



Tawang and Arunachal

History and Complete Travel Guide



Tawang Monastery, the heart of Tawang's history.

What is inside

Page	Section
2	Tawang and Arunachal at a glance
3 to 4	History of Tawang
5	Culture, people and festivals
6	The perfect time to travel
7 to 8	Places guide with photos
9	What to do and what not to do
10	Packing, food, money, FAQs and booking

A guide by Gotawang, Guwahati to Tawang tours. Facts, heights and dates are approximate and conditions change, so always confirm roads, weather and permits before you travel.



Tawang and Arunachal at a glance

Arunachal Pradesh is India's easternmost state, whose name means land of the dawn-lit mountains. In its far west, close to Bhutan and Tibet, lies Tawang: a high, cold and deeply spiritual district of snow passes, jewel-coloured lakes, pine valleys and one of Asia's great monasteries.

Fact	Details
Place	Tawang district, west Arunachal Pradesh, India
Height	Tawang town is about 10,000 ft; Sela Pass about 13,700 ft; Bumla Pass about 15,200 ft
People	Mainly the Monpa, followers of Tibetan Buddhism; also Brokpa herders and other communities
Languages	Monpa, Hindi and English are widely understood
Gateway	Guwahati (airport and railway), about 450 to 500 km by road, usually done over two days
Permit	Inner Line Permit (ILP) for Indian travellers; photo and ID needed
Best months	Mid-October to November for clear views; December to February for snow; March to April for flowers
Not for	The monsoon months of July to September, when landslides are common



A frozen lake under snow-dusted peaks.



The Sela Tunnel, opened in March 2024, keeps the high road open more often.

Why go?

- Dramatic Himalayan scenery changes every hour: forest, river valley, snow pass, frozen lake.
- A living Buddhist culture, with monasteries, prayer wheels and festivals that you can see and respect.
- A story of faith, borders and courage that you can follow place by place, which this guide explains.
- Warm homestays and local food that make the cold worth it.



History of Tawang (1): faith and a monastery

The Monpa people have lived in the valleys of Tawang and Dirang for many centuries. Their way of life grew from Tibetan Buddhism, hill farming, yak herding and trade over high passes with Tibet and Bhutan. Tawang was a meeting point of these worlds long before modern roads.



Tawang Monastery stands on a spur above the town, with sweeping valley views.

Tawang Monastery

Tawang Monastery, called Galden Namgyal Lhatse, was founded around 1680 to 1681 by Merak Lama Lodre Gyatso, following the wishes of the 5th Dalai Lama. It belongs to the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism, the same school as the Dalai Lamas. It is the largest monastery in India and, by many accounts, the second largest in the world after the Potala Palace in Lhasa.

The name Tawang is said to mean chosen by horse. In the local story, the lama's horse wandered off, and the spot where it was found became the monastery site. Ta means horse and wang means chosen or blessed.

What you will see inside

- A large assembly hall with a giant gilded Buddha statue.
- A library holding old Buddhist manuscripts and scriptures.
- Colourful murals, thangka paintings and butter-lamp-lit shrines.
- Monks at prayer. Morning prayers are an unforgettable experience if you arrive early and stay quiet.

A line of Dalai Lamas

Tawang's story is tied to the Dalai Lamas. The 6th Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso, a poet-monk, was born near Tawang in 1683 at Urgelling. In March 1959, the 14th Dalai Lama entered India through this region and rested at Tawang Monastery for some days before moving on. Many Buddhists still see Tawang as a sacred place for these links.

