



Uttarakhand

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Why Go?

Soaring Himalayan peaks and steamy lowland jungles. Revered temples and renowned ashrams. Peaceful hill stations and busy cities. Uttarakhand is truly a *thali* of a state, with some of India's best trekking, yoga schools, holiday towns and wildlife watching all tucked into this little corner of the country.

Hindus think of Uttarakhand as *Dev Bhoomi* – the Land of Gods – and the dramatic terrain is covered with holy mountains, lakes and rivers. Twisting roads and high-altitude hiking trails lead to spectacular pilgrimage sites where tales from the Hindu epics are set. And something of these ancient stories seems to have been absorbed by the land, which exudes a subtle sense of actually being sacred – even to ultra-orthodox agnostics. Many travellers flock here for this vibe, finding it a powerful place to pursue a spiritual practice.

Others come here for the tigers!

Best Places to Eat

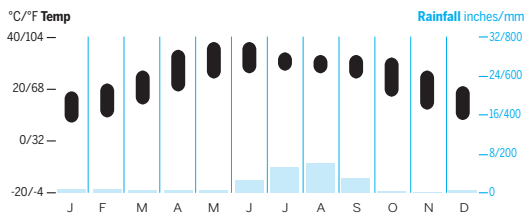
- » Kasmanda Palace Restaurant (p411)
- » Little Buddha Cafe (p422)
- » Imperial Square (p410)
- » Prakash Lok (p415)

Best Places to Stay

- » Palace Belvedere (p433)
- » Kasmanda Palace Hotel (p409)
- » Infinity Resorts (p432)

When to Go

Rishikesh



Apr–mid-Jun

The best season for tiger spotting at Corbett Tiger Reserve.

Jul–mid-Sep

Monsoons may make travel difficult; Valley of Flowers bloom is best July–August.

Mid-Sep–Oct

The perfect time to trek the Himalayas.

MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

- » Haridwar, Dehra Dun and Haldwani are easily reached by train or bus.
- » Jolly Grant Airport is convenient to Rishikesh and Dehra Dun.
- » Enter or exit Nepal at Banbassa.

Fast Facts

- » Population: 10.1 million
- » Area: 51,125sq km
- » Capital: Dehra Dun
- » Main languages: Hindi, Garhwali, Kumaoni
- » Sleeping prices: \$ below ₹800, \$\$ ₹800 to 1800, \$\$\$ above ₹1800

Top Tip

If travelling through the hills or mountains, get to buses early to claim a window seat. The landscape, much of which you'll never stop to explore, is gorgeous.

Resources

- » US Military maps (www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/ams/india), useful for trekking.
- » Background on the Chipko movement (<http://nandadevi.prayaga.org/chipko.html>), the original 'tree-huggers'.
- » Read up on Transcendental Meditation (www.tm.org), founded by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

Food

Not famous for its food, cuisine in Uttarakhand is typically North Indian. The most variety is found in Mussoorie, Rishikesh, Nainital and Dehra Dun. A warning to meat-eaters: towns with top-tier religious significance are all-vegetarian, all the time.

DON'T MISS

Every evening around sunset, hundreds of Hindu worshippers converge at **Haridwar's Har-ki-Pairi Ghat** to perform *puja* (prayer offering) on the Ganges canal. Leaf baskets filled with a fragrant rainbow of flower petals, each softly lit by a candle nestled in the centre, are launched onto the water; this river of flickering flames carries the prayers of the faithful downstream. Beautiful and intense, this might be the most potent scene of archetypal 'India' in all of Uttarakhand.

Just north of Haridwar, follow the footsteps of The Beatles to **Rishikesh**, the world-renowned spiritual-seekers' city, where you'll surely find a yoga or meditation course to suit your needs – whether you're a serious practitioner or an undisciplined dabbler.

Spanning the northern half of the state are the mighty **Himalayas**. A vast land of soaring, snowy summits and rolling alpine meadows – plus a chance to see snow leopards and meet tribal herders – Uttarakhand is a **trekking** paradise. Choose between busy pilgrims' trails on the Char Dham route or remote wilderness where you'll hardly see another soul.

Top State Festivals

- » Magh Mela (Jan & Feb, Haridwar, p412) Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims come to bathe in the soul-cleansing Ganges during this huge annual religious fair. The Ardh Kumbh Mela is held every six years; and millions of pilgrims attend the mega Kumbh Mela every 12 years.
- » International Yoga Festival (Mar, Rishikesh, p421) Yoga and meditation masters from around the world converge and give demonstrations and lectures.
- » Shivaratri (usually Mar, Tapkeshwar Temple, p406) A festival celebrated in style with carnival rides and stalls at a picturesque riverside cave temple on the outskirts of Dehra Dun.
- » Nanda Devi Fair (Sep, Almora, p437) During this five-day fair, thousands of devotees parade the image of the goddess around and watch dancing and other cultural shows.



Uttarakhand Highlights

- 1** Visit the temple at **Gangotri** and trek beyond it to **Gaumukh**, the source of the holy Ganges River (p425)
- 2** Float a candle down the Ganges at the gorgeous nightly ceremony at Haridwar's **Har-ki-Pairi Ghat** (p412)
- 3** Scout for rare Bengal tigers and ride an elephant in **Corbett Tiger Reserve** (p430)
- 4** Get your asanas and chakras sorted at **Rishikesh**, the yoga and ashram capital of the universe (p417)
- 5** Cool off in a scenic Raj-era hill station in **Mussoorie** (p408) or **Nainital** (p432)
- 6** Trek to the sublime **Valley of Flowers** and nearby **Hem Kund** for an unforgettable combo of the scenic and sacred (p428)
- 7** Immerse yourself in a mind-blowing Himalayan landscape while trekking the **Kuari Pass** (p430) through **Nanda Devi National Park (Sanctuary)**

History

Uttarakhand consists of the culturally distinct Garhwal (in the west) and Kumaon (east) districts. Over the centuries various dynasties have dominated the region, including the Guptas, Kuturyi and Chand *rajas* (kings). In the 18th century the Nepalese Gurkhas attacked first the kingdom of Kumaon, then Garhwal, prompting the British to step in and take most of the region as part of the Treaty of Sigauli in 1817.

After Independence, the region was merged with Uttar Pradesh, but a vocal separatist movement followed, and the present-day state of Uttaranchal was formed in 2000. In 2007 it was officially renamed Uttarakhand, a traditional name meaning 'northern country'.

Climate

Look at the altitude to get an idea of likely temperatures in this state of elevation extremes. Trekking the Himalayas is possible from May to October, but can be extremely dangerous between July and mid-September, during the monsoon. Heavy rains at that time can also make roads impassable for days. Hill stations can be visited all year, but winters there are freezing cold. Low-lying Rishikesh and Haridwar are most comfortable from October to March.

i Information

Most towns in the region have an Uttarakhand Tourism office, however the main responsibility for the region's tourism rests with the **Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam** (GMVN; www.gmvl.com), which covers the Garhwal district; and **Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam** (KMVN; www.kmvl.org), which covers the Kumaon district.

i Getting Around

Tough old government buses are the main means of travelling around Uttarakhand. In addition, crowded share jeeps (often called 'sumos') criss-cross the state, linking remote towns and villages to important road junctions. Pay 10 times the share-taxi rate and you can hire the whole vehicle and travel in comfort. Roads that snake through the hills can be nerve-racking and stomach-churning.

Dehra Dun

☎0135 / POP 527,859 / ELEV 700M

Perhaps best known for the institutions the British left behind – the huge Forest Research Institute Museum, the Indian Military Academy, the Wildlife Institute of India and the Survey of India – the capital

of Uttarakhand is a hectic, congested city sprawling in the Doon Valley between the Himalayan foothills and the Siwalik Range. Be prepared to encounter assertive beggars in the city center.

A once green and pleasant town of rice and tea gardens, Dehra Dun has lost much of its charm, but you don't have to go far out of the city centre to find relief from the traffic. Rishikesh and Mussoorie are both just over an hour away, so most travellers merely pass through, but Dehra Dun is worth a stop for its lively Paltan Bazaar and vibrant Tibetan community south of the city in Clement Town. It's also a transit point for Himachal Pradesh.

👁 Sights & Activities

Great Stupa & Buddha Statue

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

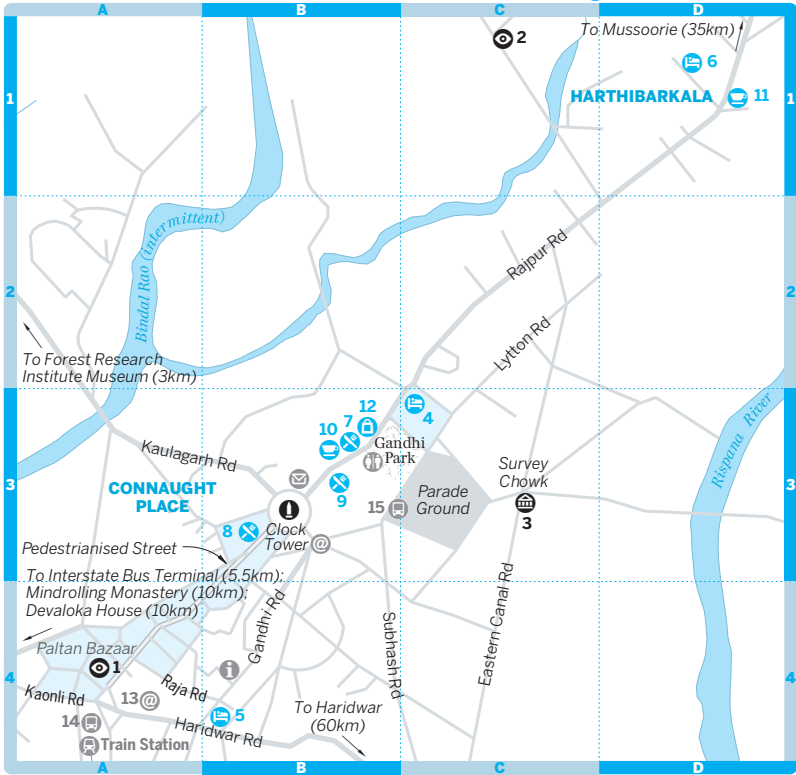
The region around Dehra Dun is home to a thriving Tibetan Buddhist community, mainly focused on the **Mindrolling Monastery** (☎2640556; www.mindrolling.org), about 10km south of the centre in Clement Town. Everything about the monastery is on a grand scale: it boasts a large college, manicured gardens and the five-storey **Great Stupa** (admission free; ☎5am-9pm). At over 60m, it's believed to be the world's tallest stupa and contains a series of shrine rooms displaying relics, murals and Tibetan art. Presiding over the monastery is the impressive 35m-high gold **Buddha Statue**, dedicated to the Dalai Lama.

The streets around the monastery have several Tibetan-run guesthouses and cafes. Take *vikram* (large tempo) 5 from the city centre (₹10). An autorickshaw costs about ₹150.

Forest Research Institute Museum

NOTABLE BUILDING

(☎2759382; www.icfre.org; admission ₹10, guide ₹50; ☎9.30am-1pm & 1.30-5.30pm) The prime attraction of this museum is the building itself. Set in a 5 sq km park, the institute – where most of India's forest officers are trained – is larger than Buckingham Palace and is one of the Raj's grandest buildings. Built between 1924 and 1929, and designed by CG Blomfield, this red-brick colossus has Mughal towers, perfectly formed arches and Roman columns in a series of quadrangles edged by elegant cloisters. Six huge halls have displays on every aspect of forestry in India that look like leftovers from a middle school science fair. Highlights include beau-



tiful animal, bird and plant paintings by Afshan Zaidi, exhibits on the medicinal uses of trees, and a cross-section of a 700-year-old deodar tree. A return autorickshaw from the city centre, including waiting time, costs around ₹250. Or take *vikram* 8 (from Gandhi Rd) or *vikram* 6 (from Connaught Place) and get out at the institute's entry gate.

Ram Rai Darbar

MAUSOLEUM

(Paltan Bazaar; admission free; ☀️dawn-dusk) This unique mausoleum is made of white marble, and the four smaller tombs in the garden courtyard are those of Ram Rai's four wives. Ram Rai, the errant son of the seventh Sikh guru, Har Rai, was excommunicated by his father. He formed his own Udasi sect, which still runs schools and hospitals. When Ram Rai died in 1687, Mughal emperor Aurangzeb ordered the building of the mausoleum. A free communal lunch of dhal, rice and chapatis is offered to anyone who wants it, although a donation is appreciated.

Survey of India Museum

MUSEUM

(Survey Chowk; admission free; ☀️10.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) Instruments used to accomplish the monumental task of mapping India in the 19th century are on display here, including some designed for the mission by its leader, George Everest. Among them are beautiful transits and scopes of gleaming brass, and a bar made partly of iron, partly of brass, which allowed surveyors to compensate for inaccuracies in their measurements, caused by the expansion and contraction of their instruments due to heat and cold. Small placards tell snippets of the story of one of the most impressive geographical feats ever achieved.

The museum, however, is not officially opened to the public. To get permission to see it, go to the Surveyor General's office at the Survey of India compound in Harthibarkala. There, you'll have to write a brief letter explaining why you want to view the collection. Permits are given only to those

Dehra Dun

📍 Sights

- 1 Ram Rai DarbarA4
- 2 Survey of India Compound,
HarthibarkalaC1
- 3 Survey of India MuseumC3

🏨 Sleeping

- 4 Hotel PresidentC3
- 5 Hotel SaurabB4
- 6 Samar Niwas Guest HouseD1

🍴 Eating

- 7 Kumar Vegetarian & South
Indian RestaurantB3
- 8 Lakshmi RestaurantB3
- 9 MotimahalB3

☕ Drinking

- 10 BaristaB3
- 11 Maa Cozy Coffee LoungeD1
- Polo Bar (see 4)

🛍 Shopping

- English Book Depot(see 10)
- 12 Natraj BooksellersB3
 - Survey of India Map Counter(see 2)

Information

- 13 iWayA4

Transport

- 14 Mussoorie Bus StandA4
- 15 Parade Ground Bus StandB3
- Taxi Stand(see 14)

with an academic or professional interest in the subject – like a geography student or a historian – but proof of your vocation or college major isn't demanded.

Tapkeshwar Temple

HINDU TEMPLE

(☀️dawn-dusk) In a scenic setting on the banks of the Tons Nadi River, you'll find an unusual and popular Shiva shrine inside a small, dripping cave, which is the site of the annual **Shivaratri** festival. Turn left at the bottom of the steps for the main shrine. Cross the bridge over the river to visit another one, where you have to squeeze through a narrow cave to see an image of Mata Vaishno Devi. The temple is about 5km north of the centre. Take a rickshaw for ₹300 roundtrip.

🛏 Sleeping

There are plenty of cheapies along the Haridwar road outside the train station, some charging as little as ₹250 a double, but

the better places can be found along Gandhi Rd and Rajpur Rd. There are also some cheap guest houses in the Tibetan colony at Clement Town.

TOP CHOICE Samar Niwas Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(☎2740299; www.samarniwas.com; M-16 Chand-erlok Colony; d ₹800-1500; 📞) This charming four-room guesthouse, in a peaceful residential area just off Rajpur Rd, is as cosy and welcoming as it gets. The owners are descendants of the Tehri royal family, but the rulers of the house seem to be the friendly pugs that roam the comfortable lounge-cum-lobby. Rooms are well-appointed, but beds are a bit hard.

Devaloka House

HOTEL \$

(☎9759862769; Clement Town; s/d/tr ₹250/350/450) Part of the Mindrolling Monastery complex, the spotless white rooms here are above the semicircular arcade looking across to the monumental Great Stupa and gardens. Rooms have TV, hot water, a small balcony and tiled floors. Check in at Norjin Restaurant.

Hotel President

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2657082; www.hotelpresidentdehradun.com; 6 Astley Hall, Rajpur Rd; s ₹2250-2500, d ₹2500-2800; 📞) This Dehra Dun institution is one of the classiest hotels in town, despite being sandwiched within the complex of shops, restaurants and fast-food spots called Astley Hall. Rooms are thoroughly modern and even the least expensive have fridges, safes and complimentary slippers. There's a good restaurant, a coffee shop and the Polo Bar.

Hotel Saurab

HOTEL \$

(☎2728042; hotelsaurab@hotmail.com; 1 Raja Rd; s/d from ₹550/700, with AC from ₹1200/1600; 📞) With midrange quality at a near-budget price, this neatly furnished, comfortable hotel just off Gandhi Rd is a great deal. All rooms have hot water and TVs, and there's a multicuisine restaurant.

Hotel GP Grand

HOTEL \$

(☎2625555; 68 Gandhi Rd; s/d from ₹750/900; 📞) If you want to be near the train station, you can't get much closer or cleaner than the GP Grand.

🍴 Eating

Dehra Dun has an eclectic range of restaurants, but by far the best hunting ground is along Rajpur Rd, northeast of the clock tower.

The Astley Hall precinct is popular for fast food and has a couple of upmarket bars.

Kumar Vegetarian & South Indian Restaurant

INDIAN \$\$

(15B Rajpur Rd; mains ₹50-150; ☺lunch & dinner; ☹) This popular, sparkling clean restaurant serves what surely comes close to the Platonic Form of a masala dosa, which is the main reason locals flock here. Other Indian dishes are also cooked to near perfection and even the Chinese food is quite good. The waitstaff are very attentive.

Motimahal

INDIAN \$\$

(7 Rajpur Rd; mains ₹110-300; ☺lunch & dinner; ☹) Locals consistently rate Motimahal as one of the best midrange diners along Rajpur Rd. An interesting range of vegetarian and nonvegetarian includes Goan fish curry and Afghani *murg* (chicken), along with traditional South Indian fare and Chinese food.

Lakshmi Restaurant

SOUTH INDIAN \$

(Paltan Bazaar; mains ₹22-44; ☺10.30am-9pm) If you're looking for fast, cheap and tasty, Lakshmi is your place. Near the top of Paltan Bazaar, the busy, blue-walled dining room is a classic Indian restaurant. Dosas and lassis are the specialties, plus chow mein and a few other South Indian snacks.



Drinking

Maa Cozy Coffee Lounge

CAFE

(76 Rajpur Rd; ☺11am-11pm) A hip Arabian-style lounge where you can smoke a fruit sheesha (water pipe from ₹210) while reclining on cushions and rugs. Has a big range of tea, coffee and cold drinks.

Polo Bar

BAR

(6 Astley Hall, Rajpur Rd; ☺11am-11pm) One of the more salubrious of Dehra Dun's many hotel bars, this one is at Hotel President.

Barista

CAFE

(15a Rajpur Rd; drinks & snacks ₹10-50; ☺9am-11pm) A popular modern cafe with board games and an excellent bookshop next door.



Shopping

The congested but virtually traffic-free street through **Paltan Bazaar**, running south from the clock tower, is a popular spot for an evening stroll. Here you can pick up everything from cheap clothing and souvenirs to camping and trekking gear.

Among the best bookshops in town are **Natraj Booksellers** (17 Rajpur Rd; ☺10.30am-1.30pm & 3-8pm Mon-Sat), which gives plenty

of shelf to local author Ruskin Bond, and **English Book Depot** (☎2655192; www.englishbookdepot.com; 15 Rajpur Rd; ☺10am-8pm), attached to the Barista coffee shop.

