

Nature Tour to the “Land of Perpetual Winds” South Garo Hills, Meghalaya, India

Organized By
**Samrakshan Eco Tours, Siju Conservation and Tourism Society
and Gongrot Eco- Tourism**

View of Balpakram-Baghmara Landscape

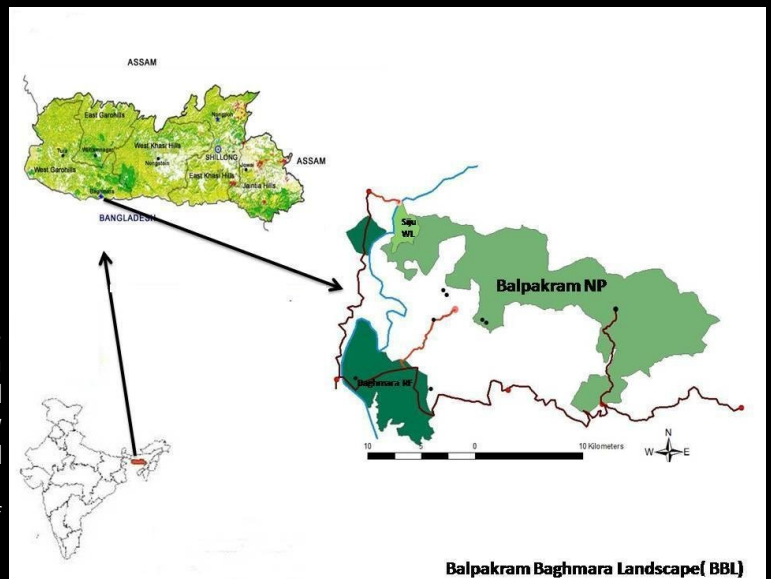
The north-eastern state of Meghalaya is situated in the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot. Along with protected areas, the presence of large stretches of old growth and secondary forests which are community owned has helped preserve the immense faunal and floral bio-diversity of this region. Meghalaya has three primary hill ranges-Jaintia Hills to the extreme east, Garo hills to the extreme west and Khasi hills sandwiched in between. The Garo hills have possibly the best tract of forests remaining in Meghalaya.

Meghalaya at a glance

Located : North East India
Capital : Shillong
Area : 22, 429 sq. km
Population : 2.32 million (Census 2001)
Primary languages : English, Khasi and Garo
Tribes : Khasi, Pnar (in Jaintia Hills) and Garo

About Balpakram Baghmara Landscape (BBL)

The Balpakram-Baghmara Landscape (BBL) falls in South Garo Hills district of Meghalaya which has the maximum forest coverage in Meghalaya. The Balpakram Baghmara Landscape is ~ 600 km² and comprises Balpakram National Park (220 km²), Siju wildlife sanctuary (6 km²), Baghmara Reserve Forest (45 km²) and community owned land. The landscape consists of primary and secondary forest growth of tropical moist evergreen forest with maximum elevation of ~900m.



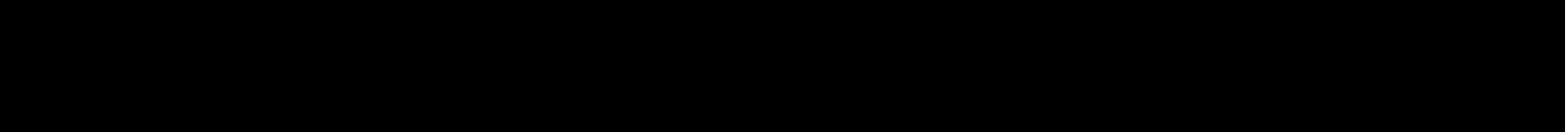
The Garo Hills are predominantly inhabited by the Garo Tribe or A.chik. Garos follow the matrilineal society where property right lies with the girl child. Garo consider Balpakram to be a sacred place where human souls take a rest prior to their heavenly journey.

Climate

The winter is between November and March with a mean high of 25 °C and low of 7 °C. Summer is between end April and October is humid and hot with maximum temperature of 37 °C. Monsoon hits this region in end April with an annual average rainfall that varies between 4,000mm to 11,436mm.

Season to visit

- The place can be accessed round the year however the best time to visit between October and April.
- Best time for Butterfly watching is March to June and October to December.
- Best time for Bird watching is October to April.



Flora and fauna of South Garo Hills

Mammals, birds, butterflies, reptiles, amphibians, orchids-loads of breath-taking flora and fauna to be seen, if one takes the time out to search for these elusive sights. Spectacular plants like insectivorous Pitcher Plant abound as do orchids such as Meghalaya's state plant- Lady's Slipper Orchid.

Mammals of South Garo Hills

Amongst the large mammals, beware-this is elephant habitat! An estimated population of close to 900 elephants exists in the Balpakram-Baghmara Landscape (BBL). One needs to be constantly on guard to ensure that no chance encounters with this pachyderm occur. Amongst the large cats, tiger and leopard's co-exist with lesser cats including the Civets and Leopard Cats. Not to be left behind, India's only ape-Hoolock Gibbons are common in the landscape, with their whoops ringing through the forest. Assamese macaque and Stump-tailed macaque can be seen occasionally throughout BBL. Let's not forget the cute rodents-the Hoary-bellied & Orange-bellied Squirrels amongst others.



