

# GANGOTRI GAUMUKH TAPOVAN TREK

## INTERESTING FACTS/INFORMATION ABOUT THE PLACE

### **Uttarkashi**

Uttarkashi town is the district headquarters of Uttarkashi and is situated along the banks of the river Bhagirathi. It is well known for its ashrams and temples and also because it is home to one of the best Mountaineering Institutes in India – the Nehru Institute of mountaineering. It was named as Uttarkashi (The Kashi or Varanasi of the North) since its topography and location along the banks of the Bhagirathi bears close resemblance to the city of Varanasi that lies along the river Ganga.

Uttarkashi is very famous among adventure enthusiasts as it offers white water rafting along with some excellent trekking routes and mountaineering expeditions into the Gangotri region. Uttarkashi is also the site of a couple of hydro electric power project (the Tiloth Power Plant) dams at Maneri (Maneri Dam) and Joshiyari village (Bhali Dam)

Uttarkashi is also the biggest town and main centre for trekking supplies and guides for all treks going into the Gangotri and Yamunotri regions.

### **Gangotri Temple**

Gangotri is a high-altitude town in Uttarkashi district, located at 3,048 meters above sea level on the banks of the holy Bhagirathi river. It is regarded highly as a Holy pilgrimage site on the Char Dham yatra with legend citing it as the place where the river Ganga first descended from the heavens. The current temple here was built in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century by the Gorkha General Amar Singh Thapa. The temple has a naturally formed submerged rock shivling, which is clearly visible prior to winter as the cold increases causing the waters to recede and make it visible.

It is only open during summers, post May, since there is heavy snowfall in the region during winters, preventing easy access to it.

### **Harsil**

Harsil (altitude - 7,860 feet) is a small town that lies on the banks of the Bhagirathi River, enroute to Gangotri. The idol of Goddess Ganga is brought down from the Gangotri temple every winter just before it closes, to a village called Mukhba which lies very close to Harsil. The DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation) have also established the Defence Agricultural Research Laboratory here and setup a cantonment area.

Harsil is also famous for a strange legend – that of “pahari Wilson”, a British Army officer who deserted the army and reached the sleepy hamlet of Harsil where he married a local girl and settled

down. He then built himself a fortune out of the trade of skins, fur, musk and later from the timber business. In time, he became more powerful than the Raja of Tehri Garhwal and even minted his own coins! He built himself the sprawling Wilson's Cottage (which is now in ruins) and the Charleville Hotel in Mussoorie.

The most interesting part of the story is about the ghost of Wilson who comes galloping on full moon nights across a suspension bridge (that he himself had built but is has long since broken off) across the Bhagirathi river.

### **SuryaKund**

This is a spectacular yellowish red sedimentary rock gorge where the river Ganga takes a deep plunge. It is a truly spectacular spot that can be visited as a day trip from Gangotri town.

### **Gaumukh**

Gaumukh glacier is one of the largest glaciers in India, despite its size having shrunk due to global warming. Its length is 30 kms and its width is about 2-4 kms. Its snout looks like the mouth of a cow, which explains the name "Gaumukh" which literally translates to "mouth of a cow". It is the origin of the Bhagirathi river that later joins with the Alaknanda and forms the holiest river of India, the Ganga.

Gaumukh is a massive glacier and has fantastic geological features such as steep rock and ice walls, glacial lakes (tarns), crags, gullies and waterfalls. Most of it lies covered under extensive moraines of mica schist, gneiss, granite and quartz schist.

A trip to the Gaumukh glacier is awe-inspiring for its sheer size and also for the beautiful Bhagirathi series of peaks that rise in the background, supplementing its grandeur.

### **Nandanvan**

Nandanvan is a high altitude meadow at approximately 16,000 feet that comes to life in summer with a fresh coat of green grass and a carpet of delightful wildflowers. It is fringed on three sides by massive Himalayan peaks with the most dominant being the Bhagirathi massif. It is also the base camp for expeditions to the Bhagirathi series of peaks.

### **Tapovan**

Tapovan, located near Gangotri in Uttarakhand is a barren plain, that literally translates to a forest for spiritual meditation or penance. It is at a height of approximately 14,640 feet and lies at the feet of Mt. Shivaling that completely dominates the horizon. Owing to its magnificent location, it has always been a home to a number of sadhus who meditate here during the summers and hence has acquired the name Tapovan.

It is the base camp for expeditions to Mt. Shivaling and is also extremely popular among trekkers who camp here before moving onto Nandanvan, a beautiful high altitude meadow further ahead.

### **Mt. Shivaling**

Mt. Shivaling, at 21,467 feet may not be one of the highest Himalayan peaks, but it is one of most beautiful. It's conical peak that looks like a Shivaling (hence its name) is extremely difficult to climb and has been given the moniker of the "Indian Matterhorn" owing to its striking profile that is similar to Mt. Matterhorn in the European Alps.

It juts out as a spur from the ridge line that forms the southwest side of the Gangotri Glacier basin. This ridge line has perhaps the most famous selection of strikingly beautiful peaks, with Mt. Meru, Mt. Thalay Sagar and the Bhagirathi sister peaks lying along it.

### **Yamunotri**

The source of the river Yamuna lies atop a flank of Bandarpoonch mountain at an altitude of 3,293 metres, in the westernmost Garhwal Himalaya. It is also regarded as the seat of Goddess Yamuna and the shrine is named as Yamunotri in her honour. It is a popular pilgrimage location and one of the most important "char dhams" of Hindu Pilgrimage alongwith Gangotri. It is located about 30 kms North of Uttarkashi.

The actual source of the river is the Champasar Glacier that is located on the Kalind Mountain, 1 km away from the shrine and almost 500 metres above! (at 4,421 metres). The approach is extremely difficult and dangerous and it is regarded as inaccessible.

The deity of the temple is made of black marble and was placed by Maharaja Pratap Shah of Tehri Garhwal. There are a number of hot springs gushing out of the cracks in the mountains here, which pool and form steaming ponds (or "kunds") The most important among these is the Surya Kund (Hot springs are also found about 7 kms away at a place known as Janki Chatti).

The temple closes for winter on Diwali day and reopens in summer on the auspicious day of Akshaya Tritiya.