

# Indian Himalayas Trek Challenge

organised by  
**DIFFERENT TRAVEL**

## About India

India conjures up images of lush green paddy fields, brightly coloured saris, jasmine scented incense, ancient palaces and adorned maharajahs. A huge country, India is often known as the Indian Subcontinent; at 3,287,240 km<sup>2</sup> it makes number 7 on the top ten largest countries by landmass on earth.

It borders Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. The population is rapidly rising and currently at 1.17 billion people.

The major tourist attractions in India include the Taj Mahal, the Agra fort, the Himalayas, the backwaters of Kerala, the beaches of the South West, the national parks where tigers can still be seen, the Holy cities of Varanasi, Pushkar and the many temples and shrines. India has so much to offer. India's major exports include petroleum products, textile goods, gems and jewellery, engineering goods, chemicals and leather.

Hindi and English are the official languages but there are many regional languages spoken. The unit of currency is the Rupee. Mostly India's climate is tropical, but due to the size of the country there are regional variations.



## Itinerary

### Day 1: LONDON

Depart London for Delhi on an overnight flight.

### Day 2: DELHI

Upon arrival, transfer to a central hostel to freshen up. After lunch, visit the project for an introductory visit and briefing. Welcome dinner tonight.

### Day 3: DELHI

Spend the day assisting on a range of projects at the chosen project. Packed lunch and dinner included.

### Day 4: DELHI – PATHANKOT

Spend a final day working on the project before taking the overnight sleeper train to Pathankot (departs 21.20). Overnight on train (Air conditioned sleeper class). (packed lunch and dinner provided).

### Day 5: PATHANKOT – DHARAMSHALA

Arrive in Pathankot in the morning and transfer to Dharamsala. On arrival in this Himalayan hill resort, the abode of the Dalai Lama, check in at the hotel and enjoy the rest of the day at leisure. We suggest you may enjoy a walk along to mall road, where Tibetan refugees display and sell traditional handicrafts. Overnight stay at hotel in Dharamsala.

### Day 6: DHARAMSHALA - VOH VILLAGE - KANOL VILLAGE (1800m)

This morning drive for approximately 1 hour to Boh, from where we start the trek. Start off today with a gentle 3 hour trek to Kanol village, trekking through thick oak and pine forests, where Himalayan langur monkeys are abundant. There is a chance for further trekking this afternoon before setting up camp for the night.

### Day 7: KANOL VILLAGE – KARERI LAKE (3250m) – GUNA DEVI

After breakfast, set off for Kareri Lake, a duration of approximately 5-6 hours trekking. After lunch at this peaceful spot, surrounded by open meadows and pine forests, continue to Guna Devi where we camp overnight. Along the track many types of bird will be seen, and there is also the chance of spotting wild goats, pigs and perhaps even black bear and leopard!

### Day 8: GUNA DEVI – TRIUND (2827m) – MCLEODGANJ – PATHANKOT

A total of around 7 hours trekking today. Triund is located in the foothilla of the mighty Dhauladhar range,

above which the soaring peaks rise in icy splendour. Its crisp air, breath-taking beauty and sense of peace sum up the Himachal Pradesh area perfectly. Continue to Mcleodganj, from where the bus will take you back to Pathankot for the overnight train to Delhi.

#### **Day 9: DELHI**

A morning arrival in Delhi. After freshening up at a hostel, visit the project for your final farewells before transferring to the airport this evening for your overnight flight home.

#### **Day 10: LONDON**

Early morning arrival in London.

## **BEFORE YOU GO: AN A-Z OF INFORMATION ON INDIA**

**A is for Arrival.** Most nationalities (including British) require a visa prior to arrival into India. The tourist visa is valid for 180 days and costs £30 plus a £9.05 service charge. (Correct as of Feb 2010) See <http://in.vfsglobal.co.uk/> for more information.

**B is for Begging.** Do not hand out money or gifts to beggars. Be aware that many of these are full time professionals. Similarly be cautious when purchasing items from street vendors who approach you.

