

## CENTRAL HIMALAYAS TREK



The Garhwal region contains some of the finest mountains in the Himalaya and is highly accessible. This spectacular trek takes you deep into the Central Himalaya. It is a “Sadhu” Trail which the devotees use to cross over from Gangotri to Kedarnath. This is one of the very few Sadhu trails left in the Himalaya. Dramatic canyons, majestic mountains, cascading waterfalls, pine and birch trees, together with the holy waters of India’s most sacred river make the Source of the Ganges trek a feast for the soul and senses. The views of Mount Shivling and the Bhagirathi range in the Garhwal Himalaya are unforgettable.

You start with an acclimatisation trek before arriving at Gangotri to embark on the Source of the Ganges trek which ascends to 14,294ft/4463m at Tapovan. This acclimatisation walk is a unique, short Himalayan trek with the interesting objective of passing through the foothills and actual hill villages where the world-famous ‘Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag’ spread terror among the local people. The scenery is lovely, giving commanding views of the main peaks of the Garhwal Himalaya and taking you through lush terraced hills, pristine forests and many villages. The weather at this time of year is typically warm and sunny, clear blue skies being the norm.

We have designed this tour to give you a comprehensive Indian experience – you will stay in Delhi’, take an Indian train journey across the plains, drive on twisting mountains roads through the Garhwal foothills, visit holy ghats, ashrams and temples in Rishikesh and Haridwar, trek to a height of 14,294ft/4463m, and watch the sunrise on the dramatic Garhwal Himalayan giants such as Shivling (20,956ft/6543m) and Bhagirathi I, II and III (21,958ft/6856m, 20,857ft/6512m, and 20,671ft/6454m respectively).

Duration: 15 Days (Delhi -Delhi)  
Grade: Moderate  
Activities: Trekking, Rafting, and Religious  
Season: April –June, Mid Sep. – Nov.

### DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

**DAY 01: ARRIVE DELHI, DAY AT LEISURE.** You will be met on arrival and transferred to your hotel. A chance then to sample the heat, dust and atmosphere of India's capital city. Time is your own to do your own thing, any shopping before the trek, or perhaps hustle up taxis to have a look around the

city. A good place to start is Old Delhi, as here you see India in the raw. Crowded bazaars, shops selling everything under the sun and people on every form of transport imaginable and from every part of the sub-continent. Overnight Metropolitan Hotel Nikko.

**DAY 2: SHATABDI EXPRESS TRAIN TO HARIDWAR, DRIVE TO RISHIKESH.** (Approximately 1 hour drive time) You transfer early morning by taxi to board the 7:00am Shatabdi Express to Haridwar, one of the seven holy cities of Hinduism. The train journey takes 5 hours, 40 minutes. Legend has it that Vishnu's footprint was found on the bank of the holy river, giving it its sanctity. Situated at the base of the Siwalik Hills, Haridwar is where the River Ganga (Ganges) passes through its last gorge and begins a 2,000km journey across the plains of India to the Bay of Bengal. Haridwar is a very old town and was mentioned by the Chinese traveler, Hiuen Tsang. The wealth of the town attracted the attention of Timur the Great, more commonly known as Tamerlane, who sacked it in 1399.

After arrival at Haridwar Station (12:40pm) you will be met and first visit the town's 'steps' on the banks of the Ganges. Haridwar is the gateway of pilgrimage to Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri, which lie further up in the mountains. Every twelve years, when Venus and Jupiter coincide with Aquarius and the Sun and Moon are in Aries and Sagittarius respectively, there takes place an event unlike any other in the world. This is the 'Khumbh' Mela, when more than a million Hindu pilgrims gather on the banks of the Ganges to bathe in its holy waters. At more normal times there is still a great deal of activity and you will see Sadhus, pilgrims, hawkers, snake charmers and people bathing in the river, some diving for coins and others praying. Incense pervades the air and you are suddenly immersed in the experience that is India.

You then drive on to Rishikesh (25kms) where again there should be some time to cross the Laxman Jhoola (a large suspension bridge) to visit the 13-storey temple on the other side and visit perhaps Triveni Ghat, Bharat Temple and/or the place Lord Rama bathed at Rishikund. This small town is the ancient roadhead for all pilgrim traffic and in the season is hectic with groups of villagers from all over India clamouring for seats on the buses to the four hill shrines. The northern part of the town is called Muni-ki-Reti and refers to the silver shores of the river where the rishis of old meditated. Across the Ganga, large, sprawling but well-maintained ashrams teach yoga and publish books on the scriptures. You stay overnight at the Hotel Neeraj Bhawan.

