

**BANJARA RETREAT & COTTAGE, SOJHA, 8700 ft.
Kullu, Himachal Pradesh**



Banjara Retreat

Banjara cottage

If you are looking for a holiday that will refresh and revitalise you, experience the magic of the Banjara Retreat at Sojha. This little village is 5 kms short of Jalori Pass that links the Shimla and Kullu districts. The thickly wooded mountainside, densely populated with conifers, deodars and toosh characterize the beauty and uniqueness of Sojha. With unending slopes of emerald forests, verdant and pristine, nature is at its most alluring. Located in Seraj valley, still undiscovered by many, Sojha is a breathtakingly beautiful place. The mornings in Sojha are particularly invigorating. One can just stroll around, walk up to the meadows or perhaps take the pathway into the jungle. Nature lovers can enjoy thick wooded hill slopes starting from bottom as far down or up or sideways or deep as one can look. One can see the great snow clad peaks beyond the tree line and some great cloud formations. The whole region is a part of the Great Himalayan National Park. The park can be visited only by foot and there are numerous habitats for explorations from bush forest of Oak, Conifer and Bamboo, to gentle alpine meadows; from swift flowing rivers to high alpine glaciers. The terrain and geology are diverse. If one is lucky there are opportunities to observe endangered species of western Himalayas in their natural habitat.

Best time to visit

The Retreat is open from March- December. From April to October it is pleasant in the day and slightly cold at night. Additionally, in July and August there is always a possibility of rain. November, Dec and March is a great time to experience the magic of wintertime in the hills with snowfall being a strong possibility and minimum temperatures around zero degrees centigrade.

Special times to visit:

March: there is a lot of snow at the pass and close to retreat as well.
April: Rhododendron colors
Mid- end May: Irises in bloom
Oct: Fall colors



Accommodation

The Banjara Retreat and Cottage at Sojha are two wooden houses (called retreat and cottage) surrounded by wooded forest, from which you get a panoramic view of the snow covered Himalayan ranges in the distance. Large, fully furnished, comfortable rooms with attached bathrooms with hot and cold water supply are available. The kitchen offers you a variety of treats! All the rooms face the valley and Dhauladhar ranges beyond. The cottage offers amazing and full views. The retreat offers restricted views.

Banjara Cottage: 6 rooms spread over 3 floors. Each floor has separate entrance and there are only 2 rooms per floor.
Banjara Retreat: 2 classic rooms and 2 suites. All on the top floor (2nd floor). The middle floor has dining area and common sit out.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE ARE 130 STEPS THAT LEAD YOU DOWN FROM PARKING TO RETREAT.

Hikes and places to visit around the Retreat:

Serolsar Lake: A lovely 5-6 hrs return walk through thick Oak forest.
Raghpur Fort ruins: Another interesting walk through forest and a meadow to the remains of fort on top of a plateau. The site offers panoramic view of the valley.
Waterfall Point: About an hour's walk through thick Himalayan forest. This is best done on day of your arrival to acclimatize to rarefied atmosphere.
Tirthan Valley: About 30 kms from Sojha. The Tirthan River, which flows through the valley, is great for trout fishing.
GHNP: A little ahead of Tirthan valley is The Great Himalayan National park. You can enjoy a day hike in the periphery area of park.
Angling: Angling is possible on a certain section of Tirthan River (fly fishing only and you will need to get your own gear but inform us in advance so that permits can be organized).
Kullu and Naggar: You could visit Naggar castle, Roerich's art gallery and Kullu town for a day. The drive is 3 hrs one way.
There are several other interesting walks/ hikes in the area.