**C is for Communications.** The international direct dialling code for India is +91. Local and long distance services are provided throughout all regions of the country and the field has been opened up to the private sector. The mobile service has seen phenomenal growth and some of the dominant names include are Bharti Airtel, Idea Cellular and Reliance. Internet access is widespread although connection speeds can vary wildly depending on where you are.

**C is also for Clothing.** India is a very hot country so tropical weight clothing is appropriate throughout the year; light woollens during December and January, rainwear in the Monsoons. The Indian subcontinent is conservative, so men and women should avoid wearing shorts. Women should not wear mini-skirts, cleavage revealing tops or bare backed dresses. Women should wear trousers or skirts to the mid-calf or ankles, long or medium length sleeved loose shirts or kaftans, Punjabi outfits, or tank tops teamed with a pashmina that is worn over the shoulders. Men should wear light weight trousers and shirts or smart t-shirts (with absolutely no obscene, offensive or potentially insulting writing or logos).

**C is also for Culture Shock.** India is an incredibly different place to anywhere in Europe and many visitors are shocked when their first visit to India is not the exotic glamour of palaces and maharajahs, but poverty and relative chaos. It is important to be aware of the following:

- **Attention.** Many local people will unabashedly stare at foreign tourists.
- **Cons artists, touts and beggars.** Foreigners can be magnets for persistent touts and beggars.
  - Beggars, especially malnourished children and the badly deformed can be particularly disturbing.
  - Con artists may tell you that your hotel is closed and that you should take a taxi with them to a different hotel, which will be very expensive and the taxi driver will make commission from taking you there.
  - People will often approach you offering to have your photo taken with them, and once you have taken the photo they will insist on payment.
  - Women may approach you and shake your hand, but hold onto it and start drawing henna onto your hand; if you try to pull away but they will hold onto you, even if you tell them you have no money. They will finish the henna and will insist on payment, claiming that people pay \$20 or more dollars.
  - Do not accept **anything** from anyone (even 'just to look') without agreeing on a price first. Being too trusting is likely to lead to you being conned, particularly in big cities.
- **Filth.** Dirt, garbage and insects abound in the cities. Roadsides are often used as public lavatories, and it is not uncommon to see men and women urinating and defecating in fields.
- **Noise.** Drivers lean on horns, radios and TVs blare Bollywood tracks, even temples, mosques and churches use loudspeakers to spread their message.
- **Pollution.** All Indian cities suffer badly. Exhaust combined with dust can make the drier seasons a nightmare for asthma sufferers. The sewer systems can be primitive and when the temperature rises, the smell can be very strong.

- **Crowds.** Indian streets, markets, and bazaars are jam-packed with people, vehicles and animals (particularly cows, which are sacred), and streets tend to be narrow.
- **Same-sex interaction.** It is not unusual to see men holding hands with other men, or with their arms around each others' waists. This is not a display of homosexuality, but sincere friendship. However, Western men holding hands will be taken as homosexuality which is not accepted in India.
- **Opposite-sex interaction.** Indian women may be very reserved about talking to men so men should be cautious when approaching an Indian woman (even for asking directions or something simple). Women may feel comfortable to communicate with Indian women. Indian men may be very keen to interact with Western men and women, but women, please be aware that friendly conversation with Indian men can be considered a flirtation and eye contact with men is also considered a sexual invitation. Wear sunglasses and/or avoid eye contact to reduce unwanted attention.

Many people will find it easy to come to terms with these radical differences in culture, but for some it takes longer. Just take things slowly and try to immerse yourself in Indian culture.

**D is also for Daypack.** You will need a daypack for your trek. This will be your responsibility and you will be carrying it yourself – so don't make it too heavy. We recommend a 25-30 litre pack which may weigh around 5kg or more with water and other essentials. You may wish to carry some essentials with you such as a sun hat, sunglasses, sun cream, water bottle, tissues/wet wipes, medical kit etc. You may also wish to bring your camera and spare memory cards and batteries. Porters will carry your main luggage.

**D is for Dehydration.** You are advised to drink at least 2l of bottled water each day and have a supply of rehydration tablets just in case. Avoid ice, drink only bottled water, and do not use the tap water to brush your teeth as tap water in India is undrinkable.

