

itinerary

India: Ladakh – Little Tibet

Days 1 & 2

Our caravan of insight and adventure begins as we depart from JFK to **New Delhi, India**. Arrive in New Delhi and transfer to hotel. Overnight - Delhi

Day 3

Our first day of exploration of Delhi begins after lunch as we visit one of the most amazing examples of Indian contemporary architecture. The **Bahai Temple** was completed in 1986 and takes the shape of a giant lotus flower, an important symbol common to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The Bahai Temple is a beautiful sanctuary where adherents from all faiths come to pray, meditate and enjoy the peaceful calmness of the sacred space. After the Bahai Temple, we will visit a **Sikh Temple** where we will observe the devout performing their daily rituals and prayers. We will receive a lecture from a Sikh holy man who will share his in-depth knowledge and personal experience of Sikhism, one of the many spiritual traditions of India. Overnight - Delhi

Day 4

Early morning departure for **Agra**, located 204 kilometers south of Delhi. We have a full day of exploration of Agra, the home of India's most famous building – the **Taj Mahal**. The Taj Mahal has been described as the most extravagant monument ever built for love and is definitely, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. This spectacular white marble building was built over a 20 year period with more than 20,000 people from India and Central Asia. After our tour of the Taj and the city of Agra, we return to Delhi and prepare for our morning departure flight to Ladakh. Overnight - Delhi.

Day 5

We depart Delhi on a spectacular mountain flight to **Ladakh – Little Tibet**. Ladakh is located in the north of the great Himalayan ranges in the northern most region of India. It is part of the Trans-Himalaya, a vast complex mountain region between the main Himalaya range and the Tibetan plateau. Ladakh is surrounded by massive snowcapped peaks of both the **Himalaya** and **Karakoram** mountain ranges, the two highest mountain ranges in the world. Arrive in **Leh**, the capital of Ladakh. Transfer to hotel. Evening walk through the ancient market place of Leh. Overnight -Leh.

Day 6

Full day of exploring **Leh**, the 11,500 foot capital of Ladakh that is nestled in a side valley just to the north of the Indus Valley. In the morning we visit the ancient bazaar and the old town of Leh with its labyrinth of alleyways and houses stacked with dry wood. Leh was once one of the main trading locations with Tibet and Central Asia along the ancient **Silk Routes**. In the afternoon we visit the 150 year-old **Sankar Gompa**, located north of the town center. Sankar Gompa has a wonderful collection of art, especially its 1000 arm statue of Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. In the evening we experience Ladakhi folk dance and music. Overnight - Leh.

Day 7

After breakfast we visit one of the most impressive monasteries in Ladakh – **Tikse Gompa**, located 17 km south of Leh. This monastery has a great collection of Tibetan books and an excellent collection of Tibetan sacred art. In its Maitreya temple, we are treated to a massive 2 story statue of the future Buddha Maitreya. We will witness our first Tibetan Buddhist puja, or religious ceremony performed by the monks here at Tikse. In the afternoon, we explore **Shey Gompa**, once the former summer palace of the kings' of Ladakh. At Shey, we see a beautiful 12 m statue of Shakyamuni Buddha made of



copper and gold-plated. There are many ancient stupas to be seen at and around the Shey Gompa. Overnight - Leh.

Day 8

Our morning begins with a visit to **Spituk Gompa**, located on a hilltop above the Indus River. This 15th century monastery belongs to the Gelugpa order of Tibetan Buddhism and houses a great collection of ancient Tibetan paintings and statues. After lunch we travel to the beautiful rural village of Phyang where we will explore the **Phyang Gompa**. As we pass the many **mani walls** – stone walls with sacred inscriptions, we arrive at this 16th century monastery that was built by King Tashi Namgyal. This monastery belongs to the Kargu order of Tibetan Buddhism. After our tour of the monastery we will stroll through the village and meet the local villagers. Overnight - Leh.

