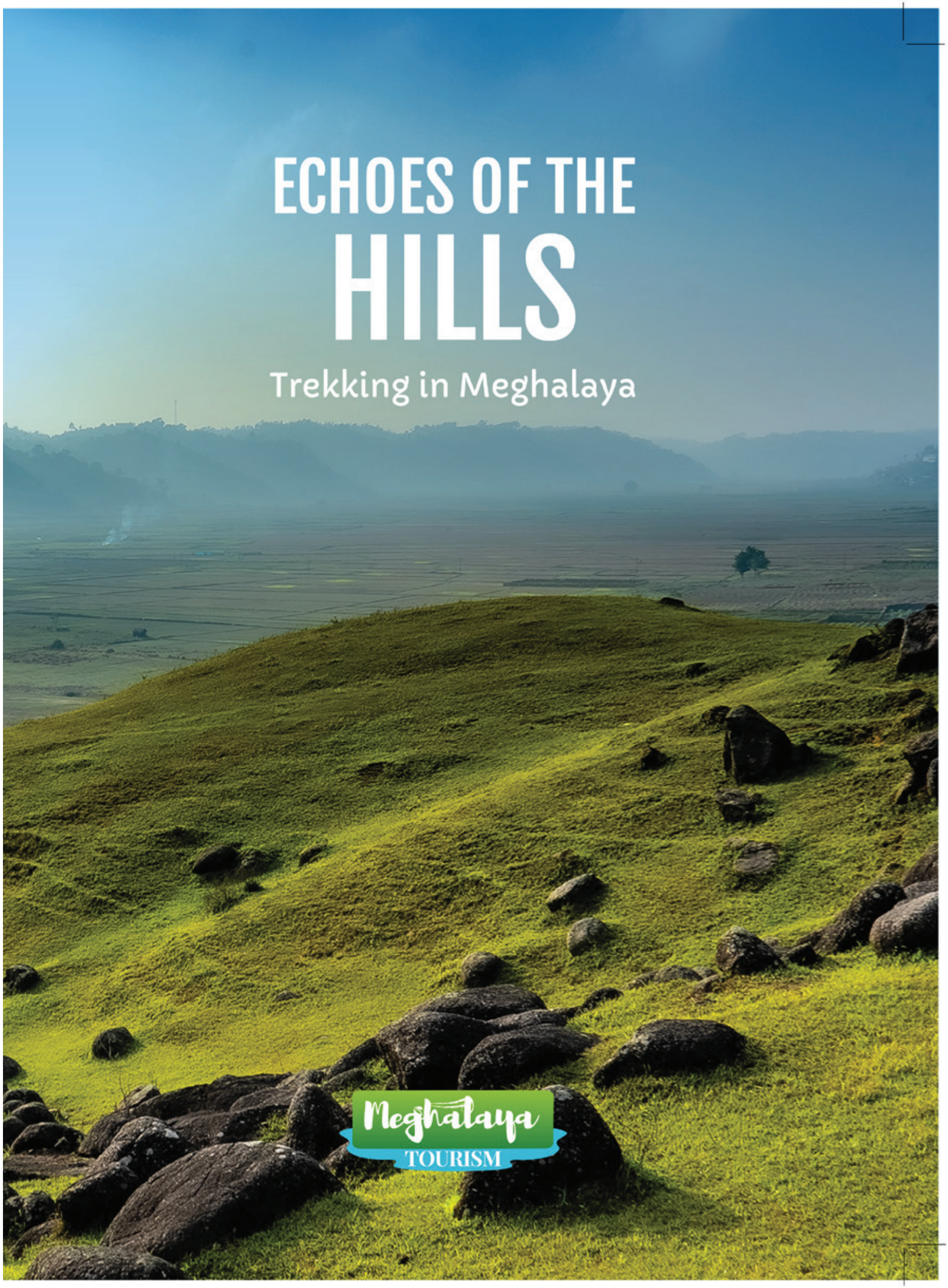
ECHOES OF THE
HILLS
Trekking in Meghalaya
Meghalaya
TOURISM

Trek The Himalayas
Safest & Trusted Adventure Provider

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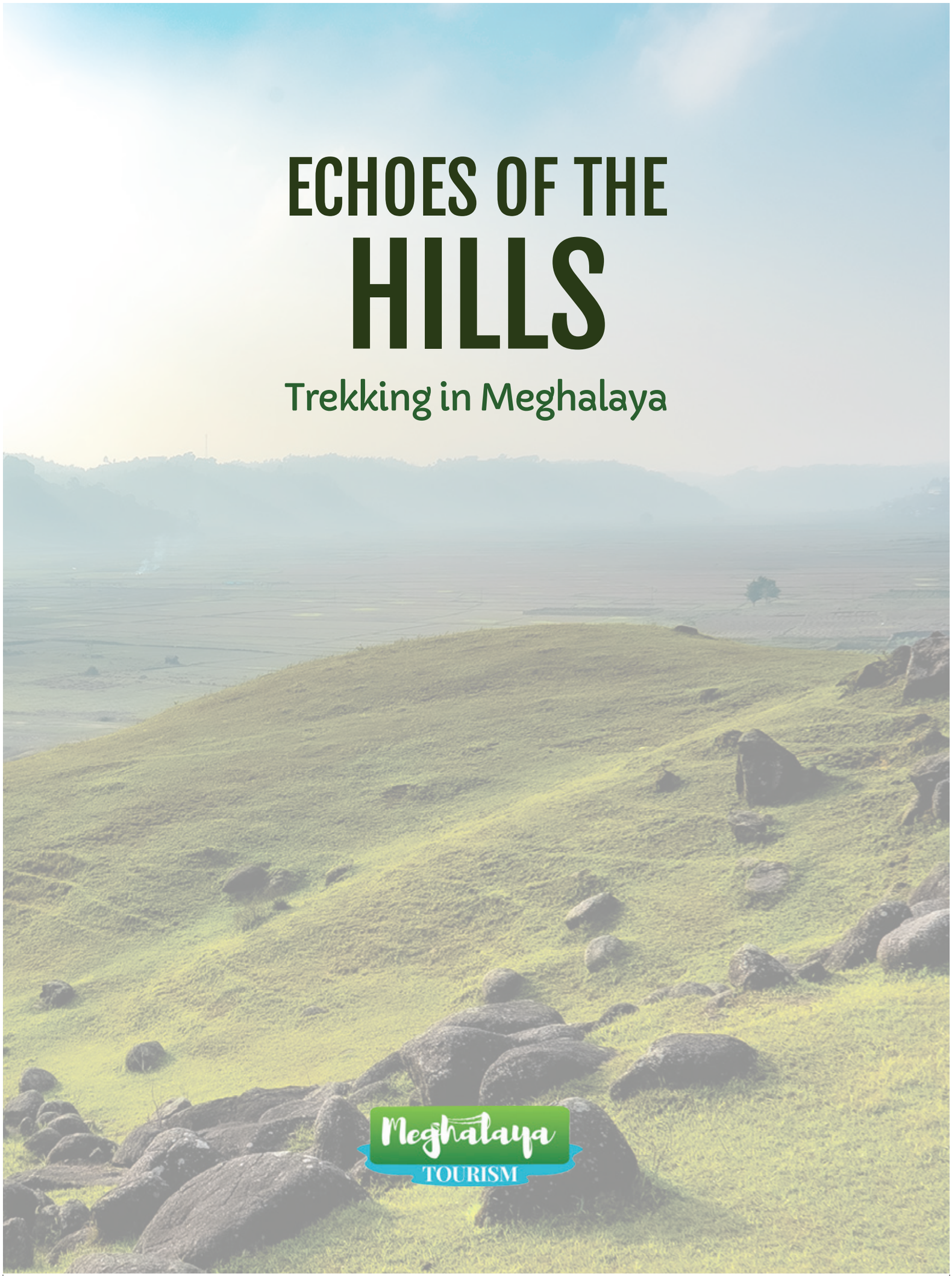
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I would like to congratulate the entire team of *Echoes of the Hills: Trekking through Meghalaya's Valleys* for their endeavours which has led to such a wonderful expression of Meghalaya's natural beauty and cultural heritage. In the world today, fuelled by the desire for urban opportunities and aided by the tools of technology, traditional ways of living are on the decline everywhere. While this might not be a big concern in Meghalaya, this is why, when the project that eventually produced this book was being conceptualised, our aim was to create more than just a guide to discovering more of Meghalaya's famed trekking routes. We wanted to present unknown facets of our culture and the proud traditions of life in our villages that the world would love to come and experience while they are still thriving in our villages.

This book, *Echoes of the Hills*, presents both new and old trekking routes that will allow visitors to the state to experience the ways of living that have guided the various tribes since the dawn of our memories. This land, and its legends, have shaped its people in deeply enriching ways, and the hope is that it will help visitors feel inspired enough to seek out that enrichment for themselves.

The efforts of the project team have resulted in other endeavours like the creation of a mobile app for trekkers coming to Meghalaya, which will help boost the tourism sector in Meghalaya. Our sincere hope is that this will give residents of the state an opportunity to grow as they present their culture to the outside world. The impact of this is something that will benefit all Meghalayans in the generations to come.

I'd like to thank the team who helped made *Echoes of the Hills* a reality and hope that their efforts get all the success they deserve.

Shri Conrad K. Sangma
Chief Minster, Meghalaya

Meghalaya is no different. Guests are welcomed with a smile and kwai, our signature combination of betel leaf, lime paste and areca nut, which is extended to all guests regardless of status or station. This simple but powerful symbol speaks volumes of the egalitarian approach of Meghalaya's tribespeople. By ensuring a wide-ranging and inclusive coverage of the various tribes in our state, this ethos has been captured beautifully by the team that made *Echoes of the Hills: Trekking through Meghalaya's Valleys*, a book that shows visitors how best to gently walk through our lands and lives.

The Tourism Ministry is very excited and proud of this achievement because as an archive and aid, it has no precedent or parallel in our state. There is also a mobile app on these trails that has been created to provide greater access to this content. Combined with the publication of this book, this will help boost Meghalaya's image and make more people aware of the wonders of our state. This will provide a big boost to tourism both in terms of the profile of guests that we will welcome as well as the opportunities that have been created in the villages along these thirty trails and treks. This is something that we are eager to see and will work hard to ensure that the benefits will enhance the lives of those who live along these trails.

I would like to thank the entire team behind *Echoes of the Hills* for making something so momentous and beautiful with all their hearts and ensuring that visitors will be able to come to Meghalaya feeling the same way.

Bah Paul Lyngdoh
Tourism Minister, Meghalaya

The Department of Tourism Meghalaya has long needed a showcase for the richness and diversity of the state's people, cultures, lands, and the flora and fauna that thrive on them, and this book has filled that need.

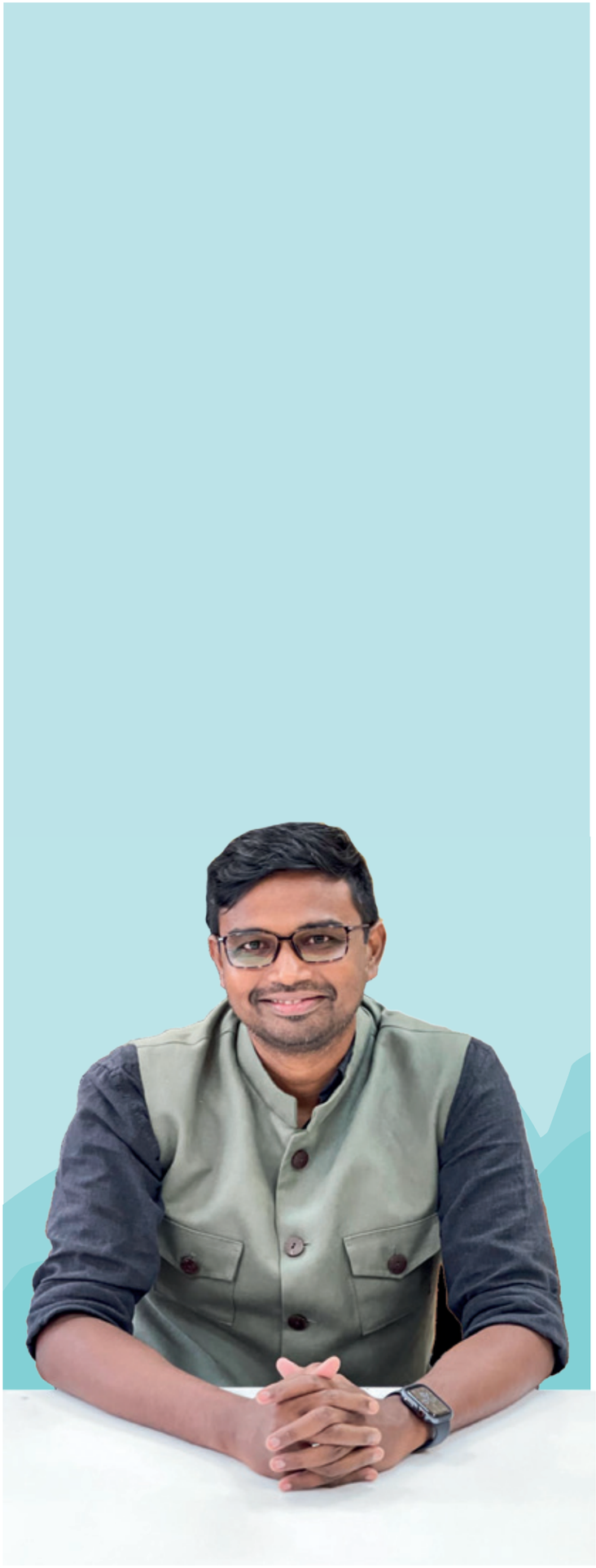
When we first started working with the field team, no one could have predicted the challenges we would face. A lot of these trails had never been professionally mapped before and even for the more popular treks, we didn't have a single exhaustive resource that could help visitors to Meghalaya plan their trips with more confidence.

Working with the project team that brought *Echoes of the Hills: Trekking through Meghalaya's Valleys* to life was akin to winning a championship after we'd pooled together all our talents over the last few months. Watching the book take shape has proved to be the ultimate reward for the challenges that we've faced. Together, I'm sure that this book, with its accounts of the legends of the past and the adventures of the present, will be a grand success.

I would like to commend the team for covering the remotest corners of the state on foot and uncovering places of such wonder in such detail. They have shown exemplary dedication in returning with wonderful stories and images while dealing with challenging terrain and often inclement weather, and their efforts will ease the path for generations of trekkers who will surely follow in their footsteps.

Thank you and all the best!

Dr Vijay Kumar D, IAS
Commissioner and Secretary



I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to everyone behind this book titled *Echoes of the Hills: Trekking through Meghalaya's Valleys*. Excellent photography, particularly from some of the more remote locations in the state, backed by thorough research and engrossing storytelling, have helped this labour of love come to life.

The team has visited the communities in Meghalaya's Khasi, Jaiñtia, and Garo Hills while on their travels. I'm hoping that the written and visual content will inspire tourists and trekkers to come explore the breathtaking landscapes of Meghalaya.

We hope through this book, trekking and other soft adventure tourism activities will find the appropriate support and market for the wide range of tourist products that our state has to offer. This will benefit local residents, local tour operators, and other regional stakeholders.

I have little doubt that *Echoes of the Hills* will do much to advance tourism in our state. In the near future, we intend to develop additional trekking routes and trails for all types of guests.

Shri Cyril V. Darlong Diengdoh, IAS
Director, Tourism

WELCOME TO MEGHALAYA

If you ever get asked 'Kumno?' by a local in Meghalaya, don't be at a loss for words. They are only asking, in a pleasing, musical way how you are. The correct way to respond would be to say 'Kumne' which means 'I'm well'. This warm greeting embodies the spirit of the people of Meghalaya and is the perfect welcome to a walk in the clouds.

The History of Meghalaya

The history of mankind is the history of migration, and Meghalaya is no exception. The Khasi and Garo tribes are considered some of the earliest settlers in this area. Humans have lived in these parts for many millenia and even today, the farmers here practice jhum cultivation, also known as slash-and-burn cultivation, and which is largely regarded as the first transition from hunting/gathering to an agrarian way of life. In this method, cultivators clear the trees and vegetation from a patch of land, cultivate crops on it for some time, and move on to clear another patch of land, allowing the older patch to regenerate. The Khasi call the method 'thang shyrti' or 'thang bun'.

This way of living off the land has continued largely unchanged for centuries as Meghalaya entered the modern age. The modern history of the state is as interesting as its ancient one. The hills that act as a natural barrier against the monsoon have also been a barrier to exploration, especially from the south. The hills lie right between the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam and the plains of Bangladesh, and it wasn't until the British in the early 1800s that serious efforts were made to establish (trade) routes between the two places.

Davis Scott, the commissioner of Assam for the East India Company, helped set up a mule route nearly a hundred kilometres long between Assam and Bangladesh. This helped merchants and villagers travel and trade more freely across the two countries. It also allowed missionaries easy access to the villagers, marking the advent of Christianity in these parts. However, Tirot Sing, a chieftain of the Khasis, was opposed to the actions of the civil administration and he waged war on the British for four years before being captured and defeated. Today, Tirot Sing is honoured as one of Meghalaya's most valiant sons. And while David Scott remains largely unknown outside the region and trekking circles, some treks in this book trace the steps of both men.

By the mid-1800s, the British had political control over the region but didn't interfere with life here for the next hundred-odd years. This meant that while Christianity was able to take root amongst the local population, the age-old ways and beliefs of the tribals also sustained into modern India.

In 1936, SP Chatterjee, one of the leading figures in Indian geography, coined the name Meghalaya from 'Megh' meaning 'clouds', and 'Alaya' meaning 'abode' to give a name to the region. Meghalaya was formed from two districts of the then Assam state—the Khasi and Jaiñtia Hills and the Garo Hills. On 21 January 1972, Meghalaya was formed and attained statehood and since then, it has been the home of the clouds.

The Land

Hills define Meghalaya. Across the state, they can be broadly classified as the Khasi Hills, Garo Hills, and Jaiñtia Hills, each of which is named for the tribal group residing on the eponymous hills. From east to west, the hills roll on, mostly carpeted in lush green forests that occasionally open up into undulating meadows. To the north of the state, the terrain eases into what is known as the Shillong Plateau. The monsoon sweeps in from the plains of Sylhet in Bangladesh to the south and when faced with the formidable hills of Meghalaya, it starts to drop its precious cargo to make its way inland. This results in the state getting

unusually heavy rain through the monsoon, particularly in places like Sohra (popularly known as Cherrapunji), which is perched right on top of the some of the steepest hills in the region. Small wonder then, that Sohra was once known as the wettest place on Earth.

Parts of Meghalaya receive in excess of 10,000 mm of rain every year, with several rainfed rivers snaking their way across the inclines of the state. This nurtures thriving woodlands teeming with life and has led to deep gorges being cut out by these rivers over time. Many rivers, undaunted in their journey to the sea, also plunge off Meghalaya's cliffs, creating some of the highest, and most dramatic-looking, waterfalls in India.

The rains also have another interesting effect on the terrain. Centuries of the wind and rain, combined with the ceaseless flows of the rivers, have helped carve out numerous caves and cave systems. Many caves in Meghalaya remain largely unexplored, while those that have been investigated reveal astonishing wonders. Among them, Meghalaya boasts some of the largest caves in India, notably the impressive Krem Liat Prah cave. The relative remoteness of these caves means several species of flora and fauna are still being discovered, like the *Neolissochilus pnar*, the world's largest species of cave fish discovered in the Jaiñtia Hills in 2019.

The People

Meghalaya is home to many tribes, most of which are sub-groups of the three main tribes of the land—the Khasi, Garo, and Jaiñtia. There are also smaller tribes that stand on their own like the Hajong, Koch, Rabha, Boro, and Mann.

While a large population of the state follows Christianity, they still remember and honour their animist ancestors. This is something that can be seen in the care with which they treat the monoliths across the state. These stones take the form of menhirs and dolmens and mark the resting place of both men and women. However, they could also be a memorial to an achievement like a martial victory. Nartiang, a village in the Jaiñtia Hills, has the largest, and tallest, collection of such monoliths in the state, but similar structures dot the landscape anywhere you'll walk or drive in Meghalaya. Even though the custom of erecting dolmen is now followed only by small groups that still practise traditional religions, the Khasi, regardless of their faith, respect all memorial structures and consider it a grave offense to move, destroy or desecrate them.

English is the official language and is widely spoken in urban centres, while Khasi and Garo are the other main languages. An aspect of Khasi that an English speaker might find fascinating is that its script is based on the alphabet they know, but it has only twenty-three letters. Khasi was an oral language with no script of its own until 1841, when a Welsh missionary named Thomas Jones arrived in Sohra and wrote the alphabet in the Latin script for the first time, modifying it for phonetic accuracy.

Culture

All cultures have unique facets and aspects, but the three main tribes of Meghalaya have a cultural practice that is found in few other communities across India—the matrilineal structure of their families. Simply put, this is a system in which the woman is the custodian of the family. After their wedding, her husband moves into her home. Their children trace their lineage through the mother's bloodline and take her clan's name as theirs. Additionally, the mother's ancestral property is passed down to the khun khatduh (youngest daughter) of the house, who usually continues to live in it even after she gets married.

Thanks to the abundant rain that Meghalaya receives, its landscape is crisscrossed with rivers and dotted with lakes and ponds. Not surprisingly, fishing is not just an occupation but also a popular form of recreation. And the locals take it very seriously indeed. Angling competitions are very popular here, and anglers travel across the state to participate in them. The stakes are high and prizes are often in the six figures!

Food

The tribes of Meghalaya are agrarian, and this reflects strongly in their cuisine. Thanks to the copious rainfall, the villagers can grow a lot of rice. In fact, Meghalaya is supposed to be one of the cradles of wild rice species in India, making it an important repository of the genetic diversity of rice in the Indian subcontinent and, by extension, the world. Sandopara, a village in the Garo Hills, still cultivates a species of rice that is 6,000 years old!

Rice forms the staple food, accompanied by a variety of proteins like pork, beef, fish or chicken, prepared in diverse ways. A rich assortment of accompaniments made with vegetables and tubers, such as potatoes, tapioca, or yams, as well as root vegetables like carrots, beans, and squash, enriches the meal. Relishes, made from ingredients, such as fermented fish, tree tomatoes and mushrooms, further enhance the flavours. Additionally, culinary traditions extend to delicacies incorporating snails, eels, silkworms, cicadas, caterpillars, bee larvae and other foraged animals. Khasi cuisine is typically lightly spiced, with relishes adding an extra zest to the dining experience.

The contents of a meal may vary between regions and communities, but two dishes found commonly across the state perhaps best represent Meghalaya's cuisine. One is jadoh, which is a portmanteau of the word 'ja', which means rice, and 'doh', which means meat, and is a preparation of red rice and pork, fish or chicken cooked with aromatic spices to make a delicious one-pot- meal. The other is Doh khlieh, which is a salad made from shredded or minced pork or chicken, onions and chillies.

Festivals

As one would expect from a land of tribes, the festivals that Meghalaya is known for are a celebration of its indigenous heritage. The most famous of these is the Shad Nongkrem, a Khasi festival that is celebrated in Smit for five days every October or November. The festival celebrates the Goddess Ka Blei Synshar, and participants pray to her for a bountiful harvest and for peace and prosperity to follow.

For the Songsarek Garos, Wangala is an important harvest festival that is held in honour of Misi Saljong, the sun god, and signify the onset of winter. The celebrations at the 100 Drums Festival resound with the beat of the nagra drum, an earthen pot that is covered with cowhides and is beaten to call people to assemble at the house of the nokma (chieftain) for a feast or celebration. Chad Sukra, the sowing festival of the Jaiñtia, is held on one of the most important dates of the Niamtre calendar and is held to pray for a healthy harvest that will bring prosperity.

There are also many other festivals and celebrations that might not be as well-known but are no less spectacular. Raid Ïalong in Thadlaskeiñ, in the West Jaiñtia Hills, is the only place in where the Noh Sakyriat is performed, which is something you can witness for yourself on the Sacred Forest Trek. Sikpuiruoi, a harvest festival of the Hmar tribe, is celebrated on 5 December in the Khaddum village in the Jaiñtia Hills, where some of the treks in this book are based. The Bhoi Khasi from the East Khasi Hills celebrate Shad Sajer, a retelling of their history via narration, song and dance towards the end of January.

Apart from the indigenous festivals, Christian festivals like Easter and Christmas are also celebrated with great gusto. The reverence Christianity is given can be seen in the numerous churches, big and small, that pepper the land. In fact, almost all commercial establishments in Shillong, the capital of the state, stay shut on Sunday to honour the Lord's Day.

The diligence and passion with which the tribes of Meghalaya celebrate their festivals is a key reason why their folklore and legends are well-known amongst their youth and hence, well preserved.

Folklore

India, with its wide and varied tribes, is home to countless legends from which the lore and myths then take root and grown tall through millennia of retelling. Meghalaya is no exception to this. Even today, many local communities honour their traditions and their tales, which is why the folklore of the land has not faded from the memories of its people.

The origin story of the Khasi is a captivating one. There are slightly different versions of the story, all making the same point—that Earth and Heaven were once connected and through an act of evil, the connection between them was severed. This caused seven of the original sixteen tribes to be on Earth while the other nine remained in Heaven. This is why the tribes that were left back on Earth were called 'Ki Hynñiew Ha Tbian' which means the Seven Below. These seven clans of the Khasi tribe are the Pnar, Bhoi, Khynriam, Maram, War, Lyngngam, and Diko, who together comprise the Khasi.

The Garo have their myths, and shapeshifting is one of the recurring themes as can be seen in the story of Dombe, a legendary beauty, and the merman who

transformed into a bangle seller to kidnap her. When he was foiled by Joreng, Dombe's husband, he pursued them to where they had fled and flooded their home, creating a lake that is known today as Dombe Wari (Dombe's Lake). Balpakram National Park stands as a revered sanctuary for the Garo people, brimming with legend and cultural significance. Within its bounds lie numerous sites steeped in mythological importance. We'd say more but then that will leave less for you to discover when you take the trek and visit Balpakram yourself.

The legends of the Jaiñtia are fascinating in how they differ from those of their fellow Meghalayans. The Jaiñtia kingdoms extended beyond the hills and into the plains of modern-day Assam and Bangladesh. This allowed for much more interaction with other cultures than the Khasi and the Garo, with their relative isolation in the hills, enjoyed. As a result, one sees Hindu mythology mingle with tribal tales. Nartiang is home to both a Durga temple which is a shaktipeeth, one of the holiest types of shrines for Hindus, as well as one of the largest collections of menhirs and dolmens, which are menhirs erected in the tribal tradition in memory of their ancestors. Additionally, almost every Niamtre home in the village has an image of the Goddess Bishohori, a Hindu deity who is said to offer protection against snakebites. This unique syncretism is heartwarming to see and is proof that different faiths have, and can still, always coexisted.

Biodiversity

The incredible biodiversity of Meghalaya has always existed in balance with the humans that live on and off the land. The fact that many species of flora and fauna are an important part of the folklore and are accorded a special or even a sacred status helps in their conservation. For example, the Huro, known as the Hoolock gibbon in English, is among the sacred animals revered by the Garo community. It is safeguarded with great care, as harming a Huro is believed to bring misfortune upon the people of the region.

The forests of this lush state are home to a dazzling array of bird and animal life. You can spot large birds like the great hornbill as well as smaller ones like the hill myna, the state bird. You might see any one of the many owl and eagle species resident here as well as winter visitors like the Bar-headed geese, the world's highest-flying bird that journeys over the Himalayas to makes its way from its Central Asian home to India. Along with the clouded leopard, the state animal, several other types of wild cats (including the Bengal tiger) also live in these forests. A remnant population of the elusive red panda is also thought to still live in a corner of the state.

The flora of Meghalaya has an equal status to its fauna. The sacred grove in Mawphlang is perhaps the best known one in Meghalaya, but it is by no means the only one here. The state abounds with them, and the rule for each one is the same—not even a leaf or a pebble can be taken out of the grove. Everywhere that these groves are preserved, they not only act as an important repository of local faith but also of local biodiversity as many plants endemic to Meghalaya have been found thriving in these sacred forests.

As you prepare for your walk in the clouds, we hope that this book gives you a deeper understanding of Meghalaya and all that awaits you when you start walking under its trees and over its ridges. Remember to say 'Khublei shibun' (which means 'thank you' in Khasi and can also be used to say goodbye) when you take your leave, and we guarantee an experience you won't be able to wait to return to.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Before you head out on one or more of the treks in this book, do take the time to carefully read through some tips and advice that will help make your experience safer and easier.

Good to Know

Meghalayans are a proud people. They have largely embraced modern ways of living and modern belief systems, but they still identify with and honour the tribal traditions they come from. Please check with residents on the importance of natural landmarks, forests and structures across the state. What might be a stone platform to you could be an important memorial and what might look like another green patch could be a sacred forest. Ask before you act, tread lightly, and you will be richly rewarded.

The residents of Meghalaya are diligent about their cleanliness drives and are proud of the recognition their efforts have earned, so please be respectful and don't leave behind any litter.

Speaking of respect, nothing shows it more than a visitor making the effort to converse with the locals in their language. 'Kumno' means 'hello', 'Bah' and 'Kong' are terms of respect used when addressing male and female elders respectively, and 'Khublei shibun' means 'Thank you very much'. Use these correctly and frequently, and you'll leave with more memories than most visitors do.

Rice is the staple here and is eaten with pork, beef, chicken and fish. If you are vegetarian, you might want to ask ahead for arrangements. If you feel like eating something specific and non-local, please carry it along with you. However, do keep in mind that in these hot and humid climes, food spoils quickly, so only carry items that aren't quickly perishable. Also, remember that you're going to have to carry all this food yourself, so pack accordingly.

ATMs are easily found in the large cities, and it would be wise to carry enough cash and perhaps a bit extra from places like Shillong before you leave for a trek. If possible, prepay for accommodation and services like taxis, so that you need not carry around extra cash.

Road infrastructure is still being built, both in and to many of the remote places that the treks are in, so while taxi services might be available, they might not be regular or reliable everywhere you go. Also, you will need to drive between various spots on many trails. Hence, it would be best to organise a cab to keep with you all through your trek.

The remoteness of these locations also means that you might not be able to find anything apart from basic medicines on the trail. Carry any specific medication you need as well as a basic first-aid kit comprising disinfectant, bandages, painkillers and aspirin.

The name of the state means 'the abode of the clouds', which should give you an idea of just how much it might rain here. While the monsoon sees trails at their most lush and beautiful, it is also the time that they are at their slipperiest, so access might be an issue. In a mountainous state, the rains can also play havoc with roads and connectivity. Plan a monsoon trek keeping your fitness and sense of adventure in mind; alternatively, plan an easier trek between November and March.

Meghalaya is safe from a social standpoint, but treks are often in remote areas with limited or no mobile network. Do leave a contact number with your trek organiser or with a local in case of any emergencies.

Good to Carry

- Rain is never too far away in Meghalaya, so carry a proper rain jacket if you're trekking in the monsoon and a poncho or light jacket at any other time of year.

- Even if it doesn't rain on your trek, you might have to ford streams or rivers, so quick-dry clothing that is also lightweight would be perfect to wear.

