

GRACIOUS PEOPLE UNIQUE CULTURE

The people of Sikkim are warm, simple and friendly with a nature gaiety.

The customs and rituals of Sikkim are as diverse as the ethnic that inhabit the land ; the 'Lepchas' -- essentially children of the forest , the 'Bhutias' and the 'Nepalese'.

The people of sikkim love to celebrate. Be it the chasing away of the evil spirit or the celebrations on the occasion of the new year, the Sikkimese do it all with a gay abandon. And if you're fortunate you could persuade the Sikkimese to offer you ' chang' - a preparation from fermented millet. The drink is served to you in bamboo containers with a hollow bamboo pipe.

The Sikkimese culture finds expression in it's beautiful arts and crafts. Carry back a **momento** of your holiday - be it an intricately carved piece of furniture (choktse), a highly embellished carpet or an artifact of woven bamboo.



Traditional Dragon Ear Rings



Traditional Nepali Bangles & Necklace



Sikkimese Painting



Sikkim Tea Packets

THE LEPCHAS



The original inhabitants of Sikkim are said to be **Lepchas**. They existed much before the Bhutias and Nepalese migrated to the state. Before adopting Buddhism or Christianity as their religion, the earliest **Lepcha** settlers were believers in the bone faith or mune faith. This faith was basically based on spirits, good and bad. They worshipped spirits of mountains, rivers and forests which was but natural for a tribe that co-existed so harmoniously with the rich natural surroundings. The Lepcha (Zongu) folklore is rich with stories. The **Lepcha** population is concentrated in the central part of the Sikkim. This is the area that encompasses the confluence of Lachen and Lachung rivers and Dickchu.

Life in a **Lepcha** dwelling is very simple. The **male Lepcha** wears a dress called a "**pagi**" made of cotton, which is stripped. The **female Lepcha** wear a two piece dress. The Lepchas speak the **language lepcha**, although this language is not very well developed but is rich in vocabulary related to the flora & fauna of Sikkim. Lepchas are very good at archery. The polyandry marriages are permitted amongst the Lepchas.

THE BHUTIAS

These are the people of Tibetan origin. They migrated to Sikkim perhaps somewhere after the fifteenth century through the state of Sikkim. In Northern Sikkim, where they are the major inhabitants, they are known as the **Lachenpas** and **Lachungpas**. The **language** spoken by the bhutias is **sikkimese**. **Bhutia** villages are as large as those compared to those of **Lepchas**. A Bhutia house called "**Khin**" is usually of rectangular shape.

The traditional dress of the **male member** is known as the "**Bakhu**" which is a loose cloak type garment with full sleeves. The **ladies** dress consists of a silken "**Honju**" which is a full sleeve blouse and a loose gown type garment. The ladies are very fond of heavy jewelry made of pure gold.



THE NEPALESE



The **Nepalese** appeared on the Sikkim scene much after the **Lepchas & Bhutias**. They migrated in large numbers and soon became the dominant community. The Nepalese now constitute more than 80 % of the total population. **The Nepali** settlers introduced the terraced system of cultivation. Cardamom was an important cash crop introduced by **the Nepalis'**. Except for the **Sherpas & Tamangs** who are Buddhists, **the**

Nepalis' are orthodox Hindus with the usual cast system.

The Nepali language is spoken and understood all over the state. This language is similar to Hindi and uses the **Devangri script** . The traditional male **nepali** dress consists of long double breast garment flowing below the waist and a trouser known as "**Daura Suruwal**". **The female dress consist of a double breasted garment with strings to tie on both the sides at four places, which is shorter than the Daura and is known as "Chow Bandi Choli".** They also wear a shawl known as "**Majetro**". The "**Khukri**" which has become a synonym to the **Nepali (Gurkha) culture**, is a very sharp edged, angled, heavy weapon carried in a wooden or leather scabbard known as "**Daab**".