

VOL. 1 · NO. 5 · MAY 2026

WAYFARER

One Planet. Endless Journeys.

Ladakh's high season: how to climb slowly

- KHANGCHENDZONGA: SIKKIM'S SACRED MOUNTAIN
- SPITI: A VALLEY OF MONASTERIES AND HOMESTAYS
- GORILLA COUNTRY: RWANDA'S VOLCANO FORESTS
- THE ALTITUDE SAFETY CHECKLIST

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EDITOR'S DISPATCH

Mountains Calling

A note from the editor

Mountains have a way of rearranging a traveller's priorities. A schedule that looks sensible at sea level meets a thin-aired reality at 3,500 metres, and the people who are best at planning for it are usually the ones who live there.

That is why so much of this issue is about the quiet, practical things: sleeping low and climbing high, resting on arrival, listening to guides, and buying from the families who run homestays. Four of our People & Places pages are about people who have built livelihoods around guests in the mountains, and they have a good deal to teach those of us who arrive with a camera.

A note on the mountains themselves. Khangchendzonga is sacred in Sikkim, and it is only polite to treat it that way. The same goes for monasteries, prayer walls and the villages below. We have tried to say plainly where rules, permits and road openings are uncertain, because in May, in the Himalaya, they usually are.

Write to us about the highest place you have been. We would like to hear how you got there, and how you felt on the way down.

Write to us about the highest place you have been.

EDITOR'S DISPATCH

- Gitanjali Gautam

May is when the high passes begin to open and the high-altitude calendar starts to turn. This issue climbs slowly: Ladakh's monastery country, Sikkim's sacred peak, the Spiti valley, Nepal's quieter trails, the Dolomites and the volcano forests of Rwanda. Along the way it meets the people who make mountains welcoming, and asks how to arrive without leaving a mark.

DID YOU KNOW

The Himalayan Homestay Programme in Ladakh began in Rumbak in 2003 on the suggestion of the village's women.

DID YOU KNOW

Leh sits at about 3,500 metres; a flight from Delhi takes a little over an hour.

DID YOU KNOW

Khangchendzonga National Park was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2016.

DID YOU KNOW

The Dolomites were inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009.

DID YOU KNOW

Spiti's tourism season runs from roughly mid-May to mid-October.

DID YOU KNOW

Julley is the Ladakhi word for hello, goodbye and thank you.

TRAVEL TIP

Sleep low, climb high: a day trip to a high point is safer than sleeping there.

TRAVEL TIP

Walk clockwise around stupas and prayer wheels, and ask before photographing monks.

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.

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FROM THE RUMBAK HOMESTAYS PROFILE

Masthead

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How to read Wayfarer

RESEARCHED	Compiled from public sources; field verification pending.
PROPOSED	A commission, brief or concept - not a published story.
ILLUSTRATIVE	An example itinerary; check times and costs locally.
TEMPLATE	A format showing how offers appear; no real prices.

PLAN FOR WEATHER

High-pass opening dates change every year; keep a spare day or two.

TRAVEL TIP

Carry a refillable bottle; water is scarce and plastic lingers in the mountains.

Write to us about the highest place you have been.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DISPATCH



Photo: Sharada Prasad CS from Berkeley, India · CC BY 2.0

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.



COVER STORY

Ladakh's high season: how to climb slowly

Leh sits at about 3,500 metres, and the best trips begin with doing very little. A guide to arriving well, moving up gradually and travelling with the place rather than at it.

RESEARCHED · VERIFY PERMITS AND ROAD OPENINGS BEFORE TRAVEL

Photo: Bernard Gagnon · CC BY-SA 4.0

A FLIGHT FROM DELHI to Leh takes a little over an hour and lifts you from the plains to about 3,500 metres. That is the whole story of why Ladakh catches visitors out. The scenery arrives quickly, and the body has no time to adjust. The most important planning decision for a Ladakh trip is not where to go but how slowly to begin.

The standard advice, widely repeated by mountain medicine organisations and local doctors, is to rest on the day of arrival, to avoid alcohol and heavy exercise for the first day or two, to drink plenty of water, and to increase the altitude at which you sleep gradually, by a few hundred metres a day once you are above about 3,000 metres. Anyone who develops a severe headache, confusion, breathlessness at rest or trouble walking in a straight line should descend and seek medical help. See our Altitude Safety Checklist in this issue for a fuller list, and talk to your doctor before you travel.

A sensible itinerary builds on that logic. Spend the first days in and around Leh, with a gentle walk through the old town and a visit to a nearby monastery. Then drop to lower ground, such as the Sham valley, where villages sit at around 3,000 metres and the walks are easy. Only after that, with the body settled, head to the high places: the Nubra valley over the Khardung La, which reaches a little over 5,300 metres, and Pangong Tso, at about 4,300 metres. Staying overnight at the lake is a decision to make with a guide and a doctor's advice, not an Instagram plan.

Many visitors dream of the road in. The Manali to Leh and Srinagar to Leh highways are seasonal, and their opening dates depend on how much snow has fallen and how quickly the Border Roads Organisation clears it. Treat any date you read in May as a forecast, not a promise, and keep a day or two spare. The Manali road crosses passes above 5,000 metres and tempts riders into sleeping at very high camps such as Sarchu, which is often cited as a place where altitude sickness strikes. If you do go overland, break the journey, for example at Keylong or Jispa, so that your body has a chance to catch up.

Ladakh is also living culture. The valley's monasteries, among them Thiksey, Hemis and Alchi, are active places of worship. The Hemis festival is held in the summer, with masked dances, and in 2026 the dates are expected around 24 and 25 June, set by the Tibetan lunar calendar. Dress modestly, walk clockwise around stupas and prayer walls, ask before photographing monks or worshippers, and do not touch ritual objects.

This is a cold desert, and water is precious. Carry a refillable bottle, avoid single-use plastic, and ask your hosts how they manage water before you take a long shower. Stay in homestays where you can: the Himalayan Homestay programme, described on our People & Places pages, has been spreading income to villages for more than twenty years.

Permits and rules change. Indian visitors need Inner Line Permits for several border areas, such as Nubra and Pangong, and foreign visitors need a Protected Area Permit. Environment and other fees apply in Leh district. Apply through the official Ladakh administration portal or an operator, check current security advisories, and carry printed copies of permits and ID.

Go late in the season if you can, go slowly always, and leave room for a day when nothing happens. In Ladakh, that is often the best day of the trip.

At a glance

BEST TIME	Roughly May to September, when the high roads are open; June to August is busiest and coldest nights are still sharp
GETTING THERE	Fly to Leh (IXL); the Manali and Srinagar highways open seasonally.
PERMITS	Indian visitors: Inner Line Permits for Nubra, Pangong and other restricted areas. Foreign visitors: Protected Area Permit. Check the official Ladakh portal.
HEALTH	Rest on arrival and ascend gradually; consult a doctor before travel (see our altitude checklist).
CHECKED	10 November 2026 — permits, fees, road openings and advisories change; re-confirm before booking.



