



Uttarakhand (Uttaranchal)

UTTARAKHAND
(UTTARANCHAL)

For a small state, Uttarakhand (formerly Uttaranchal) packs in an incredible amount. You can be taking yoga classes at an ashram in Rishikesh and white-water rafting down the Ganges one day, trekking in the shadow of the Himalayas the next. Walk with pilgrims to ancient temples near the source of Ganges and Yamuna Rivers, or take *puja* (offering or prayers) with thousands of devotees on the ghats at Haridwar. Put your feet up and relax in Raj-era hill stations, or ride an elephant and take your camera on a hunt for tigers at Corbett or Rajaji National Parks. If you get your timing right, it's all possible in Uttarakhand.

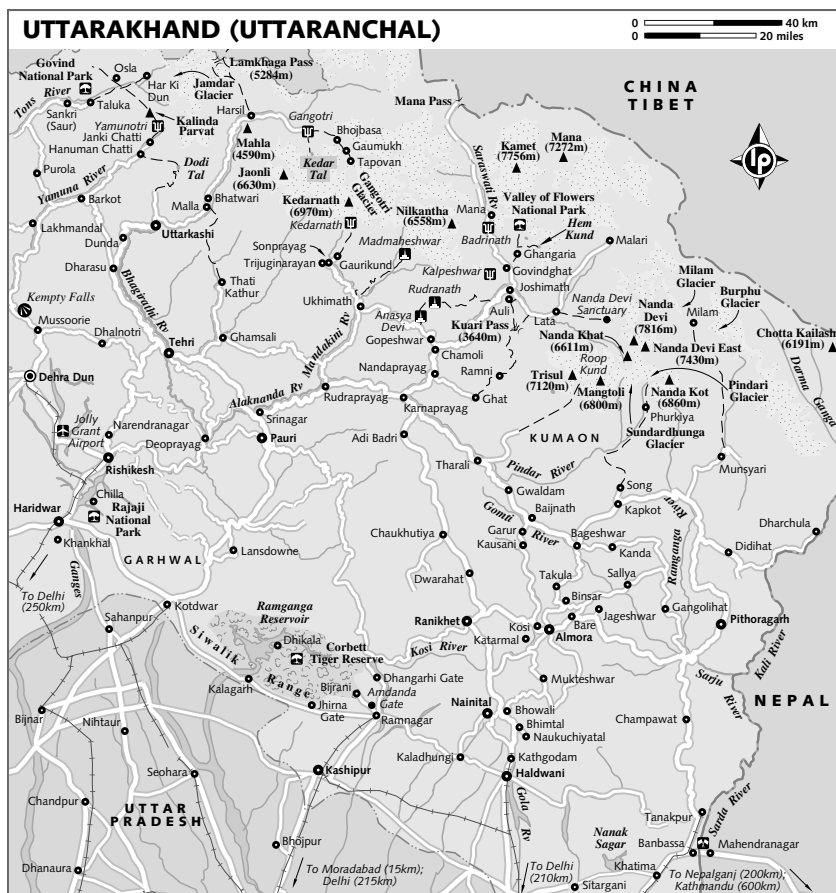
This is a region where nature takes control – rolling forest-clad hills, snow-topped 6000m peaks, rivers, waterfalls, lakes and glaciers. The state is 90% hills and 80% forest. The sacred Ganges River, which rises at Gaumukh Glacier in the far north, winds its way down to the plains via the significant pilgrimage centres of Gangotri, Rishikesh and Haridwar.

The British, fleeing the oppressive heat of the plains in summer, built enduring hill stations in the Himalayan foothills with Raj-style houses, hotels, churches and boarding schools that still exist. Mussoorie and Nainital have a real holiday atmosphere year-round and distant Himalayan views. Further north, the high Himalaya attracts trekkers, mountaineers and skiers as well as pilgrims on the Char Dham and Hem Kund routes. But it's Rishikesh that draws most foreign tourists for its ashrams, yoga, meditation and all-round spirituality. Whatever your interest, square for square, this is one of India's richest regions for travellers.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Grab a backpack and **trek** (p445) to remote, pristine glaciers and passes, surrounded by the mightiest mountain range on the planet
- Join the **Char Dham** (p468) and **Hem Kund** (p470) pilgrimages to remote temples, holy rivers and sacred lakes
- Scout for tigers from atop an elephant in **Corbett Tiger Reserve** (p472)
- Get your asanas and chakras sorted at **Rishikesh** (p459), the yoga capital of the universe
- Cool off in a scenic Raj-era hill station in **Mussoorie** (p450) or **Nainital** (p474) in the Himalayan foothills
- Trek into the sublime **Valley of Flowers** (p470), a mosaic of natural colour, then visit charming **Mana village** (p471) in the shadow of the Himalayas





History

Uttarakhand consists of the culturally distinct Garwhal (in the west) and Kumaon (east) districts. Over the centuries various dynasties have dominated the region, including the Guptas, Kuturyi and Chand rajas. In the 18th century the Nepalese Gurkhas attacked first the kingdom of Kumaon, then Garwhal, 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 following a vocal separatist movement, the present-day state of Uttarakhand was formed in 2000. In 2007 the state was officially renamed Uttarakhand, a traditional name meaning 'northern country'.

Climate

The hill stations can be visited all year, although winters (December to February) are freezing cold, with snowfall likely in January, so make sure your room has heating. Further north the main trekking and pilgrim season runs from April to late October or early November, with a break in July and August when the monsoon rains arrive and landslides block roads. As in all mountainous regions the weather is fickle and can vary greatly during any season. Look at the altitude to get an idea of likely temperatures.

Information

Most towns have an Uttarakhand Tourism office, but the main responsibility for the

FAST FACTS

- Population: 8,479,562
- Area: 51,125 sq km
- Capital: Dehra Dun
- Main languages: Hindi, Garhwali and Kumaoni
- When to go: May to July and September to November; in lowlands (ie Rishikesh, Corbett and Rajaji National Parks) November to March

region's tourism rests with the **Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam** (GMVN; www.gmvnl.com), which covers the western Garhwal district; and **Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam** (KMVN; www.kmvn.org) covering the eastern Kumaon district. The two manage a network of tourist bungalows throughout the state.

Activities

TREKKING

Whether walking through the hills and forests of Kumaon or tackling a 3500m mountain pass, Uttarakhand provides some of India's finest and most accessible trekking country. In the Garhwal district, the Char Dham pilgrim routes (p468) mean that public transport to many treks is excellent. But you can also get away from the crowds and head to spectacularly remote places like Har ki Dun Valley or the magical Nanda Devi Sanctuary, which has a limit on the number of walkers allowed in at one time. Trekking the Kuari Pass brings sublime views of Nanda Devi, India's second tallest peak, and follows in the footsteps of Viceroy Lord Curzon. In the eastern Kumaon region, nudging up against the Tibetan border, you can tackle challenging Pindari or Milam Glacier treks.

The best (safest) time to trek is either the premonsoon period (mid-May until the end of June), or the postmonsoon season (mid-September to mid-October). In July and August the major problem is landslides that cut roads to the trailheads and cause long delays. The Char Dham temples and other high-altitude treks close in winter (late November to March).

Clothes and equipment can be purchased new or secondhand or hired from local shops or from GMVN. On these treks and trails

cheap, basic accommodation is available in private guesthouses, ashrams and GMVN or KMVN tourist bungalows and dormitory huts. Camping is another option and porters are not expensive to hire. *Dhabas* (snack bars) serve up rice, chapatis, vegetables and instant noodles.

Government-run **GMVN** (www.gmvnl.com) and **KMVN** (www.kmvn.org) organise all-inclusive treks for Rs 1500 to 3000 a day, but there are private trek companies offering much the same thing for Rs 1000 to 4000 a day depending on group numbers and the level of food and service required. However, it's easy to organise your own trek – guides costs around Rs 500 a day, cooks Rs 500 and porters Rs 300. Ponies may also be available for hire on some treks. On *yatra* (pilgrimage) trails and on popular treks a guide is not necessary, but on more remote treks it is recommended for safety reasons and to support the local subsistence economy. Porters make any trek easier and more enjoyable. Trekking maps are available from the **Survey of India** (www.surveyofindia.gov.in) For a more in-depth coverage of treks, see Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Indian Himalaya*.

RAFTING & KAYAKING

White-water rafting on the fast-flowing Ganges and Alaknanda Rivers is fast growing in popularity, with a dozen or more companies setting up riverside rafting camps during the season (October to May). Rishikesh is the main place to organise rafting trips (p463) but agencies in Joshimath also arrange trips, usually starting from Rudraprayag. Kayaking is also gaining a foothold and there's a recommended outfit in Rishikesh (p463).

TOP TREKS

- Kuari Pass (p471)
- Valley of the Flowers & Hem Kund (p470)
- Pindari Glacier (p483)
- Milam Glacier (p484)
- Nanda Devi Sanctuary (p471)
- Gangotri (p467)
- Yamunotri (p468)
- Har ki Dun Valley (p468)

FESTIVALS IN UTTARAKHAND

Makar Sakranti day (Jan; Uttarkashi, p467) Religious images are borne aloft on palanquins and carried into town from outlying villages.

Magh Mela (Jan & Feb; Haridwar, p454) Hundreds of thousands more pilgrims than usual come to bathe in the soul-cleansing Ganges during this huge annual religious fair; every six years the Ardh Kumbh Mela is held, and every 12 years during the mega Kumbh Mela the town is packed out with pilgrims.

International Yoga Festival (2-7 Feb; Rishikesh, p459) Yoga and meditation masters from around the world converge and give demonstrations and lectures.

Shivaratri (usually Mar; Tapkeshwar Temple, opposite) 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, p480) During this five-day fair, thousands of devotees parade the image of the goddess around and watch dancing and other cultural shows.

SKIING

India's premier ski resort is Auli, near Joshimath in the northern Garwhal district. Although a small resort with only one chair-lift and one rope tow, the snow is reliable (January to March) and the infrastructure is improving.

YOGA & MEDITATION

Yoga and meditation are big business in Rishikesh (p462), where you can stay in an ashram or just turn up to classes at one of dozens of yoga centres. Haridwar also has some less-touristed ashrams (p462).

Getting Around

Although Dehra Dun, Haridwar, Rishikesh and Ramnagar are accessible by train, tough old buses are the main means of travelling around Uttarakhand. Because of the popular pilgrim routes, they run to very remote areas deep in the Himalaya for most of the year. In addition, a vast network of crowded share jeeps crisscrosses the state, linking remote towns and villages in the hills to important road junctions and bus routes. They tout for customers on the highway in the direction of the next town or transport hub, but usually don't leave until full (or at least jam-packed). They charge slightly more than the equivalent bus ride. Pay 10 times the share-taxi rate and you can hire the whole vehicle and travel in comfort.

Some of the hairpin mountain roads are frightening to travel on – especially when you're on a bus being driven by a particularly impatient and insane driver – and are subject to landslides, especially after the monsoon. Don't expect to cover more than 25km an hour on most roads.

DEHRA DUN

☎ 0135 / pop 527,859 / elev 700m

Blessed with a moderate climate, the capital of Uttarakhand is 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.

What was once a green and pleasant town of rice and tea gardens has morphed into a hectic, congested city, and considering Rishikesh and Mussoorie are both only an hour away, most travellers merely pass through. But Dehra Dun is worth a stop for its lively Paltan bazaar, vibrant Tibetan community and energetic vibe.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

English Book Depot (15 Rajpur Rd; ☎ 9.30am-8.30pm) CDs, trekking books and maps, and Barista café attached.

Natraj Booksellers (17 Rajpur Rd; ☎ 10.30am-1.30pm & 3-8pm Mon-Sat) Specialises in ecology, spirituality, local books and local author Ruskin Bond.

INTERNET ACCESS

Cyber Park (near clock tower; per hr Rs 15;

☎ 10.30am-8pm)

i-way Hotel Grand (Gandhi Rd; per hr Rs 25; ☎ 8am-8pm); Rajpur Rd (per hr Rs 25; ☎ 8am-10pm) The Rajpur Rd branch is above Café Coffee Day.

MEDICAL SERVICES

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

MONEY

Banks on Rajpur Rd exchange travellers cheques and currency and have ATMs that accept foreign credit cards.

POST

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

TOURIST INFORMATION

GMVN office (☎ 2747898; www.gmvl.com; 74/1 Rajpur Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) The commercial arm of Uttarakhand Tourism runs rest houses and tours and treks throughout the western Garhwal region.

Uttarakhand Tourism office (☎ 2653217; 45 Gandhi Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Attached to Hotel Drona.

Uttarakhand Tourist Information counter (train station; ☎ 7am-9pm)

Sights & Activities**FOREST RESEARCH INSTITUTE MUSEUM**

The prime attraction of this **museum** (☎ 2759382; www.icfre.org; admission Rs 10, guide Rs 50; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 1.30-5.30pm) is the building itself. Set in a 500-hectare park, the institute – where most of India's forest officers are trained – is larger than Buckingham Palace and one of the Raj's grandest buildings. Built between 1924 and 1929, 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 rather old-fashioned and dry displays on every aspect of forestry in India. Highlights include beautiful 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.

TAPKESHWAR TEMPLE

An unusual and popular Shiva **shrine** (☎ dawn-dusk) is inside a small dripping cave in a scenic setting on the banks of the Tons Nadi River. Turn left at the bottom of the steps for the main shrine, and cross the bridge over the river to visit another cave shrine where you have to squeeze through a narrow cave to see an image of Mata Vaishno Devi.

RAM RAI DARBAR

This unique **mausoleum** (Paltan Bazaar; admission free; ☎ dawn-dusk) is made of white marble, and the four smaller tombs in the garden courtyard are those of Ram Rai's four wives. The entrance gate is adorned with colourful murals. 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, one of his supporters, the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb, ordered the building of the mausoleum. As in other gurdwaras (Sikh temples), a free communal lunch of dhal, rice and chapatis is offered to anyone who wants it, although a donation is appreciated.

GEOLOGY MUSEUM

The Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology has a small **museum** (☎ 2627387; 37 General Mahadev Singh Rd; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2.15-5.15pm Mon-Fri) which covers local rocks, glaciers and earthquakes. Fossils include a dinosaur egg and stacks of teeth.

GREAT STUPA & BUDDHA STATUE

The region around Dehra Dun is home to a thriving Tibetan Buddhist community. Just south of the centre in Clement Town, the Mindrolling Monastery boasts a large college and the five-storey **Great Stupa** (☎ 9am-5pm). At over 60m it is claimed to be the world's tallest stupa and contains a series of shrine rooms displaying relics, murals and Tibetan art. Nearby, the 35m-high gold **Buddha Statue**, dedicated to the Dalai Lama, is set in a pretty garden.

HEALTH CLUB & SWIMMING

Hotel Madhuban (☎ 2749990; 97 Rajpur Rd) has a health club with a sauna, spa, gym and Ayurvedic massage. Nonguests can use the swimming pool at **Hotel Ajanta Continental** (☎ 2749595; 101 Rajpur Road) for Rs 300.

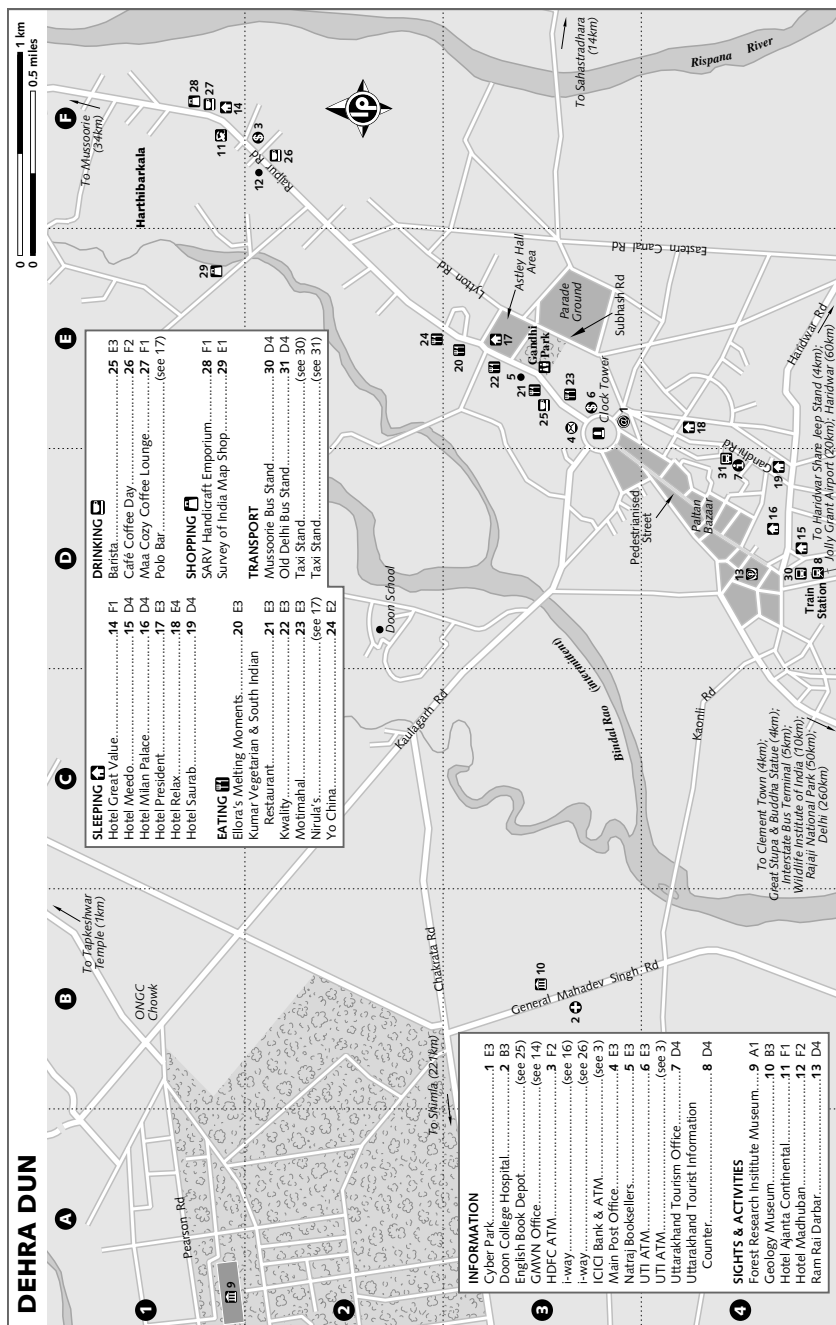
Sleeping

Hotel Meedo (☎ 2621544; Haridwar Rd; s Rs 200-300, d Rs 300-400) The best of an average bunch of cheap hotels by the train station, Meedo has a range of neglected rooms but all have TV and private bathroom (bucket hot water). Restaurant and bar next door.

