

Ladakh best Cycle Circle: Indus Valley, Nubra & Rupshu by Bike

18 days/ 14 days biking

Tour JTT-LA-BC01: Delhi - Leh – Likir – Alchi – Leh – Hundar – Sumur – Tanggyer – Takthok – Chumathang – Sumdo – Korzok – Puga – Tsokar – Leh - Delhi

On this tour, you'll explore the majestic mountains and remote idyllic villages of Ladakh by bicycle. Going at your own pace along millennia-old caravan trails and interacting with the utterly friendly and contented Ladakhi people while staying at home-stays, you'll see and experience so much more of this fairy-tale country than the jeep-sitters will.

Ladakh is situated on the Tibetan Plateau, and it's high. The altitude will force you to go slower than you are used to back home, but that only adds to the experience. There is no hurry on this trip. Being on the trail, winding your way up to a high pass with majestic views and coming down again to be greeted by cheerful kids and waving prayer flags, that's what it is all about. On the bicycle ride, you'll have your back-up car to make the ride easier or shorter if you want.



Depending on your time window, you may also be lucky enough to witness one of the spectacular, colourful and mystical Buddhist festivals, called *tsechus*, where monks dance in brilliant costumes wearing ancient masks of gods, demons and mythical animals. If the dates coincide, we'll make sure that you are able to squeeze in a fantastic festival on this holiday as well.

Itinerary



Day 01: Flight Delhi – Leh (Ladakh)

Early morning you'll fly from India's capital to Leh, the capital of Ladakh.

Although the flight takes only one hour, on a clear day, it is no doubt one of the most spectacular flights in Asia. After leaving the North-Indian plains, you'll cross a number of ranges, including the glacier-clad Pir Panjal Range, before flying over the actual Himalayan Range, the highest mountain range in the world. You'll be amazed at

the different landscape you'll see beneath you on the other side: bare, brightly coloured mountains without any vegetation and tiny rivers that are only recognizable from the string of

green poplars and willows accompanying them. Likewise, the tiny hamlets of Ladakhi farms are surrounded by deep-green fields of barley, made possible by ingenious forms of irrigation.

Leh airport is situated at 3500 m altitude and your guesthouse slightly higher. You may feel the altitude, but even if you don't, it is recommended that you take the rest of the day off. Stay at the guesthouse or at best walk around Leh bazar. Only if you wake up next morning without a headache, you may consider yourself fit to go for not-too-strenuous excursions.

Day 02: At Leh

Leh is a bustling little town. It's small size and laid-back atmosphere belie a very prominent and historically important position. Before the closing of the border between India and China-held Tibet Leh saw daily caravans going to and coming from Yarkand and Kashgar in Turkmenistan, Kashmir, Kullu, Baltistan and Lhasa.

As you will be staying a few kilometers outside Leh, it is a very pleasant walk through the fields to the bazaar. On the way, you can visit your first Ladakhi gompa (monastery), the quaint little Sankar Gompa.

Today, if you feel fit, you can also do a short bike ride to Shey. Shey Gompa is about 15 kms from Leh. It is part of the old palace that used to be the summer palace of the kings of Ladakh, built by Deldan Namgyal in the beginning of 17th century. There are many stupas and other gompas built around the palace. The main attraction in Shey Gompa is the 12m Shakyamuni Buddha statue inside the main prayer hall.

Thiksey Gompa, close to Shey is about 4km further. The monastery is considered to be one of the most beautiful in Ladakh and belongs to the Gelukpa order. It is said to be a smaller evrsion of the Potala in Lhasa, the former residence of the Dalai Lama. After seeing Thikse, it would be wise to turn around, as this is only the second day at this high altitude.

Day 03-05: Leh – Likir – Basgo – Lamyuru (135 km in three days, 3 – 5 hr per day)

In the next three days we do a relatively easy three tour of the Indus Valley northwest of Leh. You'll cycle to the pleasant village of Likir where a magnificent gompa sits atop a hill. On the way there is time to visit other monasteries, such as Spituk (near Leh) and Basgo. This is partly uphill, partly downhill cycling. The next day you'll continue, almost all the way downhill, to Ladakh's oldest temple, Alchi Gompa on the other side of the Indus. From here you return to Leh. Overnight will be at simple but clean and pleasant Ladakhi-style guesthouses.