Photo: KennyOMG · CC BY-SA 4.0

HOW TO REACH

Leh, Ladakh

AIRPORT	Kushok Bakula Rimpochee Airport, Leh (IXL), roughly 5 km from the town centre.
RAILWAY	No railway in Ladakh. The nearest main rail heads are Jammu Tawi or Chandigarh/ Kiratpur, both a long road journey away.
BY ROAD	Manali to Leh is about 430–470 km and usually takes two days; Srinagar to Leh is about 420 km. Both roads are seasonal.
GETTING AROUND	Local taxis and tempo travellers; self-drive is not recommended for first-timers; taxis are the norm.

Distances approximate; road openings depend on weather and snow clearance. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Ladakh Tourism (Government of Ladakh) (ladakh.gov.in); Incredible India: Ladakh (www.incredibleindia.gov.in); Border Roads Organisation (www.bro.gov.in)

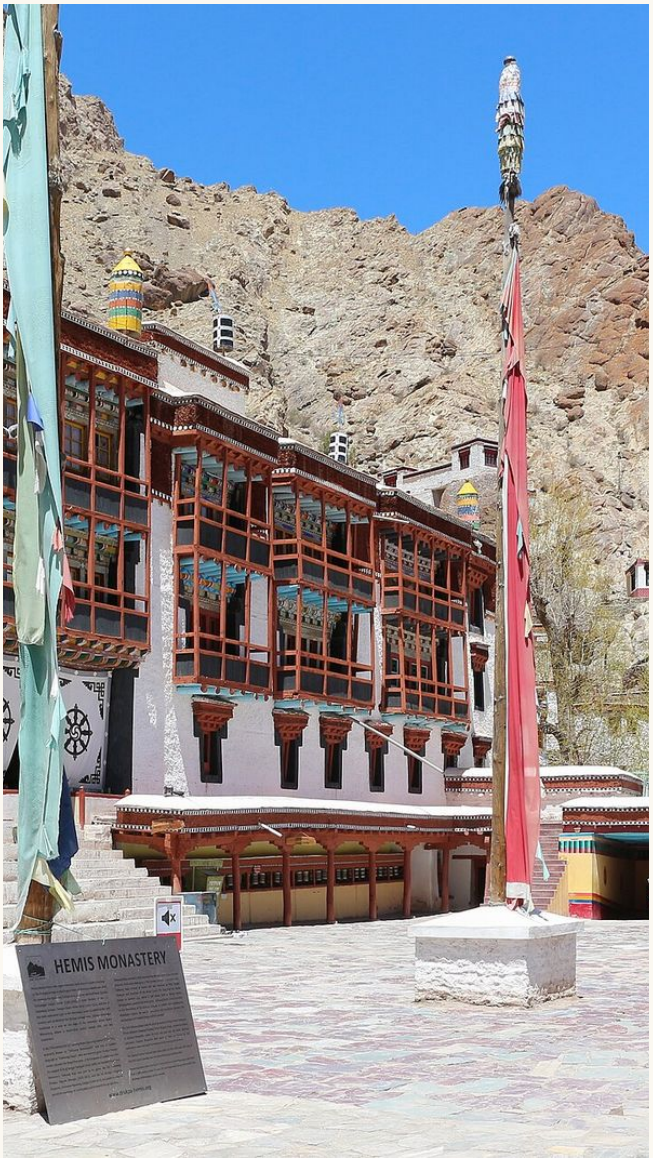


Photo: Bernard Gagnon Canon EOS REBEL T4i · CC BY-SA 4.0



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NORTHEAST INDIA

Khangchendzonga: Sikkim's sacred mountain

A national park, a World Heritage Site and a living deity. How to walk in the shadow of the world's third-highest peak with the respect it asks for.

RESEARCHED · VERIFY PERMIT RULES WITH SIKKIM FOREST DEPARTMENT

Photo: Veda · CC BY-SA 4.0

KHANGCHENDZONGA, AT ABOUT 8,586 metres the third-highest mountain on Earth, is more than a peak in Sikkim. It is regarded as a guardian deity by communities who live in its shadow, and local traditions place sacred valleys and lakes around it. The Khangchendzonga National Park, in the west and north of the state, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, listed in 2016 for both its natural and its cultural significance, which is why it is one of the few mixed sites in India.

The usual way to meet the mountain is the trek from Yuksom, a small village in West Sikkim that was the site of the first coronation of a Sikkimese king in 1642, to Dzongri and onward to Goecha La. The route, usually done over a week to ten days with a guide, climbs through forests of oak and rhododendron, past yak pastures, to high viewpoints. Early on the trail you sleep at a few hundred metres higher each night, which suits the acclimatisation that these elevations demand. Local trekking guides, porters and cooks are mostly drawn from the villages near Yuksom, so booking through a Sikkim-based operator keeps the income local.

April and May are one of the two best windows for the high trails, the other being October and November. In spring the rhododendron forests flower, and the days before the monsoon are often clear in the early morning and cloudy by noon. Plan for cold nights and for mist rolling in by afternoon, so that you can rise early for views.

Permits are the part that most often catches visitors out, and sources disagree. Park entry permits are issued through the Sikkim Forest Department's office at Yuksom, and trekking companies advise carrying photo ID and passport-size photographs. For foreign nationals, trekking agencies say a Protected Area Permit and travel in a group of at least two through a registered Indian agency are required. A different travel guide says Indian citizens usually do not need a separate permit for most treks. We have not been able to confirm the exact current rules from a government source, so check with Sikkim Tourism and the Forest Department before you go.

There is a tradition to honour. When Khangchendzonga was first climbed, in 1955, the British team stopped a few steps short of the summit out of respect for the Sikkimese people's belief that the top is sacred. Many climbers since have followed the same custom. Walkers can follow a gentler version of it: leave no litter, do not shout or play loud music at lakes or shrines, and follow your guide's advice about where to camp and where not to.

For those who prefer valleys to trails, West Sikkim offers monasteries, villages and homestays around Pelling and Yuksom without a high-altitude trek. Whichever way you go, May is the month to start asking questions early, because permits, huts and guides are limited.

At a glance

BEST TIME	April to May and October to November for the high trails (local trekking operators)
GETTING THERE	Fly to Bagdogra (IXB) in West Bengal or Pakyong (PYG) in Sikkim; the road to Yuksom takes most of a day.
PERMITS	Park entry permit at Yuksom; Protected Area Permit for foreign nationals. Sources disagree on details; confirm with Sikkim Tourism and the Forest Department.
HEALTH	Climb gradually and carry any regular medication.
CHECKED	10 November 2026 — permit rules, fees and trail conditions change; verify before travel.

HOW TO REACH

Yuksom and Khangchendzonga National Park, West Sikkim

AIRPORT	Pakyong Airport (PYG) in Sikkim, or Bagdogra Airport (IXB) in West Bengal, both roughly 150–170 km from Yuksom by road.
RAILWAY	New Jalpaiguri (NJP) near Siliguri, the nearest major rail head.
BY ROAD	From Bagdogra or NJP to Yuksom takes roughly 6–7 hours via Jorethang and Legship.
GETTING AROUND	Shared and private jeeps from Jorethang or Gyalshing; trekking operators arrange transfers.

