

Three Easy Days in the Queen of the Hills

Shimla, Himachal Pradesh — Queen of the Hills

A gentle, walkable introduction to colonial Shimla built around the Ridge and Mall Road, a half-day up at Jakhu and out to Kufri, and a short taste of the famous toy train without committing a full day to the Kalka run. Paced for families with young children and grandparents, with taxis handling the steep bits and plenty of sit-down meals built in.

Suits: Families with young kids or elderly parents who want classic Shimla sights without long treks, plus a short authentic toy-train experience and proper sit-down meals rather than rushed street food.

What it costs, per person

Stay: Rs 4,000 · Food: Rs 2,350 · Local transport: Rs 820 · Tickets: Rs 830 · **Total: Rs 8,000**

Day 1 · Colonial Shimla on Foot

The Ridge, Mall Road and the Raj-era buildings

09:00 Morning walk on The Ridge and Mall Road

Start at The Ridge, the open square at the top of town, then walk the pedestrian Mall Road past shopfronts and colonial facades. This stretch is flat and stroller/wheelchair friendly, unlike most of Shimla, so it's an easy way to ease older relatives and young children into the day.

The Ridge and Mall Road · 120 min · Rs 0

With family: Cars are banned here so it is one of the few genuinely safe, level stretches for toddlers to run around and grandparents to walk without stairs.

11:15 Christ Church visit

A short stop at the yellow neo-Gothic church overlooking the Ridge, North India's second oldest church, known for its stained glass. It's really an outside-appreciation stop since the interior is small and photography inside isn't allowed.

Christ Church, The Ridge · 25 min · Rs 0 · Walk, 5 minutes, free

With family: Quick and easy, no queues expected outside peak weekend afternoons.

11:45 Viceregal Lodge guided tour

Taxi over to Observatory Hill to see the former Viceroy's summer residence, now the Indian Institute of Advanced Study. A short guided interior tour covers a few rooms including where the 1945 Shimla Conference was held, and the maintained gardens outside are worth wandering even if you skip the interior.

Viceregal Lodge (Rashtrapati Niwas), Observatory Hill · 100 min · Rs 20 · Taxi, 15 minutes, approx 100 INR per person shared

With family: Closed on Mondays, so do not plan this stop for a Monday. Grounds are mostly flat gravel paths, manageable for elderly members.

15:00 Himachal State Museum

A quiet colonial mansion holding Pahari miniature paintings, 8th-century stone sculpture and a doll gallery of Himachali bridal costumes. Good low-key indoor stop after a walking-heavy morning, and works equally well as a rainy-day substitute if scheduled on another day.

Himachal State Museum, Chaura Maidan road · 75 min · Rs 10 · Taxi, 10 minutes, approx 80 INR per person shared

With family: Also closed on Mondays, like Viceregal Lodge - avoid scheduling this whole day on a Monday.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Simple breakfast, omelette or idli with filter coffee — Indian Coffee House, Mall Road (Rs 150)

Lunch: North Indian thali or momos at a sit-down Mall Road restaurant — Mall Road restaurant (Rs 350)

Dinner: Himachali dham thali (rice, dal, rajma, yoghurt curries) at a dedicated Himachali restaurant — Near The Ridge (Rs 400)

Where to stay

Hotel Shivalik Regency, Mall Road · Rs 2,000 a night. On Mall Road itself so the family can walk to most of today's sights, cost shown assumes two people sharing a room off the approx 4000 INR rack rate, which off-

peak online booking often beats.

Save a little: Book the Shivalik Regency or Hotel Nishat directly online rather than walk-in; off-peak rates often run below the rack rate quoted at the desk, and sharing a room brings the per-person cost well under budget.

Day total, per person: Rs 3,110

Day 2 · Jakhu Temple and Kufri

A temple with a view and a half-day out to the pine forests

08:30 Jakhu Temple via ropeway

Visit the Hanuman temple on Shimla's highest point, marked by the huge Hanuman statue visible across town. Going up early avoids both the heat and the monkey activity around food later in the day; the ropeway covers the steep 2.5 km climb for anyone who can't manage the footpath.

Jakhu Temple, Jakhu Hill · 90 min · Rs 500 · Walk, 10 minutes to ropeway base near The Ridge, free

With family: Monkeys here are aggressive around food and will snatch bags, spectacles or anything shiny - keep food out of sight. Use the ropeway both ways if anyone is nervous, elderly or unsteady, rather than the footpath.

11:15 Drive to Kufri

Taxi out of town toward Kufri, about 15-17 km away, on winding but well-maintained hill roads. Ask the hotel for the current fixed union fare rather than negotiating cold at a taxi stand.

Kufri · 45 min · Rs 0 · Taxi, 45 minutes, approx 400 INR per person round trip

With family: Winding road; pack motion sickness tablets if anyone in the family is prone to it.

12:00 Himalayan Nature Park

Walk the cedar forest trails and see Himalayan species like musk deer in naturalistic enclosures. It's a relaxed, mostly level walk that suits both young kids and older relatives better than a real trek would.

Himalayan Nature Park, Kufri · 120 min · Rs 100 · Walk, 5 minutes, free

With family: Shaded and cool even in summer, a good midday stop when the sun is strongest.

14:15 Kufri village pony ride and viewpoint (optional)

Kufri village itself has short pony rides and mountain viewpoints, and snow-season activities if visiting in winter.

This is optional and priced separately from the day total since it's negotiated on the spot.

