

### SIGHT SEEING

A miniature version of the Potala in Lhasa, the **Leh Palace** is one of the major attractions here. The palace was built in 17

th century by Tashi Namgyal and is now dilapidated and deserted. It was the home of the royal family until they were

exiled to Stok in the 1830s. Above the palace, at the top of Namgyal peak, is the

**Victory Tower,**

built to commemorate Ladakh's victory over the Balti-Kashmir armies in the early 16

th century.

The **Namgyal Tsemo Gompa**, built in 1430, contains a three-storey Buddha image and ancient manuscripts and frescoes. The fort above this gompa is ruined, but the views of Leh from here are breathtakingly beautiful.

The **Sankar Gompa** is located a couple of kilometres north of the town centre. The Gompa belongs to the Gelukpa order and has an impressive impression of the Buddhist deity Avalokiteshwara Padmahari or Chenresig, with 1,000 arms and equal number of heads.

The **Shanti Stupa** was built by Japanese order and was opened by Dalai Lama in 1985. From the top, one can view the exotic locales nearby. The Stupa is located at a distance of 3km from the Fort road.

Mughal emperor Aurangzeb commissioned the **Mosque** at the head of Leh Bazaar. The **Soma Gompa**

lies near the mosque opposite to Ladakh Book Shop.

### EXCURSIONS:

67km from Leh, on the banks of river Indus, is the **Alchi Gompa** dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It is one of the largest and a famous monastery with a widely renowned collection of paintings.

At a distance of 49km south of Leh, **Hemis** is one of the biggest gompas in Ladakh. Built in 1630, it belongs to the red sect, Brokpa. It is also known as Chang Chub Sam Ling or 'the lone place of the compassionate person'. To commemorate the birth of the renowned Indian sage, Padmasambhava, the annual Hemis festival is held in the month of June/July.

Situated on the opposite bank of the Indus across Thikse, the **Matho Gompa** was established in first half of the 16<sup>th</sup>

century and has valuable collection of old and beautiful thangkas, some in the form of 'Mandalas'. Its annual Festival of oracles in early march is an important event in Ladakhi religious calendar.

Until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the **Shey Gompa** was the royal residence. It is located at a distance of 15km south of Leh. This Palace Monastery has the largest statue of Maitreya Buddha (the Buddha to come) in Ladakh. Erected in the mid-17<sup>th</sup>

century, worked out of gold and gilded copper sheets with blue hair, it stands 17.5m high.

At a distance of 8km from Leh, standing majestically on top of a hillock overlooking the Indus valley, lies the **Spituk Gompa**. It was in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and houses a collection of ancient masks, antique arms, icons and thangkas. Higher up the hill is the

#### **Mahakali Temple**

, containing the shrine of Vajrabhairava.

About 19km south of Leh, **Thikse Gompa** is an imposing monastery and one of finest

examples of Ladakhi architecture. It belongs to the Gelukpa order. The 12-storey monastery complex contains numerous stupas, statues, thangkhas, wall paintings, swords and a large pillar engraved with the Buddha's teachings.

25km upstream from Thikse, **Stakna** is situated on a 60-metre-high isolated rock. The word Stakna means 'Tiger's nose'. It was built by the step brother of King Sengge Namgyal, as a part of the Brokpa order.

Built in 1814, the **Stok Gompa** (17km) is the site where the last king of Ladakh died in 1974. The museum here has a unique collection of royal ornaments, and traditional clothing, along with exquisite thangkhas representing the life of the Sakya Muni Buddha.

The **Lamayuru Monastery** (125km) was founded in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It houses a library, thought to be the oldest in the region. The present Monastery dates back to 16<sup>th</sup> century and has the 11-headed image of the Avalokiteshwara Buddha.

Founded in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the **Likir Monastery** (60km) was rededicated to the Gelukpa order in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The earlier Gompa was destroyed in fire and the present Gompa dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It contains huge clay images of the Buddha and various old manuscripts. It also houses an interesting collection of thangkhas, old religious and domestic costumes and implements.

Belonging to the Brokpa sect, the **Phyang Gompa** was built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Located at a distance of 17km from Leh, it houses hundreds of statues, thangkhas, old manuscripts and some old weapons.

The **Bagso Gompa** is located 42km downstream from Leh, and was the seat of power of a branch of Namgyal family. It is here in 1680 A.D. that involves Mongol and Tibetan armies were held in check over a three-year-long siege. Original 16<sup>th</sup> century murals and other arts of Bagso are worth seeing.

About 45 km from Leh, the **Chemrey Gompa** is situated in a picturesque valley leading to Changia. It was constructed on Sengge Namgyal's death in 1645. A large collection of scriptures with pages in sterling silver and the text in gold letters is kept here.

Precariously perched atop a 200-metre-high crag, the **Mulbekh Gompa** has an imposing rock carving of the future Buddha. On the other end of the valley is a phallus-shaped rock with a monastery at its base.

At a distance of 50 km east of Leh, the **Thak Thok Gompa** is the only monastery belonging to the Nying-ma-pa order. Gum Rinpoche (Padma Sambhava) is said to have founded this monastery and the temple where he meditated is still to be seen here. Tu-Phuk houses the images of Guru-Tsan-Gyet (eight forms of Padma Sambhava), Guru TakpoTsahe and the 11-headed Avalokiteshwara. The new monastery is built on ground level and contains the image of Guru Nang Srith Zilon in a central position. To its right is an image of guru Dorje Dolo and on the left is an image of Guru Padma Gyalpo. There are seats for the Dalai Lama and Taklung

Rinpoche (the incarnate Lama of the monastery). The Monastery stages two festivals every year. Dak-thok Tse-Chu is held from the ninth to the eleventh day of the sixth Tibetan month.

Thak Thog Wangchogis is held from the 26

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to the 29

th

day of the ninth Tibetan lunar month.

Nearby, the town **Choglamsar** (7km) is an important centre for Tibetan Buddhism and study of Tibetan study and culture. One can find here a Tibetan Library, medical centre, handicrafts shops, study centre, bookshops, plenty of restaurants, and the Central Institute of Buddhist studies.

The Sikh shrine of **Gurudwara Shri Patthar Sahib** is situated about 25 km short of Leh town on the Leh-Srinagar highway on the confluence of the Indus and Zaskar rivers. Built in the memory of Guru Nanak Dev, the great prophet who sanctified the place by his sacred visit during the year 1517 while on his second missionary tour. The Guru reached here by Nepal, Sikkim, Tibet, Yarkand and Leh after having spiritual discourses with the Sidhas at Mount Sumer (Central Himalayas).

**Khardung La** is a high mountain pass, 49 km from Leh, the highest motorable road in the world at an altitude of 5359 m. The views from the top of the pass are amazing. Built in 1976, it was opened to motor vehicles in 1988 and has seen many expeditions.

**Pangong Tso** (148 km) is a lake situated at a height of about 4,250 m (13,900 ft). It is 134 km long and extends from India to Tibet. The lake is 5 km wide at its broadest point. In winter, the lake surface freezes completely despite being salt water. Pangong Tso can be reached in five-hour drive from Leh, most of it on a rough and dramatic mountain road. The road traverses the third-highest pass in the world, the Changla pass.