



Go!  
Beyond

75

EXPERIENCES  
IN NORTH INDIA

अतुल्य! भारत  
Incredible! India



This is the first edition of the Go Beyond ebook. This book has been created through the collaborative efforts of many people who contributed and assisted in the completion of this ebook.

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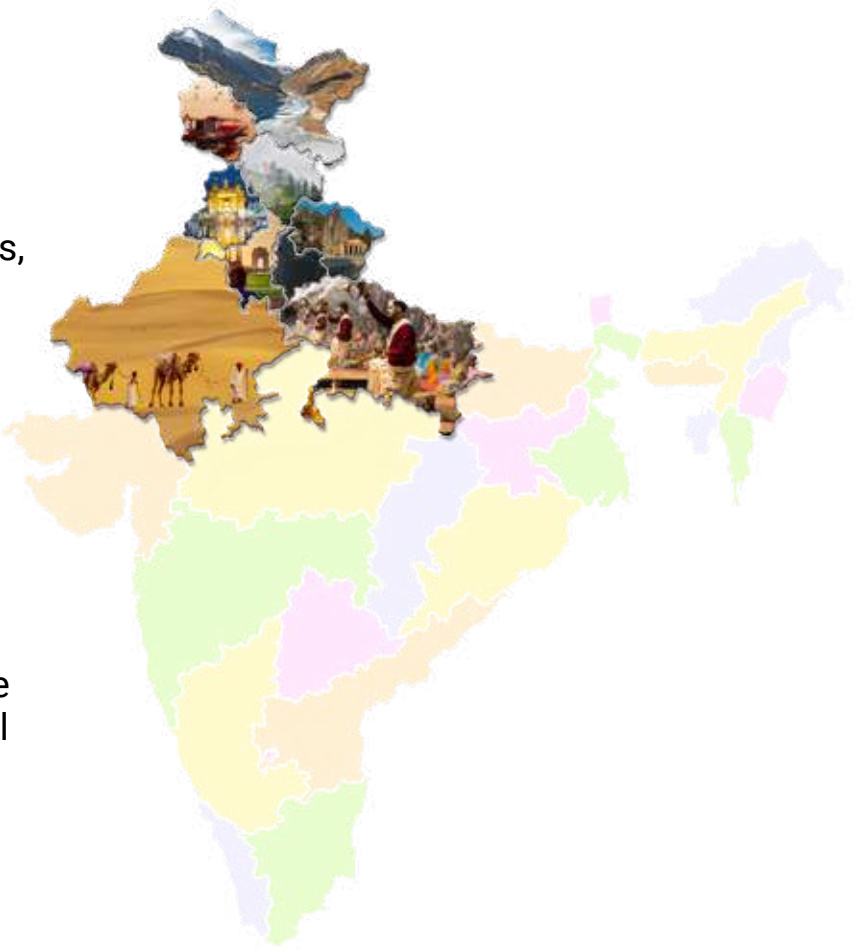
Content

Interns & Associates at Indiatourism, Delhi



India is a destination beyond imagination; where every turn opens up to mesmerizing locales, where every field welcomes you with fresh aromas and where the sky above is a rainbow of multichromatic hues.

This book is a journey of experiences and destinations that are a little beyond the usual, still quaint and still pristine. We nudge you to go that extra mile, to explore an India that is Incredible, Beautiful and simply Breathtaking.



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# JAMMU & KASHMIR

**W**ith the misty Pir Panjal and the Great Himalayan Ranges overlooking the lush valley, Kashmir welcomes you with the poetry of nature. Gurgling streams, aroma of alpine forests, snowclad mountains, flower-spangled meadows and stunning landscape make visiting [Jammu & Kashmir](#) a heavenly experience. Flanked by two adjacent states of Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, this newly crowned Union Territory of India is truly magical.

With some of the most pious pilgrimage sites like the Mata Vaishno Devi Temple and Baba Amarnath Cave interspersed with the pristine valleys of Gulmarg and Sonmarg along with the tranquil waters of Dal lake and Nigeen (Nageen) lake, Kashmir treats you with unforgettable experiences. Go a little further and you will find a hidden side of Kashmir; still pristine, still untouched and still unexplored.

## HOW TO Reach

**By Air** – Jammu & Kashmir has two main airports; one in Jammu and the other in Srinagar.

**By Train** – The nearest mainline railway station to Srinagar is Udhampur. (You can also reach Banihal by road from Udhampur, then take a local train to Srinagar).

**By Road** – Alternatively, one can also take the scenic Mughal Road which passes through Akhnoor, Sunderbani, Rajouri, Bafliaz, Peer Ki Gali Pass, and Shopian.



## ACCOMMODATION

J&K Tourism department has innumerable [stay options](#) to suit your budget. From houseboats to log huts in the midst of the green meadows, tourists get a wide choice of hotels here.



Photo Credit: Naveed Bashir

Photo Credit: Devial Setimore



Photo Credit: Bhaswaran Bhattacharya

## BEST TIME TO VISIT

Kashmir is decked in natural beauty throughout the year; albeit its flavours change with every season. The snow in winter makes for a wonderful white vacation and the summers welcome you with flower-dressed sights and golden chinar hues.



Photo Credit: Bhaswaran Bhattacharya



# Cool! Beyond

For travellers who wish to explore Kashmir beyond the oft-praised havens, we bring you experiences that Kashmir saves only for those who seek. Experience this taste of Kashmiriyat to experience a slice of heaven.

## WADI-E-LOLAB OR THE LOLAB VALLEY

Less than an hour's drive from Kupwara district, lies this valley of love and beauty. Lolab Valley mesmerizes visitors with its lush green rolling fertile fields, abundant apple, cherry, peach, apricot and walnut orchards giving it the title of "The fruit bowl of J&K". With crystal clear gushing waters of the Lahwal river, the mysterious caves of Kalaroos and the picturesque forests of pine and deodar, Lolab is the hermitage for every weary city soul. Get your share of digital detox and connect with nature at its best as you indulge in activities such as camping, trekking and horse riding. Alternatively, experience the peace that Lolab's magical silence offers you.



Photo Credit: Sheikh Basharat



Photo Credit: Bhaswaran Bhattacharya

## IGLOO CAFE GULMARG

A paradise on earth where there is something for every wanderlust traveller. This Meadow of Flowers also hosts the Igloo Cafe where nature's beauty is rivalled only by Kashmiri hospitality. Set at an altitude of 2650 m, this cafe is the cynosure of all tourists who visit the ski-resort town of India, Gulmarg. India's first-ever, this Igloo Cafe is a destination in itself and is a must-visit in the winter months. Pristine white tables and chairs carved out of ice with customary sheepskin covers offer warmth and comfortable seating arrangements. Kashmiri heritage in the way of traditional hand-engraved copper vessels set on top of tables carved out of ice and Kashmiri rugs give the cafe a distinct rustic character and a sublime ambience. Here you can enjoy sipping your hot Kahwa (Kahwa - Kashmiri tea) while watching the mesmerizing snowfall.



Photo Credit: Ronnie Gupta



Photo Credit: Ronnie Gupta

Photo Credit: Ronnie Gupta



## ALPATHER LAKE - BEAUTY BEYOND

Situated 13 kms away from Gulmarg, this bowl-shaped lake nestled amidst the foot of the snow-clad peaks of Apharwat Range is simply a slice of heaven. Perched at 4390 m makes this lake both alluring and mystical. An arduous two-hour trek at 3500 feet above Gondola Phase 2 in Gulmarg is what it takes to witness this beauty. It is this elusiveness that keeps this alpine lake pristine throughout the year. Due to the daunting altitude, the waters of the lake remain frozen for a good nine months which is why Alpathar Lake is also called the Frozen Lake in the region. Summers usher in sunshine and transform the lake into a cauldron of magic with chunks of ice floating in the silvery purred waters. The wildflowers swaying by the lake and the crisp mountain breeze make it a magical sight to behold. After a majestic gondola ride, you reach the lake and the views here are simply breathtaking.





## SHESHNAG LAKE TREK

A shimmering drop of sapphire-blue set amidst the snowclad mountain ranges hovering over is what the Sheshnag Lake Trek has to offer. A tinge of ancient mythology of where the King of Serpents resides, a fun fact that it is an oligotrophic lake with water that is without impurities and the gorgeous environs that simply are spectacular. This alpine lake trek is definitely a much sought after sojourn for people across all spectrums. From city-weary souls to pilgrims en route to the Amarnath Cave, the Sheshnag Lake Trek is one that finds itself listed high up. Perched at an altitude of 3590 feet and 23 kilometers from Pahalgam, the Sheshnag Lake trek starts at Chandanwari. The trail twines around the picturesque Aru Valley that is breathtakingly beautiful and the Betaab Valley that is a part of the Indian celluloid dream with chinar trees and gurgling brooks. Just 120 km from Srinagar, June to September is the ideal time to do this trek.



Photo Credit: 1. Pankaj Kumar | 2. Tufail Shah |  
3. Abhinav Chaurasia



## AWANTIPURA RUINS - BEAUTY BEYOND

Situated 29 kilometers from Srinagar, the sleepy town of Awantipura, was founded by Avantivarman, the founder of the Utpala dynasty in the 9th century. This idyllic town is an ode to the historical and architectural marvels that once adorned the landscape set between the meandering river and the deep gorges of Pahalgam and trace back the regal lineage of Jammu and Kashmir spanning over 1100 years.

Built by emperor Avantivarman, the two temples; Avantishwar dedicated to Lord Shiva and Avantismami dedicated to Lord Vishnu today lie in ruins that whisper the tales of the golden period when they stood in their resplendent



Photo Credit: Prasad Mantri

glory on the banks of the river Jhelum seeped in faith and devotion. They have been restored partially revealing the Vishnu Temple which is stated to have been inspired by the Gandhara style architecture with a central shrine built in a courtyard and four smaller shrines in the corners.



Photo Credit: Abhinav Chaurasia

## WARWAN VALLEY - PICTURE PERFECT

Rocky moraines, gurgling mountain streams, luscious verdant valleys and divinely embroidered trails make Warwan Valley one of Kashmir's finest masterpieces. Known to be one of the eight ancient trans Himalayan trade routes, this valley has witnessed people traverse it for eons and yet has remained untouched. It is the closest one can get to knowing the purest form of Kashmiri traditions and oldest Kashmiri clans.

Situated in the Kishtwar district at 7000 feet, this valley is cushioned between Ladakh and Kashmir thus making it a vision of pristine beauty throughout the year. A three-hour drive along the serpentine roads crisscrossing the terrain from the tourist hub of Kokernag brings you to witness this demure beauty where chinar trees crayon the canvas with their colours and the gushing waterfalls embroider its tapestry making it an ethereal sight. Trekking through the Warwan valley is an unique experience as the Salt Route meanders through the delta basin of Sumdo, the Bracken glacier and then the unending grasslands dotted with remote quaint villages making it one of the most rewarding treks anywhere in the world.

Winters envelop the entire valley in snow thus making May to October the best time to visit Warwan to experience it in all its finery.

Photo Credit: Tufail Shah



Photo Credit: Pijush Roy



Photo Credit: Sourav Das

## MESMERISING SHIKARA FESTIVAL

Embroidered with beauty and wrapped in romance, Srinagar is a resplendent vision in all climes and is truly the Venice of East. To accentuate its beauty and add to its timeless charm, the Indian government hosts the annual Shikara Festival with pomp and show in spring. Srinagar is the intricate oeuvre of the Creator in which the small colorful and bright boats or shikaras are the masterstrokes.

Afloat on these colorful boats are merchandise ranging from saffron to flowers to even a unique floating post office that is fully functional and the only one in the subcontinent. A pageantry of festivities including a shikara race, dragon boat race, kayaking and canoe polo match create an ambience of celebration of the true spirit of Kashmir. A cup of hot kahwa in one hand and the sound of the santoor being played on board as you float across the tranquil Dal Lake is an experience that will be perhaps the closest to divinity you will ever get.

The major attractions alongside the Shikara Festival are the Mughal Gardens, Nishat Bagh, Shalimar Bagh, Achabal Bagh, Chashma Shahi, Pari Mahal and Verinag alongwith the Shankaracharya Hill which offers spectacular views of the Kashmir valley.



Photo Credit: Aniket Modak



## MANTALAI - THE TEMPLE TRAIL

Surrounded by deodar trees and less than 100 Kms from Jammu, the Mantalai Temple in the Udhampur district of Jammu and Kashmir is one of the most revered sites in India. Regarded as the birthplace of the Goddess Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva, the Aparneswar temple has been a cynosure of pilgrims for ages. Shrine of the goddess in her avatar of a maiden or 'kanya' holds a special place in the temple premise. This temple is also believed to be the place where the divine nuptials of Goddess Parvati and Lord Shiva took place. It is marked by a sacred rock and the Mantalai Lake which is said to have been used as a Homa Kund during

the celestial event. Along with the mysticism of mythology, Mantalai Temple also has an immense archeological significance with the unearthing of several terracotta figures, statues and red earthenware.

Towering at an altitude of 1450 meters, the temple has idols of Lord Shiva, Parvati, Ganesha and Nandi. The best time to visit Mantalai is during celebrations of Amavasya, Chaudash, Punya Jayesth Purnima and Vyasa Purnima. The nearest airport is in Jammu, at a distance of 90kms.

Photo Credit: Ashima Bansal





# LADAKH

**L**adakh, the land of cold dry scenic deserts, snowclad mountain peaks and tranquil water bodies was made a union territory of India in the year 2019. With the call of the Siachen glacier on one end and the Karakoram range on the other with the mighty Himalayas towering over the small region, Ladakh is the ultimate adrenaline surge for travellers who look beyond what meets the eye.

Known as the land of high passes, Ladakh is a perfect combination of spirituality, adventure, tradition and culture that goes back to the neolithic era. Blessed with crisp azure skies, serene lakes and landscapes that inspire, Ladakh is a dream destination that offers tourists that make for indelible memories of a lifetime. Off the beaten track, Ladakh is a treasure hunt just waiting to begin as you touch base.

## HOW TO Reach

**By Air** – The Kushok Bakula Rimpochee Airport is located in Leh, which is just 3.8 km from the city hub.

**By Road** – There are two roads that lead to Ladakh. The one from Manali cruises along for 494 km whereas the one from Srinagar is 434 km offering delightful scenic escape routes along.



## ACCOMMODATION

Ladakh has become one of the most visited [tourist destinations](#) in India. In recent times many hotels have come up to suit every traveller's need. However, it is suggested to book your Ladakh stay well in advance during the peak travel season.



Photo Credit: Neelesh Prakash Jain



Photo Credit: Arindam Datta

## BEST TIME TO VISIT

Ladakh is beautiful round the year so you can plan a holiday almost any time of the year. However, we suggest staying away from visiting in extreme cold months of November, December, January and February.

# Go! Beyond

Being one of India's young administrative divisions, Ladakh holds a special place in the bucket list of travelust souls who seek adventure. Filled with virgin territories, Ladakh is a destination for the mystic in you.

## KARGIL WAR MEMORIAL

Standing tall in the foothills of the Tololing Hills in the Dras region, this edifice in pink sandstone built by the Indian Army commemorates the martyrdom of soldiers who laid down their lives. As the tricolor flutters in the cold mountain breeze, the Kargil War Memorial tells the story of how the bravehearts fought during Operation Vijay. Every year on 26th July, celebrated as "Vijay Diwas", this monument shines as a beacon of hope and pride. If being Indian was a religion, then the Kargil War Memorial would be a pilgrimage. A flight to Srinagar followed by a road journey of over 160 km through NH1 takes you to the Kargil War Memorial and the best time to visit is during March to August.



Photo Credit:  
Indranil Mandal



Photo Credit: Namrata Sadhvani





Photo Credit:  
1. Ritika Saini | 2. Jhuma Datta



## SANGAM VALLEY - PICTURE PERFECT

The shimmering blue Indus and emerald green Zaskar meet near a small village of Nimmu, and this Indus Zaskar confluence, about 35 km away from the town of Leh is popularly known as the Sangam Valley. The view from atop is simply surreal, a picture-perfect canvas that can be painted only by the almighty. Summer at Sangam Valley is a rafter's delight typically from Chilling to Nimmu. However, when winter approaches and temperatures plummet below zero, the Zaskar transforms into a thick blanket of ice, often referred to as the Chadar transforming into a trekker's heaven. Both seasons lure adventure lovers thus making Sangam a hotspot for tourists from May to October, the tourist season of Ladakh. You can also explore the Magnetic Hill, Gurudwara Pathar Sahib, and the Likir monasteries, making your trip super interesting.

## TURTUK - THE LAST INDIAN HAMLET IN LADAKH

Perched at an altitude of 9,250 ft, surrounded by the walls made by the magnificent Karakoram range on one side and rimmed by the pristine Shyok river on another, the hamlet called Turtuk has history that is riveting and scenic beauty that is unrivalled. Green pastures, friendly Balti residents, pristine natural beauty and a strategic location with Nubra Valley on one side, Turtuk is magic waiting to be experienced. The village is home to orchards of apricots and apples and plantations of barley and buckwheat that are sown over the vast acres like an ornate tapestry interspersed with rock walls, stone houses and cobblestone alleys. Poised and enigmatic, Turtuk transcends time and geopolitical space to let visitors indulge in the beauty that it holds within. Though the nearest Airport in Leh is at a distance of 205 kms, you will enjoy the scenic 6-7 hours drive to reach Turtuk.



