

NATURE GETAWAY - VAN SERAI - JAGESHWAR



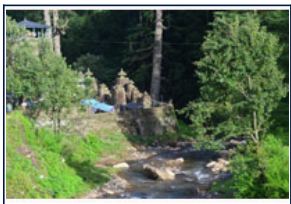
ITINERARY

Jageshwar

The Hindu pilgrimage town of Jageshwar sits, as though frozen in time, perched at an altitude of 6135 feet. Believed to be the abode of one of the twelve 'Jyotirlingas', it is one of the most important religious places for Hindus in Kumaon. Legend has it that Lord Shiva would come down from his abode and meditate here, surrounded by the thick Deodar forest.



A grueling six years in the making, Van Serai has truly been a labour of love. Attention to every detail has resulted in a unique stay option that has ensured the lodge fits into the local surroundings seamlessly. The architectural inspiration of Van Serai comes from the traditional Kumaoni style of construction. All the rooms and common areas have been designed keeping in tune with the local architectural feel. Big verandas in the front and back have been specially created to let the guests enjoy the greenery and make the most of the warm sunshine bathing the lodge.



How to reach GPS MAP co-ordinates: 29.633133, 79.843687 To get to Jageshwar, one can take any of the following options: □ Drive from Kathgodam: 4 hours □ Drive from Ranikhet via Almora: 3.5 hours □ Drive from Delhi via Moradabad, Rampur, Rudrapur, Haldwani and Almora will take about 10 hours.

Best Time to Visit Situated in the mountains, Jageshwar can be visited anytime. Summers are cool, winters get quite cold and it may snow. Being a sacred site, crowds throng the place during important religious festivals.



THE LODGE

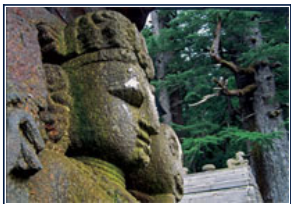
Naivedyam - The Dining Room Walking up about 30 meters on a bridle path from the main road and climbing 18 steps, one reaches the Dining Room. The dining room also serves the purpose of a restaurant. When we have a full house we serve buffet meals. à la carte meals are served on prior order as per the menu. Please give adequate notice. The meals are wholesome and hygienic. The menu consists of vegetarian Indian and Kumaoni dishes. We usually serve traditional home-cooked Indian food. We try and keep spice and chilly levels moderate but if you still find the food too hot, do let our staff know and we'll be happy to suit it to your taste. Please inform us if you have any special dietary requirements. On prior intimation we could also arrange a private dinner in the verandah of your room or provide you room service. We also provide packed meals for your return journey. Let us know in advance and we will arrange it for you.



We stock a limited selection of beverages at the lodge. All beverages are chargeable. Alcohol is not served at the lodge.

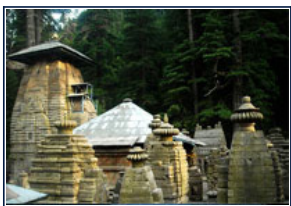
We discourage the use of pre-packaged food items and bottled water as it adds to pollution and is additional cost for us to carry it all the way back to Haldwani for proper disposal. The guests may get their own food items as per their preference and are requested to take away as much non-biodegradable material with them. We serve filtered water that is safe to drink.

Accommodation Each room has a double bed with fresh linen, fresh towels and warm blankets / duvets. Heaters are provided in cold weather.



Deluxe Room From the dining area walk up 31 steps, one reaches the deluxe room. The room is equipped with a double bed, a wooden attic with two separate floor mattresses, en suite toilet with a WC and a hot shower, a verandah overlooking the deodar forest. Bucket and mugs are provided in the toilet for wash up if the water pressure is less in the shower or faucet. The size of the room is about 12'x17'.

Superior Room From the dining area walk up 17 steps, one reaches the superior room. The room is equipped with twin beds, en suite toilet with a WC and a hot shower, a verandah overlooking the deodar forest. Bucket and mugs are provided in the toilet for wash up if the water pressure is less in the shower or faucet. The size of the room is about 11.5'x13.5'.



Massage Room From the dining area walk up 31 steps, one reaches the massage room on the same level as deluxe rooms. The room is equipped with a wooden massage dhroni & other steam equipment, en suite toilet with a WC and a hot shower, a verandah overlooking the deodar forest. Bucket and mugs are provided in the toilet for wash up if the water pressure is less in the shower or faucet. The size of the room is about 11'x16'.

