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1963-2013

STAY AT

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

LIFESTYLE

SPOTTED BY SITA

TOP CHEF RECOMMENDS

DESTINATION INSIDER

6 THINGS WE LIKED ABOUT

FESTIVALS

INSPIRATION LOCATOR

TRADE SHOWS



Art of Travel



Stok Palace Heritage Guesthouse, Leh

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Standing four storeys tall, Stok Palace is the official residence of the royal family of Ladakh and was constructed in 1814 by Ladakh's last ruler. This elegant 4 storey palace atop a huge moraine of pebbles swept down from the mountains, has ancient and modern styles blending amid beautiful gardens and lovely panoramic views. Expect rooms (4 in total) in red, creme or lapis lazuli blue with Ladakhi motifs, rugs, woodcarvings with balconies overlooking the Indus Valley. All the rooms are very cozy and vey tastefully decorated. “Only few people known to the family and their friends are allowed to stay at the palace guest house. So let us know well in advance for us to make the arrangements for your clients wishing to stay here” says Soumya Mukherji from our Destination Knowledge Centre.

“Two nights is a must to enjoy your stay here in this beautiful accommodation within Stok Palace,” adds Soumya. Spend one day soaking in the tranquility of the place - stroll around the palace, listening to the soothing sound of monks deep in prayers. Later enjoy the eccentric family museum with jewels, armor and 'thangka' collection - painted, embroidered ceremonial scrolls found in Buddhist monasteries. The thangkas, kept inside the museum are from the 16th century and depict the life and teachings of Buddha.” In the museum I saw the royal crowns, jewellery, royal artefacts, precious stones, prayer instruments and other heirlooms. This is one of the better preserved meusems that I came across” says Soumya. Next morning go walking to the village nearby and see the village life up close. Enjoy a picnic lunch with the locals and get invited into the homes of the friendly villagers for a cup of Gur Gur Cha (butter tea).

Stay At





Yoga Teacher

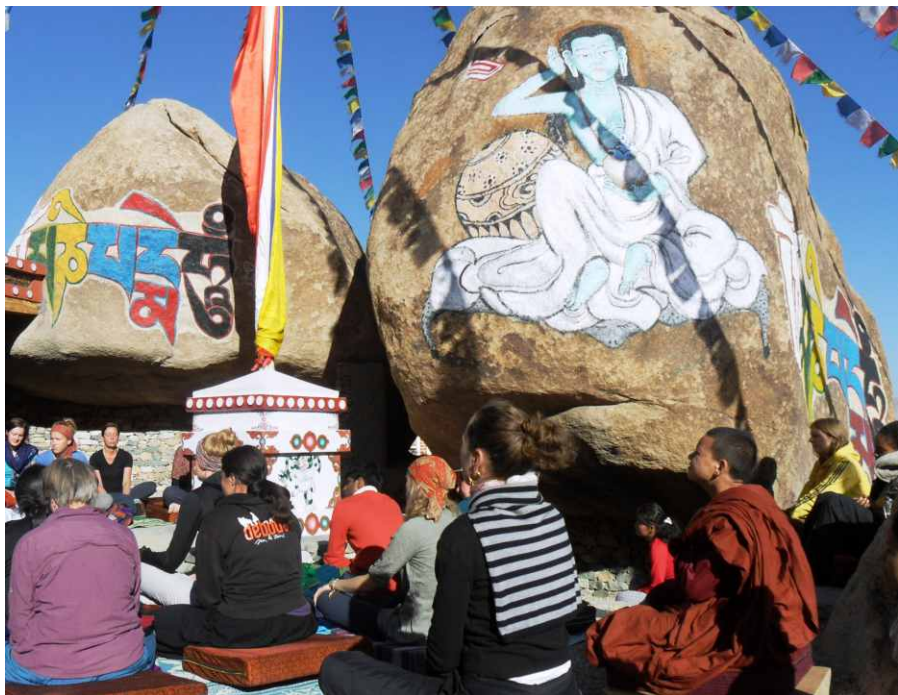
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Walking away from the touristy city centre of Leh, past the Moravian Mission School I came across Mahabodhi Meditation Centre. It's five o'clock in the evening and the staff tells me that they are about to start the evening session of meditation and yoga. Kunzang Dechen, our teacher is a young Ladakhi lady. She gives out an aura of a person who is completely at peace with herself. At the end of the class, I told her that this was the first time that I have tried meditation. She was very keen to know how my experience was and we start talking.

