

# Tinchuley: Passport to paradise

By **SOMEN SENGUPTA**

**F**rom Teesta bazaar crossing the zigzag road that goes up the hill is enveloped with cloud and mist. Here at every hairpin bent of the road the pine whispers with the cold wind. In that mystic milieu, light and shadow play hide and seek. When the road goes even higher on the hilltop a sea of green envelopes the riders. The step cut rock on which the tea is planted looks like a sea of waves and then suddenly panorama gets a golden touch when queen of all peak takes her cavern off. This is Tinchuley - this is a new, a different planet.

Situated almost equidistance between Darjeeling and Kalimpong, the tiny sleeping hamlet of north Bengal derived its name from the word *Teen chullah* meaning three ovens. Tinchuley is nothing but a corrupted version of that. It claimed fame in the year 2000 when it was crowned by World Wildlife Fund (WWF) as the first model village of the region. It was soon adopted by an NGO and today Tinchuley is the most low profile yet a gem like hill retreat from where jaw-falling panorama of Himalaya can be seen. Its low profile and less frequented by common tourists. Virgin and unpolluted, the small village, with only 20 families can be said to be a kingdom of silence. With its green rock bed, blue sky, white snow capped mountain & colourful flowers this is just a picture postcard destination.

Enriched with nature's endless beauty and famous for its home stay under various local families, Tinchuley has a perfect European hill station mood. The cottages are designed in such a way that you can sip your morning tea while basking in the soft winter Sun, while watching the peerless panorama of Kangchenjunga right in front of you. The same mighty mountain stands at your service even when you are having your lunch cooked over firewood and mostly with organic ingredients in the back kitchen.

Tinchuley wins all with its golden sunrise over the Himalaya. Over the horizon at the eastern corner on a clear day when the sun rises, Mt Kangchenjunga takes its breathtaking shape. As soon as the first ray of Sun kisses the snow, the mountain turns orange and then golden. Finally before becoming white it turns a pale pink. In front of your eyes all these colours change in a span of half an hour and its simply magical.

Kangchenjunga is distinctive in every sense. You are lucky if you see an amazing amalgamation of 5 snow peaks in one group. Believe it or not, the fact is except one, all are more than 8450 mt tall. Kangchenjunga is now world's 3rd highest peak. Nowhere one can expect such a magical combination on the earth. The meaning of the word Kangchenjunga is '5 treasures of snow'. During winters, the hill beds are full of colourful flowers that attract even more colourful butterflies. Up on the sky over the blue horizon an army of snow capped peaks are there to dazzle your eyes. The most gorgeous among them is Mt Kangchenjunga. Side by side there are also equally important peaks like Mt Kharg, Rathung, Kokthang, Kabroo, Pandim, Talung, Kumbhakarn, Simvo, Siniolchu and many more.

Before the dawn breaks be ready with camera and your morning cup of tea. During early mornings, more often than not, the clouds kiss the mighty peaks. And suddenly, the clouds disappear and the mighty peak stands before you - in all her glory.

From then till mid day, Kangchenjunga dons the skyline of Tinchuley.

Even in this isolated hamlet, history comes close to thrill you. Just few minutes drive from the hill top of Tinchuley there is a 100 years old Buddhist monastery which is not only beautiful in its colourful appearance, but also houses a small museum that is a treasure of historical artefacts. A century ago a group of monks left Sikkim and arrived at this place to set up a new place of worship. Today Takling gumpha, which is celebrating centenary year of its existence still has century old utensils, musical ornaments, dancing masks, silk and many artefacts in its museum. Small replica of the original monastery houses 2 small celestial Budha statues. The monastery offers breathtaking views of the hill, while the colourful Buddhist prayer flags flutter in the blowing wind to create an amazing sound that echoes all around. Tinchuley has another small Buddhist monastery named Tinchuley monastery but that is not as old as this.

Tinchuley is also known as the orange basket of the region. One of the best orange of India is grown here at the slope of various orchards. The biggest and best is known as Gurung garden. The garden set up in 1931 has a paid entry and a guide will take you to the lower edge of the slope showing various Himalayan flora. Be ready to be amazed by the gigantic sized vegetables naturally grown in the garden. If it is winter all trees are loaded with ripe oranges. One of the sweetest oranges of India, known as Kalimpong Cleopatra, is grown here. Here the special small sized orange which is not meant for human consumption but for decorating Christmas tree is also grown. The garden includes a factory that extracts garden fresh orange juice for commercial purpose.

For those who want to enjoy white water rafting, Tinchuley offers one of the best options in

India. Chitarey is a place 11 km down from Tinchuley where at the confluence of Teesta and Rangeet, rafting and other water sports are arranged. The rafting starts from a place named Melli and it ends at 24th mile. The stony river bed, white water waves with massive undercurrents and green forests on the bank make it an irresistible temptation in any adventurer's heart.

Near Tinchuley there are several tea estate producing world's finest tea. The most beautiful of those is Peshak tea estate. A trip inside of those gardens can take you to such a height from where world looks like a paradise. Here the smoky clouds walk side by side with you and the chill in the air pulls you close to your beloved. Hold the hands of your nearest and dearest and walk through these gardens - be mesmerised by the hundreds of colourful butterflies who will give you company. In such an ultra romantic mood, when the Sun comes for a bit over the horizon, Kangchenjunga smiles like a celestial Budha and this divine atmosphere transports every soul to the zenith of an extraordinary joy.

If you want to be charmed by this magic, be assured that your passport to paradise is endorsed here at Tinchuley.

#### Travel Logistics:

Tinchuley is just 32 km from Darjeeling and 43 km from Kalimpong town of West Bengal.

The nearest airport is Bagdogra and nearest railway station is NJP. It takes 3 hours to reach the place from station and airport. NJP and Bagdogra are well connected with Delhi and Calcutta.

Taxi at the rate of Rs 2500 to Rs 3000 is available from station and airport.

Home stay is the only option - check net for details.

Rai Resort and Gurung Guest house are the best 2 options. Rai Resort has the facility of viewing Kangchenjunga from every room.

Average room rent Rs 2000 plus Rs 500 for all meals.

White water rafting is made at own risk.

A day tour can cover all destination - it costs Rs 1500/vehicle.

No photography is allowed inside of monastery museum.

(Pics: Somen Sengupta) ■

