



## ABODE OF THE GODS

### HIMACHAL PRADESH, NORTHERN INDIA

#### INTRODUCTION

Overlooking Dharmsala and the Kangra valley in Himachal Pradesh lies Dharamkot (7,200ft/2,195m), home to the Butterworths whose family have lived in India for many generations. Dharamkot is a protected wildlife sanctuary and the base from which this trek is organised. The area is renowned for wildlife. In recent years a leopard killed the Butterworths' chickens! But besides leopards, there exist black bears, porcupine, various types of deer and mountain goats, langur and rhesus monkeys,

jackals, pine marten, and the local equivalent of the yeti known as a Gye. The bird life is fantastic, ranging from a host of brightly-coloured small species to parrots, griffon vultures, lamagier, eagles and different types of forest pheasant. Home to the Gaddi people who live a semi-nomadic lifestyle, the Abode of the Gods lies between the Dhaula Dhar range of mountains and the Kangra valley. It is an enchanting region of heavily wooded glades of pine, oak and rhododendron trees, green meadows and shrines dedicated to the Goddess Durga.

Christina Noble's book '**Over the High Passes**' gives a perfect description of the Gaddi people and this region: Publisher: FORTANA/COLLINS. ISBN 0-00-637350-X Eloise Napier's book '**A Place to Walk**' (Conran publishers) also features this trek in unforgettable walking holidays from around the world.

The Gaddi shepherds migrate annually with their small flocks of sheep and goats in search of grazing areas, a search that will entail covering mountainous terrain and crossing high passes for six months of the year. A proud and hospitable people, the Gaddi shepherds are superstitious and devout worshippers of the Goddess Durga, whose name they invoke for protection against evil spirits and to ensure a safe journey over mountain passes. During the trek we camp close to Gaddi hamlets and sometimes share a campsite; visitors are always welcome. This trek also encompasses a visit to the Dalai Lama's present town of exile, an Indian rail journey (a fascinating experience in its own right!) and some time to glimpse a little of Delhi, India's teeming capital.

This is a very pretty trek in an unspoilt part of the Himalaya. You are unlikely to see any other Europeans. The spring trek enjoys a wealth of rhododendron: the locals collect the petals to make jam.

## DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

**DAY 1-: Arrive Delhi** International airport just before midnight. After clearing customs, you will be met by our representatives who will be holding a placard and transferred by taxi to your hotel.

**Day 2- : SIGHTSEEING THEN TRANSFER TO OVERNIGHT TRAIN.** You check out at midday and in the afternoon we provide transport and an English-speaking guide to take you on a sightseeing tour of Old and New Delhi. Our tour of Delhi will include the Raj Ghat memorial, the Red Fort, once the most lavish fort and palace of the Mughal Empire and the Qutb Minar, the 73m high tower of victory. This is followed by an evening (approx. 19.00 hours) transfer to the railway station to board the express train to Pathankot, travelling in air-conditioned sleeper compartments. The Express is due to depart at 21.00 hours.

**DAY 3-: ARRIVE PATHANKOT, DRIVE TO MCLEOD GANJ.** The train arrives at 07.20 hrs. A two and a half hour taxi ride takes us to McLeod Ganj (6,200ft/1,890m). You break your journey to have breakfast at Kotla. McLeod Ganj is home to a thriving Tibetan community, who settled here with the Dalai Lama in 1959. In the afternoon there is a sightseeing tour laid on for those that wish, otherwise the time is yours to explore the town or relax at the Hotel. Evening pre trek briefing. Overnight at the Hotel Tibet.

## DHARAMSALA & MCLEODGANJ

Population approx. 21,000. Founded in 1855, it has one of the most spectacular settings for a Hill Station. It is built along a spur of the Dhauladhar range and varies in height from 4,500ft at the bazaar to 5,900ft at McLeod Ganj. It is surrounded by trees and is set against a backdrop of peaks rising to over 15,600ft/4,755m on three sides. The great granite mountains almost overhang the town. Views are superb, not only of the mountains but also over the Kangra Valley and Siwaliks. There are two sections to the town, the upper part is McLeod Ganj and the lower is called Dharmsala. The distance between them is almost 10km by road from centre to centre but there is a shorter, steeper path that takes about 40 minutes to cover. In both there is a strong Tibetan influence.

The Dalai Lama settled here after his flight across the Himalaya following the Chinese invasion of Tibet in October 1959. There is a monastery at McLeod Ganj, a short distance along from the Dalai Lama's residence, and a Library.

