

LADAKH WITH HEMIS FESTIVAL
JUNE 26- JULY 9, 2023

We shall attend the Hemis Festival held annually at Hemis Monastery, the largest monastery in Ladakh.; tour Leh and surrounding villages and travel to the spectacular Nubra Valley.

June 26, Day 1: Arrive Delhi/ The Pride Plaza or similar.

You will be met at the hotel and transfer to hotel near airport. Check-in time is 2 pm. Early am arrivals incur an extra hotel night charge.

June 27, Day 2: Fly Delhi - Leh (3506 Mt) / Spic-n-Span (B,L,D)

Transfer to domestic airport for flight G8 221 dep. 09.10 / arr. 10.20 or 6E 2797 depart 10.55 / arrive 12.30 (schedule subject to change). Flying over snow-capped ranges of pristine Himalayan peaks, this is a never-to-be-forgotten travel experience as you arrive in the striking land of Ladakh in the upper Indus Valley.

On arrival transfer to hotel and take the rest of the morning to acclimate.

This afternoon visit 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.

June 28, Day 3: Leh - Hemis - Leh (90 km) / Spic-n-Span (B,L,D)

This morning we drive to Hemis to attend the most celebrated monastic festival of Ladakh.

HEMIS GOMPA: Founded in 1630's by Stag-tsang-ras-pa under the royal patronage of Sengge Namgayl, Hemis is one of the largest and richest gompas of Ladakh.

Hemis festival, is one of the most celebrated monastic festivals commemorating the birth of Guru Padmasambhava, the founder of Tantric Buddhism in Tibet. The sacred dance drama of the mission of Buddhism is performed by monks wearing masks and colorful brocades robes. The monks dance slowly around the main tarchen (flagpole) in the main courtyard.

There are morning and afternoon sessions of the dance which emerges into different forms. During the festival, the 60 foot thanka of Guru Padma Sambhava is hung in the courtyard and other precious thangkas are also exhibited.

On the first day of the festival the part, which foreigners can watch, begins at 10.00 am with ceremonies in the courtyard. After prayers in the Dukhang, the Rimpoche climbs the steps up to the courtyard, accompanied by musician monks, crosses it and takes his place underneath the gallery. Shortly afterwards, the dances begin which have as their theme the struggle against evil and infidels and the inevitable victory of good and of Buddhism.

The Padmasambhava dance, which shows the conquest of the 'Ruta' demons, is part of this dance. Other figures, which the dancers represent, are 'Yama' - the god of death, the black hat sorcerer guru Trakpo the vanquisher of all demons, and various other forms of Padmasambhava. The sequence of the dances changes with time - often to present a different finale for the benefit of distinguished guests!

The dancing continues to late afternoon, with a brief stop at midday. Locals and foreigners find time to patronize the many small stands outside the monastery walls where tea, soup, Tsampa, sweets and other refreshments are sold.

Between dance sessions we shall explore the richness of Hemis in its various Dukhangs (halls). We'll see the huge silver chortens (stupas) studded with precious stones, ancient thankas brought from Tibet, huge statue of Maitriya Buddha & many statues of different god & goddesses.

Late afternoon drive back to Leh for overnight

June 29, Day 4: Leh - Hemis - Leh (90 km) / Spic-n-Span (B,L,D)

We return to Hemis and begin the day with prayers in the courtyard followed by the mask dance bearing resemblance to certain legendary animals and illustrating various moods of the gods. There are at times as many 15-20 performers on the open-air stage with the audience sitting as close as possible to the performers.

The festival ends with a long prayer meeting held by the Rimpoche of the monastery.

There will be opportunities to interact with the Lamas, the local people, browse shops and wonderful photography. Late afternoon drive back to Leh for overnight.

June 30, Day 5: Leh- Shey - Thikse - Stok - Leh (75 km) / Hotel Spic-n-Span (B,L,D)

A full day touring. We start with a visit of Shey Palace and Thikse 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.

In the late afternoon visit Stok for a tour of the palace and museum. Stok Palace is the only inhabited palace in Ladakh. This palace houses a fine private museum, open to the public when the royal family is in residence.

