

Definitive Cultural Tour of Ladakh, India – with Dakthok Festival

Travel from the verdant valleys of Northern India to the dramatic mountain scenery of Ladakh.



Group departures

See overleaf for departure dates

Holiday overview

Style	Tour
Accommodation	Hotels, Fixed Camp
Grade	Tour
Duration	16 days from London to London
Min/Max group size	4 / 12. Guaranteed to run for 4
Trip Leader	Local Leader India
Land only	Joining in Delhi, India
Max altitude	5,441m/17,852ft, crossing the Taglung La, Day 9

Private Departures & Tailor Made itineraries available



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Departures

Group departures

2024 Dates:

Fri 07 Jun - Sat 22 Jun With Hemis Festival
Sun 07 Jul - Mon 22 Jul With Dakthok Festival

This detailed itinerary is for our July departure only. A separate itinerary for our June departure is available to download from our website or can be requested from the Mountain Kingdoms office.

Will the trip run?

This trip is guaranteed to run for 4 people and for a maximum of 12. In the rare event that we cancel a holiday, we will refund you in full and give you at least 6 weeks warning. Many trips do fill up quickly - we advise you to book early if you want to secure a place(s) on the dates of your choice.

Group prices and optional supplements

Please contact us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or visit our website for our land only and flight inclusive prices and single supplement options.

No Surcharge Guarantee

The flight inclusive or land only price will be confirmed to you at the time you make your booking. There will be no surcharges after your booking has been confirmed.

Insurance

We offer a travel insurance scheme - please contact us for details.

Private Departures

We can also offer this trip as a private holiday. A Private Departure follows exactly the same itinerary as the group departure but at dates to suit you (subject to availability) - please contact us with your preferred dates.

Tailor Made service

We pride ourselves on the level of quality and choice we provide for our clients who want a fully tailor made holiday. A holiday will be created especially for you by one of our well-travelled experts. They will be able to advise on the accommodation best suited to your needs, the sights you should visit (and those to avoid!) and the best walks and activities matched to your ability. In short, we will work together with you to create your perfect holiday.

If you would like to explore the idea of a Tailor Made holiday with Mountain Kingdoms then please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or see the Tailor Made pages of our website for further inspiration.

Your trip highlights

- Enjoy a summer adventure in the Himalaya
- Take a train journey across the plains of India and ride the famous toy train to Shimla
- Drive through the Greater Himalaya on a thrilling four day road journey
- Explore Leh, the Indus valley and the famous temples at Alchi
- Visit a village of skilled artisan metal workers in Chilling
- Fly over the top of the Himalaya with views of K2
- Join the vibrant celebrations at the Dakthok Festival

At a glance itinerary

Days 1-2	Fly to Delhi.
Days 3-4	Train to Kalka and toy train to Shimla. Sightseeing and walks in Shimla.
Days 5-6	Drive to Manali and Keylong.
Day 7	Acclimatisation in Keylong and drive to Jispa.
Days 8-9	Drive to Sarchu and continue to Leh.
Day 10	Full day sightseeing in Leh Valley with Hemis and Thikse and lunch in Stok.
Day 11	Attend Daktok Festival. Walking tour of Leh and Shanti Stupa.
Day 12	Drive to Phyang and optional walk up valley. Drive to Nimmu.
Day 13	Visit Chilling metal workers and lunch in village with local family. Return to Nimmu.
Day 14	Visit Alchi, Likhir and Basgo. Return to Saboo.
Days 15-16	Fly to Delhi and fly to London.

Trip summary

This is a tremendously exciting trip. Ladakh, formerly a Buddhist kingdom, lies embedded in a high mountain world at the core of the Trans Himalaya, with the Karakoram to the north-west and the Himalaya in the south west. Historically its position on the upper Indus has given Ladakh great importance on the trade route from north-west India to Tibet and to Turkestan. The main chain of the Himalaya usually prevents the Indian summer monsoon from reaching this far which makes it a good summer destination.

This is a trip of great contrasts and cultural interest. To travel from the Indian lowlands up to Leh in its high eyrie involves a fantastic Himalayan road journey on the road link between Manali and Leh, open only for a few months each year due to snow on the passes. The four day traverse takes you right across the Greater Himalaya and offers some grand scenery. You cross many high passes which offer panoramic views of the Himalaya with, in the far distance, the peaks of the Karakoram. Even before you start your road journey through the Himalaya you will be immersed into the frenetic pace of life that is India. You will stay in a 4* 'colonial' hotel of great Raj character in Delhi, experience the hurly-burly of an Indian railway station (Delhi Railway Station is a cultural experience all of its own), and travel by train across the Indian plains. You then take the toy train up to historic Shimla in the foothills of the Himalaya, where you will stay in the famous Clarkes Hotel, long known for its charm and colonial elegance. You continue to the old hill station of Manali before setting off on your journey over the mountains to Leh.

Finally, having crossed the Himalaya you arrive in Ladakh and driving up the Indus valley you arrive at the town of Leh. Here you will explore this picturesque capital and then visit further afield to old palaces and some of the large and thriving Buddhist monasteries of the Indus valley. You will drive westwards towards Kashmir to visit the fabulous temples of Alchi. It is amazing to think that these incredible temples have survived undamaged for a thousand years! You also make the exciting drive up the Zaskar River gorge to visit the metal-working village of Chilling where you will have lunch in a local house and have some time in the village to give you contact with the local people.

