

JAN Treks & Travels

Journeys into Adventure and Nature

Hidden Kingdoms of the Southern Himalayas - 20 days

Amritsar to Kalka via the Spiti Valley

Tour JTT-HP02: Amritsar-Dharamshala-Chamba-Killard-Lahaul & Spiti-Kinnaur-Shimla-Kalka

On this tour you'll pass through an amazing array of landscapes, cultures and religious realms. Starting off at the holiest site of Sikhism, the famous golden temple, your trip takes you straight to the abode of the Dalai Lama and the largest Tibetan community outside Tibet. The days after you'll be traversing many mountain passes, giving access to erstwhile Himalaya kingdoms and vassal states. After visiting the valleys of Chamba, Udaipur, Pangi and Hundan, all in the realm of Hinduism, we cross the Great Himalayan Range into Spiti, an enclave of Tibetan Buddhism. Its starkly colored barren mountains will provide a stunning contrast with the lush green valleys of Dharamshala.

Itinerary

Day 01: Arrive at Amritsar to Transfer to Hotel

We arrive at **Amritsar Railway Station** and meet our staff from where we are transferred to hotel by Jeep. Afternoon we go to The Golden Temple which is the most sacred and holiest place of Sikhism. It is located in Amritsar (meaning: Pool of the Nectar of Immortality). Amritsar is the holiest city of Sikhism in Punjab, India. The Sikh people come from all over the world to enjoy its environs and offer prayers. The official name of this temple is Harmandir Sahib or Darbar Sahib, which means: The Abode of God. Then we drive for the place where hundreds of unarmed, defenseless Indians were killed by a senior British military officer on 13th April 1919, **Jallianwala Bagh**, at the heart of Amritsar. Jallianwala Bagh was a garden belonging to the Jalla, derives the name from that of the owners of this piece of land of land in Sikh times. It was the property of the Sardar Himmat Singh around 1829, a noble in the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780 - 1839), who originally came from the village of Jalla, now in Fatehgarh Sahib District of Punjab. Overnight at the Hotel.

Day 02: Amritsar to Dharamshala (210 km, 7-8 hrs) altitude 1387m.

Today we drive to the north of the Kangra Valley, which is flanked by snow clad the Dhauladhar range of the Himalayas, to the side which Dharamshala and McLeodganj also

called Upper Dharamshala. Founded in 1855, Dharamshala (altitude 1387m) is the principal township of Kangra commanding splendid view of the surrounding country. This place is surrounded by deodar forest, it is set against a back drop of massive snow capped peaks on three sides. This is known as the synonymous of Tibet. This is the place the His Holiness Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of the Tibetan's reside and also this is where the head quarters of the Tibetan Government. Overnight at the hotel.

Day03: Dharamshala – Full day sightseeing.

Today we start our visit for the His Holiness' Temple, the impressive monastery that has got larger than life images of the Buddha, Padmasambhava and Avaloktshwara. Then we visit to the Norbulingka Institute, a registered Trust functioning under the chairmanship of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Established in Dharamshala. It is build according to traditional Tibetan style, following a ground plan based on the proportions of Avaloktshwara, the Bodhisattva of compassion. Set amidst beautiful gardens, surrounded by the green fields of the Kangra Valley. This institute promotes Tibet's traditional Tibet's traditional arts and literary studies and comprises the following sections; the centre for arts; the academy of Tibetan culture. It is committed to the preservation of Tibetan culture, which is threatened with destruction in its homeland. About 8 kms from Norbulingka Institute is the Astronomical Medical Center, where Tibetan medicine is made from herbs gathered from the high altitude of the Himalayas. After that we drive for 2 kms away from McLeod Ganj is an ancient temple of Bhagsunath Temple and about 1 km there is a small nut lovely waterfall close to the temple. Overnight at Hotel.

