

Course Description

Semester in India

Features of this Course

- Five sections: Backpacking (2 sections), Wilderness Advanced First Aid, Whitewater Rafting, Home Stay and Environmental Studies
- Emphasis on the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) core curriculum and Leave No Trace
- Advanced First Aid taught by the Wilderness Medicine Institute of NOLS
- Whitewater rafting expedition on the River Ganga (Ganges)
- Ten day home stay with a local family and participation in environmental studies classes and activities
- Human and natural history of the Kumaon Himalaya
- Camping for three weeks over 10,000 ft
- Attempted crossings of snow covered passes over 14,000 ft
- Cross-cultural experience
- Hiking route (both sections): approximately 170 miles
- Average group size: 15 students / 3-4 instructors
- Course begins in Conway, WA 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 and Garhwal regions of the Indian Himalaya—sites of this semester—are rugged, glacier-carved ranges world-famous for 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 7,000-meter peaks like Nanda Devi (Kumaon area) and Trishul (Eastern Garhwal area) are situated in this vast region of primeval forests and diverse natural history. These mountains also comprise the headwaters of the holy Ganges River.

This semester offers the opportunity to interact with cultures very different from western cultures. Attempting 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.

Semester Progression

The semester is an exciting opportunity to learn and expand your horizons. For 80 days, you will immerse yourself in the culture and natural history of India, while focusing on the NOLS core curriculum of Leadership and Teamwork, Outdoor Skills, Environmental Studies and Risk Management.

This semester has five sections that will expose you to different skills and landscapes. The first day of your semester is in Conway, WA at the NOLS Pacific Northwest branch. Here you will get outfitted with gear that you need for the semester, buy or rent personal gear that you need, and bag food and rations that are not available in India. You will also pack up for the flight to India and take care of last minute details and phone calls. The following day you will take a flight out of Seattle-Tacoma International Airport for New Delhi. Your journey in India will begin with a 12-hour bus ride from New Delhi to the mountain town of Ranikhet. This ride is a chaotic adventure in third world road travel. NOLS India is based out of Ranikhet,



at an altitude of 6,000 ft. It is a quiet and wooded town that we will occasionally return to during the semester to repack food and gear.

Backpacking Section

After your flight halfway around the world and a 12-hour bus ride, you will be ready to hike! The initial backpacking section will expose you to, and lay the foundation for, the basics of the NOLS core curriculum and Leave No Trace (LNT) ethics. You will backpack in the Pindari Valley of the Kumaon Himalaya and attempt to reach an area known as Zero Point at 12,000 ft. You will hike through forests of maple, oak and rhododendron and pass villages where water buffalo-powered agriculture is still the main way of life. These remote areas see few western visitors and are home to the Himalayan black bear, Himalayan thar, fox, bharal (in the deer family) and the ever-elusive snow leopard. On this section, you will learn to take care of yourself and your course mates in a variety of conditions. You will learn to cook and fine-tune the art of backcountry baking. You will discuss environmental ethics and talk about issues that are pertinent to this area.

Wilderness Advanced First Aid Section

You will return to the NOLS base at Ranikhet for this 5-day (40 hour) course. Presented by senior staff from the Wilderness Medical Institute (WMI) of NOLS, this course teaches you the appropriate treatment for conditions such as shock, head and chest injuries, spine injuries, fractures and dislocations, wounds and burns, illnesses caused by extremes of heat, cold and altitude, emergencies caused by lightning and drowning, and medical conditions such as cardiac, respiratory and neurological emergencies. Also included is a 4-hour session on adult cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Going far beyond standard first aid, wilderness medicine prepares care providers to deal with patients over a long period of time and to improvise treatment methods when definitive medical equipment is not at hand. Emphasis is placed on using sound judgment based on proven principles instead of the memorization of treatment modalities.

Whitewater Rafting Section

This section takes place on the River Ganga (Ganges) and its two main tributaries, the Alaknanda and the Bhagirathi. Initially, you will learn the skills needed to paddle a raft through low-grade rapids. After you refine these skills, you will be dropped off at the put-in point to embark on a multi-day rafting expedition down the Alaknanda River. Instruction will include an overview of paddle rafting and captaining skills, mastering stroke combinations, and timing and communication skills needed to put your raft exactly where you need it. We'll then move on to advanced subjects like hazard evaluation, hydrology, and rescue techniques including flipping and raft rescue. You will learn to scout rapids and to apply risk management principles as you negotiate them. Learning to rig, load and row the oar rafts that carry your gear will complete the well-rounded curriculum of whitewater rafting skills.