Hotel Milan Palace (☎ 2626026; 64 Gandhi Rd; d Rs 400-600) This reasonable budget option set back from the main road has clean rooms with TV and hot water and helpful staff.

Hotel Saurab (☎ 2728041; 1 Raja Rd; s/d from Rs 500/600, with AC Rs 1100/1400; ☎) Neatly furnished, comfortable rooms make this hotel, just off Gandhi Rd, a good deal. All rooms have hot water and TV, and there's a multicuisine restaurant.

Hotel Relax (☎ 2657776; www.hotelrelax-aketa.com; 7 Court Rd; s/d Rs 750/850, with AC Rs 950/1100; ☎) Although a large hotel, the rooms are cosy enough with flowery bedspreads, TV and some with balcony.



Hotel President (☎ 2657082; www.hotelpresidentdehradun.com; 6 Astley Hall, Rajpur Rd; s Rs 1400-1700, d Rs 1600-1900; ☺) Part of a popular complex of shops, restaurants and fast-food places known as Astley Hall, President has well-appointed rooms – those in the annexe above Nirula's are stylishly ultramodern – as well as two good restaurants and the Polo Bar.

Hotel Great Value (☎ 2744086; www.greatvaluehotel.com; 74C Rajpur Rd; s Rs 1500-2500, d Rs 2200-3150, ste Rs 5100; ☺) In spite of the naff name, attention to detail is the strong point of this elegant and stylish hotel with marble décor, antique furniture and greenery. Rooms have TV, fridge and broadband internet access. The restaurant has live music at 8pm.

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.

Nirula's (Astley Hall, Rajpur Rd) Bright and breezy Nirula's specialises in ice creams but also does inexpensive fast food such as burgers.

Ellora's Melting Moments (29 Rajpur Rd; mains Rs 15-60) Often packed with local families, Ellora's is a fast-food institution serving up pizza, sandwiches, burgers, sweets and lassis.

Kumar Vegetarian & South Indian Restaurant (15B Rajpur Rd; meals Rs 25-70; ☺ 11am-3.30pm, 7-10.30pm; ☺) Fine South Indian dosas and thalis are served in this clean, busy restaurant.

Motimahal (7 Rajpur Rd; mains Rs 50-80; ☺) Plenty of choices are available at this busy diner with kebabs and Chinese offerings as well as more exotic items.

Yo China (☎ 2655733; 33 Rajpur Rd; mains Rs 45-120; ☺ 11.30am-11.30pm; ☺) Bright, spotless fast-food restaurant on three floors specialising in all things Chinese, from dim sum and chicken wings to chow mein.

Quality (☎ 2657001; 19B Rajpur Rd; mains Rs 80-200; ☺ 11am-11pm; ☺) This is an elegant restaurant with cream-cushion furniture and a superb range of veg and nonveg dishes from chicken tikka sizzlers to roast lamb. Finish off with tempting desserts or cocktails. Attached is the cosy Cobble Bar.

Drinking

Maa Cozy Coffee Lounge (76 Rajpur Rd; ☺ 11am-11.30pm) Dehra Dun's coolest hang-out, Maa Cozy is an Arabian style lounge where you can smoke a fruit-flavoured sheesha pipe (Rs 125 to 180) while reclining on Middle Eastern

cushions and rugs. Big range of tea, coffee and cold drinks.

Polo Bar (6 Astley Hall, Rajpur Rd) One of the more salubrious of Dehra Dun's many hotel bars, this one is at Hotel President.

Barista (Rajpur Rd; drinks & snacks Rs 10-40) is a popular modern café with board games and an excellent bookshop next door. **Café Coffee Day** (Rajpur Rd) is another chain place that does great coffee shakes and snacks.

Shopping

SARV Handicraft Emporium (☎ 2742141; 78 Rajpur Rd; ☺ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat) This small store has a great range of crafts and clothes with striking designs at reasonable prices. Money raised here benefits women working in Himalayan villages who have few employment opportunities.

Survey of India Map Shop (☎ 2747051; off Rajpur Rd; www.surveyofindia.gov.in; ☺ 9am-1pm & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri) This tiny shop at the Survey of India stocks all sorts of current and antique maps of Indian states, cities, tourist areas and treks, as well as digital maps on CD.

The congested but virtually traffic-free street through Paltan Bazaar is a popular evening stroll and you can pick up everything from cheap clothing and souvenirs to camping and trekking gear.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Air Deccan has one daily flight from Delhi to Dehra Dun's Jolly Grant airport, about 20km east of the city on the Haridwar road. Internet fares for the one-hour flight start at Rs 1650. A taxi from the airport costs Rs 250.

BUS

Although a few buses still leave from the Old Delhi bus stand, almost all long-distance buses arrive and depart from the huge, modern Interstate Bus Terminal (ISBT) at Clement Town, 5km south of the city centre. To get there take a local bus (Rs 4), *vikram* 5 (Rs 4) or an autorickshaw (Rs 50). A few Mussoorie buses leave from here but most go from the Mussoorie bus stand next to the train station. For more bus details, see the table, p450.

TAXI

A taxi to Mussoorie officially costs Rs 400. A share taxi should cost Rs 50 per person and both can be found in front of the train station. Taxis charge Rs 650 to Rishikesh or Haridwar.

BUSES FROM DEHRA DUN

Destination	Fares (Rs)	Duration (hr)	Departures
Chandigarh	113	6	hourly btwn 5.30am & 5pm
Delhi (deluxe)	190	7	hourly btwn 6.15am & 12.15am
Delhi (standard)	135	7	hourly btwn 6.30am & 10.30pm
Dharamsala	272	14	12.30pm & 5.30pm daily
Haridwar	35	2	half-hourly
Manali	355	14	3pm daily
Mussoorie (A)	28	1½	half-hourly btwn 6am & 8pm
Nainital	175	12	eight daily
Rishikesh	30	1½	half-hourly
Ramnagar	248	7	4.30am, 5.30am, 1pm daily
Shimla	180	10	6am, 8am, 10am, 11.30pm daily
Uttarkashi	130	8	6am daily

A – buses departing from Mussoorie bus stand. Some go to the Picture Palace bus stand at one end of Mussoorie while others go to the Library bus stand at the other end.

TRAIN

Dehra Dun is well connected by train to Delhi, and there are a handful of services to Lucknow, Varanasi, Kolkata (Calcutta) and Amritsar. The best service linking Dehra Dun and Delhi is the daily *Shatabdi Express* (chair/executive Rs 470/920) which leaves New Delhi at 6.55am and reaches Dehra Dun at 12.40pm. The return trip leaves Dehra Dun at 5pm. It's not worth paying the extra for executive class.

The daily *Mussoorie Express* (sleeper/3AC/2AC Rs 146/412/592, 11 hours) is an overnight service that leaves Delhi Sarai Rohilla station at 9.10pm, arriving at Dehra Dun at 8am. The return trip leaves Dehra Dun at 9.30pm.

Getting Around

Hundreds of eight-seater *vikrams* (shared autorickshaws; Rs 3 to 5 per trip) race along five fixed routes (look at the front for the number). No 5 *vikrams* go to the New Delhi bus stand at Clement Town. Autorickshaws cost Rs 30 for a short distance, up to 60 for a few kilometres or Rs 100 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' spends much of the year swathed in clouds. 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. It certainly gets cold up here in winter, with snowfall common in January. 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.

Orientation

Central Mussoorie consists of two developed areas: Gandhi Chowk (also called Library Bazaar) at the western end and the livelier Kulri Bazaar at the eastern end, and the two are linked by an almost traffic-free road, the Mall. Cycle-rickshaws will take you the 2km between the two ends but it's a pleasant, scenic walk. Beyond Kulri Bazaar a narrow road leads 5km to the settlement of Landour.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Connexions (the Mall, Kulri Bazaar; per hr Rs 60;

☎ 10.30am-10.30pm) Above the Tavern.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Landour Community Hospital (☎ 2632053; near Tehri bus stand, Landour Rd) Has 24-hour emergency cover as well as dental services and a 24-hour pharmacy.

MONEY

Bank of Baroda ATM (Kulri Bazaar)

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

Trek Himalaya (☎ 2631302; Upper Mall; ⌚ 11am-8pm)

Exchanges major currencies and travellers cheques at a fair rate.

UTI ATM In the Mall and Gandhi Chowk.

POST

Main post office (☎ 2632206; the 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.

Sights & Activities**GUN HILL**

From midway along the Mall Rd, a **cable car** (return Rs 50; ⌚ 9am-8pm) runs up to Mussoorie's highest point, Gun Hill (2530m) which has views of several peaks, including Bandarpunch. 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 mini-carnival atmosphere with kids' rides, food stalls, magic shops and honeymooners having their photos taken dressed up in Garhwali costumes.

WALKS

The walks around Mussoorie offer great views when the clouds don't get in the way. **Camel's Back Rd** is a popular 3km promenade from Kulri Bazaar to Gandhi Chowk, which passes a rock formation that looks like a camel. There are a couple of good mountain viewpoints along the way, including a teashop with a telescope (Rs 10). You can ride a horse (Rs 120 one way, Rs 150 return) along the trail if you start from the Gandhi Chowk end. An enjoyable, longer walk (5km one way) starts at the Picture Palace, goes past the 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** (☎ 2631302; Upper Mall; ⌚ 11am-8pm) can organise guided walks to these points for around Rs 600 a day.

CHURCHES & TEMPLES

Christian churches of various denominations can be visited. The **Union Church** in Kulri Bazaar holds a service in English at 11am every Sunday, while the beautiful **Christ Church** (1863) is the oldest in Mussoorie and bears memorial plaques of colonial residents. More recent places of worship include a Sai Baba Temple, the Radha Krishna Temple, the Jama Masjid and a Buddhist temple (in Happy Valley).

Courses

Mussoorie is home to many schools and colleges, including the **Landour Language School** (☎ 2631487; www.landourlanguageschool.org; 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 Rs 140 per hour, private tutorials Rs 200 per hour. Course books (Rs 1000 to 1350) and enrolment fee (Rs 250) are extra.

Tours

GMVN booth (☎ 2632863; Library bus stand;

⌚ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) GMVN organises two local tours – one to Kempty Falls (three-hour tour Rs 70) and the other to Dhanoltri, Surkhanda Devi Temple and Mussoorie Lake (full-day tour Rs 140).

Trek Himalaya (☎ 2631302; www.trekhimalaya.

com; Upper Mall; ⌚ 10am-8pm) Long-time local trekker Neelambar Badoni organises three-day treks to unspoilt Nagtibba for around US\$100 per person (minimum five) as well as customised treks to Dodital, Har ki Dun, Gaumukh Glacier and safaris as far as Ladakh.

Sleeping

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

Hotels are strung out between the two bazaars, with the better budget places around Kulri Bazaar and the top-end hotels closer to Library Bazaar. Check out is usually 10am.

MUSSOORIE

INFORMATION

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- Connexions.....(see 30)
- GMVN Booth.....(see 37)
- Main Post Office.....2 E2
- Police Box.....3 A1
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- State Bank of India ATM.....5 E2
- Trek Himalaya.....6 D2
- UTI ATM.....7 C1
- UTI ATM.....8 B1
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- Snooked Pool Parlour.....(see 30)

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- Taxi Stand.....(see 39)

BUDGET

Budget places are few, but most hotels drop their rates to budget levels out of season.

Hotel Broadway (☎ 2632243; Camel's Back Rd, Kulri Bazaar; d Rs 200-350) Number one for backpackers, this historic 1880s wooden hotel with colourful flowerboxes in the windows oozes character without sacrificing comfort. Some rooms have good views and meals are available. Prices triple in peak season.

Hotel Deep (☎ 2632470; deephotel@hotmail.com; Camel's Back Rd; r Rs 100-700) Next door to Broadway, this is a candy-striped warren of a place with a huge range of rooms. In the off-season budget rooms are as little as Rs 100 (Rs 900 in summer), but there are also some spacious rooms and suites. There's a pleasant terrace with views.

Hotel Rockwood (☎ 2632850; the Mall, Kulri Bazaar; d Rs 1200-2000, off-season Rs 200-400) In the heart of the bazaar and an off-season bargain, the rooms are a mixed bag but some have a balcony.

MIDRANGE

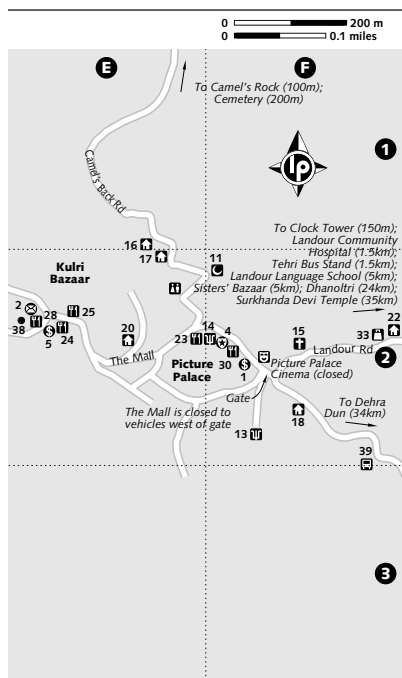
Hotel Horizon (☎ 2632899; Picture Palace; d Rs 1600-1800, off-season discount 40%) A touch of style with hand-

painted murals in all the rooms. You descend below reception to the rooms, most of which have views as well as TV and heating.

Shiva Continental (☎ 2632174; www.shivacon.com; Landour Rd; r Rs 1500-3000, off-season Rs 950-1950) This slightly eccentric hotel on the road up to Landour has marble décor, sculptures, a shady terrace and so many pot plants that they threaten to take over the place. Carpeted rooms are bright and most have views.

Hotel Padmini Nivas (☎ 2631093; www.hotelpadmininivas.com; the Mall; d Rs 1700-2300, ste Rs 2800-3200, off-season discount 50%; ☎) Built in 1840 by a British colonel and then bought by the Maharaja of Rajpipla, this green-roofed heritage hotel looks a bit ramshackle but has a real old-fashioned charm. Large 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 five acres of landscaped gardens.

our pick Kasmanda Palace Hotel (☎ 2632424; kasmanda@vsnl.com; off the Mall; d Rs 2800-4000, off-season discount 20%) Mussoorie's most romantic hotel, this 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. All of the rooms have charm but the wood-panelled and antique-filled Maharaja Room is the royal best. The formal dining room and pretty garden area complete the picture.

Eating

Meeting Point Cafe (the Mall; meals Rs 25-45) Away from the bazaars, this is a pleasant little hang-out with espresso coffee and Tibetan food.

Casa Mia Bakery (the Mall, Kulri Bazaar; snacks Rs 16-45) The best of the many bakeries, this one has a dazzling range of temptations, including croissants, cakes, muffins, apple pies and frozen drinks.

Howard Revolving Restaurant (the Mall; meals Rs 35-50) Halfway along the Mall, this is a novel place to eat – it's switched on when guests arrive ('No charges for revolving!'). Reasonable food, good views.

City Point Restaurant (the Mall, Gandhi Chowk; meals Rs 30-110) This small wood-panelled place is great for breakfast or a quick snack but also

does curries and dishes such as khadai chicken for dinner.

Kalsang Friends Corner (☎ 2633710; the Mall; meals Rs 20-80) This deservedly popular place is one of several Tibetan restaurants in town. Along with *momos* (Tibetan dumplings) and noodles, mains include Thai papaya salad, chicken dishes and omelettes.

The Tavern (☎ 2632829; the Mall, Picture Palace; meals Rs 70-235) A favourite place to dine and hang out, Tavern boasts a global range of food from crispy roast lamb to Goan fish curry and just about everything in between. The décor is a bit British pub, but staff are welcoming and there's live music in the evening. Beer and cocktails are available at the bar.

