

The Great Himalayan Crossing – 13 days

Delhi to Leh via the Spiti Valley

Tour JTT-LA02: Delhi -Shimla – Kinnaur – Spiti – Lahaul - Ladakh

On this tour you'll travel along one of the world's most spectacular road trips, crossing the Great Himalayan Range to Ladakh on the Tibetan Plateau. After a leisurely train ride to Chandigarh, our guide and car will take you to Shimla, the former winter capital of the British India. Here you'll get a glimpse of the Himalayan giants that await you later in the journey. Then you'll travel through the deep gorge of the Sutlej, one of the five rivers that originate near the holy Mt. Kailash in Tibet, through Kinnaur.



Gradually you'll see the landscape changing from lush green and forest-covered to the barren, stark but beautiful high altitude desert of the Trans-Himalaya. At the same time you'll see a remarkable change in culture and people. "Indians" make way for "Tibetans", while Hinduism is replaced by Buddhism. In Spiti you'll see famous Tabo Gumpa, probably the oldest lamaist Buddhist monastery in India, and walk among some of the highest villages in the world. The road becomes even more spectacular as you cross three road passes of altitudes between 4885 and 5300 m while traversing an immense no-man's land between Spiti and Ladakh. Reaching the Indus Valley and Ladakh's capital Leh, will be like reaching Timbuktu.

Itinerary

Day 01: Arrival at Delhi International Airport

At Delhi you are met outside the International Arrivals Hall and transferred to a hotel or guesthouse for overnight stay. If your flight reaches after midnight, we suggest that you spend the next day sightseeing in Delhi (not included in the price). We can offer a tour of India's capital, including Old Delhi, and a visit to the Red Fort, Jama Masjid, Chandni Chowk, Humayun's Tomb and the Akshardam temple.

Also you can do an early morning (or evening) bicycle ride through Old Delhi, the bustling market place with narrow streets where more happens on a street corner in half an hour than in your home town in a month. The bicycles are of a good quality and you'll be guided by a professional guide.

Overnight stay is at a hotel in Delhi or guesthouse in Gurgaon, which is closer to the airport.

Day 02: New Delhi – Chandigarh – Shimla (109 kms, 3 – 4 hrs)

We board the Shatabdi Express to Chandigarh at New Delhi Railway station. On arrival at the railway station in Chandigarh, you'll be met by our local guide and driven to Shimla by jeep (109 km/ 3-4 hrs drive). Since the evening is free, we recommend a walk down the mall road - the main promenade that runs along the top of the Ridge - a busy shopping area with old colonial buildings, souvenir shops and restaurants. Overnight stay is at a hotel in Shimla.

Day 03: Sightseeing around Shimla

In the morning, we visit some interesting places, such as the vice regal lodge. Housed in the gothic splendor of this building, is the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, India's premier academy for higher research. Quite close to this is the Himachal State Museum, a colonial building set in spacious lawns. It has collections of Pahari miniatures, stone sculpture, local handicrafts, textiles and embroidery.



Day 04: Shimla – Sarahan (175 kms, 7 – 8 hrs)

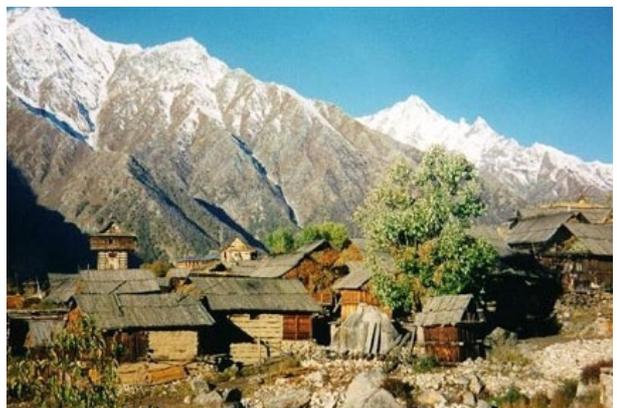
We set off on the jeep tour at this point. We drive to Sarahan (2165 mts), which takes about 7-8 hrs from Shimla. We drive through many small towns such as Nirth, Rampur through Satluj Valley. At Nirth, there is an old temple, dedicated to Sun God. And Dutt Nagar is known for its archaeological importance. Sarahan is a small but beautiful village, which is host to the historical Bhima Kali Temple, believed to be 1500 years old. Overnight stay is in a comfortable hotel.

