

# The Mystical **PARASHAR LAKE**

A guidebook to **Hidden Hamlets** around  
**Parashar Lake, Mandi, Himachal Pradesh**



Dine, explore and live like a local,  
with a local! All details inside

**PARASHAR  
ECOTOURISM  
INITIATIVE**



Development Alternatives



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The contents of this booklet may be revised from time to time and it is advisable to call and check on current information before planning a trip.



NMHS



# Namaste!

On behalf of the Parashar Ecotourism Initiative, we congratulate you on your decision to visit us!

The Parashar region consists of the high-altitude lakeside temple and a **cluster of Hidden Hamlets: Thatta, Lagshal, Bhanuthi- Shikari and Kalang**, that have come together to set up an ecotourism enterprise for discerning travellers who believe in experiencing the local, enjoying nature at nature's pace and ensuring their visit generates a minimal carbon footprint.

Our villages are close (please refer map) to the alpine grassland lake of Parashar, located at a height of 2730 m above sea level. The lake is held sacred to Sage Parashar, who is said to have meditated there. Rishi Parashar's 13th century temple is situated by the lakeside. Surrounded by perpetually snow-capped peaks and looking down on the fast flowing Beas river, the lake can be reached by road. Our villages are approachable from here through hiking trails.

Warm village homes with local cuisines cooked out of homegrown ingredients are awaiting you. Within visiting distance are the Shikari Mata Temple and Kamrunag peaks, while the Dhauladhar and Pir Panjal ranges are within sight. You can walk undiscovered paths with our trained village guides, work the fields, graze livestock or just join the revelry in a fair and dance the Nati to the beat of mountain drums.

Come as a pilgrim, a disciple of nature to the Upper Himalayas, a landscape dotted with stately Deodar, Himalayan Oak, Pine and Rhododendron forests. Once you rise above the tree line, you are amidst the great Himalayan alpine grasslands. This is Parashar, where village communities offer you memorable experiences. Even as you have the time of your life, you support communities in preserving their ecologically sustainable ways of life.

*Welcome...*

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# The Mystical Parashar Lake

## ABOUT our MISSION & the PLACE

This little book is an effort to compile all the information you may need while planning your visit to this region.

While all the standard information on places to visit, options on where to stay, what to eat is in here, we also give suggestions on package tours and do's and don'ts for the conscious traveler.

Through the Parashar Ecotourism Initiative, we are trying to promote a unique brand of slow tourism, with walking as its core philosophy. As an interested traveler we urge you to emerge from your comfort zone and experience the mountains - best explored with the locals, at nature's pace and on foot.

The true experience of travel comes from wandering through a village, tasting local cuisines and understanding a different way of life. This experience comes essentially from walking and imbibing at a slow pace.

Have a great time at our **Hidden Hamlets**, you could meet a different you when you return!

**Parashar lake is approachable from our villages through hiking trails and vice versa**

## Blast from the Past

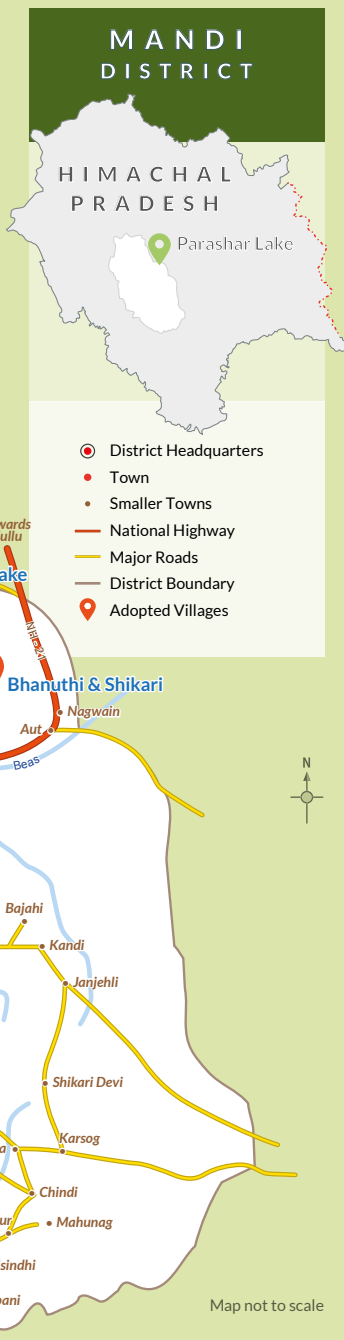
### BRIEF HISTORY of PARASHAR

Parashar Lake and the **Hidden Hamlets** of **Thatta, Lagshal, Bhanuthi- Shikari** and **Kalang** lie in the Mandi District of Himachal Pradesh.

The town of Mandi is situated on the banks of the River Beas. A former capital of a princely state, the town retains its historic character. Founded in 1526, it was merged with Suket post-independence, to form a district. More than eighty rock-hewn temples can be seen here. The worship of Lord Shiva and his local manifestations of Bhootnath, Trilokinath and Panchvaktra have given the town the sobriquet of Choti Kashi. The old palace and the Victorian bridge across the Beas lend

# Locating Parashar

Area: Mandi District 3950 km<sup>2</sup>  
 Elevation: 760m (2495 ft)  
 Population: 999,777 (2001 census)  
 Native Language: Pahadi, Mandyali, Hindi



the town other-worldly charm.

The Shivaratri celebrations at Mandi are special, where over two hundred devi-devtas arrive in procession to participate in a grand fair. Devi-Devatas are itinerant deities of the Himalayan region. They travel in processions, marking territory and delivering justice. They speak through their oracles who can be seen in consultation with pilgrims at temples.

Situated 49 km from the town of Mandi, perched atop an alpine grassland is the Parashar Lake. Sage Parashar is said to have meditated here, making it a pristine and uplifting space.

Rishi Parashar, a revered mythical sage is the grandson of Rishi Vashishta, who is considered the author of many ancient texts including Mandala 7 of the Rigveda. He is also known as the first sage to expound on the Vedanta School of Philosophy. This is Rishi Parashar's abode where he is worshipped as a patron devta. Another legend has it that Devta Kamru Nag, the rainmaking serpent deity witnessed the Mahabharata

**200 devi - devtas** arrive in procession to participate in a grand fair

until its very end, after which he and the Pandavas decided to find a suitable place for meditation and penance. They were enchanted by the landscape and decided to stay beside the lake, rendering it sacred.

