



## India

Trekking tour to India's North West Frontier

# PIONEER EXPEDITIONS



Do something extraordinary.....

## Itinerary

## India • Trekking tour to NW Frontier

17 Days • 16 Nights

Delhi – Leh Ladakh – Leh Bazaar – Lamayurhu – Dha Hanu –  
Ladakh Valley – Tso Morari – Pangong Tso – Ladakh Sarai – Delhi

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Visit the unmissable Valley of the Drogpas
- See the oracle of Sabn whom is believed to possess supernatural powers.
- Trek to Likir and visit the nearby monastery as well as other monasteries, lakes and temples.
- The fantastic Zaskar Mountain range.



## TOUR ESSENTIALS

Tour Style	Overland Safari and walking adventure
Tour Start	Delhi
Tour End	Delhi
Accommodation	Camping
Included Meals	15 Breakfasts, 13 Lunches, 13 Dinners
Difficulty Level	Difficult

A challenging grade 3 trek, you will visit some fantastic sights as well as experience plenty of wildlife. This is the home of the blue sheep, the tibetian wolf. You will also experience high altitude flora. A key feature is visiting the Valley of the Drogpas tribe, the last of the Aryan race. This trek takes you to the hidden kingdom of Zaskar and on your travels you will trek through mountains and drive along the Indus river.

# Overview

This 15 day trip offers a challenging and rewarding trekking - walking – overland adventure amidst breathtakingly beautiful scenery, mountains and valleys. Discover Ladakh, cradled in the heart of the Great North-Western Himalaya. India's "little Tibet" is one of the few strongholds of Tibetan Buddhist life, culture and religion. You will visit monasteries, pass through villages and have the opportunity to interact with the local people; in particular when we set camp for the night. You can only be captivated by the natural beauty of this region and the welcoming hospitality of its people. During our trip we will take special inner line permission and enter The Valley of the Drogpas Tribe, the last of the true Aryan race.

## Itinerary

### DAY 1: DEPART THE UK

Fly to New Delhi (Virgin Atlantic is recommended as arrival is a convenient mid-day)

### DAY 2: ARRIVE DELHI (B)

You are met upon arrival in Delhi. Our company's executive receives you at the arrival lounge of the International airport and transfers you to your centrally located hotel, "The Metropolitan Hotel" (or similar)

### DAY 3: FLY DELHI TO LEH, LADAKH (B,L,D)

Today you travel by air over the gorgeous snow-covered Himalayan peaks to Leh (3521m) -- the capital of Ladakh. Leh is a bustling little town that is dominated by the ruins of the ancient castle perched above the main bazaar. Your Jet Airways flight departs at 05:45 hours and reaches Leh at 06:55 hours.

Upon arrival in Leh you are met by our representative and are transferred to The Ladakh Sarai.

Rest of the day free to acclimatize. We recommend a full day rest at the Ladakh Sarai with a gentle walk up to the Ayu monastery in the evening.

All meals are served at the Sarai

### DAY 4: STOK & EXPLORE LEH BAZAAR (B,L,D)

After breakfast guided visit to Stok palace. The palace houses a fine private museum. There is a superb collection of thangkhas, said to be the best in the world. Some of them have been worked in pure gold and paints made of crushed semi-precious stones. Also of interest are antique robes and royal jewelry, specially noted for its turquoise and red coral. The collection also includes artillery and animal skins. Stok Gompa is a subsidiary of Spitok and the same lama, Nawang Lotus founded both, during the reign of King Takpa Bumde. Stok belongs to the yellow-hat sect of Buddhism and currently has about 20 lamas living there. The oldest parts of the gompa are some 550 years old though the Dukhang or main assembly hall is only about 50 years old.

In the afternoon explore the town of Leh and the colorful bazaar. The main street is open and airy, with rows of shops on either side. On either side of the market are seen a long line of Ladakhi women in traditional dress and colourful jewelry of coral and turquoise, seated behind enormous baskets, selling vegetables. The spectacular eight-storey Leh



Palace looming above, overlooking the town, was built in the 16th century, about the same time as the Potala in Lhasa which it resembles.