Day04: Dharamshala – Chamba (145 km /5 hrs)

Today after a leisurely breakfast we drive for Chamba, driving very close to the panoramic Dhauladhar range. Chamba, the unspoiled Valley that lies ensconced between the mighty and snow clad mountain of Dhauladhar, constituting the outer Himalayas, the Pir Pranjal or the mid Himalayas, and the Zanskar Range or the Inner Himalayas. In the center of the town there is a big spacious playground called Chowgan, where the famous Minjar Festival is held. Apart from this there are a few most interesting objects in Chamba that dates back to 10th Century. Like the number of richly carved ancient temples considered the finest examples of Hindu (Pahari) architecture. Three of these are dedicated to Vishnu and remaining to Shiva, All the shrines have Shikharas or Spire. Evening we visit the richly carved Laxmi Narayan Temple is the oldest one here, at an altitude of 930 mts. This is the principal temple of Chamba, dedicated to Vishnu (Narayan). It is the group of six stone temples, arranged in a row from north to south, representing the Shikhara style. Constructed in 10th century during the reign of Raja Shail Varman – founder of Chamba. The temple has a large image of Lakshmi Narayan along with a sculpture of Lord Ganesha and Buddha on either side. The fine image of the deity is decorated with precious ornaments and clothes with beautiful crown mounted in the head and a chattar (parasol) stands over the image. There are also some other fine arts around including those of Lakshmi, Narsingh and Krishna with gopis. The other fives temples are dedicated to Radha

Krishna, Chandra Shekar Mahadev, Gauri Shankar temple, Triambakeshawara and Lakshmi Damobara. Overnight at Hotel.

Day 05: Chamba – Bharmaur – Chamba (130 km / 8 hrs)

Today we drive Northward from Chamba lies to the Bharmour, which is known as the home of the Legendary Gaddies, semi-nomadic and semi-pastoral tribes, who spend the summer on the alpine pastures grazing their herds of sheep and goats and in winters move down to the lower hills of Himachal. The small town of Bharmaur is famous for the well known Chaurasi Temples complex; these temples are associated with 84 Yogis, who is said to have visited Bharmour during the reign of King Sahil Verma. The Yogis were pleased by King's humanity and hospitality they blessed King with ten sons and a daughter named as Champawati. These temples leave visitors a wondering amazement of the beauty and eloquent examples of striving of men to complement sublime beauty of nature. Overnight at Hotel.

Day 06: Chamba – Kalaban (95 km / 5 hrs)

P.M.

Day 07: Kalaban–Killard (Pangi Valley) over Sach Pass (4390 m /64 km / 6 hrs)

Today we drive for Cold and desolate, the Chenab Valley also called as Pangi Valley, sublime in its beauty and grandeur and is one of its sub – Divisional with headquarters at Killar. It is the scenic valley of Pangi at the foot of Himalayas, between two parallel ranges, the highest of which vary from 4447 m to 6402 m. This valley is grandeur and majesty, both in appearance and in effect. The valley remains dry during the rainy season and attracts adventurous tourists for mountaineering and trekking. There are still a few virgin peaks of 6402 m to 6705 m high, challenging mountaineers. Two main communities Pangwal and Bhots inhabit in this valley. In Pangi valley, there is hardly any village or even hamlet where one or more temples is there, out of which the most important are Mindhal Vasni Temple, about 15 km and temple of Purthi about 30 km from Killar. Killar is situated in the east of Chamba, deep and narrow gorge of the Chenab River. Here we are in the high Himalayas.

Day 08: Killard – Hundan Valley and Sidhbaba Temple (70 kms / 7 hrs)

P.M.

Day 09: Sidhbaba Temple – Udaipur, enroute Mindal Temple (85km / 8 hrs)

Today we have long drive till Udaipur. In Udaipur we visit the temple dedicated to Mrikula Devi, constructed during 15th century by King of Chamaba and his Lahauli feudal chief, who was a Hindu architecture with fine wooden carvings. It is said that the famous Hadimba temple in Manali and this temple had same architect.

