ROAD TRIP!
DRIVE AND EXPLORE KINNAUR AND SPITI

With Banjara Camps & Retreats and Rishad Saam Mehta

26th June to 7th July 2010

Enjoy an adventurous yet luxurious driving holiday led by Rishad Saam Mehta on India's most rugged and spectacular road trip, on a circuit where Banjara Camps & Retreats have set a benchmark in comfortable and rustic accommodation.

RISHAD SAAM MEHTA, a well known travel writer and photographer, has racked up over 100,000 kilometres on Indian roads when he was handling Autocar India's series on self drive holidays. He has driven and mapped this circuit twice. This particular drive in Outlook Traveller's latest book 'Driving Holidays Across India', has been researched and written by him. He has also written the first chapters on how to prepare for a driving holiday, how to enjoy on and deal with emergencies.

BANJARA CAMPS AND RETREATS P. LTD. has established camps and retreats on the route that don't lack any comfort and the staff has years of experience who ensure that while you maybe away from urbanity, you still have comfortable beds, spotless bathrooms, running hot water and home cooked food.

Banjara Camp, Sangla

Route: Chandigarh – Shimla – Thanedar – Sangla – Nako – Tabo – Kaza – Kunzum La – Chandra Tal – Rohtang La – Manali – Jalori La – Shojha – Shimla – Chandigarh.

Distance: 1700 km (approx)

Highlights:

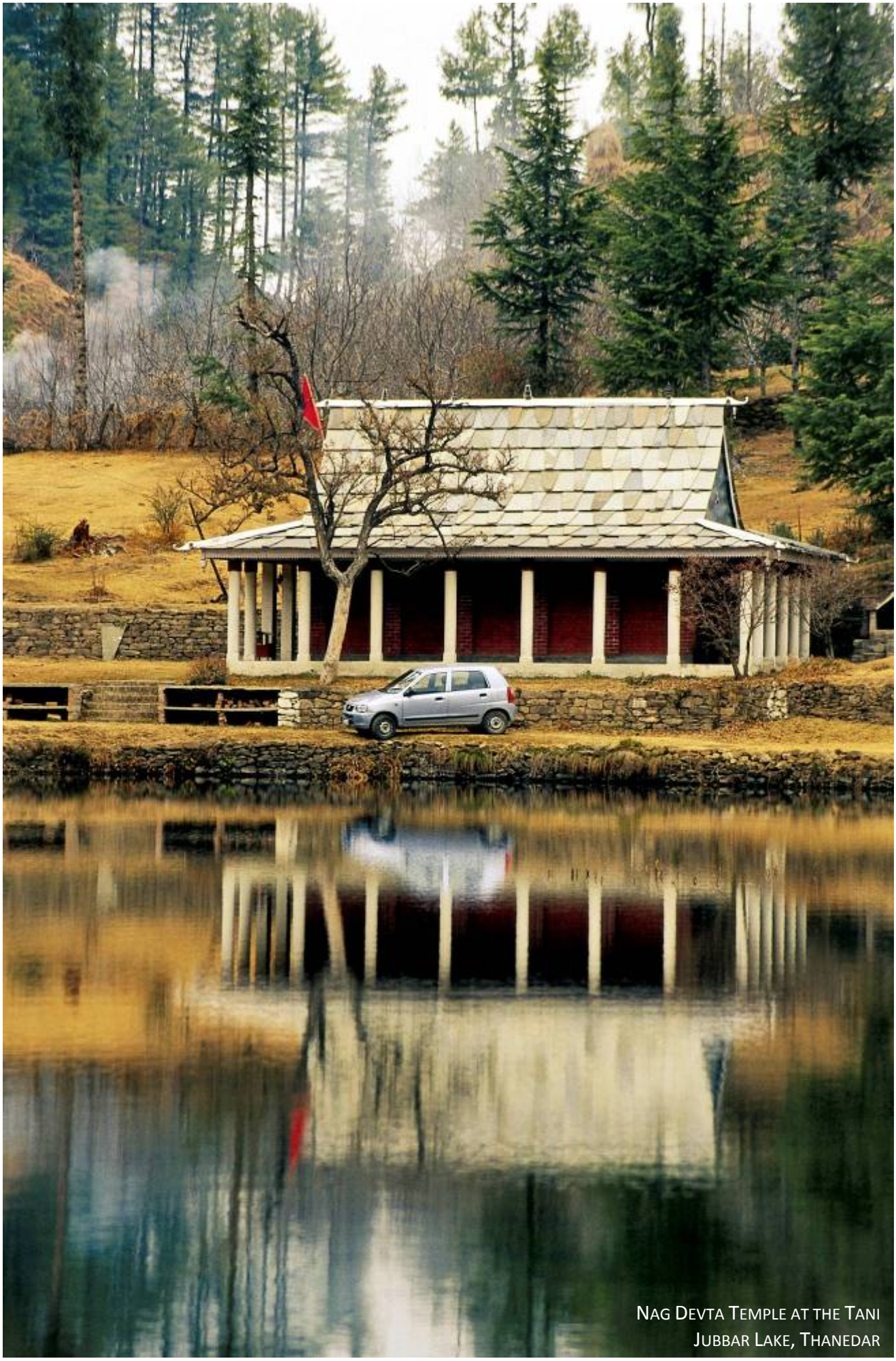
- Overnights at stunning locations
- An old church, ancient gompas and sacred lakes.
- Spectacular views of the Sutlej along the Hindustan – Tibet road.
- Drive up to the hilltop perched Kee Gompa
- Drive to the highest road connected village in the world
- Drive the jaw-droppingly awesome road from Kaza to Manali over the mighty Kunzum La.
- Spend a night camping by the tranquil and enigmatic Chandra Tal or the moon lake.
- Food that will tempt you to overeat every single day

