

CHANDRATAL- BARALACHA LA TREK

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1: Drive from Delhi to Chandigarh (250 Kms, 4 to 5 hrs), Overnight stay in hotel at Chandigarh

The very first day of what we are sure will be a memorable trip, starts with a round of introductions, after which we get into our vehicles for the drive from Delhi to Chandigarh. This is a pretty straightforward stretch, with the road being the usual city highway and we should be in Chandigarh by evening. If we reach early, it's worth spending some time at the Nek Chand Rock Garden and later soaking in the night ambience of Sector 17. Tomorrow we will head into the hills and stay overnight at Manali.

Day 2: Drive from Chandigarh to Manali (310 Kms, 7 to 9 hrs), Overnight stay in hotel at Manali

The drive from Chandigarh to Manali is a long one that is flat in the beginning, but after a while it starts climbing up into the hills in a series of wide, sweeping turns and switchbacks. Once you reach Mandi, you can sense the beginning of the mountains with the River Beas rushing below the edge of the road and the turns ascending up along the jagged rock cliffs to the right. We will reach Manali by early evening (or late afternoon) and you can spend the time seeing the sights of the town, if you feel up to it or you could just walk down to the market and have an early dinner.

Day 3: Drive from Manali to Batal^{3900mtrs} (114 Kms, 3 to 4 hrs), Start trek to Chandratal^{4270mtrs} (16 Kms, 6 to 7 hrs) (This distance can be travel by vehicle also), Overnight camping at Chandratal

We drive up from Manali early in the morning to reach Batal as soon as possible. The road winds upwards, running parallel to the Beas for a while before it starts climbing towards the Rohtang Pass. The vista opens out as we get higher with lush green mountain sides dotted with dark pines and wisps of clouds swirling lazily through them. We will come across a thick glacial patch just a short while before we reach Rohtang Pass. The Pass is the highest point on the ridge and connects the valleys of Spiti, Lahaul and Kullu. On the other side of the pass, the difference of vegetation is obvious as we get lower with trees starting to thin out as the lofty snow peaks frame the dusty moonscape that we see far ahead in the distance on either side of the Chandra river that traces a deep gorge below. The road continues to go lower along switchbacks and the vegetation gets sparse as we go along.

While on our journey down from Rohtang pass, we will come across a couple of typically tricky sectors where the road always gets washed away due to the force of the gushing glacial streams crossing the road as they fall down the mountain side. These streams move with considerable force later in the day. Thus the chances of a vehicle getting stuck between the rocks while trying to pass through increases as the sun gets higher in the sky due to the ice melt rate speeding up. If we are unfortunate to be stuck behind any vehicle that gets stuck at such a sector, the resulting traffic pile up on either side can cause unforeseen delays. Another notorious sector is about 10 kms before Batal along the

banks of the Chandra river where the stream is larger than the first instance that occurs about an hour after crossing Rohtang and just before Chhatru. It is a good thing though that we get down and wade in here as it gives us time to admire the spectacle of the stunning and massive Bara Shigri glacier on our right that comes down in an intimidating ice fall all the way from the peaks till almost to the river bank.

After braving the rough drive through the rocks, undulating roads and wading through the freezing glacial streams, we finally arrive at the campsite of Batal, a green patch surrounded by towering mountains on all sides with the turbulent Chandra river flowing along the valley. Batal is a fantastic campsite with vast fields of multicoloured stones and pebbles surrounding a small meadowland of bright yellow flowers with a glacial stream running through it.

While the distance between Manali and Chandratol can indeed be driven, it is much more exciting to experience the terrain while hiking it out. However, it is possible that we might have to drive if we get delayed arriving at Batal.

If we reach Batal by afternoon, we can quickly settle in, have lunch and begin our trek to Chandratol. Batal is at a fairly high altitude and is windy, chilly and dry, so there is a possibility of some members feeling the effects of mild AMS. All members are advised to carry bottles of water and walk very slowly with minimal effort, in order to avoid aggravating the AMS effects. While those with AMS could go to the lake via a vehicle, we would recommend trying to hike it slowly till the lake since the trek to Baralacha after Chandratol is going to take us to higher altitudes and it will be very difficult to acclimatize later.

The trek begins from the Batal campsite and crosses over the bridge, past Chacha ka Dhaba and the small temple. On the right you will be able to see the steep peak of Papsura rising steeply into the sky, flanked by its cousin Dharamsura and a whole host of spectacular peaks of the CB(Chandra Bhaga) range. The walk is along the road that leads on towards Kunzum La and into Kaza further on, but we will take the road going left at the fork about 2.5 kms ahead. The route has slight ascents and descents but is largely level with an overall gradual descent till we reach the level of the river. The panorama is truly breathtaking with the rare vehicle passing by, while the surrounding feels like a huge painting, with the river Chandra making wide channels below interspersed with mud islands. To our right and left stand lofty snow peaks with flanks covered in yellow wildflowers and bright green grass.

After a few hours of walking we will come across a wide gushing glacial stream as the road takes a left. This is when we know the lake is not far away. After a couple of kms as we turn along with the road, we can see probably the most majestic of the CB peaks – the CB 14 with its gigantic hanging glacier to our left and a series of camps on a bright green meadow that leads down to the river. This will be our camp for the night. The actual lake lies another 1-2 kms ahead just beyond the hill that lies behind the camp. We will unload our things here and then rush to get a glimpse of the incredible lake.

