

# ADRENALINE RUSH!

An adventure sport holiday in the hills with the Honda CBR 250R as a trustworthy companion

Story & Photography: Piyush Sonsale



A panoramic view of the Ganga from the Little Buddha Cafe in Rishikesh

**T**HE NORTH INDIAN STATE OF UTTARAKHAND attracts thousands of pilgrims and foreign tourists every year to its holy shrines and religious towns, nestled in the hills of the Shivalik ranges. The Ganga is also an added attraction since this mighty glacial river is in its cleanest state when it flows through the mountains with great force, washing away all the 'sins'. In the last few years, however, this small State has also become a destination for adventure sport. So we decided to explore and experience this fun aspect of Uttarakhand on a riding trip to the Garhwal region.

Our journey began in New Delhi, where we picked up our ride, the trusted old Honda CBR 250R. This quarter-litre single is one of the best bikes available in the country when it comes to touring. It is powerful enough to cruise at a steady speed of 120 km/h with the rider and a pillion astride and returns an average fuel efficiency of 35 km/l, which is an impressive figure for a 250-cc motorcycle. At the same time, it can unleash its sportier traits when pushed and is a robust machine that keeps on going flawlessly in any weather and on even the worst of roads.

Our bike was loaded with saddlebags hangings from both the sides and a tank-bag that carried a camera and the contents of my pockets. Wending our way through the chaos of Ghaziabad, where our GPS thought it would be funny to make us take the narrow lanes of a slum instead of the highway, we made it to NH 58 after an eventful hour.

It was a pretty smooth ride from there onwards for about 130 km before we entered Uttarakhand, some 20 km before Roorkee. The road condition deteriorated in Uttarakhand and the highway narrowed down to a single carriageway with traffic flowing in both directions. This compelled us to drop our average speed to about 60 km/h. After about five hours of riding, we reached the holy town of Haridwar after dark and called it a day.

The next morning we woke up to an overcast sky, with thunders damping our riding spirit. We got ready none the less and hopped on to the bike in a bid to reach Rishikesh before it started pouring. Rishikesh is about 20 odd clicks away from Haridwar, but the rain gods were in no mood to wait. It started raining heavily on that stretch of the road, which made us run for cover. We rode the remaining distance after the rain had subsided, but were caught in chaotic traffic at the entrance to Rishikesh, which is a usual feature in most Indian towns, especially after a shower.

We took a right inside a lane and rode down some slippery slopes to

## JUMPIN HEIGHTS

Jumpin Heights offers adventure sports like bungee jumping, canyon swinging and flying fox. They offer pick and drop service from their office at Tapovan, which is three km north of Rishikesh. The facility has a café and a merchandise section where one can buy Jumpin Heights memorabilia. The activities can be booked online on their website and they operate all seven days of the week, but are closed from mid-July to end of September due to rainy season.

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reach the 'Laxman Jhula', which is one of the two narrow suspension bridges in Rishikesh (predictably, the other one is the 'Ram Jhula') laid across the width of the Ganga. Surprisingly, motorcycles are allowed to cross the bridge along with pedestrians and, of course, cows. Once on the other side, we had to ride on for another 15 km for our first dose of fresh mountain adrenaline at Jumpin Heights.

Jumpin Heights is an adventure sport outfit, located near village Mohanchatti on the Neelkanth Road. True to its name, Jumpin Heights offers adventure sport involving a jump from a great height. Their infrastructure was designed by David Allardice of New Zealand, the country pioneering in modern bungee jumping. Jumpin Heights have a state-of-the-art facility, which includes a permanent cantilever platform that extends from a cliff over the river 'Hall'. The activities are supervised by international experts and are carried out in an extremely professional and safe environment.

The sport of bungee jumping involves jumping off a platform from a great height with a bungee (elastic) cord hooked to the harness of the jumper. Jumpin Heights at Rishikesh is the only permanent bungee jumping facility in India right now and they operate all seven days of the week, save a few months during the rainy season.

As I walked down to the open edge of the platform, my mouth went dry and I was almost shivering with fear and excitement while my survival instinct was yelling in an almost audible voice, begging me to turn back.

The bungee cord is a thick rope that hooks on to the cuffs that bind your legs just above the ankles. It has a balancing mechanism that involves a set of pulleys and a water canister, which works as the balancing weight.

The instructors put me at ease while I waited for the jump set-up to be ready and walked up to the edge of the platform gingerly as the leg cuffs restricted my movement. The platform is at a height of 83 metres from where one has to dive straight down into the valley. One realises how steep that is while standing at the edge of that platform. There was a pit in my stomach as I spread my hands like Jesus, but I told myself that I will not close my eyes while the instructor did the 3-2-1 countdown. At the end of the countdown, he shouted "Bungeeee!" while I leaned my body forward and dived head first into the valley. As my feet left the platform, I realised that it was only the cord that was now connecting me to Mother Earth and that I had no control over myself! So I just let go and put faith into the rope while gravity sucked me down. I felt an immense rush as I saw myself freefalling into the valley and, about three to four seconds later, the cord became taut and I bounced back up in reverse. It happened twice and then I was swinging in the valley for some time before becoming steady, after which they started lowering the bungee cord.

