

## Himalaya-traverse from Uttarakhand to Spiti – 22 days

From the springs of the Ganges to the Tibetan Plateau

**Tour JTT-HPT04:** Rishikesh - Yamunotri – Barasu Pas -Sangla Valley - Kaffnu - Pin Valley - Tabo - - Kaza - Manali - Chandigarh



The best way to explore the Himalayas is on foot. A hike through the world's highest mountains always delivers unforgettable experiences. But it becomes a real voyage of discovery when you cross the Great Himalayan Range from south to north. On this hike we first climb with shepherds and Hindu pilgrims through forests covered with bearded mosses to the springs of the sacred Ganges.

Then we cross two high passes, where we come face to face with the heavily glaciated Himalayan giants. They are the gatekeepers of a totally different world: the colourful mountain desert of Spiti, the most western part of the Tibetan-Buddhist cultural area.

### ***Itinerary***

#### **Day 01: Delhi - Rishikesh**

In the morning we get on the train to Haridwar. After four hours of watching passing rice paddies and Indian village life, we switch to jeeps that take us a short distance into the foothills of the Himalayas, to Rishikesh. There we check in at the hotel. Rishikesh is a medium-sized city. Because the Ganges come out of the mountains here, Hindus consider it a very sacred place. Rishikesh became famous in the seventies because the Beatles were inspired by Indian gurus here for a while.

#### **Day 02: Rishikesh - Hanuman Chatti**

Continue on the road to the Hanuman Chatti at an altitude of 2400 m. For quite some time we follow the Ganges, first over forested slopes, later along rice fields and small villages. Chapels along the road and *saddhus* - pilgrims - on foot betray that this is the

*dhev bhumi*, the land of the gods. Along the way we also pass the immense dam of Tehri, which has only been in use since seven years. Hanuman Chatti is a busy, small village, where pilgrims prepare for the hike to the pilgrimage site Yamunotri. Here we sleep in a simple lodge.

### **Day 03: Hanuman Chatti - acclimatization**

In order to get used to the altitude, and to get some rest before we arrive, we make a light walk in the surroundings of Hanuman Chatti today.

### **Day 04: Hanuman Chatti - Yamunotri (4 - 5 hours walk)**

In the morning the luggage is first distributed to the porters. Then we board the pilgrim path to Yamunotri, together with a cross-section of the Indian population. They look at us and we look at them. The first stage isn't long but we go up 800 m straight away. That's why rich Indians rent a horse, have themselves transported in a litter or even on the back of a toiling Nepali. Yamunotri (3200 m) is one of the *char dham*, the four most important holy places in Uttaranchal. The hot springs that originate here are seen as the beginning of the Yamuna, the most important tributary of the Ganges. Yamunotri has a very special atmosphere. It is hidden between steep mountainsides, it is not accessible by road and yet very busy. Hundreds of pilgrims flow in and out of temples, *dhabas* (restaurants), *ashrams* and *dharamsalas* (pilgrim inns).



### **Day 05: Yamunotri - Damni (4 - 5 hours)**

For the time being, it's still climbing. Slowly we rise out of the forest and reach the high grazing ground where local shepherds spend the summer with their cattle. Damni (3965 m) is such a meadow and that is where we make our camp.

### **Day 06: Damni - Yamunotri pass - North Side Base Camp (7 hours)**

The real work: today we cross the Yamunotri pass (4900 m). After roughly 4 hours of climbing we reach the pass. There your effort is rewarded with fantastic views - at least if the weather is good. The Bandarpunch, Swargarohini and other six-thousanders form the scenery. After a steep descent through rocky terrain and perhaps also snow, we reach the camp at 4200 m altitude.

