

TRANSINDIA RAILS

GRAND INDIAN MOUNTAIN RAILWAYS EXPEDITION

27 December – 9 January

A curated winter rail expedition across India's most evocative mountain railways

DARJEELING HIMALAYAN RAILWAY

KANGRA VALLEY RAILWAY

KALKA-SHIMLA RAILWAY

A JOURNEY THROUGH INDIA'S MOUNTAIN RAIL HERITAGE

Three railways. Three landscapes. One unforgettable winter.

There are journeys that carry you from one place to another, and then there are journeys that carry something within you — across time, across altitude, across the accumulated silences of a hundred mountain winters. This expedition is firmly the latter. Beginning in the Eastern Himalayas aboard the legendary Darjeeling Himalayan Railway — a UNESCO World Heritage line that has wound through tea gardens and cloud forest since 1881 — it moves westward to the serene Kangra Valley, where a graceful narrow-gauge line threads beneath snow-laden Himalayan peaks, before reaching its crescendo in Shimla aboard the beloved Kalka–Shimla Railbus.

Private charter operations grant exclusive access to locomotives and lines that ordinary visitors never encounter. Visits to working engine sheds reveal the human craft behind the steam. Handpicked hill-station hotels carry their own sense of colonial history. And the timing — across Christmas and New Year — lends the whole affair a festive warmth that no other season in India can provide.

DARJEELING HIMALAYAN RAILWAY

27 Dec – 1 Jan

Exclusive steam charters on a UNESCO World Heritage line rising through the Eastern Himalayas — with dining trains, workshop visits and a New Year in the hills.

KANGRA VALLEY RAILWAY

2 – 5 Jan

A graceful metre-gauge journey beneath the Dhauladhar peaks of Himachal Pradesh, through ancient temple towns and jade-green river valleys.

KALKA–SHIMLA RAILBUS

6 – 9 Jan

96 kilometres of UNESCO-listed mountain railway — 102 tunnels, 864 bridges, and the most scenic climb to any hill station in India.

27 DECEMBER – 1 JANUARY

DARJEELING HIMALAYAN RAILWAY



'Forest Whisper' — a B-class DHR steam locomotive prepares to depart Siliguri at the start of the expedition

27 DECEMBER — ARRIVAL IN SILIGURI

Where the Plains End and the Mountains Begin

Your expedition begins at Bagdogra Airport, gateway to the Eastern Himalayas, where the warmth of the Bengal plains gives way to cool foothills air scented faintly of tea and pine. After a warm welcome and transfer to Siliguri, the afternoon delivers an immediate and extraordinary overture: a private diesel charter operating between New Jalpaiguri and Siliguri — your first encounter with the narrow-gauge magic that will define the days ahead. As dusk settles over the foothills and the lights of the town flicker on, the expedition marks its opening night with an exclusive dining charter, candles lit against the dark while the locomotive idles at the platform and the mountains wait in the distance. Overnight in Siliguri.

28 DECEMBER — SILIGURI TO TINDHARIA

Into the Himalayan Foothills

The morning is cool and still as your private steam charter departs Siliguri, the locomotive's exhaust cutting through the mist as it echoes off the station walls. Within minutes the flatlands dissolve and the DHR begins its extraordinary ascent — looping back on itself through classic zigzags, crossing roads where vegetable vendors step aside as the train passes at arm's reach. The tea gardens thicken around you; the altitude rises almost imperceptibly until the plains are a pale memory below. At Tindharia, a traditional thali lunch awaits, followed by a privileged visit to the Tindharia Railway Workshop — one of India's most remarkable living museums, where Victorian-era machinery still turns and the art of steam locomotive maintenance has been handed down across generations of skilled craftsmen. Overnight in Siliguri.



29 DECEMBER — TINDHARIA TO KURSEONG

The Most Spectacular Section

If yesterday was the overture, today is the symphony. The private charter continues its upward journey from Tindharia through what many consider the most visually arresting section of any mountain railway in the world. The track clings to near-vertical hillsides, dives through dripping tunnels, and emerges onto viaducts with valleys plunging hundreds of metres below. The locomotive labours and breathes; rhododendrons press in from either side of the narrow cutting. Ahead, the white-painted buildings of Kurseong emerge from the mist — the 'Place of the White Orchid' — a hill town of colonial schools, quiet monasteries and panoramic terraces that has somehow retained the unhurried charm that Darjeeling can no longer quite manage. The afternoon is yours to explore at leisure. Overnight in Kurseong.



30 DECEMBER — KURSEONG TO DARJEELING

Arrival at the Queen of the Hills

The final ascent to Darjeeling is a slow procession through living history. Through Tung and Sonada the landscape grows ever more dramatic, until the train crests the ridge at Ghum — at 2,257 metres, the highest railway station in India — and on clear mornings the full panorama of Kanchenjunga unfolds: rank upon rank of snow peaks blazing against a deep blue sky, the third-highest massif on earth, close enough to feel improbable.