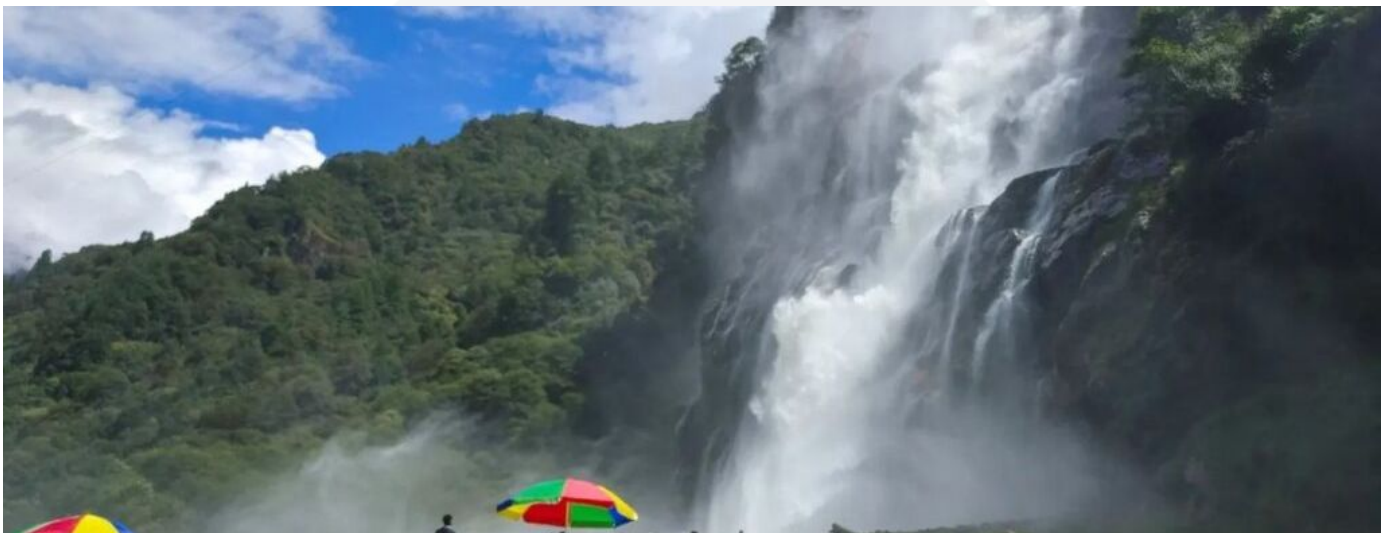


History of Tawang (2): borders, war and courage

Tawang lies in a sensitive border region. Over the 20th century its story became closely linked with the line that divides India from Tibet and China.

Key moments

Period	What happened
1914	The Simla Convention drew the McMahon Line. India treats it as the international border; China disputes it.
1951 onwards	The area came under Indian administration and became part of the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA).
1959	The 14th Dalai Lama enters India through the Tawang region.
1962	The Sino-Indian war. Chinese forces advanced into Tawang. They withdrew from the area after the ceasefire.
1972	NEFA is renamed Arunachal Pradesh and becomes a Union Territory.
1987	Arunachal Pradesh becomes a full state of India.



Nuranang Falls, a roaring waterfall near Jang, tied to a 1962 war story.

The Battle of Nuranang and Jaswant Singh Rawat

In November 1962, soldiers of the 4th Garhwal Rifles fought near the Nuranang river. Rifleman Jaswant Singh Rawat held a post for many hours and was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra after his death. Local tradition tells of two Monpa girls, Sela and Nura, who helped him; the Sela Pass and the Nuranang Falls are said to carry their names. The Jaswant Garh war memorial, on the road between Sela and Tawang, honours him, and soldiers still show deep respect there.

Today

Tawang is a peaceful and welcoming place. Roads and tunnels have improved, tourism supports homestays, and the monasteries remain at the centre of daily life. Because it is a border district, there are army camps and checkpoints. Follow all instructions and treat the soldiers with courtesy.



Culture, people and festivals

Arunachal is one of India's most diverse states, with 26 major tribes and many sub-tribes, each with its own language, dress and festivals. In Tawang and Dirang, the main community is the Monpa.



Dirang's Buddhist monastery, set among green hills.



Bomdila Monastery above the town.

Monpa life

- Faith first: prayer flags, prayer wheels and mani stones are part of every village.
- Houses in Dirang are often built of stone with wooden upper floors and slate or shingle roofs.
- Hand-made Monpa paper, called Mon Shugu, is made from tree bark and used for scriptures.
- Brokpa herders live at high altitude with yaks and have their own dress and traditions.

Festivals worth planning around

Festival	When (approx.)	What to expect
Torgya	Around January	Masked dances at Tawang Monastery to drive away evil spirits
Losar	February to March	Monpa New Year with prayers, feasts and family visits
Ajilamu	Varies	A Monpa masked dance-drama telling old stories
Mask dances	Through the year	Held at various monasteries; ask locally for dates

Food to try

Thukpa noodle soup, momos, millet-based dishes, butter tea, soft yak cheese called churpi, and local brews like chang if offered by your host. Vegetarian and non-vegetarian food are both easy to find. Fresh kiwi and apples from the Dirang valley are a seasonal treat.

