

ITINERARY for Vajrayana Institute Hemis Festival, Spiti Valley and Dharamsala, India– 2023

Tour Dates:

25 June-10 July 2023

Tour Cost:

A\$ 4350 per person twin share

A\$ 1450 single supplement

including A\$500 to Vajrayana Institute

Tour Route:

Delhi-Ladakh-Hemis-Keylong-Kaza-Manali-Dharamsala-Delhi, India

Tour Highlights:



Join the Vajrayana Institute as we travel deep into the mountains of Ladakh to experience a once in a lifetime visit to the Hemis Festival. The spectacularly isolated mountain geography of this remote Indian province is one of the few remaining strongholds of Tibetan Buddhism in the world. Monasteries adorned with the iconic blue, red and yellow prayer flags dot the steep mountain slopes and crystal-clear rivers flow from glaciers, cascading into the mighty Indus river. A part of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, it was only opened to tourists in the mid-70s and since then thousands of people from around the world have thronged to this bastion of Himalayan Buddhism.

The Hemis festival is a uniquely Ladakhi experience, dedicated to Lord Padmasambhava (also known as Guru Rinpoche) an 8th century Buddhist master who was responsible for spreading Buddhism across the world. This festival of dance and theatre is enacted with elaborate masks, costumes, and adornment. The glorious finale – in a cacophony of instruments, chants and sounds – ends in the unveiling of the monastery's giant Thankga (Tibetan Buddhist painting).

We will then travel overland to the Spiti Valley, a little visited area with high passes blocked by snow and ice for half the year, and precariously perched Buddhist monasteries on high cliffs. Truly a land that time forgot. Following this we will visit Manali for a short rest before we reach Dharamsala, the home of the Dalai Lama. Here we will immerse ourselves further into Tibetan culture, visiting the Tibetan Children's Village and the Norbulingka to witness the preservation of Tibetan culture. Along with a visit to the Dalai Lama's temple, this is a fitting end to our amazing Pilgrimage.

ITINERARY

Day 01

25 June 2023

Welcome to India! Upon your arrival at the airport in Delhi, our representative will greet you and escort you to the hotel. After checking into your hotel, spend the rest of the day at your leisure exploring the local area and relaxing in the hotel. Our friendly guide and hotel staff will be on hand should you need restaurant recommendations or general provisions.

Overnight: Hotel, Delhi



Day 02

26 June 2023

Delhi – Leh

We will take an early morning flight to Leh, the spectacular capital of Ladakh. Our flight will pass over multiple Himalayan ranges and serves as a fantastic photo opportunity. Leh is framed on all sides by the towering Himalayas, with the mighty Indus River roaring in the valley below. After we land we will take a walking tour of Leh Bazaar, an important stop on trade routes dating as far back as the third century. The rest of the afternoon is at your leisure to rest and acclimatise.

Overnight: Hotel, Leh



Day 03

27 June 2023

Leh

After breakfast, we will visit Gompa Soma, a Buddhist temple constructed in 1840 at the base of the towering Leh palace. Afterwards, we head to Moti Market, Leh's old bazaar, for an exploration of its ancient lanes with a rich history that can be traced back to the Asian spice trade. We will eat lunch together followed by free time to rest, explore, or sip traditional Tibetan butter tea at your leisure.

Overnight: Hotel, Leh

Day 04

28 June 2023

Hemis Festival

Today we will witness the celebrations of the Hemis Festival, which commemorates the birth of Guru Padmasambhava. After an early breakfast we will travel to the Hemis Monastery, the largest and richest monastery in all of Ladakh. At 9am the birthday celebrations of Guru Padmasambhava begin in the courtyard, which quickly fills up with local Ladakhi's and Buddhist pilgrims. A raised platform with a richly cushioned seat and a finely painted small Tibetan table is placed with the other ceremonial items – cups full of holy water, uncooked rice, incense sticks and tormas made of dough and butter. A number of musicians play traditional music using cymbals, drums, trumpets and wind instruments.

The festival highlight is the gathering of the lamas around the central flagpole to perform the mystic mask dances (Chams) and sacred plays. Dressed in colourful bright brocades with vibrantly decorated and richly adorned paper-mache masks the dancers enact an elaborate combat between good spirits and evil demons to the clatter of drums, cymbals and long horns.