### **Day 07: Base camp north - Ruinsara Tal (5 hours)**



We descend to a wide half-open valley with meadows surrounded by birches and juniper berries. We cross the large river with a bridge (if it has survived the winter - otherwise it will be cross-deep wading) and pitch our tents at the idyllic lake Ruinsara Tal (3320 m). This may be the first time



we meet the semi-nomadic Gujar shepherds with their large herds of goats, buffaloes and horses. Every spring these people migrate from the plain into the Himalayas with all their cattle. Because they don't formally own any land here, they are forced to migrate above the area of the villages and their grasslands.

#### **Day 08: Ruinsara Tal - Seema (5 - 6 hours)**

We follow the Ruinsara River downstream, first through birch forest and rhododendrons, later we return to the coniferous forest zone. A very varied and in itself not difficult day. We make camp at the confluence of the Ruinsara and Har Ki Dun rivers (2500 m).

#### **Day 09: Seema - Har Ki Dun (4 - 5 hours)**

We turn our noses north again, towards the Himalayan chain. Through a wide valley with forest and meadows we gradually climb to the Gujarkamp of Har Ki Dun (3550 m). In the meantime, we get an increasingly beautiful view of the white peaks that form the buttresses of the Himalayas.



#### **Day 10: Rest day Har Ki Dun**

To get used to the altitude even more

before we cross the pass and to enjoy the fantastic high mountain world we ended up in, we stay one day on the high meadows of Har Ki Dun. We take a short walk in the area or stay with a book at the (kitchen) tent, while the cook uses the extra to show us what he's capable of.

### **Day 11: Har Ki Dun - Lal Pathar (5 - 6 hours)**

Over a deserted railway track we go further up through the valley. It is very unlikely that we will meet anyone else in the next two days, apart from a single Gujarherder. The path is difficult to find here and there and we have to rely on our guide. In the meantime we've arrived in a real rough high mountain world, where the elements are the service. We

can choose whether we make camp at 4200 or 4550 m altitude. We let this depend on the extent to which everyone is used to the altitude. The advantage of camping higher up is of course that the next day will be less heavy.



### **Day 12: Lal Pathar - Barasu pass - Zupika Gad (6 - 7 hours)**

The big day. Today we cross the 5450 m high Barasu pass. Of course, that won't happen by itself. At this altitude, climbing is slow. Probably nobody has slept well and the altitude plays tricks on us. The terrain is also difficult: a lot of raw moraine material and at the highest part we have to cross a glacier. In September this crossing is not dangerous, you don't have to master alpine techniques for it. Maybe we'll have to pull the rope here. Once we get to the top it's the views that are breathtaking, but that's a luxury problem. Over a hundred kilometres the Himalayan chain stretches in front of us, from the south side of Zanskar to the Tibetan border. Among the many seven-thousanders we also see India's third highest mountain, the Nanda Devi (7816 m). Also the descent on the colder, so more icy north side requires some concentration.

### **Day 13: Zupika Gad - Doria Camp (4 - 5 hours)**

It is clear that we have crossed a climatic boundary: the area looks a lot drier than where we were two days earlier. But the area is still wooded and green. And very sparsely populated. Besides local shepherds it is not excluded that we encounter a bear here. Over a steep and sometimes difficult path we descend to a camp in the Sangla Valley (4000 m).



**Day 14: Doria Camp - Chitkul (5 hours); jeep to Sangla**

An ancient trade route to Tibet runs through the Sangla Valley. It has been closed since the 1960s, but for some time the border crossing has been reopened for small-scale trade. Unfortunately we are not allowed to take a look at it.



