

Fall Semester in India

Course Description

Spend a semester immersing yourself in the culture and landscape of the Indian Himalayas. From towering peaks to the rushing waters of the Kali River, you'll challenge yourself and grow as a leader while developing outdoor leadership, and intercultural skills. If you're seeking an experience beyond the tourist track, this is the course for you.

Features

- Duration: 80 days
- Course sections: Whitewater rafting, cultural, backpacking, and Wilderness First Aid
- Average group size: 12-15 students / 2-3 instructors
- Average age: 20 / Minimum age: 18
- Average pack weight: 45-60 pounds
- Opportunity for intercultural exchange on a homestay with a local family
- Opportunity for students to travel in small groups independent of instructors at the end of the backpacking section (based on instructor discretion)
- Certifications: 24-hour Wilderness First Aid with CPR

Overview

You'll spend your semester in the Kumaon and Garhwal regions of the Indian Himalayas, rugged, glacier-carved ranges famous for mountaineering, trekking, and whitewater rafting.

This course has several different skill sections that will introduce you to a variety of outdoor activities and leadership opportunities. Your journey will begin at New York's JFK International Airport with an NOLS staff member escorting you to the NOLS India base in Ranikhet. At an altitude of about 6,150 ft, Ranikhet is a quiet, wooded town to which you will occasionally return during the semester to transition between course sections.

Course Sections

Wilderness First Aid (WFA)

- Duration: 3 days
- Certifications: WFA and Adult & Child CPR
- Location: NOLS India in Ranikhet, India

The semester begins with a 3-day (24-hour) Wilderness First Aid (WFA) course. Presented by senior staff from [NOLS Wilderness Medicine](#), this course teaches you the appropriate treatment for conditions you may encounter in the backcountry, such as shock, head and chest injuries, fractures and dislocations, wounds and burns, illnesses caused by extremes of heat, cold and altitude, and medical conditions such as cardiac, respiratory and neurological emergencies. You will also participate in a 4-hour session on adult cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). This will prepare you to develop judgment and decision-making tools if the unexpected arises during your course.

Whitewater Rafting

- Duration: 16 days
- Elevation range: 3,000-5,000 feet
- Emphasis on paddling skills and risk management
- Watercraft used: paddle rafts and oar rigs
- Location: Kali River, Eastern Kumaon

This section takes place on the upper reaches of the Kali River, which also forms the international border between India and Nepal. The river flows past terraced farms of Kumaoni and Nepali villages, freshwater streams, sandy beaches, thick tropical jungles, and plantations.

Instruction begins with an overview of paddle rafting and captaining skills, loading and rigging the boats, mastering stroke combinations, and the communication skills needed to effectively maneuver the rafts. You'll then move on to advanced topics like hazard evaluation, hydrology, and rescue techniques. You will learn to assess rapids and apply risk management principles as you negotiate them. By the end of this section, you'll have the skills to paddle on whitewater wherever your adventures take you.

Cultural

- Duration: 12 days
- Stay with local host families
- Emphasis on cross-cultural exchange
- Classes will focus on local natural history and cultural studies
- Opportunities to practice Hindi language skills
- Location: Village of Sarmoli

The village of Majkhali will be the base for this experience. At an elevation of around 6,200 feet, this tiny hamlet near the town of Ranikhet offers an amazing view of the Greater Himalayas on a clear day. Pairing up with a fellow coursemate, you will live with a local family to experience firsthand what it takes to live in remote, rural India. You will engage in domestic chores and eat meals with your host family.

During the day, you will gather with your coursemates to learn about the natural history of India and the surrounding Himalayas. Classes will include subjects such as landscapes, forest use, and farming as a means of livelihood. You will also learn about local food products, the economy, and alpine ecology. If you are interested, there can be a focus on Hindi in this section. By the end of this section, you'll have had numerous opportunities to immerse yourself in the village's daily life and learn about a way of life different than your own.