In the afternoon, we will return to Leh for a guided tour of the city, including a visit to the Royal Palace. Constructed in the 17th century, this imposing nine story stone palace is one of the most captivating architectural ruins in the region. Situated in the foothills of the barren landscape, the palace was built as a residence for the King and to mark the reunification of Upper and Lower Ladakh. Above the Royal Palace, on Namgyal Tsemo (Victory Peak), are the ruins of Leh's earliest royal residence, a fortress type structure built by King Tashi Namgyal in the 16th century.

Overnight: Hotel, Leh

Day 05

29 June 2023

Stok Palace, Shey Palace & Thiksey Monastery

After breakfast we will set off to explore Stok Palace, Shey Palace and Thiksey monastery. Stock Palace is the home of the present-day royal family. The palace and accompanying museum were built in the year 1825, by King Tsepal Tondup Namgyal. At present the place has a collection of elaborate royal dresses and crowns which are open for travellers to explore. Shey Palace was built by Deldan Namgyal at the beginning of the 17th century AD. The main image in the monastery is a three-story statue of Buddha Shakamuni, made of copper gilt which was made by Deldan Namgyal in the memory of his father Singay Namgyal. The statue is the only one of its kind in the region.

Thiksey Gompa belongs to the Gelukspa order of Buddhism and is considered to be the most beautiful of all the monasteries in Ladakh. After our day of sightseeing we will return to Leh in the evening to rest and eat dinner.

Overnight: Hotel, Leh

Day 6

30 June 2023

Leh to Keylong (9-10 hours drive, approximately 380 km)

This morning we will leave Leh by private car and travel across the high plateau (approximately 9-10 hours' drive). We will pass through the border town of Sarchu and into the picturesque Lahaul Valley before reaching Keylong, where we will spend the night. This is a once in a life time journey through an amazing lunar-like landscape often referred to 'Little Tibet'.

Overnight: Hotel, Keylong

Day 7

1 July 2023

Keylong to Kaza(9-10 hours drive, approximately 190 km)

After breakfast we will leave Keylong and travel to Kaza (approximately 9-10 hours' drive). We will drive to Chatru and enter the Spiti Valley through the spectacular Kunzum Pass (4550 metres). You might be able to spot yaks as they graze peacefully along the banks of the Spiti

River. We will follow the valley floor until we reach Kaza, the largest town of the region, and our overnight stop.

Overnight: Hotel, Kaza



Day 8

2 July 2023

Kaza

We will spend the day in Kaza - arranging our permits to travel through the Spiti Valley, acclimatising and visiting the local town. In the afternoon we will travel by car to Ky Monastery. The monastery is located on top of a hill at an altitude of 4166 metres above sea level and has the distinction of being the oldest and the biggest in the Lahaul and Spiti district as well as being a religious training centre for monks. It is home to around 300 novice monks who receive their religious education here.

We will then head to the remote town of Kibber at 4270 metres. Soak in the remoteness and beauty of the Spiti Valley. With sweeping views of the mountains on one side and the Spiti Valley on the other, it is a great place to relax and to enjoy the view. The Kibber area is also home to the elusive Blue Sheep, and if you keep your eyes peeled on the horizon you may see one of these shy creatures in the distance. In the late afternoon we will drive back to Kaza.

Overnight: Hotel, Kaza

Day 9

3 July 2023

Dhankar Monastery & Tabo Monastery

Today we will visit Dhankar Monastery, perched high above the valley floor and with a rich history. The monastery was built on a 300-metre high spur overlooking the Spiti and Pin Rivers. It truly is one of the world's most spectacular settings for a monastery and has many holy stories attached to it.

Following this we will travel to Tabo and visit the famous 12th century Tabo Monastery, known for its Buddhist relics. Tabo Monastery was founded by the

Tibetan Buddhist translator Rinchen Zangpo and is noted for being the oldest continuously operated Buddhist enclave in both India and the Himalayas. The monastery houses a priceless collection of thankas (scroll paintings), manuscripts, well-preserved statues, frescos and extensive murals which depict tales from the Buddhist pantheon. The monastery is protected as a national historic treasure of India.