Lady's Slipper



Pitcher Plant



The Genial Pachyderm



Leopard Cat



Capped Langur



Orange-bellied Squirrel

Birds of the South Garo Hills

The Balpakram-Baghmara Landscape is classified as one of Meghalaya's Important Bird Area's by the Indian Bird Conservation Network: Bombay Natural History Society and Birdlife International (UK) with the IBA site code IN-ML-01. Over 270 bird species have been recorded from the area during brief surveys though the actual number could be much greater. Some of the interesting bird species that have been sighted here include Black & Jerdon's Baza, Mountain Bamboo & White-Cheeked Partridge, Grey Peacock Pheasant, Blyth's Kingfisher, Bay Woodpecker Asian Emerald Cuckoo, Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, Olive Bulbul, Eye-Browed Wren-Babbler, Crested Finchbill, Dusky & Eastern-Crowned Warbler. This site is the known westernmost distributional limit for the White-winged Duck which is listed as "Endangered". Other bird species that could be found here (and maybe you can be the one to do so!) are Chestnut-fronted Shrike-babbler *Pteruthius aenobarbus* (only record from India is a specimen collected from the Garo hills), Tawny-breasted Wren-babbler *Spelaornis longicaudatus* (rare & endemic) and the Flavescent Bulbul *Pycnonotus flavesens*.



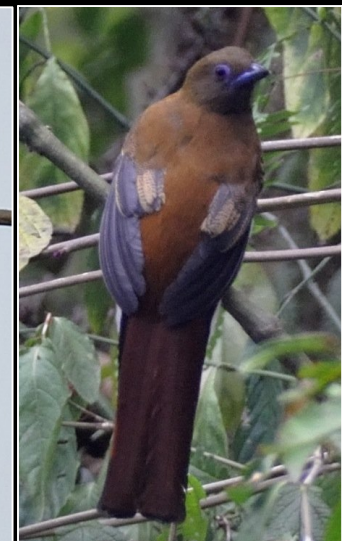
Orange bellied Leafbird



Small Niltava



Longtailed Broadbill



Redheaded Trogon(Female)



Butterflies of the South Garo Hills

The butterfly diversity of the area is amazing; brief surveys have resulted in a checklist of close to 300 butterfly species. Mud puddling swallowtails abound with numerous Swordtails (Spot, Four-bar & Five-bar Swordtails), Zebras (Great & Lesser Zebra) and Jays (Common, Tailed & Great Jay). Amongst the Nymphalids, the spectacular Rajahs are common (Tawny, Variegated and Black Rajah). Sightings of uncommon species such as Kohinoor, Marbled Map, Peal's Palmfly, Common and Large Faun are not unusual. Hesperids whiz about everywhere, defying you to identify them! Purple-and-gold flitter, Khasi Forest Bob, Orange Awlet, Common Awl, Wax Dart-the list is endless. Not to be left behind, the Lycaenids (or the blues) are equally stunning. Common Brownie and Great Darkie have been sighted here, as have many Royals, Flashes and Silverlines. A week's visit in the right season will reveal between 150 to 200 butterfly species.



Silver Royal



Orange Awlet



Small Leopard



Kohinoor

Herpetofauna of the South Garo Hills

For those inclined to search for elusive herpetofauna, the magical diversity of the South Garo Hills beckons. Over 60 species of amphibians, lizards and snakes have been found here. Interesting amphibian records include Smith's Leaf Litter Frog *Leptobrachium smithii*, Northern Trickle Frog *Occidozyga borealis* (recorded by Birand & Pawar (2001) in the North East after 90 years) and the Assamese Cascade Frog *Amolops assamensis* (described only in 2008). Interesting lizard sightings include the spectacular Blue-throated Lizard *Ptyctolaemus gularis* and the Khasi Hills Bent-toed Gecko *Cyrtopodion khasiense*.



Green Cat snake



Khasi Bent-toed Gecko



Blue-throated lizard



Assamese Cascade Frog

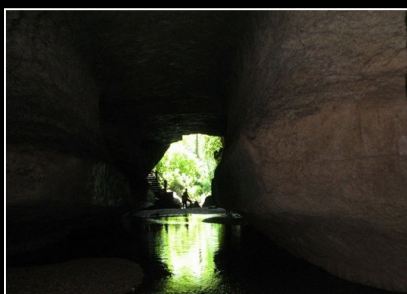
How to get to this place

The nearest airport and railway station is in Guwahati. Baghmara is 320 km and 345 km from GBI airport, Guwahati and Guwahati railway station respectively.

