

Pilgrimage with Khandro Rinpoche and Jampal to the remote Himalayan Valley of Spiti

Khandro Rinpoche and her brother Jampal are taking interested people on a Pilgrimage into the sacred Spiti Valley.

Spiti valley is an area of high mountains scooped out by glaciated valleys falling in the rain shadow of the Himalaya, creating an astonishing high-altitude desert that inspired Rudyard Kipling to say "Surely the Gods live here; this is no place for men".

Most of the people in Spiti are Buddhists. There are many ancient gompas and traditional Tibetan houses creating a timeless atmosphere. You could be in old Tibet.

The language spoken is similar to Tibetan and is known as Bhoti.

With China now occupying Tibet there has been a resurgence in the cultural and religious life of Spiti following the formation of the Tibetan Government in Exile, with much work done to preserve the Buddhist art and gompas of the region.

This Pilgrimage will start on the 20th Aug and complete on the 4th Sept.

From Delhi we will travel overland by jeep stopping overnight in Chandigarh. This is the Punjabi capital and was designed by Swiss born architect Le Corbusier who was well known for his concrete and steel buildings. The strict geometry of his architecture is Chandigarh's legacy.

Khandro-la's daughter is in boarding school here.

If we leave Chandigarh early we will arrive in Rewalsar (Tso Pema) early enough to explore the lake. For Buddhists this lake is believed to have been created by Padmasambhava, the great 8th century master who established Buddhism in Tibet. The story is that he took the king of Mundi's daughter as his consort. When the king found out he bound his daughter and Padmasambhava to a pyre and set light to it. On his return to the site he found Padmasambhava and his daughter floating above the lake which had extinguished the fire. There are many gompas here several of them from the Nyingmapa sect. This lake is very unusual and many friends have been deeply effected by visiting this lake. There are many nuns practicing around the hills of the lake.

For Hindus this is sacred because it was where the sage Rishi Lomas did penance as a dedication to Shiva.

The Sikhs have the huge Guru Gobind Singh Gurdwara dedicated to Gobind Singh 10th Guru who stayed a month at Rewalsar.

The following day we will explore this sacred place fully and for those fit enough we will walk up to Padmasambhava's cave where he meditated with Mandarava the king's daughter. For those unable to do the walk there is a road that takes you to the top.

We will raise prayer flags and do Kora and make many prayers for our loved ones and the planet.

We will stay overnight and continue the following morning to Manikaran which means 'Jewel from the ear'. Local legend says a giant snake took earrings from Parvati while she was bathing and then snorted them out into the ground releasing the hot springs. Yes, we will bathe/swim in these hot pools so don't forget your bathers. These springs are renowned for their healing qualities. The Dalai lama has visited these springs. The town is revered by both Hindus and Sikhs with many sadhus and pilgrims visiting here. You will find many religious souvenir shops.

Manikaran to Manali. We will drive beside the Bihars River which runs through a beautiful valley. We will go through Kullu which is renowned for its woolen shawls. When we get to Manali there will be time for shopping (you will find the shawls here), looking around or just resting.

Manali is where Khandro-la and Jampal live so we will be treated to tea with the family and also to visit the retreat center of their father Apho Rinpoche where great yogis and practitioners still practice. We will also visit Shabdrungs Monastery- Khandro-la's late husband's gompa.

On the 7th day we will go over the famous Rotang pass on our way to Chatru. We will need to drink lots of water that day. Water is a way to prevent high altitude sickness- you need to drink a lot. Stopping at Kesar springs where there are footprints left in the rock from Ling Kesar and clear spring water gushing from the rock which is drinkable. This spot is very holy and offers many blessings. It is a beautiful spot with native herbs which are picked and used for medicinal purposes.

From here on we will be camping. You need to bring warm clothing and a very good sleeping bag. The tents and cooking are provided, setting up and taking down done for us, but night time can be cold so come prepared.

Chatrul-Kunzum Pass-Kazar- The road now becomes a little rocky and travelling is slower. On the way we will visit Chandratul lake which is very remote and very beautiful surrounded by mountains. There have been unusual UFO sightings that have been reported by shepherds and local people in the area. The Dalai Lama has been here. We are wanting to spend a few hours here to meditate and enjoy this sacred and remote spot. The other unusual thing about this lake is that its not so cold considering it is surrounded by mountains and is extremely deep.

The local people believe that Kunzum Mountain is the protector Yeshe Gumpo. We will traverse this pass on our way to Kaza.

Kaza is the administrative and major town of Spiti and is surrounded by inspirational scenery. There is the 'Old part of town with its white wash buildings, shops and hotels and the 'New town' which is across the creek being tin roofed government buildings.

Here we will have to show our passports. It can get very cold here and we will be camping probably near the river which is very picturesque.

The next day we will visit Ki and Kibber Gonpas. The Ki gompa being of the Gelukpa sect and the oldest and largest gompa in Spiti. It looks like the Potala having a spectacular location and surrounded by high altitude desert. There is a priceless

collection of thangkas but photographs are forbidden. The Dalai lama performed the Kalachakra ritual here.

Kibber was once part of the salt trade and has a dramatic and desolate location. At 4205m it is one of the highest drivable villages in the world where they grow barley, beans and potato.

We will meet friends of Jampals here and possibly the Queen of Spiti as Jampal studied with her son and they have been friends for a long time. For those ready for a trek this can be arranged, for those interested in taking back gifts there will be time to shop in Kaza.

From Kaza we will head for Dhankar. Dhankar built 1000 yrs ago is in a very rocky location. It once was the capital of Spiti. The gompa has some interesting sculptures and frescoes. If we can we will try to get Hotel accommodation but this is the high tourist season, there is no booking system but we will do our best otherwise we will camp.

Pin Valley National Park is known for its ibex and snow leopard,- here we will visit the Ningmapa monestry called Kungri gompa.

From here we'll go to Tabo Monastery which is one of the most important in the world for buddhists. Ringchen Zangpo the translator bought artists from Kashmir to decorate the gompa and has some of the best preserved Indo-Tibetan art remaining in the world. There are nine temples in the complex dating from the 10th-16th century. The Tsuglhakhang is surrounded by 33 raised Bodhisattva statues and houses a four-sided statue of Sarvarvid Vairocana. There is also Shakyamuni Buddha and eight medicine Buddhas. The statue of Tara is awesome with similarities to the Statue in Alchi, Ladakh.

Opposite Tabo are caves known as Pho Gompa with faded murals bring a torch....

There is also an impressive Library in the monastery's guest house and also a thangka school nearby, founded by the Dalai Lama.

Now we turn for home and travel quickly to Delhi. Leaving Dhunkar we travel to Manali, stay in hotel overnight, rest all day or do last min shopping, internet etc then get the sleeper coach which has proper beds and travel by night to Delhi.

We arrive sometime in the morning where we will book hotels and fly out that evening for home. International flights leave in the evenings from Delhi.

Contact Person: Lena McGregor 61 (0)2-66-337-196 Australia

dhamata@hotmail.net.au