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CST Permit #2057026-40

Kashmir and Ladakh August 21-September 2, 2024

Maximum Group Size: 12 people

Join us for an intimate experience with the people, the culture and the land of Tibetan Buddhism.
Prior study of Buddhism not required.

During our spectacular adventure to this gorgeous ancient land we shall tour Leh and surrounding villages and travel to the spectacular Nubra Valley over the Khardung-la, the highest motor-able road in the world (18,380 ft).



Aug 21 Day 1: Arrive Delhi /Hotel Pride Plaza by airport

You will be met at the airport and transfer to the hotel.

Aug 22 Day 2: Fly to Srinagar / Mahjong Deluxe House Boat (B, L, D)

Transfer to airport for flight AI 825 dep. 10:15 am / arr. Srinagar 11:40 am. On arrival transfer to our Houseboats.

Relax and enjoy leisure time and lunch on the Houseboat. At 3 pm, we cruise in hand-paddled traditional Shikara on Dal Lake passing through the small canals to see the local life, ancient houses, agricultural fields, patches of flowering lotus and paper maché handicraft-the specialty of this area.

Return to the Houseboat for dinner and overnight.

Aug 23 Day 3: Srinagar / Mahjong Deluxe House Boat (B,L,D)

Rise early for a sunrise (6 am) boat ride on Dal Lake to see the floating vegetable markets at a spot called 'gudher' meaning gathering. Vendors throng to this market in their vegetable laden shikaras to sell their produce. The market runs from 6 am-8 am. Dawn-time is the best time to catch an excellent photogenic visit.

Return to the houseboats for breakfast and a short rest time. Departing at 10 am, we embark on an excursion to the oldest part of Srinagar city visiting Jamia Masjid, Shahi Hamdan Mosque and walking through the decorated old bazaar. We shall also see the ancient wooden bridges of the city.

We continue with a drive to the renown Mughal Gardens, built by the Mughals in the Islamic style of architecture which was greatly influenced by the Persian concept of the 'char-bagh,' where a garden is symmetrically divided into four smaller quadrilaterals by axial walkways.

Shalimar Bagh, built in 1619 A.D by Emperor Jahangir, is surrounded by a brick and stone wall. The garden is arranged in four terraces lying one above another of nearly equal dimensions. The fourth terrace was for the exclusive use of the ladies of the harem, providing them excellent views of the vistas around. The terraces feature beautiful stone chutes, carved with numerous ingenious patterns of shell and fish, leading to the reservoir with fountains and canals. The highest terrace also has a black pavilion etched with the famous inscription by Amir Khusrau, 'Gar Firdaus rōy-e zamin ast, hamin ast-o hamin ast-o hamin ast; "If there is a paradise on Earth, it is this, it is this, it is this."

Our tour of the Mughal Gardens cannot be complete without a visit to another architectural masterpiece of the Mughals, the splendid Pari Mahal. Once the royal observatory, Pari Mahal has a well laid out garden with spectacular views of the Dal Lake and its surroundings.

Aug 24 Day 4: Srinagar - Pahalgam - Srinagar (186 kms) / Mahjong Deluxe House Boat (B,L,D)

Full day excursion to Pahalgam, (aka the Vale of Kashmir), elevation approx 8005. On the way we visit Saffron fields, Avantipur ruins and Anantnag Sulphur Spring.

Located about 30 km southeast of Srinagar, the ruins of Avantipur are a silent reminder of the Hindu empire that once was. It was built by King Avantivarman who founded the Utpala dynasty in the ninth century and ruled Kashmir from 853 to 888 AD. That era faded into the background after fourteenth century Afghan invasions in the valley that paved the way for a largely Persian culture.

We'll enjoy a hot lunch in Pahalgam. Pahalgam is the most utilized location for the Indian Film Industry. Enjoy the nature and charm of the valley. In the evening we return to houseboat for dinner and overnight.

Aug 25 Day 5: Srinagar-Sonmarg-Kargil / Highland Mountain Resort (B,L,D)

We depart at 8 am for a thrilling drive over the Zojila Pass into Ladakh. The road passes through panoramic villages to reach Sonmarg (8989 ft). Early lunch at local restaurant in Sonmarg.

After Sonmarg it is mostly a rough road to wet Zoji La, 11572 ft. (*Gateway of Ladakh*), located on the boundary of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. The Pass connects the Kashmir Valley to the west with the Dras and Suru valleys to the northeast and the Indus Valley further east.

