

# RANIKHET

## Getting Around

Ranikhet is made for walking. The roads are not crowded, the forests are gorgeous, and the inclines are gentle.

Public transportation is available, although limited. You can get a seat in a shared sumo (paying between Rs. 10 and 20) on the highway that connects Ranikhet bazaar to the hotel (tell the driver you are going to "Kalika"). These will also take you further to Naini or Almora if you need to go there. A few local buses ply the route as well, but public transportation becomes hard to come by after 5 or 6 pm as drivers head home for the night.

## The Evenings

Ranikhet sleeps early. If you plan to be out later than 5 or 6 pm, make sure you figure out how you are getting home beforehand (or have a local taxi driver's number handy) as it can be hard to get shared cabs at that point.

Also, many locals here told me not to be out after sunset; the area is known for its panthers and leopards that periodically come out to hunt after dark, as well as for snakes in the long grasses. Stay safe.

## Welcome to Jayanti Residency



When I got to Jayanti in early July 2016, I had lots of questions about the little town I'd be calling home for a month. I was lucky to make some local friends right away, and I went on lots of long walks between drafts of my book, both of which became a wonderful window into this sleepy town. So as you get ready to come here, I thought you'd find some of this information useful.

## The Phone and Internet Situation in the Cottage

I have two SIM cards in my phone: Airtel and BSNL. The BSNL number gets excellent phone reception throughout the town, including in the cottage, but no internet connectivity. The Airtel number, has less phone connectivity (next to none in the cottage), but the internet works fine, albeit slowly, in the garden, and out in the town. Basically, it depends.

There are also several cyber cafes in Ranikhet bazaar where you can use the internet on one of their computers.

PS: Don't fall for what it says on the hotel's website. They do not, in fact, have wifi!

## Remember to bring

- Insect repellent, especially if you are here in the monsoon. The cottage has a lovely, wild garden, which is therefore full of lots of little biting critters
- Good walking shoes: this town is perfect for long walks, but as mentioned it is also full of leeches and other critters. Especially if you intend to go for forest hikes, make sure you have good shoes, hiking sandals may not cut it.
- A raincoat if you're here in the monsoon. The cottage has umbrellas, but the mountain monsoon rain has a way of soaking you anyway. If there is any chance you'll be lugging your laptop around in search of wifi, bring a waterproof case or a raincoat you can slip over your backpack!
- A good flashlight. Remember the snakes and other critters? Good to be able to see where you are going after dark, even if it's just up to the hotel restaurant. Also, power can go out for hours together, so I wouldn't rely just on my phone's flashlight.

## Umang Cooperative

Village Naini is home to Umang, a grassroots women's collective that sells lovely hand knitted woollens as well as various kinds of freshly made pickles and chutneys. It is a fair trade organisation, and profits go into a common collective pool. If you do head over to The Cafe at Naini, think about stopping in here (it's a five minute walk from the cafe).

## Printing and Photocopying

There are several shops where you can print or photocopy in Ranikhet. However, if you are printing or copying large volumes, costs become an issue; some places charge up to Rs. 10 per page for printing.

I found Bhatt Photostat at Gandhi Chowk (in Ranikhet bazaar) the best. Printouts cost Rs. 2 per page if you take him a pen drive with your work, a bit more if you email it to him, and he will spiral-bind your manuscript for around Rs. 50 if you need that too.

## Shopping

Toiletries, teabags, fruit, basic stationery and other everyday items are easily available throughout the bazaar. For fancier food items, such as cheese, dark chocolate, green tea, etc., head to Bhatt General Store (I don't know what it is with the Bhatt's!), also close to Gandhi Chowk, just after the Latif Motors car workshop on your right.

If you are particular about your coffee or tea, though, bring some from home. The hotel has chamomile tea (with creamer, no less) covered.

## Hiking Trails

Ranikhet is full of lots of lovely walks and hiking trails, but they can be a bit difficult to navigate in the monsoon. There are two trails that pretty much begin from the Royal Mountain Hotel, which I wasn't fully able to explore because I got rained on each time I set out, but maybe you'll get luckier!

Keep in mind, though that if you are here in the monsoons like I was, the trails are likely to be overgrown, and you should keep an eye out for the snakes that come out of their water-filled holes. Or just walk along the highway and through the adjoining golf course—those walks are still gorgeous!