Day Activities at Van Serai - Hikes & Excursions

Chittai Chittai is a famous temple of Golu Devta (god of justice and peculiar to Kumaon). The temple is hung with bells of all shapes and sizes, brought by grateful devotees.

Binsar and Kangarchina Drive to Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary till tourist lodge (2¾ drive). From there start hiking to Jhandhidar (Zero point - 2410m) which commands one of the best Himalaya views in Kumaon. Then follow the ridge down to Shiva temple and turn right towards Gangarchina village. On way enjoy a packed lunch. This is basically a ridge walk partially through dense oak and rhododendron forests, hoary, old trees hung with lichen and covered with sweet smelling moss. The trail slopes gently downwards and offers lovely views into the Bhasoli valley on one side and on and off towards the Himalaya (5 to 6 hrs. walking). After reaching Kangarchina drive back to Van Serai.

Lakhudiar Discover the famous Kali temples, 34 temples in the complex. Another 300m further Vishnu temple dated 9th. to 12th. C. Enjoy a packed lunch at the banks of the river. From there follow irrigation channels and then upwards through old Kaphal tree forests towards Lakhudiar. (Prehistoric rock paintings). Drive back to resort. Approx. 30 minutes.

Syahi Devi Temple - Katarmal Sun temple Drive approx. 3 hrs. to Sitlakhet via Kosi river and Kund (which is the ancestral village of the late Gobind Bhallabh Pant, who was the first Chief Minister of U.P. and did a lot for Kumaon and particularly Almora, building roads etc.). Stop at old colonial forest rest house, and trek up 1½ hrs. to Syahi Devi temple. This temple is dedicated to the goddess Kali/Durga, where blood sacrifices took place in ancient times. The place commands a beautiful view of the Himalaya. The surrounding forest abounds in fruit orchards and herbal plants used for medicines. Packed lunch at temple complex return via different route to forest rest house (1½ hrs. walk). Thereafter drive via Katpurya towards Kosi, then from there a 2 km. uphill trail through villages (45 mins.) which leads to the 800 year old Katarmal Sun temple. One of the few sun temples in India after Konarak. It has a forgotten feel to it and houses some fine statues, including the main image of Surya holding sundials in his arms. From the temple a path leads up to the ridge. After following the ridge return to village close to Katarmal sun temple. Late afternoon drive back to Jageshwar.

Patal Bhuvneshwar According to belief King Rituparna of the Sun dynasty (Surya Vansha) discovered the cave in 'Treta yug'. It has been described in the 'MANAS KHAND' of 'SKAND PURAN'. It is said that during his visit, he had encountered several demons and "Sheshnaag" himself acted as his guide. One can see the gateway of the great ages in Patal Bhuvaneshwar. There are four entrances inside the cave named as 'Randwar' 'Paapdwar', 'Dharamdwar' and 'Mokshadwar'. The Paapdwar was closed soon after the death of Ravana and the Randwar, literally, the road to war, was closed down after the great Mahabharata war. At present only two gateways are opened. Adi Shankaracharya visited this cave in 1191 AD. That was the beginning of the modern pilgrimage history, at Patal Bhuvaneshwar. The journey inside the cave has to be carried in feeble lights, holding protective iron chains. The Stone formations of Sheshnag can be seen, holding earth, heaven the world beneath. 'Havan' (fire sacrifice) is performed in a dimly lit, solemn atmosphere, under the spell of holy chants. The cave, it is believed, is connected by an underground route to Mount Kailash. It is believed that Pandavas, the 'Mahabharat' heroes proceeded towards their last journey in the Himalayas after meditating here, in front of Lord Shiva. This hidden pilgrimage situated at 1,350mts above sea level is mainly dedicated to Lord Shiva. Almost every god that you would have heard of resides in this mystifying cave. It is also believed that you can worship at Patal Bhuvaneshwar is equivalent to worshipping at Char Dham of Uttarakhand. The motorable road ends half a kilometer away from the cave entrance. You have to descend nearly 100 steps into this narrow cave, to reach the sanctum sanctorum, which gives an overwhelming feeling that you're entering the centre of the earth. Each stone, each stalagmite within each cave or doorway, in magnificent erection reveals the story of Hindu pantheon in the shapes of Gods, Goddesses, saints and known mythological characters.

Festivals

Though crowded with devotees, it is an experience in itself to see Jageshwar transform from a sleepy hamlet to a bustling venue full of religious fervour. Some key festivals celebrated here are: □ The Jageshwar Monsoon Festival is held between 15 July to 15 August □ Annual Maha Shivratri Mela takes place during March or April □ The famous Pooram Festival (April/May) is celebrated at the Vaddakkunnath Temple with nightlong fireworks and a magnificent elephant procession. □ Onam, the harvest festival falls during August or September.