We continue driving towards Dras (the second coldest inhabited place in the world). We stop here for tea and passport check.

Another two and half hours, we arrive at Kargil (8891 ft). The city gained importance after the opening of Ladakh for tourists in 1974. Transfer to the hotel.

Aug 26 Day 6 Kargil- Lamayuru - Uletokpo (190 km / 6 hrs) / Ule Ethnic Resort (B,L,D)

We depart at 8 am on a panoramic drive to Lamayuru, ascending two passes: Fotu-la and Namika-la.

The first stop is the Buddhist village Mulbek where we visit Mulbek Monastery. We then cross the highest pass (Fotu-la 13,477 ft.) on Srinagar-Leh route, and then Namika-la (12,129 ft).

We will reach Lamayuru for lunch. After lunch, we visit Lamayuru Monastery, the oldest in Ladakh. It is believed to have been a sacred site for the pre-Buddhist religion called Bon. This fascinating 10th century monastery is located in a spectacular setting overlooking verdant farming terraces and is home to some of the finest frescos, carpets and thangkhas we will see. The complex includes one of the oldest libraries in the region, containing extensive books and other literature on the Tibetan Kagyupa Sect.

Continue one hour drive to Uletokpo for overnight.

Aug 27 Day 7: Uletokpo-Alchi-Likir-Phyang-Leh (3506 Mt) (95 km / 4hrs) / Hotel Spic-n-Span (B,L,D)

This morning we drive to Leh en-route visit Alchi, Likir & Phyang gompas.

Departing at 8:30 am for a short 15-20 min drive to Alchi Monastery (18 km) - said to be the oldest and most well-known. The monastery is approximately 1000 years old and a temple called Dhu-Kang dates back to 11th century or 12th century. Some of the houses here are well preserved Indo-Himalayan style with magnificent wall paintings. The Alchi monastery is not only a worshipping place for Buddhist but a study centre too. It is a monastic complex of temples that consists of three shrines: the Dukhang (an assembly hall), the Sumtseg and the temple of Manjushree.

After early lunch, we continue our drive (18km, approx. 40 min) to Likri Gompa. This gompa is one of the most well maintained monasteries in Ladakh. Likir gompa is not only large, it is pretty wealthy too. Around 100 monks reside here.

Further we'll drive 40 km/approx. 1 hr, to Phyang. It is also 6 km away from the Leh-Srinagar highway and 17 km from Leh, a monastery, giving an appearance of a palace standing atop a hill. Mani walls lead to the little - visited gompa, which was built around the 16th century by king Tashi Namgyal and is today home to about 45 monks of the Kagyupa order.

Afterwards drive approx. 30 min to Leh (11,483'); the remainder of the day is free for independent activities. Dinner at hotel restaurant.

Aug 28 Day 8: Leh- Shey - Thikse - Hemis - Leh (75 km) / Hotel Spic-n-Span (B,L,D)

A full day tour: visit of Shey Palace, Thikse Gompa and Hemis Gompa.

Shey, built in 1645 as a summer residence for the kings of Ladakh, is the oldest palace in Ladakh. The adjacent gompa houses a gilded copper two-story image of the seated Buddha.

Thikse's twelve levels rise impressively on a rocky hillside. This gompa out did Shey by constructing a fifteen-meter-high clay statue of the Buddha to commemorate the 1970 visit of the Dalai Lama.

Hemis Gompa was founded in 1630 by Stag-tsang-ras-pa under the royal patronage of Sengge Namgayl, It flourished under the Namgyal dynasty for the royalty favored the Drugkpa Sect, which managed the monastery. Hemis is one of the largest and richest gompas of Ladakh. It also has the largest Thanka, which is unfurled once every 12 years. Return to Leh.

Aug 29 Day 9: Leh- Hundar (126 km/6 hrs) / Hotel Stone Hedge (B,L,D)

Depart at 8 am for the drive to Hundar in Nubra Valley over the Khardung-la (18,380 ft) the highest motor-able road in the world. Nubra Valley is north of Leh sandwiched between the Karakoram Mountains to the north and the Ladakh range to the south, in between lie the Shyok and the Nubra Rivers.

The villages of Nubra valley are scattered along these two valley floors. This is a beautiful region that once formed a part of the Silk route into Afghanistan. Because of the lower altitude, a wide variety of fruits, vegetables and grains are grown, creating an impression of abundance.