In addition you will visit the Dakthok Festival one of the leading festivals of Ladakh. Such celebrations are very colourful and atmospheric events. Local people come from villages and hamlets all around the region to watch the 'Black Hat' dancers, meet their relatives and friends, gain merit and improve their karma, perhaps look for a bride or a husband, and generally enjoy themselves. Buddhist festivals are great fun and offer great photographic opportunities.

The trip finishes with one of the world's most sensational scheduled flights, right over the top of the greater Himalaya and back to Delhi where you may extend your time to take in some of the city's main sights. You can also visit the Taj Mahal by adding just one more day to your itinerary. Check with our office for details.

Your guide



Your leader will be a knowledgeable, friendly, English-speaking Indian guide. We use one of the largest and oldest tour operators in India who have excellent, highly-trained staff.

Your trip itinerary

Day 1: Fly London to Delhi.

Depart London for the overnight flight to Delhi.

Overnight: In flight

Day 2: Arrive Delhi. Group transfer to hotel. Rest of the day at leisure.

You will arrive in Delhi in the morning and will be met and transferred to your hotel.

The hotel we normally use has a very nice swimming pool in a garden where you will see parakeets flying about. Although Delhi can initially still be quite culture shock with its heat, dust and frenetic activity, it is also nowadays a vibrant and cosmopolitan modern city with thriving business areas, an excellent metro system and plenty of reminders of its vibrant history and ancient civilization. There is plenty to see and In the old town you might visit the Friday mosque and Delhi Fort, an amazing Moghul fortress and palace, or Chandni Chowk the old bazaar. In New Delhi there are Lutyens' impressive buildings created to celebrate New Delhi as the capital of the Raj and the British in India. Overlaid onto this history is the modern infrastructure created for the Commonwealth Games; completed rather late, but hauling Delhi firmly into the 21st century.

Overnight: Hotel Oberoi Maidens or Similar, Delhi

Day 3: Train to Kalka - 4hrs and then 'Toy Train' to Shimla, 2,276m/7,467ft - 4-5 hours.

You will transfer to the railway station to take the mainline train across the Indian plains to Kalka. In Kalka you will connect with the 'Toy Train' for Shimla. This is a narrow gauge railway, built over one hundred years ago, and it is said to be one of the most beautiful railways in the world. Views along the way are stunning and the scenery is enchanting.

In Shimla you will be met and taken to Clarkes Hotel.

Overnight: Clarkes Hotel or Similar, Shimla (Meals: BLD)

Day 4: Full day of sightseeing and walks in Shimla.

The town of Shimla came into being in the first quarter of the 19th Century and some forty years later became the summer capital of the British Raj, as a place where British administrators and military and their families, could escape the stifling heat of the plains. Nowadays it is the capital of the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. Shimla is set along a ridge, with steep forested hillsides falling away in all directions and offering spectacular mountain views. Its famous Mall, with its many shops, cafes, restaurants and book shops, runs east and west just below the spine of the ridge. South of the Mall the maze-like alleys of the bustling bazaar drop steeply down to Cart Rd.



Today you will have the day to explore Shimla with a guide. Your walk will start at Vice Regal Lodge (now housing the Indian Institute of Advanced Study), with a tour of Vice Regal Lodge, which will take about 30 to 45 minutes. You then continue your walk on the ridge towards the Mall, which will take about 1 to 2 hours with good views of the Himalaya and rolling hills of Shimla along the way. You will also see many other historical building dating back to the Raj, such as historic Christ Church and the State Museum. You will have a good Himachali lunch at the Ashiana Restaurant, which offers fine views of the Mall on one side and the ridge on the other side. After lunch, you will continue your walk through the colorful bazaar on the Mall road towards Chota Shimla and finish the walk at Hotel Woodville Palace for high tea in the garden!

Overnight: Clarkes Hotel or Similar, Shimla (Meals: BLD)

Day 5: Drive from Shimla to Manali, 1,960m/6,430ft - 9 hours.

Although long, this is a very picturesque route. Firstly it is about 78 kms to reach the Beri junction, where you join the main Chandigarh to Manali road. About 145 kms from Shimla the road joins the valley of the Beas River which it then follows, through the busy town of Kullu, before finally arriving at Manali.

The town of Manali, once a trading outpost at the start of an ancient trade route to Ladakh, is now the jumping off spot for the road to Leh and is also very popular with Indian tourists looking for a taste of the Himalayas. Set in the beautiful Beas Valley and surrounded by mountains, this once quiet village has transformed in recent years into a bustling resort town with numerous hotels, cafes and restaurants.

Overnight: Mayflower Hotel or Similar, Manali (Meals: BLD)

Day 6: Morning free in Manali. Drive to near Keylong, 3,050m/10,006ft - 10 hours.

After a ten minute walk to visit Hadimbu Temple, you make a short drive to two monasteries in the town and also make a visit to the hot spring baths at Vashist. You start your drive to Leh, crossing over your first pass of the trip the Rohtang La, 3,978m/13,051ft. This pass featured heavily in the early exploration of the western Himalaya and gives excellent panoramic views of glaciers and the high peaks. A picnic lunch is usually taken at Mahli, 3,405m/11,171ft, 17km before the pass, but where you have lunch depends on whether there are any delays on this narrow mountain road which follows the mighty River Chandra for the last 60km. From here you drop into the region of Lahoul before reaching Drilbu Retreat, Tupchiling, 3,050m/10,006ft, 7km short of Keylong.

Overnight: Drilbu Retreat or Hotel In Keylong (Meals: BLD)

Day 7: Acclimatisation walk to monasteries in Keylong area. Drive to Jispa, 3,141m/10,305ft - 1 hour.

