

Ananda Himalayas Vacation

written by Pam Baker



If it is enlightenment you seek, consider a trip to the top of the Himalayas and a vacation in the land of gurus and the Maharaja of Tehri. Ananda, a resort that once was the Maharaja's royal palace, echoes with the divine presence of Ma Anandamayi, a renowned figure of universal love whose aura is said to linger on Ananda's premises. As South East Asia's finest destination spa, Ananda offers "a spiritual vision, an uplifting wisdom of the ages and a pure bliss of being." Here at the top of the world, you can explore the sacred source of the Ganges and investigate the beguiling mystique of the Himalayan mountains.

In the ancient times of royal reign, the regal corridors of the palace echoed with footsteps of distinguished guests like the late Sri. Lal Bahadur Shastri and Mrs. Indira Gandhi - Prime Ministers of India. Other revered personalities throughout history frequented the palace including spiritual leaders such as Ma Anandamayi and Swami Sevanand and political leaders such as the last British Viceroy of India - Lord Louis Mountbatten. In 1947, when India gained independence, the kingdom of Tehri Garhwal was merged with the state of Uttar Pradesh.

Today, the completely restored Viceregal Palace is nothing short of mesmerizing. The traditional 'aarti' welcome leaves you reminiscing about kings and royal splendor and is all the more enjoyable since the staff speaks fluent English, as well as several other languages in addition to their native tongue of Garhwali - a dialect of the national language Hindi.

Adjacent to the overwhelming splendor of the reception area, is the grand Viceregal Tea Lounge filled with old-world charm and understated elegance and it is a wonderful place to enjoy a splendid cup of Darjeeling tea. Afterwards, be sure to browse the Maharaja's billiards room where you will find the oldest billiards table in India, dating back over a 100 years.

The 21,000 square foot spa offers an extensive menu of over 79 body and beauty treatments, integrating the traditional Indian systems of Ayurveda with the more contemporary Western spa approach.

But this trip is about so much more than a spa respite and an exploration of ancient mystical beliefs and royal structures; it is also an adventure packed escape from all things routine. There are numerous outdoor sports to enjoy from whitewater rafting to some of the world's best fishing. You can also safari into Rajaji National Park, Corbett National Park or Chilla Sanctuary to sight the big cats, tigers, leopards, panthers, elephants, bears and wild boars. In addition, you can spot a reptile peculiar to Ganges waters, the long-nosed crocodile, called the Gharial. If art and culture are more your thing than exotic wildlife, be sure to take in the wondrous realms of Indian music and dance (performed in traditional costume) and take home any of numerous treasures sporting the richness of Indian art.

TIP #1: Passport and Immunization Needs

You will need a valid passport to travel to the Himalayas. Be aware that passport regulations have recently changed, so be sure your passport meets the new standards rather than simply checking to see if your passport is current. The good news is no special immunizations are required to travel to India.

TIP #2: Pack Warm Clothing

The area has a moderate climate throughout the year except during winter, particularly between December 15th and January 15th when the temperature drops to 6 degrees Centigrade (43 degrees Fahrenheit) at night. Since the Palace is located at an altitude of 3,000 feet (1000 meters), the invigorating air is richly perfumed by wild flower blossoms but the chill can be penetrating. Light woolen clothing is recommended. You might also want to pack some antihistamines.

TIP #3: Plan for Jet Lag

The time change can really take your legs out from under you. Plan a day or two of rest on your way, either at the Ananda or en route.

Once you arrive at New Delhi's airport you still have a ways to go. Ananda is 250 kilometers North and you can get there by a 45 minute flight to Jolly Grant airport (although you may have to wait as long as three hours for your flight); a 4-hour train ride; or, a scenic 7-8 hour drive. If you plan to make the drive yourself, consider staying in a hotel in New Delhi for a day or two first to fend off the effects of some serious jet lag. Otherwise, hire a driver. The 4-hour train ride is the most convenient and may even allow you time to catch a much-needed nap but it can be a bit crowded and unsettling to the uninitiated.

A chopper service is also available if you rather make a short helicopter trip directly to the Palace grounds

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