Home Stay and Environmental Studies Section

Village Sarmoli will be the hub for this ten-day experience. It is a tiny hamlet near the remote road head town of Munsiri in the Johar Valley and offers breathtaking views of the Himalaya. You will be paired up with a fellow course mate as you “go home” for the night to experience, first-hand, what it takes to live in remote, rural India. You will be engaged in domestic chores and also eat meals with your host family.

You will regroup in the morning and spend the day engaged in various activities and classes. Sarmoli is ideally located at an altitude of 7,500 ft. You will make field trips to higher elevations and study alpine ecology and travel down to about 2,500 ft to study river ecology. You will also learn about the habitat that falls in between these alpine and river areas. There will be two overnight field trips during this section.

Classes will include landscape and forest use as a means of livelihood. You will be engaged in discussions that include the natural history and human history of the Johar valley, which used to be one of the most important trading routes between India and Tibet and, as such, has a rich and vibrant history. Afternoon sessions will lean towards hands-on activities like carpet weaving, basket making and community work. There is also an opportunity to completely focus on Hindi if that is your area of interest.

Hindi Backpacking Section

Backpacking in the Himalaya is something few people get to experience as fully as you will, especially having learned conversational Hindi during the preceding week. For 30 days you will hike through soaring mountains surrounded by the perennial snow and ice of the famed Himalaya. Munsiri marks the end of the tarmac road into this region. From there, the trail winds its way along the gorge created by the Gori Ganga River, tracing one of the major trading routes into Tibet. You will pass the ruins of villages at Lilam, Bugdyar, Laspa, and Martoli until you reach Milam, the last village in this valley. This



valley was inhabited by traders whose caravans crossed from India to Tibet by the high passes of Unta Dhura and Kungribhingri La. Grain from the valley and factory-made goods from the Indian plains were carried on yaks in exchange for salt, turquoise and borax from Tibet. Once the trading season was over, the entire population from Milam and the lower villages would migrate to Munsiri or lower for the winter months. Trade stopped with the India-China conflict of 1961 and these once prosperous villages are now deserted. However, the trail linking the villages still exists and makes for a very exciting NOLS experience.

Along the way, you may cross passes over 14,000 feet. Gaining and losing 2,000 feet of elevation on some days, you'll work hard traveling over steep, rocky terrain at high altitude with all your gear on your back, but you will play hard as well. And you will learn the skills you need to travel in the high mountains long after the end of your course. These skills begin with reinforcing the basics—camping, cooking, map reading, stove use, Leave No Trace techniques and sanitation—skills that are the foundation for advanced backpacking. During your course you will live with two or three other students in a cook-group. These small groups help disperse impact on the land and enable you to master the art of backcountry cooking and living.

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 suggested resources section, below.

Weather, Altitude and Other Challenges

Between sweltering New Delhi and the high mountains, temperatures can vary from 100° to 0° Fahrenheit. Mountain weather is fickle. On any given day, temperatures may fluctuate widely. Courses may experience snow and rain, or long stretches of sun and blue sky.

To travel in the Himalaya, you may cross raging rivers, scramble across boulder fields, and sweat your way up high-mountain passes. You will travel over steep slopes of snow, loose rock and exposed mountain trails. Prudent route selection and continual adherence to risk management practices will minimize the risks from the inherent dangers of moving water, falling and rolling rock, falls on steep terrain, avalanches, altitude 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. You'll be miles away from the amenities of civilization such as telephones, ambulances, and hospitals. 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.

Staying healthy in Asia is frequently a particular challenge, and gastrointestinal distress is a common theme. Helping a tent-mate stay hydrated creates a unique bond, and almost everyone has a turn being a little under the weather from the effects of altitude. Identifying and managing mountain hazards will be a constant theme of our instruction. Managing risks and assuming responsibility for yourself and your colleagues will help make your expedition in these wild and beautiful mountains healthy and rewarding.

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.



Student Independence

On all NOLS courses, students will be independent (unaccompanied by instructors) at various times. This will include 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 the field portion of their course.

Independent Student Group Travel

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 travel 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.

Course Objectives

Each course is unique, due to variables such as route, group dynamics, individual fitness levels and environmental conditions. Working with these variables, it is our intent that each student achieves the following outcomes:

Leadership and Teamwork

Students are exposed to 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:

- Actively participate in the decision making process.
- Take responsibility for the health and well being of self and others.
- Demonstrate sound expedition behavior, including commitment to group decisions and a positive attitude.
- Effectively communicate ideas and concerns on an individual and group level.
- Show initiative in leadership/teaching roles with peers.
- Employ leadership styles appropriate to the situation; support others in the leadership role.
- Work effectively as a team member.
- Take responsibility for learning; set and attain personal goals.
- Provide effective oral and written feedback.