Today is kept aside as an acclimatisation day. There are a number of different temples and monasteries that can be visited from Tupchiling and you may also have the chance to visit the capital of the Lahoul region, Keylong at 3,349m/10,987ft. Lahoul is still quite green, with barley and potato fields edged with poplar and willow trees, but already the high peaks are screening out the monsoon rains and it feels now like high mountain country. We suggest two short walks in the Keylong area to help you become more accustomed to the rare air of the Himalaya before crossing the highest passes. The first walk is after a 6km drive for a slow 30 minutes up (150m/492ft climb) to the 11th century Khardong Gompa, the oldest in the region, returning to the transport to drive 20km, crossing the Bagrha River for an hour's walk up, 350m/1,148ft above Keylong, to the 16th century Sashur Gompa. Each gompa can be seen across the valley from the other. You then drive a further 25km to the Ibex Hotel where you will spend the night.



Overnight: Ibex Hotel or Fixed Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 8: Drive to Sarchu, 4,220m/13,845ft - 6 hours.

After Jispa you cross the formidable Baralacha La, 4,891m/16,046ft, source of the Bagrha River which you saw joining the Chandra River near Tupchiling yesterday. You enter a much more arid, sparsely populated stretch. There are one or two lakes and impressive canyons and huge plains. Some stretches of the road beyond Lahoul and up until the Indus Valley are non-metalled and, in parts, may be quite bumpy.

Stay at Sarchu fixed camp. The camps on this road are semi-permanent to cater for traders/travellers on this important highway and have been set up by enterprising locals. They have large walk-in sleeping tents with camp beds and adjacent bathroom/toilet facilities. There will be a big mess tent and plenty of good food.

Overnight: Fixed Camp (Meals: BLD)

Day 9: Drive to Saboo near Leh, 3,505m/11,500ft - 10 hours.

You will make an early start to go over the highest passes today; 21 loops with hair pin bends and a 477m/1,565ft climb to Nakella La, 4,739m/15,547ft, the Lachulang La, 5,065m/16,616ft and 90km and 3½ hours later (including crossing 48km of the More Plains) the Taglung La, 5,441m/17,852ft - this has a sign stating it to be the second highest motor-able pass in the world. On the drive you will have wonderful views of canyons, pinnacles with boulders balanced on their tops and other geological wonders. You descend to join the Indus at Upshi, 3,384m/11,102ft. You drive alongside the River Indus, following the river downstream, passing on the way some of the monasteries that you will be visiting later, continuing for a further 50km or so to reach Saboo village, a very pretty and fertile spot, located off the main highway and just a short distance from Leh town. It is quiet and secluded and a real oasis among the otherwise rather stark landscape. The village is made up of traditional village houses which are surrounded by cultivated fields, and bubbling streams run through groves of poplar trees and willows. There are wonderful views of the mountains including the Stok Kangri range from here. The Saboo Resort where you will stay is a lovely resort hotel built in traditional style.

Ladakh, often known as 'Little Tibet', is the highest and most remote region of India. Its landscapes are more like Tibet and culturally too, Ladakh has more in common with Tibet than with India. Lying north of the main Himalaya chain, like Tibet it receives relatively little rainfall which means that unlike much of the Himalaya, the summer months are a good time to visit. Ladakh's wonderful, if arid, mountain landscapes, many palaces and monasteries and its distinctive cultural heritage make it a fascinating area. The rather stark landscape is relieved by numerous oases of green, where sparkling streams tumble through groves of willow trees alongside villages of traditional flat-roofed brick houses. The distinctive monasteries and gompas are still central to the lives of the Ladakhi people and illustrate the deep Tibetan Buddhist heritage of the region.

Overnight: Saboo Resort or Similar, Leh (Meals: BLD)

Day 10: Full day of sightseeing in the Indus Valley.

Leh and the Indus Valley are surrounded by the mountains of the High Himalaya and many snow peaks such as Stok Kangri are visible from town. The Indus Valley cuts a wide swathe through these mountains and the various valleys which come down from the high mountains to meet this main valley are cultivated and fertile in their lower reaches with distinctive ancient palaces and monasteries watching over the villages and fields below. You will spend the day visiting three or four of the more spectacular and important places in the Indus valley east of Leh.

Firstly you drive to Hemis Monastery which stands above the Indus River, approximately 47 kilometres from Leh. This monastery dates back to 1630 is the largest and is the most wealthy monastery of Ladakh. It belongs to the Drukpa Lineage, or Dragon Order, of Mahayana Buddhism.



You then visit Thikse Gompa, perched on a hill high above the Indus, and considered one of the most splendid of all Indus valley gompas. This gompa contains a three storey high statue of Chamba, Buddha of the future and has marvellous views of the valley from the roof. It has the largest contingent of monks in Ladakh. On the right of the entrance to the main courtyard a new chapel houses an enormous 15 metre high figure of Chamba, Buddha of the Future. About 100 yellow-cap monks belong to the gompa. If you get there by 6.30am you can witness the daily morning prayers, but there are also prayers closer to noon, preceded by long, mournful sounds from the horns on the roof.

