Himalayas

Name

The name of the range derives from the Sanskrit Himālaya (हिमालय, "Abode of Snow"), from himá (हिम, "snow") and ā-laya (आलय, "receptacle, dwelling"). They are now known as the "Himalaya Mountains", usually shortened to the "Himalayas". Formerly, they were described in the singular as the Himalaya. This was also previously transcribed Himmaleh, as in Emily Dickinson's poetry and Henry David Thoreau's essays.

The mountains are known as the Himālaya in Nepali and Hindi (both written हिमालय), the Himalaya (ཧི་མ་ལ་ཡ་) or 'The Land of Snow' (གངས་ཅན་ལྗོངས་) in Tibetan, the Himāliyah Mountain Range (Urdu: سلسلہ کوہ ہمالیہ‎) in Urdu and the Ximalaya Mountain Range (Chinese: 喜馬拉雅山脈; pinyin: Xǐmǎlāyǎ Shānmài) in Chinese.

Geography and key features

In the middle of the great curve of the Himalayan mountains lie the 8,000 m (26,000 ft) peaks of Dhaulagiri and Annapurna in Nepal, separated by the Kali Gandaki Gorge. The gorge splits the Himalayas into Western and Eastern sections both ecologically and orographically – the pass at the head of the Kali Gandaki, the Kora La is the lowest point on the ridgeline between Everest and K2 (the highest peak of Pakistan). To the east of Annapurna are the 8,000 m (5.0 mi) peaks of Manaslu and across the border in Tibet, Shishapangma. To the south of these lies Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal and the largest city in the Himalayas. East of the Kathmandu Valley lies valley of the Bhote/Sun Kosi river which rises in Tibet and provides the main overland route between Nepal and China – the Araniko Highway/China National Highway 318. Further east is the Mahalangur Himal with four of the world's six highest mountains, including the highest: Cho Oyu, Everest, Lhotse and Makalu. The Khumbu region, popular for trekking, is found here on the south-western approaches to Everest. The Arun river drains the northern slopes of these mountains, before turning south and flowing through the range to the east of Makalu.

In the far east of Nepal, the Himalayas rise to the Kanchenjunga massif on the border with India, the third highest mountain in the world, the most easterly 8,000 m (26,000 ft) summit and the second highest point of India. The eastern side of Kanchenjunga is in the Indian state of Sikkim. Formerly an independent Kingdom, it lies on the main route from India to Lhasa, Tibet, which passes over the Nathu La pass into Tibet. East of Sikkim lies the ancient Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan. The highest mountain in Bhutan is Gangkhar Puensum, which is also a strong candidate for the highest unclimbed mountain in the world. The Himalayas here are becoming increasingly rugged with heavily forested steep valleys. The Himalayas continue, turning slightly northeast, through the Indian State of Arunachal Pradesh as well as Tibet, before reaching their easterly conclusion in the peak of Namche Barwa, situated in Tibet inside the great bend of the Yarlang Tsangpo river. On the other side of the Tsangpo, to the east, are the Kangri Garpo mountains. The high mountains to the north of the Tsangpo including Gyala Peri, however, are also sometimes also included in the Himalayas.

Going west from Dhaulagiri, Western Nepal is somewhat remote and lacks major high mountains, but is home to Rara Lake, the largest lake in Nepal. The Karnali River rises in Tibet but cuts through the center of the region. Further west, the border with India follows the Sarda River and provides a trade route into China, where on the Tibetan plateau lies the high peak of Gurla Mandhata. Just across Lake Manasarovar from this lies the sacred Mount Kailash, which stands close to the source of the four main rivers of Himalayas and is revered in Hinduism, Buddhism, Sufism, Jainism, and Bonpo. In the newly created Indian state of Uttarkhand, the Himalayas rise again as the Garhwal Himalayas with the high peaks of Nanda Devi and Kamet. The state is also an important pilgrimage destination, with the source of the Ganges at Gangotri and the Yamuna at Yamunotri, and the temples at Badrinath and Kedarnath.

The next Himalayan Indian state, Himachal Pradesh, it is noted for its hill stations, particularly Shimla, the summer capital of the British Raj, and Dharmasala, the centre of the Tibetan community in exile in India. This area marks the start of the Punjab Himalaya and the Sutlej river, the most easterly of the five tributaries of the Indus, cuts through the range here. Further west, the Himalayas form most of the southern portion of the Indian administered State of Jammu & Kashmir. The twin peaks of Nun Kun are the only mountains over 7,000 m (4.3 mi) in this part of the Himalayas. Beyond lies the renown Kashmir Valley and the town and lakes of Srinagar. Finally, the Himalayas reach their western end in the dramatic 8000 m peak of Nanga Parbat, which rises over 8,000 m (26,000 ft) above the Indus valley and is the most westerly of the 8000 m summits. The western end terminates at a magnificent point near Nanga Parbat (killer mountain) where Karakoram, Himalayas and Hindu Kush ranges intersects. It's situated in the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

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