# RISHIKESH

## a map made by Zostel for young travellers

**FREE MAP · UTTARAKHAND**



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ZOSTEL

**AN IDEA**
**The Ganga to the lakes**
From the river to the lakes: a train three days a week runs by Delhi and Jaipur to Udaipur. Take the boat on Pichola.

**AN IDEA**
**The Ganga to the sea**
One train a week runs from Rishikesh's own station down the coast: get off in Goa for the beach shacks, or ride on to Kochi's nets.



## Keep Zosteling

Every place we're live, on one map. Rishikesh is one: pick your next.

**111+** Zostels · **80+** destinations · **5M+** travellers · **since** 2013




### Around Rishikesh, by road

Drive times from our Zostels in Rishikesh

**Up into the hills**
Mussoorie 2½ h
*From the Ganga to Gun Hill.*

**On to Himachal**
Shimla 8½ h › Manali 7½ h
*Shimla's Ridge, then Manali's deodars.*

**Down to the Taj**
Delhi 5 h › Agra 5 h
*India Gate at dusk, the Taj at sunrise.*

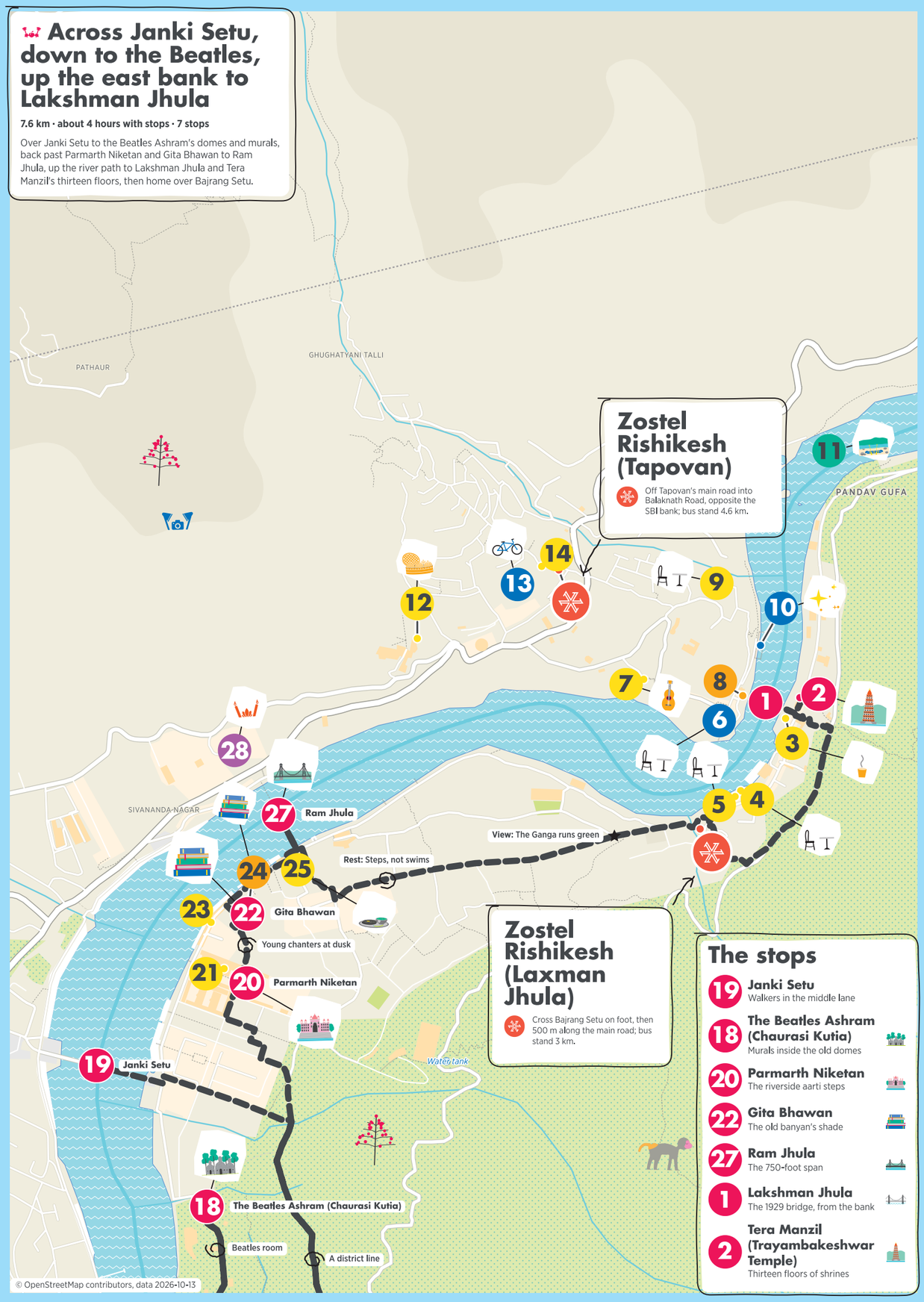
DED 40 min, SWN 4 h
Rishikesh 5 km

India and its states: DataMeet (CC BY 4.0), the Survey of India outline. Roads, airports, station: © OpenStreetMap contributors; drive times by FOSSGIS OSRM, scaled to Zostel's own published times (2026-10). Pins nudged apart where they crowd; edge pins point the way. Flights and trains change: check before you plan.

## Across Janki Setu, down to the Beatles, up the east bank to Lakshman Jhula

**7.6 km · about 4 hours with stops · 7 stops**

Over Janki Setu to the Beatles Ashram's domes and murals, back past Parmarth Niketan and Gita Bhawan to Ram Jhula, up the river path to Lakshman Jhula and Tera Manzil's thirteen floors, then home over Bajrang Setu.




