

RUPIN PASS TREK

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1: Drive from Delhi to Dehradun (248 Kms, 5 to 6 hrs), Overnight stay in hotel at Dehradun

Assemble in Delhi where our luxury vehicle will pick you up and we will proceed from here to Dehradun. The drive is largely uneventful and passes along Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Deoband (where you can see rows of poplar tree plantations), Saharanpur and then finally onto Dehradun. We will be halting for the night here and will move on to Dhaula in the morning.

Day 2: Drive from Dehradun to Dhaula^{1675mtrs}(195 Kms, 8 to 9 hrs), Overnight stay in hotel at Dhaula

Early in the morning, we will have breakfast and move on up the road to Dhaula, which at approximately 5,500 feet, is the starting point of our trek. There are a couple of routes to get to Dhaula, the fastest of which goes right after Sahaspur, parallel to the Yamuna river until it takes a left from just before Lakhwar to join National highway 123. The other route is to go up to Mussoorie and drive on past Kempty Falls until you reach the same Lakhwar junction and then carry on driving ahead. The second route is a steeper climb, although it is definitely more scenic and is usually preferred.

The highway carries on following the route of the Tons river (that forms the Yamuna below) past forested foothills and scenic villages of which Purola is the biggest village before Mori, which is where we turn right. From here, the forest starts getting dense with the stately pines making their presence felt. It is not long before we reach Netwar, where you can alight and explore its unique history. Netwar is probably the only region in India where Duryodhan of the Kauravas is worshipped and it is home to interesting ancient carved temples that have him as their presiding deity! What is also a worth visit is the temple dedicated to one of the most unique characters in the Mahabharat—the Shalya king Karna. After this mini break, we get back in and carry on through the rolling pines and finally reach Dhaula where we can see Rupin Gad, the start point of our trek. We halt tonight at Dhaula and get ready for what will be some unforgettable days ahead!

Day 3: Trek from Dhaula to Sewa^{2050mtrs}(10 kms, 4 to 4.5 hrs), Overnight camping

We begin our trek in the morning out of Dhaula. The trail is quite easy and very enjoyable (in the beginning) as the gradient is fairly easy and it also flattens out after about a half hour of walking to give a panoramic view of the Rupin river and the valley below. Shortly after we begin climbing a steep track, the river disappears from view only to be visible spectacularly in a deep gorge from where the climb ends and the track, levels off. A short distance ahead lies the village of Sewa that falls under the state of Himachal Pradesh, but is separated from it by the high Dhauladhars, some of which we would be crossing over.

One interesting little snippet here...if possible, do visit the temple in Sewa. It is a complete departure from the usual temples you would have seen in Garhwal, since it is built in the traditional Kinnauri style that is reminiscent of the Kamru fort in Sangla. We will be camping in the open ground tonight with the deep gorge on one side and the rocky mountainside on the other (Quite an adventurous end to day one)

Day 4: Trek from Sewa to Jakha^{2650mtrs} (14 Kms, 5 to 6 hrs), Overnight camping

The trek today is going to be quite difficult as it involves a number of steep sectors. The physical effort begins right at the beginning as you climb up steep slopes and landslides to finally meet up with a rocky trail that surprisingly leads onto a road head after crossing a wonder bridge that demarcates Himachal Pradesh from Uttarakhand. This is Gosangu and the road here comes down from Rohru (the alternate mentioned at the start) and then onto Shimla. It is a long haul from here by road but this is the last chance for those unfit or unsure to be able to quit the trek.

We will be moving on further along the road from here, enjoying the open valley views for about an hour, until we come to a narrow track that winds up steeply in a series of switchbacks along the right bank. This is an extremely strenuous and risky path with it going nearly vertical upwards, with one side completely exposed to the deep gorge below! It is important to take it slow and easy and follow the instructions of the trek leader, as any error here could lead to disaster.

After about an hour of tense and tough climbing, the path finally levels off and eases into a village where everyone can take a break and relax for a while. This is the location where you get your first glimpse of the snow mountains ahead and it's a sight that rejuvenates tired limbs and gets everyone excited to carry on to the next phase.

The trail from here on is of a medium grade and much easier, which helps revive everyone's spirits. The next halt on our trek is the small village of Jiskun that also has a Himachali post box! The stony trail leads through the village and across a bridge that spans a stream that gushes down to join the Rupin far below. It is advisable to refill water bottles and take a nice long drink here since the next couple of hours are another tough haul.

