

# Char Dham Yatra : Government to hand over heli booking services to IRCTC

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The Char Dham Yatra will begin with the opening of the portals of Gangotri and Yamunotri on April 22. (File Photo | PTI)

By Express News Service

DEHRADUN: Registration for the Chardham Yatra, which has made a major contribution to the state's economy, will begin on February 21. This year, the government has decided to book tickets for heli services during the Char Dham Yatra through the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC).

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The Uttarakhand government has decided to book heli service tickets through IRCTC with an aim to streamline and simplify the 'Char Dham Yatra'. A fresh tender process is underway for the Kedarnath heli service. A three-year contract will be signed with nine companies for heli service operations from Guptkashi, Sirsi and Phata. Till now, tickets were booked online through Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam (GMVN).

"IRCTC has a robust system of booking railway tickets", Uttarakhand Civil Aviation department authority (UCADA) Additional Executive Officer Anil Singh told this newspaper, "The tender process for Kedarnath heli service is going on. Online ticket booking is being considered for handling over to IRCTC". 70 per cent of the tickets for the Kedarnath heli service are booked

online while 30 per cent of tickets are booked through companies operating heli service. Till now, online ticket booking was done through GMVN.

"The tourism department has advised pilgrims to register before the yatra as well as undergo health check-ups" and "also to travel slowly in the camps with a short halt on the yatra route, so that passengers coming from hot regions can adapt themselves to the climate here", state tourism secretary Sachin Kurve told this newspaper.

"In the year 2022, there was a 35 per cent increase in the number of Char Dham pilgrims as compared to the pre-Covid season in 2019," Badri Kedar Temple Committee Chairman Ajayendra Ajay told TNIE, adding that "over 1.32 lakh people availed helicopter services to visit Kedarnath temple". There was a huge rush for the heli service in May-June as the rush of pilgrims peaked during the yatra. The operation of heli service is also frequently affected due to bad weather in Kedarnath. Due to this the backlog of advance booking of tickets increases, and passengers have to wait a long time.

In the year 2022, a total of 4681131 pilgrims visited Chardham and Hemkund Sahib. The government hopes to cross this figure this time. For the Yatra, which begins on April 22, the government has also directed this time that pilgrims coming to Uttarakhand will have to mandatorily install a "vehicle location tracking system" with their vehicle registration.