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NIRVANA

Tour

Information Pack

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Introduction

This information guide is intended to help with your preparation for your Nirvana Tour to Ladakh, Delhi and Dharamsala. Our aim is to make your stay in India as comfortable and fulfilling as possible. By no means does this guide cover everything, rather it aims to give you a general introduction before you arrive.

Ladakh is a land of mountains ranges, rocky crags, towering snowy peaks, sandy plains and lush green fields dotted with whitewashed chortens and adobe brick houses, giant mountaintop monasteries and multicolored prayer flags.

Flanked by Tibet and Pakistan, India's northernmost province, Ladakh - is spread over a mountainous terrain averaging of an average altitude of 3500m above sea level. A part of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, it was 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. And yet, it is still far less touristy than Nepal.

The early history of the region is deeply interconnected with that of Tibet. An independent kingdom ruled by the Thi dynasty from the 10th century AD, it was the 16th century King Soyang Namgyal who united the entire region and consolidated a part of western Tibet into his kingdom, making Leh his capital.

Crisscrossed by the river Indus, Ladakh comprises of a number of valleys separated by tall mountain ranges. Though extremely arid, most of the inhabited valley floors are cultivated using an indigenous system of irrigation where streams are dammed and split into numerous channels covering a large area; an age-old system of water management that insures that each field gets its measure of water.

Along with the Ladakhis, who are originally of Tibetan descent, the area is also populated by ethnic groups like the Baltis and Dards, as well the migrant Kashmiris. Mahayana Buddhism is the predominant religion here, though about 40 % of the population is Muslim.

Leh, at an elevation of 3417metres, is the largest town and the capital of Ladakh and an ancient trading post of the Central Asian silk route.

To help you prepare for your experiences in India, we have put together this Information Pack to assist you in your travelers with our Nirvana Tour. We hope this information will provide you with necessary information to make the journey more comfortable. Be ready for the ride!

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Essentials

Passport Requirements

- You must have a passport which is valid for six months more than you plan to be in India for.
- Find your passport and check the expiry date **NOW**.
- Need a new passport? - details are available on www.passports.gov.au
- You must have a passport with you all the time.

Maintenance

Make several copies of the first page of your passport and a copy of the page with your Indian visa. The copies should be kept separate from the original in the event that if your passport is lost or stolen. We suggest you also leave one copy with someone in Australia.

Lost and Stolen Passports

If your passport is lost or stolen then you should report this to the local police and contact the Australian High Commission in Delhi.

Australian High Commission

1/50 - G, Shantipath
Chanakyapuri, New Delhi - 21
P.O. Box 5210
New Delhi 110021

Telephone: 011 41399900

Opening hours: 8:30 am to 5:00 pm (1pm- 2pm lunch) Monday-Friday

www.ausgov.india.com

Visas

You must obtain an Indian Visa before leaving Australia. Indian tourist visas permit stays of six months and typically allow for multiple entries. When applying for a visa, make sure your passport is valid six months beyond the date of intended return.

It is fastest to apply through the embassy in Australia (see list below). You will need to fill out an application form and provide your current passport, at least two passport photos, and a visa processing fee. Contact your nearest Consulate Office well in advance of

your trip for more information. Allow at least two weeks for processing. You can download a visa application form from the Consulate website.

Dharmasala is politically sensitive area. Therefore, the Indian Consulate *could* reject your application if you say you will be visiting this part of India. For this reason, you should state on your application that you intend to go to Delhi, Agra and Varanasi.

The following information was downloaded from www.smartraveller.gov.au. Please check the website for up to date information.

INDIA

State Offices

- [New South Wales](#)
- [Queensland](#)
- [Victoria](#)
- [Western Australia](#)

New South Wales

Level 27, 25 Bligh Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Tel: (02) 9223 9500
Fax: (02) 9223 9246
Email : indianc@indianconsulatesydney.org

Queensland:

175A Swann Road
Taringa Qld 4068

Fax: (07) 3371 5198
Email : indcon@optusnet.com.au

Victoria

1st Floor, 15 Munro Street
Coburg Vic 3058

Tel: (03) 9384 0141, 9386 7399
Fax: (03) 9384 1609
Email : himelb@bigpond.com.au

Western Australia

Suite 21, 2nd Floor, Lincoln House 4
Ventnor Avenue
West Perth WA 6005

Tel: (08) 9486 9011, 0412 709 729
Fax: (08) 9486 9611
Email : consul@wa1.quik.com.au

HEALTH

Staying healthy while travelling can help to ensure your trip to India is a happy and enjoyable one. The following information and health tips have been put together to help you have a hassle-free and healthy journey.

Vaccinations and health checks

Make an appointment with your doctor or travel clinic to have a basic check-up and find out if any vaccinations or health checks are required at least 6-12 weeks before you depart.

Not all travellers to countries where there is a potential risk of infection need to be vaccinated but it is important that you discuss your personal travel plans with a doctor so they can determine the correct vaccinations for your trip.

Vaccines can prevent you from contracting some diseases, but it is important to remember:

- Vaccines are not perfect. New vaccines are constantly being released but diseases continue to evolve
- some vaccines require a long period to take effect, but it is never too late to vaccinate
- health risks within a country can vary from locality to locality and local authorities may be slow to announce outbreaks of disease
- new diseases, such as SARS, can appear suddenly. Check out the [latest travel advice](#) for your destination before you depart and while travelling so you can ensure you have the latest information
- common infections contracted by travellers include those which follow eating or drinking contaminated food or water.
- there are a number of mosquito-borne illnesses you can contract while overseas particularly in tropical areas. Be sure to take measures to avoid being bitten such as wearing light coloured, loose fitting clothing that covers your arms and legs, regularly applying an appropriate insect repellent and staying in mosquito proof accommodation.

Travelling with medicine

Before leaving home, you should check that your medications are suitable for India.

Since the National Health Act was amended in 1999, it has been an offence to carry or post Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medicines overseas unless they are for your personal use, or the use of someone travelling with you.