I asked her when did she realise that teaching yoga is something she would end up doing. “Honestly, I never thought yoga was my cup of tea, says Kunzang. It was when I was studying Psychology and Journalism in Bangalore, that one day a Gururji (preacher) visited our institute and few students were chosen to attend a yoga course. After the course I realised the importance of yoga and meditation in our daily lives and how happy it made me feel. Completing my studies I trained at Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana in Bangalore and also did a diploma at the Yoga Vidya Gurukul in Nashik. From that time onwards, I wanted to practice and teach yoga and spread the joy of yoga with everyone. I am honoured to be one of the first one to clear the exam at the Mahabodhi Yoga & Meditation Centre and now I am in charge of the Leh centre of Mahabodhi Yoga & Meditation Centre,” tells Kunzang. How popular is yoga with the people of Ladakh? “Yoga is still not very popular amongst the locals, but foreigners and people coming from the rest of India love the peace and tranquillity they find at Mahabodhi and slowly more and more locals are getting drawn to yoga,” Kunzang tells me. I realised what she said was true, since in the entire class of twenty people I had only spotted one local.

So what is a typical day for Kunzang like. “I believe the quality of the day depends on how you start your day [click here to read more](#).

A Day in The Life of Kunzang Dechen





Lifestyle



The Himalayan Nomads

When we were driving to the Tso Moriri Lake, Tsultim, my guide said that we may come across nomads and asked if I wanted to stop for a chat. I said why not if it is possible. But I didn't have high hopes. You can never really say for sure where you'll find them... they are nomads after all. Suddenly in the distance we spotted a cluster of black tents. Tsultim told me that they are the Changpas and the tents or rebos as they are called are made from yak skin.

Seeing a Ladakhi with me, these otherwise shy women came up to us and started talking to Tsultim. I learnt that their husbands were away with the animals in the nearby pastoral land. The Changpas practice yak, sheep and goat rearing as a part of their sustenance. Maintenance of such herds is possible only through a skillful organisation of the migration movements to avail pastures in certain niche or at certain times in the particular environment of the cold desert. Generally a whole group migrates in units between lowland and highland pastures. They do not invest heavily in landed property. In the absence of permanent settlements, the residential pattern is characterised by the encampment of tents near the grazing area I was told.

To manage the grasslands, all the yaks belonging to the villagers are kept 10-15 kilometers away from the campsite and on a rotation basis, four members from the village have to stay with the herd of yaks for three nights and four days. This very interesting practice is called Yakze (taking the Yaks for grazing). For Yakze, the Changpas carry only food, utensils and sleeping bags. No tent, no heat furnace. After the day's grazing, they just have to sleep out in the open for three nights. The reason that four people from the village have to constantly look out for the Yaks is because of the Tibetan Wolf, locally known as Shangu. The women tells us that just the previous evening a pack of nine Shangus had killed a fully grown Yak.

The Changpas live in the harshest of terrains but I was surprised to know that they welcome the first snow. They have a saying - "If it does not get white, it won't get green". If there is no snowfall, there won't be any grass for their livestock in the summer. After this brief encounter with the nomads, we left for Tsomoriri with a silent prayer in our hearts, that all goes well for them when the harsh winters set in.