Overnight: Hotel, Kaza



Day 10

4 July 2023

Kaza to Manali

We will leave Kaza very early in the morning for the drive to Manali. You will pass along the valley floor before gradually rising and crossing the spectacular Rothang Pass (3980m) which offers some of the most spectacular mountain views in the world. We will stop at the pass to admire the stunning view, before continuing to Manali and arriving by early afternoon. The rest of the evening is at your leisure to explore this picturesque town or to take a well-deserved rest.

Overnight: Hotel, Manali

Day 11

5 July 2023

Manali

Today we will spend the day sightseeing in Manali, a quaint town nestled amongst the Himalayas on the banks of the Beas River. Manali offers an exotic charm unlike any other place in India. We will explore old Manali, which has maintained an old-world charm despite modern conveniences such as the many restaurants offering a variety of local and international cuisines. In the afternoon you can relax or visit the local markets and the Manu and Hadimba temples.

Overnight: Hotel, Manali

Day 12

6 July 2023

Manali – Dharamsala

After breakfast we will drive to Dharamsala. On arrival we will check into our hotel before exploring the town of McLeod Ganj with Tibetan shops and culture running through the town. This fascinating and multicultural hill station is universally known as the home of the 14th Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government in Exile.

In the afternoon we will visit the temple of His Holiness, the Namgyel Monastery, where you can turn the giant prayer wheels and observe the monks going about their daily activities. Spend the evening in one of the many international restaurants that dot the town as we admire the beauty of the spectacular Dhauladhar mountain range in the background.

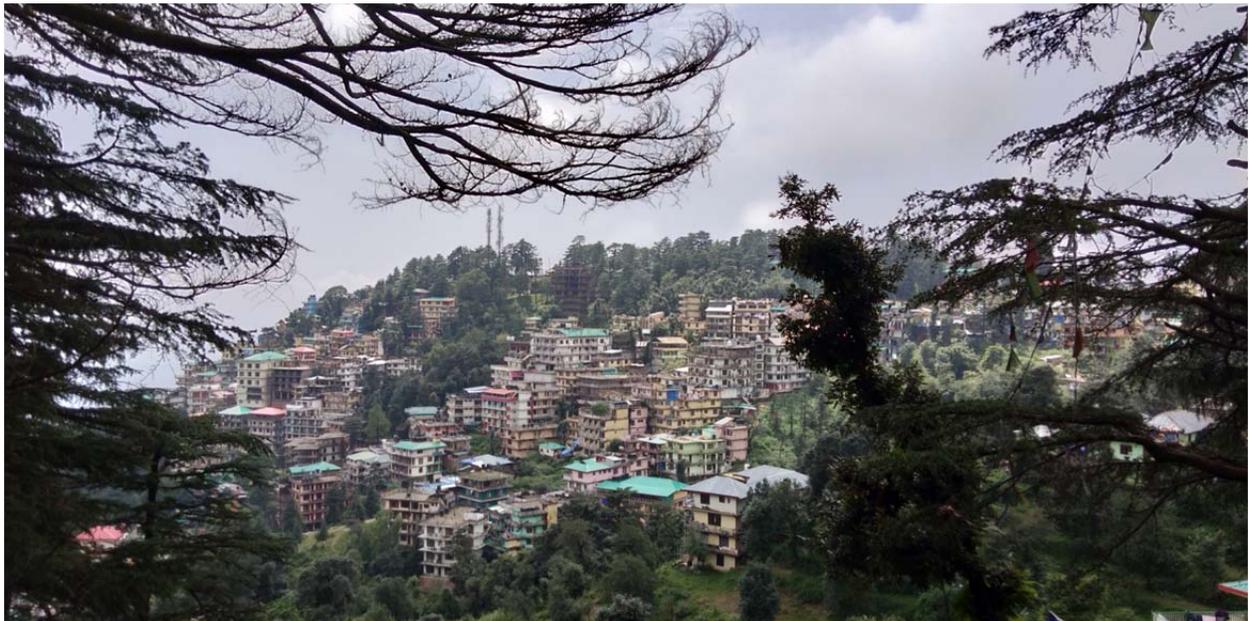
Overnight: Hotel, Dharamsala

Day 13

7 July 2023

Dharamsala

This morning you might like to enjoy one of the many cafes in the town and have that long awaited espresso coffee, you have earned it! After breakfast we will take a short visit to the picturesque village of Naddi. This peaceful village offers spectacular views of both the Dhauladhar mountain range and the lush Kangra valley. Wandering around Naddi and soaking up the scenery is a perfect way to reflect on the journey we have taken and the Buddha's teachings.