Mussoorie has lots of cafés along the Mall, including branches of Barista and Café Coffee Day. For fine dining, you can't go past the restaurants at Hotel Padmini Nivas (opposite) and Kasmanda Palace Hotel (opposite).

Drinking & Entertainment

Mussoorie's family-holiday entertainment includes video game arcades and an indoor roller-skating rink.

Snooked Pool Parlour (the Mall, pool per hr Rs 80, snooker per hr Rs 100; ☎ 10.30am-10.30pm) This pool parlour above the Tavern is a good place to keep yourself entertained and to meet locals. Downstairs there's live music every evening at the bar.

Mussoorie Co-op Club (☎ 2632828; Lower Mall; ☎ 2-11pm) A throwback to the Raj, despite being built in 1957, this ramshackle club is a good place to come for a beer (Rs 100) and a game of billiards or snooker (Rs 100 per hour).

HANGING BY A WIRE

Uttarakhand has plenty of hills and a few of them have cable cars – usually called 'ropeways' locally – which not only make getting to the top a breeze, but are a source of great civic pride. Nainital's cable car (p475) takes you from the lake to Snow View for a glimpse of the Himalaya, while Mussoorie (p451) has a similar set-up. Haridwar has two that are specifically designed to take pilgrims up to hilltop temples (p455). But the *pièce de résistance* belongs to Joshimath, where a 4km-long cable car (p470) takes you more than 1000m up to the ski resort of Auli for magnificent views of Nanda Devi.

Garhwal Terrace Bar (the Mall; ☎ noon-11pm)

Pleasant place for a beer with views down the Doon Valley.

Shopping

There's a **Tibetan Market** (the Mall; ☎ daily 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. They are scattered mainly along the Mall and at the top of the cable car.

Ancient Palace (☎ 2631622; Landour Rd; ☎ 10am-9pm) This shop is crammed with antiques and curios.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Frequent buses leave from the Mussoorie bus stand (next to the train station) in Dehra Dun for Mussoorie (Rs 28, 1½ hours). Some go to the **Picture Palace bus stand** (☎ 2632259) while others go to the **Library bus stand** (☎ 263 2258) at the other end of town. The return trip takes an hour. There are no direct buses to Rishikesh or Haridwar – you'll need to change at Dehra Dun.

It's possible to take the 'back roads' north into the Himalaya from Mussoorie. Enquire at the Library bus stand about buses to Yamunotri (Rs 174, six hours) which are irregular, or to Sankri for the Har ki Dun trek (Rs 120, seven hours), which may require a combination of buses and share jeeps. Local buses, such as those to Tehri Dam, leave from the Tehri bus stand on the way to Landour.

TAXI

From taxi stands at both bus stands you can hire taxi to Dehra Dun (Rs 400), Rishikesh (Rs 1100) or jeeps to Uttarkashi (Rs 2500). A shared taxi to Dehra Dun should cost Rs 50 per person.

TRAIN

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

Getting Around

Cycle-rickshaws along the Mall cost Rs 20. A full day of sightseeing around Mussoorie by taxi including Kempty Falls and Dhanoltri costs around Rs 1800.

AROUND MUSSOORIE

The most popular sight around Mussoorie is impressive **Kempty Falls**, 15km northwest, where you can swim in the crowded pool. A trip to **Dhanoltri** offers panoramic snowcapped Himalayan views and is a lovely picnic spot set among deodar forests 25km northeast of Mussoorie. About 9km further north is **Surkhanda Devi Temple**, at a height of 3030m, which is a 2km walk from the road. A taxi to Kempty Falls costs Rs 600 and to Dhanoltri and Surkhanda Devi temple the cost is Rs 900. See p451 for cheaper bus tours.

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 architecture 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' rest houses) and ashrams, some of which are the size of small villages. Famous for its Ayurvedic medicines, the city is relatively hassle-free and is also the gateway to nearby Rajaji National Park.

Haridwar is busy during the *yatra* season from April to November, but the big annual event is the Magh Mela in January or February, which every six years becomes a bigger Ardh Magh Mela. Every 12 years the mega Kumbh Mela (the next one in Haridwar is 2010) attracts millions of pilgrims.

Orientation

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 (bridge) so vehicles travel around the opposite bank of the river. The alleyways of Bara Bazaar run south of Har-ki-Pairi ghat.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

7 Days Cyber Café (Upper Rd; per hr Rs 40; ☎ 9am-10.30pm)

Internet Zone i-way (Upper Rd; per hr Rs 40;

☎ 10am-10pm)

Mohan's Adventure Tours (Railway Rd; per hr Rs 40;

☎ 8am-10.30pm)

MEDICAL SERVICES

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

MONEY

Canara Bank (Railway Rd) Exchanges foreign currency and travellers cheques.

LPK Forex (☎ 329279; Upper Rd; ☎ 10am-9pm) Changes cash and travellers cheques for 1% commission.

State Bank of India ATM (Railway Rd)

POST

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

TOURIST INFORMATION

GMVN tourist office (☎ 2244240; Railway Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Can organise half-day taxi tour of Haridwar for Rs 700.

Tourist Information counter (train station; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat)

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

Sights & Activities

HAR-KI-PAIRI GHAT

Har-ki-Pairi (The Footstep of God) is where Vishnu is said to have dropped some heavenly nectar and left a footprint behind. As such it is very sacred to Hindus and 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 uniform 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 (Rs 5) 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 Rs 200 or more. If you want to make a donation, give it to a genuine priest or uniformed collector or put money in a charity box.

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

MANSA DEVI & CHANDI DEVI TEMPLES

Take the **cable car** (return Rs 48; ☎ 7.30am-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.

Many visitors and pilgrims combine this with a **cable car** (return Rs 70; ☎ 8am-6pm) up Neel Hill, 4km southeast of Haridwar, to **Chandi Devi Temple**, which was built by Raja Suchet Singh of Kashmir in 1929. Pay Rs 144 at Mansa Devi and you can ride on 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** (☎ 265543, mobile 9837100215; www.mohansadventure.in; Railway Rd; ☎ 8am-10.30pm) can organise any kind of tour, including cycling, trekking, fishing, bird-watching and rafting. He specialises in five-hour safaris (Rs 1750 per person) around Rajaji National Park (see p459). Sanjeev also runs three-day trips to Corbett Tiger Reserve.

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%. See the boxed text, p462, for details on staying at an ashram.

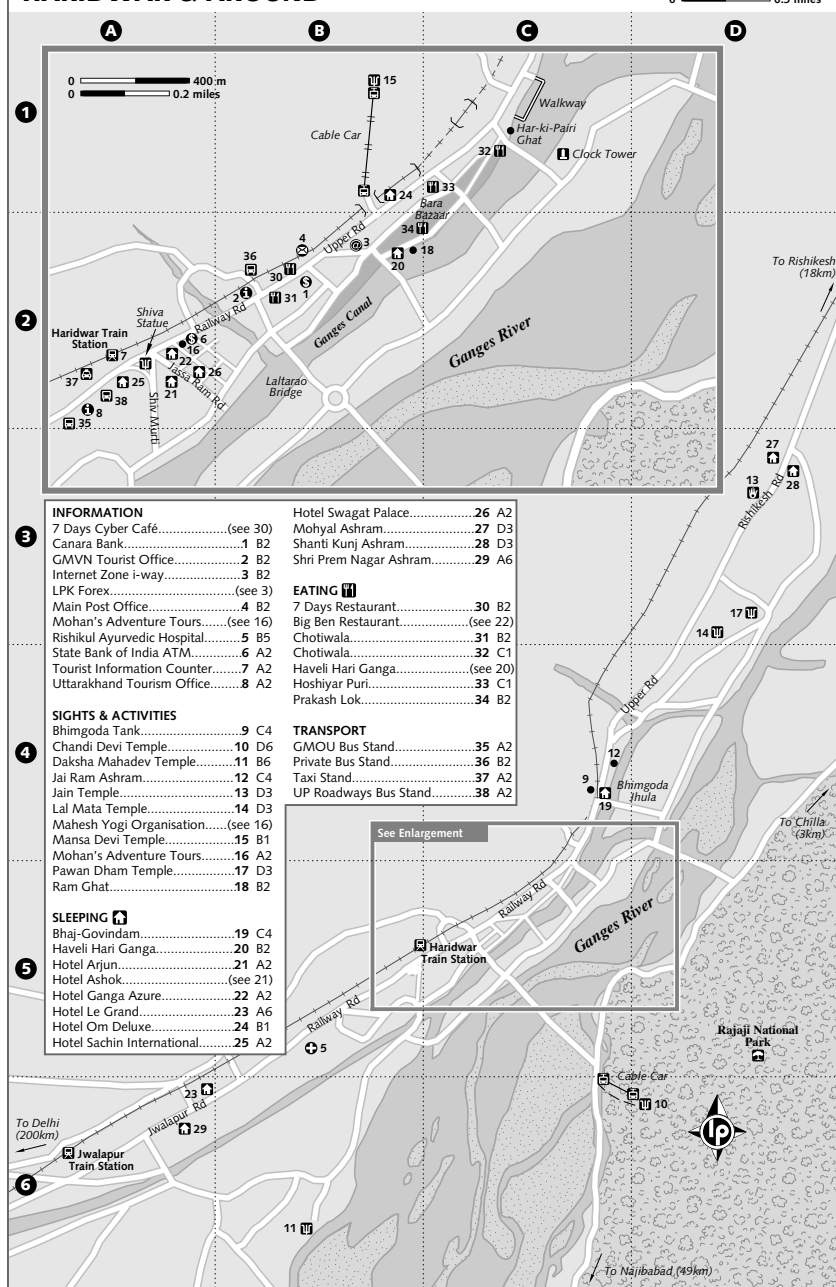
BUDGET

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 very good. Rishikesh has far superior budget accommodation.

Hotel Ashok (☎ 2426469; Jassa Ram Rd; s Rs 110, d Rs 150-250; ☎) A fairly grim cheapie where only the 'deluxe' rooms (with TV and hot water) are faintly appealing.

HARIDWAR & AROUND

0 1 km
0 0.5 miles



PRIESTLY PANDAS

'Where can I find my family panda?' This is a common question from Hindu pilgrims visiting Haridwar. Pandas (priests and pilgrim guides) also maintain accurate records of a family's history, which can date back hundreds of years. You can see them not only at the ghats but also at the train station. Pilgrims give a panda the name of their clan, caste, village, district and state and are then directed to their specific family panda.

Once found, their panda will record their visit and any births, marriages and deaths that have taken place since the last pilgrimage of a family member. In the past, pilgrims stayed with their trusted panda, who acted as banker, minder and cook. Today, this is not so common, but pandas still help with the many cremation rituals. Pandas can become wealthy as pilgrims donate not just generous sums of money, but also valuable items belonging to their deceased relatives.

Hotel Swagat Palace (☎ 221581; Jassa Ram Rd; d Rs 250-500; 🏠) Reasonable value as the better rooms are spacious with TV and clean tiled floors.

Hotel Om Deluxe (☎ 226639; Upper Rd; d with/without AC Rs 750/450; 🏠) Large, clean rooms (some with a balcony), a central location near the cable car to Mansa Devi Temple, and helpful staff make this a good option.

Hotel Arjun (☎ 421962; Jassa Ram Rd; d Rs 650, with AC Rs 950; 🏠) The best of the bunch on Jassa Ram Rd – if you don't mind pink décor. Rooms are clean and bright, there's solar hot water and even an elevator. Prices drop by 50% in the off-season.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hotel Ganga Azure (☎ 220938; www.hotelgangaazure.com; Railway Rd; d Rs 500-700, with AC Rs 1500, off-season discount 20%; 🏠) Centrally located a short walk from the train station, this hotel has an interesting inner courtyard with a multicoloured glass roof. The rooms aren't quite as interesting and some are a bit small, but there's a range to choose from.

Hotel Sachin International (☎ 222655; hotelsachin@haridwar.com; Railway Rd; s/d Rs 850/950, with AC Rs 1600/1800; 🏠) Amid the transport hub, this is a large, nondescript but comfortable hotel with rooms around a central car park and a restaurant reached over a causeway.

Bhaji-Govindam (☎ 261682; haridwar@usnl.com; near Bhimgoda Jhula; huts Rs 800, with AC Rs 1250; 🏠) Haridwar's most relaxing accommodation in a wonderful location on the bank of the Ganges, these comfortable bamboo huts are set in a pleasant garden and are equipped with fans, air cooler or AC, and tiled private bathrooms. The accommodation is absolute riverfront with its own private ghat – ask to be dropped at 'Bhimgoda Jhula'.

Hotel Le Grand (☎ 2429250; www.hotelgrand.com; Railway Rd; d Rs 1395-1795; 🏠) An enormous echoing central foyer greets you at this stylish, upmarket hotel 2km south of the train station. Comfortable rooms have balconies and mod-cons. While the location is relatively quiet, it's removed from Haridwar's action.

our pick Haveli Hari Ganga (☎ 226443; www.havelihariganga.com; 21 Ram Ghat; r Rs 2800-3400; 🏠 🏠) 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 onto one terrace and downstairs an Ayurvedic health spa offers treatments as well as yoga classes.

Eating

Being a holy city, only vegetarian food and nonalcoholic drinks are available. In Bara Bazaar, Prakash Lok is an institution for its lassis and almond milk – that's all it serves!

Chotiwalla (meals Rs 20-60) There are a couple of outlets for this popular veg restaurant – one on Upper Rd and another down on the river at Subhash Ghat. You may find the forlorn mascot (the chotiwallah) sitting out the front. The veg snacks and Chinese dishes are simple but tasty.

7 Days Restaurant (Upper Rd; meals Rs 15-65) This bright first-floor restaurant and internet café serves up dosas, pizzas, cheese burgers and Chinese dishes.

Hoshiyar Puri (Upper Rd; meals Rs 20-65; ☎ 11am-4pm & 7pm-4am) Established in 1937 and still with a loyal following – the kidney beans, *lacha paratha* (stuffed fried bread), *aloo gobi*

(cauliflower and potato curry) and *kheer* (rice pudding) are lip-smacking good.

Big Ben Restaurant (Hotel Ganga Azure, Railway Rd; meals Rs 40-125; ☎ 8.30am-10.30pm; ♿) Watch the passing parade and enjoy some of Haridwar's best comfort food in this restaurant with mirrors, soft music and polite staff. A big continental breakfast is Rs 85. Snack on soups and toasted sandwiches or tackle the special thali or gourmet Kashmiri *dum aloo* (spicy potato dish).

Haveli Hari Ganga (☎ 226443; 21 Ram Ghat; dinner buffet Rs 300; ☎ 8.30-11pm) For something special, the evening Indian vegetarian buffet at this lovely heritage hotel is the classiest in Haridwar.

Getting There & Away

Haridwar is well connected by bus and train, but book ahead for trains during the pilgrimage season.

BUS

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

Private deluxe buses and sleeper buses run to Agra (seat/sleeper Rs 240/400), Delhi (Rs 180/300), Jaipur (Rs 350/450) and Pushkar (Rs

450/550). They leave from a stand around the corner from the GMVN tourist office and any travel agent in town can make a booking.

TAXI & VIKRAM

The main taxi stand is outside the train station on Railway Rd. Official rates include Chilla (for Rajaji National Park, Rs 300), Rishikesh (Rs 460) and Dehra Dun (Rs 650).

Shared *vikrams* run to Rishikesh (Rs 15, one hour) from Upper Rd at Laltarao Bridge, but buses are more comfortable.

TRAIN

Numerous trains run between Haridwar and Delhi, but the only overnight service is the *Mussoorie Express* (sleeper/3A/2A Rs 128/361/518, 8½ hours) which departs at 11.20pm and gets in to Old Delhi station at 7.55am. The fastest service is the *Shatabdi Express* (chair car/executive Rs 505/955, 4½ hours). The *Doon Express* runs daily to Kolkata (Rs 405/1141/1642 sleeper/3AC/2AC, 32 hours) via Lucknow (Rs 195/549/789, 10 hours) and Varanasi (Rs 283/800/1148, 18 hours). Two trains run to Amritsar – the easiest way to get to Dharamsala. The *Jan Shatabdi* (daily except Thursday, 2nd class/chair car Rs 137/450, seven hours)

BUSES FROM HARIDWAR

The following buses depart from the UP Roadways Bus Stand.

Destination	Fares (Rs)	Duration (hr)	Departures
Agra	200	12	early morning
Almora	250	10	early morning & afternoon
Chandigarh	120	10	early morning
Dehra Dun	35	2	every 30min
Delhi	117	6	every 30min
Dharamsala	280	15	2.30pm & 4pm
Jaipur	260	12	early morning
Nainital	170	8	early morning & evening
Ranikhet	190	10	6am & 4.30pm
Rishikesh	17	1	every 30min
Shimla	205	14	early morning & evening
Uttarkashi	152	10	9.30am

In the *yatra* season from April to October, buses from the GMOU bus stand run as follows:

Destination	Fares (Rs)	Duration (hr)	Departures
Badrinath (via Joshimath)	265	15	every few hr btwn 3.30am & 2.30pm
Gangotri	230	10	btwn 3am & 5am
Hanuman Chatti	210	10	btwn 3am & 5am
Kedarnath	200	10	btwn 3am & 5am

and the overnight *Amritsar Passenger* (sleeper/3AC Rs 98/480, 12 hours).