Photo Credit: Suman Ghosh





Photo Credit:

1. Arpan Uzir, 2. Jigmet Namgial, 3. Sudipta De, 4. Madhu Soodanan P  
5. Anup Kumar Dutta

## CHANGTHANG - THE WILD STOPOVER

The blue sky is pierced by the towering snowclad mountain peaks of the Himalayas as the landscape of Changthang meets your eyes at 15,400 feet above sea level. The windswept valley of Changthang, famously known for its Changpa nomads and the exquisite pashmina wool, is chameleonic in its beauty. The vast grassland is home to some of the most exotic species of birds and animals and the Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary is where wildlife is more than just an adventure. Exotic birds flocks with occasional sightings of wolves, snow leopards and gazelles make Changthang a nature lover's ultimate destination. Pangong Tso with its nomadic winds and clear skies is one of the most pristine sights in Ladakh that embellishes the Changthang landscape making it one of the most sought after destinations in Ladakh. A day's exploration through the quaint villages of Chushul and Nyoma and a night spent within the precincts of the Changthang plateau is one of the best ways to take in the untouched beauty of Ladakh. Homestays and lodges are aplenty in the region, so do make a night stay here.



Photo Credit: Arpan Kalita





## BASGO - LADAKH'S TRYST WITH ROYALTY

Just 35 km from Leh stands the quiet village of Basgo. With about 150 families living in this historically strategic village that once was used by caravans to access the famous Silk Route, Basgo is still quaint and magical. Remains of an ancient fort, three temples with beautiful paintings, ruins of a palace and innumerable chortens can be seen all across the village. Basgo is the ultimate destination to absorb the unique Ladakhi life and marvel at the intricate Tibetan craftsmanship prominent in the architecture of this small hamlet. You can also pay reverence to the two huge statues of Maitreya Buddha and Jamyang Namgyal King, which are over 14 metres in height, and mingle with the monks who come there for their daily prayers. The best time to visit this quaint village is in the summer months and accommodations are available in nearby Alchi village.



## UPSHI - SMALL VILLAGE WITH BIG WONDERS

Upshi is an idyllic village that stands near the main junction of the Leh-Manali Highway, 29 miles from Leh with the waters of Indus river gushing down and the wondrous Tanglang La pass inviting tourists to witness the beauty that is simply unrivalled. The road through this picturesque village traces up to Gya; one of the highest altitude settlements in the world where time has stood still. Both Upshi and Gya are inhabited by nomadic farmers and shepherds. These villages produce the most exquisite pashmina wool that is known the world over for its warmth and texture. Upshi will also hold the distinction of becoming a part of the world's highest railway line once the project connecting Delhi to Ladakh is completed.

The divinity of nature and its splendour is reflected in the warmth and hospitality of the villagers making Upshi one of those places where humans and nature complement each other striking a perfect balance. Near Upshi lies the city of Leh, the Lamayuru Monastery and Pangong, the place

famous for the river backwaters. Due to its easy access, Upshi can be visited throughout the year, though temperatures can plummet quite a bit during winters.





## YARAB TSO LAKE - SACRED WATERS

A serene alpine lake set in the folds of the Himalayan Range, Yarab Tso is one of those natural wonders that is both magical and elusive. Located near the Sumur Village, approximately 15 km from Diskit, this shimmering lake is Ladakh's "hidden lake". Its sparkling waters are untouched, divine and revered as one of the holiest alpine lakes in India. The crystal clear waters of the lake mirror the clear skies above and the majestic snow-clad mountains around to put together an image of natural beauty that is next to none. Scattered in the vicinity of the Yarab Tso lake are the quaint villages of Panamik, Sumur and Diskit, which incidentally also takes pride in the resplendent Diskit Monastery and the 32 metre high Maitreya Buddha statue in the courtyard of the monastery.

## HANLE - STARGAZER'S PARADISE

Hanle looks up with stars in its eyes, literally. One of the remote villages in Ladakh, this village has been spared the scourge of modern civilization leaving it an untouched oasis in this cold desert. With next to none aerosols, low humidity and an altitude that is enviable, this village is a crucible for magic when night unfolds. The sky transforms into a robe of stars, stretching the vistas of your imagination. It is no surprise that the Hanle Observatory has the second-highest optical observatory in the world with a telescope of about 2.01 metres (6.5 feet) at a staggering altitude of 4500 metres. Hanle is not just another Ladakhi village, Hanle is a stargazer's ultimate fantasy. Hanle's tryst with Tibet and Buddhism is testified in the beautiful 17th century

Hanle Monastery of the Drukpa Kagyu branch of Tibetan Buddhism built by Sengge Namgyal.

Given its proximity to the Indo-Tibetan border, Hanle was not open for tourism up until recently and even now one needs an inner permit to venture into Hanle. May to September is the best time to visit Hanle as the skies are clear and the celestial drama is all set for you to experience.



Photo Credit: Ladakh Tourism





## STOK - STEEPED IN TRADITION

Just 14 km away from Leh, Stok welcomes you with the splendour of monasteries, palaces, festivals and cuisine. The Stok Monastery founded by Lama Lhawang Lotus was once the abode of the royal family, the Namgyals. If you are looking for a holiday with a difference, this monastery offers a treasure trove of artefacts telling you tales of the life of the Ladakh royals and their history. Every February, the Stok Monastery holds the famous Stok Guru Tsechu in its premises where monks from Stok and Spituk come together with the locals and tourists to celebrate with colourful masked dancers, food and fun.

A favourite haunt for trekkers en route to the Stok Kangri trek, this village is famous for its hospitality and food. If you are a food connoisseur, let your taste buds be tantalised by some sumptuous veg thuksim soup, indulge in a bowl of piping hot Chutagi or a traditional Ladakhi recipe of potatoes and slices of flat bread cooked with local spices. The best time to visit Stok is May to October as adventure seekers can enjoy rafting, trekking and mountain biking to the fullest.

Photo Credit: 1. Rini Ghosh | 2. Anindya Phani | 3. Tsewang Nurboo | 4. Preeti Patel | 5 & 6. Abhay Sonar Kami



Photo Credit: Kalyan Nath

Photo Credit: Sandipan Mukherjee

## SUMUR - TRULY ENCHANTING

Nestled in the folds of the towering mighty Karakoram Range, Sumur is a small village with a big view. At an altitude of 3,100 m, this charming village of just about 40 households is where adventure enthusiasts frequent while traversing Ladakh. A tarred road with some amazing mountain views is what makes the 6 hours drive from Leh pleasurable. A bridge near the confluence of the Nubra and Shyok river leads to this pretty village that is laid out to perfection with white and maroon painted houses set atop the slopes in neat rows.

Walking through the village gives visitors a feel of how simple and beautiful the hamlet is. Clusters of yellow mustard flowers spring up in the midst of luscious green meadows with the river sauntering down, this is nature's canvas; breathtakingly beautiful. A 150-year-old gompa, the Samstanling Gompa is a place to pay reverence to Shakyamuni whose image adorns the inner sanctum, flanked by statues of Maitreyi and Mahakal. Frescos and colourful thangkas make the Buddhist gompa not only a place of worship but also a treasure trove of culture that has been passed down through generations. Here, you can stay at the Nubra Eco Lodge which offers a glimpse of a Ladakhi life. To visit any part of Nubra, you need an inner line permit.



Photo Credit: Jhuma Datta



Photo Credit: Gourab Nath



## CHUMATHANG - HOT SPRINGS IN THE COLD

At a distance of 138 km from Leh, Chumathang puts together a show so spectacular that one is left gasping. Hot sulphur springs with fumes emerge on the banks of the ice-cold Indus casting a spell of sorts on this sleepy village. Take a dip in this natural spa or step on the waters made warm by the springs to feel the joy of being touched by magic. Considered to have healing powers, this water is used by the locals for all their daily needs. The springs bubble with beauty, health and vigour.

Given the distance, Chumathang is a place that has so far not been much discovered by tourists and so you can enjoy the pristine beauty of the majestic Himalayas standing tall and the Indus river gurgling down the lush meadows. Trek down the picturesque landscape and enjoy Ladakh in all its finery. Dig into hot steaming momos that are sold by roadside vendors as this idyllic village



Photo Credit: Arpan Uzir

heals your body and also soothes your soul. Though Chumathang is often a pitstop en route to Tso Moriri Lake from Leh, you will remember it as the place where your soul rested.

## SECMOL-THE CHANGEMAKER



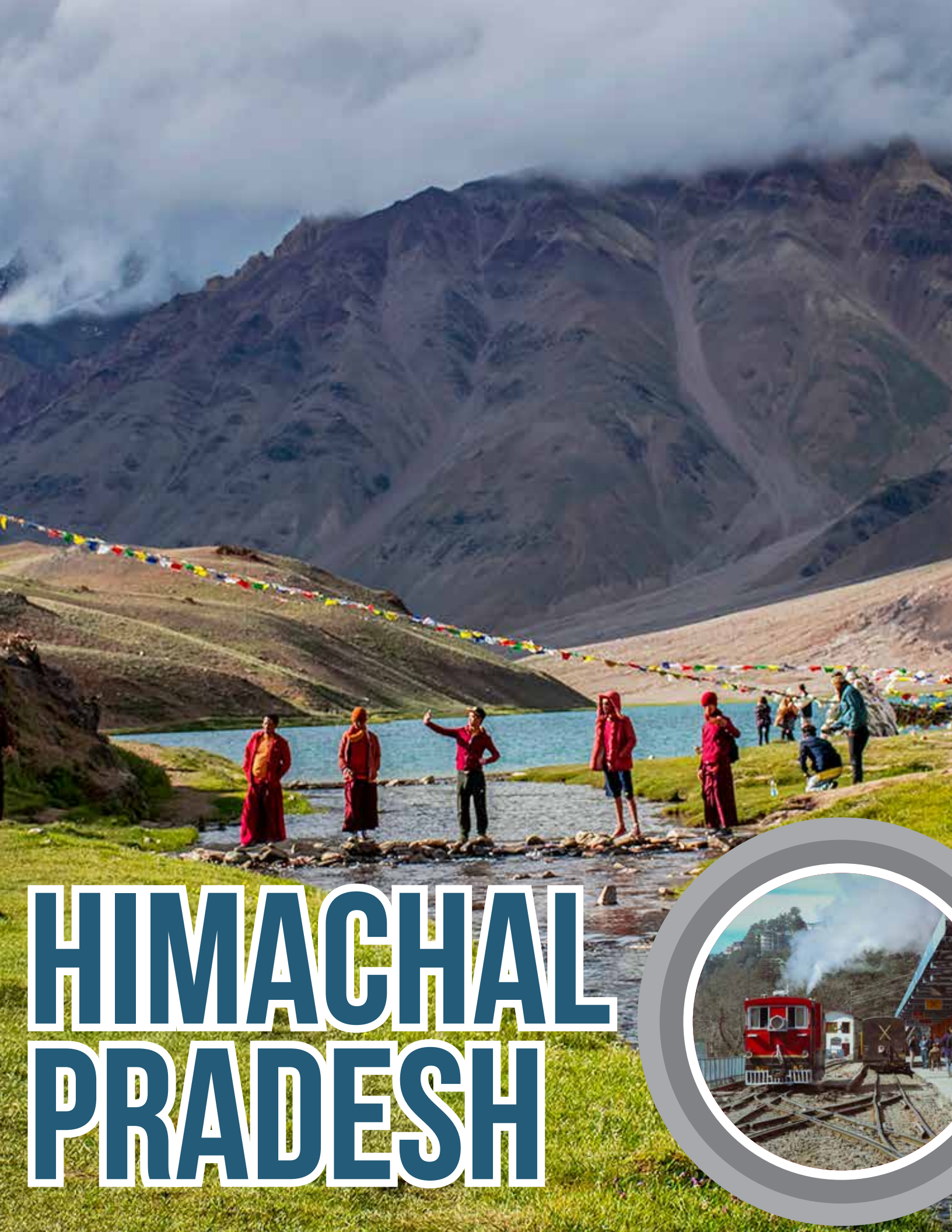
Photo Credit: SECMOL

Situated in the quaint village of Phey with the river Indus gurgling down, SECMOL or The Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh is simply a revolution. Initiated in 1988 by the visionary and educator, Mr. Sonam Wangchuk,

a group of young university graduates brought about a small, yet significant change in the way we weave modern methods to solve age-old problems in Ladakh. From reforming the government education system to imbibing a futuristic and eco-friendly lifestyle in a campus that runs only on renewable energy sources, this school is a place where young minds learn the newest technologies alongside Ladakhi culture and history.

The mantra here is simple; use the 3 Hs; head, heart and hands to transform anyone into a genius and not surprisingly the eligibility criteria mention that children who have failed their class X exams are also welcome. It is no surprise that this institution made its way into the golden alleys of tinsel town of Bollywood after the mega success of the movie 3 Idiots. Visiting hours of SECMOL are from 10 a.m to 1 p.m and the fees for visiting are Rs. 300 per person. A taxi ride from Leh takes you to this wonderful bubble of knowledge that goes beyond the realms of the classroom and who knows, it might just change your life.





# HIMACHAL PRADESH





**H**imachal Pradesh, the state that is surrounded by the magnificent mountains of Shivalik, Pir Panjal and Zaskar, crisscrossed by the snow-fed rivers of Sutlej, Chenab, Ravi and Beas is the land where nature speaks with eloquence. From lofty snow-clad mountains, carpeted forests, gushing rivers, deep gorges and swaying streams, Himachal is the most coveted destination in both the domestic and the international sectors. Divided into 10 culturally and naturally diverse districts, Himachal Pradesh is the finest tourism chapter of India served on a silver platter with unmatched hospitality.

Though the terrain makes railroads a little tricky, Himachal takes pride in the fact that it still hosts the exotic Kalka-Shimla narrow gauge railway line which is a UNESCO World Heritage site. The train line passes through mountains, innumerable tunnels and breathtaking views which can be enjoyed from the slow-moving train.

## HOW TO Reach

Photo Credit: Anik Saha



**By Air** – Himachal Pradesh is very well connected by air. It has three airports; namely the Bhuntar airport, Gaggal airport, and the Shimla airport.

**By Train** – Himachal Pradesh is well connected by train from across the country. The main stations are Kalka, Shimla, and the Una railway line, which is the only broad gauge line in Himachal.

**By Road** - The state is very well connected by roads from all neighbouring states. There are many National Highways across the state beside numerable State Highways.

Photo Credit: Gourab Nath



## ACCOMMODATION

Himachal Pradesh has plenty of stay options at all major tourist hotspots. Many homestays have come up in quaint villages in recent times. Apart from that, one can also choose to stay in the many government-approved [accommodations](#).

## BEST TIME TO VISIT

Himachal Pradesh is a beautiful round-the-year destination with things to do in all seasons. While in the summer months you can enjoy the treks and lush green locales, in the winter months the snowy beauty of Himachal gets simply mesmerizing.

Photo Credit: Piyush

# Cool! Beyond

Himachal Pradesh is one destination that is amazingly beautiful whenever you decide to visit. The winter months with its snow-capped mountains make it a sought-after destination for Indians and international tourists and the summers too are soothingly cold with fresh crisp mountain breeze blowing from all across.

Photo Credit: Himachal Pradesh Tourism



## MINJAR MELA - A CULTURAL CAULDRON

Chamba, an idyllic village located on the banks of the Ravi river decks up like a bride on the second Sunday of the sacred month of Shravan (July-August) to celebrate one of Himachal Pradesh's historic cultural fiestas, the iconic Minjar Mela. 'Minjar', meaning a silk tassel (a symbol of a rich harvest of corn or paddy), is passed around at the commencement of the festival to usher in abundance throughout the year. This well-known state fair is a week-long sequence of festivities that are held in the lush green field of Chowgan.

The entire region is a riot of colours, music, sports, fun rides, food stalls and celebrations with locals donning exquisite garments and exotic jewellery. As the colourful Minjar procession weaves its way through the village with the accompaniment of drums, singers singing the Kunjari and Malhar songs and dancing troupes, there is euphoria in the air. All the tribes including Bhatiyat, Chambiyal, Churah, Gaddi and Pangi come together to celebrate this fair that celebrates life in all its opulence. As the clouds hover around, be sure to munch on some freshly cooked Chambiyali Khatta to take in the essence of this small hamlet that throws in a huge rainbow as the Minjar Mela comes to a close. The nearest airport and railway station is Kangra, and one can also reach Chamba from Shimla by road.



Photo Credit: Himachal Pradesh Tourism



Photo Credit: Ajesh CM



Photo Credit: Harsh Agarwal

## JIBHI - THE HIMALAYAN HAMLET

The aroma of pines and cedars envelops this quaint village of Jibhi that stands silently by the banks of the Tirthan river as the crystalline water cascades down its lush green meadows. Nothing in Jibhi is out of place; be it the Victorian cottages or the tree houses, Jibhi has touched them all with its silent beauty. Orchards of apple and Galgal sprout hues of red and orange in the backyards of houses crafted from stone and wood that dot the entire landscape.

Visit the Jalori Pass which is situated at a distance of 12 km from Jibhi and witness breathtaking panoramic views along with a trek to the most pristine alpine lakes in the world, the Serolsar lake. The Jibhi waterfall and the Great Himalayan National Park are also places



Photo Credit: Rahul Rautela

where the Himalayan odyssey mesmerises you. Nature speaks in all its dialects in Jibhi. Hike to the Chehni Kothi, a spectacular garrison in Pahari architecture, explore Kulhi Katandi and pay reverence to the presiding deity at the Shringa Rishi Temple. Jibhi has plentiful options for accommodations and is easily accessible by roads from Shimla.

