

**BANJARA RETREAT, KAZA,
SPITI VALLEY, HIMACHAL PRADESH**



Kaza is the capital of the Spiti Valley. Rudyard Kipling describes Spiti in "Kim" in these words: "At last they entered a world within a world - a valley of leagues where the high hills were fashioned of the mere rubble and refuse from off the knees of the mountains... Surely the Gods live here". The valleys of Kullu and Lahaul bound Spiti; locally pronounced "Piti", on its south and west; the region of Ladakh lies to the north and the Kalpa valley lies to the southeast. Geologically and archaeologically, Spiti is a living museum. The mountains are devoid of any vegetation and erosion by wind, sun and snow over thousands of years has laid bare the rocks. The rugged and rocky mountain slopes sweep down to the riverbeds giving the landscape a moon-like appearance. Spiti valley is a cold desert and falls in a rain shadow region.

How to get there:

- By Air:** Nearest airport is Kullu (200 kms). One can also visit from Shimla side (400 kms). Visit from Shimla helps you acclimatize better as you gain altitude gradually. The flights to Kullu and Shimla are not reliable as of now hence, Chandigarh would be best option.
- By Train:** Nearest station is Shimla (400 kms and toy train), Kalka (490 kms), Kiratpur Sahib (440 kms)
Daily morning and evening Shatabdi from Delhi- Chandigarh/ Kalka- Delhi
Daily train from Mumbai and Kolkata.
- By Road:** Delhi- Kaza via Sangla: 850 kms- route open throughout the year
Delhi- Kaza via Manali- 700 kms- this route open towards end June

Best time to visit May- mid- October

The temperatures vary with the altitude and seasons. May to September months have pleasant days and cold nights. We open the retreat on May 1 and close around mid- Oct.

Accommodation

Eleven rooms with attached bathrooms. All the rooms are fully furnished and have attached baths with 24 hr hot/cold water supply.

Places to visit around the Retreat:

- Ki Monastery:** Ki Gompa, the largest in the valley, is 11 kms away. Located above Kaza at a height of 4116m, fine murals and valuable collection of Kangyur - ancient Buddhist texts are its main attractions.
- Gete and Kibber:** Gete at 4270m and Kibber at 4205m are perched on a vast rocky stretch of land and surrounded by mountains of limestone rocks, the view from here is truly breathtaking.
- Chandertal:** Situated at 4270m, Chandertal is a crystal clear natural lake that lies in a broad grassy plain. Perched between a low ridge and the main Kunzum range, the lake is a wonderful camping site and a spectacular trekking destination.
- Dhankar Monastery:** Dhankar, the traditional capital of Spiti, is a 30 km/approx 1 hr drive from Kaza. The Hilltop fort here that overlooks the Spiti Valley, used to serve as a jail in earlier times. Today, more than 160 lamas reside here. About an hour's walk from here on a slightly uphill track is a small lake that sits languidly in a bowl.
- Pin Valley NP:** The Pin Valley National Park has extreme temperatures (3700-6000M), scant vegetation and mostly dominated by alpine trees, patches of Himalayan cedar and smatterings of several medicinal plants. It is the natural habitat for a number of endangered animals including the Snow Leopard and the Siberian Ibex and rare birds like the Himalayan Snow Partridge, the Tibetan Snow Finch etc. the soil is rich in fossils.
- Tabo Monastery:** The monastery is referred to as, 'Chogs-hkhor' (doctrinal Enclave). It is one of the most sacred Trans- Himalayan Buddhist shrines and is endowed with a wealth of wall paintings and stucco images. Founded in 996 AD, by the great translator and teacher, Rinchensang Po, it is the oldest continuously functioning Buddhist monastery in India and the Himalayas, with its original decoration and iconographic program still intact.
- Langza- Hikkim:** A good trek from Kaza is the Langza- Hikkim- Komic circuit which passes through a virtual treasure trove of fossils, the highest motorable villages at 4460m and highest monastery at 4560m respectively. The panorama from these villages is enthralling and inspiring. The mighty peaks can be seen from here in their full glory. The Chocling La Peak (6510 M) is visible clearly like a Shivalingam from these villages. Now-a-days, you can even drive up to these villages.

List of things to bring:

T-Shirts/ Shirts (Preferably Long Sleeved)
Thermal Wear
Personal Toilet Requisite
Rain gear (just in case)

Trousers/ Jeans/ Track Pants
Gloves, Muffler, Woolen Socks
Personal Medication
Knapsack/ Daypack (to carry water, camera)