At a trekking distance from the Parashar Lake and temple are located the **picturesque Hidden Hamlets** of **Thatta, Lagshal, Bhanuthi-Shikari** and **Kalang**, where one can stay comfortably and develop an appreciation for the Himalayan way of life.

## Transformative & Tough

### TERRAIN & LANDSCAPE

Parashar is located at high altitude and the terrain is a dense scrubby forest of Silver Fur, Juniper, Pine, Birch and Rhododendron. These





alpine forests soon give way to alpine grasslands through shrubs and scrub. The grassland extends upwards to the snowline.

Alpine meadows are usually referred to as 'nature's own gardens' where the topography is undulating, overlaid with a carpet of spongy grass. During winter the alpine meadows remain snow-covered. At high elevations above the treeline, the

sub-alpine meadows erupt in color every spring as delphiniums, gentians, poppies, roseroots, louseworts, anemones, and asters bloom.

A local belief tells us that during the flowering season, people would venture into the grasslands only in groups because the fragrance of the flowers would induce amnesia. If you went alone, you would simply forget who you were and where you came from!

**Devta Kamru Nag**, the rainmaking serpent deity witnessed the **Mahabharata** until its very end, after which he and the Pandavas decided to find a suitable place for meditation and penance. They were **enchanted by the landscape and decided to stay beside the lake**, rendering it sacred.

## Abundant Flora & Fauna

### PLANTS & FLOWERS

The most common and valued tree in the region is the Himalayan Cedar or Deodar. The presence of the tree reflects sacredness as its forests were used by Shaivite sages to meditate in. Besides its use as a timber tree, there are many medicinal applications for its oil. Its pollen, forming yellow

fragrant paste, is used for ritual consecration.

The Banj or Himalayan Oak is another valued tree that provides fodder, fuel wood and timber. The tree roots are deep and can store and purify large quantities of ground water.

Chir Pine is also commonly found. Though an exotic species, it is somewhat naturalized in the mountains. Its leaf litter is used in manure and animal bedding. The bark is used in the smelting of copper vessels.

Rhododendron is a commonly spotted bush and tree, which, when in full bloom lends an ethereal aura to the mountainsides. Its crushed petals make for a delicious drink.

The region is rich in wildlife too. Yellow Throated Martens, Black Bear, Leopard, Barking Deer and Himalayan Goral or blue sheep are sighted in forest areas. Himalayan Fox can be spotted on the grasslands. Himalayan Weasel can be commonly seen in and around settlements.

Parashar offers special delights for the birder. Besides summer visitors like Spotted Dove, Wedge-tailed Green-Pigeon, Brainfever Bird, Indian Cuckoo, Asian Koel, Large-tailed Nightjar, Long-tailed Minivet, Red-vented Bulbul, Bay-backed Shrike, Rufous-backed Shrike, Oriental Magpie-Robin, Cinnamon Tree Sparrow etc, there are winter visitors like Snow Pigeon, Common Hoopoe, Dark-throated Thrush, Blue-fronted Redstart, Bar-throated Minla, Yellow-naped Yuhina, Common Chiffchaff and Eurasian Goldfinch.

The summer influx birds

here include Black Francolin, Blue Rock Pigeon, Alexandrine Parakeet, Slaty-headed Parakeet, Plum-headed Parakeet, Common Cuckoo, Red-rumped Swallow, Common Stonechat, Verditer Flycatcher, Rufous-bellied Niltava, Rock Bunting, Red-billed Blue Magpie etc. Species like Asian House-Martin, Grey-winged Blackbird and Green-backed Tit are the winter influx species.

Great place for spotting butterflies and moths too!

## Seasons above the Clouds

### PARASHAR CLIMATE

The Parashar landscape is attractive throughout the year. Due to high altitudes, the weather remains cold the year round, but changes drastically from one season to





peeps out after long spells of rain. This is when you can be one with the elements and float in the clouds!

## People of Parashar

### LOCAL RESIDENTS

The simple people of the Parashar landscape lead a tough life. One can appreciate this as one walks from the lake to the villages. Nevertheless, they live in harmony with nature, utilizing every single endowment it has to offer to its fullest. Their lives are dictated by the rhythms of the seasons, especially since much cannot be produced during the harsh long winter. Seasonal fluctuations call for building reserves for the cold weather. Agro-pastoralism is the main occupation.

People share a very intimate bond with devtas like Parashar Rishi. The deity speaks through an oracle or Gur. The oracle, when possessed, speaks as the mouthpiece of the deity, and one can witness people consulting with the gurs in village courtyards. Officials are appointed to manage logistics of the temples and for the deity journeys. Locals devote a lot of time, resources and effort to the work of the deities, especially during festivals and times when the deity visits their village. They simply describe this as *devta raja ka kaam* and attach great importance to it.

The slow pace of life revolves around these festivals, where rituals that have sustained these communities over millennia are performed.

another. In Summer, it remains pleasant from the months of April till June. Monsoon arrives in July and August and the entire region receives moderate to heavy rainfall.

During winter, the lake freezes partially if not entirely and the temperature drops several degrees below zero. But if you're looking for snowbound treks, this could be the best time to visit.

If you enjoy photography, the months of February, April and September are the best. For someone who just wants to enjoy easy to moderate hikes and loves spending a night in the great outdoors, any time of the year would be good.

Avoid the Monsoon if you do not like being wet and cold at the same time. However, one gets the most spectacular views when the sun

Hospitality is considered duty, and many are averse to accepting money for services rendered.

Life may be tough up here, but nature's bounties more than make up for it.

## Festivities

### EVENTS & FESTIVALS

#### IN MANDI

Maha Shivratri is an important festival, celebrated in the Phalgun months (March). The seven-day festival is celebrated with great fanfare in Mandi. Deities presiding over various villages come together to offer tributes to the chief protector deity, Madho Rai, a form of Lord Vishnu, and Lord Shiva at the Bhootnath temple. The festival commences with a traditional puja and procession locally called Jaleb.

It is a delight to watch hundreds of people participating in the celebrations, even as the devta processions march in all their regalia.

#### IN PARASHAR

People have immense faith in Rishi Parashar who is seen as a protector from harm and misfortune. They celebrate local fairs and festivals to commemorate the arrival of the deity, seeking grace and prosperity.

