



White-Water Rafting in North India

Cloud-piercing peaks, dense forests and roaring rivers make for heady adventures *By Ranjan Pal*

Few adventures beat rushing down a river, paddling its rapids and frothy stretches. And anybody serious about white-water rafting makes at least one pilgrimage to Rishikesh, the Mecca for the sport in India. But beyond the Ganga lie a host of other options, and summer is just the time to immerse yourself into multi-day expeditions or short weekend trips on these rivers.

The Zaskar, Ladakh Threading its way through Ladakh, the Zaskar River travels through the awesome Zaskar gorge. A three-day drive from Leh to the put-in point at Remala village takes you through some surreal trans-Himalayan landscapes imaginable—craggy peaks, multi-hued mountains and blue skies. The opportunity to appreciate remote Tibetan monasteries like Rangdum, which sits on a giant flood plain surrounded by the towering crags of the Zaskar range, is a heart-warming bonus.

At the heart of this rafting expedition is an exhilarating

Class III to IV ride through the desolate Zaskar gorge, with walls rising a few thousand feet above the river bed, truly deserving the name 'Grand Canyon of Asia'. If you are lucky, you won't flip in The Constriction (we did!): the killer rapid where the walls of the canyon close down and force the river through an 18-foot gap.

www.hrrindia.com; expedition August 21-31; ₹7,500 per person per night on twin-sharing basis; rafting ₹1,500 per person per day.

The Kali Sarda, Uttarakhand If you are looking for a less remote and shorter rafting expedition, the Kali

Sarda is an obvious choice. After arriving in Kathgodam, a nine-hour drive leads visitors to the town of Pithoragarh. The put-in point for the rafting expedition is the small village of Jauljibi, where the river's upper reaches define the western border between India and Nepal, with a footbridge connecting the two countries.

Here, the Kali starts out deceptively calm but after its confluence with the Saryu (in Pancheshwar) where it becomes the Sarda, the going gets tough and you can expect a final couple of days of exciting Grade III to IV rapids as the river drops into the plains. The Kali is famous for fishing expeditions—and catnip for the devotees of the golden mahseer—so if you're lucky, you could find this delicious fish on your dinner menu! Rafting the Kali Sarda is an experience right out of *The Jungle Book*, taking those who dare through dense, uninhabited tropical forests before the river enters the terai region with tall grasslands and terraced fields in its final stretch.

www.snowleopardadventures.com; expedition April 18-25; minimum group size 8; ₹65,450 per person on twin-sharing basis.

The Tons, Uttarakhand Camp Bagi on the banks of the river Tons is a delightful spot for a short weekend rafting getaway with the kids. From Mussoorie you descend to follow the Yamuna upto Navgaon before climbing slowly to the Tons watershed, all through terrific alpine country. You will then arrive at Camp Bagi, with tents pitched on a lovely beachfront amidst lush green Himalayan forests. The Tons, Yamuna's biggest tributary, is a small volume Class IV river which is very fast-moving with several technical moves through large boulder gardens which will keep your adrenaline spiking. The camp also offers a waterfall hike with natural pools to walk up to. Impromptu cricket and volleyball games enliven days, and swapping stories by crackling bonfires fills the nights at the camp. *aquaterra.in; weekend trips April-June, ₹11,550 on twin-sharing basis.*

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