Retracing your steps, you will visit Shey Palace, the palace of the old Ladakhi Kings. The old 'summer palace' of the Kings of Ladakh was built about 550 years ago by Lhachen Palgyigon, the first King of Ladakh. It stands next to the remains of a larger construction on the east side of a hill, which runs south east towards the Indus. From the palace you can see over the fertile Indus plain north east to Tikse Gompa and over the Indus to the Zaskar mountain range. The old Shey Palace has the largest golden Buddha statue in Ladakh in its gompa. The statue worked out of gold and gilded copper sheets, stands 12 metres high and has blue hair. It was erected by King Dalden Namgyal in the middle of the 17th Century. The most important moment in the construction of such a figure is when the eyes are painted in and the statue can 'see'. No artist or monk would dare to look the Buddha in the eye so the pupils are painted over the artist's shoulder, with his back to the idol, using a mirror.

Later you travel to Stok, a lovely village with fertile fields, overlooked by Stok Palace. In Stok village you will enjoy the hospitality of a local family and have lunch in the lovely dining room/kitchen at the Gyab Thago Heritage Home. The family who live here built this relatively new house, but set just above it, is their old

home, an ancient house no longer lived in. You may visit this house after lunch where you will see the traditional layout of a Ladakhi home, with accommodation for the animals downstairs, and upstairs the kitchen with its central fire and the walls lined with all sorts of pots and old utensils. There is the store for keeping barley during the winter months and a prayer room, while up on the roof is a sheltered space where the family could sit in the sunshine out of the wind during the cold winter months.

After lunch you will visit the palace of Stok, built in the 1840s to house the Ladakhi Royal family. The King of Ladakh was allowed by the Kashmiris to move here after they invaded in 1837. A visit to Stok Palace is a step back in time; the family still live here and run it as a small guesthouse with a couple of rooms. There is also an excellent museum which has a remarkable display of royal memorabilia and many fine 'thangkas' (Buddhist religious paintings) along with traditional Ladakhi clothing and jewellery. Much of this collection formerly belonged to the Ladakhi royal family, including the queen's spectacular turquoise headdress, along with the wooden case in which it was carried.

Overnight: Saboo Resort or Similar, Leh (Meals: BLD)

Day 11: Visit Dakthok festival, sightseeing in Leh and walk to Shanti Stupa.

This morning you will visit the Dakthok festival, a major festival of Ladakh and always well attended, by visitors and locals alike. Ladakhi festivals are very colourful and cheerful affairs with dances and plays performed by masked lamas, representing the triumph of good over evil. People from all over the region flock here, dressed in their best clothes, to celebrate, achieve religious merit and to socialize. These festivals are always great fun to attend and you can expect large crowds of local Ladakhi people to be there all their finery.



Later in the day you will enjoy a walking tour of the sights of Leh in the company of a knowledgeable English-speaking guide. Leh was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Ladakh and the kings of Leh once commanded a huge civilization stretching from Baltistan in the west, almost as far as Lhasa in Tibet. Leh is full of interest with its semi-ruined Potala-like palace and in the old town a maze of narrow streets, filled with shops, several temples, a mosque and bustling bazaars. It is a great place to explore. You will see the backstreets, bazaars and temples of Leh as well as the Royal Palace which dominates the town. The tour will give you a real sense of the mediaeval character of Leh town before the advent of the modern age. At the ecological centre you will discover from various exhibits how a relatively fragile Ladakhi culture is being threatened by a rapidly changing outside world. You might also relax at a rooftop café, or do a bit of shopping - Leh has some good bookshops.

In the late afternoon you may walk the short distance up to Shanti Stupa for the great views from there. It's a bit of a heave up the many steps to reach the top but you will be rewarded with incredible views over Leh town and the surrounding countryside in the beautiful evening light.

Overnight: Saboo Resort or Similar, Leh (Meals: BLD)

Day 12: Visit Phyang Gumpa and optional walk in the valley. Drive to Nimmu.

Today you will drive west along the Indus and turn north up a valley to visit the spectacular Phyang Monastery, which like so many such buildings is set on a hill overlooking the valley. Phyang is one of the very important monasteries of the Indus Valley but tends to be less visited than those to the east of Leh. It is believed to date back to the 16th century. It is one of the few monasteries belonging to the Kagyu-pa sect of Buddhism and it houses some magnificent paintings and images. After your visit to the monastery you might like to have a bit of a leg stretch with a very pleasant and quiet walk up the valley above Phyang. From the end of the tarmac road a trail leads up the valley, rising high above the village and entering a harsher, more alpine landscape. Wild thyme scents the air and you may see butterflies flitting over the low bushes and occasionally birds and animals such as hares, blue sheep and ibex. You may also encounter mule trains and descending trekkers, for this is a trekking route coming over a high pass from Hundar in the Nubra Valley.

You then drive to the village of Nimmu located close to the confluence of the Indus and Zaskar rivers. Nimmu is a picturesque village featuring houses of traditional Ladakhi architecture surrounded by orchards of apricot, apple and walnut trees. You will stay here for two nights at the Nimmu House Hotel, formerly home to a cousin of the king of Ladakh and tastefully converted into a unique heritage hotel.

You will have the afternoon at leisure in Nimmu with the opportunity to take a gentle walk round the village to visit the ancient monastery, an old caravanseraï and Nimmu's orchards and gardens where you will meet local villagers working in the fields or beside their houses.

Overnight: Hotel Nimmu House, Nimmu (Meals: BLD)

Day 13: Drive to Chilling, 3,350m/10,990ft. Visit metalworking families, explore village and have lunch. Return to Nimmu.

