

# Questions & Answers

**Please read carefully the General and Tour Operator Q&A**

## **General**

### **1. How do I take part in the 2010 Balashram Trek?**

If you can fulfill all the necessary terms and conditions you can proceed with your booking.

### **2. How much does it cost?**

You pay a non refundable registration fee of £600, Euro 690 or USD 960 which goes towards the cost of the trek when you book. In addition to the registration fee you will need to book and pay for your own flights to Delhi and commit to raising £2500 (Eur 2875, USD 4000) in sponsorship (See 6 below for details). Finally trek travel insurance costs £72, which is payable to the operator Challenges (Un)Limited. Please see Travel Insurance in the Information Pack area for further information.

### **3. What do I do next?**

Please read the following Questions and Answers and **all** of the information provided on this website including the documents in the **Information Pack** area and download the registration forms in the **Register Here** area. Please post your completed forms to Michael Mannion, Balashram Trek Administrator, Flat 22 Overstrand Mansions, Prince of Wales Drive, London SW11 4EZ, UK and at the same time send your registration fee to Kriya Yoga UK bank account by interbank wire transfer. Please reference the bank transfer with your Name/Balashram Trek. Please contact the Balashram Trek Administrator by Email on [admin@balashramtrek.org](mailto:admin@balashramtrek.org) or by phone on +44 (0)20 74988282 for our bank account details. You will receive confirmation of your booking and be sent sponsorship forms and updates as applicable.

### **4. Are places limited on the trek?**

Yes, the limit is 30 trekkers. The treks are very popular and fill up quickly each year. If you are interested please book up as soon as possible to avoid disappointment as we anticipate that this years trek will also fill up quickly. Please note that you cannot reserve your place; the only way to ensure that you are considered for the trek is to send in the signed registration forms along with your booking form. We regret that we cannot process your booking until you registration fee is received. However it is very important that you read all of the information provided and be sure that you can fulfill all the necessary obligations before committing to join the trek.

## 5. Who is organizing the trek?

Challenges (Un)Limited ("CUL") who also trade under the name Charity Challenge are the tour operator. CUL are an experienced operator at arranging charity treks and are responsible for the organisation and logistics of the trek. Please read the **CUL Questions and Answers** below. Kriya Yoga UK ("KYUK") is assisting with marketing the trek and coordinating the fundraising aspect. In addition, KYUK will collect registration forms and registration fees and will forward the relevant forms and deposit to CUL. Kriya Yoga UK is a Registered Charity in England and Wales Number 1119701 and a Company Limited by guarantee, registered in England Number 6243130. Kriya Yoga Institute, Inc. Tax ID 52-1074796, USA will be responsible for collecting the sponsorship monies for US participants (See 7 below for further details).

## 6. Why do I pay a registration fee?

The registration fee is needed to pay towards the cost of your trek.

## 7. How much sponsorship do I have to raise?

You are required to raise a minimum of £2,500 (EURO 2,875 or USD 4,000) in sponsorship. If you wish you can self sponsor by paying part or all of the sponsorship requirement yourself. Sponsorship cheques must be made payable to Kriya Yoga UK/Balashram Trek and posted by secure delivery to Kriya Yoga UK **except** for US resident sponsors who must send their sponsorship cheques made payable to Kriya Yoga Institute with the reference BalashramTrek on the memo line to Kriya Yoga Institute Inc. Miami. If you are self sponsoring you may send money by wire transfer. The full amount of minimum sponsorship **must** be sent to Kriya Yoga U.K. or Kriya Yoga Institute Inc.(as applicable) **eight weeks** before departure **i.e. by 30th April 2010**. The tour operator needs to have final numbers by this date in order to finalise the logistics of the trek. If you do not provide all your sponsorship money by this date you will lose your place on the trek and you will forfeit your registration fee. Please remember as stated in 2 above that you need to pay the registration fee and your international flights yourself which are **separate from and do not come out of sponsorship monies**. Please see **Trek Conditions of Entry** for further information.

## 8. How do I convince sponsors that this is a worthwhile challenge to support?

Assisting under privileged children is certainly a worthy cause. Your sponsors can read about Balashram on this website if they wish to have more information on the school and it's children. In addition to your fundraising efforts, you will be training for months to undertake this demanding physical challenge. You will be trekking for 5 days for up to 7 hours a day during which time you will be without your creature comforts and will be coping with basic living conditions.