General and important information:

1. There are indoor and outdoor games including table tennis, ludo, carrom etc. There is also a small library.
2. We cater to different food needs including strictly vegetarian or even Jain food. Inform us in advance and consider it catered to. All meals are served buffet style. We usually serve Indian, Chinese and Continental. Let us know in advance about any food related allergies. **Water** served comes from RO purification system. **There is no room service.**
3. 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 woollens to cater to a weather condition like 5-6 degrees centigrade (lower if you visit in winters). There is a good chance, you may not use it but in case you have to, you will be really glad you carried them.
4. There are books and magazines for those of you wish to read. We also have a lot of open as well as shaded corners for you to discover. If you wish to carry a packed lunch and spend a day reading in your own corner, feel free to do so.
5. There are charging points for mobile, cameras in your rooms.
6. There is a good mobile connection. BSNL, Airtel and Reliance work best. Internet connectivity is there but not completely reliable (you will need to bring your data card/ dongle).
7. There is a doctor on call for any emergencies.
8. Transport to and fro Sojha may be organized.

How to get there:

By Air: Daily flight from Delhi- Kullu- Delhi- currently Indian Airlines flies on this sector but flights are not very reliable.

Daily direct flight from Delhi/ Mumbai/ Bangalore- Chandigarh and back

By Train: Daily morning and evening Shatabdi from Delhi- Chandigarh

Daily overnight train (Himachal Express) from Delhi- Kiratpur Sahib- Delhi

By Road:

Delhi- Sojha:	490 kms/ 12 hrs
Chandigarh- Sojha:	250 kms/ 8 hrs
Kiratpur Sahib- Sojha	190 kms/ 6 hrs
Kullu airport- Sojha	50 kms/ 2 hrs

List of things to bring:

- T-Shirts/ Shirts (Preferably Long Sleeved)
- Trousers/ Jeans/ Track Pants
- Pullover
- Wind Cheater
- Jacket
- Thermal Wear (For April and October)
- Gloves, Muffler, Woolen Socks (For Apr n Oct)
- Cap
- Well Worn Sports Shoes
- Personal Toilet Requisite
- Personal Medication
- Sun Glasses/ Sun Block
- Rain gear (just in case)
- Flash light
- Knapsack/ Daypack (to carry water, camera)
- Camera/ Writing Material



BANJARA COTTAGE AND RETREAT ROOMS



Cottage room



Classic Retreat room



Cottage room sitout



HIKES AROUND SOJHA

A walk to the waterfall

Duration: 1.5- 2 hours

Level: Easy

This is an easy walk of around 45 minutes to an hour from the retreat. It is a good way to refresh yourself on your arrival at the camp and flex those muscles tired of sitting in the vehicle. From the road head, there is a slight uphill walk towards Jalori Pass. Few hundred meters up the road, one takes the right fork in to the forest that leads to the waterfall.

The trail winds its way through a wide variety of pine and many wide leaved higher Himalayan species. The sunlight filtering through the forest, birds chirping and the gentle cold breeze makes it quite a romantic affair. To quote Mr. Chikkara who was with us in Shoja in the summer of 2005, "The breathtaking trek through the Cedars, the Spruces and the Pines to the water fall was adventurous as well as rewarding."

You are welcome to take a towel and a change of clothes in case you think you might be tempted to take a shower in the cold - really cold, waterfall. Many do. Else there is always an option to chill your beer bottle in the ice- cold water while you patiently wait while soaking in the mild sun. Again, many do.



Raghupur Fort meadows

Duration: 3-4 hrs

Level: Medium

In the mountains, if you want to be rewarded well by nature in its full glory, you must make an early morning start. The same is true of this hike to Raghupur Fort meadows that overlook the Tirthan Valley in Kulu district in the West and Shimla district in the East.

This five kms uphill drive will test your car as well as your mountain driving skills! From Jalori, it is a level walk in the open for about hundred meters towards Satluj Valley before it heads straight into the forest on a well-defined trail. Half a kilometer later, a short steep climb takes one to a small meadow that offers a photo-op. A short rest and off you go into the Oaks and Rhododendrons forest slowly climbing up and then shifting gear for a final steep

climb of 15 to 20 minutes. Here the tree line finishes and we move into a lush green meadow. A little up and we are rewarded with a 360 degrees view of The Himalayas, Dhauladhar and Kinnaur ranges, all of them in one sweeping glance. All around you are swathes of lush green meadows that gently descend into the oak and blue fir forests.

