

LADAKH: Little Tibet

HEMIS Monastery Festival

20 Days

June 30- July 19, 2014

“**Ladakh** is far too kaleidoscopic to be dismissed with a string of platitudes. Its people, even the meanest peasant, are imbued with a culture handed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. Personally I am in no doubt at all that Ladakh is the most interesting country to visit that one could imagine. It fulfills almost all the expectations of the traveler who is prepared to see it through his own eyes, to experience it through his own emotions, to comprehend it through his own sensibility.”

Heinrich Harrer

The *Hemis Festival* is one of the most remarkable celebrations in all of Tibetan Buddhism. Each year **Hemis Gompa** (Lone Place of the Compassionate Person) has a two-day festival where visitors and pilgrims alike are afforded the opportunity to witness uncommon ritual and prayer. The momentous nature of this will bring Buddhist pilgrims from all over the mountain regions to observe the spectacular drama dances of Buddhism with monks ‘performing’ in splendidly colorful masks representing various figures from the Tibetan pantheon. The sounds of horns and drums blend with the mantras and gaiety to create a surrealistic scene.

Ladakh lies within the specter of the most massive mountain ranges on Earth ... the Karakoram ... the Ladakh ... the Zaskar ... and the Himalaya. This region is a high-altitude desert plateau that is of great interest to people who are fascinated by the world’s high places and the history of Tibet. As the cradle of Buddhism, the religion spread to Tibet. Today, it is only here that the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism is found as a living, thriving religion. And where, a visitor has the opportunity to witness times past, through the thronged festival at the *Phiyang Gompa* and accessible masterpieces of Buddhist art at *Alchi Gompa*.

While Ladakh is, today, far more Tibetan than Tibet (because of the manner in which China has changed Tibet) the topographical and cultural resemblances to Tibet are only part of her appeal. Here you will evidence an intermingling of cultures, an astounding array of mountain vistas, an uncompromising monastic tradition and a people who will strike a chord of consonance in your heart. There is something spiritually stirring about the silence and isolation of the place.

DAY by DAY ITINERARY

- DAY 1** **June 30, 2014** **Monday** **Departure from NEW YORK**
This evening, we depart from JFK aboard *Air India*, on our flight to New Delhi.
- DAY 2** **July 01, 2014** **Tuesday** **Enroute to INDIA**
Late evening arrival in **New Delhi**, India. We will clear Customs formalities and be transferred to the **LE MERIDIEN HOTEL**.
- DAY 3** **July 02, 2014** **Wednesday** **Sightseeing in DELHI**
The old and the new, the ancient and the modern are constantly in juxtaposition in **Delhi**, the capital of India. Delhi has been continuously inhabited for over twenty-three centuries and is today a bustling metropolis.
- Our exploration today will include the sites of ‘New’ and ‘Old’ Delhi: the 12th century ***Qutub Minar Complex***, with its soaring and graceful, hand-carved victory memorial, the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque, the first mosque built in India and the Iron Pillar, whose iron is so pure it has not rusted after 2,000 years; ***Humayan’s Tomb***, a fabulous example of early Moghul architecture dating from the mid-16th century; the 120 foot high arch of the ***India Gate Memorial***, dedicated to those who died in WWI; the current government buildings; the ***memorial to Mahatma Gandhi***, where he was cremated on January 31, 1948; the splendid architectural achievement of Shah Jahan, ***Jama Masjid***, the largest mosque in India, that reputedly required 5,000 masons six years to complete; and the royal residence of Shah Jahan, the ***Red Fort***, built of red sandstone in 1638. **LE MERIDIEN HOTEL**
- DAY 4** **July 03, 2014** **Thursday** **Fly to LEH**
Leh, the capital of Ladakh, lies between the **Stok Mountains** to the south and the **Ladakh Range** to the north. The skyline is dominated by the Palace of Leh which is reminiscent of the Potola Palace, in Lhasa, Tibet, though on a much smaller scale. **Leh** has a population of 32,000 and the elevation is 11,500 feet. The entire layout of the town was created to accommodate the trade caravans from Central Asia. The caravan trade dominated the economical (and social) life of Leh right up to the time of India’s independence (1947). The **Main Bazaar** is still the center of the town’s activities ... Ladakhi women still sell vegetables along the shady side of the street ... old men and women spin hand-held prayer wheels in the narrow alleyways ... Muslims still congregate around the mosque in animated conversation ... and everything closes down for a polo match! Leh’s most appealing visual area is directly below the Palace, where you will find a labyrinth of alleys and houses.
- Upon arrival we will be transferred to our hotel and take a little time to settle in and acclimatize since we have gone from a relatively low elevation in New Delhi to over 11,000 feet in Leh! During the afternoon, we will walk through the **old town**, beneath the **Leh Palace**, to allow you to get oriented to this fascinating city.
SPIC ‘n SPAN HOTEL