Only Australian residents living in Australia at the time a PBS prescription is dispensed are entitled to receive PBS-subsidised medication and there are restrictions on the amount of PBS medicine that can be carried or sent overseas.

When planning to travel overseas with PBS medicine it is important that you:

- talk to your doctor/travel doctor (www.travellerdoctor.com.au) and discuss the medicine you will need to take
- carry a letter from your doctor detailing what the medicine is, how much you will be taking, and stating that it is for your own personal use
- leave the medicine in its original packaging so it is clearly labelled with your name and dosage instructions.

If you intend to travel with large quantities of medicine, including over-the-counter or private prescription medications, you should ask your doctor, dentist or pharmacist to provide you with a letter explaining why you need to carry such quantities.

If you have to inject your medication it might be preferable to carry your own needles and syringes but you should check with the Indian Consulate to make sure this is acceptable. If you buy needles and syringes while overseas ensure you buy packs that are sealed and sterile. And, if you need to carry needles and syringes with you on the plane, inform your airline before you travel and if necessary, arrange a letter from your doctor explaining why you need to carry them.

It is important to be aware that some items purchased overseas may be packaged under a different brand name to those available in Australia. Keep an eye on the strength and active ingredients of similar-sounding medications overseas-they can vary.

More information on travelling with medicines is available from the [Medicare Australia](#) or by phoning the Travelling with PBS medicine enquiry line: 1800 500 147.

TIPS FOR A HASSLE-FREE, HEALTHY JOURNEY

before departure:

- if you are prescribed malarial medication, take it as prescribed-prior to leaving, while in risk areas and when you return
- purchase and take with you enough medication to cover the length of the trip-it may not be available overseas
- make up a small medical kit. Include items such as headache tablets, antacids, antiseptic lotion, cotton wool, band-aids, latex gloves, safety pins, 30+ sunscreen and an appropriate insect repellent
- if your trip will involve increased physical activity such as walking and you are not exercising regularly, gradually build up your fitness (after receiving clearance from your doctor) weeks, or preferably months before you depart
- organise a variety of financial options for while you are away, including credit cards, travellers' cheques and cash
- find out whether essentials are readily available in your chosen destination. In some countries supplies of feminine hygiene products, nappies and contraceptives including condoms can be unreliable, so it may be best to stock up before you leave.

while flying:

- keep important medication with you in case your luggage goes missing
- continue taking your prescribed medication
- factor the effects of jet lag into your itinerary
- drink plenty of fluids (but avoid alcohol and caffeine)
- while seated stretch your feet and lower legs
- walk around the cabin at regular intervals.

while travelling:

- don't over exercise-especially in hot climates
- drink only bottled water (also use this to brush your teeth) and always check the seal on the bottle
- avoid ice in cool drinks-freezing preserves germs, it does not kill them
- beware of uncooked food including salads and fruit that you cannot peel
- include 'rest time' in your travel itinerary
- wear comfortable shoes, a hat and sunscreen for sightseeing
- dress and behave conservatively, in accordance with local customs and sensitivities
- wear a pair of thongs/crocs when showering

Avoid trouble with illegal drugs overseas

Every year Australians are arrested overseas on drugs charges. Don't be fooled into thinking it is worth risking carrying or taking illegal drugs overseas. Australians do get caught and the strict penalties in place, including the death penalty, do apply to foreigners.

To minimise your chances of getting into trouble with drugs overseas:

- obey the law — don't purchase, take or travel with illegal drugs
- don't leave your bags unattended in public areas
- don't leave your bags in the care of a stranger
- never carry anything into or out of another country for someone else
- ensure your medicines are not considered illegal drugs overseas by contacting the nearest embassy of the country you are visiting before departing

lock your luggage as a sensible precaution against tampering or theft. Information on luggage safety is available from the [Australian Civil Aviation Safety Authority](#).

Insurance

Insurance is essential. Organising comprehensive travel insurance before you depart can save you the worry of unexpected medical costs. Regardless of how healthy and fit you are, remember the first rule of travel — if you can't afford travel insurance, you can't afford to travel.

When organising travel insurance, ensure you are covered for general medical expenses, existing medical conditions, hospitalisations and medical evacuations. Shop around for a policy that meets your needs and covers you the whole time you will be away. If you plan on participating in adventure tourism or sports like scuba diving or parasailing, be upfront about your plans with your insurance provider and ensure your policy covers these activities.

- Don't base your insurance on the assumption that 'it won't happen to me' — accidents do happen and hospitalisation, medical evacuations, or even the return of a deceased person's remains to Australia, can be very expensive. Be aware when organising your insurance that uninsured travellers (or their families) are held personally liable for medical and associated costs incurred overseas.

Travel Advisories

Up to date information about travel to India is available from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Consular Assistance Service. You will find the information on their website www.smartraveller.gov.au.

India Facts and Figures

Delhi Climate

One of Delhi's drawbacks is that for more than half the year the climate is lousy. For about four months it is bearable, from November until about March - it's fine, with daytime temperatures between 21 and 30°C (70-86°F). However, by the end of April it's hot, while May and June are really hot - temperatures can swoop up to more than 45°C (113°F). In July it gets cooler but the humidity really hits, often with all-day rain through August and September

Ladakh Climate

The climate in Ladakh is extremely cold in winter and the sun's effect is harsher due to the rarified air. You could therefore suffer from conditions as diverse as frostbite and sunburn at the same time, if you're not well protected. Temperatures in Ladakh, range from -3 to 30 degrees Celsius in the summer and from ---20 to -15 degrees Celsius in the winter. You will be visiting Ladakh mid-summer however it is still advisable to take warm clothes.

Dharamsala Climate

There are four seasons in Dharamsala. July-September is the monsoon season with rain every day interspersed with sunny, humid days and cool nights; October to mid-December is mostly sunny and warm during the day with cool nights; mid-December to February is cold, requiring warm clothing and heating (it can include some snow). March to mid-May is bright, sunny and warm with cool nights; May to June is hot and mostly dry and sunny.