After breakfast you will drive back along the Indus River to the confluence of the Indus and Zaskar Rivers and then turn south alongside the Zaskar River. You follow the winding road beneath steep cliffs, up the river valley toward Chilling. Below Chilling you leave the vehicles and climb up the narrow footpath into the village itself. Chilling, a very picturesque village, is famous throughout Ladakh for all manner of the traditional metal handicrafts which are made there. These items are the pride of every Ladakhi kitchen, in particular beautiful items such as ladles, spoons, prayer wheel, teapots and also ornate stoves. The people of Chilling have a great reputation for their traditional skills in working copper, bronze, tin, silver and iron and believe themselves to be descended from Nepalese craftsmen brought to work for the King of Ladakh in ancient times. You will be able to visit their workshops and showrooms and see some of the craftsmen working in these traditional home industries. You will have lunch with a local family.



There will be the opportunity for a pretty day walk around Chilling. The gorge scenery is awesome. Later you will return to Nimmu.

Overnight: Hotel Nimmu House, Nimmu (Meals: BLD)

Day 14: Visit Alchi and Likir. Return to Saboo via ruined castle at Basgo.

Today you drive to Alchi, a pretty village set in picturesque apricot orchards above the river Indus and having one of the most ancient and attractive temples of this entire region. A visit to Alchi is a step back in time. Alchi temple has somehow miraculously survived war and earthquake relatively intact for over 1,000 years. Its stunning frescoes are said to be among the best-preserved examples of Buddhist art from this period to be found anywhere. These wall paintings are in a different style to those you will see in other monasteries of the Indus Valley - their style is said to be more Indian or Indo-European. The various chapels which make up the complex, house a stunning array of magnificent images, wood carvings, stucco art and statues. The sheer artistry and originality found at Alchi sets it apart from other monasteries and makes a visit there unforgettable.

After your visit to Alchi you will drive to Likir. From Alchi you return to the main highway and turn east towards Leh. You then turn off the main Leh road to drive up a short way north to Likir. Likir Gompa is a very ancient monastery dating back in part to the 11th century. It sits majestically on a hill top dominating the valley and is attractively set amongst running water and willow trees which make a pleasant contrast to the surrounding barren landscape. Likir is famous for its imposing 25m high golden figure of the Matraiya Buddha, which sits behind the gompa looking towards the east. You may take time to explore the many finely decorated halls and temples. The gompa also contains a small museum with a very interesting collection.

Returning towards Leh, you can also visit Basgo. Basgo is known for its ruined castle dating from 15th century and the adjoining royal temples spectacularly located on cliffs above the valley floor. You then drive back to Saboo for your last night in Ladakh.

Overnight: Saboo Resort or Similar, Leh (Meals: BLD)

Day 15: Fly to Delhi.

An early start for the short drive to the airport for one of the most sensational flights in the world! Within minutes the aircraft flies over a sea of ice-cold peaks and glaciers as it crosses the Greater Himalaya range. On one side can be seen in the distance the peaks of possibly K2, Nanga Parbat, Gasherbrum and on the other side, so close that you feel you could reach out and touch it, is the Nun Kun massif.

On arrival in Delhi you will be transferred to a hotel near the airport for the night.

Overnight: Holiday Inn New Delhi International Airport, Delhi (Meals: B)

Day 16: Transfer to airport. Fly to London.

After breakfast there will be a transfer to the airport for your return flight to London. **(Meals: B)**

Our grading system

Definitive Cultural Tour of Ladakh is graded as a Tour, as described below.

Tours

Tours may include any of the following activities: sightseeing, visiting local villages, exploring temples, game viewing, birdwatching, husky sledding, mountain flights, city tours and dramatic journeys by road, rail, or river. Occasionally there will be short, gentle walks so that you can properly explore the cultural sites you are visiting.

Trip altitude

Important - please be aware that this trip involves travel at altitude. Whilst all our itineraries are carefully designed to optimise acclimatisation to high altitudes, participants on this trip are likely to experience some symptoms of being at altitude. The Dossier pack we provide when you book your holiday includes comprehensive advice on safe travel at altitude. If you require further information or advice on travel at altitude prior to booking please contact the office to speak to an experienced member of our team. Alternatively we recommend www.medex.org.uk as a good source of information.

What the price includes

Mountain Kingdoms aims to offer the best value for money. We do not charge extra for meal packages or apply local charges and try to ensure that all the key elements of your holiday are included.

What's included:

- ✓ Economy class non-stop return air fares from the UK & UK Departure Tax (flight inclusive only)
- ✓ All internal flights
- ✓ Single, timed group airport transfers for international flights on arrival and departure
- ✓ Train from Delhi to Kalka (air conditioned chair car), and toy train to Shimla
- ✓ Good standard hotel accommodation (4 star) in Delhi, twin share bed and breakfast basis
- ✓ Best available hotels in outlying towns, on full board
- ✓ All facilities and all meals at the fixed camps
- ✓ All road transport by private vehicles
- ✓ Sightseeing where specified
- ✓ Carbon offsetting with the Ecoan Tree Planting Project (for clients taking our flight inclusive option)
- ✓ A free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle

Airport transfers

The cost of a transfer to/from the airport is included in the price of your holiday. This is a single group transfer which is arranged to coincide with the timings of the group flights. If you book your own flights which arrive/depart at different times to this, or we book flights at your request that have different timings, we will be happy to provide a quote for a separate transfer. Please contact us should you require any further information.

What's not included:

- ✗ Indian Visa fees
- ✗ Lunch and evening meals in Delhi
- ✗ Airport transfers (if arrival/departure times do not coincide with the group flights)
- ✗ Tips

Water-to-Go Reusable Bottle Campaign

We have joined the campaign to help cut down on the use of plastics and, in particular, single-use water bottles. To do this we have teamed up with the revolutionary company, Water-to-Go who have developed a multi-use drinking bottle with a reusable filter that eliminates over 99.9% of all microbiological contaminants. This makes water from virtually any source safe to drink and significantly reduces the need for travellers to buy bottles of water wherever they are in the world.