Distances and times approximate; check landslide and road advisories. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Sikkim Tourism (official) (www.sikkimtourism.gov.in); UNESCO: Khangchendzonga National Park (whc.unesco.org)



Photo: Rohit Sharma · CC BY-SA 4.0

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.



INDIA

Spiti: a cold desert of monasteries and homestays

Himachal's high valley asks for time and a little humility. The reward is a landscape where almost every village has its own story.

RESEARCHED · VERIFY ROAD STATUS BEFORE TRAVEL

Photo: Original: Kulbhushan Singh Suryawanshi (website) Derivative work: Aristeas · CC BY-SA 4.0

SPITI, IN THE NORTH-EAST of Himachal Pradesh, is a high-altitude cold desert. Its villages sit between about 3,500 and 4,500 metres, and its landscape of pale mountains, river gravel and green barley terraces feels closer to the Tibetan plateau than to the Himalayan foothills. The name is said to mean the middle land, between India and Tibet.

The road in matters. The most reliable approach is from Shimla through Kinnaur, a long journey that can take a full day or more to reach Kaza, the valley's main town. The route from Manali crosses the Kunzum Pass and is seasonal, opening in late spring or early summer depending on snow, so check its status with local authorities rather than a travel blog. Both routes are subject to landslides, and the monsoon months make them less predictable.

Culture is the draw. Key Monastery, perched above the river, is the largest in the valley. Tabo Monastery, in the lower valley, is among the oldest continuously active Buddhist centres in the Himalaya and is known for its ancient murals. Smaller villages such as Langza, famous for fossils, and Kibber and Komic, among the highest villages in Asia with road access, show how farming and herding adapt to altitude.

May is the beginning of the season. Spiti's tourism season runs from mid-May to mid-October, according to one of the valley's own tourism enterprises. Early in the season, nights are cold, many facilities open late, and the first days at altitude need as much care as in Ladakh: rest, hydrate and climb slowly. Mobile and internet connectivity is patchy, so tell your host your plans and carry cash.

Homestays are the best way to stay and the best way to give back. The social enterprise Spiti Ecosphere, whose co-founder is profiled in this issue, helped set up the valley's early homestays, which let visitors stay in village houses while the families keep the income. Ask your host about water, waste and the season's work, and be prepared for simple food, shared bathrooms and early nights.

A last note on care. Spiti's fragile environment is under growing pressure from traffic and plastic. Travel in shared vehicles where you can, carry out what you carry in, and treat the monasteries as places of worship.

At a glance

BEST TIME	Mid-May to mid-October (valley tourism guidance); Kunzum Pass road opens seasonally
GETTING THERE	Nearest airports: Bhuntar, Kullu (KUU) or Shimla (SLV); long road journeys follow. Nearest rail heads: Shimla (narrow gauge) or Chandigarh/Kalka.
PERMITS	No Inner Line Permit is generally required for most of Spiti for Indian citizens; foreign nationals should check rules for Kinnaur and Spiti border areas.
HEALTH	Spiti is high; rest and ascend slowly.
CHECKED	10 November 2026 — road status, permits and homestay availability change; confirm locally.

HOW TO REACH

Kaza and the Spiti Valley, Himachal Pradesh

AIRPORT	Bhuntar Airport, Kullu (KUU), or Shimla (SLV); neither is close, and the road to Kaza is long.
RAILWAY	Shimla (via the Kalka–Shimla narrow-gauge line) or Chandigarh; no railway in Spiti.
BY ROAD	Shimla to Kaza is roughly 410 km via Kinnaur (a full day or more); Manali to Kaza via Kunzum La is roughly 200 km but seasonal and slow.
GETTING AROUND	HRTC buses, shared taxis and private cars; homestays can help arrange local transport.

Distances approximate; mountain roads are slow and may close for landslides or snow. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Himachal Pradesh Tourism (official) (himachaltourism.gov.in); Outlook Traveller: Ishita Khanna and Spiti Ecosphere (www.outlooktraveller.com)



Photo: Prof. Vikramjit Kakati · CC BY-SA 4.0

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.



ASIA

Nepal beyond Everest and Annapurna

Quieter Himalayan trails, shorter routes and an honest look at what trekkers should check before they fly.

RESEARCHED · PERMIT RULES CHANGE OFTEN

Photo: Rajan Karki · CC BY-SA 4.0

NEPAL'S BEST-KNOWN TREKS, EVEREST Base Camp and the Annapurna Circuit, are loved for good reason. They are also busy, particularly in the spring and autumn windows. For a trip that is shorter, less crowded and more manageable at altitude, Nepal has a number of other options.

In the Annapurna region, the Mardi Himal and Poon Hill treks are shorter routes that offer big views in a few days. Langtang, north of Kathmandu, is a valley trek within Langtang National Park that can be done in about a week. Further afield, the Manaslu circuit and Upper Mustang are restricted areas that require special permits arranged through a registered agency, and are normally done in organised groups.

Spring, roughly March to May, is one of the two main trekking seasons, the other being autumn. It is also the season when rhododendrons, Nepal's national flower, bloom on the lower trails, and the mid-April Nepali New Year, when the Bikram Sambat calendar moves to 2083, falls inside it. Pre-monsoon haze can reduce distant views, and by late May humidity and afternoon cloud build up. The monsoon, from about June to September, makes many trails wet and leech-ridden.

Rules matter and they change. Reports from Nepali trekking agencies differ on whether the TIMS card, a trekker registration, remains compulsory in every region, and fees are revised periodically, often at the start of the fiscal year in July. The Annapurna Conservation Area permit and the Langtang National Park entry permit are commonly described as mandatory. Some sources say solo trekking by foreigners on certain routes is no longer permitted. For up-to-date information, consult the Nepal Tourism Board or a registered trekking agency.

Indian citizens do not need a visa to enter Nepal, but must carry valid photo identification such as a passport or voter ID. Other nationalities should check Nepal's Department of Immigration. Whatever your passport, buy travel insurance that covers trekking at altitude and helicopter evacuation.

A last point on how to go well. Hire local guides and porters, ask about fair wages and weight limits for porters, and choose lodges (teahouses) that treat their staff well. Our People & Places pages profile one Nepali company that trains women as guides.

At a glance

BEST TIME	March to May and October to November for most trails; the monsoon runs roughly June to September
GETTING THERE	Fly to Kathmandu (KTM) or Pokhara (PHX); buses and jeeps to trailheads.
PERMITS/VISA	Indian citizens: no visa, but carry ID. Trekking permits (ACAP, national park entry, restricted-area permits) vary by region and change often.
HEALTH	Treks above 3,000 metres need slow ascent; buy insurance that covers evacuation.
CHECKED	10 November 2026 — permit and fee rules vary across sources; confirm with the Nepal Tourism Board.

HOW TO REACH

Annapurna and Langtang regions, Nepal

AIRPORT	Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu (KTM); Pokhara International Airport (PHX) for Annapurna treks.
RAILWAY	Nepal has no passenger rail network for tourists; travel is by road and air.
BY ROAD	Kathmandu to Syabrubesi (Langtang) is a long day by road, roughly 7–8 hours; Pokhara to the Mardi Himal trailhead takes around 2–3 hours.
GETTING AROUND	Local buses, shared jeeps and taxis; trekking agencies arrange transport and permits.