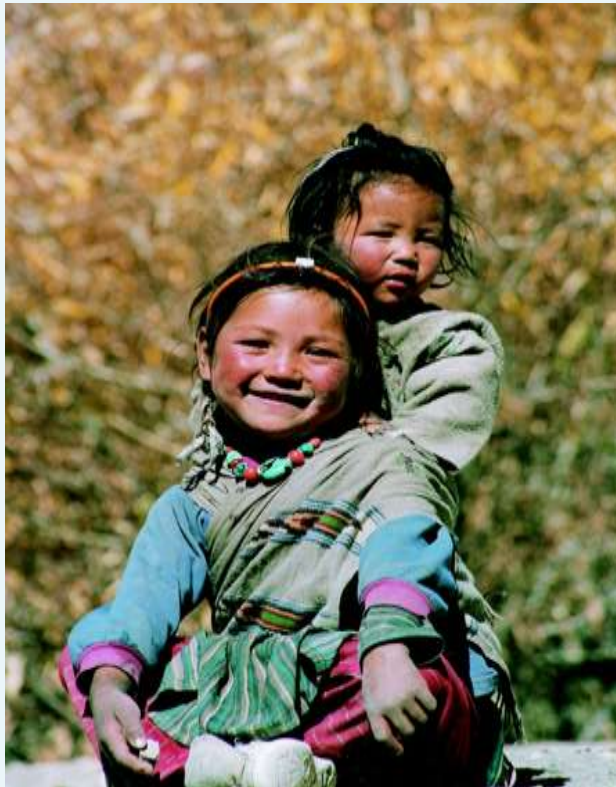
Pullover
Cap

Wind Cheater
Well Worn Sports Shoes
Sun Glasses/ Sun Block
Camera/ Writing Material

Jacket

General and important information:

1. We cater to different food needs including strictly vegetarian, less or more spiced up or even Jain food. Inform us in advance and consider it catered to.
2. We expect the weather to listen to us or at least to Mets department ☺ but a lot of times, it throws tantrums and becomes cranky. Since you are traveling to high altitude, irrespective of the month you are travelling in, please carry good woolens.
3. We have a range of books and magazines available for those of you wish to read.
4. There are charging points for mobile, cameras in your rooms.
5. There is good mobile connection. BSNL, Airtel and Reliance work best. Internet connectivity here is highly unreliable.
6. There is a doctor on call for any emergencies.
7. Transport to and fro Kaza may be organized.
8. You could enter the Spiti valley from Kinnaur or Lahaul/ Manali side. The Kunzum pass (from Lahaul side) opens only in June and exact dates vary. If you wish to cross over Kunzum and get to Manali or vice versa, you should plan your visit for End- June onwards. Spiti valley is open from Kinnaur side throughout the year.
9. There are indoor games like ludo, carrom etc.





PLACES TO VISIT

KI, KIBBER AND GETE

Ki is the biggest monastery in Spiti Valley. Situated between Kaza and Kibber, it dominates the Ki village and the Spiti Valley. Ki Monastery (4116M) is a Gelugpa sect monastery. Its hilltop position points to a post-thirteenth century construction. The monks' dwellings rise in a closely packed cluster up the south and east face to the summit, where the main temple building is situated. The greatest wealth of Ki Gompa lies in its collection of 'Thangkas' salvaged with difficulty from the devastating raids of the Dogras and the Sikhs in the 19th century. At 4270M and 4205M height, Gete and Kibber are the two highest villages in Asia connected by road. From Ki, a scenic drive takes you to **Kibber**, a small village. From Kibber, the pastures are spread over hundred of square kilometers. Kibber is the take off point for the popular trek to Tso Moriri in Ladakh. Kibber also falls on the old route used over centuries by traders from trans-Himalayas to reach Spiti for an annual fair where traders from Spiti, Kinnaur, Ladakh and Tibet use to participate in. Further up, six kilometers from Kibber, we drive up to a still smaller village of **Gete**. Consisting of just six houses, it boasts of being the highest village in Asia connected by road. The view from here of the whole Spiti valley is truly spectacular. There is also, for the willing and adventurous, a short-cut to Ki monastery that takes less than an hour (hiking). A short drive ahead is the pretty village of Tashigong. It is now considered sacred earth as the present Dalai Lama stayed here once. He said that Tashigong reminded him of his home. The view of Shilla peak from here is breathtaking. It is a good idea to go to the village and ask for 'Dahi'- generally made from Yak milk and amazingly tasty. Kaza, Ki, Kibber, Gete and Tashigong are quite close knit and can be comfortably covered in a day.

CHANDRATAL

Chandertal lies in Lahaul. The lake can be approached through either 4551M high Kunzum Pass (this pass divides the Lahaul and Spiti areas) or through Batal, a small two teashops place that lies at the base of the Kunzum Pass. Nothing can be more fascinating than a drive through the awe-inspiring Spiti valley from Kaza to Kunzum La. You drive past a couple of villages before you hit Losar, 22 Km short of Kunzum La. A nice teashop, a shop to buy hand knitted socks, a police post and few basic guest houses pretty much make up the village. From here, drive for 7 km through a grassy bed besides Spiti River before starting the climb to the pass. From Kunzum La you get a most outstanding panoramic view westward towards Lahaul. Starting from Kunzum, one gets the benefit of starting from a place higher than the lake itself. So not only one gets to see far flung mountain ranges on this approximately 13 km route but also the lake itself even when you are still 5 to 6 kms.