## **9. Can tax relief be claimed on donations made?**

Gifts of money made by UK taxpaying sponsors to Kriya Yoga UK/Balashram Trek will allow sponsors under most circumstances to reclaim tax relief on their donations under the Gift Aid system. Gift Aid forms will be sent to all UK trekkers which will include information on eligibility for their UK sponsors. If you need more information, please refer to the UK Inland Revenue website. For US based trekkers we have arranged with Kriya Yoga Institute Inc., Miami to administer the sponsorship funds for the trek. US sponsors may be eligible for some tax relief on charitable contributions. (US tax rules differ to those in the UK for trekkers). Please note that your registration fee is not tax deductible. We regret that KYUK cannot offer participants or sponsors from other countries any tax advantages. Trekkers from other countries must pay KYUK direct and not through other charities. We attempted to do this in the past but ran into significant administrative problems and unacceptable delays in receiving sponsorship funds.

## **10. Is there an age limit?**

You need to be 18 years of age to join the trek.

## **11. What is a typical day?**

You will rise early and have an opportunity to meditate for one hour before breakfast. After breakfast you will finish packing up your things and will prepare for the days trek. You trek for an average of six hours a day. There will be a picnic lunch en route, with time to take in the views. Evenings are usually spent in camp with an opportunity for an hour's meditation before dinner. Please read the concise itinerary on the first page of this website.

## **12. Is the trek high altitude?**

This years Balashram trek is generally at a lower altitude than earlier treks. The highest altitude on this year's trek is 2,975m in comparison to a maximum altitude of 3,890m last year and 4,800m the year before. However it is essential that you train and get fit to truly enjoy the experience. Your trek is being organised by an experienced operator and the itinerary is designed to allow time for acclimatisation. You will also be accompanied by a qualified doctor and other first aid trained staff who will have first aid resources at their disposal. For further details see High Altitude Health Advice provided by the operator CUL in the Information Pack area of this site.

### **13. Do I need special kit?**

You will need walking boots, sleeping bag etc. You will find a comprehensive kit list of what you need to bring in the Information Pack area of this site.

### **14. Do I need to be practising Kriya Yoga to participate?**

No, this is not necessary. The trek is open to anybody who has the desire to help Balashram. However there will be meditations each day for those practising Kriya Yoga and an opportunity for those who wish to learn Kriya Yoga to do so.

### **15 Will I meet His Holiness the Dalai Lama?**

Unfortunately this is unlikely as His Holiness is not anticipated to be in residence when you are in Dharamsala.

### **16. Do I require any special vaccinations?**

You will need to check with your doctor to find out which vaccinations are required. It is important to explain to the doctor what you will be doing. You will be drinking bottled/boiled water throughout the trip.

### **17. What about spending money?**

You are likely to need some spending money at the beginning and end of the trek. We suggest you take about £200- £300 in local currency and a credit card for emergency situations.

### **18. What about tips?**

In India tipping is customary. Please see guidelines on tipping provided by CUL in Q&A 38 below. To ease administration effort and save trekkers from carrying additional cash on the trek we have included £40 (or equivalent) in your registration fee to cover all tips.

## **Operator Q&A**

### **19. Do I need a visa?**

Yes; please see the India Fact File for more information.

### **20. How big is the group?**

Each group is intended to be a minimum of 16 people in order to run and a maximum of 30 people due to the wilderness environment in which this expedition takes place, and the unique mountain accommodation used during the trek.

### **21. What about the flights?**

You will need to book your own flights. You must confirm the details with the Charity Challenge office within 2 weeks of booking at [flights@charitychallenge.com](mailto:flights@charitychallenge.com). We will need ALL of the following information from you for both your outbound & return flights in the following format:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Flight #</b>	<b>Departs</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Arrives</b>	<b>Time</b>
<i>EG: 26 June 2010</i>	<i>9W121</i>	<i>London Heathrow T3</i>	<i>2050hrs</i>	<i>Delhi</i>	<i>1040hrs+1</i>
<i>06 July 2010</i>	<i>9W122</i>	<i>Delhi</i>	<i>1255hrs</i>	<i>London Heathrow T3</i>	<i>1655hrs</i>

*+1 indicates arriving the following day. 2*

### **22. What is the luggage allowance?**

As no formal clothes are needed, luggage should be kept to the absolute minimum – details on what to pack are provided in your kit list. Your rucksack/soft bag (suitcases are not appropriate) must not exceed 15kgs in weight. Each day when you begin to trek, your personal kit will be transported to the next camp.

