

Five relaxed days in Shimla: colonial lanes, pine forests and a toy train

Shimla, Himachal Pradesh — Queen of the Hills

This plan uses the Kalka-Shimla toy train as the opening set-piece, then settles into an easy rhythm of level walks along the Ridge, half-day trips to Kufri and Jakhu, and long sit-down meals of dham and siddu. It is built for families with young children or grandparents who want the flavour of the Himalayas without serious trekking.

Suits: Families with young kids or elderly parents who want colonial sightseeing, easy nature stops and good food without steep treks or a punishing pace

What it costs, per person

Stay: Rs 12,000 · Food: Rs 3,850 · Local transport: Rs 3,150 · Tickets: Rs 730 · **Total: Rs 19,730**

Day 1 · The journey is the destination

Arrival via the Kalka-Shimla toy train

06:00 Taxi from Chandigarh area to Kalka Railway Station

Assumes an overnight stop near Chandigarh or Kalka the previous night. A shared taxi covers the roughly 30 km to Kalka in about 90 minutes on a good road, timed to catch a mid-morning toy train departure.

Chandigarh to Kalka · 90 min · Rs 600

With family: Early start; carry breakfast for young children as there is little to eat before boarding.

08:00 Kalka-Shimla Toy Train

The UNESCO-listed narrow-gauge line climbs through more than a hundred tunnels and bridges over 5-6 hours. Book the standard second-sitting or splurge on the glass-roofed Vistadome for better views; carry snacks and water as onboard catering is basic.

Kalka Railway Station to Shimla Railway Station · 330 min · Rs 350 · Walk to platform, 5 min, free

With family: A wonderful novelty but genuinely long for toddlers who need a nap in a proper seat; keep this day light on other plans.

14:00 Check in and rest

Settle into the hotel and rest after the long ride before heading out for an easy evening walk.

Mall Road area · 60 min · Rs 0 · Taxi from Shimla Railway Station to hotel, 10 min, approx 150 INR

16:30 Evening stroll on the Ridge and Mall Road

Both are pedestrian-only and flat, making them the easiest introduction to Shimla for anyone tired from travel. Watch the sunset over the hills from the Ridge and browse the shopfronts along Mall Road.

The Ridge and Mall Road · 120 min · Rs 0 · Walk, 10 min, free

With family: Flat and stroller/wheelchair-friendly, unlike most of Shimla.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Packed sandwiches or paratha eaten before boarding — Kalka Railway Station stalls (Rs 150)

Lunch: Light snacks from the train pantry or a Kalka station vendor — Onboard / Kalka station (Rs 200)

Dinner: North Indian thali or momos — Baljee's or a similar Mall Road restaurant (Rs 400)

Where to stay

The Orchid Shimla, Near Mall Road — Rs 3,000 a night. Comfortable mid-range base within walking distance of the Ridge, with valley views; cost shown assumes double occupancy.

Save a little: A family of four sharing one room brings the stay cost down to roughly 1500 per person; the toy train's plain second-sitting fare is far cheaper than the Vistadome coach.

Day total, per person: Rs 4,850

Day 2 · Colonial Shimla

Churches, viceroys and museum quiet

10:00 Christ Church

The yellow neo-Gothic church overlooking the Ridge is North India's second-oldest church, known for its stained glass. It is a short outside-and-in stop since the interior is small; photography inside is not allowed.

The Ridge · 30 min · Rs 0 · Walk from hotel, 10 min, free

10:45 Viceregal Lodge (Rashtrapati Niwas)

The grey-stone former summer residence of the British Viceroy sits in maintained gardens on Observatory Hill; a guided interior tour covers the room where the 1945 Shimla Conference was held. Closed on Mondays, so swap this stop with Day 3 if your visit falls on one.

Observatory Hill · 100 min · Rs 20 · Taxi, 10-15 min, approx 150 INR

With family: Grounds are gently sloped and manageable for grandparents; the interior tour involves some standing.

12:30 Lunch back on Mall Road

Return to the town centre for a sit-down lunch before the museum visit.

Mall Road · 60 min · Rs 0 · Taxi, 15 min, approx 150 INR

14:00 Himachal State Museum

A quiet colonial mansion holding Pahari miniature paintings, 8th-century stone sculpture, coins and a doll gallery of Himachali bridal costumes. Uncrowded and a good option if the weather turns. Closed on Mondays.

Chaura Maidan area · 75 min · Rs 10 · Taxi, 15 min, approx 150 INR

With family: Air-conditioned and level-floored, an easy stop for tired legs.

