



Himachal Pradesh

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Best Places to Eat

- » Moonpeak Thali (p324)
- » Lazy Dog Lounge (p309)
- » Indian Coffee House (p286)
- » Jakhu Temple (p283)

Best Places to Stay

- » Chonor House Hotel (p322)
- » Chapslee (p284)
- » Norling Guest House (p328)
- » Veer Guest House (p307)

Why Go?

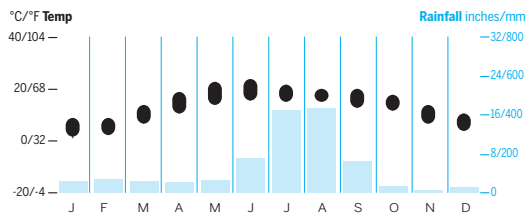
With spectacular peaks and gorgeous river valleys, Himachal is India's outdoor adventure playground. From trekking and climbing to rafting, paragliding and skiing, if it can be done in the mountains, it can be done here. Yet Himachal offers much more than just a shot of alpine adrenaline.

Across the state, traditional Himachali culture flourishes amid Himalayan landscapes. Villages perched on staggering slopes enchant with fairy tale wood-and-stone architecture and the easygoing grace of the people who live there. Elsewhere, hill stations appeal with colonial-era charm, while groovy backpacker magnets lure with their legendary local charas.

In many places, you might think you've stumbled into Tibet. But the ancient Buddhist monasteries, troves of Buddhist arts, and the home-away-from-home of the Dalai Lama are just another part of the essence of Himachal.

When to Go

Manali



Jan/Feb Tibetan New Year is celebrated across Himachal.

May-Jun & Mid-Sep-Oct Outside the monsoon season is perfect for trekking.

Nov-Apr Great for skiers, but snow blocks the high passes to the Lahaul and Spiti Valleys.

Food

Himachal is the best place in India to get a taste of authentic Tibetan cuisine. *Momos* (steamed or fried dumplings), *thuk-pas* (noodle soups) and breads made from *tsampa* (barley flour) are found virtually everywhere. Tasty and cheap, these dishes hit the spot when you're not in the mood for curry.

Carnivores enjoy traditional Himachali food, which frequently features chicken or fresh trout from the region's streams. Most vegetarian specialities are flavourful dhal-based concoctions, often mixed with yoghurt, paneer or potatoes. Himachal is also known for producing India's finest apples, harvested in autumn.

DON'T MISS

McLeod Ganj isn't called 'Little Lhasa' just because it's the seat of the Tibetan government-in-exile; it's infused with a living blend of ancient and contemporary Tibetan culture, from arts to religion to food. The nearby **Norbulingka Institute** is among the best places in the world to see exquisite Tibetan crafts being handmade by masters and their apprentices.

Further east, Himachal's stretch of the **Great Himalayan Circuit** – a demanding and sometimes terrifying road – crosses towering mountain passes as it traverses the **Lahaul and Spiti Valleys**. A remote land of rugged, elemental beauty, you'll find countless trekking opportunities near some of the highest villages and Buddhist monasteries on earth. A favourite gateway to this region is **Manali**, Himachal's outdoor adventure capital, with activities from the relaxed (walking) to the intense (mountaineering or heli-skiing) to the absurd (zorbng).

Top State Festivals

- » Losar (Jan/Feb, McLeod Ganj, p316, Lahaul, p337, Spiti p339) Tibetan New Year is celebrated with processions, music and dancing, and masked performances by monks in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries.
- » Ladarcha Fair (Aug, Kaza, p340) An ancient trade fair celebrated in Spiti, with Buddhist dances, mountain sports and bustling rural markets.
- » Phulech Festival (Sep/Oct, Kalpa, p293, Sangla p292) Villagers throughout Kinnaur fill temple courtyards with flowers of intoxicating fragrance; oracles perform sacrifices and make predictions for the coming year.
- » Dussehra (Oct, Kullu, p300) An intense celebration of the defeat of the demon Ravana, with a huge parade led by the chariot of Raghunath (Rama).
- » International Himalayan Festival (10-12 Dec, McLeod Ganj, p316) Celebrating the Dalai Lama's Nobel Peace Prize, this festival promotes peace and cultural understanding with Buddhist dances and music.

MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

Shimla, Dharamsala and towns in the Kullu Valley are connected to Delhi by direct buses and air services. A long and wild road connects Manali to Leh, in Ladakh.

Fast Facts

- » Population: 6.9 million
- » Area: 55,673 sq km
- » Capital: Shimla
- » Main languages: Hindi, Pahari, Punjabi
- » Sleeping prices: \$ below ₹800, \$\$ ₹801 to ₹2000, \$\$\$ above ₹2000

Top Tip

If travelling between the Spiti and Kinnaur Valleys, foreigners must obtain an easy-to-get Inner Line Permit in Kaza (see the boxed text p340), Rekong Peo (p293) or Shimla (see the boxed text p287). Permits are also required for some Tibetan-border-area treks.

Resources

- » Himachal Tourism (www.hptdc.gov.in)
- » US Military maps (www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/ams/india/), useful for trekking
- » Online bus info and booking (www.hrtc.gov.in), (www.hptdc.nic.in/bus.htm)