DAY 5 **July 04, 2014** **Friday** Sightseeing in **LEH**
The morning is ours to enjoy at leisure to enhance the bodies desire to acclimatize. There will an optional walk to one of the fine overlooks of the city, which is quite near our hotel and a visit to the **Main Bazaar**. During the afternoon we will concentrate our photographic endeavors on several of the most important gompas in the area. To the northwest of town is **Shanti Stupa**, built and dedicated by the Japanese in 1985, as a part of a mission to promote world peace through Buddhism. It stands overlooking Leh and the Indus Valley and views are spectacular.

SPIC 'n SPAN HOTEL

DAY 6 **July 05, 2014** **Sunday** Visit **Phiyang, Spituk & Sankar Gompas**
We will plan to visit the **Phiyang Gompa** today. Then not far from Phyang, Perched on a hilltop overlooking the *Indus River* is the 15th century **Spituk Gompa** (Gelukpa – **Yellow Hat**), our next stop. Our final stop of the afternoon will be back in Leh, at 150 year old **Sankar Gompa**, home to Ladakh's most senior Gelukpa monk. It is a delightful walk through the fields, along streams and by some ornate chortens to Sankar. The roof terrace offers some expansive views of the surrounding region.

SPIC n SPAN HOTEL

DAY 7 **July 06, 2014** **Monday** **STAKNA GOMPA**
This morning will be free to explore the environs of Leh independently. After lunch we will drive to the southeast of Leh to visit **Stakna Gompa**. The foundations of the gompa date from about 1630 and appear to be the earliest of the Drug-pa foundations in all Ladakh. The situation of the monastery on a 200' high hill rising from the flat, open Indus valley is stunning and the views of the region are spectacular.

SPIC n SPAN HOTEL

DAY 8 **July 07, 2014** **Saturday** Attend the **HEMIS FESTIVAL**
Rising early, we use the darkness to cover the distance from Leh, to the northwest, along a rough track, to the lovely village of **Hemis**. **Hemis Gompa** was built during the 15th century and today houses about 70 monks of the *Kagyupa (Red Hat) order*. The Gompa is renowned for its strong tradition of religious painting.

Hemis Gompa is one of the few gompas where outsiders can witness a traditional celebration. The Gompa crowns a small hill overlooking the village and is one the most beautiful settings in all Ladakh. During the festival the monastery's *greatest treasure*, an immense thangka, is ritually exhibited. The momentous nature of this unveiling will bring Buddhist pilgrims from all over the mountain regions to witness the drama dances of Buddhism. The **festival** is a dance drama performed by lamas wearing rich brocade robes and grotesque masks. The lamas

perform a series of solemn mimes that are punctuated by interludes in which young novice monks cheekily caricature the solemn rites, to the great delight of the crowd. The climax of the drama is the dismembering of a human effigy (moulded out of tsampa/barley dough), interpreted as the annihilation of gross desires in the individual soul and its purification. It is here that we will likely have the opportunity to photograph Ladakhi women wearing their traditional *peraks* (turquoise-studded headdresses).