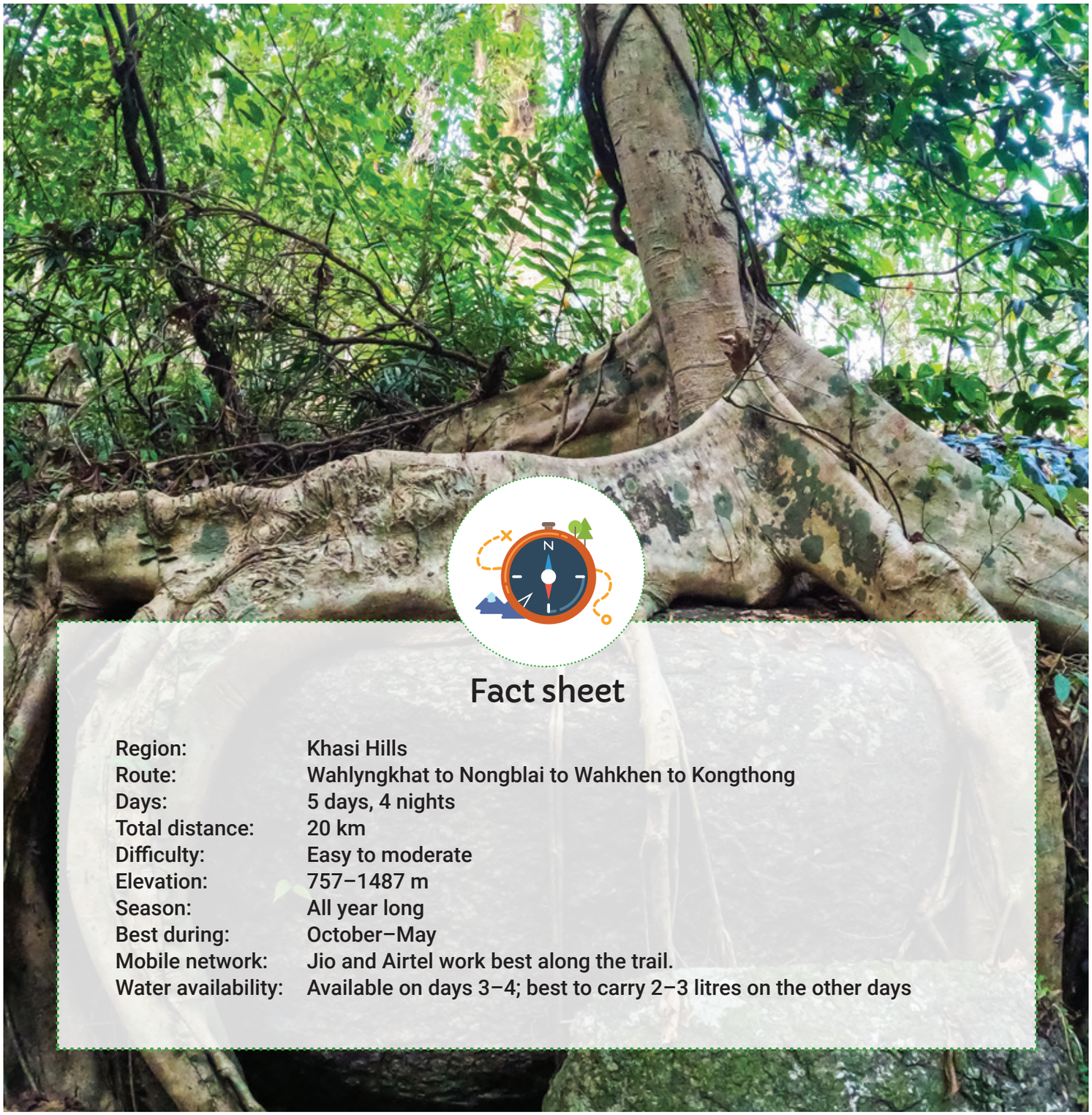
- It will get very cold in the winter, especially between sundown and sunrise, so carry woollens or jackets. You will be trekking through thick tropical forest, and it will be humid even when it's dry.

- Pack light since you'll be lugging your rucksack up and down inclines. Don't forget to carry chocolates, energy bars and loads of enthusiasm.

THE BRIDGE TO MEMORIES TREK

Wahlyngkhat - Nongblai - Wahkhen - Mawryngkhang - Kongthong

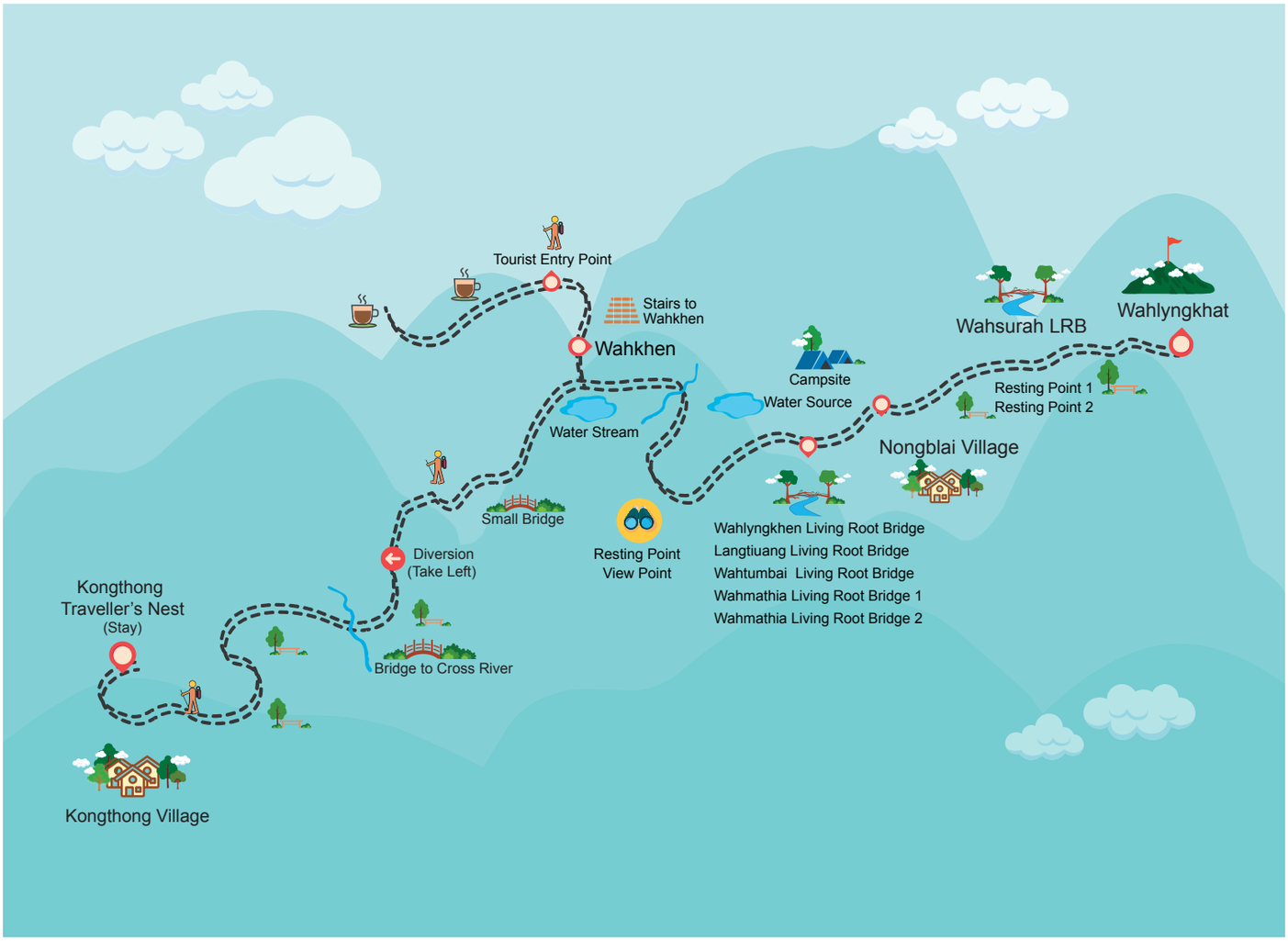
Between several living root bridges on the Trail of Thousanders, the Bamboo Trail to the King of the Rocks, and the Village of the Mother's Love Song, this is a trek that will leave you with memories to last several lifetimes.



Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Wahlyngkhat to Nongblai to Wahkhen to Kongthong
Days:	5 days, 4 nights
Total distance:	20 km
Difficulty:	Easy to moderate
Elevation:	757–1487 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Jio and Airtel work best along the trail.
Water availability:	Available on days 3–4; best to carry 2–3 litres on the other days

Wahlyngkhat - Nongblai - Wahkhen - Mawryngkhang - Kongthong



Wahkhen has a musical school that showcases many traditional instruments. The school is open only on Sunday, so keep that in mind and try to visit it if you're around on that day of the week.

Tourists are not allowed in Kongthong village after 10 p.m., so don't wander about at night.

Overview

The Bridge to Memories trek is truly an experience of several different yet equally memorable parts. It winds its way through villages thrumming with traditions born in the East Khasi Hills, each unique in its own way. From names that are sung to rocks that are royalty to bridges that live and grow with time, this is one trek that you want to take your time with.

Most visitors to Meghalaya have a picture of a living root bridge in mind, thanks to travellers sharing photos on social media. But nothing prepares you for your first steps on one.

The living root bridges of Meghalaya are a marvel of natural engineering. The steep valleys of southern Meghalaya often make fording streams difficult. So, at some point in the past, which nobody now remembers, the forebears of the Khasi people took the pliable, ariel roots of the rubber fig tree, guided them over the stream to the other side, set rocks in their midst to eventually form a platform, and then let nature spin its magic. With time, the roots grew thick and became a living testament to Khasi ingenuity. You will descend 5,000 steps (hence the Trail of Thousanders name) from Wahlyngkhat to Nongblai, which will be your base for exploring some of the 16 Living Root Bridges in the area.

From Nongblai, you will trek to Wahkhen, a village nestling on the ridge. This takes you through lush vegetation. The trees are thick with fruit with banana, jackfruit, oranges, and pineapples and you will also pass fields of broom-grass, the ubiquitous crop of the state that is used to make the broom it's named after. Upon reaching Wahkhen, you will be presented with two choices. One, to continue on the trail up to Kongthong. Two, to take a day-long optional trek and reward yourself.

That option lies along the Bamboo Trail, which one takes to go see Mawryngkhang, the King of the Rocks. The name sounds like something out of an Indiana Jones movie, and the lore behind it is not much different. Mawryngkhang fell in love with a lady rock from the other side of the valley but the men on her side objected. They fought with Mawryngkhang and shot one of his arms off, which is believed to be the origin of the monolith you'll see there. On some of the sheer rock faces outside Wahkhen village, the locals have built bridges and walkways out of bamboo and anchored them into the rock faces and over gorges and fields, creating a completely unique experience that lets you walk up, down, alongside, and even below the rocks as you wind your way across the breathtaking panoramas that await you when you reach Mawryngkhang, the King of the Rocks.

But perhaps nothing will prepare you for Kongthong at dusk. The locals who live here follow the tradition of jingrwai ïawbei, which translates to 'Mother's Love Song'. According to this, newborns are given not only a 'regular' name but a tune specially composed by their mothers which a unique expression of their love. Every evening, as the day draws to a close, the air comes alive with these songs as mothers whistle or sing out their children's names to call them home for the night.

Flora

All the villages on this trail cultivate broom-grass, the ubiquitous symbol of the local culture that is visible outside every door. So, your trail will take you through several cultivations of this natural wonder as well as trees laden with fruits like bananas, oranges, pineapples and jackfruits. You will also see spices like bay leaf, medicinal herbs and wild mushrooms.

Fauna

Some of the animals you could spot are the flying squirrel, fox, barking deer and the clouded leopard. Keep an eye out for the ñiangbei, an insect that makes traps like quicksand and also a type of fly on the trail that can get in one's eye.

DAY 1

Wahlyngkhat to Nongblai

Total Distance: 2.2 km

Altitude of Wahlyngkhat: 1487 m

Altitude of Nongblai: 770 m

Trail: A descent of around 2 hours

Today, you set off from Shillong and drive around 3 hours to reach Wahlyngkhat, which is located only 5 minutes from the main road. Don't be alarmed if you find mostly children in the village—the adults leave early in the morning for their fields and return only in the evening.

From Wahlyngkhat, you begin trekking downhill for Nongblai. The trail will take about 2 hours and has 3 rest stops on the way. At the third rest stop, look out for a rope house on the left. It has a ropeway that is used to ferry food and other small items across the valley.

Accommodation: Homestay or tents

DAY 2

In and around Nongblai

Total Distance: Depends on you
Altitude of Nongblai: 770 m
Trail: Mostly flat walking with gradual ascents and descents

Today, you will spend the day in Nongblai exploring of the 16 magnificent root bridges that can be accessed from the village. The distance you walk will depend on how many bridges you choose to visit.

In Khasi, 'wah' means 'river', which gives you an idea of which river these bridges are built over. Do spend some time on the banks of the river, listening to it gurgle by.

While you explore, don't forget to look at how the homes in the villages are set up on terraces cut into the mountainside.

Accommodation: Homestay or tents

DAY 3

Nongblai to Wahkhen

Total Distance: 4 km

Altitude of Nongblai: 770 m

Altitude of Wahkhen: 909 m

Trail: A gradual descent and ascent of 4–5 hours

Today, you will climb from Nongblai to Wahkhen, a village on the ridge. The village has proper road access and also has a few shops serving tea, snacks, and food. Once you reach Wahkhen, you can rest for the adventures ahead.

Accommodation: Homestay or tents

OPTIONAL DAY

Wahkhen to Mawryngkhang and back.

Total Distance: 6.5 km

Altitude of Wahkhen: 909 m

Altitude of Mawryngkhang: 757 m

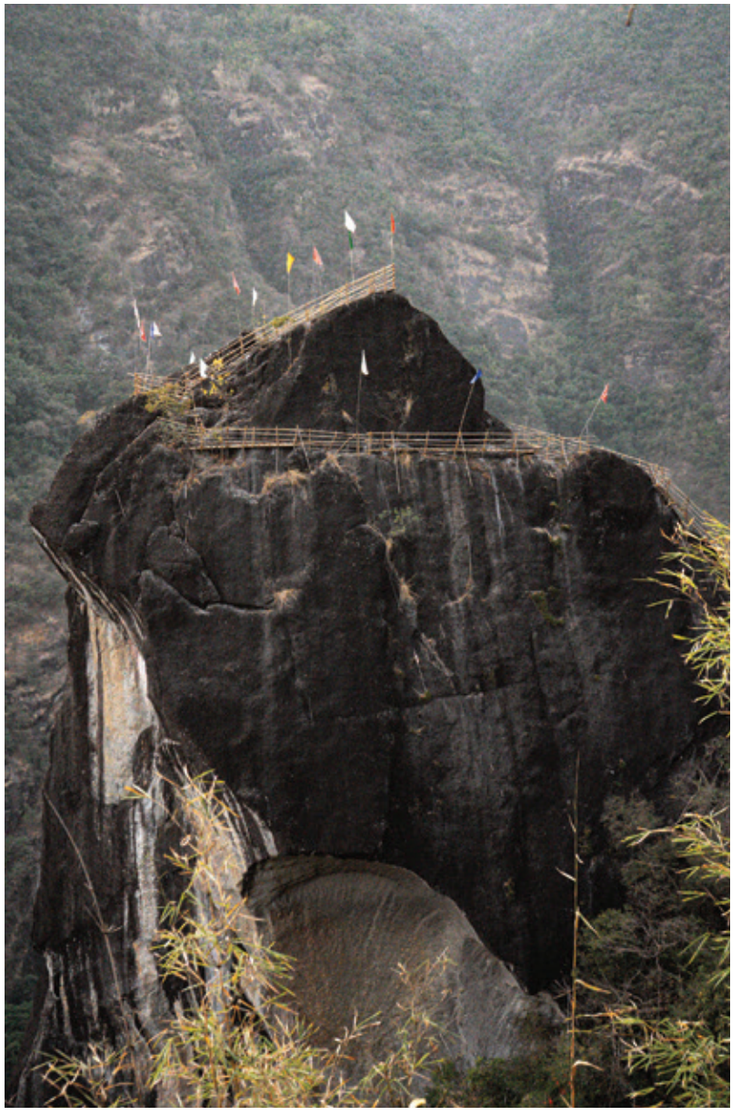
Trail: A gradual descent walking on bamboo bridges and ladders of 5–6 hours

Today, you have a very exciting option to pursue—meeting the King of the Rocks via the Bamboo Trail.

The Bamboo Trail is a truly one-of-its-kind experience and the village council takes a lot of care to inspect and maintain it for safety to ensure that you are safe, whether walking up or down the rocks, along their sides, or even below them!

So, please take the extra day and take the trail. An audience with the King of the Rocks and the panoramic views around it deserve at least that much.

Accommodation: Homestay or tents



DAY 4

Wahkhen to Kongthong

Total Distance: 5.2 km

Altitude of Wahkhen: 909 m

Altitude of Kongthong: 1106 m

Trail: A steep descent and ascent of 5–6 hours

After a night of restful sleep, you'll climb for between 5–6 hours today to reach Kongthong on top of the high ridge above you. The breathtaking view from the top will be a worthwhile reward for your labour.

And if that wasn't enough, you will experience the magic of jingrwai ïawbei at dusk as the setting sun is sent off to the tune of the Mother's Love Song as parents call their children home in the most melodious way you could imagine.

Accommodation: Tents at the campsite

DAY 5

Kongthong to Shillong

After breakfast, you will leave from Shillong which is approximately a 4-hour drive away.

How to Get There

The trek starts in Wahlyngkhat, to where buses and taxies ply, and ends in Kongthong, from where taxis are easily available. However, like in villages anywhere, local transport systems are subject to sudden change. Hence, it might be more prudent to book your car from Shillong itself to drop you and fetch you a few days later.

THE WHISTLING VILLAGE TREK

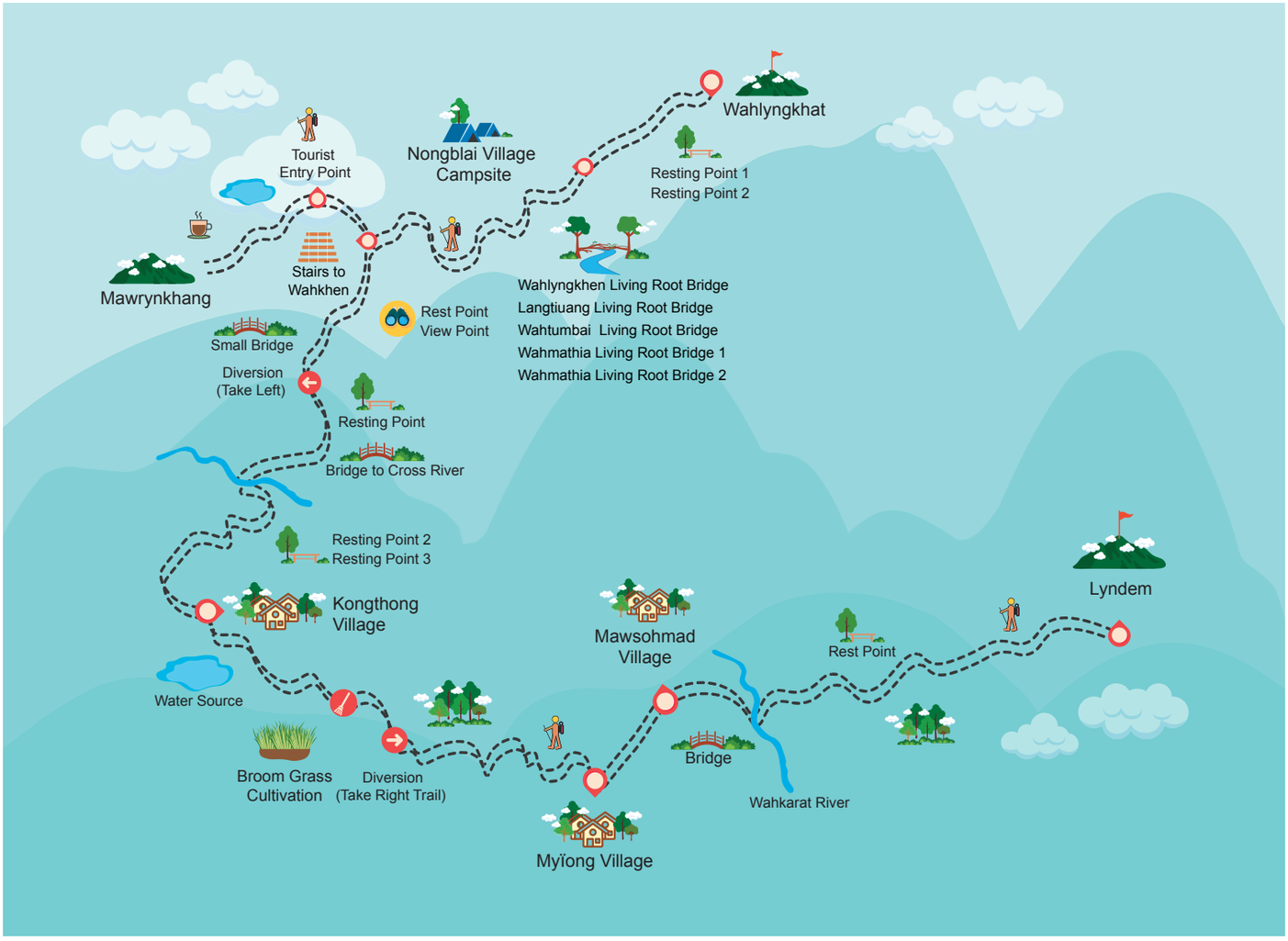
Wahlyngkhat - Nongblai - Wahkhen - Kongthong - Mawsohmad - Lyndem

Over seven days, walk through some of both the known and the hidden wonders of the East Khasi Hills, and go back home with memories that will stay with you for a lifetime.

Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Lyndem to Wahkarat River to Kongthong via Mawsohmad
Days:	3 days, 2 nights
Total distance:	10 km
Difficulty:	Moderate
Elevation range:	247–1125 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Jio and Airtel work best along the trail.
Water availability:	Available on the trail

Wahlyngkhat - Nongblai - Wahkhen - Kongthong - Mawsohmad - Lyndem



Kongthong is famed for its local produce, especially oranges and pure honey, thanks to the beekeepers in the village. Do buy some to take home.

Tourists are not allowed in Kongthong village after 10 p.m., so don't wander about at night.

Overview

Sometimes, short is truly sweet—like the Whistling Village Trek, a three-day experience that manages to pack in more than many longer trails.

This trail offers invigorating ascents and descents that will challenge any grade of trekker without straining them. The first descent, from Lyndem village, takes you down a steep path that ends at the Wahkarat River, one of the cleanest rivers you'll ever find. A dip in its clear blue-green waters will wash away any fatigue you might feel from the climb down.

When you wake up in the morning, you will watch the waters come alive as the first rays of the sun catch their gurgling flow. Take a dip, refresh yourself, and set off for the gruelling, two-stage climb up to Kongthong.

The first stage will take you to Mawsohmad, a village that seems untouched by modernity and where life seems to follow the age-old patterns of traditional Meghalayan society. Catch your breath and refresh yourself in preparation for the second stage of the climb up to Kongthong. This stage will take longer, though the ascent is gentler than that of the first stage. The trail passes through thick vegetation that is rich with fruit and spice trees, all of which is a sight for sore eyes.

But perhaps nothing will prepare you for Kongthong at dusk. The locals who live here follow the tradition of jingrwai ïawbei, which translates to 'Mother's Love Song'. Each newborn is given not only a 'regular' name but also a tune specially composed by their mother, a unique expression of her love. Every evening, as the day draws to a close, the air comes alive with these songs as mothers sing out their children's names to call them home for the night.

Flora

All the villages on this trail cultivate broom grass, the ubiquitous symbol of the local culture that is visible outside every door. Your trail will take you through several cultivations of this natural wonder, as well as trees laden with fruits like bananas, oranges, pineapples and jackfruits. You will also see spices like bay leaf, medicinal herbs and wild mushrooms.

Fauna

Some of the animals you can spot here are the flying squirrel, the fox, the barking deer and the clouded leopard. Watch out for the ñiang, an insect that makes traps like quicksand, and also a type of fly that can get in one's eye.

DAY 1

Shillong to Lyndem to Wahkarat River Camp

Total distance: 3.5 km

Altitude of Lyndem: 1125 m

Altitude of Wahkarat River Camp: 247 m

Trail: A steep descent of around 3 hours

You will start the day by leaving from Shillong for Lyndem, a village perched on a ridge that falls under the Raid Mawja. Once you reach Lyndem, you take a steep trail down to the bank of the Wahkarat River. Taking in the sight of its clear, emerald waters will take away any tiredness from the trek.

Accommodation: Tents or homestays

DAY 2

Wahkarat River Camp to Mawsohmad to Kongthong

Total distance: 6 km

Altitude of Wakharat: 247 m

Altitude of Mawsohmad: 839 m

Altitude of Kongthong: 1106 m

Trail: An ascent of around 6–7 hours

This is going to be a day that will test your fitness and endurance, so sleep well the night before. The trek up will be split into two parts.

The first part, from Wahkarat to Mawsohmad, will take 2–3 hours. You will then rest for a while, enjoying the refreshing panoramic views before carrying on to Kongthong, which lies further up the hill.

The climb up to Kongthong will take 3–4 hours, and it's a gradually ascending trail that winds its way through thick vegetation. You will reach Kongthong in time to catch the spectacle of jingrwai ïawbei.

Accommodation: Tents or homestays

DAY 3

Kongthong to Shillong

Wake up in the morning, pack and leave for Shillong.

How to Get There

The trek starts in Lyndem, to where buses and taxis ply from Shillong, and ends in Kongthong, from where taxis are easily available back to Shillong. However, as with villages anywhere, local transport systems are subject to sudden change. Hence, it might be more prudent to book your car from Shillong itself to drop you and fetch you a few days later.

THE WEEK OF WONDER TREK

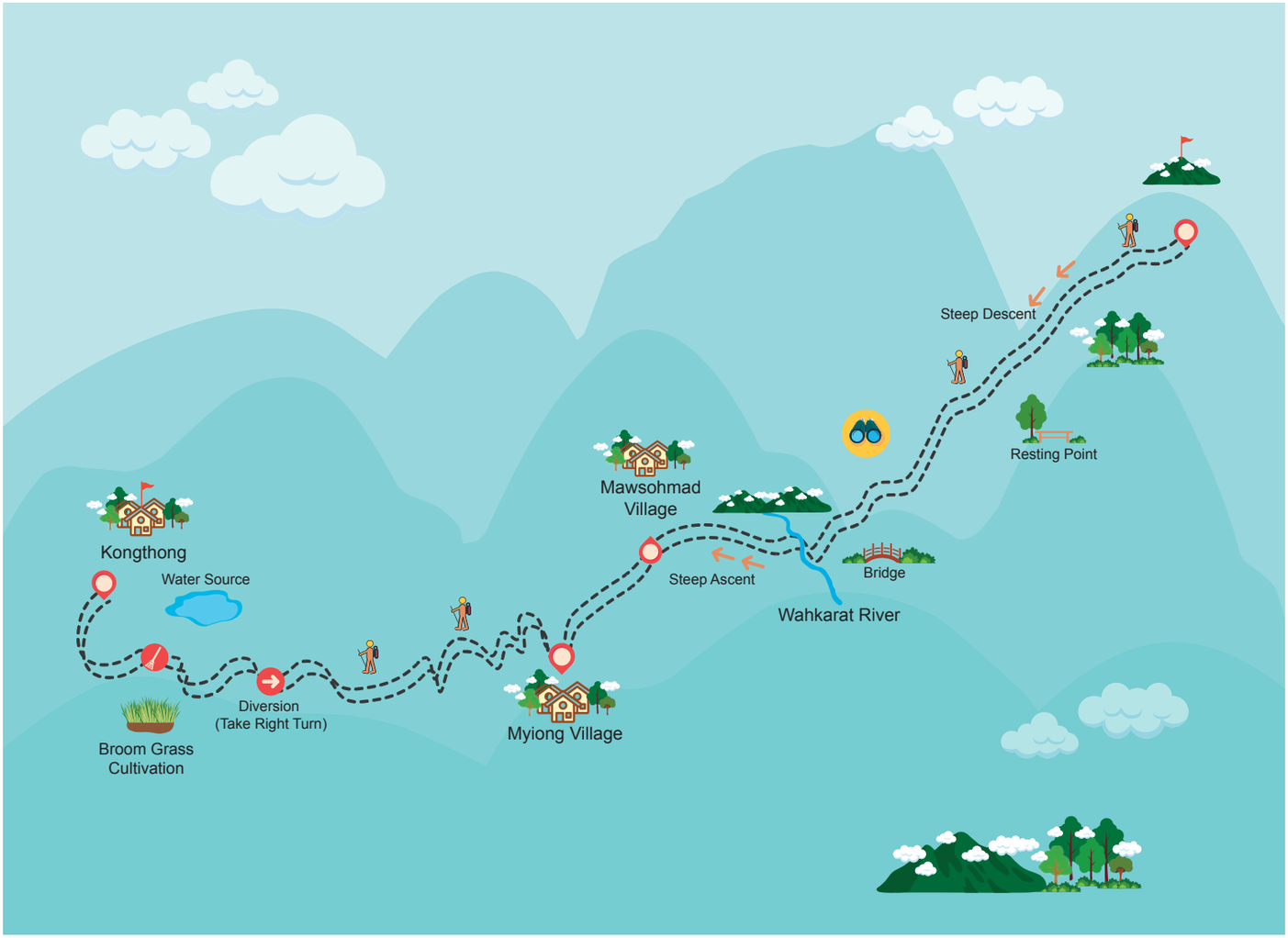
Lyndem - Wahkarat River- Kongthong via Mawsohmad

Visit the emerald river, head down a path that will take your breath away and reward yourself with the sight of a village of parents who whistle to call their children home.

Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Wahlyngkhat to Nongblai to Wahkhen to Kongthong to Mawsohmad to Lyndem
Days:	7 days, 6 nights
Total distance:	30 km
Difficulty:	Easy to moderate
Elevation range:	247–1487 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Jio and Airtel work best along the trail.
Water availability:	Available on days 1–5; best to carry 2–3 litres on the other days

Lyndem - Wahkarat River- Kongthong via Mawsohmad



Kongthong is famed for a lot of local produce like oranges and pure honey, thanks to the beekeepers in the village. Do buy some to take home.

Wahkhen houses a musical school that showcases many traditional instruments. The school is open only on Sunday, so keep that in mind and try to visit it if you're around on that day of the week.

Tourists are not allowed in Kongthong village after 10 p.m., so don't wander about at night.

Overview

The 'Week of Wonder' trek is an experience that consists of several different yet equally memorable parts. It winds its way through villages thrumming with traditions born in the East Khasi Hills, each unique in its own way. From names that are sung to rocks that are royalty, from bridges that live and grow with time, to rivers of the clearest aquamarine – this is one trek that you want to take your time with.

The living root bridges of Meghalaya are a marvel of natural engineering. The steep valleys in the southern parts of the state make fording streams difficult. So, at some point in the past, the ancestors of the Khasi people took the pliable, aerial roots of the rubber fig tree, wrapped them around bamboo poles and guided them over the stream to the other side, set rocks in their midst to eventually form a platform, and then let nature work its magic. With time, the roots grew thick and became a living testament to Khasi ingenuity.

At the start of this trek, you will descend 5,000 steps (which gives it the 'Trail of Thousanders' name) from Wahlyngkhat to Nongblai, which will be your base for exploring some of the 16 living root bridges in the area.

From Nongblai, you will trek to Wahkhen, a village nestling on the ridge. Upon reaching Wahkhen, you will be presented with two choices: one, to continue on the trail up to Kongthong, and two, to stop there overnight and take a tough rewarding trek the next day.

