



# THE TRAIL ORGANISER

ARJUN MAJUMDAR

**I**t is wonderful to get calls from parents wanting to know which trek to take their kids on. Parents who are keen trekkers themselves know the value of the outdoors. Kids can learn many of life's little lessons quickest when they are on an adventure.

So, when do you start kids on trekking? The answer is, as young as possible. But not in the way most parents think.

First, a few physiological truths: Kids grow rapidly when they are young. Every day, until into their teens, their arms and limbs gain strength. As they run around the whole day, their lungs get larger and process more air. Kids seem to possess an infinite reserve of energy. Yet, like a cheetah that springs after a gazelle, these energies are in bursts. Children cannot sustain the endless energy required on a trek... which is why on a long trek kids tire easily. And when they're tired, they lose interest in the surroundings. They absorb less and the purpose of a trek is lost.

Like any other sport, kids need to be gradually introduced to trekking. Here is how you go about it:

By the time kids are three, start exposing them to the outdoors. Take them out of the city and on a nature walk. It need not be in the hills. Even a nearby pond or lake would do. Always set a theme for your walk, like a flower walk—and get the child to show you flowers of five different colours. Or a bug-watching walk, or a leaf-collecting walk, or a stone-gathering walk. Kids love the sense of collecting things so allow them to get back the collectibles. Very soon, your kids will start badgering you to take them out on a theme walk!

When they are four or five, kids get more adventurous.


They want to explore more, so take them on longer walks. Target a local hillock and see if you can challenge the child to get to a point halfway. Show them how to get to the milestone by reaching smaller targets—such as a big bush on the left and then a brown boulder on the right. Life's lessons are built in. It is okay if they can't reach the target but must put in that effort. And it's okay to find something along the way. Walk as long as they are happy and full of energy. Reward them with a sandwich or something to eat when they reach the target. A visit to

a nearby hill station at this age does a world of good to their memories.

By the time kids turn six or seven, they are ready for day treks. Their understanding of the world has increased and they love challenges. Kids at this age also love organising things, so enrol them on day hikes and get them to organise the gear for the trek, or the food. With digital cameras, you could get them to photograph the trek as they see it!

When kids are eight or nine, they are strong enough for a four- or five-day Himalayan trek. They have been mentally prepared and can easily

manage without parents. They make ideal team members. The confidence gained from a Himalayan expedition sticks with them forever. It reflects in their studies and other activities too.

Treks give children lessons that last them a lifetime. They are ingrained in the trek itself and require no teacher. Parents who recognise this will want their children to imbibe them. And this is a welcome movement in our country. 

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

**TREKS GIVE CHILDREN  
INVALUABLE LESSONS  
THAT LAST THEM A  
LIFETIME. PARENTS  
WHO RECOGNISE THIS  
WILL WANT THEIR  
CHILDREN TO IMBIBE  
THEM. AND THAT IS  
GREAT EDUCATION**