SPIC n SPAN HOTEL

DAY 9

July 08, 2014 Tuesday Visit HEMIS, SHEY, THIKSEY

Our day begins at **Hemis Gompa**. Founded in the 1630s, under royal patronage, Hemis is the largest and the richest of the Ladakh Gompas. It is nestled into the mountainside in the Zaskar Range. Next we will visit the other two major gompas in the region, Thiksey and Shey. **Thiksey** is planted dramatically on the end of a mountain spur overlooking the Indus Valley. This Gompa was founded during the 15th century, in the first phase of the Gelukpa expansion. Our next stop will be in at **Shey**, which was once the capital ancient Ladakh and home to the kings. The earliest dated ruins are of the fort at the top of the hill. Nearby, we find the ruins of the Gompa, rock carvings of Buddhas and a 40 foot high golden Buddha, along with some original color murals.

SPIC n SPAN HOTEL

DAY 10

July 09, 2014 Wednesday Drive to HUNDER

The next few days will be enjoyed in the *once-restricted Nubra Valley*. Located to the north of Leh, on the north side of the Ladakh Range, Nubra is a sea of verdure and, thus, the most fertile area of Ladakh. Here the locals grow apples, apricots and grains for personal consumption and trade. Once **Nubra** was along the major caravan route that connected Chinese Turkistan with Tibet. The area is dominated by the enormously broad valley situated between the **Shyok** and **Nubra Rivers**. The eastern **Karakoram Mountains** loom on the horizon to the north.

Leaving Leh at dawn, we drive over the highest motorable road in the world. The **Khardung-la Pass** is 18,380 feet and offers a view of endless peaks and ridges of the **Zaskar** and **Ladakh Ranges**, when clear. At **Khalsar**, we begin to follow the course of the **Shyok River** toward Disket. The **Disket Gompa**, with 80 monks is the largest and oldest gompa in the Nubra region. The views from the roof terrace are breathtaking. Beyond Disket is an area of beautiful sand dunes (this was once the bottom of the Tethys Sea - 300 million years ago) with the snow-capped **Himalayas** running along the horizon. The village at **Hunder** is quite picturesque with an abundance of trees and streams. It is here that we camp for the night.

PERMANENT TENTED CAMP HUNDER

DAY 11 **July 10, 2014** **Thursday** Sightseeing in **HUNDER area**
Today, we retrace our route south to **Khalsar** and then follow the course of the **Nubra River** up the Valley on the other side. We travel up the Nubra side until we reach the village of Sumur. **Sumur** is a splendidly pretty little village with an interesting complex of seven temples, located in a ravine surrounded by poplar trees. The ***Dalai Lama*** inaugurated the **Samsten Ling Gompa**, in 1962. The afternoon at Sumur will allow us a leisurely exploration of a little-seen and inviting area.

PERMANENT TENTED CAMP HUNDER

DAY 12 **July 11, 2014** **Friday** Return to **LEH**
Our return drive to Leh will give us the opportunity to stop and photograph sites that we hadn't covered on the drive up the valley or would like to see again. Perhaps, visiting a village that we didn't have time for on the way in, a home visit with a local family or, of course, the remarkable mountain settings. We again cross the **Khardung-la Pass** (18,380 feet) and will find ourselves back in **Leh** during the late afternoon.

SPIC n SPAN HOTEL

DAY 13 **July 12, 2014** **Saturday** To **ULETOPKO**
Traveling along the 'Kargil' road to the northwest, in the constant presence of the Ladakh Range, our destination is the gompa at Likir. **Likir** (Water Spirits) Gompa has a magnificent setting overlooking the village. Built during the 14th century, Likir has the distinction of being the first gompa built under the direction of Tibetan monks. Here we find a small chapel with some imagery of great beauty. After lunch at **Uletopko** (our permanent tented camp for the next two nights) we plan a pleasant walk, of several kilometers, to the little-seen **Ridzong Gompa** and the **chomolling (nunnery)**. Ridzong is situated above a ridge of glacial debris that blocks the gorge at the narrowest point. Perhaps, the most striking feature of this gompa is the austere and faithful manner in which the Buddhist way is upheld.