Processions mark these festivities and are essentially a re-enactment of battle victories against demons. In all puja ceremonies, locals offer *chatra bhet* or silver or gold parasols to the deity along with datura (Vespertine), belpatra (Wood Apple), buransh (Rhododendron), gende (Marigold), fruits and milk. Pahadi songs accompanied by the rhythmic beats of dhol and nagade (large copper drum and kettledrum), melodies



In Thatta the presiding deity is **Shukhdev Rishi**, in Lagshal Aadi Brahma, in Bhanuthi-Shikari it is **Tunga Mata** while in Kalang it is **Parashar Rishi**.

of nati, pati-yantra, shehnai and ranasingha (wind instruments). They adorn themselves in Pattu, traditional head scarf for the women and a jacket called Jhaggi for men, along with bright woolen topis or caps.

While Parashar Rishi is the overarching deity, in the four villages they worship local deities too, consecrated in temples. In Thatta the presiding deity is Shukhdev Rishi, in Lagshal Aadi Brahma, in Bhanuthi-Shikari it is Tunga Mata while in Kalang it is Parashar Rishi.

**SARNAUHALI MELA**

The most significant festival at Parashar is the Sarnauhali Mela. This is a three-day fair organized by communities around the Parashar Lake, in the month of Ashadh, corresponding to the middle of June. The dates vary according to astrological alignments.

Sarnauhali literally means bathing in the lake. Legend has it that Pandavas initiated these celebrations as an assembly of deities around the sacred Parashar Lake. One of the essential rituals is of the *milni* or greeting by the deity of one village by the deity from another. *Milni* is performed with great delight – accompanied by song, dance and music. Another important ritual is the bathing of the devta palanquins in the lake. The carriers of the rath take the devta inside and cleanse them with the holy water.

| Festival            | Where?                          | When?         | What Happens?  |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|--|
| <b>Baisakhi</b>     | Tunga Mata Temple, Bhanuthi     | April         | In this day-long festival, people come together to pray for protection against the harsh winter.         |
| <b>Kashi Mela</b>   | Bandhi Village to Parashar Lake | Early August  | A ritualistic journey where the priest carries Parashar Rishi’s mask image from the village to the lake. |
| <b>Jaag</b>         | Thatta                          | End August    | Night vigil for prosperity. Fire torches carried from Thatta to Shukhdev Rishi’s temple.                 |
| <b>Shavar Mela</b>  | Tunga Mata Temple               | End September | End of harvest. Walnuts and sweets distributed to everyone.  |
| <b>Maal</b>         | Every village                   | October       | Worshipping of livestock.  |
| <b>Mangsar Mela</b> | Thatta                          | December      | Shukhdev Rishi palanquin visits each house, people offer walnuts for wish fulfillment.                   |



## How to Reach

Parashar Lake can be reached through Mandi. From the lake, one can proceed to our **Hidden Hamlets**.

### REACHING MANDI

#### By Air

Nearest airports are Bhuntar and the International Airport at Chandigarh. Chandigarh flights are more frequent and reliable. Chandigarh Airport to Mandi - 200 Km

#### By Train

Nearest Railway stations are Kiratpur Sahib (125 km; 3.5 hrs), Joginder Nagar (57 km; 2 hrs) and Pathankot (205 km; 5.5 hrs). (We suggest you reach Kiratpur Sahib or Pathankot if travelling by train. Joginder Nagar is a narrow-gauge line which adds to travel time)

#### By Road

Mandi lies at a distance of around 430 km from New Delhi (9 hrs) and 187 km from Chandigarh (5 hrs).

Mandi is well connected by road and has convenient public transport options, as it lies on the road to Manali. All buses heading to Manali from Delhi will stop at Mandi. You can book tickets on Redbus or the HRTC website. There are multiple options available ranging from non-AC, semi-sleeper/Volvo and even Mercedes buses. You could take government owned HPTDC or HRTC buses, which are usually more reliable.



### FROM MANDI TO OUR VILLAGES

#### Reaching THATTA

Private car: 35km  
Local bus: Mandi - Thatta (35km)

#### Reaching LAGSHAL

Private car: 45 km via IIT Mandi and 70 km via Bajaura  
Volvo bus: Drop at Bajaura - Lagshal (30km)

#### Reaching BHANUTHI & SHIKARI

Private car: 75km  
Volvo bus: Drop at Panarsa - Bhanuthi-Shikari (30km)

#### Reaching KALANG

Private car: 65km  
Local Bus: Mandi - Parashar - Kalang (65km)  
*Kalang is 3km ahead of Parashar Lake*

It is advisable to reach all the villages by **3pm**, till its bright daylight. **Expect the last mile to be a bit rough.** Your local host will help you get there if your conveyance isn't able to, or prepare to walk a kilometer or two.

Illustrations by Aishwarya Sehra @wonderfullyweird



Enjoy the tranquillity of nature through walks guided by local community. Our villages offer treks to Parashar Lake through undiscovered routes filled with crystal clear water streams, no human traffic and mesmerising views of Dhauladhar ranges!



## Places to Visit

### Parashar Lake & Temple

Parashar Lake is a sacred destination nestled among soaring, snowbound mountains of the Dhauladhar Ranges. The mystery of a floating island on the lake with mesmerizing vistas of snowclad Himalayas beckons you. A serene tranquillity echoes in the surroundings as the jade blue waters of the lake overlook river Beas. During the winter, the lake is frozen and the alpine grassland around it is entirely blanketed by snow.

Legend has it that the entire temple was built out of just **one Deodar tree** and was built by a child in day!



Parashar Rishi Temple is considered a gem of Himachali architecture. It was on the consecration of this temple in this vast seclusion, as a curiously attenuated pagoda, that the place came to be known as Hardwar. Dedicated to Rishi Parashar, the temple is unique as a representative of the three-storied multi-tiered slate roof and timber temple architecture characteristic of the mountains. Legend has it that the entire temple was built out of just one Deodar tree and was built by a child in day!

Historians believe the temple was either constructed or renovated on the orders of King Ban Sen who ruled over Mandi from 1301 to 1340 CE. Temple carvings depict folklore, traditions, animals and knotted serpents, reminiscent of the classical tradition of stone art translated in wood with same vigour and fluency.

### Tunga Mata Temple

Perched at an altitude of 2995 m above sea level, the temple is accessible through an easy 1.5-hour hike from the ecotourism village of Bhanuthi-Shikari. The devi shrine is revered by communities across the district of Mandi.



