



# ROHTANG PASS

## The courtyard of paradise

By **SOMEN SENGUPTA**

**T**here is no romance in the name Rohtang which in Tibetan means 'heap of corpse'. It is believed that many centuries ago while crossing this passage of Pirpinjal range of Himalaya, this snow covered basin of two rivers named Chenab and Beas was the virtual graveyard of people coming from Lahaul. Even today when the snow melts and naked rock beds are exposed, skulls and bones of human and animals are spotted. One does not need to struggle in realising why this place is so deadly. Apart from its tough and complex surface, the landscape situated at 13400 ft from sea level is often bleak - high speed mountain wind and freezing cold being the hallmark. Add to it, landslides and avalanches of snow walls, and the gravity of being on dangerous grounds is complete.

Though this much is enough opprobrium for a place but the amazing fact remains that along with shivering cold and delightful sunshine a horizon dotted with a blasting panoramic beauty makes Rohtang pass a place with no equal. As surprising as this may sound but the fact remains that a zone where thousands of dead people may still be lying under a thick carpet of snow is now one of the most romantic places to get engrossed with.

Welcome to Rohtang La pass of Himachal Pradesh where beauty of nature ruthlessly overpowers a sad past of human tragedies.

From the time of colonial rulers, Manali of undivided Punjab, now in Himachal Pradesh, was a fabulous hill retreat though it was never commercially developed like Shimla or Darjeeling. Rather Manali was allowed to remain a place without any major contamination. However from Manali the magic called Rohtang was never explored by British, a race always fond of discovering new places.

For reaching Rohtang La one needs to take a 51 km journey through hills from Manali the picture postcard hill retreat of Himachal. In this journey every single spot is a photo point and every single curve is a jaw of death.

Legend from epics like many other places of Himalayan foothills prevails here as well. Local believes it was here in Indrakila par-

vat now known as Deutibba where Arjuna did his penance to satisfy his father Indra. Satisfied with his dedication Indra gifted him *pashupata* arm. Even now, Arjuna *gufa* or the cave of Arjuna, hardly 5 km from Manali on the way to Rohtang is visited by people. Vyas *kund* another place on this path is believed to be the place of penance by Maharishi Vyas and Vashishtha. Whatever be the legend or local belief, the magic of this climbing slope towards Rohtang pass is dominated by breathtaking beauty of nature. Here nature is decorated with thick line of pines and green meadows. Over the horizon brown rock beds and white snow-capped peaks of Pirpanjal range of Himalaya adds more opium to an already intoxicated mind driven by the beauty of the atmosphere.

Another 1 km will take you to a cold water stream named *Nehru kund*. Beside that stands a Hanuman temple, not that impressive though.

The best place to relax before reaching Rohtang is valley of Solang, a place of attraction by its own merit.

It comes after crossing another 10 km on NH 21. Solang is the paradise of snow sports and leisure. From paragliding to ski to river rafting to sledge travel, Solang is the playground of happy souls. Whether it is a newly married couple throwing snow at each other or a small group of toddlers forming and then destroying a cute snowman with snow dust, valley of Solang beams with frolic and joy. It is the place where rock climbing and heli skiing are also done.

Hardly 3.5 km from Solang near the Solang nala nowadays people visit to see a huge heap of know shaped in almost like a Shivalinga. Known as Swambhu Shiva this natural stack of snow goes up to 24 ft. Many love to call it Amarnath of Himachal. From here mountain ranges comes much closer and sky turns deep blue in colour. The extraordinary blue sky and white train of peaks come together to create a mesmerising panorama that takes all attention away and from here roads gain a natural wall of solid snow.

Another drive of 2 km from here takes one to a small village named Kothi Koda.

The first look of this place is simply amazing - like a painted picture. Kothi Koda is a place that has small glaciers and water streams, with a cool wind adding to its

charm. Here Beas, the romantic river of undivided Punjab, flows like a divine dancer. It is narrow here but young and deadly in her speed.

Just 12 km from Kothi Koda are the beautiful waterfalls named Rohalla that fall down from 70 km up at 35000 mt of height.

Marrhi is the next place to have a date with nature. Here car has to make tough negotiation with ice chunks that often come down on the road and here chance of collapsing of the ice wall is high. Weather changes fast with no prealert of any kind. Road often gets choked with big chunks of snow blocks and one needs to be alert every moment.

If all is well at Marrhi, then it is just the last leg of 16 kms that takes one to Sonapani glacier, a gateway to Rohtang pass - the most romantic snow world of India.

River Beas originates from Beas *kund* of Rohtang. Legend has it that one may turn blind if he goes near it. Near Rohtang there is another famous glacier named Sonapati. Chandra river flowing across the Lahaul valley can also be seen from here.

At Rohtang it is nature that rules. The giant looking snow peaks and endless snow covered horizon are enough to certify this. Walking on the snow is not easy. One needs to wear right kind of footwear. Slipping on the snow is obvious. But that is part of the

fun. Here at Rohtang no one is allowed to be serious and somber. The only password one can use to unlock the endless captivating beauty of nature is a cheer in face. And here, for fun, there is no age limit. With the glorious array of peaks of Pirpanjal range and a clear sky in the background dazzling in the rays of the Sun turns the magic on.

Once this was the place where hundreds of aspirant travelers while crossing Lahaul and Ladakh died in snow storms and blizzards. Many skeletons are still buried here under the snow.

The stunning panorama of Rohtang is unforgettable.

This attracts innumerable tourists and that is harmful to the ambience and environment. The level of air pollution has gone up to such an alarming high that HP tourism department has restricted daily number of vehicles based on the type of fuel they consume. The registration fees have also been increased to a great extent so as to control number of people. No hotel has allowed to open there so that people are deterred from visiting and loitering. For the sake of saving Rohtang several actions have been taken.

As one cannot stay overnight here, the limited time one gets at this beautiful, wild and picturesque place must be fully utilised by those visiting.

### Travel Logistics:

Rohtang pass is 51 km from Manali - It is also accessible from Leh city of Ladakh. Rohtang pass is open only between April to June and again from September to November subject to the clearance received from Indian Army.

Visit to Rohtang is subject to the permit and amount payable to Himachal Pradesh Government. One needs to take the permission in advance with all details of the visitors and the vehicle.

There is no provision to stay overnight at Rohtang pass but Solang valley has HPTDC hotel.

No private car is allowed - Only tourist car.

The pass is closed for tourist on Tuesdays.

Please keep a watch on weather - Any sudden change is a big alert and do not take risk in this zone. One can come back from Solang if weather is not suitable to go Rohtang pass.

The iconic Manali-Leh adventure drive route that was opened in 1989 passes through Rohtang pass - Starting from Manali it travels 51 km to reach Rohtang pass and from there it goes through breathtaking Karakoram range of Himalaya.



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