PERMANENT TENTED CAMP ULETOPKO

DAY 14 **July 13, 2014** **Sunday** Drive to **LAMAYURU**
The oldest religious site in Ladakh is **Lamayuru Gompa** (place of freedom), dating from the 10th century. While the gompa itself has fallen into disrepair, out of neglect, the setting of Lamayuru, among the tiers mountains, is mesmerizing. Extending out from a barren and eroding crag, vulnerably, dwarfed by the surrounding mountains, your first glimpse of Lamayuru will never be forgotten. It was here (in the declared holy place) that criminals could once be safe from persecution if they were within one mile of the gompa.

PERMANENT TENTED CAMP ULETOPKO

DAY 15 **July 14, 2014** **Monday** Return to **LEH** via **ALCHI**
Alchi Gompa houses some of the finest examples of 11th century Indian Buddhist art found anywhere, in the world. Alchi is a religious complex of five temples and associated **chortens** (*Tibetan word for stupa - 'a receptacle for offerings'*), essentially unknown to the outside world, before 1974. This artistic site of global importance is remarkable for the exquisite variety of artwork ... murals, woodcarving, statues and frescoes. Our return drive has us arriving in Leh during the late afternoon. The remainder of the afternoon will be at leisure or you can join an optional walk to the top of **Namgyal Peak** for some impressive views of the surrounding area, from Leh's highest point. **SPIC n SPAN HOTEL**

DAY 16 **July 15, 2014** **Tuesday** Majestic **PANGONG TSO LAKE**
One of the most beautiful and least-visited sites in all of Ladakh is Pangong Tso Lake. Situated along the Chinese border (and thus, travel has been highly restricted), in the southeast portion of the country, **Pangong Tso** has special unrivaled **Himalayan** beauty. The lake's elevation is nearly 14,000 feet, making it the highest lake in Ladakh and it is flanked by peaks of 20,000 feet. It is approximately 80 miles long but never more than two miles wide. About 25% of the lake is in India and the remainder in Tibet and thus, *claimed* by the Chinese. However, the most stunning characteristic of the lake is the iridescent blue color of the water. **PERMANENT TENTED CAMP** near Shakti

DAY 17 **July 16, 2014** **Wednesday** Return to **LEH**
This morning we will photograph the incomparable **Palace of Leh**. Majestically overlooking the town, the Palace allowed the king to survey his subjects at all times. Today, the Palace stands empty, as it has since the mid-19th century when the royal family moved to Stok Palace. Built during the 17th century, it stands nine stories high. The afternoon is free to explore the fascinating capital city of **Leh**. Perhaps, you would like to revisit the Palace or wonder through the old town area, enjoy the bustling bazaars, or visit the **Jama Masjid Mosque**. This evening we will have a traditional Ladakhi farewell dinner. **SPIC n SPAN HOTEL**

Day 18 **July 17, 2014** **Thursday** Fly to **DELHI**
The early morning is ours for a final exploration of Leh. In the late morning we board our flight to **Delhi**, where we arrive in the early afternoon. This evening (early evening) we will enjoy a special Indian meal and classical dance show. **LE MERIDIEN HOTEL**

DAY 19 **July 18, 2014** **Friday** In **DELHI**
Today is at leisure to explore the fascinating city of Delhi. **LE MERIDIEN HOTEL**

DAY 20 **July 19, 2014** **Saturday** **Return USA**

Our flight back to the USA departs Delhi very early in the morning. As a result, we leave the hotel shortly before midnight to clear airport formalities. We board our return flight and arrive back in USA, mid-afternoon.