Time

Australia is 4 1/2 hours ahead of India and 5 1/2 hours in summertime (eastern States)

Communications

Phone – Calling home

To call Australia use the international dialing code 00, the 61 for Australia followed by the number.

Throughout India you will find phone shops displaying the signs PCO/ISD/STD. Rates are set by the government and a meter shows how much you should pay. In big cities such as Delhi you may find discounted rates.

Email

There are internet cafes in all major cities and places on the tourist trail. Rates per hour vary, it is approximately 30-50Rs per hour depending where you are.

Mobile Phones

You should check with your service provider in Australia on the availability of network connections in India. Most people choose to buy a local Sim card. However, there is some bureaucracy involved but Ekno Experience will help you with getting a connection.

Money

Currency

The rupee, INR – usually abbreviated to Rs - is the unit of currency. You can check current exchange rates at www.x-rates.com.

One Rupee is equal to hundred paise. Notes are in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100 and 500. (Although denominations less than Rs. 10 are rare.)

Coins start at 10, 20, (not used so much these days) 25, 50, paise
Coins are also available for 1, 2, and 5 rupees.

Do not accept torn or disfigured notes. In case you do get torn notes you can change them at the Reserve Bank of India or large branches of other big banks.

It is advisable to carry a mixture of Australian dollars cash and a cash card to guard against any situation.

A currency declaration form has to be filled out by tourists if they enter the country with US\$10,000 or its equivalent in any other currency.

Tourists can get a relatively better exchange rate for traveller's cheques and they are safer to carry though not as liquid as cash. A large number of hotels, restaurants and shops accept credit cards.

It is advisable to change ample amounts of money at one time and keep the encashment certificates.

ATM Cards

ATM machines are springing up all over the country and are a convenient way to access your money. Most are open 24hours. There is an ATM machines are available all over India and accept most international cards.

Banks

Banking hours in India are from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. (Mon-Fri) and from 10 a.m.-12 noon on Saturdays. Banks at the Delhi, Calcutta, Mumbai, and Chennai airports, Ashoka hotel in Delhi and the Air India building in Mumbai are open 24 hours a day.

You can also wire money into India. These services are offered by foreign banks with branches in India and also with Indian banks with branches abroad such as the State Bank of India and ICICI.

Electricity

240V 50HzHz

Electric Plug Details

Indian-style plug with two circular metal pins above a large circular grounding pin



OR

European plug with two circular metal pins



Local Conditions

Water

The number one rule is don't drink the tap water and that includes ice. If you don't know for certain that the water is safe always assume the worst. Reputable brands of bottled water and soft drinks are generally fine, although in some places the practice of refilling bottles with tap water is not unknown. Only use water from containers with a serrated seal not tops or corks. Take care with fruit juice, particularly if water may have been added. Milk and yogurt are generally fine. Tea or coffee should also be OK, since the water should have been boiled and the majority of the drink will be with milk. Finally, remember to brush your teeth with bottled water.

Laundry

Dhobi-wallahs (clothes washers) are numerous and cheap. It is a joy of India to hand someone your soiled garments and receive them back the next day, washed and ironed.

Safety

Personal Safety

To avoid unwanted attention, try to blend in as much as possible. Respecting local customs (in many cases, dressing more conservatively than you would at home) may placate would-be hecklers. Familiarize yourself with your surroundings before setting out, and carry yourself with confidence. Check maps in shops and restaurants rather than on the street. If you are traveling alone, be sure someone at home knows your itinerary, and never admit that you're by yourself. When walking at night, stick to busy, well-lit streets and avoid dark alleyways. If you ever feel uncomfortable, leave the area as quickly and directly as you can.

Protecting your valuables

Never leave your belongings unattended. Be particularly careful on buses and trains; horror stories abound about determined thieves who wait for travelers to fall asleep.

Carry your backpack in front of you where you can see it. Use a lock to secure your pack to the luggage rack. Try to sleep on top bunks with your luggage stored above you (if not in bed with you), and keep important documents and other valuables on your person.

There are a few steps you can take to minimize the financial risk associated with traveling. First, bring as little with you as possible. Second, buy a few combination padlocks to secure your belongings either in your pack or in a hostel or train station locker. Third, carry as little cash as possible. Keep your traveler's checks and ATM/credit cards in a money belt—not a “bum bag”—along with your passport and ID cards. Fourth, keep a small cash reserve separate from your primary stash. This should be about AUS\$50 sewn into or stored in the depths of your pack, along with your traveler's check numbers and important photocopies.

Packing Checklist

When it comes to packing, the less you have, the less you have to lose. Pack lightly. Lay out only what you absolutely need, then take half the clothes and twice the money. The **Travelite FAQ** (www.travelite.org) is a good resource for tips on traveling light.

However, essentials that you should carry with you to cope with the climate in Ladakh are polar fleece, thermals, thick socks, gloves, scarves, a hat or woolen cap, sturdy boots or walking shoes, sunscreen, lip balm and sunglasses.

The online **Universal Packing List** (<http://upl.codeq.info>) will generate a customized list of suggested items based on your trip length, the expected climate, your planned activities, and other factors. See the packaging list at the end of to this guide.

Luggage

If you plan to cover most of your itinerary by foot, a sturdy frame backpack is unbeatable. Toting a suitcase or trunk is fine if you plan to live in one or two cities and explore from there, but not a great idea if you plan to move around frequently. In addition to your main piece of luggage, a daypack (a small backpack or courier bag) is useful.

First-Aid Kit

For a basic first-aid kit, pack bandages, a pain reliever, antibiotic cream, a thermometer, a Swiss Army knife, tweezers, moleskin, decongestant, motion-sickness remedy, diarrhea or upset-stomach medication (Pepto Bismol or Imodium), an antihistamine, sunscreen, insect repellent, burn ointment, and a syringe for emergencies (get an explanatory letter from your doctor).