The trail now goes up unrelentingly, along a rock face, offering tantalizing glimpses of the Jhaka village in the distance perched precariously amid the mountain side. The trail by itself is fairly well laid but the unceasing slope really tests your limits. After a couple of hours, we finally end up at Jhaka, which surprisingly has a few hours of electricity everyday and also has a few pockets of mobile connectivity! The main produce here is the delicious Kinnauri apples which (if the season is right) can be purchased at a steal!

We finally end the day here and take a nice long break to rest our aching bodies.

Day 5: Trek from Jhaka to Suruwas Thatch^{3400mtrs} (7 Kms,4 to 5 hrs), Overnight camping.

Today's trek is easier than yesterday and will be that much more enjoyable after a nice rest from last night. Please make sure to go slow and enjoy the scenery, since the trek will go beyond 11,000 feet today, which will cause some discomfort and care has to be taken to ensure you go slow, enjoy the scenery and keep yourself well hydrated to help acclimatization.

The trail begins ascending but after only about half an hour, Jhaka seems far below while a tall forest canopy of fir and maple greets us spectacularly ahead. Just before you plunge into the dense forest, you get a view of the river far below and the snow capped mountains with myriad patches of snow along their flanks.

A short walk and you are into the fir forest that is speckled with the odd maple. The trees soar majestically into the air and shroud the entire forest in darkness. After about half an hour of gentle descent, you come across a large snow bridge that is about a hundred feet long and across, spanning the stream. The thickness and the colour of the snow bridge will depend on the time of the year. As it gets warmer during summer, the snow will begin melting and make the bridge slushy and give it a muddy appearance, as also makes it thinner and less spectacular. Crossing this snow bridge leads you onto a short hillock on the other side, from where you can see that we have now crossed to the other side of the river. A few minutes later, we will reach the river bank from where it is some hopping along boulders next, as we follow the course further.

From here on, for the next 2-3 hours you will move along the river bed, crossing rivulets and boulders until you reach a grassy patch that you need to ascend. It is here that you can see the river turning sharply to the right, making a marked horseshoe shape to the valley, and carrying on in the distance till the waterfall high up, without deviation. This sharp U bend is visible when viewed from the top of the waterfall where we would be reaching in a couple of days.

Walk along for approximately another half an hour, crossing a number of streams and marveling at a few small waterfalls flowing down the steep rock faces on both sides. You will now see the final slope beyond which will be our destination, the campsite of Suruwas Thach. This is where we camp for the night. For those more adventurous, you can trek up the slope about half an hour further ahead to be able to spot the mesmerizing Rupin waterfall in the far distance.

Day 6: Trek from Suruwas to Dhanderas Thatch/Lower waterfall camp^{3550 mtrs} (6 Kms, 4 to 5 hrs), Overnight camping

Today we will be enjoying an absolutely beautiful trek through the alpine valley reminiscent of some of the most beautiful in Europe. From Suruwas Thatch, the path continues following the river towards Dhanderas Thatch (also known as the lower waterfall camp). Watch out for the appearance of the interesting Bhoj (silver birch) trees. You can identify them by their bark that looks like layers of parchment! And in fact, parchment they are! It is believed that the Ramayana was written on parchment made from the Bhojpatra, and you yourself can peel off a few layers and marvel at their durability.

As you keep moving along, you will come across at least three more snow bridges that you will cross and navigate across the constant streams and rivulets.

Another interesting thing to watch out for if you are in the early season is the presence of herds of sheep. Owing to the harsh winter in Kinnaur, the shepherds march entire herds down till Sewa for grazing and as summer comes along, they can be seen snaking away up the same trek route we were moving along. It is quite an amazing sight if you do get lucky!

Finally, we come in sight of the beautiful green meadows of Dhanderas Thatch, criss crossed by numerous streams that make up the Rupin. It is truly breathtaking to see the huge snow capped mountain right in front of you, capping off the valley, with its snow patches and the incredible Rupin waterfall cascading from the rocks high above.

Important! Try to walk slowly onto higher ground around the camp in order to acclimatize better, since we will now be moving onto higher altitudes where acclimatization can mean the difference between enjoying the trek and just going through the motions. Make sure you are well hydrated and have a good night's sleep.

Day 7: Trek from Dhanderas to Rati Pheri/Upper waterfall camp^{4000 mtrs} (4 Kms, 2.5 to 3 hrs) overnight Camping

The trek today is short but is extremely demanding for a number of reasons. To start off you will be reaching an altitude that can get distinctly uncomfortable and can cause mild AMS such as nausea or headaches if you have not acclimatized properly. Add to it the fact that this will be a steep ascent through hard packed snow that requires concentration and technique to avoid slipping and dragging the team with you.

