

THE BEAUTY OF SHIMLA

It's easy to succumb to the beguiling charms of Shimla, the once upon a time summer capital of British India, which today ranks among India's foremost, largest, and most popular hill-resorts

First discovered by the British in 1819, the scenic spot became a permanent settlement, its popularity assured by its pretty landscapes and cool climate. As the summer heat built up in the plains, first the memsahibs and then the sahibs would descend upon Shimla's cool environs, imbibing the resort with a high-flown social life that became legendary.

Now capital of Himanchal Pradesh, the Shimla that awaits you today retains some of its former British flavour, best seen in stately old buildings of the period. Christ Church, Gorten Castle, and the former Viceregal Lodge on Observatory Hill, are all local landmarks, and Lajpat Rai Chowk is better known as Kipling's 'Scandal Point'.

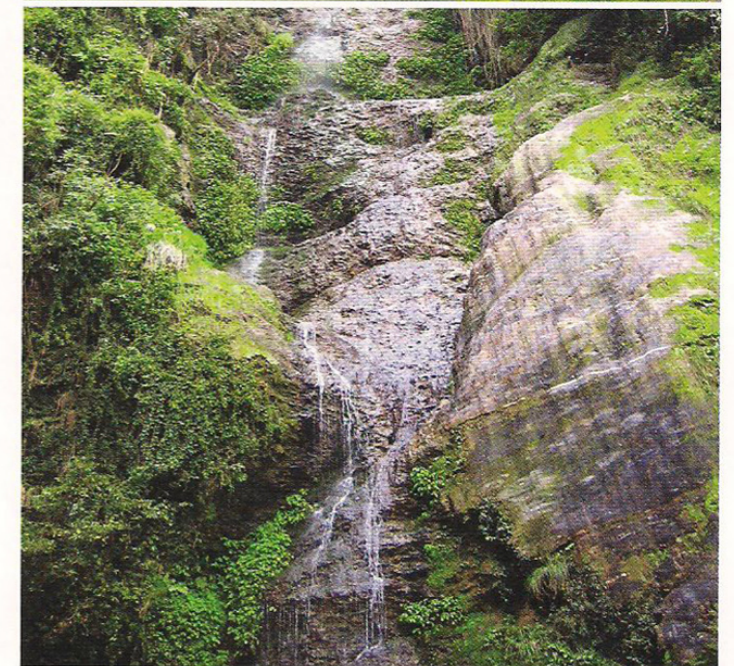
Nature's been kind to the town and its environs. At an altitude of 2,130 metres, it sprawls along a crescent shaped ridge, its suburbs clinging to the slopes. The Ridge is the center of town, and houses several iconic landmarks like Ashiana Restaurant and the Old Library. This is where you go strolling, pony-riding, or just sunset gazing.

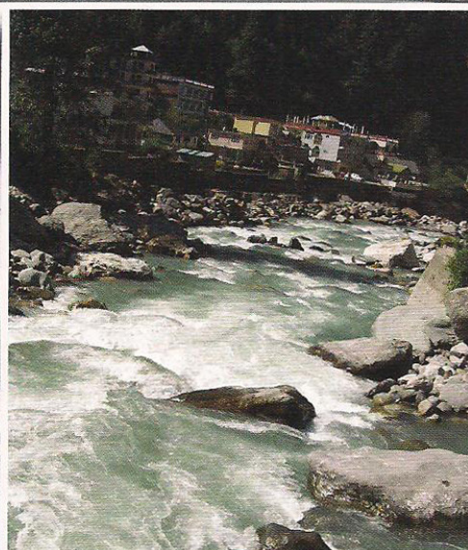
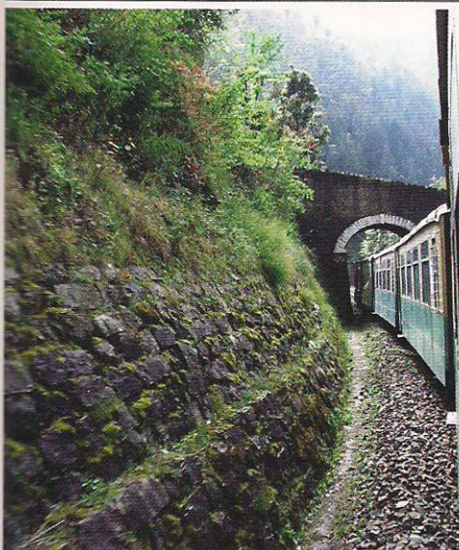
Along the ridge runs The Mall, the town's main boulevard, and it's heart, body, and soul, presenting a busy scene in the evenings with throngs of tourists walking its length, and congregating for a bit of socialising and merry making. Lining the boulevard, are stately, English-looking houses with English names. Alongside new cafes like Barista and Domino's, are older ones like Himani, Baljees and Devicos.

This is also the local downtown area, where you find not just the best cinemas, restaurants and boutiques, but also pristine views of the surrounding countryside, with the valleys and peaks on both sides coming into sharp focus.