Our clients who are not given a free Mountain Kingdoms kit bag for their holiday (these are required for certain treks), will instead receive a free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle. These unique Water-to-Go bottles can also be purchased from us at a discounted rate.

For further information about our campaign visit <https://www.mountainkingdoms.com/water-to-go-reusable-bottle-campaign>.

Your accommodation

We will endeavour to secure the hotels named in the itinerary but if our first choice of hotel is not available we will book a suitable alternative of a similar standard.



Hotel Oberoi Maidens or Similar, Delhi

We normally use the Hotel Oberoi Maidens. This is a 50 room, 4* colonial style hotel built in the time of the Raj, and has a great cavalry bar, historic dining room, friendly breakfast room / coffee shop, and a large outdoor swimming pool. We will book this if at all possible but subject to availability we may also use the Hotel Metropolitan or Claridges.



Clarkes Hotel or Similar, Shimla

You will stay at the Clarkes hotel which is one of the oldest hotels in Shimla, and has recently been upgraded to Heritage Grand category. The hotel is known for its colonial architecture, charm and elegance. It is conveniently located within walking distance of Shimla's attractions such as the Gaiety Theatre, Groton Castle, Museum, Rothney Castle and Viceregal Lodge. It has a good standard of service and all modern facilities and amenities.



Mayflower Hotel or Similar, Manali

Manali - You stay at the Mayflower Hotel - our favourite hotel in Manali. Large comfortable en-suite rooms. It features lots of pine cladding, lovely verandahs, log fires and excellent food and service. A comparatively quiet location being at the top end of town and up the hill, backing onto forest.



Drilbu Retreat or Hotel In Keylong

We use either the Drilbu Retreat which is a fixed camp with fine views and bamboo style bedrooms with simple toilets and showers attached, situated about 7km from Keylong, or a simple hotel in Keylong, depending on availability.



Ibex Hotel or Fixed Camp

Although small and quite basic in terms of facilities the Ibex is clean and comfortable.

Alternatively we may use a nearby fixed camp. The camps that we use have been set up by enterprising locals to cater for traders and travellers. They have large walk-in sleeping tents with camp beds and adjacent bathroom/toilet facilities. There will be a big mess tent and plenty of good food.



Saboo Resort or Similar, Leh

The Saboo Resort is a stylish hotel offering a traditional Ladakhi ambience but with all creature comforts and great service. The resort comprises 16 separate cottages built with traditional, locally available materials such as mud bricks and wooden floors. All rooms have en suite facilities and a veranda with views over the beautiful gardens and towards the surrounding mountains, including the peak of Stok Kangri. Food at the resort is excellent and includes many local products.



Hotel Nimmu House, Nimmu

Nimmu house, a jewel of Ladakh architecture, was originally built by a cousin of the Ladakhi king as a nobleman's house. It has now been tastefully renovated as a unique boutique hotel. It is built on three storeys with renovated guest rooms with all facilities, two Buddhist temples and stables with farms animals. The hotel is surrounded by gardens and orchards of apricot, apple and walnut trees and has been renovated as a unique boutique hotel.



Holiday Inn New Delhi International Airport, Delhi

The Holiday Inn is situated just 4km from the airport and offers all the facilities you would expect from a good quality hotel. It is also just a short walk from a metro station.

Meal arrangements

Bed and Breakfast in Delhi, all meals included elsewhere.

Flight arrangements

Flight inclusive from price

Our 'Flight inclusive from' price is based on the best fare available at the time of printing. As airfares change on a constant basis, this should be used only as a guide price. Rest assured that, at the time of booking, we will endeavour to get the best possible price for the flights you need. Remember, the earlier you book the greater your chances of securing the best fare.

Flight inclusive packages booked through Mountain Kingdoms are protected through our ATOL bonding scheme.

Flight upgrades and regional Airports

Please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 for flight options from regional UK airports, Business Class upgrades, alternative airlines and stopovers. Please also check our website for the most up to date flight inclusive 'from' prices.