The descent into Darjeeling traces the famous Batasia Loop, the track spiralling back through a garden of marigolds and war memorials before pulling into the old terminus. Darjeeling receives you as it has received travellers for a century and a half: with woodsmoke, the scent of first-flush tea, and the unhurried cadence of a town entirely at peace with its altitude. Overnight in Darjeeling.



The DHR 'Forest Whisper' at dusk, Darjeeling — the locomotive glows against a violet Himalayan sky as another year prepares to turn

31 DECEMBER & 1 JANUARY — DARJEELING

New Year at 7,000 Feet

Two days in Darjeeling unfold at their own fine pace: slowly, with great pleasure, and with the feeling of being precisely where one ought to be. Mornings may begin before dawn with a drive to Tiger Hill, where the year's first light catches Kanchenjunga's summit in shades of copper and rose gold before the rest of the world has stirred. The town rewards unhurried exploration: the covered market with its pungent spice stalls and silver jewellery, the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute founded by Tenzing Norgay himself, the Padmaja Naidu Zoological Park — home to the red panda and the snow leopard — and the Tibetan Refugee Centre with its extraordinary thangka weavers and carpet looms. New Year's Eve is celebrated in a traditional English-style pub in the town centre, raising a glass to old railways and new journeys as midnight arrives quietly in the hills. Overnight in Darjeeling.

2 – 5 JANUARY

KANGRA VALLEY & HIMALAYAN FOOTHILLS



The Kangra Valley Railway winds through green valleys with the snow-capped Dhauladhar range shimmering in the distance

2 JANUARY — DARJEELING TO PATHANKOT

Crossing India by Air

The expedition pivots westward today, carrying you from the Eastern Himalayas to the foothills of Himachal Pradesh in a single sweeping arc. A transfer to Bagdogra connects with a flight to Delhi, where the great plains of North India spread out below the wing in fading afternoon light. An onward IndiGo service carries the group to Amritsar — city of the Golden Temple, its marble precincts glowing amber against the night sky — before a private transfer north to Pathankot, gateway to the Kangra Valley. The Dhauladhar peaks are out there somewhere in the darkness, waiting for morning. Overnight in Pathankot.

3 JANUARY — PATHANKOT TO JOGINDER NAGAR

The Valley Railway Beneath the Peaks

The Kangra Valley Railway is one of India's most beautifully kept secrets: a 164-kilometre metre-gauge line threading through some of the most sublime scenery in the Himalayan foothills. Opened in 1929, it passes ancient temples whose bells carry across the rice paddies, rivers running jade-green with glacial melt, and small hill towns where the pace of life has not materially changed in a century. The train from Pathankot to Palampur sets the scene in the most agreeable fashion, and the onward journey to Joginder Nagar completes this long valley crossing. Snow-dusted Dhauladhar peaks fill the windows on clear days. This is a line that asks nothing of you except to look. Return to Palampur by coach. Overnight in Palampur.



4 JANUARY — DHARAMSHALA EXCURSION

The Little Lhasa of India

A full-day excursion to Dharamshala and McLeod Ganj opens a window onto one of the most culturally layered towns in all of India. This is the home of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, and the streets of McLeod Ganj weave Buddhist monasteries in with Himalayan cafes, refugee thangka workshops with the sound of monks at cricket. The Namgyal Monastery and the Tibet Museum tell a story of exile with extraordinary dignity. From the ridge on clear days, the full sweep of the Kangra Valley lies below and the Dhauladhar above — a landscape so improbably dramatic that it has drawn pilgrims, seekers and wanderers from across the world for decades. Return to Palampur. Overnight in Palampur.



5 JANUARY — PALAMPUR TO CHANDIGARH

The Modernist City

A transfer to Kangra Airport connects with a scheduled flight to Chandigarh — the extraordinary modernist city that Le Corbusier designed for India in the 1950s, its grid of broad boulevards and sector parks a deliberate counterpoint to the organic chaos of the Subcontinent. An evening here permits a visit to the famous Rock Garden: an astonishing outsider-art installation built over decades from urban rubble, broken bangles and industrial waste — one of the most quietly radical artworks in Asia. Overnight in Chandigarh.

6 – 9 JANUARY

KALKA–SHIMLA MOUNTAIN RAILWAY



The Kalka–Shimla Railbus threads through the Shivalik Hills — scarlet engineering on a UNESCO World Heritage line built for the British Raj

6 JANUARY — KALKA TO SHIMLA

The Toy Train to the Summer Capital

The Kalka–Shimla Railway is this expedition's final and perhaps most storied jewel. Built between 1898 and 1903 to carry the officials of the British Raj to their summer capital, the line climbs 1,420 metres across 96 kilometres of mountain terrain — passing through 102 tunnels and across 864 bridges in a feat of Edwardian engineering that still provokes astonishment at every bend. The railbus departs Kalka in the cool of the morning and the journey unfolds as a series of revelations: the great Barog tunnel (over a kilometre of absolute darkness and perfect straightness), the soaring viaducts at Kandaghat, the sudden panoramas over the Shivalik Hills as the line emerges from the forest. By the time Shimla's mock-Tudor station comes into view, you will have understood precisely why this line too carries a UNESCO World Heritage inscription. Overnight in Shimla.

