

# Course Description

## Himalaya Mountaineering

### Features Of This Course:

- NOLS core curriculum in a remote expedition format
- Glacier travel, snow and ice craft
- 75-mile technical hiking route
- Attempt to gain altitude up to 18,000 feet
- Cross-cultural experience
- Average group size: 14 students / 3 instructors
- Average pack weight: 40% - 45% of body weight
- Course begins and ends in New Delhi, India

### India

Empires of great size and complexity existed in India far earlier than anything comparable in Europe or other parts of the world. India encompasses one of the world's oldest religions and civilizations. The origins of its current social structure can be traced back thousands of years. Yet India, as an entity, exists as a comparatively recent aggregate unified by the British. It gained its independence in 1947.

A land of diversities, India covers an area equal to the United States west of the Mississippi River. Sixteen languages and 200 dialects are spoken within its borders. Considered the largest democracy in the world, India's population of one billion people remains fairly well spread out. India offers a varied experience: it is as vast as it can be crowded, as luxurious as it is impoverished; the plains are as flat and scenic as the Himalayas are rugged and magnificent, and the transport is as exhilarating as it can be uncomfortable.

The Kumaon region of the Indian Himalaya—site of this course—is a rugged, glacier-carved range world-famous for its climbing, trekking and whitewater rafting. These mystic mountains are sacred to the Hindus and continue to be a place of meditation for sages and holy men. Here myth, religion, folklore and the natural environment embrace each other. Well-known 7000-meter peaks like Nanda Devi and Trishul are situated in this vast region of primeval forests and diverse natural history. These mountains also comprise the headwaters of the holy Ganges River.

The Himalaya Mountaineering course offers the opportunity to interact with cultures very different from your own. To attempt to learn about and understand Indian culture is a much-appreciated sign of respect. Most travelers have experienced greater monetary advantages in life than the average Indian citizen and can be regarded differently because of this. Politeness and the cultivation of a sincere interest in other cultures are always appreciated in this situation. Such displays of respect are the first step in overcoming economic and cultural differences.

### The Expedition

This mountaineering course is an exciting opportunity to learn and expand your horizons. You will immerse yourself in the culture and natural history of India, while focusing on the NOLS core curriculum of Leadership & Teamwork, Risk Management, Outdoor Living skills and Environmental Studies.

Your expedition will trek and climb in the Kumaon region of the Indian Himalaya. The course is designed to teach participants the basic skills needed to organize and carry out a technical expedition in the vast Himalaya. It is not a guided climb to the top of a high mountain. The focus is on learning what goes into organizing an international expedition, teaching mountain travel and mountaineering skills, and attempting to explore a route that may reach elevations of over 18,000 feet. This framework provides ample opportunities to practice the skills learned on the course. The emphasis will be on the learning and enjoyment made possible by being an integral part of an expedition in a foreign mountain range.

Your journey will begin with a bus ride from New Delhi. This ride is a chaotic adventure in third world travel. The two days required to reach the road head are split with a rest day at the NOLS base in Ranikhet. At an altitude of 6,000 ft, Ranikhet is a quiet and wooded town where you will rest and repack your food and gear for traveling into the mountains. You will continue the bus journey to Song at 5,200 ft (the roadhead) and then trek over 25 miles and gain 7,000 feet to reach Zero Point, the camp at the toe of the Pindari Glacier. The trek leads through dense forests and glades of ferns and wildflowers along the



Pindari River gorge. As you move upstream, the landscape opens and vegetation changes from alpine shrubs to a world of moraine, rock, ice and snow of the Pindari Glacier. This course is not designed as a peak attempt in the Himalaya, but as a high altitude traverse over glaciers and high passes where the skills required to do either is the same. Your course will attempt to cross the Kafni Col at approx 17,000 ft, Dhanu Dhura pass at 18,300 ft, and exit via the Shalang glacier, into Martoli and Munsiri. Your instructors will strive to balance teaching formal classes and completing the traverse. Sometimes, due to weather, injury or student health conditions, the traverse may not be attempted. It is important to realize that no matter what the outcome, you will be taught a significant portion of the NOLS mountaineering curriculum and have ample opportunities to put it to use.