### Shukhdev Rishi Temple

The temple is dedicated to Rishi Shukhdev, known to be the grandson of Rishi Parashar. Situated on the hilltop at a distance of 1.5 km from ecotourism village of Thatta, the temple is a multi-tiered slate roof timber structure, similar to Parashar temple.

Carvings depicting various incarnations of Lord Vishnu from Satyug to Kalyug, from Rama to Kalki, featuring twenty-six characters are found at the entrance. Residents of Thatta helped in the restoration of the



temple and preserve it. It is believed that the ones who helped construct the temple were endowed with great craft skills and were sent by Shukhdev Rishi himself, to accomplish the task.

### Shikari Devi Peak

Shikari Devi peak is the highest point of Mandi district with an altitude of 3359 m. It is located at a distance of 90 km from Mandi town, passing through dense forests of Deodar and Pine. Temple of Shikari Devi, the Goddess of hunters, is a well-known temple open to the skies. The temple is mysteriously devoid of snow even as the entire region is snowbound in winters. The region is protected as the Shikari Devi Wildlife Sanctuary which



has immense ecological significance. A trek of 16km can be done from Shikari Mata temple to Kamrunag Lake.

## Rewalsar Lake

At a distance of 22 km from Mandi at an elevation of 1,360 m, the lake is significant for its association with Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist beliefs. It is a natural lake famous for floating reed islands and fish. According to legend, Chinese Buddhism originated from here. The lake is also known by the name “Sar” and is associated with the legend of Panadavas. Other six lakes around the Rewalsar Lake also



hold a special symbolic significance.

## Choti Kashi, Mandi Temples

Mandi is popularly called Choti Kashi as 81 stone temples dedicated to Lord Shiva and Goddess Kali, along the banks of River Beas and Sukheti Khad are found here. Among these 81 temples, the Bhoothnath, Trilokinath, Panchvaktra and Shyamakali are the most well-known.

The temples present notable examples of rock hewn architecture with beautiful stone carvings. Foundation date of many



of the temples is still unknown. Most of the temples were recognized and renovated in the reign of Ajber Sen, founder of the Mandi state, in 1526 CE.

According to legend, the Kamrunag Lake in Mandi resembles **Bhim's elbow**. The region thus came to be known as Kamru Valley. Kamrunag Lake can be reached through a trek of 16km from Shikari Mata temple.



Illustrations by Aishwarya Sehra @wonderfullyweird



Go on heritage walks to discover the rich cultural and natural heritage of the place you are visiting. Appreciate the temple architecture and some ancient heritage elements of the region through walks curated with artisans and craftsmen. Himalayan villages can be surprisingly rich with such bounty!

# Stuff to Do

## LONG TREKS

Take a day long hike to Parashar Lake from our homestays:

### FROM THATTA

Easy | 10 km | 5 - 7 hrs

Trek along Parashar Khad (stream) with splendid Himalayan views. On the way, visit Shukhdev Rishi Temple and Sukhsar Lake. Spot Pink Rhododendron in the spring from March-April.

### FROM LAGSHAL

Easy-Moderate | 19 km | 9 - 11hrs

Visit Narayan Devta and Old Tunga Mata Temple. Relax at the waterfalls on the way - Chota Jamunala and Bada Jamunala and walk through the region's most splendid forest trail! Spot Black/White Guchi (wild mushroom) on the way. Also spot Spotted Forktail, Kalij Pheasant, Spotted Dove, Himalayan Vulture, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Shikra, Jungle fowl and Eagles. You could also visit the Khokan Wildlife Sanctuary.

### FROM BHANUTHI-SHIKARI

Easy-Moderate | 8 km | 6 - 8 hrs

Visit Tunga Mata Temple (steep climb) followed by a walk through lush meadows and grasslands all along. Rest at the Darba, the camp of the Van Gujars (shepherds). Spot wild strawberries in summer and monsoon season. Also spot Porcupine, Bear, Kakad (wild deer).



## SHORT TREKS

These are for travellers who prefer lighter treks without too much difficulty, but at the same time offer abundant natural pleasure:

### FROM THATTA

Easy | 3 km

Trek upto Magrod which is enroute Parashar Lake.

### FROM LAGSHAL

Easy | 4-5 km

Khokan Wildlife Sanctuary (Please take permission in advance from Forest Department/ Village Panchayat. You can contact the cluster manager for this.)

### FROM KALANG

Easy

- Parashar Lake is right opposite Kalang village - 4 km
- Trek to Shehla Mata trek - 7 km towards Lagshal
- Maahudaag - 3 km towards Bhanuthi

### FROM BHANUTHI-SHIKARI

Easy-Moderate

- Trek up to Tunga Mata temple - 1.5km
- A short snow trek from Pub to Bhanuthi-Shikari village during the winter will also delight enthusiastic travelers! This is about 3km long and you may ask your local host for guidance!

Difficulty Level for Treks: **Easy to Moderate**. The path offers mixed terrain filled with well-maintained as well as rugged tracks. These treks are suitable for **regular walkers** who are generally fit.



We present to you a wide range of **uniquely designed** activities to choose from. The brochures and modules have been prepared by **Development Alternatives** along with their partners and the local community. Each village is unique and gives you an experience of rural life sprinkled with **adventure, heritage and tranquility**. Get your tour customized and select from our **theme-based activities**. If you wish to stay longer and explore more options to be involved, please contact our cluster manager.

## ACTIVITIES

Here is a list of stuff that you could do while in the **Hidden Hamlets of Thatta, Lagshal, Bhanuthi- Shikari and Kalang**:

### 1. HERITAGE WALK

Take a Heritage Walk around the villages in the company of a local guide, who will share insights and stories all along the route. The tour will be about 2-3 hours where one will witness village lifestyle, various traditional elements of their culture and architecture of the village. Refer to the heritage section for more details.

### 2. CULINARY & AGRICULTURAL TOUR

Experience local Mandyali cuisine and understand how farming is an essential lifestyle activity in our bountiful villages. Lunch and tea will be organized during this tour. Get your hands dirty in fields and relish the old charm of plucking your own veggies and cooking a local meal.

### 3. LONG TREK TO PARASHAR LAKE

All our villages are well connected with Parashar Lake through a trek/hike documented by us along with support from the locals and the Forest Department, Mandi. The trails are mostly well-maintained with rugged stretches and several resting points on the way. Refer to the trek section for more details. What are your trekking options?

