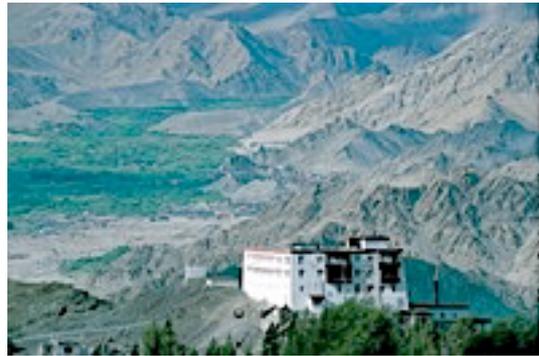


Highlights of Ladakh – 16 days

Tour JTT-LA-01: Delhi – Srinagar – Kargil - Padum – Kargil – Leh – Nubra – Pangong Tso – Leh - Delhi

On this tour you'll fly to Srinagar, in the lush green Valley of Kashmir. After two utterly relaxed days staying on a houseboat among floating gardens and the soothing sound of splashing shikara peddles, you'll embark on a spectacular two-day road trip to Ladakh. Crossing the Himalaya Range, you'll reach an area that can't be more different from Kashmir. Here, forbidding but colourful mountains form the décor for tiny green hamlets of man-made oases with fort-like Tibetan houses.



Before heading to Ladakh proper (the Indus Valley) we take you along a spectacular road to hidden and remote Zaskar. This area is still closed off from the outside world half of the year due to snow on the high passes. Here you'll spend two days exploring the wide and beautiful valleys of Zaskar and its picturesque little villages and *gompas* (monasteries), before returning to Kargil.

Continuing from Kargil to Leh you'll visit the ancient and beautiful *gompas* of Lamayuru and Alchi. At Leh, the capital of Ladakh situated in the upper reaches of the Indus Valley, you can take it easy for a while and explore the beautiful Buddhist monasteries in the area. Then, you'll be taken to the remote and idyllic Nubra Valley, from where you'll continue over quiet backroads through gorgeous mountain scenery to Pangong Lake. This is one of the biggest saltwater lakes in the world and situated in a stark and spectacular landscape right on the border with Tibet. After returning to Leh, you'll fly back to Delhi.

Itinerary

Day 01: Flight Delhi – Srinagar

The short flight from the dusty capital of India to the valley of Kashmir is just a short one. But it will land you in a totally different world. Surrounded by deeply forested and snow-clad mountains of the Pirpanjal and Himalayan Range, 'the valley' is a lush green enclave where



nature's bounties seem to be in abundance. Water thunders down from the high mountains in raging rivers that cut through dense forests and flower-covered alpine meadows. The pleasantly warm, 'mediterranean' weather allows almost all thinkable crops to grow exuberantly. This includes rice, all sorts of vegetables and fruits, and the precious saffron. No wonder, Shah Jahan, one of the famous Moghul emperors who ruled India for many century liked to spend his summers here. His is the well-known remark on Kashmir "If there is a paradise on earth, it is here, it is here."

Dal Lake, near Kashmir's capital Srinagar is an idyll of sorts within this paradise. Here, you'll stay in a floating hotel built in nineteenth century British cottage style. On this houseboat, you'll be surrounded by quiet waters and the subtle sounds of splashing peddles of passing *shikaras* (small, wooden boats; only non-motorized boats are allowed here), kingfishers, pariah kites and other water birds.

Day 02: At Dal Lake (Srinagar)

Today you can explore the surroundings of your houseboat. You'll be taken on shikara ride through the backwaters of Dal Lake, and in the afternoon a taxi will take you along some of the highlights of Srinagar. The latter includes Shankaracharya Hill, where an old Hindu temple overlooks the lake, the Jamma Mashid (main mosque) and a carpet factory.

Day 03: Srinagar – Kargil (7-8 hrs)

After an early start, you'll be heading north, traveling the ancient caravan route to Ladakh. The roads first winds through terraced fields of rice and vegetable gardens, and small villages shaded by centuries-old *chennar* trees (a kind of maple), then enters the alpine forests of the Himalayas. After passing the tourist village of Sonamarg (2800 m) you'll quickly gain height and finally find yourself on an unpaved road that has been carved out from a steep rock face, looking down at alpine meadows half a kilometer below. The faint-hearted are advised to sit on the left side of the car here. This is the 3528 m high Zoji La, the pass that gives access to Ladakh.

After descending form the pass you'll notice many differences. Houses are mostly constructed from sun-dried bricks and plastered with loam, the roofs mostly flat. This relatively cheap form of construction, which requires a minimum amount of wood, is possible thanks to the much drier climate here, and an adaptation to the general scarcity of trees. Technically, you have entered the Trans-Himalaya, part of the vast Tibetan Plateau. Although people here adhere to Islam, genetically they are strongly influenced by the people living further east who are know for their Buddhist beliefs. Overnight is at a hotel in Kargil.

Day 04 Kargil – Padum (250 km/ 10-11 hrs)

Early morning drive to Padum (Zanskar). On the way, you can have magnificent views of Nun Kun Peak and Durung Drung Glacier. We'll stop for a visit to Rangdum Monastery and for those who feel fit enough, we'll walk upto a view point that can be counted among the best in the whole Himalayas. You'll reach Padum by evening, where you'll check in to a simple guesthouse.



