

Hike The Himalayas Information Pack

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India General

- India is a large, triangular-shaped country in Southern Asia. It is bordered by Pakistan to the northwest, China, Nepal and Bhutan to the north and Bangladesh and Myanmar to the east.
- India is the seventh largest country in the world. The Himalayan mountain range to the north and the Indus River (west) and Ganges River (east) forms a physical barrier between India and the rest of Asia. The country can be divided into five regions: Western, Central, Northern (including Kashmir and Rajasthan), Eastern and Southern.
- The fifty years of freedom from colonial rule have seen a remarkable transformation of the country. Despite the rapid pace of change, many traditions remain firmly rooted and India has retained a profound cultural distinctiveness. Today India is one of the most richly rewarding regions of the world to visit. Its scenery is amongst the most varied and exciting anywhere.
- We shall be trekking in the foothills of the Middle or Lesser Himalayas, starting from the hill town of Shimla or, as it is known in India, "Simla" - the capital of the Himachal Pradesh state, north-western India.
- Visitors to India should have an open mind, forget about how things work at home and go with the flow. India is a place where nothing happens very quickly or in the way you'd expect – the only thing to expect is the unexpected!

A few facts and figures:

- Full country name: Republic of India
- Area: 3.28 million sq. km. (1,29 million sq. m.)
- Population: 1.1 billion (UN 2005)
- Capital city: New Delhi (pop. 19.8 million in 2001)
- People: 72% Indo-Aryan, 25% Dravidian, 3% other
- Languages: Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Bengali, Kashmiri
- Religion: 80% Hindu, 14% Muslim, 2.4% Christian, 2% Sikh, 0.7% Buddhist and 0.5% Jain
- Government: Federal Republic
- Prime Minister: Manmohan Singh since 2004
- Head of state: President APJ Abdul Kalam
- Time: 5½ hours ahead of the UK
- Telephone: Country code from the UK is 00 91. Mobile phone coverage is limited to major towns.

Shimla, the 'summer capital' of British India sprawls along a crescent-shaped ridge at an altitude of over 2100m (6890ft) in southern Himachal Pradesh. This was the most important hill station in India before Independence, and the hub of society life for the British escaping the heat of the city. The famous main street, The Mall, still runs along the crest of the ridge and is lined with stately English-looking houses.

The Taj Mahal, described as the most extravagant monument ever built for love, has become one of the modern wonders of the world of India. Emperor Shah Jahan constructed the tomb in memory of his second wife Mumtaz Mahal. It took 22 years to complete.

First Impressions of India

Anyone who has not visited a third world country before is likely to be overwhelmed by their first impressions on arrival in India. You should be prepared for the following:

- **Pollution:** All the cities suffer bad air pollution.
- **Noise:** Many people find India incredibly noisy as radios and loud speakers seem to blare in unlikely places at all times of day.
- **Smells:** India has an almost baffling mixture of smells from the richly pungent to the delicately subtle.
- **Begging:** The number of beggars, some of whom may be badly physically handicapped, can be very distressing.
- **Pressure:** There often seems no sense of personal privacy with everyone trying to sell you something whenever you are in a public place.
- **Public hygiene:** It is not uncommon in both town and country to see people using the streets as a public convenience.

Maps

- Each participant will be given a map of the route.

Weather

- October is the start of the cool season so is one of the best times of year to be trekking in the foothills of the Himalayas. Daytime temperatures are likely to be 5°C - 13°C, falling at night. We recommend participants take warm layers.
- There is the possibility of short showers so we recommend that participants take a waterproof jacket.
- In Agra and Delhi it will be warmer – around 15 - 25°C.

India has a three-season year - the hot, the wet and the cool. The heat starts on the northern plains around February and by April it becomes unbearable. The first signs of the monsoon appear in May with high humidity, short rainstorms and violent electric storms. The monsoon rains begin around 1 June in the extreme south and sweep north to cover the whole country by early July. The main monsoon ends early October.

Training

See Training Advice section on My Challenge pages.

Typical Day

- Wake up 07:30

- Breakfast 08:00
- Start trekking 08:30
- We stop every two to three hours for water, dependent on temperature and the ability/standard of group.
- Mid morning and mid afternoon – there will be short water/snack breaks.
- Lunch break will last for an hour to an hour and a half approximately.
- Each evening there will be a group briefing on the next day's trekking and everyone will eat together.

