

GANGOTRI GAUMUKH TAPOVAN TREK

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1: Drive from Delhi to Uttarkashi (450 Kms, 10 to 12 hrs), Overnight stay in hotel at Uttarkashi

We meet in Delhi and begin our drive as early as possible, so that there is some time to explore Rishikesh in the evening. The drive by itself is unspectacular until we come across the holy ghats of Haridwar where we will skirt the wide and swift flowing river Ganga. From this point on, the road gets more interesting with a climb up the wooded foothills of Rishikesh, passing by the various Yoga ashrams and retreats that Rishikesh is known for.

The drive from Rishikesh to Uttarkashi goes through the towns of Narendra Nagar, Mohan Chatti, Tehri, Chamba and Chham. Most of the road is narrow and is pretty much a constant climb until we reach Uttarkashi.

Day 2: Drive from Uttarkashi to Gangotri ^{3046mtrs} (95 Kms, 3 to 4 hrs), Overnight stay in hotel/camp at Gangotri

We leave Uttarkashi after breakfast and undertake the short drive (3 to 4 hours) along the usual rough Himalayan roads to the holy town of Gangotri. The route goes past the towns of Bhatwari, Haril and Bhaironghati before ending up at Gangotri. It is worth taking a short break at Harsil, which is a pretty town with the pine and deodar forests and the interesting legend of Wilson's ghost!

About 10 kms before Gangotri, we will come across the town of Bhaironghati (the confluence of the Jat Ganga and the Bhagirathi rivers) where you could stop by and visit the temple of Bhairav Nath nested among the lovely dark coniferous forests. The final stretch to Gangotri begins from here and will not take very long.

Gangotri is famous as the place where the River Ganga (as Bhagirathi) descended from the heavens onto Lord Shiva's locks and then onto the earth. (The shivling where Shiva is said to have received the river is located at the Gangotri shrine and lies submerged under water. It is partially visible in winters when the water level recedes) We can spend the evening visiting the temple shrine and walk about the town, visiting the Pandav Gufa or the Suryakund, enjoying the scenic views of the snowclad peaks we will be visiting from tomorrow onwards.

Day 3 Trek to Bhojbasa ^{3800mtrs} (14 Kms, 6 to 7 hrs) via Chirbasa ^{3350mtrs}, Overnight camping at Bhojbasa.

We need to start early in the morning, since the trek is fairly long and strenuous. At the very beginning, as you head about 100 metres up the steps just behind the temple, you will start to feel out of breath! A short distance further ahead, we will come to the Forest Check Point. After the Check

Point, the trail carries on along the true left bank of the Bhagirathi for a while, switching back and forth with a few stream crossings. Keep your eyes peeled for possible sighting of the blue sheep (bharal) that are known to inhabit the rocky crags to your left.

The climb will continue gradually until we come to Chirbasa, which is named because of the “chir” trees whose bark was used for writing in the ancient era. Chirbasa is the end of the treeline and from here on, it will be small shrubs and meadows till the glacial basin.

The trail now moves ahead to Bhojwasa and the climb and effort start getting more strenuous with the increase in altitude. As we go further along, about 3-4 kms prior to Bhojwasa, we will come cross shaky towers of glacial moraine (rocks from landslides piled atop glaciers) that form a wide and hide canyon around us but look precariously perched and are a source of worry as we rush along the boulders. The final climb to Bhojwasa is steep and fairly difficult and reaching the Bhojwasa campsite is a huge relief!

An important thing to keep in mind here is that all trekkers in the team should look to take it slow and conserve energy since the altitude gain is considerable and could cause AMS to those who have not hydrated well enough or may have over exerted.

**Day 4: Trek from Bhojwasa to Tapovan ^{4463 mtrs} via Gaumukh ^{3,969 mtrs} (9 Kms, 4 to 5 hrs)
,Overnight camping at Tapovan.**

We need to start the day really early today since it is advisable to cross the glacial section near Gaumukh in the mornings. The reason is that the rocks get heated during the day time and thus are prone to shifting and falling down the mountain slopes around afternoon and beyond.

From Bhojwasa, we begin our trek with a gradual climb for about 3 kms towards Gaumukh. As you walk along, you will see boards that indicate the position of the glacier across the decades and it is quite a sobering thought to see how far it has retreated! The route is barren and over boulders surrounded by snowy and rocky peaks.

