

Neora Valley Initiative : Rishyap, Rishet & Lava

Where nature is a part of the village life

East Himalaya is probably the most diverse in terms of nature and culture. With the mighty Khangchendzonga (8585 mtrs), the third highest peak in the world as a backdrop, the villages in the mountains here make an ideal destination for tourists, greeted by the smiling villagers.

Lava is set here in the midst of the mountains. It is an obscure village in the Darjeeling district under Kalimpong Subdivision. It was unknown to the outside world till 1995. Gradually with the effort of the local people and the West Bengal Forest Development Corporation, tourists started visiting Lava mostly as day visitors. The more adventurous ventured to stay a night or two. Realising the demand the Forest Development Corporation, increased the number of beds within their complex. However, due to lack of a proper circuit development, tourists left without adding to the income of the locals. The tourists did not get the chance to encounter with locals nor did they learn about their culture or nature.

With the initiative of Mr Sailendra Thapa, a local school teacher and **Help Tourism** the 'Lava Biodiversity and Eco-tourism Community' was formed. Since then there has been no looking back. Local lodges and restaurants developed, sightseeing and other activities- oriented programmes have been introduced and locals have gained from tourism.

However, within a year, the small hamlet of Lava became saturated because of aggressive promotion. To ease this pressure on Lava and also to extend the benefits of tourism to the villages nearby, **Help Tourism** began to develop **Rishyap**, four kms from Lava as an ideal step forwarding eco-tourism development.

Fact Sheet

Rishyap is a dream destination. This small village is set against the backdrop of the mighty Khangchendzonga, the third highest peak in the world. The view of the mountains is one of the most expansive with sixteen other peaks looking down on the valley. The mountains have retained the verdant cover with very old trees. Here Nature is in her un-spoilt beauty.

Yet another village Rishet, just below Neora Valley National Park was also developed as an ecotourism destination. The two villages are either side of the massive valley. Excellent village and nature trails are available at both the places. Here nature is an integral part of the village life. Both these places are approachable by fair weather roads.

Features

Both villages offer breathtaking views of Mt. Kanchendzonga and sixteen other snowcapped peaks. Remote villages without electricity, satellite and telephone connections. Fair weather approach roads and all weather approach walking trails. Agriculture and allied activities are the main source of living for the locals. Nature is a part of the village life. . All accomodation, food and guide services are provided by the local people. Rishyap accomodation in local village lodges and Rishet in camps and local village lodges. Rishet campsite is supported by local forest department as it is within the forest area and an extra ecotourism fee is charged. Local cultural programmes are a part of tourist activities.

Activities/Tours

Birding,Himalayan Jeep Safari,Treks and expeditions,Orchid tours,Himalayan Village tours.

Access

New Jalpaiguri is the nearest railhead while Bagdogra is the nearest airport.Nearest town Kalimpong is connected by frequent bus and share taxis from Siliguri/Darjeeling.A dedicated vehicle is however recommended.