## GUSHAINI - AN ADVENTURE HOTSPOT

Nestled at the entrance of the Great Himalayan National Park, Gushaini is a small, unpretentious hamlet that has been gifted with the Himalayan bounty in abundance. As the river Tirthan meanders through this idyllic village, it weaves its way through the lush green pastures and glides down terraced lands gleaming with golden crops. At an altitude of 4500 feet, the town of Gushaini is a perfectly painted canvas that has captivating beauty and charm. Surrounded by emerald green fields, Gushaini opens its arms to welcome you for some amazing adventure sports like angling, rappelling, hiking, camping or just lying still in the arms of nature while taking in the magnificent beauty of the Himalayan trail.

In addition to the orchards of apricots, apples, pears and walnuts that sprout nature's bounty, the river Tirthan is teeming with trouts at all times. Being strategically located near the Great Himalayan National Park, Gushaini offers a once-in-a-lifetime experience into one of the highest alpine jungles which is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. From camping by the riverside to experiencing local life while staying at a homestay, Gushaini is a haven for tourists, one that remains accessible and enjoyable throughout the year.



Photo Credit: Hemant Anant Sant



## KALKA - SHIMLA RAILWAY

With the backdrop of a colonial legacy and impeccable national pride, the Kalka - Shimla railway climbs through the Shivalik ranges connecting the plains of the country to its former summer capital, the Queen of Hills - Shimla. It passes through a network of 102 tunnels, 864 bridges, 919 curves and 20 stations over a distance of 96.6 km. It holds a place in the Guinness Book Of World Records for the steepest rise in altitude from 2150 ft to 6811 ft and it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that offers a one-of-a-kind experience where the journey is indeed the destination.

Built in the year 1903, this narrow gauge railroad opens the vistas of picturesque hills and valleys as it chugs past the 20 stations while passing through a landscape dotted with tunnels, jungles of pine and birch to make this one of the most scenic train journeys in India. Be awestruck as you sit through the fleeting lights and sounds as you approach the longest tunnel - Tunnel number 33, stretching for 1143.61 m, en route to the Barog Station and marvel at the engineering expertise of bridge number 226 that passes over a deep valley with steep hills enveloping it from the sides giving an adrenaline surge that is overwhelming. For the amazing train ride, you can opt for the luxurious Shivalik Queen or the glass-roofed Rail Motor to give you an experience of a lifetime.

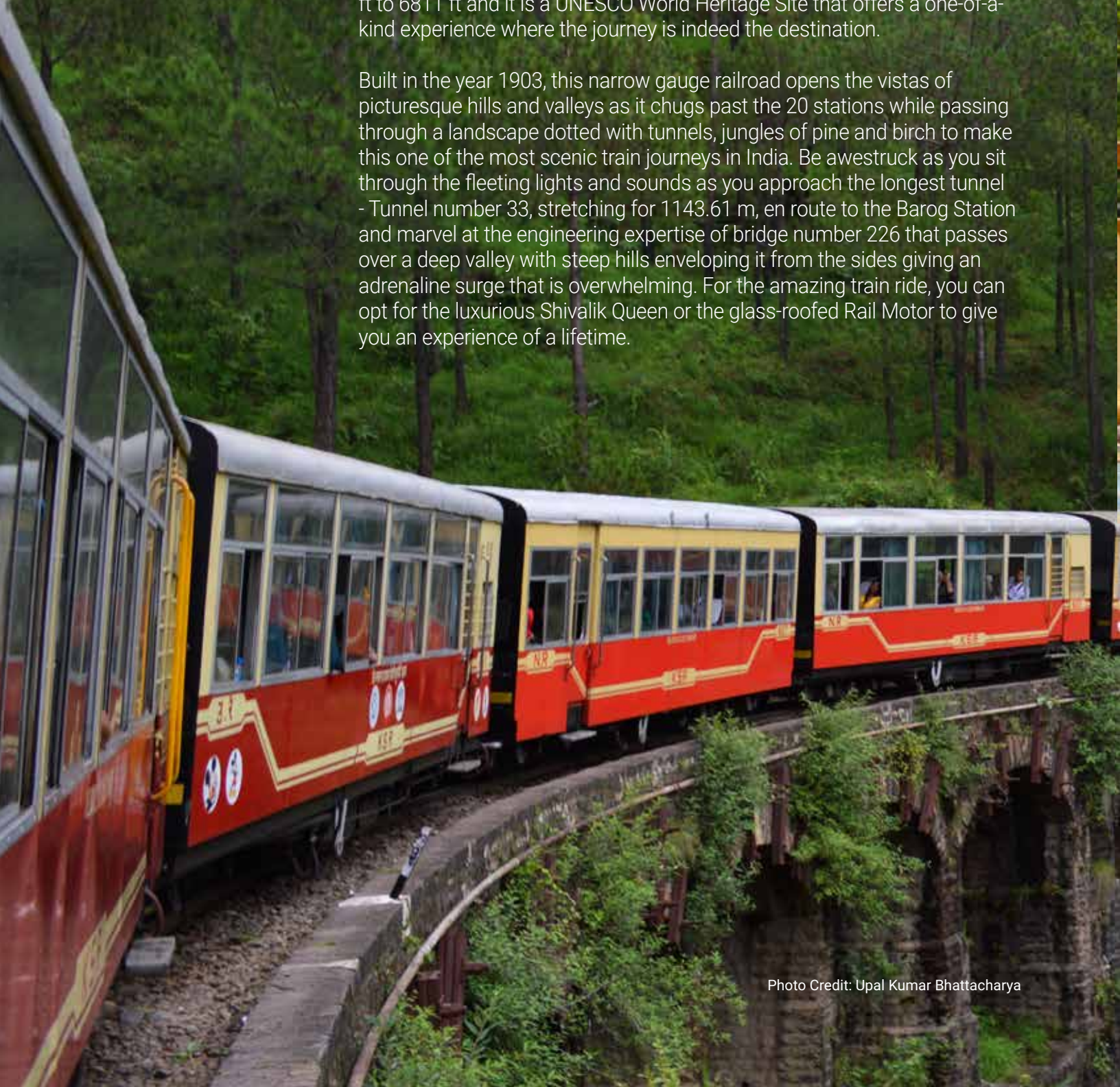




Photo Credit: Himachal Pradesh Tourism



## SPITI FOOD TRAIL - A CULINARY ADVENTURE

With the snow-crowned Himalayas as a constant companion, the valley of Spiti serves magic on the plate to all travellers treading on its terrain. This is where food is served to soothe the soul. The harsh climes and the altitude make Spitian food a purely organic affair with every home having its own vegetable patch, the rivers teeming with trout, fields of buckwheat providing the staple cereal, and yaks being the primary source of meat and dairy. Sip a hot cup of the savoury and slightly salty butter tea as you gaze at the Himalayan peaks or taste some delectable and authentic Tibetan noodle soup “thukpa” filled with organic vegetables and meat of choice. Another Tibetan delicacy is the exotic flat noodle broth or “thentuk” that is served with an array of fresh hand-picked vegetables with cardamon, cloves, chillies and an assortment of aromatic spices that are widely available at every roadside food kiosk.

At Spiti, you can dig into a hot and fluffy Siddu, a local bread made of flour with a generous helping of butter and honey, or couple it with some chha gosht, a lamb curry seasoned to perfection with aromatic spices and yogurt or some sumptuous fresh trout curry. This is a Pahari gastronomical delight at its very best. A trip through Spiti Valley is an exploration of everything a traveller envisages and food certainly adds a very unique dimension to the mountainous terrain.



Photo Credit: Himachal Pradesh Tourism



Photo Credit: Himachal Pradesh Tourism





## TOSH - THE LOST VILLAGE

A small sparsely populated village nestled in the crevices of the surreally beautiful Parvati Valley is where nature beckons you with all her charm. This is what makes Tosh irresistible for wanderers who wish to explore the Himalayan vista in its raw and unspoiled finery. The mountain roads that lead to Tosh are carpeted in the white powdery snow making it a surreal sight to behold. Small wooden houses spread amidst blossoming orchards of apples and apricots dot the entire landscape making Tosh a visual delight.

Apart from the enchanting Himalayan scenery, there are several other equally mesmerising places to visit in Tosh, one of them being the temple of Rishi Jamadagni. This temple opens only once a year in the month of either January or February. Made of wood with intricate carvings depicting the revered sage Jamadagni, this temple has an enigmatic rule that prohibits people from touching anything within its premises. Being close to Barshaini, the base point for trekking to Kheerganga, Tosh is a trekker's delight. It is accessible in all climes though winters are quite harsh with heavy snowfall covering the small hamlet in its white splendour. With activities like trekking and camping, Tosh is the place where you simply let nature nourish your soul.





Photo Credit: Abhishek Tiwari



## MALANA - THE HIDDEN BEAUTY

Somewhere deep in the lush and shimmering Parvati Valley below the Chanderkhani Pass, perched precariously at an altitude of 9500 ft lies the enigmatic village, Malana that conforms to its own rules. The village where you can get high on nature quite literally. No outsider is allowed in the village without permission and staying overnight is banned as is videography. Such is the isolation that Malani people speak in a dialect - Kanashi, that is not even known to the people in the Kullu region. From agriculture to language and from idol worship to legislature, Malana is long known to be an isolated entity. Though the sage-like village now has started opening to a selective audience, the innocence of Malana is still surreal.

The Malana village is about 21 km away from Kasol and the shortest way to reach Malana is from the village Jari connected to Kullu Valley with the nearest airport being Buntar. There is no provision for outsiders to stay in Malana and hence one can stay at Kasol where many hotels have sprouted in the recent past and the summer months are the best time to visit.



Photo Credit: Somenath Sen

## CHICHAM - ON THE SPOTLIGHT

A village with mesmerizing beauty was once lost in obscurity. Everything changed in 2018 when this little piece of paradise got connected to Kibber and Kaza through Asia's highest suspension bridge. Owing to its unmatched location within the Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary, and arguably better suited for most things that Kibber has been famous for - Chicham is now firmly stamped on the tourism map of Spiti. Thanks to the bridge, the once disconnected village, is now bang on the more preferred route for people driving from Spiti to Manali. Newer, sustainable and niche homestays have come up and added to the rising popularity of the village in the region. It's only a matter of time before other hidden gems around Chicham will get discovered. Chicham's offerings range from an ancient cave of great historical and archaeological significance, Shimo Khabdin, to short hikes that take you to hidden camps by the springs in a meadow.



Photo Credit: Kiran Kallur



Photo Credit: Kiran Kallur

## KAZA - FROSTED BEAUTY

Serpentine mountain roads inching towards majestic mountains and vistas of icy landscapes standing in their barren beauty that is Kaza; an abode fit for gods. Loftily perched at 3650 m, the village of Kaza is situated along the Spiti river gurgling down, cussing the cultural beauty of Indo-Tibetan life in all its splendour. Kaza presents two worlds in itself, a perfect blend of the old and new. The Kaza Soma, the new town houses all important administrative buildings whereas the Kaza Khas still clutches on to the old world magic of palaces, monasteries and gompas.

The rocky cliffs and high mountain facades with caving canyons paint a picture of nature's rugged beauty. Every road is a trek and every destination, a hike and that makes the terrain of Kaza a delight for adventure seekers with Kaza being the origin for many notable treks like Pin Parvati, Pin Baba and Parang La. A divine township, Kaza is home to some amazing gompas or monasteries with the most notable ones being the Sakya Tanyud monastery and the Kee monastery, two of the highest altitude monasteries. Situated at an edge of a gorge, with sight of Buddhist monks in their traditional attire and prayer flags in all hues fluttering in the mountain breeze. This monastery hosts an array of festivals like Halda, Lahaul and Losar as the Tibetan new year is ushered in with resplendence.

Trek to the highest post office in India, just a few kilometres away from Kaza at Hikkim or you could drive down to the world's highest petroleum pump at Kaza that is situated at 12,270 ft above sea level. Be enchanted by the simple life of the people and indulge in the soul stirring food available at local cafes with the barren Himalayan rock face as the backdrop. Options for accommodations are plentiful and it is accessible from Lahaul and Kinnaur thus making it a dream destination for bikers, trekkers and adventure enthusiasts with the ideal time for visit being from May to September.



Photo Credit: Maheep Singh Gaur

Photo Credit: Prithwis Chatterjee



## MIYAR - YOSEMITE OF INDIA

Long known among the International climbing community and hailed by reputed international publications as the Yosemite of India, Miyar was heaven hiding in plain sight waiting to be discovered. The improved connectivity of Lahaul with Manali means that the real beauty of Lahaul that has been hiding within its corners and fringes, like Miyar, are now more accessible than ever before. Miyar Valley has long been associated with high-quality rock climbing and harder treks like Kang La which involves crossing the 25-odd km long glacier and finally culminating in Zanskar. However, the rolling meadows and vast grounds within the valley, abundant with fresh water streams, wildlife and untouched natural beauty is a reward for anyone willing to visit this place. The valley itself is accessible and easy to hike for a beginner and seasoned hiker alike. It's only a matter of time before this place becomes a must-visit on everyone's bucket list.

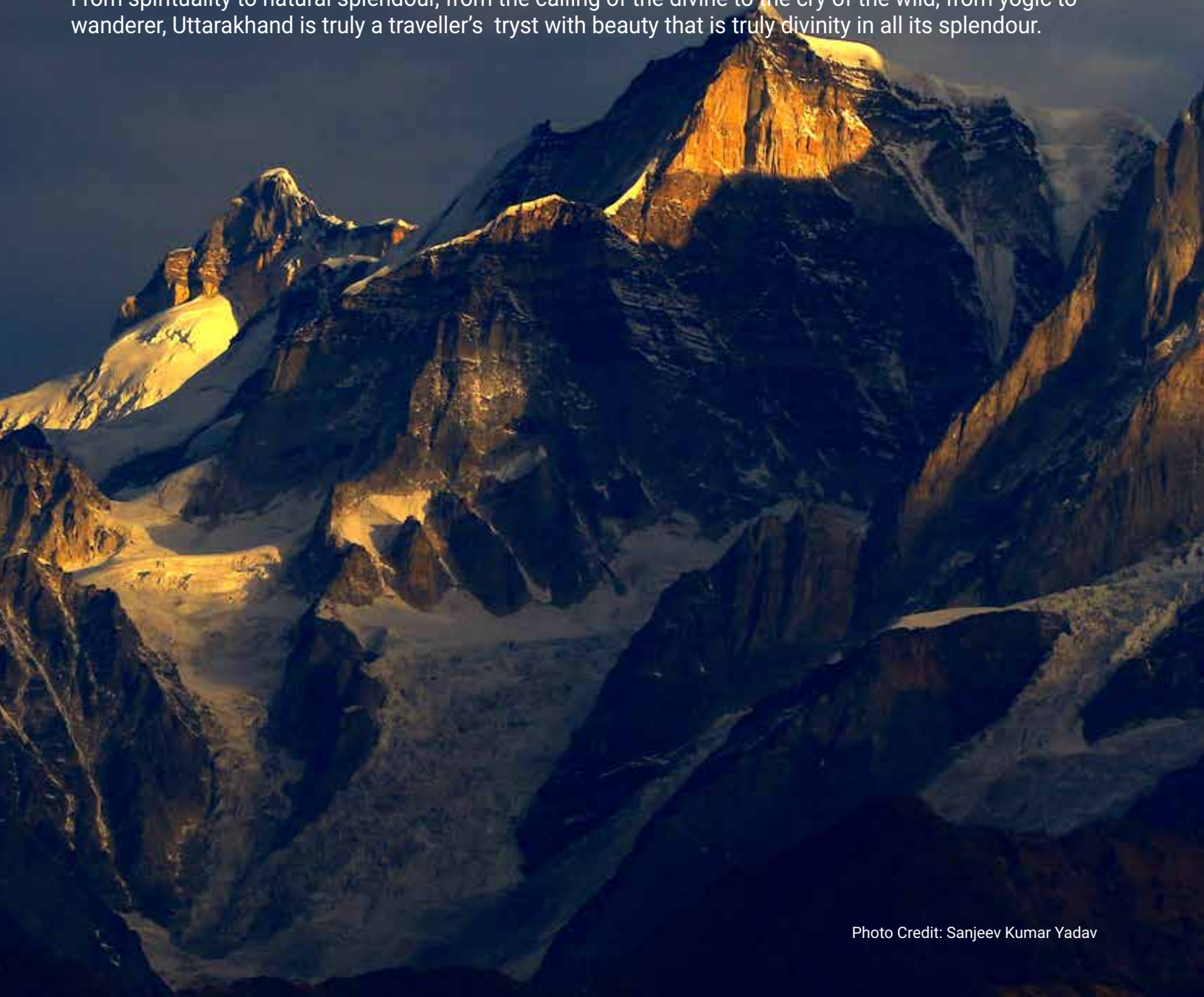




# UTTARAKHAND

**T**he snow covered peaks of the divine Himadri Range, the deep canyons of the Shivalik and the glacier-fed holy rivers make Uttarakhand truly an abode of the Gods. Carved out from Uttar Pradesh and bordered by the states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand is divinity personified. With a topography that scintillates your soul, Uttarakhand is a landscape that has the Himalayan cedars, Himalayan pine, oak, poplar and birch that reach up to some of the tallest peaks in the world like Nanda Devi, Badrinath and Kamet. Home to the four holiest pilgrimages for Hindus or the Char Dhams of Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri, this is the sacred abode of the Hindu Gods.

