

EXPLORE LAMAHATTA

With Shrestha Saha

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'TRAVELAMA'

It is natural for one to long for a tranquil respite from the hustling battle of modern lives every once in a while. What is a better respite from the hustle bustle of life than a parallel reality of a short, serene getaway? Shrestha Saha brings to you her experience about one such getaway to a mesmerizing place called Lamahatta, nestled among the Eastern Himalayas.

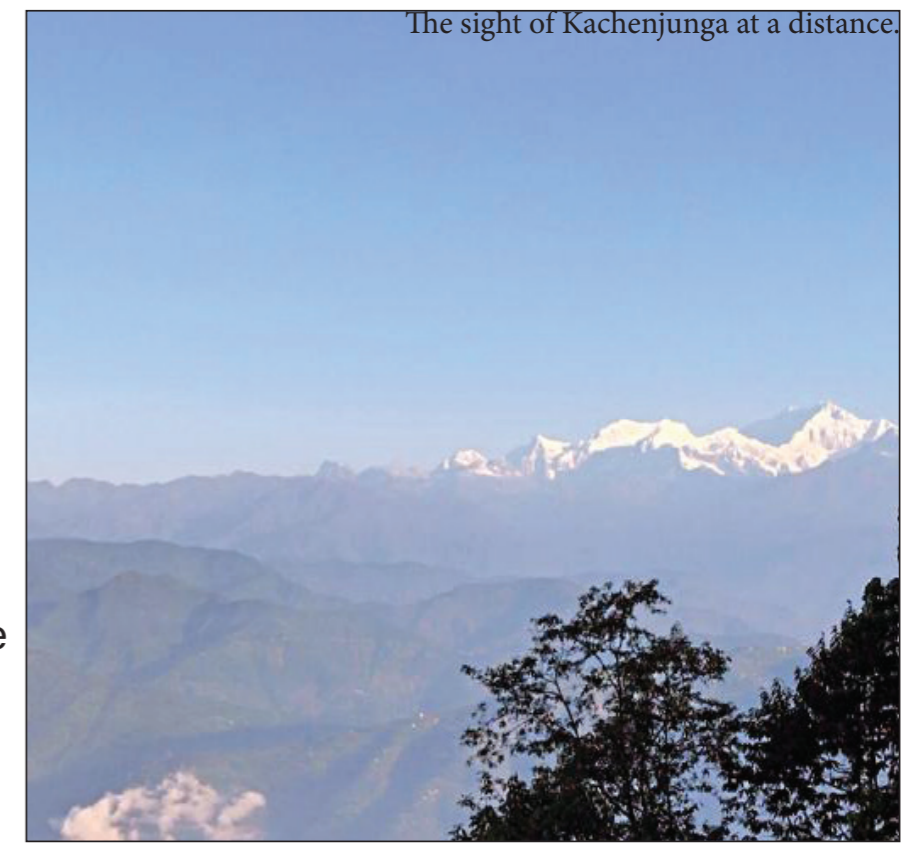


Quoting Sir Edmund Hillary "It's not the mountains we conquer but ourselves", so in the year of 2021 I went along with my family to conquer the tireless monotony of daily life in a peaceful area among the mountains called Lamahatta. It was a short trip in the month of October. Lamahatta is a relatively newer pin on the map of tourism compared to others in the state of West Bengal. It is located near the main town of Darjeeling. We took a railway train from the Sealdah station in Kolkata to New Jalpaiguri in the evening. Then the next early morning we got down from the train and booked cabs. It was a soothing drive as t, I felt the softness of wind brushing past my hair when I rolled my car window down. At first, the sight of lush green hills then the captivating scenery of mountains welcomed us as the drive continued. I could feel the wind getting colder as we drove towards the higher altitude. Then we got to our location after a four-hour drive, including a break for snacks. Lamahatta was at an altitude of 5700 feet. There was a lot of traffic right in front of our stay because the village falls on the way of Darjeeling and Sikkim so that causes a traffic of tourists itself that come to travel the North-East.

