

## PREPARATION of CHOTA CHAR DHAM YATRA

### How Long Char Dham Take?

Before starting, you are first supposed to wash all your sins away by bathing in the holy Ganges at Hari-ki-Pauri in Haridwar. It is then customary to first go to Yamunotri and then in order to Gangotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath. The entire trip will take 10 to 15 days, depending on the weather and how fast you want to travel. Sometimes the road can be blocked because of an avalanche. You have to move at a quick pace to complete the trip in 10 days, spending 6½ days on a bus.

### Best Times to Go

The temples open the last week of April or the first week of May and usually close the second week of November because of severe weather. The opening day is called Akhand Jyoti Darshan. May and June is the peak season, and next is September and October.

The rainy season goes from the 1st week in June to the beginning of September. During this period *it can start raining at any time*. During October the sky is clear but *it can be cold*. As far as the weather is concerned, the middle of June and the end of September are the best times to go.

### Himalayan Rivers

There are seven holy rivers in the Himalayas (called Sapta Samudrik Tirtha): the Alakananda (Vishnu Ganga), Dhuli Ganga, Nandakini, Bhagirathi, Pindar Ganga, Mandakini (Pindar), and Nayar. They are said to have all come down on Lord Siva's head, but they fall in different places. The Yamuna River begins near Yamunotri.

There are five confluences (*prayags*) of the Ganges on the way to Badrinath. A confluence is when two rivers meet. This is considered to be an especially auspicious place. The main branch of the Ganges is the Bhagirathi, which originates at Gaumukh, 18 km east of Gangotri. The five confluences are located on the route between Rishikesh and Badrinath and many pilgrims bathe at all *five sangams* (confluences) before having darshan at Badrinath. To visit all five places would be difficult without your own transport.

**Deva Prayag (Deoprayag)** is the confluence of the Bhagirathi and Alakananda. It is 90 km from Rishikesh. At this point the river takes the name Ganges. It is the second most important confluence in India, next to *Prayag* (Allahabad), where the Yamuna, Ganges, and Saraswati meet.

In Treta-yuga Lord (Rama and Lakshman performed a sacrifice) here to atone for killing Ravana, who was a Brahmin. There is an ancient **Raghunath** Temple here with a 4.5 m (15 Ft) tall deity of Sri Rama (Raghunath). It was installed about 1,250 years ago and is one of the 108 most important Vishnu temples in India (Divya Desams). In front of the temple is Garuda and to the left is Annapurna. Behind the temple and slightly up a hill is Vamana's cave. Nearby is Lord Rama's stone throne.

**RudraPrayag** is where the Mandakini from Sri Kedarnath meets the Alakananda. There is a large temple of **Rudranath** here. Nearby is a place where **Narada Muni** is said to have performed austerities. At this point the river is very forceful and moves quickly. RudraPrayag is 70km north of Deoprayag. The Alakananda has flowed 159km from Badrinath to reach here.

**KarnaPrayag** is where the Alakananda meets the Pindar Ganga (from the Pindar Glacier). **Karna**, the half-brother of the Pandavas from the *Mahabharata*, is said to have performed austerities here to please Surya Deva and Rudra. Karna Prayag is 34km from Rudraprayag.

**Nanda Prayag** (914m) is a small confluence of the Nandakini and Alakananda. Ravana is said to have done austerities here, and Nanda Maharaja (Krishna's father) is said to have performed a great sacrifice here. Dushyantha married Sakunthala here, and Kanva Rishi had his ashram at this place. There is a Gopalji temple here. NandaPrayag is 21 km from Karna Prayag.

**Vishnu Prayag** is where the Dauli Ganga (from Niti Valley) meets the Alakananda River (from Badrinath). One road here, via the Niti Pass, leads to Mount Kailash in Tibet, Lord Siva's abode. VishnuPrayag is 10km past Joshimath on the way to Badrinath.

In *the SrimadBhagavatam (5.17.9)* it is said: "The branch of the Ganga known as Alakananda flows and falls down with fierce force upon the peaks of the Himalayan Mountains. Then the Ganges flows into the ocean of salt water (Bay of Bengal). Persons who come and bathe in this river are fortunate.

