

A bag of surprises

Apart from being blessed with lush green tea estates and stunning views of the Himalayas, Bagdogra is also an apt springboard to other interesting tourist destinations. [By Hema Narayanan](#)



Alight from the flight, drive down into the town of Bagdogra, and you are welcomed by a bag of surprises – immense greenery, captivating Himalayan ranges, the mighty Teesta river and a base for connecting to many destinations of tourist interest. This town has plenty of visitors year-long, both for its own attractions and due to its proximity to Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Siliguri and Gangtok. And during the time of Makar Sankranti, pilgrims come over from all over the country to celebrate the festival of Gangasagar Mela with pomp and zest. Situated in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, Bagdogra preserves its age-old rich culture and tradition.

Sprawling greenery - lush, pristine and soothing to the eye - is seen all over, thanks to the tea cultivated in this town. Spread over miles and miles, the tea gardens and estates are an integral part of Bagdogra and start surrounding you soon after you enter it. There are numerous well-known plantations and tea estates: Bagdogra Tea Estate, Bijoynagar Tea Estate, Gungaram Tea Estate, Kamalpur Tea Estate, Maruti Tea Estate, Mousam Tea Estate, Shovarani Tea Estate, and many more. Interestingly, many heritage tours are arranged among the tea plantations and they are quite a worthwhile experience.

Whoever said that people go only on wine-tasting tours, should know that in Bagdogra,

**DRIVING ALONG
BAGDOGRA, I SPOTTED
RIVER TEESTA WITH ITS
UNIQUE AND SELDOM
SEEN COLOUR – EMERALD**

one can go tea-tasting too. Engulfed by the tea plantations myself and its spreading aroma, I was certain that I had to dip as many tea bags as possible and sip them along with glimpses of the mighty Himalayan ranges – before heading back home.

Some places are just so blessed with beautiful



A grand view of the Eastern Himalayan Mountains and (below) rafting on the Teesta

QUICK FACTS

▶ GETTING THERE

GoAir flies to Bagdogra.

▶ BEST SEASON TO GO

Mid-September to mid-October and mid-March to mid-June.

▶ WHAT TO DO THERE

Heritage tours among the tea plantations, white water rafting in the Teesta, angling and fishing, trekking in the hill ranges and visiting popular destinations like Siliguri, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Gangtok.

▶ WHERE TO STAY

It's a good idea to stay up at Siliguri, the closest town and visit Bagdogra. Good budget hotels in Siliguri include Hotel Sinclairs and Vinayak Hotel.

landscapes. At least this is how I felt when I stepped into Bagdogra, especially having travelled from the concrete cosmopolitan jungle of Bengaluru. Bagdogra offered outstanding views of the Eastern Himalayan Mountains – which are massive and mesmerisingly scenic.

Topographically, the East Himalayas comprises of the hill tracts of northern West Bengal (passing through Bagdogra), Sikkim and the broad green fields and virgin forests of the Dooars Valley. One can't ask for more when it comes to the variety in the topography of the land in these ranges – since it has right from the highest mountain peaks to hills and fertile wide plains.

As we drove along through Bagdogra, I soon spotted a graceful river flowing beside us. This was river Teesta. What makes it gorgeous is its unique and seldom seen colour – emerald. It blends gracefully with the colour of the dense foliage around it. Though it is said to be the lifeline of the state of Sikkim, Teesta, shares the border with West Bengal (here in Bagdogra). Flowing so graciously through the thick green forests, it carves out verdant Himalayan tropical and temperate valleys.

The rapids of the river not only offer a stunning view, but also an adrenaline gush for the adventure buffs who travel to this town from all over, to indulge in a spot of white water rafting. Teesta is known to offer some of the best-experienced rafting stretches in the world. Therefore, if you are really up for a lifetime adventure, wanting to observe the true serene surroundings of Mother Nature at its best, then



river rafting on Teesta is something you should really try. Activities like angling and fishing are also possible here due to numerous water bodies that dot the region.

Bagdogra acts as a great hub for connecting well sought-after destinations in north eastern India – Siliguri, Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Gangtok. Visitors coming in to see any of these places stop over at Bagdogra for a couple of days before heading over to these locales.

Known as the 'Gateway of North East India', Siliguri is a city in West Bengal just 13 km away from Bagdogra. It offers many attractions like the Mahananda Weir Wildlife Sanctuary, the

Salugara Monastery which hosts a historical 100 foot stupa that was blessed by the late Kalu Rimpoche and the Umrao Singh Boat Club, run by the Indian Army, where you can go boating in boats of different sizes and shapes.

Famous for its numerous Buddhist monasteries, Kalimpong is situated around 80 km from Bagdogra. Kalimpong is a hill station quieter than Bagdogra, situated at the foothills of the Himalayas. Fabled for orchids, rare cacti and interestingly set up nurseries, it offers amazing views of the Mount Kanchendzonga ranges.

One of the most popular hill stations in India, Darjeeling is merely 93 km from Bagdogra. Offering great views of Mount Everest and the Kanchendzonga ranges, this is a place that requires at least two to three days to relish. Tiger Hill, at an altitude of about 2,590 metres is a major attraction of Darjeeling.

Known as the 'Top of the Hill', Gangtok is an urban hub 124 km from Bagdogra. Though a long drive, it is a worthwhile experience. Its landscapes, monasteries and the lifestyle of the people here come as a big surprise. Many attractions galore, but couple worth a mention include Tashi View Point and Chongo Lake. Tashi View Point gives breathtaking and the closest view of the majestic mount Kanchendzonga – its golden peak stands out during the time of the sunrise. Ever heard of a lake at 12,400 feet? I could not believe it myself until I saw Tsmogo or Chongo Lake – it can sweep anyone off their feet. This is a tranquil lake which freezes completely during the winter and is very highly revered by the locals.