**DAY 3: DRIVE VIA SRINAGAR TO GULTIR (2,116ft/645m) AND TREK TO KOTHKI SAM (2,083ft/635m).** (Approximately 2 hours' drive time, 1 hour trekking). One hour's drive from Srinagar look out for Gulab Bari, 3km before Rudraprayag. This is the place where Jim Corbett made his famous 'Shot in the dark' and killed the Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag. Here there is a commemorative plaque on the exact spot below the tree where he had his platform. Accounts differ but it is believed the leopard had killed upwards of 125 people before Jim Corbett's single shot put paid to its reign of terror. He stayed on his tree platform until it was light for fear he had only wounded the animal that locals believed was an 'evil spirit'. Nearby is the 'Pundit's House' and if he is at home you may meet Totaram, the grandson of the pundit, who was Corbett's friend. He will show you a photo of his grandfather and Corbett, and a copy of Corbett's book describing the hunt. The road through Rudraprayag itself is noisy and congested and the staff will probably stop to buy fresh vegetables. Further down the road you will see your first views of snow-capped peaks framed in the distance. Not far from here to Gultir.

Gultir village is situated on the left bank of the Alakananda River. You cross the river over a suspension bridge and commence the trek from the right bank. The trail is flat and easy along the banks of the Alakananda River. There is a small Hindu temple above the campsite. Time permitting, you can walk up to the village of Kothki and then descend to the river camp. The word 'Sam' means 'playground' or 'festival place'. This is where village festivals are occasionally held. There is a small pumping station nearby which gives water supply to the village. Camp overnight.

DAY 4: TREK TO ISHALA (4,593ft/1,400m). 5-6 hours. The trail is at first level by the river, then you climb through fields and trees to Chimka. From here the 'short cut' goes very steeply up to Ishala but is very tough and the longer route is much more interesting. The 'long route' begins by descending very slightly then on the level for some time passing a small hamlet below. The river is now some way below. Then begins an easy climb to Kodakhal (2,960ft/925m). Before it is reached there is a huge Pipal tree next to a water supply. The tree is a tangle of creepers and roots dropping from branches. At Kodakhal there is a red stone memorial to some 'Freedom Fighters' contained in a walled enclosure. There is a post office here. After Kodakhal the path pulls steadily up through a fir forest to reach a ridge from where you can see over and down into the next valley. Then on up the ridge until eventually Ishala is seen in profile. Almost bare dun-coloured mountain tops rise beyond and you can see the 'pass' up there with a village sprawling on the west of the village. You stop at Ishala where camp is set in old terraced fields. At Ishala you start to see orange trees: one of the main crops in the area. Camp overnight.

DAY 5: TREK TO AAGAR (6,555ft/1,998m). 4-5 hours. Initially it is quite a stiff pull for an hour or so to reach the 'pass', mainly through forest with many pretty birds. You come to the crest of the ridge and now there are views of big peaks to the north, Chaukhamba (23,418ft/7,138m), just peeping over the ridge in front of us. You are now at the village of Kandi, 5,508ft/1,679m. Again lots of orange trees. The next village is clearly seen on the next ridge and doesn't look too far. You contour around past terraced fields to come up to the village astride the ridge, Jagtoli (5,310ft/1,771m). There are great views from here west to Trisul, 23,389ft/7,066m, and Dunagiri, 23,182ft/7,066m. Locals say the big massif is Nanda Devi but it is really hidden behind Trisul. Just as you enter the village there is a silver smith with a small shop. A small Hindu shrine occupies a hillock behind the houses and from here the views are excellent. Then you pass through the school ground down below the village. This is an Inter school with 438 students. You are now so high that range after range of foothills march into the distance and the views down the valleys with their terraced fields and forests are lovely. Lots of eagles today. From where you are you can see the next village of Aagar. You walk up the slope behind the playing field; through some small stone gulleys, up a steep mud track to gain a fine stone paved path to the village. Camp overnight just beyond the village.

