



## The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway

*Lovingly known as the Toy Train, this narrow-gauge relic takes passengers from the Himalayan foothills to the cloudy heights of India's tea country.*

FROM NEW JALPAIGURI TO DARJEELING, INDIA  
7 HOURS (2 HOURS FOR THE JOY TRAIN SERVICE)

Since the late nineteenth century, this sweet old steam train has been a much-loved sight on the ascent to Darjeeling. Puffing uphill like an elderly relative, it wails into view, black smoke trailing from its chimney. Trucks and carts slow to a halt to allow the train to crisscross Hill Cart Road, with amused walkers watching from the sidelines and gasping as the train runs so close to shop fronts that passengers could reach out and touch the fruit. Established by British colonizers, the railway was built to transport tea, rice, and other produce up and down the hillside. Now it takes big groups of Indian families singing Bollywood songs and is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site—one that the town's residents are keen to preserve. However, given that some of the locomotives were built in Glasgow more than 150 years ago, old parts are hard to come by. And as engineers die out, so too does their trade. Up until the last few years, the train departed from New Jalpaiguri and took more than seven hours to cover the 55-mile (88-kilometer) route. Zigzagging around thick bamboo and pine, it wound through emerald-green slopes of tea, arriving into the damp hill station where cloud hangs low like steam. It is unclear when the route might be resurrected, but for now, it is still possible to ride the two-hour "joy train" from Darjeeling down to Ghum and back, which includes entry to the train museum. On clear days, passengers should see the jagged head of Kanchenjunga dusted with snow. ♦