

WILD PHOTOGRAPHY HOLIDAYS



HIMALAYAN PEAKS & THE SOURCE OF THE GANGES

INDIAN PHOTOGRAPHIC TREK

HIGHLIGHTS

- Spectacular views of Shivling and the Bhagirathi peaks
- Beautiful trekking to the source of the Ganges
- Atmospheric Gangotri and its pilgrimage temples
- Traverse the Gamukh Glacier
- Rishikesh and the lamp-floating Aarti Ceremony
- Delhi railway station
- Night photography over the mountains
- Classic Indian train journey
- Stunning Himalayan sunrises and sunsets
- Trekking with Hindu pilgrims and Sadhus
- Jagged peaks of the Garhwal Himalaya
- Spires of rock and ice
- Sadhus and pilgrims
- Three nights on top of the world!

INTRODUCTION

This fabulous photographic trekking expedition takes a classic trail through the spectacular scenery of the Indian Garhwal Himalaya. Starting from Delhi, we make a classic railway journey to the pilgrim towns in the foothills of the Indian Himalayas. Here we will be immersed in the vibrantly colourful, spiritual and bustling heart of this mystical sub-continent. India's culture like its people is a rich mosaic, vibrant, chaotic, a land of incredible contrasts and paradoxes. Leaving the towns behind we join the throngs of pilgrims heading for the source of the Holy Ganges on the glacier at Gaumukh. The source of the Ganges is one of the most revered and spiritual places in all of India. Leaving the crowds behind we will trek through lofty snow capped Himalayan

peaks spending three nights in Tapovan, one of the world's most beautiful Himalayan meadows. Fully supported by our local team who will take care of us well, our only concern should be to take it easy, acclimatise slowly, have fun and take some amazing images. By immersing ourselves in the moment and approaching each day with curiosity and flexibility we will come to understand that India is truly one of the world's most stunning trekking and photographic locations.

DAILY ITINERARY

Day 1: Arrive Delhi

Arrival in Delhi. Our driver will meet you at the airport and transfer you to our first night hotel close to Delhi Railway Station and Old Delhi. This is a very well placed

hotel for the best sights in Old Delhi with its amazing bazaars and interesting backstreets. Our hotel directly overlooks the famous Chandni Chowk Mosque, a unique photographic opportunity. If you would like to book any extra days before or after the official trip dates please contact us for information.

Accommodation hotel

Day 2–3: Train to Haridwar

Early morning we transfer to the railway station to catch the express train to Haridwar. The train journey takes around four hours and is a rich source of photographic opportunity both in the station and on the train itself. We arrive in Haridwar at lunchtime. Our drivers and cars for the short drive to Rishikesh on the banks of the Ganges meet us. In 1968 the Beatles immortalised this town for westerners when they visited and stayed in the Ashram of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. The town has many temples, shrines and ashrams and is a major starting point for pilgrimages to Badrinath and Gangotri. We spend two nights in Rishikesh to thoroughly explore this interesting and photographically rich pilgrim town. In the evening we will witness the 'Aarti' ceremony, which is a pleasant ritual of worshipping the Ganga. The ceremony commences with the singing of bhajans, (prayers) followed by a purifying and sacred ritual that takes place around a fire, with the offerings made to Agni the fire god. The lamps are lit and the Aarti takes place as the final part of the ceremony.

Accommodation hotel

Day 4: Drive to Uttarkashi

Today, we begin our drive up into the Indian Himalaya. Our route follows one of the major tributaries of the

Ganges, the Bhagirathi River, which twists and turns through steep-sided and heavily forested valleys. After a day of exciting driving with spectacular scenery we arrive at the important pilgrimage town of Uttarkashi (1350m) in the state of Uttarakhand in India. The town lies on the banks of River Bhagirathi and close to the rivers Varuna and Assi. There are numbers of ashrams and temples located in and around Uttarkashi. Every year thousands of colourfully clad devotees visit the town. An ancient temple of Lord Shiva, known as Vishwanath Temple, is located here. Apart from being a famous Hindu pilgrimage site, Uttarkashi is also known as the place for adventure lovers who pass through on their journey to enjoy trekking in the high Himalayan peaks.