DAY 6: TREK TO GIMTOLI (6,391ft/1,948m), CONTINUE TO FOREST CAMP (5,249ft/1,600m). 4-5 hours trekking. Up to Aagar Pass (6,624ft/2,019m) from where there are nice views of Kedernath, 22,769ft/6,940m, Kedar Dome and again Chaukhamba. Looking down there is the village of Gimtoli 6,503ft/1,982m, and below that another school ground. When you reach Gimtoli however there is a road and it is possible to catch a local bus to drive 6km to Kanak Churri, 7,109ft/2,167m, a small village on the road. From the village you walk up to Kartik Swami Temple (8,163ft/2,488m), 1 hr 5 mins with no stops. This is a lovely walk through woods and eventually out onto the top of an airy ridge. Another 45 mins brings you to a couple of houses for Sadhus. The Temple itself was destroyed on 25 April 1999 by an earthquake centred some 60 kms from here. The Temple has now been re-built. It sits right on top of, and at the end of the ridge, which itself is the highest for miles around. A nice place for a picnic, with huge eagles cruising the ridge. Returning to the road take one of the buses back

to Gintoli. From here it is a long descent to the bottom of the valley and the village of Suwarri, 5,335ft/1,626m, through terraced fields. Looking at the hillside opposite you can see the path zig-zagging up to the ridge, but instead of crossing this ridge you will eventually contour leftwards for 20 minutes to reach another ridge crossing point in a forest. There is a small shrine at the 'pass'. You descend now for half an hour to a clearing in the forest, used by the locals as a cricket pitch with obstacles, where you camp. Two years ago our reconnaissance party were kept awake by the sounds of a leopard nearby! Camp overnight.

Note – it is possible to trek directly to Kartik Swami Temple from Aagar and to the forest camp without using the bus from Gintoli. This does make a much longer day and this option can be examined with your leader at the time. The bus though is quite an interesting Indian experience!

**DAY 7: TREK TO SODI (2,677ft/816m), DRIVE TO RUDRAPRAYAG.** Trek time 2-3 hours. Today you trek downhill through some of the prettiest country so far and pass through the villages of Mangu and Bathwari. The next village is Deodar where there is a government school. The road to Kedarnath is visible from here. The Mandakini river can also be seen as it flows along beside the road. Drive to Rudraprayag. Camp overnight.

**DAY 8: DRIVE TO GANGOTRI (10,170ft/3100m).** Gangotri is alive with Rishis, Sadhus, Pandas and hippy clad westerners. Gangotri's stunning waterfalls mark the spot where the Goddess Ganga descended from heaven in ancient times. Shiva received the shattering impact of the celestial torrent upon his head, and the Ganga split into four sacred streams: Bhagirathi, Yamanu, Mandakini and Alaknanda. Here you are rewarded for your 3 day journey with superb views of Sudarshan peak. In the evening you visit the famous temple which serves the devout Hindu pilgrims, and witness the daily puja. Overnight at Tourist Guest House.

**DAY 9: TREK TO CHIRBASA (11,549ft/3606m).** Approx. 3-4 hours. The walk begins with gradual ascent through pine trees, alongside the roaring Bhagirathi river with towering cliffs on your left hand side. Soon after you leave Gangotri, you pass a check post for the Gangotri Conservation Project. The money they collect from your guide on your behalf goes towards projects such as collection of litter, re-planting birch trees, and an awareness campaign for trekkers on eco-sensitive tourism. Today's walk is quite short to help with acclimatisation. Chirbasa means pine trees. Here you have superb views of Manda peak (20,853ft/6511m), Hanuman Tibba (17,186ft/5366m), Bhrigu Parbat (19,217ft/6000m), Bhagirathi I, II and III (21,958ft/6856m, 20,857ft/6512m, and 20,671ft/6454m respectively). You could well spot herds of Bharal roaming the hillside above Chirbasa. Overnight camp.

**DAY 10: TREK TO GAUMAUK (3892m).** Approx. 4 hours. It takes approximately 1-2 hours to reach Bhojbasu (12,145ft/3792m) which has an ashram, a tourist guest house and police post. Here the majestic soaring peak of Shivling (20,956ft/6543m) comes into view. The trek from Bhojbasu to Gaumauk is a fairly gradual ascent. "Gau" means cow, and "Mauk" means mouth. At Gaumauk, you can dip your hands and toes in the revered holy water of the Ganges, and you may well find your guide collecting holy water here on the decent for a puja. Gangotri used to be the source, but the glacier has receded now to just beyond Gaumauk. Overnight camp.

