

# Spiti:

## Expedition with a Mission

August 7th - 30th 2006

24 day Overland, Cultural Expedition,  
with a Mission to help the  
Munsel Ling Tibetan Children's Home School



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# Spiti

Si = Mani Piti = place Spiti = The place of Mani

Spiti lies in a valley between the rugged Zaskar mountains and the Himalayas. Located on the Tibetan border and once under control of the 13th Dalai Lama as part of the Kingdom of Guge, Spiti has been able to completely preserve its Tibetan heritage due to its isolation and assimilation into India. It was off limits to any visitors, foreign and Indian alike, until the early 1990's, due to its politically sensitive position on the border of India and China and still requires a special permit to visit. Spiti has a haunting and unforgettable beauty. Thousands of years of erosion by wind, sun and snow has laid bare the rocky hillsides that change colour during the day from pale pink to deep scarlet. Stark terrain, sparkling rivers, and weathered gorges describe the valley through which the glacial Spiti river runs from its origin in the Kunzum mountains, to join the Sutlej River at Sumdo. Cultivable land is marginal and there are no trees except small patches of willow and poplar at the river edge. In June, however, wild rose bushes burst from the sandy soil and cover the hillsides with colour and fragrance. Small villages are scattered along the river bank, whilst monasteries cling to the hillside, high above. Locally pronounced "Piti," its inhabitants are largely buddhist of the Gelugpa sect and its culture and life are focussed around its ancient monasteries - Tabo, Dhankar, and Kyi to name a few.

# Lahoul

Lahoul has been called the "Valley of Glaciers." Lying at a height of 2745m, the valley summers are cool and pleasant with luxuriant grass, alpine flowers and an abundance of crops. With no monsoon, trekkers and climbers are able to enjoy a long unbroken season exploring the wilderness and grandeur of the Inner Himalaya. Ethnically, the people of Lahoul are a mixed race of Tibetan, the Munda tribes of Bengal and Central India and the Saka and Khasa tribes from central Asia. Also famous for its monasteries, Khardung, Shashur, Gemur are rich repositories of Buddhist culture and art.

# Ladakh

A land of high passes, Ladakh is the Trans Himalayan zone marking the boundary between the peaks of the western Himalaya and the vast Tibetan plateau. Since it opened for tourism in 1974, it has been known as "Little Tibet," a result of its predominantly Buddhist culture which once had close cultural and trading links with Tibet. Today, monasteries containing exquisite art work and frescos, still remain active centres of religious instruction. The area receives minimal rainfall and when the fields are dry, the farmers pray for sun - to melt the glacial snow and provide water to flow through their extensive irrigation channels to the crops. Barley fields and poplar trees in the valleys contrast strongly with the barren ridges and mountains that define Ladakh's geography. To the east lie several beautiful alpine lakes in the high altitude Tibetan plain.

The capital city of Leh, once a pivotal link in the caravan trade with Yarkland and Kashgar, remains an important strategic centre for India, being close to its troublesome borders with Pakistan and China. Now a popular tourist destination, its bazaars are full of Kashmiri and Ladakhi arts and crafts

# DETAILED ITINERARY

## Day 1-3 Depart Canada/Arrive Delhi

Leave Vancouver for Delhi via Singapore. Overnight in Singapore arriving in Delhi Day 3. Transfer to hotel with remainder of day free to recover from journey or independant sightseeing.

Welcome dinner in the evening.

Days 1-2 meals on your own. Day 3 D

## Day 4 Kalka/Shimla

Early morning transfer to train station to board the Himalayan Queen express train to Kalka where our jeeps will be waiting to take us to Shimla, a one hour drive.

The narrow gauge railway built by the British in 1903-4 still runs from Kalka to Shimla, however the sixty mile trip takes 5 hours, stopping at 18 stations and going through 100 tunnels. We take the easier route by road which gives us more time to relax in Shimla

Hotel. BLD

## Day 5 Shimla

Summer capital of India in the British Raj, Shimla is now capital of Himachal Pradesh. Situated at 2206m, it spreads 12km along a forested ridge; a peaceful place with lovely walks and beautiful scenic views over terraced hillsides. The town remains suffused with British legacy. Many of the former colonial residences have been converted into unique hotels. The Mall, a crescent shaped promenade which runs along the base of the town and once housed ballrooms and theatres for British officers, now thrives with restaurants, clubs and shops.

Hotel. BLD

## Day 6 Sarahan via Rampur. Bhim Kali Temple

From Shimla we descend into the Sutlej river valley, traveling north-eastward to Rampur and Sarahan, 176km. The Sutlej river arises from Lake Manasarover in Tibet passing through the Himalaya into India through the Shipki pass. Rampur, once the captial of the Himalayan kingdom of Rampur Bushehr, is now a busy commercial town with a Buddhist monastery and Hindu temple. Each November when the shepherds return from their hill top pastures it hosts the biggest trade fair in Northern India.

