



THE TRAIL ORGANISER

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Robin Shukla was very worried. It was the first time he was going on a winter trek. The stories of -10°C temperatures had rattled him, but he was on the phone with a bigger worry. He wanted to take his son of nine years along. I admired him immensely, as not every parent would want to start their child trekking in the winter.

Robin's questions were what I'd expected: How would they tackle the cold? Was it dangerous to trek on snow? Did they need special gear—for the cold and the trek?

Somehow, trekking in the winter worries everyone. Yet, a winter trek is one of the easiest to manage. First, -10°C is no harder to tackle than the winters in north India. The trick is to layer sensibly and for temperatures dipping to zero, three layers are normally enough—two full sweaters and a jacket. Layering with special jackets or sweaters that are extraordinarily thick is a mistake. You just need to layer. Thickness is secondary.

It is the same for the legs. Wear a fitted pair of trackpants and another pair over. Two layers are usually enough, but for those who need to, another layer will help you face even the bitterest cold. Two sports socks, worn one over the other, are enough for the feet. For the inners, two T-shirts—or three at most—are perfect. It's simple... for every five degree dip in temperature, add a layer.

On a winter trek, the snow is very different. It is soft, light and fluffy. Almost like sand. That's why it is drier, too. Little wonder, then, that it's often fun to fall on this snow because you rarely injure yourself. Trails that are snow-covered are easier to walk on as all the bumps are covered with a convenient layer. Walking is a breeze, with the grip firmer. The prob-

lem starts when the heat of the day lines the trail with melting water. During the night, the water freezes and turns into ice and this is never easy to walk on. You slip and slide all the time, and this is where a pair of regular trekking shoes—with good grip—comes in. They help you navigate tricky ice patches, while protecting you from twists of the ankle. Avoid a pair of sports sneakers and keep in mind that though ice patches are bothersome, they are infrequent.

In the winter, you lose most of your body heat through the head. The more exposed your head, the colder you'll feel. That's simple science. Some trekkers would rather look good than stay protected, but simple woollen head gear that covers the ears can make you feel warmer by almost 10 degrees. You also need waterproof gloves—not woollen ones that tend to get wet when you touch snow. Remember: A wet glove is more dangerous than an exposed hand. Woollen gloves, however, have a purpose... they serve as a good backup. I've often seen trekkers in great distress because they've lost one hand of a pair.

To be honest, you don't need any 'special' gear for a winter trek. Most of it is already available at home. You just need some common sense and some practice in layering. Yet, a winter trek can be one of the most spellbinding experiences of your life. In a white, sugar-coated landscape, you're instantly transported to an enchanting fairy-tale land. And that's a story that you will never forget! 

Arjun is the founder of Indiahikes, a blogger and an experienced trekker. He takes a keen interest in training youngsters to appreciate our trails.

YOU DON'T NEED ANY 'SPECIAL' GEAR FOR A WINTER TREK, APART FROM A GOOD PAIR OF BOOTS. JUST LAYER SENSIBLY AND REMEMBER: THICKNESS OF YOUR CLOTHES IS NOT EVERYTHING