## The stops

19 **Janki Setu** — Walkers in the middle lane
18 **The Beatles Ashram (Chaurasi Kutia)** — Murals inside the old domes
20 **Parmarth Niketan** — The riverside aarti steps
22 **Gita Bhawan** — The old banyan's shade
27 **Ram Jhula** — The 750-foot span
1 **Lakshman Jhula** — The 1929 bridge, from the bank
2 **Tera Manzil (Trayambakeshwar Temple)** — Thirteen floors of shrines

## Namaskar, Rishikesh!

*Namaskar! We're the Rishikesh Zobus, and this is where the Ganga comes out of the hills: green, cold and fast, between sal forest and the Shivaliks, with footbridges strung across it and ashrams stacked up both banks. Seekers come from everywhere to stretch by the water, rafters come for its rapids, and in 1968 the Beatles came to meditate and wrote many of the White Album's songs. The town is vegetarian by rule and dry, so the cafés pour chai and juice with a view. Cross on foot, raft in season with a helmet on, climb to Kunjapuri for sunrise, and never swim. Then come home to one of our two: by Laxman Jhula, or in Tapovan.*



## Stay with us in Rishikesh

*Two Zostels on the river: one by Bajrang Setu at Laxman Jhula, one in Tapovan on Balaknath Road.*

### Zostel Rishikesh (Laxman Jhula)

Five minutes from Bajrang Setu, with Ganga views, a rooftop for sunsets and a yoga hall. Walk 500 m from the bridge along the main road; cars park near Laxman Jhula Police Station and walk about 100 m.

### Zostel Rishikesh (Tapovan)

In Tapovan, with a lawn for morning yoga, a rooftop café and bonfire nights. Turn off the main road into Balaknath Road; we're opposite the SBI bank. Paid parking about 50 m away while the road is repaired.

Maps: © OpenStreetMap contributors (ODbL), data fetched 2026-10-13 (UTC) · Terrain: Terrain Tiles on AWS (Mapzen/Tilezen), from SRTM courtesy of NASA and the U.S. Geological Survey. Walk lines routed by FOSSGIS OSRM on OpenStreetMap. Drawings: the Zostel brand's own. Things change: check the day's timings at the gate.

Every number is a tip on the map overleaf, in the colour of its kind: Bridges, Ghats, Ashrams · Sal, Sand and Rapids · Chai With a View · Souvenirs by the Bridge · Om and the White Album · Some Never Leave. A drawing beside a line shows what you will find there:

## Practical tips

### Getting in

Two railway stations: the old Rishikesh station at the south end of town, and the newer Yog Nagari Rishikesh, where the line being built up to Karnaprayag begins. Haridwar is about 35 km away. Buses pull into the Rishikesh bus stand. Jolly Grant, Dehradun's airport, is about 22 km from our Tapovan home. Delhi is about 250 km down the road.

### Getting around

Shared autos, the vikrams, run the main roads: from the bus stand take one to Bajrang Setu and walk on. The east bank round Swarg Ashram is for walkers. Cross on foot: Janki Setu (walkers and two-wheelers), Bajrang Setu (on foot), or the ferry by Ram Jhula, if it's running. As of October 2026 Ram Jhula is shut for repair and Lakshman Jhula stays closed. Late at night the police close the river crossings to cars.

### The river is stronger than it looks

The Ganga here is cold, deep and fast, and swimming in it is dangerous: people drown every year, even at quiet beaches such as Neem Beach and at Shivpuri. Paddle at the edge at most, stay on the steps, and leave the banks at once when the police or the SDRF call people out, as they do in the rains.

### Rafting, the safe way

Raft only with a licensed operator and a guide, always in a helmet and a life jacket. The season runs from about late September into June; the monsoon shuts it, and it reopens only after the district has inspected the river. Beginners start on the short stretch down to Lakshman Jhula; the long run from Kaudiyala is for the experienced.

### Monkeys

Rhesus macaques own the bridges and the ashram lanes. Keep food out of sight and bags zipped, don't stare them down, and let them pass. They are bolder on the footbridges than anywhere else.

### At the ashrams and ghats

Ashrams and temples are homes and places of worship as much as sights. Cover shoulders and knees, take your shoes off where others do, keep your voice down, and ask before photographing anyone. Each ashram keeps its own timings: check them at the gate.

### Vegetarian, and dry

Rishikesh is a vegetarian town by rule, and dry: it is a holy city. Respect it in your room and on the street; the cafés make up for everything with juice, chai and a river view.

### When to come

September to November and March to May are the river's best months: warm days, clear water, rafting on. Winter is cool and quiet. From about mid-June to mid-September the monsoon brings heavy rain and a high river, and rafting, the bungee and the zipline all close.

### Sawan, a heads-up

In Sawan, the monsoon month of July and August, the Kanwar Yatra brings pilgrims by the million through Haridwar and up to Neelkanth. Roads close, rooms fill: plan around it, or come for the spectacle and go on foot.

### After dark

The lanes go pitch dark once the cafés close: carry a torch, walk back with company, and watch your step on the footbridges, where cows and bulls cross too.

## 5 minutes of history

**Legend**
**Lord of the Senses**
The name is read as Hrishikesh, 'lord of the senses', a name of Vishnu. The Skanda Purana places the land in Kedarkhand and tells of a sage, Raibhya, granted a vision here after long austerity.

**Legend**
**Two jute ropes**
Lakshmana, Rama's brother, is said to have crossed the Ganga on jute ropes where Lakshman Jhula hangs today. The bridge keeps his name.

**1924**
**Taken by the flood**
An iron-rope bridge, a merchant's gift of 1889, is washed away by the great floods of October 1924.