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 antique robes and royal jewelry, specially noted for the turquoise and red coral. The collection also includes artillery and animal skins.

July 1, Day 6: Leh - Durbuk - Tangtse - Pangong Lake (126 km/4 hrs/14,200 ') / Crystal Lake Resort or similar (B,L,D)

We depart Leh after breakfast and drive through Kharu, Chemrey, Tagar Sakti to Changla Pass 5486 Mtrs.

While ascending Changla Pass, enjoy the beautiful panoramic view of the villages below. After crossing the pass we stop for picnic lunch at Tsoltak, the summer pastureland of the yaks.

Upon arrival in Durbuk we visit the small monastery. Afterwards, enjoy a wonderful sunset at the lake.

Pangong Lake is the largest brackish water lake in Asia and is 134 km in length and 2-3 km average

in width. The lake is situated at a height of 4,350 m and is one of the most attractive lakes located at such an altitude. The lake spans across India and Tibet and is in a disputed territory. Out of the 134 km length, about 60 per cent of the lake lies in Tibet and the remaining in India. The deep blue colour of its water is due to high content of minerals. The saline water here does not support fishes except for some crustaceans.

Spangmik village along with the blue lake looks lovely. The blue water and perfectly blue sky, exudes a Mediterranean feel. Similar to Greece the small village overlooks the lake. It is a beautiful village with little greenery. There are just 11 households in the village and they are not nomadic people unlike most people who live at this height. Some families have moved to Leh and other towns. In spite of the cold weather they dug in and live through the harsh winters. In such extreme conditions they can do just a little bit of farming to support their daily needs but nothing more than that. Earlier, their main source of earning was dependent on raising Pashmina goats, but only two families keep goats nowadays.

July 2, Day 7: Pangong Lake - Leh / Hotel Spic and Span (B,L,D)

Enjoy the sunrise in the backdrop of the Lake. One rarely feels so close to nature and environment and the scenery is unforgettable. Enjoy a leisurely morning visiting Spangmik village.

In the late afternoon drive back to Leh.

July 3, Day 8: Leh - Uletokpo (75 kms/ 3 hrs drive) / Ule Ethnic Resort (B,L,D)

Drive to Uletokpo, en-route we visit Spituk & Rizong monasteries.

Spituk is yet another interesting monastery, on the hill-top, offering a commanding view of Indus. It has a totally new Gompa within the monastery as well as the old Gompa that has also been restored. It is constructed in a series of tiers with courtyards and steps. The Spituk Gompa was founded in 11th century by Od-De, the elder brother of Lha Lama Changchub-od. The Gompa was named Spituk (exemplary) by Rinchen Zangpo, a translator came to that place and said that exemplary religious community would rise.

Higher up in the hill is a chamber which houses the enormous statue of the goddess.

Rizong Monastery is situated at the top of a mountain side valley on the north side of the Indus valley. Rizong monastery Ladakh belongs to Gelugpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism which is known as the Yellow Hat sect. Rizong monastery Ladakh was established in 1831 by Lama Tsultim Nima under Gelukpa order. There are mainly 40 monks residing in this monastery.

Yuma Changchbling is located about 2 km from the Rizong monastery. Approximately 20 nuns reside in Chlichan.

According to popular belief, Guru Padmasambhava meditated in the caves around Rizong. It is said that lamas used to meditate in the caves in isolation, depending on one meal a day and avoiding a relationship with the outside world.

Afterwards, we depart for Uletokpo camp, one of the most beautiful camps in the Ladakh region.

Ule Ethnic Resort, has 70 rooms which fall into two categories - Deluxe and Standard. All the rooms have attached bathrooms with running hot and cold water. All the cottages are solar heated to stay warm during winters. Please visit for more details; <http://www.uleyecoresorts.com/index.html>

Late afternoon visit Uletokpo village.

July 4, Day 9: Uletokpo -Lamayuru- Alchi / Zimskhang Holiday Home or Alchi Resort (B,L,D)

This morning we will drive 40 km/1 hour to Lamayuru. On arrival, 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 tangkhas 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.

Afterwards, we drive 30 minutes further to visit the Likir Gompa, it is located 6 km north of the main Leh -Srinagar highway. This gompa is one of the oldest and well maintained monasteries in Ladakh. Likir Gompa is not only large, it is pretty wealthy too, around 100 monks reside here.

