



# Himachal Pradesh

## Includes →

Shimla .....	283
Sangla Valley .....	294
Rekong Peo .....	295
Mandi .....	297
Parvati Valley .....	302
Kullu .....	306
Manali .....	309
Dharamsala .....	319
McLeod Ganj .....	320
Chamba Valley .....	335
Lahaul .....	341
Spiti .....	344

## Best Places to Eat

- La Plage (p315)
- Cecil Restaurant (p290)
- Hotel Deyzor Restaurant (p346)
- Moonpeak (p328)
- Evergreen (p305)

## Best Places to Sleep

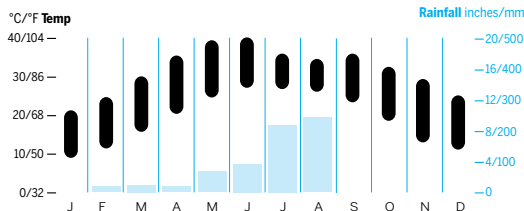
- Orchard Hut (p338)
- Wildflower Hall (p292)
- Hotel Deyzor (p345)
- Alliance Guesthouse (p308)
- Tashi Khangsar Hotel (p350)

## Why Go?

With spectacular snowy peaks and plunging river valleys, beautiful 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. A convoluted topography of interlocking mountain chains also makes Himachal a spectacular place simply to explore, by bus, car, motorbike, jeep or foot. Every pass crossing into a new valley brings you into a different world, with its own culture, deities and even language. Villages perched on staggering slopes enchant with fairy-tale architecture and their people's easygoing warmth. Hill stations appeal with a holiday atmosphere and colonial echoes, while backpacker magnets lure with their blissed-out vibe and mountain beauty. Such is the richness of the Himachali jigsaw that in McLeod Ganj, the Dalai Lama's home-away-from-home, and in Lahaul and Spiti, with their centuries-old Buddhist cultures, you might even think you've stumbled into Tibet.

## When to Go

### Manali



**May–Jun & early Sep–Oct** Outside the monsoon season; perfect for trekking and other activities.

**Mid-Jul–early Sep** The monsoon: visit Lahaul and Spiti, which stay dry.

**Nov–Apr** Good for snow-lovers, but the high passes to Lahaul and Spiti are blocked.

## SOUTHERN HIMACHAL PRADESH

As soon as you cross the state line from Hariana, the landscape starts to crinkle and fold in steep, forest-covered ridges – the foothills that herald the grand Himalayan ranges further north. The main travel destination in the south is the popular hill station Shimla, the former summer capital of British-ruled India.

### Shimla

📍 0177 / POP 170,000 / ELEV 2205M

Strung out along a 12km ridge, with steep forested hillsides falling away in all directions, the Himachal capital is a good appetite-whetter for the awe-inspiring mountain tracts of the state's interior. Shimla is one of India's most popular hill resorts, buzzing with a happy flow of Indian vacationers and full of relics of its previous life as the summer capital of British India. Traffic is banned from the central part of town, so walking is pleasant – even when huffing and puffing uphill. The long, winding main street, the Mall, runs east and west just below the spine of the hill. South of it, the maze-like alleys of the bustling bazaar cascade steeply down to traffic-infested Cart Rd.

From mid-July to mid-September, Shimla is frequently wreathed in cloud, and in winter it often gets a carpeting of snow.

### History

Until the British arrived, there was nothing at Shimla but a sleepy forest glade known as Shyamala (a local name for Kali – the Hindu destroyer-of-evil goddess). Then the new Brit-

ish political officer for the Hill States, Charles Kennedy, built a cottage here in 1822 and nothing was ever the same again. In 1864, Simla (its colonial-era name) became the official summer capital of the Raj, and from then until 1939 the entire government of India fled here for half of every year from the sweltering heat of the lowlands, bringing with them hundreds of muleloads of files, forms and other paraphernalia of government.

When the Kalka-Shimla railway was opened in 1906, Shimla's status as India's premier hill station was assured. The town became a centre not only of government but also of social frolics for the elite of the Raj. Maharajas as well as colonial grandees built mansions here, and the season was filled with grand balls at the Viceroy's lodge, picnics in the woods, amateur dramatics at the Gaiety Theatre and much flirtation and frivolity. Rudyard Kipling, who spent several summers here, used Shimla as the setting for parts of *Kim* and his short-story collection *Plain Tales from the Hills*.

### 👁 Sights

#### ★ The Ridge

STREET

The broad esplanade extending east from Scandal Point is called the Ridge and it's thronged with strolling locals and tourists all day. In clear weather a jagged line of distant snowy peaks is clearly visible to the north.

#### Christ Church

CHURCH

(📍 0177-2652953; the Ridge; 🕒 10.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm, services in English 9am Sun) At the Ridge's east end, the very English Christ Church, opened in 1846, is one of the oldest surviving churches in northern India and

### TOP STATE FESTIVALS

**Losar** (Tibetan New Year; 🕒 late Jan, Feb or early March) Tibetans across Himachal, including in McLeod Ganj and Spiti, celebrate their New Year with processions, music, dancing and *chaams* (ritual masked dances by monks).

**Minjar Festival** (🕒 last Sun Jul-1st Sun Aug) A week of processions, music, dance and markets at Chamba.

**Ki Chaam Festival** (🕒 Jul/Aug) A week of rituals at Ki Gompa culminates in a day of whirling dances by brightly costumed and masked lamas.

**Manimahesh Yatra** (🕒 late Aug/early Sep) Hundreds of thousands of Shaivites trek up to 4200m to bathe in Manimahesh Lake near Bharmour, one of Shiva's mythical abodes.

**Phulech Festival** (🕒 Sep/Oct) Villagers in Kalpa and throughout Kinnaur fill temple courtyards with flowers; oracles perform sacrifices and make predictions for the coming year.

**Dussehra** (🕒 Oct; variable dates) Intense and spectacular weeklong celebration of the defeat of the demon Ravana, at Kullu (p306).