**D is also for Dietary Requirements.** The majority of special diets, such as vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, etc., can be catered for. Vegetarian cuisine is very common, delicious, varied and recommended to avoid 'Delhi Belly', as meat can spoil quickly. Please ensure that you notify us of any dietary requirements at the time of booking or as soon as possible.

**D is also for Difficulty.** This trek is considered challenging, with some steep sections and high altitude. The trek may be strenuous for those who have never trekked before but it is advised that you are of a good level of general fitness to make the most of the challenge. Consult your GP about medication that can help with altitude.

**E is for Etiquette.** Do observe silence, due respect and proper decorum inside the places of worship and religious monuments that you might visit. Most importantly, always remove your shoes at the entrance to the main hall of any holy shrine. It is also a good idea to leave a small donation for the upkeep of the building when you leave.

**E is for Expenses.** Laundry, Drinks, Personal Spending Money, Personal Equipment, Souvenirs, Tips.

**E is also for Electricity.** Mains electricity is 230v/ 50 Hz but is subject to fluctuations and power cuts. Plugs are 3 large gold pin South African and European 2-pin style.

**F is for Food.** During your stay you will be able to enjoy delicious Indian cuisine prepared for you by your own cooks. There are considerable regional variations amongst food in India, due partly to historical influences and partly to climatic conditions. Strict vegetarianism tends to be restricted to the south of the country, and beef is strictly taboo. Common sense should be applied when ordering food, particularly from basic restaurants and roadside stalls – ensure the food is very hot and freshly cooked; avoid salads and drinks with ice in as these may contain tap water. You are advised to avoid tap water and drink mineral water instead. East Indian cuisine consists of fish and rice based meals, and Bengal is famous for its sweets. North India is famed for its variety of bread like roti, paratha and naan, the use of lentils and delicious snack foods such as samosas.

**F is for First Aid kit.** You should have a small first aid kit of essential items: personal prescription medicine, painkillers, plasters/blister spray, insect repellent (containing 50% DEET), anti-histamine tablets and cream, Imodium (Loperamide), rehydration sachets, throat lozenges, painkillers such as Ibuprofen, decongestant, lip balm with SPF, antiseptic cream, antifungal powder, scissors, tweezers, thermometer, sanitary towels and/or tampons or a Mooncup, spare glasses or contact lenses, toilet roll. See packing list for more detail.

**F is also for Fitness.** A good general level of fitness is required for this trek. You should start a training programme before departure if you are out of shape or not used to walking. Please see your fitness centre and/or GP before starting any major training changes. DTC has the right to refuse anyone who they feel is not fit enough for the challenge.

**H is for Haggling.** The charms of shopping in India lies in bargaining to your heart's content in markets and shops until you finally bring down the price and make the purchase a worthwhile experience. It is sometimes worth walking away before settling on a deal as the vendor will often lower his price so as not to lose a sale.

**H is also for Health.** Most travellers to India usually experience nothing worse than upset stomachs during their trip. However it is necessary to take precautions in the form of proper immunisations and vaccinations. You should seek medical advice at least 8 weeks before travelling and ensure that all appropriate vaccinations are up-to-date. For further information on health, see <http://www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk> .

Anti-malarial medication may be recommended depending on the region in India to be visited – please see your GP for further information. Malaria is a preventable infection that can be fatal if left untreated. Prevent infection by taking prescription anti-malarial drugs and protecting yourself against mosquito bites by using 50% DEET repellent, covering up in the evenings and sleeping under a permethrin treated mosquito net. Please remember to take all your existing medication in clearly labelled packages. There are pharmacies in all the towns in India as also in all the tourist areas. These are always well-stocked selling drugs manufactured in India under licence from foreign companies. Medications can usually be bought over the counter. The staff at your hotel is also usually the best source for the name of the nearest recommended doctor. There are also government and private hospitals in most major tourist areas as also a number of private doctors with clinics.