Though the **Survey of India Map Counter** (☺9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri; maps ₹20-70) in Harthibarkala is mostly good for being told which topographical maps you're not allowed to buy, you can pick up trekking maps that aren't bad for getting from village to village, but are worthless for backcountry navigation.

Information

Emergency

Ambulance ☎2650102

Police ☎2653333

Internet Access

iWay (Hotel Grand, Shri Laxmi Plaza, 64 Gandhi Rd; per hr ₹30; ☺10am-8pm)

Netzone (per hr ₹25; ☺9am-9pm) Located one block southeast of the clock tower.

Medical Services

Doon College Hospital (☎2760330; General Mahadev Singh Rd)

Money

The banks that are located on Rajpur Rd exchange travellers cheques and currency, and there are numerous ATMs that accept foreign credit cards.

Post

Main post office (Rajpur Rd; ☺10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat)

Tourist Information

Uttarakhand Tourism office (☎2653217; 45 Gandhi Rd; ☺10am-5pm Mon-Sat) The local tourist office, attached to the Hotel Drona. There's also a tourist-information counter at the train station.

Getting There & Away

Air

Kingfisher Airlines (www.flyingfisher.com) flies from Delhi to Dehra Dun's Jolly Grant Airport – about 20km east of the city on the Haridwar road – at 10:50am and 3pm. Flights to Delhi depart at 12:25pm and 4:20pm. A taxi to/from the airport costs ₹550, or take the AC coach for ₹100 (call the Uttarakhand Tourism office for details).

Bus

Nearly all long-distance buses arrive and depart from the huge, modern Interstate Bus Terminal (ISBT), 5km south of the city centre. To get

BUSES FROM DEHRA DUN

The following buses depart from the Interstate Bus Terminal (ISBT).

DESTINATION	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	FREQUENCY
Chandigarh	150	6	hourly btwn 4am & 10pm
Delhi (deluxe)	290/392AC	7	hourly btwn 4am & 10.30pm
Delhi (standard)	200	7	hourly btwn 4am & 10.30pm
Dharamsala	380/700AC	14	12.30pm & 5pm (AC)
Haridwar	50	2	half-hourly
Joshimath	300	12	5.30am
Manali	425	14	3pm
Nainital	275	12	7 per day
Ramnagar	200	7	7 per day
Rishikesh	35	1½	half-hourly
Shimla	240	10	6am, 8am, 10am, 11.30pm
Uttarkashi	225	8	5am & 8am

there take a local bus (₹5), *vikram* 5 (₹10) or an autorickshaw (₹100). A few buses to Mussoorie leave from here but most go from the **Mussoorie bus stand** (₹35, 1½ hours, half-hourly between 6am & 8pm) next to the train station. Some head to Mussoorie's Picture Palace bus stand while others go to the Library bus stand across town. Private buses to Joshimath (₹250, 12 hours, departs 7am) and Uttarkashi (₹190, 9 hours, departs 8.15am & 1pm) leave from the **Parade Ground bus stand**. For more bus details, see the table, p408.

Taxi

A taxi to Mussoorie costs ₹510, while a share taxi should cost ₹100 per person; both can be found in front of the train station. Taxis charge ₹810 to Rishikesh and ₹960 to Haridwar.

Train

Dehra Dun is well connected by train to Delhi, and there are a handful of services to Lucknow, Varanasi, Chennai (Madras) and Kolkata (Calcutta). The quickest service linking Dehra Dun and Delhi is the daily *Shatabdi Express* (chair/executive ₹390/780), which leaves New Delhi train station at 6.50am and reaches Dehra Dun at 12.40pm. The return trip leaves Dehra Dun at 5pm.

The daily *Mussoorie Express* (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹130/365/508, 11 hours) is an overnight service that leaves Delhi Sarai Rohilla station at 9.05pm. The return trip leaves Dehra Dun at 9.30pm.

The overnight *Dehradun-Amritsar Express* (sleeper/3A ₹127/356, 12 hours) to Amritsar departs daily at 7.40pm.

i Getting Around

Hundreds of eight-seater *vikrams* (₹3 to ₹10 per trip) race along five fixed routes (look at the front for the number). Most useful is *vikram* 5, which runs between the ISBT stand, the train station and Rajpur Rd, and as far south as the Tibetan colony at Clement Town. *Vikram* 1 runs up and down Rajpur Rd above Gandhi Park, and also to Harthibarkala (check with the driver to see which route he's on). Autorickshaws cost ₹30 for a short distance, ₹100 from ISBT to the city centre or ₹120 per hour for touring around the city.

Mussoorie

☑0135 / POP 29.319 / ELEV 2000M

Perched on a ridge 2km high, the 'Queen of Hill Stations' vies with Nainital as Uttarakhand's favourite holiday destination. When the mist clears, views of the green Doon Valley and the distant white-capped Himalayan peaks are superb, and in the hot months the cooler temperatures and fresh mountain air make a welcome break from the plains below. Although Mussoorie's main bazaars can at first seem like a tacky holiday camp for families and honeymooners, there are plenty of walks in the area, interesting Raj-era buildings, and an upbeat atmosphere.

Established by the British in 1823, Mussoorie became hugely popular with the Raj set. The ghosts of that era linger on in the architecture of the churches, libraries, hotels and summer palaces. The town is swamped

with visitors between May and July, but at other times many of the 300 hotels have vacancies and their prices drop dramatically.

Central Mussoorie consists of two developed areas: Gandhi Chowk (also called Library Bazaar) at the western end, and the livelier Kulri Bazaar and Picture Palace at the eastern end, linked by the (almost) traffic-free 2km Mall. Beyond Kulri Bazaar a narrow road leads 5km to the settlement of Landour.

Sights & Activities

Gun Hill

VIEWPOINT

From midway along the Mall, a **cable car** (return ₹55; ☀8am-9pm May-Jul & Oct, 10am-6pm Aug-Sep & late Nov-Apr) runs up to Gun Hill (2530m), which, on a clear day, has views of several big peaks. A steep path also winds up to the viewpoint. The most popular time to go up is an hour or so before sunset and there's a minicarnival atmosphere in high season with kids' rides, food stalls, magic shops and honeymooners having their photos taken in Garhwali costumes.

Walks

WALKING

When the clouds don't get in the way, the walks around Mussoorie offer great views. **Camel's Back Rd** is a popular 3km promenade from Kulri Bazaar to Gandhi Chowk, and passes a rock formation that looks like a camel. There are a couple of good mountain viewpoints along the way, and you can ride a horse (one way/return ₹200/250) along the trail if you start from the Gandhi Chowk end. An enjoyable, longer walk (5km one way) starts at the **Picture Palace Cinema**, goes past **Union Church** and the clock tower to Landour and the Sisters' Bazaar area.

West of Gandhi Chowk, a more demanding walk is to the **Jwalaji Temple** on Benog Hill (about 18km return) via Clouds End Hotel. The walk passes through thick forest and offers some fine views. A slightly shorter walk is to the abandoned **Everest House** (12km return), former residence of Sir George Everest, first surveyor-general of India and namesake of the world's highest mountain. **Trek Himalaya** (☎2630491; Upper Mall; ☀9.30am-8pm) can organise guides for around ₹650 a day.

Jawahar Aquarium

AQUARIUM

(The Mall; admission ₹15; ☀9am-9pm) Just up from the cable-car station, this aquarium is Mussoorie's newest attraction. Kids

might like it, but your local pet shop is more impressive.

Courses

Mussoorie is home to many schools and colleges, including the **Landour Language School** (☎2631487; www.landourlanguageschool.com; Landour; ☀1st Mon in Feb-2nd Fri in Dec). One of India's leading schools for teaching conversational Hindi at beginner, intermediate and advanced levels. Group classes are ₹175 per hour, and private tutorials are ₹275 per hour. There's an enrolment fee of ₹250, and course books are an extra ₹2000.

Tours

GMVN Booth

SIGHTSEEING

(☎2631281; Library bus stand; ☀10am-5pm Mon-Sat) GMVN organises a number of local bus tours, including to Kemptoy Falls (three-hour tour ₹70), and Dhanoltri, Surkhanda Devi Temple and Mussoorie Lake (full-day tour ₹160). Tours can also be booked at the Uttarakhanda Tourist office on the Lower Mall.

Trek Himalaya

TREKKING

(☎2630491; www.trekhimalaya.com; Upper Mall; ☀9.30am-8pm) For around ₹2500 per day, long-time local trekker Neelambar Badoni organises three-day treks to unspoilt Nagtibba, as well as customised treks to Dodital, Har-ki-Dun and Gaumukh Glacier, and safaris as far as Ladakh.

Sleeping

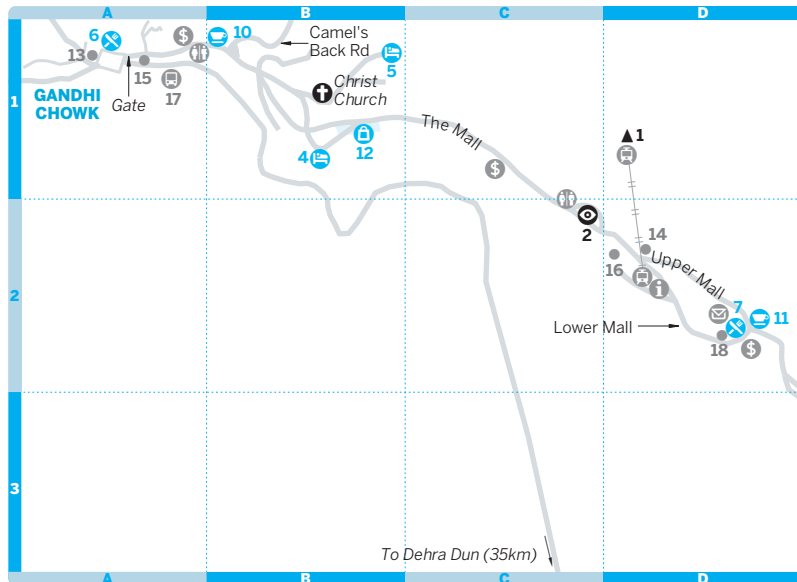
Peak season is summer (May to July) when hotel prices shoot to ridiculous heights. There's a midseason during the honeymoon period around October and November, and over Christmas and New Year. At other times you should be able to get a bargain. The following prices are for midseason, unless otherwise specified.

Budget places are few (you'll find some dives near Picture Palace), but most hotels drop their rates to almost budget levels out of season.

Kasmanda Palace Hotel

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2632424; www.kasmandapalace.com; d ₹4000-6500, low-season discount 20%) Located off the Mall, this is Mussoorie's most romantic hotel. The white Romanesque castle was built in 1836 for a British officer and was bought by the Maharaja of Kasmanda in 1915. The red-carpeted hall has a superb staircase



flanked by moth-eaten hunting trophies (the tiger and leopard skins are a sad anachronism). All of the rooms have charm but the wood-panelled and antique-filled Maharaja Room is the royal best. There's also a separate cottage with six renovated contemporary-style rooms. The formal dining room and pretty garden area complete the picture.

Hotel Broadway

HOTEL \$

(☎2632243; Camel's Back Rd, Kulri Bazaar; d ₹600-1200, low-season discount 50%) The best of the budget places by a country mile, this historic 1880s wooden hotel with colourful flowerboxes in the windows oozes character without sacrificing comfort. It's in a quiet location but close to the Mall. Room 1 has good views and lovely sunlit bay windows.

Hotel Padmini Nivas

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2631093; www.hotelpadmininivas.com; The Mall; d ₹1875-2400, ste ₹2850-3300; @) Built in 1840 by a British colonel and then bought by the Maharaja of Rajpipla, this green-roofed heritage hotel has real old-fashioned charm. Large rooms with quaint sun rooms, suites and even a private cottage are well appointed and beautifully furnished. The dining room, with its antique furniture, is an outstanding feature, and the whole place is set on 2 hectares of landscaped gardens.

Eating

Most of Mussoorie's best eating places are at the Kulri Bazaar and Picture Palace end of town. True to the holiday feel there are lots of fast-food places, and most hotels have their own restaurants. A branch of the popular **Barista** coffee shops is at Gandhi Chowk and there's a **Café Coffee Day** in Kulri Bazaar.

Imperial Square

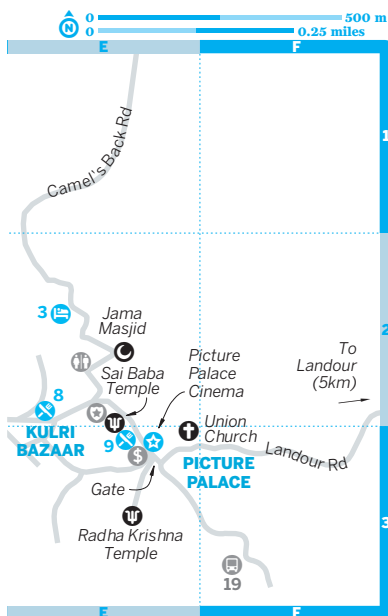
CONTINENTAL \$\$

(☎2632632; Gandhi Chowk; mains ₹120-320; ☀7.30am-11pm; ☎) The tastefully understated Imperial, with huge windows overlooking Gandhi Chowk, scores high on everything – decor, service and, most importantly, food. The menu is strong on Continental dishes, with long lists of chicken platters and sizzlers, plus big toasted vegetarian or nonvegetarian sandwiches perfect for lunch. For breakfast you can even have waffles. There's an attached **hotel** (d ₹4000, off-season discount 30%) with excellent rooms with valley views.

Lovely Omelette Centre

FAST FOOD \$

(The Mall, Kulri Bazaar; mains ₹35-60; ☀8am-9pm) Mussoorie's most famous eatery is also its smallest – a cubbyhole along the Mall that serves what many say are the best omelettes in India (a Facebook page for the restaurant started by an omelette lover



has over 2000 friends). The specialty is the cheese omelette, with chillies, onions and spices, served over toast, but the maestro at the frying pan will whip up a chocolate omelette on request.

Kasmanda Palace Restaurant

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(☎2632424; mains ₹110-350) The regal restaurant at this Raj-era hotel (found north of the Mall) is the perfect escape from Mussoorie's holiday bustle. The wood-panelled dining room is intimate but not stuffy, and the garden restaurant is fine for a lazy lunch or summer evening. The food lives up to the setting with North and South Indian dishes, as well as Continental (moussaka and pastas) and Chinese.

Tavern

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(The Mall, Picture Palace; mains ₹90-300; ☎11am-11pm) Run by the same family that owns the Imperial Square, this is a long-time favourite place to dine and hang out, with a global range of food from crispy roast lamb to Goan fish curry and just about everything in between. The decor is a bit British pub, but staff are welcoming and there's live music in the evening. Beer (₹160) and cocktails are available at the bar.

Mussoorie

Sights

- 1 Gun Hill D1
- 2 Jawahar Aquarium C2

Sleeping

- 3 Hotel Broadway E2
- 4 Hotel Padmini Nivas B1
- 5 Kasmanda Palace Hotel B1

Eating

- 6 Imperial Square A1
- 7 Kalsang Friends Corner D2
Kasmanda Palace Restaurant.....(see 5)
- 8 Lovely Omelette Centre E2
- 9 Tavern E3

Drinking

- 10 Barista B1
- 11 Café Coffee Day D2

Shopping

- 12 Tibetan Market B1

Information

- Connexions (see 9)
GMVN Booth (see 17)
13 Library A1
14 Trek Himalaya D2

Transport

- 15 Cycle-rickshaw Stand A1
- 16 Cycle-rickshaw Stand D2
- 17 Library Bus Stand A1
- 18 Northern Railway Booking Agency D2
- 19 Picture Palace Bus Stand F3
Taxi Stand (see 19)
Taxi Stand (see 17)

Kalsang Friends Corner

TIBETAN \$\$

(The Mall, Kulri Bazaar; mains ₹70-150; ☎11.30am-10.30pm) Tibetan-run, Kalsang has a longer list of *momos* than you might think possible – and they're done right. Also strong on Thai food, this place is deservedly popular for its coconut curries, Thai papaya salad and noodles.

Shopping

There's a **Tibetan Market** (The Mall; ☎from 9am) with cheap clothing and other goods. Mussoorie has a wonderful collection of magic shops, where you can buy cheap but baffling magic tricks and whacky toys – great gifts for kids. These shops are scattered mainly along the Mall and at Gun Hill.

i Information

Internet Access

Connexions (The Mall, Kulri Bazaar; per hr ₹60; ☎10.30am-10.30pm) Above the Tavern.

Money

Axis Bank ATM (The Mall and Gandhi Chowk)

Bank of Baroda ATM (Kulri Bazaar)

State Bank of India ATM (The Mall, Kulri Bazaar)

Trek Himalaya (☎2630491; Upper Mall; ☎9.30am-8pm) Exchanges major currencies and travellers cheques at a fair rate.

Post

Main post office (☎2632206; Upper Mall, Kulri Bazaar; ☎9am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Tourist Information

GMVN booth (☎2631281; Library bus stand; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Can book local tours, treks and far-flung rest houses.

Uttarakhand Tourism office (☎2632863; Lower Mall; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Near the cable-car station.

i Getting There & Away

Bus

Frequent buses leave from Dehra Dun's Mussoorie bus stand (next to the train station) for Mussoorie (₹35, 1½ hours). Some go to the **Picture Palace bus stand** (☎2632259) while others go to the **Library bus stand** (☎2632258) at the other end of town – if you know where you're staying it helps to be on the right bus. The return trip takes an hour. There are no direct buses to Rishikesh or Haridwar – change at Dehra Dun.

Mussoorie provides access to the mountain towns of Garhwal, but direct buses are not frequent. Head to the Library bus stand for buses and jeeps heading north. For Yamunotri, take a local bus to Barkot (₹140, 3½ hours), then another to Hanuman Chatti (₹60, 2½ hours), from where there are jeeps. The trip to Sankri for the Har-ki Dun trek also requires a combination of buses and share jeeps. For Uttarkashi, leave from the Tehri bus stand on the way to Landour and change at Chamba.

Taxi

From taxi stands at both bus stands you can hire taxis to Dehra Dun (₹510) and Rishikesh (₹1300), or jeeps to Uttarkashi (₹2700). A shared taxi to Dehra Dun should cost ₹100 per person.

Train

The **Northern Railway booking agency** (☎2632846; Lower Mall, Kulri Bazaar; ☎8-11am & noon-3pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) books tickets for trains from Dehra Dun and Haridwar.

i Getting Around

Central Mussoorie is very walkable – for a hill station, the Mall and Camel's Back Rd are surprisingly flat. Cycle-rickshaws along the Mall cost ₹20, but can only go between Gandhi Chowk and the cable-car station. A full day of sightseeing around Mussoorie by taxi costs around ₹2000, including visits to the popular and overdeveloped **Kemtoy Falls**, 15km west, and to **Dhanoltri** – a serene spot 25km east, set in deodar forests with Himalayan views.