- Trek up as per your will and return to your homestay (inform your guide and homestay owner a night before)
- Trek up till Parashar Lake and stay at the Forest Department camps near the lake
- Trek to another village for a more enriching experience. Contact the cluster manager for your extended travel.

### 4. SHORT TREKS

If you are looking for thrill but also a lighter trek, this is the perfect option for you. In each village we offer multiple short treks for a duration of 4-5 hours (to and fro). Refer to the trek section for more details.

### 5. A DAY WITH RINGAL ARTISANS

Spend your day with Ringal artists and create your own product with their guidance or just listen to their stories and the process of making the product. Ringalcraft is a dying art form of Himalayan states practiced by local experts. Our artisans can make baskets, laundry bags, pen stands, jewelry boxes and the list can go on. Order your favourites right away!

### 6. A DAY WITH THE DEVTAS: SPIRITUAL TEMPLE TRAIL

Our villages have rich spiritual connect owing to the presence of Sage Parashar and the local guiding deities or devtas. Apart from Parashar temple, there are many other hidden gems. The tour will be guided by priests in village Thatta, making it a unique experience for travellers to connect with the devta culture of the village.

### 7. STAR GAZING

We have trained guides to help you assist in capturing and spotting the Milky Way. Our guides have identified few spots in the village for making your experience a memorable

one. So, take a break from the city and book a star gazing experience to witness clear night skies.

### SOME OTHER THINGS YOU COULD DO:

- Take the animals out grazing, first thing in the morning.
- Go for long, lazy walks or hikes.
- Visit shrines in the villages and admire Kath-Khunni architecture, while experiencing temple rituals
- Help out in the fields, weeding, planting or harvesting.
- Go birding with our trained guide.
- Take a walk to appreciate nature, with our guide.
- Take a guided heritage walk.
- Join the weaving group and learn the basics.
- Assist in the kitchen and know about recipes and ingredients.
- Volunteer in the local school or community space.
- Sway to the beats of Nati, local dance of Himachal Pradesh.

Please consult with your homestay manager about stuff that is happening and where you would fit in.



## WHAT TO BUY

We connect you with farmers and artisans for buying organic agricultural produce and handicrafts of the region.

Our products are listed on NotOnMart. NotOnMart is an initiative by NotOnMap that directly connects consumers to producers. Scan the QR code or visit the link below to buy our products in NotOnMart:



[www.notonmart.com](http://www.notonmart.com)

Order in from their website and get your products home delivered directly from farmers and artisans!

Tag us on social media and share your photos with products to encourage your friends and family and support rural farmers and artisans.

Our range of products include:

### Chemical-free Agricultural Produce:

- Red Rice
- Ghee
- Kodo Millet
- Pahadi Rajmah (kidney beans)
- Maize Flour
- Walnut

### Ringal Handicrafts:

- Multi-purpose baskets
- Pen-stand
- Jewelry box
- Chappati box

We also customize products as per customers' demand!



## Traditional elements of a life in a Himachali Village

### Gharaat

Traditional stone-based, water operated flour mill that uses the energy of running water to mill grains into flour. Perceived to be healthier as the grinding is both slow and gradual, reducing heat-based loss of nutrients as in an electrical mill.

### Ulkhayara

Structures for pounding rice are found within the house compounds. A traditional way of dehusking rice, mostly done by women of the village. It has higher nutritional value compared to fully polished rice from the mill. Also used to powder spices and grains.

### Kothar

A traditional granary, Kothar is made of local wood and is used to store grains such as rice, wheat, pulses etc. The size of the Kothar depends upon the wealth of the family.

### Himachali Architecture

Explore the rich history, vibrant traditions, Himachali architecture and culinary traditions with the locals. The houses have a perfect blend of traditional and modern elements using local materials like stone, slate, mud and wood along with a breath-taking view of the mountains from the windows.

### Goshala

Cattle hold a special significance for the families in Indian villages. Their shelter is designed to keep them warm and accessible!



# Volunteer Programme: TRAVEL WITH A PURPOSE

Indulge in daily chores of locals to get a hands on experience of the Pahadi life. Explore village culture and lifestyle to give a new meaning to your travel experience. More details in the following page!

EXPLORE PARASHAR



NMHS



## RESPONSIBLE TOURISM: SWITCHING TO SUSTAINABILITY

# PARASHAR ECOTOURISM INITIATIVE RESPONSIBLE ECO-TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

*Calling out to leaders, science and social science researchers, young professionals, budding social entrepreneurs and liberal arts practitioners to visit culturally and ecologically rich Himalayan villages for research, internships and learning!*



**SUPPORT LOCAL ECONOMY**  
#VOCALFORLOCAL | CREATE AND BUY!  
Organic Agri Produce- pahadi ghee, rajmah, kodra, akhrot, fresh wild edible produce  
Handicrafts made by Artisans- lamps, multi purpose baskets, pen stands, jewelry boxes

### THE SKY IS THE LIMIT - DESIGN YOUR PROJECTS, CO-CREATE AND LEARN!

Understand local heritage and **pagoda-style architecture** from the local craftsmen and artisans

**Research and document the biodiversity** - go on walks and hikes to explore the rich flora and fauna, learn from the locals

Learn about farming **organically and seasonally**, garner traditional knowledge and wisdom through growing and cooking your own food

**Volunteering opportunity** with our **Ecotourism society** for skilled management researchers/ professionals to study, support and strengthen community-tourism enterprises

FOR MORE DETAILS  
Nikhil Tiwary - 9789958289 [nikhiltiwary007@gmail.com](mailto:nikhiltiwary007@gmail.com)  
Tanya Issar - [issar@devait.org](mailto:issar@devait.org)  
Development Alternatives B-32 TARA Crescent, Qutub Institutional Area

EXPLORE PARASHAR



The art of slow travel stems from slow movement, widely being accepted as a new norm where travel is more on the lines of developing an emotional connect with local community, nature, cultural, heritage and food.



