

KUARI PASS TREK

The Kuari Pass trek is also known as The Curzon Trail (named after the former British Viceroy)

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1: Drive from Delhi to Rishikesh (250 Kms, 5 to 7 hrs), Overnight stay in hotel at Rishikesh

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.

Check-in to the hotel and venture out in the evening along the banks of the river Ganga, or enjoy a walk along the Laxman and Ram Jhula, the famous suspension bridges of Rishikesh.

Day 2: Drive from Rishikesh to Joshimath (255 Kms, 7 to 8 hrs), Overnight stay in hotel at Joshimath

We need to start early in the morning for Joshimath since it is a long drive and there can be traffic jams along the route due to the road being narrow. It is a picturesque journey with the lovely blue river Ganga a constant companion on our right. You can see the colourful kayaks and rafts dotting the spectacular white sands.

After a few hours, the road begins ascending sharply and we will encounter the beautiful confluences of the rivers that make the Ganga, with the Alaknanda being the primary arterial river meeting the others at Rudraprayag, Karnaprayag, and Nandaprayag.

We will reach Joshimath by evening and will check into the hotel for a well deserved rest!

Day 3: Drive from Joshimath to Dhak (14 Kms, 30 mins), Trek from Dhak^{2100 mtrs} to Gulling^{2450 mtrs} (8 Kms, 4 to 5 hrs) , Overnight camping

Today we drive in the morning from Joshimath to Dhak village which is 12 kms further, along the Tapovan road. The gradual ascent begins from here along paths that lead through or adjoining terraced farms. As you climb higher, you will see the Kharchi village further ahead, and far below you will see the Dhauli-Ganga river rushing through the valley. We will rest a while, refill our bottles and enjoy the view of the sharp arrowhead shaped Mt. Dunagiri, poking out distinctly in the distance.

The trail passes through the village and then starts ascending up towards the mountain ridge in the distance. Just below the ridge, lies the dense Chitrakantha forest where we will be proceeding to via the potato and apple farms that can be seen dotted in the distance. We will pass a couple of small

villages before we reach the base of the forest from where we will ascend steeply through the oak and rhododendrons. After about half an hour of climbing, we will cross a stream and from there on, it is a short walk to the Gulling campsite where you can see the squat Hathi Parbat (Elephant Mountain) and its companion, the Ghoda Parbat (Horse Mountain) This unusual pairing of peaks is quite a definitive sight along the trek and you can clearly see the distinct profiles of the animals in the shape of the ridge-lines. We halt overnight here and prepare for the next day as we go up higher into the snow-line.

Day 4: Trek from Gulling to Tali/Khullara^{3100mtrs} (6 Kms,3 to 4 hrs), Overnight Camping

Today the trek is short, but involves a few sections of steep hiking. We begin our trek again crossing the stream from yesterday evening, and hiking upwards through the dense oak and rhododendron forest to the ridgeline. This is a steep climb of almost 400 feet which will take you to a shade under 10,000 feet altitude until you come to a clearing with the “gaddi” (shepherd) huts.

After a short break, we continue following the trail into the forest and move upwards to the ridge. Peeking above the ridge, you will catch sight of the snow covered Pangarchulla Peak, which is a trekking peak and shares most of its route with the Kuari pass trek, with the big difference being the bifurcation from the Curzon Trail ridgeline.

We now come across a couple of route options, one is shorter and easier and leads directly to Khullara, while the other bifurcates around Bor Taal and adds another 4 kms to our total distance. If the progress has been quick and all group members agree to it, this is a roundabout worth taking.

After a gradual climb in the beginning that takes you deeper into the forest, the trail will level out and after a short walk of about 45 minutes, you will come across a small temple on the banks of a small pond. This is Bor Taal and is a good spot to take a short break to refresh yourself.

Half an hour of comfortable walking through a largely flat forest trail brings us to the toughest part of our trek today. As you exit the forest, you can see a steep barren slope leading up to a ridge. This is the Tali ridge and you will see the trail switching back and forth up the slope.

About 45 minutes of hard climbing and you are finally at the ridge with a clear view of Nanda Devi and Dunagiri right in front. Our trail leads further up for a short while along the ridge till we reach a level ground. This is the Tali campsite from where you can see the route that goes to Pangarchulla Peak base as also into the forest below. During inclement weather conditions, camp may be pitched in the forest further ahead (in order to have more protection from the elements), in which case you need to go on further into the forest until you come across a stream adjoining large boulders where we would finally setup camp.