Haridwar

☎01334 / POP 220,433 / ELEV 249M

Propitiously located at the point where the Ganges emerges from the Himalaya, Haridwar (also called Hardwar) is Uttarakhand's holiest Hindu city, and pilgrims arrive here in droves to bathe in the often fast-flowing Ganges. The sheer numbers of people gathering around Har-ki-Pairi Ghat give Haridwar a chaotic but reverent feel – as in Varanasi, it's easy to get caught up in the spiritual clamour here. Within the religious hierarchy of India, Haridwar is much more significant than Rishikesh, an hour further north, and every evening the river comes alive with flickering flames as floating offerings are released onto the Ganges.

Dotted around the city are impressive temples, both ancient and modern, *dharamsalas* (pilgrims' guesthouses) and ashrams, some of which are the size of small villages. Haridwar is busy during the *yatra* (pilgrimage) season from May to October, and is the site of the annual Magh Mela religious festival.

Haridwar's main street is Railway Rd, becoming Upper Rd, and runs parallel to the Ganges canal (the river proper runs further to the east). Generally only cycle-rickshaws are allowed between Laltarao Bridge and Bhimgoda Jhula (Bhimgoda Bridge), so vehicles travel around the opposite bank of the river. The alleyways of Bara Bazaar run south of Har-ki-Pairi Ghat.

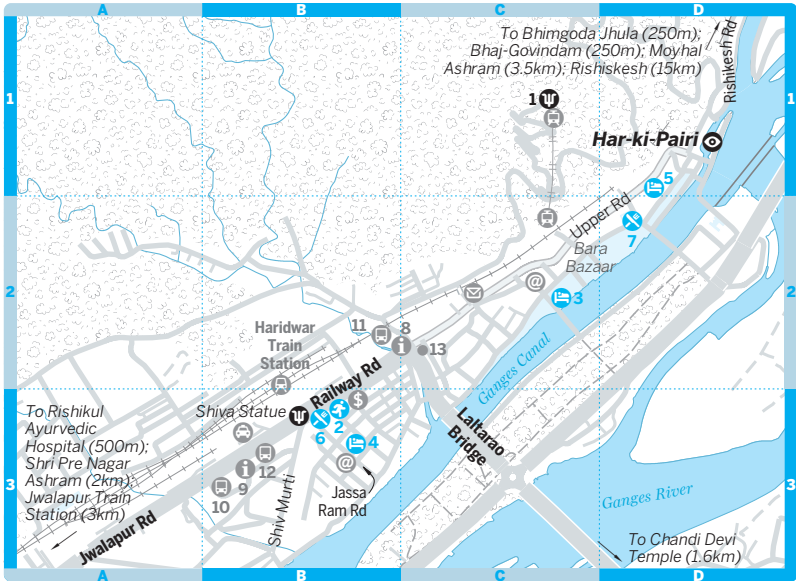
i Sights & Activities

Har-ki-Pairi Ghat

GHAT

Har-ki-Pairi (The Footstep of God) is where Vishnu is said to have dropped some heavenly nectar and left behind a footprint. As such, it is very sacred to Hindus, and is the place to wash away your sins. Pilgrims bathe here in its often fast currents and donate money to the priests and shrines.

The ghat sits on the western bank of the Ganges canal, and every evening hundreds



of worshippers gather for the *ganga aarti* (river worship ceremony). Officials in blue uniforms collect donations (and give out receipts) and, as the sun sets, bells ring out a rhythm, torches are lit, and leaf baskets with flower petals inside and a candle on top (₹10) are lit and put on the river to drift away downstream.

Tourists can mingle with the crowd to experience the rituals of an ancient religion that still retains its power in the modern age. Someone may claim to be a priest and help you with your *puja* before asking for ₹200 or more. If you want to make a donation, give it to a uniformed collector, or put money in a charity box.

The best times to visit the ghat are early morning or just before dusk.

Mansa Devi & Chandni Devi Temples

HINDU TEMPLES

Take the **cable car** (return ₹48; ☀7am-7pm Apr-Oct, 8.30am-6pm Nov-Mar) to the crowded hilltop temple of **Mansa Devi**, a wish-fulfilling goddess. The path to the cable car is lined with stalls selling packages of *prasad* (food offering used in religious ceremonies) to take up to the goddess on the hill. You can walk up (1.5km) but beware of *prasad*-stealing monkeys. Photography is forbidden in the temple.

Haridwar

📍 Top Sights

Har-ki-Pairi Ghat..... D1

📍 Sights

1 Mansa Devi Temple..... C1

🚗 Activities, Courses & Tours

2 Mohan's Adventure Tours..... B3

🛏 Sleeping

3 Haveli Hari Ganga..... C2

4 Hotel Swagat Palace..... B3

5 Yatri Niwas..... D1

🍴 Eating

6 Big Ben Restaurant..... B3

Haveli Hari Ganga Restaurant.... (see 3)

7 Hoshiyar Puri..... D2

Information

8 GMVN Tourist Office..... C2

9 Uttarakhand Tourism Office..... B3

Transport

10 GMOU Bus Stand..... B3

11 Private Bus Stand..... B2

12 UP Roadways Bus Stand..... B3

13 Vikrams to Rishikesh..... C2

Many visitors and pilgrims combine this with a **cable car** (return ₹117; ☀8am-6pm) up Neel Hill, 4km southeast of Haridwar, to **Chandi Devi Temple**. The temple was built by Raja Suchet Singh of Kashmir in 1929. Pay ₹165 at Mansa Devi and you can ride both cable cars and take an AC coach between the two temples.

Tours

From his office next to Chitra Talkies cinema, Sanjeev Mehta of **Mohan's Adventure Tours** (☎9412022966, 9319051335; www.mohansadventure.in; Railway Rd; ☀8am-10.30pm) can organise any kind of tour, including trekking, fishing, birdwatching, cycling, motorcycling and rafting. An accomplished wildlife photographer, he specialises in five-hour safaris (₹2350 per person) around Rajaji National Park. Sanjeev also runs three-day trips to Corbett Tiger Reserve (from ₹7000). Tours operate year-round.

Sleeping

Haridwar has loads of hotels catering to Hindu pilgrims. The busiest time of year is the *yatra* season from April to November – outside this time you should have no problem finding a room at discounts of 20% to 50%. For details on staying at an ashram, see the boxed text below.

Jassa Ram Rd and the other alleys running off Railway Rd have plenty of budget hotels and although some of the fancy foyers and neon signs may raise your hopes, none are great. Rishikesh has far superior budget accommodation.

Down by the ghats are a number of similar high-rise hotels that are recommended mainly for the location and views, and are popular with middle-class pilgrims.

TOP CHOICE **Haveli Hari Ganga** HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎226443; www.havelihariganga.com; 21 Ram Ghat; r ₹4000-5000; 🏠🚶) Hidden away in Bara Bazaar, but right on the Ganges, this superb 1918 *haveli* (traditional, ornately decorated residence) is Haridwar's finest hotel. Airy courtyards, marble floors, hanging flower baskets and balconies overlooking the river give it a regal charm. Room rates include breakfast, steam bath, yoga and the hotel's own *ganga aarti* on its private ghat. The Ganges laps one terrace, and downstairs an ayurvedic health spa offers treatments as well as yoga classes. It's hard to find, so call ahead for a pick-up.

Yatri Niwas HOTEL \$\$
(☎226004; www.yatrinivas.com; Upper Rd; r ₹1000) Just a few minutes walk from Har-ki-Pairi Ghat and the Mansa Devi cable car, this place is set back from the road around a surprisingly quiet courtyard. Rooms are good value, with nice wooden furnishings, glass and steel light fixtures, flat-screen TVs and modern bathrooms.

Bhaj-Govindam HOTEL \$\$
(☎261682; www.bhajgovindam.com; Upper Rd; huts ₹800, d from ₹1800; 🏠) Located on Upper Rd about 100m north of Bhimgoda Jhula, Bhaj-Govindam is in a wonderful spot with river frontage on the banks of the Ganges. Set around a grassy garden and with an am-

HARIDWAR'S ASHRAM STAYS

Most travellers make a beeline for Rishikesh to partake in yoga and spirituality and to stay in an ashram, but Haridwar has several serious ashrams where you'll be surrounded by longer-term practitioners and a less commercial feel. The two most accessible to foreigners:

Shri Prem Nagar Ashram (☎226345; www.manavdharam.com; Jwalapur Rd) This large ashram was founded by Hansji Maharaj, who died in 1966. His extraordinary mausoleum features a pyramidal blue ceiling with eight steps representing the seven holy rivers and the sea. Silent meditation takes place at 5am and singing prayers are at 7.30pm. The ashram has its own cows, ayurvedic medicine factory and bookshop, as well as a huge, pillarless meeting hall and a ghat facing the Ganges. Plain rooms (from ₹300) have fans, private bathrooms and hot water.

Mohyal Ashram (☎9219441137; mohans_india@yahoo.com; Rishikesh Rd; d ₹650, with AC ₹1200; 🏠) More a yoga retreat than an ashram, Mohyal has peaceful lawns, marble floors and a meditation and yoga hall with wonderful acoustics. The spotless, almost luxurious accommodation includes meals and occasional classes. This is not a strict ashram (although smoking, alcohol and meat are prohibited), and casual guests are welcome.

biance that's classy yet casual, rooms are as comfortable as you'd expect for the price, with some of the best mattresses in town. There are also a couple of worn reed huts you can stay in.

Hotel Swagat Palace

HOTEL \$

(☎221581; Jassa Ram Rd; d with/without AC ₹950/450; ☎) Rooms here are large and clean, with tiled floors. Each has its own quirks, so check out a few, but all in all it's decent value and close to the train and bus stations. Ask for a discount and you will probably get it.



Eating & Drinking

Being a holy city, only vegetarian food and nonalcoholic drinks are available.

Hoshiyar Puri

INDIAN \$

(Upper Rd; mains ₹40-70; ☎11am-4pm & 7pm-4am) Established in 1937, this place still has a loyal (and well-deserved) local following. The *dal makhani* (Kashmiri beans and lentils), *lacha paratha* (layered fried bread), *aloo gobi* (potato-and-cauliflower curry) and *kheer* (rice pudding) are lip-smackingly good.

Big Ben Restaurant

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(Hotel Ganga Azure, Railway Rd; mains ₹80-150; ☎8.30am-10.30pm) Watch the passing parade through the big windows and enjoy some of Haridwar's best food in this restaurant of mirrors, soft music and polite staff. It's a solid choice for breakfast, with good coffee. There's wi-fi in the adjoining lobby.

Haveli Hari Ganga Restaurant

INDIAN \$\$\$

(☎226443; www.havelihariganga.com; 21 Ram Ghat; dinner buffet ₹450; ☎8.30-11pm) The Indian vegetarian buffet at this lovely heritage hotel is the classiest in Haridwar.

Prakash Lok

LASSI \$

(Bara Bazaar; lassis ₹20). Don't miss a creamy lassi at this Haridwar institution, known for its ice-cold, best-you'll-ever-have lassis served in tin cups. Just about anyone in the Bara Bazaar can point you to it.



Information

Internet Access

There are a number of internet places on Railway Rd near the train station and down the side lanes, but most have only one or two terminals. These places have more.

Hillway Internet (Jassa Ram Rd; per hr ₹30; ☎9am-10.30pm)

Internet Zone iWay (Upper Rd; per hr ₹30; ☎10am-8.30pm)

Medical Services

Rishikul Ayurvedic Hospital (☎221003; Railway Rd) A long-established medical college and hospital with a good reputation.

Money

Sai Forex (Upper Rd; ☎10am-9pm) Changes cash and travellers cheques for a commission of 1%.

State Bank of India ATM (Railway Rd)

Post

Main post office (Upper Rd; ☎10am-6pm Mon-Sat)

Tourist Information

GMVN tourist office (☎224240; Railway Rd; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Uttarakhand Tourism office (☎265304; Rahi Motel, Railway Rd; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Getting There & Away

Haridwar is well connected by bus and train, but book ahead for trains during the pilgrimage season (May to October).

Bus

For details of major bus routes from Haridwar, see the table, p416.

Private deluxe buses and sleeper buses run to Delhi (deluxe/Volvo ₹175/400), Agra (seat/sleeper ₹240/295), Jaipur (₹375/475) and Pushkar (₹400/500). They leave from a stand around the corner from the GMVN tourist office by the gurdwara (Sikh temple), and any travel agent in town can make a booking.

Taxi & Vikram

The main taxi stand is outside the train station on Railway Rd. Destinations include Chilla (for Rajaji National Park, ₹510), Rishikesh (₹700, one hour) and Dehra Dun (₹1000), but it's usually possible to arrange a taxi for less than these official rates. You can hire private jeep Sumos to go to one or all of the pilgrimage sites on the Char Dham between April and October. One-way rates for Gangotri, Yamnotri and Badrinath are ₹6520 each; Kedarnath costs ₹5500; a 9-day tour of all four is ₹17,150.

Shared *vikrams* run up and down Railway Rd (₹10) and to Rishikesh (₹30, one hour) from Upper Rd at Laltarao Bridge, but for that trip buses are more comfortable. You can hire the whole thing to Rishikesh's Lakshman Jhula for ₹400.

Train

The trains listed in the table on p417 run daily, except as indicated.

BUSES FROM HARIDWAR

The following buses depart from the UP Roadways bus stand on Railway Rd.

DESTINATION	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	FREQUENCY
Agra	300	12	early morning
Almora	370	10	early morning & 5.30pm
Chandigarh	140	10	hourly
Dehra Dun	44	2	half-hourly
Delhi	140	6	half-hourly
Dharamsala	350	15	2.30pm & 4.30pm
Jaipur	310	12	early morning
Nainital	300	8	early morning & evening
Ranikhet	230	10	6am & 5pm
Rishikesh	22	1	half-hourly
Shimla	255	14	1.30am, 12.30pm & 5.30pm
Uttarkashi	200	10	5.30am, 7.30am & 9.30am

In the *yatra* (pilgrimage) season from May to October, the following buses run from the GMOU bus stand on Railway Rd. During monsoon season (July to mid-September), service is occasionally suspended. For current info, call ☎9897924247 for the Gangotri route and ☎9364936474 for Kedarnath and Badrinath buses.

DESTINATION	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	FREQUENCY
Badrinath (via Joshimath)	325	15	4.15am & 5am
Gangotri	300	10	5am
Kedarnath	235	10	5.30am & 7am

i Getting Around

Cycle-rickshaws cost ₹10 for a short distance and ₹30 for longer hauls, such as from the Haridwar train station to Har-ki-Pairi. Hiring a taxi for three hours to tour the local temples and ashrams costs around ₹700; an autorickshaw costs ₹300.

Rajaji National Park

ELEV 300-1000M

This unspoilt **park** (www.rajajinationalpark.in; admission Indian/foreigner per day ₹150/600; ☀15 Nov-15 Jun), covering 820 sq km in the forested foothills near Haridwar, is best known for its wild elephants, numbering around 450 at last count.

As well as elephants, the park contains some 15 tigers and 100 leopards. Although they're not easily seen, they have thousands of chital (spotted deer) and hundreds of sambar (India's largest species of deer) to feed on. A handful of rarely seen sloth bears

are hidden away. Some 300 species of birds also add interest.

Rajaji's forests include the traditional winter territory of over 1000 families of nomadic Van Gujjar buffalo herders – most of whom have been evicted from the park against their will. For more on this and other issues affecting the unique Van Gujjar tribe, visit www.sophiaindia.org.

The village of **Chilla**, 13km northeast of Haridwar, is the base for visiting the park. At the Forest Ranger's office, close to the tourist guesthouse at Chilla, you can pick up a brochure, pay entry fees and organise a jeep. These take up to eight people and cost ₹700 for the standard safari (plus a ₹100 entry fee for the vehicle). Elephant rides are no longer offered at Rajaji.

Before visiting, contact the **GMVN tourist office** (Map p413; ☎2244240; Railway Rd, Haridwar; ☀10am-5pm Mon-Sat) and **Mohan's Adventure Tours** (Map p413; ☎220910; www.mohansadventure.in; Railway Rd, Haridwar; ☀8am-

TRAINS FROM HARIDWAR

DESTINATION	TRAIN	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	DEPARTURE/ARRIVAL
Delhi (Old Delhi Station)	Mussoorie Express	sleeper/3AC/2AC 147/384/522	8¾	11.10pm/7.55am
Delhi (New Delhi Station)	Shatabdi Express	chair car/executive 512/950	4½	6.13pm/10.45pm
Delhi (New Delhi Station)	Jan Shatabdi Express	2nd class/chair car 110/352	4½	6.22am/11.15am
Lucknow	Doon Express	sleeper/3AC/2AC 212/564/772	10	10.15pm/8.15am
Varanasi	Doon Express	sleeper/3AC/2AC 298/811/1112	18	10.15pm/4.10pm
Kolkata/Howrah	Doon Express	sleeper/3AC/2AC 423/1152/1587	32	10.15pm/7am (two nights later)
Amritsar	Jan Shatabdi	2nd class/chair car 140/457	7	2.35pm/9.45pm
Amritsar	Dehra Dun–Amritsar Express	sleeper/3AC/1st class 192/503/580	9¾	9.40pm/7.25am
Haldwani (for Nanital and Almora)	Dehra Dun–Kathgodam Express	sleeper/2AC/1AC 146/516/860	6½	12.20am/6.50am

10.30pm), which offers abridged safaris even when the park is officially closed. These are five-hour trips (₹2350 per person) that include being taken on a short safari, hopefully seeing a parade of wild elephants, and maybe visiting a Van Gujjar forest camp. If you're lucky, Sanjeev might take you to see his legally adopted orphaned elephant.

Sleeping & Eating

The **Chilla Guesthouse** (☎0138-226678; r with AC Indian/foreigner ₹1500/3000; 🏠) is the GMVN rest house and the most comfortable place to stay in Chilla. There's a good restaurant here and a pleasant garden.

Within the park there are nine historic but basic forest **rest houses** at Asarohi, Beribara, Kansrao and Motichur (₹1000/2000 per Indian/foreigner), as well as Chilla, Phandowala and Ranipur (₹750/1500 per Indian/foreigner). If you're staying at one of the rest houses, the park entry fee is valid for three days. The 1883 forest rest house in Chilla has three rooms downstairs and a suite upstairs with a balcony, while the one at Kansrao has retained its original features. No food is available (except in Chilla) and if you don't have your own transport you will have to make a special arrangement with a jeep

driver. To book a forest rest house, contact the director at the **Rajaji National Park Office** (☎/fax 0135-2621669; 5/1 Ansari Marg, Dehra Dun). Mohan's Adventure Tours (see p414) can also make bookings.

There's also a new safari resort in the park north of Chilla, **Camp King Elephant** (☎9871604712; cottage per Indian/foreigner from ₹4000/\$110), with solar electricity, private bathrooms, full meal service and optional jeep tours.

Getting There & Away

Buses to Chilla (₹20, one hour) leave the GMOU bus stand in Haridwar every hour from 7am to 2pm. The last return trip leaves Chilla at 5.30pm. Taxis charge ₹510 one way for the 13km journey.

