

BLOOMING BLOSSOMS

Trek through the Valley of Flowers, where words and imaginations fail. Bask in the beauty of nature which is breathtaking, and will leave you mesmerised

BY ANUJ SARMA

Nestled in the west Himalayan region, the Valley of Flowers is situated in the Bhyundar Valley at an elevation of 3658 metres above sea level. Spread over a vast area of 87 square kilometers in the Chamoli District of Uttarakhand, the Valley of Flowers is set in the backdrop of the majestic Zaskar range. This paradise had been unknown to the outside world till the renowned mountaineer Frank Smythe

discovered it in 1931. Declared a national park of India and a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005 after the Nanda Devi National Park, the valley and the park are a part of the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve. The valley is surrounded by mountains, most notably the Nar Parbat (5,245 m) and the Nilgiri Parbat (6,479 m) to the north, Rataban (6,126) to the northeast, Gauri (6,590 m) to the east, Saptspring (5,038) to the south and Kunt Khal (4,430 m) to the southwest. Everyday

clouds wash over the high meadows in the valley coaxing new blossoms from the rich glacial soils. The valley is home to over 600 plant species which are spread across the area and you can spot some rare species such as the *Rhododendron anthopogon*, and some not so uncommon ones as the *Rhododendron campunalatum*. Flooded in one direction by white anemones, with blue hooked stickseed dotting the place and carpeted on the other the direction by slightly dark pink geraniums punctuated



by Purple Jerusalem Sage, one can witness a mass of red, orange and yellow Himalayan cinquefoil interspersed with the aptly named Lady Slipper orchid. Look out for many other, as it is possible to see 300 plus species at different times and in different terrains of the valley. There is also a rich variety of flowers that include orchids, poppies, primulas, calendulas, birch, blue poppy, *brahmakamal* and many more. The Valley of flowers is most famous for its excellent natural trekking trail. This is a must visit place for the flower and nature lovers. The valley in all its grandeur and cupidity provides a memorable treat to the eyes. Once an untouched beauty, the valley is now one of the most frequently visited hotspot for tourists as well as botanists from around the world. The valley is also home to animals like the Tahr, Snow Leopard, Musk deer, Red Fox, Langur, Bharal, Serow, the Himalayan Black Bear and the

“I hope, generously, my ignorance must judge for myself whether the Bhyundar Valley deserves its title, the Valley of Flowers. Others will visit it, analyse it and probe it, but whatever their opinions, to me it will remain the ‘Valley of Flowers,’ a valley of peace and perfect beauty where human spirit may find repose.”

-Frank Smythe on the Valley of Flowers.

Himalayan Brown Bear. The captivating beauty of these is sure to tickle any visitor's innermost aesthetic senses.

Being an inner Himalayan valley, the Nanda Devi basin has a distinctive micro climate. Weather conditions are generally dry, but there is heavy rainfall from late

June to early September. Prevailing mist and low clouds during the monsoon keeps the soil moist, hence the vegetation is lush. The valley is accessible between the last week of May and the first fortnight of September. Flowering starts from late May. During July and August, the flowering, in terms of number of species, is at its peak. Visit in September for the highest probability of seeing the peaks surrounding the valley and Hemkund lake.

This fairyland located in the high altitudes of Himalayas, is bound by snowy mountains. Covered in thick snow during the winter, the valley blossoms into an infinite carpet of flowers as the summer sets in. The trek to the Valley of Flowers begins from Govind Ghat after crossing the Alaknanda river across a

hanging bridge. Make your way up the mountains, 13 km to Ghangaria, which is the last stop that caters to visitors travelling to the two major locations—the Valley of Flowers and Hemkund Sahib, one of the most revered Sikh shrines. Hemkund Sahib is the world's highest Gurudwara and is situated at an altitude of 4,329 mts. The entire route is lined with small shacks selling biscuits, chocolates, drinks and snacks. Pulna, three kilometers from Govind Ghat, also serves as the base camp for the trek to the Valley of Flowers with hotels and lodges that provide an ideal place to relax. You can also spend the night at Ghangaria Valley Camp. The 10 km trek from Pulna to Bhyundar is easy. Halt there for some snacks and hot tea before resuming. Bhyundar is

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surrounded by a magnificent panorama of mountains, waterfalls and coniferous forests. As you leave towards the river crossing, the three kilometers climb towards Ghangaria is steep. Pink and white roses greet you on this stretch. Approaching Ghangaria, a sea of asters and other blooms would welcome you.

Visit the Hemkund Sahib Gurudwara and take a holy dip in the Hemkund lake. Also, you can visit the Laxman Mandir. It

is said that Lord Hanuman had come to this region looking for the *sanjivini* leaves to revive a wounded Laxman in the battle against Ravana. You can also add a day trip to Badrinath. If time permits, visit the last village before the border, Mana, which is three kilometers north of Badrinath. Finding its place amongst the most alluring places in the world, the Valley of Flowers surpasses all grace and can almost be compared to the Garden of Eden. **✎**