Day 05: Sarahan – Sangla (95 kms, 4 – 5 hrs)

Going to Sangla takes about 4 to 5 hrs on a well-surfaced road. Sarahan is at an altitude of 2680 mts. Overnight stay is at a camp / guest house in Sangla.

Day 06: Sangla – Chitkul – Sangla (56 kms, 5 - 6 hrs)

While we stay in Sangla, we visit the beautiful village of Chitkul (3450 mts) in the Baspa Valley. The route till Chitkul -- the last and highest village in Baspa Valley -- is very narrow and steep. Chitkul is situated on the right bank of the Baspa



Valley where there is a temple dedicated to the local Goddess, Mathi, which is said to have been constructed some 500 years ago. The location of Rackcham, another village in Baspa Valley is striking as rocky cliffs of granite rocks and forests surround it. The whole day is spent visiting all these beautiful villages. We return back to the camp / guesthouse in Sangla for overnight stay.

Day 07: Sangla –Rarang via Kanam (105 kms, 6 hrs)

Our Journey moves on the banks of river Satluj till we reach Jangi. We also make an excursion to Ribba Village, one of the biggest villages in Kinnaur, famous for Angoori, local alcohol brewed out of the grapes, one of the specialties of Kinnaur. We visit the beautiful village of Rarang. After putting up camp and afternoon tea and snacks at Jangi, the group does a side trip of Kanam. Kanam itself means, “a place of the sacred books”. Explore the real Kinnaur in these villages situated on the high hills, which in the legends and old Hindu and Buddhist literature occupies a special place. Overnight stay is at a quaint homestay in Rarang.

Day 08: Rarang – Tabo via Nako (147 kms, 6 - 7 hrs)

We drive all along the River Satluj till Khab - the meeting point of the two rivers of Spiti and Satluj. After that, all the way up, we zigzag along the Spiti River. Around 7 kms of tarmac road takes you to Nako (2950 m.). This is the highest and the largest village in the valley on the left bank of river Spiti. It is encircled on every side by high hills, which is witness to the presence of a former lake.



Tabo Monastery ((3050 Mts) - Tabo monastery is the seat of Buddhist learning. This Gumpa is regarded as being next in significance to the Tholing Gumpa in Tibet.

Day 09: Tabo – Shego via Dankar and Pin Valley (110 kms, 5-6 hrs)

Driving along the Spiti Valley, we pass through many villages and monasteries of Spiti. We Camp in Shego.

Dhankar (3890 mts) – About 30 kms from Tabo, through steep hillsides along a dusty road slowly winds its way up to the village Dhankar, located at a height of 3890 mts.

Pin - We cross the Spiti River on a solid concrete bridge and follow the Pin River, one of the major tributaries of the Spiti River. The valley is famous for its wild life – Ibex, Snow Leopard and what have you.



Day 10: Visit to the villages of Langza (4400 mts), Hikim – Komik (4500 mts), Kibbar (4,205 mts) and Ki Monastery (5-6 hrs)

These villages are all situated over the height of 4000 m, the highest one even at 4500 m, at striking locations housing some of the most interesting monasteries in the Spiti Valley. They are most likely among the highest inhabited villages in the world. Very picturesque is also Ki Gompa (monastery), at 13 km from Kaza. This monastery is built on what must have been a crater of an extinct volcano and is one of the biggest and the oldest monasteries belonging to the Gelugpa sect in Spiti.

Day 11: Shego - over Kunzam Pass - Chandratal (115 kms, 5-6 hrs)

Today we cross the Himalayan Range (again) as we drive over Kunzum pass (4550 m). After descending a little from the pass we take another narrow track to Chandratal (4,270 mts). The first sight of this wondrous 'Moon Lake' takes one's breath away, with its shores ringed with meadows carpeted with over hundred varieties of alpine flowers. It is an excellent campsite surrounded by the massive mountaintops (C.B. Ranges) and glaciers at Chandratal. Today, we camp on the side of the river Chandra, which flows from Chandratal Lake.