Uttarakhand is the home to the famous five confluences or “Prayag” where the glacial rivers Alaknanda and Mandakini meet to give rise to the holy Ganges that forms the lifeline of the Indian topography. From spirituality to natural splendour, from the calling of the divine to the cry of the wild, from yogic to wanderer, Uttarakhand is truly a traveller’s tryst with beauty that is truly divinity in all its splendour.





# HOW TO Reach

**By Air** – Uttarakhand is accessible from all major cities in India by air with two major airports in Pantnagar and Dehradun (Jolly Grant).

**By Train** – The Indian Railways has a great network with a plethora of prominent stations like Haridwar, Dehradun, Kathgodam, Rudrapur, Tanakpur and Pantnagar to provide easy accessibility for tourists.

**By Road** – Due to its strategic location and its immense popularity, Uttarakhand has a labyrinth of national highways that crisscross its terrain like NH 108, NH 109, NH 119, NH 121, NH 123 and NH 72A.

Photo Credit: Kamran Khan



## ACCOMMODATION

The hill state of Uttarkakhand has plenty of stay options to suit every budget. So, whether you are staying in quaint hamlets or in bustling cities, you will find enough government-approved [accommodations](#) to choose from.

Photo Credit: Anup Kumar Dutta

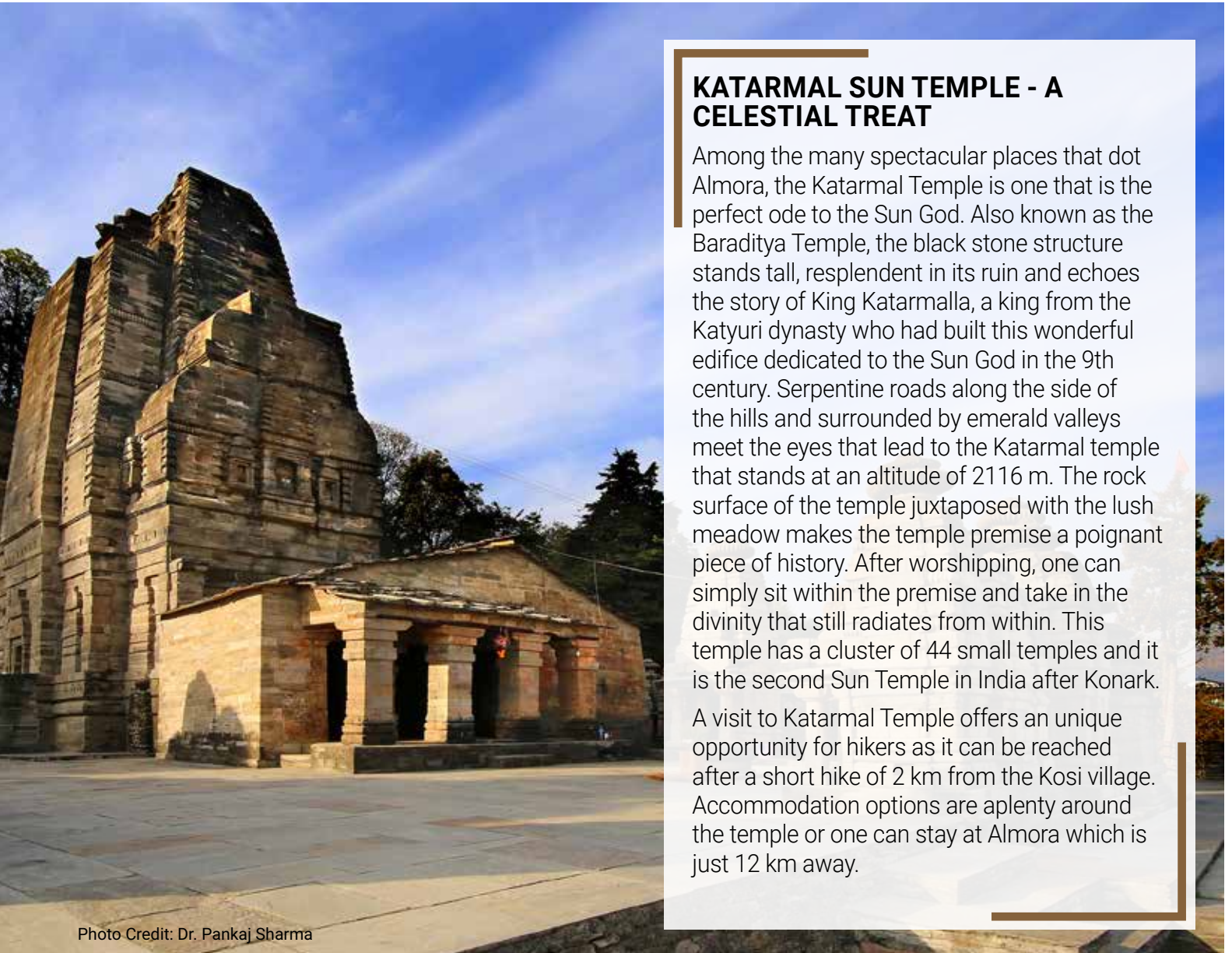


## BEST TIME TO VISIT

Uttarakhand is an all-season destination. The summer months are popular for adventure sports like trekking and paragliding. The summer months are also the time for religious tourism to the Char Dhams. December-February, Uttarakhand is decked with snowy mountains.

# Cool! Beyond

A land of the holy Dhams, rolling mountain peaks and people who are simply amazing, Uttarakhand is a land beyond imagination. Idyllic hamlets, UNESCO sites, steaming local flavours and unending adventure options, make this mountain state a favourite for all.



## **KATARMAL SUN TEMPLE - A CELESTIAL TREAT**

Among the many spectacular places that dot Almora, the Katarmal Temple is one that is the perfect ode to the Sun God. Also known as the Baraditya Temple, the black stone structure stands tall, resplendent in its ruin and echoes the story of King Katarmalla, a king from the Katyuri dynasty who had built this wonderful edifice dedicated to the Sun God in the 9th century. Serpentine roads along the side of the hills and surrounded by emerald valleys meet the eyes that lead to the Katarmal temple that stands at an altitude of 2116 m. The rock surface of the temple juxtaposed with the lush meadow makes the temple premise a poignant piece of history. After worshipping, one can simply sit within the premise and take in the divinity that still radiates from within. This temple has a cluster of 44 small temples and it is the second Sun Temple in India after Konark.

A visit to Katarmal Temple offers an unique opportunity for hikers as it can be reached after a short hike of 2 km from the Kosi village. Accommodation options are aplenty around the temple or one can stay at Almora which is just 12 km away.

Photo Credit: Dr. Pankaj Sharma



## JAGESHWAR TEMPLES - HIDDEN WONDERS

Standing by the banks of the languid Jataganga rivulet, the idyllic district of Almora stands as the chosen abode of Lord Shiva. Adorned with deodar trees, this town is famous for the Jageshwar temple complex. Housing over 124 stone temples of Lord Shiva, this complex is believed to seat the 8th Jyotirling; the Nagesh Jyotirlinga. These are some of the oldest temples in India with history that can be traced back to the 7th and 14th century.

Carved in the intricate Nagara style of architecture, the temples carry in its premises the whispers of heaven. The rhododendrons colour the path in myriad colours and the pine trees fill the air with their aroma making the entire complex a spectacle to immerse oneself in. The month of July and August mark the Jageshwar monsoon

Photo Credit: Asis Kumar Chatterjee



festival or the Hindu month of shraavan when Lord Shiva is worshipped with fervour. Alongside the Jageshwar temple complex, a tour of the Mirtola Ashram, Jageshwar Mahadev, Airavat Gufa and Archaeological Museum give a detailed insight into what makes Almora one of the oft visited places in the divine land of Uttarakhand.

Photo Credit: Vivek Pandey



Photo Credit: Vivek Pandey



## VIJAYPUR-A DATE WITH CLOUDS

Vijaypur, a tiny Himalayan village, located between Bageshwar and Chaukori is a hidden jewel. Situated at an altitude of 6750 feet, this sleepy hamlet rests on a ridge overlooking the magnificent Himalayan range. On a clear day, Vijaypur offers one of the most breathtaking views of the entire range from Trishul, Nanda Devi, Nanda Kot to Panchachuli and Appi peaks. Tea gardens carpet the slopes of Vijaypur while the surrounding ridge is completely covered by rows of Pine, along with Chestnut, Oak Kafal and Rhododendron.

Around Vijaypur you can hike up to the Dhauling temple, the guardian of the people living here. The ridge offers breathtaking views of Himalayas, sunset and the valley. The trek to the Musk Deer farm from Kotmanya (Approx 17kms) through dense pine and oak forest is breathtaking, and a must-do. Vijaypur is an all-season destination. While the summer is cool, the winter is chilly with mesmerizing views of snow-capped mountains. The monsoon too is a good time to visit as the entire landscape turns lush green.



Photo Credit: Harendra Rawat

## NANDA DEVI FESTIVAL - ALMORA

Nanda Devi, the consort of Lord Shiva, is an intrinsic divine power that has been revered and loved for ages in the Kumaon region. The Nanda Devi Festival is celebrated in the month of September and paves the way for paying homage and seeking blessings for the entire region. The festival is celebrated over a period of 5-7 days and is usually held sometime during the festival of Nandastami with much fanfare. Said to have been instituted by King Dyot Chand somewhere in the 17th century to pay reverence to the family goddess of the Chand Kings, this festival has now become a signature festival of the Kumaon region. It symbolises the opulence of the entire Kumaon region. It is held all over the region in places like Nainital, Bageshwar, Bhowali, Johar and Kot with Almora being the most significant. People decked in their best attire participate in the procession that takes the royal palanquin of Nanda and Sunanda Devi.

A flurry of activity with shops selling locally crafted exquisite products, artists singing and dancing to the "pahari" melodies and tasty delicacies are spread across the entire valley making the hills come alive with the festive spirit. With accommodations being present in plentiful, a visit planned to attend the Nanda Devi Festival is one of the best ones to savour the life that resonates in the mountains of the Kumaon region.



Photo Credit:

1. Chetan Kapoor
2. Pushkar Singh Rana
3. Aditya Shah
4. Dr. Pawanesh Thakurathi





Photo Credit: Sandeep Dobriyal

Photo Credit: Manu Pande

## GURUDWARA SHRI HEMKUND SAHIB

A star shaped gurudwara surrounded by seven great mountains with a crystal lake in front; that is the canvas that is painted at one of the holiest places of worship for Sikhs; the Gurudwara Shri Hemkund Sahib. Dedicated to the tenth Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh, Hemkund literally means "The Lake Of Snow". Strategically located at an elevation of 4329 m adjacent to the Valley of Flowers in the pristine valley of Chamoli district, this is India's breathtakingly beautiful ode to spirituality.

The snow clad mountains envelop this spectacular Gurudwara which is believed to have been the place where Pandu Raja practised yoga and where Guru Gobind Singh prayed after taking a dip in the glacial waters of the lake. Till date,



Photo Credit: Prabha Bansal

Sikhs follow in his footsteps and keep the tradition alive. This scenic seat of spirituality is accessed by an arduous 13 km trek from Pulna village, a trek which is rewarded beautifully by the vision of one of the holiest and prettiest places of worship in India. Be it adventure or spirituality, the Gurudwara Shri Hemkund Sahib is a divine spectacle.

## MUKTESHWAR - OF DIVINE SALVATION

The Kumaon Hills pierce the skyline wherever your eyes wander, such is the beauty of Mukteshwar. High up at an altitude of 2285 m and at a distance of 51 km from Nainital, this is the place which captured the heart of Jim Corbett when he came to hunt a tiger. The serenity of the Himalayas frame every bit of landscape, tall deodar trees whisper in the breeze and the tranquillity of the 350-year-old **Mukteshwar** temple talks of "Mukti" or salvation bestowed on a demon by Lord Shiva himself. These are all the ingredients that make Mukteshwar a unique feast for the eyes and food for the soul.

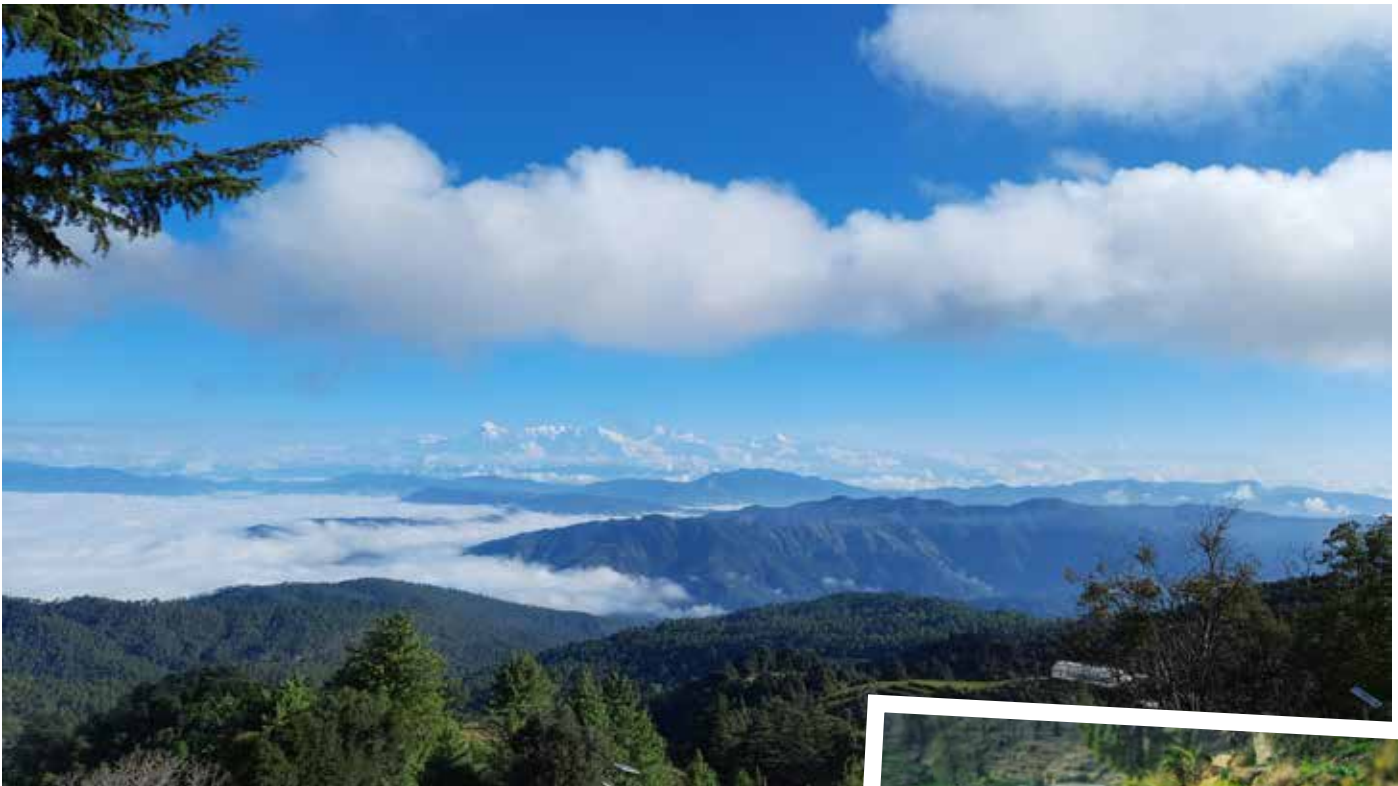


Photo Credit: Alope Kumar Bhanja

Untouched Mukteshwar is a paradise for nature buffs and adventure seekers with the sky-kissing mountains offering a wide range of activities like rock climbing at "Chauli Ki Jaali", rappelling, paragliding, hiking, trekking and camping. The overhanging cliffs, serpentine trails amidst the birches and pine forests are truly magical to explore. Being close to major tourist destinations like Nainital and Ranikhet, Mukteshwar has blossomed into a place which has good options for accommodation ranging from luxury hotels to budget guesthouses which offer excellent views and great amenities.

Photo Credit:  
Harendra Rawat



Photo Credit: Devraj Singh Rawat



## MAKKUMATH - THE HEAVENLY ABODE

As the snow-covered road swirls up the hill leading up to the idyllic hamlet of Makkumath, the aroma of the forest fills the air. Tall trees of pine, birch and oak pierce the sky and the distant calls of the birds are the only sound that breaks the tranquillity. With lush greenery all around, this winter abode of Lord Tunganath is considered to be one of the Panch Kedar and home to the highest placed shrines of Lord Shiva.

The ancient temple, made from rocks bears an uncanny resemblance to the temple at Kedarnath and is the main attraction for pilgrims who wish to avoid the trek up to Chopta. Situated at an elevation of 2100 m in the district of Rudraprayag, Makkumath is a paradise for adventure seekers. This sleepy village lies in close proximity to the magnificent Deoria Tal and Chandrashila, and offers some of the most beautiful panoramic views of the Himalayan peaks of Nanda Devi, Trishul, Kedar peak and Chaukhamba.



Photo Credit: Kakoli Dey



Photo Credit: Kakoli Dey

Apart from trekking, Makkumath is a birdwatcher's paradise. A short distance from Makkumath lies the famous Kanchula Korak Musk Deer Sanctuary which is home to a wide variety of medicinal herbs and shrubs along with the rare breed of musk deer making it a much sought-after destination. Open throughout the year, Makkumath is exquisitely beautiful in all climatic conditions and is quite well-connected.

## DARMA VALLEY - THE CALL OF THE MOUNTAINS

The white clouds float across the blue skies with the Kumaon Range glimmering in the distance as you enter the pristine Darma Valley. Placed high up in the Pithoragarh district in Uttarakhand at a lofty

Photo Credit: Anupam Roy Chowdhury



altitude of 3470 m, Darma Valley is carved by the gurgling glacial waters of the Darma river. At the cusp of two valleys, Kuthi Yankti and the Lassar Yankti and joined by high mountain passes, Darma is one of the most picturesque valleys in the Kumaon region.