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Gonkhang or Protector's Room at Thiksey Monastery

After observing the conch blowing ceremony on the roof of Thiksey monastery and listening to the morning prayers in the main gumpa, head to the atmospherically ancient Gohkhang or Protectors' temple. In order to remove obstacles and for accomplishments of personal goals, ordinary people often go to a Gonkhang to supplicate a protector deity. The face of the deity is covered, as it is believed that it is too strong for some people to look at the deity directly in the eyes. Couples having difficulties conceiving particularly come here and pray for a child.

Spotted By Sita





Super Spring Pizza

“By the fifth day in Ladakh, I was craving for something other than momos and thukpas. Ivonne, one of the guest staying at Dorje’s Guesthouse recommended that I try II Forno. II forno is in the main market of Leh and not hard to find. Sitting in the roof top restaurant, I was struggling to decide what pizza to order when Thakur Daas who turned out to be the chef, suggested that I try the “Super Spring” Pizza. The pizza was very fresh and tasty. It came with olives, capsicum, baby corn, mushrooms and as a highlight the cashewnuts. All the Pizzas at II Forno are freshly prepared, either in the wood oven or the tandoor. Restaurant owner Mast Ram tells me that the Mozzarella cheese that they use is not available in Leh. He gets it from Manali or Jammu,” says Soumya Mukherji from our Destination Knowledge Centre.

II Forno offers not only excellent pizza but also a fantastic view of the old town, Leh Palace as well as Stok Mountain range including Stok Kangri. In the evening the atmosphere is amazing. The restaurant is famous for their fast service, in high season preparing between 150 to 200 pizzas per evening. “If our guests are happy, we are happy. If they have any extra wishes - no problem,” says restaurant owner Mast Ram. II Forno is his passion and you can feel it. Besides their famous pizza, II Forno also offers pasta, lasagne, sizzlers, grilled chicken, tandoori, Indian, Chinese and Israeli Food.

Top Chef Recommends





Smiles Unlimited

Whenever, we think of Ladakh, breath-taking almost photoshopped landscapes and monasteries perched precariously on barren mountain tops pop to the mind. But what about the people? Before my trip to Ladakh I just saw photos of monks and women in 'perak' - the traditional head gear of Ladakhi women. So when I planned my trip to Ladakh I was sure that it got to be more about the people than the sights.

Leh is probably the only place in Ladakh where you are spoiled for choice with respect to accommodation. From three star accommodations like The Grand Dragon and Druk Continental to deluxe hotels like Lharimo and Omasila. But I choose to stay at a Dorje's guesthouse (more in our 6 Things We Liked About Section). My stay in Ladakh was especially memorable because I chose to stay in a guesthouse run by a local family. My mornings used to start with a hot cup of tea admiring the unobstructed view of the Ladakh Ranges from the small terrace in front of my room. Dorje's guesthouse is located in a quiet corner of the town, yet is just a 10 minute walk to the main Leh market. Hotels tend to keep you cocooned from your surroundings. For most of your overnight trips outside Leh city, you would be using tented accommodation. Leh can be used as a base from where you make overnight trips to Sham valley, Nubra and Korzok. The hordes of tourist who flock to Ladakh every year, looking for the thrill of trekking have made guesthouses and homestays very popular. Even in the most remotest of places you will find some local Ladakhi family willing to rent out one of their rooms for you to bunk in for the night.

Unfortunately, people try to cram in too much into their time in Ladakh and miss enjoying the tranquillity of the place. If you catch a flight into Ladakh like I did, you need one complete day to acclimatise. I have seen altitude sickness overcome the best of people who ignore it. A trip to Nubra valley should be planned at least two days after you land in Leh, as you would be crossing Khardung La Pass at 5,359 metres. Tsultim, my local guide as well as a friend of Sita was of great help. Traveling with Tsultim who spoke the local language helped the locals open up very easily. I still remember that small village in Rumtse while we were coming back from Tsokar and we got invited into every house and were treated like kings. In one of the houses an old lady, with a toothless grin was roasting barley in a huge pitch black frying pan for her family. When we were leaving she generously filled a bagful of fresh roasted

Destination Insider



grains for us. Such small but meaningful interactions would not have been possible without a local person to interpret the conversation. Or the time when we were driving to the beautiful Tso Moriri lake, we spotted yak skin covered tents. These were the Changpas - the nomadic yak and goat herders. Generally shy, the ladies came up to a car seeing a local and spoke with us.