Getting Around

Cycle-rickshaws cost Rs 10 for a short distance and Rs 25 for longer hauls such as from the train station to Har-ki-Pairi. To hire a taxi for three hours to tour the local temples and ashrams costs Rs 400; an autorickshaw costs Rs 200.

RAJAJI NATIONAL PARK

elev 300-1000m

This unspoilt **park** (Indian/foreigner up to 3 days Rs 40/350, camera free/Rs 50, video 2500/5000; ☞ 15 Nov-15 Jun), covering 820 sq km in the forested foothills near Haridwar, is best known for its wild elephants, numbering around 450 to 500 at last count.

As well as elephants the park contains some 38 tigers and 250 leopards although they are not as easily seen as these numbers suggest. They have thousands of chital (spotted deer) and hundred of sambars (India's largest species of deer) to feed on. A handful of rarely seen sloth bears are hidden away. Over 300 species of birds also add interest.

The village of **Chilla**, 13km northeast of Haridwar, is the base for visiting the park.

Elephant rides (per person Rs 200), which can take up to four passengers, are available on a first-come-first-served basis at sunrise and 3pm, but there are currently only two elephants. Contact the Forest Ranger's office, close to the Tourist Guesthouse at Chilla, where you can also pick up a brochure, pay entry fees and organise a jeep. Jeeps take up to eight people and cost Rs 700 for the standard safari (plus Rs 100 entry fee for the vehicle).

Before visiting, contact the **GMVN tourist office** (Map p456; ☎ 2244240; Railway Rd, Haridwar; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) and **Mohan's Adventure Tours** (Map p456; ☎ 220910; www.mohansadventure.com; Railway Rd, Haridwar; ☞ 8am-10.30pm), which offers Rajaji safaris even when the park is officially closed (most of the park is closed from 15 June to 15 November), including a five-hour trip (Rs 1400 per person) that includes a short safari, watching a parade of wild elephants and visiting a tribal village of Gujjar buffalo herders. If you're lucky, Sanjeev may take you to visit his legally adopted orphaned elephant.

Sleeping & Eating

Chilla Guesthouse (☎ 0138-226678; dm/hut/r Rs 150/900/990, r with AC Rs 1500; ☞) 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 historical but basic forest **rest houses** (Indian Rs 200-500, foreigner Rs 400-1000) at Asarohi, Beribara, Chilla, Kansrao, Kunnao, Motichur, Phandowala, Ranipur and Satyanarayan. The 1883 forest rest house in Chilla has three rooms downstairs and a suite upstairs with a balcony. The rest house at Satyanarayan is also recommended, while the one at Kansrao has retained all 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; Rajaji National Park Office, 5/1 Ansari Marg, Dehra Dun). Mohan's Adventure Tours can also make booking for forest lodges.

Getting There & Away

Buses to Chilla (Rs 10, 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 Rs 300 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 some justification – as there are 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 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* ceremony.

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 spiritual. Rishikesh is now a popular white-water rafting centre, backpacker hang-out, and gateway to treks in the Himalayas.

Orientation

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 bridges, 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.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

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

Blue Hills Travels (Swarg Ashram; per hr Rs 30)

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

Triveni Travel Services (Lakshman Jhula; per hr Rs 15)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Himalayan Institute Hospital (☎ 2412081) The nearest large hospital; 17km along the road to Dehra Dun and 1km beyond Jolly Grant airport.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi Ayurvedic Centre

(☎ 2430626; Lakshman Jhula Rd; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm) Dilapidated but provides medical services as do many of the ashrams.

MONEY

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

Bank of Baroda ATM (Dehra Dun Rd)

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

UTI ATM (Swarg Ashram)

POST

Main post office (Ghat Rd; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Near Triveni Ghat.

Post office (Swarg Ashram; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Uttarakhand Tourism office (☎ 2430209; Dhalwala Bypass Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Inconveniently located in the same building as the GMVN Yatra office; has a few brochures and can book tours.

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 and in modern times females walking alone may be at risk.

The current in the Ganges is very strong in places, 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.

Sights & Activities

LAKSHMAN JHULA & AROUND

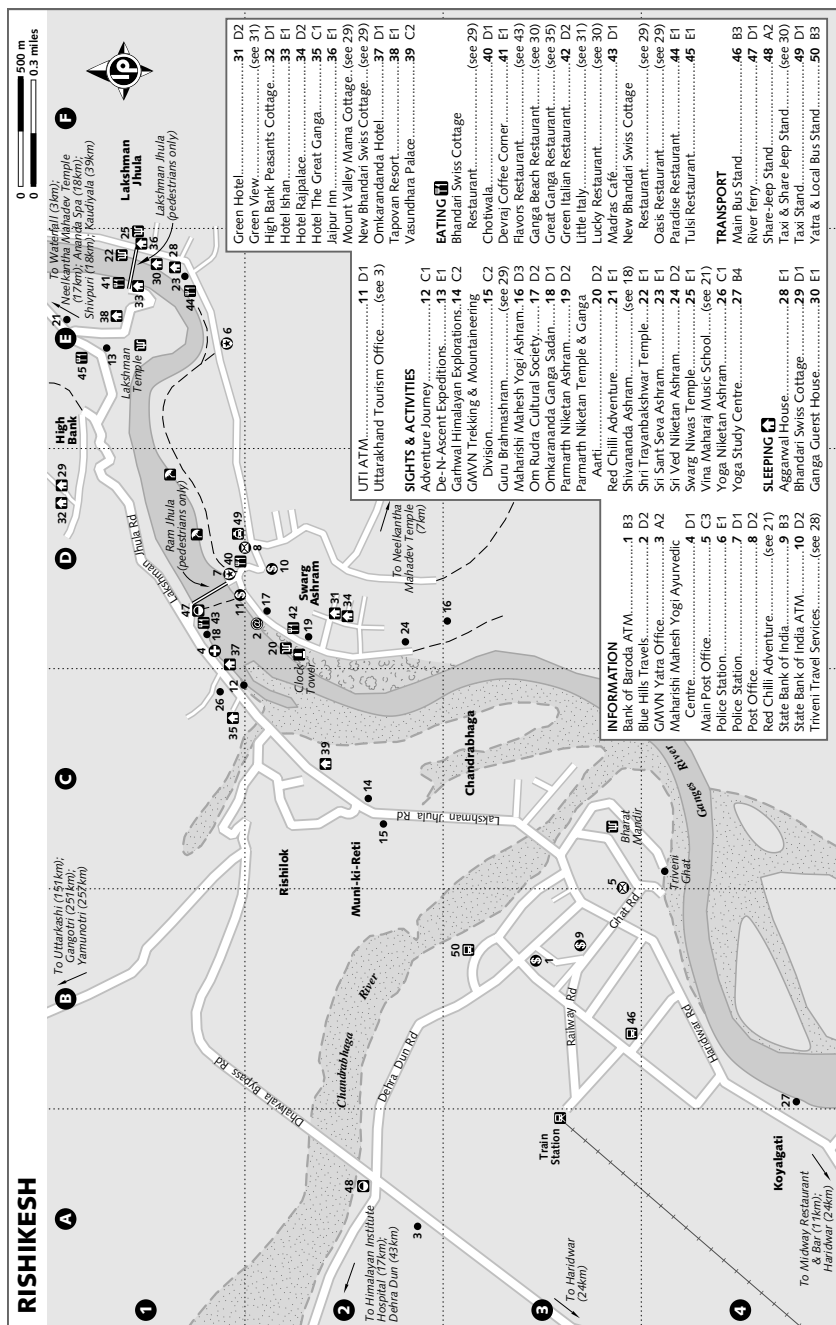
The defining image of Rishikesh is the view across the Lakshman Jhula hanging bridge to the huge 13-storey wedding-cake temples of **Swarg Niwas** and **Shri Trayanabakshwar**. Built by the organisation of the guru Kailashanand, they resemble fairyland castles and have dozens of shrines to Hindu deities on each level, interspersed with jewellery and textile shops – spiritual commercialism. 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, restaurants and guesthouses sprawl on both sides of the river here and this has grown in recent years into the busiest and liveliest part of upper Rishikesh.

SWARG ASHRAM

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, shops and the bathing ghats where religious ceremonies are performed at sunrise and sunset. The colourful *ganga aarti* ceremony is held at the riverside temple of the Parmarth Niketan Ashram, with singing, chanting, musicians and the lighting of candles.

WALKS & BEACHES

An easy walk to two small **waterfalls** starts 3km north of Lakshman Jhula bridge. The start of the 15-minute walk is marked by drink stalls and a roadside shrine, and the path is easy to find. Jeep taxis cost Rs 100 from Lakshman Jhula. Between here and Lakshman Jhula are several sandy **beaches**, sheltered from the road and popular with travellers escaping the crowds. Resist the temptation to swim in the Ganges here as the current can be deceptively strong.



For a longer hike, follow the dedicated pilgrims who take water from the Ganges to offer at **Neelkantha Mahadev Temple**, a 7km, three-hour walk along a forest path from Swarg Ashram. Neelkanth (Blue Throat) is another name for Shiva, who once drank poison churned up from the sea by gods and demons, which turned his throat blue. A much longer road (17km) via Lakshman Jhula also goes to the temple. A jeep taxi costs Rs 600 return.

MAHARISHI ASHRAM

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, but the shells of many buildings, meditation cells and lecture halls can still be seen, including Maharishi's own house and the guesthouse where the Beatles stayed and apparently wrote much of the *White Album*. The best way to appreciate it is to take the 'Beatles Ashram Tour' (Rs 100), run by former

ashramite, Joshi. Contact **Lucky Helpline Services** (☎ 2440166) in Lakshman Jhula.

MEDITATION, YOGA & ASHRAMS

Rishikesh styles itself as the yoga capital of the world and yoga and meditation are the buzz words here. Lots of people are cashing in on this, and teaching and yoga styles vary tremendously, so check out a few classes before committing yourself to a course. Ashram stays are the best ways to truly immerse yourself in the spiritual vibe.

Overlooking the Ganges in Lakshman Jhula, the large rooms at **Sri Sant Seva Ashram** (☎ 2430465; r Rs 200-500; ☑) are popular so book ahead. The yoga classes are mixed styles organised by Swami Umesh Yogi. Sessions for beginners (Rs 70) run daily in the morning and evening. There are also courses in Ayurvedic massage and cooking.

Also on the river at Muni-ki-Reti, **Omkaranda Ganga Sadan** (☎ 2430763; www.iyengaryoga.in; Lakshman Jhula Rd; r Rs 200-400, minimum 3-day stay) has comfortable rooms and specialises in Iyengar

ASHRAM STAYS

While most travellers make a beeline for Rishikesh to partake in yoga, spirituality and stay in an ashram, Haridwar has several excellent ashrams where you'll be surrounded by serious ashramites and fewer foreigners. You can join in with ashram activities as long as you obey the strict rules. Everything – lodging, meals, religious practice – is usually free, but a donation is expected. Most ashrams try to be self-sufficient mini-utopias – some grow their own herbs that are made into Ayurvedic medicines, publish books and literature or run schools.

Shanti Kunj (☎ 260602; www.awgp.org; Rishikesh Rd) A large ashram set in beautiful gardens on the road to Rishikesh, this is an inspirational community, founded in 1971, that offers simple accommodation. It suits serious students of sadhana as meditation and mantras start at 5am followed by *yagyar* (fire ceremony) and meditation in a hall dominated by a model of the Himalaya. Contact the foreigners office (the 'Abroad Cell') for further information. The ashram has established its own university and runs 'spiritual camps' (in Hindi and English) running from nine days to one month.

Mohyal Ashram (☎ 261336; mohans_india@yahoo.com; Rishikesh Rd; ☑) This intimate ashram has peaceful lawns, marble floors and a meditation and yoga hall with wonderful acoustics. Spotless midrange accommodation, including meals and classes, is available at Rs 450 to 600 for a double (Rs 900 with AC) and Rs 1500 for a suite. Dorm beds cost Rs 100. The hatha yoga tuition costs Rs 150 per hour (minimum two people). Veg meals are available at Rs 30 (get a coupon from reception). This is not the usual strict ashram (although smoking, alcohol and meat are prohibited) and casual guests are welcome. Mr Dutta the helpful manager is used to dealing with foreign guests.

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. Meditation and singing take place daily at 5am and 7.30pm and 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 accommodation has fans, private bathrooms and hot water.

yoga classes – there are daily classes (except Sunday; Rs 200) and intensive seven- to 10-day courses (Rs 750) on offer from October to May.

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

Stays at the rather austere **Yoga Niketan Ashram** (☎ 2430227; www.yoganiketanashram.org; Lakshman Jhula Rd; r Rs 250, with AC Rs 450; 🚻) include comfortable rooms, all meals, hatha yoga classes, meditation sessions, lectures and the use of the library. But it is only for serious students – the minimum stay is 15 days and the day begins at 4.30am sharp.

According to locals, the **Yoga Study Centre** (☎ 2433837; off Haridwar Rd, Koyalgati) is one of Rishikesh's most highly regarded yoga schools and runs two- and three-week Iyengar yoga courses for all levels (payment by donation). A small ashram, it is on the river south of the town.

Dominating the centre of Swarg Ashram and drawing visitors to its evening *arti* ceremony on the riverbank, the **Parmarth Niketan Ashram** (☎ 244008; www.parmarth.com; Swarg Ashram; r Rs 500) has a wonderfully ornate and serene garden courtyard. The price includes a room with a private bathroom, all meals and hatha yoga lessons.

The large **Sri Ved Niketan Ashram** (☎ 2430279; dm/s/d Rs 70/100/150) at the end of the Swarg Ashram road has a large inner courtyard, spacious meditation and yoga hall offering hatha, pranayama, meditation and philosophy classes, and spartan rooms with private bathrooms.

Behind Oasis Restaurant at High Bank, **Guru Brahmashram** (☎ 9219510654; www.mukthigaagi.com) is a branch of the Bangalore-based Mukthigaagi Foundation and specialises in meditation courses and a variety of holistic therapies.

MOTORCYCLING

Motorcycles and mopeds can be hired for Rs 200 to 250 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.

MUSIC & DANCE CLASSES

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

Om Rudra Cultural Society (☎ 2434425; rudrance@rediffmail.com; Swarg Ashram; 🗓 closed Jun-Aug) is run by an enterprising couple and offers Kathak dance, flute, tabla or Hindi lessons for Rs 900 per week.

In Lakshman Jhula, **Vina Maharaj Music School** (☎ 9412029817) offers sitar, tabla, harmonium and flute lessons at Rs 100 per hour and organises concerts.

RAFTING, KAYAKING & TREKKING

A number of companies offer half-day to multiday rafting trips, staying at rafting camps along the river bank. The official rafting season runs from 15 September to 30 June. A two- or three-hour trip starting 10km upstream and rafting back to Rishikesh starts at about Rs 400 per person, while a full day costs from Rs 1250. Most companies also offer all-inclusive Himalayan treks to places such as Kuari Pass, Har ki Dun and Gangotri from around Rs 2000 per day.

De-N-Ascent Expeditions (☎ 2442354; www.dna-expeditions.com; Lakshman Jhula) is currently the only place offering kayaking lessons and expeditions. Paddle and Eskimo roll with an experienced instructor for Rs 800 a day.

Recommended rafting and trekking companies include the following:

Adventure Journey (☎ 653791; www.theadventurejourney.com; Ram Jhula) Rafting trips and a private rafting camp.

Garhwal Himalayan Explorations (☎ 2433478; www.garhwalhimalayas.com; Lakshman Jhula Rd, Muni-ki-Reti; 🕒 8am–8pm) Himalayan trekking and rafting trips. The company runs three river camps – Ganga Nature Camp, the Himalayan Retreat and Himalayan Heights.

GMVN Trekking & Mountaineering Division (☎ 2430799; www.gmvl.com; Lakshman Jhula Rd; 🕒 10am–5pm) Can arrange high-altitude treks in the Garhwal Himalaya and hires out trekking equipment, guides and porters. Ask about the Nanda Devi Sanctuary trek.

Red Chilli Adventure (☎ 2434021; www.redchilliadventure.com; Lakshman Jhula Rd; 🕒 8.30am–8.30pm; 🚰) Reliable outfit offering trekking and rafting trips.

Festivals & Events

In the first week of February, Rishikesh hosts the **International Yoga Festival**, attracting swamis and yoga masters from around the world for discourses and lectures. Most of the action is

THE MAHARISHI & THE BEATLES

In February 1968 Rishikesh hit world headlines when the four Beatles and their partners stayed at Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's ashram in Swarg Ashram, following an interest and earlier visit by George Harrison. Ringo 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 McCartney went on record as saying 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 the teachers and healers in their tranquil ashrams scattered along the Ganges River.

centred on the Parmarth Niketan Ashram in Swarg Ashram.

Sleeping

Most of the accommodation is spread on both sides of the river around Lakshman Jhula; there are a handful of hotels at Swarg Ashram and directly across the river around Ram Jhula, and some good budget places at High Bank. For ashram stays see p462.