With verdant meadows and snow-kissed mountain peaks as the backdrop, the Darma Valley is a perfect balm to soothe all tired souls. Every road in Darma Valley is a trek leading to some spectacular views with the major attraction being the Darma Valley trek. Starting from Sobla, the trail whorls through Duktu, Dantu, Dar, Sela and Baling.

One can also set up a camp near the river bank where the Himalayan charm works like an elixir. Listen to the murmuring river, the chirping of the birds, and the soft sound of the wind passing through the alpine forest. The best time to visit Darma Valley is between April to October.

## CHOPTA - THE MINI SWITZERLAND OF INDIA

As the mountain roads weave through the thick forests with panoramic views of the Himalayas, one can only be left awestruck by the beauty of Chopta Valley. With emerald forests on one side and the sun-kissed hills on the other, Chopta is a balm for city-sore eyes. Located in the Garhwal region, Chopta lies between Ukhimath

and Gopeshwar. At an imposing height of 2680 m, Chopta is a trekkers paradise as much as a nature lover's heaven. Trekking to one of the highest Shiva temples in the world as part of the Chopta-Tungnath-Chandrashila Trek, Chopta offers breathtaking views of the Himalayas across the snow-blanketed trail, and that in itself is a destination at every step. Steeped in mythology and immersed in Indian folklore, both Chandrashila and Deoria Tal are nothing short of nature's most exquisite paintings that one can witness.

Apart from trekking, Chopta also offers many other activities like photography, bird watching, rock climbing, rappelling, skiing and cycling. In the vicinity of Chopta one can also visit Rudraprayag, Gopeshwar, the Saari Village, Agastyamuni and Makkumath.



Photo Credit: 1. Amit Sah | 2. Amit Gautam | 3. Akaar Srivastava



## **ROBBER'S CAVE - AN ADVENTURE UNFOLDS**

Amidst the crevice of two steep jagged rocky facades stretching over 600 metres, a gurgling brook, a 10 metre high waterfall, and a disappearing water spring come together to create an adventure that is straight out of nature's wild imagination. Just 8 kilometres away from the bustling city of Dehradun, lies the famous Robber's Cave also known as Guchhupani, a favourite haunt for both tourists and locals. Shrouded in myths and folklore, the Robber's Cave is nature's mischief carved to perfection.

The limestone rock face caves into an extremely narrow crypt as its serpentine formation coupled with the water gushing beneath makes the trek of 600 metres one of the most memorable experiences. Be ready to get drenched and enjoy the cool water as you trek your way up through the cavern. Stories of robbers coming here to hide their loot are famous and the formation of the cavern and its topography makes one want to believe them too.

A food court operates right outside in full swing with shops selling a variety of savouries; right from samosas to the 2-minute noodles, tea, cold drinks and lots more. Being just about 8 kilometres from the heart of Dehradun, near Anarwala village, this wonder is accessible round the year.





# DELHI

Lying on the banks of river Yamuna, Delhi, the national capital of India is not just a city, it is India's pride and legacy at its pinnacle. Delhi is the perfect culmination of the narrow lanes and havelis of Old Delhi with the high rises and stately government buildings of New Delhi. Home to the highest seat of governance and judiciary, Delhi is where the world's largest democracy thrives. This is a city that truly speaks of India.

Bounded by Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, Delhi has always been a commercial, political and cultural hub. The city is dotted with architecture that carries you through various regimes that it has witnessed. From Rajasthani intricate works depicting floral motifs and trellis to stamps of Seljuk architecture, to the colonial architecture, Delhi stands as a city that flows from being frozen in time to being a throbbing metropolis.



# HOW TO Reach 8

**By Air** - Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport (T3) is connected by international and domestic flights from across the globe. The other two airports T2 and T1 have flights coming from all Tier II and Tier III cities.

**By Train** - Delhi has four important railway stations; namely New Delhi, Delhi Junction, Hazrat Nizamuddin and Anand Vihar Terminal.

**By Road** - Delhi is connected to the entire country through prominent National Highways.

## ACCOMMODATION

The capital city of Delhi has many [stay options](#) across all categories. One can choose to book B&Bs for long stays or enjoy the amazing Indian hospitality in one of the big hotels spread across the city.



Photo Credit: Kabir Singh Bansal



Photo Credit: Sarahana

# Go! Beyond

Dotted with around 100 odd historical sites and UNESCO World Heritage sites, Delhi is a rare city that welcomes you with the beauty of ruins juxtaposed with modern-day wonders. With sanctuaries, forts, pulsating metro networks, and people from across geographies, Delhi is truly an Indian experience.

## AGRASEN KI BAOLI - A STEP INTO THE PAST

At a walking distance from the bustling Connaught Place on Hailey Road, right in the heart of India's capital, lies a stepwell, an ornate water conservatory named Agrasen Ki Baoli. It is one of the largest and definitely one of the finest pieces of stepwells in and around Delhi. Named after the legendary king, Agrasen of Aroha, this stepwell measures 60 metres in length and is 15 metres wide and is an architectural marvel in sandstone and a display of India's engineering acumen.

This stepwell was built not only as a water reservoir but was also a place where communities would gather in unison as the structure offered respite



Photo Credit: 1. Maloti Bhattacharjee 2. Manjulika Pramod

from the scorching summers. A flight of about 100 steps descending down, juxtaposed by the arched cubicles surrounding them, this stepwell is a photographer's delight with perfect symmetry and a lovely interplay of light and shade. From architectural magnificence and engineering skills to paranormal urban legends and celluloid magic, the Agrasen Ki Baoli manages to keep travellers captivated and surely stands out as one of Delhi's best-kept secrets.

## ST. JAMES'S CHURCH - GLORY FROM THE PAST

Photo Credit: Jayant Suri



As the light filters through the two exquisite panels of stained glass paintings depicting Christ's ascension and crucifixion, it disperses in the colours of the rainbow and lights up the oldest church in Delhi where people congregate to celebrate the life and love of Christ. Near Kashmiri Gate on Church Road stands the colossal and classical colonial church, which was the first to be built in Delhi in 1836 by Col. James Skinner.

This massive church structure is the oldest and the finest imprint of the Imperial Regime in India and stands tall in a city where temples, mosques, gurudwaras etch the skyline simultaneously. Col. Skinner, son of a Scottish father and an Indian mother when left to die on the battlefield vowed to build a chapel if he was spared death. And when a Dalit woman did come along to save his life, his faith championed the cause of God and build the edifice that stands in solemn faith and servitude till today. Lush green gardens flank the building and a beautiful Florentine dome rises over to kiss the azure sky as one walks past some of Delhi's oldest roads to enter the tranquil premises of the church. One can soak in the serenity of faith while sitting in one of the rows of neatly laid benches with glazed wooden armrests and neatly placed books as history wafts past in all its glory.



## NATIONAL WAR MEMORIAL - STANDING TALL

Spread over 40 acres in the midst of India's national capital stands the stoic National War Memorial, an awe-inspiring tribute to all the soldiers who fearlessly fought for India post Independence. Inaugurated on 25th February 2019, this memorial stands in the glow of the eternal flame of the Amar Jawan Jyoti depicting a nation indebted to its soldiers. The memorial is dedicated to each soldier who has fought many battles post Independence.

Taking the concept of Chakravayuh, a traditional Indian warfare tactic, the National War Memorial invokes the spirit of Indianness to depict the four aspects of war. Concentric circles, each depicting a sentiment, spiral in the form of a military formation with the Rakshak Chakra or the Circle Of Protection symbolised by a row of trees standing like every soldier standing their ground to protect the country. This is followed by Tyag Chakra or the Circle of Sacrifice where the name of each soldier glistens in gold for making the supreme sacrifice for India which

in turn is followed by the Veerta Chakra or the Circle Of Bravery where six bronze murals showcase the combats that protected India's freedom and sovereignty and finally coming down to the Amar Chakra or the Circle of Immortality which holds an Obelisk or Stambh and the glow of the Eternal Flame burns forever to show a nation's gratitude to the heroes who have defended to keep the sovereignty of the nation.

Stand in the solemn ambience as the Retreat Ceremony begins with a bugle call and lowering of the flags, done to symbolise the end of a day. At the same time, a wreath is laid by the next of kin of martyrs each day to keep alive the spirit of nationalism in every soul.



1



2



3

Photo Credit:  
1. Sachin Singh 2. Aditya Shah 3. Sachin Singh



## ASOLA BHATTI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Tucked amidst the bustle of India's capital city - Delhi, is an ecological wonder that in its own quiet way depicts the resilience of nature amidst man's unrelenting urge for urbanisation. About 32.71 sq kms of lush greenery stretching along the Southern Delhi Ridge of the ancient folds of the Aravallis house flora and fauna that is simply breathtaking.

Estimated to have about 190 avian species along with 80 species of fascinating butterflies in the jungles of dhau trees, this sanctuary is where city souls come to seek a reprieve. The native fauna of this completely stable ecosystem right in the heart of the city is an amazement in itself. From nilgai, blackbucks and monkeys to jackals and leopards, this wildlife sanctuary is regaining its lost foothold with the increased numbers as found in the recent census. Either explored on foot or by vehicle, the Asola Bhatti sky offers sightings of rare avifauna like the Brahminy kite, Egyptian vulture, Himalayan Griffon along with Common Pochard and often the regal peacock.

Photo Credit:

1. Diksha Gupta 2, 3. Robin Sahni 4. Diksha Gupta 5. Kabir Singh Bansal





## PHOOL WAALON KI SAIR

With a history dating back to 1812 and soaked in India's unique communal harmony, the 3-day festival held every year in Delhi called Phool Walon Ki Sair or 'procession of florists' is one that threads together Delhi's regal past and its amazing future. Folklore traces its origin to the era of the Mughal King Akbar Shah II when the British took his son, Mirza Jehangir, to jail. A distraught mother, Mumtaz Mahal Begum vowed to offer a chaddar to the dargah of the saint, Khwaja Bakhtiyar Kaki, on her son's release. And this is how this annual celebration started. It thereafter brought the Hindus into its stride with them offering a floral fan or Pankha at the Yogamaya Temple thereby making it a truly inspiring festival.

Revived in the post-Independent era, the Phool waalon ki Sair remains one of the most beautiful festivals that one can possibly experience. Floral



Photo Credit: Ronnie Gupta

offerings in hand, thousands walk through the streets of Mehrauli with qawwals singing sufi songs and dancers regaling people who wait for the procession to pass.

## QAWWALI AT NIZAMUDDIN AULIYA DARGAH

As endless soul-stirring melodies waft in the air, one is lured through the labyrinth of narrow congested bylanes of Nizamuddin West to reach the mausoleum complex where the Sufi saint, Nizamuddin Auliya, princess Jahan Ara Begum and the prolific poet, Amir Khusro have found their final abode. It is indeed a night when neon lights atop the dargah shine through the darkness and the 700-year-old tradition

of singing paeans in the sufi style known as qawwalis pierce the quietude of the night. Poetries of Amir Khusro find their melodies and voices in the vocals of the seasoned qawwals who are descendants of the great saint, Nizamuddin, who sing to elutriate the soul of all its blemishes.

Every Thursday evening, the Nizamuddin dargah becomes an elixir for souls. The voices of the qawwals singing the devotional songs reverberate in the hearts of all those who sit there in a trance taking them to a long-lost era. A night of qawwalis in Nizamuddin is incomplete without walking to the inner sanctum to pay tribute to the saint along with a visit to the tomb of the famous poet, Mirza Ghalib. Thereafter, embarking upon the famous food trail along the roads leading to the dargah is the ultimate pleasure trip as one tastes succulent kebabs and aromatic biryani.

Photo Credit: Indranjan



Photo Credit: Manish Jaisi







Photo Credit: Ganga-Jamuni Foundation

## TEMPLE TOUR OF OLD DELHI

Around the Jama Masjid area in Delhi, is an assemblage of some of the most spectacular temples that lay scattered in the precincts of the bustling metropolis. A string of exquisite and unique temples makeup this massive constellation with stellar temples like the Iskcon Temple at Chhipiwara. This temple which is in the form of a haveli houses a beautiful shrine of Radha and Krishna in the inner sanctum or garbha griha. The temple premise also once served as the office of its founder, Swami Prabhupada who propagated the essence of the Gita worldwide.

Equally unique and exquisite a temple, Shree Digambar Jain Panchayati Mandir in the Chandni Chowk area is a masterpiece in itself. Black and white chequered marble floors with tall arched gateways with colourful frescoes and glistening marble shrines, this is the oldest Jain temple in Delhi. The city also holds the distinction of housing one of the rare temples dedicated to Lord Balram, the brother of Krishna in the form of Dauji Ka Mandir along with the Jagannath Temple. Temples have always served as the place for confluence of ideas and philosophies and these lesser-known temples of Delhi provide the perfect insight into our rich legacies.



Photo Credit:  
Ganga-Jamuni Foundation



# QUAINT CORNERS, ALL LUSH AND BEAUTIFUL



Photo Credit: 1. Basabdatta Sarkar 2. Dr. Pawanesh Thakurathi 3. Rayees Ahmad dar 4. Priyanka Saini 5. Vinita Verma



# UTTAR PRADESH

**U**ttar Pradesh, India's most populous state is a cauldron of everything that one can think of as an Indian. From the awe-inspiring epitome of love - Taj Mahal, to the city that is steeped in reverence and devotion - Varanasi; Uttar Pradesh offers the magic of Indianness on a platter.

From the biggest peaceful conglomeration in the globe - the Kumbh Mela, the gold-gilded Mughal architectural marvel - Fatehpur Sikri, to the Buddhist hermitage at Sarnath, to over 15 national parks teeming with exotic animals, Uttar Pradesh is the perfect slice that showcases the entire country. Rich in its handicrafts which range from the silks and brocades of Varanasi, exquisite brassware of Morarabad, fine embroidery work from Lucknow, ebony work from Nagina, glassware from Firozabad, and intricate woodwork from Saharanpur; this is a paradise for connoisseurs of art. A land of food and festivals, royalty and nationalism, Uttar Pradesh is a traveller's delight.





Photo Credit: Dr. Pankaj Sharma

## HOW TO Reach

**By Air** - Uttar Pradesh has great air connectivity with 8 operating airports in all leading cities. The Khushinagar airport is the latest on the list and the Jewar-Noida is slated to be operational by 2024.

**By Train** - There is a robust labyrinth of railway network that connects all major cities in Uttar Pradesh. Every important tourist destination in the state has a railway station.

**By Road** - Nearly 50 National Highways run through the state of Uttar Pradesh making it easy for tourists to visit any nook and corner of the state.

## ACCOMMODATION

The [Uttar Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation](#) has a plethora of guest houses, bungalows and Atithi Ghars at various tourist locations. One can easily book your stay online before your visit.

## BEST TIME TO VISIT

Uttar Pradesh is an all-year destination. Though the winter months of October - March are very pleasant, the state gets its maximum visitors during the holy dates (festivals) and the many festivals organised by the Tourism department.



Photo Credit: Uttar Pradesh Tourism

# Go! Beyond

One of the largest states in India, Uttar Pradesh is unique in its topography, history and culture. Dotted with a Wonder of the World and UNESCO World Heritage sites, Uttar Pradesh is also steeped in age-old traditions and rituals, making it a true slice of India.

Photo Credit: Uttar Pradesh Tourism



## RAMPURA FORT - A ROYAL RETREAT

A 600-year-old fort standing majestically high above the tortuous and unending ravines of Chambal is a royal retreat that served as the private residence of the 14 generations of Raja Samar Singh, the remaining royals of Bundelkhand. Built during the reign of Raja Ram Shah, this fort was a stronghold of the Rajputs and one can see the fort still standing tall as a proud symbol of regal pride and grandeur. From royal culinary delicacies served straight from the kitchens of the royals to the enthralling music of acclaimed artisans singing paeans, to the beats of traditional instruments like dholak and jhika, Rampura Fort is an experience par excellence.



Photo Credit: Uttar Pradesh Tourism

Standing in the vicinity of some of the most imposing forts in the region like Jagamanpur, Tihar, Sarawan, Gopalpura, Samthar, Sevananda and Kalpi, this bastion is now a part of India's glorious past. Take a boat ride across the tranquil Yamuna and witness the confluence of five rivers, Kunwari, Pahuj, Jamuna, Chambal and Sind. Regale in the beauty of the Karan Kherra Temple said to be patronised by Raja Karna of the Mahabharata and the Bhairoji Temple along with the Devkali Temple that stands on the banks of Yamuna on the way to Auraiya.





Photo Credit: Uttar Pradesh Tourism

## MAHOBA - THE CITY OF FESTIVALS

Mahoba, a small district in Uttar Pradesh with a huge historic legacy, this place is a treasure trove for people who wish to go the extra mile to listen to the stories of bygone era. Being the capital city of Chandel Rajputs, Mahoba shares the same cultural root as Khajuraho and is a pageantry of temples, monuments, buildings and innumerable religious sites. Known in earlier times as the Mahotsav Nagar or the city of festivals, Mahoba stands stoically in the midst of a dusty terrain with a poignant history of its glorious past showcased on the walls of these monuments.