Outdoor Skills

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

- Dress appropriately for a variety of conditions; be punctual and organized.
- Cook nutritious meals using a camp stove or fire.
- Demonstrate appropriate campsite selection and shelter set-up.
- Employ sound bear camping and travel techniques
- Take responsibility for the care and organization of personal and group equipment
- Travel efficiently in mountainous terrain using map and/or compass skills.
- Utilize off-trail navigation and route-finding techniques to mitigate hazards.
- Understand the design, use, outfitting and care of rafts and related equipment.
- Show competency with raft rigging techniques for paddle and oar rafts.
- Demonstrate paddle-rafting skills: guide in Class II water and crew in Class III.
- Demonstrate effective oar raft rowing techniques in Class II water.
- Demonstrate basic river rescue skills: self-rescue, throw ropes, raft flip recovery and swimmer rescue.



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 sound minimum-impact living and travel skills by following Leave No Trace principles; be able to extrapolate the knowledge to new environments.
- Display an understanding, appreciation and respect for the natural world; know characteristic flora and fauna of the area.
- Develop basic natural history observation and interpretive skills.
- Demonstrate basic knowledge and respect for local and regional native cultures.
- Discuss the history of and potential solutions to pertinent environmental issues.
- Demonstrate knowledge of public land management and discuss means to be involved in issues of interest.
- Facilitate the transference of wilderness practices and ethics into daily life.

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.
- Describe and consistently perform specific techniques to reduce or avoid hazards.
- Perform basic first aid skills to support a patient until help arrives.
- Demonstrate the ability to develop an emergency plan for a group in the outdoors.
- Display sound judgment and an awareness of self and group limits.

Suggested Resources

India

- Ackerley, J. R. (1990). *Hindoo holiday: An Indian journal*. Simon & Schuster.
- Aitken, B. (2003). *Riding the ranges: Travels on my motorcycle*. Penguin Books.
- Aitken, B. (2003). *Footloose in the Himalaya*. Sangam Books, Ltd.
- Alter, S. (2001). *Sacred waters: A pilgrimage up the Ganges river to the source of Hindu culture*. Harcourt.
- Bond, R. (2005). *Delhi is not far: The best of Ruskin Bond*. Penguin Books
- Bumiller, E. (1991). *May you be the mother of a hundred sons: A journey among the women of India*. Ballentine Books.
- Cameron, J. (1974). *An Indian summer*. McGraw-Hill Companies.
- Corbett, J. (1991). *My India*. Safari Press, Inc.
- Dhar, S. (2005). *Raga'n josh: Stories from a musical life*. Permanent Black.
- Frater, A. (1991). *Chasing the monsoon: A modern pilgrimage through India*. Knopf Publishing Group.
- Guha, R. (2006). *How much should a person consume? Environmentalism in India and the United States*. University of California Press.
- Kala, D. C. (1999). *Jim Corbett of Kumaon*. (2nd ed.) Sangam Books Ltd.
- Khilnani, S. (1998). *The idea of India*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- LaPierre, D. & L. Collins. (2000). *Freedom at midnight*. (New Ed.). South Asia Books.
- Mistry, R. (1996). *A fine balance*. Knopf Publishing Group.
- Moraes, D. (Ed.) (2001). *The Penguin book of Indian journeys*. Viking Books.
- Mukerji, K. (2006). *The lost world of Hindustani music*. Penguin Books.
- Rushdie, S. (2006). *Midnight's children*. Random House Inc.

Indian Natural History

- Ali, S. (2007). *The fall of a sparrow*. Oxford University Press.
- Ali, S. (2003). *The book of Indian birds*. (13th ed.) Oxford University Press.
- Corbett, J. (1993). *Man-eaters of Kumaon*. Oxford University Press.
- Prater, S. H. (1990). *The book of Indian animals*. Oxford University Press.

Learning Hindi

- Language/30. (1990). *Hindi: Start speaking today! Audio cassettes*. Educational Services Corporation.
- Delacy, R. (1998). *Hindi & Urdu phrasebook*. (2nd ed.) Lonely Planet Publications.
- Rough Guides. (2006). *The Rough Guide phrasebook: Hindi and Urdu*. Rough Guides, Ltd.