Other Useful Items

For safety purposes, you should bring a money belt and small padlock. Basic outdoors equipment (plastic water bottle, compass, waterproof matches, pocketknife, sunglasses, sunscreen, hat) may also prove useful. Quick repairs of torn garments can be done on the road with a needle and thread; also consider bringing electrical tape for patching tears. To wash by hand bring detergent, a small rubber ball to stop up the sink, and

string for a makeshift clothes line. Other things you're liable to forget are sealable plastic bags (for damp clothes, soap, food, shampoo, and other spillables), an alarm clock, safety pins, rubber bands, a torch and earplugs.

Sources

www.smartraveller.gov.au; www.hcindia-au.org; www.indianconsultesydney.org; www.let'sgo.com

Cultural Considerations

This is by no means a complete list but aims to give you a basic idea of how to interact with Tibetan and Indian culture.

- Always take your shoes off before entering a Buddhist or Hindu temple.
- Always walk clockwise around a Buddhist or Hindu temple, monastery, shrine. This includes walking around the devotional path, or Kora, of the Dalai Lama's temple and residence.
- Khata's are the traditional Tibetan silk scarves which are used to show as a sign of greeting and respect. You can buy them from any Tibetan shop in town.
- Dalai Lama's teaching's – bow your head and body in his presence, make sure you height is lower than his.
- Do not touch religious objects.
- Always ask anybody before taking their photo and be aware that in some temples and monasteries you may not be able to take photographs.
- You should usually take your shoes off when entering someone's home unless asked to do otherwise.
- There are several cultural practices associated with sharing food. Usually when you share water you should not let your lips touch the bottle. If you are invited to an Indian home to eat it is best to let food be served to you rather than doing it yourself. If in doubt, ask!!
- It is polite but not necessary to take a gift if invited to somebody's home for the first time, or for a wedding or festival. Simple gifts could include some Indian sweets or fruit.
- Tips are appreciated in restaurants and for taxi drivers if they have done a good job. The same goes for donations in temples. Any amount from IR10-IR100 is appreciated.

Nirvana Tour Itinerary – 16 days, 15 nights



Day 01 Thursday 25 June 09 : Delhi Transfer Pickup from International / Domestic Airport to hotel in Delhi. **Overnight Delhi.**

Day 2 Friday 26 June 09: Delhi Today we see the sites of both Old and New Delhi. **Overnight Delhi.**

Day 3 Saturday 27 June 09: Leh Morning flight to Leh. Upon arrival we take the rest of the day to relax and acclimatize. **Overnight Leh.**

Day 4 Sunday 28 July 09: Leh A sightseeing tour of the city including Shankar Gompa and the ruined 17th century palace, followed by a drive across the river to see the Stok Palace. **Overnight Leh.**

Day 5 Monday 29 June 09: Lamayuru See the famous Gompas' Complex, Mountain View. **Overnight Lamayuru.**

Day 6 Tuesday 30 June 09: Lamayuru: A full day of sightseeing to visit the gompas of Shey, Thiksey, Tatak, **Overnight Lamayuru**

Day 7 Wednesday 01 July 08: Lamayuru to Alchi We follow the Indus river westwards to Alchi village and visit the historical Alchi Gompa.. **Overnight Alchi**

Day 8 Thursday 02 July 08: Hemis Full day attendance at Hemis festival. Hemis where we will experience the annual festival to honour the anniversary of Guru Padma Sambhav's birth, drive back to Leh early evening. **Overnight Leh**

Day 9 Friday 3 July 09: Leh to Sarchu We drive to Sarchu crossing the 5.328m Taglang La along the way. This will be a long day of driving, but with spectacular scenery. Tonight we stay at a tented camp, especially erected to cater for travellers along this seasonal highway. **Overnight Sarchu.**

Day 10 Saturday 4 July 09: Sarchu to Keylong Today we drive through magnificent scenery. Visit Tibetan Monasteries, Shashur Gompa. **Overnight Keylong.**

Day 11 Sunday 5 July 09: Jispa to Sidhpur Today we cross the last of the high passes at Rohtang (3,977m) descending to the Kullu Valley and the picturesque town of Kullu, Mandi and finally Sidhpur. **Overnight Thosamling Nunnery.**

Day 12-14 Monday-Wednesday 6-8 July 09 Around Dharamsala. Local sightseeing and visit to local monasteries. **Overnight Thosamling Nunnery. Day 14 : Take train to Delhi Overnight Train.**

Day 15 Thursday 9 July 09: Delhi Last minute shopping in the main Bazaar around town. **Overnight Delhi.**

Day 16 Friday 10 July 09 Flight Home Arrangements end upon arrival in Delhi

Destinations

Delhi

Delhi is full of interesting places to visit and there is wide variety of places all within easy reach. Many of the older monuments are centered around Old Delhi whereas others are quite spread out. It is advisable that you obtain a good map and plan the places that you wish to visit. This list suggests a few of the highlights. Note that some sites are closed on Mondays and that others charge a visiting or photography fee (primarily the big monuments).

- Rajpath (Kingsway) – Wide streets flanked by gardens and government buildings. Places worth visiting here include India Gate, a WWI memorial as well as the open gardens surrounding it. You can also see Parliament House and the residence of the Indian president.
- Red Fort (Lal Qila) – Largest fort in Delhi, built by Shah Jahan. Dominates Old Delhi where it's giant red sandstone walls can be seen for miles. Contains gardens, palaces, arcades, halls, a mosque and a museum. Cost – US\$2, closed Mondays.
- Jama Masjid – The largest mosque in India, built by Shah Jahan who also built the Taj Mahal. Located in Old Delhi, opposite the Red Fort. Admission free but camera and video costs apply, closed during Muslim prayer time.
- Chandni Chowk – the main street of Old Delhi, off it come several bazaars and other interesting sites, including the Jain Temple and Sikh Gurdwara at the Red Fort and the Fatephuri Masjid at the other end.
- Raj Ghat – memorial for Gandhi marks the site of his cremation. There is a museum and bookshop. Within the gardens there are also memorials for Nehru, Indira Gandhi and her two sons Sanjay and Rajiv. Closed Mondays.
- National Museum – Has free guided tours throughout the day. Located on Janpath, Closed Mondays, cost 150 Rs, 300 Rs for camera.
- Indira Gandhi House and Museum – Former residence of Indira Gandhi with her personal belongings on display. Located on Safdarjang Rd (Central Delhi) closed Mondays.
- Humayun's Tomb and Nizam-Ud-Din's Shrine – Fine examples of early Mughal architecture, located across from each other just off Mathura RD in Central Delhi. Humayun's Tomb costs US\$5 to enter.
- Lodi Garden – gardens that contain the tombs of the former rulers of Delhi. Located in Lodi, Central Delhi.
- Laxmi Narayan Temple – Hindu temple for the goddess of wealth, not far from Connaught Place on Mandir Marg.