## What to Eat

### Mandyali Dham, of course!

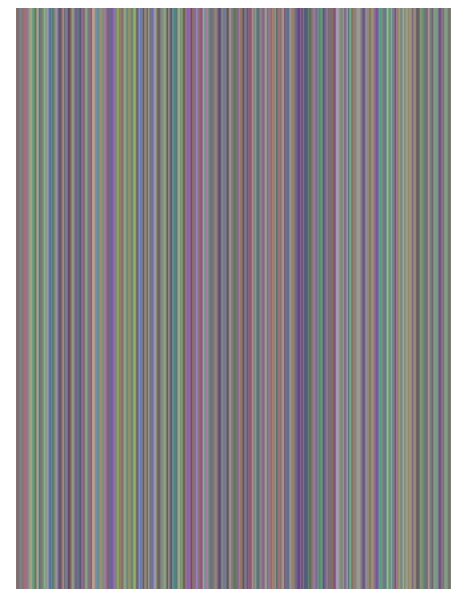
Food culture in most Himalayan villages is influenced by seasonal variations and availability of local produce. This produce could be farmed by the families themselves or could be foraged and collected from the wild patches around. People do not rely on mass produced, packaged food.

If you're interested in learning about the food culture, please seek permission and enter the home kitchen after taking off your shoes. You could pose questions to your hosts or initiate conversations with people if they're interested (they mostly are!) on ingredients and recipes.

In the **Hidden Hamlets** of **Thatta, Lagshal, Bhanuthi- Shikari** and **Kalang**, dairy and legumes constitute a major part of people's diets. Rajma, Urad Dal and Dal Vadis (locally called Sepubadi) are popular. Local grains such as rice, wheat, barley, corn and millets (barnyard,

kodo and amaranth) are also the usual fare. Ghee is the star of almost every dish - made with local pasture-fed cattle milk, churned and extracted at home using wood fires. You have to taste it to appreciate it!

While grains, dairy and pulses/legumes can be stored for longer periods of time, vegetables are



highly seasonal! Pumpkin and gourd dominate in the summer and monsoon; fiddlehead fern (lingdi) and root tubers are common in the Monsoon; greens such as nettle, mustard, spinach are relished in the winter along with crucifers such as cauliflower and cabbage. This area is also known for its massive yields of fresh peas in season!

The best fruits here are the wild ones – taste fresh **kafal** (tiny, local berries) off the tree and homemade **Rhododendron sherbet** in summer.

The tempering and flavours are complex but subtle. For an enhanced experience – ask to be served on pattals (plates made of local leaves) – it adds subtly to the flavour of the food.

All these elements combine in a traditional Mandiyali feast called Dham – a combination of local delicacies served on a platter with flavours ranging from spicy to mellow to sweet, it consists of a balanced meal with rice, rajma (kidney beans), kadhi or jhol (curd/yogurt-based gravy), pumpkin, sepubadi (dried lentil bits cooked in a gravy), pickle, salad and a local sweet.

Fruits can easily be found if you're in the higher reaches near an orchard. Trees of apples, pears, peaches and apricots are seen commonly in the villages. But the best fruits here are the wild ones – taste fresh kafal (tiny, local berries) off the tree and homemade Rhododendron sherbet in summer.

*(Most people prefer to cook and serve vegetarian fare.)*



Illustrations by Aishwarya Sehra @wonderfullyweird

Treat yourself to local pahadi food - grown without chemicals and using traditional methods. Give yourself a boost of health and taste! Shun the modern way of eating and enjoy your meal in truly traditional way by sitting on floor whilst also having a great time with the family.





## Where to Stay

### Cozy Village Homestays!

Homestays are the preferred accommodation where you get to live like a local in village homes, make conversations, eat home-grown food

and participate in village life. These homestays are family-run, mainly by women, who have received basic hospitality training. Hospitality, however, is a part of Himachali culture, and here you will be well looked after.

#### WHAT OUR HOMESTAYS OFFER:

- An experience of village life
- Clean, hygienic and cozy rooms
- Outdoor spaces
- Homestay hosts with basic hospitality skills
- Extra mattresses on request
- Clean basic toilets and bathrooms
- Home grown and home cooked, fresh and healthy food
- Chai (Tea), anytime you ask!
- Heater, hot water and bonfire
- Love and affection..

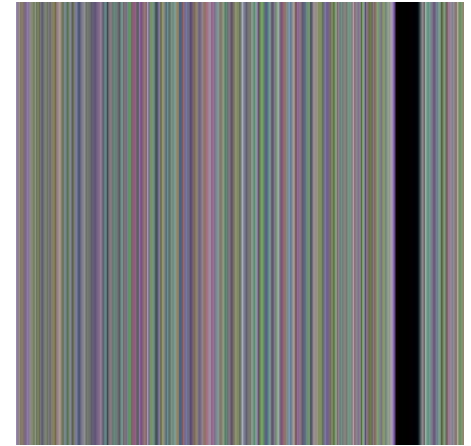
For booking your stay at homestays mentioned here, get in touch with **NotOnMap**

Contact details:  
**+91-84484-45502**  
**www.notonmap.com**  
**info@notonmap.com**

## Whistling Pines Homestay

### VILLAGE BHANUTHI

Dharam Singh and Lata Devi have beautiful house made of wood and local stones, with four rooms available for travellers. They own an apple orchard, farmland and cattle within the village. Experience simple, traditional Himachali lifestyle when you stay with them!



## Enchanted Escape

### VILLAGE KALANG

Kuram Dev and Bimla Devi are organic farmers. Kuram Dev is a great crafts person and a captivating storyteller. He also practices local ayurvedic treatments side by side.



## Into The Wild

### VILLAGE KALANG

Lal Singh and Beena Devi are organic farmers and crafts people. They are jovial in nature and Mr. Singh is the local champion of the community.



## Lagshal Valley Homestay

### VILLAGE LAGSHAL

Duni Chand and Sushma Devi live in a joint family of eight loving members. While Sushma Devi looks after their own farmlands, Duni Chand works as a contractor. They also own a 100+ years old ancestral home.



## Himalayan Hue Homestay

### VILLAGE LAGSHAL

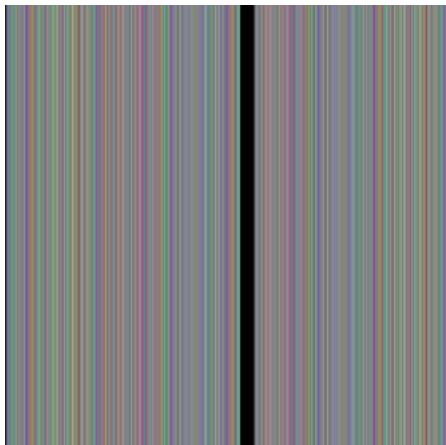
Kuram Chand is a man of many talents. His wife Narkali Devi works at a local school and cooks delicious food. Kuram Chand is a hard working farmer and also a driver. He dabbles in story telling and is a fun loving person. The family leads a simple Pahadi life.