**I is for Insurance.** Different Travel will do everything possible to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip. However, certain risks are involved and should be recognised by participants. Thus, we insist on all participants holding a suitable short-term travel insurance policy for our trips. Travel Insurance is a cost effective way to protect yourself and your equipment in the event of problems due to cancelled trips, delays, medical problems, baggage loss or damage. Please contact Campbell Irvine for details of a policy which covers everything in a Different Travel challenge. ([www.campbellirvine.com](http://www.campbellirvine.com)).

**L is for Language.** India's official language is Hindi although it is only understood by 30% of the population. There are in fact 18 officially recognised languages. Efforts have been made to promote Hindi as India's national language, and this has met with opposition in the south of the country, whereas in the north Hindi is the predominant language. Many educated Indians speak excellent English and many Indians speak more than one language.

One	Ek
Two	Do
Three	Tin
Four	Char
Five	Panch
Six	Chhe
Seven	Saat
Eight	Aath
Nine	Nau
Ten	Das
Alright/OK	Acha
Excuse me	Maaf kjiyeh
How much	Kitneh paiseh
No	Nahin
Yes	Haan

**L is also for Laundry.** Laundries are available almost everywhere and are very cheap and reliable. However, Hotels have laundries that are much more expensive than the local Laundries. (Please be aware that some local laundries do not have hot water.)

**M is for Money.** In India, the unit of currency is the Rupee (Re) divided into 100 paise (P). Change money with authorised money changers (at the airport, most banks, hotels and certain large shops) and insist on a receipt as it will help you reconvert unused rupees into the original foreign currency at the time of departure. Avoid any people on the street who offer to change your money at a temptingly high rate of exchange. Small denominations should be purchased for tips etc. Currently the Rupee trades at approximately 72 to £1 (Feb 2010). All unspent monies can be exchanged during departure at the Airport. Banks have ATM services which accept MasterCard and Visa.

**M is also for Medical insurance.** This is an absolute necessity. You should make sure that you inform them of your intention to take part in a trekking challenge as some policies have a different rate for trekking, or please contact Campbell Irvine for information about a policy which covers the activities you will participate in.

**P is for Photocopies.** Remember to leave a photocopy of all your documents (insurance details, flight numbers, passport etc) with a reliable person in the UK. Should you lose everything you can make a call to retrieve your information. It is also worth scanning these documents and emailing them to yourself too.

**P is for Photography.** When taking photographs of the local people, it would be wisest to ask their permission. Taking a photograph of someone without their permission – especially in rural areas can cause offence. In contrast, taking photographs of someone you have become friendly with is usually very welcome. If someone offers to have their photo taken with you, ask how much it will cost first, as many locals expect payment for photographs and it is wise to agree on a price first.

**R is for Religion.** As the birthplace of four of the world's major religions India is rightfully known as the land of spirituality and philosophy. The most dominant religion in India is Hinduism which accounts for almost 81% of the population. Around 500 BC two other religions evolved in India: Buddhism and Jainism. Although together they only account for 1.2% of the population, their impact on Indian culture has been huge and Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism have shaped Indian philosophy and thinking. Sikhism is a comparatively new religion and established in the 15th century. Today about 2% of Indians are Sikhs. Islam, imported to India by the Moghals is the chosen faith of 12% or more than 100 million people and is the world's second largest Muslim population after Indonesia. Christianity, most prevalent in and around Goa, is practiced by a further 2%. In Goa, Hindu and Catholic communities make up almost the entire population with minority representation of Muslims and other religions.

### **S is for Safety.**

You should follow these suggestions:

- Do not expose money, and do not wear expensive looking jewellery or show off any valuables. Carry your money and travel documents (preferably wrapped in plastic to avoid dampness) in a money belt around your waist (under your clothes) well hidden from sight.
- Use marked crossings to cross roads wherever available but take care as cars may not stop.
- Avoid walking below buildings under construction

**S is also for Sleeping.** You will be sleeping in a combination of huts, tents, overnight trains and guesthouses during the trip but you will not need to bring sleeping bag/mats with you as these are provided. If you wish to bring your own sleeping bag, please ensure it has a **comfort rating** of 0°C. It is advised that you bring a sleeping bag liner, for your own personal hygiene (the bags are washed) but the use of a liner protects the bag from your sweat and helps it perform better. Silk is recommended for its cooling and insulating properties. The expected night temperatures are between 0-4°C.