Trip Plan

Saturday, June 26, 2010

Segment: Chandigarh - Thanedar
Driving Time: 6 -7 hrs
Terrain: Plains give way to the lower Himalayas into Himachal Pradesh.
Road condition: Good
Altitude gain: 7000 ft.

The first day's drive is easy and smooth. The traffic reduces as we cross Kufri and start the climb up to Narkanda. The forests in this area are probably some of the most beautiful ones in Himachal and driving the last 15 kms from Narkanda to Thanedar is an absolute joy. Reach Thanedar and check into Banjara retreat. Rest of the day on your own to hike or rest or drive around.



NAG DEVTA TEMPLE AT THE TANI
JUBBAR LAKE, THANEDAR

Sunday, June 27

Near Hatu Peak

Segment: Thanedar - Hatu Peak - Thanedar
Driving Time: 2 hrs
Terrain: Alpine meadows and little ponds
Road condition: Good
Altitude gain: 1100 ft.

Spend time at Hatu or go for a walk to the Tani Jubbar lake or check out the old English built church in Kotgarh, which has beautiful stained glass windows.

Monday, June 28

Segment: Thanedar – Sarahan - Sangla
Driving Time: 8 hrs
Terrain: The Sutlej dominates the view here as we negotiate the Hindustan Tibet road. Sometimes far below, other times alongside
Road condition: Part good and part bad
Altitude gain: 1000 ft.

For six months every year, the Himalayan valleys of Kinnaur and Spiti emerge from a thick cloak of snow to reveal a different, secret world to man. Your discovery of the lesser-known Himalayas can begin at the Banjara Camp in the Sangla Valley. At a height of 2,700 Mts the Banjara Camp is surrounded by towering mountains on all sides and is set on the banks of the Baspa River that surges through the valley. Long walks to discover the amazing fauna and flora of the valley, treks to view snow covered Himalayan peaks, angling for trout, experiencing some of the local culture and traditions, rock climbing, rappelling are only some of the delights that are on offer.