TRIP PRICE: \$ 7,900.00
for **Ladakh** land portion only (based on 6 participants)
SINGLE ROOM SUPPLEMENT: \$1,080.00

plus

INTERNATIONAL AIRFARE via Air India *round trip NYC-New Delhi approx.:*

\$1,800 + tax Economy approximately Air India

\$4,800.00 + tax Business approximately Air India

DEPOSIT \$1,000.00 PER/PERSON due by 2/01/14

This *price includes*: all accommodations based on double occupancy; all meals; tea or coffee, ie. beverages presented as part of or taken with the daily meals; all land transportation; sightseeing and tours; all internal flights and domestic airport taxes (flights within the India); all model fees including the private models and private performances; all domestic transfers and ground transportation; all portorage in hotels and airports within India; and all entrance fees, service charges and taxes. This price covers all gratuities to guides and drivers throughout the trip. We will travel in private 4WD Tata-Sumos or jeeps. Each photographer will have 2 seats and ample room for their equipment. Our professional, hand-selected, national guide will travel with us throughout the trip to enhance our daily photographic opportunities and our appreciation and understanding of the country.

Please note: Occasionally the ground operator passes along an increased charge. Generally, VIP Expeditions absorbs these costs. However, sometimes they must be passed along to our clients. While we do not expect this, you must be aware of the possibility.

TRIP PRICE DOES NOT INCLUDE: Passport fees; India visa fees; U.S. airfare, round trip airfare from the East Coast; vaccinations; inoculations; international departure taxes; items of a personal nature, eg. laundry, telephone, alcoholic or personal beverages, etc.; personal tips; trip cancellation, travel delay or baggage insurance; charges incurred as a result of delays beyond the control of VIP Expeditions; and excess baggage.

CAMPING: Our camping arrangements will be the best available for this part of the world. We will be in a permanent-tented camp for a total of five nights. These facilities have beds, mattresses, quilts (you will need your own sleeping bag), common toilets and dining tent. There is a complete staff to handle everything in camp. A true diversity of cuisine is not available in this part of the world. However, we will have the best possible meals prepared for us three times per day.

Brian Vikander will lead this once-in-a-lifetime experience. He is an internationally recognized photographer whose work has appeared in virtually every publication that deals with the world of exotic travel, including: 1) *National Geographic* publications; 2) *New York Times* Travel; 3) the *Getty Conservation Trust*; and 4) *Smithsonian*, among others. Brian has conducted more than 60 photographic trips, on six continents, over the years and has an excellent feel for the destination, as well as the requirements of trip participants. His goal is to have you better understand the manner in which you can capture your impressions.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

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VIKANDER INTERNATIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY EXPEDITIONS
TRIP APPLICATION

*Please read and complete this form carefully
then mail with a deposit of \$1,000.00 to:*

Vikander International Photography Expeditions
1711 Via San Martino
Palm Desert, CA 92260
(406) 570-9800

email: info@vipexpeditions.com **WEB** http://www.vipexpeditions.com

PLEASE PRINT

Trip Name _____ Dates _____

Full Name _____ Age _____ Sex _____ Height _____ Weight _____

Birth date _____ as listed on your passport
month day year Birthplace _____ Citizenship _____ Occupation _____

Mailing Address (FedEx) _____
street

Passport # _____ Date of Issue _____ Date of Expiration _____ Place of Issue _____
city state zip

Home Phone _____ Business Phone _____ Fax Number _____
area code area code area code

Cellular Phone _____ Email _____

In Case of Emergency Please Notify (Name, phone & relation) _____

Describe Your Health _____ Are You Presently Taking Any Medication _____

Are You Presently Under a Doctor's Care? (If yes, please elaborate on back of form)

AIR TRANSPORTATION

All flights within the foreign destination are coordinated by VIP Expeditions. All other flight arrangements must be coordinated by the traveler him or herself. VI P Expeditions will always recommend the international flight, generally through a reputable 'consolidator.' However, VIP Expeditions must have an up-to-date copy of all independent flight arrangements for the travel.