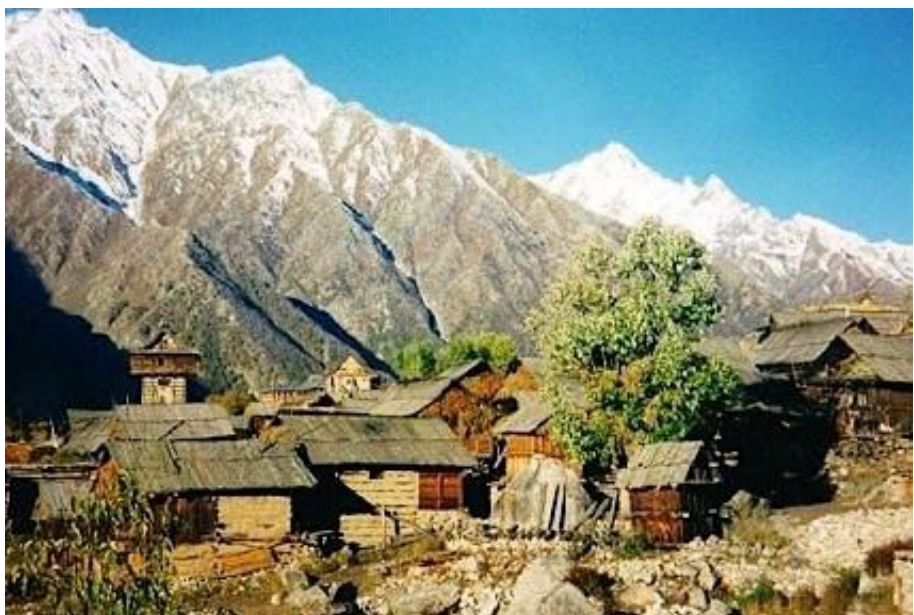
Further down the green Sangla valley we reach the picturesque village of Chitkul (3450 m). Most of the houses here are built in a rustic log cabin style, made of heavy tree trunks. Jeeps are waiting for us here to take us to the guesthouse in the village of Sangla, where we can enjoy the first hot shower in ten days.

**Day 15: Jeep Sangla - Kaffnu; pull Kaffnu - Mulling (5 hours)**

We leave the Sangla Valley by jeep. We are now in Kinnaur and cross the Sutlej. This large river, which originates at the holy mountain Kailash in Tibet, has found a way through the Himalayas, carving out a deep gorge.

In the village of Kaffnu (2800 m) we pull the benches again for the second part of the trek. Here a fresh plough of pallbearers is ready for the second part of the trek. They have four legs and eat grass: mules. Because no deep snow or tricky ice situations are to be expected on this

trek, we are now working with pack animals. While their owners are worried about distributing the luggage, we start the first leg of the trek to Spiti. We pass small farming villages lying in an archaic mosaic of meadows, fields, apple orchards and cedar forests. In the fields there are potatoes, wheat, tuber vegetables





and buckwheat. We camp on a large meadow called Mulling (3350 m).

**Day 16: Mulling - Bhaba Pass basecamp (6 hours)**

We follow the river upstream through meadows, gradually ascending. As we get higher the terrain becomes more open and we walk more and



more through flower meadows - even in September we can still enjoy that - where large streams flow through. The people of Kinnaur love flowers. In August there is a festival where villagers go into the mountains to collect flowers and display them in the villages. After about 4 hours walking we build up the camp. We are then at about 4000 m altitude.

**Day 17: Bhaba Pass basecamp - Bhaba Pass - Phaldar (8 hours)**

A long day. The first hours we climb through the ever steeper, rolling stones strewn river valley. The last part to the pass is covered with icy snow. Once on the Bhaba pass (4850 m) you know what you are doing it all for. The views over the Pin valley are phenomenal. The descent - first steep, over ice and moraines, then more gradual - is still quite long. We camp at Phaldar, a high yak meadow at 4050 m.