BUDGET

High Bank

This leafy travellers' enclave is a 20-minute walk up the hill from Lakshman Jhula and has some good accommodation where you might spot a langur monkey on your balcony. It gets pretty rowdy during peak season from November to March with backpackers staying up late and enjoying deep conversations.

Mount Valley Mama Cottage (☎ 2432817; d Rs 250, with shared bathroom Rs 120) The price is right at this small and simple guesthouse and it feels like someone's home – which is pretty much what it is. Mamma will look after you and cook up her famous thalis.

Bhandari Swiss Cottage (☎ 2432939; www.bhandariswisscottage.com; r Rs 150-600, d with AC Rs 800; 📺 🚿) A backpacker favourite with rooms in several budgets – the price goes up the higher up you stay, where the big balconies have expansive views of the river backed by green mountains.

New Bhandari Swiss Cottage (☎ 2431322; d Rs 300-800 🚿 📺) Further up the hill, this is another large, popular place with a range of tidy accommodation, a massage centre and a good restaurant.

High Bank Peasants Cottage (☎ 2431167; d Rs 500-600, with AC Rs 1000-1200; 🚿 📺) Despite the

name, this is High Bank's most upmarket accommodation with lovely gardens, wicker chairs on the balcony, spacious rooms and yoga sessions.

Lakshman Jhula

There are lots of good budget options on both sides of the river here and this is one of the liveliest parts of Rishikesh.

Ganga Guest House (☎ 2435955; d Rs 150) Not exactly spotless but you can't beat the price or riverside location of this basic guesthouse.

Aggarwal House (☎ 2433435; s Rs 100-150, d Rs 150-350) This small family-run guesthouse overlooks the river and a sandy beach. The terrace and some rooms have excellent sunset views.

Hotel Ishan (☎ 2431534; narendra_u@hotmail.com; r Rs 200-700; 📺) 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 (Rs 700) has a prime view.

Swarg Ashram

Green Hotel (☎ 2431242; www.hotelgreen.com; s Rs 100-250, d Rs 200-650, d with AC Rs 950; 🚿) Wrapped around a courtyard, this three-storey hotel has a good-value but uninspiring range of rooms in several price brackets.

Hotel Rajpalace (☎ 2440079; rajholidays@hotmail.com; s Rs 250-550, d Rs 450-650, s/d with AC Rs 750/975; 🚿) Small but well-run hotel with clean rooms. The rooftop terrace has views and facilities include a yoga hall and a travel agent offering tours and activities.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

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

Lakshman Jhula

Jaipur Inn (☎ 2440221; www.jaipur-inn.com; s/d Rs 850/900; 🏠) In a good location close to the bridge, the clean and smart rooms with pastel décor, TV and balcony views make this a good choice – go for the upper floor front rooms. The yoga hall can be used free of charge and the rooftop Ananda restaurant (meals Rs 40 to 95) serves just about any dish you want.

Tapovan Resort (☎ 2442091; www.tapovanresort.com; Lakshman Jhula; s/d from Rs 1000/1250, ste Rs 1850-2000; 🏠 🚿) This immaculate hotel on the western side of Lakshman Jhula lacks much in the way of character with its resort feel, but the rooms are plush and the more expensive ones have balconies with river views. There's a pleasant terrace, a garden, yoga classes, and the unusual circular restaurant is recommended.

Ram Jhula & Other Areas

Omkarananda Hotel (☎ 2430713; www.omkarananda-ashram.org; d Rs 750, with AC Rs 950; 🏠 🚿) Spotless new hotel on the river just south of Ram Jhula bridge. The bright, spacious rooms have TV and marble-lined bathrooms, and the upper-floor AC rooms have views across to Swarg Ashram.

Green View (☎ 2434948; d Rs 1000, with AC Rs 1500) Next door to Green Hotel in Swarg Ashram, this more upmarket annexe has bright rooms with hot showers and TVs. Ask about off-season discounts.

Hotel the Great Ganga (☎ 2442243; www.thegreatganga.com; Ram Jhula; s/d/ste Rs 1450/1650/4000; 🏠 🚿) Set in a complex of apartment blocks, this breezy hotel has great views from the balconies, despite being on the opposite side of the road from the river. Rooms have bathtub, minibar and marble floors. The multicuisine Great Ganga Restaurant is recommended.

Vasundhara Palace (☎ 242345; www.vasundharapalace.com; Muni-ki-Reti; s/d Rs 1950/2450, ste Rs 4500; 🏠 🚿) Rishikesh's top hotel, this new place close to the river 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 equally new apartments.

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

our pick Devraj Coffee Corner (meals Rs 20-80; ☎ 8am-9pm) With its prime position above the bridge and looking across the river to Shri Tray-anbakshwar temple, this is a sublime spot for an early breakfast and is usually busy all day. Bakery items like brown bread with yak cheese, croissants and apple strudel sit comfortably alongside soups, pizzas and veg sizzlers. There's a good bookshop next door.

Ganga Beach Restaurant (Ganga Guest House; meals Rs 30-80) There's no real beach, but the riverside location, spacious terrace and cushioned chill-out area make this a relaxing spot. The big menu includes wood-fired pizzas and crepes.

Tulsi Restaurant (meals Rs 20-120) Up on the main road, this is a funky little bamboo-lined restaurant with soft lighting, good food and occasional live music.

On the east bank of the river is a string of restaurants with global menus catering to travellers. Recommendations include:

Lucky Restaurant (mains Rs 20-80) An awesome riverside garden shaded by a huge tree and a cushioned area.

Paradise Restaurant (mains Rs 20-75) Elevated open dining area with a view.

SWARG ASHRAM & RAM JHULA

Chotiwal (Swarg Ashram; meals Rs 20-60) There are two open-fronted Chotiwalas side-by-side – the original has been serving up thalis, South Indian food, ice creams and sweet lime sodas since 1958. They're easy to spot by the rotund mascots with the pointy hairdo (a *choti*) sitting out the front.

Madras Café (☎ 2433291; Ram Jhula; meals Rs 20-75) This local institution dishes up tasty South and North Indian food, thalis, mushroom curry, pancakes and the intriguing Himalayan health pilau, as well as offering super-thick lassis.

Flavors Restaurant (Ram Jhula; meals Rs 20-80) Near Madras, this new place also serves tasty Indian veg dishes, soups, and a few continental offerings.

Little Italy (Green Hotel; Swarg Ashram; meals Rs 25-85) Swarg's original Italian restaurant also works hard to produce authentic Mediterranean dishes along with espresso coffee and tiramisu.

Green Italian Restaurant (☎ 249304; mains Rs 35-85) Wood-fired pizzas and imported pastas including gnocchi and cannelloni make this small, glass-fronted restaurant in the heart of Swarg popular.

HIGH BANK

Backpackers gather at the popular restaurants on High Bank.

Oasis Restaurant (meals Rs 20-100) The loungiest restaurant in Rishikesh, with cushions, trance music and DVD movies showing in the evening. It's about 20m along a path northeast from Bhandari Swiss Cottage.

Bhandari Swiss Cottage Restaurant (meals Rs 40-100) All the favourites, including bakery items and some nonveg food, are available at this popular and informal indoor/outdoor restaurant. The set breakfasts, Ayurvedic tea, pizzas and sizzlers are hard to resist.

New Bhandari Swiss Cottage Restaurant (meals Rs 40-120) The restaurant here is more refined, with candlelit tables in the garden and hanging lanterns inside. The menu ransacks oodles of world cuisines from Mexican and Thai to Israeli and Tibetan. Great desserts include apple crumble.

AROUND RISHIKESH

Midway Restaurant & Bar (mains Rs 80-250; ☎ 11am-11pm) If you've been pining for meat and alcohol, grab a *vikram* or autorickshaw to this place 11km south of Rishikesh on the road to Haridwar. In a resort-style garden with artificial pond (paddleboats and all) it serves up tandoori chicken, rogan josh and other nonveg favourites, washed down with a cold beer.

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 strings of beads, *rudraksh mala*, made from the nuts of the rudraksh tree, which originally grew where Shiva's tears fell. Beads with different faces (*mukhi*) confer different blessings on the wearer.

Getting There & Away**BUS**

There are regular buses to Haridwar and Dehra Dun; for Mussoorie change at Dehra Dun. During the *yatra* season (May to October), buses run north to pilgrimage centres, and to Joshimath and Uttarkashi year-round. See the table, opposite, for details of buses from Rishikesh.

Private deluxe and sleeper buses to Delhi (Rs 250), Jaipur (Rs 350) and Pushkar (Rs 450) can be booked at travel agents in Lakshman Jhula, Swarg Ashram and High Bank. They pick up in Lakshman Jhula and at the main bus stand.

SHARE JEEP & TAXI

Share jeeps leave when overfull from the corner of Dehra Dun Rd and Dhalwala Bypass Rd to Uttarkashi (Rs 170, five hours) and Joshimath (Rs 250, eight hours), mostly early in the morning. Share jeeps to Dehra Dun (Rs 40, one hour) can be picked up along Dehra Dun Rd, and share jeeps to Haridwar (Rs 25, one hour) leave from near the main bus stand.

Official taxi rates include Haridwar (Rs 460), Dehra Dun (Rs 650) and Uttarkashi (for Gangotri; Rs 2000).

The taxi stand in Swarg Ashram provides a local service on the eastern bank, mainly to waterfalls and temples. By road it's 16km back around to Rishikesh.

TRAIN

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

Getting Around

Shared *vikrams* run from the downtown Ghat Rd junction up past Ram Jhula (Rs 8 per person) and the High Bank turn-off (Rs 7) to Lakshman Jhula (Rs 8). To hire the entire *vikram* from downtown to Lakshman Jhula should cost Rs 30. To get to the eastern bank of the Ganges you either need to walk across one of the suspension bridges or take the **ferry** (Rs 5; ☎ 7.30am-6.30pm) 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.

AROUND RISHIKESH

Part palace, part exclusive, luxury spa resort, the prize-winning **Ananda Spa** (☎ 01378-227500; www.anandaspa.com; Badrinath Rd; s/d from US\$430/475, ste US\$850-1600; ♿ ♻️ ♿) has been making waves

BUSES FROM RISHIKESH

Destination	Fares (Rs)	Duration (hr)	Departures
Badrinath (B)	235	12	btwn 3am & 7am or 9am
Dehra Dun (A)	27	1½	every 30min
Delhi (A)	130/200 ord/deluxe	7	every 30min
Gangotri (B)	215	12	btwn 3am & 7am or 9am
Haridwar (A)	17	1	every 30min
Joshimath (B)	200	10	btwn 3am & 7am or 9am
Kedarnath (B)	165	12	btwn 3am & 7am or 9am
Nainital (A)	180	11	1 morning daily (continuing from Ramnagar)
Uttarkashi (B)	130	7	btwn 3am & 7am or 9am

(A) buses departing from the main bus stand

(B) buses departing from the *yatra* bus stand leave when full

and earning itself the reputation of being the ultimate in indulgent pampering. Perched high up in the hills 18km north of Rishikesh, Ananda Spa occupies part of the palace of the Maharaja of Tehri-Garwhal and spreads out over a manicured estate that includes luxury accommodation, a six-hole golf course, a jogging track, garden restaurants, an amphitheatre and a swimming pool.

Spa facilities include steam baths, Ayurvedic treatments, yoga sessions and beauty therapy, which are all wrapped in the tag of a royal 'wellness retreat'. You can choose to stay in the modern rooms or in the grand vice-regal suites in the palace itself. The resort is exclusive, so you need to be a guest to enjoy the spa facilities.

UTTARKASHI

☎ 01374 / pop 16,220 / elev 1158m

Uttarkashi, 155km from Rishikesh and the largest town in northern Garwhal, 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.

The town is probably best known for the **Nehru Institute of Mountaineering** (☎ 222124; www.nimindia.org), 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.

Uttarkashi has plenty of budget hotels, the best being **Hotel Monal** (☎ 222270; d from Rs 600), on the Gangotri road 3km north of town. The **GMVN Tourist Rest House** (☎ 222271; dm/d Rs 150/700-990) is in a garden setting down by the river.

Buses depart in the morning for Gangotri (Rs 95, six hours) and Rishikesh (Rs 130, seven hours).

GARWHAL TEMPLE TREKS
Gangotri Temple & Gaumukh Glacier Trek

☎ 01377 / elev 3042m

In a grand, remote setting at an altitude of 3042m, Gangotri temple was originally constructed by Gorkha commander Amar Singh Thapa in the 18th century. The brave and devout take a dip in the freezing flow of an embryonic Ganges River. Nearby is the rock on which Shiva is said to have received the Ganga (Ganges) in his matted locks. Gangotri village has guesthouses, ashrams, *dharamsalas* and a **GMVN Tourist Bungalow** (☎ 222221; dm Rs 150, d Rs 400-900).

As the source of the Ganges (known as the Bhagirathi until it reaches Deoprayag), Gangotri is one of the holiest places in India. The trek (38km return) from Gangotri to the source of the river at Gaumukh (the Cow's Mouth) and back can be done in three days with a two-night stop at **Bhojbasa** (3790m), which has basic accommodation including a **GMVN Tourist Bungalow** (dm 240). Bhojbasa is 14km (six hours) from Gangotri temple, but only 5km (three hours) from the dramatic Gaumukh Glacier.

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 that 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. For more information see Yamunotri Temple Trek (below), Gangotri Temple & Gaumukh Glacier Trek (p467), Kedarnath Temple Trek (below) and Badrinath Temple & Mana Village (p471).

The **GMVN** (www.gmvl.com) runs a range of Char Dham packages from Delhi, Haridwar and Rishikesh. From Rishikesh a 10-day bus/taxi tour is Rs 7630/9850. Private tours are also available (see www.chardham.com). But all the temples are deep in the Himalaya at the end of long valleys, which makes visiting each one in turn very time-consuming and not a good idea for tourists. Only Gangotri and Badrinath temples can be visited without having to undertake a trek.

Buses run from Gangotri to Uttarkashi (Rs 90, six hours) and Rishikesh (Rs 215, 12 hours). The last bus leaves Gangotri at around 2pm. Share jeeps (Rs 150) also run between Gangotri and Uttarkashi.

Yamunotri Temple Trek elev 3185m

Yamunotri Temple nestles in a valley 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 trek begins where the road ends at Janki Chatti, 7km beyond the village of Hanuman Chatti (2400m). There are hot springs and 1km away is a pretty village, Kharsali. From here it's a 5km, two-hour trek to Yamunotri Temple (3185m). High mountains close in around the temple and there are several hot springs where you can take a dip and others where pilgrims cook potatoes and rice to offer as *prasad*. The Yamuna River emerges from a frozen lake of ice and glaciers on the Kalinda Parvat mountain at an altitude of 4421m, 1km beyond the temple, but this is a very tough climb that requires mountaineering skills.

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

Buses run from Dehra Dun (Rs 120, eight hours), Mussoorie (Rs 100, six hours) and

Rishikesh (Rs 180, eight hours) to Hanuman Chatti during the *yatra* season. Buses also run to Uttarkashi (Rs 60, six hours) for those heading to the next Char Dham stop, Gangotri.

Har ki Dun Valley Trek

The wonderfully remote Har ki Dun (3510m) is a botanical paradise crisscrossed 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 Rs 30/350, subsequent days Rs 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 Rs 150/450) at Sankri, Taluka and Osla, but you have to stay in a Forest Department rest house or else 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 (vehicle/seat Rs 500/50) 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 (Rs 120, nine hours) or a share jeep (vehicle/seat Rs 2500/250) 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 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/d Rs 150/600). Stalls store luggage, and porters and ponies can be hired. The wide, paved trail to the temple is lined with *dhabas* and chai stalls.

The whole area is a wildlife sanctuary and a **musk deer breeding farm** has been established at Khanchula Kharak, 32km from Gopeshwar on the road to Ukhimath. These tiny deer with big ears have been hunted to the brink of extinction.

There is more pilgrims' accommodation available near the temple, including the **GMVN Tourist Bungalow** (☎ 01364-263228; dm Rs 150, d Rs 400-950).

Buses run from Gaurikund to Rishikesh (Rs 165, 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

Reached by a hair-raising mountain road from Rishikesh that hugs steep-sided valleys for the final few hours, Joshimath is a ramshackle two-street town that serves as the gateway to Auli ski resort, Badrinath Temple, and treks to the Valley of Flowers, Hem Kund and Kuari Pass. As such it's a major destination for Hindu and Sikh pilgrims as well as trekkers.

The town itself is a rather ugly administrative centre full of rusting rooftops, erratic power supply and limited places to eat, but it's a good base to organise some of Uttarakhand's best treks. Auli – with spectacular views of Nanda Devi – stands directly above Joshimath and can be reached by a 4km cable car (p470).

Information

There's a **GMVN Tourist Office** (☎ 222181; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) located just above the town (follow the road past the cable-car station) and there's a State Bank of India ATM that accepts foreign cards.

Treks of anything from two to 10 days can be arranged. Ask at the tourist office about hiring guides and porters or try **Eskimo Adventures** (☎ 222630; eskimoadventures@rediffmail.com) near the GMVN Hotel, which can organise treks and rock-climbing expeditions from Rs 1000 per day, and rent equipment (for trekking and skiing), as well as offer white-water rafting trips on the Ganges. **Himalayan Snow Runner** (☎ 222252; www.himalayansnowrunner.com), in the main market, offers similar service at higher prices. The owner, Ajay, also takes cultural tours to Bhotia and Garhwali villages in the region.