The climb up the hill is much tougher than it looks owing to the high altitude and we walk through the beautiful green grass and flowers. Once we cross the lip of the rise, we need to walk on a bit further along a trail before we finally sight the elusive moon lake, looking like a sapphire dropped miraculously into the middle of brown/grey barren peaks. An incredible feature of the lake is its beautiful, soft white sand beach and the colour of the water that changes throughout the day.

(Please be careful not to venture out into the lake as it is said to be quite deep and dangerous, especially for non swimmers)

After a quick visit to the lake shores, we will walk back to the camp, and watch the brilliant star studded night sky.

Day 4: Trek from Chandratol to Tokpo Yongma^{4420mtrs}(13 Kms, 5 to 6 hrs), Overnight camping at Tokpo Yongma.

Today we will begin early in the morning back up to the lake to spend some time at the lake and appreciate the beautiful sunrise and the incredible blue colour of the lake that will be a new shade of from what we saw yesterday evening! After spending some time here, we will go back to the campsite, have breakfast and then begin our trek.

The path by itself is pretty simple and we will constantly be keeping company with the barren snow covered peaks on both sides as we walk along the true left bank of the river climbing and skirting past the boulders enroute. We will need to take off our boots and cross the stream a few times and also move to the other side of the river which is where our camp will be. Please note that the river is fairly deep and as the day wears on, it gets deeper and rougher, so caution is advised while crossing it.

It is also very important to walk slowly and stay hydrated since we will be ascending today. Luckily the ascent is not too difficult giving us ample time to take in the sheer size and scale of the mountains in the Lahaul Spiti region.

After 5-6 hours, we will finally end up at the camp site of Tokpo Yongma. The campsite as such is pretty similar to the terrain around except for the breathtaking views of the Mulkillia range of peaks. These peaks are a cluster of fantastically shaped spires that seem to have forcibly thrust out of the ground like needles. They are technical in nature and notoriously difficult to climb and include in their midst, a number of virgin peaks.

Day 5: Trek from Tokpo Yongma to Tokpo Gongma^{4650mtrs}(9 Kms, 4 to 5 hrs), Overnight camping at Gongma.

Today we need to leave as early as possible, even at 5-6 am if all members can make it, simply because there are 2 stream crossings of which the 2nd isn't exactly a stream, it is a wide river! As has been said before, it is always much easier to cross in the mornings, hence it will help if we can begin our day quickly in order to avoid any possibility of mishap or injury later.

The first stream crossing is reasonably easy after which it is back to the usual rocky terrain with the magnificent moonscape all around. As we come to the second crossing, you will see that this is a river

and is quite tricky to cross. The usual route is across a snow/ice bridge that is a bit further along the obvious crossing point. This snow bridge also needs to be crossed carefully, watching out for any cracks and taking care over the slippery ice.

Once we are on the other side, we need to walk along by the side as soon as possible to avoid rock falls which increase as the temperature gets hotter. Once this sector is passed, it is a fairly level walk for a while before the final steep ascent traversing a tricky scree slope which finally brings us to the beautiful campsite with its stretch of grass and wildflowers that feels like an oasis in the middle of the cold desert! We will camp here for the night, but participants who are not too tired may attempt to walk up the sides of the mountains fringing the campsite in order to acclimatize as well as to look for fantastic panoramas of the beautiful peaks that is a rare view since this trek is not one of the popular treks that people undertake, which is unfortunate.

Day 6: Trek from Tokpo Gongma to Baralacha La^{4950mtrs}(12 Kms, 5 to 6 hrs), Drive to Manali via Rohtang pass(199 Kms, 6 to 7 hrs), Overnight stay in hotel at Manali

We will again need to wake up very early in the morning since we have a long day ahead of us with a fairly long drive to Manali coming up. The walk by itself is not very difficult with gradual ascents and a few gentle descents until we again have to cross a stream where we will again wade through. On the other side, the walk is again fairly easy with only a couple more smallish streams enroute.

The most amazing thing about the trek today is the spectacular views that surround us. We are literally on a high plateau in the middle of the Great Himalayan ranges, surrounded by a huge array of peaks in every direction. We will make the final climb up to Baralacha La and enjoy the magnificent vista one final time before we get into the vehicle that will take us back to Manali over the Rohtang Pass. While on our way back, we will stop for a while just after Baralacha Pass and walk down to Suraj Tal that is another fantastic high altitude lake similar to Chandra Tal, except that it is a bit larger and oval in shape. The glaciers here are the source of the river Bhaga that joins the Chandra river later to form the Chenab river.

If we reach Manali early, we can either try to visit the Bashisht hot springs or the Naggar Palace before we check into our hotel.

Day 7: Drive from Manali to Chandigarh (310 Kms, 7 to 8 hrs), Overnight stay in hotel at Chandigarh

Today early morning, we will need to get refreshed and packed for the long drive to Chandigarh. This is a fairly easy drive with the only tricky sector being the winding roads from Mandi to Chandigarh. We will halt at Chandigarh tonight and explore the famous landmarks around the city such as the Nek Chand Rock Garden or the Secretariat, and end the evening with a leisurely stroll along Sector 17.

Day 8: Drive from Chandigarh to Delhi (250 Kms, 4 to 5 hrs)

The drive from Chandigarh to Delhi is straightforward and should have us safely at the capital city in 4-5 hours.