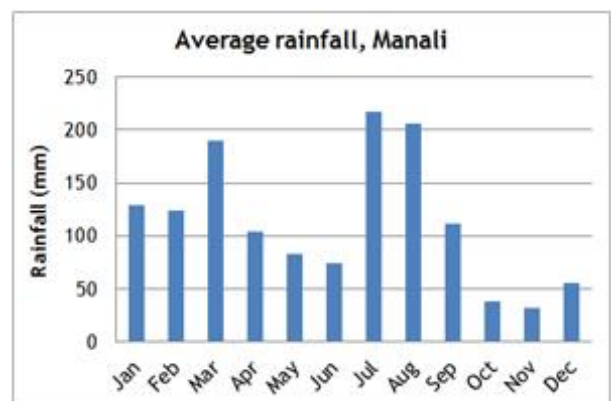
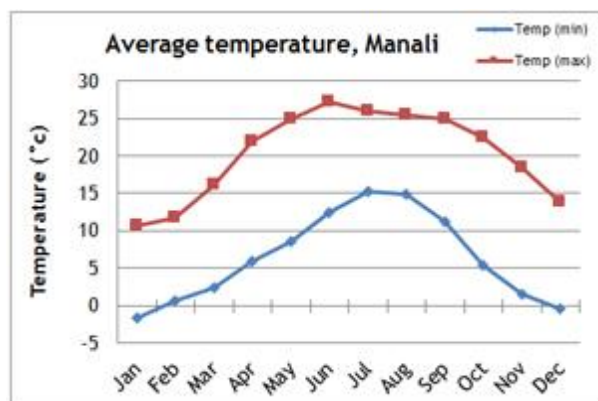
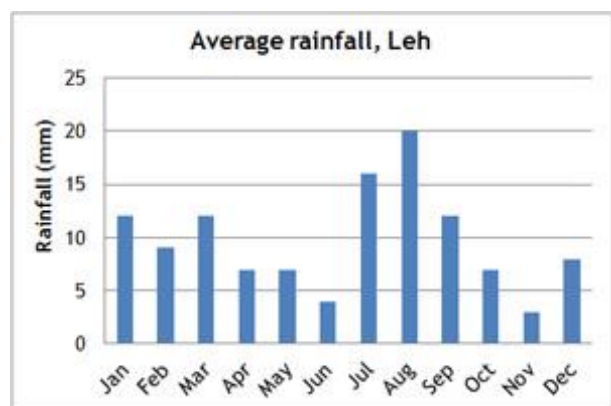
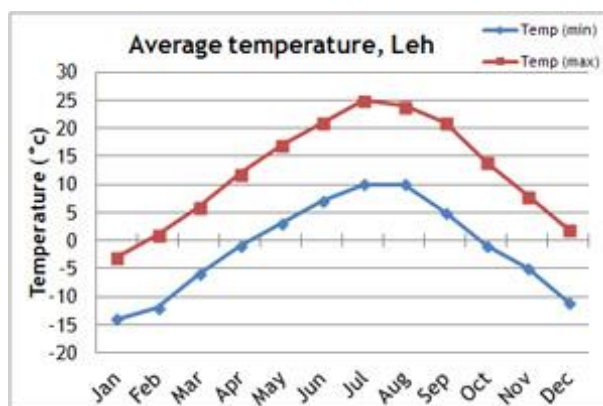
Further information

When we receive your booking, we send you a full Trip Dossier which contains details of any visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. If you do have queries at this initial stage do call us on 01453 844400 and we will be pleased to offer advice.

The nature of adventure travel

Every effort will be made to keep to this itinerary but we cannot guarantee that things may not change, either before you travel or while you are away. By its very nature, adventure travel involves an element of the unexpected, particularly in more remote areas. A variety of factors such as adverse weather conditions, changes to local schedules and difficulties with transportation can all contribute to the need to make changes to the itinerary, often at the very last minute. Our Operations Manager and your Trip Leader will make every effort to maintain the integrity of the original itinerary and minimise the impact of any changes, but an easy-going and flexible nature is a real asset! Please note that all timings and distances given are approximate.

Climate information



Extensions

Extending your holiday

If you would like additional inspiration on how or where to extend your holiday please call us on 01453 844400. Alternatively, you can download a range of extension information sheets on our website, at www.mountainkingdoms.com.



Additional accommodation in Delhi

If you would like to stay longer in Delhi we can arrange additional nights and upgrades from our selection of first rate hotels such as the Oberoi Maidens in the city or Claridges Hotel in New Delhi.

Agra, Taj Mahal & Jaipur

We offer various extensions to Agra, from a one-day visit to see the majestic Taj Mahal to a six-day trip to visit both the Taj and the Amber Fort at Jaipur. All options travel to Agra on the Shatabdi Express and include the services of an English-speaking guide, sightseeing and private transport.



Why book this holiday with Mountain Kingdoms?

- Our unique and in-depth cultural tour has been carefully designed to give a real insight into this little-visited region of India and encompasses a rail journey, a dramatic drive across the Himalaya, a Buddhist festival, an exploration of ancient monasteries and visits to traditional villages.
- The itinerary has time built in to acclimatise to the altitude of Ladakh, and for the drive through the Himalaya.
- On the journey to reach Ladakh we use hotels of quality, whenever possible, including famous Clarkes Hotel in Shimla. The hotels in Keylong and Jispa are more simple, but clean and comfortable.
- In Ladakh we use beautiful heritage properties which are both attractive and very comfortable.
- Internal flights, rail journeys and all meals outside of Delhi are included in your holiday price.
- We have a maximum group size of 12 to ensure all the benefits of a genuine small group experience.
- We offer a flexible service and can extend your holiday with visits to the Taj Mahal and Agra, or additional time in Delhi.
- As part of our commitment to 'Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency', we will be carbon-offsetting all international flights booked through us by donating funds to the Ecoan Tree Planting Project in Peru.
- If you wish to fly with a specific airline, from a regional UK airport or on alternative dates to the main group we would be happy to arrange this for you. Please contact our Flights Manager, April, for flight options, quotes and further information.

If we've tempted you to take your next holiday with us, we advise you to check availability and you can do this via our website: www.mountainkingdoms.com or by calling the team on +44 (0)1453 844400. Bookings can be made online, by phone or by completing a booking form and returning it to us. We can also provisionally hold places if you need time to consider your options.

What our clients say



What I really enjoyed about travelling with Mountain Kingdoms was the smooth organisation, the variety of accommodation and the fantastic road journey to reach Leh.

-Ms H, Norfolk

Mountain Kingdoms provided a 'cushion' to us less experienced in the adventurous way of travel, through excellent preparation, full information and a great tour leader. There was a fair mix of experiences.

- Ms W, Bristol



Not so much a holiday as an adventure, with stunning scenery and a few heart-stopping roads. Endlessly fascinating with mostly comfortable hotels and many lovely people. The sort of trip where you come back with stories to share, as well as photos.