Sleeping & Eating

There are lots of cheap lodgings and a few hotels scattered around Joshimath.

Hotel Kamet (☎ 222155; Main Bazaar; d Rs 250-500) Good central budget option. Slightly worn rooms have TV and bucket hot water.

Hotel Snow Crest (☎ 222344; fax 222575; dm Rs 180, d Rs 700-1450) Right behind Kamet but more upmarket, the rooms here are clean and cosy, if a little small. The front rooms are brightest. There's a good restaurant serving a vegetarian menu of North and South Indian and Chinese. The rates are usually reduced by 40% except in May and June, and there's a 10-bed dorm.

Mawari Hotel (snacks Rs 35-80) Below Kamet, this is a busy *dhaba* churning out tasty thalis and dosas.

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 (Rs 35, two hours) and share jeeps (Rs 50 per person, Rs 500 per jeep) run in convoy (due to a one-way traffic system) to Badrinath temple departing from Joshimath at 6.30am, 9am, 11.30am, 2pm and 4.30pm – check times the day before. Take the same buses to Govindghat, the start of the treks to the wonderful Valley of Flowers and dramatic Hem Kund.

Buses run from Joshimath to Rishikesh (Rs 200, 10 hours) and Haridwar (Rs 230, 11½ hours) roughly every half hour between 4am and 7am. They leave from outside the tiny **GMOU booth** (Upper Bazar Rd, ☎ 4am–8pm), where you can also book tickets. To get to the eastern Kumaon region take any Rishikesh bus to Karnaprayag (Rs 65, 3½ hours), from where local buses and share jeeps can take you along the slow-going route to Kausani (Rs 65, five hours) or Almora (Rs 130, eight hours). Direct buses are few, however, so expect to make several changes en route.

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 enjoy the awesome views of Nanda Devi 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 (Rs 100 per trip) which runs beside the main slope, and an 800m chairlift (Rs 200) which 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 Rs 400; ☎ every 20 min 8am–6.50pm), India's longest, links Joshimath to the upper slopes above Auli. There's a café of sorts at the top.

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

GMVN Tourist Rest House (☎ 223208; www.gmvl.com; dm Rs 150–200, huts Rs 900, d Rs 1400) At the start of the chairlift, there are no views from the rooms here but the four-person dorms are

certainly cheap and the flimsy huts are quite cosy inside (read: tiny). There's a restaurant and bar.

Cliff Top Club Resort (☎ 01389-223217; in Delhi 011-25616679; www.nivalink.com/clifftop; studio Rs 2600–4500, ste Rs 6000–8000) This hotel 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.

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 meadows (*bugyal*) of tall wild flowers are a glorious sight on a sunny day, rippling in the breeze, and framed by mighty 6000m mountains which 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. But the peace and beauty that Smythe found here can be experienced at any season, and there's still a good chance of seeing a carpet of flowers in September.

The 87-sq-km **Valley of Flowers National Park** (Indian/foreigner for 3 days Rs 40/350, for subsequent days Rs 20/175; ☎ 6am–6pm, last entry 3pm) starts less than 1km from Ghangaria village. Just 2km from the ticket office, the fabled valley begins and continues for another 5km. Tracks are easy to follow. No overnight stay is permitted here (or at Hem Kund) so all visitors must stay in Ghangaria.

A tougher trek from Ghangaria is to join the hundreds of Sikh pilgrims toiling up to the 4300m **Hem Kund**, the sacred lake where the 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 (Rs 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 restaurants, hundreds of ponies, a

pharmacy and a doctor. Water and electricity supplies are erratic. The **Nature Interpretation Centre** (☎ 3-8pm, 1 Jun-5 Oct) shows a film nightly at 7pm on the Valley of Flowers.

Hotel Priya (d with private bathrooms Rs 250) is one of the better places to stay, though it's not very good. Make sure you have plenty of bedding as nights can be freezing.

Ghangaria is a scenic but strenuous 14km, seven-hour uphill trek from Govindghat, but you can help the local economy by hiring a porter (Rs 350) or a pony (Rs 400). The return trip takes four to five hours.

At **Govindghat** you can stay at the huge **gurdwara** (payment by donation) where VIP rooms are basic but have private bathrooms, or the new **Hotel Bhagat** (☎ 01381-225226; d Rs 500-600) with very clean rooms and meals available.

All buses and share jeeps between Joshimath and Badrinath stop in Govindghat (check times locally), so you can easily get transport in either direction.

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 most 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.

A very scenic 3km walk beyond Badrinath along the Alaknanda River and past fields divided by dry-stone walls leads to tiny but charismatic **Mana village**, which 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 weaving blankets or carpets while the men tend the sheep or play cards or carom. Carpets (Rs 150 for a small square, Rs 2000 for bigger ones), blankets and jerseys are all on sale.

Just outside the village in a small cave is the tiny, 5000-year-old **Vyas Temple**, and 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 145m **Vasudhara Waterfall** can be seen from the vil-

lage and is a 4km hike along the river. 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 and Joshimath but check scheduled departure times or you may end up stranded.

Sleeping & Eating

Badrinath can be visited in a day from Joshimath, 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 Rs 100 a room outside the short peak season of May and June.

Jagirdar Guest House (☎ 9412935549; r Rs 400) In a stone building across the river about 100m from the temple, this is a good budget place accustomed to travellers. You can camp here.

Sarovar Portico (☎ 222267; www.sarovarhotels.com; s/d Rs 3500/4000) A sign of the times and the deepening of pilgrims' pockets, this flashy new hotel seems a little out of place high in the Himalaya. Rooms are comfortable, though not luxurious, centrally heated and there's a good 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 and is still one of Uttarakhand's finest and most accessible treks, affording magnificent views of the snow-clad peaks around Nanda Devi. 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 finishing in Tapovan in three days. A tent, guide and your own food supplies are necessary, all of which can easily be organised in Joshimath.

Auli can be reached by bus or cable car from Joshimath. From Ghat share jeeps (Rs 35, 1½ hours) go to Nandaprayag, from where buses run to Joshimath or southwest to Rishikesh and Haridwar.

NANDA DEVI SANCTUARY TREK

The 630 sq km of breathtaking World Heritage scenery that makes up this sanctuary was closed to all visitors in 1983, but recently

small-group treks have been permitted. Only 20 visitors a week are allowed inside this fabled Himalayan wonder between 1 May and 31 October. GMVN has an all-inclusive nine-day trek (Rs 2583 per person per day) for groups of three to five, which involves a 54km trek and start at Rishikesh. Approved private trekking companies are also permitted to do the trek but check carefully as some 'Nanda Devi' treks might not actually visit the sanctuary. Access is via Lata Village, near Joshimath, but don't try it on your own unless you want to experience living conditions in an Indian prison.

CORBETT TIGER RESERVE

☎ 05947 / elev 400-1210m

This famous **reserve** (📅 15 Nov-15 Jun) was established in 1936 as India's first national park. Originally called Hailey National Park, then Ramganga National Park, it was renamed in 1957 after the 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 programme which started in 1973 and saw the creation of 22 other reserves. However, sightings are down to chance as the 130 or so tigers in the reserve are neither baited nor tracked. Your best chance of spotting a tiger 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 backside), 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.

Dotted around the park are *machaans* (observation towers) overlooking water holes which you can climb to unobtrusively watch for wildlife.

Be sure to bring binoculars (although 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 east of Ramnagar, is now a **museum** (admission Rs 10; 🕒 8am-5pm).

While the majority of the park is closed between 15 June and 15 November, the jungle around Jhirna Gate, 25km from Ramnagar in the southern part of the reserve, remains open all year, and short jeep safaris and elephant rides can be organised in Ramnagar. In 2004, the park started opening for day safaris (a maximum of 60 vehicles per day) a month early on 15 October from Amanda Gate.

Orientation & Information

The main **reception centre** (☎ 251489; Ranikhet Rd; 🕒 8.30am-noon & 1-5pm) is located on the main road in Ramnagar, almost opposite the bus stand. There is another **centre** (☎ 01382-224823; 🕒 8.30am-1pm & 2-5pm) at Kotdwar, on the western edge of the reserve. Ramnagar is the nearest railhead and has plenty of jeeps for hire.

The main entry points for the park are Amanda Gate (for Bijrani visitor centre), 1.5km north of Ramnagar and Dhangarhi Gate (for Dhikala), 18km north of Ramnagar.

Dhikala, 51km northwest of Ramnagar and deep inside the reserve, is the main accommodation centre within the park's core area, but it is only open to overnight guests, or as part of a tour booked through the reception centre at Ramnagar. Dhikala has a library and wildlife films are shown here for free at 7pm. Day-trippers are restricted to the Bijrani visitor centre (11km from Ramnagar), which has an interpretative centre and a restaurant and is close to the reserve entrance.

Two-hour **elephant safaris** (Indian/foreigner 4 passengers per elephant Rs 150/250) are available at Dhikala, Khinnanauli, Gairal and Jhirna Gate at 6am and 4pm on a first-come first-served basis.

Ramnagar has a couple of internet cafés (per hr Rs 30), and a State Bank of India ATM.

PERMITS & COSTS

Entry permits are bought at Dhangari Gate for Dhikala and at Amdanda Gate for day trips to Bijrani. In the off-season (15 June to 15 November) you can only enter through Jhirna Gate. However, from 15 October to 15 November, day visits are permitted through Amdanda Gate (Rs 200 plus jeep and guide fees; open 6.30am to 11am and 3pm to 5.30pm).

During the season the entry fee (Indian/foreigner Rs 50/450) covers three days. The jeep fee is Rs 100 at Bijrani and Rs 150 at Dhikala, and a compulsory guide fee (Rs 150) must also be paid.

Jeeps or the smaller Maruti Gypsies can be hired in Ramnagar. Half-day safaris should cost around Rs 600 per jeep or Rs 1200 for a full day, excluding the entry fees. Check prices at the reception centre and your hotel before hiring a jeep. This means a full-day safari for two people including an elephant ride costs Rs 3000.

Fishing permits (along the Ramnagar River outside the park) can be obtained at the reception centre.

Tours

The reception centre in Ramnagar runs a daily bus tour to **Dhikala** (Indian/foreigner Rs 600/1200) at 8.30am.

Sleeping & Eating

For serious wildlife viewing, Dhikala, deep inside the reserve, is the best place to stay, despite the high prices. Rates given for accommodation inside the reserve are for foreigners – Indians pay less than half. Book through the reception centre in Ramnagar except where indicated. Book ahead as space is limited and you must have accommodation arranged to stay within the park. The town of Ramnagar has budget accommodation, while upmarket resorts are strung out along the road skirting the eastern side of the park between Dhikuli and Dhangari Gate.

DHIKALA

Resembling 3AC train sleepers, **Log Huts** (dm Indian/foreigner Rs 100/200) offer 24 basic beds (no bedding supplied). **Tourist Hutments** (Rs 2400) offer the best accommodation in Dhikala and sleep up to six people. Dhikala has a couple of restaurants.

If you're after VIP accommodation, the **Old Forest Rest House** (r Rs 3000), the **New Forest Rest House** (r Rs 2600) and two **cabins** (Rs 2600) can be booked through the **Chief Wildlife Warden** (☎ 0135-2644691) in Dehra Dun. The **Annexe** (r Rs 1200) can be booked through **KMVN** (☎ 011-23350481) in Delhi.

ELSEWHERE IN THE RESERVE

Small rest houses (all Rs 600) in the park are at Kanda, Sultan Mailini, Lohachaur, Halduparao, Morghatti, Sendhikal, Mudiani, Rathuadhab, Dhela, near Jhirna Gate and Kalagarh. Other places:

Bijrani Rest House (s/d Rs 600/1200) The first place in from Amdanda Gate; meals and elephant rides available.

Gairal Rest House (r Rs 1200) On the Ramnagar River accessed from Dhangari Gate; meals available.

Sarapduli Rest House (r Rs 1200) Also has a good location in the reserve's core area.

Khinnanauli Rest House (☎ 0135-2744225; r Rs 2000) Near Dhikala, deep in the reserve.

RAMNAGAR

At the southeast corner of the park, Ramnagar is the main service town and while it has a few facilities, hotels, restaurants and transport connections – mostly along Ranikhet Rd – it's a dusty, unappealing place.

Hotel Anand (☎ 254385; Ranikhet Rd; s/d Rs 200/350)

This is the best of the budget places with clean rooms with bucket hot water and TV, although some rooms only have windows onto a corridor. The restaurant is worth trying (meals Rs 30 to 60). It's about 100m from the bus stand.

Corbett Inn (☎ 251755; kmv@kumaonindia.com; Ranikhet Rd; d Rs 590, with AC Rs 990; ♿) Ramnagar's top hotel has clean, spacious rooms with balconies or verandas, and a helpful manager who can help organise safaris. The restaurant is open when the reserve is.

Govind Restaurant (Ranikhet Rd; meals Rs 20-130) Although a bit gloomy inside, the food is good and the menu huge with monster thalis (Rs 60 to 90), biryani, butter chicken and tasty stuffed tomatoes.

NORTH OF RAMNAGAR

Half a dozen upmarket resorts are strung along the Ramnagar–Ranikhet road that runs along the reserve's eastern boundary, and given the cost of accommodation at Dhikala, these are well worth considering. When most of the reserve is closed (15 June to 15 November)

discounts of up to 50% are offered. Rates given here are for room only, but most have packages which include meals and safaris. All places have resident naturalists, recreational facilities, restaurants and bars.

Tiger Camp (☎ 2551963; www.tiger-camp.com; s Rs 1400-1900, d Rs 1850-2350, s/d cottages Rs 2400-2850; 🏠) This intimate, excellent-value resort is nestled in shady jungle-style garden by the Kosi River 8km from Ramnagar. Modern, cosy cottages and bungalows have all the facilities, and nature walks and village tours are offered.

Infinity Resorts (☎ 251279; s/d from Rs 4500/6000; 🏠 🏠) This impressive resort 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 herds of golden mahseer fish. The resort owner founded the Corbett Foundation (www.corbettfoundation.org), a nonprofit eco-organisation that raises wildlife awareness and provides medical care and water to regional villagers.

Corbett Hideaway (☎ 284132; www.corbetthideaway.com; Dhikuli; cottages Rs 5750-6750; 🏠 🏠) 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. Plenty of recreation and ecotourism activities.

Getting There & Away

Buses run almost hourly to Delhi (Rs 143, seven hours), Haridwar (Rs 108, six hours) and Dehra Dun (Rs 142, seven hours). For Nainital (Rs 64, 3½ hours) take a bus via Kadhungi. Buses to Ranikhet (Rs 72, 4½ hours) leave every couple of hours in the morning and some continue to Almora. Frequent buses run to Haldwani (Rs 32, two hours).

Ramnagar train station is 1.5km south of the main reception centre. The nightly *Corbett Link Express* (sleeper/2AC Rs 107/433) leaves Delhi at 10.15pm, arriving in Ramnagar at 5am. The return trip leaves Ramnagar at 9.30pm, arriving in Delhi at 4.40am. For other destinations, change at Moradabad.

NAINITAL

☎ 05942 / pop 39,840 / elev 1938m

Kumaon's largest town and favourite hill resort, Nainital gets crowded with holidaying families and honeymooners during peak seasons. Occupying a steep forested valley around the deep, green volcanic lake Naini, it's an attractive, upbeat place 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 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, but avoid peak seasons – roughly May to mid-July and October – when Nainital is packed and hotel prices double.

Orientation

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

Information

Bank of Baroda ATM (Tallital) Accepts international cards.

BD Pandey Government Hospital (☎ 235012; off the Mall, Mallital)

Cyberia (off the Mall, Mallital; per hr Rs 30; 📶 9.30am-9pm) Behind Swad Restaurant, this is Nainital's best internet café. Offers CD burning, printing etc.

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

Municipal Library (the Mall; 📶 8.30-10.30am & 4-7pm Tue-Sun)

Narains (the Mall; 📶 10am-7.30pm) Good selection of books including plenty relating to local hero Jim Corbett who used to patronise this bookshop.

Post office (Tallital; 📶 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) On the side road to Fairhavens.

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

Uttarakhand Tourism office (☎ 235337; the Mall; 📶 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Ask for the helpful Nainital brochure.

Sights & Activities

NAINI LAKE

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 land-

slide, is on the precise spot where the eye is believed to have fallen. Nearby is the **Jama Masjid** and a **gurdwara**.

For holidaying families, a boat ride around the lake is de rigeur. Boatmen will row you for Rs 120 (Rs 50 one way) in the brightly painted gondola-like boats, or the **Nainital Boat Club** (Mallital) will sail you round for Rs 120 between 10am and 4pm. Pedal and rowing boats can also be hired for Rs 50 to 80 per hour.

SNOW VIEW & CABLE CAR

A **cable car** (adult/child return Rs 70/45; ☎ 10.30am-5pm) runs up to the popular Snow View at 2270m, which on clear days has panoramic Himalayan views, including Nanda Devi. At the top you'll find the usual food, souvenir and carnival stalls, as well as **Mountain Magic**, an amusement park with rides that kids will love.