Half a km before the snout (Gaumukh) we come cross a number of small temples and shrines built by sadhus who worship here. By now we are walking on top of the moraine that hides the glacier and to first timers it seems odd to not find the classic white ice that they imagine. Here the ice is a dull, dirty looking bluish green and you will see pieces of ice floating along the river that is gushing out of its snout. The dull look of the ice is due to the rocks that fall down the slopes of the mountains that encircle this vast amphitheatre like basin and have weathered over a period of time. It is quite amazing to think that this glacial ice was formed over hundreds of thousands of years over a slow process of accumulation!

After crossing Gaumukh we will traverse across the glacier to our left (the true right of the glacier) carefully across the boulders and moraine. This is the location where you need to watch out for falling rocks from the barren mountain slopes above. It is advised to be alert and on the watch, as also to try and cross this section as soon as possible.

Keep jumping across the boulders following the cairns that continue along the left. After about 30-45 minutes on your left, you will see the location of what used to be the Raktavaran glacier, that has now completely broken up! It is also the route up to the needle like Mt. Thelu summit. We will need to keep climbing till we reach the top of the Gaumukh glacier (and this is a steep climb!) where the ridge splits into two with one route leading to Nandanvan and the other leading to our destination.

After crossing the Akash Ganga stream (which can get quick tricky as it gets late in the day due to volume of water) we now come to the last segment with the final steep ascent that will take you to the top of the steep slope ahead and then beyond to Tapovan. This is the most difficult sector of the trek today with the altitude making it extremely difficult to climb up the scree, as also the slippery ice that may look like rock and catch you unawares.

Once this has been crossed, you finally come to the spectacular meadow of Tapovan with the incredible Mt. Shivaling towering over us.

If you have energy left, you could take a walk to Neel Tal, a small pond about an hour away, formed by a stream that flows down the Bhrigupanth slope.

Day 5: Trek from Tapovan^{4463 mtrs} to Nandanvan^{4,400 mtrs} by crossing Gangotri glacier(7 Kms, 4 to 5 hrs), Overnight camping at Nandanvan.

Today's trek is also a tough one and members are again advised to not over exert themselves and be alert. We trek back up and along the ridge of the Gangotri glacier with the Bhagirathi peaks giving us company. Nandanvan lies at the base of the Bhagirathi massif and we will take the trail that leads down and to the right from the top of the ridge. Once we are down on the Gangotri glacier, we will continue walking along it. This is a fairly level and is one of the few easy sections in terms of climb but care has to be taken to walk over stable boulders and avoid stepping on ice slabs.

After the traverse, we will look to go towards the base of Nandanvan which lies close to the terminus of the Chaturangi and the Gangotri glacier. The terminus is quite prominent with a semi formed glacial bridge between them.

The final approach is quite steep and will take at least an hour to complete. The campsite makes the effort worth it. Lying at the base of Bhagirathi 2, it allows spectacular views of Mt. Shivaling, Mt. Meru, Mt. Kedardome and of course the Bhagirathi massif!

Day 6: Trek from Nandanvan^{4400 mtrs} to Chirbasa^{3350mtrs} (13 Kms, 5 to 6 hrs) Overnight camping at Chirbasa.

Once again we will begin the trek early since it is longer than yesterday, although it is considerably easier since we will be descending. The route is pretty much the same, we find our way up past the terminal of the Chaturangi and Gangotri glaciers, until we are back on the ridge. From here, we take the route that leads back on down, skirting past the Gaumukh snout, through the rockfall zone.

Our trail doubles back along the moraine of the glacier and down to Bhojbasa where we had camped before. After a short break, we will proceed further and end the day at the Chirbasa campsite among the treeline.

Day 7: Trek from Chirbasa^{3350mtrs} to Gangotri^{3046mtrs} (5 Kms, 2 hrs) and Drive to Uttarkashi(95 Kms, 3 to 4 hrs), Overnight stay in hotel.

We again begin trekking early in the morning, since we will be driving to Uttarkashi today itself. The trek is fairly easy and will take us back past the Forest Check Post, down the steps behind the temple and into Gangotri town. After a short break, we will begin our drive down to Uttarkashi again via Harsil.

Day 8: Drive from Uttarkashi to Delhi (450 Kms, 8 to 9 hrs)

From Uttarkashi, we drive down till Dharasu bend, where we will turn left and proceed till Rishikesh. From Rishikesh to Haridwar, we descend along forested slopes, paralleling the river Ganga. The drive from Haridwar onwards to New Delhi is through the plains via Roorkee, Meerut and Ghaziabad and is almost an anti-climax after the beautiful time spent amidst the sublime Himalayan beauty.