- Jantar Mantar – A huge outdoor observatory. Located on Sansad Marg, close by to Connaught Place. Cost: US\$2, camera extra.
- Bahai Temple – Located in Kalkaji, this interesting temple is open to people of all faiths. It is best seen at sunset and is set amongst peaceful gardens. Closed Mondays.

Shopping

In Delhi you can find just about anything, with similar items usually centralized in a common market. The following list is an overview of the main shopping areas in Delhi.

- Paharganj - for trinket shopping, cheap clothes, shoes, shawls, bags, perfumed oil, incense, The main street of Paharganj has great shops
- Connaught Place - For up market clothing shops, great bookshops, handicrafts, textiles, art and good tailors; as well as the cheap street stalls selling magazines, CD's and DVD's and cheap jewelry. The quickest way to take there from Pahar Ganj is by Metro (one station – Rajiv Chowk).
- Janpath – Government emporiums, handicrafts, textiles, jewelry, clothes, handmade paper.
- Palika Bazaar – Underground local market selling cheap Indian and Western clothes, CD's and DVD's, electrical goods, shoes. An area to watch out for pick pockets.
- Khan Market – The expatriates haunt for shopping and eating. Bookshops, magazines, Fab India cater for western style Indian dress. Dr Mohans – Prescription Glasses – very cheap and up to date fashion styles Books – Turtle Book Store and others. Home wares, accessories, imported food, good tailors Located in South Delhi.
- Chandni Chowk – Indian goods including jewelry, textiles, wedding goods, spices, teas, food, perfumed oils and handmade paper.
- Karol Bagh – Western and Indian clothes, shoes, accessories, home wares, spices. Located in New Delhi, not far from Paharganj. Take the metro from Paharganj
- Lajpat Nagar – for saris, cloth, Indian clothes and jewelry. South Delhi
- Sarojani Market – Western clothes sold cheaply. South Delhi
- Nehru Place – computer equipment and fabric

Food

In Delhi you will find all manner of food, from street stalls to Western fast to cheap travelers haunts and five star establishments. The following restaurants are recommended for good food and cleanliness and we have listed them in terms of location. If you are interested in finding out about more up market restaurants try looking in the Delhi magazine *First City*.

- Paharganj – Metropolis Restaurant and Bar (around the corner from Prince Polonia, Main Bazaar) has great food, coffee, beer, a roof top terrace and AC; Sonu Chat House (Main Bazaar) for South Indian; Sam's Café (Vivek Hotel, Main Bazaar) for Western food; Everest Bakery Café (opposite Hotel Star Paradise) small and friendly Nepali café with good breakfasts, drinks, Thai food and Nepali Thali's.
- Connaught Place – Banana Leaf (N Block) for south Indian food; Zen (B Block) for Chinese and Japanese; Embassy (D Block) for Indian; Various café's including United Coffee House, Barista and Café Coffee Day; Western fast food chains such as McDonalds, KFC as well as Baskin and Robbins. The Imperial Hotel is located on Janpath, close by to Connaught Place, and has several excellent restaurants, including buffet meals with imported food.
- Old Delhi – Karim's (South Gate of the Jama Masjid) for Mughlai food; Chor Bazar (Hotel Broadway, Asaf Ali Rd) for Kashmiri food and ambience; Try to sweet shops and food stalls along Chandni Chowk for samosas's, Indian breads and sweets.
- Khan Market – Ramur Kitchen for tandoori food, several café's including Café Turtle, fast food and take away places.

Ladakh

Buddhism in Ladakh

The population of Ladakh is predominantly Buddhist and Ladakh has been deeply influenced by Tibetan Buddhism, which follows the Mahayana and Vajrayana schools. In these forms of Buddhism, Buddha is worshipped a deity who has attained Nirvana (freedom from the cycle of birth and death). Various incarnations of Buddha, known as Bodhisattvas, are also worshipped in Gompas in Ladakh.

The mythology of Tibetan Buddhism has many tales of various spirits and demons. These representations of both good and evil qualities are depicted in the form of masks and their stories are enacted as masked dances during the annual festivals of various Gompas in Ladakh.

Buddhism is the dominant religion in Ladakh and one can find its stamp all over in Ladakh. Be it monasteries, music or simple of way of life, Buddhism is essence of

Ladakh. One can find 'tangkhas', masks, musical instruments and precious items in the Gompas in Ladakh.

Gompas: A Gompa is a spiritual community where monks or nuns live and practice their religion. Gompas are also educational institutions and play a central role in the life and economy of the local community. Gompas are more than just monasteries and many have museums where tourists can view collections of Buddhist art. The annual festival celebration held at the Gompas are a colorful sight with masked dances and religious ceremonies drawing both pilgrims and tourists in large numbers.

Chortens and Stupas: Chortens and stupas are dome shaped structures built over a square base. They are usually built in memory of a Buddhist monk or religious teacher. Some stupas may contain relics of holy men. Chortens are often decorated with Buddhist prayer flags and offerings such as oil lamps or flowers etc may be placed around them.

Thangkas: Thangkas are Buddhist religious paintings that depict episodes from the life of Buddha or various Bodhisattvas. Rich in symbolism and Buddhist imagery, Thangkas are religious artifacts and the art of learning to paint a Thangka is a discipline that requires extensive training.