We had pre-booked a homestay called 'Lamahatta Residency' beforehand and boarded on that homestay itself. At a first glance, it looked like another ordinary homestay away from the city crown, snuggled among the chilly hill areas warmed by the huge Conifers and warm Pine oaks. But after we were taken to our rooms with open balconies and corridors, it was a whole different picture.

The area was circled with hypnotizing snow-clad Himalayan ranges that glistened with orange pride against the sunshine. The ever-famous third highest mountain in the world, Kangchenjunga, also fairly showcased itself against the charming vision of nature as its snow cap gleamed echoing the warm sunlight around it. The enchanting environment put me in awe before I could even settle down and made me excited towards staying there. Then we settled in and had our lunch.

As we were all worn out, we freshened up and made us ourselves cosy inside our rooms. Soon after that, the sun started slipping down against the mountains with the background of different shades of orange and purple flirting with each other. We observed the magnificent view of the magical sunset from our balconies. It was incredible! Then the darkness dawned and our visions captured one of the most empowering sight where the city lights of Darjeeling sparkled studded in faraway hills among the darkness like stars on skies. Then we went out for a walk in the neighbourhood soaking in the dimmed soothing ambience of that area. Not to miss out on the mandatory Asian snack, we tasted some 'momos' that we spotted a local steaming. We roamed around exploring the surroundings and conversed with a few more natives. The natives were very heart-warming and always greeted us with a smile. But did you ever wonder why they named the place 'Lamahatta'? The residents enlightened us with the answer to this, they mentioned that 'Lama' means a monk and 'hatta' means a hut. Long ago this area used to be a habitat for monks hence the name derived as 'Lamahatta'. After pondering over the mystique ambience of the area a while more, we were driven back to our stay, following that we slept after having our dinner.

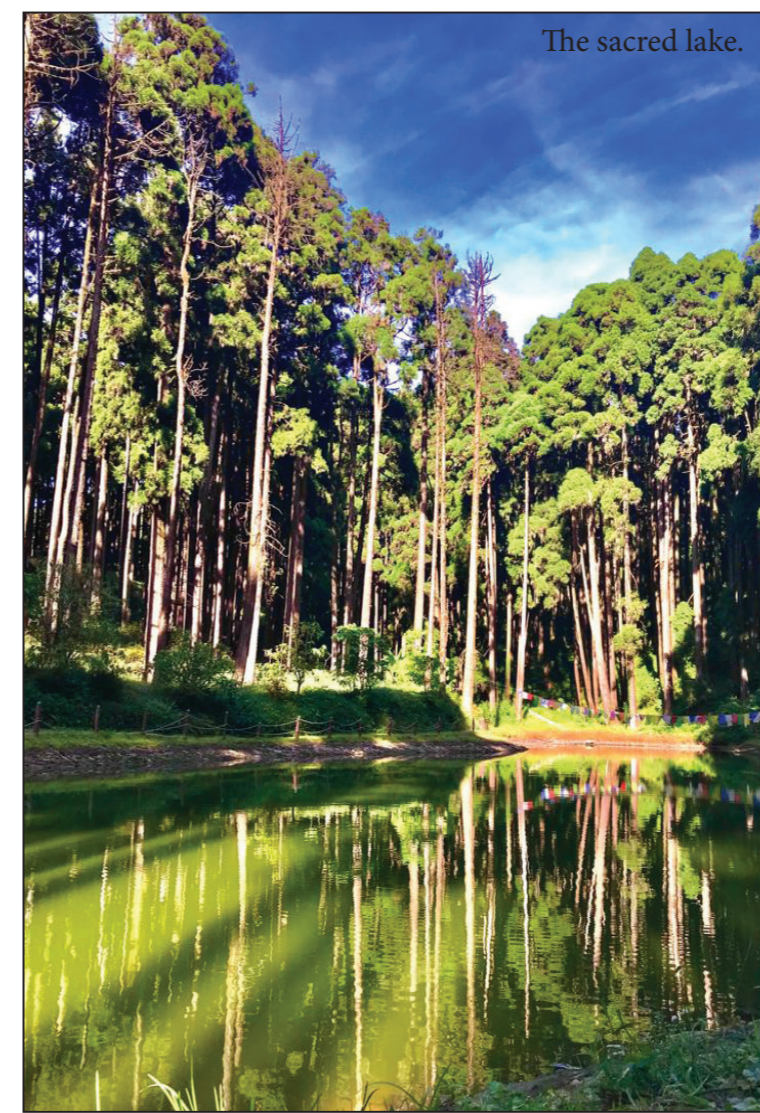


The sight of Kachenjunga at a distance.