**S is also for Souvenirs.** There are many excellent handicrafts in India including brassware, terracotta, carved furniture, bamboo work, papier-mâché, textiles, carpets etc. These are available in the Government Emporia and also at shops and stalls near the popular tourist spots. Remember to bargain – hard – and to think carefully about what you want to take home with you. With so much choice you are advised to not rush into anything until you have developed some appreciation of the variety that is on offer. In Dharamsala you will also find Tibetan handicrafts for sale by the many refugees resident there.

**T is for Tipping.** Tipping is generally expected at hotels and restaurants. Ten percent of the bill or around Rs. 5 for other services is in order. For exemplary service please tip at your discretion. Tipping for taxi drivers is not customary. As a general rule you should follow these guidelines:

- £1 per person per day for Tour Guide
- 10 rupees per bag for hotel porter
- 10% of food cost for waiters

**T is also for Toilets.** Indian toilets are of the squat variety, although Western toilets are often found in hotels and guesthouses catering to foreign visitors. Indian toilet culture is very different to European and toilet paper is rarely used, with water from a tap in the bathroom being used to cleanse instead. You should take toilet paper with you wherever you go but put it into the bin provided rather than down the toilet. On the trek, there will be long drop style toilets provided with a 'toilet tent'. Have a look online for a variety of insightful guides into Indian toilet culture!

**W is for Washing.** There will be no shower or bath facilities during the trekking section of the trip, so we recommend that you take a good supply of baby wet wipes to wash with.

**W is also for Water.** All water on this trip is undrinkable; this includes the tap water at the hotel. You must not brush your teeth or rinse your mouth with the tap water, only use bottled or purified water. You should bring water purification if you would prefer not to buy bottled water. A highly recommended purification is 'Biox Aqua Drops' which contains chlorine dioxide. You may also wish to consider powdered fruit juice, as this will make the purified water taste better.

## PACKING LIST

### CLOTHING

Flip Flops/ Trekking sandals

Walking boots

Trainers

Light (or convertible) trekking trousers x 2

Pair of long shorts/Capri pants

Long base layer trousers

Breathable waterproof trousers

Long-sleeve thermal base layer

T-shirts/vests x 2

Long-sleeved cotton shirt x 2

Thick sweater/fleece

Warm jacket

Breathable waterproof jacket

Trekking socks

Underwear

Scarf / pashmina

Warm hat and gloves

Sun hat

Swimwear

### HYGIENE

Wash bag and washing kit

Personal toiletries

Toothbrush/Toothpaste

Soap/Shower Gel

Large pack of wet wipes

Antiseptic hand gel

Sanitary towels/tampons

Wash bag and washing kit

### SLEEPING

Silk sleeping bag liner

Eye mask / Ear plugs

### FIRST AID KIT

Anti malarials (see your GP)

Prescription medicine

Painkillers

Plasters

Anti-histamine tablets/cream

Imodium

Rehydration salts

Lip balm with SPF

Antiseptic cream

Antifungal powder

Scissors/tweezers

Insect repellent: 50% DEET

Spare glasses/contact lenses

Sun cream - high SPF

After-sun lotion

### ESSENTIALS

Tickets (or e-tickets)

Passport and copy

Money

Insurance policy details

Torch, head torch + spare batteries

Diary/Notebook and pen

Sunglasses

Toilet roll

Books/Playing Cards

Money belt

Adaptor (2 round pin European or 3 gold round pin South African)

### LUGGAGE

Day pack 25-30 litres

Large Rucksack/holdall (max 50 litres)

Waterproof rain cover for daypack and large rucksack

### OPTIONAL

Camera

Video camera + charger

Films/batteries/memory stick

Mobile phone + charger

Walkman/MP3 Player

Sewing kit

Trekking poles

Sleeping bag with comfort rating of OC (a bag is provided)

### EATING AND DRINKING

Powdered fruit juice

Energy snacks

2 litre personal water bottle x 2

Water purification

If there are any questions or queries regarding the items on this list, please feel free to contact us on [info@different-travel.com](mailto:info@different-travel.com)