Accommodation mountain lodge

Day 5–6: Drive to Gangotri 3050m

The scenery on our drive today rapidly becomes dramatic and we will start to see impressive rock spires and snow-capped peaks rising up above the valley sides. We reach the pilgrimage site of Gangotri (3050m) in the late morning. We will spend two nights here mindful of the need to acclimatise before starting our trek. Surrounded by mountains and deodar forests, overlooking the thunderous Bhagirathi River, Gangotri, the base camp, makes a stunning setting. Gangotri is known as the source of river Ganga (the actual source being Gaumukh) No doubt we will find lots of interesting and unusual photographic subjects including the local pilgrims and the ever present mountain scenery.

Accommodation mountain lodge (2 nights)

Day 7: Trek to Chirbasa 3600m

Our pace on the approach to Gaumukh and Tapovan is governed by our need to acclimatise properly, rather than by the actual distance, which we are prepared to walk each day. The distances covered each day are short, averaging about 8 or 9 kilometres and on most days we will be walking for no more than 5 hours. Our walk begins with a relatively easy ascent through forests of oak and pine. We follow the Pilgrim's Trail on a well-defined path, which climbs gradually beside the Bhagirathi River. It is said that King Bhagirath prayed to Lord Shiva for salvation of the souls of his 60,000 sons. Shiva obliged and requested Goddess Ganga to release her water, which purified the ashes of Bhagirath's sons. This mythological story elevated the status of River Ganga as a means to purify one's soul. Today we see an impressive Himalayan peak, Sudarshan Parbat over 6000 meters looking stunning in the background. It lies in a cluster of many major peaks. After getting our permits checked we proceed on the trail high above thundering Bhagirathi River. There are a few isolated glaciers on this river that are melting rapidly and swelling the milky waters. We will reach our camp at Chirbasa in time for a hot lunch. From our camp on a level site beside the river, we will have fabulous view of the surrounding Himalayan Peaks such as the very impressive Bhagirathis. Tonight will be our first night camping and a fine opportunity to experience/photograph the darkness and stars that are common in such remote places.

Accommodation tent

Day 8–9: Trek to Bhujbasa 3800m

Accompanied by hardy pilgrims, we continue our hike in this impressive valley, climbing through pine forest to the alpine plateau of Bhujbasa (3800m). Arriving in camp after just a couple of hours walking, we will take an early lunch. In the afternoon we will take it easy to allow our bodies to acclimatise to the heady height of 3,800 m. we stay here for two nights to allow a more relaxed walk on the following day to the legendary source of the Ganges, where we can dip our feet in the sacred water of the river. The Holy River Ganges is the most sacred river in the Hindu religion with its source at the Gaumukh glacier, considered as one of the holiest places for Hindus who come here to witness the birth of Mother Ganga! Gaumukh is a unique sight for only when you get close do you realise how big and magnificent this glacier really is! The walk will give us some valuable acclimatisation in preparation for our trek to Tapovan the following day. For the less energetic, a short distance above camp we will get our first views of Shivling which many consider to be one of the world's most spectacular Himalayan peaks. There are usually lots of colourful sadhus or holy men to around this particular camp.

Accommodation tent

Day 10–12: To Tapovan 4350m

From Bhujbasa, we trek a little way back up towards Gaumukh before turning onto the Gangotri Glacier. We cross the glacier by following a well cairned trail that leads to the east side of the glacier. This is truly exciting trekking. We have superb close up views of the snow-capped peaks including Bhagirathi, Shivling, Meru, and Kharchkund. Tapovan (4350m) will be our base for three

nights. From here Shivling rises from its base all the way to its summit. It is indeed a rare sight in the Himalayas to see a mountain in its entirety. Aesthetically Shivling is one of the world's most photogenic mountains. Majestic mountains viewed from such a close range are totally special. Here we find Neelatal, a turquoise glacial lake with the snow-capped giants Shivling and Meru in the background. The perfection and clarity of the view is surreal! In Tapovan we camp in a large meadow. Three nights here will allow us to be unhurried with our photography. We are in a superb place for some remarkable Himalayan sunrises, sunsets and Himalayan giants against the night skies.

Accommodation tent

Day 13: Down to Chirbasa 3600m

Rising early, we can hopefully enjoy a final spectacular sunrise over the surrounding 6000 metre peaks. Following breakfast, we set off downhill on the first leg of our return to civilisation. Re-crossing the Gangotri Glacier, we descend the valley with a welcome stop for lunch near the trail at a local Dhaba. We will reach the camp back at Chirbasa mid afternoon.