Distances and times approximate; mountain roads are slow. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Nepal Tourism Board (official) (www.welcomenepal.com); Department of Immigration, Nepal (immigration.gov.np)



Photo: Diganta Talukdar · CC BY-SA 4.0

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.



AROUND THE WORLD

The Dolomites in early summer: huts, lifts and patience

Italy's pale mountains are a World Heritage Site and a hiker's dream. May is the shoulder, and June is when it all opens.

RESEARCHED · CHECK LIFT AND HUT OPENING DATES

Photo: This Photo was taken by Wolfgang Moroder. Feel free to use my photos, but please mention me as the author and send me a · CC BY-SA 3.0

THE DOLOMITES, IN NORTH-EASTERN Italy, are made of pale rock that glows at dawn and dusk, and were inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009. They are known for walking, climbing and a network of mountain huts, called rifugi, that make multi-day hikes possible without carrying a tent.

Timing is the key to planning. In May many lifts and huts are still closed or open only on weekends, and snow lingers on higher trails. Most huts and cable cars begin their full summer operation around mid-June and run into late September. A May trip suits those who want lower valleys, villages and quieter trails, and who accept that high routes may not be open. If you want the classic high-altitude routes, plan for late June to September.

The region has its own character. It spans three provinces and several language communities, and in the South Tyrol you will hear German and Ladin as well as Italian. The food shows the same mixture, with dumplings, speck and polenta alongside pasta. Be ready for the reality that tourism is heavy in July and August, and that some of the best-known viewpoints, such as lakes and road passes, now have booking or traffic restrictions on peak days.

Practical matters: Indian passport holders need a Schengen visa for Italy, which should be applied for well ahead. Check the Italian ministry of foreign affairs and the VFS centre's current instructions. Carry insurance that covers mountain activities and rescue. Mountain weather changes quickly, so carry rain gear and layers even on a sunny morning, and tell the hut or hotel where you are going.

How to go well: use the local buses and lifts where they exist; book huts well ahead; and carry your waste back down. Many huts operate on small margins and appreciate guests who arrive on time and follow house rules.

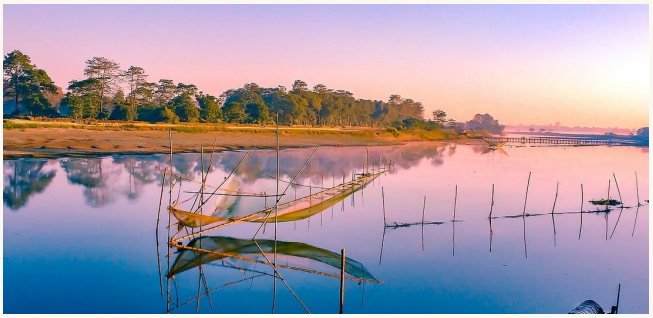


Photo: Udit Kapoor · CC BY-SA 4.0

At a glance

BEST TIME	Mid-June to late September for high routes and huts; May is shoulder season with limited services
GETTING THERE	Fly to Venice (VCE), Innsbruck (INN) or Verona (VRN); regional buses and trains reach valley towns.
VISA	Indian passport holders need a Schengen visa; check the Italian authorities and the VFS centre.
BOOK AHEAD	Huts and peak-season accommodation fill early (provisional advice).
CHECKED	10 November 2026 — lift schedules and restrictions change each year; confirm with local tourist boards.

HOW TO REACH

The Dolomites (Cortina d'Ampezzo, Val Gardena and surrounding valleys), Italy

AIRPORT	Venice Marco Polo (VCE), roughly 2 hours by road from Cortina; Innsbruck (INN) and Verona (VRN) serve other valleys.
RAILWAY	Bolzano and Brunico stations serve the South Tyrol; Cortina has no railway (nearest station: Calalzo di Cadore).
BY ROAD	Autostrada A22 (Brenner) and the SS51 and regional roads link the valleys; mountain passes are seasonal.
GETTING AROUND	Local buses (Südtirol Mobil and regional lines), cable cars and, in places, summer shuttles.

Distances approximate; pass roads and shuttles change each season. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Dolomites official tourism site (www.dolomiti.org); UNESCO: The Dolomites (whc.unesco.org)



Photo: Extreminatethejuice · CC BY-SA 4.0



AROUND THE WORLD

Gorilla country: Rwanda's volcano forests

A tightly regulated permit system, a conservation success story and a community that has changed its relationship with the forest.

RESEARCHED · CHECK THE RWANDA DEVELOPMENT BOARD FOR CURRENT PERMITS

Photo: Charles J. Sharp · CC BY-SA 4.0

VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK, IN north-western Rwanda, protects part of the Virunga range, home to the mountain gorilla. Tracking them is a regulated, small-group experience: visitors are assigned to a habituated gorilla group, accompanied by trained trackers and guides, and are allowed a limited time with the animals once found. The permit system is run by the Rwanda Development Board.

Permits are expensive and fees change. Many guides cite US$1,500 per person per trek for foreign non-residents, but in January 2026 the board published promotional rates for Rwandans, East Africans and other African citizens and residents, valid until the end of 2026 (excluding June to October). The notice reported by KT Press did not state the standard rate for other international visitors, so confirm it directly with the Rwanda Development Board before you plan a budget.

Treks can last from an hour to most of a day, depending on where the group has moved overnight. The terrain is steep and often muddy, at altitudes of about 2,400 to 3,500 metres, so fitness, waterproofs and good boots matter. Porters can be hired locally at the park, and hiring one is a simple way to put money directly into the community.

The deeper story is about the communities around the park. As The National reported in 2015, conservationist Edwin Sabuhoro began working with former poachers and their families, and his work is profiled in this issue. Many have since become guides, porters and craftspeople. The idea is simple: when people who once hunted in the forest can earn more by protecting it, the forest benefits.

Practicalities: Rwanda's visa policy changes, so check the Directorate General of Immigration and Emigration. Plan to stay at least two nights near the park, since weather and group assignments can change at short notice. Keep a distance of at least the guide's stated limit, do not trek if you have a cold or other contagious illness, and never feed or touch the animals.

How to go well: book through licensed operators and follow park rules to the letter. A gorilla encounter is a privilege that depends on the discipline of everyone who goes.

At a glance

BEST TIME	Two dry seasons: roughly June to September and December to February; the park is open year-round
GETTING THERE	Fly to Kigali (KGL); the drive to Musanze and the park takes about 2.5 hours.
PERMITS	Gorilla permits are issued by the Rwanda Development Board; the standard international price was widely listed at US$1,500, but promotional rates exist for Africans in 2026.
VISA	Check current requirements with Rwanda's immigration authority.
CHECKED	10 November 2026 — permit prices and visa rules change; verify before booking.

HOW TO REACH

Volcanoes National Park, near Musanze and Kinigi, Rwanda

AIRPORT	Kigali International Airport (KGL), about 100–110 km from the park.
RAILWAY	Rwanda has no passenger railway; travel is by road and air.
BY ROAD	Kigali to Musanze takes about 2–2.5 hours by good road; the park headquarters at Kinigi is a short drive further.
GETTING AROUND	Hire a car and driver or join an organised tour; park transfers on the morning of the trek.