Sarahan our destination today, lies 40km further. A pastoral town, surrounded by apple orchards and snow covered peaks, it is the ancient capital of Rampur. Here, the exquisite Bhim Kali temple stands with pagoda like roofs and silver coated doors, a mixture of Hindu and Buddhist architecture.

Here we make our first overnight camp. We will be camping for the next two weeks with our camp crew preparing our meals and taking care of camp chores.

Camp BLD

## Day 7 Sangla to Kalpa

Today we enter the Sangla valley, the most beautiful of Kinnaur and initially drive through flower filled meadows and orchards. The valley becomes more barren as we approach Chitru with stony snow covered slopes.

Kalpa, altitude 2960m, is the district headquarters surrounded by vineyards which are protected from bears by specially trained dogs. Mount Kinner Kailas (6050m) looms across the Sutlej river and changes colour several times a day with changing weather conditions.

Camp BLD

## Day 8 Kalpa to Moorang (Akpa)

A short drive takes us to Moorang, 2278m, a picturesque village encircled on three sides by high mountains. Here we will visit the Sherab Choling Nunnery

Camp BLD

## Day 9 Moorang to Tabo via Nako

Nako lies about 7km above the Hindustan -Tibet road and is 1km from Yangthang where heavy rains last year resulted in a landslide which obstructs our route. We will therefore be hiking 2km, up and down, across the landslide area where new jeeps will be waiting to pick us up to take us to Tabo. Our luggage will go by cable trolley,

Camp BLD

## Day 10 Morning at Tabo Monastery, Drive to Kaza/Rangrik visiting Dhankar monastery en route.

Tabo monastery, the most important in Spiti, was built in 996 and celebrated its 1000th birthday in 1996, with a Kalachakra ceremony given by HH Dalai Lama. Established by the Western School of Tibetan Buddhism which is known for unique three-dimensional mandalas, Tabo is the only monastery outside Tibet where they may now be seen.

Located in a stark setting, it is a complex of 8 temples surrounded by a high mud wall.

Inside the temples, a priceless collection of manuscripts, thangkas, ancient stucco figures and exquisite frescos and murals, with vibrant colours representing a living museum of Tibetan art through the ages.

Driving north we visit the 12th century Dhankar Monastery, perched high on rocky slopes from where we enjoy a spectacular view of the Spiti Valley. Above, stands the remains of a castle of the Spiti kings. 24km further north lies Kaza, the capital of the region where in August each year, a large traders festival is held and will hopefully coincide with our visit. From Kaza, we cross the Spiti River for a short drive to Rangrik, where we will spend the next 4 nights.

Camp: Rangrik BLD

## Day 11 Day Trip to Pin Valley

From our base in Rangrik we spend the day exploring one of Spiti's side valleys - the Pin Valley which was declared a National Park in 1987. With its snow laden unexplored higher reaches and slopes, the Park forms a natural habitat for a number of endangered animals including the Snow Leopard and Siberian Ibex. The elevation of the Park ranges from about 3,500m near Ka Dogri to more than 6,000m at its highest point. Because of its high altitude and extreme temperatures, the vegetation in the area is scant and mostly dominated by alpine trees, groups of Himalayan cedar and patches of medicinal plants. In summer, flowers decorate the valley and rare birds like the Himalayan Snowcock, Chukor, Snow Partridge and the Tibet Snow Finch flourish. Several small monasteries, including Kungri, a Nyingmapa monastery built around 1300AD, exist on the park's periphery.

Camp Rangrik BLD

## Day 12-14 Munsel Ling Tibetan Children's Home School

In the early 90's, Tashi Namgyal, a lama from Kyi Monastery recognised the desperate need for a school in this remote Indian valley to provide education for the impoverished community. In addition, he saw the need to include the Tibetan language and culture into the standard Indian government school curriculum to prevent the loss of their ancient Tibetan heritage. Built with donations, it opened with the inauguration by HH Dalai Lama in July 1996 following the Kalachakra Initiation at Tabo monastery. At that time the school comprised of 75 children in 2 kindergarten classes and one Grade 1. The children from distant villages were boarded with local families. Gradually the school expanded. Boarding houses were built and more children arrived. Today, there are 378 pupils in classes ranging from kindergarten to Grade 10, including a special opportunity class for gifted students. TRAS has supported the school throughout, initially providing financing for teacher training and then training housemothers for the new boarding houses. Subsequently, it has assisted with the purchase of computers, established a senior school library and financed the building of solar powered green houses for fresh vegetables and to provide heat the boarding houses. We will spend 3 days here working with the children and staff. Please bring your skills and creativity! For more information about the school: [www.rinchenzangpo.org](http://www.rinchenzangpo.org)

