



# Himachal Pradesh

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## Best Places to Stay

- ▶ Chonor House (p326)
- ▶ Norling Guest House (p331)
- ▶ Orchard Hut (p338)

## Best Off the Beaten Track

- ▶ Nako(p347)
- ▶ Lhalung Monastery (p346)
- ▶ Chitkul (p295)

## Why Go?

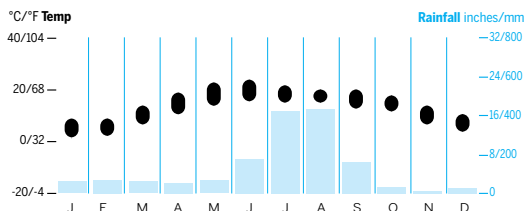
With spectacular peaks and gorgeous river valleys, Himachal is India's outdoor adventure playground. From trekking and climbing to rafting, paragliding and skiing, if it can be done in the mountains, it can be done here. Yet Himachal offers much more than just a quick fix of alpine adrenaline.

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 blissed-out vibe and mountain trails.

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; plenty of festivals in October.

**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), *thukpa* (noodle soup) and *thenthuk* (noodle squares) 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 yogurt, *paneer* (unfermented cheese made from milk curd) 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. It's the perfect place to volunteer with the refugee community, study Tibetan or simply learn how to make Tibetan *momos*.

Further east, Himachal's stretch of the **Great Himalayan Circuit** crosses towering mountain passes as it traverses the spectacular **Lahaul** and **Spiti Valleys**. In a remote land of rugged, elemental beauty, you'll find countless trekking opportunities beside 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 (zorbing).

## Top State Festivals

- ➔ **Losar** (☺ Jan/Feb; McLeod Ganj, p320, Spiti, p342) Tibetan New Year is celebrated with processions, music and dancing, and masked performances by monks in Buddhist monasteries.
- ➔ **Ladarcha Fair** (☺ Aug; Kaza, p343) An ancient trade fair celebrated in Spiti, these days with Buddhist dances, mountain sports and bustling rural markets.
- ➔ **Phulech Festival** (☺ Sep/Oct; Kalpa, p296, Sangla, p294) Villagers throughout Kinnaur fill temple courtyards with flowers; oracles perform sacrifices and make predictions for the coming year.
- ➔ **Dussehra** (☺ Oct; Kullu, p303) An intense celebration of the defeat of the demon Ravana, with a huge parade led by a chariot-bound god.
- ➔ **International Himalayan Festival** (☺ 10-12 Dec; McLeod Ganj, p320) 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, while Shimla and Pathankot (in the Punjab) offer the nearest rail links. 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 ₹1000, \$\$ ₹1000 to ₹2500, \$\$\$ above ₹2500

## Top Tip

If travelling between the Spiti and Kinnaur Valleys, foreigners must obtain an easy-to-get Inner Line Permit in Kaza (see boxed text, p344), Rekong Peo (p295) or Shimla (boxed text, p290). Solo travellers will find it easiest in Kaza.

## Resources

- ➔ **Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation** ([www.hptdc.nic.in/bus.htm](http://www.hptdc.nic.in/bus.htm))
- ➔ **Himachal Road Transport Corporation** ([www.hrctc.gov.in](http://www.hrctc.gov.in))
- ➔ **Himachal Tourism** ([www.hptdc.gov.in](http://www.hptdc.gov.in))
- ➔ **Himachal Tourist Guide** ([www.himachaltouristguide.com](http://www.himachaltouristguide.com))