

HIKE THE HIMALAYAS
OXFAM
12 – 22 October 2007

Nothing in this country is ever quite what you expect! The fifty years of freedom from colonial rule have seen a remarkable transformation. Despite the rapid pace of change after fifty years of freedom from colonial rule, many traditions remain firmly rooted and India has retained a profound cultural distinctiveness. Today India is one of the most richly rewarding regions of the world to visit. Its scenery is amongst the most varied and exciting anywhere.

The Himalayas are one of Nature's most magnificent mountain ranges spreading 1,550 miles across South Asia. The Great Himalayas are perpetually snow-covered, home to the highest mountain in the world, Mount Everest. Our challenge is to trek 5 days in the foothills of the Middle or Lesser Himalayas, starting from the hill town of Shimla or, as it is known in India, "Simla" - the capital of the Himachal Pradesh state, north-west India. We will be following trails on the mountainside through pine, oak and cedar woodland which is home to elusive deer and leopard. We end our stay in India with an overnight train journey down to Agra to witness one of the world's modern wonders, the breath-taking Taj Mahal.

Day 1

Overnight flight from London – Delhi.

Day 2

Delhi

Late morning arrival, free time in Delhi with the chance to take part in an optional tour or relax at the hotel.

Day 3

Delhi – Kalka

Transfer by train (5-6 hour journey)

Kalka – Shimla

Transfer 96km by Toy Train (approx 5 hours)

Early morning transfer to train station to catch the train to Kalka. From Kalka we change trains for a really special start to this challenge: the famous narrow -gauge "Toy Train" which takes us all the way to the hill station of Shimla. This is a spectacular journey chugging through scenic river valleys, pine forests and 107 tunnels and bridges. The seats on the train are wooden, so have something soft to hand to sit on. The leisurely 96km route will take about 5 hours – it is one of the biggest attractions of the area and will be worth it! We arrive late afternoon have dinner and overnight at Hotel Asia the Dawn, Shimla.

Day 4

Monkey Temple

7-8km / 4 hours approx.

Free time to adjust to the climate and recover from the journey. Shimla is at an altitude of 2,159m and set deep in the foothills of the Himalayas. It is the capital of the Himachal Pradesh province and it is India's largest and most famous hill station. It is not difficult to understand why the British chose this spot as their summer capital with its clean, cool air and spectacular panoramic views across the snow-capped Greater Himalaya mountain range.

This morning we stretch our legs with a challenging half-day hike in the hills around Shimla. The trail is on dirt roads and good paths, undulating from time to time dipping down to a stream then up a series of steps to the Monkey Temple where we take a short break. Then it's a 20 minute steep uphill to rejoin the road back to Shimla where we have lunch and spend the rest of the afternoon relaxing. Overnight at Hotel Asia the Dawn, Shimla.

Day 5

Shimla – Junga / Transfer to Shillon Bagh **16-18km/ 6 – 7 hours approx.**

Today is a beautiful hike with the highlight being a visit to the Palace of Junga. We begin with a 2km walk along the Shimla – Solan road to the end of the village. We turn off the road and trek up a series of steps through a very peasant forest trail. After about 2 hours we reach the Tara Devi temple where we take a short break to visit the temple. From the temple the path we take is downhill, part on-road but mostly off-road along dirt tracks. The steepness of the trail makes this the most challenging part of today's walk. At the bottom of the valley we cross a river over a small bridge and then walk up the other side. We join with a good dirt road which leads to the village of Junga. Transfer to Shillon Bagh (approx 1½ hours).

Day 6

Shillon Bagh – Chail / Transfer to Kandaghat **16-18km/ 8 hours approx.**

Another long hike in the foothills of the Himalayas this time in the forests around Chail, it will be slightly less challenging than yesterday. We spend the day following an undulating path through pine forest, across a river and joining a quiet road once or twice. At midday we have a picnic lunch, then continue for the rest of the day through forest and local villages all the way to Chail. We meet our coach transfer here (approx 1 hour) to take us to Kandaghat where we overnight.

Day 7

Trek Kandaghat – Mount Karol - Solan **20- 22km / 8-9 hours approx.**
Transfer to Parwanoo

Today is perhaps the most challenging as we will be climbing uphill for most of the morning to the pass of Mount Karol, gaining about 1,000 metres above sea level. The scenery is mountainous and lush on the way up. We pass a small temple and should also catch sight of vultures soaring majestically across the skies. The climb will be worth it as we are rewarded with fantastic panoramic views from the top of the snow-capped Himalayas and across the whole region from Shimla to Chandigahr. After a well-deserved lunch we descend down the other side, on forest trails to a cave temple. From here it is undulating terrain to Solan where we take our coach to Parwanoo (approx 1 ½ hours). The last part of the transfer is by cable car (the only way we can reach the hotel) to the top of the mountain where we overnight at the Timber Trail Resort. This is a spectacular resting place with views across the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas and down into the green, sweeping valleys below. A fitting finish to an unforgettable day!

Day 8

Parwanoo – Sikh Temple – Parwanoo **18km / 5-6 hours approx.**
Transfer to Kalka for train to Tundala **11 ½ hour train journey**

The last day of trekking in the foothills of the Himalayas. After a gentle walk on good dirt tracks we arrive at a Sikh Temple and celebrate the end of the trek. Transfer back to the Timber Trail Hotel at the bottom the mountain for dinner followed by a transfer (approx 1 ½ hours) to Kalka train station to catch the overnight train to Agra. The train departs at 2330 hrs and takes about 11 hours.

Day 9

Agra

Arrive in Tundala late morning and take the 1 hour transfer to Agra, home of the Taj Mahal. Volumes have been written about the perfection of this monument but the reality never fails to overwhelm all who see it. Lunch and entry to the Taj Mahal are included on this day. Overnight in Agra. This evening we enjoy a celebratory dinner.

Day 10**Agra - Delhi**

This morning we may have chance to visit an Oxfam project in Agra. We then take a coach transfer to Delhi (approx 5 hours). Overnight in Delhi. Lunch is not included today.

Day 11

Transfer to the airport for our flight home to London.

This is a complex itinerary and is subject to change

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