

# H.P. Govt asks Air India to start special flights to Shimla

## Shimla winter carnival starts on Dec 25

Shimla, Kullu, Manali remain the top favorite destinations in Himachal Pradesh. Be it a family vacation or a honeymoon trip or a corporate getaway, Shimla, Kullu and Manali are the most visited destinations among travellers.



*Kulu Valley : Simply breathtaking*

The week long Shimla Winter Carnival will be organised from December 25 to January 1. The main attractions of the carnival will be live-stage performances by various dance troupes and fashion show.

The Government anticipates a significant increase in tourist arrivals for Christmas and New Year festivities. It has asked Air India, to start special holiday flights to Shimla.

The railways has already announced two special holiday trains on the Kalka-Shimla rail line to cater to tourist rush. Speaking to HT, Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Board vice-chairman Vijay Singh Mankotia said, "All efforts to facilitate the tourists during the year-end festivities are being made. We have requested Air India to start special

holiday flights connecting the Shimla airport.”



*Kulu Airport*

Just one day ago, Durgapur Airport became operational. (See Durgapur) . It is the PM’s dream to air-connect small cities especially cities of tourist interest like Shimla !

“I have directed all hotels to make appropriate arrangements for a pleasant stay for tourists. Besides, dishes from local cuisine would be an added attraction for the tourists,” said Harish Janartha, vice-chairman of Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (HPTDC), which owns 58 hotels across the state, having a capacity of 2,300 beds.

The Himachal Pradesh high court had recently directed the authorities concerned to resume flights on a trial basis at the Jubbarhatti Airport, 18km from Shimla town.



*Shimla Airport*

Made operational in the early eighties, flights at the airport

were suspended in 2012 in the wake of soil erosion that shrunk the runway to 3,800 feet from 4,100 feet. Since Kingfisher Airlines stopped operations on September 6, 2012, no flight landed at the airport. In a written reply in Rajya Sabha, the then Civil Aviation minister Vayalar Ravi had said that the DGCA had identified 11 airports which were considered critical airports from flight operations point of view. Two out of three airports in Himachal Pradesh had been named in the list namely Shimla and Bhuntar (Kullu) airports.



*HP Tourism Development Board vice-chairman Vijay Singh Mankotia*

The state had then requested the Union ministry of civil aviation to provide funds to carry out repair work at the airport, following which the ministry sanctioned Rs 142 crore to the Airport Authority of India. However, of the sanctioned amount, just Rs 10 crore was released that was used to ready the landing strip and the airport was thrown open in December.



*Kingfisher was the last airline to operate here*

However, though non-scheduled flights between Shimla and Delhi have resumed, none of the airlines has shown interest in starting regular flights to the hill state capital.

“About six non-scheduled flights have arrived at the airport after it became operational. It’s for the airlines to decide as and when they start scheduled flights,” airport director Parvindra Tiwari said.

Those associated with the hospitality industry have been demanding that the government make efforts to resume flights to Shimla.

“The government should step up to get flights resumed at Jubbarhatti Airport. We are expecting heavy tourist rush for Christmas and New Year as 60 to 70% hotels are already booked,” said Harman Kukreja, president of the Shimla Hoteliers and Restaurateurs Association.