Day 5: Trek from Tali/Khullara to Kuari pass^{3640mtrs} and back to Tali(15 Kms, 7 to 8 hrs), Overnight Camping.

We have a fairly long day of trekking in store, most of it through snow, and will have to begin early in the morning. We will be climbing up to the highest point of our trek, the Kuari Pass and will be returning as well. If we have camped in Tali, we will enter Chitrakantha forest below the ridge and then make a gradual ascent all the way up to Chitrakantha Top via the Khullara meadows. As you walk past the meadows, you will gain yet another uninterrupted vista of the mighty Garhwal Himalayas that have been awe-inspiring us virtually every day.

The trail further on, will be through undulating forest terrain that takes you into a birch forest after which it is only about half an hour's climb to reach Chitrakantha Top. From the top, you get a rare 360 degree view of the surrounding Peaks, including the base of the constant companion, Pangarchulla peak. We will now be descending onto a lower ridge line that joins the Curzon Trail that comes from Tapovan. We will be walking along the Curzon Trail until we cross a stream and reach the col (lowest point on a mountain ridge/w 2 peaks) known as Puli Dhar after yet another stiff climb up snow slopes.

From Puli Col, which is the highest point, we descend slightly along the ridge to our destination Kuari Pass, trekking along extensive snowfields. We will break here and enjoy the spectacular views and the solitude that is equally charming in summer as well as winter, before we re-trace our steps and return to camp in the evening. Caution is advised on the return journey, since the snow and ice patches can get slippery and tricky to navigate during the downward descent.

Day 6: Trek from Tali /Khullara to Auli^{2750mtrs}(13 Kms, 5 to 6 hrs), Drive from Auli to Joshimath (15 Kms,30 mins), Overnight stay in hotel at Joshimath

Morning begins with an easy walk down to Tali lake where you can see the fantastic reflection of the mountains bang opposite us. In summer, you could get lucky to find the beautiful and rare cobra lily that grows along the banks of this lake. After a few moments at this mesmerizing lake, we ascend up the Tali ridge, which we will traverse and then move onto the Gorson ridge. This ridge will take you to Gorson top, from where you get a fantastic view of Nanda Devi alongwith all the other Himalayan giants. The ascent up to Gorson Top can be strenuous and if this is to be attempted, it is advisable to leave camp early.

From Gorson Top we come down to Gorson meadows via a narrow trail that clings along the mountain slopes. The Gorson meadows are a popular junction for the gaddis (shepherds) and it is always possible to find a large of sheep meandering along. You are also likely to find patches of hard packed snow along the slopes here which remain away from the sun. Gorson meadows is also a campsite which is the first camp that groups setup when trekking upto Pangarchulla Peak from Auli (this is the other route to Kurai pass as well)

The soft, pastel green meadows are a beautiful sight as they undulate like a carpet reminiscent of Scottish meadows and golf courses. Near the Gorson campsite, there is a small pond and just beyond it on the horizon stand the peaks that have been a constant sentinel all along our route. After traversing the glades of Gorson meadows, we enter a dark forest that leads on towards a small, stone temple from where the trail is clearly defined and descends sharply down past the ITBP obstacle course, to the Auli ski resort ski-lift and finally onto the roadhead. This is where we end our trek still in the presence of the fantastic rugged peaks that surround Auli.

The drive down from Auli to Joshimath will take about 15-20 mins and we will check into a hotel for the night.

Day 7: Drive from Joshimath to Haridwar(275 Kms, 7 to 8 hrs), Overnight stay in hotel at Haridwar

The drive from Joshimath to Haridwar is pretty long and follows the gushing Alaknanda far below on the right hand side. Watch out for the fantastic views of the river confluences at Rudraprayag, Devprayag and Karnaprayag. While the journey is beautiful, it is also quite a thrilling drive, with the narrow roads and the deep gorges along one side.

Near Rishikesh, you will see a number of adventure operators offering kayaking and river rafting and you can see resorts and rafting camps on the white river sands. The road from Rishikesh to Haridwar is pretty straight forward and we will make quick time along it. We should be able to reach by around late evening.

Day 8: Drive from Haridwar to New Delhi(215 Kms,5 to 6 hrs)

The drive from Haridwar 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.