The stroll through the town is followed by a visit to Sankar gompa, about 2 km from the market. It has a number of pure gold icons and richly painted walls, its pictures depicting different stories, including some from the Panchtantra. Return to the Ladakh Sarai or a hotel in Leh for dinner and overnight stay.

Overnight stay at the Ladakh Sarai.

## DAY 5: IN LEH (SHEY, THIKSEY & HEMIS) (B,L,D)

After breakfast, visit the Oracle of Sabu in the village of Ayu. Although many oracles are lamas, this oracle is an old woman who is believed to possess supernatural powers that enable her to prophesize.

After the oracle is over visit Shey Palace was built in 1645 by Deldan Namgyal, as a summer residence for the kings of Ladakh. It is the oldest palace in Ladakh and above the palace is an even older ruined fortress.

You also visit Shey gompa adjacent to the palace. Hundreds of chortens of all shapes and sizes stand below the palace and gompa. These chortens demonstrate the interest taken in Shey by the Ladakhi kings and queens who succeeded Shey's original builder.



Located on the second storey of the gompa is a large Buddha statue made in 1655 by a Nepalese sculptor who was assisted by three Ladakhi craftsmen. The seated Buddha is 12 meters high and worked of copper sheets gilded with gold. This Buddha is the biggest metal statue in the region and was the largest Buddha statue of any type in Ladakh until Thiksey gompa installed a 15-meter tall Buddha made of clay in 1970. The castings of the statue were made in Leh while the statue's copper was collected in Zanskar and hammered into plates on big rocks. More than five kilos of gold were then used to plate the copper. The statue was built in parts in the Zanstil Palace (Zans means copper and til means to hammer) in Leh and then transported to Shey where it was assembled and installed.

After visiting Shey drive to Thiksey Gompa, the most picturesquely situated monastery in Ladakh, perched high on a hill above the Indus. Its buildings are arranged at various levels, leading up to the private apartments of the incarnate lamas on the summit. From here one commands a magnificent view of the valley. The gompa possesses a rich and beautiful collection of hundreds of hand-written or painted prayer books.

A new temple contains a 15-meter tall Buddha statue, constructed in 1970 to commemorate a visit to Thiksey by the Dalai Lama. The statue, made of clay and covered with gold paint, is the largest Buddha figure in Ladakh and took four years to construct. Inside, the statue is filled with the Kandshur and the Tandshur - volumes of Buddhist canonical texts.

The statue was made entirely by local craftsmen and represents Maitreya, ("compassion" in Sanskrit) the Buddha of the Future. The prophecy made of the Future Buddha is that the world will be undergoing such chaos that He will teach compassion to the people.

Hemis Gompa is one of the most important in Ladakh, the largest and also the wealthiest. The king-architect Singe Namgyal, a great patron of Buddhism, built it in 1620. He filled Hemis with golden statues, stupas set with precious stones and thangkhas brought from many places, including Tibet.

The lamas of Hemis were associated with the Ladakhi royal family and became quite prosperous, owning much land and supervising many smaller, scattered monasteries. Although only about a dozen lamas actually live here, Hemis has several hundred lamas attached to its subsidiary monasteries.



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The Rimpoche or spiritual head of Hemis is a reincarnation of the monastery's founder Stagtshang Raspa. The last Rimpoche was a reincarnation who, as a five-year old child, was being taught in Tibet when the Chinese invaded. There has been no communication with the Rimpoche since the 1960s. During the 1975 festival, Drugpa Rimpoche, a 12-year old youth, became the new Rimpoche as a new incarnation.



Hemis is the location for numerous religious festivals throughout the year, although the most important one is in summer (July 4 and 5 this year) when a huge thangkha, one of the largest in the world, is hung in the courtyard. It takes about 50 monks to carry the thangkha to its place and unfold it. The thangkha is made of fine heavy silk and embroidered with pictures of various gods as well as of the founder of Hemis. The dances in front of this thangkha represent the forces of good, symbolized by legendary heroes and saints, overcoming demons. Eventually, the violence of the demons is overcome by the superiority of virtue resting on wisdom and the demons are driven from the courtyard. Spectators watch these dances from the upper storey verandahs around the courtyard.