You'll drive through desertland high above the Indus River, see the scenic confluence of the Indus and the Zaskar River and pass numerous little hamlets of traditional houses. You'll really appreciate the ruggedness of Ladakh and the hard work that people had to put in to create oases based on irrigation.

Day 06 At Leh

One day in Leh to recover, take a shower, maybe buy some souvenirs and sample different cuisines in good restaurants in town.

Day 07: Leh – Khardung La by car (40 km/ 2 hr); Biking downhill to Hundar (88 km/ 3-4 hrs)

As climbing up world's highest motorable road on the first day of your bicycle trip may not be such a good idea, our jeeps will make it easy fro you. From Leh (3500 m) you and the bikes will be



riding the jeeps up to the 5450 m high Khardong La. Even without any biking, you'll find this pass to be breathtaking. Not just the views on the way up, that are admittedly awesome, but the sheer altitude gain of almost 2 kilometers and its corresponding drop in oxygen levels are unmistakable. So today, you'll ride down only. A whopping 2300 vertical meters are ahead of you, the first 1000 meters over slippery and rocky road, then passing Khardong village (4200 m) set amidst high and imposing mountains, eventually landing you at Khalsar (3150 m). After some level coasting along the banks of the wide, gushing Shyok River and a bit of further descending, you'll reach Deskit, the cute little capital of Nubra. Barely twenty kilometers ahead you'll reach Hundar, a lush green enclave of traditional houses hidden away among apricot groves. Here you'll stay in a comfortable guesthouse.

Day 08 & 09: At Hundar and Sumur: exploring Nubra Valley

Today and tomorrow you'll stay at guesthouses in Hundar and Sumur, from where you can make day excursions down the Shyok River in the direction of Pakistan, up the Nubra River to the pleasant hamlet of Panamik, or stay closer to 'home and visit some of the magnificent gompas closer by.



Day 10 Sumur – Tanggyer (58 km/ 4.5 – 6 hr)

Today is a long and rewarding day. First you'll follow the metalled road down to the Shyok River, crossing it by bridge and then on to Khalsar. Here you veer southeast on a very little used road that runs along the bank of the Shyok River. Apart from a few ups and down at the beginning of this stretch, it is mainly a very doable, gradual ascent. The sheer vastness of the valley and its colourful mountains, interspersed with tiny green patches of irrigated fields and villages is very spectacular. Almost 30 kms from Khalsar, you leave the river and climb up approx. 450 m (over 10 kms) till the hamlet of Tanggyer.

Tanggyer is a very picturesque traditional village set against the backdrop of imposing mountains, with a small monastery on a ridge overlooking the valley. In Tanggyer, you can either stay in tents that we take along or in a very simple home stay.



Day 10: Tanggyer to Takthok via Wuri La

Today is the most serious one of this tour. From Tanggyer at 3750 m you climb to Wuri La at 5250 m. As the distance is not too long, you can take your time however, taking regular breaks and enjoying the high pastures where yaks and wild marmots graze. On the pass you'll be rewarded with spectacular views of the Sakti Valley, Indus Valley and the Zaskar Mountains behind it.

Coasting down to Takthok is another well-deserved pleasure. Here you'll stay in a comfortable home stay.

Day 11: Takthok – rest

Today you have the time to explore the magnificent valley near Takthok, either on bike or on foot. For instance, you can visit to the small but very significant gumpa in the village. Takthok means 'rock roof', which refers to the cave around which the gumpa is constructed. Guru Padmasambhava (who brought Buddhism to many parts of the Himalayas in the eight century)

himself is believed to have meditated here, as well Lama Anagarika Govinda while being on pilgrimage to Tibet in the nineteen-thirties (described in his book *The way of the white clouds*).



Day 12, 13 & 14: Takthok – Tsomoriri (192 km in 3 days)

The next three days will take you through some dramatic differences in landscape. Rolling down an easy road along the beautiful oases of Sakti, made up of large whitewashed houses amidst deep green fields of barley fields. On the way, you can visit Chemre Gomba, perched spectacularly on a rock promontory in a side valley.

