

A Guide to Himachal

Chandigarh → Spiti Valley → Manali → Chandigarh: The Ultimate 12-Day Himalayan Road Trip

From the moment you leave Chandigarh's bustling plains, the road begins to tell a story — of pine-scented ridges, apple-laden valleys, stark high-altitude deserts, and glacial lakes that mirror the Milky Way.

This 12-day circuit is a **journey through three worlds**: the green embrace of Himachal's lower hills, the raw, lunar beauty of Spiti, and the lush, river-fed valleys of Manali.

Trip Overview

Duration: 12 Days

Best Season: Mid-June to mid-October (*Kunzum Pass & Chandratal open*)

Total Distance: ~1,100 km

Vehicle Type: SUV / High Clearance

Difficulty: Moderate to Challenging

Permits: Inner Line Permit for foreign nationals (Shimla or Kaza)

Mobile Network: Jio & BSNL in most towns; patchy/no signal in remote stretches

Day-by-Day Itinerary

Day 1: Chandigarh → Solan → Shimla

Distance: 115 km | **Drive Time:** 4–5 hrs

Ease into the mountains via NH5. Stop at **Mohan Shakti Heritage Park** for panoramic views and intricate sculptures. In Shimla, wander **Mall Road**, visit **Christ Church**, and watch the sunset from **The Ridge**.

 *Travel Hack:* Start early to avoid traffic bottlenecks near Dharampur.

Stay: Shimla (2,200 m) | **Roads:** Excellent.

Day 2: Shimla → Narkanda → Rampur

Distance: 130 km | **Drive Time:** 5–6 hrs

Climb to **Hatu Peak** (detour) for 360° views of snow-clad ranges. Descend into the Satluj Valley, tracing the river to Rampur.

 *Fuel Stop:* Rampur has the last major petrol pump before Kinnaur.

Stay: Rampur / Jeori | **Roads:** Smooth but winding.

Day 3: Rampur → Sarahan → Kalpa

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Distance: 120 km | **Drive Time:** 6–7 hrs

Visit **Bhima Kali Temple** in Sarahan, then continue to Kalpa for golden-hour views of **Kinnaur Kailash**.

💡 *Photo Spot:* Roghi village cliffside viewpoint.

Stay: Kalpa (2,960 m) | **Roads:** Narrow, cliff-hugging.

Day 4: Kalpa → Nako → Tabo

Distance: 160 km | **Drive Time:** 7–8 hrs

Pause at **Nako Lake** and monastery, detour to **Gue** to see the 500-year-old mummified monk, and end at **Tabo Monastery** — a living museum of Buddhist art.

💡 *Network Note:* Expect no signal between Pooh and Tabo.

Stay: Tabo (3,280 m).

Day 5: Tabo → Dhankar → Kaza

Distance: 50 km | **Drive Time:** 3–4 hrs

Stand on the cliff at **Dhankar Monastery** where two rivers meet. If acclimatized, trek to **Dhankar Lake**. Arrive in **Kaza** and rest.

💡 *Acclimatization Tip:* Avoid alcohol and heavy exertion today.

Stay: Kaza (3,800 m).

Day 6: Kaza – Hikkim, Komic, Langza Loop

Distance: ~50 km loop | **Drive Time:** 4–5 hrs

- **Hikkim:** Post a letter from the world's highest post office.
- **Komic:** Visit Tangyud Monastery.
- **Langza:** Fossil hunting and giant Buddha statue.

💡 *Best Time:* Morning for clear skies and fewer tourists.

Stay: Kaza.

Day 7: Kaza – Key, Kibber, Chicham Loop

Distance: ~40 km loop | **Drive Time:** 3–4 hrs

- **Key Monastery:** Attend morning prayers if possible.
- **Kibber:** Gateway to wildlife spotting.

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- **Chicham Bridge:** Asia's highest suspension bridge.
💡 *Photography Tip:* Late afternoon light is magical here.
Stay: Kaza.
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Day 8: Kaza → Kunzum Pass → Chandratal

Distance: 90 km | **Drive Time:** 6–7 hrs

Spin prayer wheels at **Kunzum La** (4,551 m), then camp near **Chandratal Lake** under a sky thick with stars.

💡 *Camping Rule:* No camping at the lake shore — use designated sites.

Stay: Camps near Chandratal | **Roads:** Dirt tracks, stream crossings.

Day 9: Chandratal → Manali (via Atal Tunnel)

Distance: ~125 km | **Drive Time:** 7–8 hrs

Rough descent to **Gramphu**, then smooth highway through the **Atal Tunnel** into Kullu Valley.

💡 *Weather Note:* Carry rain gear — sudden showers possible in Kullu.

Stay: Manali (2,050 m).

Day 10: Manali Exploration

Visit **Hadimba Temple**, **Old Manali cafés**, **Solang Valley**, or trek to **Jogini Falls**.

💡 *Local Flavour:* Try siddu (steamed bread) at a Himachali dhaba.

Stay: Manali.

Day 11: Manali → Mandi → Chandigarh

Distance: 300 km | **Drive Time:** 8–9 hrs

Follow the Beas River, optional stop at **Rewalsar Lake**, and return to Chandigarh.

💡 *Drive Tip:* Start before 7 am to avoid traffic near Kiratpur.

Essentials to Carry

- Warm layers & windproof jacket
- Sturdy trekking shoes
- Valid ID & permits

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- Sunglasses, SPF 50+, lip balm
 - Altitude sickness medication
 - Offline maps & extra fuel for Spiti stretch
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Route Map Overview

Route: Chandigarh → Solan → Shimla → Narkanda → Rampur → Sarahan → Kalpa → Nako → Tabo → Dhankar → Kaza → Hikkim → Langza → Key → Kibber → Chicham → Kunzum → Chandratal → Atal Tunnel → Manali → Mandi → Chandigarh



Insider Tip

The magic of this trip lies in its pace. Don't rush Kaza — give yourself time to connect with the villages, sip butter tea with locals, and let the thin mountain air slow your thoughts.