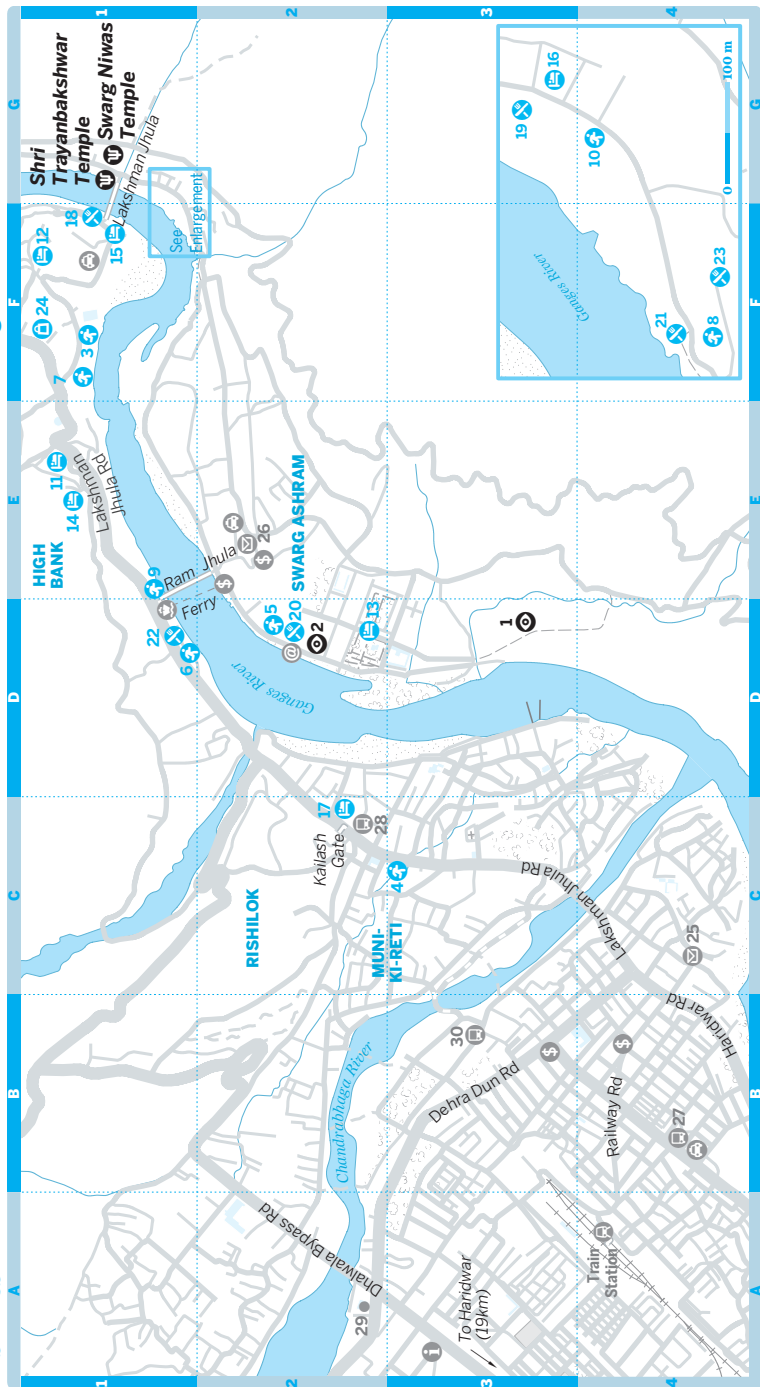
Rishikesh

☎0135 / POP 79,591 / ELEV 356M

Ever since the Beatles rocked up at the ashram of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in the late '60s, Rishikesh has been a magnet for spiritual seekers. Today it styles itself as the 'Yoga Capital of the World', with masses of ashrams and all kinds of yoga and meditation classes. Most of this action is north of the main town, where the exquisite setting on the fast-flowing

Rishikesh

0 0.5 mile 1 km



Rishikesh

📍 Top Sights

- Shri Trayanbakshwar TempleG1
Swarg Niwas Temple.....G1

📍 Sights

- 1 Maharishi Mahesh Yogi Ashram D3
2 Parmarth Niketan Ashram..... D2

🏞️ Activities, Courses & Tours

- 3 De-N-Ascent Expeditions F1
4 GMVN Trekking &
Mountaineering Division C3
5 Om Rudra Cultural Society..... D2
6 Omkarananda Ganga SadanD1
7 Red Chilli Adventure.....F1
8 Sachdeva Language ServiceF4
9 Sivananda Ashram E1
10 Sri Sant Seva Ashram G4

🛏️ Sleeping

- 11 Bhandari Swiss Cottage..... E1
12 Divine Ganga Cottage F1
13 Green Hotel D2
Green View Hotel..... (see 13)
14 High Bank Peasants Cottage..... E1
15 Hotel Ishan F1
Hotel Rajpalace..... (see 13)
16 Hotel Surya G3
New Bhandari Swiss Cottage (see 11)

- 17 Vasundhara PalaceC2

🍴 Eating

- 18 Devraj Coffee CornerF1
19 Ganga Beach RestaurantG3
20 Green Italian RestaurantD2
La Bella View..... (see 21)
21 Little Buddha Cafe F4
Lucky Restaurant..... (see 19)
22 Madras CafeD1
Oasis Restaurant..... (see 11)
23 Pyramid Cafe.....F4

🛍️ Shopping

- 24 Adventure Compass.....F1

Information

- Lucky Internet (see 19)
25 Main Post Office.....C4
26 Post OfficeE2
Red Chilli Adventure(see 7)

Transport

- 27 Main Bus StandB4
28 Private Buses to Delhi.....C2
29 Share Jeep Stand.....A2
Taxi & Autorickshaw Stand (see 22)
Taxi & Share Jeep Stand(see 19)
30 Yatra & Local Bus Stand.....B3

Ganges, surrounded by forested hills, is conducive to meditation and mind expansion. In the evening, the breeze blows down the valley, setting temple bells ringing as sadhus (spiritual men), pilgrims and tourists prepare for the nightly *ganga aarti*.

Rishikesh is very New Age: you can learn to play the sitar or tabla on your hotel roof; try laughing yoga; practise humming or gong meditation; experience crystal healing and all styles of massage; have a go at chanting mantras; and listen to spiritually uplifting CDs as you sip ayurvedic tea with your vegetarian meal.

But it's not all spirituality and contorted limbs. Rishikesh is now a popular white-water rafting centre, backpacker hang-out, and gateway to treks in the Himalaya.

Rishikesh is divided into two main areas: the crowded, unattractive downtown area (Rishikesh town), where you'll find the bus and train stations as well as the Triveni Ghat; and the riverside communities 2km upstream around Ram Jhula and Lakshman Jhula, where most of the accommodation, ashrams,

restaurants and travellers are ensconced. The two *jhula* (suspension bridges) that cross the river are pedestrian-only. Swarg Ashram, located on the eastern bank, is the traffic-free 'spiritual centre' of Rishikesh, while High Bank, west of Lakshman Jhula, is a small enclave popular with backpackers.

📍 Sights

Lakshman Jhula & Around

AREA

The defining image of Rishikesh is the view across the Lakshman Jhula hanging bridge to the huge, 13-storey wedding-cake temples of **Swarg Niwas** and **Shri Trayanbakshwar**. Built by the organisation of the guru Kailashanand, they resemble fairyland castles and have dozens of shrines to Hindu deities on each level, interspersed with jewellery and textile shops. Sunset is an especially good time to photograph the temples from the bridge itself, and you'll hear the bell-clanging and chanting of devotees in the morning and evening. Shops selling devotional CDs add to the cacophony of noise on this side of the river.

Markets, restaurants, ashrams and guest-houses sprawl on both sides of the river; in recent years the area has grown into the busiest and liveliest part of upper Rishikesh.

Swarg Ashram

AREA

A pleasant 2km walk south of Lakshman Jhula along the path skirting the east bank of the Ganges leads to the spiritual community of Swarg Ashram, made up of temples, ashrams, a crowded bazaar, sadhus and the bathing ghats where religious ceremonies are performed at sunrise and sunset. The colourful, though rather touristy, *ganga aarti* is held at the riverside temple of the **Parmarth Niketan Ashram** every evening at sunset, with singing, chanting, musicians and the lighting of candles.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi Ashram

HISTORIC BUILDING

Just south of Swarg Ashram, slowly being consumed by the forest undergrowth, is what's left of the original Maharishi Mahesh Yogi Ashram. It was abandoned in 1997 and is now back under the control of the forest department. However, the shells of many buildings, meditation cells and lecture halls can still be seen, including Maharishi's own house and the guest house where the Beatles stayed and apparently wrote much of the *White Album*.



Activities

Yoga & Meditation

Rishikesh styles itself as the yoga capital of the world, and yoga and meditation are the buzzwords here. Teaching and yoga styles vary tremendously, so check out a few classes before committing yourself to a course. If you want to get started, virtually every hotel offers one-hour yoga sessions for around ₹100, but ashram stays are the best way to truly immerse yourself in the spiritual vibe. Many places also offer ayurvedic massage.

Sri Sant Seva Ashram

MIXED YOGA

(☎2430465; www.santsewaashram.com; Lakshman Jhula; d ₹150-600, with AC ₹1000; @) Overlooking the Ganges in Lakshman Jhula, the large rooms here are popular, so book ahead. The more expensive rooms have balconies with river views. The yoga classes are mixed styles and open to all. Beginner (₹100) and intermediate and advanced (₹200) sessions run daily. There are also courses in reiki, ayurvedic massage and cooking.

Omkanaranda Ganga Sadan

IYENGAR YOGA

(☎2430763; www.iyengar yoga.in; Lakshman Jhula Rd; r with/without AC ₹850/280, minimum 3-day stay) Also on the river, at Ram Jhula, this ashram has comfortable rooms and specialises in Iyengar yoga classes at the Patanjala Yoga Kendra centre. There are daily classes (except Sunday; ₹250) and intensive seven- to 10-day courses (₹800) on offer from October to May. The ashram has its own ghat and evening *ganga aarti*.

Sivananda Ashram

YOGA, MEDITATION

(☎2430040; www.sivanandaonline.org; Lakshman Jhula Rd) Founded by Swami Shivananda, this ashram is run by the Divine Life Society. Free yoga and meditation classes are available every morning, but two months' advance notice is required if you want to stay here – email the ashram through its website.

Parmarth Niketan Ashram

HATHA YOGA

(☎244008; www.parmarth.com; Swarg Ashram; r ₹600) Dominating the centre of Swarg Ashram and drawing visitors to its evening *ganga aarti* on the riverbank, Parmarth has a wonderfully ornate and serene garden courtyard. The price includes a room with a private bathroom, all meals and hatha yoga lessons.

Rafting, Kayaking & Trekking

A number of companies offer full- and half-day rafting trips, putting in upstream and paddling back to Rishikesh. Some also offer multiday rafting trips, staying at rafting camps along the river bank. The official rafting season runs from 15 September to 30 June. A half-day trip starts at about ₹800 per person, while a full day costs from ₹1500. Most companies also offer all-inclusive Himalayan treks to places such as Kuari Pass, Har-ki Dun and Gangotri from around ₹2300 per day.

De-N-Ascent Expeditions

KAYAKING, TREKKING

(☎2442354; www.kayakhimalaya.com; Tapovan Sarai, Lakshman Jhula) Specialist in kayaking lessons and expeditions. Learn to paddle and eskimo roll with an experienced instructor, or go on multiday kayaking or rafting adventures. Also organises trekking trips.

GMVN Trekking & Mountaineering Division

TREKKING

(☎2430799; www.gmvl.com; Lakshman Jhula Rd, Muni-ki-Reti; ☀10am-5pm) Can arrange high-altitude treks in the Garhwal Himalaya

and hires out trekking equipment, guides and porters.

Red Chilli Adventure TREKKING, RAFTING
(☎2434021; www.redchilliadventure.com; Lakshman Jhula Rd; ☀9am-9pm) Reliable outfit offering Himalayan trekking and rafting trips throughout Uttarakhand and to Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh.

Walks & Beaches

An easy, 15-minute walk to two small **waterfalls** starts 3km north of Lakshman Jhula bridge on the south side of the river. The start is marked by drink stalls and a roadside shrine, and the path is easy to find. Four-wheel-drive taxis cost ₹100 from Lakshman Jhula.

On the other side of the river, it's about 2km north to the signposted walk to lovely **Neer Garh Waterfall** (admission ₹30), from where it's a 20-minute uphill walk.

For a longer hike, follow the dedicated pilgrims who take water from the Ganges to offer at **Neelkantha Mahadev Temple**, a 7km, approximately three-hour walk along a forest path from Swarg Ashram.

🎓 Courses

Look out for flyers around Lakshman Jhula, Swarg Ashram and High Bank advertising music tuition and concerts.

Om Rudra Cultural Society (☎98376 54284; rudrance@rediffmail.com; Swarg Ashram; ☀Sep-May) is run by an enterprising couple and offers *kathak* (classical) dance, flute, tabla or Hindi lessons.

Sachdeva Language Service (☎98971 03808; sachdevalanguage@yahoo.com.uk; Lakshman Jhula; per hr ₹150) offers casual one-on-one Hindi language instruction.

★ Festivals & Events

In the first week of March, Rishikesh hosts the **International Yoga Festival** (www.internationalyogafestival.com), attracting swamis and yoga masters from around the world for discourses and lectures. Most of the action is centred on the Parmarth Niketan Ashram in Swarg Ashram. Check the festival website for dates.

🛏 Sleeping

Most of the accommodation is spread on both sides of the river around Lakshman Jhula; there are a handful of hotels among the ashrams at Swarg Ashram and directly across the river around Ram Jhula, and some good budget places at High Bank. For ashram stays, see p420.

Midrange and top-end hotels are in relatively short supply in budget-minded Rishikesh.

HIGH BANK

This small, leafy travellers' enclave is a 20-minute walk up the hill from Lakshman Jhula and has some of the best backpacker accommodation in Rishikesh. All of the following places are clean, relaxed and good value. It gets pretty rowdy during peak season from November to March.

New Bhandari Swiss Cottage HOTEL \$
(☎2435322; www.newbhandariswisscottag.com; d ₹300-800, AC cottages ₹1200-1800; 🍷🍷) One of the last places on the High Bank lane, this is a large, popular place with rooms ranging from clean and simple to simply impressive. There's a massage centre, a good restaurant, and a helpful travel desk in their internet cafe.

High Bank Peasants Cottage HOTEL \$\$
(☎2431167; d ₹600-800, with AC ₹1500-2000; 🍷🍷🍷) A High Bank original, this is the

THE MAHARISHI & THE BEATLES

In February 1968 Rishikesh hit world headlines when the Beatles and their partners stayed at Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's ashram in Swarg Ashram, following an earlier visit by George Harrison. Ringo Starr and his wife didn't like the vegetarian food, missed their children and left after a couple of weeks, but the others stayed for a month or two. They relaxed and wrote tons of songs, many of which ended up on their double album *White Album*. But rumours of the Maharishi's demands for money and his behaviour towards some female disciples eventually disillusioned all of them. 'You made a fool of everyone,' John Lennon sang about the Maharishi. In later years, Harrison and Paul McCartney said, on record, that the rumours were unfounded. The original ashram is now abandoned, but nearly 40 years on, idealistic foreigners still swarm into Rishikesh seeking spiritual enlightenment from teachers and healers in their tranquil ashrams scattered along the Ganges River.

most upmarket accommodation here (it's closer to midrange than budget). Lovely gardens feature flowering trees and giant cacti, there are wicker chairs on the balconies, and the spacious rooms are neatly furnished.

Bhandari Swiss Cottage

HOTEL \$

(☎2432939; www.bhandarisswisscottage.com; r ₹150-600, ste with AC ₹1500; 🍷🍷) The first place you come to, this is a well-run backpacker favourite with rooms in several budgets – the higher up you stay, the higher the price. Rooms with big balconies have expansive views of the river backed by green mountains. Excellent little restaurant, internet cafe and yoga classes.

LAKSHMAN JHULA

There are several good budget options on both sides of the river here, which is the liveliest part of Rishikesh.

Divine Ganga Cottage

HOTEL \$

(☎2442175; www.divingangacottage.com; r ₹300-600; 🍷🍷) Tucked away from the hubbub and surrounded by small rice paddies and local homes with gardens, the huge upstairs terrace has supreme river views. Sweet rooms for the price have nice beds, and some have writing tables. There's an ayurvedic spa and yoga instruction on some days.

Hotel Surya

HOTEL \$

(☎2433211; www.hotelsuryalaxmanjhula.com; s/d ₹150/250) Above the Coffee Day, Surya is great value. Some rooms have balconies overlooking the river and all are good-sized and clean, though there are signs that mice like it here too. The management is friendly and helpful.

Hotel Ishan

HOTEL \$

(☎2431534; narendra_u@hotmail.com; r ₹250-700; 🍷) This long-running riverfront place near Lakshman Jhula looks a bit rough, but has a wide range of clean rooms, some with balconies overlooking the river. The top-floor room with TV and balcony has a prime view.

SWARG ASHRAM & MUNI-KI-RETI

If you're serious about yoga and introspection, stay at one of Swarg's numerous ashrams. Otherwise, there's a knot of guest houses a block back from the river towards the southern end of Swarg.

Green Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2434948; www.hotelgreen.com; Swarg Ashram; d with/without AC ₹1300/750; 🍷🍷) In a small enclave of hotels down an alleyway, the newly

renovated Green has bright rooms with tasteful furnishings, hot showers and flat-screen TVs. There are peaceful views of the hills – but not the river – from the rooftop terrace. Hallways on some floors are connected by wooden bridges over the atrium. The sibling Green View Hotel around the corner is a bit cheaper (₹500-900) but not as nice.

Vasundhara Palace

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2442345; www.vasundharapalace.com; Muni-Ki-Reti; s/d ₹2950/3550, ste ₹5500; 🍷🍷) Rishikesh's top riverside hotel, this modern high-rise has luxurious, tastefully designed rooms, an elegant restaurant, and a rooftop pool and health spa with river views – unfortunately, views from the rooms are blocked by apartments.

Hotel Rajpalace

HOTEL \$

(☎2440079; rajholidays@hotmail.com; Swarg Ashram; d ₹450-650, with AC from ₹1000; 🍷) This is a small but well-run hotel with clean rooms and friendly staff. The rooftop terrace has views, and facilities include a yoga hall and a travel agent offering tours and activities.



Eating

Virtually every restaurant in Rishikesh serves only vegetarian food, but there are lots of travellers' restaurants whipping up various interpretations of Continental and Israeli food, as well as Indian and Chinese.

LAKSHMAN JHULA



Little Buddha Cafe

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(mains ₹70-140; ☉8am-11pm) This funky tree-house-style restaurant has an ultraloungey top floor, tables overlooking the Ganga, and really good international food. Pizzas are big and the mixed vegetable platter is a serious feast. It's one of the busiest places in Lakshman Jhula, for good reasons.

Devraj Coffee Corner

CAFE \$

(snacks & mains ₹30-100; ☉8am-9pm) Perched above the bridge and looking across the river to Shri Trayanbakhshwar temple, this German bakery is a sublime spot for a break at any time of the day. The coffee is the best in town and the menu ranges from specialties like brown bread with yak cheese to soups and sizzlers, along with the usual croissants and apple strudel. There's a good new and used bookshop next door.