The valley was a trade route from Leh and Khasgar via Saser and Karakoram Passes. Apart from unparalleled trekking opportunities, the valley has several Buddhist monasteries namely Sumoor, Tygar and the 14th century Diskit monastery renown for its murals.

From Khardung-la we drive to Khardung village (13,464 ') through starkly beautiful countryside to the Traffic Check Post (TCP) at Khalsar where permits have to be registered and checked.

We continue 32 km to Hunder village and check into our hotel.

Aug 30 Day 10: Hundar- Diskit - Sumur - Hundar (80 km) / Hotel Stone Hedge (B,L,D)

Early departure, 6:30 am, driving 14 km to Diskit Village. Diskit is the headquarters of the Nubra Valley and thus has lot of government offices with basic facilities. Diskit village and the monastery have become the congregation centre for people of the region of the valley.

The Diskit Monastery, founded by Changzem Tserab Zangpo in the 14th century, is situated on the hill, just above the flood plains of the Shyok River, on its right bank in Diskit village (3144m/10,315 ft.). The monastery is one of the highest points near the villages belonging to yellow sect. It has 120 resident monks. The Prayer Hall (Dukhang) has many statues one of which holds the head and left arm of a Turkish invader believed to be about 5000 years old.

We aim to reach the monastery in time to witness the morning prayer ceremony that starts at 7 am.

Return to Hundar for breakfast. Afterwards, we drive one hour to Sumur (44 km) & visit the Samstaling Monastery, an important Buddhist shrine located the picturesque Nubra Valley.

Return to Hundar for lunch. This afternoon visit Hundar village, old fort and small monastery...or just relax and rest after the long day yesterday and early start this morning.

Aug 31 Day 11: Hundar - Leh (120 km / 5 hrs) / Hotel Spic-n-Span (B,L,D)

Drive back to Leh. Check-in and lunch.

This afternoon a relaxed 2 hour tour visiting the town of Leh, a fascinating labyrinth of winding streets and quaint bazaars. The spectacular eight-story, Leh Palace, looming above and overlooking the town, was built in the 16th century, about the same time as the Potala Palace in Lhasa.

We also visit Sankar Monastery (gompa) situated on a valley floor right in the town. Sankar is the home for the Geluk-pa sect (yellow hat sect). Afterwards visit the ruins of Tisseru Chorten, Changspa Chorten and Sanchi Stupa. These sites are all within 5 km from each other.

Dinner at hotel restaurant.

Sep 1 Day 12: Leh – Visit Stok & Choglamsar / Hotel Spic-n-Span (B,L,D)

This morning visit Stok: tour the palace, museum and monastery. Stok Palace is the only inhabited palace in Ladakh. The palace houses a fine private museum, open to the public when the royal family is in residence.

One of the large halls in the palace is converted into a museum. There is a superb collection of thankas, said to be the best in the world. Some of them have been created out of pure gold and paints made of crushed semi-precious stones. Also of interest are royal crowns, coins, antique ritual objects, ceremonial sword, precious stones and traditional head dresses worn by Ladakhi women antique robes and royal jewelry, specially noted for the turquoise and red coral. The collection also includes artillery and animal skins.

Stok Monastery (Gompa), one of the renown gompas of Leh, is just 15 km away from the main city which used to be the royal residence. Stok Gompa belongs to yellow-hat sect of Buddhism. The entrance veranda has beautiful mural paintings of the guardians of the four directions. The main assembly hall is decorated with thankas and banners. The courtyard at Stok Gompa consists of a large number of prayer wheels. Founded in 14th c, it is located above Stok Palace.

Return to Leh for lunch.

This afternoon we drive to Choglamsar (8 km) to visit the residence of His Holiness Dalai Lama & the site of Kalachakra 2014 in Ladakh. We will also visit the Tibetan SOS village (Tibetan Govt in exile and their projects for the Tibetan children), meet the chief representative and hear him about Tibetan refugees and their spiritual practices in Leh.

Dinner at hotel restaurant.

Sep 2 Day 13: Leh - Delhi / Pride Plaza hotel near airport (B)

Transfer to airport for flight to Delhi AI 446 dep 10:35 am, arrives 12:00 pm (schedule subject to change). On arrival those ending the tour: transfer to hotel for wash/change, room available until 10 pm. Transfer to International airport for flight home. Those continuing on the Ancient Cultures tour transfer to Hotel Lalit.