There is so much one can do in Leh itself if you don't want to go on long drives. In the morning attend the morning prayer at Sankar Monastery, managed by just twenty monks. The walls and the doors of the place are opulently painted with mandalas. Take a walk in the old Leh and head for Lala's roof top café, Easy to miss walking in the old city, Lala's cafe was restored by German conservator Patrick Jürgens in 2008—Lala's on the first floor, resembles a traditional Ladakhi home with a narrow stairwell and low seating. A trap door leads you to the next level: a small terrace with three-legged stools, low benches, dog-eared books and the Leh Palace rising like a canyon behind it. The Ladakh Arts and Media Organization (LAMO) is also worth a visit. LAMO is a public charitable trust established to articulate an alternative vision for the arts and media in Ladakh. The organization set up the LAMO Centre in Leh, the main town of the region, to provide a space for the understanding and development of the arts. LAMO Library is now open (Monday to Saturday, 10AM to 5 PM). You can also support LAMO by donating books for its library in the form of art and media related books and films. In the late afternoon, when walking near the Masjid area you can see ladies on both sides of the streets selling fruits and vegetables. Here you can sometimes see the Drokpa's community, who are considered the last race of Aryans.

[click here to read more](#)



Dorje Guesthouse, Leh

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The Family - “The Dorje family are the perfect host, smiling and available when needed. In the morning I would see senior Dorje walking up and down the narrow garden path, ever smiling. During breakfast, a simple affair – tea, toast, butter and eggs in the patio, I invariably ended up having a very interesting conversation with true travellers – some of them who had trekked the Andes, Alaska, Patagonia but always come back to Ladakh because they have fallen in love with its beauty and its people. One day when I came back early from the days excursion, Dorje took me to his favourite restaurant,” says Soumya from the Destination Knowledge Centre who stayed there recently.

The Rooms - “I was sceptical about staying at a guesthouse in Leh, when there are so many smaller hotels to choose from. But it was a wise decision,” says Soumya. The rooms at Dorje’s guesthouse, 16 in total, are bright and airy with large windows. It is well kept and clean. Though, only four rooms have attached bathrooms. The rest of the rooms have shared bathrooms, two on every floor. The two rooms on the second floor with attached bathrooms are the best, if you don’t mind climbing the stairs. They are large in size and have a small terrace with an incredible view of the surroundings. “I used to come out every night on the terrace to gaze at the stars which seemed to shine brighter in the clear nights of Leh” says Soumya. Most of the homestays; including Dorje Guest House, switch off the lights by 2300 hours and give you flashlights if you require. “I didn’t mind the lights being switched off during my stay at Dorje’s. Light pollution in big cities like Delhi, where I live makes it impossible to see the stars at night and seeing such a beautiful night sky made me feel like a kid once again,” says Soumya.

The View - Every morning when you open your eyes and if it is a clear day you will be greeted with the beautiful panoramic view of the snow-capped Great Himalayan Range, framed with green patches of wild fruit trees and farm fields. “Even a late riser like me was up and about at the crack of dawn admiring the play of the clouds and the sun, as the first light hit the ranges visible from my room. One of my favourite memory from my time in Ladakh is sipping my morning tea sitting in Dorje’s garden, which was in full bloom and enjoying the perfect weather. It was perfect,” says Soumya.

