



JOURNEY TO THE SACRED SOURCES

HIMALAYAS WITH SATI KAZANOVA

1-12 June 2023



The program is subject to change due to weather, road conditions or other unforeseen circumstances. Bhakti Bharat is not responsible for any changes in the program due to unforeseen circumstances.

Dates may be change by 2-3 days; final dates will be published soon

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GUIDEs:



Sati Kazanova

Musician, singer, founder of the Sati Ethnica project and yoga adept since 2007. In 2012, she was initiated into Atma Kriya Yoga and the same year met her Spiritual Master, Paramahansa Viswananda. This meeting radically changed Sati's life. In 2016, she became a teacher of Atma Kriya Yoga and initiated hundreds of students into the mystery of ancient yogic tradition.



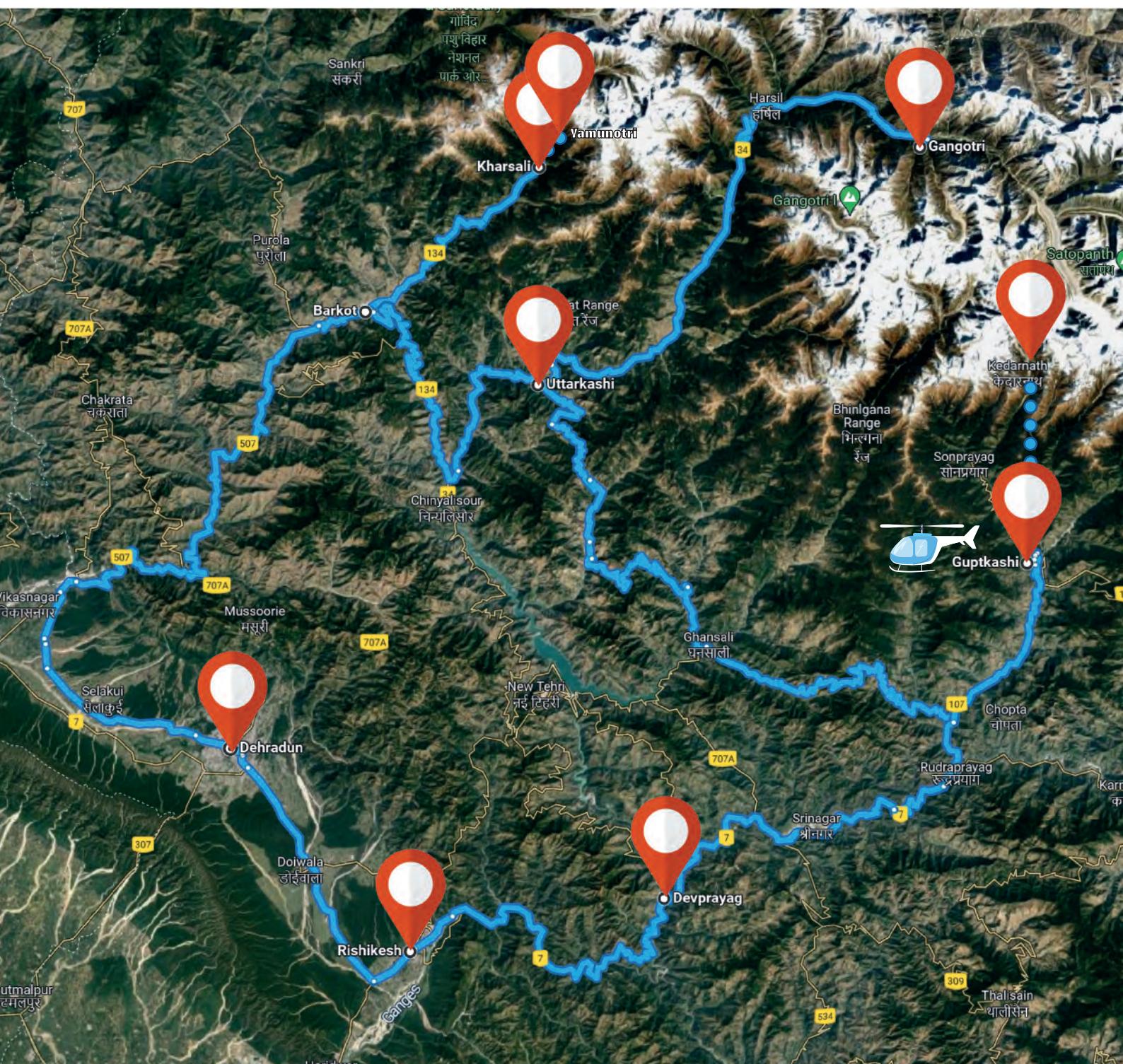
Rishika Abhirami

Teacher of Atma Kriya Yoga with 15 years of experience, Rishika Abhirami also leads lectures on the Bhagavad Gita and other spiritual scriptures of India, as well as teaches meditation, mantras and mudras. Since 2007 she has been a disciple of Paramahansa Viswananda, and since 2014 she has been living permanently in Vrindavan, India. Over the past 10 years, Abhirami has organised more than 20 different pilgrimage trips and spiritual retreats in India, which have opened this ancient mystical country to hundreds of travellers.



