



THRILLS and chills

THE BLOOD GOES RUSHING TO YOUR HEAD WHEN THE COLD RIVER WATER HITS YOU HARD IN THE FACE — NO ADVENTURE GIVES YOU A FASTER HIGH THAN RAFTING!

Rafting has seen unprecedented growth in India over the past decade. The old and the young, the 'reserved' and the 'boisterous' are all out tasting the highs and lows of daredevilry in 'do-able' rivers across the country. There are times when you are paddling furiously to counter the rapids, and times when the raft floats lazily down the river allowing you to savour the scenery. You can go rafting even if you don't know how to swim. And if you are unfortunate enough to get a freeze-moment dunking in the river, let it find a place in the annals of your adventure diary.

The stunning topography of India's vast and varied terrains is marked by both gentle and tempestuous waterways making it a highly popular destination for the world's rafters. Depending on your budget, you'll discover an array of arrangements for on-site comforts ranging from basic to luxury tents with attached bathrooms, and even gourmet meals. Kayaking and canoeing, trekking, rock climbing and rappelling and local community visits can be a part of the package.

Uttarakhand and Himachal's snow-fed rivers offer rafters some of the most nerve-tingling, adrenaline-pumping moments in time. The white water rapids of the Bhagarathi which emanates from the Gangotri glacier on Mt Trishul's northern slopes at Gaumukh, and the Alaknada that come together at Devprayag to become the Ganga, are first preference rafting stretches by the many privately-run adventure camps along the banks around Shivpuri and Kaudiyala, 19 km and 40 km respectively from Rishikesh.

The government-run Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam (GMVN) operates a rafting camp that also offers coaching in river rafting and water-skiing. Rudraprayag, Tehri, Srinagar and Kaudiyala are some of the popular start-up points in the Garhwal hills. The Tons river, a tributary of the Yamuna in the Garhwal hills, is another popular river run, with a series of Class 3-4+ rapids. Reputed operators include Delhi-based Snow Leopard, Aquaterra and Himalayan River Runners, and the Bengaluru-based Southern River Adventures firm.

A nice option for amateurs is the Barkot to Bernigad, and again the Damta to Yamuna Bridge stretch on the Yamuna river. You can get in touch with the Snow Lion Resort (Mob: 9810076770, 9810219677) at Kalsi near Dehradun for details. In Kumaon, experienced rafters will get thrilled at the sight of the turbulent River

<< **FLOWING WITH THE RIVER:** A team of rafters tackles the Golf Course rapid in the Ganga

FACT FILE

GRADING OF RIVER RAPIDS

Grade I: Easy, Tiny waves. No obstacles along the way.

Grade II: Moderate amount of difficulty, clear passage

Grade III: Difficult, high irregular waves, narrow passages, precise maneuverings needed

Grade IV: Very Difficult, the waves are powerful, very precise maneuverings

Grade V: Extremely tough, long and violent, highly congested-for experts only

Grade VI: Suicidal

OPERATORS

Garhwal Mandal Vikas

Nigam Yatra, Office Shail Vihar, Haridwar Bypass Road, Rishikesh, Uttarakhand.

Tel: 0135 2431793/83,
www.gmvnl.com

Aquaterra Adventures, Delhi

Tel: 011 41636101,
www.treknraft.com
Camp Silver Sands is 27 km from Rishikesh. Contact them for rafting in the Brahmaputra.

Snow Leopard Adventures, Delhi

Tel: 011 26122775,
www.snowleopardadventures.com
They offer Leopard Beach Tented Camp at Shivpuri.

Himalayan River Runners

Tel: 011 26852602,
www.hrrindia.com
Their campsite is 17 km from Rishikesh.

Nature Admire, Bengaluru

Mob: 9611647900

Southern River Adventures, Bengaluru

Tel: 080 41531326,
www.southernriveradventures.com



<< **TONS OF THRILLS:** (Left and bottom) A group tests its endurance in the Chookha rapid in the Kali river; meandering down the curves and bends of the Upper Tons

Mahakali that enters Kumaon from neighbouring Nepal. About 68 km from Pithoragarh, the river merges with the Gori river at Jauljivi. Expect Grade IV rapids all the way (100 km) to Tanakpur, before it gets gentle downstream. In recent years, amateurs have been thrilling to the highs and lows of the surly Sutlej around Shimla. Get in touch with The Chalets at Naldehra (Tel: 0177 2747715) for details. Season: September-November, and March-May.

