

# HAMPTA PASS TREK

## INTERESTING FACTS/INFORMATION ABOUT THE PLACE

### **Kullu district**

Kullu is the prime administrative district in Himachal Pradesh and is also the most populous. The largest valley in the district is the Kullu valley (also known as the Valley of the Gods) where we have the famous hot springs of Bashisht and the popular tourist town of Manali. The northern border of the Kullu district is bounded by the Rohtang pass that is one of the most visited tourist destinations in the state. The river Beas is the primary river that flows through the district and most of the big towns such as Manali and Mandi lie along its banks.

### **Kullu valley/Manali**

It is a broad open valley famous for its sprawling apple orchards and the equally famous pashmina and angora shawls. The airport to access Manali town is located at Bhuntar near Kullu town, about an hour's travel (by car). The primary religion of people in the valley is Hinduism and there are many famous temples in the valley where people come from far and wide as a pilgrimage.

### A Brief History

Kullu has been a prosperous and fertile valley since recorded history and has found mention in all the epics (Ramayana and Mahabharata) and the Puranas. In the later eras, a number of dynasties laid claim to the land, from the Nandas, to the Mauryas, to the Guptas, Palas and Karkotas. The region was later united by King Harshavardhana, but after his death, it again broke apart into small principalities, which were conquered by the Marathas and the Sikhs, before finally being annexed by the British. However, it remained fairly secluded until the construction of a motorable road only after Indian Independence, which meant that the people have retained their age-old customs and traditions, without being influenced or assimilated.

### Mythology

According to Hindu mythology, Kullu valley is regarded as the cradle of all mankind after the great deluge. The name "Manali" is derived from "Manu-alaya" that means the home of Manu, who is said to be the Hindu version of Noah, the progenitor of humanity. You will find the delightfully wood carved Manu temple a couple of kms above old Manali.

Another story from the Mahabharata tells of "Bheem", the strongest of the Pandavas, killing a demon terrorizing the area, "Hadimb" and then marrying his sister "Hadimba". Their son, Ghatotkacha was one of the pivotal characters in the great war against the Kauravas, sacrificing his life to make sure Arjuna would be invincible. The Hadimba temple, shrouded in dense pines on a hill above old Manali is a beautiful multi-tiered wooden, pyramidal temple that was built to honour Hadimba devi.

Legend also talks about “Arjuna Gupha”, a cave on the flanks of Mt. Deo Tibba, where Arjuna is said to have meditated in order to acquire the most destructive weapon, the Pashupati Astra from Lord Indra.

### **Other Places of interest**

Naggar palace – Naggar was the capital of Kullu for 1400 years and its 16th century wood and stone castle is exquisite and a must visit while in the area. There is a beautiful weeping willow in its central courtyard with lovely views of the snow capped mountains in the distance. Paintings by the German artist Nicholas Roerich, adorn the walls of the art gallery in the castle. There are also interesting ghost stories that are quite entertaining and worth listening to, especially on chilled, winter nights. Most of the castle is now an exclusive heritage hotel.

Kasol – A very popular valley for treks and especially for trout fishing, the Kasol valley is much loved by Indian and foreign tourists.

Jogini Falls – About 2 Kms away and further up from Vashisht hot water springs, after trekking through a dense pine forest and a final steep climb, you will come across the Jogini Falls that are not only spectacular on their own, but also offer a spectacular panoramic view of the valley below and the snow cladded mountains in the distance.

Old Manali market – The Old Manali market has a distinct 70s hippie era vibe about it. It is completely laid back, and has quaint shops selling all kinds of brass and silverware, including ornaments, trinkets and musical instruments. A walk along the Old Manali street is quite an experience, with the strains of music wafting out of the river side pubs and the psychedelic stores around.

Manikaran – This town is also on the must visit list of most visitors, not only for its beauty and its hot springs, but also as an important place of pilgrimage for Hindus and Sikhs. As per Hindu legends goes that if one has a bath in the hot springs here, he has no need to go to Kasha for purification. There is a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, Lord Ram and a Sikh Gurudwara.

### **Jagatsukh**

The village of Jagatsukh used to be the erstwhile capital of Kullu and is famous for its beautiful 8<sup>th</sup> century temples dedicated to Lord Shiva and Sandhya Gayatri. The annual Chacholi Jatra is a famous festival associated with this town replete with fruit orchards and natural beauty. It is the base for expeditions to Deo Tibba and also to treks that go across the ridge towards the Lahaul side. The Pandav Gufa (cave) lies fairly close to the village and is a popular tourist spot.

## **Mandi**

The city of Mandi (formerly known as Mandav Nagar) is the third largest in the state of Himachal Pradesh. It is known as the “Varanasi of the Hills” because it is home to 81 temples as compared to 80 temples that are part of the Varanasi diaspora.

### **A Brief History**

The name Mandi, traces its origin back to the ancient times, where it is said that the Rishi Mandav performed such severe penance in the region that the rocks turned black and the town was named in his honour. The town also served as the traditional marketplace and commercial hub for trade between Tibet and the plains and the name could also be derived from the Hindi word for a market (mandi)

The present day Mandi district is the result of a merger between the two states of Mandi and Suket (Surendranagar)

### **Rohtang Pass**

Rohtang Pass (13,050 feet) is a high altitude pass above Manali that lies on the Pir Panjal range and connects the Kullu valley with Lahaul and Spiti. Due to its unique location, dividing the lush Kullu valley from the rain shadow desert on the other side, it is prone to dramatic weather changes and blizzards causing travelers to get stranded high up, with many losing their lives. These incidents have led to its forbidding name that translates to a “pile of corpses” in the local language!

It is the main highway that connects Himachal to Ladakh and hence it sees a lot of commercial traffic alongwith tourist traffic. This has already led to a considerable effect on the fragile ecosystem and of late the Himachal Pradesh government has limited the number of tourist vehicles allowed upto the pass.

### **Chandratal Lake (Lake of the Moon)**

This is a crescent shaped pristine lake that is the origin of the Chandra river, situated at an altitude of 14,100 feet in the high mountains of Spiti in the Lahaul Spiti valley. It is one of the two high altitude wetlands in India and the area around it looks spectacular during spring time with its profusion of beautiful wildflowers.

The lake by itself is a trekker’s delight, lying in a bowl, surrounded by high altitude snow covered mountains on all sides. In the mornings it looks like a deep blue sapphire, while during the later afternoons and evenings, it changes colour to a deep, soothing emerald green. Camping is not allowed here to protect the lake, however there are camping grounds 2 kms before the lake along the banks of the Chandra river, right under the feet of the towering CB (Chandra-Bhaga)-14 peaks with its huge hanging glacier.

There is a trekking route from here that goes further onto Surya Tal (Sun lake) about 30 Kms away which leads through fantastic rugged terrain and ends up near Baralacha pass on the Leh highway. There is also a route from here (about 5 Kms) that leads to the high altitude Kunzum La Pass.

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