

# Gateway to mysticism



(Left and below) Alleys of both Haridwar and Rishikesh are full of temples and ashrams; (right) banks of Ganga at Rishikesh



RITALLI  
DHILLON

Haridwar — the gateway to the Hindu Gods and the holy abode of Lord Vishnu (Hari) — has been the centre of Hindu religion and mysticism for centuries. And it's also the starting point of many soul journeys.

Haridwar is where the holy river Ganga descends from the hills into the North Indian plains. It is amongst the seven holiest cities of the Hindus, and is the point of entry to *char dham* — Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri. Har Ki Pauri is the most important *ghat* where devotees gather to bathe and worship. It is believed that Lord Vishnu's footprint graces the upper wall of Har Ki Pauri where the sacred Ganga touches it at all times.

On this Pauri lies the "Brahma Kund" where, as per legends, drops of *amrit* (the elixir of life) carried by Garuda had fallen. Every evening the bells and melodies of the Ganga *aarti* resonate in the atmosphere and the golden floating



*diyas* light up the holy waters, a divine ritual which is moving and awe-inspiring.

Several temples and *ashrams* dot this town, popular amongst them are Maya Devi temple, Mansa Devi and Maa Anandamayee Ashram. Haridwar plays host to the Kumbh Mela — humanity's largest religious festivities.

A 45-minute drive along the canal and the forest route from Haridwar brings you to Rishikesh, the spiritual magnet of the seekers of the soul.

Scenically located where the Ganga approaches the plains from the Shivaliks, Rishikesh is the World Yoga capital and a doorway to the Himalayas. As the Beatles jammed at Rishikesh, it catapulted to Western fame in the 60s and ever since is visited by hundreds of foreign tourists.

There is plen-

ty to do and see in this alcohol-free, vegetarian haven for the yogic body and spiritual mind. The yoga centers mostly located north of the main town on the banks of the fast-flowing Ganga, surrounded by wooded hills are popular destinations. On the must-see list is the Lakshman

Jhula and the *Par m a r t h* Niketan, one of the few *ashrams* in India which continues to educate children on Vedic Gurukul

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principles.

An evening *aarti* on the banks of the holy river is an unforgettable experience. The Triveni Ghat, Trayambakeshwar temple, Bharat Mandir, Gita Bhawan and Swarg Ashram are other places of interest.

Rishikesh is very new-age; you can learn to play the sitar or the tabla, experience crystal healing, visit ayurvedic experts, palmists or astrologers. The markets are dotted with German bakeries, cyber cafes, eateries and interesting shops selling eclectic apparels and stone jewellery. For the adventurous and outdoorsy, there is rafting, rappelling, rock climbing, kayaking, trekking and bungee jumping.

And for all, nights of camping on the banks of the river Ganga, mornings to awaken with the birds, afternoons of inhaling the fresh air, and evening of singing hymns are memorable experiences.

The writer is a travel enthusiast

## Pitstop



## LORE BEHIND THE BRIDGE

According to the legends, Lakshman *jhula*, a prominent bridge was built in 1939 over the Ganga river. It is said that Lord Ram's brother, Lakshman had crossed the river on a jute rope from here. This part of the town is known for its busy bazaars, restaurants and cafes.



## STAIRWAY TO LORD'S ABODE

The Trayambakeshwar Temple is of its levels is dedicated to a different deity. In Rishikesh, this is set on the backdrop of the majestic Himalayan ranges. You'll be surprised to see the level of cleanliness here.

Trayambakeshwar means the abode of Lord Shiva. It is very well placed on the banks of Ganges and the natural beauty around the temple is breathtaking.

Buy the  
Way

## HAVEN FOR VEGETARIANS

Streets of Rishikesh and Haridwar are dotted with eateries that offer delicious vegetarian fair. Chotiwalla Restaurant at Rishikesh is one of the favourites among tourists looking to try authentic Indian and Garhwali cuisine.



A statue depicting a scene from Bhagwad Gita outside the Gita Bhawan in Rishikesh