From the island temple of Kakramath to the Shiv Temple where Lord Shiva is worshipped in his Rudra Roop, to the Rahila Sagar Sun Temple made in the classic Pratihara style of architecture, Mahoba holds together a part of the Indian history that has been left unexplored. The Chandika Devi temple and the Gokhar Parvat which house rock-cut shrines of different faiths showcase the beauty that lies hidden in the heart of India. Mahoba is the one off-beat destination that holds a huge historical grandeur in its small precincts just waiting to be unravelled.

## CHAUKHANDI STUPA - OF DHARMA & PEACE

Uttar Pradesh offers religious plurality like none other and the Chaukhandi stupa stands as a stoic testimony to the tales of religious homogeneity that connects India and makes it unique. The distinctive red brick structure that stands loftily on an octagonal base is a landmark structure in the Sarnath Complex. The Stupa traces its origin to the 5th century A.D. and is said to be the place where Lord Buddha while travelling from Bodh Gaya to Sarnath was reunited with his five companions who had previously deserted him at Rajgir.

Though commissioned in the Gupta period, this Stupa is a crown jewel in India's pluralistic tapestry as the octagonal tower atop the Stupa was constructed by the Mughal Emperor Akbar in the memory of his father, Humayun who visited Sarnath in 1532. The rising stepped-terraces with the grassy meadows overlooking a small



Photo Credit: Pravinsinh R. Chauhan

water body are sure to make one reflect on India's unique ability to stitch together this wonderful drape which knits together bhikshus to kings and teaches one to override their differences. At a distance of 13 km from Varanasi, this is a 20-minute drive by road to let your soul soak in the ethos of dharma and peace.





## GANGA MAHOTSAV - A FESTIVE AFFAIR

Ganga, the river of abundance and piousness traverses through the heart of India making its plains fertile, valleys green, and people pure. This is the river that weaves a tapestry of beauty in every inch it flows over and India pays obeisance to its holiest natural resource in style. Held on the banks of Ganges in Varanasi is a festival of pure reverence to nature, a one-of-a-kind offering to the river that makes civilization possible. The Ganga Mahotsav is observed 15 days after Diwali in the month of October/November and is a five-day extravaganza dedicated to India's lifeline, the Ganga.

The ghats along the river are lit up with a million lamps on the day of the new moon making it a surreal vision. Amidst the sound of the conch shells, chanting of mantras and a congregation of pilgrims on the Dashashwamedh Ghat, the Ganga aarti is performed by a row of priests who stand with huge lamps in their hands and pray to the sacred river for its benevolence. From the extravaganza of food, arts and crafts, fireworks, and a prestigious cultural bonanza where maestros of Indian classical music and dance perform, the Ganga Mahotsav is not just a festival, it is an ethos of the Indian spirit where nature and divinity merge to form the greatest carnival of the country.







Photo Credit: Ankush Pandey

## **LAKHANIYA DARI FALLS - CASCADING BEAUTY**

Tucked in Chunar near Mirzapur among the parched dry terrain alongside agricultural fields, a surprise awaits. This is the place where historic forts like Chunar and Saketgarh fort preside over the landscape only to be unexpectedly interrupted by a bubbling spring that cascades down boulders and rocks as it makes its way to the Ahraura Dam which stores its waters to feed the parched plains. In monsoons, the Lakhaniya Dari waterfall coming down a height of 150 m is a sight to behold.

At a distance of 54 km from Varanasi, Lakhaniya Dari is a breathtaking waterfall situated near Ahraura in Mirzapur district of Uttar Pradesh. The way to the waterfall is an adventure in itself. A trek of 2-3 km from the entry gate over massive rock surfaces, gurgling rivulets, jungles with deciduous trees taking around one and half hours is what makes this waterfall such a hugely satisfying experience. In the state which is blessed with such natural variety, the Lakhaniya Dari Falls stands out as a memory of pristine beauty that drenches your soul with beauty that is simply irresistible.



## CHANDRAPRABHA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY - NATURE'S BOUNTY

The waters of the Chandraprabha river gush through the plains of Varanasi, piercing the hills to make deep gorges before finally cascading down into a natural pool sprinkling the entire valley with fresh water during the monsoons. This river feeds the fertile expanse of the Chandraprabha Wildlife Sanctuary and transforms this natural reserve forest into a one-of-a-kind adventure trail.

Once said to have been the home of the majestic Asiatic lions, the Chandraprabha Wildlife Sanctuary is gifted with nature's bounty while being very close to one of the most visited and popular cities of India, the holy city of Varanasi. Leopards still are seen on the prowl in the dense thickets of deciduous forest of mahua and sahal trees along with the black buck, chital, sambar, nilgai, porcupines, chinkara with more than 150 types of birds that dot the skies. Though temperatures run high during summers, the Chandraprabha Wildlife Sanctuary is a dream destination during the monsoons. The waterfalls of Rajdari and Devdari alongside the ancient Hanuman Temple make this journey exceedingly gratifying.

Being just 70 kms away from Varanasi along the Chakia-Naugarh road in the Chandauli district, this piece of natural beauty is very well connected by road and railways with Mughalsarai being the nearest railway station.



Photo Credit:  
Prashant Kumar Awasthi



Photo Credit: Jitesh Pandey



## **BARSAANA - WELCOME SPRING IN STYLE**

Just 50 km away from Mathura lies the small town of Barsana, a town that is steeped in the flavour of the mystical romance between Lord Krishna and his divine consort, Radha. As spring treads softly on the divine land where Radha was born, the colour of spring dyes the whole town as it celebrates the Hindu festival of colours, Holi. Symbolic of spring, the hues of love, joy and frolic fill the air and permeate your senses. But the celebration of Holi here in Barsana is a little different, just like its history. Men from the nearby town of Nandgaon, or the land of Lord Krishna come during Holi to douse the women in the colours of festivities, but the women not only tease them but also beat them in jest with batons or lathis thus giving the name, Lathmar Holi. It is this distinct flavour of the festival that sets Barsana apart from the entire country.

As mythology gets re-created, the festive spirit finds way to a spread of delicacies like sweet semolina dumplings or gujiyas and the spice-tinged chaats are downed with cool drinks like thandai. Barsana's tryst with mythology is truly a fascinating experience, one that cannot be missed.



Photo Credit: Kalyan Nath



Photo Credit: Kishore Das



# RAJASTHAN



Photo Credit: Nishikant Gangadhar Mhatre

**T**he state of Rajasthan has been the favourite among tourists; both domestic and international since time immemorial. Regal, majestic and culturally enthralling, it is a state with many tourist hot spots. From the regal palaces, the towering forts where life still goes on in full swing to the desert and lakes, this state has something for everyone. A wedding destination for celebrities across the world, one can visit Rajasthan and get a slice of royalty still thriving.

## HOW TO Reach

**By Air** - The state of Rajasthan is very well connected by air with many airports; namely Jaipur International Airport, Maharana Pratap Airport - Udaipur, Jodhpur airport and more.

**By Train** - Rajasthan is well connected by trains from all major cities across India. Jaipur, Udaipur, Kota, Bikaner, Jodhpur, Alwar, Ajmer are few of the important railway stations in Rajasthan.

**By Road** - Rajasthan is connected by National Highways from all neighbouring states. The good road condition within the state also makes Rajasthan a great driving destination.



Photo Credit: Soumyakanti Mandal

## ACCOMMODATION

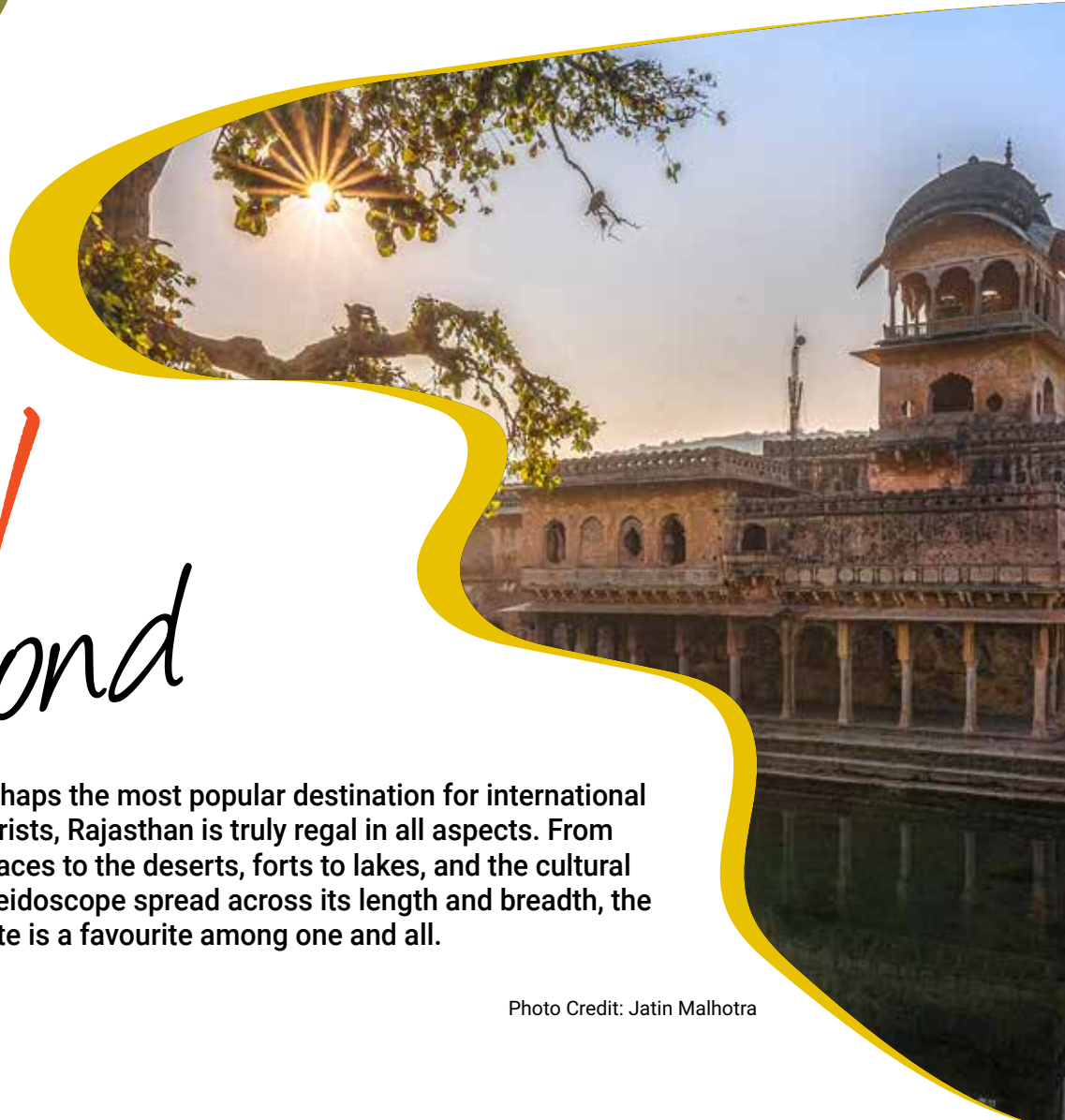
Rajasthan has a [wide range of accommodation](#) options ranging from heritage hotels to pocket-friendly Bed & Breakfast facilities. Stay like the Maharaja in this state known for its royal grandeur.



## BEST TIME TO VISIT

Rajasthan in the North of India is most visited in the winter months between October to February. Though the state can be visited round the year, it is advisable to avoid the peak summer months of May and June.

Photo Credit: Sridarshana Mukherji



# Go! Beyond

Perhaps the most popular destination for international tourists, Rajasthan is truly regal in all aspects. From palaces to the deserts, forts to lakes, and the cultural kaleidoscope spread across its length and breadth, the state is a favourite among one and all.

Photo Credit: Jatin Malhotra



## ALSISAR - BEAUTY FROM THE PAST

The small town of Alsisar, situated in the Jhunjhunu district in Rajasthan is an oasis with a regal history. Passed down as a legacy by Thakur Pahad Singh, Alsisar was made a capital by his son, Thakur Samarth Singh in the 18th century. The sultry breeze strokes your soul as you enter Alsisar Mahal, one of the most important landmarks in the quaint desert town. The architecture of the Alsisar Mahal is undoubtedly one of the finest depictions of Rajput architecture. A blast of colours in the midst of a desert, the Alsisar Mahal houses some of the most majestic fresco carvings, motifs and paintings depicting the history and grandeur of Rajasthani supremacy in true Shekhawati style. Tall facades and glazed marbles put together a vision that echoes with the exemplary craftsmanship of the Shekhawat Thikanedars who carved this poetic piece of architectural beauty at the edge of a desert.

Situated just 200 kilometres away from Jaipur, the Alsisar Mahal is a revelation in itself. The Badal Mahal or the Palace of Clouds which house chandeliers glistening and shimmering down colours in every hue making it a vision to behold. Apart from Alsisar Mahal, this town is renowned for its innumerable and exquisite havelis some of which still standing tall as a beautiful ode to its rich history like the Kejriwal Haveli, Ramjas Jhunjhunwala Ki Haveli and Thakur Chaatu Singh's cenotaph.



Photo Credit: Abhimanyu Singh



Photo Credit: Abhimanyu Singh

## UDAIPUR WORLD MUSIC FESTIVAL

The City of Lakes erupts in a crescendo of symphonies as winter slips into the warm embrace of spring each year in the month of February as it celebrates one-of-its-kind festival in the world, the Udaipur World Music Festival. As musicians and music lovers congregate at the scenic venues in Udaipur, the city is host to global artists from over 20 countries.

Organised by SEHER, the Udaipur Music Festival tugs at your heartstrings as you listen to the globe coming together in an unparalleled symphony. Be it the Celtic music of Spain or the gypsy tunes of the Balkan regions, you can be sure to be smitten by the language of music that transcends geographical boundaries barriers with effortless ease.

Photo Credit: Seher Foundation



Conducted on the Fateh Sagar Lake in Udaipur, the World Music Festival goes on for 3 days where over 150 musicians weave spells of magic as their fingers strum and percuss on their musical instruments and their voices resonate for a long long time. With the objective to make Udaipur a destination for World Music in South Asia, this platform connects people from different geographies through the single most potent language that knows no boundaries, which is music.





Photo Credit: Sanjoy Lahiri

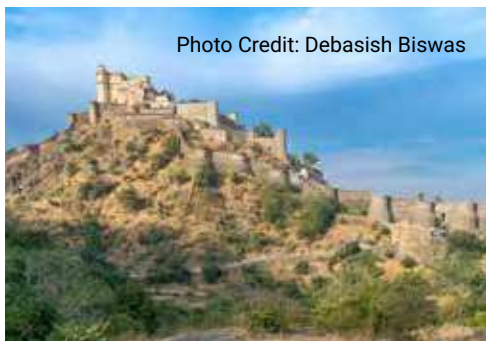


Photo Credit: Debasish Biswas

## KUMBHALGARH - AN EPITOME OF POWER

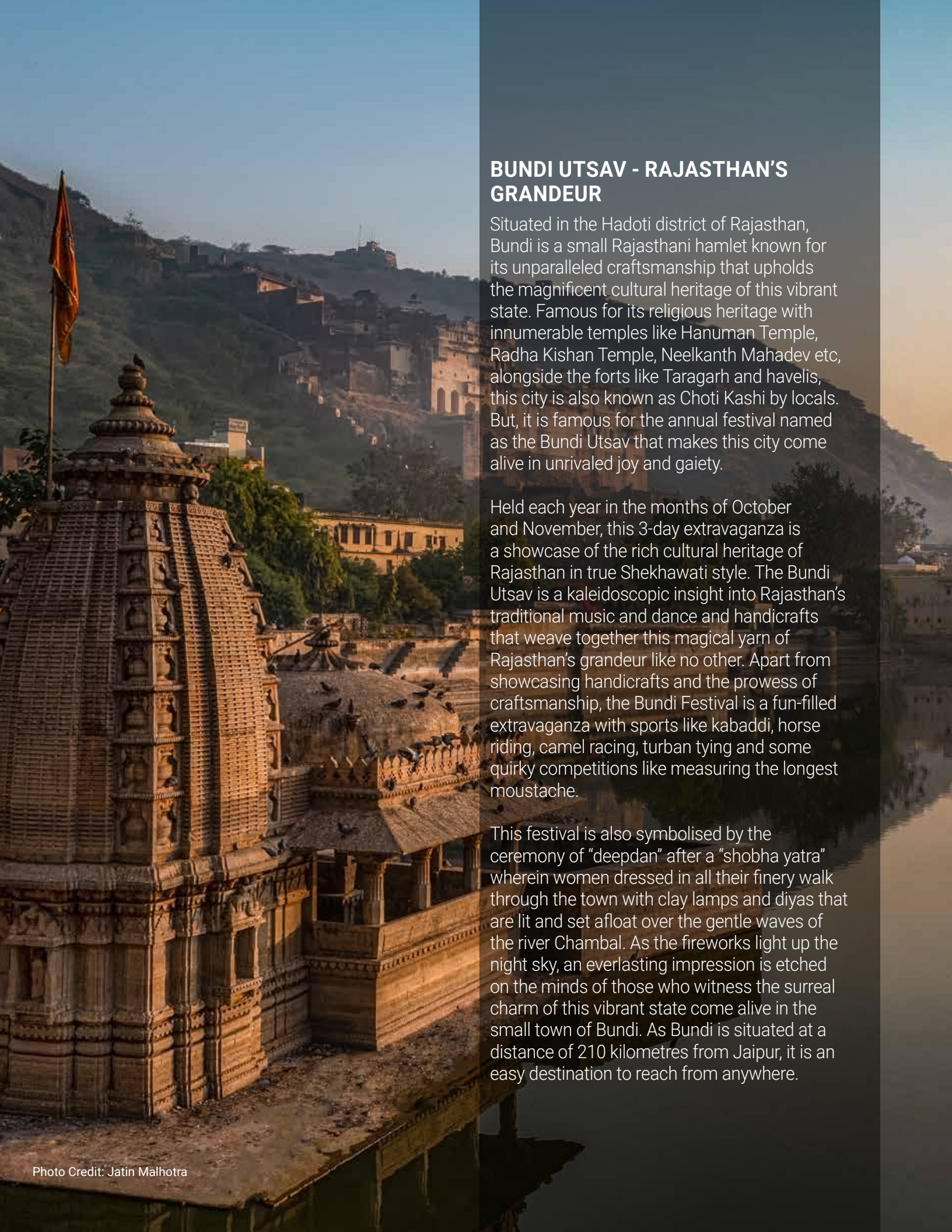
Rajasamand district in Rajasthan, a Mewar bastion hosts a national treasure that is not only a vanguard but also an inspiring piece of Rajput history, the Kumbhalgarh Fort. Running along the Aravalli Hills, this 15th century fortress is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is an epitome of the power and glory of the Mewar regime. Poised over the Aravalli Range the fortified walls of the fort go on for 36 kilometres and is the second longest wall after the Great Wall Of China and is one of the most incredible sights that one can see unfolding for miles in a bid to touch the horizon.



