

When is the best time to visit Ladakh?

Ladakh is open for tourists throughout the year, while the best period is between April and October ending. For adventure tours, June to October is the suitable period. Most of the trekking routes are closed after November due to snow at high passes. However, one can visit during the other months as well for festivals like Stok, Matho and the New Year or for winter photography where one gets to see a very different side of Ladakh. There are few hotels and guest houses with heating facilities in Leh that provide accommodation in winter too.

How to reach Ladakh?

There are daily flights from Delhi to Leh from three airlines- Air India, Jet Airways and Kingfisher. Another option is to drive up from either Srinagar or Manali (Himachal Pradesh) and both of these trips take two days with a night halt in between. The drive on either of these highways is a complete different experience and a memorable one if you have the extra days.

Visa and Permit:

Tourist can reach Leh with normal Indian tourist visa and does not require any special visa or permit. However, the foreign tourists are required to register themselves at Drass, Rumtse and Sarchu if they are travelling by road. Those travelling by air get themselves registered at the airport. The tourist, both foreign and domestic are required to get permit for restricted areas like Tsomoriri, Tsokar, Pangong Lakes, Dhahanu and Nubra Valley, Which can obtained through registered travel agencies.

Acclimatization and altitude sickness

Ladakh is a high altitude cold desert with a low level of atmospheric oxygen. It is, therefore, absolutely necessary that visitors reaching Leh from the plains of India by air, give themselves sufficient time for acclimatization before engaging in any physical activity. The rarefied atmosphere may cause high altitude ailments like Acute Mountain Sickness, necessitating instant evacuation of visitors who are unable to get acclimatized.

Anyone travelling to altitudes above 10,000 ft (2,700 m) is liable to suffer from acute mountain sickness (AMS) unless properly acclimatized. The most common symptoms of acute mountain sickness are headache, disturbed sleep and loss of appetite, nausea, coughing, irregular breathing, breathlessness, lassitude and lack of concentration. If you are reaching Leh by air, it is important to take complete rest for the first 24 hours after arrival. Any kind of physical exertion is to be avoided. Smoking and drinking should also be avoided till you are fully acclimatized. The symptoms of acute mountain sickness generally develop during the first 36 hours, and not immediately upon arrival. Your body should get used to the lower oxygen level of Ladakh after 2 or 3 days if you have taken complete rest for the first 24 hours and as much rest as possible during the next 12 hours.

High Altitude Pulmonary Oedema (HAPO) and High Altitude Cerebral Oedema (HACO) are very serious forms of acute mountain sickness. These are life-threatening ailments and warrant immediate medical attention.

As a preventive measure, Tab Diamox 250 mg should be taken at the rate of 1 tablet twice a day for 3 days, at-least 2 days before coming to Ladakh or any high altitude area.

Inner-line Restrictions:

Entry of foreign tourists beyond one mile north of the Zoji-la-Dras-Bodhkarbu- Khalatse road is restricted. But on the Khalatse-Leh road, the monasteries of Tia-Tingmosgang, Rizong, Likir and Phyang can be visited even though these are situated north of the road. Similarly, foreign tourists are allowed to visit Shey, Thikse, Chemrey and Tak-thok monasteries lying north of the Leh-Upshi road. The Leh-Manali road is also open upto one mile east of its general alignment. Newly Opened Areas. The north eastern and northern regions of Ladakh are now partially open for foreign visitors, but they are required to obtain the prescribed permission from the Deputy Commissioner, Leh. This is issued only subject to several conditions, including the condition of

travelling along certain identified tour circuits in groups of 4 or more. (For details of the tour circuits refer to the section on the newly opened areas.)

Environmental Protection:

The Ladakh environment is ecologically fragile and the survival of the inhabitants depends upon the land. As such, it is absolutely important that trekkers and mountaineers keep the routes and campsites clean and avoid disturbing the region's delicate environment. Before striking camp, trekkers and tour operators should ensure that no garbage is left behind at the campsites. Plastic containers and wrappers must be incinerated, while other types of garbage should be properly buried. In this context, it is advisable to follow the instructions regarding preservation of environment contained in the Indian Mountaineering Foundation's publication, "While in the Himalayas -Do's and Don'ts