### Naini

Cross the road outside the hotel, go into the temple complex, and ask around for the trail that leads from there to Naini (you have to go behind the temple). This trail goes over the ridge and through some gorgeous deodar forests, coming out at the village of Naini,

## Monkeys



They are everywhere, including on your cottage roof (yes, that's the banging you hear on your first night when you've just arrived from a long journey and feel like someone is throwing boulders at your cottage!). If you walk down the road with food visible in your hands, it will most likely be taken from you. Ditto for shiny objects like foil wrappers. Backpacks are your friends – make sure everything is zipped up before you head out.

Also, avoid eye contact with the monkeys, especially if there is a baby around; they will read it as a threat. I almost got attacked once for walking past and looking at a baby monkey (the mother came right up to me and bared her teeth at me from 2 inches away!) It's the only non-food situation where I've seen them act aggressive; otherwise, they mind their own business if you mind yours!

## Leeches

These little draculas love the wet earth during the monsoon, especially around oak trees. If you are going hiking, wear good shoes, and carry salt. And maybe ask the internet for tricks to safely remove them before you head out!

from where you could either walk back along the highway or take a shared sumo.

## *Dalmothi*

Cross the road from the gate of Royal Mountain Hotel, but instead of going into the temple complex, go around the little teashop on your right, and you'll find a trail that winds behind the forest department nursery. This leads to Dalmothi, where there is a forest rest house. I was only able to walk a short portion of this trail but am told it goes on for about 6 kilometres (and you are unlikely to get public transportation back, so leave early if you intend to do the whole hike — you don't want to trek through the forest after dark!). Even if you are only able to do a short portion of the hike, it's still very worth it.

## Eating Out and Wi-fi

Unlike some other hill stations, Ranikhet does not have a lot of cafes with wifi — or a lot of cafes, period. Still, there are some nice options for when you need a change of scenery or cuisine: Windsor, The Cafe, and Rosemount all have Wifi in theory, but be prepared for it being somewhat erratic, especially when it rains.

## *Windsor Lodge*

The closest Wifi to Hotel Royal Mountain that I was able to locate is in Windsor Lodge, about a 10-15 minute walk from here (walk along the highway for a few minutes towards Ranikhet, and you'll see a right turn in towards Windsor. It's a short walk down that road) and has an old fashioned dining room that is mostly empty during the monsoon, as well as a nice garden where you can sit out. The wi-fi in their restaurant is slow and not always functional, but it's worth a try. And while you're there, the food is very good, although somewhat pricey, and they have various meat options if you're tiring of the vegetarian cuisine!.

## *The Cafe, Village Naini*

If you walk along the highway in the opposite direction to Ranikhet (towards Almora), an hour's lovely walk will bring you to the village of Naini, home to "The



Cafe.” The balcony has a gorgeous view of the valley, and the place is very cute and very quiet. I sat there for hours with a cup of tea and a book.

You can take a shared taxi from and to the cottage — just hail one of the Sumos along the road — but if you’re up for walking, I highly recommend that: the road isn’t too busy, the views are gorgeous, and the inclines are gentle. The Cafe is right along the main road, on your left, soon after the Umang Cooperative Shop; you will not miss it.



menu are prone to taking off on occasional treks in the hills.” But the garden overlooking the forests is perfect for a long afternoon with a book and a lazy meal. They also have Wifi; ask at the reception for the password if your waiter isn’t sure.

### *Rosemount*

Rumour has it that Rosemount was once home to prostitutes brought from England for the soldiers in the cantonment in Ranikhet (no one really knows if this is true). Today, the gorgeous heritage building houses a hotel and restaurant with some of the best continental food in Ranikhet, and it is moderately priced as well. The waiters will take their time with everything, and you can’t really complain because their menu warns that “Dishes on this

Rosemount is a bit tricky to get to by public transportation. If you are taking shared taxis, you will take one from Royal Mountain to the Ranikhet bazaar, and then you’ll have to find a second shared taxi headed towards Chaubatia, along the Mall Road. Tell the driver to let you off at Meghdoot hotel; there are two roads curving to the left right after the hotel; the lower one will take you to Rosemount. You could also choose to walk from the bazaar, it’s a long (5-6 km) but beautiful walk through the cantonment area, and the road is pretty straightforward.

### *Ranikhet Bazaar*

Ranikhet Bazaar has various dhabas if you need to grab a bite while in town for errands. If you are non-vegetarian, visit Prem Restaurant (of *Highway on a Plate* fame) for excellent, albeit super spicy, mutton chops. Tahitea, right at the start of the bazaar, is supposed to have the best *chaat* in Ranikhet.

That’s all I have! I hope this information helps orient you and that you fall as much in love with this little sleepy-town as I did. Feel free to contact me through the Sangam House Facebook group if you have other questions. And happy writing!

Warmly,  
Aditi Rao