**Day 18: Phaldar - Mud Pharka (5 hours); jeep to Tabo**

We descend through the lunar landscape of Spiti, high valleys surrounded by barren but colourful mountains. The bright green fields of Mud Pharka - which can only exist thanks to irrigation, because rain hardly falls here - can be seen





from afar. You must have seen the contrast with the light-coloured mountains to believe it. Mud is a typical Spitian village, with a gomp a lying strikingly on a rock. The large white-plastered houses are made of tamped loam and have wide black bands around the windows. Also typical for Spiti is that the windows are



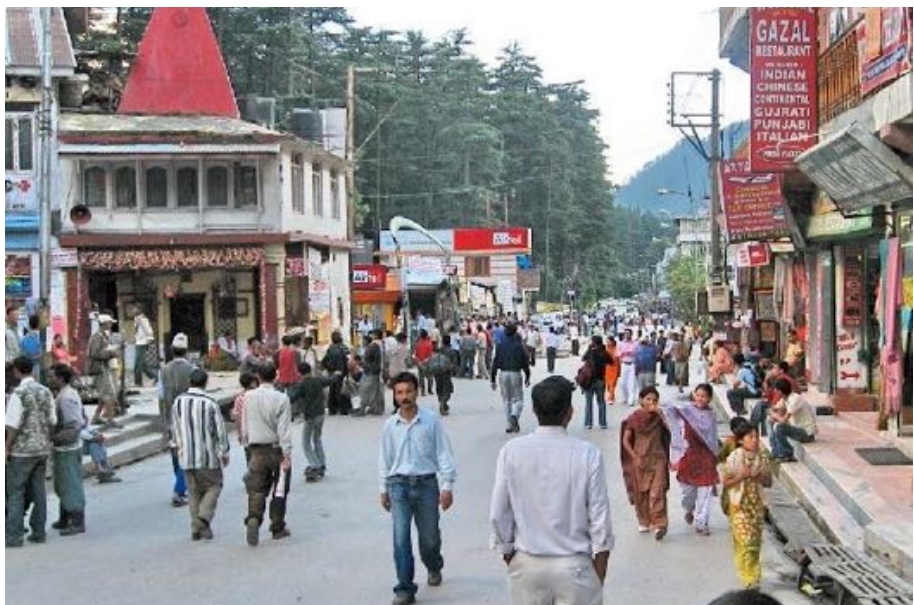
not rectangular, but narrower towards the top. The red colours on the eaves serve to scare off evil spirits. On all roofs there are prayer flags - which "give" the prayers printed on them to the wind - and the yaks buzz approvingly when we arrive.

By now our jeeps have also arrived here - if the road hasn't been hit by landslides. They will take us out of the Pin valley to the legendary Tabo. This is one of the oldest gomp a's in the Tibetan cult area. It was probably founded by Rinchen Zangpo, the "great translator" who did missionary work in this region shortly before the first turn of the millennium. A very special place, so special that the Dalai Lama here wants to enjoy his old age.

### Day 19: Tabo - Kaza

By jeep we travel up along the River Spiti. Our destination is Kaza, the capital of Spiti. This is not more than a cosy village by the way. On the way we visit three picturesque

monasteries: Dankar, Lalung and Ky. Especially the visit to Ky, which lies high above the Spiti Valley, will stay with you. This monastery was founded over 1000 years ago.



### Day 20: Kaza - Manali

With the jeeps we follow the river Spiti up. This is a beautiful ride along

small traditional villages through the wide Spiti Valley. We cross the 4551 m high Kunzum La, and then we are in the middle of the glaciers. After a short descent we return to the Rothang pass (3978 m), after which we descend to the small town of Manali, which is situated between coniferous forests.

### **Day 21: Manali**

Today we have the whole day to explore this pleasant little town, buy souvenirs and sample the many Indian restaurants.

### **Day 22: Manali- Delhi**

By car (own transport) we drive to Chandigarh. There we take the train to Delhi, where we arrive halfway through the evening.

### ***Price:***

This depends on the number of participants. For the group trip, with an English speaking tour guide, this amounts to € 2750,- (from Delhi to Delhi) from 8 participants. For small groups (from 4 persons, with or without a Dutch tour guide): ask for a quotation: [info@jantreksandtravels.com](mailto:info@jantreksandtravels.com).