

BANJARA ORCHARD RETREAT, THANEDAR, 7700 ft
Shimla, Himachal Pradesh



80 kms from Shimla on the old Hindustan-Tibet road lays Thanedar, which enjoys a special place in Himachal history. In 1916 Samuel Stokes (also known as American in Khadi), a social worker from Philadelphia brought the first apple saplings to Kotgarh (a couple of kms from Thanedar), the place he eventually adopted as his home. One can still see the 'Starking Delicious' apple orchard that he planted there. Nestled amongst acres of apple blossoms in this region is the Banjara Orchard Retreat - an eco-friendly getaway that will enchant nature lovers. Mr. Prakash Thakur, the host, for whom the Orchard Retreat has been a labor of love, is also the resident expert on the history and culture of this little piece of paradise. The retreat is situated overlooking the Sutlej River flowing thousands of feet below and snow capped Shrikhand Mahadev peaks in the distance. On a typical day, Sun rises reluctantly from hills behind the retreat, gains momentum and sets brilliantly across the mountains in front. In between that time you have a lazy day spent on walking in town/ forest or a day spent playing, reading, laughing or just watching all life buzzing around you.

Time to visit:

The Banjara Orchard Retreat is open throughout the year (unless it snows heavily in Jan/ Feb. Temperatures vary with the seasons. May to September have pleasant days and cold nights while March- April & October- November has pleasant days and night temperature may dip to 2-3 degree centigrade. December- Feb can get very cold with good chance of snow fall early Jan onwards.

Special times to visit:

Cherry blossoms-	Mid- April
Apple blossoms-	Mid- April
Apples on trees-	August- early September- the entire town full of orchards.
Fall colors-	October

How to get there:

By Air:	Irregular flights Delhi- Shimla- Delhi Daily flight to Chandigarh from Delhi/ Mumbai/ Bengaluru
By Train:	Daily morning and evening Shatabdi from Delhi- Chandigarh Daily overnight train (Kalka mail) from Delhi- Kalka- Delhi Narrow gauge from Kalka to Shimla- 5 hrs one way
By Road:	Delhi- Thanedar: 440 kms/ 11 hrs Chandigarh- Thanedar: 195 kms/ 6-7 hrs Shimla- Thanedar: 85 kms/ 3 hrs

Accommodation:

3 classic rooms, 3 retreat rooms, 2 Family Suites and 2 independent Log Cabins, all are fully furnished with attached bath and hot and cold water supply. Log huts have an attic/ loft which children (and sometimes adults too 😊) enjoy immensely.

PLEASE NOTE THAT YOU HAVE TO CLIMB DOWN 94 STAIR STEPS OR WALK ABOUT 100 MTRS FROM MAIN ROAD TO RETREAT.

Walks and places to visit around the Retreat

Tani - Jubbar Lake:	This is tiny little lake is famous for 'Nag Devta' temple built along the lake. The lake is 6 kms from the retreat.
Hatu Peak:	15 kms away, at 11,000 ft, this peak offers a panoramic view of the snowline. You could drive or hike up to it.
St. Mary's Church:	Built in 1843; this church at Kotgarh is one of the older churches in India.
Saroga forest:	Ideal for a refreshing early morning walk.
Jan Shila ridge:	For a good hiker, a hike to this ridge makes for a fantastic day.
Bonfire:	We have a bonfire pretty much every day (except when it rains).
Bhimakali temple:	Day excursion to this temple in Sarahan (3.5 hrs drive one way).
Narkanda:	A day visit to Narkanda (16 kms away) is invigorating.
Activity:	For a minimum of 4 guests, rappelling and rock climbing can be organized.



General and important information:

1. There are indoor and outdoor games. We have table tennis and dart board. There are also indoor games with some of the usual suspects like ludo, carrom etc.
2. 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.
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 woolens. 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 good mobile connection. BSNL, Airtel and Reliance work best. Internet connectivity is also fine but not completely reliable. (you will need to bring your data card).
7. There is a doctor on call for any emergencies.
8. Transport to and fro Thanedar may be organized.