Backpacking

- Duration: 40 days
- Route length: 85-110 miles
- Elevation range: 6,000-15,000 feet; a daily elevation change of 2-3,000 feet is common
- Wildlife you may see: Himalayan black bear, Himalayan tahr, fox, bharal (blue sheep) and barking deer
- Location: Eastern Garhwal and Kumaon Himalaya

This section will take you through the soaring mountains of the famed Himalayas. As you pass through forests of maple, oak, and rhododendron, you'll have frequent opportunities to interact with villages where cattle- and water buffalo-powered agriculture is still the main way of life.

Gaining and losing 2,000 feet of elevation on some days, you'll work hard traveling over steep, rocky terrain at high altitudes with all your gear on your back. You'll learn all the foundational skills of backpacking: camping, cooking, map reading, stove use, Leave No Trace techniques, and proper sanitation. These are skills that you can apply to travel in any environment.

Independent Student Group Travel

At the beginning of the course, your instructors will travel with you to teach travel skills including navigation, leadership, risk assessment, and decision-making. As you develop competence, instructors will gradually give you more responsibilities. Once you gain proficiency and demonstrate competence to your instructors, you may travel in student-led groups without instructors for up to a day at a time—we call this independent student-group travel.

Student Expedition

After successful practice with independent student group travel and if your instructors think your group is ready, your course may culminate in a multi-day student-led expedition. Usually, for the Student Expeditions you will travel in a group of five to seven students independently of instructors for 2-6 days (depending on location). This independent expedition caps off your NOLS experience and gives you a chance both to put into practice the skills you've learned and to appreciate the relationships you've formed with your expedition mates over the duration of your course.

The Student Expedition is carefully planned with your instructors and emergency plans are created for each group. Your instructors may be up to 24 hours away, but each group carries an electronic emergency communication device to alert the NOLS emergency response system in the event of an accident. Ultimately, in this course, you will develop the competence to travel independently in the wilderness and with your family and friends.

Weather and Other Challenges

Weather

Between sweltering New Delhi and the high mountains, temperatures can vary from 100° to 0° Fahrenheit. Mountain weather is unpredictable. On any given day, temperatures may fluctuate widely. Courses may experience snow and rain, or long stretches of sun and blue sky.

Terrain

Traveling in the Himalayas, you may cross raging rivers, scramble across boulder fields, and sweat your way up high mountain passes. You may travel over steep slopes of snow, loose rock, and exposed mountain trails. Prudent route selection and continual adherence to risk management practices will mitigate the risk of moving water, falling and rolling rock, falls on steep terrain, avalanches, altitude, and harsh weather.

Remoteness

You'll be miles away from the amenities of civilization, including telephones, ambulances, and hospitals. From these mountains, evacuation to modern medical facilities is difficult and may take several days. Packs can be heavy (45-60 pounds) and are carried over rugged terrain. Getting to and from the mountains requires travel on roads that could be in poor condition.

Please note that personal satellite phones and SPOT devices are illegal in India, so please do not bring one. Instructors will carry a NOLS cell phone and personal locator beacons (PLBs) for the course—communication technology that is appropriate to respond to emergencies that may arise.

Health

Staying healthy in Asia is frequently a challenge for visitors, and gastrointestinal distress is a common theme. Tropical environments harbor a wide variety of unusual diseases, such as malaria in lower elevations. In addition, some students may experience some initial discomfort from the effects of altitude.

Self-care, good hygiene habits, and consult your doctor for appropriate medication and inoculations go a long way in managing these risks. Assuming responsibility for yourself and your classmates will help make your expedition in these wild and beautiful mountains healthy and rewarding.

Learning Goals at NOLS

NOLS courses teach wilderness and leadership skills on expeditions and in classrooms. You will apply these skills to challenges in a supportive learning culture with high expectations. Your course will provide you with the opportunity for a positive, transformative experience intended to inspire you and empower you to act.

We craft NOLS courses so graduates will be able to assume leadership roles; live and travel in the outdoors; act with confidence and competence; respect and collaborate with others on expeditions, on teams, and in communities; care for themselves and

NOLS

others; understand their strengths, habits, and areas for growth; function under difficult circumstances; make informed and thoughtful decisions; communicate effectively; connect with natural places; and appreciate living simply.

We believe positive, ethical leaders change the world. Join NOLS and become one of these leaders.