ROUTE

Dehradun - Kharsali - Yamunotri - Uttarkashi - Gangotri - Guptakashi - Kedarnath - Devprayag - Rishikesh





We will visit and almost completely cover the Chota Char Dham Yatra – the main pilgrimage route of the Indian Himalayas. Chota Char Dham includes the sources of the great sacred rivers of India and the main abodes of Lord Narayana and Lord Shiva on earth. Located high in the mountains, these places are the spiritual and material sources of the four sacred rivers: Yamuna (in Yamunotri), Ganga (in Gangotri), Mandakini (in Kedarnath) and Alaknanda (in Badrinath).

Moreover, being the abode of Shiva, Kedarnath has a very unique and one of a kind Shiva-lingam.

'Chota Char Dham' literally translates as 'four small abodes', and they make up a small circle of abodes of divine energy on earth. The Great Char Dham is located in the four cardinal directions in the Himalayas and on the shores of India.





Akshaya Tritya (it falls on April or May in the Gregorian calendar) marks the beginning of Chota Char Dham Yatra, but due to the rainy season in the Himalayas in summer and harsh snowy winter, these places are possible to visit for a few weeks only.

These places are often mentioned in the scriptures, according to which pilgrims visiting Chota Char Dham are freed from all sins and the cycle of birth and death.



TRAVEL PROGRAM





Day 1

DeHRadun

Arrival in Dehradun. Visit the Tapkeshwar Mahadev temple and the place where Dronacharya performed austerities.

On the first day of our pilgrimage, we will visit the Tapkeshwar Mahadev Temple in Dehradun. The temple is located in a natural cave known as the 'Dronacharya Cave'. Here, two self-manifested Shiva-lingams are worshipped. Interestingly, one of them does not need a water vessel above it, as naturally every several seconds a drop of water drips on it from the top of the cave. The second lingam is fully covered with rudraksha (5,151 pieces).

This temple is around 6,000 years old. It was famous even during Krishna's times, and Dronacharya himself was performing his 12-year-long tapasya (penance) here over 5,000 years ago. Lord Shiva was pleased with his tapasya and granted him archery skills.

Dronacharya was the one who taught the Pandava and Kaurava princes military skills and granted his archery skills to Arjuna, the middle brother of the five Pandavas. Later, the brothers showed their military skills during the battle on the Kurukshetra field, where Sri Krishna gave the holy knowledge of the Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna.

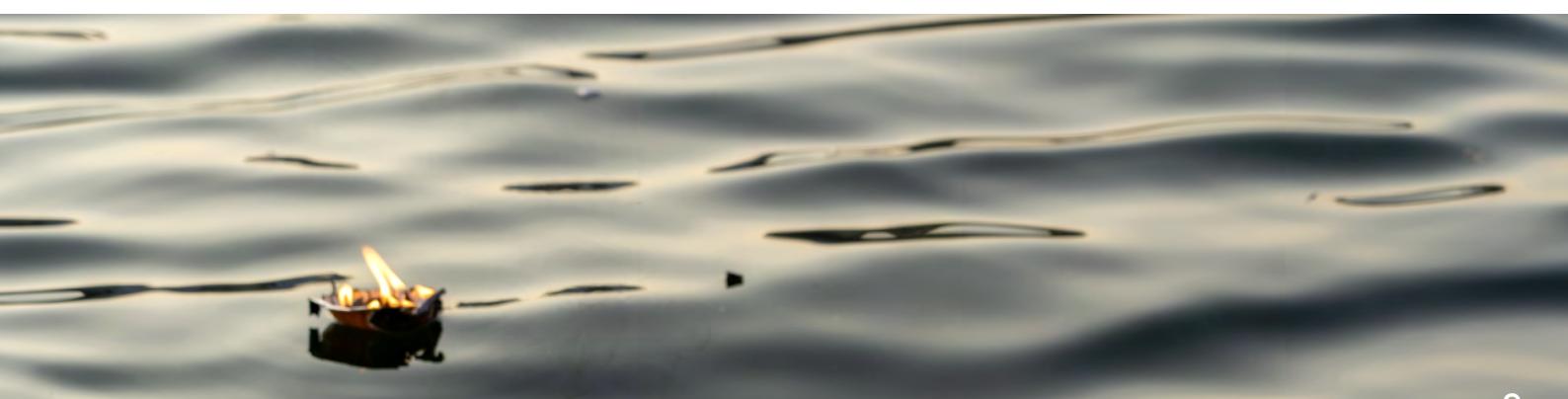


DAY 2

KHARSALI

Visit the place where the goddess Yamuna winters.