Trekking in the Himalaya requires significant technical skills to negotiate high mountain passes, icefalls, and many miles of extensively crevassed glaciers. Special attention will be devoted to learning the tools and systems of glacier travel. First, a foundation of basic skills will be developed: knots, rope-handling, belaying, anchors, and use of the ice axe. Later, advanced techniques will be introduced, including crevasse rescue, protection placement, crampon use, hazard evaluation, and climbing techniques for snow and ice. We have scheduled approximately 2 weeks at base camp and above for acclimatizing, learning new techniques and completing our route. Conditions and weather allowing, the course will spend this time learning and practicing traditional mountaineering techniques. In the past, some students have been surprised at the slow pace at the beginning of this course. Apart from moving slow to let your bodies acclimatize to higher elevations, you will also get to visit villages along the way and enjoy their hospitality. Having the course stay in overall good health will be a key factor in the success of the course.

Our goal is to develop competent, well-rounded mountaineers. A mountaineer must know how to stay warm in adverse weather and develop competence in cooking, camping, map reading, travel techniques, and river crossings. These and other skills will be taught and used, all with an emphasis on minimizing environmental impact.

### **Language**

Hindi is the national language of India. English is spoken mainly in the cities and is recognized as the second national language. Fully one-third of the time on your India course will be spent in close contact with the porters, tea stall owners, bus drivers and local hill people of northern India. Even a basic understanding of Hindi will make your time on the course more rewarding and educational. We recommend taking some time before your course begins to study one or more of the books and tapes on Hindi language listed in the bibliography below.

### **Weather and Other Challenges**

Mountaineering is more than just climbing on ice, snow, and rock. It is an adventure in outdoor leadership, "expedition behavior," and mountain travel. It is developing the knowledge and judgment to understand the seriousness and commitment involved with climbing in remote areas. It is taking responsibility for others as well as yourself, perhaps carrying extra weight when your tent mate is having an off day. It is also preparing meals after long, hard, cold days, or sitting out storms in the cramped quarters of a tent.

To travel in the Himalaya you will wade icy, whitewater rivers, scramble across teetering boulders and sweat your way up high mountain passes. You will travel over steep slopes of snow, loose rock and ice, and negotiate glaciers, crevasses and extensive icefalls. Prudent route selection and continual adherence to risk management practices will minimize the exposure to the inherent dangers of crevasses, moving water, falling and rolling rock, falls on steep terrain, avalanches, and harsh weather.

Some of the risks and potential dangers of this expedition are no different than those found on any NOLS course, while others are unique to our operation in India. From these mountains, evacuation to modern medical facilities is difficult and may take several days. Packs can be heavy (65-75 lbs.) and are carried over very rugged terrain. Getting to and from the mountains requires travel in both private and public vehicles on roads that are often in poor condition and shared by drivers of dubious ability. Tropical environments harbor a wide variety of unusual diseases, such as malaria. This list of hazards is not meant to intimidate you; rather it is meant to increase your awareness of possible risks, so you can make an informed decision about participating in this course.

Please be aware that chronic knee, ankle, or back ailments have been a source of problems in the past and can make for difficult evacuations from the field. If you have a history of such problems, please contact us to discuss these or any other medical considerations.



## **Personal Electronics**

A key element to a NOLS education is time spent in wilderness. The benefits of this include being closer to nature, time away from society and civilization, and being in an environment where natural forces predominate and students have the opportunity to develop good judgment and practice self-reliance. For this reason, students are not permitted to take personal music players (iPods, MP3 players, CD players, etc.), cell phones, or satellite phones on NOLS courses. Instructors will be carrying sufficient communication equipment (usually a satellite phone and a ground-to-air or marine band radio) to handle any emergencies that may arise.

## **Behavior on the Expedition**

Each person's values, beliefs and actions affect those of the rest of the group -- balancing these is an important part of expedition behavior. We want you to have a positive and responsible learning environment. Therefore we expect all students to respect the values and beliefs of other members of the expedition. The best expedition members have positive attitudes, apply new skills and ideas at the first opportunity and come motivated to work hard with people they have just met. They care about others, value the welfare of the group equal to their own, and understand that an expedition succeeds when all its members complete each day responsibly. If you feel your values, or beliefs, are not being respected by NOLS' staff or students, it is essential that you speak up so the issues are addressed.

