



— A trail through —
**Meghalaya's
colonial past**

Once lovingly called Scotland of the East by homesick British officers during the East India Company rule, Meghalaya still retains the crown.

words // **Edwina D'Souza**



With picturesque misty hills, wild untouched rainforests, refreshing spring baths, and rolling meadows, Meghalaya is full of pristine natural beauty. You will never cease to be amazed by its breathtaking nature trails, jaw-dropping waterfalls, countless living root bridges and sacred forests waiting to be discovered. One such hidden gem is the David Scott Trail in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya - a charming hike through India's colonial past.

FROM THE PAGES OF HISTORY David Scott was a British admiral in the East India Company between 1802 and 1832. His services as the Commissioner of Revenue Circuits on the north east frontier covered areas that are modern day Bangladesh, Assam and Meghalaya. A remnant of David Scott's legacy is the 100 kilometre horse-cart trail that he created for trading goods like silk, cotton, wax, honey and minerals like iron and limestone between Assam and Bangladesh. Meghalaya's indigenous Khasi tribe, led by U Tirot Singh, revolted against the British to stop this trade route. They fought a guerrilla style warfare with bows and arrows for four years until the British emerged victorious and

U Tirot Singh was captured and deported to Dhaka, where he breathed his last in 1835.

Today, the David Scott Trail is recognised by the United Nations as an Indigenous and Community Conserved Area (ICCA), which should come as no surprise since the people of Meghalaya have always been very protective of their forests and believe that God resides there.

FROZEN IN TIME

While the original 100 kilometre trail through the East Khasi Hills takes about five days to complete, a shorter 16 kilometre route is more popular with day-hikers and is considered one of the prettiest nature trails in India.

The David Scott Trail, a charming hike through Khasi Hills in Meghalaya, is one of India's prettiest nature trails.





HOW TO GET THERE

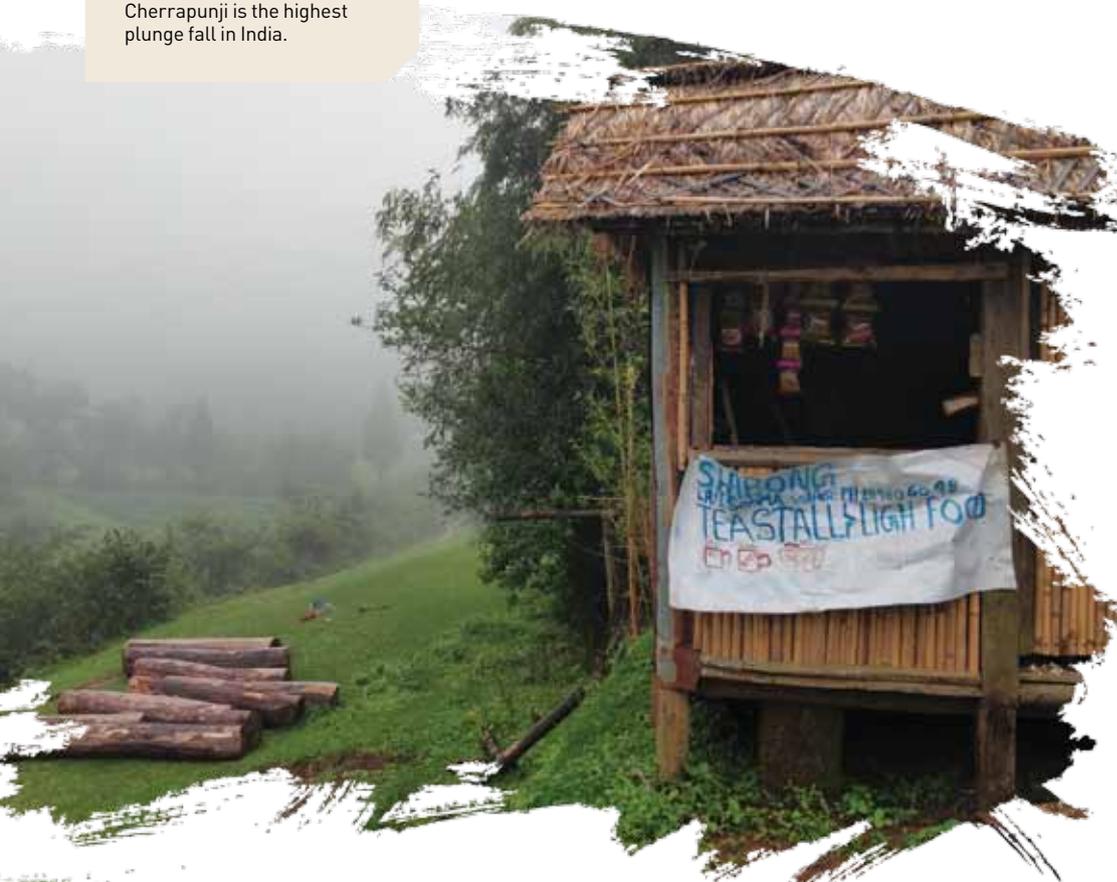
The David Scott Trail is 25km from Shillong, Meghalaya. The nearest airport is in Guwahati, Assam, from where Shillong is a 3 hour drive. Vistara has daily non-stop flights to Guwahati from Delhi and Bagdogra, along with convenient connections from other cities.

OTHER PLACES OF INTEREST IN MEGHALAYA

- The picturesque secret pool and Rainbow Falls are at an added two hour trek from Nongriat in East Khasi Hills.
- The Arwah caves and Mawsmi caves are popular for their limestone formations.
- The Mawphlang sacred forest is a forest conservation initiative by the Khasis and is a great way to spend some time in the lap of nature.
- The Nohkalikai Falls in Cherrapunji is the highest plunge fall in India.



Above: Flowers in full bloom hanging like garlands in the rainforest;
Below: One of the many tea stalls for refreshments along the picturesque trail



The hike begins from Mawphlang heritage village, which has played an important role in shaping Khasi culture and is popular for its sacred forest grove with stone monoliths. A grassy trail leads you from the front and a water stream runs parallel through the entire trail that takes 5 to 6 hours to complete. Expect to cross rickety bridges, ice cold waters and misty meadows while occasionally getting a glimpse of Khasi villages frozen in time.

The air in the hills is intoxicatingly pure and the streams are clean enough for you to replenish your water anywhere along the trail. Bright green fern shrubberies adorn walls along the winding trails looking like wallpapers. The weather is nippy all year round with erratic rains, creating natural pools for the Khasi villagers to take a dip. It would be a good idea to carry some salt to protect you from leeches that thrive in wet conditions like these. The rivers which are brown from the moving silt during monsoon turn crystal blue during winter, making for a picturesque landscape. Mobile network is non-existent, but the mountain dogs do a pretty good job of being a companion or guide on the route.

For lunch, you can stop at any of the Khasi villages and enjoy a plate of hot noodles and *lal cha* (red tea) native to Meghalaya, while soaking in the amazing vistas and contemplating if you should even go back to the city. As the forest cover begins to reduce, stone quarrying comes in sight. This signals that you are approaching the Lad Mawphlang village which is the end of your 16 kilometre long expedition on foot through the abode of clouds. ✿