7 JANUARY — SHIMLA

A Day in the Former Summer Capital

Shimla gives itself slowly to those who walk its ridge, and that is the only proper way to meet it. The Mall — the great colonial promenade from which motor cars were once banned entirely — connects Christ Church (the second-oldest church in North India), the Gaiety Theatre and Scandal Point in a stroll through living Raj history. Below the ridge, the bazaars tumble down the hillside in layered colour and agreeable noise, a complete contrast to the ordered Victorian streetscape above. The Viceregal Lodge on Observatory Hill — now the Indian Institute of Advanced Study — stands in splendid Elizabethan isolation, its rooms still haunted by the decisions of empire. Snow may dust the surrounding deodar cedars. The day is entirely and unhurriedly your own. Overnight in Shimla.

8 JANUARY — SHIMLA TO DELHI

The Return Journey

The railbus retraces its magnificent path to Kalka — a journey that remains as breathtaking in reverse as it was on the ascent, the valleys now on the opposite side, the light falling differently on the same pine-covered ridges. At Kalka, the Shatabdi Express takes over for the rapid run across the plains to Delhi. The capital receives you with its characteristic intensity: the vast ceremonial geometries of Lutyens' New Delhi, the medieval lanes of Old Delhi near the Jama Masjid, the amber glow of Humayun's Tomb at dusk. Tonight, rest in a city that never quite does. Overnight in Delhi.

9 JANUARY — DELHI

The Delhi Railway Museum & Departure

The expedition concludes, fittingly, at the Delhi Railway Museum — one of the finest railway collections in Asia, where locomotives from every era and gauge of India's extraordinary rail network stand in the open air like a parliament of iron horses. Broad-gauge Pacifics stand alongside narrow-gauge veterans, steam beside diesel, the imperial past beside the modern present. It is an ideal coda to a journey that has traversed so much of this extraordinary country by rail, and left so much still waiting to be discovered. An optional excursion to the Taj Mahal at Agra is available for those who wish to extend the adventure by a final, unforgettable day. Overnight in Delhi before international departures.

PRICING & OPTIONS

Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Section

27 Dec – 1 Jan • 6 nights

Twin Share

£1,495

Single supplement: £375

Kangra Valley & Foothills Section

2 Jan – 5 Jan • 4 nights

Twin Share

£745

Single supplement: £195

Kalka–Shimla Railway Section

6 Jan – 9 Jan • 4 nights

Twin Share

£1,050

Single supplement: £225

Complete Grand Expedition

27 Dec – 9 Jan • 14 nights

Twin Share

£2,999

Single supplement: £795

All prices include internal flights within India, private charter train operations, tour management services, a group tipping fund, and accommodation on a twin-sharing basis. Individual sections may be booked separately or combined as a complete 14-day expedition.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

INCLUSIONS & EXCLUSIONS

INCLUDED

- ✓ All accommodation (twin-sharing) as per itinerary
- ✓ Private DHR charter operations and NJP–Siliguri diesel special
- ✓ Exclusive dining charter experience
- ✓ Scheduled Kangra Valley Railway journey (Pathankot–Joginder Nagar)
- ✓ Railbus travel on the Kalka–Shimla UNESCO Heritage Railway
- ✓ Shatabdi Express: Kalka to Delhi
- ✓ Internal flights: Bagdogra–Delhi, Delhi–Amritsar, Kangra–Chandigarh
- ✓ All road transfers and overland transport as per itinerary
- ✓ New Year's Eve celebration in Darjeeling
- ✓ Dedicated UK Tour Manager throughout
- ✓ Experienced Indian rail coordinator on the ground
- ✓ Group tipping fund: drivers, porters and service staff
- ✓ Guided visit to the Delhi Railway Museum
- ✓ All railway permissions and charter coordination

NOT INCLUDED

- International flights to/from India
- Pre-tour domestic flight to Bagdogra
- Indian visa fees
- Travel insurance (mandatory — not included)
- Alcoholic beverages and personal bar expenses
- Meals not specifically mentioned
- Optional Agra excursion
- Personal expenses: laundry, telephone, room service
- Excess baggage on domestic flights
- Camera/video permit fees where applicable
- Costs from weather, rail disruption or force majeure
- Any service not listed under Inclusions

Charter operations and workshop visits are subject to final railway permissions and operational approval. The tour commences in Bagdogra and concludes in Delhi.