## **Student Independence**

An emphasis of this course is the development of skills that permit you to be self-sufficient in remote backcountry areas. Our teaching progression for accomplishing this is carefully planned and executed. Initially travel groups, usually of four to six students, will include an instructor who will teach travel skills and leadership. Gradually, as you gain proficiency, the instructors will allow you to take on more responsibility and make more of the decisions. When you have demonstrated the necessary competency to the instructors, you may travel in student-led groups without instructors for a day at a time as you hike from camp to camp. We call this daily independent student travel and it is an effective educational tool. It allows you to practice travel skills and leadership and gives you responsibility for the outcome while still having indirect supervision by instructors and the benefit of the NOLS support systems.

This course may culminate in a Student Expedition. After successful practice with daily independent student travel and if your instructors think your group is ready, the instructors will help you divide into student expedition groups (usually four to six students each.) With instructor oversight, each group will then select a leader and carefully plan and execute a multi-day independent student led expedition. This part of the course builds on the skills you've learned and practiced and allows you to travel without instructors for up to four days. Students are aware of where the instructors and the other student groups are planning to travel and camp. However, instructors with emergency communication capability may be up to 24 hours away from the students. Our students often say the Student Expedition was the highlight of their course.

On all NOLS courses students will be independent (that is unaccompanied by instructors) at various times. This includes time in and around camp such as while cooking or performing camp chores. Instructors may allow students to travel away from camp. Students often have independent unsupervised time, usually in town, before and after their course starts.

## **Fitness Recommendations**

We feel that the Kumaon Himalaya provides an excellent setting for learning and applying expedition camping skills, off-trail travel and glacier climbing techniques; it also provides an opportunity to apply technical mountain travel skills at high altitude. Being physically fit will enable you to take full advantage of this opportunity and will also make your NOLS course a safer and more enjoyable experience.

It is essential that students participating in this expedition arrive in very good physical condition and health. High altitude mountain travel is demanding, no matter how fit you are. Our goal is to inspire those students in poor or fair condition to catch up and get into better condition. We're not trying to encourage students already in very good condition to get into even better condition, but we strongly encourage you to consider your physical condition now. For more information, please see the Physical Conditioning page of your enrollment packet.



## Course Objectives

Each course is unique due to variables such as route, group dynamics, fitness levels and environmental conditions. Within the given parameters, we intend to accomplish the following objectives in five areas:

### Risk Management, Judgment and Decision-making

NOLS teaches wilderness visitors to practice responsible habits that promote the health and well being of self and others. Each student is expected to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the hazards in a mountain environment.
- Consistently perform specific techniques taught on the course to reduce or avoid hazards.
- Describe an emergency plan for a group in the outdoors.
- Demonstrate the ability to perform basic emergency procedures to support a patient until help arrives.
- Use experience and judgment to implement sound decisions and follow them through to completion.
- Display sound judgment and an awareness of group and self-limits.

### Leadership

Students are exposed to the theory and practice of outdoor leadership, teamwork, and expedition behavior. At NOLS, expedition behavior involves commitment to the group, acceptance of others, and cooperation to achieve goals. Each student is expected to:

- Work effectively as a member of a team, displaying a positive attitude despite hardship.
- Effectively communicate ideas and concerns on an individual and group level.
- Accurately identify personal strengths and areas for growth in developing outdoor leadership.
- Take responsibility for learning through setting and attaining personal goals.
- Take initiative in teaching and leadership roles with peers.
- Respond to problem situations using decision-making and planning skills.
- Provide effective oral and written feedback.

### Outdoor Skills

NOLS students learn to live and travel in mountains within a framework of personal health and care of the environment. Each student is expected to:

- Live comfortably in a mountain environment; learn to camp, cook, and dress for a variety of conditions.
- Travel competently in mountainous terrain using map and compass skills, off-trail navigation, hazard evaluation, route-finding techniques, bear camping and river- crossing techniques.
- Accurately assess skills, strengths and endurance in self and others and conservatively apply those limits to given situations.