If you choose the first option, you will arrive at Kongthong at dusk. And nothing will prepare you for what you will hear. The locals who live here follow the tradition of jingrwai ïawbei, which translates to 'Mother's Love Song'. According to this tradition, newborns are given not only a 'regular' name but also a tune specially composed by their mothers, a unique expression of their love. Every evening, as dusk falls, the village comes alive with these songs as mothers whistle or sing out their children's names to call them home for the night.

The second option lies along the Bamboo Trail, which one takes to go see Mawryngkhang, the King of the Rocks. The name sounds like something out of an Indiana Jones movie, and the lore behind it is not much different. Mawryngkhang fell in love with a lady rock from the other side of the valley but the men on her side objected. They fought with Mawryngkhang and shot off one of his arms off—the origin of the monolith you'll see there. On some of the sheer rock faces outside Wahkhen village, the locals have built bridges and walkways out of bamboo and anchored them to the rock faces and over gorges and fields, creating completely unique structures that let you walk up, down, alongside, and even below the rocks as you wind your way across the breathtaking panoramas.

From Kongthong, you will trek to Mawsohmad, a village that seems untouched by modernity. Rest here for the gruelling but rewarding day that will ensue when you leave Mawsohmad for Lyndem, a Raid Mawja stronghold. En route, you will need to cross the Wahkarat river. Before you do, or maybe after, take a break, rest your body and refresh your mind by taking a quick dip in the river's clear, emerald-green waters.

Recharged, you can now take the last trek of the week as you climb up towards Lyndem, your halt for the night.

When you leave for Shillong the next morning, we guarantee that you'll wonder if it's only been a week since you came to the East Khasi Hills. After all, it does feel like it would take longer to collect a lifetime of memories.

Flora

All the villages on this trail cultivate broom grass, the ubiquitous symbol of the local culture that is visible outside every door. So, your trail will take you through several cultivations of this natural wonder as well as trees laden with fruits like bananas, oranges, pineapples, and jackfruits. You will also see spices like bay leaf, medicinal herbs, and wild mushrooms.

Fauna

Some of the animals you could spot here are the flying squirrel, the fox, the barking deer, and the clouded leopard. Watch out for the ñiangbei, an insect that makes traps like quicksand, and also a type of fly that can get in one's eye.

DAY 1

Wahlyngkhat to Nongblai

Total distance: 2.2 km

Altitude of Wahlyngkhat: 1487 m

Altitude of Nongblai: 770 m

Trail: A descent of around 2 hours

Set off from Shillong and drive around three hours to reach Wahlyngkhat, which is located only five minutes from the main road. Don't be alarmed if you find mostly children in the village—the adults leave early in the morning for their fields and return only in the evening.

From Wahlyngkhat, you begin trekking downhill for Nongblai. The trail will take about two hours and has three rest stops on the way. At the third rest stop, look out for a rope house on the left. It has a ropeway that is used to ferry food and other small items across the valley.

Accommodation: Tents or homestays

DAY 2

In and around Nongblai

Total distance: Variable

Altitude of Nongblai: 770 m

Terrain: A descent of around 2 hours

Today, you will spend the day in Nongblai exploring of the 16 magnificent root bridges that can be accessed from the village. The distance you walk will depend on how many bridges you choose to visit.

In Khasi, 'wah' means 'river'. Each name thus gives you an idea of which river the bridge is built over. Do spend some time on the banks of the rivers, listening to them gurgle by.

While you explore them, don't forget to look at how the homes in the villages are set up on terraces cut into the hillside.

Accommodation: Tents or homestays

DAY 3

Nongblai to Wahkhen

Total distance: 4 km

Altitude of Nongblai: 770 m

Altitude of Wahkhen: 909 m

Trail: A gradual descent and ascent of 2–3 hours

Today, you will climb from Nongblai to Wahkhen, a village on the ridge. The village has proper road access and also a few shops serving tea, snacks, and food. Once you reach Wahkhen, you can rest in preparation for the adventures ahead.

Accommodation: Tents or homestays

DENIM

Optional Extra Day

Wahkhen to Mawryngkhang and back

Total distance: 6.5 km

Altitude of Wahkhen: 909 m

Altitude of Mawryngkhang: 757 m

Trail: A gradual descent on bamboo bridges and ladders of 5–6 hours

Today, you have a very exciting option to pursue—meeting the King of the Rocks via the Bamboo Trail.

The Bamboo Trail is a truly one-of-its-kind experience, and the village council takes a lot of care to inspect and maintain it for safety, to ensure that you are safe, whether walking up or down the rocks, along their sides, or even below them!

When you're planning this week, please plan for this additional day. An audience with the King of the Rocks and the panoramic views around it deserve at least that much.

LOWER PRIMARY
SCHOOL

Day 4

Wahkhen to Kongthong

Total distance: 5.2 km
Altitude of Wahkhen: 909 m
Altitude of Kongthong: 1106 m
Trail: A steep descent and ascent of between 5–6 hours

After a night of restful sleep, you'll climb for 5–6 hours today to reach Kongthong, on top of the high ridge above you. The breathtaking view from there will be a worthwhile reward for your labours.

And if that wasn't enough, you will experience the magic of jingrwai ïawbei at dusk, as the setting sun slips away to the sound of parents calling their children home in the most melodious way you could imagine.

Accommodation: Tents or homestays

Day 5

Kongthong to Mawsohmad

Total distance: 6 km

Altitude of Kongthong: 1106 m

Altitude of Mawsohmad: 839 m

Trail: A descent of around 3–4 hours

Today's trek is on a gradually descending trail that runs through lush vegetation and includes a viewpoint a short distance from Kongthong that you could take a break at.

Day 6

Mawsohmad to Lyndem

Total Distance: 5.5 km

Altitude of Mawsohmad: 839 m

Altitude of Lyndem: 1125 m

Trail: A steep descent and then ascent of 3 hours each

From Mawsohmad, you will take a steep trail down to the Wahkarat River. Refresh yourself at the Wahkarat river camp and, if time permits, take a dip in the emerald waters.

Eat a meal and fortify yourself before crossing to the other side for the steep climb up to Lyndem, where you will spend the night.

Day 7

Lyndem to Shillong

After breakfast, you will leave from Shillong, which is approximately a 4-hour drive away.

How to get there

The trek starts in Wahlyngkhat, to where buses and taxis ply, and ends in Lyndem, where taxis are usually available. However, as with villages anywhere, local transport systems are subject to sudden change. Hence, it might be more prudent to book your car from Shillong itself to drop you and fetch you a few days later.

THE GREEN RIVER TREK

Kutmadan - Sohkhmi - Suktia

From the tallest plunge waterfall in India to one of the most famous points offering views of a neighbouring country, the Green River Trek will reward you with more than just a dip in aquamarine waters.

Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Kutmadan to Sohkhmi to Suktia
Days:	2 nights, 3 days
Total distance:	6 km
Difficulty:	Easy to moderate
Elevation range:	70–1180 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Jio and Airtel work best along the trail.
Water availability:	Available along the trail

Kutmadan - Sohkhmi - Suktia

Suktia is a designated no-tobacco zone, so please don't consume any form of it within its borders.

Overview

Water, the essence of life, shapes the essential experiences on this trek beyond just a view and a dip in the famed Green River. It is everywhere on this trail situated near Sohra (the original Khasi name of Cherrapunji), which was once considered the wettest place in the world.

Your trek begins in Kutmadan, a village on the ridge that you will reach within a few hours of leaving from Shillong. The area around Kutmadan is home to waterfalls like the Seven Sisters or Nohsngithiang Falls, which flows in seven segments, leading to its name. There are also the famous Nohkalikai Falls which, at a height of 340 metres, is India's tallest plunge waterfall. In local legend, the falls were named after Ka Likai, a widow who had remarried and worked as a porter to support her daughter. Her new husband, jealous of the time and devotion she lavished on her child, flew into a rage and killed the girl while her mother was away. Lamentably, that isn't where the story ends. He then cooked her flesh and left. When Ka Likai returned hungry to an empty home, she thought the meat was a meal for her, and she ate it. Later, upon discovering her daughter's severed finger, she realised what she had done. Maddened with anger and grief, she ran around blindly until she fell off the waterfalls and to her death. Since then, the falls have been named for her, and serve as a reminder of the perils of jealousy.

While in Kutmadan, you will also visit Ka Khoh Ramhah, a huge rock formation that, according to legend, is the upturned basket of an evil giant who used to torment the locals. In order to be rid of him, they invited him for a meal and mixed nails and sharp iron pieces into his food, which led to his demise. The basket that he is said to have left behind is what is known as Ka Khoh Ramhah today. On a clear day, you can see the plains of Bangladesh from here.

From here, you will trek down to the Green River and camp by its beautiful waters. The trek is tough, but rewarding—this is the ultimate experience of water that the trail offers, and while you're here, you can swim in some of the cleanest waters you'll ever come upon, peer through the clear river and spot fish swimming around at the bottom, and fall asleep to the sounds of the flowing water.

Your trek will end by ascending to Suktia from the Green River. On your way, remember to stop and pay your respects at the Mawshyïeng, a large stone structure that houses the remains of the local tribespeople's ancestors.

So come, walk to the Green River. It will be a truly immersive experience.

Flora

All the villages on this trail cultivate broom grass, the ubiquitous symbol of the local culture that is visible outside every door. Your trail will take you through several cultivations of this natural wonder, as well as trees laden with fruits like bananas, oranges, pineapples, and jackfruits. You will also see spices like bay leaf, wild mushrooms and medicinal herbs.

Fauna

On this trail, you coud spot species the locals call Phyllad (Himalayan yellow-throated marten) and Bshad (Large Indian civet) as well as birds with Khasi names like Jyllop, Wahku, Pait-puraw (Red-vented bulbul), Pait kliar (Red-whisked bulbul) and Syiar-khlaw (Red jungle fowl).

Day 1

Shillong to Kutmadan

Total Distance: 58 km by car

Altitude of Wahlyngkhat: 1180 m

Drive: around 2 hours

Today, you will leave Shillong by car in the morning and reach Kutmadan before noon. Drop your bags wherever you're staying, get something to eat, and set off to explore some of the sights in the area. You can visit the Seven Sisters Falls and the Nohkalikai Falls, Khoh Ramhah Rock, which is an awe-inspiring natural structure wrapped in legend, and Thangkharang Park, from where you can enjoy views of Bangladesh on the plains below.

Accommodation: Tents or homestays

Day 2

Kutmadan to Wah Lyngngam Campsite

Total distance: 3 km by car, 4 km on foot

Altitude of Kutmadan: 1180 m

Altitude of Sohkhmi: 665 m

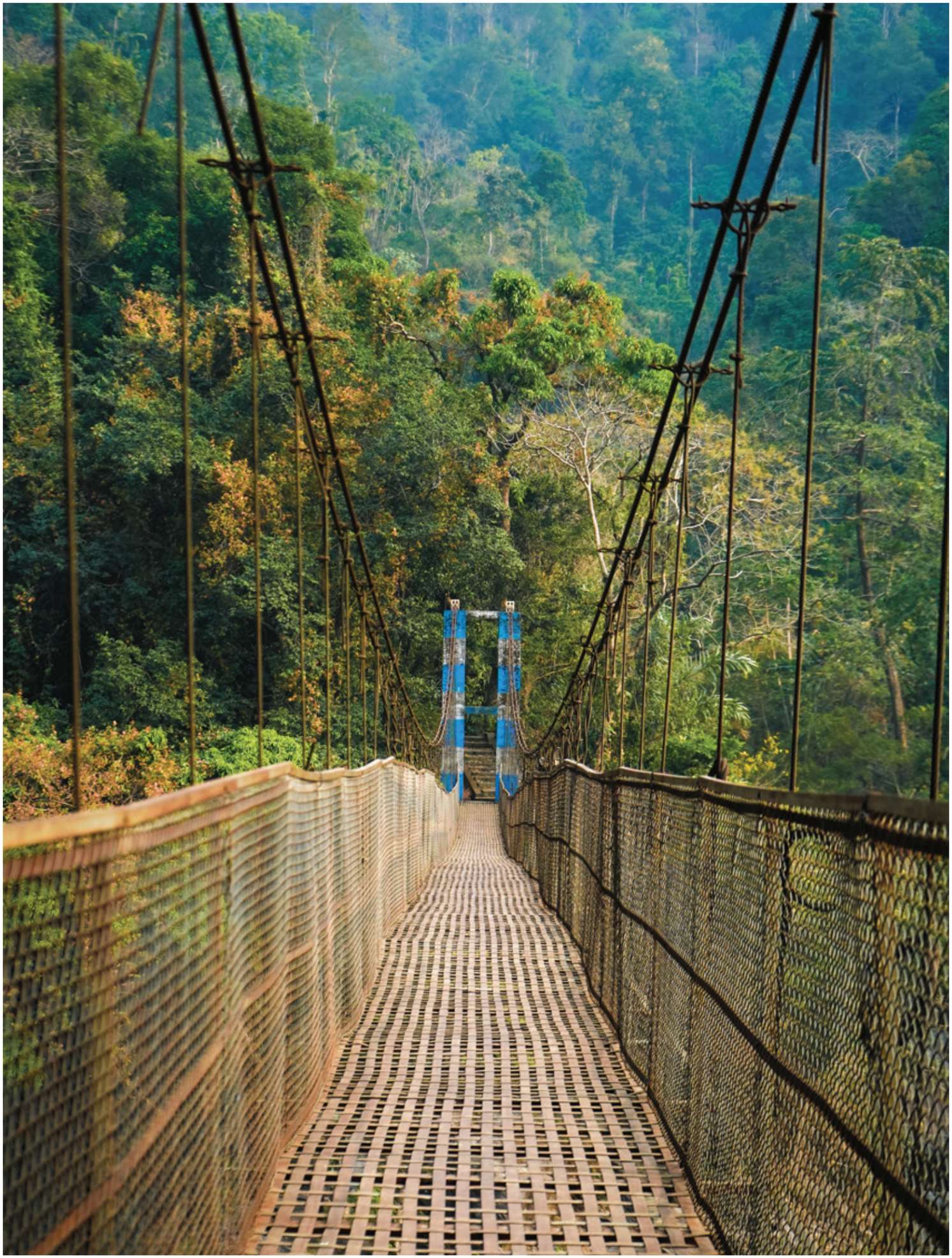
Altitude of Wah Lyngngam River Campsite: 70 m

Trail: Gradual, then steep descents over 2 hours

Your trek starts today. After breakfast, you will take a car, which will drop you 3 kms away, at the starting point of the trek, from where you will begin the gradual descent to Sohkhmi. This 1.5-km trail should take you 2–3 hours to complete.

Catch your breath and a bite at Sohkhmi, refill your water bottles, and make your way to the stone steps from where the steep descent to your destination begins. This journey of 2.5 km should take you three hours to complete and will end at the Wah Lyngngam River Campsite, where you'll spend the night.

Accommodation: Tents at the campsite



Day 3

Wah Lyngngam Campsite to Suktia to Shillong

Total distance: 1.5 km on foot, then 66 km by car

Altitude of Wah Lyngngam Campsite: 70 m

Altitude of Suktia: 346 m

Trail: A gradual ascent of 2–3 hours

Wake up in the morning and take a dip in the Green River's waters. Then, pack and prepare for the uphill climb to Suktia. This 1.5-km walk should take 2–3 hours. On the way up, stop at the Mawshyïeng.

When you reach Suktia, visit the football ground and watch the children play as you wait for your cab back to Shillong.

How to get there

The trek starts in Kutmadan, which is well connected to the main road and hence to Shillong. Getting a cab to bring you here will be easy. Getting a cab back from Suktia should also not be hard. However, as with villages anywhere, local transport systems are subject to sudden change. Hence, it is advisable that you book your car from Shillong to drop you and fetch you a few days later.

THE STORIES IN STONE TREK

Laitsohum – Mawlyngbna

Asia's longest sandstone cave? Check. Fossils frozen in stone? Check. Mythical pawprints of dogs and other animals in rocks? Check. On this trek, the stones have stories to tell. You only need to listen.

Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Laitsohum to Mawlyngbna
Days:	3 nights, 4 days
Total distance:	11 km
Difficulty:	Easy
Elevation range:	886–1372 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Jio and Airtel work best along the trail.
Water availability:	Available on the trail; carry for day 1 from Shillong

Laitsohum – Mawlyngbna

Suktia is a designated no-tobacco zone, so please don't consume any form of it within its borders.

Overview

When a person loses their hearing, they say they've gone 'stone deaf'. But if you know how to listen, the stones speak. From the whispering wind in the cave of Krem Puri to the fossils at Umkhakoi to the legend of the traitorous dog whose pawprints are captured in the rocks at the *Ïew Luri Lura* campsite, every stop on this trek is built around stories captured in stone.

This story starts in Laitsohum village, which is best known as the base from which one can access Krem Puri, the longest sandstone cave in the world, only 500 metres from the village. The path to the cave is a unique one, made of stone steps that undulate, almost in preparation for what awaits you inside.

Meghalaya is an emerging global destination for spelunking (cave exploring), and you'll be thrilled to be one of the first to explore this cave that is supposed extend over 24 kms into the earth! The entrance to Krem Puri is deceptively normal-looking, but once inside, you will be surprised at the complex network of passages and sub-passages that has been carved out over the millennia by the relentless water. The wind whistling around the stones seems to whisper stories of a bygone age. While you will be tempted to lose yourself in this subterranean wonderland, keep in mind that the entire cave system will take you days to explore, so wrap up your visit on that day with an initial exploration and leave something to see for when you return.

Don't tire yourself out in Krem Puri because once you leave, you will have to trek downhill for more than four hours to reach the *Ïew Luri Lura* campsite, your halt for the night. Here, you will spot lots of pawprints and pugmarks of various animals in the rocks. The story of how they came to be is truly fascinating. The legend speaks of Iew Luri Lura being a marketplace of animals—they'd assemble here and barter and sell their wares to each other. Once, a dog that had nothing to sell went to the human village nearby and saw them selling fermented beans. The beans had a very pungent aroma that the humans liked but the animals did not. The dog got some beans from the humans and tried to sell them at the animal marketplace. However, put off by their smell, the animals started crushing the beans into the ground, leaving behind their pawprints and pugmarks in the process. Angry with the dog for interacting with the humans, the other animals banished him from their kingdom. The dog then chose to live with the humans, leading to the bond that we have with our canine best friend today.

The next stop on this journey is the campsite at the Umkhakoi Waterpark. There is a fossil trail nearby, where you can see the remains of animals from another era. The most intriguing of the fossils, though, has to be the starfish. The ancient evidence of an ocean floor creature being found so high and far inland speaks of how the area that is today a highland must have once been the floor of the ocean!

Do not miss the chance to trek along the banks of the Umkhakoi River. You can also jump off cliffs, swim, kayak, fish, and indulge in other water-based activities, like spotting and trying to guess the various forms of rocks visible by the river. Keep an eye out for the ones shaped like crocodiles and rest assured that they won't slither into the river after you.

Still looking for a reason to take this trek? How about memories set in stone?

Flora

All the villages on this trail cultivate broom grass, the ubiquitous symbol of the local culture that is visible outside every door. So, your trail will take you through several cultivations of this natural wonder as well as trees laden with fruits like bananas, oranges, pineapples, and jackfruits. You will also see spices like bay leaf, medicinal herbs, and wild mushrooms. Around Laitsohum, keep an eye out for some plants you'll find only here: the Dieng Sohum, a myrtle species of this high plateau that has light red or black fruit; two varieties of the Bayberry Tree, also called Sohphie in Khasi, which has sour, colourful fruit; and the Pitcher Plant, Nepenthes khasiana, called Tiew-rakot in Khasi, one of the few carnivorous plants in the world.

Fauna

Some of the animals you could spot are the flying squirrel, fox, barking deer, the clouded leopard and even the Asian black bear.

Day 1

Shillong to Laitsohum to *Ïew* Luri Lura Campsite

Total distance: 78 km by car, 7 km on foot

Altitude of Laitsohum: 1372 m

Altitude of *Ïew* Luri Lura Campsite: 886 m

Drive: Around 4 hours

Trail: A mostly gradual downhill descent of 6 hours

Leave from Shillong after breakfast and you'll disembark at Laitsohum around four hours later. From here, the journey on foot gets exciting.

First, you will visit Krem Puri, the longest sandstone cave in the world. After you've spent some time listening to the stories on the wind, you'll walk down to the *Ïew* Luri Lura Campsite, just in time to explore pawprints and pugmarks and listen to the legends behind them.

Then rest for the night, the best way to prepare for the day ahead.

Accommodation: Tents

Day 2

Ïew Luri Lura Campsite to Mawlyngbna Campsite

Total distance: 5 km
Altitude of *Ïew* Luri Lura Campsite: 886 m
Altitude of Mawlyngbna Campsite: 886 m
Trail: A gradual descent followed by a flat walk of around 4 hours

Get ready to hear the stones speak of creatures from millions of years ago as you explore the fossil trail near your campsite. Look carefully and you'll spot the millennia-old fossils of starfish and other creatures.

The walk along the river will be even more rewarding if you choose to swim to the other side. The adventurer in you will love the option of cliff-jumping—all safety protocols being adhered to, of course.

Walk to Umkhakoi and have fun in the lake there before retiring for the night.

Accommodation: Tents at the campsite

Day 3

Mawlyngbna campsite at Umkhakoi Waterpark

Total distance: Variable

Altitude of Mawlyngbna Campsite: 886 m

Trail: Flat walking of 5–6 hours

Today is the day to do all that you couldn't do yesterday—that's not just a life lesson but also the instruction for this third day of the trek.

Swim, fish and listen to the stories that all the various rock shapes around you are sharing. Pay close attention to the ones shaped like crocodiles.

Later that day, explore the cultural aspects of Mawlyngbna village. Explore the shops, eat local delicacies in the restaurants, and go to bed with lots of memories.

Accommodation: Tents at the campsite

Day 4

Mawlyngbna Campsite to Shillong

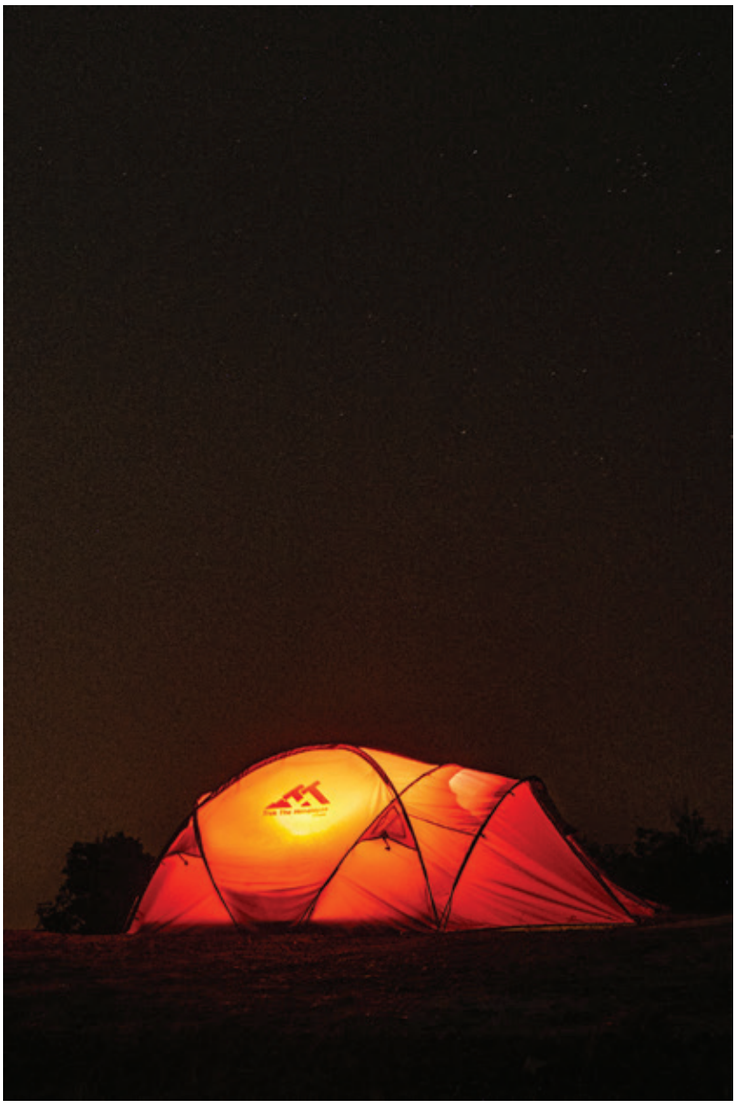
Total distance: 78 km

Drive: 5–6 hours

Depart for Shillong after a hearty breakfast.

How to Get There

The trek starts in Laitsohum, which is well connected to the main road and hence to Shillong. Getting a cab to bring you here will be easy as will getting one back from Mawlyngbna. However, as with villages anywhere, local transport systems are subject to sudden change. Hence, it might be more prudent to book your car from Shillong itself to drop you and fetch you a few days later.



THE TREK OF TESTAMENTS

Wahkdait - Pashum - Shnongpdeng - Nongbareh

Most trails leave trekkers with memories. But only this trek brings trekkers face-to-face with villages and memorials that stand testament to the region's strong ties to its past.

Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Wahkdait to Pashum to Shnongpdeng to Nongbareh
Days:	2 nights, 3 days
Total distance:	10 km
Difficulty:	Easy to moderate
Elevation range:	25–605 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Jio and Airtel work best along the trail.
Water availability:	Available along the trail

Wahkdait - Pashum - Shnongpdeng - Nongbareh

The Nongbareh village offers you perhaps the easiest access to a living root bridge—it's right by the road. Do take the time to visit it.

Overview

Humankind's relationship with the past is a universal one. Wherever you travel, you will find that people still tend to mark the memories of their forebears and create their own memories—and in this case, memorials—that stand the test of time.

On this Trek of Testaments, you will experience a unique facet of Meghalaya's history: its ancient villages and the modern memorials that its people often erect to mark the departure of a loved one.

This trail is bookended by two villages that are over a hundred years old: Pashum at the beginning and Kudengrim at the end. Pashum is a sleepy village with betelnut groves just off the main road, the thin tops of the trees swaying gently in the mountain breeze. Kudengrim is a larger town that is modern and relatively well developed, but look closer and you'll spot scores of memorials, often made in the shapes of homes, to mark the passing of a local villager. There is also a double-decker bridge a short distance from the village, in case you want to experience another one of Meghalaya's unique age-old traditions. An interesting fact about Kudengrim is that the original village was destroyed in an earthquake in 1897, after which the villagers set up the current village, higher up the mountain.

Between these two villages, your trek will be enlivened by time spent along the Umngot River that flows through the valley between them. One of the cleanest and most popular rivers in Meghalaya, travellers come from around the world to gape at its clear green waters and feel like they're suspended in air as they float along in kayaks or boats. There are also a lot of other activities like cliff-jumping and ziplining that you must experience before you leave. You can also hire a boat and travel upriver, over huge boulders sitting serenely on the riverbed, before you reach a waterfall that flows with the biting-cold freshness only a mountain river can offer.

Something else you must do is spend a few hours of your day by the Umngot and the water pool that is on the trail to Amkoi village. And don't forget to visit the food stalls that line the market road just above the campsites by the river. Locals set up these stalls offering a range of traditional Khasi delicacies, an experience your palate should not miss out on.

Your route from Shnongpdeng to Nongbareh will take you through Amkoi village. Traditional plant medicines and medicinal massages are still popular here, but they aren't offered to outsiders yet. As a result, you won't be able to rejuvenate via medicine or massage, but the locals will be happy to help you refresh yourself by refilling your water bottles.

In Nongbareh, don't forget to take a walk down the main road. It is lined with memorials to family members, and each of these is in the shape of a small house itself. One can't help wondering whether there is a connection between the person and the shape of their memorial.

One thing that you won't need to wonder about on this Trek of Testaments is how long the memories from your time on it will stay with you. We wager, surely until your family creates a memorial for you.

Flora

The tbasiang (cotton) tree is used by the locals to make utensils, while the soh snam tree, endemic to the area, bears a red fruit that looks like a cherry tomato. All the villages on this trail cultivate broom grass, the ubiquitous symbol of the local culture that is visible outside every door. Your trail will take you through several cultivations of this natural wonder, as well as trees laden with fruits like bananas, oranges, pineapples and jackfruits. You will also see spices like bay leaf, medicinal herbs and wild mushrooms.

Fauna

Some of the animals you could spot here are the flying squirrel, the fox, the barking deer, the clouded leopard and even the Asian black bear.

Day 1

Shillong to Wahkdait to Pashum to Shnongpdeng

Total distance: 73 km by car, 3 km on foot

Altitude of Wahkdait: 314 m

Altitude of Shnongpdeng: 25 m

Drive: 3–4 hours

Trail: Mostly downhill, 3–4 hours

Once you reach Wakhdait, the trailhead, you will start the trek by first walking to Pashum, one of two ancient villages on this route and home to the soh-snam fruit, which is found only in this area.

From here, you will continue to Shnongpdeng, a village set on the banks of the Umngot River, famed for its clean, green waters. Here, you will break for the night.

Accommodation: Tents or homestays

Day 2

Shnongpdeng

Total distance: NA

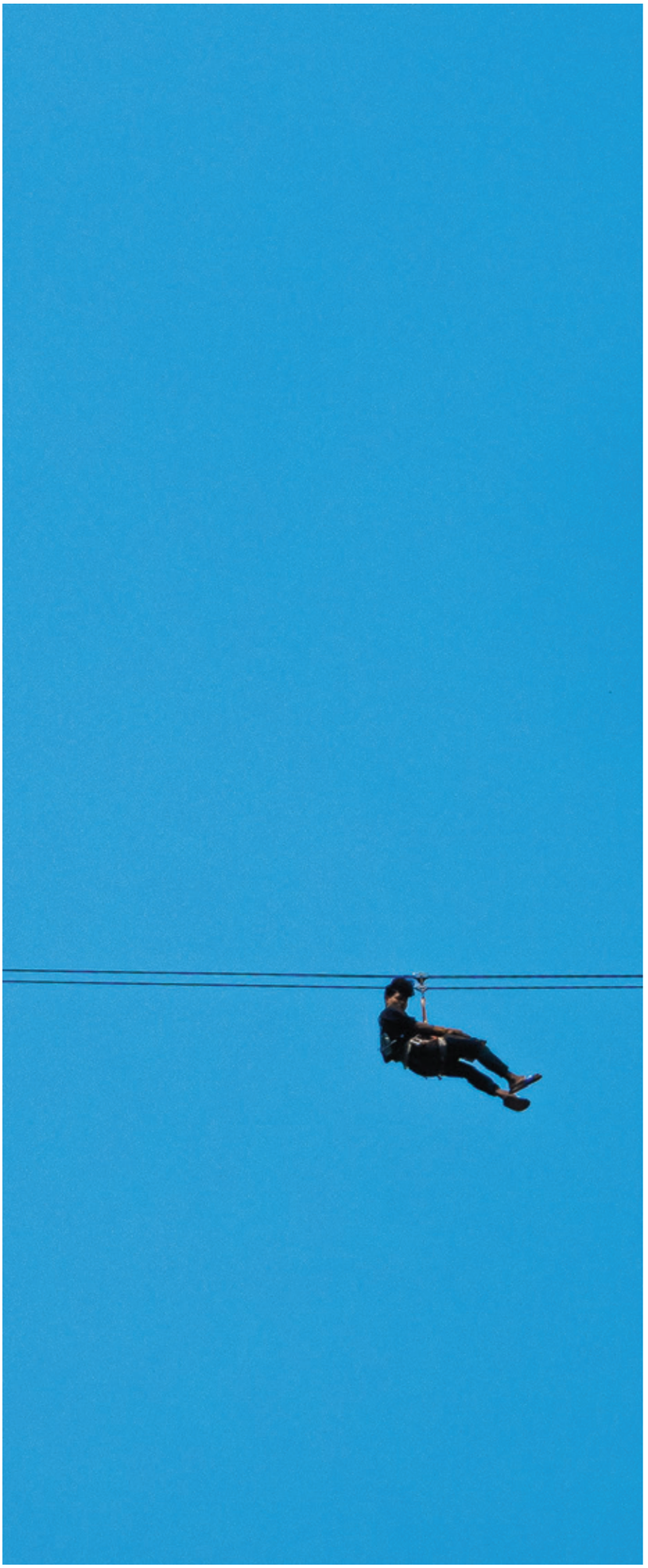
Altitude of Shnongpdeng: 25 m

Trail: Mostly easy/flat walking

Today, you will spend your time enjoying all that Umngot river has to offer. You can enjoy a range of activities here, such as cliff jumping, ziplining, boating and kayaking. However, most of all, spend time swimming in these crystal-clear waters.