On our way back to McLeod Ganj we will visit the Tibetan Children's village (opening hours permitting), which provides care and education for Tibetan children living in exile. The village is a thriving educational community for Tibetan children living in exile. We will return to McLeod Ganj to spend some more time at the temple of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Museum, absorbing Tibetan culture as we explore.

Overnight: Hotel, Dharamsala

Day 14

8 July 2023

Norbulingka Institute

After lunch you will visit the Norbulingka Institute, which works to preserve traditional Tibetan culture and art forms. The visit will include a guided tour of the workshops, where you can meet the artisans as they work. Before heading back to McLeod Ganj, you will be able to visit the Gyoto Monastery, a secluded and peaceful haven specialising in the study of Tantric meditation, Tantric ritual arts and Buddhist philosophy.

Overnight: Hotel, Dharamsala



Day 15

9 July 2023

Dharamsala – Delhi

Today we will fly back to Delhi. Enjoy your last day sightseeing or shopping in Delhi. As an optional extra you can visit the National Museum which houses the Sacred Relics of Buddha (5th-4th century BC) which were discovered in Uttar Pradesh (a state of India). The relics are outstanding specimens of Buddhist Art and are illustrated through exhibits in a variety of materials and forms from the three principal Buddhist forms – Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana.

Overnight: Hotel, Delhi

Day 16

10 July 2023

We will transfer you to the airport in time for your flight home or further travel in India.

Includes

- Fully accompanied by Geshe Ngawang Samten
- 15 nights accommodation and daily breakfast
- **Internal flights**
Delhi to Leh
Dharamsala to Delhi
- **Transportation in Delhi by AC Tempo Traveler or Toyota Innova Car or similar**
Transportation in Leh, Spiti & Dharamsala by SUV cars (AC Toyota Innova/Crysta/Scorpio)
Following transport included:
Pickup/Drop off from Delhi airport for international flight (within 24 hours of tour starting and ending)
Drop off at Delhi airport
Pickup, sightseeing and Hemis Festival Tour in Ladakh
Transport from Ladakh-Keylong-Kaza-Manali-Dharamsala
Sightseeing in Dharamsala
Drop off at Dharamsala airport
Pickup and Drop off at Delhi airport
- Entrance fees to all museums and monuments
- Local guide in Leh
- Welcome and Farewell Dinner
- Services of local English speaking guide from Delhi to Delhi
- Donation to Vajrayana Institute, Sydney

Excludes

- Return airfares to India
- Cost of Indian tourist visa (on arrival)
- Lunch and dinner (unless otherwise specified)
- Personal expenditure such as drinks, laundry service and souvenirs
- Tipping
- Donations to monasteries
- Compulsory insurance of any kind

Optional Extras:

- Pickup from International airport Delhi (if arriving more than 24 hours before to trip)
- Drop off at International airport Delhi (if departing more than 24 hours before to trip)
- Extra night in Delhi at Hotel Hans or similar – please ask for details
- Optional sightseeing in Delhi

Notes:

