



THE TRAIL ORGANISER

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In the last week of June, when the monsoon was vigorous and active across the country, I squeezed out of my tent at Vishnusal lake in Kashmir. At 6 am, it was already bright outside. The sun slanted on the meadows around my tent in a hue of orange. The waters of the lake, still in the shadows of the tall cliffs surrounding it, were a deep green. One half of the lake was still frozen and the bluish snow patches leading to the lake itself made a sharp contrast to the deep colours of the waters. I have trekked for years but this was a sight that made me gasp.

Few people know such treks exist in our country—treks that are beautiful, easily accessible, relatively drier and wonderful to do when the country is deluged by rain. Here's my list of the top three such treks.

First, the Kashmir Great Lakes Trek (*Duration: 7 days; difficulty: moderate*) must top anyone's list even when it does not rain. Nowhere in our country do you get the feeling that you are trekking in the European Alps as much as you do on this trek. Yet, the magnitude and scale of the Indian Himalaya looms large over it. If the beauty of the seven lakes doesn't get you, the endless meadows and plains of Kashmir will. Add to it the beautiful pine, maple and silver birch forests that spring along the way. This trek is easily accessible from Sonamarg, but a guide and camping gear is a must. If you're short on time, a four-day curtailed trek to Vishnusal Lake is almost as good.

Second, the Lidderwat Meadows Walk (*Duration: 2 days; difficulty: easy*) is a beautiful trek for families and holds a bounty of nature's delights. Starting from Aru, 12 km ahead of the tourist town of Pahalgam, the trek gets you the moment you reach

Aru, which is a tiny settlement nestled amid acres of undulating meadows with clumps of willow, poplar and pine trees in shady groves all over the village. With clear brooks running through the village, Aru is as picture perfect as it can get. The trail climbs out of Aru, weaving in and out of pine trees that seem to touch the sky. It ascends gently along the Lidder river and camping in the Lidderwat meadows is a delight that you should experience. If you're a bit more adventurous, a longer trek to the turquoise lake of Tar Sar rivals any of the Himalaya's top treks.

Finally, the Hampta Pass Trek (*Duration: 4 days; difficulty: moderate*) in Himachal Pradesh, right out of Manali. Usually used by shepherds to cross over from the Manali valley to Lahul and Spiti, this trek is a delight when it rains. Wild flowers sprout all over the narrow valley in a myriad of colours—yellow, purple, blue, white and red. Crossing the pass is a thrill and the scenery on the other side changes dramatically to a green vista. Add to this the chance to visit the exquisite moon-shaped lake of Chandra Tal, this trek is complete

food for the soul. You'll need a guide and camping gear, but it's a trek that you should definitely undertake.

Of course, while trekking in the rain—in any part of India—it makes sense to pack a light poncho and a few extra pairs of clothes. You'll always encounter a shower or two. But this is also the time you see spectacular rainbows—especially in the early evening, against an overcast sky. **D**

Arjun is the founder of Indiahikes, a blogger and an experienced trekker. He takes a keen interest in training youngsters to appreciate our trails.

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