Hemis also has a thangkha, reputed to be the largest in the world, that is displayed once every eleven years. It was last shown in July 1992. The hands of the artist who painted this thangkha are preserved at Hemis as holy relics, though they are not shown to the public.

Evening return to Leh. Dinner will be served in the hotel.

Overnight stay in the Ladakh Sarai.

## DAY 6: DRIVE FROM LEH TOWARDS LIKIR VILLAGE – 2 HOURS + WALK – TREK TO THE FIRST CAMP AT LIKIR (B,L,D)



Our destination is Likir Village our first camp

The Likir Gompa was established around the 15th century and early in its history, became responsible for the oversight of Alchi Gompa, to which it has posted lamas up to the present day. Likir belongs to the yellow-hat sect of Buddhism and currently houses about 120 lamas.

The monastery is set on an isolated ridge a few kilometers north of Saspol. The road approaching the Gompa makes a wide semi-circle around its base, affording beautiful views of the Gompa from different vantage points. The head lama of Likir is a younger brother of the Dalai Lama, and has married (against the rule of the sect) and is permanently absent from the Gompa.

Overnight camping.



## DAY 7: TREK LIKIR TO YANGTHANG VILLAGE (3,000m) – 4-5 HOURS (B,L,D)

Today we cross two small passes - Chhagatse la (3,600 m) and Phebbe la (3,580 m) to reach the campsite at Yangthang. Enroute we stop for a packed lunch and have time to take in the unparalleled views of Zaskar Mountain range to the south.

Overnight in camp which will have already been established and set up before your arrival.

## DAY 8: AT YANGTHANG VILLAGE (B,L,D)



From our “base camp” Take a day trek to Rizong gompa (5 to 6 hours round-trip) which is off the beaten track up a side valley to the north..

The gompa is in a truly beautiful mountain setting. The path leads to the buildings of Chomoling, a nunnery set in the midst of a lovely apricot grove and part of the Rizong gompa. The area around Chomoling is called Julichen meaning many (chen) apricot trees (juli). Chomoling itself does not have any temples as the chomos (nuns) worship at the temples in Rizong gompa. The chomos also work all the fields belonging to Rizong, take care of the animals and make the butter needed by the lamas both for their butter tea and for the butter lamps lit in the

temples. The chomos believe that by selflessly serving others, instead of themselves, they are serving Buddhism. Keeping the nunnery's buildings on the left, walk on a clearly marked path for a few more minutes. At a fork marked by a tall prayer flag pole, turn left. Walk on this trail for about 30 minutes through arid gorges that produce a beautiful

effect of solitude and serenity. After one last curve, Rizong gompa will suddenly appear, set between two barren rock walls. Rizong is a relatively new monastery, founded in 1829 by Tshul-khrims Nyi-ma and presently has about 30 lamas attached to it. It also has the reputation of being the best disciplined monastery in Ladakh.

Return to the campsite at Yangthang for overnight stay.

## DAY 9: TREK FROM YANGTHANG VILLAGE TO HEMIS SHUKPACHAN VILLAGE – 5 HOURS (B,L,D)

An early start to approach and trek up and over the Hemis La (3,650 m) it is a long trail up to the pass offering spectacular views of the approach trail that we came along and with fine views of the Zaskar Range.

Hemis Shukpachan is a beautiful village famous for its juniper trees. On the far east one can see the unclimbed Hemis peak, some 60 km as the crow flies. Two small passes - Aang La (3,650 m) and Meptak La (3,700 m) are also crossed.

Overnight camping.

## DAY 10: TREK TO THEMISGAM VILLAGE (3,150m) – 3 HOURS (B,L,D)

An early start to a full days trek towards the village of Themisgam.

There will be time to explore the Themisgam Palace and village in the late afternoon.

Overnight camping.



## DAY 11: DRIVE FROM THEMISGAM VILLAGE TO WANLA VILLAGE OR DIRECT TO LAMAYURU MONASTERY – 3 HOURS (B,L,D)

After breakfast we help down the camp for a trek down through the village to the nearest road head to where our vehicles await you and to embark for the spectacular drive along the true left bank of the Indus River, taking a left turn and up through the mountains to Lamayuru Monastery.

You can spend several hours trekking through the village which is a photographers paradise - on your own or with one of our guides.