Pyramid Cafe

MULTICUISINE \$

(mains ₹35-95; ☉8am-10.30pm; 🍷) Sit on cushions inside pyramid-shaped tents and choose

from a menu of home-cooked Indian food, plus a few Tibetan and Western dishes including pancakes. The family that runs it is super friendly and they also rent out a peaceful, well-kept pyramid tent with a double bed and attached bath (₹250). At the time of research, this was the only cafe in Rishikesh that had wi-fi (per hour ₹ 20). Bonus!

Ganga Beach Restaurant MULTICUISINE \$
(mains ₹60-120; ☀️8am-10pm) Great riverside location with a spacious terrace and big menu including crepes and ice-cold lassis.

Lucky Restaurant INDIAN \$
(mains ₹40-100; ☀️9am-10pm) An awesome riverside garden shaded by a huge tree and a cushioned area.

La Bella View MULTICUISINE \$
(mains ₹60-120; ☀️9m-11pm) A good menu and a split personality: upstairs is more refined, with tables overlooking the river, while the cushioned downstairs area has a hippie-den vibe.

SWARG ASHRAM & RAM JHULA

Madras Cafe INDIAN \$
(Ram Jhula; mains ₹50-120) This local institution dishes up tasty South and North Indian vegetarian food, thalis, a mean mushroom curry, whole-wheat pancakes and the intriguing Himalayan 'health *pilau*', as well as super-thick lassis.

Green Italian Restaurant ITALIAN \$\$
(Swarg Ashram; mains ₹60-150) Wood-fired vegetarian pizzas and imported pastas including gnocchi and cannelloni keep the customers coming back to this spotless, glass-fronted restaurant in the heart of Swarg.

HIGH BANK

Backpackers gather at the popular restaurants on High Bank. This is the only area in town where you'll find meat on the menu.

Oasis Restaurant MULTICUISINE \$\$
(mains ₹45-190) At New Bhandari Swiss Cottage, this place has some character, with candlelit tables in the garden and hanging lanterns inside. The menu covers oodles of world cuisines, from Mexican and Thai to Israeli and Tibetan, and features a number of chicken dishes including a delicious chilli chicken. Great desserts include apple crumble.



Shopping

Swarg Ashram is the place to go for bookshops, ayurvedic herbal medicines, clothing, handicrafts and tourist trinkets such as

jewellery and Tibetan singing bowls, though there are also plenty of stalls around Lakshman Jhula. Many stalls sell *rudraksh mala* (the strings of beads used in *pūjā*), made from the nuts of the rudraksh tree, which originally grew where Shiva's tears fell. Beads with *mukhi* (different faces) confer various blessings on the wearer.

If you need outdoor gear, your best bet is **Adventure Compass** (☎️9899297904; www.adventurecompass.com; Badrinath Rd, Lakshman Jhula), which stocks everything from sleeping bags and carabiners to climbing harnesses and trekking boots.

Information

Dangers & Annoyances

Travellers should be cautious of being befriended by sadhus – while many sadhus are on genuine spiritual journeys, the orange robes have been used as a disguise by fugitives from the law since medieval times.

The current in some parts of the Ganges is very strong, and as inviting as a dip from one of the beaches may seem, people drown here every year. Don't swim out of your depth.

Women walking alone may be at risk.

Internet Access

Internet access is available all over town, usually for ₹20 or ₹30 per hour.

Blue Hills Travels (Swarg Ashram; per hr ₹30; ☀️8am-10pm)

Lucky Internet (Lakshman Jhula; per hr ₹30; ☀️8.30am-10pm) Wi-fi access.

Red Chilli Adventure (Lakshman Jhula Rd; per hr ₹30; ☀️9am-9pm) Surf with a view.

Medical Services

Himalayan Institute Hospital (☎️2471133; ☀️24hr) The nearest large hospital, 17km along the road to Dehra Dun and 1km beyond Jolly Grant airport.

Shivananda Ashram (☎️2430040; www.sivandaonline.org; Lakshman Jhula Rd) Provides free medical services and a pharmacy.

Money

Several travel agents around Lakshman Jhula and Swarg Ashram will exchange travellers cheques and cash.

Axis Bank ATM (Swarg Ashram)

Bank of Baroda ATM (Dehra Dun Rd)

State Bank of India ATM (Swarg Ashram & Dehra Dun Rd)

Post

Main post office (Ghat Rd; ☀️10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Near Triveni Ghat.

Post office (Swarg Ashram; ☺10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat)

Tourist Information

Uttarakhand Tourism office (☎2430209; Dhalwala Bypass Rd; ☺10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Inconveniently located out on the road to Haridwar, it's in the same building as the GMVN Yatra office. It has a few brochures and can book tours.

Getting There & Away

Bus

There are regular buses to Haridwar and Dehra Dun; for Mussoorie change at Dehra Dun. Buses run north to pilgrimage centres during the *yatra* season (April to November), and to Joshimath and Uttarkashi year-round. See the table below for details.

Private deluxe buses to Delhi (₹350, seven hours) leave from Kailash Gate, just south of Ram Jhula, at 1.30pm and 9.30pm. There's also one direct overnight bus daily from Rishikesh to Dharamsala (₹1100) at 4pm.

Private night buses to Jaipur (seat/sleeper ₹700/900, 13 hours), Agra (₹600/700, 12 hours) and Pushkar (₹700/900, 16 hours) can be booked at travel agents in Lakshman Jhula, Swarg Ashram and High Bank, but they leave from Haridwar (see p415).

Share Jeeps & Taxi

Share jeeps leave, when overfull, from the corner of Dehra Dun Rd and Dhalwala Bypass Rd, to Uttarkashi (₹180, five hours) and Joshimath (₹250, eight hours), mostly early in the morning, starting from 4am.

From the taxi stand near the main bus stand, official taxi rates are: Haridwar (₹500), Dehra Dun (₹650, 1½ hours) and Uttarkashi (for Gangotri; ₹2000, seven hours).

There are also taxi stands at Ram Jhula and Lakshman Jhula (west bank), charging ₹550 to Haridwar, ₹800 to Dehra Dun, ₹2300 to Uttarkashi and ₹3500 to Joshimath. Although these rates are fixed, on long-distance trips you can usually get a cheaper rate by asking around at travel agents and guesthouses.

Vikrams charge ₹300 to make the trip to Haridwar.

Train

Bookings can be made at the **reservation office** (☺8am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun) at the train station, or at travel agents around Lakshman Jhula and Swarg Ashram (for a fee). Only a handful of slow trains run from Rishikesh to Haridwar, so it's usually better to go by bus or taxi.

Getting Around

Shared *vikrams* run from the downtown Ghat Rd junction up past Ram Jhula (₹10 per person) and the High Bank turn-off to Lakshman Jhula. To hire the entire *vikram* from downtown to Ram Jhula should cost ₹80, and from Ram Jhula to High Bank or Lakshman Jhula is ₹40.

To get to the eastern bank of the Ganges you either need to walk across one of the suspension bridges or take the **ferry** (one way/return ₹10/15; ☺7.30am-6.45pm) from Ram Jhula.

On the eastern bank of the Ganges, taxis and share jeeps hang around to take passengers to waterfalls and Neelkantha temple, but it's a 16km trip by road to get from one side of the river to the other.

Motorcycles (Enfields and Yamahas) and mopeds can be hired for ₹300 to ₹600 a day around the Lakshman Jhula area. There are no specific shops – you just hire from private owners – so there's no insurance; ask around at guesthouses or look for rental signs.

BUSES FROM RISHIKESH

The following buses depart from the main bus stand (A) or the *yatra* bus stand (B). The latter leave when full.

DESTINATION	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	FREQUENCY
Dehra Dun (A)	33	1½	half-hourly
Delhi (A)	167/265 ordinary/deluxe	7	half-hourly
Gangotri (B)	250	12	btwn 4am & 7am or 9am
Haridwar (A)	22	1	half-hourly
Joshimath (B)	230	10	btwn 4am & 7am or 9am
Kedarnath (B)	210	12	btwn 4am & 7am or 9am
Yamnotri (B)	230	12	btwn 3am & 7am
Uttarkashi (B)	150	7	btwn 3am & 12pm

Uttarkashi

📍01374 / POP 16,220 / ELEV 1158M

Uttarkashi, 155km from Rishikesh and the largest town in northern Garhwal, is a major stop on the road to Gangotri Temple and the Gaumukh Glacier trek, so it's an obvious place to break your journey and stock up on supplies at the local market. Guides and porters can also be arranged here.

There's a State Bank of India ATM in the market.

The town is probably best known for the **Nehru Institute of Mountaineering** (📍222123; www.nimindia.net; ☀️10am-5pm), which trains many of the guides running trekking and mountaineering outfits in India. The centre has a museum and outdoor climbing wall. Basic and advanced mountaineering and adventure courses are open to all – check the website for details and admission information. Across the river from the main market.

Uttarkashi also hosts the annual **Makar Sakranti** festival in January.

There are plenty of hotels and *dhabas* (snack bars) around the bus stand and in the nearby market.

Monal Guest House HOTEL \$
(📍222270; www.monaluttarkashi.com; Kot Bungalow Rd; s/d/q/ste from ₹400/500/1350/1500; @) Off the Gangotri road 3km north of town, about 100m from the office that issues permits to Gaumukh, this hillside hotel feels like a large comfortable house with lean, airy rooms, a big-windowed restaurant and peaceful garden setting.

Hotel Govind Palace HOTEL \$
(📍223815; near bus stand; s/d from ₹ 200/300) One of the best value choices if you've got to catch an early morning bus. It's got good beds, hot showers, TVs and helpful management.

Shangri-La Restaurant MULTICUISINE \$
(mains ₹30-125; ☀️9am-9pm) In the main bazaar, this restaurant has the most diverse menu in Uttarkashi: pizza, veggie burgers and banana pancakes as well as Indian and Tibetan food.

Buses depart in the morning for Gangotri (₹90, six hours), Haridwar (₹175, eight hours, at 7am), and Dehradun (₹190, nine hours) via Rishikesh (₹160, seven hours). There are buses to Hanuman Chatti, for Yamunotri Temple, at 7.45am and 10am (₹115, seven hours), and multiple services to Sangam Chatti, for Dodi Tal, until 3pm (₹10, one hour).

Garhwal Temple Treks

GANGOTRI TEMPLE & GAUMUKH GLACIER TREK

📍01377 / ELEV 3042M

In a remote setting at an altitude of 3042m, Gangotri temple is one of the holiest places in India. Near the source of the Ganges (known as the Bhagirathi until it reaches Deoprayag), the shrine is dedicated to the origin of Hinduism's most sacred river – nearby is the rock on which Shiva is said to have received the flowing waters in his matted locks.

Erected by Gorkha commander Amar Singh Thapa in the 18th century, the temple – for a site of such significance – is surprisingly underwhelming. Unless you're a devout Hindu, to get a real sense of awe for the place you'll probably have to trek from Gangotri to the true source of the river, at **Gaumukh**, 18km upstream. There, the water flows out of **Gangotri Glacier** beneath the soaring west face of **Baghirathi Parvat** (6856m), with the peak of **Shivling** (the 6543m 'Indian Matterhorn') towering to the south.

Don't be daunted by the trek – the trail rises gradually and is totally solid. Fourteen kilometres (four to six hours) up the trail, at **Bhojbasa** (3790m), there's a **GMVN Tourist Bungalow** (dorm beds ₹300) and other basic lodging; Gaumukh is 4km (1½ hours) past that. On clear days, the best time to visit the source is early-to-mid-afternoon, when it's out of the shadows. Porters (₹500 each way) and horses (one way/return ₹850/1250) can be hired in Gangotri. More ambitious hikers with their own gear often continue to the gorgeous meadow at **Tapovan**, 6km beyond Gaumukh.

Before trekking to Gaumukh, you must get a permit from the **District Forest Office** (📍222444), 3km north of the Uttarkashi bus stand. It's valid for two days and costs ₹150/600 per Indian/foreigner (then ₹50/250 for each extra day). Access to Gaumukh is limited to 150 people per day. Bring a copy of your passport ID page and visa.

Gangotri village has plenty of guesthouses, ashrams and *dharamsalas* charging ₹300 or less per room. There's also a **GMVN Tourist Bungalow** (📍222221; dm ₹150, d ₹400-900). When hungry, follow the Indian families to the **Hotel Gangaputra Restaurant** (mains ₹ 45-100; ☀️7am-11pm), which is busy for a good reason.

Buses run from Gangotri to Uttarkashi (₹90, six hours) and, during peak season, to Rishikesh (₹250, 12 hours). Share jeeps (₹150) also run between Gangotri and Uttarkashi.

YAMUNOTRI TEMPLE TREK

ELEV 3185M

Yamunotri Temple is tucked in a tight gorge close to the source of the Yamuna, Hinduism's second most sacred river after the Ganges. For pilgrims, Yamunotri is the least visited and so least developed of the *char dham* temples, but once you get to the trailhead it's an easy trek in.

The 5km, two-hour hike begins where the road ends at **Janki Chatti**, 6km beyond the village of **Hanuman Chatti** (2400m). At Yamunotri Temple there are several hot springs where you can take a dip, and others where pilgrims cook potatoes and rice as *prasad*. One kilometre beyond the temple, the Yamuna River spills from a frozen lake of ice and glaciers on the **Kalinda Parvat** mountain at an altitude of 4421m, but this is a very tough climb that requires mountaineering skills.

Across the river from Janki Chatti is the pretty village of **Kharsali**, which is worth a stroll if you've got the time.

Accommodation is available at basic guesthouses or the **GMVN tourist lodges** (www.gmvl.com) in Yamunotri, Janki Chatti and Hanuman Chatti.

Buses only go as far as Hanuman Chatti, where you need to catch a share jeep to Janki Chatti (₹30). During peak *yatra* season buses run from Dehra Dun, Mussoorie and Rishikesh to Hanuman Chatti, but the most frequent transport services originate in Barkot. From Janki Chatti, share jeeps go to Barkot (₹60, two hours); from Hanuman Chatti, buses go to Barkot (₹50, 2½ hours)

and Uttarkashi (₹115, seven hours) for those heading to Gangotri.

HAR-KI-DUN VALLEY TREK

The wonderfully remote Har-ki-Dun (3510m) is a botanical paradise criss-crossed by glacial streams and surrounded by pristine forests and snowy peaks. The area is preserved as **Govind Wildlife Sanctuary & National Park** (Indian/foreigner up to 3 days ₹50/350, subsequent days ₹20/175). You might be lucky enough to glimpse the elusive snow leopard above 3500m.

The trail begins at Sankri (also called Saur), and there are **GMVN Tourist Bungalows** (dm/d ₹150/450) at Sankri, Taluka and Osla, but you have to stay in a Forest Department rest house or camp in the valley itself. It's a 38km hike to Har-ki-Dun, which takes three days – or two days if you take a share jeep to Taluka. A side trip to Jamdar Glacier takes another day. The trek can be busy during June and October.

To get to Sankri, take a bus or a share jeep from Gandhi Chowk in Mussoorie. If you cannot find a bus or share jeep going all the way, go as far as you can and then catch other buses or share jeeps.

KEDARNATH TEMPLE TREK

01364 / ELEV 3584M

Kedarnath is revered as the source of the Mandakini River, but this magnificent temple is primarily dedicated to the hump that Shiva (who had taken the form of a bull) left behind when he dove into the ground to escape the Pandavas. Other portions of Shiva's body are worshipped at the other four Panch Kedar shrines, which are hard to reach but can be visited: the arms at Tungnath; the face at Rudranath; the navel at Madmaheshwar; and the hair at Kalpeshwar. The actual source of the Mandakini River is 12km past Kedarnath.

THE CHAR DHAM

The *char dham* of Garhwal refers to the four ancient temples that mark the spiritual sources of four sacred rivers: the Yamuna (Yamunotri), the Ganges (Gangotri), the Mandakini (Kedarnath) and the Alaknanda (Badrinath). Every year during the *yatra* (pilgrimage) season from April to November, hundreds of thousands of dedicated Hindu pilgrims make these important treks – the exact dates the temples are open are announced each year by local priests.

Religious tourism is big business and numerous buses, share jeeps, porters, ponies and palanquins are on hand for transport, along with a well-established network of budget guesthouses, ashrams and government rest houses. As a result, getting to these temples is easy enough without the need for a guide or carrying supplies. Only Gangotri and Badrinath temples can be visited without having to undertake a trek.

The temple was originally built in the 8th century by Guru Shankara, who is buried behind the shrine. The surrounding scenery is superb, but Kedarnath attracts 100,000 pilgrims every year, which means plenty of people, noise and litter. The site is so auspicious that pilgrims used to throw themselves from one of the cliffs behind the temple in the hope of instantly attaining *moksha* (liberation).

The tough 14km uphill trek to the temple (3584m) takes six hours on foot (five hours on a pony) and begins at Gaurikund, which has basic accommodation and a **GMVN Tourist Bungalow** (☎269202; dm ₹200, d ₹600-990). Stalls store luggage, and porters and ponies can be hired. The wide, paved trail to the temple is lined with *dhabas* and chai stalls.

There is more pilgrim accommodation available near the temple, including the **GMVN Tourist Bungalow** (☎263218; dm ₹200, d ₹640-800).

Buses run from Gaurikund to Rishikesh (₹190, 12 hours), or you can use share jeeps to make the same journey. Get off at Rudraprayag for connections to Joshimath, Badrinath and the eastern Kumaon district.

Joshimath

☎01389 / POP 13,202 / ELEV 1845M

As the gateway to Badrinath Temple and Hem Kund, Joshimath sees a steady stream of Hindu and Sikh pilgrims from May to October. And as the base for the Valley of Flowers, the Kuari Pass and Nanda Devi treks, and Auli ski resort, it attracts adventure travellers year-round.

Reached from Rishikesh by a hair-raising mountain road that hugs steep-sided valleys for the final few hours, Joshimath is a ramshackle two-street town and a rather ugly administrative centre full of rusting rooftops, erratic power supply and limited places to eat. Although the mountain views are lost from the town itself, it's only a short cable-car ride from here to magnificent views of Nanda Devi.



Activities

Trekking

Kuari Pass and Nanda Devi are two of the most popular treks from Joshimath. You need a permit and a registered guide to undertake these treks. There are three excellent operators in town who can organise everything.

Adventure Trekking

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

(☎9837937948; www.thehimalayanadventures.com; Main Bazaar) Treks of anything from two to 10 days can be arranged here for around US\$45 per person per day, as well as white-water rafting, skiing and mountain climbing. The owner, Santosh, is helpful and runs a guesthouse on the way up to Auli (r ₹1000 to ₹2000).

Eskimo Adventures

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

(☎222630; eskimoadventures@rediffmail.com) Offers treks and rock-climbing expeditions from ₹1500 per day, and equipment rental (for trekking and skiing), as well as white-water rafting trips on the Ganges.

Himalayan Snow Runner

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

(☎9412082247; www.himalayansnowrunner.com) Recommended outfit for trekking (from ₹1900 per day), skiing and adventure activities. The owner, Ajay, also takes cultural tours to Bhotia and Garhwali villages, and runs a guesthouse in his home in Mawari village, 5km from Joshimath (d ₹1060).

Sleeping & Eating

There are lots of cheap lodgings and a few hotels scattered around town. Joshimath's trekking outfits also operate upmarket homestay-style guesthouses that are worth considering.