Support

- A member of the Classic Tours team and the Oxfam Rep will meet the group at London to distribute flight tickets and ensure that the check in procedure runs smoothly.
- There will be a Classic Tours Tour Manager and Oxfam Rep with the group throughout the trek.
- Local guide(s) will walk with the group, knowledgeable about the country and route.
- A UK Doctor (Brian Booth) will accompany the trek.
- There will be sufficient support vehicles for water, doctor, participants who are tired and luggage. However, there will be certain places where the vehicles will not be able to accompany the group.
- Walkie-talkies will be used to communicate between staff.

Health/Vaccinations

- You should be up to date with Tetanus, Polio and Hepatitis A - and check if you require typhoid, diphtheria, hepatitis B; tuberculosis; meningitis; rabies. Allow 2 months for the full set.
- Malaria precautions are essential in all areas below 2000m, all year round. There is no risk in the area of this trek located in Himachal Pradesh, however there is a risk in Delhi and Agra. Avoid mosquito bites by covering up with clothing such as long sleeves and long trousers especially after sunset, using insect repellents containing DEET on exposed skin.
- Professional medical advice must be sought in conjunction with these guidelines.
- You should also advise your doctor that you will specifically be visiting the Himachal Pradesh Province for the trek followed by Agra and Delhi.
- Traveller's diarrhoea can be avoided by following basic hygiene rules: avoiding ice, only drinking bottled water, brushing teeth with bottled water etc.

- You should bring your own regular medication with sufficient supplies for the whole trip and a small first aid kit (see packing list).
- There will be a UK Doctor on hand throughout the trek. The doctor will set up a “surgery” each evening to deal with any ailments.
- Health facilities are average - good in the main cities.
- Altitude sickness usually occurs only at altitudes of over 3,000 metres. We shall be trekking up to 2,800 metres above sea level. We recommend that you refer to your doctor for further information.

Suggested Packing List

Clothing

T-shirts - one per day (one provided by the charity)
 Walking boots - lightweight with good ankle support - **must be worn in**
 Walking socks - one per day plus spares and extra for evenings
 Spare trainers for general walking
 Lightweight cotton trousers or shorts
 Long sleeved lightweight shirts for Delhi and Agra
 Water/windproof jacket/cagoule
 Cap/hat to cover head
 Woolly hat and gloves for the early mornings
 Warm casual wear for most of week i.e. fleece, sweatshirt, tracksuit, jeans
 Something slightly smarter for dinner on last night
 Sunglasses
 Swimming outfit
 Leg and head covering for visiting holy sites

Kit

Sleeping bag for overnight train journey
 Foldable trekking poles (optional) with rubber tips
 Drinking water bottle
 Small bum-bag or rucksack (with water bottle carrier) for carrying small items while you trek, e.g. valuables, camera, sun cream, tissues etc.
 Small ‘day’ bag which can be used for extra items and transported on support vehicle
 Towels – 1 or 2
 Camera and film
 Torch and spare batteries

Personal and medical

Small personal medical kit - antiseptic ointment, plasters, ankle/knee supports, bandage, pain killers, Insect repellent, sting relief, Diareze, Dioralyte, Compeed (blister treatment), isotonic powders
 Antibiotics for severe diarrhoea is recommended, e.g. Ciprofloxin – participants should consult their doctor for the best option
 Regular medication (if applicable) packed in hand luggage not main luggage
 Water purifying pills/iodine dropper (optional - bottled water will be provided throughout trek)
 Tissues
 Anti-bacterial wet wipes

Toilet paper
Sun cream (minimum factor 15)
Lip salve (SPF 15)
Ladies are advised to take tampons
Carrier bags/bin bag - useful for dirty washing or wet clothing
Ear plugs (sharing with noisy room mates can prevent sleep!)
A photocopy of your passport, visa and insurance details

- Pack as lightly as possible, preferably in a soft, robust bag as all luggage is transported together each day in a truck and needs to be durable.
- This list is not exhaustive and also some items may not be required during the trip but it is better to have them than not!

Discount at Nomad Travellers Store & Medical Centre

Nomad Travellers Store and medical centre specialise in travel clothing, equipment, travel essentials, medical supplies and vaccinations. They offer all participants a **10% discount** on purchases (including mail order and vaccinations but excluding pharmacy items). To receive your discount quote reference "classic07".

To request the Nomad Travellers Store colour catalogue telephone 020 8889 7014, or e-mail orders@nomadtravel.co.uk remembering to give your full postal address. For Travel Health advice and vaccination recommendations telephone 09068 633414 (calls 60p per minute) and you will be able to discuss your queries directly with their clinic nurse or pharmacist.

