

## Lepchas

Travel through the North Sikkim region brings you directly in contact with the Lepchas. These isolated forest dwellers have lived harmoniously with nature over centuries. An understanding of their culture, customs and language helps to foster an appreciation of the beautiful mountains, deep forests, villages with traditional Lepcha homes, and the beautiful emerald-colored Teesta River.

The Lepchas, according to the mythology, are Rongpas (ravine dwellers) and their tribal homeland is referred as Mayal Lyang ('Hidden Land' or 'the land blessed by God'). They are believed to be the aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim, India, known for their retention of rich cultural heritage. They have folklores and tales of past that suggest their inhabitation in the region from times immemorial. Majority of its population inhabits in Dzongu valley, an officially demarcated reserve for Lepcha community.

They hold tremendous amount of traditional knowledge on the use of flora and fauna acknowledged by the fact of their age old practices of using plants to cure numerous ailments. They have accumulated a vast understanding on the use pattern of various wild products of the area. Besides being skilled hunters, they have gained marvel over the technical use of bamboo, ranging from articles of routine requirement to artifacts, water distribution network, musical instruments, etc.

The Lepchas were hunters and gatherers and used to live complete nomadic lives, but now they are fast learning to cope with the modern age civilization. They began with practicing settled agriculture and have now diversified their interests into many other professions. However they still continue to be a Lepcha in their heart and soul - shy, simple and sincere, always carrying a chunk of blissful Mayal Lyang in their unsullied heart.