Accommodation tent

Day 14: Down to Gangotri and Uttarkashi 1350m

From our camp at Chirbasa, we descend easily through the pine forest for just a couple of hours to Gangotri. We will no doubt feel full of energy as our lungs fill with rich oxygen! In Chirbasa we rejoin our vehicles and drivers to take us on the return journey down the scenic Bhagirathi Valley to Uttarkashi. The town has similar ghats and temples to Varanasi and is a marvelous place for photography. It is often referred to as 'little Varanasi'! The

most important temple here is dedicated to Shiva and known as Vishwanath Mandir, many pilgrims will come here for 'Puja', prayers and blessings.

Accommodation Lodge

Day 15: Uttarkashi – Haridwar

Today we make the seven-hour road journey to Haridwar. The views are spectacular and we will break the journey with photographic stops and lunch.

Accommodation hotel

Day 16: Haridwar – Delhi

This morning we board the train for Delhi. Arriving around lunchtime we will have time to explore several options including the Mosque, Delhi Railway station or the fascinating streets and markets of Old Delhi. Alternatively we can take a long shower, relax and contemplate our amazing Himalayan adventure. In the evening we will enjoy a celebratory dinner together.

Accommodation hotel

Day 17: Home flights

Transfer to Delhi International Airport for homeward flights

JOINING ARRANGEMENTS AND TRANSFERS

Participants generally arrive at different times since they will book their own flights. The first-night hotel in Delhi will be available for check-in at midday on Day 1. If participants arrive several hours before this, they may prefer us to book them in for an extra night in order to get some valuable rest. Please ask us if you would like us to book an extra night for you.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- All meals
- Return train 2 class A/C from Delhi to Hardware
- All accommodation
- An English-speaking Indian guide
- Private vehicles for transport
- Photography tutor/guide
- All entrance & camera fees, except for video equipment
- Delhi Airport transfers on group arrival and departure days

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- International flights
- Travel and medical insurance
- Alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, extra snacks
- Tips for local staff
- Indian visa

ACCOMMODATION

Our accommodation is an eclectic mix that includes a quality tourist hotel in Delhi, good hotels in Rishikesh and Haridwar, trekking lodges and tents. If you choose to pay the single supplement you will have a room/tent to yourself, otherwise you will be teamed up with another person as appropriate. We have chosen accommodation carefully to allow us both access to some exciting locations and peaceful retreats from the vibrant hustle and bustle of daily life in India. All accommodation is allocated on a twin-sharing basis.

FOOD

Western and continental-type food will be available in Delhi and occasionally in the northern towns of

Rishikesh and Haridwar. The standard of Indian cuisine will be of a good standard. We will always take care to eat in establishments that have a high standard of hygiene. Bottled water is recommended and readily available. On trek we have our own cook team. The food served during the trek is a mixture of local and Western and is a very good standard.

LANGUAGE

Though the most widely spoken language in North India is Hindi, most people speak some English. India is therefore an easy place to make friends and get to know local people.

CURRENCY

Indian Rupees. There are ATM machines at the airport, in Delhi and the bigger towns such as Rishikesh and Haridwar. In 2016 the Indian government issued new

500 and 2000 Rupee banknotes. The 1000 Rupee notes were discontinued. Beware when changing money at the airport and on the street that you are not given old Rupee notes, that are now illegal tender and therefore valueless. See the picture for 'old versus new' notes.

SPENDING MONEY

This always depends on personal spending habits. Prices in India tend to be cheaper than the West, although some things such as bottled beers can be similar. £150 should be allowed for miscellaneous expenses, including approximately £60 for tips for local staff who we encounter on our expedition and especially those who support us while trekking. This will allow money for soft drinks and/or beer and any extra snacks. If you are intending to buy expensive souvenirs, there are cash machines in Delhi and the larger towns. Sellers, for a small additional cost, can often ship bulky items and some



places take credit cards although the connections of the machines can be spasmodic.

GUIDANCE ON TIPPING

Tipping is an accepted and expected part of Indian culture, although you should only tip for services that are performed well. The total amount that you can expect to pay in tips for your local guide, drivers, as well as hotel staff etc. is around £60. It is common and welcome to donate an item of clothing or equipment to members of the trek/cook team who look after us. Bear this in mind as you pack, you may want to include an item/s that you would consider donating. We will offer advice on tipping once you have arrived in India.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

It is recommended that you take out appropriate insurance to cover personal accident, medical costs, repatriation, and loss of baggage and holiday cancellation. We will need a copy of your travel insurance at the time of booking.