Nomad has the following branches:

- 3 – 4 Wellington Terrace, Turnpike Lane, London N8 0PX Tel 020 8889 7014
- 40 Bernard Street, Russell Square, London WC1N 1LJ Tel 020 7833 4114
- 52 Grosvenor Gardens, Victoria, London Tel: 0207 823 5823
- 43 Queen's Road, Clifton, Bristol Tel: 0117 922 6567
- 6 Civic Centre Road, Southampton, SO14 7FL Tel: 02380 234920

Discounts on UK Airport Hotels and Car Parking

- Classic Tours are offering up to 55% off airport hotels and airport car parks in conjunction with Holiday Extras. Call 0870 844 4000 and quote reference number HX508 for details and rates. The best savings can be made if hotel accommodation and car parking are booked together.

Food and Drink

- All water should be regarded as potentially contaminated. Water used for drinking or brushing teeth should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilised. Bottled water will be provided throughout the trek.
- Tea and coffee are widely available. There is a huge variety of bottled soft drinks, including well-known international brands. Indian beer is excellent.
- The food will be tasty and wholesome to provide energy whilst trekking. A typical daily menu:

Breakfast: cereal, toast, jam, eggs, tea, coffee, juice, Indian breakfast dishes e.g. vada (deep fried vegetable mix), sambhar (a soupy dish)

Lunch: Always vegetarian e.g. Sandwiches or omelette or rolled paratha, fruit, chocolate, juice

Dinner: soup, vegetables, lentils (dhal), vegetable curry, salad, chips, chicken or lamb dish, or eggs, rice, naan, paratha, fruit

- Breakfasts will be provided on the train journeys also
- We need to know of any special dietary requirements to advise the airline and our local agent. Vegetarians can be catered for, as most meals will be vegetarian. However, if you have an unusual dietary request we will try to help but it's your responsibility to organise your own extra food.
- Lunch is not included on day 10 and day 11.

Accommodation (subject to change)

- Accommodation on charity challenge events is usually quite basic hostels or hotels to keep costs to a minimum. In India, while still reasonably priced, there are 1 or 2 hotels of a higher standard.
- Rooms are likely to be twin or triple share throughout the event except on overnight trains.
- Accommodation will be single sex. Married couples/partners must be aware that it will not be automatically possible to share.
- Hot water and electricity are not always available; facilities are not equal to Europe.

Hotels – to be confirmed. They will be of tourist class, some hotels are of a lower standard than others and there may be shortages of hot water/electricity.

Overnight train from Kalka to Tundala

Tourist-class sleeper cabins with air-conditioning - 6 people per cabin. Bedding will be supplied on the train however we advise everyone to bring a sleeping bag. The train departs at 23:30 and takes about 11 ½ hours.

Transfers

- There are transfers on nearly each day of the trek, which will be by coach.
- Train timings and reservations can be cancelled or changed without notice and changes may be made to the itinerary.
 - Train from Delhi (Niamudin Station) – Kalka (Queen Express 4095)
Depart: 05:00; Arrive: 11:20
Breakfast on board at approx 07:00
 - Toy Train from Kalka to Shimla (255 Express)
Depart: 12:10; Arrive: 17:20

Bottled water and packed lunch provided on board
This train has wooden seats, no cushions. It takes about 6 hours to cover 96km

- Bus transfer from Agra to Delhi – approx 5 hours.
Depart Hotel at 09:00 and arrive in Delhi at midday.

Flight Details (subject to change)

- The flights have been confirmed with Virgin Airlines and the flight timings are:

12 October	London Heathrow – Delhi	22:00 – 11:15 (arrive 13/10)	VS300
22 October	Delhi – London Heathrow	13:10 – 16:55	VS301

- Luggage allowance per person 20 kg (44lbs)
- India is 5 ½ hours ahead of the UK

Flight arrangements for all our events are arranged through scheduled airlines over which we have no control. Consequently we cannot be held responsible for any flight delays, cancellations or overbookings.

Airport Tax

- Pre-paid airport tax (£122.00 - Jan 2007 rates) is included in your fundraising but is subject to change up until ticketing; therefore this may affect the final fundraising total required.

Extending the flight

- Anyone wishing to stay on after the event should contact our flight agent, Peltours, using the flight extension form when it is available in the **Key Forms** section on the My Challenge web pages. The administration charge for changing the flight is £35 providing you take exactly the same return routing (Delhi – London).