Keep strolling and in a while we end up at the dilapidated Raghupur Fort. The local people believe that an erstwhile king of Mandi province got this fort constructed hundred of years ago. Theories abound as to why this fort was constructed on a ridge where scarcity of water was a perennial issue. One of them will have us believe that this retreat was made in case the king had to retreat in to the mountains in case his kingdom was attacked by the enemy forces from the plains. Yet another popular belief is that the fort was constructed for the pleasure of the king away from the prying eyes of his family and subjects. Whatever the truth, the King could not have chosen a better location. One look and you would not want to go back.

The meadows also happen to be the favourite ground of local shepherds. It is a sight to behold with hundreds of sheep and goats munching around with not a worry in the world, with at least couple of shepherd dogs in attendance. An early start, especially if you are a photography buff, is recommended.

Serolser Lake

Duration: 5-7 hrs

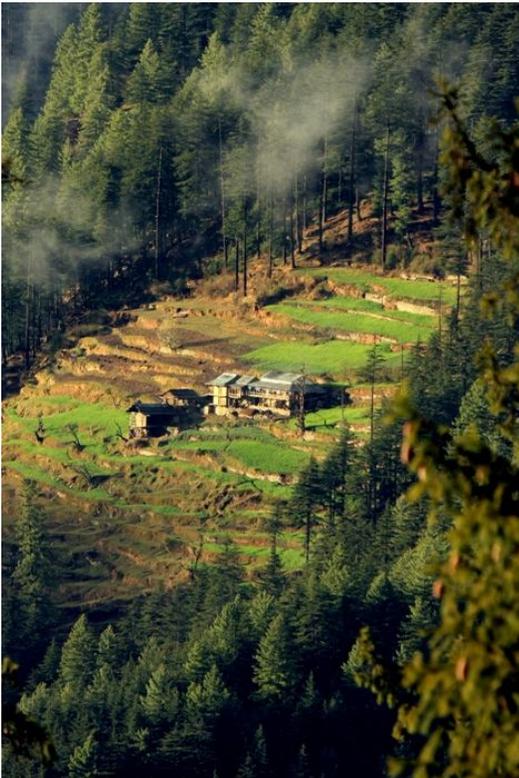
Level: Medium

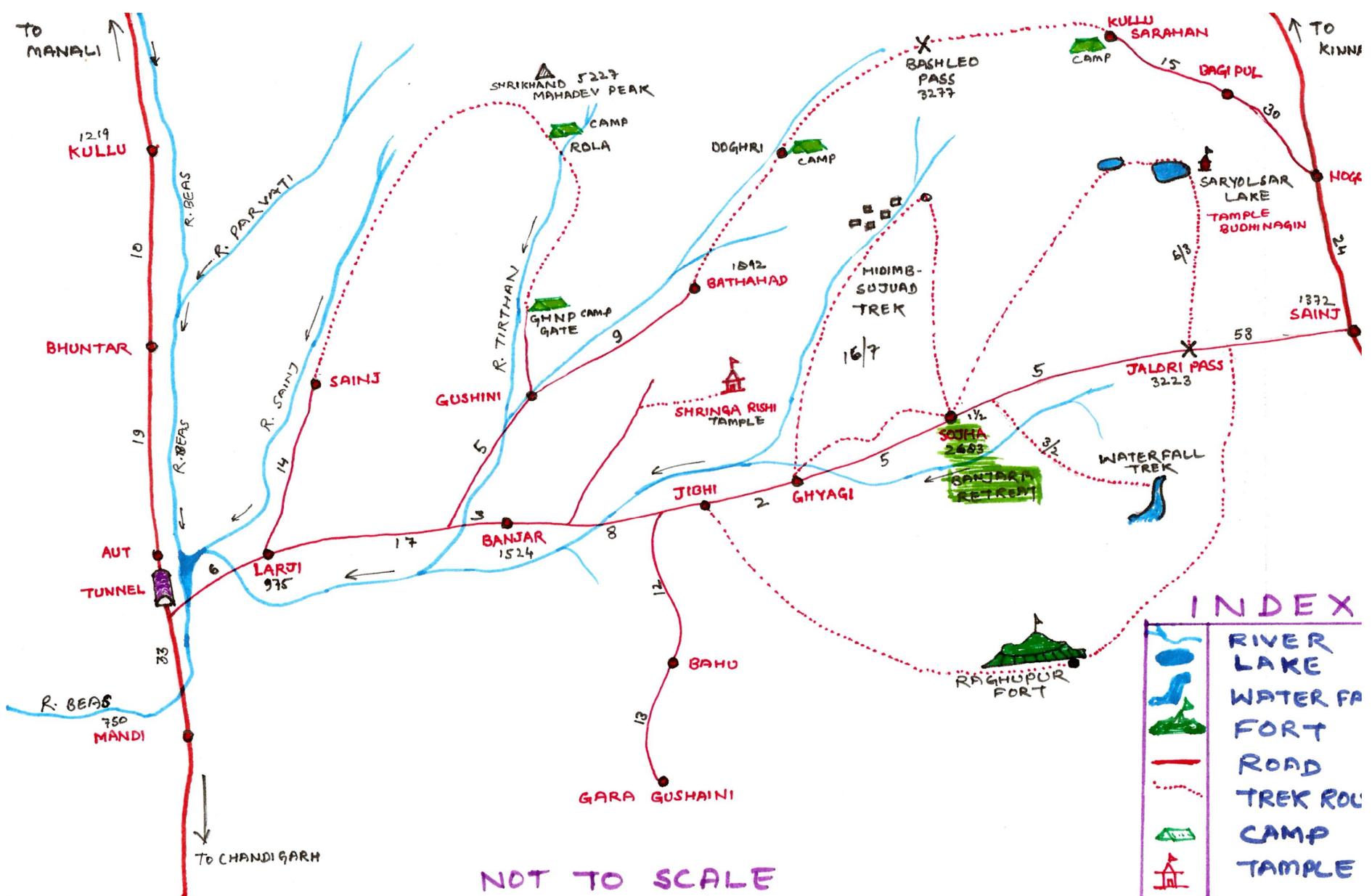
Himachal Pradesh, with most of it lying in the lap of Himalayas, has an abundance of lakes. One such lake is in Tirthan valley (Kulu District). Located 11 kms (5 kms by car from our retreat to Jalori Pass and 6 kms on foot from there to the lake) from Banjar Retreat in Shoja, it is one of the better hikes for the families. A drive to Jalori pass will take 15-20 minutes from the retreat. From there, a well-defined trail takes one to the lake. Few hundred meters on the trail and then you get in to the Oak forest. The