## Evergreen Abode

### VILLAGE SHIKARI

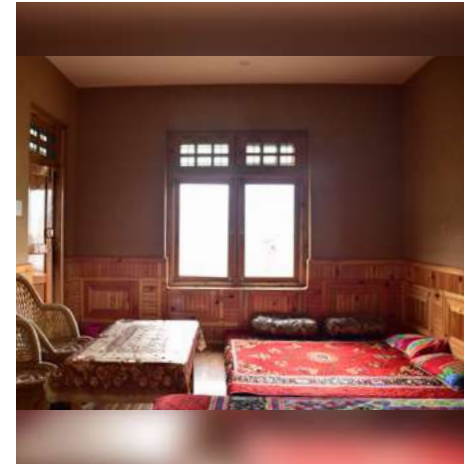
Tek Singh and Shakuntala Devi are pastoral farmers and they have their own little kitchen garden. Tek Singh loves storytelling and also runs a business selling Guchi, a wild edible mushroom and one of the most expensive mushrooms in the world. Let him know beforehand if you wish to savour it!



## Sukhdev Rishi Homestay

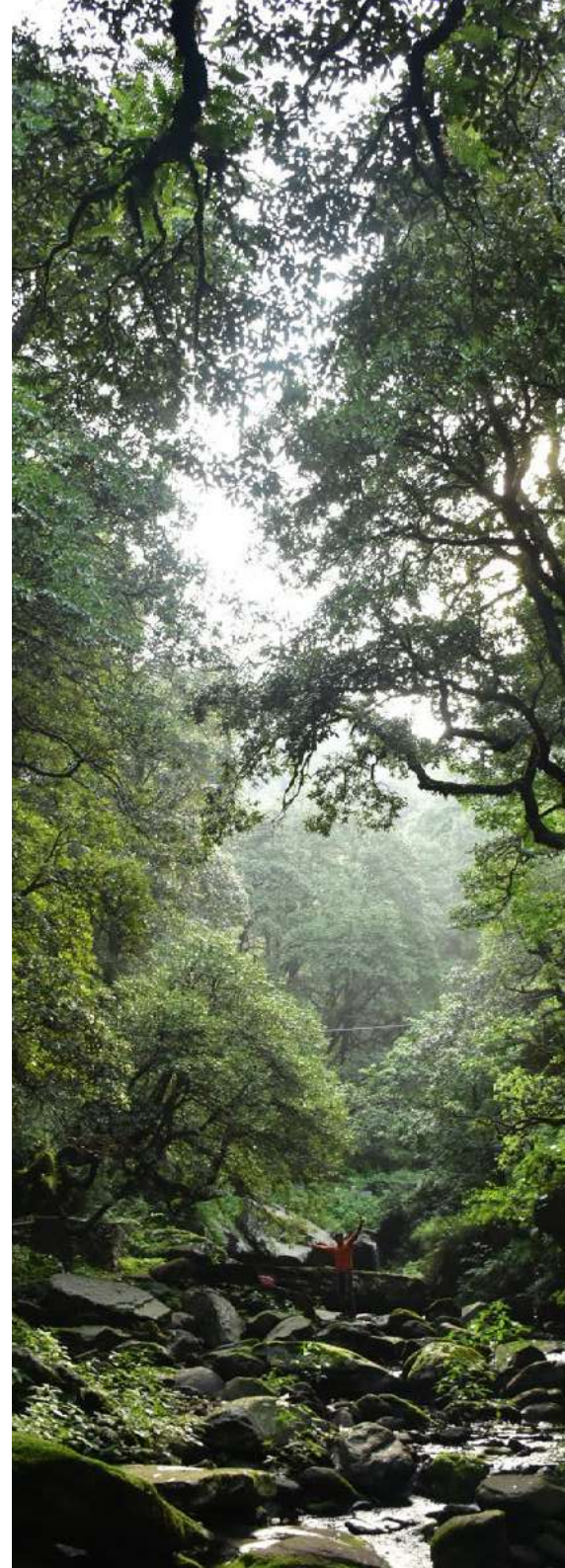
### VILLAGE THATTA

Jhabe Ram and Bhyansaru Devi are organic farmers and live a simple life. They are a traditional Pahadi family and have seen the village evolve over many decades. Jhabe Ram is a brilliant Nati performer, dance along to make your evenings memorable with a bonfire and picturesque views from the verandah.





On your vacation, stay in local homestays that offer warm hospitality and insight into local life and culture. These homestays are built in kath-kuni style traditional architecture with wooden interiors to give you a warm cozy ambience.



# Parashar Ecotourism Initiative

We function as an association between the local Ecotourism Society (Rishi Parashar Paryatan evam Vikas Samiti) guided by Development Alternatives, Center for Sustainable Development and NotOnMap.

**For travel enquiry contact:**

**NotOnMap**  
+91-84484-45502  
www.notonmap.com  
info@notonmap.com



**Rishi Parashar Paryatan evam Vikas Samiti**

c/o Center for Sustainable Development (CSD),  
Sundernagar, Himachal Pradesh  
For any local guidance, please contact  
Jitender Verma, President, CSD  
+91-94184-59434  
www.censud.org  
jitender@censud.org

**Taxi Service at Mandi**

Him White cabs: +91-94181-156918

**Bus Stand**

Mandi Bus Stand - 0190-523-5538



# Preparing for a Trip

Here are a few general suggestions on how to prepare for walking trails. Here is a checklist on how you might prepare for any walking trail:

- You must ensure that you and your companions are physically fit and capable of completing the trip.
- Take note of terrain descriptions and the mileage of the various legs of the journey.
- Carry both sun protection and wet weather protection if you are not used to the weather in the mountains.
- When hungry, buy food, preferably, from village communities and homes. You could also carry your own food in a steel tiffin-box. We strongly advise that you carry a steel tumbler as well, for drinking tea/water. Buying food and beverages in disposables generates trash and harms your health too.
- Please avoid buying bottled

water, which generates unwanted trash. Carry a steel bottle and take a refill where you find one.