Crafts to buy

Thangka paintings, hand-woven carpets and shawls, wood carvings, Monpa paper and prayer flags. Buy from local craft centres and shops to support artisans, and ask before photographing people.



The perfect time to travel

There is no single perfect month. It depends on what you want to see. Here is how the year looks in Tawang.

Months	What it is like	Verdict
Mid-Oct to Nov	Clear skies, crisp air and sharp mountain views. Days are pleasant and nights are cold. Roads are usually open, with early snow possible at the highest points by late November.	Best overall. Ideal for first-timers and families
Dec to Feb	Cold with snow on Sela and Bumla and frozen lakes. Nights can fall well below freezing. Roads can close for hours or days after snowfall.	Best for snow. Keep plans flexible
Mar to Apr	Spring brings rhododendron blooms and fewer tourists. Some snow remains at the high passes.	Great for flowers and photography
May to Jun	Warmer days, green hills and some pre-monsoon showers. Good valley views.	Good, with some risk of showers
Jul to Sep	Heavy monsoon rain, landslides, road blocks and leeches.	Avoid unless you are experienced



Ptso Lake in winter: snow-dusted shores and a deep blue lake.

Choose by what you love

If you want	Go in
Snow and frozen lakes	Mid-December to January (be flexible with dates)
Clear photos and easy roads	Late October to November
Flowers and green hills	March to April
Festivals	January (Torgya) or February to March (Losar)
Quiet trip with elders or kids	Late October to mid-November

Gotawang's peak season is October to December, when views are best and trips run most smoothly. Because snow decides road access, always keep one buffer day after your trip.



Places guide (1): Tippi, Bomdila, Dirang and the Sela road

The road from Guwahati climbs gradually from the plains into the Himalayas. These are the places you will pass on Day 1 and Day 2.

Tippi and Bhalukpong

Tippi is home to an orchid research centre, a reminder that Arunachal has hundreds of orchid species. Stretch your legs, enjoy the greenery, and see the flowers at their best in spring.

Bomdila

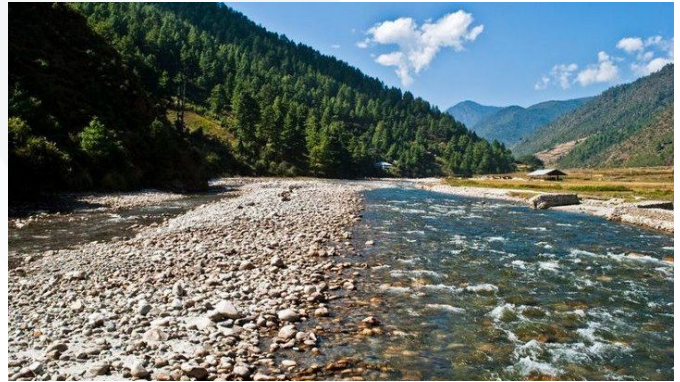
At about 8,000 ft, Bomdila is your first cool night. Visit the monastery for valley views and see the local market for apples, handicrafts and snacks.

Dirang and Sangti Valley

Dirang sits in a milder valley, known for kiwi and apple orchards, hot springs, stone houses and a yak research centre. Sangti Valley, a river valley nearby, is a winter home for black-necked cranes from Tibet.



Dirang Monastery, peaceful and photogenic.



Sangti Valley: river, pines and open meadows.

Sela Pass, Sela Lake and the Sela Tunnel

Sela Pass, at about 13,700 ft, is the high point of the road between Dirang and Tawang. The all-weather Sela Tunnel, opened in March 2024, reduces delays in bad weather. The old pass road leads to Sela Lake and the snowy viewpoints, where the air is thin and cold, so move slowly and keep warm.



High-altitude lake scenery near the pass.



Travellers soaking in the mountain air.

Nuranang Falls

Near Jang, about a 100 m cascade pours down the mountainside. Spray rises like mist, and the area is great for photos and a hot cup of tea. Respect the story of the 1962 war attached to this place.



Places guide (2): Bumla, the lakes and Tawang



Bumla Pass: snow, prayer flags and army posts.



The Bumla marker: about 15,200 ft.

