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Ladakh ("Land of high passes")

About Ladakh:

Ladakh is the highest plateau of the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir with an average altitude of above 10,000 ft. It is a high altitude desert as it lies in the rain-shadow region of the Himalaya. Ladakh borders Tibet to the east, Lahaul & Spiti to the south, Kashmir valley to the west and the trans-Kunlun region of Xinjiang on the other side of the Kunlun range across the Karakoram Pass in the far north.

Ladakh is renowned for its remote mountain beauty & culture. It is sometimes called as "Little Tibet" as it has been strongly influenced by Tibetan culture.

Our Route up to Leh, the capital & main city of Ladakh region presents us with innumerable surprises.

We get to see a complete cultural, geographical & ecological transition in a short distance of 435 kms.

Till we cross Zojila we are in a high rainfall area & the color is green & white of snow all around us. As soon as we cross Zojila we enter arid cold desert of Ladakh & the colour changes to shades of brown. The changes in habitat bring about changes in the flora and fauna.

As one proceeds towards Leh almost everything changes, right from the houses to clothes to the entire lifestyle. The religion & culture also change from predominantly Muslim to predominantly Buddhist.

Our Itinerary:

May 18 - Day 1: Srinagar / Sonamarg (90kms/3 - 4 Hrs)

Arrive Srinagar by flight.

We start our journey from Srinagar Airport. Depending on the flight timings we either stay the night in Srinagar or proceed to Sonamarg from the Airport. We pass by **Shankaracharya temple, Dal Lake & Mougul gardens**. Famous **Char Chinar Island & Hajrat bal darga** can be seen en-route. As we proceed, the road after village Kangan goes along **River Sindh** right up to Sonamarg.

Sonamarg is famous for **Thajwas glacier** & the trek up to Thajwas & back takes about 4 hours.

May 19 - Day 2: Srinagar / Sonamarg – Kargil (135 Kms / 6-7 Hrs.)

As soon as we leave Sonamarg we start climbing towards **Zojila (11,500ft)**. One can see '**Baltal**', a starting point for Amarnath, on the right side down in the valley. The valley on the right goes to Amarnath, where as we cross the ridge on left & when we cross Zojila, which is a pass in greater Himalayan range, we enter the region of Ladakh.

After about an hour's drive from Zojila we approach Drass. Just before Drass we can see **Tiger Hill** on our left – famous because of the Kargil war. **Drass** is the 2nd coldest inhabited place on earth & temperatures drop to -35 degree in winter. Worry not, it will be very pleasant when we go there in summer. After about 10 kms from Drass we stop at the **War Memorial** to pay our tribute to Kargil war heroes.

It takes about two hours to reach Kargil from Drass. The road goes along **River Suru** to Kargil.



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May 20 - Day 3: Kargil – Leh (200kms. / 8-9 Hrs)

2 hours from Kargil we come to Mulbek village. We see a 1400 year old **Chamba statue** carved in a single rock. We see one of the first 'Mane' (Prayer wheel) & here onwards it is a predominantly Buddhist region.

After Chamba we start climbing towards **Namikla** & then **Fotula**. Fotula at 13500 ft is the highest pass that we cross en-route to Leh.

After Fotula we see the magnificent **monastery of Lamayuru** on the right side. After passing Lamayuru we enter **Moon Land** which is a phenomenally beautiful moon like landscape.

Just about 35 kms before Leh, **at Neemu** we see **a confluence of Holy River Indus (Sindhu) & River Zaskar**.

We stop at the **Magnetic Hill** to see the wonder that eludes all the concepts of gravity & reach Leh for evening tea.

May 21 - Day 4: Leh – (Local Sightseeing)

Morning: After breakfast we go to **Hemis monastery & Thiksey Monastery**. On our way back we stop at **Sindhu Darshan**. Lunch & relax.

Evening: Visit **Shantistupa**. On way back one can get down at Leh market & walk back to the hotel.

May 22 - Day 5: Leh – Nubra Valley

The region comprising the valley of the Shayok and Nubra rivers is known as Nubra. Nubra means Green & in Nubra valley there is a grand mixture of green in otherwise arid landscape. Water is the source of life & you can see it as villages are absolutely green in the brown surroundings.

Today we cross world's highest motorable pass – **Khardung la (18380 ft.)** & go to **Nubra Valley**. Reach Sumur / Hunder village in time for lunch.

Afternoon: Relax & enjoy beautiful surroundings.

Evening: Visit **Monastery** & go to **Panamic hot water springs**. The road beyond Panamic goes to Siachin glacier 90 kms. & tourists are not allowed to go further. On the way back, one can do a small trek to **Yarab Tso** – a small lake. In Hunder one can have a pleasure of riding Double Humped Camels (Bactrian Camels) on sand-dunes surrounded by snow clad cliffs.

May 23 - Day 6. Nubra Valley – Pangong Tso via Shyok

After breakfast we check out and take Shyok route to go to Pangong Tso. Pangong is situated at an altitude of about 15000 ft. Only 30% of the lake is in India, rest is in China. One has to actually see it to know its beauty & admire it.

May 24 - Day 7: Pangong Tso – Leh

Today we cross Chang La. (17500 ft) & go back to Leh.

May 25 - Day 8: Leh - (Local)

Free Day for leisure and to Enjoy Leh Market

Opt for Rafting in Zaskar.(Optional) and /or enjoy Leh market at leisure

May 26 - Day 9: Airport drop for flight back home.