**1930**
**The bridge we know**
The Public Works Department builds a 450-foot iron suspension bridge in 1927–1929; it opens to traffic on 11 April 1930. Its plaque promises that no toll will ever be charged to cross.

**1936**
**Sivananda's society**
Swami Sivananda founds the Divine Life Society at Muni ki Reti: its Sivananda Ashram teaches yoga, prints books and runs a free hospital.

**1956**
**A vegetarian town**
Rishikesh becomes vegetarian by rule, and the Supreme Court upholds the rule in 2004. The town is dry, too: a holy city's choice.

**1968**
**The Beatles come to meditate**
In February the Beatles arrive at the academy the Maharishi built on the east bank in 1963, with Donovan, Mike Love and Mia and Prudence Farrow. Lennon and Harrison stay until April; eighteen songs of the White Album are written here.

**1986**
**Ram Jhula**
A second suspension bridge, 750 feet long, joins Sivananda Nagar to Swarg Ashram, about 2 km downstream of Lakshman Jhula.

**1999**
**The Yoga Festival finds a home**
The International Yoga Festival moves to Parmarth Niketan, on the river at Swarg Ashram, and has filled a week of March there every year since.

**2015**
**The ashram opens its gates**
The Maharishi's academy, empty for decades and taken back by the forest, opens to visitors in December as the Beatles Ashram, inside Rajaji, a tiger reserve from the same year.

**2018**
**Rafting, paused**
The High Court stops rafting across Uttarakhand until the state writes rules for it. Some 300 operators were then running a 36 km stretch of the Ganga; today the rafts go out season by season with the district's permission.

**2019**
**The old bridge rests**
Lakshman Jhula is declared unsafe and closed in July 2019. In November 2020 Janki Setu opens downstream, 346 m long, for walkers and two-wheelers.

## Talk like a local

**Namaskar**
Hello (Garhwali and Hindi alike)
*nuh-mus-kaar*

**Siwasaunli**
Hello, the Garhwali way
*see-waa-saun-lee*

**Aap kan cho?**
How are you?
*aap kun cho*

**Mi bhallu cho**
I'm well
*mee bhul-loo cho*

**Dagdaiya**
Friend! (calling out to one)
*dug-dai-yaa*

**Kakh?**
Where?
*kukh*

**Yu kathaga cha?**
How much is this?
*yoo kuth-gaa chuh*

**Dhanbad**
Thank you
*dhun-baad*

**Feri malyan**
Goodbye
*fay-ree mul-yaan*

**Ho / Ni**
Yes / No
*ho / nee*

**Jhula**
A swing: the bridges sway
*jhoo-laa*

**Setu**
Bridge
*say-too*

## Eat like a Rishikesh local

*Rishikesh has eaten vegetarian by its own rule since 1956, and its own food is Garhwali: dal, gahat and phaanu, greens in kafuli, millet in mandua roti and jhangora kheer. Round that, the old town eats aloo puri off leaf plates, the ashrams serve sattvic thalis, and the riverside cafés cook the world for travellers. The hill kitchens first, then the cafés.*

**25 Chotiwala.** Our maps' table for a thali and the hill dishes: kafuli, aloo ke gutke, and singori from the Kumaon side.
*"Kafuli and aloo ke gutke at Chotiwala, singori after. Then back across the river."*

**Jal & Jalebi.** Our food list's special pahadi thali on a kansa plate: gahat soup, aloo ke gutke, red rice, millet kheer, bal mithai.
*"The pahadi thali on a kansa plate: gahat soup first, bal mithai last."*

**38 The Sitting Elephant.** Our food list's rooftop for mandua ki roti and kafuli, at its best at sunset.
*"Mandua roti and kafuli on the roof, the sun going down over the Ganga."*

**37 Pappu Lassi.** Lassis, of course: our food list says no more, and needs to say no more.
*"A lassi in Mayakund, then down to the ghat for the aarti."*

**23 The Office.** Samosas stuffed with mango, apple, banana or chocolate, and a masala chai that our old map rated the best in town.
*"A banana–Nutella samosa with masala chai. Don't knock it till you've tried it."*

**7 The Beatles Cafe.** Retro music on a loop, the band on the walls, books, and a view of the Ganga.
*"Pasta, the Ganga, and the 60s on the speakers."*

**5 Little Buddha Cafe.** Big breakfasts and fresh juices, Italian, Indian and vegan, with more river on every floor.
*"Up the stairs at Little Buddha for breakfast, before the good seats go."*

**4 Om Freedom Cafe.** Pancakes our guide and our food list both name, and lassi in tall mugs.
*"Banana Nutella pancakes at Freedom. Worth the queue."*

**12 Bistro Nirvana.** Israeli, Italian, Chinese and Indian; our food list orders the momos and the mezze.
*"Momos and mezze on the bamboo patio."*

**3 Ganga Beach Cafe.** Low cushions, chai, and sunset over the river and the bridge.
*"Chai and a book at Ganga Beach Cafe till the sun goes."*

**Devraj Coffee Corner.** A German bakery and coffee shop above the bridge: brown bread with yak cheese, croissants, apple strudel.
*"Apple strudel above the bridge, the temple across the water."*

**9 Ramana's Garden.** Organic food, much of it grown on the grounds; the profits go to the children.
*"Lunch at Ramana's: salad from the garden, and a school gets paid."*

**14 Ira's Kitchen & Tea Room.** Ragi cheela, a thin pancake of finger millet, and a hot chocolate.
*"Ragi cheela in Tapovan: the hills' millet, for breakfast."*

**Ganga View.** Very popular, so expect a wait; our food list orders the pizza and the waffles.
*"Pizza and waffles at Ganga View. There's a wait; that's how you know."*

**21 The ashram kitchens.** Simple vegetarian meals and sattvic thalis: fresh, seasonal, locally grown.
*"A sattvic thali at Swarg Ashram. Finish your plate."*

**38 Mandua roti.** Flatbread of finger millet, the hills' grain, eaten with ghee and chainsoo or greens.

**Jhangora kheer.** Barnyard millet cooked in milk with jaggery or sugar and cardamom, nuts on top: the hills' festival sweet.