Tuesday, June 29

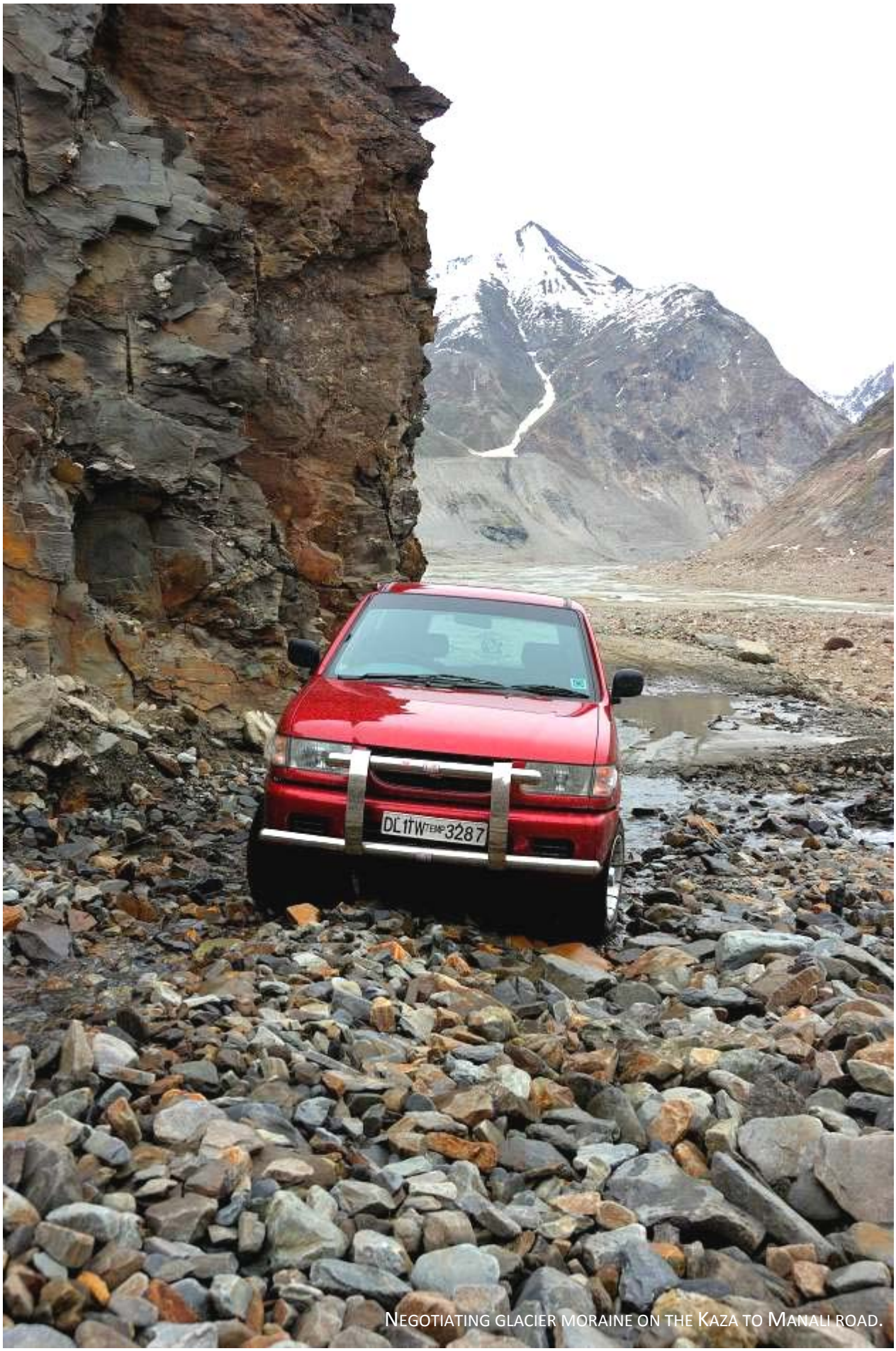
Segment: Sangla – Chitkul - Sangla
Driving Time: 2 hrs
Terrain: Alpine forest with plenty of streams and lots of snowcapped views.
Road condition: Average
Altitude gain: 1500 ft.

Visit Chitkul and hike up to Nagasthi, the last border outpost on the old Indo-Tibetan trade route. Later in the day visit the village by the camp.

Wednesday, June 30

Sangla

Relax by the river, read a book in a hammock or go for a trek.



NEGOTIATING GLACIER MORAINE ON THE KAZA TO MANALI ROAD.

Bridge across the Sutlej River

Thursday, July 1

Segment: Sangla - Tabo
Driving Time: 9 hrs.
Terrain: Kinnaur gives way to Spiti and the terrain becomes stark and craggy with wind erosion sculptures on mountain faces.
Road condition: Mostly good with some bad patches
Altitude gain: 1300 ft.