Visit to the monastery and explore the area.

Overnight in tents.

Lamayuru Gumpa lies 15 km east of the Fatu La on the Srinagar-Leh Highway, with its medieval village seemingly growing out of the rocky hillside below it. In the past, Lamayuru has housed up to 400 lamas, but presently there are only 30 to 50 lamas living here, although about 150 lamas belong to the gumpa. The other lamas stay and teach at Lamayuru's smaller daughter gompas located in outlying villages. Twice a year, all the lamas gather at the gumpa for general prayers, accompanied by three days of masked dancing. These gatherings occur in the second and fifth months of the Tibetan calendar (usually March and July). Lamayuru belongs to the red-hat sect of Buddhism. Ancient legends say that at the time of Sakyamuni (the Historical Buddha), Lamayuru's valley was a clear lake where nagas (holy serpents) lived. The Bodhisattva Madhyantaka foretold that the lake would be emptied and a monastery built there. The legends continue by saying that Naropa, an 11th century Indian Buddhist scholar, came to Lamayuru and spent many years meditating in a cave, which can still be seen in the main Dukhang or assembly hall. Naropa then caused a split in the surrounding hillside and the lake emptied through this opening. After the lake emptied, Naropa found a dead lion previously covered by the waters of the lake. On this spot, Naropa built the first temple at Lamayuru, the Singhe Ghang (Lion Mound). Other historical accounts relate that in the 10th century the King of Ladakh ordered the building of Lamayuru gumpa and placed it under the supervision of Rinchen Zangbo. The original gumpa was composed of five buildings although only the central one still stands. In the 16th century, Ladakh's King Jamyang Namgyal was cured of leprosy by a lama from Tibet. In gratitude, the King gave Lamayuru gumpa to this lama and also bestowed other privileges - no taxes were collected and the area surround the gumpa was declared a sanctuary where none could be arrested. For this reason, Ladakhis still refer to Lamayuru as Tharpa Ling, the "Place of Freedom".

Overnight in tents



## DAY 12: DRIVE LAMAYURU/DHA VILLAGE – 3-4 HOURS (B,L,D)



After breakfast drive to the "Valley of the Drogpas".

We cross over the Indus River and head down the beautiful side valley which leads us to the Drok-pa territory. We will let the Sherpa team go ahead to set up the base camp for the next couple of nights. We will have time for hiking along the narrow road along side the true right bank of the river stopping by a sandy beach for a picnic lunch.

Reaching late afternoon and over night in camp set among apricot and apple orchid.

The Drok-pa are Indo-Aryan by race in contrast with the Tibetan racial characteristics of majority of the Ladakhis, having their own distinct traditions and customs and practicing a form of Buddhism that has an intriguing intermixture of pre-



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to Bema, via Achinathang - the home of the Drok-pas. The restricted areas of Ladakh include not only the outlying regions of Nubra, the Pangong Lake and Rupshu, but also the Indus valley below Khaltse, where the villages of Da, Hanu, Garkhon and Darchiks are home to a minuscule Buddhist animist beliefs.

### DAY 13: AT DHA – HANU (B,L,D)

After breakfast walk to and trek up to the village of Hanu. The people of this valley are known for their joie-de-vivre, and also for having brought Ladakh's rich oral literature to its finest degree of development. Though Muslims, they retained till very recently traces of the Buddhism from which they were converted at an uncertain period during the last 400 years.

The best versions of Ladakh's national folk-epic, the *Kesar Saga* are said to have been those recited by the bards of Chigtan.

Visit the village of Bema and return to camp for overnight stay.

Overnight stay in the base camp.

### DAY 14: AT DHA HANU (B,L,D)

The Droghpa are Indo-Aryan by race in contrast with the Tibetan racial characteristics of majority of the Ladakhis, having their own distinct traditions and customs and practicing a form of Buddhism that has an intriguing intermixture of pre-Buddhist animist beliefs.

The Shagkar-Chigtan valley, where we are runs north from Bodh-Kharbu. The people of this valley are known for their joie-de-vivre, and also for having brought Ladakh's rich oral literature to its finest degree of development. Though Muslims, they retained till very recently traces of the Buddhism from which they were converted at an uncertain period during the last 400 years.