Also, take the short but steep two-hour hike and visit the water pool at Amkoi.

Accommodation: Tents at the campsite



Day 3

Shnongpdeng to Amkoi to Nongbareh to Kudengrim to Shillong

Total distance: 110 km by car, 4 km on foot

Altitude of Shnongpdeng: 25 m

Altitude of Amkoi: 370 m

Altitude of Nongbareh village: 605 m

Distance from Shnongpdeng to Nongbareh: 4 kms

Trail: A steep ascent of 4–5 hours

Today is an action-packed day, so leave the campsite early in the morning after eating your breakfast and packing lunch to have on the way.

Your destination is Nongbareh, and the trek up is a steep one. Ensure that you've left Shnongpdeng with your water bottles full, because hydration will be important today. You can stop at Amkoi village for a rest. Have your lunch here and refill your bottles before heading on up. Once you're in Nongbareh, explore the village and take a short 2.5-km drive to Kudengrim village, where you can see its Double Decker Living Root Bridge and its unchanged ways of life before heading off for Shillong.

How to Get There

The trek starts in Laitsohum, which is well connected to the main road and hence to Shillong. Getting a cab to bring you here will be easy. Getting one back from Mawlyngbna should also not be hard. However, as with villages anywhere, local transport systems are subject to sudden change. Hence, it might be more prudent to book your car from Shillong itself to drop you and fetch you a few days later.

KUDENG RIM PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
(Presbyterian Church Of India)

THE LIVING ROOT LADDER TREK

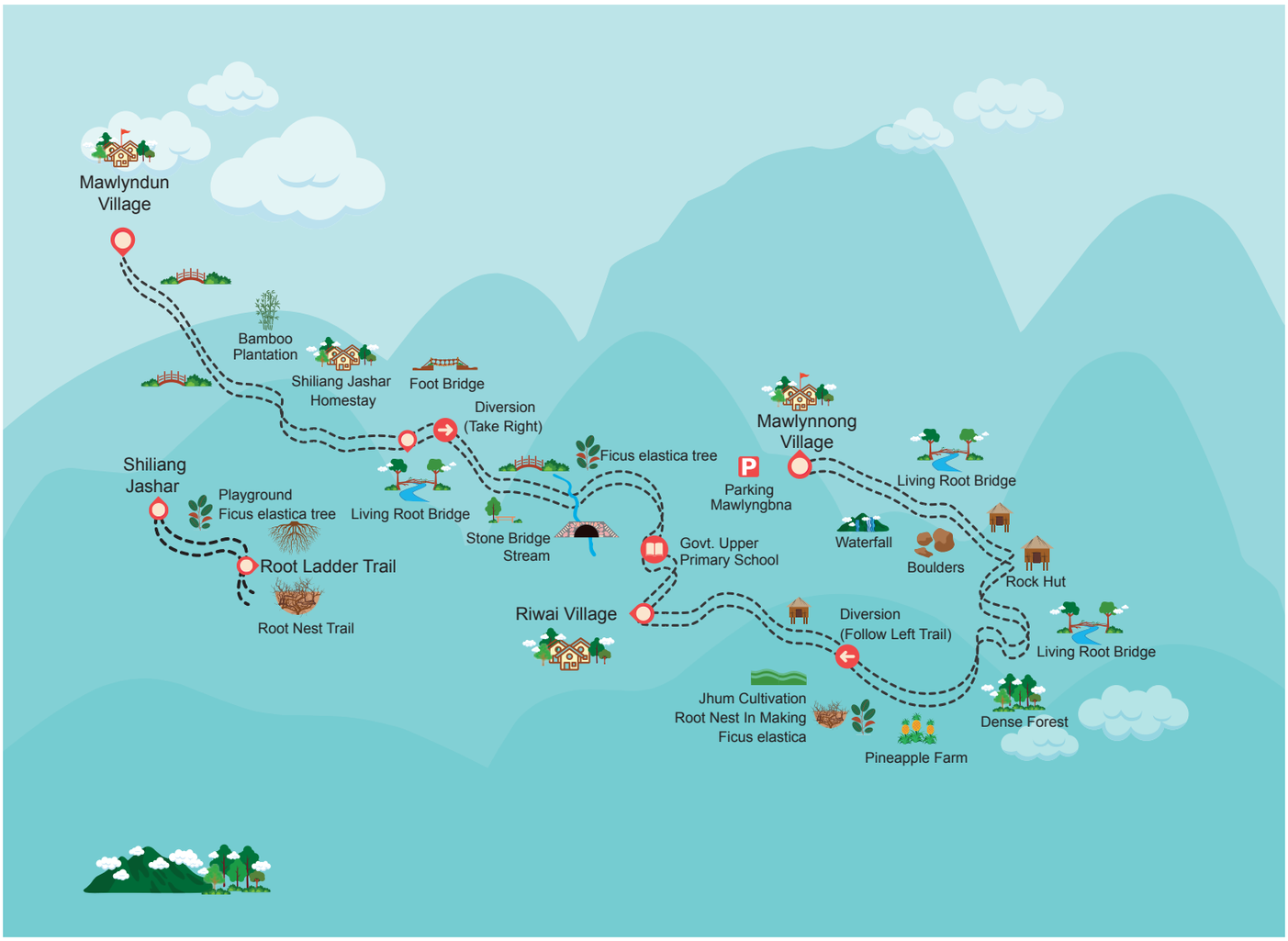
Mawlyndun - Shiliang Jashar - Riwai - Mawlynnong

If Meghalaya's only living root ladder is not incentive enough to take this trek, how about a living root nest, one of the state's least visited waterfalls or one of its cleanest villages?

Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Mawlyndun to Shiliang Jashar to Riwai to Mawlynnong
Days:	3 nights, 4 days
Total distance:	16 km
Difficulty:	Easy to moderate
Elevation range:	452–1009 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Jio and Airtel work best along the trail.
Water availability:	Available along the trail

Mawlyndun - Shiliang Jashar - Riwai - Mawlynnong



Overview

As social media can testify, many trekkers have been to many of Meghalaya's famous living root bridges. The more intrepid have even been to the double decker ones. But not many have been to what is likely Meghalaya's only living root ladder. Here's your chance to be part of that select band of trekkers.

Like most treks in Meghalaya, this one too starts with a car journey out of Shillong. Leave early in the morning so you can make it to Mawlyndun in time for the trek to your next destination: the home of the Living Root Nest. Once you reach Shiliang Jashar, named for the Jashar River that flows nearby, you can rest for the night.

The morning will bring the promise of not one but two unique natural formations that bear testament to mankind's ability to work in harmony with nature. The Living Root Bridges that dot the Khasi Hills already showcase this spirit. But the forests around Shiliang Jashar are home to more marvels: not just the Living Root Ladder but also the Living Root Nest, both of which are wonderful examples of human innovation moulding natural creation for an enduring benefit.

The Living Root Ladder is truly a sight to behold. A living root bridge is formed over time by coaxing the roots of the rubber fig tree to grow along bamboos placed over a river. Eventually, these roots grow thick and, buttressed with rocks, form a bridge sturdy enough for people to cross over. The Living Root Ladder is built along the same principle but with one key difference—the bridge is made to grow vertically, not horizontally, along the mountainside. This gives the locals a vital means of traversing the nearly vertical trails on these slopes and being able to access their fields and the jungles more easily. To climb up and down this ladder is to experience a cultural tradition found nowhere else in the world.

Another marvel not too far from the village is the Living Root Nest. A bower-like structure made by moulding the roots upwards to form a circle, this creation is the perfect place to take a rest while feeling cocooned in safety.

When you visit the Kylmeng Waterfalls, remember to fill your water bottles. Not only is it a great source of clean, refreshing water, but it's also the very taste of Meghalaya itself.

While you will come across memorable living root bridges too on this trial, a sight that might really stay with you is that of homes perched high up on large boulders! Wondering how they get in and out? Look out for the steps hewn into the rock.

The Living Root Ladder trek is surely one that you want to take. After all, the chance to clamber up and down a living tradition doesn't come by too often.

Flora

All the villages on this trail cultivate broom grass, the ubiquitous symbol of the local culture that is visible outside every door. Your trail will take you through several cultivations of this natural wonder, as well as trees laden with fruits like bananas, oranges, pineapples and jackfruits. You will also see spices like bay leaf, medicinal herbs and wild mushrooms.

Fauna

Some of the animals you could spot here are the flying squirrel, the fox, the barking deer, the clouded leopard and even the Asian black bear.

Day 1

Shillong to Mawlyndun to Shiliang Jashar

Total distance: 57 km by car, 3 km on foot

Altitude of Mawlyndun: 1009 m

Altitude of Shiliang Jashar: 906 m

Drive: Around 3 hours

Trail: A very gentle descent of around 3 hours

After arriving in Mawlyndun from Shillong, you will set out for Shiliang Jashar on a well-planned forest trail that makes its way under a lush, green canopy.

The trail seems almost flat, because you only descend 100 metres over 3 km, and its gentleness is matched by its beauty. Soak in the myriad hues of green and listen for the classic forest soundtrack—the chirping of cicadas—as you approach your stop for the next two days.

Accommodation: Tents at the campsite

Day 2

In and around Shiliang Jashar

Total distance: Around 4–5 km

Altitude of Shiliang Jashar: 906 m

Trail: A steep ascent and descent of 2–3 hours

This is the day that you set out to discover Meghalaya's more unique man-nature collaborations. The Living Root Nest and the Living Root Ladder are respectively 1 km and 1.5 km from the campsite. The trail is steep, so ascending and descending will be challenging. But the rewards are well worth the toil.

Accommodation: Tents at the campsite

Day 3

Shiliang Jashar to Riwai via Nohwet

Total distance: 7 km
Altitude of Shiliang Jashar: 906 m
Altitude of Riwai village: 562 m
Trail: A gradual descent followed by a flat walk of 4–5 hours

The hard work of yesterday is offset by a pleasant trail today, one that has gradual descents and level walks. Around 1 km after you set out from Shiliang Jashar, you will come across Kylmeng Waterfall, the perfect place to catch your breath and refill your bottles.

Continue along the breathtaking forest trail until you reach Riwai, your destination for the night. As a bonus, you'll cross another living root bridge today.

Accommodation: Tents at the campsite

Day 4

Riwai to Mawlynnong to Shillong

Total distance: 6 km on foot, 76 km by car

Trail: A gradual ascent and descent of 4–5 hours

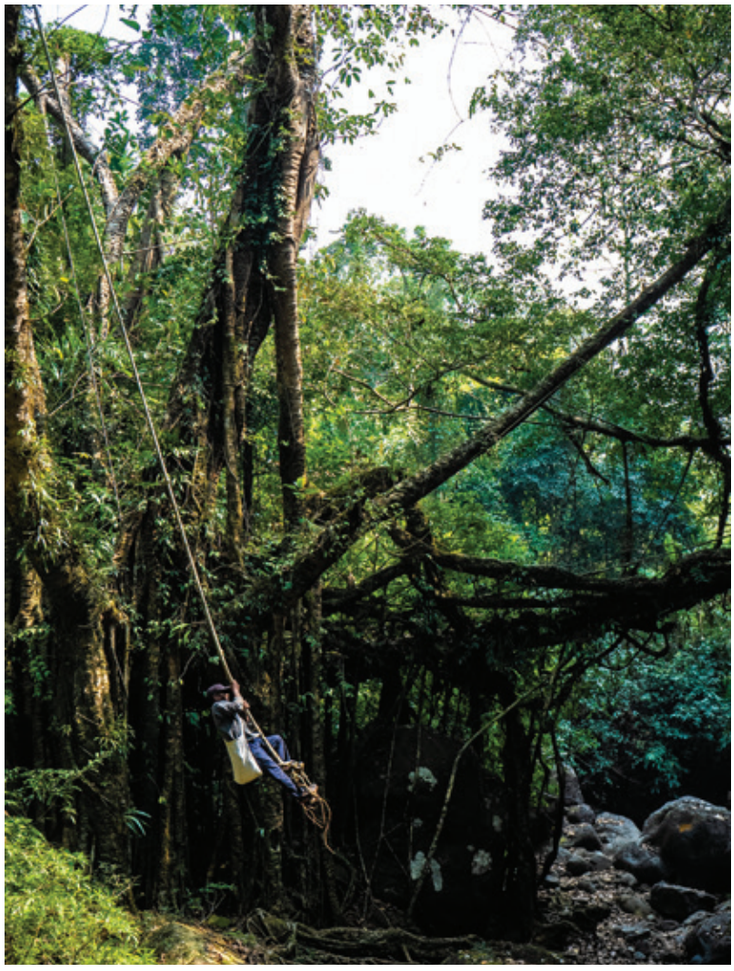
Drive: 3–4 hours

Your destination today is Mawlynnong. If the name sounds familiar, it's likely because the efforts of the villagers here have resulted in it being named 'Asia's Cleanest Village' by *Discover India* magazine in 2003.

The route to Mawlynnong takes around six hours and goes across more living root bridges, around homes perched on boulders, and within seeing distance of the Bangladesh border.

How to Get There

The trek starts in Mawlyndun, which is well connected to the main road and hence to Shillong. Getting a cab to bring you here and take you back from Mawlynnong should be straightforward. However, as with villages anywhere, local transport systems are subject to sudden change. Hence, it might be more prudent to book your car from Shillong itself to drop you and fetch you a few days later.



THE DAVID SCOTT TREK

Ladmawphlang - Laitsohma - Mawphlang

A part of one of Meghalaya's oldest trails, this trek takes you back in time as you walk along a section of a 100-km-long trade route that was established by the British as they explored and colonised India.

Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Ladmawphlang to Laitsohma to Mawphlang
Days:	1 night, 2 days
Total distance:	16 km
Difficulty:	Easy
Elevation range:	1536–1829 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Jio and Airtel work best along the trail.
Water availability:	Available along the trail

Ladmawphlang - Laitsohma - Mawphlang

The Sacred Grove at Mawphlang is of deep importance to the Khasis, so please maintain decorum while you're there and do not take away even a petal or a leaf when you leave.

Overview

Most treks in Meghalaya are steeped in the history of the state's indigenous tribes. But only one trek offers you an experience that blends the legacies of its people with those of its colonisers. The David Scott Trek, named after the British administrator who was posted to these parts in the early 19th century, today runs on part of the 100-km-long trade route that was established as the British expanded into Meghalaya from the plains of what is now Bangladesh.

Today, the trek offers you the chance to see the best of East (India) and West (Britain) across two days. A lot of trekkers complete the trail in a day, but we recommend that you take your time and savour it across two days.

We also recommend taking the trek in the opposite of its usual direction. The reason for this is simple: by starting at Ladmawphlang, you will encounter the remnants of the Raj on your first day. You'll walk over a quaint stone footbridge (one of many on this trail) before coming across an arched stone bridge that seems right out of the British countryside. One can almost picture a wagon drawn by horses trotting across it. Stop awhile here, take in the views, and take a photo or two. You will also spot Elephant Hill and Mawnguid Briew, a rock that the Khasi legends say once swallowed a child. A natural pool is also at hand, if you would like to dip your toes in it and rest your feet.

The trail serves as a resting place for many, as can be seen by the presence of numerous ancient megaliths along the way, each erected to mark a victory, a site of sacrifice, or the last resting place of a loved one. More modern and more touching though is the grave of a child named Camilla, marked by a tombstone that dates back to 1843.

However, the real reason for inverting the direction of the trek as well as for taking an extra day becomes clear when you end the trek in Mawphlang. The site of an at least 800-year-old forest that is venerated by the Khasis as their most sacred grove, Mawphlang is home to their legends as well as many rare and unique species of plants.

Standing under its canopy, you can feel why the locals hold this place dear. It has a presence that grants a walk here a sense of gravitas that you'll rarely feel elsewhere. Spend some time listening to the forest and when you leave, do not take anything away with you except gratitude and memories.

Flora

This is very different terrain from that of many other treks, and hence, the flora is also very different. You'll walk through open, grassy meadows, stroll under swaying rhododendrons and silent pine trees, and carefully tread through the Sacred Grove that nurtures mushrooms and orchids along with rare plant species.

Fauna

This is a trail much more rewarding for flora, so don't pin your hopes on sighting much fauna.

Day 1

Shillong to Ladmawphlang to River Campsite

Total distance: 32 km by car, 8 km on foot

Altitude of Ladmawphlang: 1727 m

Altitude of River Campsite: 1536 m

Drive: Around 2 hours

Trail: A very gentle descent of around 3 hours

After a short and bracing drive from Shillong, get off at Exit Point at Ladmawphlang and make your way on to the trail. Keep an eye out for the stone paving that has survived the many decades since the British had it laid nearly two centuries ago.

Cross Laitsohma village to reach the campsite by the river, where you will break for the night.

Accommodation: Tents at the campsite

Day 2

River campsite to Mawphlang to Shillong

Total distance: 8 km on foot, 25 km by car

Altitude of Mawphlang: 1829 m

Trail: A flat walk with a gradual ascent of 3–4 hours

Wake up and leave after breakfast. The views are constantly spectacular, and you'll even get a glimpse of the Mawphlang dam. Cross the broken stone bridge before spending time at the Sacred Grove.

Drive: Around 1 hour

How to get there

The trek starts in Ladmawphlang and ends in Mawphlang, both of which are very well connected by road to Shillong. For this trail, taxi drivers often double as guides.

THE SEVEN SISTERS WATERFALLS

Laitïam - Suktia

From waterfalls that represent each of the modern states of the Northeast of India to lore that honours the region's legendary chiefs, this trek has more than enough for you to soak in.

Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Laitïam to Suktia
Days:	3 nights, 4 days
Total distance:	10 km
Difficulty:	Easy to moderate
Elevation range:	70–1036 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Jio and Airtel work best along the trail.
Water availability:	Available along the trail

Laitïam - Suktia

The Seven Sisters Waterfalls are rain-fed, which means the best time to see them in full flow is just after the rains.

Overview

Waterfalls flow from the hills of Meghalaya like rain pours from the clouds that the state takes its name from—freely and frequently. And perhaps one of the most impressive waterfalls here is the Nohsngithiang Falls, better known as the Sever Sisters Waterfalls. On this trek, you'll not only get a great view of these falls but you'll also get a chance to bathe in some of the region's folklore.

The Seven Sisters Waterfalls are a sight to behold, especially when it flows in its full majesty just after the monsoons have swept through Meghalaya. Over 70 metres broad and with a height of 315 metres, the rushing, roaring waters are as breathtaking to see as they are to hear on their way down. The Nohsngithiang Falls is actually comprised of seven different streams, each of which is supposed to represent one of the north-eastern states of India. This is where it gets its modern name from.

However, there's a lot more to this trek than India's fourth highest waterfalls. Umrohpei means 'through the holes' in Khasi, and this is exactly how another waterfall on the trail appears—emerging unexpectedly from a cave in the cliff, thus earning itself this name.

Wait until you encounter Mawsienong, though. Sounding like a formidable creation from the legends, it is an iron ladder built by the locals to help them descend and ascend a treacherously steep part of the trail. It was built over 30 years ago, and the locals have already started intertwining the roots of the *Ficus elastica* in preparation for the time when this human innovation will rust away and nature's creation will take its place as a living root ladder.

At the bottom of the valley is a village that thrives in the presence of the Five Sacred Forests that surround it. Wander awhile under the shade of its boughs and you might experience the ineffable feeling that makes the villagers protect these groves.

This region, like most in Meghalaya, is also home to a legend of epic tragedy that has implications in the present.

In time out of mind, Laitïam consisted of three villages: Sohbar, Laitïam, and Ryngud. Marangsiang, the last chieftain of these villages, fell in love with Saïa Nongum, a girl of modest means. This was not an ideal match, and in fact it was one that his mother opposed, but Marangsiang listened to his heart and married his love.

One day, when he was out visiting the villages on a royal tour, his mother, taking advantage of his absence, gave Saïa Nongum away to the Chief of Mawphu. Hearing of this treachery, Marangsiang rushed home and requested the Chief of Mawphu to return his love to her home. The Chief refused, which led to their deciding to settles matters on the battlefield.

Unfortunately, the Chief of Mawphu prevailed and slayed Marangsiang. Distraught at the news, Saïa Nongum asked to be allowed to pay her slain husband one last visit, after which she would marry the Chief of Mawphu. She carried water in a hollow bamboo in the hope of reviving her husband, but, upon seeing his severed head, she let out a wail that is said to have rent the heavens and caused a flood to come coursing down the valley. The soldiers of Mawphu were drowned and their village was washed away.

Even today, the villagers of Laitïam revere this bond between man and wife. And the residents of Sohbar, Laitïam, and Ryngud believe that, before the harvesting season, any village that spots the visage of Marangsiang on the hills will have a bountiful harvest.

Thankfully, you don't need to spot Marangsiang on the cliffs to have a rewarding trek.

Flora

The thri or riphin vines that are used to weave a lot of items in the villages can be spotted along this trail. Laitïam village is one of the largest producers of these vines.

Fauna

Some of the animals you might spot while walking here are antelopes, the Asian black bear, and some species of wildcat.

Day 1

Shillong to Laitïam

Total distance: 57 km by car, 3 km on foot

Altitude of the Laitïam roadhead: 1036 m

Altitude of Laitïam village: 427 m

Drive: Around 3–4 hours

Trail: A gradual to steep descent, followed by a level walk, total of 4 hours

Leave Shillong early, so that you can disembark at the Laitïam roadhead and start the trek to the village in good time. The forest is soothing, and old stepping stones still remain from the path the villagers built before the modern road connection. Be careful, though, as the stones can be a bit slippery.

If you take a short detour off the trail, you'll spot the Umrohpei Waterfall that almost magically appears out of caves in the cliffs. And don't forget to keep an eye out for the flagship sight of this trek—the Seven Sisters Waterfall!

The final kilometre throws up a challenge in the form of a steep descent, but you can use the Mawsieniong ladder to ease your way as you approach Laitiam.

Accommodation: Tents at the campsite

Day 2

Laitïam to Wah Lyngngam River Campsite

Total distance: Around 5.5 km

Altitude of Laitiam village: 427 m

Altitude of Wah Laitïam Lyngngam River Campsite: 70 m

Trail: A level walk followed by a gradual descent of 2-3 hours

Start the day by walking around the Laitïam village. You will find a natural water pool near the campsite. There are five sacred forests around the village, so visit a few of them before setting off for the campsite on the banks of the Wah Lyngngam.

Two living root bridges named Usten and Sohpal await you on this part of the trail.

Five kilometres into this trail, the road forks and offers a diversion to Suktia. Take this route, and you'll reach the campsite in 500 metres.

Accommodation: Tents at the campsite

Day 3

Wah Lyngngam River Campsite to Shillong via Suktia

Total distance: 1 km on foot, 66 km by car

Altitude of Wah Lyngngam River Campsite: 70 m

Trail: A gradual descent followed by a flat walk

Drive: 2–3 hours

Wake up early to enjoy a swim in the river before you pack up and leave for Shillong. On the way, stop in Suktia to explore the village.

How to get there

The Laitïam roadhead is well connected to the main road and hence to Shillong. Getting a cab to bring you here will be easy. Getting a cab back from Suktia should also not be hard. However, as with villages anywhere, local transport systems are subject to sudden change. Hence, it might be more prudent to book your car from Shillong itself to drop you and fetch you a few days later.

THE ORANGE GORGE TREK

Ngunraw - Nongnah

The name of this trek is both a description and a suggestion.
We suggest you take the trek and find out more.

Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Ngunraw to Nongnah
Days:	2 nights, 3 days
Total distance:	5 km
Difficulty:	Easy to moderate
Elevation range:	406–1149 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Patchy all along the trail
Water availability:	Available along the trail

Ngunraw - Nongnah

Overview

What comes to mind when you hear 'orange'? Or when we say 'gorge'? If you thought of a colour and a style of eating, you wouldn't be wrong in using these terms to describe the highlight of this trek. However, if you thought of a fruit and a deep and narrow canyon, you'd also be right. How?

The Orange Gorge Trek is one that takes you through a remote part of Meghalaya, where the state's best oranges grow plentifully in the orchards above and in the gorge of the Wah Lyngon river.

The remoteness of the area can be gauged by the time it takes to reach the trek's starting point from Shillong. But once you descend into the gorge above which Ngunraw is perched, you'll leave most traces of the modern world behind. That includes mobile phone coverage.

This area is famed for growing some of Meghalaya's best oranges, so while you spend some time exploring its natural beauty, don't forget to sample the village's star produce.

As you step gingerly down the stone steps that line the steep path into the gorge, you would be forgiven for thinking that you're an explorer on an adventure of your own. Rest awhile in one of the bamboo groves along the path and enjoy the sounds of the original windchime—the bamboo shoots clinking together softly as the wind whistles through the groves. There can be no better soundtrack as you savour an orange, freshly plucked from an orchard on the slope.

Most gorges have a river running through them, and this one is no exception to Nature's rule. The Wah Lyngon runs true and is a great place for you to wash off the day's labours as you take a dip in its welcoming waters.

When you begin ascending the other side of the gorge, keep your mind on the reward that awaits you on the top—a rolling meadow, shorn of people and tall with grass. Nobody outside the village knows of it, and you would do well to keep it that way. Lie down in the grass and feast on the sight of the blue skies overhead. Get up when you're ready, and drink in the 360-degree views of the West Khasi Hills. And prepare to head home having gorged on some of the best experiences Meghalaya has to offer.

Flora

Apart from the ubiquitous broom grass plantations, you will also get the opportunity to walk through orchards of the region's finest oranges. Bamboo groves by the river and fan palms offer a welcome break from the betel nut and banana trees.

Fauna

Some of the animals you might spot while walking here are antelopes, the Asian black bear and some species of wildcat.

Day 1

Shillong to Ngunraw

Total distance: 100 km by car

Altitude of Ngunraw: 1149 m

Drive: Around 5–6 hours

Ngunraw is in a remote part of the state, and it takes half a day to reach there, which is why today is only a travel day. Arrive at Ngunraw and explore the culture of the village. Soak in the panoramic views and don't forget to gorge on its most famous product—oranges!

Accommodation: Tents at the campsite

Trek The Himalayas

Day 2

Ngunraw to Wah Lyngon Campsite

Total distance: around 2 km

Altitude of Ngunraw: 1149 m

Altitude of Wah Lyngon campsite: 406 m

Trail: A steep descent of around 3 hours

Today, you will descend into the gorge, towards the Wah Lyngon. The way down is lined with stones but is very steep, so you need to watch your step as you climb down.

The path is lined with bamboo groves and orange orchards, so you have enough to refresh yourself with on this short but challenging trail.

Reach the campsite by the river and cool off by taking a dip in its crystal-clear waters.

Accommodation: Tents at the campsite

Day 3

Wah Lyngon River Campsite to Shillong via Nongnah

Total distance: 2.5 km on foot, 105 km by car

Altitude of Wah Lyngon River Campsite: 406 m

Altitude of Nongnah: 1010 m

Trail: A steep ascent of around 3 hours

Drive: 5–6 hours

It's time to go back up, but this time, you will take the opposite slope of the gorge. This will be a four-hour test of your endurance, but you will be rewarded first by the unexpected sight of a serene, sprawling meadow, and then, by 360-degree views of the hills and villages of the region.

Soak in the sights and the silence before walking to the roadhead and heading back to Shillong.

How to get there

The Laitïam roadhead is well connected to the main road and hence to Shillong. Getting a cab to bring you here will be easy. Getting a cab back from Suktia should also not be hard. However, as with villages anywhere, local transport systems are subject to sudden change. Hence, it might be more prudent to book your car from Shillong itself to drop you and fetch you a few days later.

THE INFINITY POOL TREK

Shillong - Mawten - Shillong

A newly established trail that has a unique surprise at the end of it, this is one experience that sounds familiar but will feel brand-new.

Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Shillong to Mawten to Shillong
Days:	2 nights, 3 days
Total distance:	6 km
Difficulty:	Easy to moderate
Elevation range:	515–1568 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Patchy all along the trail
Water availability:	Available on days 1 & 3; carry on day 2.

Shillong - Mawten - Shillong

Overview

All of us dream of a vacation at a beach resort, lazing in the infinity pool as we stare at the waves in front of us. A lot of us have fulfilled this dream, too. Here's your chance to do something familiar, yet different.

The Infinity Pool trek offers you the chance to do all of this, but with one vital difference—instead of a beach, you'll be looking out at the green canopy of a jungle in Meghalaya.

This pool awaits you atop the Ud-Rngai Waterfalls, whose name means Moaning Spirit in Khasi. But don't worry—that's likely a reference to the sounds the water makes as it falls over, rather than to anything spooky.

Take the time to (literally) soak in this experience. The combination of roaring water, chirping crickets, and whistling wind creates a soundtrack that even decorated composers would struggle to match.

This waterfall and its infinity pool were only recently discovered by the outside world, so chances are that you won't find the usual bustle that a spot like this would otherwise attract.

And there's more to discover on this trail than just the most unique infinity pool you'll see. The path to the beautiful Synrang Rngai Lake is lined with meadows that roll over undulating hills and off towards the horizon in an unending sway.

The trek is short but rewarding and would be great if combined with another trek before or after it. Just like the infinity pool would be perfect with a friend beside you.

Flora

On this trail, you might find the golden Himalayan raspberry growing on chest-high shrubs.

Fauna

Some of the animals you could spot here are the flying squirrel, the fox, the barking deer, the clouded leopard, and even the Asian black bear.