After an early breakfast, drive down to Tabo. Today, the landscape changes strikingly from the lush greenery of the Kinnaur valley to the barren vistas of the Spiti valley as you enter a cold desert. Reach Tabo and check-in. In the evening, visit the Tabo Gompa, reputed to be the oldest (an inscription on a wall here indicates, it was founded in AD 996) continuously functioning Buddhist monastery in India and the Himalayas, with its original decoration and iconographic program intact. Night stay in Tabo.

Friday, July 2

Segment: Tabo – Kaza via Dhankar
Driving Time: 4 hrs.
Terrain: Hilly and along glacial river beds created by the last ice age
Road condition: Mostly good but sudden sections of sand and gravel
Altitude gain: 1500 ft.

Local at Dhankar Gompa

After breakfast, we depart for Dhankar, enroute to Kaza. Dhankar, the traditional capital of Spiti, sits pretty on a hilltop overlooking the valley. A statue of Dhyan Budha where four complete figures of Budha sit back to back is the main attraction of this more than seven-century old monastery. Reach Kaza, check into the Banjara Retreat and spend rest of the day at leisure. Kaza Market has got many cyber cafes for those who need to check email and upload their stunning pictures to social networking websites.

Saturday, July 3

Around Kaza

After breakfast visit Ki monastery and Kibber village. Kee gompa is a Gelugpa sect monastery. Its hilltop position points to a post-thirteenth century construction. The greatest wealth of this three stories structure lies in its collection of 'Thangkas' salvaged with difficulty from the devastating raids of the Dogars and the Sikhs in the 19th century. From Kee, a scenic drive takes you into the pasture country of Kibber. The pastures are spread over hundreds of square kilometers. Kibber is small village and is the take off point for the popular trek to Tso Moriri in Ladakh. Further up six kilometers from Kibber, we drive up to a still smaller village of Gete. Consisting of just six houses, it boasts of being the highest village in Asia connected by road. Drive back to the retreat for lunch and spend rest of the day at leisure – preferably resting.

Sunday, July 4

Segment: Kaza – Chandra Tal via the Kunzum La
Driving Time: 5 hrs.
Terrain: Through ice age glacier paths and across many minor and a few major streams. Huge canyons and big and might mountains
Road condition: Dirt and rock strewn sections at times
Altitude gain: 2500 ft.

No matter what we say about this road, you'll still be stunned when you see it so we're just going to let you experience it without any attempt to describe it to you. Today you'll cross over the mighty Kunzum La (4553m) and then take the ridiculous excuse of a road to Chandra Tal. This road is triple distilled adventure and you have to be very cautious as the edges are crumbly and the turns unbelievably tight.
The Moon Lake is stunning and worth every meter of bad road driven.
Spend the rest of the day exploring and if you want even swimming in the lake.
Overnight in tents by the lake.

Monday, July 5

Segment: Chandra Tal – Manali via the Rohtang Pass
Driving Time: 5 hrs (depending on traffic while descending from Rohtang)
Terrain: Spiti gives way to Lahaul and the first patches of green start. Alpine landscape on both sides of the Rohtang Pass.
Road condition: Dirt till Gramphu, tarmac thereafter
Altitude loss: 8000 ft.

Continue on the stunning Kaza to Manali road and cross into Lahaul. We join the Manali – Keylong road behind the Rohtang Pass and cross the pass and descend back to civilization, traffic and cacophony.
Relax in hotel or walk around Manali

CHANDRA TAL – THE MOON LAKE (14000 FEET ABOVE MSL)

CHORTENS AND PRAYER FLAGS AT THE KUNZUM LA

Tuesday, July 6

Segment: Manai – Sojha
Driving Time: 4 hrs
Terrain: Constant view of the Beas till Aut and then along the dense green valley of the Tirthan
Road condition: Will feel like heaven after the Kaza – Manali section
Altitude gain: 2500ft.

