

Explore the Trans-Himalayan Desert of Spiti



Highlights

Spend 8 days exploring the Trans-Himalayan Desert in Spiti. Travelling by jeep and with plenty of trekking opportunities, you can expect huge, empty spaces, incredible rock formations, vast dry desert plateaus, little villages and Buddhist monasteries peppering this hauntingly beautiful land.

The geological landscape is by far the most immediately striking feature of Spiti: the massive mountain peaks reaching above a broad, bowl-shaped valley completely dwarf any signs of human activity. The sense of sheer space is colossal, with an otherworldly feel due to the almost complete absence of trees and oceanic deep-blue sky. This is one of India's least-populated regions, with tiny villages of fewer than fifty houses peppered here and there, and isolated monasteries built on rocky outcrops gazing out into the silence. A place of desolate beauty, where Himalayan Blue Sheep and Snow Leopards eke out a precarious life among the rocks, this is a land that leaves a lasting impression on those who visit.

Crossing Rohtang La is the first of many moments at which you'll catch your breath as new scenery is unveiled on your guided jeep safari: this is your introduction to the barren beauty of the high deserts, such a contrast to the lush, green world of the foothills around Manali. At Kye, one of the oldest continuously inhabited villages in the world, you'll see the unique monastery, perched on its pyramid of rock, with a view that fills the mind, and at Langza you can join the Buddha statue overlooking the village in its silent vigil across the valley. You'll visit Lhalung, where possibly the first Buddhist monastery in Spiti was founded over 1000 years ago, along with a sacred tree that may have been planted at that time.

Is it for me?

This is a long tour through some spectacular and remote regions of Northern India, some of it at high altitude. Anyone in reasonable physical condition should be able to cope fairly well, given that you will be travelling most of the distance by jeep or even yak (for an additional cost), but bear in mind that higher altitudes do take some getting used to, no matter how robust you are. Many jeeps crossing north over the Rohtang pass routinely take oxygen tanks with them, in case any tourists have trouble getting used to the environment. You'll also spend two nights of the trip camping; those who are used to luxuries should bear that in mind- as should anyone who hasn't experienced the true bumpiness of a jeep ride along mountain roads!

The tour operator who organises this Spiti Valley jeep safari has responsible tourism at the heart of their business. Working closely with local communities, they seek to ensure that tourism has a positive, rather than a detrimental effect on the environment and people. They are also involved in specific ecotourism initiatives including working on restoring the Dhankar monastery, encouraging and aiding women in promoting and selling local handicrafts and promoting the use of green houses and solar passive homes.

We know a lot of people claim responsible practices, but this really is a holiday where you get to see a hidden part of the world and, in doing so, support local people and communities.

Accommodation

You'll be staying at hotels and guesthouses for much of this trip. They are all well-appointed, with all the basic comforts you might expect. You'll also spend a couple of nights in traditional homestays in the Spiti area, where

Prices from

484 GBP (9 days) per person

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you're likely to find that true warmth and hospitality that still exists within these communities that are isolated from the outside world for much of the year. Not only will you be comfortable, but you'll feel genuinely welcome. For two nights you'll be camping. All essential equipment is provided, but bear in mind that at high altitude the nights can be very cold- a good quality sleeping-bag will help a great deal. Also, it's easy to find good-quality woollen blankets in Manali at an affordable price; they work wonders as multi-purpose shawls and extra bedding!

Itinerary

Day 1: Manali to Kaza O/N KAZA

Today is an early start. You'll drive over the Rohtang pass into the Chandra river valley, past Chattru and Batal and over the Kunzum La, between Lahaul and Spiti. You'll visit the Buddhist shrine and get into your waiting jeep, to reach Kaza by evening.

Day 2: Kaza- Day trip to Kye, Kibber (overnight at Kaza hotel/guesthouse)

Today you'll visit the Kye village and the largest monastery in Spiti, then drive to Kibber. A short hike here will help you acclimatise before your trek the following day.

The evening can be spent roaming the Kaza market where you may find interesting local handicrafts.

Day 3: Kaza to Langza (overnight at Langza homestay)

After breakfast, you'll drive to Langza village and visit the Lang (temple) before lunch at a homestay. You'll then visit the village fossil centre accompanied by a field expert. Dinner will be served in the homestay.

Day 4: Langza to Camp 1 (overnight camping at Camp 1)

You'll start early as it's the first day of trekking and should be taken slowly. You'll see Glacial melt lakes and the trail is rich in flora; spotting Blue Sheep is likely.

Day 5: Camp 1 to Camp 2 (Overnight camping at Camp 2)

The trail slowly winds itself over pasturelands and the day is spent marvelling at the grazing yaks and horses.

The night is spent

camping at a summer settlement of the villagers.

Day 6: Camp 2 to Demul (overnight at Demul homestay)

After breakfast you'll trek to Demul village, in one of the most remote areas of Spiti. Today you can also opt to do a yak safari (for an additional cost) to a vantage point close to the village from where close to 20 villages of Spiti can be seen.

Day 7: Demul to Lhalung to Dhankhar (overnight in Dhankhar Monastery guesthouse)

Today's route will take you to the valley floor of the Lingti River, which you'll then follow to the village of Lhalung. You'll have your packed lunch and then take a jeep to Dhankhar, ancient capital of Spiti, with an ancient Monastery perched between unique wind-eroded structures.

Day 8: Dhankhar to Tabo to Kaza (overnight in Kaza guesthouse)

Today you'll rise early to hike to Dhankhar Lake. After breakfast you'll visit the monasteries and Dhankhar Fort before a jeep ride to Tabo, with a monastery over 1000 years old, driving back to Kaza for the night.

Day 9: Kaza to Manali (overnight in Manali guesthouse)

After breakfast you'll drive back to Manali along the same route you took to reach Kaza.

If time permits there is the chance to take a short detour after crossing Kunzam La to Chandra Tal.

Details

Getting there

The tour operator can arrange to pick you up and drop you off at Delhi. There are flights to Delhi from most major UK airports. If you want to travel from Delhi to Manali under your own steam, you can fly to Bhunter Airport, then take a taxi to Manali; alternatively, take a train from Delhi to Chandigarh then a jeep taxi to Manali from there.

Price includes

All meals, from Day 1 dinner to Day 9 breakfast, accommodation on a twin sharing basis starting Day 1 to Day 8, guide starting Day 1 to Day 9, support staff, donkeys and equipment while camping, all jeep transfers starting Day 1 to Day 9.

Price details

The price quoted above is based on you joining a fixed departure.

If there are more than 2 of you, the trip can depart on any date, at a cost of 52900 each..

When is best

If there are more than 2 of you, the trip can depart on any date. Bear in mind that May - October are the best months to visit.

Typical Duration

9 days

Comfort level

Down to earth (hostels, camping, huts)

Experience required

A reasonable level of fitness and interest is all that is needed