sun rays filtering through the tree cover, the blue of the sky through the foliage, the up and down of the trail, an occasional sight of a bird, a clearing showing the huge green vistas cascading down to the Sutluj valley, all of this and more will keep you an enchanting company all the way to the lake. The lake makes up in crystal clear clarity what it lacks in size. The local belief is that no one has ever found a leaf floating in the lake though leafy trees surround the lake itself. You will certainly not find a leaf floating in the lake. Nearby is a small temple beyond which the meadows start. A couple of teashops regularly come up between April-October. They have also some local sweets and savories- worth trying. During summer a lot of Gujjars come with their buffaloes and cows to these pastures. It won't be unusual if you bump into some carrying Khowa and paneer to the local market. An early start will get you back to the retreat for the hot lunch. For people who would like to spend more time with the chirping birds, we will be too happy to provide you with a lunch hamper for you to enjoy an al fresco lunch on the banks of the lake.

Tirthan Valley

About 30 kms from Sojha via Banjar is Gushaini. One needs to enter from here to the GHNP. The Tirthan River, which flows through the valley, is great for trout fishing. One needs to have a permit to angle for brown and rainbow trouts that we will be happy to organize with minimum two days notice. One can also buy trout from the farms in that area and our cook will gladly prepare it for you. Please do check with us on season for fishing.







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NOT TO SCALE