From the ridge, the streets fall away steeply, with colourful local bazaars nestling on the southern slopes. Inhabiting the congested Middle and Lower Bazaars are hundreds of shopkeepers who can change their price list literally every second. This trading area presents another face of Shimla, less glamorous but essential to the town's existence.

Braving a light drizzle, I walked up to the Viceregal Lodge, a grand palace that sits on a hillock to the west of town. A huge, fortress-like building with a magnificent reception, dining halls, and library, it opens a door to the opulence of former lifestyles. The drizzle continued, but so did my walk and I ended up at the Himachal State Museum that has a fine collection of stone





statues, local handicrafts, and textiles.

The next day brought mellow sunshine, and a brisk walk through sylvan surroundings deposited me at Jakhu Temple, dedicated to Hanuman. Perched on the ridge's highest point, the temple offers panoramic views of the surrounding valleys and of the town itself.

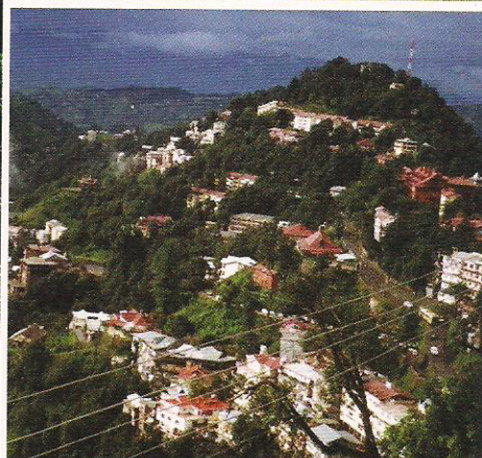
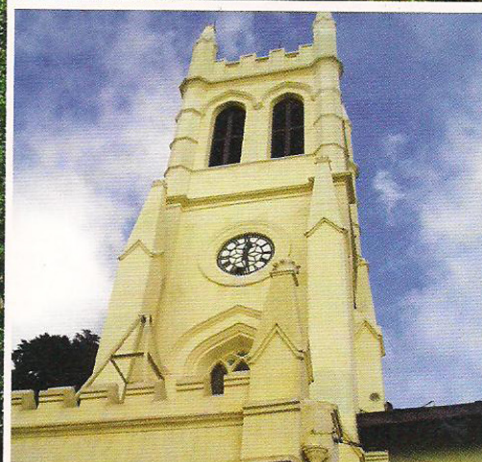
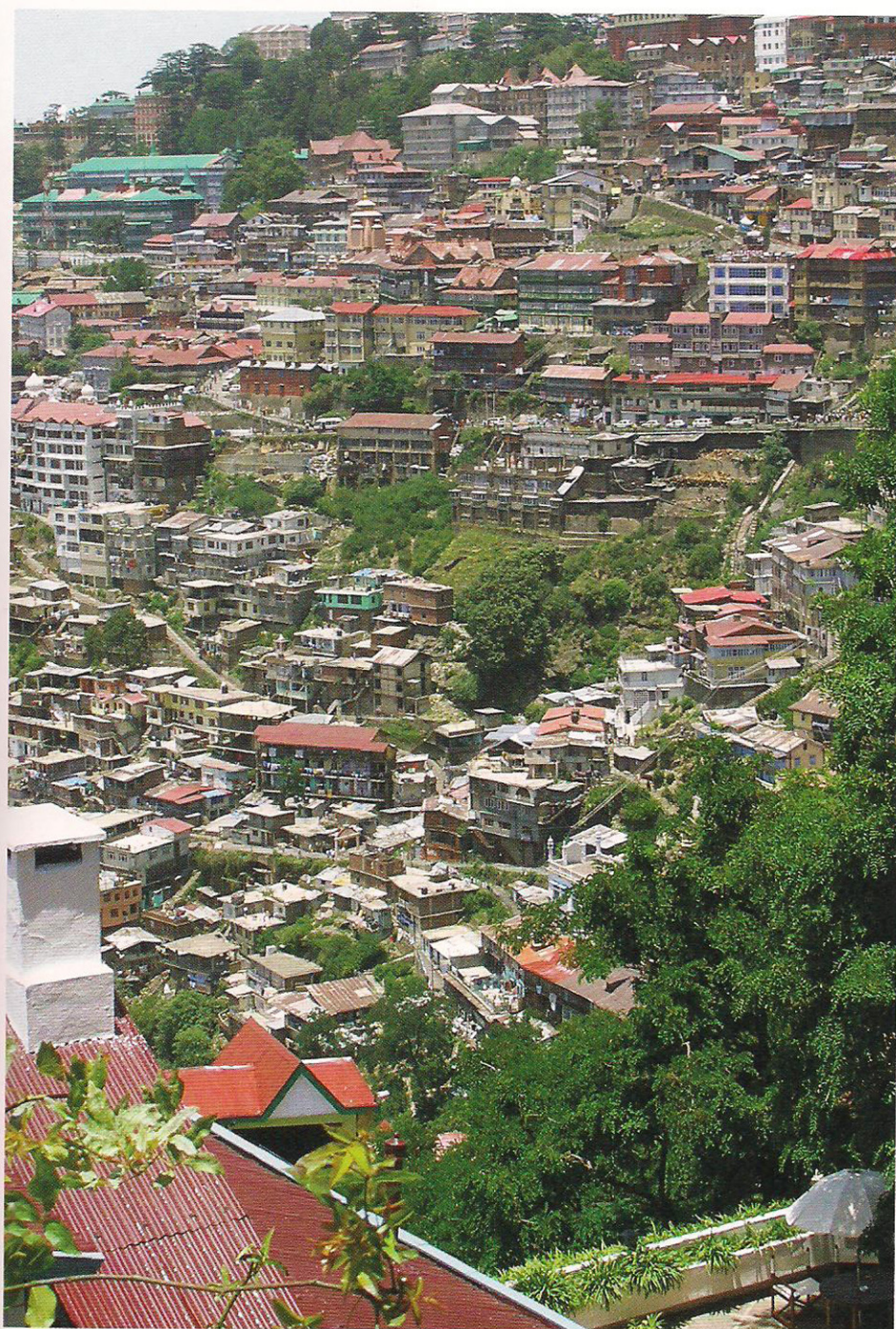
Mountain-resort cuisine? Is there such a thing? It doesn't matter. There are choice pickings to be had, with an abundance of fresh fruit - apples, peaches, strawberries, cherries, apricots, and plums - providing just the right kind of nourishment after an afternoon's walk along The Mall.