After a kilometer of comparatively easy hiking to reach the base of the climb, we will begin the ascent up the right side and then cross over to the left across the snow bridge below the waterfall. Please trek up carefully using your ice axe and focus on the snow walking techniques that have been explained. Make sure to step sideways into the grooves cut by the trek leader so that you gain more purchase. After a while of hard work moving through the snow you will reach the massive snow bridge under which the Rupin waterfall disappears. This is quite a fantastic sight to behold and well worth resting and taking in the splendor.

You will then cross this snow bridge onto the other side, where you will walk further up through the snow as if stepping on rock and snow ledges until you come to a meadow that lies above the waterfall. This is where we will be making our Upper Waterfall camp (or Rati Pheri) for the night. From here you can see the entire valley stretching away below you and will be amazed to see how much height you have gained. Behind your back, you will see the top of the ridge that is the lip of Rupin Pass where we will be moving to tomorrow.

Once again, make sure to take in a lot of fluids and to get enough rest tonight as we will be moving onto our highest altitude tomorrow, coupled with an 11-12 hour long trek!

Day 8: Trek from Rati Pheri to Rupin Pass^{4650 mtrs} and then descend to Ronti Gad^{4100 mtrs}(12 kms,10 to 11 hrs, Overnight camping at Alpine Camps

The day will begin very early, around 3 am or 4 am since today will be a long, excruciating 11-12 hour long hike till the Rupin Pass and then over and beyond it to the Ronti Gad campsite. The climb will begin as a series of continuing ascents ploughing through long, unending snow fields in all directions. Please make sure to take it slow and follow the snow walking technique as was demonstrated by the trek leaders yesterday. After a slow plod through the glistening snow (if you are lucky to have a full moon night) you finally arrive at a canyon like rock gully that leads to the top of the pass. This is quite unique as you experience walking through a canyon when you least expect it, having your movements echo back at you, bouncing off the walls.

Finally we reach the top of the windy pass where you can see multi-coloured prayer flags that mark the Rupin ridge. The view here is stunning with the snow fields behind us and the Ronti Gad campsite far below us amid the green meadows framed by the spectacular Kinner Kailash standing majestically in the distance.

After a small break to take in the beauty, we now go down the steep descent, plunging through almost knee deep snow for most of the way, until we reach Ronti Gad, the bright green meadow we saw from the top of the ridge. This is quite a tricky descent and it is advised to exercise caution here, as most mistakes happen coming downhill. Finally after an arduous 11-12 hours of virtually nonstop trudging, it is a huge relief to kick off the shoes and rest the tired body in the warm and cozy sleeping bags. The trek is virtually at its end with just a final easy descent left for tomorrow.

Day 9: Trek from Ronti Gad to Sangla^{2700 mts}(12 Kms,5 to 6 hrs)

The trek from Ronti Gad begins with a steep descent till Sangla Kanda. We round a bend in the trail here and this is where the Kinner Kailash absolutely dominates the sky. As you look back, you can also see the Rupin Pass and marvel at the completely different topography of the two sides of the pass. The Kinnaur side is lush green and smooth while the Rupin side has a stark, rugged, boulder strewn beauty that is a contrast.

After a further 3 hours of walking through meadows and crossing terraced farms and orchards, we finally reach the banks of the Blue-green Baspa river that flows through Sangla. Cross the bridge and walk upwards for a short while, and we are finally at the motorable road that passes through Sangla. Tonight, we will be halting here and celebrating the end of a tough trek!

Day 10: Drive from Sangla to Chandigarh (330 Kms, 8 to 9 hrs)

Today we begin our drive back to the plains. The road out of Sangla leads along a dusty track that is fringed by rock crags on both sides while the Baspa river flows below on the left. The road will join the highway coming down from Kalpa on the right, while we take a left turn here and proceed

along forward towards Shimla via Rampur, Narkanda and Kufri. At this turn, you will come across the massive dam constructed by the Jaypee group that is a marvel of technology, where they have diverted the flow of the Sutlej river itself to make it possible.

The road will then start descending as it parallels the Sutlej river, and the terrain will now be a lush green tree cover with apple orchards higher up the slopes. To the right in the far distance, you will be able to see the snow capped mountain ranges as you climb up to Kufri. From Kufri it is again a descent that leads to Shimla, from where it is a straight and uneventful drive down to Chandigarh.

Day 11: Drive from Chandigarh to New Delhi (250 Kms, 4 to 5 hrs)

Chandigarh to New Delhi is a flat fast drive through the plains via Ambala, Krukshehra and Panipat, to finally reach Delhi in pretty quick time.

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