Then we continue 1.5 hours to reach Alchi. On arrival, check in. Evening at leisure.

July 5, Day 10: Alchi - Leh (70 km/2.5 hrs drive) / Spic-n-Span (B,L,D)

Morning visit Alchi Monastery - which is said to be the oldest and most well-known. The monastery is around 1000 years old. A temple called Dhu-Kang dates back to 11th century or 12th century and houses some of the well preserved Indo-Himalayan style magnificent wall paintings.

The Alchi Monastery is not only a place of worship for Buddhists but a study centre too. It is a monastic complex of temples that consists of three shrines: the Dukhang which an Assembly hall, the Sumtseg and the temple of Manjushree.

Afternoon drive to Leh, check into hotel, the remainder of the day is free for independent activities.

July 6, Day 11: Leh - Hundar (125 km/6 hrs drive) / Hotel Stone Hedge (B,L,D)

Early morning drive from Leh to Hundar. The Nubra Valley lies north of Leh and is accessible over the Khardung-la (18,380 ft) the highest motor-able road in the world.

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 350 year old Diskit monastery famous 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 be registered and checked.

Transfer to our hotel.

July 7, Day 12: Hundar - Sumur - Hundar (110 km)/ Hotel Stone Hedge (B,L,D)

Early morning drive to Diskit monastery (14 km) to witness the morning prayer ceremony. The monastery is one of the highest points near the villages belonging to yellow sect. The monastery has 120 resident monks. The Prayer Hall (Dukhang) has many statues one of which holds the head and left arm of Turkish invader believed to be about 5000 years old.

Return to hotel for breakfast.

Afterwards, we drive to Sumur (44 km) & visit the Samstaling monastery. Situated in the Sumur village of the picturesque Nubra Valley, the Samstanling Monastery is considered to be an important Buddhist shrine.

Return to Hundar for lunch.

Afternoon visit Hundar village through sandy desert valley and visit old fort of Hundar village and small monastery. Overnight at Hotel Stone Hedge.

July 8, Day 13: Hundar - Leh (120 km / 5 hrs) / Spic-n-Span (B, L)

Drive back to Leh. Afternoon free is free for independent activities. Dinner on your own.

July 9, Day 14: Leh - Delhi / The Pride Plaza or Novotel (B)

Transfer to airport to connect flight AI 446 depart 11.50hrs / arrive 1400hrs (schedule subject to

change).

On arrival transfer to hotel for wash/change till 8 pm. Late night transfer to International airport for flight home.

Price: \$3350 per person based on minimum 4 people, Single Room Supplement: \$990

Plus Airfare: (estimate/exact TBD when booked): Delhi-Leh-Delhi \$320

Extra night Delhi: \$78 per person twin share, \$145 single room

Includes:

Accommodation with all meals except Delhi where only breakfast included:

One night Delhi at The Pride Plaza <http://www.pridehotel.com/delhi/new-delhi-aerocity>

Seven nights Leh at Spic-n-Span <http://www.spicnspanladakh.com/>

One night Pangong Lake at Crystal Lake Resort <https://crystallakeresort.in/>

One night Uletokpo at Ull Ethnic Resort, deluxe cottages <http://www.uleresort.com/>

One night Alchi at Zimskhang or Alchi Resort <http://alchiresort.tripod.com/>

OR Zimskhang <http://www.zimskhang.com/>

Two nights Hundar at Stone Hedge <https://www.stonehedgeladakh.com/>

Rooms for wash and change on departure at The Pride Plaza (near airport) until 8 pm.

Meals: Breakfast in Delhi, all meals day 2-12, lunch only day 13

Arrival departure transfers on group tour dates (extra cost for transfers on other dates) by air-conditioned tempo traveller

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

Local English speaking Buddhist Escort/guide in Leh section

Entrance fees to monasteries in Ladakh

Inner line permit to Nubra Valley

Laddakh Environmental Fee

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, Porters, Tips to drivers and guides, Still and Video Camera Fees if any, Any expenditure of personal nature such as drinks, telephone calls, laundry