Day 1

Shillong to Mawten

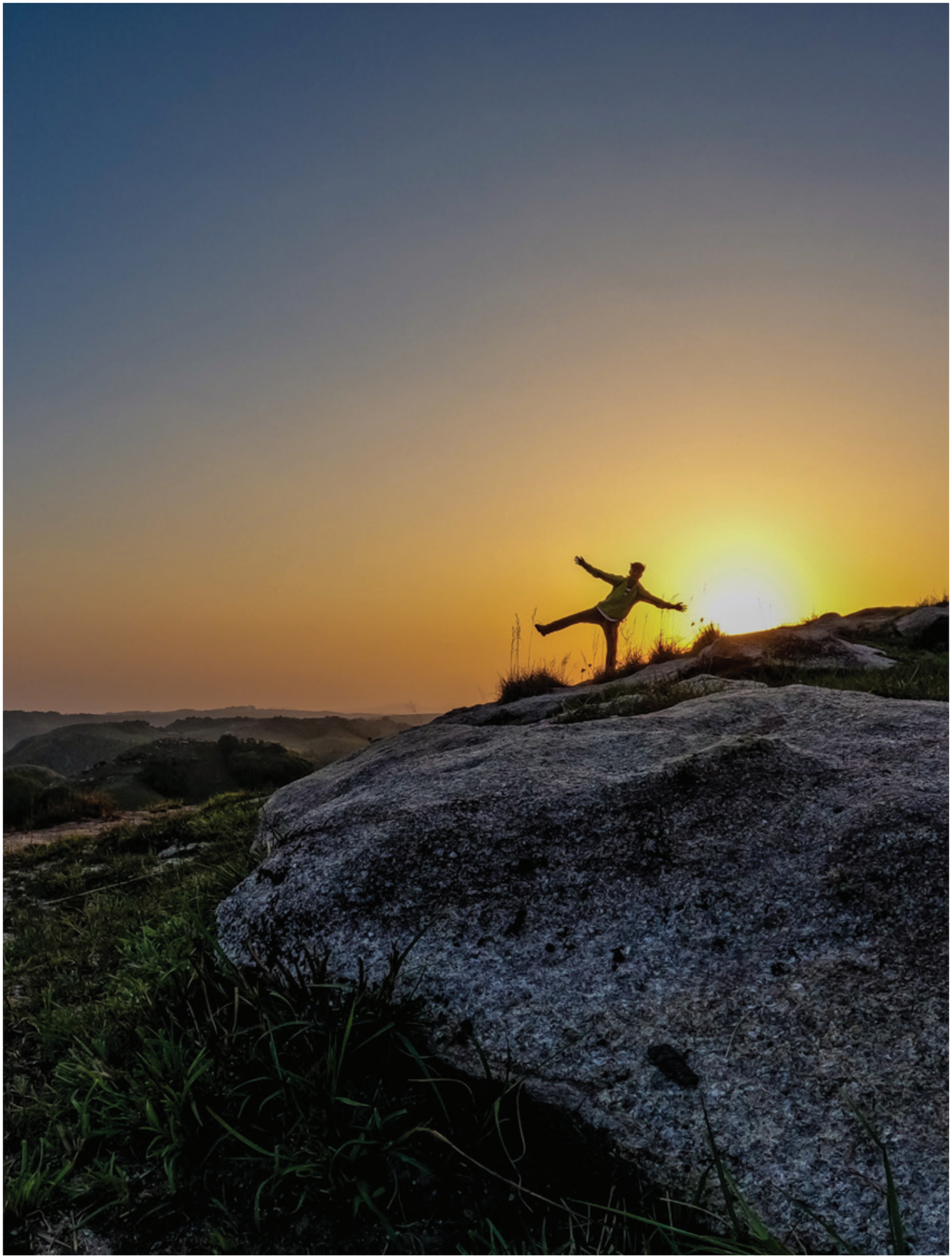
Total distance: 77 km

Altitude of Mawten: 1568 m

Drive: A round 3 hours

You can leave Shillong after breakfast and make it to Mawten in time for lunch. Explore the village and rest for the trek tomorrow.

Accommodation: Campsite at Mawten



Day 2

Mawten to Ud-Rngai to Mawten

Total distance: 6 km

Altitude of Mawten: 1568 m

Altitude of Ud-Rngai: 515 m

Trail: A mostly gradual ascent and descent of 4–5 hours

Wake up early, because the day is packed with a lot of places for you to visit. The trail goes through an expanse of rolling meadows and hills before taking you to Synrang Rngai, a lake nestled in the thick forest.

Refreshed by this sight, you'll carry on through the thickening forest. Some parts of the trail might have a challenging incline, but your efforts will soon be rewarded by the Ud-Rngai Waterfalls. Climb up and give in to the natural infinity pool that crowns the falls.

Trek back to Mawten for the night.

Carry water for today.

Accommodation: Campsite at Mawten

Day 3

Mawten to Shillong

Total distance: 77 km

Altitude of Mawten: 1568 m

Drive: Around 3 hours

Leave after breakfast for Shillong or any other onward destination you have planned for.

How to Get There

Mawten is not that far from Shillong and should offer good car and taxi connections. Keep a car with you, if you can.

THE REFUGE OF THE HILL MYNA TREK

Shillong - Nongnah - Umpung - Shillong

Visit the place where the state bird of Meghalaya is given sanctuary and discover one of the many admirable conservation efforts undertaken by the proud residents of Meghalaya.

Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Shillong to Nongnah to Umpung to Shillong
Days:	2 nights, 3 days
Total distance:	8 km
Difficulty:	Easy to moderate
Elevation range:	29–1081 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Patchy all along the trail
Water availability:	Available on days 1 and 3; carry on day 2.

Shillong - Nongnah - Umpung - Shillong

Overview

Everyone is proud of their home. But in Meghalaya, this pride extends into admirable conservation endeavours that benefit the flora and fauna that share the land with its human residents.

Meghalaya is dotted with fish sanctuaries, as even a casual drive around the state will testify. But in the South West Khasi Hills, a village has turned a local endeavour into a matter of state pride. Umpung village is famed throughout Meghalaya for its zeal towards conservation, the highlight of which was a 2017 drive to help address dwindling hill myna numbers.

The hill myna needs tall trees with dense foliage to nest in. Sensing that the number trees in Umpung that were suitable for hill myna nesting were not enough, the villagers designed a man-made ruh (nest in Khasi) and placed lots of them on tree tops. This gave the birds a place to take refuge in and also a safe place to lay their eggs and raise their young in.

The hill myna is also famed for its ability to mimic human speech, and this had led to it being captured and sold as a pet and show bird in the markets nearby. The Dorbar shnong, which is the traditional Khasi council that governs a village, passed a rule in 2018 banning the capture and sale of these birds on all land under its administration.

The combined impact of these proactive measures was to give the beleaguered birds a fighting chance at survival. Villagers now claim that sightings of the bird are up by over 50 per cent today!

The Umngi River that flows through the region is a treasure trove of rare species like like the goonch (Bagarius yarrelli), the Himalayan mahseer (Tor putitora), the glass fish (Parambassis ranga), the *Wallago attu* and more. To help protect this treasure, a body called Friends of Umngi was formed. It isn't surprising that Umpung was one of the founding nine villages to sign up.

Don't miss out on the Refuge of the Hill Myna trek. It's not every day that you get to see a state's pride take flight.

Flora

On the trail, you will come across numerous plantations of broom grass, jackfruit, and betel nut, as well as many bamboo groves.

Fauna

The area is known for its birds, so along with hill mynas, you could also spot blue-throated barbets, wild ducks, serpent eagles, fish eagles, fish owls, and hornbills.

Day 1

Shillong to Nongnah

Total distance: 135 km
Altitude of Nongnah: 1081 m
Drive: Around 5–6 hours

Reach Nongnah in the afternoon. Explore the village and rest for the trek tomorrow.

Accommodation: Campsite at Nongnah

Day 2

Nongnah to Umpung

Total distance: 8 km

Altitude of Nongnah: 1081 m

Altitude of Umpung: 29 m

Trail: Mostly easy over 5 hours

Leave for Nongktieh, the starting point of the trail. Take in the view of the valley below and Umpung bridge and start the trek.

This part of the trail goes along a ridge and through thick cultivation. After 4.5 km, you will come to a diversion, where you turn right. The trail now winds its way through thick forests for a kilometre, leading to the banks of the Photkynsain River. Cross the river and take the paved road for 3.5 km more until you reach Umpung on the banks of the Umngi River.

Take a dip and refresh yourself. Rest for the night.

Carry water for today.

Accommodation: Campsite at Umpung

Day 3

Umpung to Shillong

Total distance: 96 km

Altitude of Umpung: 29 m

Drive: Around 4 hours

Umpung is the home of the Hill Myna Sanctuary, so delve it and discover what the residents are doing to help conserve this and other species.

You could also fish or do some kayaking before leaving for Shillong.

How to Get There

Nongnah is connected to Shillong by road. Even so, it might be prudent to book a car from Shillong and keep it with you until you return.

UMPUNG
VILLAGE
CAUTION
WEAK BRIDGE
MAXIMUM LOADING
CAPACITY 9.00 TONS
SAVIBA

THE MEANDERING RIVER TREK

Shillong - Mawkynrum - Shillong

Wander with one of Meghalaya's most beautiful rivers and pick your way through the massive boulders by its banks.

Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Shillong to Mawkynrum to Shillong
Days:	2 nights, 3 days
Total distance:	6 km
Difficulty:	Easy
Elevation range:	1578 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Patchy all along the trail
Water availability:	Available on days 1 & 3; carry on day 2.

Shillong - Mawkynrum - Shillong

Overview

Not all treks in Meghalaya are elaborate. But every trek in Meghalaya is memorable, as this meander by the Namlang River will show you.

The Meandering River Trek is a short trek that will leave you with long-lasting memories. Located around the Namlang River, the area is close to Shillong but reassuringly little-known, as a quick search on Google will show. But that means there's less for you to share as you pick your way through the boulders that line the banks of the river.

After you begin the trail and cross the bamboo bridge that you'll encounter early on, you'll come to a massive boulder. Climb atop it for a viewpoint that affords you 180-degree panoramas of the river as it makes its way through paddy fields and meadows.

Once you're on the far bank, turn left and make for the pine trees. This is where it will get exciting. There lies a huge boulder in your path with no way around it. You will need to climb some smaller boulders to get to the top. Be careful while descending on the other side—it's a sheer rock face you have to clamber down.

The trail then opens up and takes you through the classic bucolic landscape of Meghalaya. Vast fields, cattle sheds, country huts, and even a water reservoir—all of this will give you a glimpse of how the Khasi have always lived.
There is a part of the trail that meanders through grasslands dotted with grazing cattle. From here, the road to the exit point is a straight and easy one and leads directly to the foot of a hill, on the top of which waits another massive boulder, atop which is the best point to view the dying sun from.

So come, meander awhile. If you don't know how, let the Namlang teach you.

Flora

Most treks in Meghalaya will allow you to get deep inside its tropical jungles. This trek however, is one of the few that serves up rolling grasslands.

Fauna

Since you're going to be spending a large part of the trek along a river, keep an eye out for wading and fishing birds. This trek also goes through pastoral lands, so you might spot more cattle than deer.

Day 1

Shillong to Mawkynrum

Total distance: 68 km

Altitude of Mawkynrum: 1578 m

Drive: Around 3 hours

Since your destination is not too far away, you could leave Shillong after a leisurely breakfast.

Accommodation: Campsite at Mawkynrum

Day 2

Mawkynrum to Namlang River to Mawkynrum

Total distance: 6 km

Altitude of Mawkynrum: 1578 m

Trail: Mostly easy, except for a few sections with boulders of around 4–5 hours

All the action happens today, and it begins right by the campsite, which is where the trail starts. Walk along the Namlang and through the boulders until you cross the river, and then walk through the different parts of the village.

After crossing the paddy fields, you'll come to the exit point. Climb the hill from here for stunning sunset views atop another massive boulder. Return to the campsite and rest.

Carry water for today.

Accommodation: Campsite at Mawkynrum

Day 3

Mawkynrum to Shillong

Total distance: 68 km

Altitude of Nongnah: 1578 m

Drive: Around 3 hours

How to Get There

Mawkynrum is reasonably close to Shillong, so rented cars or private taxis should be easy to find. Still, keep a car with you if you can.

THE UNNAMED LAKES TREK

Shillong – Mawphanlur – Lawdisai – Mawlangren – Shillong

Be one of the first trekkers to discover the lakes on this newly formed trail.

Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Shillong – Mawphanlur – Lawdisai – Mawlangren – Shillong
Days:	3 nights, 4 days
Total distance:	11.5 km
Difficulty:	Easy
Elevation range:	1773–1925 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Patchy all along the trail
Water availability:	Available on days 1 & 4; carry on days 2 & 3.

Shillong – Mawphanlur – Lawdisai – Mawlangren – Shillong

Overview

If you were asked to name a trek around mountain lakes, you might name the Great Lakes trek in Kashmir. Or perhaps any one of the many lakes in Uttarakhand. Or even Chandra Taal in Spiti. But would you know that there is also one in Meghalaya?

The Unnamed Lakes Trek in the West Khasi Hills is one trekking circuit that is a must-do. There are many reasons for this.

One, the trek is a very recent discovery—in fact, it is so new that only the first lake on the route has a name, Pung-syier Lake.

Two, Pung-syier Lake is stunning and makes for a perfect start. This picturesque lake is a great spot to first go swimming and then kayaking or boating.

Three, the hike past the other six lakes has shaded rest stops that have been built for trekkers, making it a very comfortable route to take.

Four, the trail has been crafted to take you to Mawthadraishan, one of the highest peaks in Meghalaya.

Five, it takes you through and past some lovely villages, where the locals still live to the rhythms and traditions of a bygone age. Six, a part of the hike passes by groves of golden Himalayan raspberry trees, which are a treat to stop at during fruiting season.

And seven, you might be one of the first people to take this trek.

So, there you have it—seven reasons for seven lakes. You surely don't need another reason to go on the Unnamed Lakes Trek. You only need a season, which for this trek is all year round.

Flora

The paths go through dense forests as well as fruiting shrubs.

Fauna

This route is not famed for animal sightings so enjoy the scenery on offer.

Day 1

Shillong to Mawphanlur

Total distance: 71 km

Altitude of Mawphanlur: 1822 m

Drive: Around 3 hours

Savour your breakfast and set off for Mawphanlur, a quaint village nestled amidst lush verdure.

After you arrive, walk to Pung-syier, the first of the seven lakes and the only one with an 'official' name. You could also participate in the water sports on offer here.

Accommodation: Campsite at Mawkynrum

Day 2

Mawphanlur to Lawdisai

Total distance: 4.5 km
Altitude of Mawphanlur: 1822 m
Altitude of Lawdisai: 1891 m
Altitude of Mawthadraishan Peak: 1925 m
Trail: Easy walking of about 2–3 hours

The trail today has a lot in store for you. Head north from the campsite and you'll come upon a vantage point just a few hundred metres away, from where you can enjoy a stunning view of Pung-syier Lake. Head east along the well-paved path and you'll pass by six more postcard-worthy lakes, all of which have shaded places of rest built along their shores.

Three kilometres more will bring you to a well-paved road, 500 metres down which lies Mawthadraishan, one of Meghalaya's highest peaks. Drink in the views and walk the remaining kilometre to Lawdisai, your halt for the night.

Carry water for today.

Accommodation: Campsite at Lawdisai

Day 3

Lawdisai to Mawlangren

Total distance: 5 km

Altitude of Lawdisai: 1891 m

Altitude of Mawlangren: 1773 m

Trail: A gradual ascent and descent of 4–5 hours

Today's vistas will bring you pine forests and hills. But first, a kilometre into your hike, you'll come upon Domkseh village, surrounded by paddy fields.

If you're in luck, it will be fruiting season for the golden Himalayan raspberry, and you'll be able to feast on them further along the trail.

The trail ends at Mawlangren, where you will stop for the night. Sleep early, because you will need to rise early to witness what this village is famed for.

Carry water for today.

Accommodation: Campsite at Mawlangren

Day 4

Mawlangren to Shillong

Total distance: 71 km by car, 2 km on foot

Altitude of Mawlangren: 1773 m

The village of Mawlangren is known for its glorious sunrises, with the sun parting the curtains of mist. Watch this sight, have breakfast, and leave for Shillong.

How to Get There

Mawphanlur and Mawlangren are both quite close to Shillong, so rented cars and private taxis should be easier to find. Still, keep a car with you if possible.

THE BRIDGE TO FREEDOM TREK

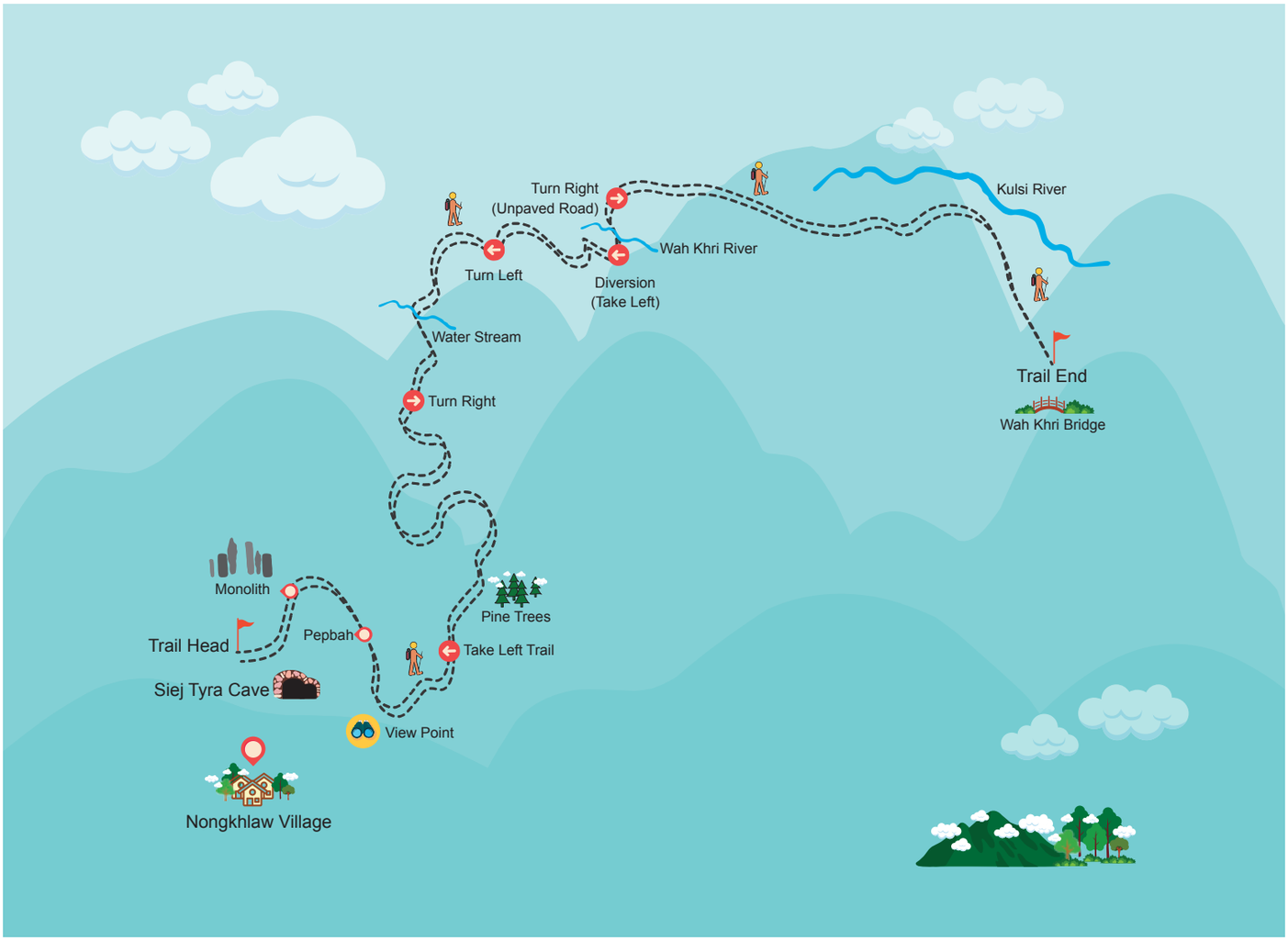
Shillong - Nongkhlaw - Shillong

On this trek, you can walk in the footsteps of one of Meghalaya's most valiant sons, who lost his life defending his home from the British.

Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Shillong to Nongkhlaw to Shillong
Days:	2 nights, 3 days
Total distance:	11.5 km
Difficulty:	Easy
Elevation range:	684–1401 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Patchy all along the trail
Water availability:	Available on days 1 & 3; carry on day 2.

Shillong - Nongkhlaw - Shillong



Overview

From Birsa Munda to Bhagat Singh, every state in India has had sons of the soil who gave up their lives fighting British invasions. In Meghalaya, that hero is Tirot Sing. A syiem (chief) of the Nongkhlaw in the early 1800s, he resisted British efforts to control the Khasi Hills in order to build a road through it to connect Assam with Bangladesh.

Tirot Sing and his warriors sought to negate the superior firepower of the British by avoiding direct combat and engaging in guerilla warfare instead. They would hide in the caves in this area and emerge suddenly to attack the invaders. This worked well for four years until, one day, Tirot Sing was shot. Badly wounded, he took refuge in one of his hideouts. He recovered and went on to head the resistance until he was finally captured a few years later.

The cave in which he hid as he recovered is today known as Krem Tirot or the Cave of Tirot, and is the main attraction on this trek. It is one of two caves that has been developed for tourists.

The other is cave is called Krem Siej Tyra, named after the endemic species of bamboo that grows near it. Outside this cave, you will find the Maw Shong Bishar. This rock was the seat of judgement used by Tirot Sing as he held court and pronounced his verdicts.

The trail to the Wah Khri Bridge is one to savour. A jungle trail that slowly narrows as you go deeper into the trees, the path is peppered with flowers of many shades, as well as orchids. Walking along a path perfumed by wildflowers is a privilege that few ever experience.

When you reach the bridge, stop awhile to look at and listen to the Wah Khri flowing beneath you. If you listen closely enough, you can almost hear Tirot Sing's voice on the wind.

Flora

Orchids and a variety of other white and purple flowers will offer you something new to see along the way. Keep an eye out for the Siej Tyra bamboo species, after which one of Tirot Sing caves is named.

Fauna

Keep an eye out for forest birds and, if you're lucky, deer.

Day 1

Shillong to Nongkhlaw

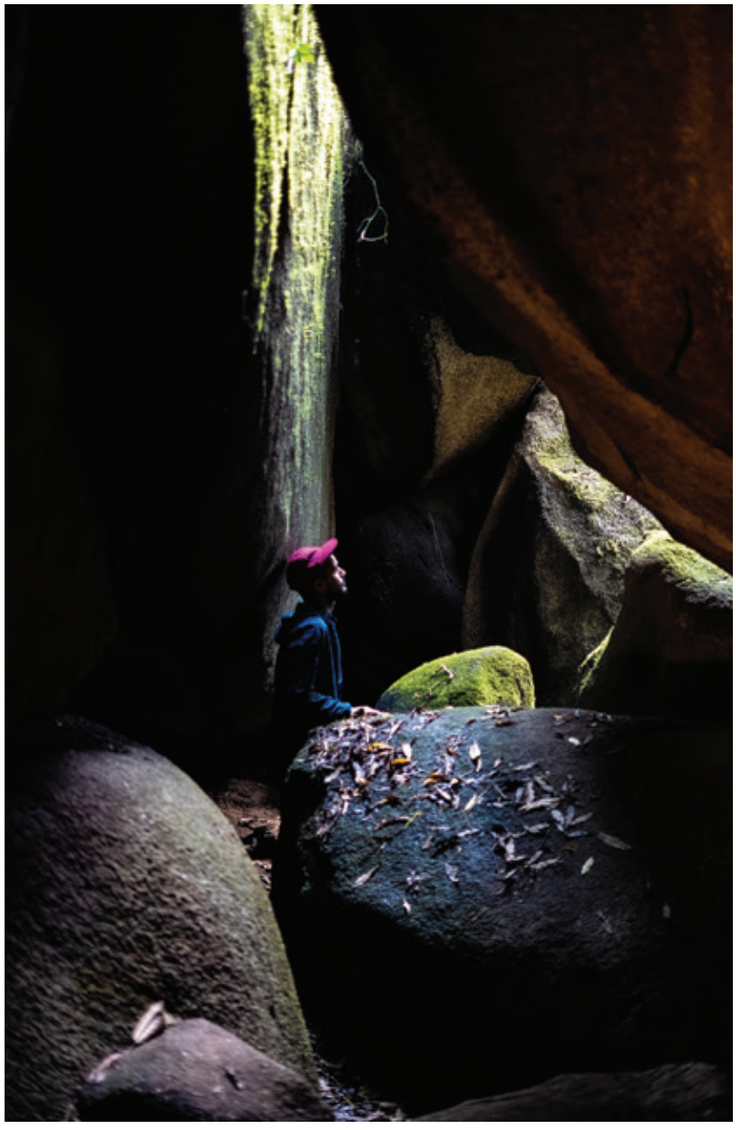
Total distance: 60 km

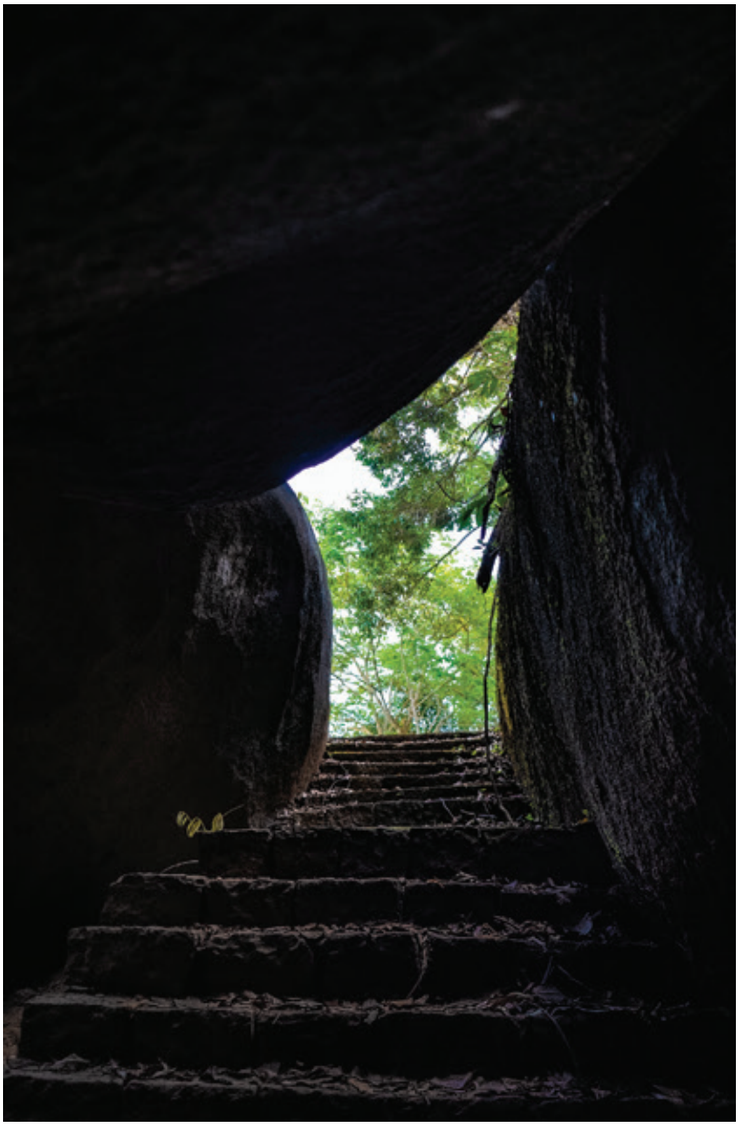
Altitude of Nongkhlaw: 1401 m

Drive: Around 3 hours

Even though Shillong is not too far away, be sure to leave early. You want to get to Nongkhlaw with time in hand to explore Krem Tirot and Krem Siej Tyra, which are close by, along a paved path.

Accommodation: Campsite at Nongkhlaw





Day 2

Nongkhlaw to Wah Khri to Nongkhlaw

Total distance: 10.5 km
Altitude of Nongkhlaw: 1401 m
Altitude of Wah Kri: 684 m
Trail: Mostly over 6–7 hours

Today is the main day for trekking. You'll walk on jungle paths lined with orchids and cross the bridge on the River Wah Khri, from where you'll take a car back to camp.

Carry water for today.

Accommodation: Campsite at Nongkhlaw

Day 3

Nongkhlaw to Shillong

Total distance: 60 km

Altitude of Nongkhlaw: 1401 m

Drive: Around 3 hours

Have breakfast and leave for Shillong.

How to Get There

Nongkhlaw is not too far from Shillong, so rented cars and private taxis should be easier to find. Still, keep a car with you if possible.

THE FLOWING FALLS TREK

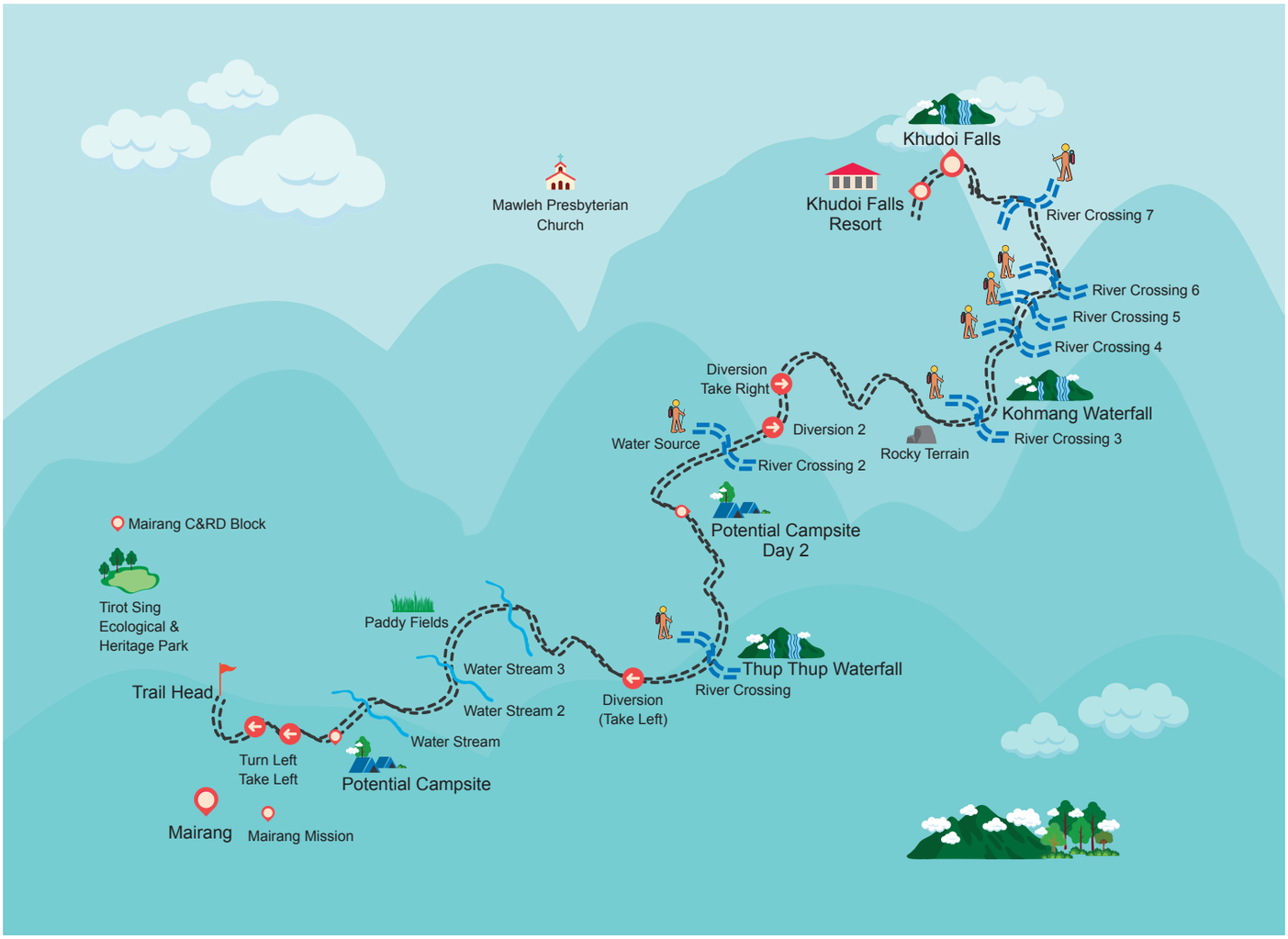
Shillong - Mairang - Shillong

Discover a circuit that allows you to easily flow across three waterfalls as you discover some of Meghalaya's lesser-known wonders.

Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Shillong to Mairang to Shillong
Days:	2 nights, 3 days
Total distance:	11.5 km
Difficulty:	Easy to moderate
Elevation range:	1360–1702 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Patchy all along the trail
Water availability:	Available on days 1 & 3; carry on day 2.

Shillong - Mairang - Shillong



The forest is very thick and close to the trail in some parts, so wear full sleeves and full-length trousers when you walk.

Due to the frequent river crossings, wearing quick-drying clothes will be prudent, as will be carrying at least one extra set of clothes.

Overview

The water of a river flows, determined to find the sea and undaunted by boulders in its path. It is this spirit that has inspired the creation of the Flowing Falls Trek, a circuit that allows you a smooth flow as you trek to three of the region's most spectacular waterfalls.

The trail begins in Mairang, birthplace of Tirot Sing, one of Meghalaya's most famous heroes, who died resisting the British in the Anglo-Khasi War of the early 1800s.

Close to Mairang is the first of three waterfalls on this trail—the Thup Thup Falls. The path to the falls leads through large pine forests before opening up to expansive paddy fields and wide grounds by the river's side. This trail has several river crossings in it, and you will undertake a few of them as you make your way through the large boulders that line the way to Thup Thup Falls.

Once you're there, though, it will all have been worth it—sit back and enjoy the quiet, almost secret waterfalls that descend 60 metres into an emerald pool below.

Khudoi Falls is no less impressive. Hurtling down from a height, the waters form a deep pool at the base, from which they flow out and over another smaller waterfall. You might not yet have seen a double-decker living root bridge, but this is your opportunity to see a double-decker waterfall.

What makes Kohmang Falls unusual is that its waters flow over a series of steps in the stone, making it look almost like they're flowing down a stairway. Stay here awhile and ponder what makes waterfalls seem so similar when they are each so unique.

So go with the flow and take the Flowing Falls Trek when you visit Meghalaya next.

Flora

Mairang is known for many species of bamboo like Siej Tyra and several species of orchids.

Fauna

You might not spot animals like deer and bear, but you should spot fish in the pools of the waterfalls.

Day 1

Shillong to Mairang

Total distance: 45 km
Altitude of Mairang: 1702 m
Drive: Aound 2.5 hours

Reach Mairang by early afternoon, explore the village, and then walk to the nearby hills to catch the sunset.

Accommodation: Campsite at Mairang

Day 2

Mairang to Thup Thup Falls

Total distance: 6.5 km
Altitude of Mairang: 1702 m
Altitude of Thup Thup Waterfall: 1511 m
Trail: 6-7 hours of a mix of open and jungle walking with a few steep ascents and descents

The path to the first of three falls weaves its way through a pine forest. The trail winds around boulders and involves crossing a few streams. Enjoy the sight of the water flowing before you proceed to the campsite close by.

Carry water for today.

Accommodation: Campsite at Thup Thup Falls

Day 3

Thup Thup Falls to Kohmang Falls to Khudoi Falls

Total distance: 45 km by car, 7 km on foot
Altitude of Thup Thup Falls: 1511 m
Altitude of Kohmang Falls: 1422 m
Altitude of Khudoi Falls: 1360 m
Trail: Challenging with frequent river crossings over 5–6 hours

Today, you will visit the Kohmang and Khudoi Falls, thus completing the circuit. The trail will be a challenging one, thanks to seven different river crossings.

Leave for Shillong from Khudoi.

Drive: Around 3 hours

How to Get There

Mairang is not too far from Shillong, so rented cars and private taxis should be easy to find. Still, keep a car with you if possible.

THE GUARDIAN TIGER CAVE

Shillong - Nongpoh - Shillong

When a cave of bats is said to be guarded by a tiger and used as a place of worship by the local tribe, you know that this is a place worth the trek.

Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Shillong to Nongpoh to Shillong
Days:	2 nights, 3 days
Total distance:	5 km
Difficulty:	Easy to moderate
Elevation range:	571–585 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Patchy all along the trail
Water availability:	Available on days 1 & 3; carry on day 2.

Shillong - Nongpoh - Shillong

Overview

When it comes to getting oneself a guardian, you can't do much better than the bats of Pahamshiken village. Their home, a cave close to the village, is said to be guarded by a tiger. Yes, a tiger.

This unique legend has made this a sacred place for the Bhoi, a sub-group of the Khasi tribe. It also makes the cave a great place for intrepid trekkers to visit, which is what you will do when you take the Guardian Tiger Trek. Standing at the mouth of the cave and listening to the soft screeches and murmurs of the colony hanging upside down from the roof will give you an understanding of why the Bhoi consider a visit here to be not just a moving experience but also a spiritual one.

Based in the Ri Bhoi region of Meghalaya, this trail is a short drive outside Shillong, which makes it perfect for anyone looking for either a quick but immersive experience or a trail to add to something to an itinerary you already have planned out for the region.

This route has been mapped to take you through a few Bhoi villages that still practice a time-honoured agrarian life. So be prepared for long walks through lush plantations bursting with jackfruits, bananas, turmeric, ginger, and betelnut. But what makes this trail especially memorable is the opportunity to spot indigenous plant species like dieng star, also known as the elephant rope tree, and sohkyndur, among many others.

The Bhoi have a wonderful tradition of handmaking many items of daily use, like tea strainers, the pla thri (a sling bag made of cane), the khiew khyndew (a pot for rice beer), and the donor (a clay serving vessel for rice beer). They also make sweet wines from papaya and pineapple.

Like most of Meghalaya, this part of the state too is steeped in its lore. At one point in your trek, you will summit a hill and see a rock formation ahead and below you. The Bhoi have named this Mawkba, because they claim that paddy used to grow on these rocks. To those of us used to seeing paddy standing in water and on flat land, this comes as a surprise.

But in Meghalaya, nothing should surprise you—including a cave full of bats being guarded by the master of the forest.

Flora

A lot of the trail passes through thick plantations of banana, papaya, jackfruit, ginger, and turmeric. But keep an eye out for indigenous species of plants on the middle section of the trail.

Fauna

Despite the name of the trek, you aren't likely to spot a tiger here. You could, however, spot smaller forest animals like deer, flying squirrels, and several species of birds.

Day 1

Shillong to Nongpoh

Total distance: 51 km
Altitude of Nongpoh: 571 m
Drive: Around 1.5 hours

Nongpoh is a short drive from Shillong, so rise at leisure and leave after a lazy breakfast.

Accommodation: Campsite or guesthouse at Nongpoh

Day 2

Nongpoh to Mukoibari to Pahamsyiem to Pahamshken to Nongpoh

Total distance: 5 km on foot

Altitude of Mukoibari: 571 m

Altitude of Pahamsiem: 585 m

Trail: Mostly easy, with one steep section

Drive: 2 hours

You will visit several places today, by car and on foot, so buckle up for the ride. From Nongpoh, a 20-minute car ride will take you to Mukoibari, the village where the trailhead is. Set off from here and pass through thick cultivation.

After two kilometres, you'll pass through some boulders and arrive at a hilltop, the approach to which is steep and challenging. At the summit, look out for the Mawkba rock formation.

Continue north through more fruit plantations. You'll soon begin to spot a lot of indigenous plants. After two kilometres, the trail ends at Pahamsyiem, but your experience continues. Get into your car and head to Pahamshiken for the cave of bats that a tiger is supposed to guard. Absorb the atmosphere there and return to Nongpoh for the night.

Accommodation: Campsite or guesthouse at Nongpoh

Day 3

Nongpoh to Shillong

Total distance: 51 km
Altitude of Nongpoh: 571 m
Drive: Around 1.5 hours

Leave at your convenience for Shillong.

How to Get There

Nongpoh is close to and connected to Shillong, so rented cars and private taxis should be easy to find. Still, keep a car with you if possible.

THE LANDMARK SANCTUARY TREK

Shillong - Pahamsyiem - Lailad - Shillong

Visit a sanctuary that is setting benchmarks in conservation as well as becoming a haven for the discovery of new species.

Fact sheet

Region:	Khasi Hills
Route:	Shillong to Pahamsyiem to Lailad to Shillong
Days:	2 nights, 3 days
Total distance:	13 km
Difficulty:	Easy to moderate
Elevation range:	190–571 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Patchy all along the trail
Water availability:	Available on days 1 & 3; carry on day 2.

Shillong - Pahamsyiem - Lailad - Shillong

Overview

When it comes to wildlife sanctuaries, most of us have visited the larger, landmark sanctuaries that tourism campaigns feature. On the Landmark Sanctuary Trek, you have a chance to visit a sanctuary that is setting benchmarks.

Nongkhyllem Wildlife Sanctuary is a biodiversity hotspot that thrives barely an hour's drive north from Shillong. That a wildlife area can do so well, so close to a large city, is a landmark in itself.

The Royal Bengal tiger calls this region home, along with other megafauna like the Indian bison, the Himalayan black bear, and the clouded leopard, to name a few. Birds like the brown hornbill, the Manipur bush quail, and the rufous-necked hornbill can also be spotted here, as can a wide range of reptiles.

But what really shot the park to prominence was two incidents that occurred in quick succession in 2021. The first was Nongkhyllem Wildlife Sanctuary being recognised as the Best Protected Area in the North East, as per a management effectiveness evaluation (MEE) report of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. The evaluation was conducted by the government and Nongkhyllem was awarded the top spot due to biotic interference in the sanctuary being reduced over a two-decade period, proof that good work was being carried out by successive officers there.

The second was the first ever sighting of the *Eudiscopus denticulus*, also called the disk-footed bat. This is a bat that dwells in bamboo and has sticky disks on its feet, hence its name. What makes this discovery even more remarkable is that this was the first time that the species had been spotted this far west, nearly a thousand kilometres from its nearest known habitat in Myanmar.

Apart from these two landmarks that are worth travelling for, this trail also brings you to two of the region's rivers—the Umran and the Umtrew. Both have their unique charms, and walking along their banks to the accompaniment of birdsong is an experience that you won't soon forget.

But perhaps the most memorable and literal landmark is the monolith you'll come upon on the path. An enduring relic of the area's first settlers, it is also a handy reminder that on the Landmark Sanctuary Trek, only memories last forever.

Flora

Bamboo groves greet you as you start off on the trail, and deeper in, you can spot a variety of other plant species like dieng ramai (*Syzygium cumini*), dieng-tha-rong (*Mallotus ferrugineus*), dieng sali, dieng shyrtoh (*Vitex penduncularis*), dieng rai (*Michelia champaca*), dieng phieng, soh laram and soh khwai.

Fauna

Apart from a lot of large animals and birds, this is also the only Indian home of the disk-footed bat, so try and spot it if you can.

Day 1

Shillong to Nongpoh

Total distance: 51 km

Altitude of Nongpoh: 571 m

Drive: Around 1.5 hours

Nongpoh, your base for the trek, is a short drive from Shillong, so leave after a lazy breakfast.

Accommodation: Campsite or Guesthouse at Nongpoh

Day 2

Nongpoh to Pahamsyiem to Lailad

Total distance: 36 km by car, 13 km on foot

Altitude of Pahamsyiem: 585 m

Altitude of Lailad: 190 m

Trail: Easy walk of 4–5 hours

Drive: 2 hours

The trek today will start from Pahamsyiem village. Walk through the bamboo groves and you'll hit a wide path. Four kilometres down this path, you'll arrive on the banks of the Umran.

Cross the river and continue along the narrow path until you come upon a monolith. Take a right and walk until the footbridge, after which lies a wide path leading to a forest officials' patrol house.

Another six kilometres will bring you to a second, two-storied patrolling house and then a single-storied one a little further down, on the banks of the Umtrew. A short walk from here will bring you to Lailad, your halt for the night.

Accommodation: Guesthouse at Lailad

Day 3

Lailad to Shillong

Total distance: 72 km

Altitude of Nongpoh: 190 m

Drive: Around 3 hours

Leave at your convenience for Shillong.

How to Get There

Nongpoh and Lailad are close to Shillong, but don't take public transport for granted. It would be better to organise your own pick-up and drop.

THE LOST CANYON TREK

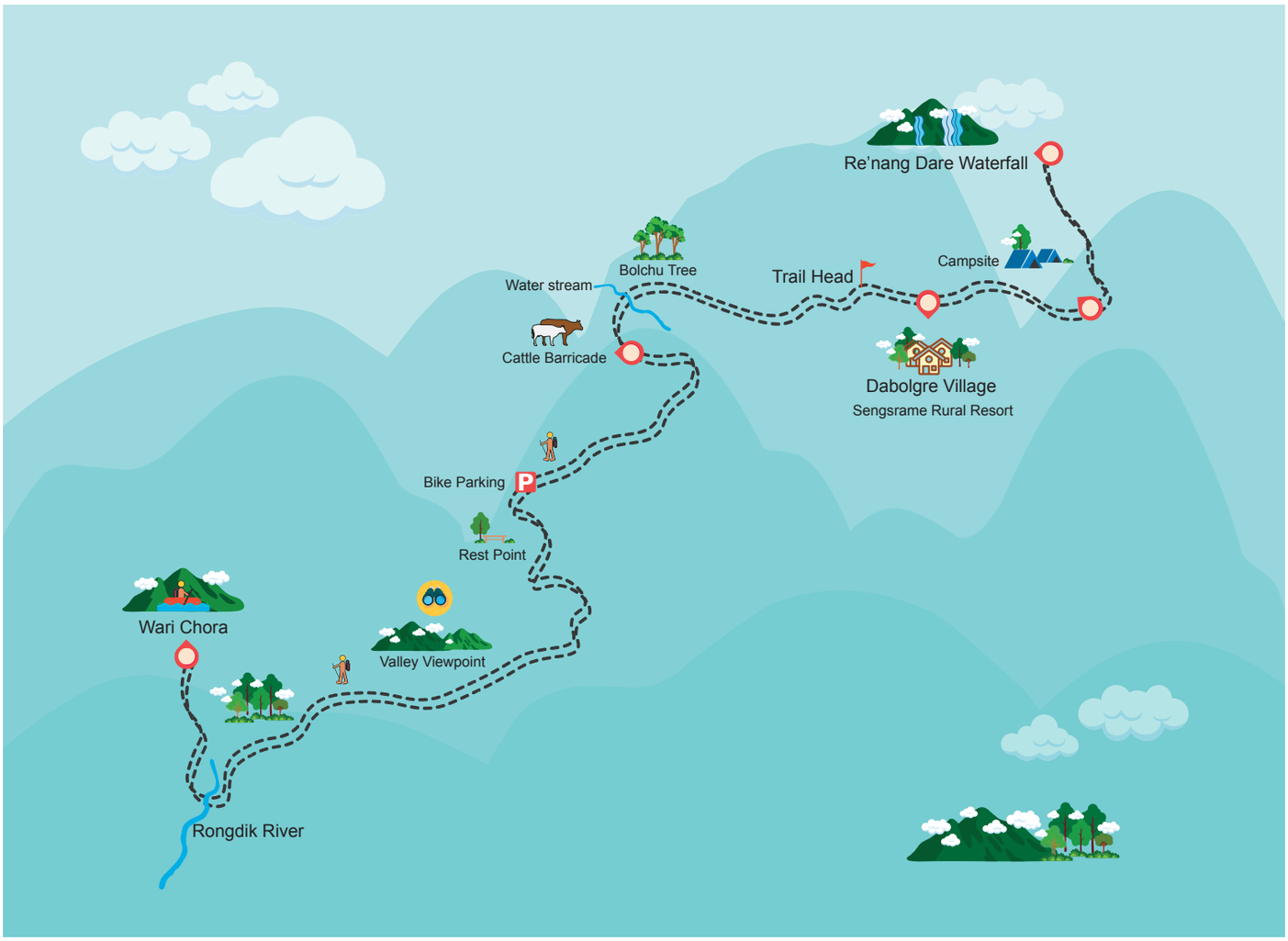
Chisobibra - Dabolgre - Chisobibra

A canyon that lay hidden until recently now offers the adventure of a lifetime, while the caves and waterfalls in the vicinity only add to the movie-like feeling.

Fact sheet

Region:	Garo Hills
Route:	Chisobibra to Dabolgre to Chisobibra
Days:	4 nights, 5 days
Total distance:	10 km
Difficulty:	Easy to moderate
Elevation:	290 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Patchy all along the trail
Water availability:	Available along the trail

Chisobibra - Dabolgre - Chisobibra



Overview

If someone told you that you could explore a forgotten canyon with an emerald river snaking through it, you'd be forgiven for thinking they were talking about taking a trip to the heart of Africa. But what if we told you that this exotic experience can be found in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya?

The Lost Canyon Trek is truly a trail to remember. Based around the Wari Chora Canyon, this is a short but memorable experience of a part of Meghalaya that's been concealed from the tourist eye until recently.

The remoteness of this region can be gauged by the fact that we recommend coming here from Guwahati rather than Shillong—the former is a few hours' drive nearer! However, you could also choose to come here from Shillong or anywhere else in the state.

Meghalaya has a large number of government initiatives for fish conservation, and the road to your destination takes you to one of them: the Jadisil Fish Sanctuary. And guess what makes this such a popular place for people to visit—the opportunity to swim with large shoals of fish in crystal clear water! Carry your swimwear and dive right in when you get here. The sanctuary is a great example of conservation incorporating ecotourism to good effect. Usually, experiences like this need one to go snorkelling or scuba diving.

Swimming with the fish is actually fitting preparation for what awaits you at the bottom of the Lost Canyon of Wari Chora. The beginning itself is exciting, as you rattle along for a kilometre in an off-roader to reach the starting point of the trek. There's a point further down to which bikes can go, but we strongly advise you to experience this section on foot. The trail gets steeper as you descend and also incorporates bamboo ladders to help you reach the riverbank.

It's when you get to the water's edge that the magic begins. Wari Chora is made up of two Garo words that mean 'deep water' and 'serpent' respectively. It's easy to look at the Rongdik snaking along the canyon floor and imagine it to be a shape-shifting serpent that displays unimaginable shades of blue and green as you ride along its back. Which is exactly what you should do, whether in a raft or on a kayak.

The canyon seems to soak up all sound except the rippling of the stream and the dripping of the water from the rocks overhead. Paddle close to the waterfall and let it rush over and refresh you. If you're fortunate, you'll watch a rainbow emerge and dance amongst the droplets. You would be forgiven for thinking that you're on an Indiana Jones-esque adventure of your own.

However, the canyon, highlight though it may be, is not the only descent that will enthral you on this trek. The Nakama Cave, with its unconventional approach track, holds a lot of promise for the intrepid. You need to take a car for five kilometres on an off-road track before walking for a kilometre through magical meadows and lush forest. Don't go more than 50-100 metres in, though. The stalactites and stalagmites can be seen early enough, and, keeping safety in mind, going further into the cave would need both expert guidance and gear.

The campsite at Dabolgre has been chosen with an incentive in sight—the Re'nangdare waterfall. An easy two-kilometre return hike over a paved path that runs through photo-ready betelnut plantations takes you to the natural pool at the waterfall's base. Taking a dip here is the best way to prepare for the stroll back.

So come, lose yourself on this trek and you'll find another reason why it's been given the name it has.

Flora

Apart from the ubiquitous broom-grass plantations, you will also get the opportunity to walk through orchards of the region's finest oranges. Bamboo groves by the river and fan palms offer a welcome break from the betel nut and banana trees.

Fauna

The forests around Dabolgre are home to the rare hoolock gibbon, so keep an ear out for its whooping cry and see if you can spot one.

Day 1

Guwahati to Chisobibra

Total distance: 178 km by car
Altitude of Chisobibra: 290m
Drive: Around 7–8 hours

You have a long drive ahead of you to reach Chisobibra, so land in Guwahati as early as you can and have a car waiting to pick you up and leave straight for your destination.

Reach Chisobibra and rest.

Accommodation: Guesthouse

Day 2

Chisobibra to Dabolgre

Total distance: 80 km

Altitude of Chisobibra: 290m

Altitude of Dabolgre: 267 m

Drive: Around 9 hours

On the way to Dabolgre, you can visit the Jadisil Fish Sanctuary. Don't forget to swim with the fish—it's an experience not many can have.

Accommodation: Camp at Dabolgre

Day 3

Dabolgre to Wari Chora to Dabolgre

Total distance: 2 km by car, 10 km by car

Altitude of Dabolgre: 267 m

Altitude of Wari Chora: 250 m

Trail: A gradual and then steep descent and ascent of around 4 hours

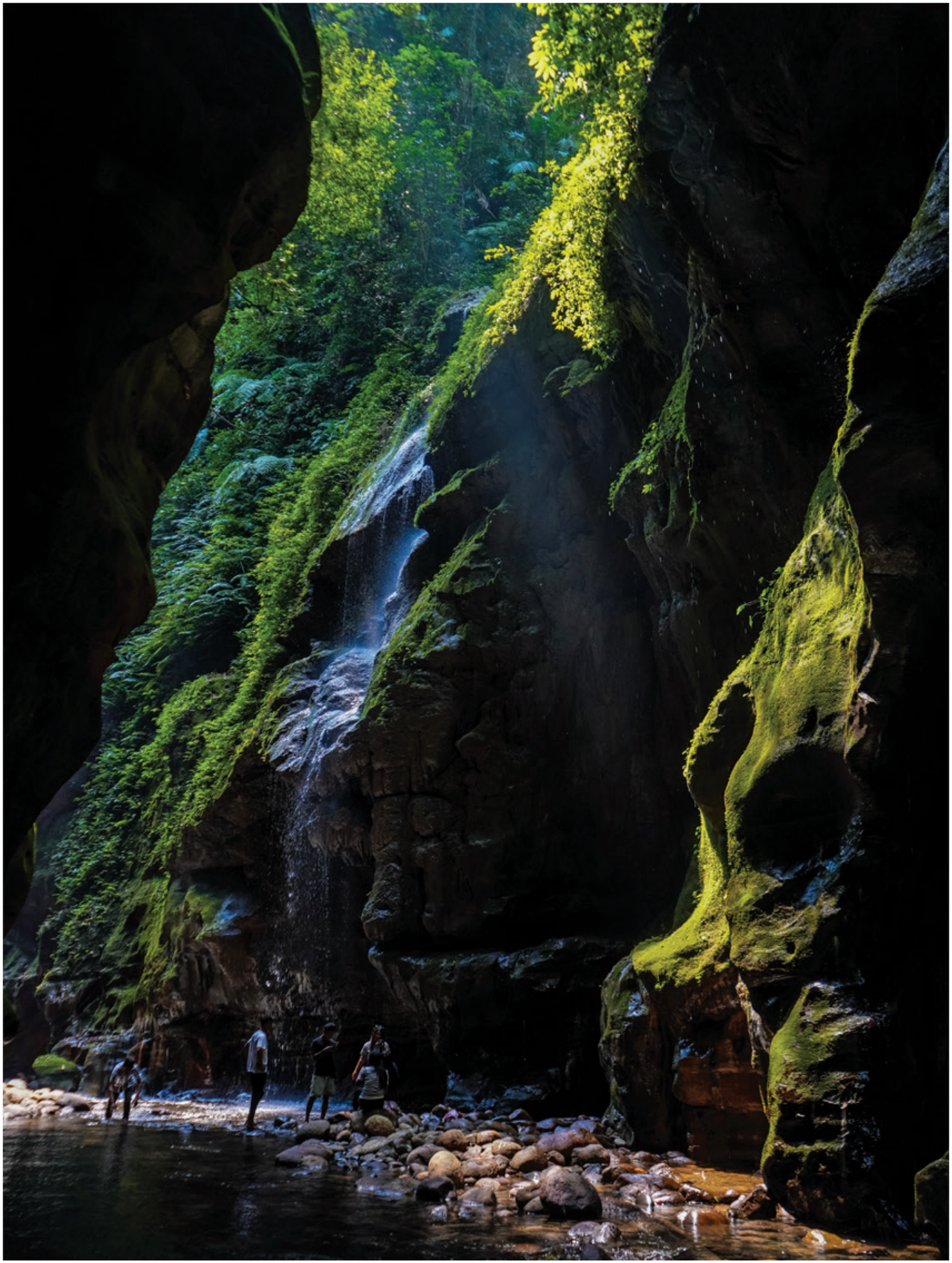
Drive: 2 hours

Rise to the whooping of the huro, as the hoolock gibbon is called in Garo. Freshen up and get ready to leave in the off-roader for the Wari Chora Canyon experience.

Once you disembark, you'll climb down 5 km to the floor of the canyon and to the banks of the Rongdik River. Prepare to lose yourself in the various shades of blue and green as you float down towards the waterfall and gaze up at the imposing canyon walls rising around you.

Climb back up to Dabolgre and rest for the night.

Accommodation: Tents at Dabolgre



Day 4

Dabolgre to Re'nang Dare Waterfall to Nakama Cave to Chisobibra

Total distance: 4 km on foot

Altitude of Dabolgre: 267 m

Altitude of Re'nang Dare Waterfall: 269 m

Trail: A gentle and gradual walk of around 1 hour

Drive: 7–8 hours

The Re'nang Dare Waterfall is visible from the campsite, so leave early in the morning and take the paved path, lined with betelnut trees, that leads to it. Take a dip in the pool at the waterfall's base and return to camp to leave for Nakama Cave.

The cave can be reached after five kilometres of off-roading plus a two kilometre easy hike through meadows and forests. Enter the cave but don't go in too deep. You'll de able to spot geological structures not too far in from the mouth of the cave, anyway.

Return to your cars and leave for Chisobibra, where you'll reach late in the evening.

Accommodation: Guesthouse

Day 5

Chisobibra to Guwahati

Total distance: 178 km by car

Altitude of Chisobibra: 79 km

Drive: Around 7–8 hours

You have a long drive to Guwahati, so have a hearty breakfast and leave early.

How to get there

Chisobibra is in a remote part of western Meghalaya, so please organise your car to and from the trek beforehand.

THE FLIGHTS OF FANTASY TREK

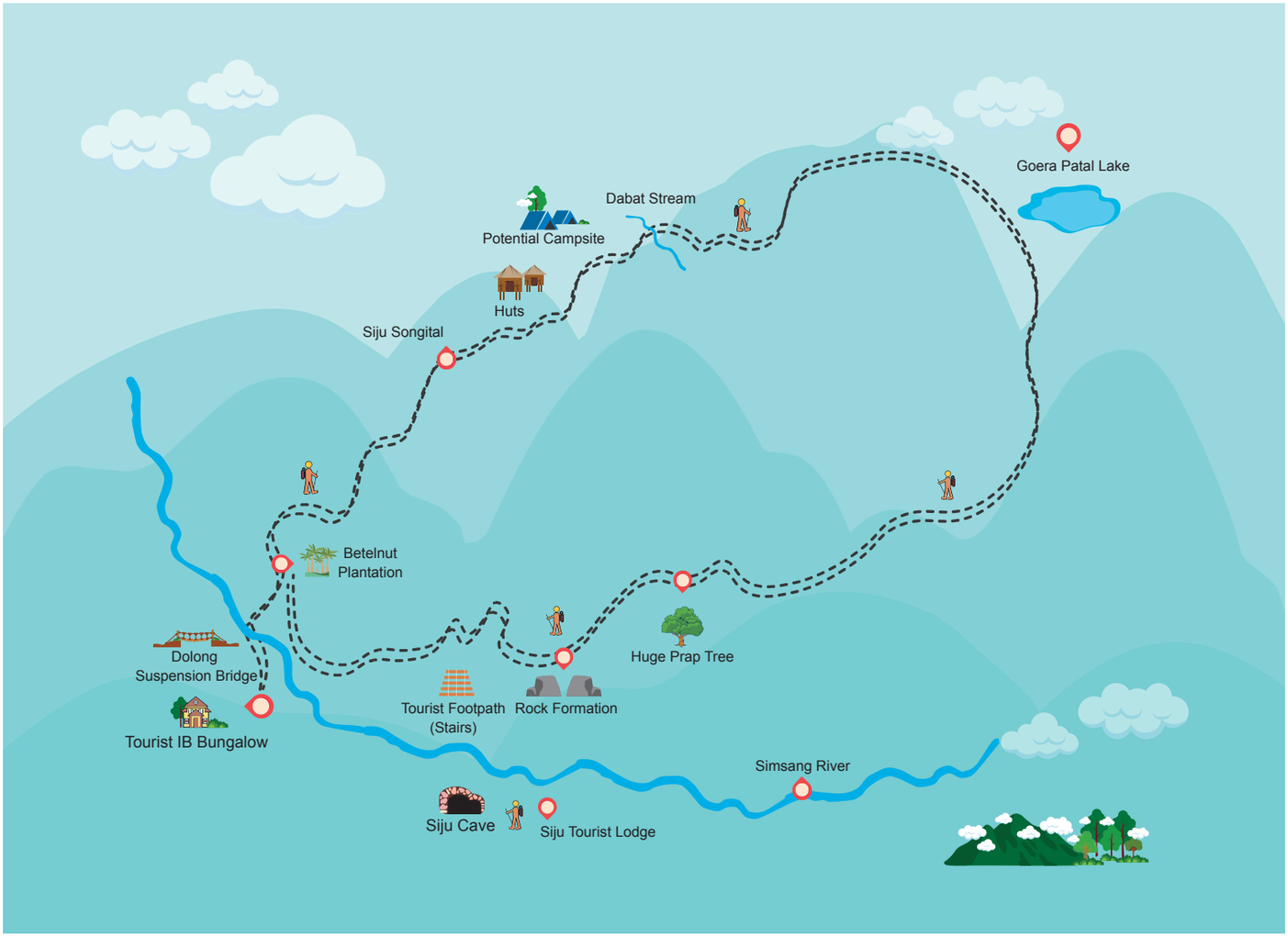
Chisobibra - Dabalgre - Chisobibra Siju - Siju Songital

From a bird sanctuary that houses exotic species to a limestone cave that's home to a primitive species of blind fish, from a lake frequented by the animals that reside here to rock formations that invoke civilisations long gone—this trail has everything your imagination needs to take wing.

Fact sheet

Region:	Garo Hills
Route:	Siju Bird Sanctuary to Siju Songital
Days:	3 nights, 4 days
Total distance:	8 km
Difficulty:	Easy to moderate
Elevation range:	267 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Patchy all along the trail
Water availability:	Available along the trail

Chisobibra - Dabolgre - Chisobibra Siju - Siju Songital



Overview

It isn't often that one gets to spend a few days discovering new experiences that can make one's imagination soar. It's even rarer that these experiences are close to one another, like they are on the perfectly named Flights of Fantasy trek.

Based in the South Garo hills of Meghalaya, this enchanting trek is based in and around Siju village, where the story begins. The original name of the village was Sijyw, after the *sijyw-sijyw-sijyw* call of a bird that used to be found in these parts. This was the name used by Captain Williamson Sangma, the first Chief Minister of the state, but outsiders were unable to follow suit and called it Siju, which is the name that stuck. Old-timers, however, still refer to it as Sijyw.

The Siju Wildlife Sanctuary is the first, and hence oldest, wildlife sanctuary in Meghalaya. Befitting its name and status, it protects elephants, deer, leopards, hoolock gibbons, and even tigers. But it is more popularly known as the Siju Bird Sanctuary, because it is home to rare species like hornbills and peacock pheasants, as well as host to migratory birds like spoonbills and Siberian ducks. A big reason why these species migrate here is the Goera Patal lake, a large water body deep in the sanctuary. Walk along its shore and you'll spot the spoor of many a wild animal that came down to the water to drink.

The charms of this area are not limited to creatures that fly but also include some that swim. The Dobakkol Cave, a natural marvel said to be one of the longest limestone caves in Asia, might be named for the bats that inhabit its ceilings, but the deep pools on its floor are home to a species of blind white fish that, combined with the fossils freely dotting the walls, gives you an indication of how old this ecosystem is.