Staying on after the trek

- Classic Tours is a charity challenge specialist and holidays are not their forté. It is suggested that participants make any holiday arrangements for after the event with a specialist. The recommended agent is:

CTS Horizons
CTS House, 7 Upper St Martin's Lane
London WC2H 9DL Tel: 020 7836 9911 Fax: 020 7836 3121
Contact: Alexandra Killwick

- CTS Horizons donate 10% of the package costs to Oxfam.

Travel Insurance

- All participants must have adequate travel insurance cover to participate in the trek.
- You are required to declare any a pre-existing medical conditions needs to your insurance company when you take out insurance. If you fail to do this, you will be

liable for any costs incurred should emergency treatment be needed whilst on the event.

- Classic Tours can organise travel insurance at a cost of £52 per person. For anyone wanting to stay on after the event there is a special rate of £56 for 24-day cover. Please note that these rates are for 16-66 year olds only. Anyone aged 66+ years should contact Emma Southall at Classic Tours 020 7619 0066 ext 212 for separate rates.
- There is no obligation to take Classic Tours insurance however you must be adequately covered to go on the event – helicopter medical evacuation and repatriation must be included in the cover, trekking on a charity event.
- Please note that non-British residents can now be covered on the Classic Tours policy. If anyone is a resident of the USA higher rates will apply. Please contact Emma at Classic Tours for details.
- If taken, once you receive your Classic Tours insurance policy document you must read this carefully to ensure that you are happy with the cover provided. The document contains certain terms and conditions, especially relating both to their health and the health of persons not necessarily travelling but upon whom travel depends such as a close relative. You are entitled to a full refund of premium under the 14 day Cooling Off Period if the cover is not appropriate for your requirements and if you have not yet travelled or submitted.
- Anyone intending to bring expensive camera equipment should check his or her insurance covers the item.
- Oxfam and Classic Tours require proof that you have taken insurance at least 8 weeks before departure. Information needed is: the policy name, certificate number and the insurance company's emergency assistance telephone number.

Passports/Visas

- You must have at least 6 months validity on your passport from the date of return to the UK. If not, we suggest that they obtain a new one between now and the event.
- You need to organise your own Tourist Visa at a cost of £30. Visa fees are non-refundable and subject to change without notice. No refund or amendment will be made after the application is processed and visa is issued.
- Do not apply too early as the visa is issued on receipt of passport and is valid from date of issue and not the date of travel.
- The visa information below applies to UK residents only; non-UK residents should contact Oxfam to liaise with Classic Tours who will advise requirements.

Visa Application Form can be downloaded from the following website: www.hcilondon.net

Indian visas can be obtained from the UK in person from the High Commission of India, London or other Consulates at the addresses mentioned below:

High Commission of India

India House, Aldwych, London WC2B 4NA

Tel: 020 7836 8484

Fax: 020 7836 4331 or 7836 3039 or 7836 6312 (visa enquiries).

Opening hours: Mon-Fri 08:30-12:00 (visa enquiries), 09:15-17:30 (visa applications and collections; telephone enquiries).

Website: www.hcilondon.net

Consulate General of India, Birmingham

The Spencers, 20 Augusta Street, Jewellery Quarter, Hockley, Birmingham, B18 6JL

Please contact the Consulate for the current working hours for Visa Services

Tel: 0121 212 2782

Fax: 0121 212 2786

Opening hours: Mon-Fri 09:30-12:30 (visa application submission), 15:00-16:30 (visa collection).

Consulate General of India, Edinburgh

17 Rutland Square, Edinburgh, EH1 2BB

Please contact the Consulate for the current working hours for Visa services

Tel: 0131 229 2144

Fax: (0131) 229 2155

Website: www.cgiedinburgh.org

Opening hours: Mon-Fri 09:15-17:45

Working Hours: Queue numbers are issued to visa applicants between 08:30 and midday Mondays to Fridays, except holidays.

Visa Application Requirements

- Completed visa application form
- Valid passport for at least 6 months (use the passport that you will be travelling with)
- 2 passport photos
- Visa fee

Applications made in person:

- Payment made either by cash, postal order or cheque payable to "The High Commission of India".
- Application forms and "Q" numbers for lodging visa applications will be issued from Monday – Friday between 08:30 and 12:00 hours only. Your "Q" number determines when your visa application will be processed. Please be at the visa hall only at the time given on the "Q" number card and go to the counter when your number is called/displayed.