Departure Date _____ Departure City _____ Airline& Flight # _____

Arrival Date _____ Arrival City _____ Airline& Flight # _____

Departure Date _____ Departure City _____ Airline& Flight # _____

Arrival Date _____ Arrival City _____ Airline& Flight # _____

Departure Date _____ Departure City _____ Airline& Flight # _____

Arrival Date _____ Arrival City _____ Airline& Flight # _____

ACCOMMODATIONS

Vikander International Photography Expeditions will do all possible to satisfy requests to share rooms for single tour members. Trip members who occupy single accommodations either by choice or by circumstance are required to pay the Single Supplement charge. In some locations single accommodations are not available.

I will share a double room with _____

___ Please assign a roommate if available ___ I prefer a single room ___ I am a smoker ___ I am a non-smoker

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

RESERVATIONS AND PAYMENTS

Early reservations are recommended, since group size is limited to less than 10 persons. When we receive your completed Trip Application and a \$1,000.00 deposit, we will confirm your space. Upon receiving your deposit we will send you a confirmation letter, detailed trip itinerary, visa applications, medical, health, and insurance information, clothing and equipment list, suggested reading list, photographic notes and equipment recommendations, and general information on the countries you are visiting. We will invoice you for the balance of the trip which is due 70 days prior to departure. Applications received within 21 days of departure are subject to a \$250 late filing fee, if applicable. Your air tickets, trip roster and final tour briefing (with contact numbers and group meeting locations) will be sent out 3 weeks prior to departure.

CANCELLATION AND REFUNDS

If you cancel your trip the following charges will apply (computed as of the date of our actual receipt of written cancellation notice): **non-refundable** cancellation charge — \$250; **61-90 days** before departure — \$500; **31-60 days** before departure — 50% of the land cost; **30 days or less** before departure — no refund. No refunds shall be issued after the tour has commenced. No refunds shall be issued for occasional missed meals or sightseeing tours. We highly recommend trip cancellation/interruption insurance.

CANCELLED TRIPS

Vikander International Photography Expeditions reserves the right to cancel any trip prior to departure for any reason whatsoever, including insufficient sign up or logistical problems which will impede trip operations. The refund of all payments received shall release Vikander International Photography Expeditions from any further liability. In the event of trip cancellation, Vikander International Photography Expeditions is not responsible for additional expenses incurred by trip members (e.g., non-refundable "advance purchase" air tickets, medical expenses, passport and visa expenses, equipment purchases etc., nor for any necessary additional arrangements should the applicant have embarked prior to the group's departure. We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation/interruption insurance to protect your travel investment at the time of sign-up.

LAND COST

Prices of a tour are subject to change. Trips are often planned more than a year in advance, and as the departure date nears we receive up-to-date figures on land expenses and currency exchange. We endeavor to keep our prices the same as published. If there is a price increase prior to the day of departure in the basic costs, such costs may be passed along to the participants. Also, if bookings fall below a minimum required, passengers will be advised of additional costs.

Land cost includes the following: Deluxe or best available twin sharing accommodation with private bath where available; baggage and hotel portage; airport and ground transportation for members using Vikander International Photography Expeditions coordinated group flight arrangements; all meals unless noted in the itinerary; sightseeing as outlined in the trip itinerary; entrance and permits; services of English-speaking leaders, guides and agents; services of a professional photographer; special permits, costs of research, itinerary development, and documentation; all internal flights; all model fees, including private models and private performances; and all tips to local staff local service people (guides and drivers).

Land cost does not include the following: En route accommodations at stopover cities at the beginning and end of the your trip; international airfare except as noted; U.S. airfare; domestic airfare on certain trips; excess baggage fees; passport charges; visa charges; and airport departure fees; alcoholic beverages; beverages with meals; items or tips of a personal nature; laundry; insurance of any kind; individual transfers for individual arrival or departure; medical costs; costs of evacuation; immunizations and/or inoculations; and expenses arising from the delay or extension of a trip due to weather, political disputes, illness, failure of transportation or other causes beyond our reasonable control.

I have read the *Limitation of Liability, Assumption of Risk* and the *Terms and Conditions* and agree to abide by them.

Signature _____ **Date** _____