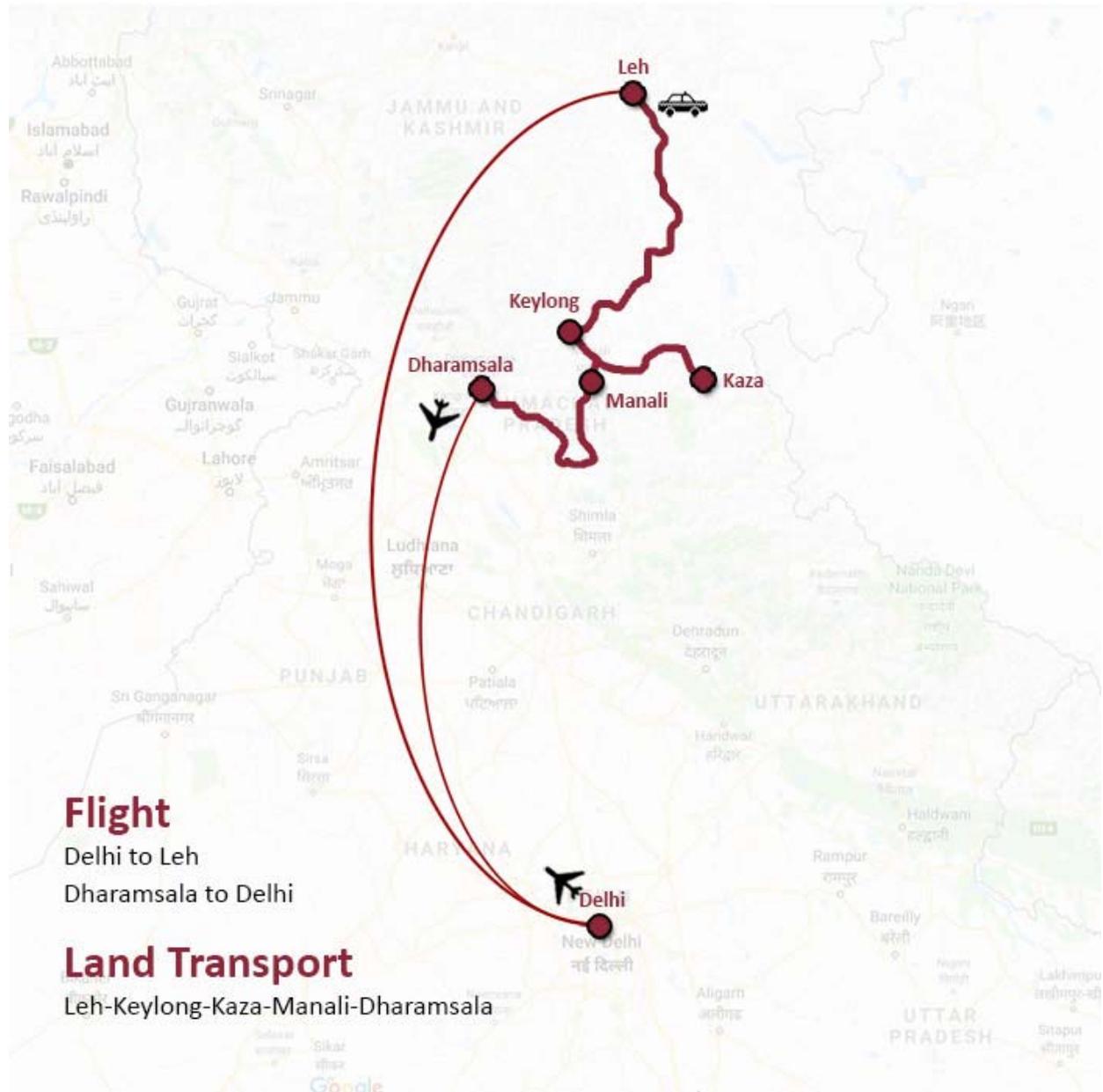
ACCOMMODATION

Place	Name of Hotel/ Guest House or similar	Nights
Delhi	Hotel Hans / Lemon Tree	2
Leh, Ladakh	Munshi Continental/Zen Ladakh	4
Keylong	Hotel Dekyid	1
Kaza	Hotel Deyzor/Sakya Abode	3
Manali	Johnson Lodge / Negis Mayfare	2
Dharamsala	Serkong House	3

Conditions of Quote:

The trip price is based on costs and exchange rates current at time of preparation. We reserve the right to adjust the prices due to exchange rate fluctuations and other costs (such as taxes) until 30% deposit has been made. We cannot guarantee airfare cost and choice of accommodation until this deposit has been made.

Tour Map



Updated on 17 June 2022

We thank you for this opportunity to quote for your holiday to our Incredible India.