



Still inching slowly towards creating a spot for itself on the travel map of the Northeast, Tripura remains pleasantly away from tourist clichés. Running to its own rhythm, for those going solo, it is as offbeat as it gets



Shopping

You can pick up a few home-made crafts with traditional motifs

What: Cane, bamboo and wooden products are the three main highlights of the craft sector of Tripura. Densely woven cane baskets and exquisite household products created out of wood and bamboo can be seen commonly in the shops. Distinct tribal motifs and styles appear on different products, giving them a unique touch and character. The best way to see the crafts in the making is to visit the small clusters of homes in different villages, which are known for their local handicrafts.

Why: Since tourism is at a relatively nascent stage in the state a lot of planning can be done on the ground, depending on local contacts. It's mostly in regions like **Sadar, Tamakdi, Mohanpur, Churilam, Sonamura, Melaghar, Khowai, Kailasahar** and **Belonia** that the industry thrives in households. These villages lie in a small radius around Agartala.

How: To see the craft sector at close quarters keep Agartala your base. Connected to key cities by air and rail, it is not difficult to reach. Visit during the winter months when its most pleasant for your explorations.



The royal life

Soak in Tripura's architectural delights

What: Use the filter of royalty to create your Tripura itinerary, focusing on **Neermahal**, the summer palace of the Maharaja and the **Ujjayanta Palace** to get a glimpse of Tripura's history. You can take a detour from these destinations for more sightseeing options.

Why: King Bir Bikram Kishore Debbarman built Neermahal or the 'water palace' in 1930. The unique architectural style with Hindu and Islamic influences is the biggest draw for travellers. The reflection of the palace in the Rudra Sagar Lake is a classic image that one associates with the palace. Situated in **Agartala**, the Ujjayanta Palace is the former royal palace of the princely state of Tripura. Well-manicured Mughal gardens surround the white palace grounds, which house Hindu temples dedicated to Lakshmi Narayan, Uma-Maheshwari, Kali and Jagannath.

How: The two palaces are easily accessible from the capital city of Agartala, with Ujjayanta Palace within the city limits and Neermahal just 60 km away. The best season to travel to Tripura is in the winter months of October to April.



Take a detour to Neermahal

ANSHUMAN SEN



Countryside bliss

Get acquainted with Jampui Hills' dramatic history

What: Tripura's pristine countryside offers places like the **Thaidawr Peak** and **Jampui Hills** make for great getaways—ones you would never want to come back from. Carpeted with thick forests and abundant fauna, the same hills are also home to rich cultural diversity. Thaidawr Peak and Jampui Hills, coupled with Agartala's sightseeing options make for a wholesome trip for the solo traveller.

Why: The Jampui Hills are particularly interesting given their

dramatic history. The Mizo people once occupied the hills in the 16th century and slowly started to migrate westward into Tripura. The exodus continued over the next hundreds of years till a dreaded disease called Zawngghri finally chased the Mizo community away. Even then, a handful continued to stayed back in Jampui Hills. The culture of the hills is vividly different from that of the rest of Tripura. Heading that side, you can reserve November for the Orange Festival in the Jampui Hills.

How: One has to travel 206 km east of Agartala to reach the Jampui Hills. Cabs and local buses are available from the city. Book yourself at **Eden Tourist Lodge Tel: (0381) 2325 930** at Vangmun Village for basic facilities and matching cost.



Wonders etched in stone

Chase legends engraved in massive rocks at Unakoti

What: Zig-zag through the sinuous hills of Tripura, 135 km north east of Agartala, to arrive at the **rock carved figures** from 7th-9th centuries. The massive rocks that bear carvings of gods and goddesses punctuate the sprawling green topography. The legend goes that Lord Shiva set out to find Kashi with a troupe of a crore deities and rested here for one night. He asked his coterie to wake up early before sunrise the next morning. When no one but himself woke up early, Shiva cursed them to become stone idols and carried on the journey.

Why: **Unakoti Hill** is often combined with Agartala's sightseeing options such as the Neermahal Palace, Tripura Sundari Temple, Ujjayanta Palace and the state museum. A trip to Agartala is not complete without the detour to Unakoti, so spare a day for the visit.

How: Agartala's airport is a small one but has connections to major cities in India. There is also a railway station that serves as the major nodal point of the state. Arrive between October to March and hire a cab for 'out of city' tours.



SECRET

TRIPURA SUNDARI TEMPLE

The gruesome legend of Sati has its traces in Tripura as well. Visit the Tripura Sundari Temple, which was constructed in 1501. Dedicated to Kali, it's visited by a stream of devotees who come to commemorate the Goddess whose right foot is said to have fallen here while Shiva danced with her mutilated corpse. Animal sacrifices are common but the intense religiosity is what one experiences richly.

KALYAN CHAKRAVORTY

Discover the history behind the rock carved figures of Unakoti Hill