Price: \$3650 per person based on minimum 4 people, single room supplement: \$970
Plus Airfare: (estimate/exact TBD when booked): Delhi-Srinagar: \$105 & Leh-Delhi : \$145

If joining our Indian Himalayas Tour: Discount: \$200 per person.

Includes:

Accommodation with daily breakfast:

1 night Delhi: Pride Plaza Hotel <https://www.pridehotel.com/pride-plaza-hotel-aerocity-new-delhi-hotel/>

3 nights Srinagar at Mahjong Group of Houseboats <https://www.mahajonghouseboats.com/>

1 night Kargil at Highland Mountain Resort, deluxe room <https://www.thehighlandkargil.com/>

1 night Uletopto at Ule Ethnic Resort, deluxe room <http://www.uleresort.com/>

5 nights Leh at Spic-n-Span <https://www.spicnspanladakh.com/>

Or Royal Ladakh <https://www.hotelroyalladakh.com/>

2 nights Hundar at Hotel Stone Hedge <https://www.stonehedgeladakh.com/index.html>

Rooms for wash and change on departure at Pride Plaza (near airport) until 10 pm.

All meals day 2-13. In Leh dinner is mandatory in the hotel restaurant; come to dinner when you wish.

Arrival departure transfers on group tour dates (extra cost for transfers on other dates)

Transport in Kashmir & Ladakh by Toyota Innova (3 people per car) as per the itinerary.

Professional accompanying guides (separate ones for Srinagar & Ladakh)

Entrance fees to monasteries in Ladakh

Inner line permit to Nubra Valley

Ladakh Environmental Fee

Porter tips at hotels and airports
2 Bottles of Mineral water per day / per person during drives.
India Govt. Service Tax 5%

Does not include: International Air, Travel Insurance, Airport departure taxes, Visa Fee, Tips to drivers and guides, Still and Video Camera Fees if any, Beverages during meals (you can bring your water bottle into the restaurant or purchase beverages and pay direct), Any expenditure of personal nature such as drinks, telephone calls, laundry.

Trip notes:

Although there is no mandatory hiking on this trip, the high altitude of the itinerary is a concern. Most of the trip is spent at elevations above 11,000 feet in remote terrain. You should be fit to travel on this tour.

Distances mentioned are good estimates and depend on road conditions, traffic and other events.

The weather in Ladakh in September is perfect; sunny days between 65-68° F with pleasant crisp evenings 50-54° F.

Bathroom facilities during sightseeing in remote areas or on long drives are sometimes non-existent, which may limit your privacy to a nearby tree or rock. Flexibility and a sense of humor are essential.

Meals are mandatory in Ladakh hotels, hence they are included in the tour price. However, in Leh there are many restaurant walking distance from the hotel. During your independent time in Leh, you may wish to explore and experience a meal in one of these local restaurants. You would pay direct. There is no refund for not eating the meal at the hotel restaurant.

Trip Grade: II Active - Some walks at or to sites, a few elevations can be slightly demanding. Comfortable but busy schedule with some long rides as well as congested traffic in the cities, while some rural roads can be bumpy and slow.

Accommodations

Please view the hotels on the web (links given above) for photos and full list of amenities. Most of the hotel websites in Ladakh will say luxury and the one in Kashmir says 5 star. This self-rating is relative to what the other options are in this region.

We have selected the very best available. All have private western bathrooms and showers. Several have spas and fitness rooms and internet service. All are in breath-taking settings and offer warm hospitality and excellent local cuisine often sourcing from their organic gardens.

Lodging Level in Leh & Kashmir: ★★★★★ - Leh hotel traditional style décor with additional amenities, refined service and comfort level acceptable to western standards. In Kashmir, a traditional luxury houseboat, the super deluxe rooms. The houseboats have 2, 3 & 4 bedrooms. All are furnished with local art, textiles and natural wood. Wifi available.

Lodging Level in Ladakh Villages: ★★★ - In the small villages of Ladakh, lodges and hotels are comfortable with western facilities. The style is traditional with lovely cozy rooms and set in incredibly beautiful landscapes. However, check out Stone Hedge Hotel in Hunday—spectacular!

Internet service is available, but not reliable. There may be times when it is not functioning. The electric power can also go down in this region from time to time.

Leh Festival: We usually align our tour to be able to attend the Leh festival. However the dates are subject to change and the festival is subject to be cancelled. Therefore, we are not mentioning the festival in our tour itinerary. If it does indeed happen, we will certainly arrange to attend.