**40 Aloo puri on a leaf.** The old town's breakfast: potatoes in a spicy gravy with puris fried crisp, served on a leaf plate.

**21 Sattvic thali.** The ashrams' food: simple, vegetarian, fresh, seasonal and locally grown.

**25 From Kumaon.** From Kumaon, across the hills: singori, khoya wrapped in a maalu leaf, and bal mithai, khoya fudge rolled in sugar balls. Both turn up here too.

**The cafés.** Riverside cafés from Tapovan to Lakshman Jhula cook for the world's travellers: Israeli, Italian, Continental, Tibetan, and pancakes everywhere.

**The rule.** Rishikesh has been vegetarian by its own rule since 1956, and it is dry: every menu in town is vegetarian, and the drinks are chai, lassi, juice and coffee.

## Dishes to hunt down

**25 Kafuli.** Garhwal's stew of greens, spinach and methi, thickened with a little flour and eaten with rice or mandua roti.

## The Beatles in Rishikesh

**Songs.** Eighteen of the White Album's songs and two of Abbey Road's come from here: Dear Prudence, Julia, Mother Nature's Son among them.

**18 February 1968.** The four arrive with Pattie Boyd, Cynthia Lennon, Maureen Starr and Jane Asher; Donovan, Mike Love and Mia and Prudence Farrow are there too.

**A first song.** Ringo Starr finished his first composition at the ashram: Don't Pass Me By.

**Dehradun.** Harrison wrote a song about the town down the road. The band never recorded it.

**18 The murals.** Since 2016 the ruins have been a gallery: murals on the walls, tributes in the hall.

## Eat like Garhwal

**25 Kafuli.** A stew of greens, spinach and methi, thickened with a little flour; with rice or mandua roti.

**Phaanu.** Lentils, often gahat, soaked overnight, ground and slow-cooked into a thick, soupy stew; with rice.

**Chainsoo.** Black urad dal roasted, ground coarse and slow-cooked with spices, finished with mustard oil.

**Gahat.** Horse gram, the hills' pulse: in soups, in phaanu, stuffed into breads.

**38 Mandua roti.** Finger-millet flatbread, eaten with ghee and chainsoo or greens.

**25 Aloo ke gutke.** Parboiled potatoes slow-roasted with spices: a street snack and a teatime plate.

**Bhatt ki churkani.** Black soybeans cooked with a rice paste, eaten with rice.

**Thechwani.** Crushed mountain radish and baby potatoes, cooked together, with mandua roti or puris.

**Jhangora kheer.** Barnyard millet in milk with jaggery or sugar and cardamom: the festival sweet.

**Arsa.** A sweet of rice and jaggery, made for weddings and handed out as a gift to take home.

## Got a day to spare?

**Mussoorie, next.** Not a day out: a stop of its own. Up in the hills over Dehradun, with our Zostel Mussoorie.

**Kunjapuri.** Up past Narendra Nagar to a hilltop temple at about 1,676 m, for sunrise over Bandarpunch, Swargarohini and Chaukhamba, and the Ganga valley below.

**32 Neelkanth Mahadev.** About 32 km into the forested hills above the east bank, where two streams meet: a temple with a carved, tiered tower. Trek up or drive.

**Vashishtha Gufa.** Over 20 km up the Badrinath road: a cave by the river kept as a place of silence, where a swami meditated from the late 1920s to 1961.

**Rajaji's forest.** The tiger reserve starts at the town's edge: elephants, leopards and over 315 kinds of bird. Take a jungle safari from a gate such as Chilla; check the season there.

**33 Haridwar.** About 35 km downstream, where the Ganga meets the plains: Har Ki Pauri and its evening aarti.

**Devprayag.** About three hours up the road, where the Bhagirathi and the Alaknanda meet and become the Ganga.

**33 Ardh Kumbh, Haridwar (January to April 2027).** Next door, ten great bathing days between 14 January and 20 April 2027: expect crowds and full rooms here too.

## Festivals worth timing a trip for

**20 International Yoga Festival (March).** A week of classes, talks and music by the river at Parmarth Niketan, every March since 1999: the yoga capital's own festival.

**1 Holi (March).** The town gathers to play colours at the Lakshman Jhula parking, and much else closes for the afternoon. Old clothes, a big breakfast first.

**32 Maha Shivaratri (February or March).** Neelkanth's biggest day: crowds walk up through the forest to the temple.

**35 Ganga Dussehra (Jyeshtha, May or June).** The river's own day: Rishikesh's ghats are at their fullest.

**32 Sawan (July and August).** The Kanwar Yatra's pilgrims fill the roads to Neelkanth: a spectacle, and a reason to book early or come another month.

## The Ganga, rapid by rapid

**Grades I to IV.** From ripples to rapids that flip rafts. Pick the stretch for your crew, not your ego.

**29 Four stretches.** From the gentle run down to Lakshman Jhula for first-timers, through Shivpuri and Marine Drive, to Kaudiyala for experts: each about 10 km.

**Byasi.** About 30 km upstream, a quieter rafting base with rapids from moderate to hard.

**The season.** About late September into June; the monsoon closes the river, and it reopens only after inspection.

**Helmet and jacket.** No helmet, no life jacket, no raft. Wear them even when the water looks flat.

**31 The jump.** Near Mohan Chatti, about 15 km from Lakshman Jhula: a bungee and a giant swing from 83 m, India's highest, since October 2010. Closed in the monsoon.