Dharmsala was one of the 80 hill stations established by the British between 1815 and 1847 though it was not on a par with Shimla, Nainital and Mussoorie in terms of popularity and size. The Church of St John-in-the-Wilderness (1860) is a short distance below McLeod Ganj on the way to Forsythganj. Along with other buildings in the area it was destroyed by the earthquake of 1905 but has been rebuilt. The 8th Lord of Elgin, one of the few Viceroy's to die in office, is buried here. Apparently, it was his wish as it reminded him of his beloved native Scotland. There are some very attractive stained glass windows.

Nowadays McLeod Ganj is home to a large community of Tibetans who settled here in the years following 1959 with their spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama.

## DAY 4-: TREK TO GEHRA (6,000ft/1,829m).

Approx. 5 hours walk. After breakfast you leave McLeod Ganj behind and ascend into pine and rhododendron forest before reaching Dal Lake. The highest point of today's walk is just before Dal Lake at around 6,700ft/2,042m (not to be confused with the Kashmir lake!) for an early lunch. To continue our journey you pass several hamlets before descending towards Gehra, your first campsite. There is a chance to swim and rest tired feet in the nearby river. You may well see monkeys in this area.

## DAY 5- : TREK TO NOLI. (7,000ft/2,134m).

Approx. 5 hours walk. Morning tea is brought to you

first thing. After a leisurely breakfast, you make your way along winding shepherd trails, through a valley dotted with villages and cultivated terraces until you reach Kereri, a small village inhabited by Gaddi shepherds where you have lunch. Here there is a one hundred year old Forest Officer's bungalow. Built by the British, it was part of a system of local administration. Many villages have Water Buffalo and you may well see the men and women spinning and weaving wool. In the afternoon you have a gradual ascent through pine, oak and rhododendron forest to reach Noli, gateway to the domain of the Gaddi shepherds. Camp beside wooden bridge at Noli.

**DAY 6-: TREK TO THE BASE OF THE KERERI LAKE.** (8,500ft). Approx. 6 hours walk. We strike camp at 8.30 am and continue deeper into the valley along a forest trail that leads you towards the Daula-Dhar mountains, having lunch en-route. In the afternoon you continue your ascent through pine and rhododendron forest until we reach our campsite.

**DAY 7 -: TREK TO KERERI LAKE.** (10,500ft/3,200m). Approx. 4 hours walk. A gradual ascent through thick pine and bearded oak forest until we reach Kereri lake situated at the base of the Minkiani pass. Camp at Kereri Lake. The afternoon is free to explore the surrounding high ridges that offer spectacular views of both the Kangra valley below and the Dhaula-Dhar mountain range. There is a temple here just near the lakeside.

**DAY 8 -: TREK TO RHELLA.** (8,000ft/2,438m). Approx. 5 hours walk. There is a leisurely start to the day as you continue your journey by crossing a ridge and descending into unspoilt valleys of rhododendron and wild chestnut trees, green meadows with alpine flowers and clear mountain streams, before reaching Rhella, your next camping area. Lunch along the way. Camp at Rhella.

**DAY 9 -: REST DAY.** Time to relax in the camp and go swimming in the nearby river.

**DAY 10-: TREK TO LAKA RIVER.** (6,200ft) Approx. 6 hours walk. You follow in the footsteps of the Gaddi shepherds, winding your way down Rhella Valley and stop for lunch beside a river. We walk over intermediate ridges, before descending towards our campsite near Laka river before descending towards our campsite near Laka river. In the afternoon there is an optional walk to Guna temple, 7,000ft/2,134m, (approx 2 hours walk, there and back) a pilgrimage centre for the Gaddi shepherds. Sightings of the Goddess have been reported in this

area and pilgrims travel great distances to offer their respects. camp at Laka river.

**DAY 11-: TREK TO TRIUND.** (9,000ft/2,743m). Approx. 5 hours walk. A gradual climb past cultivated terraced fields and village hamlets brings us to Gullu ridge 7,500ft/2,286m, where you have lunch. A long afternoon walk takes you to Triund, situated at the foot of the Dhaula-Dhar range. You camp on a meadow with views of the peaks above and the Kangra valley below.

**DAY 12-: TREK TO LAKA.** (11,000ft/3,353m). Approx. 4 hours walk. After breakfast a rocky trail leads you through pine forest in a steady ascent to Lake Got (11,000ft/3,353m), at the base of the Indra-Har pass (14,100ft/4,328m). Camp Laka.

