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The sprawling Cooch Behar palace is an awesome sight

Where History Speaks From Every Edifice

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SITUATED ON the banks of river Torsa in north Bengal, Cooch Behar is famous for its majestic palace. Once a small princely state, Cooch Behar is steeped in history.

According to Hindu mythology this was Lord Shiva's favourite abode. Records say that in 1510, Raja Bishwasingha established the royal family here. During the 17th century, the king of Bhutan waged several wars against the state. Later, the royal family entered into a treaty with the East India Company and became a princely state. In 1949, king Jagadeependranarayan merged his kingdom with India.

The main attraction of this town is the royal palace. A classic example of Roman architecture, this palace rebuilt in 1863 by King Nripendranarayan, is a small replica of St Peter's Church at Rome with a massive tomb at the centre surrounded by Corinthian pillars and arches.

One of the first things to draw attention in the palace is the Durbar Hall, a round room with natural lights coming from 12 glass panels. The marble floor bears a carving of the royal family's symbol.

The town has numer-

TOURIST INFO

Getting to Cooch Behar is an overnight journey by train from Kolkata. The town is also connected to Siliguri. Buses from Kolkata take about 20 hours to reach. The palace, Madanmohan temple and other historical buildings are located in the heart of the town, while Baneshwar temple is on the outskirts.

ous lakes, most of which are well-maintained. One such is Sagardighi, a sanctuary for migratory birds. The Ras Mela held in front of the Madanmohan temple is one of the oldest and biggest fairs in the state.

The Victorian College, renamed Acharya Brajendra Seal College, Jemkins School, Cooch Behar Club, Victoria Tower and the collector's building are regarded as some of the finest examples of European architecture. Next to the Baneshwar temple, which is unique for its custom of offering non-vegetarian *prasad* to Lord Shiva, is a pond where one can find hundreds of giant tortoises, which are considered sacred. ■