Day 05: At Padum/Zanskar

After breakfast leave for full sightseeing exploring

the wide Zaskar Valley north of Padum, visiting Karsha, Stongde and Sani, all beautiful, still largely traditional villages with a *gompa* (monastery) that is worth seeing.

Back to Padum by evening for overnight at the hotel.

Optional: 2-4 hour walk on the other side of the Zaskar River between some beautiful traditional villages.

Day 06: At Padum/Zaskar

Today you'll explore the more remote upper reaches of the Zaskar River south of Padum, driving upto Purne (road conditions permitting) and visiting the monastery of Bardan on the way. Again you'll see very picturesque villages against a backdrop of colorful mountains. From Purne you can walk to the isolated Monastery of Phugtal, hidden in a cave high above the river. This walk takes about 4-5 hours but is highly recommended.



Day 07: Padum – Kargil (250 km/ 10-11 hrs)

You'll return along the same long, but spectacular road to Kargil.

Day 08: Kargil – Alchi (230 km/5-6 hrs)

Today, you'll enter the 'real' Ladakh, an area that is even more dry and barren than Zaskar. While Kargil is a muslim enclave, soon after leaving this town you'll again see the first signs of Buddhism. At Mulbekh you'll pass an eight-century bass-relief of the Buddha Maitreya, sign of the ancient pilgrim's road you are traveling. You'll pass two passes that are each higher than the actual Himalayan pass you crossed when you came from Srinagar, but as the valleys are even higher than 3000 m here, they may not seem so impressive.

After 3-4 hours of driving you'll pass the legendary monastery of Lamayuru. The monastery itself is a must-see and its setting as well.

Soon after leaving Lamayuru you'll reach the Indus. From here you'll follow this river (that gave India its name) upstream to Leh, the capital of Ladakh. En route you'll pass Alchi Gompa. This is the oldest and according to art historians the most important gompa of Ladakh. It dates back more than thousand years. Overnight is at Alchi Village.

Day 09: At Leh

It is just a two hours drive to Leh. Here, you'll check in to your guesthouse or hotel. The rest of the day can be spent on exploring Leh Bazaar or on short walks in the surroundings. Your accommodation will be according to your wishes, a simple but clean guesthouse, a good hotel with a gorgeous view from the rooftop restaurant, or a very comfortable resort just outside Leh.

Day 10: At Leh

Today you'll visit some of the finest gompas (Buddhist monasteries in the Indus Valley, not far from Ladakh. Depending on your level of interest and knowledge you can see two, three or a whole series of gompas belonging to different sects of Buddhism.

Day 11: Leh - Nubra Valley (120 km/ 5-6 hrs)

After breakfast drive to Nubra Valley via Khardung La (one of the highest motorable roads in the world, 5.450m). You'll arrive at Hundar or Sumur village in Nubra by the afternoon. Rest of the day is free to explore the quaint little villages of Nubra. Overnight at a comfortable lodge.

Day 12: In Nubra Valley

Today, you'll spend the whole day on exploring the Nubra Valley. If you opt for the 'active' program, you'll be taken on a ride through the dunes near Hundar on the back of Bactrians, two-humped camels that directly descend from animals that worked the caravan trails to Yarkand and Kashgar. Though right on the banks of the river, the landscape is a true desert here, and riding the camels, you may easily forget you're actually in between the Himalayas and the Karakoram! In the afternoon, you can visit two of the most interesting and old gompas of Nubra, Deskit Gompa and Samsthanling Gompa. However, if you feel like stretching your legs, we can take you on a small mountain trail that climbs high above the Nubra river to a remote little gompa that Lonely Planet has never heard of.



Day 13: Nubra Valley – Pangong Leh (164 km/ 9 hrs)

Early morning you'll set out on what is probably the most spectacular road rip of this journey. The road follows the wild and untamed Shyok River leads through a sparsely inhabited valley till it joins the much more popular road from Leh to Pangong Tso at Durbuk.

It depends on road conditions whether you can follow this unknown backroad all the way to Durbuk (total 5.5 hours to Pangong Tso). If not, you'll have to cross the Wuri La pass and after that the Chang La pass (both approx. 5400 m high), making the drive considerably longer, but definitely at least as spectacular as the shorter one (total 9 hours to Pangong Tso).

Pangong largest high-elevation salt (actually brackish) water lake in the world, shared by the two countries India and China. Overnight in a tented camp at Pangong Lake (decent, large tents with attached bathroom).



Day 14: Pangong Lake – Leh (148 km/ 6-7 hrs)

After breakfast you return to Leh. On the way you'll pass some some interesting and more remote gompas that most visitors don't get to see, in particular Takthok Gompa and Chemre Gompa.

Day 15: Transfer to Airport

Early morning you'll board the flight from Leh to Delhi. Although the flight takes only one hour, on a clear day it is no doubt one of the most spectacular flights in Asia.

Shorter version

If time is a constraint, we can offer you this tour without visiting Srinagar. You'll fly in and out to Leh. The total no. of days of this tour is 13.

Price

Please ask for quotation. Price depends on accommodation level, car type and whether you prefer to be accompanied by a local guide throughout your journey or not.