

Himalayas

Geography, Ranges, Rivers, Peaks and Facts

The Himalayas are one of the youngest and the highest mountain ranges in the world and play a very important role in India's geography, climate, and culture. Stretching across five countries, including India, Nepal, Bhutan, China, and Pakistan, the Himalayas cover about 2,500 kilometers. They are home to the highest peak in the world, Mount Everest (8,849 m). Apart from being a natural barrier, the Himalayas also give rise to many rivers like the Ganga, Yamuna, and Brahmaputra. For competitive exams, questions on their formation, ranges, peaks, and importance are very common.

Himalayas

The Himalayas are rightly called the crown of India. They are not only important from a geographical and environmental point of view but also for the economy, culture, and security of the country. For competitive exams, understanding the Himalayas is very important as they are a frequent topic in questions related to geography, environment, and current affairs.

Origin of the Himalayas

The Himalayas were formed around 50 million years ago due to the collision between the Indian Plate and the Eurasian Plate. This tectonic activity pushed up layers of sedimentary rocks, giving rise to high peaks and deep valleys. Even today, the Himalayas are rising by a few millimeters every year, making them geologically active. The continuous movement of tectonic plates also causes earthquakes in the Himalayan region.

Location and Extent of the Himalayas

The Himalayas form the northern boundary of the Indian subcontinent. They extend from the Indus river in the west to the Brahmaputra river in the east. Their width varies from 150 km in Arunachal Pradesh to 400 km in Kashmir. The Himalayas not only protect India from cold winds but also influence monsoon winds that bring rainfall.

Location and Extent of the Himalayas	
Feature	Details

Length	Around 2,500 km
Width	150 km to 400 km
Countries Covered	India, Nepal, Bhutan, China, Pakistan
Highest Peak	Mount Everest (8,849 m)
Average Elevation	6,000 m approx.

Division of the Himalayas

For better study and understanding, the Himalayas are divided into three parallel ranges.

- 1. The Greater Himalayas (Himadri)**
 - The highest range with peaks above 6,000 meters.
 - Contains Mount Everest, Kanchenjunga, Nanga Parbat, and Annapurna.
 - Always snow-covered.
- 2. The Lesser Himalayas (Himachal)**
 - Lies south of the Himadri.
 - Contains famous valleys like Kashmir, Kangra, and Kullu.
 - Popular hill stations such as Shimla and Mussoorie are located here.
- 3. The Outer Himalayas (Shivaliks)**
 - The lowest range of the Himalayas.
 - Height varies between 900 and 1,100 meters.
 - Known for Doon valleys like Dehradun and Patli Dun.

Division of the Himalayas		
Division	Height	Characteristics
Himadri	Above 6,000 m	Snow covered, highest peaks
Himachal	3,700 to 4,500 m	Valleys, hill stations
Shivaliks	900 to 1,100 m	Doon valleys, foothills

Important Peaks of the Himalayas

The Himalayas are famous for their towering peaks which are often asked in exams.

Important Peaks of the Himalayas		
Peak	Height (m)	Location
Mount Everest	8,849	Nepal-China Border
Kanchenjunga	8,586	India-Nepal Border
Nanga Parbat	8,126	Pakistan
Annapurna	8,091	Nepal
Nanda Devi	7,816	India (Uttarakhand)

Rivers Originating from the Himalayas

The Himalayas are the source of some of the most important rivers in South Asia. These rivers are vital for irrigation, hydroelectric power, and drinking water. These rivers form fertile plains which support millions of people in India and neighboring countries.

- **Indus River System:** Originates near Mount Kailash.
- **Ganga River System:** Formed by Bhagirathi and Alaknanda.
- **Brahmaputra River System:** Originates in Tibet as Tsangpo.

Climate and Vegetation of the Himalayas

The Himalayas show a wide range of climates from tropical in the foothills to alpine in the higher regions. Vegetation also changes with altitude. The Himalayas act as a climate barrier by stopping the cold winds from Central Asia and allowing the monsoon winds to bring rainfall to northern India.

- **Tropical forests** in foothills.
- **Temperate forests** in mid-altitudes.
- **Alpine vegetation** in higher altitudes.
- **Snow-covered regions** at the top.

Economic Importance of the Himalayas

The Himalayas are not just a physical barrier but also a source of livelihood.

- Provide fertile soil in the northern plains.
- Source of rivers for irrigation and drinking water.

- Hydroelectric power generation.
- Forest wealth, including timber and medicinal plants.
- Tourism and pilgrimage centers like Amarnath, Kedarnath, and Badrinath.

Strategic and Cultural Importance of the Himalayas

The Himalayas also form a natural defense for India. Many passes like Nathu La, Shipki La, and Zoji La are of military and trade importance. The Himalayas are deeply linked with Indian culture as many religious sites and rivers have origins in this mountain range.

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