**DAY 13-: OPTIONAL WALK TO THE INDRA HAR PASS. WALK TO DHARAMKOT.** (14,100ft/4,328m). An early morning start for those who want to climb the Indra Har pass. (approx 4 hrs walk) From the pass you will be rewarded by views of the Pir Panjal Himalayas and Mount Kailash, the abode of Shiva. Packed lunch en route. In the afternoon we will walk to Dharamkot, (approx 3 hours walk) a protected nature reserve and home to the Butterworth family. This lies on a wooded ridge, with views up to the craggy peaks of the Dhaula Dhar ridge - the most beautiful perhaps being Moon Peak (15,100ft/4,604m). There are also very fine views across the Kangra valley. The protected status of the woods means that much of the wildlife is relatively tame; some very fine pheasants can be seen, including chir pheasant and Khalij pheasant. Accommodation will be in stone cottages or tents.

**DAY 14-: RETURN TO MCLEOD GANJ, VISIT TIBETAN CENTRES, THEN DRIVE TO PATHANKOT FOR TRAIN TO DELHI.** There is a 1 hour walk down through the woods from Dharamkot to McLeod Ganj. The day is spent exploring the Tibetan handicrafts centre run by the Dalai Lama's sister. You will also visit the Tibetan children's village, a refugee centre for homeless Tibetan children. You then drive back to Pathankot to catch the 17.45 overnight train back to Delhi.

**DAY 15-: ARRIVE DELHI** Early morning (5.45am) and transfer to your Delhi hotel. (Check in at 12 noon) Rest of day at leisure. Overnight hotel.

**DAY 16 -: TRANSFER BY TAXI** to the airport to board your return flight home.

**Maximum Altitude** 11,000ft/3,353m optional  
14,100ft/4328m

## EQUIPMENT & SERVICES PROVIDED.

When we receive your booking we will send you a full India travel guide, which contains a suggested gear and clothing list. If you do have queries at this initial stage do ring us and we will be pleased to offer advice.

## ACCOMMODATION:

**DELHI:** We use the Oberoi Maiden hotel, a comfortable 4-star hotel. Facilities include swimming pool, bar, coffee shop, restaurants room service and it is fully air-conditioned. This hotel is a 30 minute drive away from Connought Place.

**MCLEODGANJ: Hotel Tibet.** Basic clean comfortable accommodation and friendly service in one of the best local hotels.

**WEATHER:** The best weather in this part of Himachal Pradesh is from late Autumn to Spring with warm sunny days and pleasant nights. It can be quite hot during the day (up to 25°C) at lower altitudes and at higher altitudes (over 10,000ft) the temperature can drop to -1°C at night. In late March/April there is the added attraction to many of rhododendron in bloom.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Whilst every effort is made to keep to the above itinerary, clients will hopefully appreciate that this is adventure travel in a remote mountain region. **Given the nature of these treks there will quite likely be changes to the itinerary in terms of anything from on the spot choice of camp site to the day that a rest day is taken.** Weather conditions, road conditions, vehicle breakdowns off the beaten track, local availability of porters, can contribute to the need for changes. Your trek leader will do everything in his/her power to see that you are inconvenienced as little as possible in such events. **Timings given are approximate.**

**MEAL PLAN:** B&B in Delhi and elsewhere. Full board on Trek

**NOT INCLUDED:** Air travel\*. Alcohol, bottled water or soft drinks. Entry fees to monuments of historical importance. The Taj Mahal is closed to the public on Fridays.

**TRANSPORT:** Transport is by private car/coach with an English speaking driver.

**SPENDING MONEY:** You should allow about £5 a day for incidentals and tips, perhaps a little more if you enjoy a few beers as these are comparatively expensive in India.

**INSURANCE:** It is a condition of joining any of our tours that you hold adequate insurance cover. This must include medical and personal accident insurance.

**TRAIN TRAVEL.** Overnight train travel is by 4 or 6 berth air-conditioned sleeper compartments. Depending on availability, train\* travel is usually in 1<sup>st</sup> A/C (fifties style 4 berth cabins with cabin doors) or 2<sup>nd</sup> A/C (4 & 6 berth cabins with pull to curtains for privacy) On some routes the only class available (apart from 2<sup>nd</sup> class non a/c) is 3<sup>rd</sup> class A/C which is 3 tier on either side of the carriage with a shared passage. Bedding is normally supplied free of charge. (pillows, sheets and blankets) \* Train times are subject to confirmation by our agents in India.

**NOT INCLUDED:** Entry fees\* to monuments of historical importance. \*Expect to pay between £2.00 and £6.00 per person for entry fees to monuments of historical importance in Delhi and elsewhere.