Distances and times approximate. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Visit Rwanda (official) (www.visitrwanda.com); Rwanda Development Board (www.rdb.rw); KT Press: promotional gorilla permit rates (5 January 2026) (www.ktpress.rw)

REAL STORIES FROM THE ROAD

Three sisters who put women on Nepal's trails

Lucky, Dicky and Nicky Chhetri started an all-women trekking company in Pokhara, and a charity that trains women as guides.

PROFILE · FROM PUBLISHED REPORTING · NOT INTERVIEWED BY WAYFARER



Photo: Jmhullot · CC BY 3.0

In the early 1990s, three sisters ran a small lodge in Pokhara, Nepal, and heard the same complaint from female trekkers again and again: they felt unsafe or unwelcome with male guides. Lucky, Dicky and Nicky Chhetri decided to do something about it, and the result was an all-women trekking agency and a training charity.

Accounts differ on the exact dates. One account says the sisters founded Empowering Women of Nepal and 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking Company in 1994; another says the company was formally established in 1998 and the charity registered in 1999. We have not tried to settle the difference here.

The idea was not easily accepted. Reporting says that when they began, the idea of women leading treks was so unfamiliar that some local people suspected the agency was a cover for something else, and competitors tried to undermine it. The sisters continued, and the company is described in a Women's Empowerment Principles profile as the only trekking agency that specialises in trained female guides.

The charity, Empowering Women of Nepal, offers free vocational training, paid for by a share of the company's profits reported at 15 to 20 per cent. According to the same reporting, more than 800 disadvantaged or rural women have trained as guides and assistants, and the company employs nearly 200 women across Nepal in a trekking season. Lucky Chhetri was named an Ashoka Fellow in 2004, and was born in Darjeeling in 1965, according to Ashoka's profile.

For a traveller, the practical lesson is that who guides you matters. If you trek in Nepal, ask your agency how guides and porters are trained, paid and insured, and consider booking a woman guide, particularly if you are travelling solo.

This profile is based on published reporting. The numbers are drawn from different years and may have changed.



Photo: Vikramjit Kakati · CC BY-SA 4.0

At a glance

VERIFICATION	Facts and figures are taken from the cited reporting and must be re-checked against the original before print.
REPORTED BY	Women's Empowerment Principles (UN Women and UN Global Compact) company profile; Ashoka Fellow profile; Onlinekhabar English; other press
PEOPLE NAMED	Lucky Chhetri, Dicky Chhetri, Nicky Chhetri
NOT INTERVIEWED BY US	This profile paraphrases published reporting. We have not spoken to the people named; figures and dates differ between sources.
TO FEATURE THEM PROPERLY	Contact 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking and Empowering Women of Nepal, Pokhara, for consent, current figures and photographs.

HOW TO REACH

Pokhara, Gandaki Province, Nepal

AIRPORT	Pokhara International Airport (PHX), a short drive from Lakeside.
RAILWAY	Nepal has no passenger rail network for tourists.
BY ROAD	Kathmandu to Pokhara is roughly 200 km, about 6–7 hours by road or about 25 minutes by air.
GETTING AROUND	Taxis and local buses; trekking trips begin from agency offices or trailheads.

Distances approximate. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Women's Empowerment Principles profile (PDF) (www.weps.org); Ashoka: Lucky Chhetri (www.ashoka.org); Onlinekhabar English (english.onlinekhabar.com)

REAL STORIES FROM THE ROAD

The homestay idea that began in Rumbak

Women in a village inside Hemis National Park proposed hosting trekkers. The programme that followed has changed how Ladakh lives with snow leopards.

PROFILE · FROM PUBLISHED REPORTING · NOT INTERVIEWED BY WAYFARER



Photo: Chris Hunkeler from Carlsbad, California, USA · CC BY-SA 2.0

Rumbak is a small village in Hemis National Park, in Ladakh, a place where snow leopards are among the animals that sometimes kill livestock. A conservationist named Rinchen Wangchuk co-founded the Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust in 2000, with American biologist Rodney Jackson, to look for ways in which people and the animal could coexist.

In 2003, according to The Better India's 2020 profile, the trust began the Himalayan Homestay Programme in Rumbak, an idea that women in the village had proposed: host trekkers in their own homes and earn from it. The programme has since helped set up more than 200 homestays across Sham Valley, Rong Valley and Zanskar. The same report says residents earn roughly Rs 15,000 to Rs 2.5 lakh over a season of about six months, depending on how popular their route is.

A second idea sits alongside it: livestock insurance. Villagers pay premiums for insured animals, and the trust adds a matching amount, which builds a fund from which villagers are compensated when an animal is killed on high pastures. The trust has also helped build more than 200 predator-proof corrals across Ladakh. The aim, in plain terms, is to make tolerating the leopard less costly.

Rinchen Wangchuk, who began as a nature guide for wildlife film crews, died in 2011, aged 42. His work continues through the trust, and the state wildlife department took over management of Hemis National Park in 2006. Conservationists have called the homestay model a game-changer, though that is their own assessment rather than an independent evaluation, and snow leopard numbers in Ladakh remain a concern, with estimates of just over 250 in one account.

If you visit, book through a registered homestay or operator, accept simple food and shared rooms, hire local guides, and remember that wildlife sightings are never promised. The money you spend is the point.



Photo: Rumelade · CC BY-SA 4.0

At a glance

VERIFICATION	Facts and figures are taken from the cited reporting and must be re-checked against the original before print.
REPORTED BY	The Better India, 30 December 2020
PEOPLE NAMED	Rinchen Wangchuk (died 2011); Rodney Jackson; Tsewang Namgail (conservationist, quoted in other reporting)
NOT INTERVIEWED BY US	This profile paraphrases published reporting. Snow leopard and homestay figures differ between sources.
TO FEATURE THEM PROPERLY	Contact the Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust and the Hemis National Park authorities for consent, current facts and photographs.

HOW TO REACH

Rumbak, Hemis National Park, near Leh, Ladakh

AIRPORT	Leh Airport (IXL), roughly 25–30 km from the Rumbak trailhead at Zingchen.
RAILWAY	No railway in Ladakh.
BY ROAD	Leh to Zingchen is roughly an hour by road; Rumbak is reached on foot or by a rough track.
GETTING AROUND	Book a homestay through a registered operator; arrange transport from Leh.

Access depends on season and weather; acclimatise in Leh first. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Source article (The Better India) (thebetterindia.com); Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust (snowleopardindia.org)

REAL STORIES FROM THE ROAD

From poachers to guides: Edwin Sabuhoro and the Virunga forests

A former Rwandan park official decided that the war on poaching was unjust, and turned poachers into eco-tourism partners.

PROFILE · FROM PUBLISHED REPORTING · NOT INTERVIEWED BY WAYFARER



Photo: Shabanmasengesho · CC BY-SA 4.0

In 2003, Edwin Sabuhoro ran tourism operations at Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda, where around 200 rangers and soldiers were assigned to protect the gorillas. Poaching, illegal logging and grazing continued anyway. A long profile by Phil Sands in The National, published on 9 July 2015, tells what happened next.

