



THE TRAIL ORGANISER

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Trekking is sometimes seen as an inelegant sport—you live in the wilderness for days. You have to manage with very little. So, people assume that just because you are a trekker, it is okay to be unkempt and dirty. Frankly, this bothers me quite a bit.

Trekking is a sport like any other. There are unwritten rules that govern it. In cricket, you can't get on the pitch in any attire you want. Trekking also demands that you dress for the sport. It does not have to be 'fashionable,' but it does require a certain decorum, and a lot of trekkers seem to ignore that.

I'm shocked at how some men turn up for a trek, and I have to say it is almost indecent. They'll wear big three-fourth trousers and short-sleeved T-shirts that are flimsy and almost see-through. The choice of clothes can leave you somewhat stunned—loud T-shirts in reds, yellows, oranges and greens. If that wasn't enough, their T-shirts also sport big horizontal stripes. Or, they'll follow a new trend—they'll wear big checked scarfs, almost like towels, around their necks. When I ask trekkers a reason for this 'costume,' I'm told that the scarfs protect them from ultraviolet rays, and I wonder what happened to wide-brimmed hats.

Trekkers in India also seem convinced trackpants are the universal dress code, and sometimes even dirty trackpants. It is a bane for sore eyes, and I'm convinced wearing simple cotton pants in light colours can solve any problem.

Then, of course, there's grooming. Men think it's acceptable to grow a beard during the trek and, at the end of it, look nothing short of a bear. I wonder if there's a law that says men must

not shave on treks? Shaving by a riverside or while watching a beautiful mountain can be a joyous experience. But, apart from a sense of dressing and basic grooming, here are some suggestions that can bring back elegance to your trek.

The first thing you need to sort out is your backpack. Many trekkers carry inelegant bags that dangle from their shoulders. Not only do they harm their bodies and strain their muscles, but they endanger the trek because the straps can snap at any time. Remember that there are only two kinds of backpacks—internal

or external frame—and everything else is a bag that is unsuitable for trekking.

The next thing that you need to carry is a trekking pole. Indians hate using trekking poles, because they have the misguided idea that it is a waste of money and a blot on their egos. Even though a branch of dead wood can make a good pole, a real trekking pole is designed to reduce fatigue, and to balance and stabilise you. This will make your trek infinitely more comfortable.

Then, sneakers and sports shoes are not meant for trekking—you need trekking shoes that have ankle support

and they normally do not cost more than regular sports shoes.

Finally, back to your clothes—the right clothes can make a difference. Sober, plain colours like beige, straw and greys are most suitable, and you should stick to single tones and avoid loud stripes. Well-fitted T-shirts and pants not only make trekking easier, they also lend you an air of quiet confidence. Because elegance and style are essential in any sport. **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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