### Mountaineering Skills

While advanced skill emphasis will vary, students can expect to be exposed to a complete foundation of basic glacier mountaineering skills and will be expected to:

- Correctly tie fundamental climbing knots and display efficient rope-handling techniques.
- Demonstrate appropriate crampon and ice ax techniques for snow, ice and mixed terrain.
- Display appropriate belay skills in a variety of mountaineering systems (rope-team, running belay, etc.)
- Competently build simple snow and ice anchors.
- Recognize a safe route through crevassed terrain and where avalanches are a hazard.



## Environmental Studies

An integral part of every NOLS course is to raise students' awareness of their impact on the natural world. Each student is expected to:

- Consistently perform minimum-impact living and travel skills by following Leave No Trace principles.
- Display a basic knowledge of the local Indian culture.
- Display basic natural history observational and interpretive skills and use them to demonstrate an understanding of and respect for the course environment.
- Discuss the history and potential solutions relevant to pertinent environmental issues.
- Demonstrate basic knowledge of and respect for local cultures.
- Reflect on the transference of wilderness ethics and practices into daily personal and professional life.

## Suggested Resources

### Mountaineering

- Chouinard, Yvon: Climbing Ice. San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1978.
- Ferber, Peggy, ed. Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills. 6th ed. Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1998
- Shipton, Eric: The Six Mountain Travel Books. Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1985
- Tilman, H.W.: The Seven Mountain Travel Books. Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1985
- Mike and Andy's glacier travel and crevasse rescue book.

### About India

- Ackerley, J. R.: Hindoo Holiday. Penguin Books
- Aitken, Bill: Riding the Ranges. Penguin Books
- Aitken, Bill: Footloose in the Himalaya. Permanent Black, 2003
- Alter, Stephen: Sacred Waters. Penguin Books.
- Bond, Ruskin: Delhi is Not Far. Penguin Books
- Bumiller, Elizabeth: May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons: A Journey Among the Women of India. Fawcett Books, 1991
- Cameron, James: An Indian Summer. Penguin Books
- Collins and LaPierre: Freedom at Midnight. N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1975. (A history of Indian Independence)
- Dhar, Sheila: Raga'n Josh: Stories of a Musical life. Permanent Black
- Frater, Alexander: Chasing the Monsoon. Penguin Books, 1991
- Guha, Ramachandra: How Much Should a Person Consume? Thinking Through the Environment. Permanent Black. 2006
- Khilnani, Sunil: The Idea of India. Penguin Books
- Mistry, Rohinton: A Fine Balance. Vintage Books, 1997
- Moraes, Dom. ed.: Journeys. An Anthology of Indian Travel Writing. Penguin Viking
- Mukerjee, Kumar: The Lost World of Hindustani Music. Penguin India
- Corbett, Jim: My India. Oxford University Press
- Kala, D.C.: Jim Corbett of Kumaon. Ravi Dayal Publisher
- Rushdie, Salman: Midnight's Children. Penguin Books, 1995

### Indian Natural History

- Ali, Salim: The Fall of a Sparrow. Oxford University Press
- Ali, Salim: The Book of Indian Birds. London: Oxford County Press, 1988
- Corbett, Jim: Man eaters of Kumaon. Oxford University Press
- Prater, S.H.: The Book of Indian Animals. London: Oxford County Press, 1988

### Learning Hindi

- Bedi, Susham, ed.: Hindi, Language/30, Audio cassettes and phrasebook. Washington D.C.: Educational Services Corporation, 1995
- Delacy, Richard: Hindi/Urdu Phrasebook. 2nd ed. Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 1998
- Lexus & Pal: Hindi and Urdu, A Rough Guide Phrasebook. London: Penguin Books, 1997

### NOLS Publications

- Hampton, Bruce & Cole, David: NOLS's Soft Paths. Harrisburg: Stockpile Books, 1996
- Harvey, Mark: The National Outdoor Leadership School's Wilderness Guide. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999
- Pearson Claudia, ed: NOLS Cookery Fifth edition. Stackpole Books 2004
- Powers, Phil: Wilderness Mountaineering. Stackpole Books 2000
- Schimelpfenig, Tod: Wilderness Medicine. Stackpole Books 2000



- Wells, Darran: Wilderness Navigation. Stackpole Books 2005
- Lamb, Jennifer & Goodrich, Glen: Wilderness Ethics. Stackpole Books 2006
- Gookin, John, ed: Wilderness Wisdom. Stackpole Books