16:00 Browse Lakkar Bazaar

The wood-carving market just below the Ridge is a relaxed place to pick up souvenirs like walking sticks, wooden toys and shawls, with Tibetan snack stalls scattered through it.

Lakkar Bazaar · 45 min · Rs 0 · Walk, 15 min, free

Where to eat

Breakfast: South Indian or omelette breakfast — Indian Coffee House, Mall Road (Rs 150)

Lunch: North Indian thali — Ashiana or Goofa restaurant, Mall Road (Rs 350)

Dinner: Tibetan momos and thukpa — Lakkar Bazaar Tibetan stall or a Mall Road cafe (Rs 400)

Where to stay

The Orchid Shimla, Near Mall Road — Rs 3,000 a night. Same base as Day 1, keeping the group within walking distance of the evening Ridge scene.

Save a little: Walk from the Ridge to Viceregal Lodge instead of taking a taxi (25-30 minutes, mostly gentle downhill on the way) if no one in the group has mobility issues, saving the 150 INR fare.

Day total, per person: Rs 4,530

Day 3 · Hanuman's hill and a quiet forest break

Jakhu Temple, local food and Summer Hill

09:30 Jakhu Temple via ropeway

A Hanuman temple on Shimla's highest point, marked by a very large Hanuman statue visible across town. The ropeway covers the steep 2.5 km climb, which is a better option than the footpath for anyone unsteady on their feet or nervous around monkeys.

Jakhu Hill · 90 min · Rs 250 · Walk to ropeway station near the Ridge, 10 min, free

With family: Monkeys here are aggressive around food and will snatch bags, phones or spectacles - keep all food out of sight and hold children's hands near the temple.

12:00 Dham thali lunch

A ceremonial Himachali vegetarian thali of rice, dal, rajma and yoghurt-based curries, traditionally served at weddings and now available at a few dedicated restaurants in town.

Mall Road area · 60 min · Rs 0 · Ropeway down and walk back, 20 min, included in ropeway ticket

14:00 Summer Hill

A quieter, forested hillside a short taxi ride from central Shimla, good for a half-hour walk away from the Mall Road crowds with views back over the town.

Summer Hill · 45 min · Rs 0 · Taxi, 15 min, approx 150 INR each way

With family: Unpaved paths in places; fine for older children but watch toddlers near the edges.

16:00 Free evening on Mall Road

Return to town for shopping or simply sitting out on the Ridge to watch the evening crowd.

Mall Road · 90 min · Rs 0 · Taxi, 15 min, approx 150 INR

Where to eat

Breakfast: Bun-omelette or paratha — Hotel or a Mall Road cafe (Rs 150)

Lunch: Dham thali — A dedicated Himachali dham restaurant on or near Mall Road (Rs 350)

Dinner: Siddu with ghee and a mild curry — A Himachali-focused restaurant near the Ridge (Rs 400)

Where to stay

The Orchid Shimla, Near Mall Road — Rs 3,000 a night. Continuing at the same base keeps check-in/out simple across the sightseeing-heavy days.

Save a little: Skip the return taxi from Summer Hill and take an HRTC bus back to Mall Road for a fraction of the fare if the group is comfortable with basic shared transport.

Day total, per person: Rs 4,450

Day 4 · Up to Kufri

Nature park, pony rides and a waterfall detour

09:00 Taxi to Kufri

Kufri is about 15-17 km from Shimla; a full-day taxi hire is the easiest way to cover this plus the return and a waterfall stop, and avoids negotiating with local taxi unions at the stand.

Shimla to Kufri · 45 min · Rs 0

With family: Ask your hotel for the current fixed full-day fare rather than negotiating cold at the taxi stand.

09:45 Himalayan Nature Park

A high-altitude park holding Himalayan species like musk deer and snow leopard in naturalistic enclosures, set in dense cedar forest with gentle walking trails.

Kufri · 120 min · Rs 100 · Walk from taxi drop-off, 5 min, free

With family: Mostly level paths, manageable for grandparents; good shoes help as the ground can be uneven after rain.

12:00 Kufri village and pony rides

The village itself has pony rides, snow-season activities and simple food stalls; pony rides are a popular add-on for children but are a separate, negotiated cost.

Kufri village · 60 min · Rs 0 · Walk, 10 min, free

With family: Pony ride costs are not fixed; agree the rate and duration before mounting, typically around 200 INR for a short loop.

13:30 Chadwick Falls detour

A forested waterfall on the way back towards Shimla, fuller after monsoon and reduced to a trickle in peak dry summer. There is a walk down to the base that is not stroller-friendly and can be slippery.