Experiences at Jageshwar

Van Serai is perfect for a peaceful holiday. It is ideally located for those wanting to introspect, meditate or take a break from their stressful lives. However, for those who like a little action, there is plenty to do in and around Jageshwar.

Yoga, Meditation and Wellness The tranquility and divinity of the area lend themselves beautifully for the one-ness of the body and mind. With pure nature around you, doing yoga, asanas, pranayams or meditation feels like second nature. The pure mountain air with the soft sun showering you with warmth, the chirping of birds and calm gurgling of the stream nearby provide the best possible environment for a yoga session. Whether you are a novice or a regular practitioner of yoga, our yoga gurus can help you completely relax and rejuvenate your body and mind. You may opt for our transformational programmes, please refer to the wellness section. The lodge can be hired for yoga and meditation retreat. Should you wish to conduct a programme with an expert teacher from Isha Yoga Centre, do let us know and we shall organise the teacher and the team for you.

Temple Visit A visit to the famous temples is almost mandatory. Reminding you of the stone balanced structures straight out of a Flintstones comic or Stonehenge, these temples have been here since centuries and are a wonder in themselves. The little legends and tales around the temples are part of the folklore and intrigues which our local guides would be happy to share with you.

Birding and Nature Walks The deodars forests at the lower altitude and the pine cover further up, are the perfect habitat for many rare bird species. Van Serai's birding expert will be happy to initiate you into the world of bird watching. If you are already into birding, he would be an interesting source of information on species specific to this region. You can also choose to explore the beautiful forests at your own pace, maybe carry a picnic hamper for a longer trek and make the most of the natural beauty around you.

Treks At Van Serai, along with usual treks, we have a unique Village trekking experience in store for you. Our concept of the Village Trek provides an insight into the lives and daily routine of the Kumaoni villager. On the trek, we take you through thick deodar forests and quaint Kumaoni villages. The highlight is being able to stay at one of these village houses. Along with seeing some unforgettable views of the magnificent snow-capped mountain ranges, sighting endemic birds and local fauna, you get the opportunity to admire and reside in the traditional old Kumaoni houses with carved wooden doors and windows. We start the trek at Binsar from where we leave early morning making our way to Jageshwar. Overnight stay in the village houses gives you a chance to experience their warm and genuine hospitality. The accommodation is rustic but clean and has all the basic amenities. The village houses have been partially renovated and toilets and bathrooms added without compromising on the ambience. Traditional food is cooked by the villagers ensuring good hygiene standards. Mineral water is also provided. This trek can be done as a full day trek (7-8 hours) or split into 2 days with the option of staying in a village house and one night in a tent, based on availability. Since its mostly downhill, it is a relatively easy trek suitable for everyone. The other short treks are to Vriddha Jageshwar (3 km one way) and Jhakharsain (3 km one way). Picnics Nothing like a packed lunch under the Deodar trees while sitting on a large rock by the rivulet. From having grown up in the area, our staff knows the undiscovered spots with the best rocks. Make paper boats or simply watch the small fish swim around. For the more adventurous, wash your feet in the chilled water.

Village Visit You can take a walk around the local villages, admiring the traditional old houses with carved wooden doors and windows. Watch how time has stood still in some places and modernity has engulfed some others.

A visit to Jageshwar is incomplete without an interaction with a local family accompanied with a local Kumaoni meal. Sit around the bonfire hearing the local folklore and haunting Kumaoni music and songs. Feel the warm hearted welcome and make a friend for life. Let our staff know if you're interested and we will help put it together for you.

Exploring Caves

The cave structures in and around Jageshwar are absolutely enticing. From small holes in the walls to large caves which were probably used for Tantric congregations. The entire countryside around the area is dotted with caves, each one with its own story. The most famous amongst these are the Airavat Cave and the Pataal Bhuvaneshwar caves, in case you are feeling adventurous enough to explore them.

Jageshwar Museum

Most of the sculptures and idols found in the Jageshwar temple complex have been housed in the Archaeological museum just outside the main temple complex. In all, it houses around 174 sculptures, each of them beautiful beyond words. Unfortunately, photography is not allowed inside the museum, and photographs of the sculptures are not available either.

Other places of interest in the area

* Jata Ganga, the river that flows through the town

* Brahma Kund * The temple of Golu Devata at Chitai.

* Other temples such as Sri Kuber Temple and the Batuk Bhairav Temple.