- If you are part of a diverse group, you must carry basic medication needed by your companions.
- Check if you are wearing suitable walking shoes. Never walk in new shoes. In the Monsoon, do not forget to carry salt and leech proof socks.

## In General...

Please remember the following:

- Please carry rucksacks with cushioned shoulder straps. The bag should be spacious enough to carry all the essentials. Refrain from overloading.
- To prevent insect bite, do wear full-sleeved shirts and trousers. The weather in the mountains can change any moment. Light woolen clothing must be carried. Please wear earthy colours.

- Be sensitive to religious spaces. Shoes must be removed at the edge of any religious sanctuary.
- Please note that you are a guest, a visitor. Whether people litter or keep surroundings clean is their prerogative. We can politely correct them if they keep surroundings unclean. The onus of leaving the place as you found it, however, rests on you. Treat people with respect and practice “leave-no-traces” travel.
- Take time out to communicate with people, especially the elderly. They are the real intangible heritage and because of their history has come to be.
- And finally, avoid being intrusive. Ask before taking pictures.

## Walking Trip Checklist

1. This book/ Bird Guide/ Insect Guide/ Butterfly Guide or any other resource, depending on your area of interest
2. Steel or copper water bottle.
3. Dry Food, Chocolate
4. Pen or pencil
5. Cap
6. Sunglasses
7. Camera
8. A smart phone for directions and positioning
9. Basic medicines for a group
10. Curiosity and Stamina

## Carrying a First Aid Kit – Contents’ Checklist

1. A pair of scissors
2. Tweezers
3. Cotton and Bandage
4. Glucose
5. Hand Sanitizer
6. Betadine
7. Electrolytes
8. Ibuprofen (for inflammation, pain)
9. Paracetamol (for fevers, headache)
10. Imodium (for easing Diarrhoea)
11. Stemetil (for prevention and treatment of mountain sickness)
12. Diamox (for prevention and treatment of acute mountain sickness)
13. A strip of antibiotic tablets

## In the Mountains...

The hills and valleys are endowments that are rare and precious. We realize that you have decided to undertake these journeys because you value this precious natural and built heritage. We sincerely hope you will help us reduce the baggage of mass, unregulated tourism and leave the sites in their pristine form, for future visitors and your own children and grandchildren to enjoy.

## In the Forests...

- Make sure that you bring your waste with you when you return.
- For washing and cooking, please do it at least 30 m away from water bodies. Do not use chemical soap.
- Do not try to feed or touch fauna.
- Avoid using flash while taking pictures.
- While camping, do not discard waste into water bodies or into the open
- Talk softly. If you need to draw attention, whistle, or use an insect sound or an animal call.

Our village **Thatta** has been awarded for its cleanliness. Please help us in **maintaining that status!**

- If the path is narrow, walk single file. Do not trample over plants on the edges.
- Never dare nature. Be adventurous but bathe only on designated spaces and not anywhere along rivers. Attempt a short cut if one is clearly visible, but do not climb precarious slopes, if not essential.

## Amongst People...

- Respect people and their traditions.
- Avail services of local guides and home stay options, as much as possible. Make sure that when you spend, benefits flow into the local economy.

Gently remind fellow travellers too, if they do not follow the above. Please heed all warnings given by guides.



Illustrations by Aishwarya Sehra @wonderfullyweird



Travel is life-altering and eye-opening. It breaks down borders and allows us to experience cultures that are different from our own. Share meaningful moments with local people, help out the communities when you can, be aware of where your money is being spent and do not leave anything behind (waste) but a piece of your heart. Happy and responsible travel to you!



# The Project

and the FORCE BEHIND it

The National Mission on Himalayan Studies aims to support and enhance innovative studies and related knowledge interventions to sustain and benefit the ecological, natural, cultural and socio-economic

assets of the Indian Himalayan Region. In alignment with the mission, Development Alternatives is implementing a project in two village clusters in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh to explore and generate livelihoods through ecotourism activities.

## Development Alternatives



Development Alternatives (DA) is a premier social enterprise with a global presence in the fields of green economic development, social empowerment and environmental management. It is credited with numerous innovations in clean technology and delivery systems that help create sustainable livelihoods in the developing world. DA focuses

on empowering communities through strengthening people's institutions and facilitating their access to basic needs; enabling economic opportunities through skill development for green jobs and enterprise creation; and promoting low carbon pathways for development through natural resource management models and clean technology solutions.

## Been There Doon That?



Been There Doon That (BTDT) seeks to bring communities to the centerstage of travel economies by promoting a brand of slow tourism, with walking as its core philosophy. We ask travelers to emerge from their comfort zone and convince them that the mountains are best explored on foot. The true experience of travel, we tell them, comes from walking

through a village, tasting local cuisines and understanding a different way of life. This experience of living with nature comes essentially from walking and imbibing at nature's pace. We strive that village communities organize themselves to supplement their incomes through responsible tourism, thereby also regenerating pride in their culture and traditions.

## NotOnMap



NotOnMap is a socially driven initiative generating alternative livelihood & minimizing unskilled migration from traditional villages. Committed to promoting community based responsible tourism, NotOnMap identifies new destinations, preserves cultural assets, facilitates travellers access to these locations through community-

oriented approach in order to ensure that rural folk, especially women and those from marginalized communities, earn a livelihood and feel empowered and travellers get a once-in-a-lifetime experience. NotOnMap's value propositions include livelihood generation, capacity building and cultural preservation.

## Centre for Sustainable Development



Centre for Sustainable Development is a Himachal Pradesh based non-profit working in research and development. CSD has an inter-sectoral approach to development

and has activities in several interrelated areas of Agriculture, Ecotourism, Solar lighting, Water management, DRR, Forestry, and Rural Development.

— PARASHAR ECOTOURISM INITIATIVE —

# The Mystical PARASHAR LAKE

This little book is an effort to compile all the information you may need while planning your visit to our **Hidden Hamlets**. While all the standard information on places to visit, options on where to stay, what to eat is in here, we also give suggestions on package tours and do's and don'ts for the conscious traveller. Through the Parashar Ecotourism Initiative, we are trying to promote a unique brand of slow tourism, with walking as its core philosophy.

For more information and bookings, scan the QR code or visit the link below:

[www.notonmap.com](http://www.notonmap.com)



NMHS



Centre for  
Sustainable  
Development



Development Alternatives