



A Sustainable Winter Journey through the Eastern Himalayas

Darjeeling – Sonada – Mineral Spring – Sittong

(24 Dec 2025 – 1 Jan 2026)

This winter, we curated a slow, sustainable holiday for my friend **Kamal & Sheena Chabbria with family from Bangalore**—a journey designed to reconnect with nature, people, and simple living in the Eastern Himalayas.

The experience focused on **community-run homestays**, local cuisines, gentle treks, birding trails, and meaningful interactions with mountain communities—travel that supports livelihoods while offering deep, authentic experiences.

The journey was thoughtfully curated by my close friend **Dipra Chakraborty (Vista Holidays)** and beautifully organized by **Srijana Di and her close-knit family**, who are living examples of how sustainable eco-tourism can empower entire communities. A special mention to **Moin Da**—a rare multi-talent and local legend—bird guide, healer, singer, designer, and storyteller, whose energy and wisdom added magic to every day.



We arrived at **Bagdogra on 24th December** and immediately began our ascent through tea gardens, misty valleys, and frequent crossings of the iconic narrow-gauge toy train. As the air grew colder, warm cups of tea and local snacks became our constant companions.

Our first stay at **Sonada** was a charming wooden homestay perched on a cliff, offering sweeping views of valleys and mountains. Hosted warmly by **Pawan and his wife**, the days unfolded with early-morning birding, visits to Rainbow Waterfall, the endangered Himalayan Salamander lake,

and quiet moments at a monastery and historic church—where nature and spirituality blended seamlessly.

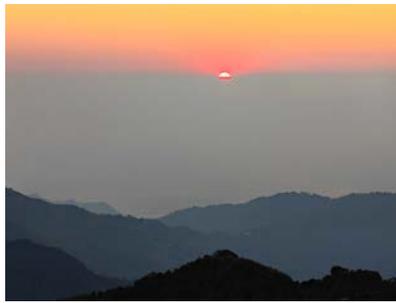


From there, we moved to **Mineral Spring**, overlooking the mighty **Kanchenjunga**. Nestled between forests, streams, and deep valleys, the homestay offered views of Darjeeling on one side and snow peaks on the other. Hilltop walks, rich birdlife, and heartfelt hospitality from **Ashish and his family** made this leg deeply rejuvenating. We also explored Darjeeling town—riding the legendary toy train to **Ghum**, visiting the zoo, ropeway, local markets, and even touching the Nepal border at Shimana amidst towering pine forests.





Our final stop was **Toryok village in Sittong**, near Kalimpong. Here, expectations were exceeded by a beautiful self-sustained homestay surrounded by vegetable gardens, orange orchards, rivers, and tea estates. With temperatures dropping between 4–7°C and Kanchenjunga looming closer, the setting felt truly Himalayan.





At nearby **Latpanchar**, one of India's finest birding hotspots, we spotted over **50 bird species in just three hours**, including the majestic **Rufous-necked Hornbills** and **Sultan Tit**. An early 4:30 a.m. start led by Moin Da rewarded us with an unforgettable sight—a courting pair of hornbills at close range.

The first rays of 2026 from the rising Sun over Bhutan blessed us with golden light and positivity.

This journey was not just a holiday—it was a **shared learning experience**, especially for the children. The true success revealed itself back in Bangalore, when **three-year-old Kabeer** began sending bird photos and videos he captured from his own balcony.

That, for me, is the real meaning of a **sustainable family holiday**—when the journey continues long after you return home.

Travel That Inspires Change

When a child returns home and starts observing birds from their balcony...

When a family understands where their food comes from...

When communities thrive because visitors chose responsibly...

That is the true success of sustainable eco-tourism.

Review from our guests

Dear Jai & Shreelata

Thank you so much for organizing such a wonderful trip



It was adventurous and fun

Most importantly because of you and sir it was enjoyable, your company was comforting and reassuring with the kids !!

Looking forward to meeting up soon and more such wonderful experiences



Much love

Kamal & Sheena

Sara, Kyra, Kabir

Some beautiful birds of Eastern Himalayas