Day 10: Udaipur – Dadarpul en route visit Mrikula Temple and Trilokinath Temple (120 km / 8 hrs)

Today we drive for Dadarpul on the way we visit the Markula Devi Temple which goes back to Ajayyarmān's Reign in Kashmir, the original work of this temple is not dated but part of the temple has been copied during the repairs in the 11/ 12th and 16th century. Markula's wood carvings belongs to two different periods, the earlier one consisting of the facade the sanctum sanctorum and the ceiling and four main pillars of the mandapa and the alter one consisting of two additional pillars, the *dwarpala* statues on the both side of the façade, window panels and the architraves supporting the ceiling. The exterior of the temple is most ordinary as it had to be renewed time and again because of vagaries of nature. The interior, however, is rich in artistic quality. The walls panels depict scenes from the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, Sunderkand, Yuddhakand, grant of ground by Raja Bali to Vaaman, three headed incarnation of Vishnu, Churning of the ocean (Samudramanthan) Amritpaan, etc. The local people here believe that this temple to be the work of the master craftsman who built the famous Hadimba Temple at Manali for Bahadur Singh of Kullu. Historically this theory sounds plausible because Pratap Singh was the son-in-law and close friend and ally of Bahadur Singh. There is striking similarity between many figures and other details of the later wood carvings to the reliefs of the Hadimba Devi Temple. Then we go to the Triloknath (means Shiva). Guru Padmasambhava gave this Shiva Temple the look of a Buddhist monastery by installing six – armed image of Avalokishwar. So it has become a sacred place for both Hindu and Buddhist and attracts many pilgrims from both communities. In the month of August a big festival named Pori is held here for three days.

Day 11: Dadarpul – Kaza (3050mts) via Chandratat Lake (4270 m) (7hrs)

Today we drive from Dadarpul and then drive towards Batal, from Batal we take a narrow track to Chandratat Lake. The first sight of this wondrous lake takes ones breaths away, with its shore ringed with meadows carpeted with hundreds of varieties of alpine flowers and surrounded by massive mountain tops and glaciers. Sometimes the road all the way till the lake is not open, in such cases you might need to trek to the lake, depending on the road condition. We drive further along the Spiti River and pass through various villages to the base of 4551 m high Kunzum Pass (Takcha). From Takcha the first stretch of drive is up to 4551 m high Kunzum Pass, offering magnificent view of the CB range of Himalayas.

Day12: Kaza – Langja (4400 mts), Hikkim – Komik (4500 m), Kibber (4,205 m) and Ki Monastery (5-6 hrs)

These Villages are all situated over the height of 4000 Mts. with striking locations and house to some of the most interesting monasteries in the Spiti Valley. The ancient Monastery of Hikkim also known as the Tangyur Gompa is of unique importance as this is one of the two Sakya Pa Monasteries in Spiti Valley second being situated at Kaza. This Monastery was responsible for the propagation of Tantra teachings during the 14th Century. Just about 13 kms from Kaza is situated Kye or Ki Monastery at an elevation of

3969 m. The Monastery consists of large irregular heap of low ceiling rooms and narrow corridors, interconnected by dark passages and tortuous staircase, built on what must have been a crater of extinct volcano. Built around 14th century and considering it to be the biggest and the oldest monasteries belonging to the Ge – Lug – Pa sect in Spiti.

Day13: Kaza to Tabo Via Pin Valley and Dhankar monastery (3890 m)(7 hrs)

Today we drive crossing the Spiti River by a solid concrete bridge and following the Pin River, one of the major tributaries of Spiti River. The Valley is famous for wildlife like – Ibex, Snow Leopard. There is also a Monastery called Kungri Monastery believed to be found by Guru Padmasambhava. The Kungri Monastery is not built like the general Tibetan Monastery are built with a compact layout with all temples and apartments put together but Kungri Monastery is formed of three detached rectangular blocks facing due east. We drive for another 30 kms from Tabo through steep hillside along a dusty road slowly winds its way up to the village Dhankar, located at a height of 3890 m. In the middle of Ridge is a striking location, a 6th Gompa, though not well preserved but has some magnificent original Thankas and some beautiful murals. Unfortunately a part of monastery was destroyed during severe winter of 1989. The last sightseeing of the day is the Tabo Monastery at an altitude of 3050 m is the seat of Buddhist learning, the Gompa in Tibet. Established about 1000 years ago and was a part of western Tibet School that originally designed different Mandala's in the form of the statues hanging in the walls of the monasteries. But after the arrival of Guru Padmasambhava 800 years ago and the instructions of new sect, old philosophy of Western Tibet School lost its unique philosophical practices. Overnight at Hotel.

