



Pradesh's favorite rafting river, the Beas traces a path through the Kullu Valley south of Manali, serving up abundant white water from Grade 2 to Grade 4 between Pirdi and Jhiri, about 14km downstream.

Practicalities: The longest ride takes about an hour and 20 minutes, but there's no rafting during the monsoon from July to August and few trips run in the depths of winter. Agents in Manali and along the Kullu Valley - as well as at the take-out point at Jhiri - offer daily rafting trips in season, so don some safety gear and take the plunge. You'll get soaked with plenty of icy mountain

water but you'll be too thrilled to complain, and there are changing rooms at Jhiri.

Driving off the map in Himachal Pradesh

You'll need to get off the highway, and sometimes even off the road entirely, to properly explore Lahaul and Spiti. These linked valley systems north of Manali are staging posts on the journey north to Ladakh, but a detour east into Spiti will take you into a rugged moonscape whose drama is its sheer starkness. As green valleys give way to exposed rock, the road becomes little more

than a dirt track, crossing stream beds lined with rough boulders. You'll pass only the merest traces of civilization for long stretches either side of the tiny district capital, Kaza.

Practicalities: This is a popular trip for rally drivers - and would-be rally drivers - but few overseas visitors rent a car to self-drive in India. Fortunately, the trip is just as thrilling if someone else is at the wheel. Jeep operators in Manali and Keylong have plenty of experience of running trips through the Spiti Valley and on to Kinnaur in eastern Himachal Pradesh. (www.lonelyplanet.com)

