

A Two-Day Introduction to Shimla for the Family

Shimla, Himachal Pradesh — Queen of the Hills

This is a gentle, walkable two-day loop built around the Ridge, Mall Road and one half-day trip out to Kufri, designed so that grandparents and young children are never far from a bench, a toilet, or a taxi back to the hotel. It leans into Shimla's real strength - colonial architecture, easy strolling, and hill-station food - rather than trying to force in trekking or wilderness that the town doesn't really offer.

Suits: Families with young children or older parents who want a short, low-exertion hill trip with real sightseeing but minimal stair-climbing and no long drives.

What it costs, per person

Stay: Rs 12,000 · Food: Rs 1,750 · Local transport: Rs 700 · Tickets: Rs 370 · **Total: Rs 14,820**

Day 1 · The Ridge, Mall Road and Jakhu

Settling in and covering the flat, walkable core of town

10:00 Check-in and orientation walk on The Ridge and Mall Road

Drop bags at the hotel and spend the late morning simply walking the pedestrian-only Ridge and Mall Road, taking in the Gaiety Theatre, the old Town Hall and Scandal Point. This stretch is flat and stroller/wheelchair-friendly, so it's the easiest way to let everyone acclimatise to the altitude and crowd before anything more strenuous.

The Ridge and Mall Road · 150 min · Rs 0

With family: Genuinely the one flat, level stretch in Shimla - ideal for a first walk with a stroller or an elderly parent who needs to test their legs before tackling any stairs.

12:30 Christ Church

A short stop at the yellow neo-Gothic church overlooking the Ridge, North India's second-oldest, known for its stained glass. It's really a 20-25 minute look from outside since the interior is small and photography isn't allowed inside.

The Ridge, next to Mall Road · 25 min · Rs 0 · Walk, 5 minutes, free

With family: Quick and easy stop, no stairs of consequence - good for a breather between longer activities.

14:00 Jakhu Temple via ropeway

Take the ropeway up to the Hanuman temple at Shimla's highest point instead of the steep 2.5 km footpath - much easier on knees and small legs. The ropeway runs 9:30am to early evening, so a 2pm ride leaves comfortable time before the last descent.

Jakhu Hill · 90 min · Rs 250 · Walk, 15 minutes uphill to the ropeway base station, free

With family: Monkeys here are genuinely aggressive around food and will snatch bags, spectacles or snacks in hand - keep everything edible zipped away and don't carry food visibly. The ropeway is strongly recommended over the footpath for young children or anyone unsteady on their feet.

16:00 Evening at Lakkar Bazaar and Mall Road, dinner

Wander down into Lakkar Bazaar for wooden toys, shawls and souvenirs, then settle into Mall Road for dinner as it lights up for the evening - this stretch is busy, well-lit and considered the safest part of town after dark.

Lakkar Bazaar / Mall Road · 120 min · Rs 0 · Walk downhill, 15 minutes, free

With family: Evenings here are crowded but family-friendly; keep young children's hands held near the pushcarts and steps at bazaar entrances.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Simple South/North Indian breakfast — Indian Coffee House, Mall Road (Rs 150)

Lunch: Himachali thali or a north Indian sit-down meal — Mall Road restaurant (Rs 350)

Dinner: Tibetan momos or North Indian mains — Lakkar Bazaar / Mall Road eatery (Rs 400)

Where to stay

The Orchid Shimla, Near Mall Road, Rs 6,000 a night. Comfortable mid-range property, close enough to walk to the Ridge, with valley views and enough space for a family group.

Save a little: If everyone in the group is reasonably fit, skip the 250 INR ropeway and walk the footpath up to Jakhu instead - it adds about 45 minutes each way but costs nothing.

Day total, per person: Rs 7,150

Day 2 · Kufri and the Viceregal Lodge

A half-day out of town for nature and views, back for colonial history

10:00 Himalayan Nature Park, Kufri

Drive out to Kufri to see musk deer, snow leopard and other Himalayan species in naturalistic enclosures set among dense cedar forest, with short, mostly level walking trails between enclosures. This is the easiest wildlife stop near Shimla for a family without a serious trek.

Kufri, about 16 km from Shimla · 120 min · Rs 100 · Taxi from hotel, approx 45 minutes, approx 400 INR per person (confirm the current fixed fare with your hotel rather than negotiating at the stand)

With family: Trails have gentle inclines but no serious stairs; fine for older children and most elderly parents at an unhurried pace.