Day14: Tabo to Rarang on the way visit Kanum village (6hrs)

Today we stay at a Family Guest House. Also a camp will be fixed as the house has few rooms. In the evening we will arrange a local Kinnauri Folk dance in the evening. The village of Rarang is quite beautiful, it houses a temple and a Monastery. We'll explore the real Kinnaur in these villages situated on the high hills, which in, Hindu and Buddhist literature occupies a special place. On the way we visit the Kanum Monastery was built by Rinchen Zangpo is very significant monastery for the Buddhist people. Among the several monastic centres founded Rin – chen – bZangpo Ratnabhadra, (958 – 1055 A.D.), quite a good number were Chos-hkors i.e. the doctoral enclaves where facilities for diverse studies were available. The Kangyur Temple at Kanum is living testimony to his academic accomplishment, Kanum itself means, "A place of the sacred books".

Day15: Rarang to Sangla (2680 m) via Kalpa (6 hrs)

We drive today to Sangla via Kalpa on the Old Hindustan – Tibet road offering the nearest view of Kinner- Kailash and Shivlinagam Peak. Here we visit to the Roghi Village, the strikingly situated in the hills and houses an ancient temple. Later we drive to Sangla valley. Overnight at the Camp.

Day16: Sangla – Chhitkul – Sangla

Today morning we start our day visiting a beautiful village of Baspa Valley such as Chhitkul at an altitude of 3450 m - the route to this stretch is very narrow and steep till Chhitkul, the last and the highest village in Baspa Valley. There is a temple dedicated to the local Goddess, Mathi. It was constructed some 500 years ago. The location of Rakchham – another village in Baspa Valley is striking as rocky cliffs of granite rocks and forests surround it. We can also visit Kamru Temple and fort in Kamru Temple, situated on a top of Sangla Village. Spending the whole day visiting beautiful and meeting its inhabitants. Overnight in the Camp.

Day17: Sangla – Sarahan. (2165 m)(5 hrs)

We drive for Sarahan about 95 kms from Sangla at an altitude of 1920 m through deep and narrow valleys of Satluj and Baspa. Here we visit the Bhima Kali Temple one of the very famous and significant Hindu temple. Overnight at hotel.

Day18: Sarhan -Shimla (2205 m)

Today we arrive at the state capital, Shimla which has been once the summer capital of English rulers previously known as Mahasu District. We drive via many small towns such as Rampur, Nirth, Kufri, Narkanda, through Satluj valley. At Nirth, there is an old temple, dedicated to Sun god, which is said to be built by the great sage Parshram and Dutt Nagar is known for its archaeological. Overnight at hotel.

Day19: Shimla Sight Seeing.

Today we go for sightseeing in Shimla. We start our day visiting the Jakhu hill towers over Shimla. This place is replete with history and architectural charm with several houses along its steep. Climb for 1.5 mts In the forested hill there is temple dedicated to the Lord Hanuman (The Monkey God). Then we go to The Mall, the main promenade that runs along the top of the Ridge – a busy shopping area with old colonial building with souvenir shops and restaurants. There is a large open square in with a fabulous view of the town making it a favorite place for the visitors. Overlooking it the is Christ Church with fine stained glass windows, the labyrinth of Shimla's bazaars spill over the edge of the mall. Then we go to the Vice regal House, a house in Gothic splendor of the Vice Regal Lodge, which is now a Indian Institute of Advance Studies, India's premier academy for higher research. From there we go to the Himachal State Museum, a colonial building very close to Institute set in spacious lawns, is the museum. It has collection of Pahari miniatures, stone sculpture, local handicrafts, textiles and embroidery. Overnight at the hotel.

Day20: Transfer to Shimla Railway Station to Kalka then to Delhi.

Today we are transferred to the Shimla Railway Station to catch the Toy Train to Kalka and after then board the Shatabdi Express to Delhi.