Day 9

Morning visit to **Stakna Gompa** that is spectacularly situated on the side of the Indus River. Stakna is a beautiful monastery with a brightly restored courtyard and many prayer rooms and chapels. From the roof of Stakna, some of the best views of Ladakh can be seen. After Stakna Gompa we explore **Matho Monastery** that was built in the 16th century. Matho Monastery belongs to the Sakya order of Tibetan Buddhism and is a very busy place with monks and also a school for many children. Similar to Stakna, Matho's roof offers some awesome views of Ladakh's "lunarscape" landscape. In the afternoon we return to Leh and visit the **Shanti Stupa** located on the outskirts of Leh. Overnight – Leh.

Day 10

After breakfast we visit **Choglamsar** an important center for Tibetan Buddhism and the study of Tibetan culture and history. At Choglamsar there is a Tibetan library, handicraft center, study center, bookshop and the Dalai Lama's prayer ground. After lunch we visit **Soma Gompa** that has become the headquarters of the Ladakh Buddhist association. Soma Gompa is the home to a beautiful statue of Shakyamuni Buddha and also Padmasambhava, the founder of Tibetan Buddhism. At Soma we will witness the monks chanting and performing their ritual offerings and prayers. Overnight – Leh.

Day 11

Our day begins as we travel to the village of Chemrey to explore **Chemrey Gompa**. Built to commemorate the death of King Singe Namgyal in 1645, Chemrey belongs to the Kargu order of Tibetan Buddhism. Chemrey has an impressive collection of ancient sacred art in its many beautiful prayer halls and chapels. We will also visit a nearby cave gompa where many great yogi's meditated on the teachings of Buddhism. After lunch we explore **Taktok Monastery**, the only Nyingma order of Tibetan Buddhism found in the upper Indus Valley in Ladakh. Built around a sacred cave above the village of Sakti, Taktok has a great collection of frescos and paintings. After Taktok, we return to Leh and the rest of the afternoon is free time for leisure. Overnight – Leh.

Day 12

Early morning drive through the "moonscape" countryside of Ladakh to the village of Likir where we explore one of the most magnificent monasteries in Ladakh. **Likir Gompa** was founded in the 14th century and was the first monastery to be founded under the direction of Tibetan monks. Likir is the home to 150 monks who belong to the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism. Likir houses a superb collection of scroll paintings dating back 500 years. In the afternoon we travel to the oldest monastery in Ladakh, **Lamayuru**, founded in the 10th century. Lamayuru is probably the most spectacularly set monastery in all of Ladakh because it is perched high above a drained lake overlooking a massive mountain range. Lamayuru is known for its fine collection of frescos, carpets and scroll paintings. In the morning we will experience the monks performing a mesmerizing ritual ceremony. Overnight – Uletokpo.



Day 13

After breakfast we travel to both *Julichen Nunnery* and *Rezong Monastery* north of Lamayuru. Rezong Gumpa has an impressive collection of sacred art, especially its wall paintings. The monks and nuns follow a very strict lifestyle dedicated to the tenets of monastic life and contemplation. After Rezong we travel to *Alchi Gumpa*, one of the true treasures in the entire Buddhist world. Founded in the 11th century, Alchi is one of the few rare examples of Indian Buddhist art whose fresco paintings are the finest found anywhere in Buddhist lands. We are in for a very special treat in Alchi as we explore its sacred mandalas, statues, wood carvings and paintings. For those interested in Buddhist sacred art, Alchi becomes the highlight of the tour. Alchi is a tiny picturesque village hidden along the side of the Indus River. After our tour of the monastery, we will walk through this rural farming village and down to the shores of the Indus River. Overnight – Uletokpo.

Day 14

Morning drive through the Ladahki countryside back to Leh. After lunch, we visit *Hemis Gumpa* also known as Chang-Chub-Sam-Ling – Lone Place of the Compassionate One. Hemis monastery is the largest in Ladakh and was founded in the 17th century. Cradled in a lovely peaceful valley surrounded by streams and mani walls, Hemis houses a superb collection of Kashmiri bronzes and well-preserved frescos. After Hemis, we return to Leh and our last evening in Ladakh – the Land of the Lamas. Overnight – Leh.

Day 15

Depart Leh for Delhi. Transfer to hotel for rest, leisure, or shopping in the many markets of Delhi. Overnight – Delhi.

Day 16

Our last day is free to shop and explore Delhi. We depart in the evening to the airport for our late night flight back to the States.

Day 17 Homeward Bound! We depart Delhi and arrive back at JFK.