VACCINATIONS

You should visit your own doctor and dentist for a check-up prior to departure. Please make sure that your fillings are solid as sometimes the change in air pressure can cause toothache. Your doctor will have access to the most up-to-date information on the required vaccinations for India. A very good online resource is the National Health Travelers website at fitfortravel.nhs.uk

PASSPORT AND VISAS

A passport (with at least six months remaining validity) and a current Indian visa are required for this trip. Please note that you are required to have a passport with a machine-readable bar code. You will need to apply for your Indian visa in advance from the relevant issuing authority in your home country. <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html>.

HEALTH

We will have a first-aid kit available at all times. Please bring your own small personal first-aid kit, along with any medication for personal use. Hand wash that can be applied without water is always useful for getting rid of germs and removing greasy traces from fingers that will be taking photographs! Nowadays it is relatively easy to stay fit and healthy in India. We will be giving you full health advice in our Day 1 introduction/briefing in Delhi.

ALTITUDE

This holiday involves going to high altitude. During the course of your trip you will reach altitudes in excess of 3500 metres. This is not something that you should worry about; the human body is quite capable of adapting to a very wide range of altitudes, but it is important that we follow some simple rules in order to acclimatise successfully. Before coming on this holiday you should read the advice on trekking at high altitude. You can also talk to Geraldine who has spent many years looking after trekking groups at altitude.

PREPARING FOR THIS HOLIDAY

It would be great if you can get as fit as possible before joining this trek/holiday. The best way to do this is to go for some hilly walks of around 5-6 hours before joining us. The fitter you are the more enjoyable you will find the experience.

CLIMATE

The best time to visit this part of the Indian Himalaya is either before or after the monsoon (which occurs from mid-June to late September). The weather conditions should be broadly similar in the pre and post monsoon seasons, with daytime maximum temperatures around 25°C to 30°C at the start of the trek, becoming progressively cooler as we gain height. Night-time temperatures will generally be above freezing throughout the trip except possibly for the 3 nights we spend at our highest camp at Tapovan, where the night time temperatures can dip as low as minus 5°C. In this part of the world, most of the rainfall occurs during the monsoon months but this is a mountainous area and short-lived storms cannot be ruled out at any time of the year. As we are travelling at high altitudes, the sun will be stronger. A good sun-screen, along with a hat and scarf for the neck are vital. It will also be important to drink a lot of water.

DAILY ROUTINE ON TREK

You will need to have an adventurous approach in both mind and body. The altitude will require participants to take things slowly and steadily. Each morning we will rise early. Our team will bring a cup of tea/coffee to our tents followed by some warm washing water. Breakfast will be served about one hour later than this. If we are

leaving the camp then it will be our responsibility to pack bags before breakfast and leave the tent empty. This enables the team to pack the tents etc for transportation to the next camp. If we are not leaving camp then of course we will probably be up and about catching the good morning light! During a trek day we can expect tea and lunch stops as a group. The cook/trek team always tries to be ahead and our tents are generally ready for when we arrive in the afternoon. There will be a communal large tent where we eat and generally socialise. There will be no electricity at the camps so plenty of extra batteries are a necessity.

BAGGAGE ALLOWANCE

Pack animals or porters will carry your baggage on trek. The packed weight of your trek bag whilst trekking should be no more than 15 kgs. It is possible to leave clothes or other items not required on trek at the group hotel. The bag should be of the 'soft hold all' type. Wheelie hard bags are not suitable for being carried by porters or pack animals, these can be left in the Delhi hotel while we are away. One possibility is to put a hold all in your hard case 'wheelie' for travelling to India, also your empty 30–40 L ruck sack. We expect you will be carrying your camera bag as hand luggage on the long haul flight. During the trek you will be carrying water, sun cream, waterproof top and bottoms, hat, gloves plus a warm jacket/jumper. Additionally any personal items such as spare battery, memory card, phone, personal first aid items etc. Just make sure that you can comfortably fit these in to the rucksack that you bring.

CLOTHING SUGGESTIONS

The best solution to temperature control is to have a number of layers available from lightweight thermal underwear through mid-layer insulation to a windproof/waterproof jacket/trousers. If you have any questions feel free to contact us at anytime before the trip.