But perhaps the experience that really gets the mind thinking is the encounter with limestone rock formations called Goera Rong'gat at the entrance to the sanctuary. Carved by the elements over the millennia, the intriguing shapes seem like the ruins of an earlier civilisation, almost like Angkor Wat but even older and more mysterious. Spend some time here and let your imagination run free as you channel your inner explorer.

Take the Flights of Fantasy trek once. Your imagination will bring you flying back for more.

Flora

Trekking through the forests in the state's oldest wildlife sanctuary will mean you walk under the boughs of trees like the sal, teak and East Indian almond.

Fauna

This is one of the best places to spot birds—you might see grey hornbills and even a peacock pheasant. In the winter months, you might also spot spoonbills and Siberian ducks. You could also spot sambar deer, wild boars, leopards, and even tigers.

Day 1

Guwahati to Siju Inspection Bungalow

Total distance: 196 km by car

Altitude of Siju Inspection Bungalow: 267 m

Drive: Around 7 hours

Land in Guwahati and drive straight to Siju. In case you're in the region, the drive from Williamnagar is shorter—around 53 km long, and 4–5 hours.

Accommodation: Inspection Bungalow or campsite

Day 2

Siju Inspection Bungalow to Siju Songital

Total distance: 5.5 km

Altitude of Siju Inspection Bungalow: 267 m

Altitude of Siju Songital: 267 m

Altitude of Siju River: 267 m

Trail: A gradually ascending walk of around 6–7 hours

Siju Songital, our destination for today, lies inside the Siju Bird Sanctuary. But along with sightings of species like hornbills and peacock pheasants, this trail brings you two other unexpected sights: one, the limestone rock formations at the entrance to the sanctuary, and two, the Goera Patal Lake. Take your time and explore both. You won't be disappointed.

Accommodation: Camp at Siju Songital

Day 3

Siju Songital – Siju Inspection Bungalow

Total distance: 5 km on foot

Altitude of Siju Songital: 267 m

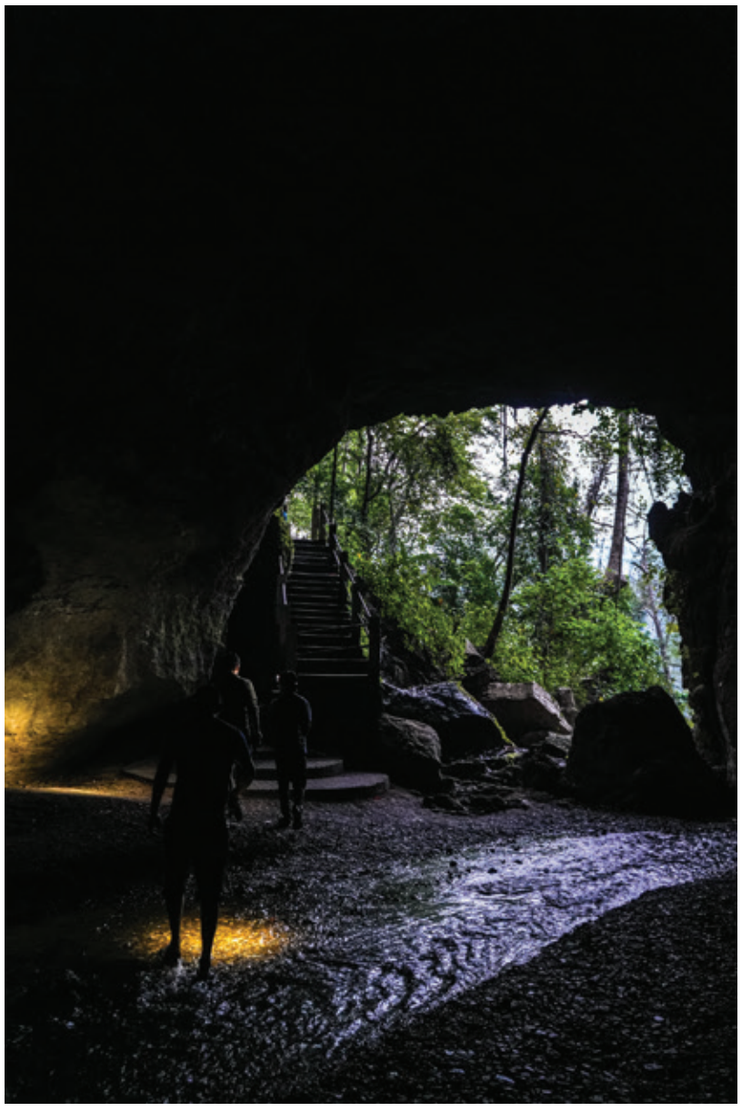
Altitude of Siju Inspection Bungalow: 267 m

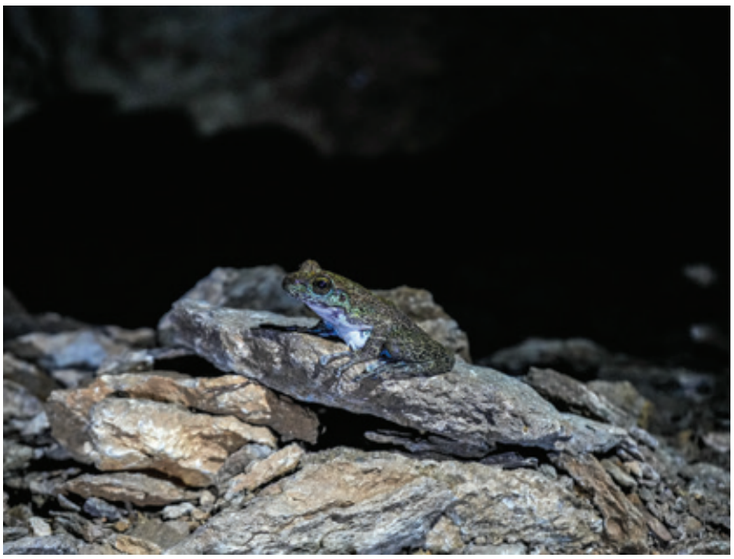
Trail: Gentle walk of 5-6 hours along a mostly paved path

When you leave Siju Songital, you will cross a modern-day marvel—a 2-km-long suspension bridge—before reaching the Siju Inspection Bungalow.

From here, the Dobakkol Cave is a short walk away. Explore the cave but don't go in too deep—it's not yet fully mapped. Also, don't forget to keep an eye out for the elusive white fish and the fossils.

Accommodation: Inspection Bungalow or campsite





Day 4

Siju Inspection Bungalow – Guwahati

Total distance: 196 km by car

Drive: Around 7 hours

Have breakfast and leave for Guwahati.

How to get there

Siju is in a remote part of western Meghalaya, so please organise your car to and from the trek beforehand.

THE FIRST MAN TREK

Siju - Arteka

The Garden of Eden might never be found, but here's your chance to visit the place where the first Garo person is said to have lived.

Fact sheet

Region:	Garo Hills
Route:	Siju to Arteka
Days:	3 nights, 4 days
Total distance:	8 km
Difficulty:	Easy
Elevation range:	29–145 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Patchy all along the trail
Water availability:	Available on days 1 & 4; carry for days 2 & 3.

Siju - Arteka

Bird Sanctuary Boundary
Huge Prap Tree
Betelnut Plantation
Diversion
Arateka Village
Rock Formation
Tourist Footpath
Dolong Suspension Bridge
Inspection Bungalow
Siju Cave
Boating Point
Siju Sonwa Community Reserve
Road

Overview

The origin of humankind is a subject that has fascinated us since at least the beginning of civilisation. Now, while Darwin might have helped us answer that question from an evolutionary perspective, we still have myriad legends, each based in their own Garden of Eden.

Arteka, a village deep in the jungles of the Garo Hills in Meghalaya, is home to one such legend. It is said that Aaru, the first person, chose to settle down and live in these parts. Soon, other people emerged and lived around him and a settlement was formed. As a tribute to his fearless and inclusive spirit, the village was named after him.

Today, Arteka, is surrounded by thick groves of betelnut trees. And that's just one of the sights you'll discover on this trail.

Everything on the trail has been curated to highlight the almost-primordial nature of this region. Dobakkol Cave, named after the bats that inhabit its roofs in their countless numbers, also has deep, seemingly bottomless pools that are inhabited by a primitive species of blind, white fish that looks like it's swum straight out of the pages of a natural history book. The stalagmites and stalactites, carved by endless years of wind and water, lend a sense of timelessness to the experience. The fact that only a portion of this cave has been mapped should tell you why it is considered one of Asia's largest limestone caves.

Rocks carved by time are a persistent theme here, both under the ground and above it. Goera Rong'gat, a series of stone formations that resemble the ruins of a lost world, beg your exploration. You would be forgiven for thinking you've been transported to Cambodia and are walking through Angkor Wat! The best part is that these formations are easily accessible at the entrance to the Siju Wildlife Sanctuary.

Even better is the fact that you can carry on from here into the Siju Wildlife Sanctuary itself, Meghalaya's first and oldest sanctuary. More popularly known as Siju Bird Sanctuary, it is home to rare species like hornbills and peacock pheasants, and also hosts winged winter visitors like the Siberian duck.

Take the First Man trek. There's always a first time for everything.

Flora

Along with vast groves of betelnut trees, you will also be able to spot white teak (*Gmelina arborea*), Indian almond (*Terminalia catappa*) and chaplaish (*Artocarpus chama*) (a species of breadfruit) trees.

Fauna

This is one of the best places to spot birds—you might see grey hornbills and even a peacock pheasant. In the winter months, you might also spot spoonbills and Siberian ducks. You could also spot sambar deer, wild boars, leopards, and even tigers.

Day 1

Guwahati to Siju Inspection Bungalow

Total distance: 196 km by car

Altitude of Siju Inspection Bungalow: 267 m

Drive: Around 7 hours

Fly into Guwahati and head to Siju. If you're already in these parts, the drive from Williamnagar is around 53 km long and takes 4–5 hours.

Accommodation: Inspection Bungalow or campsite

Day 2

Siju Inspection Bungalow to Arteka

Total distance: 5 km

Altitude of Siju Inspection Bungalow: 267 m

Altitude of Arteka: 145 m

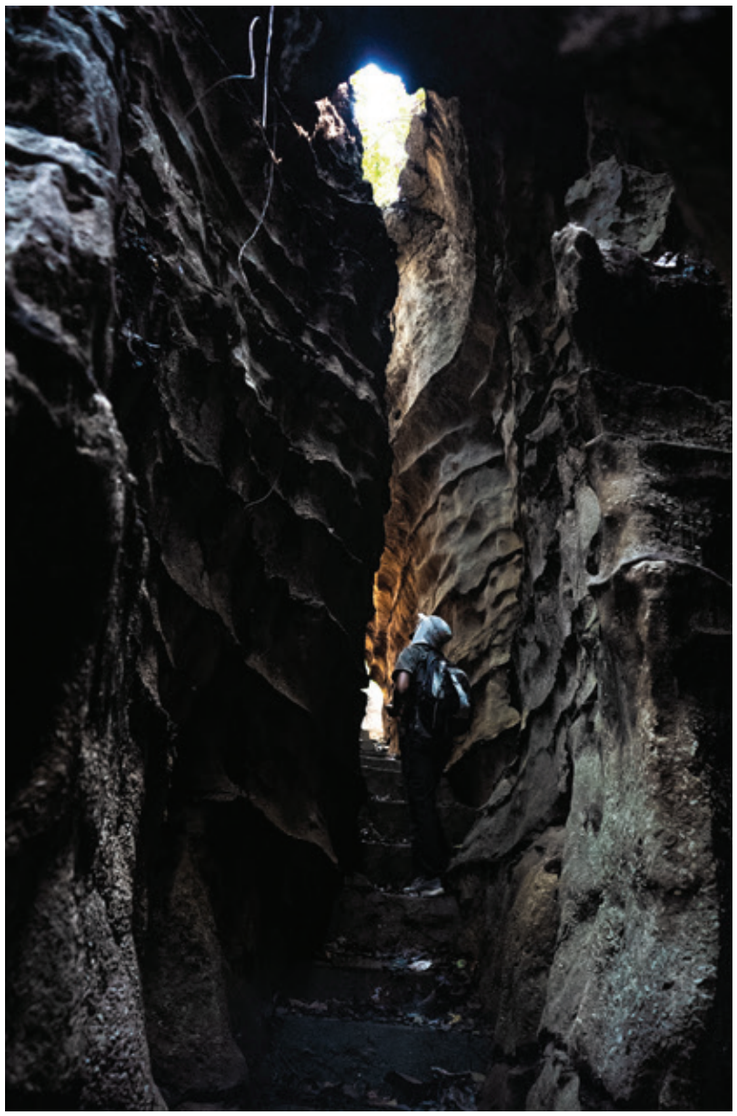
Trail: Mostly flat, with gentle ascents and descents over 6-7 hours

The day starts early from the Inspection Bungalow, as you leave to cross the Simsang River via the suspension footbridge at Dolong.

On the other side, the trail follows the river to a cemented pathway that takes you to Goera Rong'gat. From here, you will enter the depths of the forest. After around 1.3 km, you will reach a junction from where you will turn right. Arteka awaits you 800 metres down that path.

Carry water for today.

Accommodation: Campsite



Day 3

Arteka to Siju Inspection Bungalow

Total distance: 5 km by car, 2 km on foot

Altitude of Arteka: 145 m

Altitude of Siju Inspection Bungalow: 267 m

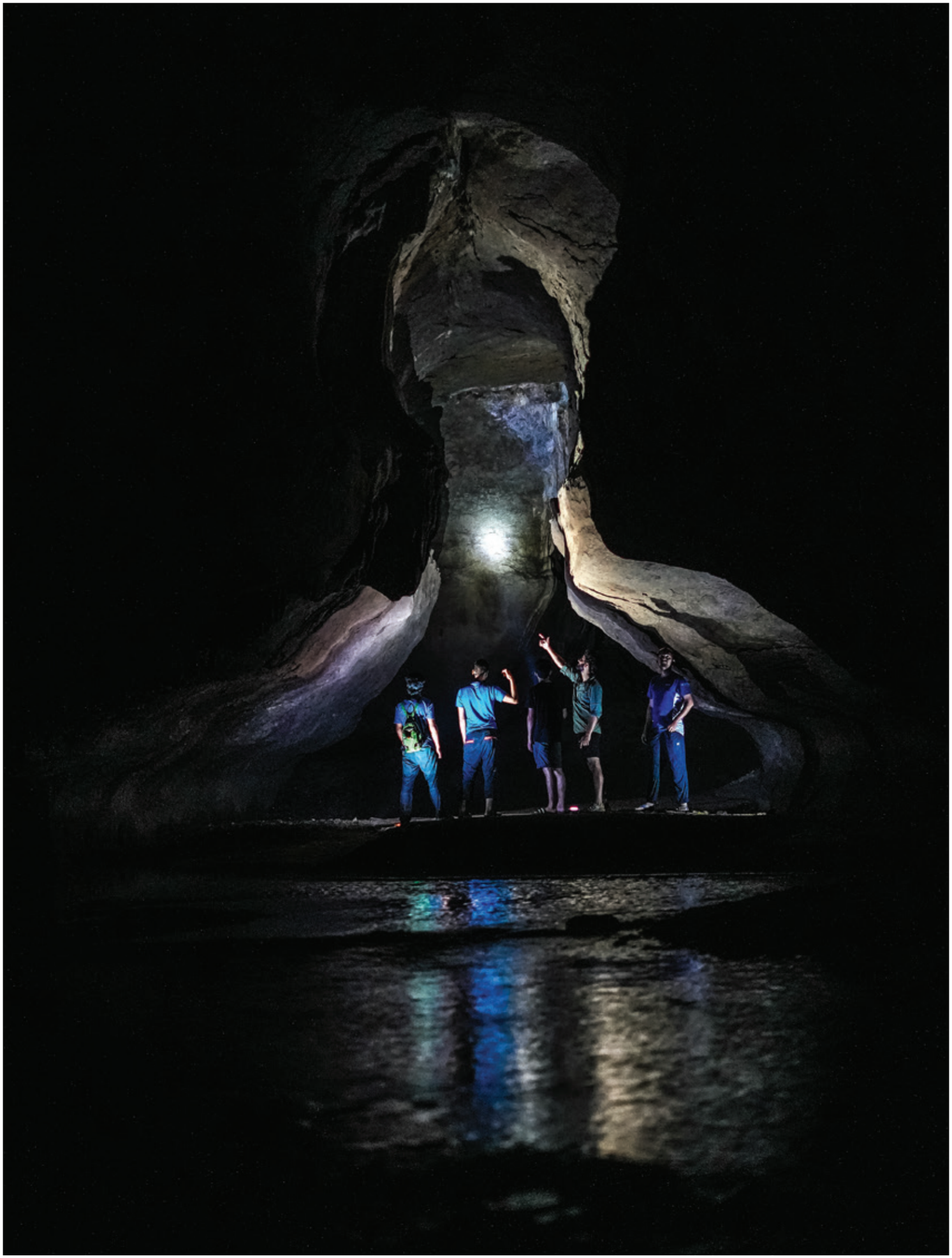
Trail: An easy walk of less than 2 hours

Today, there's a boat ride in store. Pack up and leave the village for the Simsang River, from where you will take a boat to the other shore. Hop off and walk a few hundred metres to the Siju Sonwa Community Reserve, from where you'll take a car ride back to the Siju Inspection Bungalow.

From the bungalow, walk across and enter the Dobakkol, as the Siju Cave is called in Garo, and discover a world beyond daylight.

Carry water for today.

Accommodation: Inspection Bungalow or campsite



Day 4

Siju Inspection Bungalow to Guwahati

Total distance: 196 km by car

Drive: around 7 hours

Pack your bags, enjoy breakfast, and leave for Guwahati.

How to Get There

Siju is in a remote part of western Meghalaya, so please organise your car to and from the trek beforehand.

THE HALFWAY HOUSE TREK

New Rompa - Balpakram - New Rompa

Long journeys often have halfway houses for humans. On this trek, you'll visit a halfway house for the spirits.

Fact sheet

Region:	Garo Hills
Route:	New Rompa to Balpakram to New Rompa
Days:	3 nights, 4 days
Total distance:	12 km
Difficulty:	Easy
Elevation range:	320–800 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Patchy all along the trail
Water availability:	Available on days 1 & 4, carry for days 2 & 3.

New Rompa - Balpakram - New Rompa

You're going to be in a National Park, so please don't wear loud colours, talk loudly, play music on your phones, and use strong perfumes. All of these disturb the wildlife and destroy your chances of sighting any.

The mythical sites inside Balpakram are revered by the Garo, so please behave respectfully when you're there.

Overview

Whenever a long journey has to be undertaken, a halfway house offers a vital place of rest and reflection before completing the final leg. Travel routes across India are dotted with such places for people. But Balpakram is perhaps the only place you can visit that serves as a halfway house for the spirits of our departed.

Meaning 'The Land of Perpetual Wind' in Garo, Balpakram is considered a place where the spirits of the departed rest awhile before continuing their journey to the spiritual plane. Expectedly, this area is seen as sacred by the locals and abounds in myth and legend that the wind seems to whisper in your ear.

There are many sites of importance in the area. There's Goera Rong'gat, considered the resting place of Lord Rama, and Goera Rongjaleng, which has the footprint of an ancient warrior who killed a wild boar in the gorge. There's Chidmak, a foreboding black pool of water that is said to be where the spirits bathe, and Me'mang Mesal Cha'ram, where they rest and savour their meals after having bathed.

Keep in mind that Balpakram is a National Park that is home to several species of flora and fauna. Along with ungulates and several species of wild cat, it is home to large herds of elephants, an animal revered by several communities across India. The water buffalo, whose sightings are becoming rarer across the country, can also be spotted here, as can leopards and, if you're really lucky, even tigers. Speaking of tigers, don't forget to visit Matcha Melaram, a site considered to be the meeting place of tigers.

The area also has other mystical places for you to explore—the Dobakkol Cave, for example. This ancient cave, believed to be one of the largest limestone caves in Asia, is named after the bats that make their home in its arched roof. And in deep, dark pools on the cave floor, blind white fish swim about like messengers from another time.

Take the Halfway House trek. It's a full experience of an other-worldly Meghalaya.

Flora

The National Park is home to numerous species of indigenous plants, like the Balpakram bamboo that grows only here. Local stories talk of a flower called 'dickey lock', which immobilises a person if touched.

Fauna

The haw-haw (Garo for the peacock pigeon) and the dogrik (Garo for the jungle fowl) can be seen here, along with water buffalo, the marbled cat, leopards, and over 600 elephants. Balpakram is also home to 375 different species of butterfly.

Day 1

New Rompa

Total distance: Variable

Altitude of New Rompa: 320 m

Drive: Variable

Guwahati (385 km) is the nearest airport, but if you're looking to come here from a town and city that's closer by, then Williamnagar (127 km) and Shillong (205 km) might be better options.

Accommodation: Campsite at New Rompa

Day 2

New Rompa Inspection Bungalow to Balpakram and back

Total distance: 11 km by car, 10 km on foot

Altitude of New Rompa: 320 m

Altitude of Balpakram Entry Gate: 320 m

Altitude of Balkol: 800 m

Trail: Mostly flat over 6-7 hours of walking

This is the day when you discover the legends of Balpakram. The resting place of Lord Rama, the meeting place of tigers, and the bathing pool of spirits are only some of the sites you should spend time at today.

Trek till Balkol and return to New Rompa for the night.

Carry water for today.

Accommodation: Campsite at New Rompa

Day 3

New Rompa Inspection Bungalow to Deoban to Dobakkol

Total distance: 20 km by car, 2 km on foot
Altitude of Balpakram Entry Gate: 320 m
Trail: Gentle walk of around 3–4 hours.
Drive: 1 hour

The trek today leads to Deoban, a river canyon, from where you will carry on to Dobakkol, a cave named for the endless number of bats that live on its roof. Also, look for the blind white fish that lives in the cave's depths.

Today is an easy day, which means you'll return to New Rompa in time to explore the village.

Carry water for today.

Accommodation: Campsite at New Rompa

Day 4

New Rompa to your onward destination

Total distance: Variable

Drive: Variable

Pack your bags, enjoy your breakfast, and leave for Guwahati or wherever else you are travelling to from here.

How to get there

The remoteness of Balpakram is one of the reasons why it is still so untouched and bursting with natural life. This also means that transportation here is negligible, so please organise your own car to and from New Rompa.

THE ABODE OF THE RED PANDA TREK

Sasatgre - Nokrek National Park - Sasatgre

If sighting the elusive Red Panda is not incentive enough, how about a chance to see and taste the ghost fruit of Garo legend?

Fact sheet

Region:	Garo Hills
Route:	Sasatgre to Nokrek National Park to Sasatgre
Days:	4 nights, 5 days
Total distance:	28.5 km
Difficulty:	Easy
Elevation range:	843–1415 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Patchy all along the trail
Water availability:	Available on days 1 & 5; carry for days 2, 3, & 4.

Sasatgre - Nokrek National Park - Sasatgre

Overview

Some animals are strongly connected with a particular region—like the Asiatic lion and the forests of Gir, or the red panda and the region around Kanchenjunga Mountain. That is why it might come as a surprise that a special forest, deep in western Meghalaya, offers you the chance to spot one of these rare mammals in the wild.

In the 1960s, Dr J. Lao photographed a red panda, likely part of a remnant population, in the Nokrek National Park, generating a lot of excitement. The chance of spotting one of these magical creatures draws many to the area.

The Park is part of the Nokrek Biosphere Reserve and was added to the list of biosphere reserves by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2009. Befitting its status, this area is also home to a fruit of great significance that is found only here. The *Citrus indica* or the Indian wild orange grows freely here and is called me'mang narang, which means ghost fruit in Garo. But before we tell you more about it, in true Meghalayan tradition, here's an origin legend for it.

Abong Noga was the legendary leader and king of the first tribespeople, and with his wife Silme Doka, they led the people to settle in this area. One day, the livestock in the village fell ill. Abong Noga prayed to the gods, who came to him in a dream and asked him to feed crushed wild oranges to the sick animals. He did as he was told, and lo, the animals recovered. Since then, the orange has been called me'mang narang, which means fruit of the spirits or ghosts. What makes this even more significant is that genomic analysis has shown that the Citrus indica population here is the base population for orange cultivation in India. It is thus the 'mother' of the Indian oranges we eat today. This discovery led to the establishment of the National Citrus Gene Sanctuary in Nokrek.

This entire region is suffused in Abong Noga lore. There is an open field in the forest called Abong Noga Afal, which means the Rice Field of Abong Noga. Legend has it that he used to grow rice in this field and that his spirit still roams the field. Locals say that this is why no plants grow within the borders of the field. However, a pond lies in the field and is frequented by the wild animals of the area.

This trek immerses you in all that Nokrek has to offer. Ascend to the top of Nokrek Peak and climb atop the watchtower there for breathtaking panoramic views of the forest below you. When you finally navigate the difficult, steep, final section of the approach to Matcha Nokpante, the meeting place of tigers, you'll understand why they would have chosen such a challenging place to convene.

If you don't spot a red panda, don't despair. The Sonja Wildlife Rescue Centre is home to hoolock gibbons that are rehabilitated here. Stop by to have a look at India's only species of ape.

The Abode of the Red Panda trek is a must-do, especially if your dreams of spotting rare wildlife have been looking for a home.

Flora

In the forest, keep an eye out for the black dhup (*Canarium strictum*) tree, the resin of which has medicinal uses. Around the villages, you'll spot orange and lychee groves.

Fauna

The park is home to a several vital species, such as elephants, sambar deer, and up to nine species of wild cats, including the tiger.

Day 1

Guwahati to Sasatgre

Total distance: 210 km

Altitude of Sasatgre: 843 m

Drive: Around 5 hours

If you're coming via Guwahati on the day you arrive, you can drive straight from the airport to Sasatgre. If you're already in the area, Baghmara (60 km) and Williamnagar (127 km) are convenient places to get here from.

Accommodation: Campsite at Sasatgre

Day 2

Sasatgre to Daribokgre

Total distance: 7.5 km
Altitude of Sasatgre: 843 m
Altitude of Daribokgre: 1137 m
Trail: An easy walk of 2–3 hours

The day will be spent walking to different villages inside the Nokrek Biosphere forests. After beginning with Sasatgre and exploring its traditional homes and fruit and spice plantations, we will visit the sacred A.song forest and end at Daribokgre village.

Carry water for today.

Accommodation: Campsite at Daribokgre

Day 3

Daribogkre to Nokrek Peak & Daribokgre Matcha Nokpante to Sasatgre

Total distance: 11 km

Altitude of Nokrek peak: 1415 m

Altitude of Matcha Nokpante viewpoint: 1282 m

Trail: A mostly gradual ascent with one steep section totalling 2-3 hours

Around one kilometre from the campsite is a tourist checkpoint from where the train to Nokrek Peak and Matcha Nokpante begins. You'll walk through lush forest and enter the Park to reach Nokrek Peak.

Descending will take you to a rock ledge that overlooks Matcha Nokpante, where the final 300 metres are steep and can be navigated with the help of nylon ropes that have been affixed to the rock face.

After that, you'll visit Abong Noga Afal and continue for 5 km more, until you reach the vehicles that will take you back to Sasatgre for the night.

Carry water for today.

Accommodation: Campsite at Sasatgre

Day 4

Sasatgre to Rongbang to Sasatgre

Total distance: 1 km on foot

Drive: 2 hours

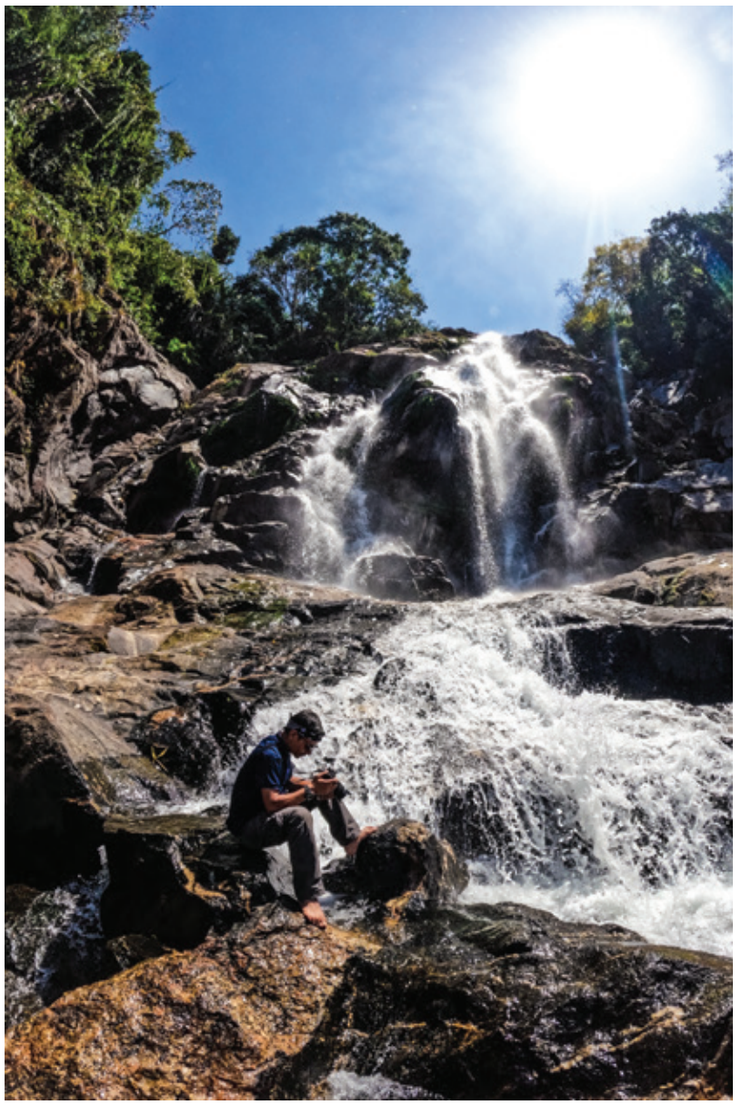
Trail: A gradual ascent and descent of 1.5 hours

Wake up and get ready to visit the magnificent Rongbang Falls. Drive for an hour to reach the point from where it can be viewed at a distance and then trek for another hour to see it up close.

On the way back to Sasatgre, you should stop at the Wachi Wari Fish Sanctuary and the Wildlife Rescue Centre in Sonja, where hoolock gibbons are rehabilitated and cared for.

Carry water for today.