Also, a quick prayer and many photographs later at the Kunzum pass, one can descend towards the Lahaul side. After a 10 km 'hair-raising' drive, you reach the magical Chandertal (Moon Lake). As one approaches Chandertal - considered to be source of Chandra River - the magnificent views of glacier and peaks of Mulkila & C.B. ranges can be seen. Do note though that it isn't always possible to drive all the way to the lake due to bad road. The Chandra River joins Bhaga River few kilometers down the valley and forms Chenab that later flows into Pakistan. Crystal clear water shadows the massive glaciers. Incredibly changing colors with the passage of day, peaceful and sublime, the lake is simply enchanting. If one were to camp here, by the time you complete Parikrama of lake, the tents would be pitched and hot tea and snacks would be ready!! At night, discover a star-studded skyline - a real treat for all the city slickers!



DHANKAR MONASTERY

Dhankar, the traditional capital of Spiti, sits pretty on a hilltop. The Hill-top fort that overlooks the Spiti Valley also used to serve as a jail. Today, more than 160 lamas reside here. A statue of Dhyana Buddha where four complete figures of Buddha sit back to back is the main attraction of this more than seven-century old monastery. About an hour's walk (about 3 kms) from here on a slightly uphill track is a small lake that sits languidly in a bowl. The size of the lake in the summer varies every year depending on how much snow the catchment area had in the previous winter. The afternoon time does get windy here. But once you level into the glacial melt bed, the wind gets blocked and your lunch-hamper beckons. One can sit for an al fresco lunch and then take a 30-minutes walk to the car. One needs to start early after breakfast for about an hour plus drive from Kaza to Dhankar monastery. The valley opens up as we start climbing the serpentine 8 kms from Sikkim for Dhankar village. Half way through, we see the wide spread of the valley where the Pin and Spiti rivers meet. It offers a panoramic view of the Spiti valley with snow peaked mountains as the backdrop. One does not realize the scale of the view till one sees the movement on the road down below in the valley plain. Once in the village, park your vehicle close to the monastery and climb up to the top to see how in the olden times, this 700 hundred year old monastery was not only a place of prayer but was also a kind of fortress, jail and seat of power. A couple of years back, a *French* guest, after gushing over the panoramic view, said in a very typical *Indian* way: 'after this, it doesn't matter, I have got my money's worth!'



TABO GOMPA

A 47 km / 2 hr drive from Kaza brings one to the hamlet of Tabo. It is home to about 400 people as also to the largest of all the monastic complexes in Spiti. 996 A. D. is historically accepted as the year of Tabo' Gompa's construction, making it one of the oldest surviving monasteries of the world. It is among the most sacred shrines of Trans Himalayan Buddhism and is endowed with one of the greatest art treasures of the world: a wealth of wall paintings and stucco images featuring the elaborate iconography of the region and its religion. They also tell a tale of fortitude and painstaking labour that created these splendid edifices over ten centuries ago. The 1996, Kal Chakra ceremony marking the completion of a 1000 yrs of the monastery's existence attracted a global audience. His Holiness the Dalai Lama conducted the ceremony considered a rite of initiation, rejuvenation and time of prayers for peace in a troubled world.

PIN VALLEY

Declared a National Park in 1987, Pin Valley is located in the cold desert region of the Spiti valley. The valley is formed by the Pin River which rises on the eastern slopes of Pin-Parvati pass (4800M) and meets the Spiti River near Attargo. With its snow laden unexplored higher reaches and slopes, the Park forms a natural habitat for a number of endangered animals including the Snow Leopard and Siberian Ibex. Spreading south of Dhankar in the Spiti district near the Tibetan border, the Park marks the Lahaul and Spiti divisions of the State. The elevation of the Park ranges from about 3,500M near Ka Dogri to more than 6,000M at its highest point. Because of its high altitude and extreme temperatures, the vegetation in the area is scant and mostly dominated by alpine trees, patches of Himalayan cedar and smatterings of several medicinal plants. In summer, flowers decorate the valley with startling hues. Along with animals, rare birds like the Himalayan Snowcock, Chukor, Snow Partridge and the Tibet Snow Finch also flourish in the area. Steeped in history, the influence of Tibetan culture is prevalent in the surrounding areas of the Park - visible in the Buddhist lamas, shrines, monasteries and culture of its residents. Pin valley is the only area in Spiti where Nyingmapa sect- a sect of Tibetan Buddhism- rules. A visit to the Pin valley makes you wonder if anything can be this remote. The drive can be long and dusty but you discover a new way of life that is quite charming. It puts things in a new perspective- life goes on within many unfathomable folds of Nature. Pin is the greenest area in Spiti. But one does not get that impression while entering the valley from Attargo on Tabo- Kaza road as the first 10 kms are very narrow with steep narrow rock walls rising on both the sides. Most of the villages are along the Pin River, the largest tributary of Spiti River, with a catchment area of 2200 sq Kms. The fossil rich soil of the upper valleys; the carpet of lush green pasture dotted with sheep, goats, yaks, horses, herds of Ibex; striking rock faces in myriad hues; snow covered mountains thrusting up the azure skies; all join to create images that leave a lasting impression on the mind.





SPITI MAP