Kharsali is a small village located at an altitude of 2,676 meters above sea level on the way to Yamunotri. It is the winter residence of Yamuna Goddess. Before winter, when the gates of Yamunotri close, they bring the Yamuna deity to the Shani Dev Temple. This temple in Kharsali was founded by Pandavas, it is over 5,000 years old.





DAY 3

YAMUNOTRI

Yamuna Goddess impersonates Prema, the love to God. Coming to its origin means obtaining a blessing to develop this pure love in oneself.

Yamuna begins in the Yamunotri glacier lake located a few kilometres higher and flows here in a narrow canyon. Yamuna-devi is the daughter of Surya, the Sun-god, and Sanjna, the Cloud-goddess. She is also a sister of Yama, the god of death.

Sanjna could not stand the heat and dazzling radiance of her husband and closed her eyes in his presence. Surya felt offended and said that their son would be the god of death Yamaraja. After that, Sanjna did her best to keep her eyes open; however, she could not help blinking, and Surya said that their daughter would be Yamuna. As Sanjna was trying to keep her eyes open, Yamuna was blessed to save people from her older brother Yama.



Yamuna Ashtakam says:

'She saves anyone, who touches her waters, from the punishment of entering the residence of her brother Yamaraja. Her splendid waters charm everyone's heart. Yamuna-devi is so powerful that, unlike all other rivers, she never mixes with ocean waters, although she crosses seven giant islands and runs into seven oceans surrounding these islands. She constantly observes amazing intimate lilas of Sri Krishna and helps these lilas to be revealed in the hearts of those, who find refuge with her. Her dark sparkling waters are more beautiful than precious sapphires. With her tender waves, as if with hands, she worships the lotus feet of Sri Krishna. Seeing a devotee of Krishna in her waters, she feels the fullness of joy. Carrying her waters through the three worlds (Bhuh, Bhuvah and Svah), she grants spiritual knowledge to their inhabitants. Those who chant her name in prayers, burn completely the fallout of the greatest sins. Her waters smell like sandal from the body of Sri Krishna. May Yamuna-devi, who is the daughter of Surya, purify me.'





The temple of Yamuna Goddess is located in a tiny village in a canyon not far from the origin of the Yamuna River. There are hot springs located nearby. This village, like any other spot in the Himalayas at such a height, is inhabited only from May to October. The rest of the year, it is covered with snow that may be up to five meters high.

Day 4

UTTARKASHI

Uttarkashi is located at an elevation of 1,352 meters above sea level on the two shores of Bhagirathi, the headstream of the Ganges.

Uttarkashi is translated from Sanskrit as ‘Upper Kashi’, i.e., upper Varanasi. The main temple here, the same as in Varanasi, is the Vishwanath Temple.

Vishwanath is the form of Lord Shiva which literally means ‘Omnipresent Lord of the Universe’. ‘Viśva’ means to pervade, to pierce; in scriptures, this word also means ‘the Universe’. ‘Nātha’ is translated as ‘master’ or ‘world ruler’.



Day 5

Gangotri

Gangotri town is located 3,050 meters above sea level among cedar woods in a canyon, 19 kilometres away from the origin of the holy river Ganga. It can be reached by a narrow curved road with incredible panoramic mountain views.

Once, when the king of demons Bali was performing a sacrifice, Lord Vishnu came to him. The Lord appeared in the form of Vamana, a dwarf Brahmin, and asked for three steps of land. Bali laughed – how much land can a dwarf cover with his steps – and agreed. Then Lord Vamana became so huge that He covered all celestial worlds and the Earth with two steps. Bali realised who was in front of him and begged for mercy.



Then, the merciful Lord did not step into the lower worlds but put His foot on Bali's head, thus giving him immortality and ordering him to reign over Patalaloka (the world of demons).

Srimad Bhagavatam, Canto 5, Chapter 17.