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

With family: Pony ride pricing is negotiated at the spot, roughly 150-200 INR per person; agree the rate before mounting, especially with young children.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Quick breakfast at the hotel or a Mall Road bakery before setting out — Mall Road (Rs 150)

Lunch: Simple dhaba meal - rajma chawal or Maggi with tea - at Kufri — Kufri roadside dhaba (Rs 300)

Dinner: Tibetan momos and thukpa back in town — Lakkar Bazaar (Rs 350)

Where to stay

Hotel Shivalik Regency, Mall Road — Rs 2,000 a night. Same hotel as night one, keeping check-in/out simple and the family close to Mall Road for the evening.

Save a little: Fix the round-trip Kufri taxi rate with the hotel before leaving rather than at the taxi stand, and skip the optional pony ride if the budget is tight - the nature park walk alone is enough for most families.

Day total, per person: Rs 3,800

Day 3 · The Toy Train and a Slow Goodbye

A short taste of the Kalka-Shimla railway plus quiet corners before departure

07:30 Toy train return trip, Shimla to Barog

Take an early narrow-gauge train down to Barog station and back, roughly two hours each way through tunnels and pine forest, without committing to the full five-to-six-hour Kalka run. Barog station is well known locally for its breakfast, so plan to eat there rather than before boarding.

Shimla Railway Station to Barog and back · 240 min · Rs 200

With family: Even this shorter version is a long sit for a toddler who needs a nap in a proper seat - if travelling with an infant, consider skipping this block and using the morning for Summer Hill and Lakkar Bazaar instead. Book tickets a day ahead in peak season as seats sell out.

13:00 Summer Hill walk

A quieter, forested hillside away from the Mall Road crowds with short, gentle walking paths and views back over the town. Good as a calm half hour after the morning's train journey.

Summer Hill · 45 min · Rs 0 · Taxi, 15 minutes, approx 120 INR per person

With family: Mostly level paths, easier than most of central Shimla for anyone tired or with knee problems.

14:00 Lakkar Bazaar shopping and snack break

Browse the wood-carving and souvenir stalls of Lakkar Bazaar for last-minute gifts, and grab a light Tibetan snack before heading back to the hotel to collect luggage.

Lakkar Bazaar · 60 min · Rs 0 · Taxi, 15 minutes, approx 120 INR per person

With family: Bargaining is normal here; prices for the same wooden souvenir can vary quite a bit between stalls.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Famous local breakfast stop while the train halts — Barog railway station canteen (Rs 150)

Lunch: Sit-down thali or Chinese-style momos before departure — Lakkar Bazaar (Rs 350)

Dinner: Light packed snacks for the onward journey rather than a full sit-down meal — En route (Rs 150)

Where to stay

N/A - departure day, Shimla — Rs 0 a night. Checkout happens this morning; no additional night booked for the departure day.

Save a little: Buy the ordinary second-sitting toy train ticket rather than the glass-roofed Vistadome coach for the short Barog run - the views are much the same for a fraction of the price on this shorter segment.

Day total, per person: Rs 1,090

Pack for this trip

- Comfortable walking shoes with good grip - much of Shimla involves stairs and sloped lanes even outside the flat Mall Road stretch.
- A light jacket or shawl even in summer, since evenings on the Ridge cool down quickly after sunset.
- Motion sickness tablets for the winding taxi road to Kufri and for the toy train's many curves.
- A small daypack that can be zipped shut around Jakhu Temple, where monkeys go for anything visible or hanging loose.
- Basic rain gear if travelling outside the March-June or September-November windows, since hill weather can turn quickly.

Stay safe

- The main hazard in Shimla is terrain, not crime: expect long flights of stairs between the Mall and lower Cart Road, so budget extra time for anyone with knee or mobility issues, or use the small tourist lift connecting the two.
- At Jakhu Temple, keep all food out of sight and hold bags close - monkeys are used to snatching from tourists and will go for spectacles too. Nervous or unsteady travelers should take the ropeway rather than the 2.5 km footpath.
- Confirm taxi fares with your hotel before getting into a cab, especially at the bus stand and taxi ranks, where visibly out-of-town tourists are routinely quoted inflated rates.
- If travelling in July-August, check road conditions before setting out to Kufri or Barog, since monsoon rains bring landslide risk on the approach roads.

Local courtesies

- Hindi is understood everywhere in the tourist core; English also works fine in hotels, restaurants and with taxi drivers in town, though it thins out with bus conductors on outlying routes.
- Most mid-range restaurants can do a Jain preparation on request, but strict Jains should specifically confirm no onion-garlic rather than assuming it's automatic.
- Dress modestly when entering Christ Church or Jakhu Temple, and remove footwear before entering the temple itself.
- Bargaining is expected and normal at Lakkar Bazaar stalls and with pony-ride operators at Kufri, but taxi and ropeway fares are fixed by local unions and not up for negotiation.

If it rains

- Swap an outdoor block for the Himachal State Museum (closed Mondays) - it's indoors, uncrowded and air-conditioned/heated depending on season.
- Mall Road's shops and cafes are covered enough for a slow browsing afternoon if the rain is light.

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Skip Chadwick Falls and Jakhu's footpath option entirely in wet weather, both get slippery, use the ropeway for Jakhu if you still want to go up.

- Treat the Kufri excursion as flexible - if roads look risky after heavy rain, postpone rather than pushing through, since the drive involves real elevation and curves.