In 2004 he led an effort to recover a baby gorilla that was being offered for sale for US$2,000, posing as a collector in order to buy it back. When he afterwards visited the poachers' families, he concluded that they were themselves victims of desperate poverty. He resigned from the park service, saying that the war against them was unjust.

In 2005 he spent six months living among poaching communities. Using about US$2,000 of his own savings, he started small potato farms, which produced enough food to eat and sell. The reporting says poaching fell as a result. He then built an ecotourism company, a cultural village and arts and crafts cooperatives, mostly employing former poachers. Many became porters and guides for gorilla trekkers.

The article also introduces Leo Nedas, a 75-year-old Batwa man who had hunted in the forest and who now shares traditional poetry, dance and stories with visitors at the cultural village. Later reports describe the village as the Iby'Iwacu cultural village and mention former poachers working as interpreters; the figures given for how many people are involved vary between sources, so we do not repeat any here.

Conservation in the Virunga forests is not finished, and a recent report from Rwanda's government says that snare recoveries in the park have risen. The lesson for travellers is simple: the permit fee you pay and the guide you hire are part of a system that has to keep making sense to the people who live beside the forest.

At a glance

VERIFICATION	Facts and figures are taken from the cited reporting and must be re-checked against the original before print.
REPORTED BY	The National (Phil Sands), 9 July 2015; further context from VOA and AllAfrica reporting on Rwandan anti-poaching efforts
PEOPLE NAMED	Edwin Sabuhoro; Leo Nedas (Batwa cultural-village performer)
NOT INTERVIEWED BY US	This profile paraphrases published reporting. We have not spoken to the people named; the article is more than ten years old.
TO FEATURE THEM PROPERLY	Contact Sabyinyo Community and Iby'Iwacu cultural village management through the Rwanda Development Board; obtain written consent.

HOW TO REACH

Volcanoes National Park area, Musanze district, Rwanda

AIRPORT	Kigali International Airport (KGL), roughly 100–110 km away.
RAILWAY	Rwanda has no passenger railway.
BY ROAD	About 2–2.5 hours by road from Kigali to Musanze and Kinigi.
GETTING AROUND	Arrange a driver and a cultural-village visit through a licensed operator.

Distances approximate. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Source article (The National, 9 July 2015) (www.thenationalnews.com); Rwanda Development Board (www.rdb.rw)

REAL STORIES FROM THE ROAD

Ishita Khanna and the Spiti valley's social enterprise

A social enterprise co-founded in 2002 tries to make conservation pay for the people of a high-altitude desert.

PROFILE · FROM PUBLISHED REPORTING · NOT INTERVIEWED BY WAYFARER



Photo: Sumita Roy Dutta · CC BY-SA 4.0

Spiti Ecosphere, a social enterprise in Himachal Pradesh's Spiti valley, describes itself as run jointly by the local community and professionals from different fields. Its co-founder Ishita Khanna, who comes from a city background and says she is not drawn to city life, told Outlook Traveller in 2014 that she and her co-founder Sunil Chauhan each spend six to seven months of the year in Spiti.

The organisation started in 2002 with a pilot project on seabuckthorn, a berry that grows wild in the cold deserts of the Himalaya. Early on, the report says, it relied on local leadership, including the title-holder known as the Nono, to earn the community's trust. Its work now covers eco-friendly travel, renewable energy and protecting the environment and cultural heritage.

Tourism is designed to support conservation. According to the article, homestays are a way to keep local incomes up while preserving village architecture, and revenue from wildlife tourism is used to change local attitudes towards snow leopards and Himalayan wolves, which sometimes kill livestock. Other reporting says the first homestays began in 2004, and that the idea met some resistance from local travel agents and hotels who feared losing business; we have not verified that claim independently.

Khanna's point, as relayed in the reporting, is that conservation must be taken into account while travelling. For a visitor, that translates into simple choices: stay in homestays where you can, hire local guides, and ask hosts how your presence affects water, waste and the village's work calendar.

Spiti's best season, according to the same article, runs from roughly mid-May to mid-October. The profile is nearly twelve years old, and Ecosphere's services have changed since.

At a glance

VERIFICATION	Facts and figures are taken from the cited reporting and must be re-checked against the original before print.
REPORTED BY	Outlook Traveller (Soity Banerjee), updated 31 March 2014; context from YourStory (2018) as seen in search listings
PEOPLE NAMED	Ishita Khanna and Sunil Chauhan, co-founders of Spiti Ecosphere
NOT INTERVIEWED BY US	This profile paraphrases published reporting. Dates and facts may have changed since 2014.
TO FEATURE THEM PROPERLY	Contact Spiti Ecosphere in Kaza for consent, current facts and photographs.

HOW TO REACH

Kaza and villages of the Spiti Valley, Himachal Pradesh

AIRPORT	Bhuntar (KUU) or Shimla (SLV), both far from Kaza.
RAILWAY	No railway in Spiti; nearest rail heads at Shimla or Chandigarh.
BY ROAD	Shimla to Kaza is roughly 410 km via Kinnaur; Manali to Kaza is roughly 200 km via Kunzum La, seasonal.
GETTING AROUND	Buses, shared taxis and cars; book homestays in advance.

Distances approximate; check road status. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Source article (Outlook Traveller) (www.outlooktraveller.com); YourStory: Spiti Ecosphere (2018) (yourstory.com)

FOOD, HERITAGE AND NATURE

The Taste of Travel: Himalayan kitchens

Thukpa, momos and butter tea: what travellers eat in the mountains, and where the dishes come from.

RESEARCHED · VERIFY LOCALLY

High-altitude cooking is built around warmth and energy. Across Ladakh, Spiti, Sikkim and Nepal, the dishes travellers meet most often are soups, dumplings and tea, and many have their roots in Tibetan food traditions as well as in local ones.

Thukpa is a noodle soup, usually with vegetables or meat, which came to the Himalayan regions of India and Nepal from Tibetan cooking. Momos, steamed or fried dumplings, are the best-known snack, and in Nepal and Sikkim they are tied to both Tibetan and Newar traditions. In Ladakh, look for skyu, a stew of hand-pinched wheat pasta with vegetables and sometimes meat, and for butter tea, called gur gur cha, a salty drink of tea, butter and salt that helps in the cold and dry air.

In the villages, barley is central. Roasted barley flour, known as tsampa or ngamphe, is eaten mixed with tea or butter and is a staple for herders and trekkers. In Sikkim, fermented foods and the millet beer tongba are part of home cooking.

A word on travel: at altitude, appetite can drop, and some visitors feel mildly unwell on arrival. Eat small, warm meals, drink plenty of water, and be careful with alcohol. Vegetarian food is easy to find in most areas, but ask what stock a soup is made with.

At a glance

SAY IT	In Ladakh, 'Julley' is the common greeting and thank-you.
ETIQUETTE	Accept tea or food when offered; ask before photographing a kitchen or family meal.
VEG-FRIENDLY?	Usually possible; confirm the stock and ingredients.