Photo Credit: Sabuj Sen

Constructed by Rana Kumbha, the Kumbhalgarh Fort is the birthplace of Rana Pratap, one of the iconic warriors to have set foot on the Indian terrain. For centuries, this fort has stood stoically witnessing the turmoil and offering refuge to the Rajputs and has been its strategic vanguard. This majestic fort encompasses a stone-pillared Shiva Temple and stately palaces that showcase the grandeur of the State of Rajputana in India. In the evening, a majestic show is held within its premises which recounts the tales of the bygone eras and lets one relive the pages of history. Situated just 82 kilometres from Udaipur, this fort is close to the Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary, the natural habitat of leopards.





## **BUNDI UTSAV - RAJASTHAN'S GRANDEUR**

Situated in the Hadoti district of Rajasthan, Bundi is a small Rajasthani hamlet known for its unparalleled craftsmanship that upholds the magnificent cultural heritage of this vibrant state. Famous for its religious heritage with innumerable temples like Hanuman Temple, Radha Kishan Temple, Neelkanth Mahadev etc, alongside the forts like Taragarh and havelis, this city is also known as Choti Kashi by locals. But, it is famous for the annual festival named as the Bundi Utsav that makes this city come alive in unrivaled joy and gaiety.

Held each year in the months of October and November, this 3-day extravaganza is a showcase of the rich cultural heritage of Rajasthan in true Shekhawati style. The Bundi Utsav is a kaleidoscopic insight into Rajasthan's traditional music and dance and handicrafts that weave together this magical yarn of Rajasthan's grandeur like no other. Apart from showcasing handicrafts and the prowess of craftsmanship, the Bundi Festival is a fun-filled extravaganza with sports like kabaddi, horse riding, camel racing, turban tying and some quirky competitions like measuring the longest moustache.

This festival is also symbolised by the ceremony of "deepdan" after a "shobha yatra" wherein women dressed in all their finery walk through the town with clay lamps and diyas that are lit and set afloat over the gentle waves of the river Chambal. As the fireworks light up the night sky, an everlasting impression is etched on the minds of those who witness the surreal charm of this vibrant state come alive in the small town of Bundi. As Bundi is situated at a distance of 210 kilometres from Jaipur, it is an easy destination to reach from anywhere.



## KHURI - OF SHIFTING SAND & CAMELS

The vast expanse of the desert with no end in sight is what unfolds as you step into the tiny Rajasthani hamlet of Khuri, 45 kilometres east of the Golden City, Jaisalmer. The tarred roads are covered by sand as the wind whispers the untold tales of the desert in hushed tones as it crosses from the desert to enter human habitats. Clusters of houses with thatched roofs and decorated doors and wall murals with men and women dressed in vibrant clothing provide a stark contrast to the shifting sands that make and break sand dunes in the vast desert. Lines of camels with their owners wait patiently to take tourists on a safari into the achingly beautiful romance of the endless desert dunes at sunset. The shadows of the camels lined one after the other moving in the sing-song cadence over the undulating dunes as the sun sets in the distance is a sight that is indelibly imprinted in the minds of those who catch the blessed sundown.



Photo Credit: Bipinchandra Christian

also go through the narrow village roads lined with shops selling some local handicrafts and indulge in the songs and dances that are often organised in the village precincts.

Khuri is accessible by train wherein Jaisalmer is the nearest railway station and by a well-knit network of roads. Jodhpur serves as the nearest airport, but it is about 300 kilometres away. Accommodation in Khuri is moderate and will



Photo Credit: Manoharan Govindarajan

As the horizon turns vermilion, sit by the desert and savour the taste of authentic and delicious Rajasthani cuisine that is served fresh and see the stars come up to light up the night sky. You can

provide basic amenities and as summers are intolerable due to the heat, winter months are the best time to visit this beautiful desolate town that thrives with the desert as its neighbour.



## NAGAUR CATTLE FAIR

A small Rajput hamlet located between Jodhpur and Bikaner, Nagaur hosts the historic cattle fair every year in the winter months of January and February. The origins of the fair date back to the time when King Umed Singh 56 years ago had invited the mystic, Shri Ramdeoji to Nagaur. It is from this legacy that the fair derives its name as the Ramdeoji cattle fair. Touted as a unique conglomeration, this fair invites tourists from far and wide alongside merchants who trade with close to 75,000 camels, bullocks and horses worth millions of dollars. Being a town fringed by the arid desert, animal husbandry is the major source of income and thus this fair helps the locals by providing them with transactions that sustain their livelihood.

Added to the hustle of the best of herds of animals displayed for trade, a plethora of events for entertainment are also arranged ranging from tug-of-war, camel races, cock fights and music and dance adding to the beauty of a simple village fair that showcases life of India in its authentic flavour. To add a tinge of spice, the mirchi bazaar or the market of red chillies is an added attraction where the condiment is traded in massive amounts and is often one of the largest chilli markets in India.



Photo Credit: Rajasthan Tourism



Photo Credit: Mukesh Chandra Yadav



Photo Credit: Rajasthan Tourism



## **BARMER - AN ENIGMA FOR ALL**

The rolling sands of Thar Desert on one side, Pali and Jodhpur on the eastern side and a border with Pakistan in the west, this is the geographical dynamic of India's fifth largest district located in Rajasthan. Barmer is a district whose geography is matched by its history steeped in the stories of its founder, Bahada Rao and how a brave warrior named Rawat Bhima established the present day city of Barmer in the year 1552. As the river Luni dissects the town of Barmer in the scorching summers with temperatures rising up to 51 degree Celsius, winters are equally harsh with lows of 0 degrees. It is in these extremes that Rajasthan thrives with elan and grace.

Once a prolific camel trade route, Barmer today is a rich district with unparalleled craftsmanship that quite literally is the saga of blood, sweat and tears etched on wood, pottery, embroidery and ajrak works. This area also hosts the Mallinath Cattle festival held in the Tilwara village and is known for the famous Barmer Garh fort along with the Jogamaya Devi temple and the Nagnechi Mata temple where Navratri is celebrated with pomp and grandeur. Dotted all over the district of Barmer are temples that are testimony to the rich historical legacy of Barmer with the Solanki style Kiradu Temples dedicated to Lord Shiva and Vishnu Temple on one hand and the pristine white Nakoda Jain Temple and Chintamani Parasnath Jain Temple on another. The Devka Sun temple and the Juna Fort and temple are legacies of Barmer's architectural glory. Barmer remains an enigma for travellers and nature lovers due to its unparalleled beauty and spectacular cultural heritage. Jodhpur serves as the nearest airport and railway station and it is connected to Barmer via a very good network of roads.

Photo Credit: Anukraman Singh Rathore



Photo Credit: Anukraman Singh Rathore



Photo Credit: Anukraman Singh Rathore





Photo Credit: Sumit Dhuper

**T**wo Persian words, 'Panj' meaning five and 'Ab' meaning water come together to describe India's overflowing granary; Punjab. The land of five perennial rivers, Sutlej, Jhelum, Ravi, Beas and Chenab, Punjab is where the golden paddy fields stretch endlessly, henna-covered hands swirl to the drum beats and where worship means (selfless sewa). From the poetry of Bulleh Shah to the bravery of Bhagat Singh, Punjab is the state from where heroes,

poets, mystics and saints have emerged to create the wave of nationalism in India.

Geographically, Punjab stands between the lofty hills of the Shivalik and the Indo-Gangetic plains, it is bounded by Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan bringing together a kaleidoscope of natural bounty. Punjab has one of the best developed roadways in the country, with dhabas selling sumptuous food all along the highways, the road to Punjab truly goes through the stomach.





Photo Credit:  
Sunil Kumar  
Dham

## HOW TO Reach

**By Air** – Amritsar and Chandigarh are the two airports connecting Punjab to all the other major Indian cities.

**By Train** – The Indian Railways has innumerable trains running to the state and reach almost every nook and cranny of the region. Few of the important stations are Amritsar, Bhatinda and Ludhiana.

**By Road** – The state of Punjab is very well connected from all sides by National Highways making it a very accessible state.



Photo Credit: Amit Singla



## ACCOMMODATION

Punjab in North India has plenty of stay options across the state. Hotels with great food spread as well as the many government-approved [Bed&Breakfast](#) make your stay in Punjab really memorable.



Photo Credit: Vinod E

## BEST TIME TO VISIT

The best time to visit Punjab is in the winter months when the weather is pleasant and the fields are lush green. Festivals like Baisakhi and Diwali also make for a great time to visit the state.

Photo Credit: Mushtak Mohammad



# Go! Beyond

A state with swaying mustard fields, prosperous villages, vibrant festivals and people who are known for the best hospitality, Punjab is every tourist's dream destination. This is also the land of Guru Nanak who founded the vibrant religion, Sikhism and people here are polyglots speaking fluently in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and English.



Photo Credit: Manish Jaisi





Photo Credit: 1. Amit Goswami | 2. Devraj Singh Rawat | 3. Chaitali Sarkar | 4. Devraj Singh Rawat | 5. Amit Goswami | 6. Chaitali Sarkar

## RURAL OLYMPICS - OF PRIDE AND VALOUR

Starting in the year 1933 by philanthropist Inder Singh Grewal to showcase the motto, 'Healthy mind in a healthy body', this is India's answer to the Olympics in the quirkiest of ways. Physical strength, mental agility, and healthy competition to achieve excellence are what make this very unconventional four-day celebration of sports a massive crowd-puller. Held each year in the month of February in Kila Raipur, a small township in the district just 15 km away from Ludhiana, this is a perfect exhibit to showcase some of India's oldest and most bizarre sports in their best versions.

From racing bullock carts and mules to tug-of-war, horse dancing to quirky events like pulling a

tractor by hair or dragging heavy farm machinery by teeth, or even lying unhurt under a heavy truck is displayed along with the ancient Khalsa martial art - Gatka. This sporting event is one-of-a-kind and certainly remains unparalleled the world over. Nothing in Punjab happens without a full-blown cultural and food bonanza and the Rural Olympics is no different. One can witness heart-throbbing motor stunts being performed while people in the periphery dance to the beat of the bhangra and the whole village reverberates in a state of ecstasy, one that is both prestigious and inspirational in today's hectic world.



## HOLLA MOHALLA IN ANANDPUR SAHIB

Holla Mohalla is a spectacular procession and a display of the amazing dexterity and agility of the Sikh warriors in their true ethnic flamboyance. Instituted by the tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh, this fascinating event traces its legacy back to the year 1701 when the historic hills of Shivaliks witnessed the prowess of the Sikh warriors in their splendour. The word 'Holla Mohalla' stands for "mock fight" and is celebrated on the first day of the lunar month of Chet, which usually falls in March. It has a rich legacy of valour, unity and combat-readiness, so much so that the Indian government accorded it the status of a national festival.

The Holla Mohalla follows the Hindu festival of colours Holi and this 3-day extravaganza gifts to its onlookers mock battles, exhibitions, display of armoury alongside a plethora of cultural activities like kirtans, music and poetry competitions with food being served in elaborate langars. On the last day a long procession, led by Panj Pyaras, starts from Takhat Keshgarh Sahib one of the five Sikh religious seats, and passes through various important Gurdwaras like Kila Anandgarh, Lohgarh, Mata Jito Ji and terminates at the starting place (Keshgarh Sahib) with Nihangs in their vibrant attire and turbans spearheading the procession with flare and fervour.



Photo Credit: Mushtak Mohammad

## AMRITSAR - OF FESTIVALS & FEASTING



1



2

The holy city of Amritsar is known for its world-famous Golden Temple, where people from all religion come together to take a dip in the holy waters of Amrit Sarovar. The kitchen of the temple is believed to be the largest in the world, serving 'langar' to thousands of guests every day. A visit to the Golden Temple in Diwali is an enthralling experience. The Gurudwara is lit with oil lamps on all sides and it is the most surreal experience one can ever imagine.

Amritsar is a city of many flavours. The Sufi Festival held in this golden city is another crowd puller. The saints and musicians come from all over the globe and sing about peace and harmony in poignant verse and poetry to instill ancient values of harmony and love among all. Organised under the auspices of Punjab Heritage and Tourism Promotion Board, this is a festival that lets soul-stirring ballads and poems bring about change and make people understand the path of divine love and everlasting brotherhood.



## SIRHIND - AN OPULENT TOWN

Just 45 km southwest to Chandigarh lies the silent city of Sirhind, a city that once was a crown jewel in the Mughal Sultanate with wealthy merchants, traders and bankers living across the town. This was the town where the high and mighty frequented, from Prithviraj Chauhan to Akbar The Great. Ironically, though that is not what makes this place famous. The town is remembered as the place where two young boys, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, the sons of the tenth guru of Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh were martyred thus making it one of the pilgrimage centres for Sikhs the world over.

Visiting Sirhind is like visiting a painful vision where the whitewashed Gurudwara Fatehgarh Sahib waits in deafening silence, the once beautiful Aam Khas Baug and the Jahaz haveli stand in desolation with its bricks wearing off and its shadows telling the tale of how treachery and war lead to the innocent souls being entombed alive in this tragic town of Sirhind. The town today is known for the Gurudwara Jyoti Sarup, Gurudwara Shahid Ganj, the Rauza Sharif, Mata Chakreshwari Devi Jain temple, the Das Nami Akhara, mosque of Sadhana Kasai and Sant Namdev temple, making it a place of pilgrimage for devotees throughout the year.

Photo Credit: Punjab Tourism



Photo Credit: Punjab Tourism

## FAZILKA HERITAGE FESTIVAL

Standing by the river Sutlej, in the rich agricultural belt which churns out rice and cotton, Fazilka is one of India's smallest towns. The 170-year-old town is a legacy of unspoilt India. This is the town that talks about the colonised town with the gridiron streets housing a Methodist church, a clock tower on one hand and speaks about the Indian heart by tempting you with Tosha sweets and the chaotic colourful bazaars of wool and textiles.

The Fazilka Heritage Festival is the story of a town that revels in its riches long after history has etched its surface with vagaries of colonisation and partition. This is the heritage festival of a town that has borne its culture through the years of pain and suffering and now revels in it every year when the Fazilka Heritage Festival lights up the city and showcases with pride the craftsmanship of the villagers, music and dances along with delectable food that lines the entire town square. Held under the auspices of the Graduates Welfare Association, Fazilka, the main aim of the heritage festival is to promote the Fazilka region with its rich culture and heritage and make it a global brand. Reaching Fazilka is easy as Amritsar International Airport and Bathinda Domestic Airport serve Fazilka.





Photo Credit: Punjab Tourism



Photo Credit: Punjab Tourism



Photo Credit: Punjab Tourism

## HARIKE WETLANDS AND WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Spread over 41 square kilometres, the Harike wetlands and wildlife sanctuary is located at the scenic confluence of two rivers, Sutlej and Beas and is the largest man-made wetland that spreads across Tarn Taran, Ferozepur and Kapurthala. Home to more than 400 avian species, this wetland was declared a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1999 and a Ramsar site by the International Body Of Wetlands under UNDP in 1990.

The blue skies are dotted with thousands of migratory birds during the cold winter months from far away lands like Siberia and the Arctic. It is a safe haven for some of the rarest ducks, wigeon, pin tail and brahminy ducks that come in thousands with numbers going up to 45,000 that have been recorded in peak months. Apart from the avian abundance, Harike is also home to innumerable reptilian and aquatic fauna like Indus river dolphins, smooth-coated otter and seven species of rare freshwater turtles making it a national treasure and an internationally renowned wildlife sanctuary that truly is a natural safe haven for wildlife in Northern India. Being very well connected the Harike Wetlands and Wildlife Sanctuary is a paradise for nature lovers, bird watchers and ornithologists who frequent it in large numbers along with photography enthusiasts and tourists.



