

A Guide to Himachal

This 21-day expedition is a rare blend of spiritual depth, desert drama, and high-altitude offroad adventure. From the lakes of Pokhara to the windswept ridges of Upper Mustang, the ancient walled city of Lo Manthang to the sacred shrines of Muktinath, this loop is for explorers who crave scale, solitude, and story.

Trip Overview

Duration: 21 Days

Best Season: April–June or September–November (*dry roads, clear skies*)

Total Distance: ~3,500–4,000 km

Vehicle Type: 4x4 SUV or ADV bike (*essential for Mustang, Korola, Hanuman Chuli*)

Difficulty: Very Challenging (*border crossings, altitude, offroad terrain*)

Permits:

- Indian citizens: No visa required
- Vehicle: Temporary entry permit at Sonauli border
- Nepal: ACAP + TIMS for Mustang, special permit for Lo Manthang

Mobile Network: Patchy in Mustang, Lo Manthang, Korola; Jio/BSNL in India and Nepal plains

Fuel Planning: Pumps in Pokhara, Jomsom, Kathmandu; carry 40–60 L spare for Mustang leg

Day-by-Day Itinerary

Day 1: Chandigarh → Gorakhpur

- **Distance/Time:** ~900 km | 14–16 hrs
 - **Highlights:**
 - Long highway drive via Lucknow
 - Overnight halt near Sonauli border
 - **Stay:** Gorakhpur
 - **Tip:** Carry all vehicle documents for border entry
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Day 2: Gorakhpur → Sonauli → Pokhara

- **Distance/Time:** ~250 km | 6–7 hrs
- **Border:** Sonauli (India–Nepal)

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- **Highlights:**
 - Cross border with vehicle permit
 - Scenic drive to Pokhara via Siddhartha Highway
 - **Stay:** Pokhara lakeside
 - **Tip:** Visit customs early to avoid delays
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Day 3–4: Pokhara exploration + buffer

- **Highlights:**
 - **Phewa Lake, Barahi Temple, Davis Falls, Gupteshwor Cave**
 - Buffer day for permits and vehicle prep
 - **Stay:** Pokhara
 - **Tip:** Apply for ACAP + TIMS + Mustang permit
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Day 5: Pokhara → Beni → Tatopani

- **Distance/Time:** ~120 km | 5–6 hrs
 - **Highlights:**
 - Enter Kaligandaki Gorge
 - Drive through waterfalls and cliff roads
 - **Stay:** Tatopani
 - **Tip:** Check tyre pressure before offroad ascent
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Day 6: Tatopani → Jomsom → Kagbeni

- **Distance/Time:** ~90 km | 5–6 hrs
- **Highlights:**
 - Cliff-hugging drive to **Jomsom**
 - Visit **Kagbeni Monastery**
- **Stay:** Kagbeni
- **Tip:** Acclimatize slowly — altitude begins here

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Day 7: Kagbeni → Muktinath → Lo Manthang

- **Distance/Time:** ~100 km | 6–7 hrs
 - **Pass:** Muktinath (3,800 m)
 - **Highlights:**
 - Visit **Muktinath Temple** — sacred to Hindus and Buddhists
 - Enter **Upper Mustang desert**
 - **Stay:** Lo Manthang
 - **Tip:** Photography restricted inside temple sanctums
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Day 8–9: Lo Manthang exploration + Korola Border

- **Distance/Time:** ~60 km round trip | 4–5 hrs
 - **Highlights:**
 - Visit **Korola Border** (*Nepal–Tibet frontier*)
 - Explore **Lo Manthang Palace, Thubchen Gumpa, Choser caves**
 - **Stay:** Lo Manthang
 - **Tip:** Carry snacks and water — no shops en route
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Day 10: Lo Manthang → Hanuman Chuli → Return

- **Distance/Time:** ~80 km | 5–6 hrs
 - **Highlights:**
 - Offroad ascent to **Hanuman Chuli viewpoint**
 - Panoramic views of Mustang desert and Tibetan plateau
 - **Stay:** Lo Manthang
 - **Tip:** Drive slow — loose gravel and wind gusts
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Day 11: Lo Manthang → Jomsom

- **Distance/Time:** ~100 km | 5–6 hrs

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- **Highlights:**
 - Return via Kaligandaki corridor
 - Visit **Marpha village** (*apple orchards*)
 - **Stay:** Jomsom
 - **Tip:** Try local apple brandy and dried fruit
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Day 12: Jomsom → Tatopani → Pokhara

- **Distance/Time:** ~120 km | 6–7 hrs
 - **Highlights:**
 - Cliff descent into Pokhara
 - Rest and refuel
 - **Stay:** Pokhara
 - **Tip:** Check suspension and brakes post offroad leg
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Day 13: Pokhara → Lumbini

- **Distance/Time:** ~200 km | 6 hrs
 - **Highlights:**
 - Visit **Lumbini** — birthplace of Buddha
 - Explore **Maya Devi Temple, monastic zones**
 - **Stay:** Lumbini
 - **Tip:** Best light for photography is early morning
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Day 14: Lumbini → Chitwan

- **Distance/Time:** ~150 km | 4–5 hrs
- **Highlights:**
 - Visit **Chitwan National Park**
 - Optional jungle safari
- **Stay:** Chitwan

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- **Tip:** Book safari in advance
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Day 15: Chitwan → Kathmandu