6 Things We Liked About



The Location - The guesthouse is located in a very peaceful locality, away from the mad rush of the main city centre. But at the same time it is located within a ten minutes’ walk from the main Leh market, changspa, shanti stupa and various other attractions of the Leh city. There are many restaurants nearby. One of them is Bon Appetit. The restaurant serves exotic food that is not available elsewhere. “Feeling cold? Try their Jungle Tea; a heady concoction of Rum and Tea. Their chocolate Momos are a nice way to end a meal”, says Soumya.

Traditional Food - Since most of the restaurants in Leh are run by chefs who come from other parts of India to work in Leh during summers, it’s hard to sample the local everyday cuisine of the region. “Momo’s are ubiquitous. But I recommend the traditional Ladakhi dishes like skyu (cap-shaped noodles stew) thukpa (variety of soups using wheat or barley flour in many cases) and khura (sweet deep fried biscuits) which are hard to find in restaurants. The locals drink Gur Gur Cha (Butter tea) which I didn’t at all, but you may like it. For those of your clients who want authentic Ladakhi flavours during their stay at the Dorje Guest House, we need to let the family know in advance. They are happy to organise a wonderful community meal where you sit with the family and have food,” says Soumya.

The Eco-Friendly Touches - “I was impressed by the eco-friendly touches. All cans and bottles are brought to Leh town for re-cycling by the Dorje Guest House. They have installed solar panels which provide hot water in the house, which has reduced the burden of collecting firewood and is a cleaner source of renewable energy. They also have a common water filter for guests to refill their bottles instead of buying bottled water from the market and adding to the plastic. I feel for a cleaner Leh it is crucial to promote Homestays, which strengthens the sense of pride amongst the local people about their culture, lifestyles, surroundings. The Dorje’s family are much better off after they have opened their doors to visitors. The winters are harsh and the additional income earned by the family has made the winter months more bearable,” says Soumya.



Festivals

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Ladakh Marathon, Leh 8 September, 2013

The Ladakh Marathon is the world's highest marathon which takes place during the Ladakh Festival- a weeklong celebration of sport, culture and tradition. Now, only in its second year, many of the participants in the first edition were young students and more than 400 participants were female. At the inaugural Ladakh Marathon 2012, over 1500 runners participated and 2013 is going to be even bigger as per the organisers. There are four challenging routes to select from, including a 10km run to the Khardung La Pass at 5359 metres above the sea level. People who have run at least two marathons in the past three years can apply.

For more details please visit
<http://www.ladakhmarathon.com>





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The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles measured from the appropriate baseline.
The administrative headquarters of Chandigarh, Haryana and Punjab are at Chandigarh.
The international boundaries between Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya shown on this map are as interpreted from the Boundary Lines (Interpretation) Act, 1971 and have yet to be verified.
The external boundaries and coastlines of India agree with the Survey of India's official map.
The coastline of Lakshadweep on this map has been taken from various sources.
The state boundaries between Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh (Chhattisgarh) have not been verified by the Government concerned.



Meet us at the Upcoming Trade Shows

If you wish to schedule a meeting, do e-mail us at
info@sita.in

Trade Shows	Booth No.	Whom to Meet
OTDYKH Leisure Fair Moscow 17th -20th September	Awaited	Ernest Dias & Deepak Sharma
TOP RESA Paris 24th -27th September	Awaited	Philip Thomas & Valerie Chalopet
FITA Mexico 26th -29th September	Trade Visitor	Neeraj Bhatt
IATO Convention India Awaited	Trade Visitor	Neeraj Bhatt & Philip Thomas
ABAV São Paulo 4th -8th September	Trade Visitor	Neeraj Bhatt
UITM Kiev 16th -18th October	Awaited	Deepak Sharma
TTG Rimini 17th -19th October	Trade Visitor	Matteo Pennacchi & Philip Thomas
WTM London 4th -7th November	Hall No S8, Booth No IN200	Neeraj Bhatt
USTOA Scottsdale 5th -7th December	Awaited	Neeraj Bhatt

Trade Shows