The best versions of Ladakh's national folk-epic, the *Kesar Saga* are said to have been those recited by the bards of Chigtan. Visit the village of Bema and return to camp for overnight stay.

We will stay this day to further explore the Droghpa and meet elderly folk for their experience and there general outlook on life and the ever changing modern World?

Visit the village of Hanu. Overnight camp.

Visit the village of Garkhon. Overnight camp.



### DAY 15: DRIVE DHA HANU TO ALCHI MONASSTERY 4 HOURS AND ONT LEH 2 HOURS (B,L,D)

Early morning proceed to Leh via Alchi Monastery.

After breakfast and whilst the camp is being packed up we can start out early for a couple of hours walking to start the day. We then drive back to Leh via the very unique Alchi Gompa situated on the southern bank of the Indus River.

Alchi Gompa which is located near the small village of Saspol. It is one of the earliest monasteries built in Ladakh, dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Because it was built before the invading wars began in the 15th century, Alchi was built on lowlands, rather than on a hilltop as others were, in order to protect them from marauding armies. King Rin-chen-Izghimpo, one of the first Ladakhi kings to engage in foreign relations, erected it. To build the monastery, the Ladakhi king signed a treaty with the Gyalpo (king) of Tibet, who agreed to provide the artisans. The rambling monastery has six main buildings: the Dukhang or main assembly hall, the Sum-tsek or three-tiered temple; the adjoining Manjusri Lha-



khang and Lotsawa Lha-khang temples; the Lha-khang Soma or "New" temple and the Kanjur-Lha-khang, which is closed to the public. Walking towards the gompa from the small group of houses nearby, the first temple of importance is the Sum-stek temple, the oldest of the Alchi gompa. The temple is surrounded by wooden pillars and carved woodwork of mythological animals. The woodwork is original and reflects Kashmiri influence. The Dukhang is the place where the

lamas gather for religious ceremonies. Inscriptions on the Dukhang's back wall attribute its building to the religious devotion and financial generosity of a man named Kal-Idan Shes-rab. The walls along both sides of the Dukhang are covered by mural paintings, which are probably original to the time of the monastery's founding. Of particular interest are the miniature scenes of royal life. The best preserved is the royal drinking scene which is one of the most remarkable to have survived anywhere in the Tibetan-speaking world. The costumes in this scene clearly depict central Asian dress and the king and queen each have a halo, a convention that appears elsewhere in Alchi and possibly shows Nestorian Christian influence from Persia. This is the only painting in Ladakh that shows central Asian influence so clearly. The chortens around Alchi gompa also contain numerous wall murals, often of Rin-chen bZang-po, meant to honour his activities as a translator in collaboration with Indian teachers of Buddhism.

After a pack lunch we will drive the couple of hours back to Leh.

Overnight at the Ladakh Sarai.

## **DAY 16: FLY LEH/DELHI (B)**

Transfer to the airport for the early morning return flight to Delhi.

Met upon arrival and transfer to the Metropolitan Hotel with ample time of the rest of the day for shopping.

## **DAY 17: FLY DELHI- HOME**

Transfer to the international airport for the early morning return flight home.



# Important Information

## INCLUDED

- 🌍 All accommodation – New Delhi (Bed and Breakfast only) and full board at the Ladakh Sarai
- 🌍 Transport
- 🌍 Food whilst in the field.

## NOT INCLUDED

- International Airfare
- Any personal expenses e.g. camera, alcohol
- Temple entrance fees
- Laundry and Telephone bills
- Lunch and Dinner in Delhi
- Airport tax

# Additional Information

ACTIVITY DURATION

5-7 hours per day

SEASON

July 2015

BEST TIME TO GO

October – March

GROUP SIZE

Minimum 4 pax with a supplement

EXPEDITION SCHEDULE

Scheduled group departure in July 2015

DIFFICULTY LEVEL

Our grades have been designated based on our perception of the degree of physical activity you are likely to require to enjoy the adventure. These are only a guideline. This itinerary has a 'Difficult' level (5-7 hours of activities per day). This means that you will need more than a basic level of fitness and some specific training may be required.