- **Distance/Time:** ~180 km | 6–7 hrs
 - **Highlights:**
 - Scenic drive via **Mugling**
 - Arrival in **Kathmandu**
 - **Stay:** Thamel
 - **Tip:** Visit **Swayambhunath, Pashupatinath, Durbar Square**
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Day 16: Kathmandu → Bhaktapur

- **Distance/Time:** ~20 km | 1 hr
 - **Highlights:**
 - Explore **Bhaktapur Durbar Square, Pottery Square, Nyatapola Temple**
 - **Stay:** Bhaktapur
 - **Tip:** Try local Juju Dhau (curd)
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Day 17: Bhaktapur → Raxaul Border → Patna

- **Distance/Time:** ~300 km | 8–9 hrs
 - **Border:** Raxaul (Nepal–India)
 - **Highlights:**
 - Cross into Bihar
 - Overnight in Patna
 - **Stay:** Patna
 - **Tip:** Carry printed vehicle permit for Indian re-entry
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Day 18: Patna → Varanasi

- **Distance/Time:** ~250 km | 6–7 hrs

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- **Highlights:**
 - Visit **Kashi Vishwanath Temple, Ganga Aarti**
 - **Stay:** Varanasi
 - **Tip:** Book Ghat-side stay for sunrise views
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Day 19: Varanasi → Lucknow

- **Distance/Time:** ~300 km | 6–7 hrs
 - **Highlights:**
 - Visit **Bara Imambara, Rumi Darwaza**
 - **Stay:** Lucknow
 - **Tip:** Try Awadhi thali and kebabs
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Day 20: Lucknow → Chandigarh

- **Distance/Time:** ~700 km | 12–14 hrs
 - **Highlights:**
 - Long highway return
 - **Stay:** Chandigarh
 - **Tip:** Celebrate completion with local Himachali cuisine
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Day 21: Buffer / Rest

- **Options:**
 - Vehicle service, content backup, or rest
 - **Finish:** Chandigarh (*trip end*)
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Essentials to Carry

- **Documents:**
 - Valid Driving License (DL), Vehicle Registration Certificate (RC), Insurance papers

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- Aadhaar or Passport for ID
- Nepal vehicle entry permit (issued at Sonauli border)
- ACAP (Annapurna Conservation Area Permit), TIMS (Trekking Information Management System), and **Special Permit for Upper Mustang** (*issued in Pokhara or Kathmandu*)
- **Clothing:**
 - Layered warm gear (base layer, fleece, down jacket)
 - Windproof and waterproof outer shell
 - Gloves, woolen cap, sun hat, thermal socks
- **Footwear:**
 - Waterproof trekking shoes with ankle support
 - Sandals or slip-ons for camp use
- **Health & Safety:**
 - Diamox (for altitude), ORS, basic meds, portable oxygen canisters
 - Sunscreen (SPF 50+), lip balm, sunglasses
 - First-aid kit with antiseptics, bandages, and altitude meds
- **Gear & Navigation:**
 - Offline maps (Maps.me, Gaia GPS), printed route backup
 - Power banks (20,000 mAh+), headlamps, extra batteries
 - Tyre inflator, puncture kit, tow strap, jump cables
 - Jerrycans (40–60 L fuel capacity), engine oil, coolant
- **Miscellaneous:**
 - Snacks, dry fruits, hydration salts
 - Thermos flask, reusable water bottles
 - Camera with extra SD cards
 - Trash bags — strict no-litter ethic

Permits, Fuel & Checkpoints

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- **Permits Required:**

- Nepal vehicle entry permit (Sonauli border)
- ACAP + TIMS (Pokhara or Kathmandu)
- Special Permit for Upper Mustang (Lo Manthang, Korola)
- ILP for Hanle/Umling La if route extends via Ladakh

- **Fuel Planning:**

- Reliable pumps: Chandigarh, Gorakhpur, Pokhara, Jomsom, Kathmandu
- Carry 40–60 L spare fuel for Mustang and Korola leg
- Fuel availability in Lo Manthang is limited and expensive

- **Checkpoints & Border Notes:**

- Customs at Sonauli and Raxaul (vehicle and ID checks)
- Army/ITBP checks near Korola and Hanle
- Local police checks in Mustang and Kathmandu Valley

- **Timing Tips:**

- Mustang roads best driven before noon
- Avoid driving after dark in offroad zones
- Border crossings open 6 am–6 pm (carry photocopies)

Insider Tips

- **Best season:** April–June and September–November for dry roads and clear skies
 - **Photography:** Lo Manthang palace, Korola desert ridges, Muktinath sunrise, Hanuman Chuli panorama
 - **Local eats:** Try thukpa and yak cheese in Mustang, apple brandy in Marpha, Newari cuisine in Bhaktapur
 - **Eco-ethic:** No littering, no drone use near border zones, respect monastery customs
 - **Road caution:** Mustang and Korola stretches are remote, dusty, and cliff-hugging — drive slow and steady
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Route Map Overview (Text)

Chandigarh → Gorakhpur → Sonauli Border → Pokhara → Beni → Tatopani → Jomsom → Kagbeni → Muktinath → Lo Manthang → Korola Border → Hanuman Chuli → Jomsom → Pokhara → Lumbini → Chitwan → Kathmandu → Bhaktapur → Raxaul Border → Patna → Varanasi → Lucknow → Chandigarh