**TIPPING:** If you are trekking with us it is customary at the end of the trek for members of the group to pool a small sum of money and any surplus clothing, which is then given to the Trek Leader for distribution among the staff. Of course, tipping is a privilege and not a right and you are at liberty to give as much or as little as you wish. Your Trek leader will be happy to field a discussion as to what you may like to give, generally we advise about £1.50 per client for each day on trek in local currency or the dollar equivalent. In the event that you are not entirely satisfied with the service provided, you are asked to make your feelings known to the Trek Leader.

**RECOMMENDED READING:** The Lonely Planet India Travel Guide and Rough Guides Travel To India.

## Timings given are approximate

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Whilst every effort is made to keep to the above itinerary, clients will hopefully appreciate that this is adventure travel in a remote mountain region. **Given the nature of these treks there will quite likely be changes to the itinerary in terms of anything from on the spot choice of camp site to the day that a rest day is taken.** Weather conditions, road conditions, vehicle breakdowns off the beaten track, local availability of

porters, can contribute to the need for changes. Your trek leader will do everything in his/her power to see that you are inconvenienced as little as possible in such events. **Timings given are approximate.**

**EQUIPMENT PROVIDED.** We provide 'A' frame or dome tents which have room for two people plus all of your equipment. There is also a dining tent, a toilet tent exclusively for our group use, and a kitchen and staff tent. There are camp chairs or stools, a kerosene/gas lamp or candles for reading in the dining tent\* at night, stainless steel crockery and tableware and \*foam sleeping mats. (\*subject to availability) **We strongly recommend you bring your own karrimat or therma-a-rest as well.** The staff complement of cooks and assistants are always in attendance. They put up and take down the tents, make the tea, cook the food, wash the dishes, load the porters and carry a load of their own. They work extremely hard and are always willing to help. If you want to join in putting up tents and taking them down, you are free to do so, but it is not expected.

\*Dining tents are heavy to carry and are only provided for a minimum of 4 people. For under 4 people a smaller tent will be provided.

## A TYPICAL DAY ON TREK

Soon after dawn you are served tea or coffee while still in your sleeping bag. A few minutes later a washing bowl of hot water is placed outside your tent. You can wash inside or outside the tent. Once dressed you can pack your kit-bag and day-pack in preparation for the day's hike, and place these outside the tent. The camp staff will take down the tents. While this is happening, breakfast is served. In the Himalaya breakfast usually consists of cereals and/or porridge with milk, eggs, usually served with chapatis, (unleavened bread that is cooked on a hot iron plate) or pancakes with honey or jam. There is always plenty of tea and coffee. The camp will be being struck while you are eating, and you will need to be packed and out of your tents before breakfast.

You can take a leisurely breakfast while the staff prepare loads for the porters or pack animals. If you have not filled up your water bottle the night before ask the cook (Before breakfast is served) to fill your bottle with boiled water. You may also collect a packed lunch, although usually you may have a cooked meal at the lunch stop. Departure from camp could be from any time between dawn and 9.00am, depending on the days itinerary, but generally you will start walking at around 8.00am.

Depending on the length of the day's walk, you will walk for three or four hours before stopping for lunch. The lunch stop will last for about an hour.

You usually arrive at the next camp site by 4:00pm. Camp may already be set up by the time you get there, and tea/juice and biscuits will be ready to welcome you. Supper will be ready soon after dark, and will be served in the dining tent or in some instances, around the camp fire. Camp fires will only be made if dead wood is available. The standard of cooking on trek is usually surprisingly good, with the style of cooking being a compromise between local and western food. Menus vary, but typically we start with soup. The main course is often a rice based meal with meat stew or mild curry, plus separate vegetable and salad dishes. A sweet dish is provided after the meal. Our meal is finished with tea, coffee or hot chocolate. Sometimes a bottle of local spirit is provided by the camp staff, but we advise clients to buy plastic half bottles from duty free. However, you should only drink alcohol when you feel acclimatised. After dinner, the usual practise is for your water bottle to be filled with hot water and used as a hot water bottle for your sleeping bag and for drinking water the next day.

We would like you to enjoy the serenity of the unhurried atmosphere that exists in these wilderness regions. Our day to day camp routine on your trekking adventure is geared to allow you to make the most of your holiday.

**Important:** Before you travel please check your **Tour Voucher** and **Arrival Information** for the latest joining instructions. This will be sent to you upon receipt of final payment.

**All itineraries are subject to change without prior notice.**