Photo: Arunachal2007 · CC BY-SA 4.0

HOW TO REACH

Leh, Ladakh, and Himalayan towns of Sikkim, Spiti and Nepal

AIRPORT	Leh Airport (IXL) for Ladakh; Pakyong (PYG) and Bagdogra (IXB) for Sikkim; Kathmandu (KTM) for Nepal.
RAILWAY	No railway in Ladakh or Spiti; New Jalpaiguri (NJP) for Sikkim.
BY ROAD	Mountain roads are slow in all these regions; allow extra time.
GETTING AROUND	Small family-run eateries and homestays are the best places to try local dishes.

Distances approximate. Distances approximate - verify.

FOOD, HERITAGE AND NATURE

Heritage Without Borders: monasteries that are still alive

Thiksey, Hemis, Tabo and Key. How to visit working Buddhist monasteries as a guest.

RESEARCHED · CHECK OPENING HOURS LOCALLY

Across Ladakh and Spiti, monasteries are not museums. They are working communities where monks study, pray and run festivals, and they rely on respectful visitors rather than tickets alone.

Thiksey Monastery, a short drive from Leh, climbs a hillside in tiers and has a large Maitreya statue; Hemis, further south, is known for its summer festival, which in 2026 is expected on 24 and 25 June, according to news reports. In Spiti, Key Monastery sits above the river, and Tabo, in the lower valley, is among the oldest continuously active Buddhist centres in the Himalaya, known for its ancient murals.

A few rules help. Dress modestly, remove your shoes before entering prayer halls, walk clockwise around stupas and prayer wheels, and do not point your feet at altars or touch statues. Ask before photographing inside and respect any sign that forbids it. Keep your voice low, and if a ritual is under way, observe from the edge.

Many monasteries accept small donations and sell crafts, and some run schools or clinics for local communities. Giving is welcome, but it should be a choice, not a performance.



Photo: Vikramjit Kakati · CC BY-SA 4.0

At a glance

ETIQUETTE	Dress modestly; remove shoes; walk clockwise; ask before taking photographs.
CHECKED	Opening hours and festival dates must be confirmed locally.

HOW TO REACH

Thiksey and Hemis (near Leh, Ladakh); Key and Tabo (Spiti, Himachal Pradesh)

AIRPORT	Leh (IXL) for Thiksey and Hemis; Bhuntar (KUU) or Shimla (SLV) for Spiti.
RAILWAY	No railway in either region.
BY ROAD	Thiksey is about 20 km and Hemis about 45 km from Leh; Key is about 12–15 km from Kaza.
GETTING AROUND	Taxis from Leh or Kaza; some monasteries are reached by shared vehicles.

Distances approximate. Distances approximate - verify.

FOOD, HERITAGE AND NATURE

The Natural Calendar: May

What to look for, where, and how sure we are.

RESEARCHED · SEASONAL, NOT GUARANTEED

Rhododendron bloom (Sikkim, Nepal and the Himalayas): the spring flowering moves up the mountains from April into May, with the lower forests first and higher shrubs later. *Reliable window; the exact weeks depend on altitude and the year's weather.*

Midnight sun (northern Scandinavia, Iceland, Alaska): the sun stops setting in the far north from around mid-May and continues into summer. *Predictable by latitude; cloud can hide it.*

High passes opening (Ladakh, Spiti, the Alps): snow clearance starts in late spring, and opening dates vary every year. *Treat any date as a forecast.*

Pre-monsoon heat (Indian plains and Southeast Asia): May is very hot, and thunderstorms build in the afternoons. *Plan outdoor activity for early mornings; rains arrive in June in much of India.*



Photo: ANKAN · CC BY-SA 4.0

FOOD, HERITAGE AND NATURE

Responsible travel: leave the mountain lighter

Six habits that help mountain communities, and the mountain itself.

PRACTICAL · EVERGREEN

Carry out your waste. At altitude, rubbish decomposes very slowly. Carry a bag for your own litter, and avoid single-use plastic by bringing a refillable bottle.

Respect water. In dry high-altitude regions, water is limited. Ask hosts about local water use, and take short showers.

Use local people. Hire local guides, porters and cooks, ask about fair pay and sensible load limits for porters, and eat in family-run places.

Respect sacred places. Mountains, lakes and passes are sacred to many communities. Follow your guide's advice on where to camp, and keep voices low at shrines.

Give wildlife space. Do not feed or chase animals, and do not trek or camp where your guide advises against it.

Know your limits. Rescue is difficult and costly at altitude. Turn back early and travel with insurance that covers evacuation.

PRACTICAL TOOLKIT

The Altitude Safety Checklist

A one-page list for anyone heading above 2,500 metres. It is general guidance, not medical advice: talk to your doctor before you travel.

PRACTICAL · EVERGREEN · NOT MEDICAL ADVICE

1. **See a doctor first:** especially if you have heart, lung or blood-pressure conditions, or are pregnant. Ask about preventive medication; do not self-prescribe.

2. **Go up gradually:** above about 3,000 metres, aim to raise the altitude at which you sleep by only a few hundred metres a day, and plan a rest day every few days.

3. **Rest on arrival:** a day of light activity before anything strenuous.

4. **Drink water:** and go easy on alcohol for the first days.

5. **Know the symptoms:** headache, nausea, dizziness, poor sleep and fatigue are common early signs of altitude sickness.

6. **Know the danger signs:** severe headache, confusion, loss of balance, breathlessness at rest or a persistent wet cough mean you should descend and seek medical help.

7. **Never ascend with symptoms:** and never leave a sick person alone.

8. **Sleep low, climb high:** a day trip to a higher point is safer than sleeping there.

9. **Insurance:** buy cover that includes altitude, trekking and evacuation.

10. **Tell someone:** share your itinerary with your host and someone at home.

11. **Sun and cold:** UV is strong at altitude, and nights are cold; carry sun protection and layers.

12. **Listen to your guide:** local guides have seen altitude problems many times; follow their advice.

PRACTICAL TOOLKIT

The 24-Hour Destination: an easy first day in Leh

One illustrative day. At 3,500 metres, the first rule is to go slowly.

ILLUSTRATIVE ITINERARY · VERIFY LOCALLY

On arrival: rest, drink water, and take it easy for at least the first half-day, even if you feel fine.

Late afternoon: a slow walk through the old town and the main bazaar; stop for tea.

Evening: a light, early dinner; skip alcohol on your first night.

Next morning: a visit to Leh Palace or a nearby monastery, taken at a gentle pace.

Midday: a simple Ladakhi lunch (skyu, thukpa or momos).

Afternoon: the Shanti Stupa for sunset, if you feel well; ask your hotel about the best way up.

What to skip if short on time: anything strenuous, and any trip to a higher point in the first two days.

Hours and entry fees are not stated here and must be checked locally.



Photo: Madhumita Das · CC BY-SA 4.0

HOW TO REACH

Leh, Ladakh

AIRPORT	Kushok Bakula Rimpochee Airport (IXL), about 5 km from the town centre.
RAILWAY	No railway in Ladakh.
BY ROAD	Manali to Leh (about two days) and Srinagar to Leh are seasonal roads.
GETTING AROUND	Walk the old town; taxis for monasteries and viewpoints.