List of things to bring:

T-Shirts/ Shirts (Prefer Long Sleeved)	Trousers/ Jeans/ Track Pants	Pullover	Wind Cheater	Flashlight
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)	Knapsack/ Daypack (to carry water, camera)		Camera/ Writing Material





St. Mary's church



HIKES/ DRIVES AROUND RETREAT

Tani Jubbar Lake **6 kms drive/ short hike**

A six kilometer drive from the Orchard retreat and a 10-15 minutes uphill climb gets you to this lake. This virtually stamp sized mountain lake is a popular picnic spot in idyllic setting. A Hindu temple dedicated to 'Nag Devta' is built next to this lake. This historic temple is a place of pilgrimage for the local residents and is associated with lot of folklore. The temple is not open to outsiders. An annual fair is held at the lake in June where local artisans/ traders display their wares.

Hatu Peak **Distance from retreat: 21 kms** **Grade: Medium** **By road: 15 kms and 6 kms hike**

The 3136M high Hatu Peak offers a panoramic view of the Pir Panjal and the Dhauladhar ranges. There are two ways of reaching the peak. The easier option is to drive towards Narkanda for 14 km and from there one can either drive or walk up the winding road through dense alpine forest for another 6 km. The conventional and more adventurous way of reaching the top is to drive to Sidhpur, 10 km from the Banjara Retreat and then climb up through the Conifer and Oak forests. The climb to the peak with a small break for a packed lunch, generally takes about 3 hours.

The forest around Hatu is famous for its flora and fauna/ Avi-fauna. One can see Silver fir, Birch, Oaks, Himalayan Cedar, Himalayan Yew, Rhododendron, herbs and wild flowers. It is also rich in wildlife and if you are lucky you may see Leopards, Black Bear, Jungle Cats, Himalayan Weasel, Flaying Squirrel, Himalayan Pheasants like Monal- state bird of Himachal, Red Jungle Fowl, Magpie Robin, Laughing Thrush, Minivets and Whistling Thrush to name a few. The Hatu Mata Temple, located on the ridge of the top, is very popular with the locals during the local meals in September and October.

Saroga Forest: **Distance from the retreat: 8 kms** **Grade: Medium**

This is one of the more popular walks with people who stay with us in our Thanedar Retreat. The trail through the forest introduces you to the rich flora of the inner Himalayas. The forest is full of Blue pine, Silver Spur, Christmas tree, Spruce, Oaks, Rhododendron and Taxus Himalayana (the tree from which Taxol is derived and used for curing cancer).

This walk is generally conducted in the afternoons and depending on the season one can pick Rhododendron flowers, Strawberries, Raspberries and wild Mushrooms. Fern lovers will be thrilled to see 'Himalayan Maiden Hair' and other fern varieties in abundance along this trail.

This soft trek takes about two and a half hours and requires a guide. A detour at the end of the trail and effort of another hour will take you to the mountain-top, from where you get a breathtaking view of the snow line. This detour culminates at Tani Jubbar Lake from where you can drive back in a vehicle.

St. Mary's Church **Distance from retreat: 7 kms** **Grade: Medium**

How the Church came about has an interesting history. In the year 1815, the rulers of this region invited the Britishers to fight the mighty Nepalese General Amar Singh Thapa who had annexed large parts of the Western Himalayas. The Britishers came and killed the General and captured his Gorkha soldiers. In lieu of services rendered, a large tract of land was gifted to them by the rulers of Kotgarh. A British garrison was established at Kotgarh in 1843, which was their last outpost beyond Shimla.

In 1872, a pretty little wood and stone church was built, which today is the only living monument of that bygone era. An hour's walk to the church from the Retreat takes you through a typical Himachali village, apple orchards and conifer forests. On the way, one comes across the cave where once Samuel Stokes lived as a hermit. Stokes was an American and is today remembered for introducing Red Delicious apples to India, and ushering in an era of prosperity.

Rudyard Kipling once called Kotgarh 'The Mistress of the Northern Hills'. One of his stories- Lispeth- from the book 'Plain Tales from the Hills', is based on this church. The great Christian Sadhu missionary Sundar Singh was associated with this church for a long time. It was at Kotgarh that he had his first mystical experience that he mentions in his book 'Spiritual World'.

A typical April morning in Thanedar