Don't hold back on indulging your shopping instincts. Taking you in hand is a wealth of offerings. Woodcarvings, jewellery, miniatures, metal craft, shawls, and rugs are always good buys, and while the big boutiques along The Mall may not bother to indulge you with bargaining, the shops in Lower Bazaar certainly will. The Himachal Emporium stocks everything at fixed prices.

Attractive by day (though some now find it overbuilt), Shimla looks

fact file

- ❖ By rail, Shimla is connected with Delhi, the stretch from Kalka to Shimla passing through hilly country and through 101 tunnels. By road, the drive from Delhi takes some 8 hours. Buses and taxis by the route. By air, it's serviced by Jagson Airlines.
- ❖ The most convenient way of moving around in town is on foot, though buses by select routes.
- ❖ The Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (HPTDC) has an office and information centre on The Mall, and conducts tours locally and to nearby places of interest and also handles hotel bookings.
- ❖ There are several hotels of different categories ranging from deluxe down to tourist and budget class. Prominent properties are: The Cecil, The Mall; Clarke's Hotel, The Mall; and Welcomheritage Woodville Palace, Raj Bhawan Road.
- ❖ Shimla is a year-round destination, the high season being May through June and September through October.
- ❖ The name Shimla comes from the Goddess Shyamala, a form of the Goddess Kali whose temple used to exist on Jakhu Hill in the early 19th century.



beautiful at night when its lights wink and shimmer like jewels on the hillsides, almost as if the stars dropped from the skies. You may not find racy nightlife, but are assured of fine dining at one of the town's appetizing restaurants.

The one thing you've got to do is take the short treks on offer. The Mall apart, there are several other interesting walks around the resort, all within 15 km of the heart of town. 4 km out is The Glen, a scenic spot with a stream flowing through the forest; 5 km away is Summer Hill, a pleasant walk through the suburbs; 7 km away is scenic Chadwick Falls; 15 minutes walking brings you to Prospect Hill which has beautiful views of the surrounding valleys; 5 km away Tara Devi hill-top temple dispenses its blessings; 16 km away nestles Kufri, a scenic resort where you can ski to your heart's content in the winter.

Shimla remains something of an adventure. Summer, spring or winter, the resort draws visitors who get caught up and ensnared by the charm that first attracted the British to this mountain retreat.

shimla for the adventurous

- ❖ Located 65km away from Shimla, on the National Highway No.22, is the tiny hill station Narkanda. Curtained by dense, lush woods, and offering panoramic views of the Himalayan ranges, Narkanda is thronged by local and international tourists alike in the winter, who come to the region to take advantage of the natural skiing slopes.
- ❖ As with its neighbour, the best time to visit the town is from April to June in the summer months, and November through to February in the winter, when there is an abundance of snowfall. During this time it is advisable to carry heavy woollens as temperatures often drop to freezing point.
- ❖ The Himanchal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation Ltd (HPTDC), organises ski packages each year for beginners that start at Rs4,955 for seven days duration. Packages include lodgings, full boarding, skiing lessons, equipment and safety bindings in accordance with international standards and is inclusive of all taxes, but does not include transport to the hill station itself.
- ❖ For more information and/or to book, contact the HPTDC Marketing offices on Tel: (0177) 2652561, 2658302 or email: shimla@hptdc.ins