### **23. How should I get from the airport to meet the group?**

We advise you to book a hotel taxi as the driver will know the location of the hotel and will not try to take you shopping or to a different hotel where he gets commission! If you elect not to take a hotel organised taxi make sure you take a pre booked and pre paid taxi at the airport. (See next question for hotel address and contact details.) You should have the address and phone number of the hotel printed out to give to the driver. Most drivers

do not speak English so with a printed address and phone number they can ask people or stop at a phone booth (all over Delhi) to call the hotel or your challenge leader if really necessary. The price for this service may be slightly more but your safety will be more assured.

#### **24. What will transportation be like?**

A/C sleeper class train from Delhi/Chakki Bank/Delhi. Road transportation in comfortable air conditioned vehicles Toyota Innova (or equivalent) with 4 passengers per vehicle.

#### **25. What should I do if I need accommodation pre & post the challenge?**

We will be staying Hotel Swati Deluxe. Should you wish to book this hotel for nights before or after your challenge, you can do so directly - Phone: +91 11-45000200, Fax: +91-11-45000222. Address: 17A/32, Gurudwara Road, Near Metro Pillar No 98,99, WEA Karol Bagh, New Delhi-110005 E-Mail: [reservation@hotelswati.com](mailto:reservation@hotelswati.com) Please advise the hotel when you are booking that you are booked in with the Charity Challenge Group on the 27<sup>th</sup> June and 6<sup>th</sup> July 2010.

#### **26. What will the accommodation be like?**

During the trekking sector you will be staying in two-person tents. In Delhi and Dharamsala, at the beginning and end of the trek, you will stay in more comfortable twin bed hotel accommodation with en-suite bathroom. In Delhi although you are not staying at your hotel overnight, you can rest, wash and change. If you are travelling with a friend or partner who you wish to share with please let Charity Challenge know in advance at [challenges@charitychallenge.com](mailto:challenges@charitychallenge.com) and we will accommodate your request where possible

#### **27. Do we need to take our own sleeping bags and mats?**

Foam mattresses are provided however an extra ground mattress such as a Thermarest will aid your chances of a comfy night's sleep and you should take a good four season sleeping bag. Please see Kit List notes in the Information Pack area.

#### **28. What are the toilet/washing facilities like?**

At every campsite, a dug-in toilet will be improvised in a separate tent for every 8 trekkers; this will be located at some distance from the campsite. Please bring no-water anti-bacterial hand gel. A washing tent will also be provided for every 10 trekkers with 1 bucket of hot water per person in the evening and one bowl of hot water in the morning. Please ensure you take bio-degradable soaps and a face cloth. Please note that due to the wilderness environment, the facilities will be spartan.

### **29. Will my valuables be safe?**

While we will do everything to provide adequate safety for the group and security for your possessions, the general rule is that if you don't need it, don't bring it. This includes jewellery, necklaces, rings and even watches. Your passport (please keep a photocopy separately) and money should be kept on you at all times.

### **30. What is the food and drink like?**

You will be served with a variety of European and Indian food. During the trek the food will be cooked on kerosene stoves by our kitchen team and most of the food will be carried in. There will be buffet tables and a dining tent with chairs to accommodate every 18 participants. All meals are vegan (without onion or garlic and not too spicy) and are healthy, nourishing and incredibly tasty; there is always plenty to satisfy a hungry appetite. Please let Charity Challenge know prior to departure if you have any specific dietary requirements, allergies.

### **31. Who will be leading the group?**

We employ one main English speaking, first aid qualified challenge leader and a number of support team members, all of whom speak English. They will be ultimately responsible for the running of the itinerary and the safety of your group.

### **32. How fit do I need to be?**

Training and an above average level of fitness is essential, as this is not for the faint-hearted. You will need to lead an active and healthy lifestyle already & the more you exercise before the expedition, the more you will get out of it. Don't forget that the temperature and altitude is probably different to home and that you will be exercising constantly for a number of days for up to 5-8hrs per day. If you are deemed unable to complete a full days trek on the warm-up walk, your challenge leader can advise you not to trek. A training weekend would be advised in order for your level of fitness to be assessed - aim to go for a weekend of camping and walking to spot any areas of extra training you may need. Training and being fit for this challenge cannot be emphasised enough! Also see Trekking Training guide in the Information Pack area.