There's also a hotel (p477) with restaurant and bar. You can hike to **Cheena/Naina Peak**, 4km away.

A walk up to or back from Snow View can take in the tiny **Gadhan Kunkyo Ling Gompa** (monastery) of the Gelukpa order (of which the Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader). Take the road uphill from the Hotel City Heart and a path branches off to the gompa (the colourful prayer flags should be visible).

TIFFIN TOP & LAND'S END

A 4km walk west of the lake brings you to Tiffin Top (2292m), also called Dorothy's Seat, from where it's a lovely 30-minute walk to Land's End (2118m) through a forest of oak, deodar and pine.

NAINITAL ZOO

This small hillside **zoo** (admission Rs 20; camera Rs 20; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun), a 15-minute walk from Tallital, has some large enclosures containing Himalayan animals, Siberian tigers and lots of pheasant species.

HORSE RIDING

Mangy horses gather west of town on the road to Ramnagar to take you on rides to beauty spots such as Dorothy Seat, Land's End and Tiffin Top. A three-hour ride costs Rs 175, or Rs 250 if you go with one of the touts down at Tallital (transport to the horses included).

ROCK CLIMBING & TREKKING

The enthusiasts at **Nainital Mountaineering Club** (☎ 235051; Mallital; 3hr course Indian/foreigner Rs 100/200)

offer rock-climbing courses at the rock-climbing area, a 15m-high rock outcrop to the west of the town.

Mountain Rovers (☎ 231480; mountain_rovers@rediffmail.com; Bada Bazaar, Mallital) offers one- or three-day rock-climbing and abseiling courses from beginner to advanced levels for Rs 750/2000. They can also organise treks in the Kumaon region and to Pindari glacier.

For information on KMVN's remote rest houses, **KMVN Parvat Tours** (☎ 235656; www.kmvn.org; Tallital) can organise treks that last six to nine days.

Tours

Travel agencies along the Mall such as **Hina Tours** (☎ 235860), **Anamika Travels** (☎ 235186) and **Darshan Travels** (☎ 235035) offer bus tours of the local lakes and tours to Corbett National Park from Rs 75 to 200.

Sleeping

Nainital is packed with hotels but they fill up fast in peak seasons when it's hard to find a bargain. The prices given below are for the peak season and virtually all hotels offer around 50% discounts in the off-season. The peak is generally 1 May to 30 June and some have a semipeak in October, at Diwali (October/November) and at Christmas. All hotels have a 10am check out.

Hotels set higher up the hillside have great views but require some strenuous walking to reach!

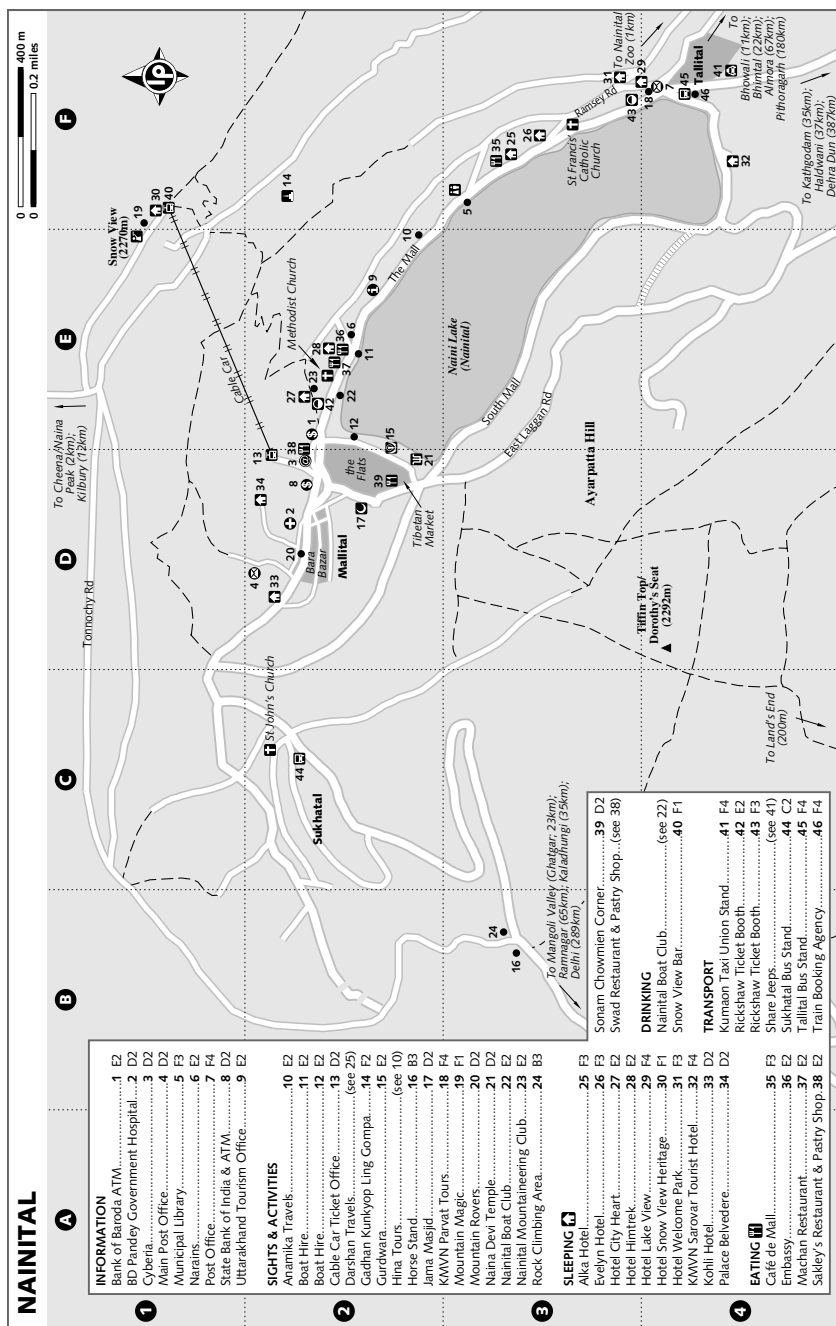
BUDGET

Kohli Hotel (☎ 236368; the Mall, Mallital; d Rs 300-600) Lovely lake views from the top rooms and terrace, and reasonable rates, make this a backpacker favourite. Light and clean rooms have TV and the private bathrooms have hot water.

KMVN Sarovar Tourist Hotel (☎ 235570; off the Mall, Tallital; dm/d year-round Rs 100/800) This uninspiring KMVN hotel rates a mention in the budget category because of its dorm rooms, which are a bargain in peak season.

Hotel Himtrek (☎ 235578; himtrekhotel@india4tourist.co.in; the Mall, Mallital; d Rs 400-700) A short hop off the Mall, Himtrek has a variety of good-sized rooms with TV, although the cheapest lack windows.

Hotel Lake View (☎ 235632; Ramsey Rd, Tallital; d Rs 500-1200) This is a simple guesthouse run by a friendly family. The cheaper rooms drop to Rs 250 in the off-season.



Hotel Snow View Heritage (☎ 238570; Snow View Peak; d Rs 800) It's hard to beat the location of this four-room Raj bungalow run by KMYN – perched in a magical spot on Snow View with easy access to great walks and complete peace once the cable car stops and the crowds depart. Rates include two rides on the cable car, which runs to the front door. Spacious old rooms have character as well as TV and hot water.

MIDRANGE

Most of the following hotels have budget range prices in the off-season.

Evelyn Hotel (☎ 235457; the Mall, Tallital; d Rs 1200-1800, ste Rs 3000-4000) This large Victorian-looking hotel overlooking the lake is quintessential Nainital – charming and slightly eccentric. It's a bit overwhelming in size with rooms terraced up the hillside amid pot plants and balconies – the higher rooms are cheaper but all are clean and well maintained.

Hotel City Heart (☎ 235228; www.cityheartotel.netfirms.com; off the Mall, Mallital; d Rs 1200-2500) The rooftop terrace restaurant has fine lake views, and pot plants and colourful décor give this place plenty of character. Rooms range from small but cute to a fabulous deluxe room with a view – it's unquestionably a bargain in the off-season when rates drop by more than half.

Hotel Welcome Park (☎ 235552; www.hotelwelcomepark.com; Zoo Rd, Tallital; d/ste Rs 2050/2650) A bit of a hike up the hill but accessible by road, this modern hotel offers plain but comfortable rooms with balconies overlooking the lake.

Alka Hotel (☎ 235220; www.alkahotel.com; the Mall; d Rs 2100-2800, ste Rs 3600) All rooms are lake-facing at this modern, upmarket hotel with flash communal areas, artworks and water features. Rooms are small but neat. Nearby is a budget annexe.

TOP END

Palace Belvedere (☎ 237434; www.welcomheritage.com; off the Mall, Mallital; s/d/ste Rs 3300/4400/4900) Built in 1897, this was the summer palace of the rajas of Awagarh. Animal skins and old prints adorn the walls of this classy hotel with comfortable rooms and an elegant dining room/lounge/veranda.

Eating

Nainital has a host of restaurants, especially along the Mall and near the Tibetan Market.

Sonam Chowmien Corner (the Flats, Mallital; meals Rs 10-20) In the covered alley part of the Tibetan Market, this authentic Tibetan *dhaba* whips up fabulous chow mein and *momos* for next to nothing.

Swad Restaurant & Pastry Shop (off the Mall, Mallital; meals Rs 25-80, pastries from Rs 15) Thalís, *momos* and mouth-watering homemade chocolates and sweets keep this place busy.

Café de Mall (☎ 235527; the Mall, Tallital; meals Rs 20-130; ☎ 9am-4pm & 5.30-10.30pm) With a touch of the Parisian, this open-fronted lakeside café is a good place for breakfast but the menu ranges from fish curry to impressive veg sizzlers.

Sakley's Restaurant & Pastry Shop (☎ 235086; off the Mall, Mallital; meals Rs 25-150; ☎ 9am-10pm) This breezy, spotless restaurant serves up some unusual global items such as Thai prawn dishes, honey chicken, lamb, plenty of Chinese dishes, pizzas and sizzlers. Desserts include pastries and Black Forest cake.

Embassy (☎ 235597; the Mall, Mallital; meals Rs 30-180; ☎ 11am-11pm) In a log-cabin interior, this place has been serving up five pages of menu items for over 40 years. There's a veg and nonveg section with everything from dosas to big sizzler plates – for something different ask for dancing coffee. There's a good people-watching terrace.

Machan Restaurant (☎ 237672; the Mall, Mallital; meals Rs 40-120; ☎ 10am-11pm) Odd jungle-themed décor and a distinctive bamboo façade complement some pretty decent food including Western comfort food in the form of pizzas and burgers. Watch the chefs at work in the open kitchen.

Drinking & Entertainment

Nainital Boat Club (The Mall, Mallital; temp membership men/women/couples Rs 300/150/300; ☎ 10am-10pm) This lakeside club is a classic remnant of the Raj. The atmospheric bar is all timber beams, wicker chairs and buttoned-up barmen with handlebar moustaches and the outdoor decking is perfect for an afternoon drink overlooking the lake. Temporary membership is steep but facilities include card-playing rooms, snooker tables (Rs 40), a gym (Rs 30) and a library with books, magazines and newspapers. Dress code is no shorts or thongs and signs warn that 'decorum should be maintained'.

Snow View Bar (☎ 10am-7pm) Although there are no views from the rustic bar, it's worth dropping in for a beer (Rs 80) after walking around the viewpoint. It's below the cable car station.

Shopping

Nainital is crowded with souvenir shops and emporiums selling textiles, clothing and handicrafts from different regions of India. Intricately carved multicoloured candles are a local speciality. On the southwest side of the lake near the flats is a busy Tibetan Market with cheap clothing and crafts.

Getting There & Away

BUS

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

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 to Bhowali (Rs 8, 20 minutes) and catch one of the regular onward buses to Almora, Kausani and Ranikhet.

From the Sukhatal bus stand, regular buses run to Ramnagar via Kaladhungi (Rs 45, three hours).

Travel agencies sell tickets on private deluxe coaches (reclining seats) to Delhi (Rs 250), which leave at 6am and 10pm.

TAXI & SHARE JEEP

From the Kumaon Taxi Union stand in Tallital, taxi drivers charge Rs 300 to Kathgodam, Rs 700 to Ramnagar, Rs 800 to Almora or Ranikhet.

Share jeeps leave when full, and go to Bhowali (Rs 8) and Kathgodam/Haldwani (Rs 40).

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 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/2AC Rs 128/518) departs Kathgodam at 8.40pm and arrives at Old Delhi station at 4.45am. In the other direction, it departs Delhi at 10.15pm, arriving at 5.55am.

Getting Around

Cycle-rickshaws charge a fixed Rs 5 along the Mall, but can only pick up and drop off at the ticket booths at either end. Taxi rides within town cost Rs 70 to 150.

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 Himalaya. The focus of the town is a busy bazaar area, but you don't have to walk far along the winding Mall Rd to be immersed in forest and tall English trees. Apart from a military museum, some peaceful walks and views of snowcapped peaks, there's not much to do in Ranikhet – it's much more of a retreat than some other hill stations, and in the off-season accommodation is excellent value.

Information

MP Cyber Cafe (Sadar Bazaar; per hr Rs 30; ☎ 9am-8pm)

Main post office (the Mall; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

There's a sub post office in Sadar Bazaar.

State Bank of India (Sadar Bazaar; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Exchanges travellers cheques but not cash. The ATM next to Ranikhet Inn accepts foreign cards.

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

Sights & Activities

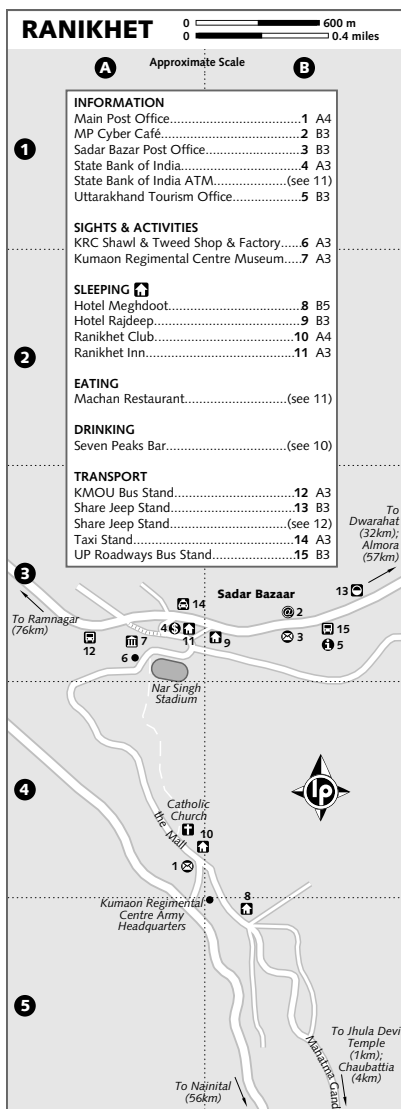
It's worth dropping into the **Kumaon Regimental Centre Museum** (off the Mall; admission Rs 10; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-5pm), stuffed full of photos and military memorabilia relating to the Kumaon regiment.

The **KRC Shawl & Tweed Shop & Factory** (☎ 220 567; the Mall; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-6pm, shop closed Wed, factory closed Sun), run by a welfare organisation for army widows, is in a converted church where you can see workers at handlooms producing shawls and tweed.

BUSES FROM NAINITAL

The following buses leave from the Tallital bus stand.

Destination	Fares (Rs)	Duration (hr)	Departures
Dehra Dun	200	10	several early morning
Delhi	182	9	morning & evening
Haldwani	32	2	half-hourly
Haridwar	145	8	several early morning
Kathgodam (A)	27	1½	half-hourly
Rishikesh	150	9	5am
A – take the Haldwani bus			



From the southern end of the Mall it's a pleasant 1km walk to the **Jhula Devi Temple**, which is festooned with bells, and you can carry on for a further 3km to **Chaubattia**, another army town, where you can turn left through an archway to a viewpoint café near some fruit trees. Take a share jeep (Rs 15) back to the bazaar.

Sleeping, Eating & Drinking

Outside the two peak seasons (generally mid-April to mid-July and 1 October to mid-November) the prices given below are reduced by 30% to 50%.

Hotel Rajdeep (☎ 220017; Sadar Bazaar; d Rs 350-900) The best of a gloomy bunch of hotels in this area, Rajdeep has a big range of old-fashioned rooms from poky budget ones at the back to spacious rooms with veranda and view at the front.

Hotel Meghdoot (☎ 220475; the Mall; s Rs 500-850, d Rs 750-1100, ste Rs 1350) 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.

Ranikhet Inn (☎ 221929; Sadar Bazaar; d Rs 1400-1600) This stylish boutique hotel is head and shoulders above the others in Sadar Bazaar. Although showing a little wear, the rooms are spotless with tiled floors, TV and hot water, and the best rooms have balconies commanding the best views in town. The patio restaurant is recommended.

Ranikhet Club (☎ 226011; the Mall; d year-round Rs 2400-3000, ste Rs 4200) For a taste of Raj nostalgia, look no further than the four classic rooms at this 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 (meals Rs 30 to 90).