A land of freezing winds and burning hot sunlight, Ladakh is a cold desert lying in the rain shadow of the Great Himalayas and other smaller ranges. Little rain and snow reaches this dry area, where natural forces have created a fantastic landscape. Surrounded by rugged mountains this land is completely different from the green landscape of many parts of the Himalayas. Bounded by two of the world's mightiest mountain ranges, the Great Himalaya and the Karokoram, it is a land which has no match.

Ladakh

The main source of water of Ladakh is the winter snowfall. It was once covered by an extensive lake system, the vestiges of which still exist on its south-east plateaux of Rupshu and Chushul - in drainage basins with evocative names like Tso-moriri, Tsokar, and grandest of all, Pangong-tso. The temperature rarely exceeds 27 degree Celsius in summer while in winter it may drop to minus 20 degree Celsius.

Made up of two administrative districts - Leh and Cargill, Ladakh covers a total area of about 59,000 square kilometers. Leh is the main town. Allied ethnologically and geographically with the Tibet region of China, the area has a predominantly Lamaism Buddhist population. It was nominally a dependency of Tibet. After 1531 it was invaded periodically by Muslims from Kashmir; it was annexed to Kashmir in the mid-19th century.

However, today Ladakh forms a part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir in India and has some of its areas under the illegal occupation of Pakistan and China.

Ladakh Monasteries - Monasteries in Ladakh may be either of the Mahayana or the Hirayana sect of Buddhism. The head lama is called a 'kasha', meaning reincarnation.

The monasteries of Ladakh are what gives the region its unique flavor and beauty. Typically, most gompas are built so that they perch precariously on lone rocks or craggy mountain-faces.

Hemis Gompa - Hemis, the largest monastery in Ladakh, was built in 1630. It lies at a distance of 45 km south of Leh. Impressive and intriguing, Hemis is different from the other important monasteries of Ladakh. The annual festival, commemorating the birth anniversary of Guru Padmasambhava, is held for two days in June-July every year, in the courtyard of the monastery. The festival of dances, where good triumphs over evil in a colourful pageant, is also the annual 'bazaar' where Ladakhis from remote areas buy and sell wares.

Sankar gompa - The Sankar gompa is located a couple of kilometers north of the town center. 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 an equal number of heads.

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

Likir Monastery - Located around 52 Kms from Leh, known as Klu-Kkhjil (water spirits) founded in the 11th century AD and was rededicated to another monastic order (the yellow sect) in the 15th century, its earlier gompa was destroyed in fire. The present gompa dates back to the 18th century. It contains huge clay images of Buddha and various old manuscripts. It also houses an interesting collection of thangkas, old religious and domestic costumes and implements etc.

Spituk Monastery - Spituk Gompa is on the hill top near Indus, around 18 kilometres from Leh. The Gompa was founded in 11th century by Od-De The Gompa was named Spituk (exemplary) by Rinchen Zangpo, a translator came to that place and said that exemplary religious community would rise. Initially it belonged to the Kadampa School then during the life time of king Gragspa Bumide made it Gayluk Pa order.

The Spituk festival held every year from 17th to 19th days of the 11th month. It houses a collection of ancient masks, antique arms, icons and numerous thangkas. Higher up the

hill is the Mahakal Temple, containing the shrine of Vajrabhairava. The terrifying face of Vajrabhairava is unveiled only at the annual festival in January

Thiksey Monastery - About 20 kms from Leh, Thiksey is an imposing monastery and one of the finest example of Ladakhi architecture. This Gompa is situated on the top of the hill and forms part of Gelugpa order.

The 12 storey monastery complex contains numerous stupas, statues, thangkas, wall paintings, swords and a large pillar engraved with the Buddha's teachings, there are sacred shrines and a many precious objects to be seen. The successive reincarnation of the Skyabje Khampo Rinpoche is in-charge of the monastery. Thiksey gustor (festival) held from 17th to 19th day of the 12th month. The main prayer hall has a 15 metres high seated Buddha figure. There is a chance to see prayers in the early morning.

Lamayuru Monastery - Spectacularly set, founded in the 10th century, Lamayuru monastery is about 125 kms. west of Leh. As the legend goes, Lamayuru was a lake. It was blessed by a Lama after which the water of the lake receded up to the mountains leaving place for the monastery to be built. Now mostly in ruins, only the main hall exists today and houses numerous tankhyas. The Yundrung Kabgyad festival is held during summer on the 28th and 29th days of the 2nd Tibetan month. Lamayuru has fascinating caves carved out of the mountainside. For sheer spectacle value no other gompa can match Lamayuru.

Shey Monastery - Situated on a hilltop 15 km south of Leh, was once the residence of the royal family and it was constructed by the first king of Ladakh, Lhachen Palgyigon. According to tradition, it was the seat of power of the pre-Tibetan kings. Standing approximately 4 metres Shakyamuni Buddha's statue which is made of copper, is the largest in the region, built by Deldan Namgyal in 1633 is a memorial to his father, king Singee Namgyal. There is another statue of the Buddha three stories in height. Stone carving and many chortens are scattered around the Dresthang Gompa. On the 30th day of the 1st Tibetan month celebrates shey rul-lo and on the 10th day of the 7th Tibetan month the festival of Shey Surb-lo is held.

Stakana Monastery - Built nearly 1580 by great scholar saint Jamyang Palkar during the reign of king Jamyang Namgyal. The Stakna monastery is 45 Km south of Leh, founded on a hill shaped Stakna (Tiger nose). Easily accessible from Leh town.

Stok Palace - Visible in the distance, at the top of a huge moraine of pebbles swept down from the mountains, the elegant four-storey Stok Palace stands above barley terraces studded with threshing circles and whitewashed farmhouses. Built early in the nineteenth century by the last ruler of independent Ladakh, it has been the official residence of the Ladakhi royal family since they were ousted from Leh and Shey two hundred years ago.