**29 Kayaks.** Shivpuri is the base for kayaking, too: lessons on the calmer water first.

## The yoga capital

**At our homes.** A lawn for morning yoga in Tapovan, a yoga hall by Laxman Jhula.

**28 Divine Life Society, 1936.** Swami Sivananda's ashram at Muni ki Reti: yoga, books and a free hospital, and the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy.

**20 Parmarth Niketan.** The largest ashram in town, with over a thousand rooms, and the Yoga Festival's home since 1999.

**20 Swarg Ashram.** The ashram quarter of the east bank, on foot, where yoga and meditation are taught to all comers.

**18 Meditation, 1968.** The Maharishi taught Transcendental Meditation here; the Beatles came to learn it.

## Only in Rishikesh

**A town without a drink.** Vegetarian by rule and dry, and the cafés are full anyway.

**1 A bridge that swore off tolls.** Lakshman Jhula's plaque of 1930 promises that no toll or tax will ever be charged to cross it.

**Clear at last.** Fresh from the mountains, the Ganga runs green and clear here, before the plains.

**Rapids with names.** Good Morning, Three Blind Mice, Crossfire and Club House: every rapid has a nickname.

**A giant in the river.** The golden mahseer of these rivers can grow longer than a person.

## Markets by what they sell

**8 Lakshman Jhula market.** Both ends of the bridge: yoga mats, loose cotton, jewellery, incense, books, Ayurvedic medicines, malas. Bargain a little.

**27 Ram Jhula market.** Temples and small shops of bohemian and religious things, steps from the ashrams of Swarg Ashram.

**39 Main Market and Triveni Ghat.** The town's own market, Mayakund to Triveni Ghat: clothes, sweets, street food; incense and kurtas by the ghat.

**Rudraksha malas.** Seeds of a Himalayan foothill tree, strung in 108 and one; sold everywhere, for chanting or wearing.

**24 The Gita Press bookshop.** At Gita Bhawan, Swarg Ashram: scriptures at nominal prices, a free Ayurvedic dispensary, handloom shops.

**Ashram bookshops.** Parmarth Niketan, Sivananda Ashram and Gayatri Parivar sell their own books; Gayatri Parivar's shop also goes on wheels.

**Herbs and murabba.** Hill mint, ashwagandha, hing; amla and carrot murabba near Parmarth Niketan; bel and buransh squash.

**8 Singing bowls.** The yoga-supply shops by the bridges sell them; sound healing is taught in town, too.

**Gear for the river and the trails.** Our old map's tip: Adventure Axis on Badrinath Road, Lakshman Jhula, sleeping bags to drysuits and trekking boots.

**43 A railway into the hills.** From Yog Nagari Rishikesh a line of 17 tunnels is being dug up to Karnaprayag, due by the end of 2028.

## Good to know

**The Char Dham? Register first.** Every pilgrim to Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri, Yamunotri and Hemkund Sahib must register with the state, free, with an original photo ID, online or at counters in Rishikesh. Check posts on the way up turn back anyone without it.

**No eggs either.** The town's vegetarian rule covers meat, fish and eggs, and the Supreme Court upheld the egg ban in 2004. So the cafés' famous breakfasts are pancakes and porridge, not omelettes.

## Rishikesh these days

*Four bridges changed in seven years, and a railway is digging its way into the hills.*

**1 Bajrang Setu.** The new bridge beside Lakshman Jhula, 132 m, with glass walkways on both sides. Walkers only, as of October 2026.

**1 Lakshman Jhula, resting.** Closed since 2019, the old iron bridge still hangs there: the best view of it is from its new neighbour.

**27 Ram Jhula, under repair.** Shut for repairs as of October 2026: cross by Janki Setu or the ferry.

**19 Janki Setu.** Since November 2020, 346 m from Muni ki Reti across to the east bank, for walkers and two-wheelers.

## From Tapovan to Neer Garh's falls

**3 km · about 3.5 hours**

From our Tapovan home down to Neem Beach's sand (look, don't swim), then up the Badrinath road and the forest trail to Neer Garh's falls. Go early, in shoes with grip.

2 11 15

# QUESTS

*Dares for the brave and the curious. The map marks each with a star; tick them off as you go.*

**13 Say siwasaunli at the chai stall.** Hello in Garhwali, the hills' own tongue. Ask 'aap kan cho?' next, and see who answers 'mi bhallu cho'.

**1 Read the old bridge's promise.** Lakshman Jhula's plaque, from 1930, promises that no toll will ever be charged to cross. The bridge is closed now; find the plaques at its west foot, if the fence lets you, and read them anyway.

**1 Cross the Ganga three ways.** Janki Setu, Bajrang Setu and, if it's running, the ferry by Ram Jhula (ask at the home first): one morning, three crossings, and a different river from each.

**2 Climb all thirteen floors of Tera Manzil.** Thirteen storeys by the river, a shrine on every floor and the whole town from the top. Count the floors on the way up; shoes off where the others take theirs off.

**34 Walk Astha Path at first light.** A riverside promenade out of Triveni Ghat: the breeze, the hills and the joggers. Go before the town wakes.

**11 Look for a golden flash in the water.** The golden mahseer, endangered, can grow longer than a person and lives in these Himalayan rivers. Watch the clear water off a quiet beach; from the bank only.

**18 Spot a peacock in the sal.** The ashram sits in Rajaji's forest: peafowl and macaques are the regulars. Come early and listen for the call before you see the tail.

**20 Find a semal in flower.** In March and April the silk-cotton trees go red before a single leaf comes back. Count the bare branches in bloom.

**15 Walk up to Neer Garh's falls.** A short climb off the Badrinath road to falls in the forest. Shoes with grip; the pools are for looking.