Accommodation: Campsite at Sasatgre



Day 5

Sasatgre to Guwahati

Total distance: 210 km

Altitude of Sasatgre: 843 m

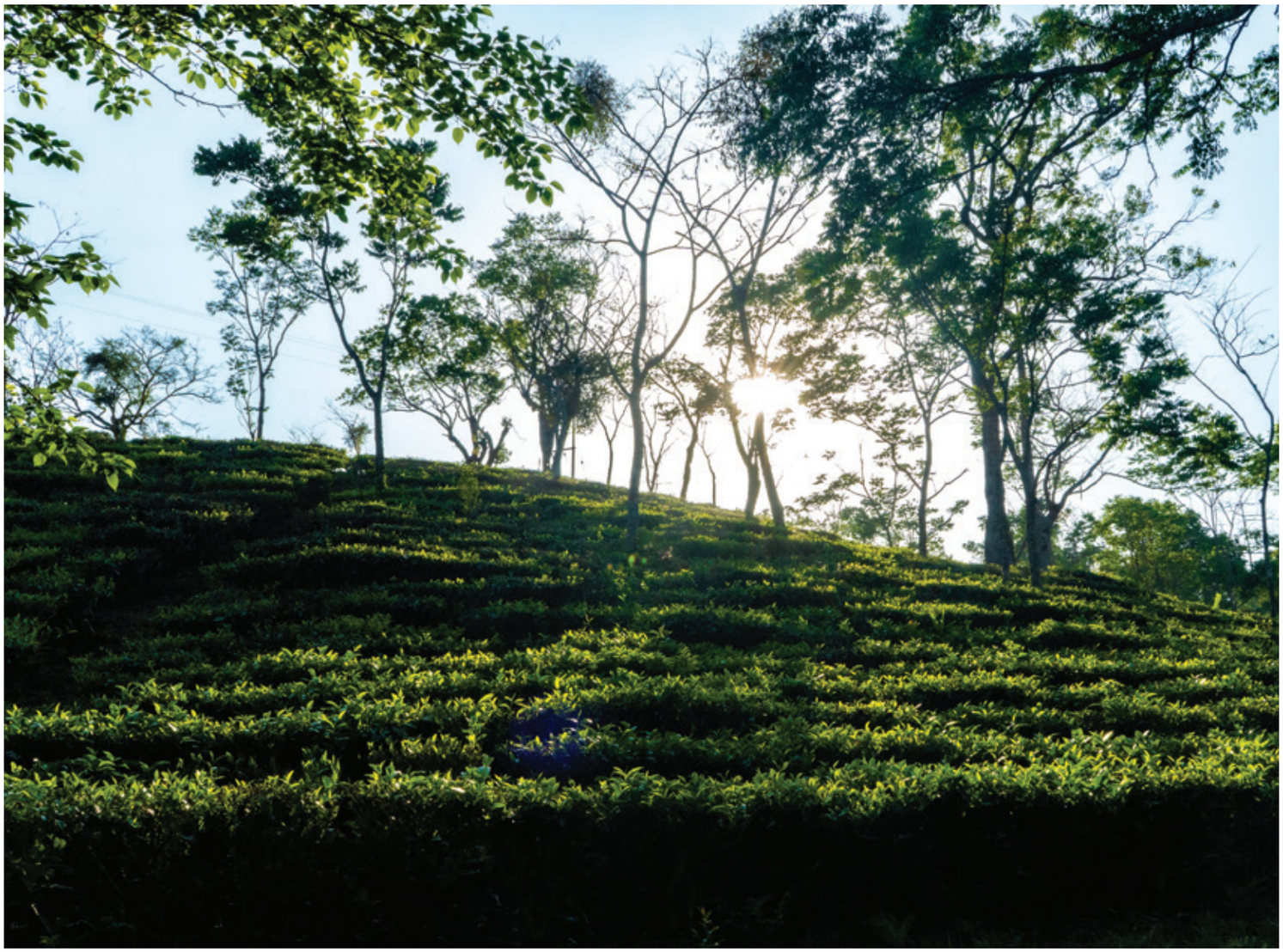
Drive: Around 5 hours

If you're leaving via Guwahati on the same day, drive straight to the airport from Sasatgre. If you're staying back in Meghalaya, then you can head to Baghmara (60 km), Williamnagar (127 km), or Shillong (280 km).

Accommodation: Campsite at Sasatgre

How to Get There

Sasatgre is not well connected to the main city routes, so it is best that you organise a car to be with you for the duration of this trip.



THE SACRED FOREST TREK

Shillong - Tuber - Ïalong - Shillong

A forest is not just a larder, but also a place of worship and memories as those who live by the old ways will show you.

Fact sheet

Region:	Jaiñtia Hills
Route:	Shillong to Nongpoh to Lailad to Shillong
Days:	2 nights, 3 days
Total distance:	6 km
Difficulty:	Easy to moderate
Elevation range:	105–309 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Patchy all along the trail
Water availability:	Available on days 1 & 3; carry on day 2.

Shillong - Tuber - Ïalong - Shillong

Sacred forests are places of sanctity for the locals, so please behave with dignity while inside. Refrain from talking loudly or playing music on your phones.

It is forbidden to take anything back from a sacred forest, so please don't pick up even a pebble or a petal to take home as a souvenir.

Overview

To walk through a forest is to feel Nature at its purest and most powerful. Tribes across the world have a deep reverence for the land that sustains them, and this manifests itself beautifully in how they care for it.

All across Meghalaya, local tribes have designated entire forests as sacred land, which not only keeps them safe but also gives the land a buffer against the blows of modernity. Take the Sacred Grove Trek and you'll find out for yourself.

This trek has been crafted in the Jaiñtia Hills, a lesser-visited part of Meghalaya compared to the Garo or Khasi Hills. The prospect of having the trail all to yourself makes it even more appealing.

The route also provides a wide range of vistas for you to enjoy. Pine trees redolent with resin, wide trails untouched by human development, rivers meandering along blithely, and sacred forests growing thick under tribal protection—this trail packs so much into a single day of walking.

Meghalaya is known for mawbynna—menhirs and dolmens erected by the ancestors of the locals, mostly to honour their dearly departed and sometimes as tributes to royals and martial victories. The Pnar tribe of the area erected lots of them in the past, and many still endure to this day. You'll spot some of them silhouetted against the curve of a hill, standing sentinel over the land. And you'll see a large number of them, accessible by a paved path, before and inside the Khlooblai (Sacred Forest).

This brings us to the speciality of this land and the source of the trek's name. The Khlooblai is dear to the Pnar, and the care with which they safeguard it shows in the richness of the forest. It is a quiet place that lends a serenity to the experience, especially when you come upon the menhirs and dolmens along your path. Seeing a tribute to forebears in such an environment can be an emotional experience, so take your time and soak it in.

As an enjoyable surprise, this trek saves a piece of unique culture for the last stop at Ialong—the Noh Sakyriat dance. A long-smoothened tree trunk, used as a pole, is fixed atop an upright beam of wood and thus perpendicular to the ground. Performers hold on to either end of the pole and perform their dance. The motion is akin to the rotors of a helicopter and this dance has no visual equal. And the best part? Ïalong is the only place in the world in which this dance is performed.

Take the Sacred Forest Trek. It's a special way to make your heart dance with joy.

Flora

The trail has all the usual plants of a Meghalayan trek, but the sacred forest is rich in flowers, mushrooms, and other plants.

Fauna

While some of the more common birds and animals might be spotted along the trail, pay special attention to the many species of butterflies and mushrooms that are usually spotted in Meghalaya's sacred forests when you're in Khooblai.

Day 1

Shillong to Tuber

Total distance: 73 km

Altitude of Tuber: 1350 m

Drive: Around 3 hours

Tuber to Shillong is a nice, scenic drive that isn't very long, so you can set out after an unhurried breakfast.

Arrive at Tuber, explore the village, and rest for a long day tomorrow.

Accommodation: Campsite at Tuber

Day 2

Tuber to Ïalong

Altitude of Tuber: 1350 m

Altitude of Ïalong: 1344 m

Trail: Mostly easy over 4–5 hours

The trek lives up to its name today. Descend along a paved path from Tuber to the foot of the hill. Walk another kilometre and you'll come upon large paddy fields to your left, with huts used for storage.

After another kilometre, you'll come to a fork in the trail. Follow the path that veers right and start ascending into a pine forest. Reach the top of the hill and enjoy the surprise: swings swaying in the wind, inviting you to enjoy them. There are also benches for you to catch your breath on.

Day 3

Ïalong to Shillong

Total distance: 64 km

Altitude of Ïalong: 1344 m

Drive: Around 2–3 hours

Leave at your convenience for Shillong.

How to Get There

Tuber and Ïalong are close to Shillong, but don't take public transport for granted. It would be better to organise your own pick-up and drop.

THE HIDDEN WORLD TREK

Shillong - Nongpoh - Lailad - Shillong

When the world's largest cave fish is discovered in a subterranean river in India's fifth largest cave, which most can't find on a map, you know this is an experience you need to unhide.

Fact sheet

Region:	Jaiñtia Hills
Route:	Shillong to Nongpoh to Lailad to Shillong
Days:	2 nights, 3 days
Total distance:	6 km
Difficulty:	Easy to moderate
Elevation range:	105–309 m
Season:	All year long
Best during:	October–May
Mobile network:	Patchy all along the trail
Water availability:	Available on days 1 & 3; carry on day 2.

Shillong - Nongpoh - Lailad - Shillong

Please exercise caution at Krem Chympe. If you choose to enter the cave, please ensure that you have experts and guides with you.

Overview

Writers often get carried away. It's true. But when it comes to the naming of this trek, we can assure you that this is an aptly named experience of firsts that you'll thank us for uncovering.

The Hidden World trek is set in the Jaiñtia Hills, a lesser-visited part of Meghalaya than the more famous Khasi Hills. The base village for the trek is Khaddum, which was originally called Thatdung, meaning a place where wild predators hunt. This alone will give you an idea of how untouched the area was.

The people here consider themselves to be native to Manipur, and even though the region is not that far from Shillong, the capital of the state, it has some natural wonders that are relatively unknown.

One is the Krem Chympe, a cave that is a world unto itself. This rich and undiscovered ecosystem shot to fame in 2019, when the world's largest species of cave fish was discovered here. Named *Neolissochilus pnar*, in tribute to the Pnar people that inhabit these parts, this discovery highlighted how the wildlife in this part of the state is as diverse as it is undiscovered.

Krem Chympe is among the longest caves in India, and only about nineteen kilometres of its length have been mapped. The river has over fifty natural dams, called gours, made from millennia of calcium carbonate that has been deposited as sediment. These dams, in such a high number, make the cave a very unique landscape.

The only way to explore the river is to paddle in on canoe or to swim, both of which we suggest you do not undertake without expert guidance. But even sitting opposite the mouth of the cave, framed by green as the blue river disappears into the Earth's womb, is a sight worth trekking here for.

Another sight worth the effort is the Chympe Waterfalls. Meghalaya abounds in waterfalls, but this one is very unique, not for just for Meghalaya but for anywhere in the world. The water climbs down along the rock face like the roots of a tree, which is a stark departure from the usual torrents thundering over cliffs that we expect when we hear the word 'waterfalls'. And best of all, the water then makes its way gently into a still pool that looks like it's made of the purest jade. You might not want to disturb such a sylvan setting, but we urge you to take a dip.

You'll emerge from the water with a new appreciation of the world that has been uncovered for you on this Hidden World Trek.

Flora

Betelnut groves abound in the area as does the lush tropical vegetation one would associate with an ecosystem that few humans have impacted.

Fauna

You might not be able to spot the world's largest cave fish deep inside Krem Chympe, but you might end up seeing some of the bat species that call it home, as they fly in and out of the cave.

Day 1

Shillong to Brichyrnot to Khaddum

Total distance: 126 km by road, 3.5 km on foot

Altitude of Brichyrnot: 349 m

Altitude of Khaddum: 105 m

Trail: A gentle descent of 2–3 hours

Drive: Around 5 hours

Leave Shillong early to arrive at Brichyrnot. You have two options to reach Khaddum—trek down or hire a four-wheel drive. We strongly recommend you trek.

About 1.6 km down the trail, you need to turn right at the diversion and descend for another 300 metres, which will bring you to the footbridge suspended over the Wah Lukha River. Soak in this breathtaking sight before continuing for another kilometre, where you'll find a small footbridge. Only 500 metres across it lies your destination for the night.

Accommodation: River campsite at Khaddum

Day 2

Khaddum to Krem Chympe to Khaddum

Total distance: 2.6 km
Altitude of Khaddum: 105 m
Altitude of Krem Chympe: 300 m
Altitude of Chympe Waterfalls: 252 m
Trail: Mostly easy over 2–3 hours

Set off from Khaddum after breakfast. The trail takes you through betelnut, banana, and broom grass cultivations. Around 2.4 kilometres in, you'll come upon a fork in the road. One road takes you to Krem Chympe, the other to the Chympe Waterfalls.

Explore both and then head back to Khaddum for a well-earned rest.

Accommodation: River campsite at Khaddum

Day 3

Khaddum to Brichyrnot to Shillong

Total distance: 126 km by road, 3.5 km on foot

Altitude of Khaddum: 105 m

Altitude of Brichyrnot: 349 m

Trail: A gentle ascent

Drive: Around 5 hours

You have two options to reach Brichyrnot—trek back up or hire a four-wheel drive car. Once you reach Brichyrnot, leave for Shillong.

How to Get There

Brichyrnot is in a remote part of the Jaiñtia Hills, so it would be better to organise your own pick-up and drop.

THE CITY SUMMIT TREK

Shillong – Umkynrut – Kynjat Phutbol – Shillong Viewpoint – Shillong

Looking to summit a peak that offers views of the plains as well as of cloud-capped mountains without having to travel too far from a bustling city? The City Summit Trek shows you how.

Fact sheet

Region:	Around Shillong
Route:	Shillong to Umkynrut–Kynjat Phutbol to Shillong Viewpoint to Shillong
Total distance:	2–3 km
Duration:	1 hour
Difficulty:	Easy
Season:	All year long
Mobile network:	Intermittent
Water availability:	Carry your own

Due to its elevation, Shillong Peak can get cold. Please carry light woollens or fleece clothing.

The Air Force has a base nearby, so foreign nationals are not allowed in the area and Indians are required to show ID and surrender their cameras at the checkpost.

Overview

Wreathed in fog and wrapped in folklore, Shillong Peak is a site that offers many stories and sights, and the City Summit Trek is a perfect way to discover both. One can be enthralled by the sight of the entire landscape of Shillong from this vantage point.

A short drive from the city, Shillong Peak (which is just under 2,000 metres in altitude) is the highest point in Meghalaya. This means that even the road to the top is often shrouded in clouds, making it mesmerising and breathtaking. However, the best experience to avail such beauty is by trekking through the rich, dense forest to the summit.

The trek can be taken on a cobbled path that starts in Umkynrut-Kynjat Phutbol and ends at Shillong Peak. It begins with a steep climb before easing up as it meanders through a thick forest. The path is paved all the way to the peak, and there are several resting points along the way, so you can take your time getting to the top. While journeying towards the top through the locality, you will also witness the beauty of the homes and people who reside there. Small shops are also available if you need light refreshments along the way.

The view from the top will make you see why Meghalaya's name is so well deserved – the panorama is filled with mountains topped with clouds. Shift your gaze a bit lower and you'll see the city of Shillong sprawled below you. On a clear day, you'll see the plains of Bangladesh shimmering as they stretch towards the Bay of Bengal. On a clear, sunny day during the winter, we can also catch a glimpse of the Himalayas, also known as 'Lum Mangkashang' in the local Khasi language.

The hill is home to U Blei Shyllong, a deity of the Khasis who protects the cities and after whom the city is named. There is a sanctum dedicated to U Blei Shyllong on the peak, and this is a place of great significance to the locals. Tread respectfully around the area since it is a sacred grove dedicated to U Blei Shyllong, and it is also where believers perform their rituals.

THE RHODODENDRON RIOT TREK

Shillong – Upper Shillong – Shillong

For a few months a year, the Himalayas are home to a very special natural phenomenon. The Rhododendron Riot Trek gives you the chance to walk through the wonder.

Fact sheet

Region:	Around Shillong
Route:	Upper Shillong – Shillong
Total distance:	6 km
Duration:	3–4 hours
Difficulty:	Easy/moderate
Season:	All year long; best from March to May
Mobile network:	Intermittent
Water availability:	Carry your own

Overview

The Himalayas are home to many wondrous sights, but few are more breathtaking than that of the hills carpeted in rhododendron blooms in every imaginable shape of pink and red. Take the Rhododendron Riot Trek during the spring and summer months, and you're guaranteed an experience unlike any other. It offers a path of mystery filled with many shaded pathways and natural spring water, in which you can rest and refresh yourself.

The trek begins near the ML05 Café in Upper Shillong, at the wooden signboard that announces the starting point of the trek, and the path circles back to end at this same spot. The trail is well marked out and winds its way through a pine forest that is thickly interspersed with rhododendron trees. You may also find another pathway which is situated near the National Highway just a few metres past the 101 Military Area. This pathway will also lead you towards the main trekking path near the ML05 Café.

The trail is mostly easy, with a few challenging ascents and descents, making it a rewarding experience for trekkers of all experience levels. You can take it slow and steady as during the afternoon, you'll be able to witness the rays of the sun passing through the forest making it more mesmerizing and giving a magical vibe to it.

The Rhododendron flower begins to bloom in spring and continues into the summer, so trekking between March and May will enable you to walk under trees laden with pink and red flowers. An additional bonus is being able to walk on a carpet of pine needles and rhododendron petals which makes treading along this path feel much lighter than you'd expect on a mountain trek. To be cautious, one can also put on trekking shoes during times of unexpected rainfall, which could make the path very slippery.

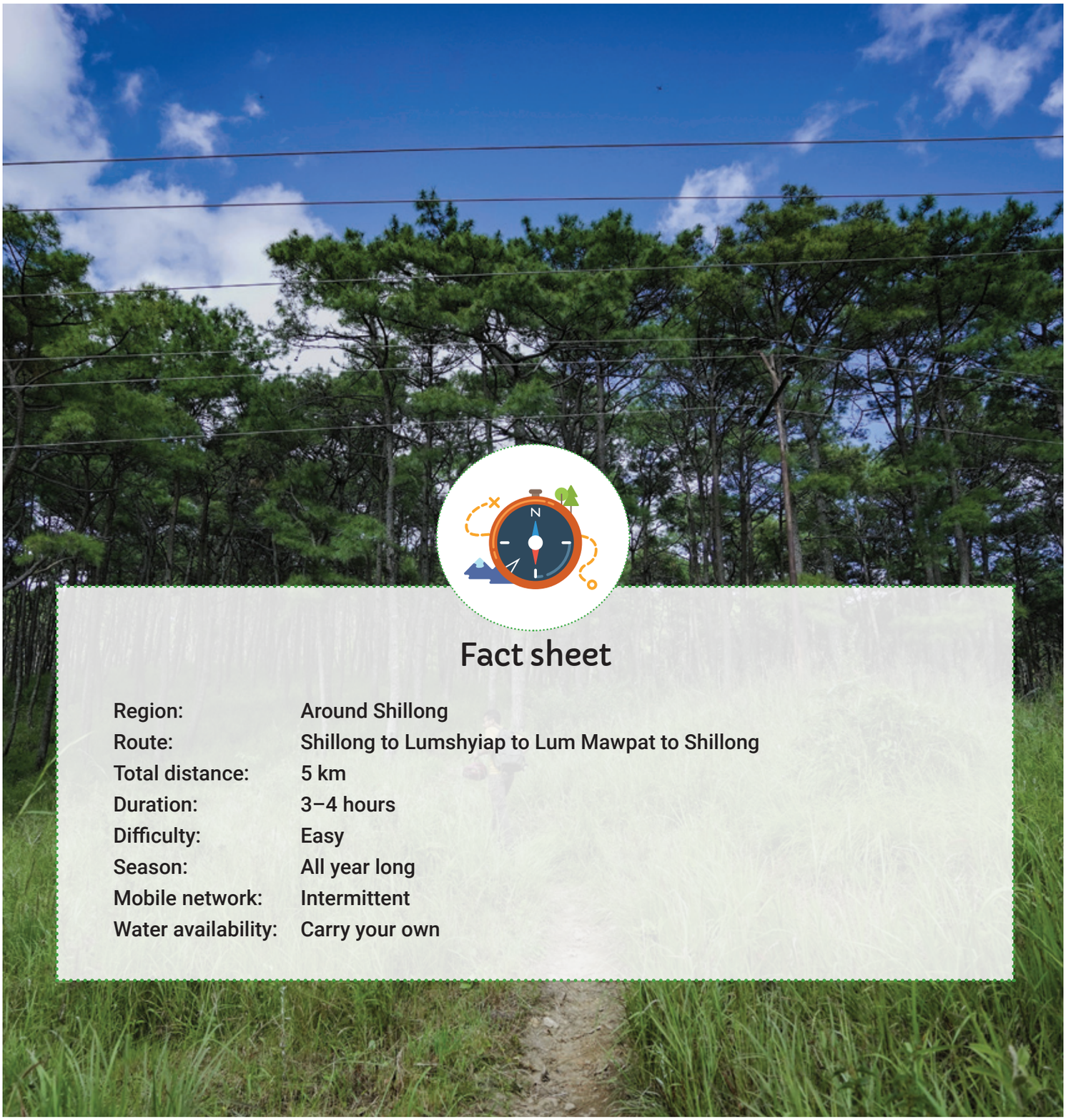
While walking here in rhododendron season is a special joy, the trail offers lots of rewards all year long. The high point, literally, of the trek is the mesmerizing viewpoint that offers panoramic views of Shillong city and the hills that surround it. In the heart of the forest, you may also find a stream that leads towards a hidden waterfall locally known as Kshaid Tymmen Falls.

Later, when you're back in the city and gazing up at the peaks you've just walked down from, it will seem hard to believe that a riot of colours you've never seen before was so close at hand.

THE PINE FOREST TREK

Shillong – Lumshiyap – Lum Mawpat – Shillong

Of all the unexpected delights that Shillong has in store, the Pine Forest Trek is one that should rank quite high on your list.



Fact sheet

Region:	Around Shillong
Route:	Shillong to Lumshyiap to Lum Mawpat to Shillong
Total distance:	5 km
Duration:	3–4 hours
Difficulty:	Easy
Season:	All year long
Mobile network:	Intermittent
Water availability:	Carry your own

Overview

When one thinks of the forests of Meghalaya, the Land of the Clouds, one immediately thinks of the dense, wet, and green tropical forests that are showcased in all the ads and brochures featuring the state. But take the Pine Forest Trek and you will discover surprisingly large patches of a tree that is usually associated with the more northern stretches of the Himalayas. This trek can be a thrilling adventure through the trees which holds a beautiful sight at the end of its summit.

Shillong, with its salubrious climate, was called the Scotland of the East during the British colonial era. The hills that surround it are home to lofty pine trees that comprise the Mawpat Forest. It is under the comforting shadow of these looming giants that the Pine Forest Trek winds its way.

The trail starts at Lumshyiap, which is easily accessible from anywhere in Shillong and ends at the exit point of the forest near Lum Mawpat, which is around 800 meters from the road head. The path between these two points is a memorable one. The summit of the forest, locally known as 'Lum Mot', is the destination to strive for, as it offers a vantage point from which one can enjoy an unobstructed view of the sky and the city below.

The smell of resin hangs in the air and will keep you fresh as you walk between the gnarled trunks of the trees. Pine cones will crunch under your feet and the thick carpet of pine needles will mildly muffle the sound, creating a mellow beat to walk to. The distance between the trees offers natural shading and a beautiful ray of sunlight to pass through, making it the perfect spot for 'golden hour'. When the tree cover breaks, remember to stop and take in the sight of brilliant blue skies with deep green pine trees seeming to prop them up from below. On the way back, remember to take the journey slow as the sight of the beautiful landscape will make you feel as though you can touch the sky. It's a sight you will pine for when you return home.

THE HIDDEN FOREST TREK

Shillong – ML05 Café – Pomlakrai – Shillong

It might seem like there's not much left to discover in and around Shillong, but the Hidden Forest Trek will show you that there is.

Fact sheet

Region:	Around Shillong
Route:	Shillong to ML05 Café to Pomlakrai to Shillong
Total distance:	2.5 km
Difficulty:	Easy
Season:	All year long
Mobile network:	Intermittent
Water availability:	Carry your own

Overview

You start at the Madan Sangmein (football field) opposite the signboard of the popular Rhododendron Trek in Upper Shillong. Cross the field and you'll immediately plunge into a lush, green forest. The pathway is easily visible once you reach an area highlighted by water pipes and a stream.

The trail is a gentle one in terms of the incline but is full of adventure as you pick your way through the thick vegetation. A gurgling stream keeps you company in the perfect way—always by your side without getting too loud. The pathway may be small but simple enough to keep you on track.

The trek is a relatively short one, but walking through a thick, relatively unexplored forest means that losing track of time is a real possibility. The peace and sound of the forest and bubbling stream make the journey a soothing experience. It is also possible to lose your way since the trail is new and not well-known or well-marked, so please take an experienced guide with you. As long as you follow the stream, you will always find your way back.

After you complete the trek, you can return to the starting point and savour some well-earned refreshments at the ML05 Café. Or, you could choose to continue onwards to the Upper Shillong Tea Garden, walk around a while and then return home with an experience that is perfect for the tea. You may also continue on the path towards Shillong Peak and end the journey at the sight of the sunset over the hills.

THE URBAN FOREST TREK

Shillong – Malki – Laitkor – Shillong

While the urban jungle is one all city dwellers are familiar with, this trek gives you the chance to uncover a unique experience of nature without leaving the city.

Fact sheet

Region:	East Khasi Hills
Route:	Shillong to Malki to Laitkor to Shillong
Total distance:	4 km
Duration:	2–3 hours
Difficulty:	Easy
Season:	All year long
Mobile network:	Intermittent
Water availability:	Carry your own

Overview

All cities are urban jungles, but not all of them offer you the chance to take a refreshing walk in the forest without actually leaving city limits. Shillong is a city that does. Surrounded by dense forests and hills on all sides, it offers a variety of pathways for an adventurous journey with nature, providing thrilling experiences amidst the natural beauty.

Nestled on the plateau that bears its name and ringed by hills, Shillong offers visitors all the experiences they would expect from a vibrant capital city. What it also offers, by virtue of its proximity to the hills, is walks and hikes that are often within the city limits. These hikes are relatively close and cover a short distance. This Urban Forest Trek is one of them.

This trail is very easy for hikers of all ages and stages of life. It starts at Malki, from where a well-defined trail leads into the forest. The early part of the trail is paved, and this gradually changes into a gentle, unpaved forest trail that takes you under the boughs of the pine trees that clothe the hills around Shillong. Multiple pathways can be seen due to the modern placement of water pipes, however, by sticking to the paved path, you will be able to witness an area filled with pine trees which offer a scenic beauty in its surroundings. Stop to listen for birdsong and catch your breath while inhaling the refreshing resin smell that is unique to a pine forest.

The ascents and descents are gentle, and the trail eventually emerges into the open from under the cover of the pine trees. It is this specific spot that offers a decent spot for camping, picnics as well as a resting spot before continuing the journey further.

From here, you may follow the trail to Laitkor, ending near the roadhead. The trek becomes easier to traverse through however one is suggested to travel alongside someone as the path may be confusing towards the road. From this point, you can either walk back to Shillong or organize a car to take you back to the city.

ABOUT TREK THE HIMALAYAS

Founded with a vision to make trekking adventure accessible to the mass and focusing on the sustainable eco-tourism components, Trek the Himalayas has created a niche in the industry as one of the most sought-after guided trekking companies in India.

Since its inception, the Trek the Himalayas founder duo, accomplished mountaineers Rakesh Pant and Sandeep Rawat, have worked tirelessly towards the shared vision and have successfully explored new treks in the depths of Himalayas across the nation.

In line with the company vision and in the spirit of true adventure the collaboration between Meghalaya Tourism Department and Trek The Himalayas has seen new horizons to be opened up in Meghalaya for sustainable trekking adventure. The Trek The Himalayas team has successfully explored 25 new trekking routes in this north-eastern state that will add significant mileage to the tourism map of Meghalaya.

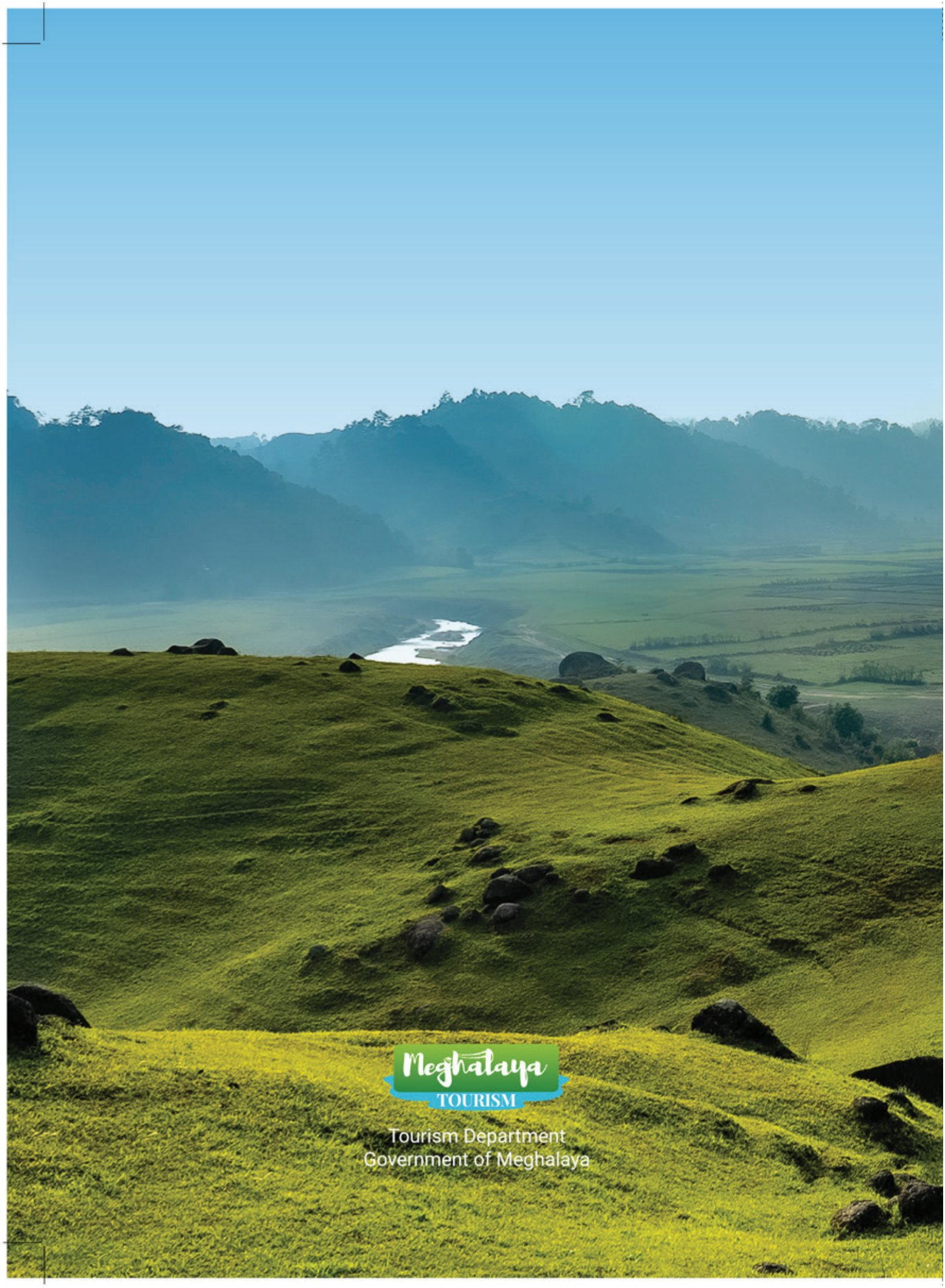
While exploring the new routes in different regions of the State, the Trek The Himalayas team has also listed and notified the relevant State Government team on the scope of development in different areas. Once implemented these areas can be developed as tourism hubs, generating sustainable financial opportunities for the local communities.

Trek The Himalayas has also conducted thorough Outdoor Trip Leader training program for the local youths who volunteered to become a part of this sustainable adventure tourism journey in the State of Meghalaya.

Trek The Himalayas is a recognized adventure tour operator affiliated with the Ministry of Tourism, India. Besides fixed departure and customized treks, their affiliation with the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) allows them to arrange mountaineering expedition to all IMF-recognized Himalayan peaks.

They have brought together a team of basic and advanced mountaineering course certified trek leaders and first aid responder certified trekking staff, bound by a code of safe & serious approach to trekking.

Trek The Himalayas
Safest & Trusted Adventure Provider



Tourism Department
Government of Meghalaya