



Trekkers Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

The hotels in India are as varied as the county in both style and price. In Delhi this can vary from a dormitory in a budget hotel where a bed will set you back US\$5, to stay a five-star, top-of-the-range hotel where a room can set you back over US\$500 a night. And that's before state government and luxury taxes that can add 30% to the bill. Once into the hills, hotel rates are considerably more affordable. A room in a budget hotel would be in the vicinity of US\$10 with or without private facilities; a mid range hotel US\$30 with private facilities to over US\$250 or more if you plan on having a room in a converted Maharajah's palace.

There are also seasonal variations. The high season in the Indian Himalaya extends from April through to June, and from mid-September until the end of October, which coincides with the student holidays and with a growing Indian- middle-class quest to stay for a week or two in the hills. Accordingly, many of the mid-range and

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upmarket hotels increase their rates by up to 50%. In some towns it may be difficult, although never impossible, to find a bed for the night. Shoulder season is generally July and August and low season November to the end of March. During these times rates are negotiable – although this is often not the ideal time to undertake a trekking expedition.

If booking in advance, try, if possible, to check out the style and structure of the hotel. In Leh, most hotels are two-storied, whitewashed structures in harmony with the surroundings. In Himachal and Uttarakhand some of the newly constructed hotels are more in keeping with

PRACTICALITIES

- The electric current is 230V to 240V, keep a multi-adapter with two-pin sockets and stock up on batteries before heading off on the trek.
- India has been using the metric system since 1966 although it is still possible to see milestones on some one of the smaller roads.
- All important documents including passport, credit cards, travel insurance etc should be photocopied before leaving home. Leave one copy at home and keep another one separately from the original.
- Visit the local offices of the Department of Forests and Wildlife that often have useful information on the region's flora and fauna.



developments in Mumbai or Delhi than the Himalaya.

In more remote locations before and after the trek look out for Forest Rest Houses (FRH) and Public Work Department (PWD) huts. Some are simply appointed with a verandah and string bed, others include carpet in the bedrooms and hot water. They come complete with a caretaker who can cook excellent Indian dishes. Expect to pay between US\$10 and US\$25 per night.

For further details refer to the Where to Stay section in the trekking chapters.

On the Trek

A major decision before leaving home is deciding whether you want to camp on the

trek or whether to go on a lodge-based trek. This will impact on what equipment you bring with you as well as the actual trek you can undertake. In Ladakh the Himalayan homestays are as close as you will get to lodge-style trekking in Nepal, but with Ladakhi cuisine at night. The state government tourist wings – the Garhwal Mandal Vikas Niwas (GMVN) and the Kumaon Mandal Vikas Niwas (KMVN) – in Uttarakhand have built lodges on some of the most popular treks. Room tariffs range from Rs 500/US\$12.50 to Rs 1000/US\$25 per night. Before booking bear in mind that these need to be booked well in advance particularly in the school holidays in May and June when large groups of Indian students hit the trails.

LODGE-BASED TREKKING IN INDIA

Compared to the popular treks in the Annapurna and Everest regions of Nepal, there are few comparable lodge-based trekking itineraries in the Indian Himalaya. On some trails there may be a Dak Bungalow or a Forest Rest House built to accommodate forest or other government officers. There might be a parachute tent in Ladakh, while elsewhere you may expect a simple lodge run by either the state government or a local family. Then again a very basic pilgrim shelter may be just about it. Whatever is available is basic at best. Expect simple, often dormitory-type rooms. Do not expect hot showers, thick mattresses, heating or similar creature comforts experienced in Nepal. If food is provided, expect *dhal bhat* (lentils and rice) and perhaps some vegetables, not a menu of pizza and apple pie. Indeed, it has been said that a trek in India is comparable to trekking in Nepal in the late 1960s or early 1970s.

On the majority of the treks in India, you will need to bring a tent, sleeping bag and insulated mat together with a supply of food and cooking gear. Add to this your personal gear and you will probably need to consider employing a porter or two. This will naturally impact on your budget and the choice of treks open to you.

The following is a brief summary of treks that may be undertaken in India without the use of a tent, and where you can expect food to be cooked for you at night:

- In Ladakh, parachute-tent accommodation (ex-Indian Air Force parachutes) is often as good as it gets during the peak season (July and August). The Himalayan Homestays cover most but not all the stages when undertaking the Markha Valley trek, while the parachute options are available on some but not all of the stages on the Phugtal Gompa & Shingo La trek and Singge La & Lamayuru trek.
- In Himachal Pradesh, a shortened version of the Chandrakani Pass & Malana trek can be completed without tents or elaborate organisation.
- In Uttarakhand, some of the more popular treks can be undertaken staying over night at one of the GMVN and the KMVN lodges. These include the Har ki Dun trek, the trek as far as Dodi Tal and the Source of the Ganges trek. In the Kumaon the Pindari Glacier trek can be undertaken without a tent and food supplies.
- In Darjeeling, the Singalila Ridge & Phalut trek requires a tent and supplies for at least two days. If you wish to trek from lodge to lodge, consider the alternative route from Mana Bhanjang to Sandakphu, although this now follows a dirt road for most of the way.
- In Sikkim, there are lodges on the Dzongri & Goecha La trek. However, this is not a do-it-yourself trek, as all trekking arrangements must be made through a recognised agent in Gangtok.