-J&J, Surrey



The drive up from Shimla to Leh was breathtaking in many ways - not only the amazing scenery but travelling along roads which were challenging after the monsoon rains had caused havoc with landslides and road surfaces washed away. Fortunately we had a brilliant driver in Suresh. Often our small group were the only people staying in hotels en route which made the tour seem very pioneering and adventurous. Being in a small group also allowed us to set our own pace and follow up on interests.

-EW, London

Mountain Kingdoms - distinctly different

Truly independent

In an age where many so-called 'independent' travel companies have in fact been bought out by multi-national giants, we remain fiercely independent with all the benefits this offers our clients.

Value for money prices with an emphasis on quality

We are not in the business of cutting our itineraries and services to the bone to offer eye-catching cheap prices. We use some of the best airlines, and typically 3 or 4 star hotels in cities. We include the majority of meals and private transport for road travel. We use excellent equipment and appoint well-trained staff and leaders. Last year, over 98% of our clients rated their Mountain Kingdoms holiday as 'excellent' or 'good'. We are members of AITO and bound by their quality charter.

Complete financial security

You can book with us confident that your holiday has full financial protection. Flight inclusive holidays are financially protected by the Civil Aviation Authority under ATOL licence number 2973 and 'Land Only' holidays are covered by a bond secured with ABTOT.

No Surcharge Guarantee

Your peace of mind is important to us so we have a No Surcharge Guarantee on all Land Only and Flight Inclusive bookings. This means that there will be no change to the price of your holiday once we have confirmed your booking, regardless of fluctuations in exchange rates or fuel prices.

Award winning Responsible Tourism

We feel strongly that all our holidays should benefit local communities, protect the environment and respect local traditions, religion and heritage. You can read more about the charities we support and our Responsible Tourism commitments and initiatives on the following page or at www.mountainkingdoms.com.

Genuine small group travel

Almost all of our holidays have a maximum group size of just 12, plus leader. This provides more contact with your leader, readier access to off-the-beaten-path areas, greater interaction with local communities and a reduced environmental impact.

Loyalty Discount

If you have previously travelled with us we recognise your loyalty with a discount on future trips.

Booking your holiday - it couldn't be easier

Once you've chosen your Mountain Kingdoms holiday you can book online, call the office or complete and post a booking form which can be found in our brochure or downloaded from our website. If you would like to hold a place on one of our trips, whilst you make up your mind, please give us a call to make a provisional booking. This is a no-obligation, no-cost booking and we will hold your place until space comes under pressure or we need your decision.

Comprehensive information

When we receive your booking we send you a full trip dossier which contains details of visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. In fact, everything you need to know to give you peace of mind and allow you to prepare for your trip of a lifetime.



RESPONSIBLE TOURISM STATEMENT CLIMATE EMERGENCY PLAN



For over 33 years, Mountain Kingdoms has been offering people the chance to visit amazing places on this extraordinary planet. We now offer trips to all corners of the world, but we are conscious that inevitably our holidays have a detrimental impact on the world around us, and we want to do all we can to reduce our carbon emissions. We are a signatory to Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency, along with a growing number of like-minded, reputable tour operators. For more information, please visit www.tourismdeclares.com

From 2020 onwards, we will be focusing on how we can reduce the carbon emissions that our holidays produce, and how to counterbalance this carbon by supporting carbon offset measures. Here are some of our current and future plans to minimise the impact of our business as a whole:

Carbon Offsetting

Already doing:

- ✓ We have been offsetting carbon since 2007, but will be increasing our donations to the [Ecoan tree planting project](#) in Peru this year. This is with a trusted partner where the funds go directly to a project where the community plants trees on its own land.

Will do:

- ✓ We are working on making our carbon offsetting more accurate and targeted.
- ✓ In future, we will add to that a further estimate for carbon produced by hotels, local road travel, trains and internal flights to arrive at a carbon offset sum for each trip we operate.
- ✓ Carbon offsetting will be included in our holiday prices. For our Flight Inclusive holidays it will include the international flight and any emissions produced by inland travel and accommodation. Our Land Only prices will include the cost of offsetting emissions caused by inland travel and accommodation.

Reducing Carbon Emissions

Already doing:

- ✓ We already offer the majority of our customers a free filtered water bottle which means they can instantly cut down on their single-use plastic consumption. This will be an ongoing project.
- ✓ We already predominantly use locally owned hotels, but will continue to ensure that, where possible, we use these rather than multinational chains.
- ✓ We have joined the Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency initiative to stand alongside like-minded travel companies, to work together to initiate best practices to make tourism as sustainable as possible.

Will do:

- ✓ We will re-evaluate our flights to make sure we are using the most fuel efficient airlines with the youngest fleets and, where possible, direct flights for each trip.
- ✓ We will stop offering unnecessary optional flights – for example our Everest sightseeing trip.
- ✓ We will eliminate unnecessary staff flights wherever possible.
- ✓ We will look at minimising internal flights.
- ✓ We will be asking all our worldwide agents and suppliers to look at their own carbon footprint and encourage them to reduce it.
- ✓ We will promote our more low impact trips to give customers an informed choice.

As part of our wider commitment to Responsible Tourism, we will continue to support a number of charities with whom we have had a long standing relationship over many years. These include: Shiva Charity in Nepal (Ginette Harrison School), Simien Mountains Mobile Medical Service and Porter Welfare, as well as setting aside a sum for emergency disaster relief should the need arise.