12:15 Lunch and stroll in Kufri village

Kufri village itself has pony rides, photo stalls with Bhotia dogs or yaks, and snow-season tobogganing when there's snow cover - all optional extras charged separately and worth agreeing a price before starting. Grab a simple lunch at one of the local dhabas here.

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

With family: Agree photo/pony ride prices upfront with vendors - these are not fixed and get quoted higher to visibly out-of-town families.

14:30 Viceregal Lodge (Rashtrapati Niwas)

The former Viceroy's summer residence, a grey-stone mansion set in maintained gardens, with a short guided interior tour covering the room where the 1945 Shimla Conference was held. The grounds alone, with their manicured lawns and views, are worth the modest entry fee.

Observatory Hill · 100 min · Rs 20 · Taxi back into Shimla, approx 45 minutes, approx 300 INR per person

With family: Closed on Mondays - if your second day happens to fall on a Monday, swap this stop for Summer Hill or extra time at the Ridge instead. The gardens are flat and easy for elderly relatives; the interior tour involves a few steps.

16:30 Farewell evening on The Ridge and dinner

Head back to the Ridge for a last unhurried walk and a sit-down dinner, closing the trip the same easy way it opened rather than rushing off to pack.

The Ridge, Mall Road · 90 min · Rs 0 · Walk, 10 minutes, free

With family: A relaxed, low-effort way to end the trip without any last-minute climbing.

Where to eat

Breakfast: Hotel breakfast or a quick paratha stop — Hotel or Mall Road cafe (Rs 150)

Lunch: Simple dhaba meal - rajma chawal or Maggi — Kufri village dhaba (Rs 300)

Dinner: North Indian or Himachali dham-style thali — Mall Road restaurant (Rs 400)

Where to stay

The Orchid Shimla, Near Mall Road — Rs 6,000 a night. Same central hotel for both nights avoids repacking and keeps the group within walking distance of Mall Road for both mornings and evenings.

Save a little: An HRTC bus to Kufri costs a fraction of a private taxi and runs frequently; use it if the group is comfortable with basic shared transport, saving most of the day's transport budget for a nicer dinner instead.

Day total, per person: Rs 7,670

Pack for this trip

- Layered clothing regardless of season - Shimla's evenings are cool even when the plains are hot, and it can be genuinely cold in winter.
- Comfortable, closed walking shoes with grip - much of the town connects via stairs and slightly slippery cobbled lanes.
- A light rain jacket or umbrella, since hill weather can turn quickly even outside monsoon.
- A small daypack that zips shut, kept out of sight near Jakhu Temple where monkeys are used to snatching food and bags.
- A walking stick or similar support for elderly relatives who find stairs difficult - Shimla has more of them than it looks.

Stay safe

- Confirm taxi fares with your hotel before heading to the stand - local unions largely fix rates and touts routinely quote inflated prices to obvious tourists.
- Keep food out of sight at Jakhu Temple; monkeys there are genuinely aggressive and will grab bags, spectacles or snacks.
- Much of Shimla connects via long flights of stairs rather than flat roads - build in rest stops and extra time for young children who tire or elderly parents with knee problems.
- Avoid the monsoon months (roughly July-August) if possible, as approach roads carry landslide risk and paths get slippery on steeper stretches.
- Mall Road and the Ridge are well-lit and busy with families in the evening and feel safe, but keep small children's hands held in the crowd.

Local courtesies

- Remove footwear before entering the inner sanctum at Jakhu Temple.
- Ask before photographing local vendors or the Bhotia dogs/yaks kept for tourist photos at Kufri, and agree a price first.
- Most restaurants offer a Jain option on request, but strict Jains should specifically confirm no onion-garlic preparation, as it isn't automatic everywhere.
- Photography is not permitted inside Christ Church.

If it rains

- Swap outdoor time for the Himachal State Museum (closed Mondays), a quiet, uncrowded couple of hours of Pahari miniature paintings and sculpture.
- The Viceregal Lodge's indoor guided tour works well in wet weather and needs less outdoor walking than the gardens alone.
- Mall Road's covered shopfronts and cafes make for reasonable shelter for a slow lunch and browsing until the rain passes.
- Skip Chadwick Falls and the Jakhu footpath in wet weather, as both get slippery; use the ropeway instead if Jakhu is still on the plan.