

Binsar diary

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1. Binsar is a beautiful hill station in Almora district in State of Uttarakhand. It is inside a forest sanctuary and at an elevation of 2400 m above sea level. It is one of the highest hill stations in Kumaon region. From Almora it is about 35 kms distance and takes almost 1.5 hours to reach through winding narrow mountain roads.
2. We had gone to this place in October 2009. The route we took was from Bareilly to Binsar via Bhowali. I had to deliver a couple of lectures at Bareilly in Invertis Business School and thought would take this opportunity to visit the abode of lord Shiva.
3. I chose Binsar because one can see a huge range of Himalayas when there are no clouds. Obviously lord Shiva smiled on us and we were blessed with a clear view of the Himalayas during our stay.



4. The best place in Binsar to get a fantastic view of the Himalayan range is from the KMVN rest house situated at the end of the road inside the Binsar wildlife sanctuary. The terrace of this rest house provides an excellent view of Trishul, Nanda Devi (the 4th highest peak in the world) and Panchchuli peaks - an expanse of about 300-500 km of Himalayan range. The sky was absolutely clear and blue with hardly any trace of dust or haziness and the weather was pretty cold with temperature touching 6-7⁰C in early morning.

5. The view from the KMVN rest house is fantastic and one gets a feeling that these beautiful snow clad peaks are just a few km away. Nevertheless everything else about this guest house is ordinary and overpriced. With a tariff of Rs. 1,600/night one gets only 2-3 hours of electricity at night from a polluting genset; no charging facility for cell phones in the rooms, ordinary lunch priced at Rs. 170/person, one bucket per person of hot water in the morning; and too much commotion and noise from the hordes of tourists. All these things are not very conducive to soak in the beauty of Himalayas. Unfortunately in the absence of any other facility with such a view this is the best one has presently.



6. Other alternative is a nice quiet Government Forest Rest House, but the view is not very good since the snow-clad peaks are not visible from it.. Nevertheless the whole range is visible from Zero Point which is the highest place in Binsar and is half an hour walk uphill from the rest houses. Also there are no arrangements of ready made cooked food in the rest house. One has to take provisions from Almora and then request the caretaker to cook the food.
7. An unintended but welcome outcome of no electricity at night was the beautiful starlit night sky. I have rarely seen stars so bright and the Milky Way arch was spread 180° in the sky. Though the valley below had electricity but the light was dim enough to enjoy the star gazing.

8. The Binsar wildlife sanctuary is supposed to be populated by panthers, barking deer, wild boars, monkeys and various birds. Hence we went trekking in it with a local guide. The trek was exhilarating where most of the times we were walking on ledges just the width of our feet. Not being used to walking on such treacherous paths, many times we had to either sit or crawl on all fours. We went up and down a 1000 feet but were unable to see any wildlife except a fat snail and a ladybird beetle! The forest was thick



but by 10-11 am most of the wildlife must have gone further down to rest. Some of the other tourists claimed to have spotted some wild life early in the morning and at dusk. In any case two to three hours of walk was a good exercise and brought on tremendous perspiration and pumped the heart rate to a maximum!

9. Later on in our journey we saw quite a few beautiful birds like brown-fronted wood pecker, great tree pie and the magnificent red-billed blue magpie with huge tail.

10. On the second day we were fortunate enough to see a massive avalanche on one side of the Nanda Devi East peak. I was sitting on the terrace in late morning watching the clear view of the Himalayas when suddenly I saw a huge snowdrift or dust cloud above the peak as if it had come out of the blue and with wind it was being blown only to one side. Then suddenly I saw a huge black notch develop on the side of the peak. With binoculars we could see a huge chunk of snow gone. The next day the notch was covered with snow but the depression remained. These avalanches keep on happening periodically in these mountains but observing it first hand and on such large scale was very exhilarating.



8. The roads in Uttarakhand are quite good so even after the rains the journey on them was quite comfortable. However the roads in UP were a different matter altogether. For example our journey from Bhowali to Delhi – a distance of 312 km took us 9 hours both because of road conditions and the chaotic traffic near Rampur and in Delhi.

9. With mobile phones and motor cycles the youngsters are really mobile. For example the kitchen staff of KMVN did not bat an eyelid before going to Almora for purchasing small provisions. An hour's journey one way did not bother them and they were used to it. This journey was done daily since KMVN guest house did not have any refrigerator for keeping butter, paneer or vegetables. A small solar- powered refrigerator could have been sufficient.
10. The Highway dhabas on Moradabad-Delhi route are tourists' delight. We had lunch at one "Gyani" dhaba and the food was excellent and very tasty. The bill for two came to Rs. 140/-. Such cheap and wholesome food is quite common in North India.
11. We broke our long journey from Binsar to Delhi (which could have taken us about 12 hours by road) by staying in the beautiful bungalow of Shri. K. C. Pant at Bhowali. The bungalow is on one of the hills of Bhowali, surrounded by forest and a sizeable area of land and offers an excellent and quiet solitude away from the hubbub of big towns like Bhimtal.
12. Staying in Bhowali provided us an opportunity to see Bhimtal (a poor cousin of Nainital) and Sat Tal which were very green with overflowing water in the lakes.
13. Our journey from Almora to Bhowali was along the beautiful river Kosi. In some places it turns into white rapids and provides a lovely sight with tall Himalayan peaks in the background. Because of excellent rains this year most of the rivers and lakes were running full.



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