Hotel New Kamal

HOTEL \$

(☎221891; r ₹300) Small and clean with bucket hot water and TV, one of the better cheapies in the town center.

Hotel Snow Crest

HOTEL \$\$

(☎222344; www.snowcrest.co.in; d ₹1750) A few steps up the road to the Auli ropeway, it's clean and cosy but very overpriced. Rates are usually reduced by 40% (except in May and June).

Hotel Kamet

HOTEL \$

(☎222155; d ₹200-900) Decent enough central budget option, but check a few rooms to find the least worn. There's a new, modern annex in the back with rooms from ₹1000.

There are several *dhabas* in the main bazaar, all serving similar vegetarian thalis and dosas from ₹20 to ₹90.

Information

There's a **GMVN Tourist Office** (☎222181; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Sat) located just north of the town (follow the Tourist Rest House sign off Upper Bazaar Rd), and there's a State Bank of India

ATM that accepts foreign cards. Four companies also have internet services.

i Getting There & Away

Although the main road up to Joshimath is maintained by the Indian army, and a hydroelectric plant on the way to Badrinath has improved that road, the area around Joshimath is inevitably prone to landslides, particularly in the rainy season from mid-June to the end of August.

Buses run to Badrinath (₹50, two hours) at 6.30am, 9am, 11.00am, 2pm and 4.00pm, departing from the Badrinath bus stand at the far end of Upper Bazar Rd. Take the same buses to Govindghat (₹25, one hour), which is the start of the treks to the wonderful Valley of Flowers and dramatic Hem Kund. Share jeeps (₹60) do the same trip, departing from the jeep stand in the same spot. Hiring the whole jeep costs ₹600.

Buses run from Joshimath to Rishikesh (₹230, 10 hours) and Haridwar (₹250, 11½ hours) about every hour between 4am and 7am. They leave from outside the tiny **GMOU booth** (Upper Bazaar Rd; ☎4am-8pm), where you can also book tickets.

During *yatra* season you can also catch an 8am bus directly to Gaurikund (₹185, 12 hours) for Kedarnath Temple. To get to the eastern Kumaon region take any Rishikesh bus to Karnaprayag (₹75, 3½ hours), from where local buses and share jeeps can take you along the beautiful road – that often feels like a charming country lane – towards Kausani, Bageshwar and Almora. You may have to change buses at Gwaldam (₹65, 3½ hours), to get to where you're going.

Around Joshimath

AULI

☎01389 / ELEV 3019M

Rising above Joshimath, 14km by road – and only 4km by the gondola-style cable car – Auli is India's premier ski resort. But you don't have to visit in winter to do some hiking and enjoy the awesome views of Nanda Devi (India's highest peak) from the top of the cable-car station.

As a ski resort, Auli is hardly spectacular, with gentle 5km-long slopes, one 500m rope tow (₹100 per trip) that runs beside the main slope, and an 800m chairlift (₹200) that connects the upper and lower slopes. The snow is consistently good, though, and the setting is superb. The season runs from January to March and equipment hire and instruction can be arranged here or in Joshimath.

The state-of-the-art **cable car** (return ₹500; ☎every 20min 8am-6.50pm), India's longest, links Joshimath to the upper slopes

above Auli. There's a cafe, of sorts, at the top, serving hot chai and tomato soup.

There are just two places to stay at Auli and both hire out ski equipment and provide ski lessons.

The **Cliff Top Club Resort** (☎223217, in Delhi 011-25616679; www.nivalink.com/clifftop; studio ₹4500, ste ₹7500, f ₹9500) wouldn't look out of place in the Swiss Alps, with its solid timber interior finish, cosy atmosphere and spacious rooms, some with views of Nanda Devi. Meals and all-inclusive ski packages are available.

If on a tighter budget, stay at the perfectly acceptable **GMVN Tourist Rest House** (☎223208; www.gmvnl.com; dm ₹250, huts ₹2500, d ₹3000) at the start of the chairlift.

Valley of Flowers & Hem Kund Trek

British mountaineer Frank Smythe stumbled upon the Valley of Flowers in 1931. 'In all my mountain wandering,' he wrote, 'I have not seen a more beautiful valley where the human spirit may find repose.' The *bugyals* (high-altitude meadows) of tall wildflowers are a glorious sight on a sunny day, rippling in the breeze, and framed by mighty 6000m mountains that have glaciers and snow decorating their peaks all year.

The 300 species of flowers make the valley a unique and valuable pharmaceutical resource that may soon be a World Heritage Site. Unfortunately, most flowers bloom during the monsoon season in July and August, when the rains make access difficult and hazardous. There's a widespread misconception that the valley isn't worth visiting outside of peak flower season, but even without its technicolour carpet it's still ridiculously beautiful. And you may find you have it all to yourself.

To reach the 87-sq-km **Valley of Flowers National Park** (Indian/foreigner up to 3 days ₹40/600, subsequent days ₹20/175; ☎6am-6pm May-Oct, last entry 3pm) requires a full-day trek from Govindghat to the village of Ghangaria, less than 1km from the park. The fabled valley begins 2km uphill from the ticket office, and continues for another 5km. Tracks are easy to follow. No overnight stay is permitted here (or at Hem Kund) so you must stay in Ghangaria.

A tougher trek from Ghangaria involves joining the hundreds of Sikh pilgrims toiling up to the 4300m **Hem Kund**, the sacred

lake surrounded by seven peaks where Sikh guru Gobind Singh is believed to have meditated in a previous life. The pilgrim season runs from around 1 June to 1 October. Ponies (₹350) are available if you prefer to ride up the 6km zigzag track.

Also called Govinddham, **Ghangaria** is a one-street village in a wonderful deodar forest with a busy market, a handful of budget hotels and mediocre restaurants, hundreds of ponies, a pharmacy and a doctor. Water and electricity supplies are erratic.

Hotel Pritam (☎0199-1322031; s/d ₹200/300) is one of the better budget places to stay. **Hotel Priya** (d from ₹200) is good, too.

Ghangaria is a scenic but strenuous 14km uphill trek from Govindghat, which takes four to seven hours depending on your pace. You can quicken the trip and help the local economy by hiring a pony (₹437) through the Eco Development Committee office at the bridge over the Alaknanda River. The return trip takes four to five hours. You don't need to carry food because there are *dhabas* and drink stalls along the way serving the army of pilgrims heading to Hem Kund.

Despite the distances and grades of the trails, treks to Ghangaria, the Valley of Flowers and Hem Kund are often undertaken by small children and people with weak legs or lungs – they ride up in a wicker chair hauled on the back of a *kandi* man (from ₹400) or reclining in a *dandi* litter (from ₹5000), carried on the shoulders of four men like the royalty of old.

At **Govindghat** you can stay at the huge **gurdwara** (payment by donation), where VIP rooms are basic, or the **Hotel Bhagat** (☎01381-225226; d ₹600), up on the main road between Joshimath and Badrinath, with very clean rooms and meals available.

All buses and share jeeps between Joshimath and Badrinath stop in Govindghat, so you can easily find transport travelling in either direction, though this trickles off later in the day and stops dead at night.

Badrinath & Mana Village

☎01381 / ELEV 3133M

Basking in a superb setting in the shadow of snow-topped Nilkantha, **Badrinath Temple** appears almost lost in the tatty village that surrounds it. Sacred to Lord Vishnu, this vividly painted temple is the most easily accessible and popular of the *char dham* temples. It was founded by Guru Shankara in the 8th century, but the current structure

is much more recent. Below the temple are hot springs that reach a scalding 40°C and serve as a laundry for locals.

A scenic 3km walk beyond Badrinath along the Alaknanda River (cross over to the temple side to pick up the path), past fields divided by dry-stone walls, leads to tiny but charismatic **Mana Village**. The village is crammed with narrow stone laneways and traditional houses of varying designs – some have slate walls and roofs while others are wooden with cute balconies. You can wander around and watch the village ladies knitting colourful jerseys or hauling loads of fodder while the men tend goats or play cards or carom billiards. Carpets (₹200 for a small square, ₹2000 for bigger ones), blankets, jerseys, hats and gloves are all on sale.

Just outside the village in a small cave is the tiny, 5000-year-old **Vyas Temple**. Nearby is **Bhima's Rock**, a natural rock arch over a river that is said to have been made by Bhima, strongest of the Pandava brothers, whose tale is told in the Mahabharata. The 4km hike along the Alaknanda to the 145m **Vasudhara Waterfall** has a great reward-to-effort ratio, with views up the valley of the Badrinath massif jutting skyward like a giant fang. The villagers migrate to somewhere warmer and less remote – usually Joshimath – between November and April.

From the large bus station at the entrance to Badrinath, buses run to Govindghat, Joshimath and Gaurikund (for Kedarnath) during *yatra* season, but check scheduled departure times or you may end up stranded.

Sleeping & Eating

Badrinath can easily be visited in a day from Joshimath if you get an early start, but it's a serene place to spend the night and there are plenty of places to stay and eat here during the pilgrimage season. Budget guesthouses are generally discounted to ₹200 a room outside the short peak season of May and June.

Hotel Charan Paduka HOTEL \$
(☎9411554098; r ₹150) Right behind the bus stand, it's friendly and clean enough for the price, with bucket hot water.

Jagirdar Guest House HOTEL \$
(☎9457646148; r ₹500) In a stone building on the temple side of the river, this is a good place in a quiet spot out of the fray of pilgrims.

Hotel Snow Crest HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎9412082465; www.snowcrest.co.in; r ₹2000-6000) Overpriced but modern and clean, rooms have heaters, TVs and geysers.

(meals ₹30-80) Directly opposite the temple overlooking the river, this is a popular restaurant.

Kuari Pass Trek

Also known as the Curzon Trail (though Lord Curzon's party abandoned its attempt on the pass following an attack of wild bees), the trek over the Kuari Pass (3640m) was popular in the Raj era. It's still one of Uttarakhand's finest and most accessible treks, affording breathtaking views of the snow-clad peaks around Nanda Devi - India's highest mountain - while passing through the outer sanctuary of Nanda Devi National Park. The trailhead is at Auli and the 75km trek to Ghat past lakes, waterfalls, forests, meadows and small villages takes five days, though it's possible to do a shorter version that finishes in Tapovan in three days. A tent, guide, permit and your own food supplies are necessary, all of which can be organised easily in Joshimath.

Auli can be reached by bus or cable car from Joshimath. From Ghat, share jeeps (₹40, 1½ hours) go to Nandaprayag, and from there buses run to Joshimath or south-west to Rishikesh and Haridwar.

For other trekking options within the fabulous Nanda Devi, you must go with a registered guiding company. Check details with trekking outfitters in Joshimath or Rishikesh.

Corbett Tiger Reserve

📍05947 / ELEV 400-1210M

This famous **reserve** (🌞15 Nov-15 Jun, Jhirna zone open year-round) was established in 1936 as India's first national park. It's named for legendary tiger hunter Jim Corbett (1875-1955), who put Kumaon on the map with his book *The Man-Eaters of Kumaon*. The British hunter was greatly revered by local people for shooting tigers that had developed a taste for human flesh, but he eventually shot more wildlife with his camera than with his gun.

The reserve Jim Corbett established inspired the India-wide Project Tiger program, which started in 1973 and saw the creation of 22 other reserves. Tiger sightings take some luck as the 175 or so tigers in the reserve are neither baited nor tracked. Your best chance of spotting one is late in the season (April to

mid-June), when the forest cover is low and animals come out in search of water.

Notwithstanding tiger sightings, few serious wildlife enthusiasts will leave disappointed, as the 1318-sq-km park has a variety of wildlife and birdlife in grassland, sal forest and river habitats, and a beautiful location in the foothills of the Himalaya on the Ramganga River. Commonly seen wildlife include wild elephants (200 to 300 live in the reserve), sloth bears, langur monkeys (black face, long tail), rhesus macaques (red face and back-side), peacocks, schools of otters and several types of deer including chital (spotted deer), sambars, hog deer and barking deer. You might also see leopards, mugger crocodiles, gharials, monitor lizards, wild boars and jackals. The Ramganga Reservoir attracts large numbers of migrating birds, especially from mid-December to the end of March, and over 600 species have been spotted here.

The **reception centre** (📍251489; www.corbettnationalpark.in; Ranikhet Rd; 🕒6am-4pm), where you must get your park entry permit and can sign up for a day trip or overnight safari, is located on the main road in the town of Ramnagar, almost opposite the bus stand. From 15 November to 15 June the entry fee (₹200/900 per Indian/foreigner) covers three days and grants access to the entire park. Single-day permits (valid for four hours) are available for every zone except Dikhala (₹100/450 per Indian/foreigner). On top of that, there's the jeep vehicle fee (₹500/1500 per Indian/foreigner overnight, ₹250/500 for a single day).

Of Corbett's five zones - Bijrani, Dhikala, Domunda, Jhirna and Sonanadi - Dhikala is the highlight of the park. Forty-nine kilometres northwest of Ramnagar and deep inside the reserve, this is the designated core area, where the highest concentration of the animals you probably hope to see are found. It's only open from 15 November to 15 June to overnight guests or as part of a one-day tour booked through the reception centre.

Jhirna, in the southern part of the reserve, is the only zone that remains open all year. Short jeep safaris can be organised in Ramnagar, but your chances of seeing serious megafauna there are iffy. In certain years, depending on conditions, some of the other zones open in October, but the only way to find out is to contact the reception centre.

Two-hour elephant rides (₹300/1000 per Indian/foreigner) are available only at Dhikala and Bijrani, at 6am and 4pm on a first-come, first-served basis.

Be sure to bring binoculars (you can hire them at park gates) and plenty of mosquito repellent and mineral water. If you're interested in the life of Jim Corbett, his former house at Kaladhungi, 26km southeast of Ramnagar, is now a **museum** (admission ₹50; ☺8am-5pm).

Tours

The reception centre in Ramnagar runs daily **bus tours** (Indian/foreigner ₹1000/2000) to Dhikala at 5.30am and 12pm.

Four-wheel drives or the smaller Maruti Gypsies can be hired at the reception centre in Ramnagar, or through your accommodation or a tour agency. The jeep owners have formed a union, so in theory the rates are fixed (on a per jeep basis, carrying up to six people). Half-day safaris (leaving in the morning and afternoon) should cost ₹1000 to Bijrani, ₹1000 to Jhirna, or ₹1500 to Dumunda, excluding the entry fees for you and your guide. Full-day safaris cost double. Trips to Dhikala cost ₹2500. Check prices at the reception centre and at your hotel before hiring a jeep.

Sleeping & Eating

For serious wildlife viewing, Dhikala – deep inside the reserve – is the best place to stay, though the prices for foreigners are exorbitant. Book through the reception centre in Ramnagar at least one month in advance, except where indicated. The town of Ramnagar has budget accommodation, while up-market resorts are strung out along the road skirting the eastern side of the park between Dhikuli and Dhangarhi Gate.

DHIKALA

Easily the cheapest beds in the park are at **Log Huts** (dm Indian/foreigner ₹200/400), resembling 3AC train sleepers, with 24 basic beds (no bedding supplied). **Tourist Huts** (Indian/foreigner ₹1250/2500) offer the best value accommodation in Dhikala and sleep up to six people. Dhikala has a couple of restaurants serving vegetarian food. No alcohol is allowed in the park.

The **New Forest Rest House** (r ₹1250/2500), three **cabins** (₹1250/2500) and the VIP **Old Forest Rest House** (r ₹1500/3000 or ₹2500/5000) can all be booked at the reception centre in Ramnagar. **Annexe** (r ₹1000/2000) can be booked through the **Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board** (UTDB; ☎011-23319835) in Delhi.

ELSEWHERE IN THE RESERVE

Small rest houses in the park are at Kanda, Sultan Mailini and Jhirna (₹600/1400 per Indian/foreigner), Lohachaur, Halduparao, Morghatti, Sendhikal, Mudiapani, Rathuadhab, Pakhro and Dhela (₹400/800). The following are some other places to stay.

Bijrani Rest House HOTEL \$\$\$
(s/d Indian ₹500/1000, foreigner ₹1250/2500)

The first place in from Amdanda Gate; meals and elephant rides available.

Gairal Rest House HOTEL \$\$\$
(r Indian/foreigner from ₹1250/2500) On the Ramnagar River, accessed from Dhangarhi Gate; meals available.

Sarapduli Rest House HOTEL \$\$\$
(r Indian/foreigner ₹2000/4000) Also has a good location in the reserve's core area.

Khinnanauli Rest House HOTEL \$\$\$
(r Indian/foreigner ₹5000/12000) VIP lodging near Dhikala, deep in the reserve.

RAMNAGAR

A busy, unappealing town, Ramnagar has plenty of facilities, including internet cafes (₹30 per hr), ATMs (State Bank of India ATM at the train station, and a Bank of Baroda ATM on Ranikhet Rd) and transport connections – mostly along Ranikhet Rd.

TOP CHOICE **Corbett Motel** HOTEL \$

(☎9837468933; karansafaris@yahoo.co.in; tent ₹400, d/tr ₹500/600) Set in a beautiful mango orchard only a few hundred metres from the train station, Ramnagar's best budget accommodation is a world away from the traffic-clogged centre and offers exceptional service and hospitality. You can stay in sturdy tents or basic but spotless rooms, and the restaurant serves fine food. The owner, Karan, is a well-known local naturalist and can organise jeep safaris into the park. Call ahead for a pick-up.

Krishna Nidhi Corbett Inn HOTEL \$\$

(☎251225; Ranikhet Rd; dm ₹300, d with/without AC ₹1600/600; ☹) Clean, spacious rooms with balconies or verandas make this a good midrange option at the northern end of Ramnagar's main street. The manager can help organise safaris.

Hotel Anand HOTEL \$

(☎254385; Ranikhet Rd; s/d ₹300/500) A noisy budget option located about 100m from the bus stand, Anand has average rooms with bucket hot water and TV – however many of the rooms only have windows onto a corridor. Its **Delhi Darbar Restaurant** (mains

₹50-100; ☀7am-11pm) is one of the cleanest, quietest places to eat in town, with a typical Indian menu plus pizzas.

NORTH OF RAMNAGAR

Half a dozen upmarket African-style safari resorts are strung along the Ramnagar-Ranikhet road that runs along the reserve's eastern boundary. Most are around a settlement called Dhikuli – not to be confused with Dhikala! When most of the reserve is closed (15 June to 15 November), discounts of up to 50% are offered. Rates given here are for a room only, but most have packages that include meals and safaris. All places have resident naturalists, recreational facilities, restaurants and bars.

Tiger Camp

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2551963; www.tiger-camp.com; r ₹2050/2500, cottages ₹3050; 🍷) This intimate, excellent-value resort is nestled in a shady jungle-style garden by the Kosi River, 8km from Ramnagar. Cosy cottages and bungalows have modern facilities, and nature walks and village tours are offered.

Infinity Resorts

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎251279; www.infinityresorts.com; Dhikuli; s/d incl breakfast from ₹6000/8000; 🍷🍷) The most impressive of the resorts in this area, Infinity has luxurious rooms, a roundhouse with restaurant and bar, and a swimming pool in a lovely garden backing onto the Kosi River (where you can see hordes of golden mahseer fish).