Camp: Rangrik BLD

## Day 15 Visit Kyi Monastery and Kibber

Across the valley from Rangrik, high on top of a conical volcanic remnant, lies Kyi monastery. Built between 1008-64 it is home to the current, 19th incarnation of Rinchen Zangpo and the most active of Spiti's monasteries with over 300 monks receiving religious training. Famous for its thangkhas and musical instruments, it has two trumpets, over 3m long, which resound through the valley. In 2000 the Dalai Lama held a Kalachakra Initiation to celebrate the inauguration of the new Dukhang (Main Chanting Hall). From Kyi we follow the winding road upwards to Kibber, one of the highest, inhabited villages in the world, situated at 4205m. Whitewashed houses made of stone with brightly coloured prayer flags decorate the hillside and local children delight in selling fossils, which abound in this region, to visitors. There is a small school and monastery in the village.

Camp: Rangrik BLD

## Day 16 Rangrik - Kunzum Pass - Chandra Tal

Today we say goodbye to our friends in Rangrik and start our journey to Lahoul and Ladakh. Driving north we pass through Losar, a small pretty village at the head of the Spiti valley and climb towards the Kunzum Pass 4551m. A large chorten and many prayer flags decorate the summit, plus two small temples.

Chandra Tal, is a crystal clear natural lake, lying in a broad grassy plain between a low ridge and the Kunzum mountain range. It is a favorite place for shepherds and an ideal camping spot.

Camp BLD

## Day 17 Chandra Tal. "The Lake of the Moon"

Half a kilometre wide and 1 kilometre long, many myths surround this lake. A local shepard is said to have fallen in love with a mermaid inhabiting the lake and spent time with her underwater. In the centre of the lake lies a small brownish patch, "Samudan Tapu," which many people have tried, unsuccessfully to reach. Alpine vegetation grows on the surrounding glacial moraine in summer and ducks and cranes abound on the lake. We spend the day exploring this region, circumambulating its 5km circumference and visiting the small temples on its periphery.

Camp BLD

## Day 18 Chandra Tal - Keylong, Lahoul

Rejoining the Spiti-Leh road we wind down the hillside into the Lahoul valley. Rugged mountains, glaciers, green grass and alpine flowers greet us.

Keylong, situated above the Bhaga river at an elevation of 3350m, is the district headquarters. Situated on the main trade route between the Rotang and Baralache passes, it is the hub of commercial activity and holds a regular bazaar. Three well known monasteries, Tayul, Kardang and Sha-Shur are located within a few kilometres radius.

Camp BLD

## Day 19 Keylong - Pang via Sarchu

From Keylong we follow the right bank of the Bhaga river then climb steadily to the Baralacha pass (4800m) where there are many small lakes and one can see migratory Siberian birds. The landscape changes dramatically from green mountain slopes to brown and bare oxidised granite as we enter the area bordering on the Rupshu region of Tibet and descend to Sarchu (3960m). Leaving Sarchu, we cross the Tsarap Chu River and climb through the Galta Loops, a series of 32 hairpin bends to cross the Lachulang - la pass (5065m) across the Zanskar range. The descent from the pass leads to the Kyang-chu plains, where many wild animals may be seen.

Camp BLD

Day 20 Pang to Tso Morari, Ladakh

Turning right out of Pang, we continue over the high barren plateau to reach the beautiful turquoise glacial lakes of Tso Kar and Tso Morari.  
Camp BLD

Day 21 Tso Morari

Known as "Mountain Lake," Tso Morari is in the Rupshu valley. Situated at an elevation of over 4000m, it is 28km long and 8km at its widest and surrounded by barren hills, backed by snowcapped mountains. We spend the day here allowing us time to walk to the nearby village of Korzok, visit the local gumpa and enjoy the terrain of the nomads and wild animals. Kiang, wild asses, are frequently seen here.  
Camp BLD

Day 22 Tso Morari to Leh

Our final drive follows the narrow Indus valley into Ladakh through more spectacular scenery to its capital Leh. En route we plan to visit the ancient monasteries of Hemis and Thikse.

Hemis, founded in the early 17th century, is also known as Chang Chub Samling (the lone place of the compassionate person). It has well preserved frescos and an excellent library. Thikse resembles the Potala palace in Tibet with the oldest part of the building dating to the 11th century. Its walls are covered with beautiful murals and paintings.