The fascinating collection comprises some of the family's most precious heirlooms, including antique ritual objects, ceremonial tea paraphernalia, and exquisite sixteenth-century thangkas illuminated with paint made from crushed rubies, emeralds and sapphires. The pieces de resistance, however, are the Gyalmo's peraks.

Still worn on important occasions, the ancient headdresses, thought to have originated in Tibet, are encrusted with slabs of flawless turquoise, polished coral, lapis lazuli and nuggets of pure gold. Also of interest are a couple of swords whose blades were allegedly tied in knots as a demonstration of strength by king Tashi Namgyal Phugtal Gompa.

Alchi Gompa - On the banks of the Indus is the Alchi Gompa, dating thousand years back. One of its walls features thousands of miniature sized pictures of the Buddha. Three large sized images made of clay and painted brightly are its focal attraction. No longer an active religious center, it is looked after by monks from the Likir monastery.

Leh Palace - The captivating Leh Palace rises from the edge of a hill overlooking the town and stretches out towards the indigo sky. A miniature version of the Potala in Lhasa, the Leh Palace is one of the major attractions in Ladakh. The palace was built in the 17th century and had nine storeys, but it 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 the Namgyal hill, is the Victory Tower, built to commemorate Ladakh's victory over the Balti Kashmir armies in the early 16th century. This palace built for King Singge Namgyal, now houses the Ladakhi branch of the Indian Government's archaeological conservation organisation

Dharamsala

Dharamsala is a former hill station located in the Northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. The town consists of lower Dharamsala, the main Indian town; and McLeod Ganj, the home of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Community. McLeod Ganj is located on a ridge 4km above Dharamsala. There are also picturesque villages, cultural

institutes and rewarding hikes. You will no doubt discover many interesting sites for yourself; however we have listed the main highlights for you.

- Tsuglagkhang Complex – The complex consists of the official residence of the Dalai Lama, the Central Temple, the Kalachakra Temple, Namgyel Monastery, Tibet Museum, Bookshop and Namgyel café. Located south of the McLeod Ganj bus stand, down Temple Rd.
- Tibetan Government in Exile and Library of Tibetan Works and Archives – Also includes the Tibetan Cultural Museum and Nechung Monastery and Temple. Located on Jogibara Rd between McLeod Ganj and Dharamsala.
- Tibetan Medical & Astrological Institute – Contains a museum, library, and college. Tibetan horoscopes available. Located near the library.
- Dip Tse-Chok Ling Gompa – A small monastery, take the path downhill past the Om Guest House.
- TIPA (Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts) – Holds occasional festivals and performances, visit to watch Tibetan opera (Ihamo) and dance classes.
- Tushita – Meditation centre located above McLeod Ganj. Holds informative video screenings and meditation classes. Contact on 01892 221866.
- Vipassana Meditation Centre – Located near Tushita, holds regular ten day meditation courses. You can register online or contact 0189 2 221309.
- Bhagsu – Located 2km east of McLeod, places of interest include the Shiva temple, waterfall, and walks with good views.
- Naddi Village – North of McLeod Ganj, excellent mountain views on clear days.
- Dal Lake – Holy lake and Hindu temple between McLeod Ganj and Naddi. The lake itself is small but the walk to and from McLeod is pleasant.
- Norbulingka Institute – A Tibetan educational complex set in Japanese style gardens with a temple, museum, gallery, workshops, hotel and café. A taxi from McLeod Ganj will cost around 200 Rs each way, or you can catch the Yol bus from Dharamsala and ask to get off at Sidhpur near the Sacred Heart School. Norbulingka is a further 15 minute walk from here.
- Thosamling Nunnery – Thosamling is located in Sidhari behind Norbulingka.
- Karmapa – Temple and residence of the Karmapa, it is possible to have a public audience and blessing by the Karmapa on most Wednesdays and Saturdays at 2pm. Take your passport and a Kata. Located just after the Norbulingka Institute.
- Kangra Art Museum – Located in Dharamsala, near the taxi stand.
- Triund – Ridge above McLeod Ganj, starting point for many treks. It is possible to

walk to Triund and back in one day, however you need to start early, take plenty of water and it is advisable not to go alone. You can continue on from Triund for longer treks to the snow line.

Shopping

There are two main shopping areas; McLeod Ganj for Tibetan goods and tourist items, and Dharamsala for Indian goods.

- McLeod Ganj – Has everything from cheap clothes, jewelry, carpets, books and Tibetan and Kahsmiri trinkets. There are several places that employ newly arrived Tibetan refugees and give back to the community, such as the Tibetan Handicrafts Cooperative (Jogibara), TVC Handicraft Centre (Temple Rd) and Stitches of Tibet (Temple Rd). Tibetan stalls line Jogibara and Temple roads and sell prayer flags, prayer wheels, clothes, blankets, jewelry, and postcards. There are also numerous bookshops in McLeod which specialise in Buddhist literature and books on Tibetan culture. There are also many tailors who can make Indian and Tibetan style clothes.
- Kotwali Bazaar, Dharamsala – The main shopping area in Dharamsala is located near the taxi stand. It is good for pashminas and shawls from the Government Emporiums; fabrics, saris and salwar kameez (Indian clothes). There are also tailors that specialise in salwar kameez.

Food

The following restaurants are recommended for good food and cleanliness.