In Arunachal, the splendour of India's northeastern landscape can be enjoyed from a run along the mercurial Brahmaputra. The Kameng river (set in the terrains of East Kameng district) has also been opened up to white water thrills quite recently. You can contact Aquaterra and Himalayan River Runners for details.

In Sikkim, rafters have discovered the magic of the Rangeet and Teesta rivers. In Sikkim, and West Bengal's Doars region, the Teesta's rapids, ranging between Class 1-3, offer you enough moments of reflection to enjoy the dramatic scenery of the gorge through which the river passes. Sikkim Tourism's adventure wing offers several rafting packages from October-November.

In Ladakh's remote Zaskar region, the forbidding white water rapids of the Zaskar river have been attracting scores of rafters from around the world. Those looking for a less-scary experience, try a gentle trip along the Indus river near Leh. Contact Himalayan River Runners and Aquaterra for details.

Down south, in Karnataka, the Cauvery river at Bheemeshwari, a big hit with mahseer anglers, offers some good rafting experience, as does the nine to fourteen-kilometre stretch of the Kali river, with its Class 3 rapids, at Dandeli. In the Coorg region, there's the enticement of running the upper Barapole river tumbling down the eastern flanks of the Brahmagiri Ghats. Expect rapids upto Class 3-5. Forget about running the tempestuous river once it roars into the Brahmagiri Wildlife Sanctuary by plunging down from a height of 120 ft – what a water fall! Rafting options – two hours from June to October, and one to two-day trips from September to November when the waters are safe and manageable. Speak to Southern River Adventures for details.

The Sita river near Udipi – the largesse of the southwest monsoon in July in the Konkan belt of the Western Ghats – draws rafters to the upper Ulhas river near Karjat, and the Kundalika river near Roha in Maharashtra. ■



TERRAIN tasting

MOUNTAIN RANGES AND HILLS ALL OVER INDIA OFFER A MULTITUDE OF TERRAINS,
AND AN OPPORTUNITY TO SAVOUR THE AREA'S CULTURAL DIVERSITY

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rekking in India is all about savouring a banquet of nature, culture and adventure over multiple terrains; we are one of the world's most popular trekking destinations. Most of the favoured routes are found in Jammu & Kashmir, Leh-Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and the Darjeeling hills, fragments of the North-east, Karnataka, the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu, Kerala's Wayanad region, and the Sahayadri range in Maharashtra.

Sikkim, India's hottest ecotourism destination, has opened up 10 designated treks, including the Pema-Ralan, Nayabazar-Soreng, Yuksom-Rahtong Glacier and the Rumtek-Yuksom treks. In the Darjeeling hills, the Maneybhanjan-Sandakhphu trek offers visits to the picturesque Lava and Lolegaon villages around Kalimpong.

Some of the most popular areas in Ladakh are areas around Leh, the Hemis National Park, Nubra Valley and the Zaskar region. Also, the Spiti Valley, tribal Kinnaur - the Sangla valley, Kalpa, and Rupin-Bhaba Sanctuary are favoured routes.

In the Garhwal Himalayas, the Tapovan trek marks the route to the Gangotri region. Tread the routes to Har Ki Dun, Roop Kund, Valley of Flowers, Dodital, and Muniyari-Milam glacier treks. In Himachal, the Pin-Parvati Valley area, and Naggar-Malana are favourites.

The game park areas such as Bandipur, Kabini and Nagarhole and Kudremukh, the Malnad region with its hills around Chikmagalur and Kemmangundi, Shimoga and Coorg are top favourites in Karnataka. South of Coorg, head to north Kerala's Wayanad district. Top highs - the trek to Chembra Peak (14 km) the highest point in Wayanad, and a stiff trek to the Eddakal Caves with their prehistoric carvings in the Ambukuthy range, from Sultan Battery ■

<< **ENCHANTING ROUTES:** A group crossing a river in Ladakh - river crossing is a part of the trekking adventure

FACT FILE

OPERATORS

Ibex Expeditions
Tel: 011 26912641/7829,
www.ibexexpeditions.com

Dreamland Trek & Tour
Tel: 01982 257784, Mob:
9419178197,
www.dreamladakh.com

TOP TREKS

Valley of Flowers: Located in the sacred environs of the Nanda Devi National Park in Garhwal Himalayas

Zaskar Chadar: Even in fierce winter, you will find dedicated trekkers drawn by that once-in-a-lifetime experience - the Chadar.