Corbett Hideaway

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎284132; www.corbetthideaway.com; Dhikuli; cottages ₹11,000-22,000; 🍷🍷) The luxurious ochre cottages offer privacy, the riverside garden is relaxing, and there's a poolside bar and thatched restaurant at this quality resort, 12km north of Ramnagar.

i Getting There & Away

Buses run almost hourly from Ramnagar to Delhi (₹150, seven hours), Haridwar (₹113, six hours) and Dehra Dun (₹150, seven hours). For Nainital (₹71, 3½ hours) there are four direct buses, or take one to Kaladhungi and change there. Buses to Ranikhet (₹77, 4½ hours) leave every couple of hours in the morning, and some continue to Almora. Frequent buses run to Haldwani (₹35, two hours).

Ramnagar train station is 1.5km south of the main reception centre. The nightly **Corbett Park Link Express** (sleeper/2AC ₹107/417) leaves Delhi at 10.40pm, arriving in Ramnagar at 4.55am. The return trip leaves Ramnagar at 9.40pm, arriving in Old Delhi at 4.15am. For other destinations, change at Moradabad.

Nainital

☎05942 / POP 39,840 / ELEV 1938M

Crowded around a deep, green volcanic lake, Nainital is Kumaon's largest town and favourite hill resort. It occupies a steep forested valley around the namesake lake Naini and was founded by homesick Brits reminded of the Cumbrian Lake District. Disaster struck here in December 1880, when a major landslide buried a hotel and 150 people, creating the memorial recreation ground now known as the Flats.

Plenty of hotels are set in the forested hills around the lake, there's a busy bazaar, and a spider's web of walking tracks covers the forested hillsides to viewpoints overlooking the distant Himalayan peaks. For travellers, it's a good place to kick back and relax, eat well, go horse riding or paddling on the lake. In peak seasons – roughly May to mid-July and October – Nainital is packed to the gills with holidaying families and honeymooners, and hotel prices skyrocket.

Tallital (Lake's Foot) is at the southeastern end of the lake where you'll find the bus stand and the main road heading east towards Bhowali. The 1.5km promenade known as the Mall leads to Mallital (Lake's Head) at the northwestern end of the lake. Most hotels, guest houses and restaurants are strung out along the Mall between Mallital and Tallital.

👁 Sights & Activities

Naini Lake

SIGHTSEEING

This pretty lake is Nainital's centrepiece and is said to be one of the emerald green eyes of Shiva's wife, Sati (*naina* is Sanskrit for eye). **Naina Devi Temple**, rebuilt after the 1880 landslide, is on the precise spot where the eye is believed to have fallen. Nearby is the **Jama Masjid** and a **gurdwara**. You can walk around the lake in about an hour – the southern side is more peaceful and has good views of the town.

Boatmen will row you around the lake for ₹160 (₹95 one way) in the brightly painted gondola-like boats, or the **Nainital Boat Club** (Mallital; ☀10am-4pm) will sail you round for ₹250. Pedal and rowing boats can also be hired for ₹100 per hour.

Snow View & Cable Car

VIEWPOINT

A **cable car** (adult/child return ₹150/100; ☀8am-7pm May & Jun, 10.30am-4pm Jul-Apr) runs up to the popular Snow View at 2270m, which (on

clear days) has panoramic Himalayan views, including of Nanda Devi. The ticket office is at the bottom. At the top you'll find the usual food, souvenir and carnival stalls, as well as **Mountain Magic** (rides ₹30-100), an amusement park with kids' entertainment including bumper cars, trampolines and a flying fox.

A highlight of the trip to Snow View is hiking to viewpoints such as **Cheena/Naina Peak**, 4km away. Local guides may offer to lead you on walks. One such guide, Sunil Kumar (☎9411196837), has plenty of experience as a trekker and birdwatcher and can take you on day walks (₹550), or overnight walks where you stay in local villages (₹1400).

If you want to get up to Snow View for sunrise, taxis charge ₹180.

Tiffin Top & Land's End HORSE RIDING, WALKING
A 4km walk west of the lake brings you to Tiffin Top (2292m), also called Dorothy's Seat. From there, it's a lovely 30-minute walk to Land's End (2118m) through a forest of oak, deodar and pine. Mangy horses gather west of town on the road to Ramnagar to take you on rides to these spots. A three-hour ride costs about ₹490, but you can take shorter rides (eg Tiffin Top for ₹70). Touts for these rides will no doubt accost you in Mallital near the ropeway.

Nainital Zoo ZOO
This high-altitude hillside **zoo** (admission ₹25, with camera ₹25; ☀10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has some large enclosures containing Himalayan animals, Siberian tigers, leopards and lots of pheasant species. It's a steep 20-minute walk from the Mall or a ₹50 taxi ride.

Rock Climbing & Trekking OUTDOOR ADVENTURE
The enthusiasts at **Nainital Mountaineering Club** (☎235051; Mallital; per day ₹600) offer rock-climbing courses on an artificial tower and at the rock-climbing area, a 15m-high rock outcrop to the west of the town.

Snout Adventures (☎231749; www.snoutadventure.co.in; Ashok Cinema Bldg, Mallital) is a recommended outfit offering treks in the Kumaon and Garhwal mountains (from ₹3000 per day, all inclusive), rock-climbing courses (₹600 per day) and adventure camps.

For information on KMVN's rest houses and trekking packages, visit **KMVN Parvat Tours** (☎235656; www.kmvn.org; Tallital; ☀9am-7pm).

Tours

Travel agencies along the Mall such as **Hina Tours & Travel** (☎235860; www.nainital

hinatours.com) and **Anamika Travels** (☎9720180161) offer bus tours of the local lakes and trips to Corbett National Park.

Sleeping

Nainital is packed with hotels but they fill up fast in peak seasons, making it hard to find a bargain at those times. The prices given below are for the main peak season; virtually all hotels offer around 50% discounts in the low season. The main peak season is generally 1 May to 30 June, and some hotels have a semipeak in October, at Diwali (October/November) and at Christmas.

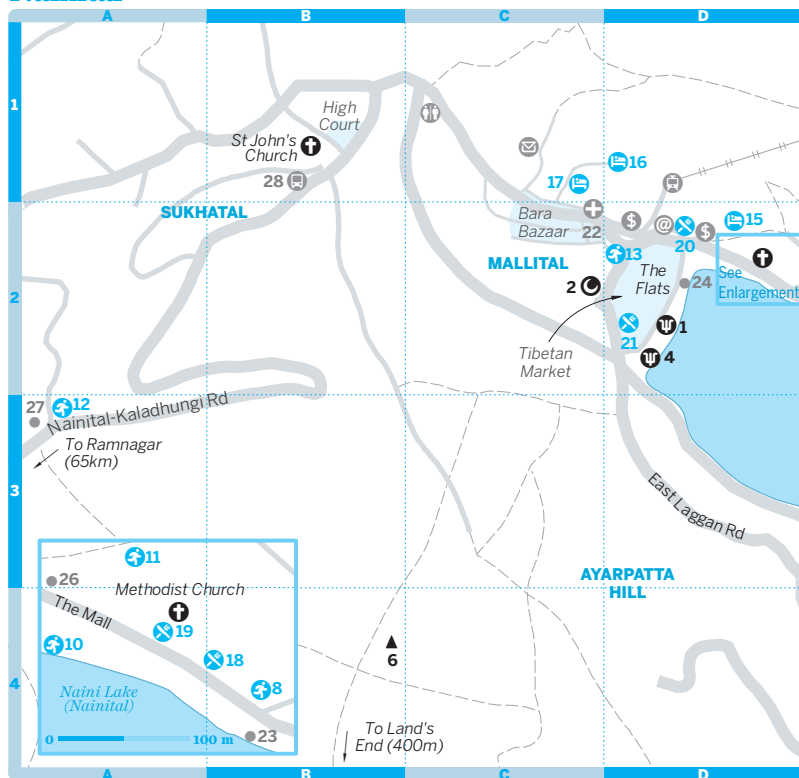
A few of the following hotels have budget-range prices in the low season.

TOP CHOICE **Palace Belvedere** HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎237434; www.palacebelvedere.com; Mallital; s/d/ste from ₹4500/5200/7000; ☎) Built in 1897, this was the summer palace of the rajas of Awagarh. Animal skins and old prints adorn the walls and lend a faded Raj-era charm. Rooms are spacious, high-ceilinged, and have a finely-aged kind of soul – there's something irresistible about them. Downstairs is an elegant dining room/lounge/veranda. You'll find it off the Mall.

Hotel City Heart HOTEL \$\$
(☎235228; www.cityhearthotel.netfirms.com; Mallital; d ₹1650-3500) Located off the Mall, the rooftop terrace restaurant has fine lake views. Rooms range from small but cute to a fabulous deluxe room with a view. This place discounts more than most and is one of Nainital's best off-season bargains, with rooms from ₹700. The effusive owner will gladly play the CD of his band covering tunes by Pink Floyd and Dire Straits.

Traveller's Paradise HOTEL \$\$
(☎9411107877; www.kmvn.gov.in; Mallital; d ₹1500) A bit north of the Mall, it's the details that set this hotel apart from others in its price range. Bedsheets are surprisingly stylish, bathrooms are colorfully tiled, and the big rooms, though not fancy, have chairs and coffee tables. It's run by the amiable Anu Consul, who spent ten years living in Mexico and knows what it's like to be on the road.

Evelyn Hotel HOTEL \$\$
(☎235457; www.hotelevelynnainital.com; the Mall, Tallital; d ₹1500-2700, ste ₹3500-5300) This large Victorian-looking hotel overlooking the lake is quintessential Nainital – charming and slightly eccentric. It's big, with stairways and terraces cascading down the hillside. It's a



bit old-fashioned, but the well-tended rooms have a nice, cosy feel.



Eating

Nainital has a host of restaurants, mostly along the Mall on the north side of the lake. For cheap eats, head to the food stalls around the Tibetan Market or to the *dhabas* in Bara Bazar.

Embassy

INDIAN \$\$

(The Mall, Mallital; meals ₹80-320; ☎10.30am-11pm) With a wood-lined chalet interior and snappily dressed staff, Embassy has been serving up five pages of menu items for over 40 years. For drinks try 'dancing coffee' or a rosewater lassi. Good terrace for people-watching.

Machan Restaurant

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(The Mall, Mallital; mains ₹80-350; ☎10am-4.30pm & 7pm-10.30pm) The jungle-themed decor and bamboo facade here represent Corbett's wild-life-spotting towers, while the menu offers

some of Nainital's best comfort food (pizzas and burgers), along with Indian fare. Watch the chefs at work in the open kitchen.

Sakley's Restaurant

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(Mallital; mains ₹60-350; ☎9am-10pm) A spotless restaurant found off the Mall, serving up a range of unusual global items such as Thai curries, honey chicken, roast lamb, pepper steaks, and plenty of Chinese dishes, pizzas and sizzlers. Desserts include pastries and Black Forest cake.

Sonam Chowmein Corner

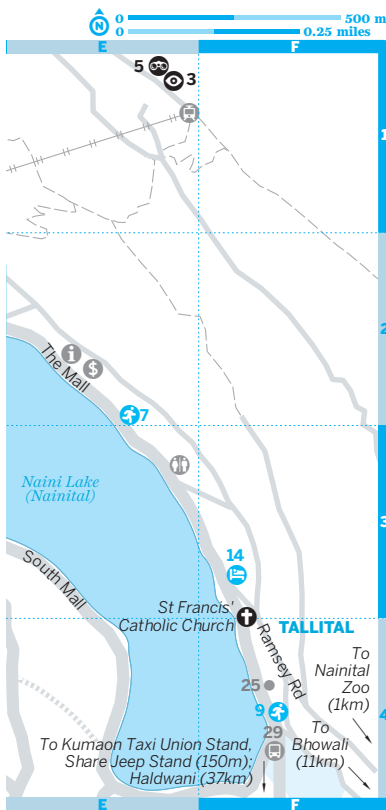
FAST FOOD \$

(The Flats, Mallital; mains ₹20-50; ☎11am-7pm) In the covered alley part of the Tibetan Market, this authentic Tibetan *dhaba* whips up fabulous chow mein and *momos* (Tibetan dumplings) for the best cheap eats in town.

Cafe de Mall

CAFE \$\$

(The Mall, Mallital; mains ₹50-250; ☎9am-4pm & 6-10pm) This open-fronted lakeside cafe halfway along the Mall is a great place for



Medical Services

BD Pandey Government Hospital (☑235012; Mallital) Located off the Mall.

Money

Bank of Baroda ATM (The Mall, Tallital) Accepts international cards.

HDFC Bank (The Mall; ☎10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Exchanges cash and travellers cheques; 24-hour ATM.

State Bank of India (The Mall, Mallital; ☎10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Exchanges major foreign currencies and travellers cheques. ATM accepts international cards.

Post

Main post office (Mallital; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Tourist Information

Uttarakhand Tourism office (☑235337; The Mall; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Getting There & Away

Bus

For details of buses leaving from the Tallital bus stand, see the table, p437.

Although there are direct buses from Nainital, many more services leave from the transport hubs of Haldwani and Bhowali. From Haldwani, regular buses head to Ramnagar, Delhi and the Nepal border at Banbassa. Haldwani is also a major train terminus. To go north, take a bus or share jeep to Bhowali (₹10, 20 minutes) and catch one of the regular onward buses to Almora, Kausani and Ranikhet.

Three daily buses to Ramnagar (₹71, 3½ hours) originating at the Tallital bus stand also pass by the Sukhatal bus stand, northeast of Mallital.

Travel agencies sell tickets on private overnight deluxe coaches (with reclining seats) to Delhi (₹250-500, nine hours), which leave from Tallital around 9.30pm.

Taxi & Share Jeep

From the Kumaon Taxi Union stand in Tallital, taxi drivers charge ₹500 to Kathgodam (1½ hours), ₹1200 to Ramnagar (three hours) and ₹1500 to Almora (three hours) or Ranikhet (two hours).

Share jeeps leave when full, and go to Bhowali (₹10, 20 minutes) and Kathgodam/Haldwani (₹60, 1½ hours).

Train

Kathgodam (35km south of Nainital) is the nearest train station, but Haldwani, one stop further south, is the regional transport hub. The **train booking agency** (☎9am-noon & 2-5pm

breakfast or a cappuccino on the terrace. The menu ranges from fish curry and *kali mirch* chicken to pizzas and impressive vegetarian sizzlers.



Drinking

Nainital Boat Club

BAR

(The Mall, Mallital; temp membership men/women/couples ₹830/415/830; ☎10am-10pm) This club is a classic remnant of the Raj-era. Temporary membership is ridiculously steep, but the atmospheric bar – with timber beams, buttoned-up barmen with handlebar moustaches, and an outdoor deck overlooking the lake, is perfect for an afternoon drink. The dress code specifies no shorts or thongs, and signs warn that 'decorum should be maintained'.



Information

Internet Access

Cyberia (Mallital; per hr ₹25; ☎10am-9pm)

Nainital

📍 Sights

- 1 Gurdwara D2
- 2 Jama Masjid C2
- 3 Mountain Magic E1
- 4 Naina Devi Temple D2
- 5 Snow View E1
- 6 Tiffin Top B4

🏠 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 7 Anamika Travels E2
- 8 Hina Tours & Travel B4
- 9 KMVN Parvat Tours F4
- 10 Nainital Boat Club A4
- 11 Nainital Mountaineering Club A3
- 12 Rock Climbing Area A3
- 13 Snout Adventures D2

🛏 Sleeping

- 14 Evelyn Hotel F3
- 15 Hotel City Heart D2
- 16 Palace Belvedere D1
- 17 Traveller's Paradise C1

🍴 Eating

- 18 Embassy B4
- 19 Machan Restaurant A4
- 20 Sakley's Restaurant D2
- 21 Sonam Chowmien Corner D2

🍷 Drinking

- Nainital Boat Club (see 10)

🏥 Information

- 22 BD Pandey Government Hospital C2

🚗 Transport

- 23 Boat Hire B4
- 24 Boat Hire D2
- 25 Cycle-rickshaw Ticket Booth F4
- 26 Cycle-rickshaw Ticket Booth A3
- 27 Horse Stand A3
- 28 Sukhatal Bus Stand B1
- 29 Tallital Bus Stand F4
- Train Booking Agency (see 29)

Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat), next to the Tallital bus stand, has a quota for trains to Dehra Dun, Delhi, Moradabad, Lucknow, Gorakhpur and Kolkata. The daily **Ranikhet Express** (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹121/339/472) departs Kathgodam at 8.40pm and arrives at Old Delhi station at 4.15am. In the other direction, it departs Delhi at 10.15pm, arriving at Kathgodam at 5.45am.

📍 Getting Around

Cycle-rickshaws charge a fixed ₹10 along the Mall, but can only pick up and drop off at the ticket booths at either end. Taxi rides within town cost ₹80 to ₹200.

Ranikhet

📞05966 / POP 19,049 / ELEV 1829M

Ranikhet, home to the Kumaon Regiment and bristling with good-old-fashioned military atmosphere, spreads over rolling green hills with some lovely views over the distant Himalayas. The focus of the town is a busy single-street bazaar area, but you don't have to walk far along the winding Mall Rd to be immersed in forest and tall English trees.

From Sadar Bazaar, the Mall heads 3km south to the army headquarters. A **walking path** starting by the sports ground provides a pleasant short cut, passing a small pond and the stone Catholic church. From the

southern end of the Mall it's a 1km walk to **Jhula Devi Temple**, which is festooned with bells. Before you get there you'll pass the **KRC Community Center** (📞220567; The Mall; admission free; ☀8.30am-4pm, closed Wed & Sun), an old church that's been converted into a handloom-weaving workshop established for the benefit of army widows.

🛏 Sleeping & Eating

Outside the two peak seasons (generally mid-April to mid-July and 1 October to early November), the prices given below are reduced by 30% to 50%. *Dhabas* and a few budget hotels can be found in the bazaar.

Ranikhet Club

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(📞226011; The Mall; d ₹7555) For a taste of Raj nostalgia, look no further than the four classic rooms at this 1860 heritage wooden bungalow. The gentrified army ambience is typified by the members' bar, billiard room, card-playing rooms, tennis court and stylish restaurant. The Seven Peaks Bar has a colonial feel – dress smartly after 7pm.

Hotel Meghdoot

HOTEL \$\$

(📞220475; www.hotelmeghdoot.com; The Mall; s ₹800-1100, d ₹1300-1500, ste ₹2000) This big old hotel, just past the army headquarters, 3km from the bazaar, has some quaint historical touches, a range of clean, spacious rooms,

and a veranda packed with pot plants and greenery. Off-season rates are a bargain here.

i Information

Ranikhet Cyber Cafe (Gandhi Chowk; per hr ₹25; ☎8am-7.30pm) Near the SBI ATM.

State Bank of India (Sadar Bazaar; ☎10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Exchanges travellers cheques but not cash.

State Bank of India ATM Just uphill from the bank, this ATM accepts foreign cards.

Uttarakhand Tourism office (☎220227; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Located above the UP Roadways bus stand.

i Getting There & Away

From the KMOU bus stand, at Gandhi Chowk, regular buses run to Almora (₹45, two hours) and to Ramnagar (₹77, 4½ hours) hourly from 6.30am to 2pm. There's one bus to Nainital at 9.30am (₹77, 2½ hours).