There were a couple of men standing on the bank of the river, who helped me on to a mattress and undid my harness. When I got back on my feet, it took a few seconds to get used to the fact that the world had straightened out! Thereafter, I was given a badge that says 'I've Got Guts' and I was asked to trudge up the mountain to reach the Jumpin Heights office.

The climb helped me overcome the adrenaline rush and I got to see my jump from a third person's perspective, as captured by an automatic camcorder. They gave us the video clip on a CD along with a certificate endorsing my daredevilry.

After having some snacks at their café behind the office, we bid adieu to the folk at Jumpin Heights and rode back to Rishikesh. Rishikesh is a



Tents at Camp  
Ganga View



Crossing the Laxman Jhula  
on the CBR 250R



**PATHIKWORLD TOURS**

Pathikworld Tours are based in Rishikesh and they organise adventure activities like river rafting, paragliding, trekking, camping and jungle safaris in Uttarakhand. They even organise religious tours in the region. It is owned and managed by Krishna Avtar Mathur, who offers reasonable deals and packages.

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Riding through the Rajaji National Park

small town with many shrines and yoga centres that attract foreign tourists. It also has a few nice eateries like the Little Buddha Café, where we spent the evening looking at the panoramic view of the Ganga, the town and the Laxman Jhula as the sun set behind the mountains.

The next day we met Mathur in Rishikesh, who is a local tour operator working under the name of 'Pathikworld Tours'. Mathurji escorted us from Rishikesh to Shivpuri where our next adventure was booked at Camp Ganga View, which is one of the numerous permanent campsites on the silt beaches of the Ganga near Rishikesh and conducts water sport as the main activity.

After lunch, we changed into suitable clothes, wore the safety gear and got ready for the ride with a paddle in our hands. We walked to the water and got into a raft and started rowing after a briefing session by the instructor. For the next two-and-a-half hours we rowed through some of the most famous Grade Three rapids in that section like the Three Blind Mice and the mighty Golf Course and Roller Coaster, where the raft goes up and down violently and you get splashed by the cold water every time it hits the tide. After passing the rapids, we jumped into the refreshing water and did body surfing for about half a kilometre. Then we rowed back to the river bank and loaded the raft on top of a pick-up that gave us a ride back to the camp. Thoroughly thrilled and terribly exhausted, we tucked into the tasty dinner and were in bed well before midnight. However, it was now the mosquitos' turn to feast, who let us sleep only after we had slapped ourselves to glory for a couple of hours.

The next day Mathurji was back at the camp to escort us to our next destination and last adventure. We rode back to Rishikesh and took a diversion at Tapovan that led us to the Rishikesh-Dehradun road. A section of this road after the Natraj Circle passes through the Rajaji National Park, which is a beautiful stretch through the jungle and is known for the notoriety of wild elephants. We reached Dehradun in about an hour and passed through the State capital to join the Mussoorie road.

The road started winding up the mountains as soon we left the city behind and we climbed up for the next 30 kilometres until we reached the popular hill station of Mussoorie, located at a height of just over 1,800 metres. The road going up is well-paved and quite enjoyable as the corners never end! The CBR was a joy to ride as its 25 PS of power made a mockery of the elevation. We were passing cars as if they were at standstill and I had almost forgotten that our bike had saddlebags and a pillion rider.

Shortly before reaching the town, we took a diversion towards the so-called 'Mussoorie Lake' for some paragliding. Paragliding is the closest one can get to flying like a bird. Hung by a parachute, you can sail with the wind while being strapped inside a harness and the cords of the parachute are used for navigation.

Pathikworld Tours also organises paragliding activities at Naukuchiatal in the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand and apparently that's an even better spot than Mussoorie, but we chose it as we were travelling in Garhwal. It was a great experience, nevertheless, as we hovered over the scenic hills in airborne chairs. Although not as extreme as bungee jumping, paragliding gives you more time in the air and an aerial view of the place below as you have never experienced before. The activity is managed by professionals and there is an expert pilot who flies along with you, strapped into the same harness and he also controls the flight while you are free to enjoy the view.

Our short trip included just a few of the activities available to the adventure-seekers in Uttarakhand, but it brought to the fore a completely new side of this hilly State, which also has many scenic routes for the biking enthusiast. **Bike**

#### GEAR CHECK

Rider: Piyush Sonsale

Helmet	Sparx Lightning	Denim	Wrangler Tough Gear
Jacket	Pjays Swift	Gloves	Rynox Kombat