Day 12: Chandratal – Serchu (240 kms, 6-7 hrs)

Today, we drive all along the Chandra River through Lahaul Valley. We join the Leh Manali Highway at Gramphu. From here on, we drive through the Chandra River along fields of potato and peas, dotted by Lahauli villages, encountering local inhabitants working in the fields. Passing the small village of Jispa with its mud-dried houses we reach Darcha, starting point for treks to Zaskar and Ladakh. The road now climbs up to Patseo, an army encampment. Leaving behind the greenery you more and more enter the barren slopes of the high Himalayas. The landscape is now alpine with gushing glacier streams, tiny white alpine flowers waving in the cold breeze and snowcapped mountains all around. On Baralacha La (4800 m), you actually cross the Great Himalayan Range again and into an area referred to as Trans-Himalaya, the major part of which consists of Tibet.

From here on the landscape is barren but the mountains are colorful to make up for that. Chocolate-colored, rusty-red, metallic-green, bright yellow and grey-blue rocks can be seen throughout the next 100 kms. After about an hour of descending from the pass you'll enter the Lingti Plains, one of the largest uninhabited high altitude plateaus on earth. As there is no habitation around you will stay in the tented accommodation with full room size canvas tents with beds, table and chair, and attached bathrooms. As the altitude is above 4200 m here, you may experience some headache or nausea and your sleep may be hampered. Though uncomfortable, this is normal.

Day 13: Serchu to Leh (253 kms, 7-9 hours)

We leave early morning, crossing two passes that are each higher than Bralacha La: Nake La (4925 m) and Lachulung La (5075 m). Lunch is at Pang, where tent-restaurants cater simple food to travelers during the summer months. After lunch, we drive over another very large high altitude plateau, called Skyangchu Thang, before we start our final and highest ascent of this journey. The Taglang La (5300 m) is the last barrier before we descend down to the Indus Valley, which is Ladakh proper. As you follow the river Indus down to Leh you'll be amazed at the lush green fields of barley that make for such a stark contrast with the surrounding barren mountains. Climate-wise, Ladakh is a desert but thanks to ingenious irrigation systems the Ladakhis are able to grow grain and vegetables here.

Upon arrival in Leh, you'll be met by our representative and check in at our hotel.

Extension of programme

After reaching Leh, you most likely don't want to take the first flight out. Ladakh is a magical place that definitely warrants exploring. We recommend a week for starters. Visiting the fascinating Buddhist *gompas* (monasteries) in the Indus Valley or crossing one of the highest motorable passes in the world to Nubra Valley or the high altitude lake Pangong Tso, on the border with Tibet, are just a few of the highlights. And, to experience the real Ladakh, you may consider a trek into the mountains. Whatever is your choice, we will be most happy to arrange it for you.



Tour Price

Staying in good guesthouses and clean home stays:

For 2 pers. INR 75.500/ € 1005/ \$ 1140 p.p.

For 3 pers. INR 72.250/ € 965/ \$ 1095 p.p.

For 4 pers. INR 64.250/ € 855/ \$ 970 p.p.

For 5 or 6 pers. INR 57.750/ € 770/ \$ 875 p.p.

Staying at hotels where available:

For 2 pers. INR 82.500/ € 1100/ \$ 1250 p.p.

For 3 pers. INR 81.000/ € 1080/ \$ 1230 p.p.

For 4 pers. INR 77.000/ € 1025/ \$ 1165 p.p.

For 5 or 6 pers. INR 75.750/ € 1010/ \$ 1150 p.p.

Price Includes:

- One night at guesthouse in Delhi (CP)
- Transfers from Indira Gandhi Int. Airport to RW Station (day1).
- Transportation by train from Delhi to Chandigarh, without guide.
- Transportation by Chevrolet Tavera (or similar) from Chandigarh RWS to Leh with driver, without guide (can be arranged at additional cost).

- All accommodation from Chandigarh to Leh on AP basis (full board), twin-sharing.
- One bottle of mineral per person per day while on the jeep drive.
- One night at guesthouse/hotel Leh, (CP basis, breakfast only)

Not included:

- International Airfare
- Air fare Leh-Delhi
- Accommodation or transport in Delhi other than mentioned (can be arranged)
- Expenses of personal nature, such as: tips, laundry, alcohol, travel insurance.