**29 Learn the rapids' names before you raft.** Good Morning, Three Blind Mice, Crossfire, Club House: the guides name every one. Shout each name as you hit it, helmet on.

**18 Find the hall the murals took over.** The ashram's old lecture hall became a gallery of murals and tributes to the band. Find it among the ruins, and pick your favourite wall.

**18 Count the meditation domes.** Chaurasi Kutia means '84 huts'. Walk the paths between the stone domes and see if the name adds up.

**18 Hum Dear Prudence where it began.** In 1968 Prudence Farrow meditated here so hard she hardly left her bungalow; Lennon wrote her a song to coax her out. Hum it on the path.

**35 Sit on Triveni Ghat as the sun goes.** The ghat gathers for the evening aarti every day. Find a step, sit, and watch the river turn gold.

**16 Watch the sun set from Kyarki.** A short hike to a Garhwali village above the river, with the Himalayan ranges behind. Say siwasaunli on the way.

**1 Cycle the town from bridge to bridge.** Rent a bicycle and ride the circle from Laxman Jhula down towards Ram Jhula and back, stopping for street food and the ghats.

**20 Take one yoga class by the river.** The yoga capital teaches at ashrams all along the east bank. One class, one morning: then decide whether you're one of those who never leave.

## REACHING US

### By the Laxman Jhula post office

**Zostel Rishikesh (Laxman Jhula).** Five minutes from Bajrang Setu, with Ganga views, a rooftop for sunsets and a yoga hall. Walk 500 m from the bridge along the main road; cars park near Laxman Jhula Police Station and walk about 100 m.

### Opposite the SBI bank, Balaknath Road

**Zostel Rishikesh (Tapovan).** In Tapovan, with a lawn for morning yoga, a rooftop café and bonfire nights. Turn off the main road into Balaknath Road; we're opposite the SBI bank. Paid parking about 50 m away while the road is repaired.

## BRIDGES, GHATS, ASHRAMS

**1 The iron bridge nobody crosses now**

**Lakshman Jhula.** The town's picture: an iron footbridge with a 450-foot span, finished in 1929; legend says Lakshmana crossed here on two jute ropes. Shut since experts found it unsafe in 2019, so admire it from the banks.

**2 Thirteen floors of temple by the bridge**

**Tera Manzil (Trayambakeshwar Temple).** Called Tera Manzil because tera is Hindi for thirteen: thirteen storeys of small shrines rising from the river by Lakshman Jhula, the tower in every photo of the bridge. No lift; climb the stairs for the view. Shoes off where signs say.

**22 A thousand rooms, the Gita on the walls**

**Gita Bhawan.** A sprawling ashram of about a thousand rooms, its walls painted with Gita verses and scenes from the epics. A free Ayurvedic dispensary, a bookshop of Gita Press editions, free boat rides for its guests and an old banyan to sit under.

**26 The sand of the sages**

**Muni ki Reti.** 'The sand of the sages': the west-bank quarter between the bus stand and Ram Jhula, the pilgrims' traditional gateway to the Char Dham. Music schools for sitar and tabla, the Sivananda ashram at its north end, and Janki Setu to cross.

**27 The longer bridge, resting for now**

**Ram Jhula.** An iron suspension bridge since 1986, 750 feet from Muni ki Reti's Sivananda Nagar to Swarg Ashram's ashrams. Closed for maintenance on Zostel's latest word: cross by Janki Setu and ask whether it has reopened. Mind the monkeys.

**35 The big ghat, at sunset**

**Triveni Ghat.** The biggest ghat, at the south end, where tradition says three rivers meet. Zostel recommends its sunset aarti, quieter than Parmarth Niketan's; the timing moves with the sun. Sit on the steps before dusk. The current is strong: don't wade out.

**18 Where the White Album was written**

**The Beatles Ashram (Chaurasi Kutia).** In 1968 the Beatles studied meditation here and wrote much of the White Album. Chaurasi Kutia, '84 huts', keeps its stone meditation domes; abandoned, then filled with murals, it reopened as a ticketed forest site in 2015. Check timings at the gate.

**19 Walkers in the middle, scooters outside**

**Janki Setu.** Opened in November 2020 between Muni ki Reti and the Parmarth Niketan side: walkers in the middle lane, two-wheelers either side, free and always open. With Ram Jhula shut, it's the crossing downstream; Zostel sends scooters this way.

**20 The biggest ashram, and the yoga festival**

**Parmarth Niketan.** Rishikesh's largest ashram, founded in 1942, over a thousand rooms, open to all. Every March it hosts the International Yoga Festival, held in Rishikesh since 1999. At sunset its ghat holds the town's best-known evening aarti: come early for a place on the steps.

**36 One of the town's oldest temples**

**Bharat Mandir.** Among Rishikesh's oldest temples, near Triveni Ghat: Wikipedia credits Adi Shankaracharya, Wikivoyage the 12th century. It sits among everyday streets and markets, a good stop between the bus stand and the ghat. Shoes off at the door.

## SAL, SAND AND RAPIDS

**11 White sand, strong river**

**Neem Beach.** A small white-sand beach upstream of Lakshman Jhula, quieter than most and seven minutes from our Tapovan hostel: bring a book or a picnic. Don't swim: the current is strong, and a tourist drowned here after being swept away.

**15 Tiered falls above Tapovan**

**Neer Garh waterfall.** A multi-tiered waterfall in the hills above Tapovan: paths climb past pools to the upper tiers, where the cafés and crowds are; the lower ones stay quieter. There's an entry ticket. Go in the morning; in the monsoon it's muddy.