Verse 1:

Sukadeva Goswami said: 'My dear King, Lord Vishnu, the enjoyer of all sacrifices, appeared as Lord Vamana in the sacrificial arena of Bali Maharaj. Then He extended His left foot to the end of the three worlds and pierced a hole in its covering with the nail of His big toe. Through the hole, the pure water of the Causal Ocean entered this universe as the Ganga River. Having washed the Lotus Feet of the Lord, which were covered with reddish powder, the water of the Ganges became tender pink. Every living being can immediately purify their mind of material contamination by touching the transcendental water of Ganga, yet its waters remain ever pure.'

Verse 4:

After purifying the seven planets under Dhruva loka (the pole star), the Ganga water is carried through the spaceways of demigods in billions of celestial aeroplanes. Then it inundates the moon (Chandra loka) and finally reaches Lord Brahma's abode atop Mount Meru (the holy mountain denoting the centre of the universe).



The kamandalu (jar) of Lord Brahma is filled with the same water that was poured onto the universe from the Causal Ocean. Ganga was flowing only in the spiritual world for a long time, not reaching the material universe, but one day righteous king Bhagiratha started praying for the release of his ancestors.

Srimad Bhagavatam, Canto 9, Chapter 9

Verse 3:

Thereafter, mother Ganges appeared before King Bhagiratha and said: 'I am very much satisfied with your austerities and am now prepared to give you benedictions, as you desire.' Being thus addressed by Ganga-devi, mother Ganges, the King bowed his head before her and explained his desire.



Verse 4:

Mother Ganges replied: 'If I fall from the sky to the surface of the planet earth, the water will certainly be very forceful. Who will sustain that force? If I am not sustained, I shall pierce the surface of the earth and go down to Rasatala, the Patala area of the universe.

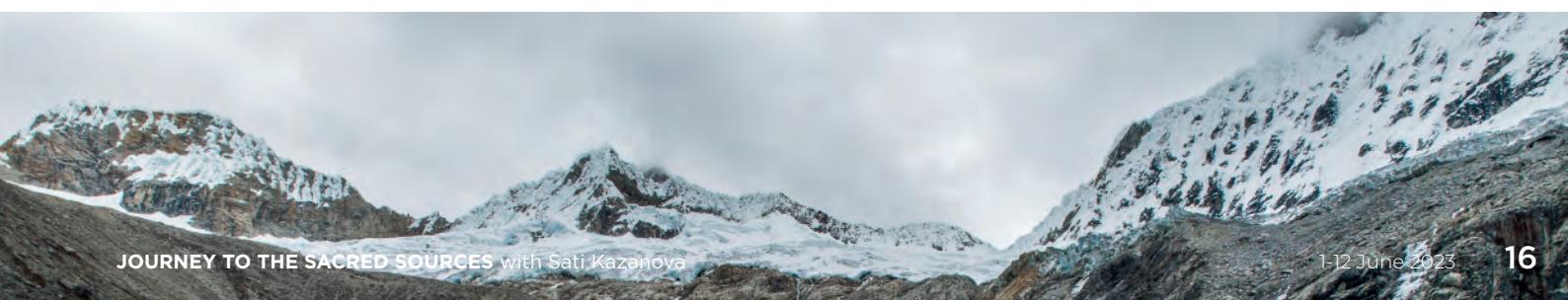
Verse 5:

O King, I do not wish to go down to the planet earth, for the people there will bathe in my waters to cleanse themselves of the reactions of their sinful deeds. When all these sinful reactions accumulate in me, how shall I become free from them? You must consider this very carefully.'

Verse 6:

Bhagiratha said: 'Those who are saintly because of devotional service and are, therefore, in the renounced order, free from material desires, and who are pure devotees, experts in following the regulative principles mentioned in the Vedas, are always glorious and pure in behaviour and are able to deliver all fallen souls. When such pure devotees bathe in your water, the sinful reactions accumulated from other people will certainly be counteracted, for such devotees always keep in the core of their hearts the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who can vanquish all sinful reactions.'

Verse 7:





Like a cloth woven of threads extending for its length and breadth, this entire universe, in all its latitude and longitude, is situated under different potencies of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Lord Shiva is the incarnation of the Lord, and thus he represents the Supersoul in the embodied soul. He can sustain your forceful waves on his head.'

Verse 8:

After saying this, Bhagiratha satisfied Lord Shiva by performing austerities. O King Parikshit, Lord Shiva was very quickly satisfied with Bhagiratha.

Verse 9:

When King Bhagiratha approached Lord Shiva and requested him to sustain the forceful waves of the Ganges, Lord Shiva accepted the proposal by saying: 'Let it be so.' Then, with great attention, he sustained the Ganges on his head, for having emanated from the toes of Lord Vishnu, the water of the Ganges is purifying.