- Pema Thang - Pizzas, good salads, Tibetan food. Bhagsu Hotel Rd.
- Carpe Diem – Western style food, good pizza's, Tandoori oven, breakfasts and jam sessions. Jogibara Rd.
- Hotel Tibet - Serves alcohol and Chinese cuisine, bakery located nearby. Bhagsu Rd.
- Surya Resort – Excellent quality Indian, Continental and Chinese with a bar. Bhagsu Hotel Road.
- Moon peak Café – Western style café, good for coffee, breakfast and toasted sandwiches. Temple Rd.
- Tang Yen – Tibetan coffee house, good coffee, teas, breakfasts, snacks, and bakery. Temple Rd.
- Nick's Italian Kitchen – Good Italian vegetarian food, sunny terrace. Bhagsu Rd.
- Malabar Café – Indian, Chinese and Western food. Jogibara Rd.
- Ashoka – Good Indian food, Tandoori oven and beer. Jogibara Rd.
- McLo's – Continental, Indian, Chinese, Israeli, ice cream, also serves alcohol. Above the bus station.
- Lung-Ta Restaurant – Japanese restaurant serves cheap Japanese food in Jogiwara Road past Chocolate Log
- Dokebi Restaurant – Korean Food behind the Lung-Ta Japanese Restaurant

- Osho Shop – Healthy bakery items, imported packaged food, cheese, herbs, and teas. Tushita Rd.
- Tibet Quality Bakery – Good muffins, bread loaves and try the Tibet Special!! Opposite Carpe Diem, Jogibara Rd.
- Supermarket – Packaged food items including noodles, pasta, biscuits, sauces, soup, tea, coffee, cheese, yoghurt, frozen food, ice-cream, drinks. Bhagsu Rd.

Entertainment

The entertainment in McLeod Ganj consists of cultural programs, video halls, music performances and a few bars.

POSSIBLE READING BEFORE TRAVELLING:

Guide Books

Lonely Planet – India

Rough Guide – India

Footprint - India

Buddhism

Any books written by HH Dalai Lama, including:

Freedom in Exile – HH Dalai Lama

The Four Noble Truths – HH Dalai Lama

The Art of Happiness – HH Dalai Lama

Old Path While Clouds – Thich Nhat Hanh

India – General Interest

A Journey into Ladakh – Andrew Harvey

A Suitable Boy – Vikram Seth

Holy Cow – Sarah McDonald

Inheritance of Loss – Karin Desi

Shantaram – Gregory David Roberts

The God of Small Things – Arundhati Roy

Midnight's Children – Salman Rushdie

End of the Brits – Patrick French

Kim – Rudyard Kipling

The Far Pavillions – MM Kaye

India – VS Naipaul

Traveller's Checklist

Print this checklist out and then - see if you have forgotten anything!

Most people have their own individual preferences for what they like to travel with so our list won't be comprehensive for everyone. It's intended to be a handy reference point from which you can build.

Documents - Don't leave home without them - THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS YOU'LL CARRY!
nearly everything else can be bought en route if necessary

- Passport
- Visa
- Spare Passport photos
- Health Documentation (International Health Certificates, prescriptions, Doctors letters)
- Transportation tickets
- Accommodation vouchers & other prepaid vouchers
- Emergency Information - (contacts, Embassy addresses, travel insurance card and contact numbers)
- Travellers Cheques (with register)
- Currency
- Credit / Debit Cards
- Personal ID (Driving Licence, Student Id)
- International Drivers Licence
- Address / phone list
- Photocopies of important documents
- Reservation receipts (tours, hotels, theatre tickets, sporting events)
- Business Cards - good even for pleasure trips

Clothes - depends on what you will be doing. The key to travelling light is to set out what you want to take and then halve it!

- Trousers or dresses / skirts

- Underwear
- Socks / hosiery
- Belts
- Cold weather gear (jumper, coat, warm hat, gloves, scarf)
- Warm weather gear (swimsuit, shorts, sandals)
- Sleep Clothes
- Rain gear (jacket or umbrella)
- Comfortable walking shoes (must be worn in)
- Sun Hat
- Dress-up clothes

Toiletries - a lot of items can be purchased wherever you go so don't take industrial-sized bottles unless you know it is not available or you can't live without it

- Comb and/or brush
- Toothbrush, toothpaste, floss etc
- Deodorant
- Soap
- Shampoo & conditioner
- Skin-care lotion
- Razor & shaving cream
- Personal hygiene items
- Vitamins
- Toilet Paper
- Bath / beach towel
- Insect repellent
- Sunscreen
- Nail clippers

Medicine Kit - these items often won't be available or at least not easily found, so it's best to take what you think you will need.

- Asprin
- Plasters
- Antiseptic wipes
- Antibiotic cream
- Insect bite cream

- Sterile bandages and safety pins / clips
- Waterproof tape
- Upset stomach medication
- Diarrhea medicine
- Sunburn relief / lip balm
- Cold medicine
- Thermometer
- Prescriptions - (malaria pills, altitude sickness pills, antibiotics, pain killers)
- Regular medication, plus a letter from your doctor for anything unusual.

Miscellaneous

- Luggage - suitcase, backpack, convertible bag
- Day pack
- Wallet
- Money belt
- Organizer bags (mesh or different colors)
- Walkman & tapes / CD's
- Camera & film
- Guide book and maps
- Phrase books
- Reading books
- Travel journal & pens
- Games / playing cards
- Small padlocks
- Luggage ID tags
- Watch - (preferably with alarm)
- Alarm Clock
- Sunglasses and case
- Torch
- Mini sewing / repair kit
- Travel clothesline & pegs
- Sink plug - (multi size)
- Laundry bag

- Ziplock plastic bags
- Large plastic garbage bag - to use as rain protection for your main bag
- Swiss Army style pocket knife with scissors, corkscrew, screwdriver etc
- Electrical converter / adapter if you have AC appliances
- Electrical plug adapters
- Rubber door wedge (security for hotel rooms)
- Nylon cord
- Duct tape (multiple uses)
- Earplugs / eyeshades
- Lighter & candle
- Mosquito net
- Sleep sheet if you will be hostelling
- Sleeping bag if you will be in cold climates (Cheap hotels don't have the best bedding or heating)
- Camping gear - (tent, sleeping pad, stove, fuel, water filter etc)

Before you go

- Stop deliveries and have Australia Post hold mail
- Arrange for care of pets, lawn, house plants, garden, swimming pool
- Arrange for home security if you're worried
- Empty refrigerator and garbage
- Turn off hot water cylinder
- Pre-pay bills (or ask close friend to collect mail and pay bills for you)
- Lock all doors and windows
- Secure grounds if in cyclone area & season
- Triple check that you have Passport / Tickets / Money

HAPPY PACKING!