**16 A Garhwali village and a long sunset**

**Kyarki village.** A small village in the hills, where the Zostel blog sends you for a glimpse of everyday Garhwali life and the sunset with the Himalayan ranges behind. A short hike. Ask before photographing anyone; carry a torch for the walk down.

**17 A forest walk to two pools**

**Garud Chatti waterfall.** Opposite the Garud Chatti temple on the Neelkanth road, a 1.5 km trail climbs into the Rajaji forest to two tiers of shallow pools, quieter than Neer Garh. Zostel's Tapovan listing recommends the hike. Real shoes, water, rubbish back down.

**29 Camps, kayaks and the longer rapids**

**Shivpuri.** Up the Badrinath road, where the river trips gather: riverside camps, kayaking, rappelling and ziplining; Byasi further up has longer runs. Book a licensed camp, and raft only in a helmet and a life jacket.

**30 The quiet one, with caves**

**Patna waterfall.** Further along the Neelkanth road, a short forest hike past Patna village to a tall limestone fall trickling into a shallow pool, with caves beside it. Less visited, which is the point. The trail isn't signed: ask in the village.

**31 Jump 83 metres into a gorge**

**The bungee at Mohan Chatti.** At Mohan Chatti a steel platform juts over a cliff above the Hyul: an 83-metre jump, India's highest bungee by most counts, plus a giant swing and a flying fox. Trained crews strap you in. It shuts for the monsoon.

**32 The temple in the forest above**

**Neelkanth Mahadev.** A Shiva temple in the forested hills above Swarg Ashram, 32 km by road or 22 km by the old route from Ram Jhula; the Zostel guide lists the trek. Shared jeeps run the road. Crowded in July and August. Start early, carry water.

**33 Where the Ganga meets the plains**

**Haridwar (a day trip).** Downstream, where the Ganga leaves the mountains for the plains: Har ki Pauri's ghat, the evening aarti's crowds and the Kumbh Mela every twelve years. It's also the railhead for most long-distance trains, about 35 km from our Laxman Jhula hostel.

## CHAI WITH A VIEW

**3 Low cushions, a book and sunset**

**Ganga Beach Cafe.** On the Ganga's bank by the 13-storey temple at Laxman Jhula: coloured cushions on low stools, baked beans, bread and chai, and sunset over the river and the bridge. A traveller on our blog read Siddhartha here all evening. Bring a book.

**4 Pancakes worth the queue, mostly**

**Om Freedom Cafe.** Down a lane at Laxman Jhula: traditional seating, a Ganga view, and our food list's banana Nutella pancakes with coffee. Smoothies, mango juice and lassi in tall mugs. There's a queue in season; the view earns it. Breakfast here becomes lunch.

**5 Three storeys up, every seat facing water**

**Little Buddha Cafe.** On Laxman Jhula Road, three storeys up steep stairs, the river growing with every floor. Our guide's pick for big breakfasts, fresh juices, Italian, Indian and vegan plates; momos and thukpa too. The good seats go early: come for breakfast.

**7 Retro on the speakers, the Ganga below**

**The Beatles Cafe.** Our guide's Beatles Cafe, in Tapovan, for the band of 1968: retro music on a loop, the band's lines on the walls, books, and a Ganga view. Asian, Italian and North Indian, from a John Lennon tofu roll to a Led Zeppelin pizza. Hum along.

**9 Lunch that pays for a school**

**Ramana's Garden.** A garden café in Tapovan that funds a home and school for children. Organic salads from the grounds, a set lunch with fresh bread and soup; our old map's picks, beetroot soup and spinach gnocchi. Daytime and seasonal: check the day's hours.

**12 Bamboo patio, momos and mezze**

**Bistro Nirvana.** A wood-and-bamboo patio in Tapovan, our old map's hidden gem: Israeli, Italian, Chinese and Indian, and our food list's picks, momos and the mezze platter. A good table after a day on the river, when nobody wants to walk far.

**14 Millet pancakes and hot chocolate**

**Ira's Kitchen & Tea Room.** Our food list's Tapovan pick: ragi cheela, a thin pancake of finger millet, the grain the hills grind for mandua roti, and a hot chocolate. A kitchen and tea room for a slow breakfast; daytime hours. On cold mornings, the chocolate comes first.

**21 A sattvic thali after yoga**

**Swarg Ashram's ashram kitchens.** Swarg Ashram's canteens cook simple vegetarian meals; Parmarth Niketan's cafeteria serves sattvic thalis, fresh, seasonal, local food, the way yoga likes it. The calmest meal in town. Eat what's served, finish your plate, keep your voice down: an ashram is a home first.

**23 Samosas filled with banana and chocolate**

**The Office.** A samosa stuffed sweet with mango, apple, banana or chocolate: a traveller on our blog called the banana-Nutella one the best in town. Our old map adds the best masala chai around, and muesli with fruit. Tell your boss you were at the office.

**25 Hill food by the end of the bridge**

**Chotiwala, Swarg Ashram.** By Ram Jhula's east end: our maps' stop for a thali and the hill dishes, kafuli of greens, aloo ke gutke and singori, a Kumaoni khoya sweet in a leaf. It claims to be the original. If Ram Jhula is shut, cross by Janki Setu.

**37 Lassi, of course**

**Pappu Lassi.** Our food list's lassi stop: three words, lassis of course. Listings put it on Mayakund's main bazaar road, a walk from Triveni Ghat. Curd whipped thick, sweet or salted, poured cold. Have one on the way to the evening aarti at the ghat.

**38 Mandua roti on a rooftop at sundown**

**The Sitting Elephant.** Our food list's rooftop for mandua roti, finger-millet bread, and kafuli, the hills' stew of greens. On a hotel on Haridwar Road, over the Ganga to Rajaji's forests, best at sunset. Dressier than the cafés upriver: come for a long dinner.

