



THE TRAIL ORGANISER

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It's not easy to talk about Himalayan treks in my social circles. Most people think trekking is beyond them. They think it is similar to climbing mountains—that you need special gear and training. Rather than trying to convince you that trekking is not beyond you, I'm going to list four easy treks, perfect as a start to Himalayan trekking.

The first is Dayara Bugyal, in Uttarakhand, which tops my list of the prettiest meadow treks. It is stunning, where miles of carpet-like lush green undulating meadows are spread in front of you. The snow-covered Mt Banderpoonch looms over the meadows, and you can even walk barefoot on the meadows the whole day. In the evening, you can camp under oak trees skirting the meadows, as the moon washes the landscape with a luminescent glow that will prompt another walk through the grass. Dayara is easily accessible—a 35-km drive from Uttarkashi gets you to Barsu, followed by a morning trek from Barsu to Dayara Bugyal. The caretaker of the GMVN at Barsu or the Dayara Resort can help organise the trek for you. Dayara, however, requires camping gear.

The second would be Kedarkantha, again in Uttarakhand. I'm yet to come across a trek with campsites as pretty as Kedarkantha, and I'll go as far as to say that I have not come across any trek in India that has prettier clearings. Every half-hour, above 8,000 feet, just when you are tiring, an almost-circular clearing appears through the forest, a grassy knoll that's perfect for a breather. Even gazing at them is refreshing. You start with a long, beautiful drive from Dehradun, and reach Sankri in western Uttarakhand. You can stay at the GMVN at Sankri or

Hotel Swargarohini. Again, the caretakers of these lodges can organise the Kedarkantha trek and camping gear for you.

The third trek on this list would be Sandakphu, in West Bengal. Spread over five days, the Sandakphu trek climbs over superb oak and rhododendron forests. When the trek finally tops the ridge line, your jaw will drop as you see the ranges between Kanchenjunga and Everest. These magnificent views will stay with you forever. The start of the trek is in Maneybhanjang, an hour-and-a-half's drive from Darjeeling. There are many lodges along the way and all you need are a decent pair of boots and warm clothes.

The final trek would be Hampta Pass, in Himachal Pradesh. I was somewhat sceptical about putting Hampta down as an 'easy' trek, and I'd rather classify it as an 'easy-moderate' trek—for the tiring pass crossing. That said, the trek is a fascinating journey of rapidly-changing scenery, so much so that it is like a movie in fast forward. From forests to meadows, from lofty summits to the desert of Spiti, the trek has everything your nature-starved eyes

could seek. In fact, as the trek ends, you will be left gushing with emotion. I strongly recommend the Hampta Pass for its scenic beauty. The trek starts out of Manali and ends at Chatru, on the Kaza highway in Spiti. You need camping gear for the trek—easily available in Manali. If you've seen *Yeh Jawani Hai Deewani*, you'll be able to identify the trek—though I have to say the movie stretches things incredulously! **DI**

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

FROM LUSH MEADOWS
TO ENDLESS PEAKS,
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EVERYTHING YOUR
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OF FITNESS AND GEAR