Times approximate. Distances approximate - verify.

COMMUNITY

The Traveller's Lexicon: julley

The Ladakhi word that means hello, goodbye and thank you.

LEXICON

Julley — pronounced roughly “joo-lay” — is the all-purpose greeting of Ladakh. It serves as hello, goodbye and thank you, and you will hear it in shops, monasteries and homestays.

Use it with a smile and a slight nod. As with any phrase from another language, it is a courtesy, not a trick, and is best followed by a real conversation.

COMMUNITY

Travel Quiz — May

Five questions. Answers appear in next month's issue.

QUIZ

1. Which mountain is the third-highest in the world and sacred in Sikkim?

2. What is the name of the Ladakhi greeting that also means thank you?

3. In which country is Volcanoes National Park, home to mountain gorillas?

4. What are the mountain huts of the Dolomites called?

5. In which Himachal valley are Key and Tabo monasteries?

Answers (for the editor's copy — reveal next issue): Khangchendzonga · Julley · Rwanda · Rifugi · Spiti.



Photo: Aravind Manickam · CC BY-SA 4.0

COMMUNITY

Your turn: your highest point

Reader engagement idea for the next issue.

READER INVITATION

Tell us about the highest place you have been: 150 words and one photograph you took. Tell us where it was, how you got there, and what you did when you arrived. A selection will appear in the Readers' Pages with your name and photo credit, only with your permission.

COMMUNITY

The Traveller's Bookshelf: three mountain books

Three books we would pack.

RECOMMENDED READING

The Snow Leopard by Peter Matthiessen — an account of a journey across the Himalaya in Nepal, part nature writing, part spiritual search. Read it for the prose.

Mountains of the Mind by Robert Macfarlane — a history of why people have felt drawn to high places. Read it to see mountains as an idea.

Annapurna by Maurice Herzog — the account of the first ascent of an eight-thousand-metre peak, in 1950. Read it as a historical document, and with other accounts alongside it.

READER AND CONTRIBUTOR BRIEFS

Proposed commission: “My first high-altitude trek”

A brief for a real reader or contributor. Not a published story.

PROPOSED COMMISSION · NOT A REAL STORY

What we want: a first-person account (800–1,200 words) of a first trek above 3,000 metres, including what you got wrong and what your guide taught you. The story should have one clear setting, one specific moment and one human encounter.

What we need from the contributor: a true story; photographs you own, with permission to publish; a short trip recap (route and dates, duration, how you acclimatised, budget range with currency and date, one thing you wish you had known).

Rights: the contributor retains copyright; we ask for permission to publish and archive with credit. We will show the edited text before publication.

To contribute, write to us via the contact page — and please do not send invented or composite stories.



Photo: Dinesh Valke from Thane, India Derivative work: UnpetitproleX · CC BY-SA 2.0



Photo: Sourabh.biswas003 · CC BY-SA 4.0

THE WORLD CELEBRATES

Festivals & events radar

Dates come from our festival guide and are approximate. Confirm with the official organiser before booking; lunar-calendar and annually announced events are provisional until confirmed.

NORTHEAST INDIA & INDIA

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Buddha Purnima	Bodh Gaya, Sarnath and Buddhist sites across India	1 May 2026 in India (some East and Southeast Asian countries observe Vesak on the following full moon, around 31 May)	The day marking the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha, observed at monasteries across the country..
Moatsu Festival	Ao Naga villages and Mokokchung, Nagaland	1–3 May 2026	The Ao Naga festival that closes the sowing season, with songs, dances and feasting..
Saga Dawa Duchen	Buddhist monasteries in Sikkim, Ladakh and Spiti	31 May 2026 (full moon of the fourth Tibetan month; the month runs roughly 17 May to 15 June)	The holiest day in the Tibetan Buddhist calendar, observed with prayers and circumambulation..
Hemis Festival	Hemis Monastery, near Leh, Ladakh	24–25 June 2026 (set by the Tibetan lunar calendar)	Masked cham dances in the best-known monastery festival of Ladakh..
Dree Festival	Ziro Valley and Apatani villages, Arunachal Pradesh	Village rituals 4 July, main celebration 5 July, concluding 7 July 2026	The Apatani agricultural festival of thanksgiving and prayer for a good harvest..
Rath Yatra	Puri, Odisha	16 July 2026 (main chariot procession); return journey on 24 July	The great chariot festival of Lord Jagannath, drawing pilgrims from across India..

ASIA

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Naadam Festival	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia	11–13 July 2026	Mongolia's national celebration of wrestling, archery and horse racing..

EUROPE

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Eurovision Song Contest	Wiener Stadthalle, Vienna, Austria	12 May and 14 May (semi-finals), 16 May 2026 (final)	The 70th contest, hosted in Vienna after Austria's win in 2025..
Venice Biennale (Art)	Giardini, Arsenale and Forte Marghera, Venice, Italy	9 May to 22 November 2026	The 61st International Art Exhibition, open for six months..
Midsummer Eve	Sweden (Dalarna is a classic setting)	19 June 2026 (Midsummer Eve), 20 June (Midsummer Day)	Maypoles, dancing and long light across Sweden..

AFRICA & THE AMERICAS

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Q'eswachaka bridge renewal	Quehue district, Cusco region, Peru	Second week of June 2026 (exact days set by the communities)	Four Quechua communities rebuild the grass-rope bridge by hand over three days..
Inti Raymi	Sacsayhuaman, Cusco, Peru	24 June 2026	The Festival of the Sun, staged each year at the Inca fortress above Cusco..



Photo: Original: Nina R from Africa Derivative work: UnpetitproleX · CC BY 2.0

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.

OCEANIA & INTERNATIONAL

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Vivid Sydney	Sydney, Australia	22 May to 13 June 2026 (23 nights)	Light installations, music and ideas across the city, with a large free programme..
FIFA World Cup 2026	United States, Canada and Mexico	11 June to 19 July 2026	The first men's World Cup hosted by three countries; expect heavy travel demand in host cities..

THE TRAVEL BRIEFING

Format example

Real developments reported before this issue's date. Each item is labelled announced or implemented, with a source.

Europe: the EU Entry/Exit System became fully operational at Schengen external borders on 10 April 2026 (implemented; European Commission). home-affairs.ec.europa.eu

Uttarakhand: the 2026 Char Dham Yatra began with Yamunotri and Gangotri on 19 April, Kedarnath on 22 April and Badrinath on 23 April (implemented; IANS, 21 April 2026). ianslive.in

Rwanda: the Rwanda Development Board published promotional 2026 gorilla permit rates for Rwandans, East Africans and other African citizens, valid until 31 December 2026 but not from June to October (announced; KT Press, 5 January 2026). www.ktpress.rw

Tell us where you are going next

WRITE	editor@travaah.com
CALL	+91 70022 09781
PLAN	travaah.com/planner
CONTRIBUTE	Send a story or photograph via the contact page



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Photo: KennyOMG · CC BY-SA 4.0



Photo: Exotica489 · CC0

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.

WAYFARER

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