Applications by post:

- Payment by post can be by crossed postal order or personal cheque only (with the cheque guarantee card number and personal address written on the back of the cheque) payable to "The High Commission of India".
- Add £1.00 handling charge to the visa fee.
- Write full name and full postal address on the outside of the envelope.
- Send applications by Special Delivery only. Enclose a stamped self-addressed pre-paid Special Delivery envelope with the application for return of the processed passport.

Minimum Working Days to Process Visa Application

- In person: 1 day

- Rupees cannot be taken into India. We will therefore arrange for envelopes of £50 worth of Rupees to be available for purchase on arrival to avoid queues at the airport bureau de change. The money used to pay for this local currency should be in English pounds not Scottish or Irish.
- It can be difficult to use torn or very worn currency notes. Check notes carefully when you are given them and refuse any which are damaged.
- Approximately £150-£200 spending money is recommended for postcards, sightseeing, optional tours etc.
- We advise against Traveller's Cheques, as they will be difficult to change during the event.
- Credit cards are accepted in main cities. Check with your credit or debit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services that may be available.

Tips/Gratuities

- The local crew and guides work extremely hard and if at the end of the event participants would like to show their appreciation we suggest a tip of £15 per person (in local currency – approx 1250 rupees). This will be collected by the Oxfam Rep during the tour and given to the staff leader at the end of the tour to share out.

Optional Tours

- Entry fee and guided visit to the Taj Mahal is included.
- On the free day in Delhi there will be a half-day optional tour to the Red Fort and market. The cost is £10 per person payable locally to the Tour Manager. This excludes lunch. *This cost is subject to change.*

Shopping

Bazaars (local markets) are often a great experience but you must be prepared to bargain. It pays to shop around. Here is a short list of the many souvenirs to look out for when you have time to shop after the trek:

- Fabrics: India's silks, cottons and wools rank amongst the best in the world.
- Carpets: India has one of the world's largest carpet industries and each region has its own speciality.
- Clothes: Clothes are cheap and can be quickly tailor-made in some shops.
- Jewellery: This is traditionally heavy and elaborate. Indian silverwork is world famous.
- Handicrafts and Leatherwork: the range includes bronzes, brass-work, cane-work and pottery.
- Other goods include pickles, spices, Indian tea, perfumes, soap and musical instruments.

Photography

- It is advisable to take camera film and any specialist camera batteries. Film is available locally but should be purchased at a reputable shop. (Hawkers and roadside stalls may pass used films off as new).
- There are strict restrictions on the photography of airports, military sites, bridges, tribal areas and “sensitive border areas”.
- At some tourist sites it is necessary to pay a camera permit fee in addition to the normal entrance charge.
- It is always polite to ask when taking pictures of people.

Electricity

- Throughout most of the country electricity supply is 220-240 volts.
- Power cuts are common throughout India.
- Socket sizes vary so you are advised to take a universal adapter. Generally plugs should be 2 or 3 pronged with round pins (not flat pins).

Mobile phones and Internet access

- As the trek is in a mountainous region, frequency differs a lot and the agent cannot state which parts of the trek have a signal and which do not. Shimla, Parwanoo, Agra and Delhi have 100% mobile phone signals. The Indian mobile system is GSM system and some of the Indian companies have international collaboration with Air Tel, Hutch/Essar, Reliance and Tata Indicom.
- Shimla, Parwanoo, Agra and Delhi hotels have Internet access.

Social Behaviour

- Cleanliness and modesty are appreciated, even in informal situations.
- Use your right hand for giving, taking, eating or shaking hands as the left is considered to be unclean.
- The greeting when meeting or parting used among Hindus across India is palms joined together as in prayer. The Indian Hindu greeting is to fold the hands and tilt the head forward to *namaste*.
- “Thank you” is usually simply expressed with a smile.
- All visitors are asked to remove footwear/leather articles when entering places of religious worship.

Women Travelling in India - Guidelines

India is overall a safe country to travel in for women. There are simple precautions to take which make it possible to avoid giving offence or drawing unwanted attention:

- Women are expected to dress modestly e.g. loose fitting, non see-through clothes fit in with the Indian standards of modesty. Keep shoulders covered. Skirts, dresses and shorts should be at least knee length. Cool and comfortable is the key thing to

remember. Full-length trousers are not obligatory, however take a pair for the sections of the trek where there is low bush to protect your legs.

- Leave short skirts, vest tops, halter necks, tight or revealing clothing at home.
- Take leg and head covering for visiting holy sites.
- Women do not shake hands with men, as this form of contact is not traditionally acceptable.

Booking Conditions

- You should have read and agreed to be bound by the booking conditions – see [Key Forms](#) section on the My Challenge web pages.