### **33. What is a typical day?**

You will wake early (around sunrise) in time for group meditation prior to a light breakfast. Your mules and their drivers will then depart camp with your luggage and head for the next evening's campsite. Walking days will last between 5-8hours. Trekking on your challenge will take place on mountain paths. Packed lunch will be provided and we will stop around noon for lunch. You will arrive at camp before sunset in order to relax and wash before it gets dark. Please note that although we aim for all your bags and the campsite kit to arrive before you, the journey can sometimes take longer than your trekking time, please be patient. Supper will be prepared and you can meditate and relax

as the stars come out. The itinerary is there as a guide and may change due to unusual weather patterns, the strength of the group and so on. We will do our very best to keep to the set itinerary however we cannot be held responsible for any last minute changes that might occur. In all such circumstances, your challenge leader will have the final say.

#### **34. What happens if I fall ill, can't keep up or there is an emergency?**

The event is not run as a race and there is always a large discrepancy in people's walking ability, which is catered for. Backup support will never be far away and can be brought in, in the event of an emergency. If we find somebody is unable to walk at all, then we can transport them from one location to the next by mule or with the help of our staff but this is only as a final option; due to bad weather conditions this can be difficult. Contact will be maintained between guides and the support team and with contact for emergency evacuation if necessary. There will always be a staff member at the back of the group to ensure you are not left behind and can take things at your own pace.

#### **35. What is included in the cost of the challenge?**

The following items are included in your expedition: internal transfers (excluding to and from the airport in Delhi), all meals and drinking water unless otherwise stated in the itinerary, all accommodation whether in tents or hotel, group first aid supplies, an English-speaking challenge leader, a UK qualified doctor and full local support team (cooks, porters, etc), backup support, US\$20 to the Balashram school project, and discount from UK based Nomad Travellers Stores and Cotswold Outdoors for personal equipment.

#### **36. What is not included in the cost of the challenge?**

The following items are not included in your challenge and will be at your own expense: international flights & taxes to and from India, transfers to and from Delhi Airport to the Swati Deluxe hotel at the start and finish of the challenge, tips for the local support team, activities not mentioned in the itinerary, personal spending money, any soft drinks or alcohol you may want during the challenge, visa (approx GBP£30 for British passport holders – citizens of other nationalities should check with their local Indian consulate), travel to and from your home airports and any required vaccinations.

#### **37. What shall I do about spending money?**

You will not need large amounts of money during the trip and other than at the start and end of the trip, you will be in the Himalayas, away from any foreign exchanges or banks. Approximately £200 cash or equivalent is recommended for gifts, extra beverages & tipping. You are not able to buy Rupees before entering India. You are advised to take a sufficient amount of cash that you can change at the airport or in Delhi. You must also carry a credit card in case of an emergency.

#### **38. How much would you recommend for tips?**

Tipping is personal and at your sole discretion. You should only tip if you feel that you have received good service. We recommend approx. £40 or equivalent per person for the full duration of the trek (**See Q&A 18**). This will cover all tips for service received including porters at hotels, all portage of luggage including at stations and tips to ground staff (including drivers, porters cooks etc). This should be given to the challenge leader who will distribute it as described above and among the crew and support team.

### **39. Should I take gifts or clothes for the locals?**

Generally we advise against giving small gifts to children as it can encourage begging. However, if you have any small items of clothing, balloons, toys, pens, stickers that you would like to donate, your challenge leader can advise you on how to ensure they are distributed where they are most needed.

### **40. What is the weather likely to be like?**

In the Indian Himalaya, the average daytime temperature is 15 to 25c during the day and when the sun is out (this can vary), the sunlight is very strong. Evenings will be 10 to 15c generally, although the wind can be chilly. In most trekking areas it is illegal to burn wood and we have to protect the environment. If necessary, we will warm the dining tents with a kerosene stove. As a general rule it is t-shirt and windproof/waterproof jacket during the day and fleece weather at night. Delhi temperatures should be around 35-40c but remember to bring appropriate attire as we will be visiting religious sites (headscarves for ladies and everyone must cover arms and legs.)

### **41. What do you do to protect the environment?**

We are keeping to a small group so that we limit the impact we have on the surrounding environment. We will ensure that all rubbish is disposed of responsibly (burnt, buried or carried out & food stuffs fed to the cows!) Batteries should be brought back home. We follow the local guidelines on cultural and environmental protection and respect.