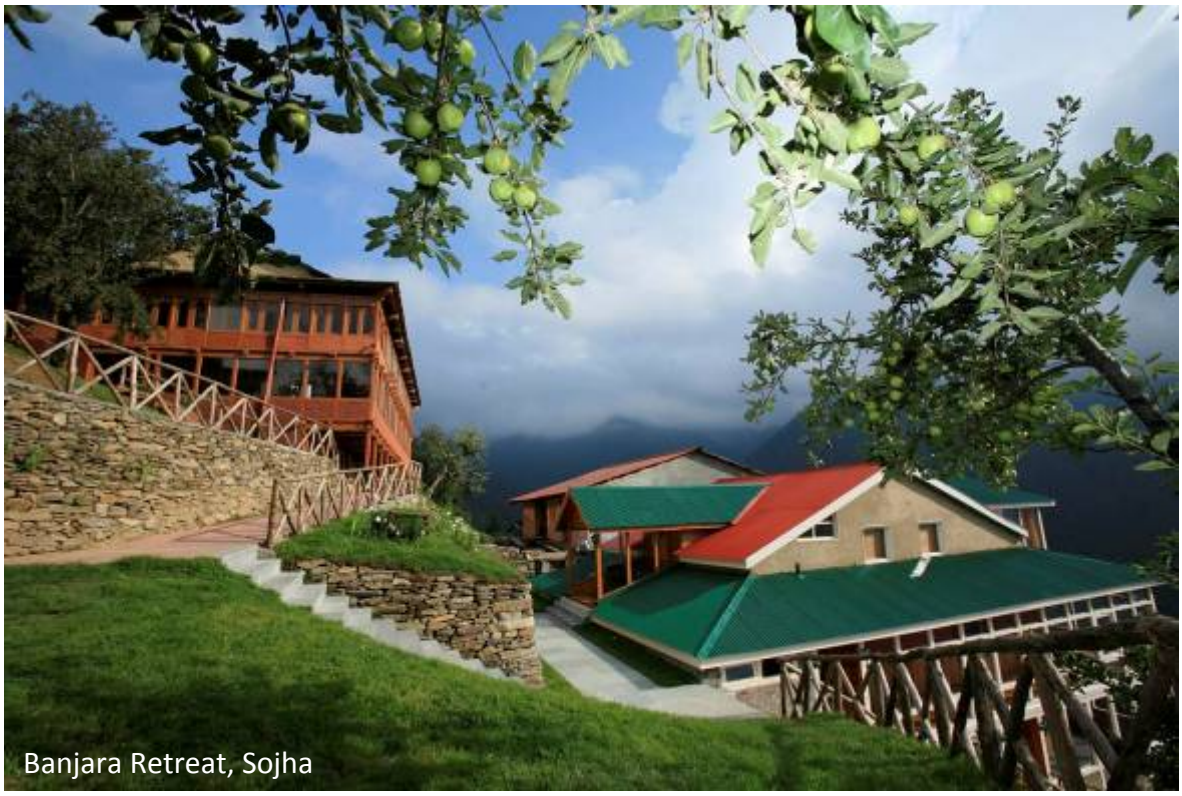
Drive to Sojha visiting Naggar castle and Roerich art gallery en route. Check into Banjara retreat on arrival. Evening at leisure around bon fire.

The mighty Kunzum La

Wednesday, July 7

Segment: Sojha – Jalori La - Sojha
Driving Time: 0.5 hrs
Terrain: Stepped agriculture hillsides.
Road condition: Average
Altitude gain: 1500ft.

Today you can either spend the day at leisure at the retreat or drive 5km to the Jalori Pass and do the trek to Serolsar Lake or Raghupur Fort.


Banjara Retreat, Sojha

Thursday, July 8

Segment: Sojha - Chandigarh
Driving Time: 9 hrs
Terrain: Along the Sutlej till Luhri and then down down the Shimla – Chandigarh road to the plains.
Road condition: Very good
Altitude loss: Down to sea level.

Trip ends!

Village belle, Sojha

Cost:

Rs. 39,000 per person on twin share basis

Cost includes:

- Accommodation on twin share basis.
- All meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner)
- Mineral water bottles for each car
- Service of a Banjara escort.
- Taxes.
- Trip led by Rishad Saam Mehta

This is essentially a drive best done in an SUV or on a motorcycle. You do see the odd small car or sedan on this route but the driver needs to be very, very careful. And, the car needs adequate underbelly protection. We do not advice bringing along a sedan for this drive. Sedans that would just about make it would be the Palio Adventure or the Ford Fusion. Remember ground clearance is king here.

Join Up!

For more information on the route and on how to prep your car and other query please contact:
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To join up for this adventure and confirm please contact:
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