SUGGESTED CLOTHING/EQUIPMENT

- Walking boots
- Trainers or sandals
- Normal socks
- Warm walking socks (2 pairs)
- Spare bootlaces
- Comfortable walking trousers
- Waterproof over trousers
- Underwear
- Thermal leggings
- Thermal shirts
- Buff or scarf
- Shirts or T-shirts
- Fleece jacket or warm jumper
- Waterproof jacket
- Warm jacket (down)
- Sunhat
- Warm hat
- Sunglasses
- Warm gloves or mittens
- Sleeping bag (comfort rated -10°C)
- Daypack 30 to 40 litres
- Head torch and spare batteries
- Sun protection (including total bloc for lips, nose etc.)
- Water bottles 1 litre (x2)
- Antibacterial hand wash

- Basic First Aid Kit including – antiseptic cream, throat lozenges, diarrhea treatment (Imodium), painkillers of choice, plasters and blister treatment, re-hydration salts (Dioralite).
- Insect repellent
- Wash bag and toiletries
- Travel clothes
- Small towel

OPTIONAL

- Thermarest mat – note that foam mattresses are provided in the tents.
- Trekking poles if you normally use these.
- Repair kit (e.g. needle, thread, duct tape)
- Small knife
- Small padlock to lock trek bag

CAMERA EQUIPMENT ON TREK

As this is a photographic trekking expedition one of our main considerations is what equipment to bring that will do the job and allow us to enjoy the trekking too. Walking at altitude will not be fun if you are carrying a heavy pack. During the trek we envisage walking with a camera and perhaps just a mid-range zoom lens. There will be ample time at camp during the 'good light' times of morning and evening to use your full camera kit, which will be carried by porters during the daytime. In the days leading up to the trekking we will be carrying camera bags as usual. This is when we will be photographing the more 'cultural' elements of the trip. In the vehicles you will have your camera bags with you.

PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT AND INFORMATION

- Camera bag or backpack such as the Flipside or Trekker series designed by LowePro.
- Any extra equipment that doesn't fit in your camera bag/hand luggage will need to go in a hard case that can be put in the aircraft hold.
- A camera with interchangeable lenses such as a digital SLR or a compact system camera/mirrorless camera.
- A set of lenses to cover a wide range of subjects, ideally a wide-angle zoom, a mid-range (standard) zoom and a tele zoom. For example... for full-frame cameras: 16–35mm wide-angle, 24–105mm mid-range and a 70–200mm or longer tele zoom. For crop format cameras: 10–20mm wide-angle, 17–70mm mid-range and a 70–200mm or longer tele zoom.
- Fixed, fast lenses for photographing in dark places. For instance a 24 or 35mm f/1.4 and a 85mm f/1.4.
- Spare camera (required)
- Travel tripod, compact but not flimsy!
- Cable release – mechanical or electronic remote to avoid shake on long exposures.
- Although not essential camera filters such as neutral density, graduated filters and polarisers can be useful. At least one neutral density filter in the range of 4–6 stops would be a good addition to your kit.
- Lens cloth, brush or blower
- Sensor cleaning device (optional)
- Lightweight 'trekking' absorbent towel for drying cameras and equipment.

- Rain cover for camera and camera bag
 - Sufficient memory cards for the whole holiday as it may not be possible to buy more during the trip.
 - Film users should bring enough film, as it may not be possible to buy in many places.
 - A laptop or tablet to download and check images as you go along (optional).
 - Backup storage device (optional)
 - Ample of spare batteries and chargers, see also below.
- All electrical sockets are compatible with European two-pin plugs, so you might need a travel plug adapter.

SPECIAL BATTERY CONSIDERATIONS

On the trek we will go for an entire week without any opportunity to recharge batteries. You will need enough spare batteries to last you through that week. This is generally not an issue for DSLRs with optical viewfinders. **However compact system cameras/mirrorless cameras, that employ electronic viewfinders, use up batteries much quicker. If your camera falls in the latter category, you will need a good strategy.** As the proprietary camera batteries tend to be quite expensive, a good solution is a combination of several spare batteries and high-capacity power banks such as the [Anker PowerCore+ 26800mAh](#). Depending on the camera you might also need a USB charger that can be hooked up to the power bank. Whatever solution you choose, you need to test it thoroughly before coming on the trip. Don't just buy something a few days before departure.

PARTNERS

Although this is primarily a photography holiday, non-photographer partners will be very welcome as there are many options and interesting possibilities in addition to taking photographs.

MORE QUESTIONS?

While we hope that this information has answered most of your questions about the holiday, we know it will not give you all the information you need. If you have any more questions, please get in touch. Talking to us on the phone (we will always call you back) can often be a quick way of sorting out individual questions. It also helps us to get to know each other before the holiday.

BOOKING THIS HOLIDAY

Fill in the [online booking form](#), or give us a call on +44 (0)1630 647828.

LINKS

View [images and information for this tour](#) on the website. Read about [our approach to teaching photography](#)

GARHWAL HIMALAYA