Verse 10:



The great and saintly king Bhagiratha brought the Ganges, which can deliver all the fallen souls, to that place on earth, where the bodies of his forefathers laid burnt to ashes.

Verse 11:

Bhagiratha mounted a swift chariot and drove before mother Ganges, who followed him, purifying many countries, until they reached the ashes of Bhagiratha's forefathers, the sons of Sagara, who were thus sprinkled with water from the Ganges.

Verse 12:

Because the sons of Sagara Maharaja offended a great personality, the heat of their bodies increased, and they were burnt to ashes. But simply by being sprinkled with water from the Ganges, all of them became eligible to go to the heavenly planets. What then is to be said of those who use the water of mother Ganges to worship her?

Verse 13:

Simply by having water from the Ganges come in contact with the ashes of their burnt bodies, the sons of Sagara Maharaja were elevated to the heavenly planets. Therefore, what is to be said of a devotee who worships mother Ganges faithfully with a determined vow? One can only imagine the benefit that accrues to such a devotee.





Day 6



KEDARNATH

The hardest to reach of all Char Dhams is the Kedarnath Temple. Both the temple and the village are located high in the mountains in the Mandakini valley, remaining there after a glacier had melted a long time ago.

Just like Gangotri, Kedarnath is also connected with the holy Indian river Ganga, as one of its origins called Mandakini starts flowing from here.

The Kedarnath Temple was built by the Pandavas 5,000 years ago. Later, in the 8th century, Adi Shankaracharya built another temple adjacent to the old one. Behind the temple, there is the place of samadhi of Adi Shankaracharya. It was here, that Shankaracharya disappeared into the rock, leaving only his walking stick on Earth.

Lord Shiva resides in Kedarnath. Kedarnath has self-manifested lingam – one of a kind.

Mahabharata narrates that after winning the holy battle on Kurukshetra, the Pandava brothers went to Varanasi, the city of Shiva, to pray to Mahadev to redeem the sin of fratricide. Shiva, however, disguised Himself in the form of a bull and ran to the Himalayas. The Pandavas recognised the Lord and started chasing after him. They reached Shiva in Kedarnath. Mahadev decided to hide under the earth from them but Bhima, one of the Pandava brothers, caught the mighty bull's back.



Therefore, Mahadev failed to timely escape and left his hump outside. The main shrine of Kedarnath is this hump of Shiva – a pyramid-shaped lingam.

The other parts of Shiva's body manifested in other places: Tunganath, Rudranath, Madhyamaheshwar and Kalpeshwar. These holy places, together with Kedarnath, are called Panch (five) Kedar.

Shiva was touched by the determination of the Pandavas and blessed them, forgiving all their sins.





DAY 7

Visiting Kedarnath by helicopter





DAY 8

DevPrayag

Driving down to the spa hotel, visiting Devprayag on the way.

This is one of the most sacred places of the Himalayas, where the Great Indian River originates. Two sacred streams, Bhagirathi and Alaknanda, merge here, forming the Ganges. The energy there is unusual and very powerful.

Visiting such places helps to purify and reboot. Devprayag is considered a place where all devas take ablution. We will bathe in this sacred place and also visit the ancient temple of Rama.



Day 9, 10

Retreat at the spa hotel and a visit to the Rishi Vasishtha Gupta.

RISHI VASHISHTHA

Today, we will visit the cave, where Rishi Vashishtha was meditating.

In Hinduism, the seven stars of the Ursa Major constellation are also called Saptarishi – seven great sages, the sons of Lord Brahma. They led a simple life in the wilderness around 10,000 years ago, in the times of Rama.

Vashishtha was one of the seven Saptarishis. In the Hindu tradition, Vashishtha impersonates a perfect Brahmana. He was the teacher of the kings of the Sun dynasty, into which Lord Rama had incarnated, and, subsequently, the Master of Rama Himself.

In ‘Yoga-Vashishtha’, Vashishtha himself says to Lord Rama: ‘In every age, for the spiritual enlightenment of everyone, the Creator wills and creates several sages and me.’





Day 11

RISHIKESH

Rishikesh is a holy city in the foothills of the Himalayas and the world capital of yoga, where legendary holy sages lived since ancient times, including such famous yoga masters of the last century as Swami Shivananda and Swami Omkarananda.

Rishikesh is also known as the gateway to the Himalayas, it lies at an altitude of 356 meters above sea level and is surrounded by foothills on three sides.

The sacred river Ganga flows through the city, and numerous ashrams are located along its banks. Here, the river emerges from narrow gorges and starts flowing in full force across the plains.





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