



Elgin Hotel's wood-panelled interiors are part of its heritage (inset); Hayden Hall works for the social development of weavers in Darjeeling (below)

Tea and mountain views in Darjeeling.

Darjeeling was one of the most popular hill stations of the British Raj with its lush, green tea plantations. Though rather congested and touristy, it is lively, with good food, music and markets, and you can take walks in the vicinity as well. The main promenade runs from the crowded Chowrasta market to the pine-forested Observatory Hill. Along the pine-covered hillside is nestled the Windamere Hotel, set in heritage buildings dating back to the 1880s, and is quite the 'grand dame' of British Darjeeling. A short distance away is the Raj period Gymkhana Club.

Descend from here to The Elgin, a classically elegant heritage hotel with decorative room, regal lounges, antique furniture, wooden floors, rich carpets, rich drapes and fireplaces. Nearby is Mayfair, once the palace of the Maharaja of Nazargunj, with manicured lawns and stylish interiors.



Darjeeling's Raj heritage extends to its taxi fleet of Land Rovers. Hire one for the trip to Tiger Hill at dawn, where you can witness a panorama of some of the world's highest peaks, from Mount Everest to Kanchenjunga. Watching this spectacle, you can't help but agree with Mark Twain, who described Darjeeling as, 'The one land that all men desire to see, and having seen once—by even a glimpse—would not give that glimpse for the shows of the rest of the world combined'. ▶



FACT FILE: DARJEELING

Getting there: Fly from Ahmedabad to Bagdogra with a change at either Delhi or Kolkata. From Bagdogra, you can hire a taxi to Darjeeling which is about 76 km away.

Where to stay: Windamere and Elgin are excellent for Raj-style charm, while Mayfair has a more modern air.

Must-dos: Visit Bengal Natural History Museum in the colonial heart of Darjeeling, Hayden Hall and Tibetan Centre for woollen rugs, shawls and handicrafts, and the Chowrasta market for tea, handicrafts and books.