The view of my favourite Sunset at Lamahatta.

The next day we went out to explore the eco-tourism factor of Lamahatta that is well-known in the region, called the Lamahatta eco-park. It was surrounded by tall Pine trees filled with lush dark green leaves that created a vibrant silhouette against the clear blue sky. The park was lined up with beautiful and varied flower plants like yellow hibiscus, rose, etc at different steps. Each step was at a higher altitude than the other. Properly structured pathways and stairs of soil were made in between each line of flowers and plants. We carefully trod the path and reached the watch tower amidst the hilly garden. The tower was surrounded by ample prayer flags and provided a stunning view of the mounts and landscape. Then we hiked upwards few more levels to reach a valley region. The landscape there was completely embraced by the warm sunrays complimenting the chilly weather of Lamahatta. Is any trip complete without clicks to garner the fond moments of the visit? Definitely no! Hence, we decided to take a few pictures in that valley-spot to cherish the memories later. Then we continued our hike to get a glimpse of the main attraction of the park which was a sacred lake at the top-most point of the park. The pathways got really steep from here onwards so we had to slowly climb upwards. Once we got to the spot, it was all worth it. There was a heavenly lake in an utmost tranquil atmosphere. The lake was mostly encircled by the towering pine trees, typical to Lamahatta. The stagnant and calming water in the lake returned the view of the standing tall trees around it through their clean reflections. We wandered around the lake for a while as our souls seem to be rejuvenated by the refreshing nature embracing us.



The sacred lake.

Then we got down to the starting point of the park and returned to our hotel after having lunch at a local restaurant. We relaxed in our rooms enjoying the mild weather and supreme magic of mountain views from our room windows. In the evening we played with the ever-friendly mountain who were adorable fluff balls with wagging tails! Then towards the night, the manager of the home stay offered to take us on a drive. We took up on the offer and hopped in his car. During the drive, everyone bonded over the car music. The enchanting city lights at a distance came up on a whole new perspective from the running car as it seemed like the glow of a faraway starry world since it was dark. We visited the nearby market that sold quirky accessories and appetising, local food. We got souvenirs for our friends back at home and returned to our homestay.

Then we filled ourselves with one of the most delicious meals of the trip, pan-fried chilly pork with noodles for dinner. This was available at the restaurant of our homestay and is a must-have! If you ever visit Lamahatta you must get a bite of the chilly pork at the restaurant of Lamahatta Residency! Then we headed to our rooms for packing our luggage since our departing train was the very next evening. The next day we took off right after our breakfast. We departed with mixed emotions that of a child as school starts when they are excited to re-unite with their friends but also sulk over the absence of daily home comfort and flexibility. I knew I had to sync in back to my daily life but my heart did not have it in itself to quit the bewitching serenity of Lamahatta. Who wants to face reality and give up a vacation anyway? With hopeful wishes of returning the mountain calls we continued our return journey to the New Jalpaiguri station. We stopped for lunch in-between at an Indo-Chinese restaurant in Siliguri. Then slowly we lost the view of the mountains and hills as drove towards the plain region and reached our station in the evening.

There was heavy rainfall prior to our arrival of train. The sky seemed to be moping over our departure too! There was a group of folk-singers at the station that sang in high-spirits in contrast to the spirit of nature. Those were very enthralling moments as it felt like the perfect ending music to the climax of a movie on one of my best vacations ever. Then the train arrived, we boarded on it with our packed luggage and hearts packed with remarkable memories.



We returned to our hometown the next morning. The humidity of the cityscape greeted us and made us miss the pleasurable coldness of the mountains even more. Lamahatta is undoubtedly one of the best locations for a quick getaway, specially for those living in Calcutta. It is a pocket-friendly locality with a soulful environment and pleasing weather. The stunning scenic beauty of Lamahatta is a must-watch in one's lifetime.



THE END.