At Karu, on the main Leh-Manali Highway you turn left. From here, you follow the Indus River upstream in the direction of Tibet along the deep gorge that the river has cut here for another 40-60 km, depending on your fitness. It is steady but gently climbing all the way till Mahe Bridge, which you'll reach the next day. Here you'll cross the Indus and follow a deserted road to the small hamlet of Sumdo where you'll camp (4500 m).

The third day you'll enter the vast and colorful plains of Rupshu (part of the western Tibetan high altitude plateau called Changtang). You follow a small surfaced road that gently climbs to a pass at 4960 m. After that you enter what has been described as one of the most beautiful stretches of road in Ladakh, before you descend to the very scenic small lake Kyagar Tso. After this is more or less level riding till Korzok on the shores of Tsomoriri.

Tsomoriri is a large (27 km long) aquamarine colored brackish ('salt') lake set amidst colorful mountains. Arguably, it is the most beautiful lake in Ladakh. Here, you'll stay at a tented camp (large tents with attached bathroom).

Day 15: At Tsomoriri

The day can be spent lazing by the lake, visiting the local gomba, walking along the shore or bicycling down to its southern tip at Kyangdom, a scenic place (40 km up and down).



Day 16: Tsomoriri – Tsokar (Approx. 95 km in 2 days)

You ride back to Sumdo, where you turn west and follow a rarely travelled small road west. You pass the small summer pastures of Puga where you'll find hot springs. A bit higher up you'll camp for the night. The next day you'll cross the Polokonka La (4970 m) and descend into another vast plain, the Wildlife Sanctuary of Tsokar Lake. It's easy descending and level riding all the way to Pongunagu at the northwestern tip of the lake where you'll stay at a tented camp. On the way there are chances of seeing *kyang*. These beautiful wild creatures are called Tibetan ass but they are actually a species of wild horse. Please don't go close as they have suffered from disturbance due to the increase of (motorised) tourism already too much.

Day 17: Tsokar – Leh by car (140 km/ 6-8 hrs)

From Tsokar you return back to Leh by car, following the Manali-Leh highway over the 5300 m high Tanglang La.

Though this could be done by bike also (2 or 3 days), after all the days of quietude pedaling almost deserted roads, the much denser traffic on this road may not be pleasant. So we propose to jump on the jeep for this stretch. However, if you wish to complete the full circle in the saddle, we are most happy to arrange another 2 or 3 days for this.

Day 18: Flight Leh – Delhi

Early morning, you'll board the flight back to Delhi

Elsewhere on bicycle trip: home stays or tents.

Tour Price

2 pers.: INR 128.000/ € 1705/ \$ 1940 p.p. (using 1 Bolero 4WD pick-up)

3 pers.: INR 122.000/ € 1625/ \$ 1845 p.p. (using 1 Bolero 4WD pick-up & 1 Mahindra Scorpio/Xylo/Toyota Qualis)

4 pers.: INR 119.000/ € 1585/ \$ 1800 p.p. (using 1 Bolero 4WD pick-up & 1 Mahindra Scorpio/Xylo/Toyota Qualis)

5, 6 pers.: INR 112.000/ € 1495/ \$ 1695 p.p. (using 1 Bolero 4WD pick-up & 1 Mahindra Scorpio/Xylo/Toyota Qualis)

Prices quoted are net and non-commissionable.

Inclusions:

- Air tickets Delhi – Leh and Leh – Delhi.
- Accommodation on twin share at the indicated places (full board on cycle tour, *breakfast only while in Leh*).
- All transfers and sightseeing as per itinerary by vehicle specified.
- English speaking escort throughout the tour.
- While on the bicycle tours: accommodation in guesthouses, tented camps and own tents; transport of luggage, back-up car(s) that enables clients to travel by car instead of bicycling at all times, assistance of English speaking local guide and cook, all meals, modern mountain bikes.
- Inner Line Permits for Nubra and Rupshu

Exclusions:

- International airfare;
- Tips;
- Drinks; laundry; telephone calls;
- Insurance; expenses of personal nature;
- Lunch and dinner while at Leh.