# INDIA, A KALEIDOSCOPE OF RARE BEAUTIES

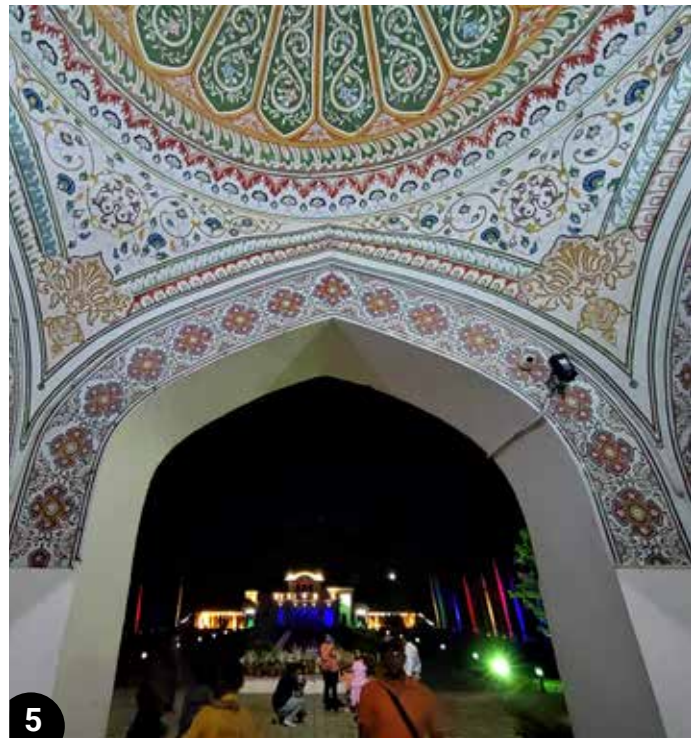
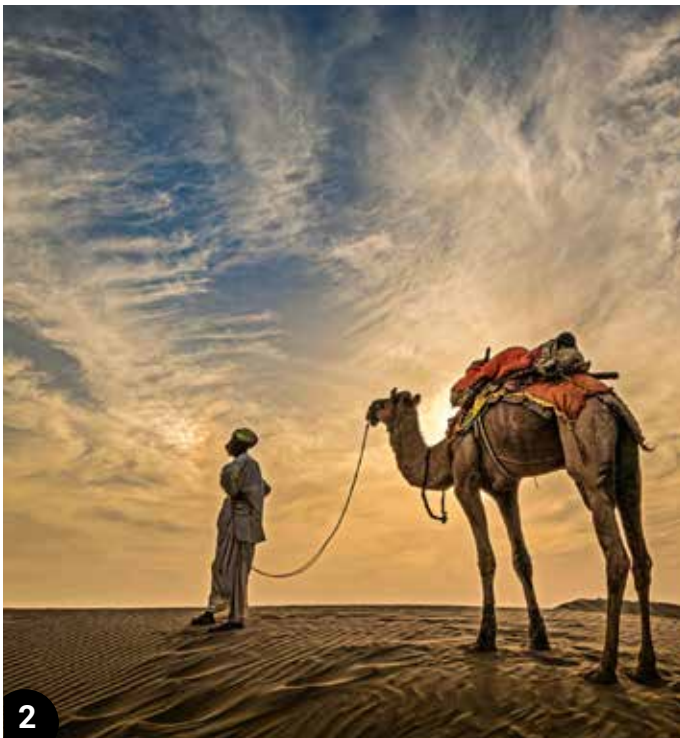


Photo Credit: 1. Manish Jaisi 2. Kishore Das 3. Asok Banerjee 4. Nalin Pandey 5. Asis Kumar Chatterjee



# CHANDIGARH



**A** fertile piece of land with the backdrop of the Shivalik Ranges, Chandigarh is a Union Territory that serves as the capital city of two states; Haryana and Punjab. One of India's perfectly planned cities under the keen supervision of Swiss born architect, Le Corbusier, Chandigarh is a perfect example of meticulous urban planning that is inspirational.

Known for its famous Chandi Mandir, from where it derives its name, Chandigarh is a culmination of people of various creed, ethnicity and religion which make it a throbbing place to be in. Chandigarh's history dates back to the Indus Valley Civilization and archeological excavations that have yielded pottery and artefacts from 2500-1700 BCE. This puts Chandigarh among some of the most fascinating cities to visit in India.



# HOW TO Reach

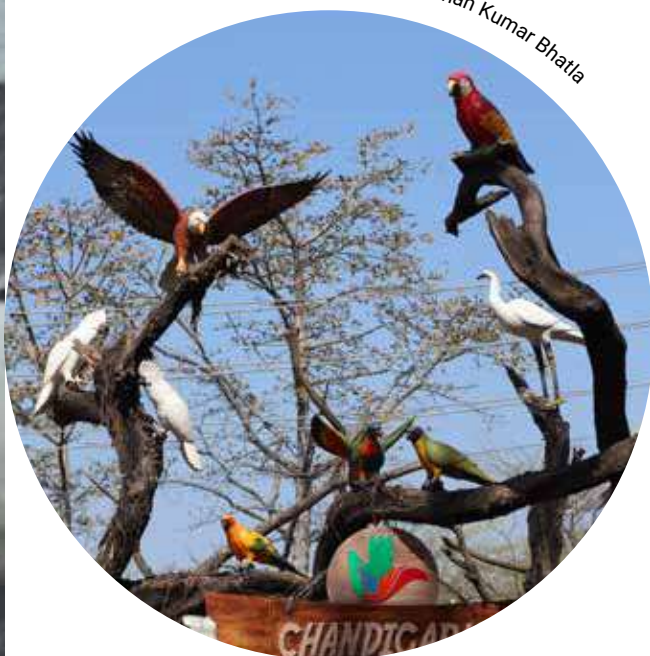
**By Air** - The Chandigarh International airport has frequent flights from all across India and also from important international cities.

**By Train** - The Chandigarh railway station is connected by trains from many cities across India. From long-distance trains to short-distance super fast Shatabdi trains, the options are plenty.

**By Road** - Chandigarh, very close to Delhi, the national capital is very well connected by roads with multiple highways crossing from all sides. Chandigarh is also the starting point for many hill stations in Himachal Pradesh and J&K, thus making it an important pit stop for road travellers.

## ACCOMMODATION

Chandigarh is a very important city in North India for both leisure as well as corporate travellers and thus has plenty of good [stay options](#). However, book in advance to have an amazing stay in this wonderfully planned city.



## BEST TIME TO VISIT

Chandigarh in northern India is a destination best visited in spring and winter. The month of January gets chilly due to its proximity to the hills. However, the summer months of May and June should be best avoided as it can get really hot.



# Cool! Beyond

Chandigarh, the only planned city in India is simply beautiful. Wide roads, curated green corridors and perfect city planning make this a city of dreams. Know for the very famous Rock Garden, Sukhna Lake, and shopping hotspots across the city, Chandigarh is a must-visit if one wants to see what modern-day cities should look like.

## CAPITOL COMPLEX - THE HERITAGE SITE

The first planned city of India, Chandigarh has one more feather on its cap with the Capitol Complex. Designed by the legendary architect Le Corbusier, this unique complex has the status of UNESCO World Heritage. With the Shivalik Hills as the backdrop, this architectural wonder spread over 100 acres is a beauty to behold. The Capitol Complex houses the state Assembly, Secretariat, and the High Court. The iconic Open Hand Monument present here has become synonymous with Chandigarh city. With the philosophy of “open to give, open to receive” the monument is the emblem of Chandigarh. The Capitol Complex also houses the Martyrs’ Memorial paying homage to the martyrs of partition.



Photo Credit: Chandigarh Tourism





Photo Credit: Chandigarh Tourism



Photo Credit: Chandigarh Tourism

## ZAKIR HUSSAIN ROSE GARDEN

Spread over 30 acres of land and named after India's former president, the Zakir Hussain Rose Garden is a colour riot with over 50,000 rose bushes that bud and bloom in 1600 species. Apart from being one of Asia's largest rose gardens, this expanse of green is home to many medicinal trees and shrubs like bel, camphor and gulmohar.

Established in 1967, this iconic garden is a mesmerising place where every inch is covered by a floral embellishment and every turn offers a new hue on the canvas of earth. Replete with colourful petals and aroma of blooming roses, the rose garden is a delight to experience.

The Zakir Hussain Rose Garden plays host to a number of festivals with the Rose Festival being the showstopper. Hosted in the last week of February, this is a sight for sore eyes. Events of landscaping, gardening, photography and the array of cultural and food festivals make for some amazing experiences while walking through the rows of neatly manicured lawns with giant rose blooms named after eminent personalities like Lal Bahadur Shastri, John F. Kennedy and Queen Elizabeth. Walk down the Rose Garden like you would tread on heaven and experience nature when she puts on her floral finery.



**F**lanked by three states and two Union Territories, Haryana is one of the most prolific states in India that lies snugly between the fertile plains of Yamuna, the Aravalli Hills and the majestic Shivalik Ranges. Historically, this is known as the Abode Of Hari or Lord Vishnu and brims with tales that define India. Known to be the land where Bhagwad Gita found its voice on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, this pious state is the birthplace of one of the defining pieces of India's religious identity, Hinduism. From the war of Kurukshetra to the historic invasion led by Alexander and finally to the Battle of Panipat which ushered in the Mughal dynasty, Haryana bears on its soul the imprint of change and struggle leading to evolution and greatness.

Haryana is also the state that ushers in the face of the new India with luminaries such as Kalpana Chawla and many Olympians who have made India proud, Haryana is India's crown jewel that evokes sentiments of nationalism and pride.





## HOW TO Reach

**By Air** - The Chandigarh International Airport is the main airport connecting Haryana to all major cities in India. However, one can also fly to Delhi and drive down to places in Haryana.

**By Train** - The Indian Railways has a great network with a plethora of important stations in Haryana like Kalka, Faridabad and Karnal to name a few.

**By Road** - Being strategically located close to the national capital, Haryana has a labyrinth of national highways connecting the state with all major Indian cities.



## ACCOMMODATION

Haryana has [stay options](#) for all budgets. You can choose from government guest houses, B&B, and a plethora of city hotels to enjoy the great hospitality that the state offers.



Photo Credit: Asis Kumar Chatterjee



Photo Credit: Ravi Kumar

## BEST TIME TO VISIT

Haryana in northern India is a destination best visited in spring and winter. The month of January gets chilly due to its proximity to the hills. However, the summer months of May and June should be best avoided as it can get really hot.

# Go! Beyond

A close neighbour to the capital city of Delhi, Haryana is an amalgamation of culture, religion and modernity. Gurugram, in NCR (National Capital Region) is the technology hub of North India and is very much a thriving megapolis. And on the other hand, Haryana has Kurukshetra steeped in history.



Photo Credit: Rajesh Kumar



## DAMDAMA LAKE - A QUICK GETAWAY

Surrounded by Aravalli Hills on the sides, the shimmering waters of the Damdama Lake ripple in the soft breeze that flows as a soothing balm over the city-sore souls. Situated at a mere 60 kilometres from Delhi, this is the capital's best known haunt for a respite from the daily humdrum of life. A couple of hours on the road leads to this drop of elixir with unmatched scenic beauty. One of the biggest reservoirs commissioned to harvest rainwater in the natural basin at the foothills of the Aravallis, this lake is a sight to behold in the monsoons. Apart from attracting tourists, this lake is a haven for over 190 species of migratory birds. Damdama Lake is in close proximity to the Northern Aravalli Leopard Wildlife corridor stretching from Sariska Tiger Reserve to the Delhi Ridge. Apart from an array of fun-filled activities like boating, parasailing, cycling and rock climbing, one can also explore the sulphur springs of Sohna and witness the ancient Shiva Temple which is greatly revered by locals.

The Damdama Lake is a paradise for nature lovers as the nearby 40 acre Damdama Biodiversity Park offers fantastic activities for children showcasing the ecological diversity with a plethora of fun activities like bullock cart rides, Tarzan's swing cricket, Burma Bridge, camel rides to give them a fun-filled experience.



Photo Credit: Haryana Tourism



## KURUKSHETRA - DATE WITH HISTORY

Named after King Kuru, the ancestor of Kauravas and Pandavas in the magnum opus, Mahabharata, Kurukshetra is the region where King Kuru had chosen to plough the land with a golden plough and sowed eight seeds of virtues that make a man. A piece of land between two rivers, Saraswati and Drishadvati, Kurukshetra is said to have been given the boon that anyone dying here will attain nirvana and go to heaven. Values of austerity, truth, compassion, forgiveness, purity, charity and devotion are deep-rooted in the creation of this holy land which has been the epicentre of classics and a crucible for the promulgation of Hinduism in India.



Photo Credit: Iqbal Singh

Kurukshetra's tryst with kings reached its pinnacle during the reign of King Harsha and it finds mention in the chronicles of Hieun Tsang. Also known as Thaneswar, the region was a part of the Mauryan Empire and also became a stronghold for Buddhism. This plurality found a new dimension when the Mughal Sultanate captured it. The imprints of each and every religion and dynasty that ruled over Kurukshetra have embellished its already glorious history.

From innumerable places of pilgrimage for Hindus like Brahma Sarovar which hosts the annual holy bath on Somvati Amavasya to Jyotishwar, the birth place of Gita; the land of Kurukshetra seeps in Indianness. Kurukshetra finds mention in the first verse of Bhagavad Gita and is known as Dharmakshetra. It holds the annual Gita Mahotsav, an elaborate event on Bhagavad Gita in October-November each year where more than 300 stalls are set up around the Brahma Sarovar and chantings from the holy text fill the air.

Photo Credit:

1. Meghna Jain
2. Keshav Krishana Arora
3. Keshav Krishana Arora





## PINJORE GARDENS

Deep in the Panchkula district of Haryana lies the most exuberant display of Mughal architecture in its divine avatar, the Pinjore Gardens. Designed to perfection by Nawab Fadai Khan, the foster brother of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, this piece of Mughal history is one that speaks through nature.

Combining Mughal and Rajput styles of architecture gives rise to this exquisite beauty with the stately Sheesh Mahal, Jal Mahal and Rang Mahal bringing together the best of both worlds to give this architectural marvel a defining look that is unique. Whispering waterfalls, gurgling fountains with lush lawns and giant cypress trees usher in nature in its best attire. After the demise of Nawab Fadai Khan and the end of the Mughal Sultanate, this garden was entombed by wilderness and it was Maharaja Yadindra Singh of Patiala who restored this elegant architectural gem to its former glory. Today, the



Pinjore Gardens are the hermitage of people from all walks of life who tread on the historic paths to come home to nature. It is famous for the special programmes that are held during the Baisakhi festival and the famous Mango festival that lets you taste the king of fruits standing on the regal pathways where once royalty tread.

Photo Credit: Nikhil Panchal



## MATA MANSA DEVI TEMPLE

Situated in Panchkula in Haryana, the Mata Mansa Devi temple is 200 years old, spread over 100 acres, and is one of the most revered Hindu temples in India. Considered to be one of the shakti peeths in the country, this is considered to be the place where the head of Sati Devi had fallen thus making it one of the holiest places of worship for Hindus. The temple complex has two temples,

one of which is dedicated to Mansa Devi. Said to have been constructed by Maharaja Gopal Singh of Manimajra, this temple not only symbolises the faith of Hinduism, but it is also symbolic of the coming together of both Hindu and Mughal architecture. Domes and minarets tower high above the main shrine which is laid out in the panchayatana style of architecture. The main shrine is surrounded by four shrines each represented by the distinct minarets in four corners. This confluence of faith and culture is something that makes this holy temple truly majestic.

Adjoining the main temple lies the Patiala Shivalaya temple constructed in 1840 by Maharaja Karam Singh. Since the temple is dedicated to Shakti, Navratri is celebrated here with pomp and grandeur every year along with the Shardiya Navratra Mela which is celebrated in the months of March and April.





## BHIMA DEVI TEMPLE

A chance archeological excavation led to the unearthing of one of the most exquisite Gurjara-Pratihara temples dating back to 8th to 11th century AD, now known as the Bhima Devi Temple Complex which is located in Pinjore, Haryana. Intricately carved erotic sculptures found here have given it the nickname of Khajuraho of North India. The archeological excavations in the region date back to the Palaeolithic period and tell the tales of the earliest known inhabitants. Popular belief links the town of Pinjore and the Bhima Devi temple to the presence of Pandavas and is an exemplary piece of architecture that has been unearthed. Legend also states that Bhima Devi belongs to the Shakti tradition which was derived from the Buddhist tantric goddess.

Over 100 artefacts including the central shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva, are similar to those found in Khajuraho and Bhubaneswar, and stand testimony to the rich cultural lineage that Pinjore carries. Intricate sculptures of Gods and Goddesses along with motifs of animals and human figures showcase the immaculate and exquisite craftsmanship that prevailed in the region thus making Bhima Devi Temple a cornerstone in unearthing and piecing together the illustrious historical legacy of India.



## MORNI HILLS

Just about 45 kilometres from Chandigarh lies the only hill station in the state of Haryana, the splendid Morni Hills. Amidst lush green meadows with the mighty Shivalik as a backdrop, the Morni Hills offer respite to the city-sore eyes of tourists. Situated at an altitude of 1220 metres above sea level, the Morni Hills and the village are named after a queen who reigned in the region.

Lavender blooms of Jacaranda trees along with neem line the road that leads to Panchkula and the air becomes crisp and clean permeating your senses and invigorating your soul. The Morni Hills are nature's way of giving respite from the arid plains below. Lush green vegetation covers the entire landscape with pines crowning the top of the hills offering a picturesque scenery. The beauty of Morni is accentuated by the two lakes that stand in tranquillity skirted by the hills on both sides. Trek to the Morni Fort and be enthralled by the 17th century edifice that has manicured lawns and breathtaking views. Alternatively, one could also visit the Pandava Temple or the Thakur Dwar Temple which has carvings and shrines that date back to the 10th century. For adventure enthusiasts, trekking, bird-watching and rock climbing are in the offing apart from camping and stargazing.



Photo Credit: Hardik

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