Leh is the ancient capital of Ladakh, and once a stop on the Asian Silk Road. The Leh palace, former home of the Namgyal dynasty dominates the town on Namgyal hill. At its foot lies the old town, a labyrinth of alleys and a bazaar selling Ladaki and Kashmiri arts and crafts. Farewell dinner at hotel.

Hotel BLD

Day 23 Leh - Delhi

Early morning flight to Delhi and transfer to hotel.

Spend the day in Delhi, independent sightseeing or last minute shopping

Hotel B on flight, L, D on your own

Day 24 Delhi - Vancouver

Transfer to airport for return flight to Vancouver.

## Trip Cost & Details

All Inclusive: \$6350 (min. 6 members)  
(Land and International Air: Vancouver -Delhi)

Land only cost \$ 4050 (min. 6 members, double occupancy)

Single supplement \$ 510

### Land Cost Includes:

Services of Local Trip Leader  
Accompanying TRAS guest  
Donation to Munsel Ling Tibetan Children's Home School  
All accommodations, including top quality tents for camping  
All group camping equipment, plus dining, sleeping and toilet tents.  
Services of Camp Staff  
Welcome and Farewell Dinners  
Meals as noted in Itinerary (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

*\* Meals included in tour are specified at the end of each itinerary day as "B, L, D" (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)*

*Trek Escapes will provide all accommodations, all land transportation, airport transfers for passengers on group flights, baggage handling and sightseeing as noted.*

### Land Cost Does Not Include

International airfare  
Meals not specified in itinerary  
Airport departure taxes  
Optional tipping or gratuities to staff  
Additional hotel nights that may be necessitated by airline schedule changes or other factors.  
Pre trip expenses of medical immunisations; traveler's insurance; passports and visas; and other personal expenses (eg. laundry, alcohol)

## Leadership

Trek Escapes carefully selects its leaders to ensure that you have a safe enjoyable trip. We will have the services of a local experienced and knowledgeable, English speaking guide.

## Special Guest

Marion Tipple, past President and current Sponsorship director of TRAS, (Trans Himalayan Aid Society) will be a guest on this special expedition. Marion has been traveling to the Tibetan plateau since 1988 and first discovered Spiti in 1996 when she attended the Kalachakra Initiation and celebrations for Tabo monastery's 1000th birthday. During this journey, she also discovered the Munsel Ling Tibetan Children's Home School and met Tashi Namgyal, the director and principal. Impressed by his dedication and desire to enhance the education and lives of the children in this remote valley, she returned to Vancouver, joined the board of TRAS (who was already financing teacher training at the school) and through TRAS has continued to work actively to support the school. A return expedition to Spiti in 2000, allowed her to revisit the school. She was extremely impressed by the progress that had been made in the short space of 4 years and the ongoing dedication and total commitment of the staff to the wellbeing of the children.

Knowledgeable about the region and an accomplished photographer, Marion has lectured and held several exhibitions of her photographs from the Tibetan plateau. We welcome her to this expedition and invite you to visit her website: [www.amatiimages.com](http://www.amatiimages.com)

## About the Trip

By Himalayan standards, this can be considered a moderate expedition. The overland portion involves some long days of driving over rough roads and 15 nights of camping. Most of the trip occurs at moderate elevation, between 3000m - 4000m (9,000ft-12,000ft), the highest point being Lachulang la pass 5065m. It is appropriate for anyone in good health, living an active outdoor lifestyle, who is prepared for two weeks of hardy outdoor living.

Important factors for enjoying this trip are a spirit of adventure; curiosity about new people and places; flexibility and ability to adapt to sometimes primitive conditions; a sense of humour and a positive attitude. Local weather conditions may affect the roads and bridges causing, detours, delays and changes of route.

*\* While as accurate as possible at the time of printing, this itinerary should be considered as a guide rather than an inflexible schedule of events: local circumstances and conditions, beyond our control, may necessitate changes.*

## Weather and Climate

The climate is generally pleasant in August with warm days and cool nights. Lahoul and Spiti are effectively isolated from the annual monsoon but are cut off by heavy snowfall for up to 8 months of the year. We may experience rain, from the tail end of the monsoon, on our approach to Spiti.

## Health and Safety

Your safety, health and enjoyment are our main concerns. We take the utmost care with selection of our Trip leaders and support staff, with attention to every aspect of your trip from ensuring hygienic food preparation to altitude related concerns.

*\* Please note that medical facilities are sparse or non existent and due to the remoteness of the area, any possible evacuation required for illness or injury may take several days.*

## Trip Extensions

If you would like to extend your trip by staying longer in Ladakh or visiting other destinations in India or elsewhere, Trek Escapes would be pleased to assist you.