**DAY 11: TREK TO TAPOVAN (14,294ft/4463m).** Approx. 3 hours. Although relatively short in distance, today's walk will feel strenuous with the combined effects of the altitude, the ascent to be gained, the glacier crossing, and the steep, rocky terrain on the final climb to

Tapovan. You begin by trekking over boulders on your approach to the glacier. The trail steepens noticeably as you ascend slowly over the rocky terrain. The glacier is covered by moraine so you do not need any technical equipment, although a steadying trekking pole is definitely handy. As you take your last step up the steep rocky path to enter the Tapovan meadow, you are greeted with the most spectacular view of Mount Shivling, rising like a great deity before you and inspiring awe. Meru, Manda, the the Bhagirathi sister peaks also dominate your view. Gazing down proudly at your ascent, you can see Gangotri glacier. Overnight camp.

**DAY 12: TREK TO CHIRBASA.** Approx. 5/6 hours.

Rise early, exit from your canvass kingdom, and you will be rewarded with a spectacular panoramic setting. Watch the sunrise on the surrounding 6000m peaks. Shivling is undoubtedly the star of the show, commanding instant attention as it soars dramatically into the sky, dwarfing its neighbours. Today you will retrace your steps to Chirbasa. A steep descent down to the glacier is followed by a rocky traverse of the glacier. Continue your gradual descent to Chirbasa where you will camp for the night in the birch trees grove.

**DAY 13: TREK TO GANGOTRI. DRIVE TO UTTARKASHI.**

Retrace your steps from Chirbasa to Malla (3 hours approx.). Drive to Uttarkashi (approx. 5/6 hours). Uttarkashi is an attractive small town situated on the right bank of Bhagirathi at an altitude of about 4,964ft/1,550m. The temples and ghats have names almost identical to those in Varanasi, a historical city in the Indian plains. The most important temple dedicated to Shiva is known as Vishwanath Mandir, where stands a magnificent Trishul (trident), one meter in circumference and made of copper. It supports a trident four meters long. Each prong is about two meters in length. Uttarkashi is known for its temples dedicated to Parshuram, Datatryea, Annapurna, Devi, Kali Bhairon and other gods and goddesses. At one time, there were 365 temples in this town.

Uttarkashi is also known as Barahat, literally meaning "a big market place". In olden days Kedarnath was a 12 days' trek away, Gangotri 7 days, Yamunotri 5 days and Srinagar 6 days away. Nowadays, motorable roads go to most of these places.

Uttarkashi also has a number of ashrams for the sanyasis and mendicants who occupy the banks of the holy river for penance and prayers. It is a modern town with facilities. The Nehru Institute of Mountaineering is located here. It is situated at a spur at Ladari, dominating the beautiful town and overlooking the entire valley. This national institute imparts mountaineering training to young people to inculcate the spirit of adventure among the youth of the country. The institute at Uttarkashi is the second Nehru Mountaineering Institute which conducts basic and advanced mountaineering courses. Uttarkashi has developed rapidly due to the construction of the Maneri Valley Hydroelectric Project.

**DAY 14: DRIVE TO RISHIKESH.**

The drive to Rishikesh takes approx. 6 hours. There will be plenty of time in the late afternoon and evening to visit the bazaars and ashrams of Rishikesh.

Rishikesh is essentially a pilgrim town, and the bulk of the pilgrims are simple villagers whose intense devotion give both Haridwar and Rishikesh a special atmosphere, a taste of the old India that continues to flow in modern dress as the Ganga canal has been harnessed to irrigate the fields of modern India. At sundown each evening there is a service at the side of the river, at the bathing ghat in the middle of Rishikesh at which tiny candle rafts are lit and let out into the choppy water to float away into the dusk.

This is highly recommended as it has a very special ambience at this time. Overnight at the Neeraj Bhawan.

**DAY 15: RISHIKESH – DELHI**

Breakfast at Hotel. After breakfast drive to Delhi. On arrival half day sight seeing of old and new Delhi.

The tour will begin with a visit to The Jama Mosque built in 1650 AD, followed by a visit to the breathtaking Red Fort (1639-48), built by the Shah Jehan, creator of The Taj Mahal. Then we proceed on to Raj Ghat, which is the memorial of Mahatma Gandhi.

The drive through New Delhi includes the Embassy area (Diplomatic enclave), India Gate, President House Government buildings and Connaught Place, New Delhi's main shopping area.

Late evening transfer to International airport on time to connect flight for onward destination.