Bumla Pass and the China border view

Bumla Pass, at about 15,200 ft and roughly 37 km from Tawang, sits on the India-China border. Visits are controlled by the army, so you need the right permission, good weather and usually a local registered vehicle. It is the highest and coldest point of the trip. Wear full winter layers, move slowly, and follow soldiers' instructions. Photography may be restricted in some spots.



Madhuri Lake: drowned tree trunks in still water.



Ptso Lake near Tawang: calm and deep blue.

Madhuri Lake (Sangetsar)

This lake was formed by the great 1950 earthquake, which flooded a forest valley. Dead tree trunks still stand in the water, making a haunting mirror-like scene. It was made famous by a 1997 Hindi film and is now called Madhuri Lake. Go early for the stillest reflections.

Ptso Lake

A peaceful high-altitude lake near Tawang, popular for photography and picnic stops. In winter its shores are dusted with snow, and in other seasons the hills around it turn green.

Tawang town and monastery

Plan your monastery visit in the morning for prayers. Walk clockwise around prayer wheels and stupas, remove shoes where asked, and speak softly. Spend time in Tawang's market and craft centre, and try a bowl of thukpa on a cold evening.



What to do and what not to do

Do	Do not
• Carry original photo ID for every traveller • Take it slow on Day 2 and Day 3 so your body adjusts • Drink plenty of water and eat light at high altitude • Dress in warm layers, including thermals, a down jacket, cap and gloves • Remove shoes in monasteries and walk clockwise around stupas and prayer wheels • Ask before photographing monks, locals and prayers • Follow instructions from army personnel and your driver • Keep one buffer day after the trip for weather or road delays • Carry your waste back and use dustbins • Keep cash handy and download offline maps	• Do not rush to the high passes on arrival or push on if you feel unwell • Do not drink alcohol or smoke at high altitude • Do not photograph army posts, bridges or border installations unless clearly allowed • Do not touch or move sacred objects in monasteries • Do not wear revealing clothes at religious places • Do not litter or leave plastic at lakes and passes • Do not drive at night on mountain roads • Do not cross barriers or go near cliff edges, even for photos • Do not fly drones without permission • Do not plan a same-day flight or train after your return

Altitude health

- Signs of trouble: headache, nausea, dizziness, unusual tiredness and breathlessness. Rest, drink water and tell your guide or driver straight away.
- If symptoms get worse, go down to a lower height and get medical help. The national emergency number is 112.
- Elders and anyone with heart, lung or blood-pressure problems should see a doctor before the trip. Take altitude medicine only on a doctor's advice.

Permits and rules

- Indian travellers need an Inner Line Permit (ILP). Gotawang arranges it when you send a photo and Aadhaar copy 3 days before travel.
- Foreign nationals need different permits; contact us early.
- Bumla and some border areas need extra permission and are weather dependent.



Packing, food, money, FAQs and booking

Clothing	Gear and documents	Health and comfort
Thermal inner wear, 2 to 3 warm layers, down or padded jacket, woollen cap, gloves, warm socks, rain or wind jacket	Original photo ID, printed booking, power bank, torch, waterproof shoes with good grip, day bag, a few cash notes	Personal medicines, sunscreen, lip balm, sunglasses, wet wipes, motion-sickness tablets, reusable water bottle

Money and network

ATMs exist in main towns but can run out of cash, so carry enough. Mobile network can be patchy in the hills; download offline maps and tell family your plan.

Quick answers

Question	Answer
Is Tawang safe for families?	Yes, with a good vehicle, warm clothes and a slow pace. Tell us about elders or health needs in advance.
Will we see snow?	Likely from December to February, and possible at Sela and Bumla in late November or March.
Can we visit Bumla?	Only with army permission, good weather and a local vehicle, so plans can change.
How many days are ideal?	5 days and 4 nights works well; add a day for buffer or extra sights.
Is a driver or guide needed?	Yes. Roads are steep and weather changes fast; local drivers are safer.

Ready to go?

Book a 5 day Guwahati to Tawang trip with Gotawang: ILP arranged, premium homestay with breakfast, pickup and drop in Guwahati.

WhatsApp +91 70990 46028 | [Gotawang.in](https://gotawang.in)

Facts, heights, dates and conditions are approximate and can change. Please confirm with Gotawang before you travel.