**40 Breakfast on a leaf plate**

**The main market's street stalls.** The old town by Triveni Ghat eats on its feet: aloo puri on leaf plates for breakfast, then aloo tikki, golgappa, samosas, kachori and chole bhature. Jalebi hot from the vendors, laddoos and barfi in the sweet shops, chai on every corner. Follow the locals' queue.

## SOUVENIRS BY THE BRIDGE

**8 Yoga mats, malas and cotton for the heat**

**Lakshman Jhula market.** The lanes round both ends of the bridge: yoga mats, loose cotton and summer dresses, jewellery, incense, books, Ayurvedic medicines and rudraksha malas. Prices are friendly; bargain a little when they aren't. Cross on foot by Bajrang Setu and shop both banks.

**24 Scripture for the price of chai**

**Gita Bhawan: the Gita Press bookshop.** On the bank at Swarg Ashram: a Gita Press bookshop, scriptures from the Gorakhpur publisher at low prices, a free Ayurvedic dispensary and handloom shops. Parmarth Niketan's and Sivananda Ashram's bookshops print their own books too. Pick up something for the train.

**39 The town's own shopping, not the travellers'**

**Rishikesh Main Market and Triveni Ghat.** The market locals use, in the old town from Mayakund to Triveni Ghat: clothes, books, Ayurvedic medicines, sweets and street food, and stalls of incense and kurtas by the ghat. Busier than the bridges. Shop before the evening aarti, then find a step.

## OM AND THE WHITE ALBUM

**28 The ashram by the bridge since 1936**

**Sivananda Ashram (Divine Life Society).** Swami Sivananda founded the Divine Life Society here in 1936; its ashram by Ram Jhula trains yoga students and runs a free charitable hospital. A working ashram, quiet rather than a sight: ask at the office what's open to visitors.

## SOME NEVER LEAVE

**6 Order slowly, stay for the view**

**The cafés over the river.** Round Laxman Jhula the lanes are stacked with cafés over the Ganga: long breakfasts, Israeli and Italian plates, books and music on loop, in a town vegetarian by local rule. Take the window seat and let the afternoon go.

**10 Listen to the river, lights on the bridges**

**The river after dark.** Zostel's own advice: sit by the Ganga late at night and listen to the water on the rocks. Go with friends, sit on the steps, keep it quiet. Carry a torch, and never step into the river at night.

**13 The backpackers' village above the bridge**

**Tapovan.** Rishikesh's backpacker hub above Lakshman Jhula: guesthouses, yoga schools, cafés, scooter and bicycle rentals along the Badrinath road, with our hostel on Balaknath Road. Pedal north into the forest; carry a torch after dark.

**34 The riverside walk south of Triveni**

**Astha Path.** A paved riverside walkway running on from Triveni Ghat, on the Zostel blog's offbeat list: a flat, free stroll with the breeze and wide river views, good before the evening gathering at the ghat. Keep off the water's edge.

**41 The old station by the centre**

**Rishikesh station (the old one).** The older station, nearer the centre; Wikivoyage lists local passenger trains to Haridwar. Zostel's listing puts it about 5.2 km from our Tapovan hostel, a short cab or auto ride. Check which of the two stations your ticket names.

**42 Buses in, shared autos on**

**Rishikesh bus stand (ISBT).** The main bus terminal, with the private and GMVN stands beside it: buses for Delhi, Dehradun, Haridwar and the hills. A shared auto to Bajrang Setu reaches our Laxman Jhula hostel; a shared cab from Chandrabhaga bridge, the Tapovan one.

**43 The new railhead for the hills**

**Yog Nagari Rishikesh station.** The new terminal, opened in January 2021 at the head of the line being built to Karnaprayag. Few long-distance trains come this far, so most travellers train to Haridwar and ride up by road. A cab or auto reaches Tapovan.

# Rishikesh

Every number is a tip around the map, in its colour. Every star is a quest.

*Two homes on the river: one a short walk from Bajrang Setu with the Ganga below, one in Tapovan with a lawn for morning yoga and a bonfire for the night.*

Manali has the Beas. Here the rapids come with a helmet, a life jacket and a guide calling every stroke.

From Mussoorie, about two hours twenty down the hill. Up there we watch the Doon; here the Ganga runs green under an iron bridge.

From Delhi, about five hours by road. Breakfast in the old town is aloo puri off a leaf plate, and chai.

Nainital has its lake. Rishikesh has the Ganga, and an evening on Parmarth's ghat when the whole bank gathers.

From Himachal's valleys to the Rajaji forest: the stone domes where the Beatles stayed in 1968.

**Zostel Rishikesh (Tapovan)**

Off Tapovan's main road into Balaknath Road, opposite the SBI bank; bus stand 4.6 km.

**Zostel Rishikesh (Laxman Jhula)**

Cross Bajrang Setu on foot, then 500 m along the main road; bus stand 3 km.

PANDAV GUFA

VATIKA

SIVANANDA NAGAR

Water tank

- Bridges, Ghats, Ashrams
- Sal, Sand and Rapids
- Chai With a View
- Souvenirs by the Bridge
- Om and the White Album
- Some Never Leave
- our two Zostels
- a quest (the list is round the map)
- Across Janki Setu, down to the Beatles, up the east bank to Lakshman Jhula, the walk (side A)
- circled: don't miss it
- a dot: its true place, where a number stands aside
- a drawing by a number: what is there
- landmarks
- water
- parks and gardens
- the hills
- a cliff

N 0 100 m 200 m

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## Around Rishikesh

The box is the big map. Edge pins point the way (not to scale).

Shivpuri · 6.1 km ▶

◀ Haridwar (a day trip) · 25.8 km

Neelkanth Mahadev · 5.1 km ▶

9.8 km ▶