From the UP Roadways bus stand at the eastern end of the bazaar, transport runs to Delhi, Haridwar, Karnaprayag, Haldwani, and Kathgodam via Bhowali.

Share jeeps leave when full for Almora (₹80, two hours), Nainital (₹100, 1½ hours) and Haldwani (₹80, two hours) from near either of the two bus stands.

Almora

☎05962 / POP 32,357 / ELEV 1650M

Clinging to a steep-sided valley, Almora is the sprawling regional capital of Kumaon, first established as a summer capital by the Chand rajas of Kumaon in 1560. A cool climate and mountain views are attractions, but don't be put off by the ugly, shambolic main street when you're first deposited at the bus stand – head one block south to the

pedestrian-only cobbled Lal Bazaar, lined with intricately carved and painted traditional wooden shop facades. It's a fascinating place to stroll, people-watch and shop. While otherwise not bursting with interest, Almora has some colonial-era buildings, reliable trekking outfits and a couple of community-based weaving enterprises. You'll often see Westerners floating around, thanks to a hippie subculture of travellers living up around Kasar Devi temple.

Sights & Activities

Nanda Devi Temple

HINDU TEMPLE

The stone Nanda Devi Temple in Lal Bazaar dates back to the Chand raja era, and is covered in folk-art carvings, some erotic. Every September, the temple hosts the **Nanda Devi Fair**.

Panchachuli Weavers

Factory

HANDICRAFTS

(☎232310; admission free; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Sat) The Panchachuli Weavers Factory, off Bageshwar Rd, employs some 300 women to weave woollen shawls. The shop here has a wider range of products than at the small shop in the Mall. Taxis charge ₹150 return to the factory, or you can walk the 3km – follow the continuation of Mall Rd to the northeast and ask for directions.

High Adventure

TREKKING

(☎9012354501; www.thehighadventure.com; the Mall) Organises six-day treks to Pindari Glacier and 10-day treks to Milam Glacier for around ₹1700 per person, per day.

Discover Himalaya

TREKKING

(☎9411346550; bobbyalmora@hotmail.com; the Mall) Also runs trips to Pindari and Milam Glaciers.

BUSES FROM NAINITAL

The following buses leave from the Tallital bus stand. For Kathgodam, take the Haldwani bus.

DESTINATION	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	FREQUENCY
Almora	100	3	7am
Dehra Dun	235-419	10	8 daily
Delhi	218-430	9	6 daily
Haldwani	37	2	half-hourly
Haridwar	235-419	8	several early morning
Kathgodam (A)	34	1½	half-hourly
Rishikesh	270	9	5am

Sleeping

Unlike most hill stations, prices here are not seasonal.

Hotel Shikhar

HOTEL \$\$

(☎230253; www.hotelshikhar.com; The Mall; dm ₹300, d ₹500-1800, ste ₹2500; 📍) Dominating the centre of town and built to take in the views, this large, boxlike hotel is perched on a hillside and offers a maze of rooms covering all budgets. Expensive rooms aren't much better than cheaper ones. The hotel also has the reasonable **Mount View Restaurant**.

Kailas International Hotel

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎230624; jawaharlalsah@india.com; dm ₹150, d ₹250-450) Ramshackle but colourful, Kailas is run by the elderly Mr Shah, an engaging retired bank manager who will regale you with tales of Almora, temples and his philosophy on life. Staying here is like sleeping in a museum's attic, though the rooms are basic and a serious mixed bag. The large rooms (such as the 'Maharaja suite') at the top are easily the best. The cheapest rooms have common bathrooms. It's off the Mall.

Bansal Hotel

HOTEL \$

(☎230864; Lalal Bazaar; d ₹300-400) Above Bansal Cafe in the bustling bazaar, but easily reached from the Mall, this is a fine budget choice with small, tidy rooms (some with TV) and a rooftop terrace.



Eating

Almora's speciality sweet is *ball mithai* (fudge coated in sugar balls), available for ₹5 in sweet shops all along the Mall and bazaar.

New Soni Restaurant

INDIAN \$\$

(The Mall; mains ₹25-150; ☎10.30am-9.30pm) A popular Sikh-run *dhaba* serving tasty *paneer* (unfermented cheese), chicken and mutton dishes, and egg curry.

Glory Restaurant

INDIAN \$

(LR Sah Rd; mains ₹35-85; ☎8.30am-9.30pm) This long-running family eatery features popular South and North Indian vegetarian and nonvegetarian dishes, including biryanis and lemon chicken. The pizzas are super cheesy.



Information

Internet access is available at several places in Lalal Bazaar and the Mall, usually from ₹25 per hour.

HDFC (The Mall; ☎9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) The ATM accepts foreign cards and the bank changes foreign currencies.

Sify iWay (The Mall; per hr ₹25; ☎7am-8.30pm) Internet access and train reservations.

State Bank of India (The Mall; ☎10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) An ATM here accepts foreign cards.

Uttarakhand Tourism office (☎230180; Upper Mall; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Getting There & Away

The vomit-splattered sides of the buses and jeeps pulling into Almora tell you all you need to know about what the roads are like around here.

Buses run from the adjacent UP Roadways and KMOU bus stands on the Mall roughly hourly until 4pm to Ranikhet (₹45, two hours), Kausani (₹47, 2½ hours), Bageshwar (₹80, two hours) and Bhowali (₹45, two hours), near Nainital. Buses to Delhi (₹325, 12 hours) leave at 2pm, 3pm & 4pm. There are early morning buses to Pithoragarh (₹128, five hours) and more run from the Dharanaula bus stand on the Bypass Rd. For Banbassa on the Nepal border, take a bus to Haldwani and change there.

There's a **Railway Reservation Centre** (☎9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Sat) at the KMVN Tourist Holiday Home.

Taxis or jeeps can be picked up from the Mall to Ranikhet (₹800, two hours), Kausani (₹1000, 2½ hours), Bageshwar (₹1200, two hours), Nainital (₹1500, three hours), Pithoragarh (₹2000, five hours) and Munsiyari (₹4000, 10 hours).

Around Almora

The hilltop **Kasar Devi Temple**, where Swami Vivekananda meditated, is 8km north of Almora and can be reached by share jeep (₹15) or taxi (₹300). The nearby village has become a popular destination for backpackers, with its peaceful vibe and clear-day Himalayan views. There are some great accommodation options here, including **Mohan's** (☎9412162816; www.mohanscafe.com; ₹500; 📍📶), which has good rooms, internet, a library and an inviting restaurant set on a large garden terrace with views; the well-run **Rainbow Guesthouse** (☎9410793473; ₹300-500; 📍) where clean, appealing rooms have soothing color schemes; and **Manu Guest House** (☎9410920696; ₹250-400), set amid an orchard with a resident water buffalo, where the largest stone or brick cottages include kitchenettes.

Beyond Kasar Devi, picturesque **Binsar** (2420m), 26km from Almora, was once the summer capital of the Chand rajas and is now a popular beauty spot for forest trekking, with panoramic views of the Himalayan peaks. There's a ₹100 fee to enter the sanctuary. A return taxi from Almora costs ₹800.

Fourteen kilometres west of Almora, the 800-year-old **Surya (Sun) temple** at Katarimal, a 2km walk from the main road, can be visited by getting on any share jeep (₹20, 30 minutes) going to Ranikhet.

An impressive temple complex is set in a forest of deodars at **Jageshwar**, 38km north-east of Almora. The 124 temples and shrines date to the 7th century AD and vary from linga shrines to large *sikhara* (Hindu temples). They're a 4km walk from Jageshwar, which can be reached by taxi (₹900 return).

Kausani

📍05962 / POP 4000 / ELEV 1890M

Perched high on a forest-covered ridge, this tiny village has lovely panoramic views of distant snowcapped peaks, fresh air and a relaxed atmosphere. Mahatma Gandhi found Kausani an inspirational place to retreat and write his Bhagavad Gita treatise *Anasakti Yoga* in 1929, and there is still an ashram devoted to him here. Nineteen kilometres north, **Bajjnath** village has an intriguing complex of 12th-century *sikhara*-style temples in a lovely location shaded by trees, with other shrines in the nearby old village.

👁 Sights & Activities

Kausani Tea Estate

TEA ESTATE

(📍258330; www.uttaranchaltea.com; admission free; ☀9am-6pm mid-Mar-mid-Nov) At Kausani Tea Estate – a tea plantation that involves private enterprise, the government and local farmers – you can look around and sample and buy products that are exported around the world. It's 3.5km north of the village on the road to Bajjnath, an easy and scenic walk.

Anasakti Ashram

HISTORIC SITE

(📍258028; Anasakti Ashram Rd) About 1km uphill from the bus stand, Anasakti Ashram is where Mahatma Gandhi spent two weeks pondering and writing *Anasakti Yoga*. It has a small **museum** (admission free; ☀6am-noon & 4-7pm) that tells the story of Gandhi's life through photographs and words. Visit at 6pm to attend nightly prayers in his memory. You can stay at the ashram for a donation, but you must respect the rules, including attending evening prayers. Meals cost ₹40.

🛏 Sleeping & Eating

Outside the two short peak seasons (May-June and October-November) the accommodation listed below is discounted by 50%.

Hotel Uttarakhand

HOTEL \$\$\$

(📍258012; www.uttarakhandkausani.zoomshare.com; d ₹750-2250; 📍) Up some steps from the bus stand but in a quiet location with a panoramic view of the Himalaya from your veranda, this is Kausani's best-value accommodation. The cheaper rooms are small, with bucket hot water, but upper-floor rooms are spacious and have hot showers and TVs. The manager is helpful and friendly, and credit cards are accepted.

Krishna Mountview

HOTEL \$\$\$

(📍258008; www.kumaonindia.com; Anasakti Ashram Rd; d ₹3200-4500, ste ₹6500-9000) Just past Anasakti Ashram, this is one of Kausani's smartest hotels, with clipped formal gardens (perfect for mountain views), the good Vaibhav restaurant, a gym and a pool table. All rooms are well kept and comfy, but the spacious upstairs rooms with balcony, bay windows and even rocking chairs are the pick.

Garden Restaurant

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(Hotel Uttarakhand; meals ₹60-250; ☀24hr) In front of Hotel Uttarkhand and enjoying fine Himalayan views, this bamboo and thatched-roofed restaurant is Kausani's coolest. The food comprises first class dishes from Swiss rösti to chicken tikka and imported pasta, as well as some Kumaon specialties, using fresh ingredients.

There are lots of cheap *dhabas* around the main bazaar and the road leading uphill from the bus stand.

📍 Information

Kausani has a State Bank of India ATM in the main bazaar, but no foreign currency exchange.

Sanchar Dhaba Cyber Cafe (Anasakti Ashram Rd; per hr ₹40; ☀6am-9pm) At Hill Queen Restaurant.

Uttarakhand Tourism office (📍258067; The Mall; ☀10am-5pm Mon-Sat)

📍 Getting There & Away

Buses and share jeeps stop in the village centre. Buses (₹45, 2½ hours) run about hourly to Almora, but afternoon buses generally stop at Karbala on the bypass road, from where you need to take a share jeep (₹10). Heading north, buses run every hour or so to Bageshwar via Bajjnath (₹40, 1½ hours). Share jeeps (₹20, 30 minutes) run to Garur, 16km north of Kausani, from where other share jeeps go to Gwaldam for onward buses and jeeps to Garhwal (via Karnaprayag). A taxi to Almora costs around ₹1000; to Nainital it costs ₹2000.

Bageshwar

📍05963 / POP 7803 / ELEV 975M

At the confluence of the Gomti and Sarju Rivers, Hindu pilgrims visit Bageshwar for its ancient stone **Bagnath Temple**. For travellers, it's more important as a transit town to or from the Milam or Pindari Glacier trailheads. There's a **KMVN office** (📞220034; www.kmvn.org; Tarcula Rd) at the Tourist Rest House, where the trekking manager can arrange all-inclusive treks. At the bus stand, **Annapurna Communication & Cafe** (per hr ₹50; ☎8.30am-9.30pm) has internet access, and there's a State Bank of India ATM in the main bazaar.

The okay **Hotel Annapurna** (📞220109; r ₹200-400, s/d without bathroom ₹70/150) is conveniently located next to the bus stand. Across the river, about 1km from the bus stand, the large **KMVN Bageshwar Tourist Rest House** (📞220034; Tarcula Rd; dm ₹100, d ₹250-600) is a bit institutional but has reasonable, spacious rooms and dorms.

Several daily buses go to Almora (₹76, three hours), and Ranikhet (₹90, three hours) via Kausani (₹35, 1½ hours). Frequent buses run to Bhowali (₹120, six hours) and Haldwani (₹170, 7½ hours). For connections to Garhwal, take a bus (₹45, two hours) to Gwaldam and change there. For the Pindari Glacier trek, there are two daily buses to Song (₹36, two hours). For Milam Glacier, there's a 9am bus to Munyari (₹135, six hours). There are also 6.30am & 8am buses to Pithoragarh (₹145/120; 7 hours). The jeep stand is near the bus stand: share jeeps go to Garur (₹25, 30 minutes), Kausani (₹50, 1½ hours) and Gwaldam (₹60, two hours). A taxi to Song costs ₹800 (two hours).

Pithoragarh

📍05964 / POP 41,157 / ELEV 1815M

Spread across the hillsides above a scenic valley that's been dubbed 'Little Kashmir', Pithoragarh is the main town of a little-visited region that borders Tibet and Nepal. Its sights include several Chand-era temples and an old fort, but the real reason to come here is to get off the tourist trail. The busy main bazaar is good for a stroll, and townspeople are exceptionally friendly. Picturisque hikes in the area include the rewarding climb up to **Chandak** (7km) for views of the Panchachuli (Five Chimneys) massif.

There's a **tourist office** (📞225527) that can help with trekking guides and informa-

tion, a State Bank of India ATM in the bazaar and a handful of internet cafes (₹30 per hour). Cheap hotels can be found around the bus stand (rooms from ₹200), but for something much better head 200m uphill to **Hotel Yash Yatharth** (📞225005; Naya Bazaar; dm ₹200, r ₹600-2500). Rates can be reduced by 80% if business is slow. For a good meal at a good price, locals swear by **Jyonar Restaurant** (Gandhi Chowk; mains ₹50-250; ☎8am-9pm) in the bazaar.

Several buses leave in the morning for Almora (₹110, five hours). Regular buses go to the transport hub of Haldwani and on to Delhi. There are hourly services from 5am to 2pm to Banbassa (₹165, six hours), the border crossing into Nepal. Buses run north to Munyari (₹135, eight hours), the trailhead for Milam Glacier, as do the ubiquitous share jeeps (₹180). If taking the long route to Munyari through Jauljibi, one stretch of road has amazing views of the Kumaon and Nepali Himalayas.

Pindari Glacier Trek

This six-day, 94km trek passes through truly virgin country that's inhabited by only a few shepherds, and it offers wonderful views of Nanda Kot (6860m), and Nanda Khat (6611m) on the southern rim of Nanda Devi Sanctuary. The 3km-long, 365m-wide Pindari Glacier is at 3353m, so take it easy to avoid altitude sickness. Permits aren't needed but bring your passport.

The trek begins and finishes at **Song** (1140m), a village 36km north of Bageshwar. Guides and porters can be organised easily in Song, or you can organise package treks through companies in Bageshwar or Almora. KMVN operates all-inclusive six-day treks out of Bageshwar for ₹5750 per person, staying at government rest houses. KMVN dorms (mattresses on the floor for ₹200), basic guest houses or *dhaba* huts (₹50 to ₹200) are dotted along the route, and food is available.

Buses (₹36, two hours) or share jeeps (₹60, 1½ hours) run between Song and Bageshwar.

Milam Glacier Trek

A challenging eight-day, 118km trek to this massive glacier at 3450m is reached along an ancient trade route to Tibet that was closed in 1962 following the war between India and

CROSSING INTO NEPAL

Border Hours

The border is open 24 hours, but before 6am and after 6pm you're unlikely to find any officials to stamp you in and out of the respective countries. While officially open to vehicles only from 6am to 7am, noon to 2pm and 5 to 6pm, rickshaws and motorcycles are usually allowed to make the 1km trip across the bridge between the border posts at any time. Otherwise, you have to walk it. (Even if the vehicle gate is closed, ask them to open it, and they might.)

Foreign Exchange

Hotels in Banbassa will exchange Indian and Nepali rupees, as will a small office near the Nepal border post. Nabil Bank in Mahendranagar has an ATM and foreign currency exchange.

Onward Transport

From the border, take a rickshaw to Mahendranagar. The bus station is about 1km from the centre on the Mahendra Hwy, from where buses leave for Kathmandu (₹1100, 16 hours) three times a day. There's also a single Pokhara service at 10.30am (₹1000, 16 hours).

Visas

Visas are available for US\$30 (cash only) at the Nepali side of the border between 9am and 5pm.

China. It passes through magnificent rugged country to the east of Nanda Devi (7816m) and along the sometimes spectacular gorges of the Gori Ganga River. A popular but tough side trip to Nanda Devi East base camp adds another 32km or three days.

Permits (free, passport required) are available from the District Magistrate in Munsyari. You will also need a tent and your own food supplies, as villages on the route may be deserted. KMVN organises all-inclusive eight-day treks (from ₹5325).

The base for this excursion is the spectacularly located village of **Munsyari** (2290m), where the 6000m Panchachuli peaks scrape the sky across the Johar Valley. A guide, cook and porters can be hired and package treks can be arranged through **Nanda Devi Tour N Trek** (☎05961-222324; trek_beeru@rediffmail.com) or **Johar Tour & Treks** (☎05961-222752).

Two kilometres downhill from the bazaar is the small **Tribal Heritage Museum** (☎9411337094; admission free), run by the charming scholar SS Pangtey, with artifacts from the days when Munsyari was an important nexus of trade with Tibet.

The plentiful accommodation in Munsyari includes **Hotel Pandey Lodge** (☎9411130316; www.munsyarihotel.com; r ₹100-1200) by the bus stand, which has a wide range of good-value rooms, some with

amazing views. For motherly urging to eat til you're stuffed (plates refilled free), try the hole-in-the-wall *dhaba* just to the left of Bughal Restaurant, at the bus stand.

A daily bus runs to Munsyari (₹190, 11 hours) from Almora; a jeep taxi costs around ₹3000 (10 hours). Buses run to and from Pithoragarh (₹140, eight hours) and Bageshwar (₹135, six hours). Share jeeps run to Thal (₹100, three hours), where you can change for onward transport. If travelling to Munsyari via Thal, get a right-side window seat for the best views along the road.

Banbassa

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Banbassa is the closest Indian village to the Nepal border post of Mahendranagar, 5km away. Check the current situation in western Nepal before crossing here, as roads during monsoon or immediate postmonsoon season may be impassable due to landslides and washed-out bridges.

Although Banbassa has a train station, only metre-gauge local trains run to the main railhead at Bareilly. A better option is the bus service that runs to and from Haldwani, Haridwar and Delhi. Alternatively, take a train from Delhi to Bareilly then a bus from there to Banbassa.

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