Machan Restaurant (Sadar Bazaar; mains Rs 25-100) At the Ranikhet Inn, this terrace restaurant has a fine view and a good range of dishes from pizza to chicken tikka and biryani – the *navratan korma* is an interesting mixture that includes papaya.

Seven Peaks Bar (temporary membership Rs 50; ☎ noon-10pm) Although modernised, the bar at the Ranikhet Club still has a colonial feel – dress smartly after 7pm. Enjoy a Kingfisher or cocktail with a Himalayan view from the veranda.

Getting There & Away

From the UP Roadways bus stand at the eastern end of the bazaar, deluxe buses run to Delhi (Rs 420, 12 hours) at 4pm, 4.30pm and 5pm, to Ramnagar (Rs 78, 4½ hours) at 8.30am, and to Haridwar (Rs 182, 10 hours) at 8.30am and 3pm. Frequent buses run to Haldwani and Kathgodam via Bhowali (Rs 40, two hours) which is only a short ride from Nainital.

From the KMOU bus stand, at the other end of town, regular buses run to Almora (Rs 44, two hours), to Ramnagar (Rs 72, 4½ hours) hourly from 6.30am to 2pm, and one bus goes to Nainital at 11.15am (Rs 45, 2½ hours).

Share jeeps leave when full for Dwarahat (Rs 35), Almora (Rs 50), Nainital (Rs 60) and Haldwani (Rs 75) from near either of the two bus stands.

Getting Around

A share jeep to the Mall area costs Rs 5, or Rs 15 to Chaubattia. A taxi to anywhere in town costs Rs 60 to 100.

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 Lalal Bazaar, lined with intricately carved and painted traditional wooden shop façades. 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 hippy subculture of travellers living up around Kasar Devi temple.

Information

Internet access is available all over town, usually from Rs 25 per hour.

Post office (the Mall; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat)

State Bank of India (the Mall; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Only exchanges American Express travellers cheques and only up to US\$500, and does not exchange currency. There's an ATM accepting foreign cards in front of Hotel Shikhar.

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

Sights & Activities

The stone **Nanda Devi Temple** in the Lalal Bazaar dates back to the Chand Raja era, and is covered in folk-art carvings, some erotic. Every September, the temple plays host to a fair (see p446).

The small **Pt GB Pant Museum** (the Mall; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) houses local folk art and ancient Hindu sculptures.

The **Panchachuli Weavers Factory** (☎ 232310; off Bageshwar Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) employs 300 women to weave shawls and carpets by hand and is an interesting place to visit. The shop here has a wider range of products than the small shop in the Mall. Taxis charge Rs 120 return to the factory, but you can walk the 3km easily enough.

For organised treks and information, including the Pindari and Milam Glacier treks, drop into **Discover Himalaya** (☎ 236890; discoverhimalaya@sancharnet.in; the Mall), which currently offers the best deals. Also check with near neighbour **High Adventure** (☎ 232277; highadventure@rediffmail.com; the Mall). Treks costs around Rs 500 to 2000 per person per day, depending on the size of the group and services provided.

Sleeping

Unlike most hill stations prices are not seasonal, but if it's not busy you can always try for a discount.

Kailas Hotel (☎ 230264; jawaharlalsah@india.com; off the Mall; d Rs 90-360) A slightly dilapidated but colourful and intriguing guesthouse run by Mr Shah, an engaging retired bank manager, who will regale you with tales of Almora 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 'honeymoon suite') at the top are easily the best. The cheapest rooms have common bath.

Bansal Hotel (☎ 230864; Lalal Bazaar; d Rs 200-250) Above Bansal Café in the bustling bazaar, this is a good budget choice with tidy rooms (some with TV) and a rooftop terrace. The top room has a view.

Hotel Konark (☎ 231217; the Mall; d Rs 400-500, tr Rs 600) Behind the pink façade, Konark has clean, modern though nondescript rooms with TV – some of the back rooms have views.

Hotel Shikhar (☎ 230253; www.hotelshikhar.com; the Mall; d Rs 150-1500; 🍷) 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 that covers all budgets. A spacious, comfortable room with a balcony, a hot shower and a TV goes for Rs 600. It also has the good Mount View Restaurant.

ALMORA

A

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Eating

A local speciality is *ball mithai* (fudge covered in sugar), available in sweet shops for Rs 3.

Bansal Espresso Bar & Café (Lalal Bazaar; drinks & snacks Rs 12-25) This simple café in a lane between the Mall and Lalal Bazaar serves up a wide range of drinks and snacks, including good coffee, lassis, chat and samosas.

Soni Restaurant (the Mall; meals Rs 20-80) A popular Sikh *dhaba* serving tasty *paneer* (unfermented cheese), chicken and mutton dishes and egg curry.

Glory Restaurant (☎ 230279; LR Sah Rd; meals Rs 25-60) This long-running family eatery on two floors is clean and modern and serves up popular South and North Indian veg dishes.

Shopping

The tiny **Panchachuli store** (the Mall; ☎ Mon-Sat) sells high-quality shawls and tweeds that are made locally using natural dyes. Run by a women's cooperative, **Mahila Haat** (the Mall; ☎ 10am-5pm) sells shawls and knitwear at reasonable prices.

Getting There & Away

Bus runs from the adjacent UP Roadways and KMOU bus stands on the Mall roughly hourly until 3pm to Ranikhet (Rs 40, two hours), Kausani (Rs 40, 2½ hours) and Bhowali (Rs 40, two hours). From Bhowali it's only a short bus or share-jeep ride to Nainital. Hourly buses run to Bageshwar (Rs 56, two hours), from where you can pick up buses or share jeeps to Song and Munyari for the Pindari and Milam glacier treks. There's a 6.30am bus to Pithoragarh (Rs 90, five hours) from the Dharanaula bus stand on the Bypass Rd. One bus goes direct to Banbassa (Rs 130, six hours) from the KMOU stand for the Nepal border crossing.

Lion Tours (☎ 230860; the Mall) runs a daily deluxe overnight bus to Delhi (Rs 280, 11 hours) which leaves at 7pm.

AROUND ALMORA

The hilltop **Kasar Devi Temple**, where Swami Vivekananda meditated, is 8km north of Almora and can be reached by share jeep (Rs 15) or taxi (Rs 200). The 800-year-old **Surya (Sun) temple** at Katarmal, 14km from Almora and a 2km walk from the main road, can be visited by getting on any share jeep (Rs 15, 30 minutes) going to Ranikhet. 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.

A large temple complex is set in a forest of deodars at **Jageshwar**, 38km northeast of Almora. The 124 temples and shrines date back to the 7th century AD and vary from waist-high linga shrines to large *sikhara* (spired) temples. They are a 4km walk from Jageshwar

which can be reached by taxi (Rs 600 return). A bus (Rs 30) leaves Almora at noon for Jagshwar, but getting back could be difficult.

KAUSANI

☎ 05962 / pop 4000 / elev 1890m

Perched high on a forest-covered ridge, this tiny village has lovely panoramic views of distant snow-capped peaks, fresh air, a cool climate and as relaxed an atmosphere as you'll find in northern India. Mahatma Gandhi found Kausani an inspirational place to retreat and write his Bhagavad Gita translation *Anasakti Yoga* and there is still an ashram devoted to him here.

Information

The nearest currency exchange or ATM is in Almora.

Global Infotech (Anasakti Ashram Rd; per hr Rs 40;

☎ 5am-10pm) Internet access.

Uttarakhand Tourism office (☎ 258067; the Mall;

☎ 10am-5pm)

Sights & Activities

At **Kausani Tea Estate** (☎ 258330; www.uttaranchaltea.com; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm mid-Mar-mid-Nov), a tea plantation that involves private enterprise, the government and local farmers, you can look around and sample and buy its products, which are exported around the world. The factory produces about 45 tonnes of tea annually. It's 3km north of the village on the road to Bajinath, a Rs 5 share-jeep ride or an easy and scenic walk.

About 1km uphill from the bus stand, **Anasakti Ashram** is where Mahatma Gandhi spent considerable time and wrote *Anasakti Yoga* in 1929. It has a small **museum** (admission free; ☎ 8am-7pm) that tells the story of Gandhi's life through photographs and words. Visit at 7pm to attend nightly prayers in his memory.

Hill Queen Restaurant (right) has a **stargazing show** (admission Rs 10; ☎ 7.30 & 8.30pm) with a telescope (when the night sky is clear).

Yogi's Uttarakhand Cycle Tours (☎ 258012; www.bikingindia.zoomshare.com; ☎ Mar-May & Sep-Nov), led by long-time Kausani resident and keen cyclist, Yogi Mueller, offers exhilarating cycling tours in the forests and hills around Kausani. He can supply all the gear for one- or two-day rides, including sturdy mountain bikes, panniers and tents. If you can't make it back up the hills, taxis can be arranged. The cost of a tour is 'by donation' – suggested at around Rs 400 per day.

Sleeping

Outside the two short peak seasons (May to June and October) the accommodation prices listed below are discounted by 50%. There are several cheap paying guest houses in Kausani with basic rooms from Rs 100 to 400.

Kausani Village Resort (☎ 258353, 9412958936; Bajinath Rd; huts from Rs 500, r from Rs 400) Overlooking the tea garden 3km north of Kausani village, these round, hobbit-style huts are a quirky and peaceful place to stay. Inside, they're a lot more comfy than they appear, with clean tiled bathrooms, TV and views across the gardens to the mountains.

Hotel Uttarakhand (☎ 258012; www.uttarakhandkausani.zoomshare.com; d Rs 550-1250; ☎) 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 but upper-floor rooms are spacious and all have hot showers. The manager is helpful and friendly.

Krishna Mountview (☎ 258008; www.kumaonindia.com; Anasakti Ashram Rd; d Rs 1800-3000) Just past Anasakti Ashram, this is Kausani's smartest hotel with clipped formal gardens (perfect for mountain views), a class 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 best.

Eating

Hill Queen Restaurant (Anasakti Ashram Rd; meals Rs 25-40; ☎) Panoramic views from the back veranda and a stargazing telescope (Rs 10) make this place popular. Good lassis and snacks.

Hotel Uttarakhand (meals Rs 30-100) The restaurant here serves up a great range of dishes from Swiss roesti to chilli chicken as well as some Kumaon specialties, using fresh ingredients. Imported espresso coffee and Kausani tea can be enjoyed on the patio.

Vaibhav (meals Rs 90-180; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) At Krishna Mountview, this formal hotel dining room offers some of Kausani's best Indian, Chinese and Continental dishes. On warm days you can eat in the lovely garden.

Getting There & Away

There's no bus stand as such but buses and share jeeps stop in the village centre. Buses (Rs 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 (Rs 5). Direct share jeeps charge Rs 60. Heading north, buses run every

two hours to Bageshwar via Baijnath (Rs 40, 1½ hours). Share jeeps (Rs 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 Rs 800.

AROUND KAUSANI

About 19km north of Kausani, **Baijnath village** is famous for its small 12th-century *sikhara*-style temples. The main group is devoted to Shiva and his consort Parvati and has a lovely location shaded by trees alongside the Gomti River. Several other Shaivite shrines are in the old village, a 10-minute walk north of Baijnath.

Take a Bageshwar bus from Kausani, or a share jeep (Rs 20) to Garur and then another (Rs 20) to Baijnath. A return taxi from Kausani is Rs 400.

BAGESHWAR

☎ 05963 / pop 7803 / elev 975m

At the confluence of the Gomti and Sarju Rivers, Bageshwar is a bustling pilgrimage town, where Hindu pilgrims file in throughout the year to worship at the ancient stone **Bagnath Temple**. Dedicated to Shiva, this important temple is festooned with bells of all sizes and features impressive carvings. Both rivers are lined with bathing ghats. Bageshwar can be used as a jumping-off point for the Pindari Glacier trek – there's a **KMVN office** (☎ 220034; www.kmvn.org; Tarcula Rd) where guides can be arranged.

Hotel Annapurna (☎ 220109; s Rs 200-400, d Rs 300-500, with shared bathroom s/d Rs 100/200), next to the bus stand, has a pleasant riverside terrace at the back and simple, functional rooms.

About 1km from the bus stand, the large **KMVN Guesthouse** (☎ 220034; Tarcula Rd; dm Rs 70, s/d Rs 200/300) has reasonable, spacious rooms and staff here can help with trekking guides.

Several daily buses go to Almora (Rs 57, three hours) and Ranikhet (Rs 80, three hours) via Kausani (Rs 30, 1½ hours), or take a share jeep to Garur and change. Frequent buses run to Bhowali (Rs 105, six hours) and Haldwani (Rs 140, 7½ hours). Jeeps and buses run up to Gwaldam (Rs 30, two hours) for connections to Garhwal. For Pindari Glacier trek, take the 7am bus to Song (Rs 25, two hours), and for Milam Glacier, to Munyari (Rs 75, six hours).

PITHORAGARH

☎ 05964 / pop 41,157 / elev 1815m

Pithoragarh is the main town of a little-visited region that borders Tibet and Nepal and has several Chand-era temples and an old fort. The town sits in a small valley that has been dubbed 'Little Kashmir' and picturesque hikes in the area include the rewarding climb up to **Chandak** (7km) for views of the Panchachuli (Five Chimneys) massif. Trekking permits are not normally needed but check with the **district magistrate's office** (☎ 222202) in Pithoragarh.

The town has a **tourist office** (☎ 225527) which can help with trekking guides and information, and a **KMVN Rest House** (☎ 225434; dm Rs 100, d Rs 500-700).

Several buses leave for Almora from 4.30am to 10am (Rs 90, five hours). Regular buses go to Haldwani, Delhi and Tanakpur (the railhead, 151km south). Buses run north to Munyari (Rs 100, eight hours), the trailhead for Milam Glacier, as do the ubiquitous share jeeps.

PINDARI GLACIER TREK

This six-day, 94km trek passes through truly virgin country inhabited by only a few shepherds and offers wonderful views of Nanda Kot (6860m) and Nanda Khat (6611m) on the southern rim of Nanda Devi Sanctuary. Eagles often soar over the trail. The 3km-long,

ROSE – VILLAGE VOLUNTEERS

The Rural Organisation for Social Elevation (ROSE) is a village-based charitable project that encourages 'village tourism' – international volunteers living and working with the rural communities. Based at Kanda village near Bageshwar in the Kumaon hills, ROSE works with local communities on agricultural and environmental projects, education and health care. Volunteers stay with ROSE founder Jeevan Verma and his family and contribute to projects including organic farming, housing construction, teaching in schools and administration. It's not all work, with plenty of opportunity to interact with villagers, learn Hindi, practice cooking and take excursions into the Himalaya. ROSE is affiliated with the Willing Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOF) organisation and we've had good first-hand feedback from volunteers. For information, contact ROSE (Jeevan Lal Verma, Village Sonargaon, PO Kanda, Uttarakhand 236 631), or check the website at www.rosekanda.info.

CROSSING INTO NEPAL

Border Hours

If you already have a visa the border is open 24 hours, but before 7am and after 5pm you may need to go in search of officials to stamp you in and out of the respective countries. The border is officially manned from 9am to 5pm.

Foreign Exchange

Banks in Banbassa and Mahendranagar will change Indian currency to Nepali rupees but there is no 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 (Rs 750, 16 hours) at 5am, 8.30am and 2.15pm. There's also a single Pokhara service at 10.30am (Rs 730, 16 hours).

Visas

Visas are available for US\$30 at the border between 9am and 5pm.

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. A guide and porters can be organised in both places or in Almora. Alternatively KMVN operates all-inclusive six-day treks out of Bageshwar for Rs 3500. KMVN dorms (mattresses on the floor Rs 150), basic guesthouses or *dhaba* huts (Rs 50 to 200) are dotted along the route and food is available. Accommodation can be a squeeze in May and June, so you may prefer to camp.

Buses (Rs 25, two hours) or share jeeps (Rs 50, 1½ hours) run between Song and Bageshwar, and buses can take you between Almora and Bageshwar via Kausani. A jeep taxi from Almora to Song costs around Rs 1600.

MILAM GLACIER TREK

A challenging eight-day, 118km trek to this massive glacier at 3450m is reached along an ancient trade route to Tibet which was closed in 1962 following the war between India and 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 30km or two days.

Permits are not required at present but check this information before you go as it

might change, and bring your passport. 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 out of Munsyari for Rs 4500.

The trailhead is the spectacularly located village of **Munsyari** (2290m) where a guide, cook and porters can be hired. The plentiful accommodation in Munsyari includes a **KMVN Rest House** (☎ 05961-222339; dm Rs 100, d Rs 600-750).

A daily bus runs to Munsyari (Rs 170, 11 hours) from Almora; a jeep taxi costs around Rs 2500. Buses and share jeeps run to and from Pithoragarh (Rs 100, eight hours) and Bageshwar (Rs 75, six hours).

BANBASSA

pop 7138

Banbassa is the closest Indian village to the Nepal border post of Mahendranagar, 5km away, but you should check the current situation in Nepal before using this remote border crossing in view of Maoist activity in Nepal's western region – while the embassy insists everything is safe, trouble can flare up at any time. It certainly should not be attempted in the monsoon or immediate postmonsoon season because the roads in western Nepal are often 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 which runs to Almora and Delhi.

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