En route back to Shimla · 60 min · Rs 0 · Taxi, 30 min, included in day hire

With family: Better suited to families with older children than toddlers or grandparents with knee problems; the walk down to the base is on uneven steps.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Hotel breakfast before the early start — Hotel (Rs 150)

Lunch: Maggi noodles and momos at a Kufri roadside stall — Kufri village (Rs 250)

Dinner: North Indian curry and rice — Mall Road restaurant (Rs 400)

Where to stay

The Orchid Shimla, Near Mall Road — Rs 3,000 a night. Same base for the last full night in Shimla.

Save a little: Skip the Chadwick Falls detour in peak dry summer when it is reduced to a trickle, and use the saved time and taxi minutes to linger longer at the Nature Park instead.

Day total, per person: Rs 4,700

Day 5 · A slow morning before heading down

Last walk, last thali, departure

09:00 Morning walk on the Ridge

A last unhurried walk along the flat Ridge and Mall Road before packing up, good for photos of the town in the morning light with thinner crowds.

The Ridge · 45 min · Rs 0 · Walk from hotel, 5 min, free

10:00 Last shopping stop on Mall Road

Pick up pashmina shawls, wooden crafts or Himachali pickles from Mall Road shops before checkout.

Mall Road · 90 min · Rs 0 · Walk, 5 min, free

12:00 Farewell dham lunch

A last sit-down Himachali thali before the drive down, a good way to close out the food theme of the trip.

Mall Road area · 60 min · Rs 0 · Walk, 5 min, free

13:30 Taxi to Kalka or Chandigarh for onward travel

The road journey down takes roughly 3.5 to 4 hours to Chandigarh on a well-maintained highway; confirm the current fixed fare with your hotel rather than at the taxi stand.

Shimla to Chandigarh · 240 min · Rs 700 · Taxi pickup from hotel, included in fare

With family: Build in a rest stop partway down if travelling with young children or elderly parents.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Hotel breakfast — Hotel (Rs 150)

Lunch: Dham thali — Mall Road dham restaurant (Rs 350)

Dinner: Not included - travelling onward — En route or at destination (Rs 0)

Where to stay

Check-out - travelling onward, Shimla — Rs 0 a night. Day 5 is a departure day; no additional night in Shimla is needed.

Save a little: Book an HRTC Volvo bus instead of a private taxi for the Shimla-Chandigarh leg if the group doesn't have much luggage; it costs a fraction of the taxi fare.

Day total, per person: Rs 1,200

Pack for this trip

- Layered clothing even in summer - evenings on the Ridge are cool year-round
- Comfortable, grippy walking shoes for the stairways and slopes that connect much of the town
- A light rain jacket or umbrella if travelling in the monsoon-adjacent months
- Sunglasses and a cap for daytime glare, especially at Jakhu and Kufri
- A small daypack that zips shut - useful given the monkeys at Jakhu Temple

Stay safe

- Keep food completely out of sight at Jakhu Temple; monkeys there are aggressive and will grab bags, food and spectacles
- Much of Shimla connects via long stairways rather than flat roads - factor in extra time and rest stops for young children who need carrying and elderly parents with knee problems
- Confirm taxi fares with your hotel before getting into a cab at the bus stand or taxi rank, since touts routinely quote inflated rates to visible tourists
- Avoid the monsoon months (roughly July-August) if possible, since approach roads carry landslide risk and visibility drops on the ropeway and viewpoints
- Mall Road and the Ridge are well-lit and busy with families in the evening and feel safe, but outlying spots like Chadwick Falls and Summer Hill should be visited in daylight only

Local courtesies

- Remove shoes before entering the inner sanctum at Jakhu Temple
- Photography is not permitted inside Christ Church
- Ask before photographing local vendors or shopkeepers on Mall Road and Lakkar Bazaar
- Strict Jain travellers should specifically confirm no onion-garlic preparation with the kitchen, as it is not automatic even when a Jain option is offered
- Dress modestly at temple sites; light shawls are handy for both the temple and the cooler evening air

If it rains

- Swap outdoor time for the Himachal State Museum or the Viceregal Lodge interior tour, both indoor and unaffected by weather (check they are not closed on a Monday)
- Mall Road's covered arcades and cafes work well for a rainy afternoon of shopping and eating
- The Jakhu ropeway may pause in high winds or heavy rain - check locally before heading up and have the museum as a backup
- Chadwick Falls and Summer Hill paths get slippery in rain and are best postponed to a clearer day within the trip if possible