- Public Transport- (1) Overnight bus service is available from Guwahati to Tura (nearest town which is well connected to Baghmara) and Baghmara. Buses start from ISBT, Guwahati at 8.30 pm which reach Tura and Baghmara at 4 am and 9 am respectively. A bus ticket will cost Rs 300 per person (2) Alternatively, a daily day sumo service available from Guwahati departing for Tura at 6 am and 2 pm.
- Private Transport- Taxi for Baghmara (TATA sumo, Indica, Alto, etc) is available from Paltan-Bazaar, Guwahati. One way cost for a full taxi (Tata Indica) from Guwahati to Baghmara is Rs 4,500/-. Alternatively, you can hire a taxi on a daily basis @ Rs 1200/- per day plus fuel costs.

Areas to visit

1. Balpakram National Park was notified as national park in 1987. It covers an area of 220 km². The entrance of BNP is 50 km from Baghmara (2 hours road travel). 2. Siju Wildlife Sanctuary (also known as Siju bird sanctuary) covers an area of 6 km². The sanctuary is along the Sim-sang River with terrific riverine landscape. 3. Siju Cave is the third longest cave system in the Indian sub-continent. Siju WLS and Caves are 33 km from Baghmara (one and half an hour road travel). 4. Baghmara Reserved Forest. Karwani, Panda and other lesser known locations/ trails in BRF are good places for birds and butterfly watching. 5. Gongrot is located at the edge of BNP with the awesome Taidang Chiring (stream) weaving its way through dense forest. Gongrot is terrific for birds and butterflies. It is 20 km from Baghmara (2 hours road travel followed by a 2.5 km trek). Trekking to the Chutmag Abri (Peak) is 12 km from Gongrot village.



Eco Stay Facility

- Gongrot: : Enjoy home-stays in Gongrot Aking. This camp has a maximum capacity of 12 persons (Garo borung (home-stay) for 4 persons and Alpine tent for another 8 persons) with common toilet (Indian commode), running water and local cuisine
- Siju: Enjoy a nature stay surrounded by forest. The camp has a maximum capacity of 12 persons (huts for 4 persons and Alpine tent for another 8 persons) with common toilet (Indian commode), running water and local cuisine.
- Baghmara: Tourist lodge at Baghmara.



Gongrot Home-stay



Siju Eco Camp

Tour packages

If you are looking for a holiday to experience the Garo Hills, this is one for you. We offer group tours up to a group size of twelve and individual tour on demand. We also design tours for students on nature education.

- Family holidays : Spend days with Garo families, experience Garo food and enjoy nature around you.
- Trekking holidays : Trekking to Chutmang Abri (Peak) from Gongrot village.
- Nature holidays : The tropical forests of South Garo hills.
- Bird tours : Specialised bird tours. See between 125-150 birds species in a week long trip.
- Butterfly tours : Specialised butterfly tours. See between 150-200 species on a week long trip.
- Culture tours : Experience the culture of the Garo tribe.

Contact us for specific packages at:

Mr. Yaranajit Deka

Samrakshan Eco Tours

Baghmara, South Garo Hills

Meghalaya- 794102

Email: samrakshan.ecotours@gmail.com or yanarajit.samrakshan@gmail.com

Contact no: +91-96152-85664, +91-94023-96591, +91-98681-42144

Website: www.samrakshan.org

Eco-tourism in South Garo Hills

Eco-tourism in Garo Hills is conducted by Samrakshan primarily to provide the local community an alternative livelihood and an incentive to conserve the forests and the area's bio-diversity. Samrakshan and the local community makes every effort to ensure that its tourism is eco-friendly. The very essence of eco-tourism, that the eco-system remains unaffected by tourism, is at the heart of Samrakshan's eco-tourism policy. In addition, every effort is made to ensure that the eco-tours are sustainable and equitable with benefits passing to the local community. Not only is the local community involved in conducting the tours, but a percentage of revenues from every tour are given back to the local community.

About Samrakshan

The Balpakram-Baghmara Landscape is the focus of the conservation initiative of Samrakshan Trust, based in Baghmara, Meghalaya. Samrakshan's long term objectives in this landscape includes influencing the state government's policy toward the landscape, altering land use planning and management by creating Community Conservation Reserves (CCR), reducing human induced removal of wildlife from the BBL (poaching, trapping, catapults) and creating alternate livelihoods for the local community including eco-tourism and developing/marketing Non -Timber Forest Produce, with active participation of the local community. Samrakshan's seeks to achieve its objectives in a fashion that is sustainable and equitable, with active participation from the local community.



Pointed-nosed Frog



Green Lynx Spider



Cucumber Moth



Copper-headed Trinket Snake

Photo Credits:

Butterflies, Moth, Mammals, Arachnids and Herpetofauna: ©Sanjay Sondhi, TITLI Trust, Dehradun.
Birds: Leafbird, Longtailed Broadbill and Redheaded Trogon (female) ©Ramana Athreya, Kaali Trust.

& Small Niltava ©Sanjay Sondhi, TITLI Trust, Dehradun.

Copper-headed Trinket Snake ©Rohan Mukerjee.

Landscapes and others: ©Samrakshan Trust.





Conserving nature.
Protecting the environment.